

A SEMANTIC IMPLICATION OF GENDER ASYMMETRY OF DYADS IN FULFULDE LANGUAGE

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Abstract

This paper attempts to analyse the gender asymmetry of Fulfulde language dyads. Gender asymmetry refers to unequal treatment or representation of genders, often stemming from societal norms, cultural beliefs, and historical legacies, resulting in disparities in opportunities, resources, and power Suganda, (2020). In language studies, a “dyad” refers to a group of two people who relate to each other, often used to describe kinship terms or interactions between two individuals, such as in dyadic communication or dyadic learning. Dyad constructions denote relationally-linked groups of the type ‘pair/group of brothers’, ‘mother and child (ren)’, ‘Husband/Wife’, and ‘teacher/student pair’ (Evans, 2003). The principal aim is to examine gender discrimination in the usage of dyads. The research adopts an ethnographic method collection and critical discourse analysis as a theoretical framework. The findings reveal gender asymmetry of dyads in the Fulfulde language. Dyads involve masculine and feminine gender pairs, such as superiority, containment, importance, mismatch and sequence. Asymmetry is manifested syntagmatically as the order of the components from an irreversible perspective. It also shows that contrary to the claim made by Moser (1997), there are different factors which lead to different constructions of Fulfulde language.

Keywords: Dyads; asymmetry; gender; Fulfulde; masculine and feminine.

Introduction

Dyad is a pair of things standing in particular relation or set of two elements treated as one. “Dyads are two things of similar kind or nature or group. Dyadic communication refers to the inter-relationship between the two. In practice, this relationship refers dialogic relations face to face verbal communication between two people involving their mutual thought, behavior, ideas, likes and queries concerning life and living in nature”. Gender asymmetry refers to “gender inequality reflected in the structural system of a language”. Similarly, asymmetry exists when the two halves of something do not match or are unequal. A “relation is said to be asymmetric if it hold between ‘A’ and ‘B’ but not between ‘B’ and ‘A’”. Besides, asymmetry in language is only possible when dealing with two linguistics elements, pertaining to the same form or class, placed on an identical level of linguistics analysis and connected by some link. Gender asymmetry of dyads is the oppositional and collocational dyad pattern in which the first component of the pair can be characterized semantically “Plus” and the second component “minus”. Therefore, the gender asymmetry of dyads investigated in Fulfulde language are dyads construction lead by sequence, containment, mismatch, importance, and superiority.

Linguistics as a Field of Study

The field of linguistics, the scientific study of human natural language, is of course a growing and exciting area, which embraces diverse areas of study like sociology, philosophy, anthropology, history, geography, psychology and language teaching, among others. However, in spite of the

importance of this academic discipline, many people, even highly educated ones, will confess that they have a vague idea as regards the fundamental concern of the field. To some, a linguist is someone who speaks several languages fluently, while others are of the perception that a linguist is a language specialist who describes the nature and structure of a language.

What then is Linguistics?

According to Finegan (2011), “Linguistics can be defined as a systematic inquiry into human language into its structures and uses and the relationship between them, as well as into its development through history and its acquisition by children and adults.” This definition emphasizes form and use (Grammar, Pragmatics), as well as its learning (language) or acquisition (Psycholinguistics). The definition above is equally supported by Verschueren (2003) and Robins (1985), in Syal and Jindal (2007).

Linguistic as a scientific study of languages has four major branches that observes and experiment the different levels that utterance undergoes for communication to be effective. These are:

- i. Phonology which is the study of the description of sound of a particular language and the rules governing the distribution of these sounds.
- ii. Morphology which studies the word formation through the use of morpheme constructions.
- iii. Syntax studies sentence and the rules governing the formation of the sentence.
- iv. Semantics as a branch of linguistics, studies the meaning of the word.

It has philosophical approach, linguistics approach and general semantic. The Theoretical Semantics deals with four general theories of meaning, such as Context Referential Image, Ideational and Behavioral Meaning. The Contextual theory of meaning expresses of lexical items can be left in context to determine. On the other hand, the Referential theory of meaning is predetermined by documentation and therefore context should not be allowed to determine.

Language Definition by Some Scholars

Language is an important tool in the society, because man needs it to share his ideas, experiences, emotions, and interact with other people in the society or in his environment. Sapir (1921) states that language is a purely human and non-instructive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols. The primary form of language is the spoken medium; language is used for expression purposes. Thus, there are other forms of communications, the non-verbal communication, which is the use of body language, gesture, signs, and signals to pass on information. Adeyemi (2000) says the Sapir – Whorfian hypothesis (1956) views that language influences our world view, and people view the world from the perspective of their different languages. That is, human beings live in different world views because of the different languages they speak. The language a group speaks can also sharpen and influence their beliefs about the world. Because the vocabularies language can limit one’s expression of ideas, thought, emotion and feelings about the environment, hence, it is widely claimed that culture influences the structure and functions of a group and language in turn influences the individual interpretations of reality.

In language, we communicate verbally by the use of sound or signs and symbol respectively. Language is a collection of mutually intelligible dialects (Chambers & Trudgil 1980). Language is spoken by all, including animals. Thus humans use language through sound making, which is well arranged in sequences for effective communication.

Matthews, (1997) sees language as “the phenomenon of vocal and written communication among human beings generally. Nicholas and Stephen (2009), in their own term, define Language as a structured system of communication that consists of grammar and vocabulary. It is the primary means by which humans convey meaning, both in spoken and signed forms, and may also be conveyed through writing. Human language is characterized by its cultural and historical diversity, with significant variations observed between cultures and across time. Human languages possess the properties of productivity and displacement.

Fulfulde Language

Fulfulde is the language of Fulbe, the speakers of this language call themselves Fulbe (plr), Pullo (sgl). The Fulbe are severally known and referred to in many literatures. They are called Fula in Gambia and Sierra Leone, the French called them Peuls, and where in English, the Hausa word Fulani is often used. Peul in French means the color Light-brown, red. However, the term Fulbe means “The scattered ones” (Lewis et al 1983). Daudu (2005) claims that the meaning of the word Pullo, is most likely to have originated from the synonyms Fulfulde (the language of the Fulbe) and Pulaaku (the code of ethics of the Fulbe). The term Pullo and Pulaaku take initial consonant /P/ because of the class markers of the words suffixes (o and ngu); otherwise the word has an underlying stem ful. Since reduplication is a morphological process in the language, the word Fulfulde is an example. It seems the stem Ful or Pul is like any primary noun in the language in which no meaning can be attached to it unless a class is suffixed to it.

Moreover, among some Fulbe, Pulaaku and Fulfulde are interchangeable used to mean the same thing. To say for instance, ‘O walaa pulaaku’ is the same as saying, ‘O walaa Fulfulde’ meaning ‘He is not mannered’ (To a Pullo’s standard). Therefore, we can conclude that Pulaaku, Pullo, there’s yet no straight forward answers to the origin of the Fulbe, the origin is described as that of a mystery. Arnott (1971) refers to them as people of unknown origins. Greenberg (1970), considers them as Judaco-syrians from Cyrenaia who entered Africa about 200AD.

Methodology

The research employs ethnographic method, which is a data gathering method that focuses on obtaining information concerning societies and cultures. It is a method of data collection which uses all qualitative research method, including participant observation, in-depth interview and focus group discussion. It is primary concerned with the analysis of language use in its cultural setting. As a branch of sociolinguistics, the ethnographic method of communication aims at describing the forms and functions of verbal and non-verbal communication behavior in a particular cultural or social setting.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted the critical discourse analysis theory for the analyses of relevant data. It is philosophical and linguistics bases are grounded on certain branches of social theory and earlier

discourse analysis, text linguistics, and interactional sociolinguistics. Critical Discourse Analysis is a cross-discipline set forth in the early 1990s by a group of scholars such as Durante and Godwin, (1992), Theo van Leeuwen, Gunther Kress, Teun van Dijk, and Norman Fairclough, Wodak & Meyer, (2001). At that time, theories and methods of CDA have been formulated to differentiate this paradigm from other theories and methodologies in Discourse Analysis. Later on, the term has been known under many designations.

While, according to their fields of research or areas of study, some scholars prefer the concept Critical Linguistics (CL), others choose to use the label Critical Discourse Studies (CDS). It follows from this to argue that CDA is an interdisciplinary approach which, as stated by Bloor and Bloor (2007), can be used by professionals from a variety of backgrounds such as historians, business institutions, lawyers, politicians, etc., to investigate social problems relating to their work. For the theory of CDA to a range of studies (Bloor & Bloor, (2007) Bayram (2010) Jahedi & Abudullah (2012) Parham, (2013) Akogbeto & Koukpossa, (2015) Koussouhon & Dossoumou, (2015), Koussouhon & Amoussou, (2016) to name but a few. Although such research works provide the reader with valuable and pertinent results, discussed so many theories on critical discourse analysis.

Fulfulde Dyads Construction Leads by Sequence

This refers to type of dyads, which their construction is based on sequential happening of time or any other thing. Therefore, sequence is the factor responsible in placing components of the dyad in this category, e.g *Jemma bê Nàange* and *Fajiri bê kiikide*.

Example 1

Table 1: Dyads Construction Leads by Sequence

S/no	Gender						Source
	Dyads	Types	Factor	Masculine	Feminine	Gloss	
1.	<i>Jemma bê Nàange</i>	Time	Sequence	<i>Jemma</i>	<i>Nàange</i>	night & day	Fulfulde
2.	<i>Fajiri bê kiikide</i>	Time	Sequence	<i>kiikide</i>	<i>Fajiri</i>	Morning and evening	Fulfulde

Example 1: Table 1 contains the dyads *jemma be naange* (night and day), which in fulfulde language signifies the sequence of time that refers to all the time. But linguistically, this structure comes to be considered as merely “correct or standard” with the first component occupying the primary or positive slot and the second component occupying the secondary or negative slot. According to a respondent, *Jemmaa* (night) always come first before *nàange* (day), and if the second component occupies the primary slots as *nàange be jemmaa* (day and night), the structure is considered ungrammatical or incorrect by the Fulani natives, because it violates the rules of language use. It is a stereotype of Fulani natives to slot *jemma* (night) in the primary or positive position and *nàange* (day) in the secondary or negative position. The factor leading the construction of dyads is sequence.

Example 2: in the above table, contains the dyads *fajjiri be kiikide* (morning and evening), in this dyads, the placement of *fajjiri* (morning) in a first or positive slot is only because of the sequence, not because that the *fajjiri* (morning) is more important than *kiikide* (evening).

Fulfulde Dyads Construction Lead by Containment

Dyads construction depends on the different factors, such as containment and any dyads with its components, example, such as; “*Unordu bê Gafurgal*” and “*Haako bê kusel*” that is one word named the container and other word named the contained. The container occupies primary slot and the contained remains in secondary slot.

Example 2

Table 2: Dyads Construction Lead by Containment

Dyads	Type	Factor	Gender		Gloss	Source
			Masculine	Feminine		
<i>Unordu bê Gafurgal</i>	item	Containment	<i>Unordu</i>	<i>Gafurgal</i>	Mortar and Pestle	Fulfulde
<i>Haako bê kusel</i>	food	Containment	<i>Haako</i>	<i>kusel</i>	Soup and Meat	Fulfulde

Example 2. Table 2 contains the dyads *Unordu bê Gafurgal* (Mortar and Pestle), in this dyad the factor which leads to the placement of *unordu* (mortar) is masculine in the positive slot of containment since the mortar contains the pestle before any act of crushing of spices takes place, it is considered more important than the pestle.

Example 2. Contains the dyad *Haako bê kusel* (Soup and Meat), *Haako* (Soup), which is feminine gender occupies the first or primary semantic slot and the masculine *kusel* (Meat), slot in the secondary or negative semantic position. The factor leading to this is containment. *Haako* (Soup), is just placed in the first slot, because it contains the meat and not because it is better than the meat. This is revealed in the Fulfulde wise saying “*Haako wolaa kusel nyaama taake*” (soup without meat is tasteless). In this case, even though, *Haako* (Soup) is the container of *kusel* (Meat), it is not significant or valuable without *kusel* (meat), which is masculine. So in Fulfulde language, this shows that language is one of the powerful tools, which allows men to express their status of supremacy. This assumption extends to the use of Fulfulde language dyads.

Fulfulde Dyads Construction Lead by Mismatch

When components which are not likely to be place composed in a particular dyad, mismatch is the factor leading to the construction of such dyad, like “*Ndiyam bê Hiite*”.

Example 3

Table 3: Dyads Construction Lead by Mismatch

Dyads	Type	Factor	Gender		Gloss	Source
			Masculine	Feminine		
<i>Ndiyam bê Hiite</i>	Chemical	mismatch	<i>ndiyam</i>	<i>Hiite</i>	wata and fire	fulfulde

Example 3. Table 3 contains the dyads *Ndiyam bê Hiite* (water and fire), *Ndiyam* (water) is masculine and *Hiite* (fire), is feminine, water and fire are two different entities so combining the two together indicate disparity. Here, the factor that lead to the construction of Fulfulde dyad

Ndiyam bê Hiite is a mismatch. Like many other Fulfulde dyads which contain masculine and feminine gender, this dyad shows gender asymmetry. Since *Ndiyam* (water) which is masculine is placed in the primary or positive semantic slot and *Hiite* (fire), which is feminine is positioned in the negative semantic slot. And changing the order of this dyad to *Hiite* and *Ndiyam* (fire and water) sound odd to native speakers of Fulfulde language.

Fulfulde Dyads Construction Lead by Important

In this category of dyads, it contains gender fear. Plausibly, the important is the factor determines which component of the dyads is placed in positive semantic slot and negative semantic slot respectively.

Example 4

Table 4: Dyads Construction Lead by Important

Dyads	Type	Factor	Gender		Gloss	Source
			Masculine	Feminine		
<i>Riiga bê Sarlaa</i>	Cloth	Important	<i>Sarlaa</i>	<i>Riigaa</i>	Shirt and Trouser	Fulfulde
<i>Gudel bê Riiga</i>	Cloth	Important	<i>Gudel</i>	<i>Riiga</i>	Wrapper and Gown	Fulfulde
<i>Nyiiri bê Haako</i>	Food	Important	<i>Nyiiri</i>	<i>Haako</i>	Tuwo and Soup	Fulfulde
<i>Hoore bê Kosde</i>	Body	Part Important	<i>Hoore</i>	<i>Kosde</i>	Head and Leg	Fulfulde

In the first example, the table above contains the dyad *Riiga bê Sarlaa* (Shirt and Trouser). The factor which leads to the placement of *Riiga* (shirt) is feminine in the positive semantic slot. As “important” because Fulani’s culture, a fully grown up man can wear only *Riigaa* (Shirt), without the trouser and move around. But to wear only *Sarlaa* (Trouser), and move around especially in a large family House is a taboo. Here, the obvious gender discrimination is the value attached to *riiga* (Shirt), just because it is used by men. There many positive attachments to *Sarlaa* (Trouser), in fulfulde language sayings.

Example 2, in Table 4, contains the dyad *Gudel bê Riiga* (Wrapper and Gown). This refers to a type of cloth in Fulani community. The placement of the two components is based on the importance each plays in terms of person who used to wear it. According to an informant, a typical Fulani native woman can wear only *gudel* (wrapper) and move around especially in a large family House. However, it is a taboo to use only *riiga* (gown) and move around in Fulani community. The importance of *Gudel* (Wrapper) in Fulani’s culture is stressed in so many ways. The gender bias in use of this dyad is that feminine gender *riiga* (gown), is subjugated by being place in a negative semantic slot. This shows that there is a tight fit between cultural assumptions and linguistic structures, which in most cases, in adulthood the gender assumptions embedded in the language becomes a natural and unconscious part of fluent language use (Moser, 1997).

Example 3, in Table 4, contains the dyad *Nyiiri bê Hàako* (Tuwó and Soup), this dyad refers to a particular food in Fulani’s culture and the factor that lead to the construction of the dyads as *Nyiiri bê Hàako* (Tuwó and Soup), is the importance given to *Nyiiri* (Tuwó) in Fulani’s culture. In this dyad, *Nyiiri* (Tuwó) which is masculine gender is placed on the primary slot, and *Hàako* (Soup), which is feminine gender, is placed in the negative semantic slot. And this shows there is gender

discrimination in the dyad. Since it become a stereotype to Fulani native speakers to use this dyad in this order. And whoever use the dyad in a reverse order as *Hàako bê Nyiiri* (Soup and Tuwô), is considered a non-native speaker of Fulani language.

Example 4, in Table 4, contains the dyad *Hoore bê Kosde* (Head and Leg). This dyad signifies the parts of the body and the factor, which leads to its formation as *Hoore bê Kosde* is ‘importance’. As part of the body one can live as a cripple without legs. However, there is no way for someone to live without head. Because once someone’s head is cut, that person must die. So *Hoore*, (head) which is masculine gender is favored over *Kosde* (Leg) which is feminine gender in many Fulfulde languages saying such “*Jaumo Sàare*” (Head of the House). On the Other hand, *Kosde* (leg), is negatively represented example, ‘*Kosde Jigaawaal*’ (leg of vulture) meaning (Sabotage). ‘*Kosde jamdii*’ (iron leg), meaning ‘Calamity’ these examples reveal the sensitivity of the whole process of conceptualization in the use of fulfulde language dyads. This culturally dependent fact complies perfectly with the examples showing the priority of the first element.

Fulfulde Dyads Construction Lead by Superiority

In this category, superiority is considered as factor which leads to the placement of one component in primary or positive semantic and other component in secondary or negative semantic position. In words like; “*Gorko bê Debbo*”, “*Hijju bê Ummra*”, and “*Worbe bê Rewbe*.”

Example 5

Table 5: Dyads Construction Lead by Superiority

Dyads	Type	Factor	Gender		Gloss	Source
			Masculine	Feminine		
<i>Gorko bê Debbo</i>	couple	superiority	<i>Gorko</i>	<i>Debbo</i>	husband and wife	Fulfulde
<i>Hijju bê Ummra</i>	religion	superiority	<i>Hijju</i>	<i>Ummra</i>	pilgrimage & Lesser hajj	Arabic
<i>Worbe bê Rewbe</i>	Human being	superiority	<i>Worbe</i>	<i>Rewbe</i>	Men and Women	Fulfulde

The first example, in Table 5, it contains the dyads *Gorko bê Debbo* (Husband and wife), in the culture and religion of the Fulani’s, only those who are legally married are called, *Gorko bê Debbo* (Husband and wife), therefore, the dyads remains name of couples. In Fulani cultural context, people are named in order to differentiate, recognize, and superiority remains the factor, which leads to the placement of masculine component in the first, or primary slot while the feminine in the second or secondary slot. According to an informant, in the culture of native speakers of Fulfulde language, if the structure changes to *Debbo bê Gorko* (wife and husband), there is an extension of meaning into a negative connotation. A home which is lead by female, (wife) and this contradict a normal way of leadership of the family. So there is a semantic extension as linguistic feature in the usage of fulfulde dyad. Moreover, a husband is expected to dictate the affairs of his wife in all aspect.

The second example in Table 5 contains the Fulfulde dyad *Hijju bê Ummrah* (Pilgrimage & Lesser hajj). The word ‘*Hijju*’ (Pilgrimage) is a masculine and favored over *Ummrah* (Lesser Hajj). Which

is feminine by been placed in the positive semantic slot. The dyad refers to specific religion activities performed by been Muslims. According to one informant, Fulanis consider *Ummra bê hijju* (Lesser hajj and Pilgrimage) as incorrect. Any person, who says it, will be considered a non-native speaker of fulfulde language because it does not follow the linguistic norms. Besides, the linguistic feature here is stereotyped. Moreover, the factor that lead to the construction of this dyad as *Hijju bê Ummrah* (Pilgrimage & Lesser hajj) is superiority. And even in Islam, which is the religious followed by most of the Fulfulde native speakers, Hajj is compulsory for those who can afford. But it is not for *Ummrah*. Therefore, *Hijju* is considered more superior than *Ummra* and this idea triggers the construction of this dyad as *Hijju bê Ummrah* (Pilgrimage & Lesser hajj).

Example 3, in Table 5, contains the Fulfulde dyad *Worbe bê Rewbe* (Male and Female), the word *Worbe* (males), which is a masculine gender occupies positive semantic slot. In addition, this shows that it is favoured over the word *Rewbe* (female), which is a feminine gender. The factor that leads to this are ‘superiority’ because in Fulani culture, there is general belief that male’s superior to females. In Hausa, Fulani and Yoruba cultures, a woman is expected to greet a man before he greets her because there are cultural assumptions of inequality. Another informant mentioned that, in the culture of native speakers of fulfulde language, masculine gender is considered to have a great role in establishing the social norms, which causes the inequality in the treatment of masculine and feminine gender through language use.

Recommendations

There are factors that influence the gender discrimination in fulfulde language, which are cultural influence. I therefore, recommend that in language, repositioning of words in fulfulde language dyads that contains gender and odd expression should be annulled. That the government under ministry of education should set up and recommends a curriculum regarding the use of common nouns in gender pairs.

Conclusion

The paper shows that there is gender discrimination in the usage of Fulfulde language dyads. This is expressed in positive and negative semantic slot. There also high level of cultural influences on linguistic structures in the expression of dyads fulfulde languages. Another important finding is that repositioning of words in fulfulde language dyads that contained gender pairs result to semantic extension, odd expression and stereotyping. It finally finds that fulfulde dyads that contained gender pairs are common nouns. As such dyads asymmetry is manifested syntagmatically as the order of the components is irreversible.

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