A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF GENDER AND POVERTY ISSUES IN SELECTED NIGERIAN ONLINE NEWS DISCOURSE

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Abstract
The paper performs a linguistic analysis of online news discourse on gender issues and the role of Nigerian women in poverty alleviation and national growth in Nigeria. This is with a view to investigating the interactions between lexical choices and the implicit ideologies in discourses on the relation between gender and poverty alleviation in national development in the Nigerian socio-political context. The data comprise online news reports downloaded from the news archives of Pulse Nigeria News, Vanguard News, The Guardian, Africa Independent Television Online, Sahara Reporters and Businessday Media Ltd. One news report is selected from each news website making a total of six (6) news reports. The Internet is the primary source of the data for this study. With respect to the available online sources, only the six listed news websites feature gender issues on poverty eradication in their News/Business Columns, which informed their selection. The study performs a qualitative analysis of the selected data using relevant aspects of Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG). Findings reveal that the lexical choices in all the selected online news reports implicitly construct women as equal to men in the public sphere and consequently in national development. The study, therefore, concludes that gender inclusion is integral in poverty alleviation and national development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Systemic Functional Grammar, gender, gendered poverty, gender inclusion and online news discourse

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Introduction
Stereotypical gender relations and gender inequalities in the “distribution of income, access to productive inputs such as credit, command over property or control over earned income, as well as gender biases in labour markets” (Çagatay, 2001, p. 6) have made women across the globe to be more vulnerable to poverty within households, state and market institutions. Women’s relative vulnerability to poverty forms the nexus between gender and poverty. In spite of the UN’s resolutions on the imperativeness of gender equity at all sectors, gender-based inequality remains largely pervasive. Gender inequalities restrain women from active participation in economic, political, educational, health, trade, agricultural opportunities and these restraints, most often, hamper their productivity and national growth performance. This has, therefore, informed the need for a critical analysis of the relationship between poverty and gender inequality in the quest for gender-inclusive policies that can alleviate or eliminate poverty and enhance human development.

Unlike the traditional definition of poverty which exclusively views poverty as “a shortfall in consumption and income” (Çagatay, 2001, p. 14), poverty, in contemporary times, is defined as “the result of a social and economic process—with cultural and political components—in which individuals and households become deprived of essential assets and opportunities as a consequence of different individual and collective reasons and processes, thus making it multidimensional in nature” (Women and Development Unit, 2004, p. 12). It is also believed to be experienced differently by men and women in that gender relation is dominant in all spheres of human’s socioeconomic life; thus, making economies “gendered structures” (Çagatay, 2001, p. 14). UNDP (1995, p. 4) reveals that “70% of the world’s poor are women”. Thus, the link between gender inequalities and poverty is highly complex and heterogeneous in that the relationship depends on political, economic, socio-cultural patterns and ideological notions (Çagatay, 1998; Moghadam 2005).

The relative poverty of women has birthed the concept known as “feminisation of poverty” which has earlier shaped the relatedness of gender and poverty alleviation in the literature (Çagatay, 1998, p. 2). The concept
is imbued with the notion that women are relatively poorer than men (Bradshaw & Linneker, 2003). However, according to Cagatay (1998, p.2; Chant, 2003), “the universal validity of the ‘feminisation of poverty’ is being empirically challenged” because it limits the unit of analysis of gendered poverty to only the household level focusing mostly on “female-headed households (FHHs)” vis-a-vis male-headed households (MHHs). Critics of the approach opine that gender analyses of poverty must extend beyond the household headship unit to “the meso level, where the interaction of households and household members with a variety of other economic and social institutions such as the state or markets is studied” (Cagatay, 1998, p. 4). This has consequently birthed, in recent times, “macroeconomic level of analysis” (Cagatay, 1998, p. 4) such as the capacities approach, the social exclusion and participative approaches (Ruggeri, Saith & Stewart, 2003) that shape policymaking in the quest for gender-based poverty alleviation schemes across globe.

Consequently, the traditional approach to poverty has been broadened to human poverty concept. UNDP (1997) attaches the concept of human poverty to “the capabilities/entitlements approach” pioneered by Amartya Sen; an approach that “constitutes the analytical basis of UNDP’s Human Development Reports” (Cagatay, 1998, p. 6-7). The significance of human poverty approach lies in its exposure of the causes and the link between gender inequalities and poverty, and not merely the symptoms of poverty. The approach, thus, reveals the gendered nature of poverty in many dimensions of capabilities such as the distribution of resources at the household, state and institutional levels which is considered to be biased against girls and women. Also, “norms about child marriage of girls, gender biases against girls’ education, women’s limited mobility, women’s lack of control over fertility decisions, gender gaps in wages” (Cagatay, 1998, p. 11) are all factors that contribute to the relationship between poverty and gender inequalities.

Scholars (e.g. Bradshaw & Linneker, 2003; Moghadam, 2005) have explored the gendered nature of poverty in different socio-cultural and political domains. The present study is, however, interested in the Nigerian context. Despite the monumental efforts made by Nigerian authorities and
some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to reduce gendered poverty via the creation of poverty alleviation programmes like National Land Development Authority (NALDA), the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Better Life Programme for Rural Women (BLP), National Directorate of Employment (NDE), etc. (Ogwumike & Aromolaran, 2000; Umar, 2015), Nigerian women remain relatively poorer than their male counterparts. Extant studies on women and poverty in Nigeria have largely deployed social exclusion theory (e.g. Ewuim, Agbodike & Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2015), content analytical approach (e.g. Alao, 2015), sampling and analytical techniques (e.g. Edet & Etim, 2014), Pá index measures (e.g. Anyanwu, 2010) and orthodox feminist-Marxist theory (e.g. Umar, 2015) as tools to analyse the causes and effects of gendered poverty on societal growth and human development, thereby circumventing linguistic approaches to the interconnection of gender and poverty in Nigeria.

The present study, therefore, seeks to extend the literature on gendered poverty in Nigeria through a linguistic approach. Specifically, the paper performs a linguistic analysis of online news discourse on gender and poverty issues with a view to investigating the lexical choices that encode the relation between gender and poverty alleviation in national development in Nigeria.

The Theoretical Paradigm
Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG), also known as Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), is a theoretical perspective that is premised on the fact that the grammar of a language is “represented in the form of system networks, not as an inventory of structures” (Halliday & Matthiessen 2004, p. 23). The networks are construed via “systemic patterns of choice” which make language a “source for making meaning” (p. 23). Thus, the notion of systemic choices contributes to structure formation in which language users are primarily concerned with making word choices based on their functions and contextual appropriateness (Bloor & Bloor, 2004; Almurashi, 2006; Adeoye, 2014; Arawomo, 2016). Significantly, context remains one of the central concerns of SFG. Thus, to shape the contextual variables of discourse, Halliday identifies distinct sub-systems at the levels
of lexico-grammar and discourse semantics (Almurashi, 2006). At the
discourse semantic level, Halliday describes three grammatical modes
of meaning known as semantic metafunctions (Matthiessen & Halliday, 1997),
namely: the ideational, interpersonal and textual meanings. Each
metafunction constitutes “a network of options, sets of interrelated choices”
(Halliday, 1977, p. 176). In this study, however, we adopt only the ideational
semantic function.

The ideational metafunction is concerned with “resources for construing
our experience of the world around us and inside us”, and at the clausal
domain, the ideational system is transitivity (Matthiessen & Halliday, 1997,
p. 15; Banks, 2002). Transitivity construes our experience as configurations
of the processes involved in a clause rank, the participants implicated and
the attendant circumstances, if specified (Matthiessen & Halliday, 1997, p.
15). Halliday identifies six process types, but the four primary process
options, which are: material, mental, verbal and relational (as discussed by
Matthiessen & Halliday, 1997, p. 15-16) shall be applied in the data analysis.

The material process type construes “doing and happenings” which
include “actions, activities, and events” (Matthiessen & Halliday, 1997, p.
17). The material clause is further categorised into “particular structural
configurations, such as Process + Actor + Goal (+ Recipient)” (Matthiessen
& Halliday, 1997, p. 17). The mental process type construes sensing such as
“perception, cognition, intention, and emotion” and it is characterised
by the structural configuration of “Senser + Process + Phenomenon”
(Matthiessen & Halliday, 1997, p. 16-18). The verbal process focuses on
saying and it has the structural configuration of the Sayer + Process +
Verbiage + Receiver (Matthiessen & Halliday, 1997, p. 16) while the relational
type which construes being and having has the Carrier + Process + Attribute
configuration (Matthiessen & Halliday, 1997, p. 16).

In the present study, the ideational metafunction construed via
descriptive strands of transitivity will enhance an exploration of the lexical
choices that determine process type choices in online news discourse on
the relation between gender and poverty alleviation in national development
in Nigeria.
Methodology
The data for the study comprises primarily online news reports on gender issues and the role of Nigerian women in poverty alleviation and national growth. The data, gathered from 2017 to 2018, a period of one year, are drawn from the online news archives of Pulse News Agency, The Vanguard, The Guardian, AIT-Africa Independent Television, Sahara Reporters and Businessday Media. One news report is selected randomly from each news website making a total of six (6) news reports. The Internet is the primary source of the data for this study. With respect to the available online sources, only the six listed news websites feature gender issues on poverty eradication in their News/Business Columns, which informed their selection. This also presupposes the fact that gendered poverty is not a prioritised issue in the Nigerian polity, and consequently, it has received sparse attention from media outlets.

In performing a qualitative analysis of the data, relevant aspects of Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2004) SFG are applied. The ideational metafunction in SFG guided by the transitivity system is selected to perform a linguistic analysis of the news reports with a view to understanding how language is employed in the online news discourse to encode the relationship between gender and poverty in Nigeria.

Data Analysis
The data analysis focuses on the linguistic analysis of the data guided by the transitivity system in Halliday’s ideational metafunctional meaning as enunciated in Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG).

Linguistic Analysis
This section examines the language use (linguistic choices) of the news reporters to reveal the representation of gender inclusion in poverty alleviation and national development in Nigeria in the selected news reports. The analysis is split into two layers: lexical and transitivity analyses.

Lexical Analysis
In this section, the lexical choices deployed in the selected news reports are elicited in relation to their ideological representations of the relation between gender and poverty in Nigeria. The lexical choices are examined in succeeding sections:
Lexical Choices Portraying Gender Gap/Gendered Poverty in Nigeria

The news reports are replete with lexical choices that link Nigeria’s underdeveloped economy to gender gap in men and women’s contributions to economic growth. Instances of such lexical expressions are underlined in Excerpts 1 and 2:

Excerpt 1: Successive governments have formulated and implemented policies to develop the Nigerian economy, with the present administration determined to do more by diversifying from oil and fighting corruption. However, closing the gap in men and women’s contributions to economic growth has yet to be adequately exploited as a strategy to develop the economy and alleviate poverty. According to the Global Gender Gap Report, 2017, released by the World Economic Forum (WEF), Nigeria is the 122 out of 144 countries in closing gender gap. (Pulse News Agency, 2018)

Excerpt 2: Queen Maxima added that there is a big gender gap presently as women own just 42.6 per cent of bank accounts compared to 54.6 per cent for men, reflecting 12 per cent difference. Also, women have limited access to other financial possibilities; just as a mere two per cent of adults use mobile money even though there are 88 million mobile telephone subscribers. “As long as more women don’t have access to their own finance, this would continue to be a problem as this gap would continue to recycle poverty.” (The Guardian, 2017)

The underlined lexical items in the two excerpts above are deployed in the news reports to depict gender gap in Nigeria which has resulted in retarded national growth. The conjunctive adverbials However and yet in Excerpt 1 demonstrate that in spite of the efforts of successive governments to develop the economy of Nigeria, closing the gender gap remains a strategic feat still to be achieved in poverty alleviation and national growth. In Excerpt 2, the use of don’t, the contracted form of do not, likewise links gendered poverty to women’s limited access to finance. The two adverbials (in Excerpt 1) and the negative marker don’t (in Excerpt 2), thus, connote a negative sense meant to underscore the import of bridging the gender gap in the efforts towards ensuring economic development in Nigeria. The attributive modifier big in the Nominal Group big gender gap in Excerpt 2 rates high the degree
of the gender inequality operative in the Nigerian economic system while the adjective limited likewise underscores men and women’s unequal access to financial resources.

Also, using the prepositional phrase According to and the verb add in the past tense form in Excerpts 1 and 2, respectively, attribute the succeeding assertions to external sources. According to is used to ascribe the Global Gender Report (2017) on Nigeria’s backward position in the global fight against gendered poverty to World Economic Forum (WEF). Likewise in Excerpt 2, added ascribes the differential percentage report on men and women’s banking patronage to Queen Maxima, a voice distinct from the news reporter. Such ascriptions aim at lending credence and validity to the reports on the existence of gendered poverty in Nigeria. The analysed lexical items portray the lexical choices deployed in the news reports to underscore the fact that gender gap in men and women’s access to national resources has resultantly birthed gendered poverty in Nigeria. The lexical choices have also foreground implicitly the need for gender inclusion to attain the much-craved for economic development.

**Lexical Choices Depicting Hierarchical Relations**

In the data, hierarchical gender and class relations are portrayed as the basic factors militating against poverty alleviation in the country. Instances of these are exemplified in Excerpts 3 to 5:

Excerpt 3: ... Speaking at the opening session of the International Law Students’ Association Conference held at Oduduwa Hall of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife on Saturday, Awosika said the statistics of gender distribution as regards Nigeria’s population says women account for 48% of the working population in the country, and a large percentage of them are either jobless, dependent or not creative. She stated that non empowerment of such a high number of people that would have contributed positively to Nigerian economy would definitely have negative impacts on the general wellbeing of the populace... (Businessday Media, 2017)

Excerpt 4: Mrs Clare Omatseye, the Director of Society for Corporate Governance, suggests that gender equality and inclusiveness should be given a priority attention in the public and private sectors... “Nigeria and Africa as a whole must invest in women. The economic
future depends on it. “Give women the opportunity to grow. Don’t view them as threats but as partners in progress,” she urges. (Pulse News Agency, 2018)

Excerpt 5: ... Oxfam, in its 2017 latest report entitled, “Inequality in Nigeria, Exploring the Drivers,” presented an alarming picture of the Nigerian economic situation, stating that 112 million Nigerians are living in abject poverty. Presenting a picture of extreme inequality in Nigeria, Oxfam argued that the combined wealth of the five richest Nigerians put at about $29.9 billion, could end extreme poverty in the country... (Sahara Reporters, 2017)

The underlined adjectives jobless, dependent and not creative in Excerpt 3 characterise women as the constitutive other with no creative instincts, and therefore, jobless and dependent on their male counterparts for sustenance. The characterisation implicitly demonstrates the hierarchical gender relation between men and women in Nigeria in which women are marginalised and disempowered. The portrayal in the excerpt links the underdeveloped state of the nation to gender inequality. Also the word threats in the imperative in Excerpt 4 is a cautionary note to men to desist from seeing women as competitors that must be stampeded. The adjectival phrase partners in progress is used in the news reports to canvass for gender complementarity and harmony as against male hegemony in the pursuance of national growth.

Excerpt 5 portrays hierarchical class relations between the upper and lower classes, the rich and the poor in the Nigerian State. The lexical item extreme shows the extent of the financial inequality between the rich and poor. This is further reinforced in the next clausal report attributed to Oxfam that portrays the huge financial gap between the upper and lower classes in the nation. The gender and class disparities are brought to the limelight as the basic fundamental banes of national growth in Nigeria.

**Lexis Linking Poverty with Domestic Violence and Increase in Female Bombers**

The news discourse also portrays linguistic expressions that show causal relationships between poverty and subtypes of violence such as Domestic Violence (DV) and insurgency in Nigeria as observed in the excerpts below:
Excerpt 6: Over 134 suicide bombings have occurred since 2009 when Boko Haram unleashed a campaign of terror on Nigeria’s Northeast region.

...According to research by Combating Terrorism Center at West Point and Yale University, at least 244 of the 338 attacks since 2011 where gender is identifiable, have been young girls under the age of 7-13. And the trend does not seem to be ending soon.

...37-year old Hadiza is a mother to three girls and a missing boy; she loves her children but is willing to offer her teenage daughter to the insurgents for the monetary benefit...

Poverty and inequality have been blamed for most of the Boko Haram crisis in the Northeast... (Sahara Reporters, 2017)

Excerpt 7: The Lagos State Chapter of De Norsemen Kclub Inc., a non-governmental organisation committed to fighting injustice against humanity has attributed poverty as the root cause of violence against women...

Coordinator, Lagos State Chapter, De Norsemen Kclub Nigeria, Mr. Jubril Babatunde, said the increase in violence against women is as a result of economic situation in the country... (The Vanguard, 2017)

The use of the conjunctive adverbial but in Excerpt 6 presupposes the negative compelling power of poverty on victims. The poverty crisis in the Northern parts of the country is so horrid that in the struggle for survival, parents trade their daughters to the insurgents for money. The use of the adverbial in the context also serves a comparable function; the woman’s love for her children is implicitly compared to her need to survive. The subtle comparison reveals that her survival instinct supersedes and dominates her emotional love, attachment and consideration for her children. The implication is that poverty has a compelling power which can overshadow the rational consciousness of the affected. The willingness of the woman to trade off her teenage daughter for monetary gains implies females are the most vulnerable during poverty crisis and it also foregrounds the relative gendered nature of human poverty.

In Excerpt 7, the Nominal Group root cause and the conjunctive adverbial phrase as a result of are both used to indicate a cause-and-effect relationship between poverty and Domestic Violence against Women (DVAW) in Nigeria. The report links the increase in DVAW to the gloomy economic situation...
in the nation. This cause and effect relationship also underscores the existence of gendered poverty in Nigeria.

**The Use of Emotive Lexis**

Emotive lexis mirror language users’ feelings and psychological state of mind towards any given phenomenon. Findings reveal that emotive lexises are sparsely used in the data. The sparseness could presumably be attributed to the objectivity imperative that markedly defines news reportage. Instances of the few emotive words in the data are underlined in Excerpts 8 and 9:

Excerpt 8: A real estate investor, Mrs Udo Okonjo, *regrets* that Nigeria loses much in gross domestic product due to lack of gender inclusiveness. (Pulse News Agency, 2018)

Excerpt 9: Hadiza is a *nervous wreck*, uncoordinated for most of the interview. Hadiza and her husband were displaced after the deadly attacks on Biu in July 2015 that left 78 persons killed including the insurgents...

..."I have lost everything, I can’t feed these kids - we hear accounts of stolen foods and items sent to those of us suffering but who are those taking it back? The wealthy," Aisha *sobs*. (Sahara Reporters, 2017)

The emotive expressions in Excerpts 8 and 9 are functionally different. In Excerpt 8, the verb *regrets* captures the psychological demeanour of Mrs Udo Okonjo towards the huge loss records of Nigeria in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as a result of gender inequality in economic growth. However, the Nominal Group a nervous wreck and the verb *sobs* in Excerpt 9 portray the emotional state of a victim of the insurgency-induced poverty crisis in the nation. The emotive expressions represent the adverse effects of gendered poverty and insurgency-induced poverty on not just the citizens, but the nation’s GDP as well.

**Lexical Expressions Presenting Gender Inclusiveness as Panaceas for National Growth**

The data is replete with expressions that foreground gender inclusiveness and parity as panacea for national development. An instance is seen in Excerpt 10:
Excerpt 10: Dr Adesina Fagbenro, a former Regional Coordinator of Department for International Development, South-West, cautions that no country can prosper economically if half of its citizens are left behind. According to him, women participation is fundamental to inclusive governance without which good governance and economic development are not possible.

“If government is to meet the needs of both men and women, it must build on the experiences of both genders. Such equality can grow our economy and reduce poverty”, he says... (Pulse News Agency, 2018)

The repetitive use of the conjunction if, in Excerpt 10, does not only introduce the conditional clauses, it also underscores the indispensability of gender inclusiveness in governmental efforts towards poverty reduction and economic development.

Transitivity Analysis
This section will examine four process types of transitivity (namely: material, mental, relational and verbal) with a view to understanding how each type represents the relations between gender and poverty in the Nigerian context.

Material Process Types
The structural configuration for the material clause is: Process + Actor + Goal (+ Recipient) + Circumstance (if indicated). Instances of the process type in the data are revealed below:

Excerpt 11: ... the Nigerian Army [actor] issued [Process: Material] a statement appealing to religious and traditional leaders in communities within the region to help dissuade people from donating their daughters or female wards to the terrorists for indoctrination and suicide bombing missions[Goal]... where the insurgents paid off the parents in exchange for their daughters[Circumstance]... (Sahara Reporters, 2017)
Excerpt 12: ... Organizers of the event [actor] emphasized [Process: Material] the need for women to be given equal opportunity to enable them compete side-by-side with their male counterparts[Goal]. (AIT, 2018)
Excerpt 13: The Chief Executive Officer of the Nigerian Economic Summit Group, Mr Jaiyeola Olaoye, [actor] also emphasizes [Process: Material] that women contribution is important for the growth of any economy[Goal]. (Pulse News Agency, 2018)
As exemplified in Excerpts 11 to 13 above, the material process type is mostly used in the online news reports to represent actions and activities performed by Nigerian governmental bodies like the military in Excerpts 11 and 13, as well as private organisations in Excerpt 12. They are visibly represented as actors (animate subjects) in the active clausal structures in the news reports in order to underscore their roles and efforts towards gender parity and national development. These actors realised by nominal groups in the transitivity structures of the news reports (e.g. the Nigerian Army, The Chief Executive Officer of the Nigerian Economic Summit Group, Mr Jaiyeola Olaoye, and Organizers of the event), are depicted as people vested with the power to control or influence the actions of the citizenry.

The Process is realised by the lexical verbs, issued and emphasised while the Goal is also realised by nominal groups. It is, however, observed that the Goals in the three excerpts are inanimate. In Excerpt 11, the goal represents the military’s statement of appeal to religious and traditional grassroots stakeholders within in the Northern communities to persuade the citizenry from trading off their daughters to the insurgents for monetary exchange. The Goals in Excerpts 12 and 13 represent gender parity for economic growth. Circumstance, an optional structural configuration, features in Excerpt 11 to depict the antecedent (parents’ exchange of daughters to the insurgents for monetary benefits) of the Nigerian military’s statement of appeal to the locals.

Thus, the military’s action in the transitive clause and the circumstantial antecedent of that action presupposes that girls/women are most vulnerable in insurgency-induced poverty conditions. The three excerpts demonstrate the Nigerian government’s proactiveness towards saving girls/women from such despicable situations. Actions of private bodies and relevant stakeholders in emphasising gender parity in national development are also foregrounded through the transitivity structure of the clauses.

**Mental Process Type**

Mental processes are characterised by Senser + Process + Phenomenon. Very few instances of the process type can be observed in the data as revealed in the following excerpts:
Excerpt 14: She [Senser] wants [Process: Mental] corporate organisations and civil societies to support and empower women for nation-building...


Excerpt 15: 37-year old Hadiza is a mother to three girls and a missing boy; she [Senser] loves [Process: Mental] her children but is willing to offer her teenage daughter to the insurgents for the monetary benefit [Phenomenon]. (Sahara Reporters, 2017)

Mental process type as seen in Excerpts 14 and 15 is primarily used by the news reporters to encode the desires and emotions (positive and negative) of attributed voices in the news reports. In both excerpts, the Sensers represent animate entities with cognitive abilities and they are realised via nominal groups. The pronoun She in Excerpt 14 is an anaphoric reference to “Dr Omobola Johnson, a former Minister of Communications Technology and Chairperson…”, an advocate in the campaign for gender parity in the Nigerian workforce whose desire for gender parity is represented by the desiderative verb want. Her desire, captured in the phenomenon, demonstrates the yearnings of some elites for gender inclusiveness; it shows that not all elites are indifferent to the plight of women in Nigeria.

However, she in Excerpt 15 refers to Hadiza, a victim of insurgency-induced poverty in the Northern region of Nigeria. The cognitive verb love which portrays her positive emotion for her children is contrastively set against her advertent act of offering her daughters to the insurgents in exchange for money. This contrast aims to reveal the high poverty level that the Boko Haram insurgency has triggered in the affected parts of Northern Nigeria; it also reveals the high vulnerability of girls/women relative to their male counterparts. Rhetorically, the contrast draws attention to the gendered nature of poverty in the insurgency-ridden parts of Northern Nigeria.

Regret, a cognitive verb in Excerpt 14 is a mental process used in encoding the negative emotion of the Senser. The negative portrayal aims at bringing to the limelight the huge loss Nigeria experiences in GDP due to gender gap in national development. It also aims to foreground the imperativeness of gender inclusiveness to a boost in the nation’s GDP.
Verbal Process Type
Findings reveal that the verbal process, which focuses on what is said, abounds in the data. Its structural configuration includes: the Sayer + Process+ Verbiage+ Receiver. Below are some instances of its occurrences in the data:

Excerpt 16: … The Chairperson of First Bank of Nigeria PLC … [Sayer] said [Process: Verbal] long held belief that women with good economic means or career cannot keep home front should be discarded, noting that she had been married for 27 years and despite daring challenge of keeping her marriage she had managed to combine effectively, managing her home and business[Verbiage]… (Businessday Media, 2017)
Excerpt 17: … Coordinator, Lagos State Chapter, De Norsemen Kclub Nigeria, Mr. Jubril Babatunde, [Sayer] said [Process: Verbal] the increase in violence against women is as a result of economic situation in the country [Verbiage], saying [Process: Verbal] “a lot of men needs to be talked to because most of them lost their jobs[Verbiage]… (The Vanguard, 2017)

The dialogue-anchored form of the verbal process makes it an important transitivity structure. The contents of the processes in the two excerpts are directed to specific audiences, though not visible. The verbal processes in the excerpts, thus, encode interactions between the speakers (Sayers) and some other participants. The Sayers are represented via the nominal groups (The Chairperson of First Bank of Nigeria PLC, Coordinator, Lagos State Chapter, De Norsemen Kclub Nigeria, Mr. Jubril Babatunde). The depictions portray the Sayers as institutional heads vested with constitutional power in their institutional domains. The portrayal of their high social status seeks to lace their verbal processes with authoritative weight and credibility. The further use of she in Excerpt 16 and Mr in Excerpt 17, reveal the genders of the Sayers in both excerpts with a view to validating their opinions.

The Verbiage in Excerpt 15 debunks the general notion among Nigerians that career woman are mostly incapable housewives. The further reference to the speaker’s ability to combine career and marriage successfully reinforces and validates the speaker’s assertion. The rhetorical effect of the assertion is to eliminate gender gap against women at the workforce level and
strengthen equal opportunities within the workforce to alleviate gendered poverty. In Excerpt 16, the Verbiage reveals women’s vulnerability to violence at the home front in poor economic situation; when the economy is poor, women are at the receiving end. This revelation reinforces the fact that women relatively suffer most during poor economic situations.

**Relational Process Type**

Relational processes have the following structural configurations: Carrier + Process + Attribute. The data set is also replete with several instances of the process type. Some few ones are exemplified in the excerpts below:


The carrier, realised via the nominal group in each excerpt above, exhibits some notable attributes. In Excerpt 18, Nigeria, an inanimate entity, is relatively attributed as one of the countries with a huge gender gap which has negatively impacted on the country’s economic development. The circumstance of the recent global gender gap report ranking of countries (2017) projects gender-based disparities as one of the factors beguiling Nigeria’s poor economic performance. It also underscores the centrality of gender parity in national growth.

The relational processes realised via the copular verbs (are, was) in excerpts 19 and 20 characterise women (the carrier) positively. Using adjectival phrases (valuable role models...) to depict women’s attributes in Excerpt 19, women’s inherent ability to contribute positively to national growth is
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projected with a view to celebrating their indispensability in economic development. While the carrier (women) in Excerpt 19 is generic, the carrier in Excerpt 20, realised via the first person singular pronoun I is specific. Her argument (in Excerpt 20) of being able to balance career and housewifery successfully seeks to invalidate the assumed disinclinations of career women to housewifery. Rhetorically, her proposition simultaneously debunks negative attributive portrayal of women and proves that women have the ability to combine home and business effectively. The argument is geared towards reinforcing the essence of women in national development to bridge the gender gap.

In Excerpt 21, the attributive relational process type is used in describing Hadiza, a poverty-stricken victim of insurgency in Northern Nigeria. By describing the victim’s pitiable state during the interview, the report draws attention to how the Boko Haram insurgency, ravaging Northern Nigeria, has caused grievous physical and emotional damages to women relative to men. Rhetorically, women’s vulnerability in times of crisis is emphasised.

Concluding Remarks
The present study explores the lexical choices in online news reports on gender and poverty issues in Nigeria. This is with a view to investigating how language is used to encode the relation between gender and poverty alleviation in national development in Nigeria coupled with the role of Nigerian women in poverty alleviation and national growth in Nigeria.

Using the ideational metafunction construed via descriptive strands of transitivity in Halliday and Matthiessen’s (2004) Systemic Functional Grammar as theoretical framework, findings from the analysis reveal that through deliberate linguistic choices, the news reporters foreground the existence of gender inequalities in Nigeria which disfavour women and result in their non-inclusiveness in national planning and development as well as its huge negative impact on economic development. The transitivity structures represent actors (Nigerian governmental bodies and private organisations) at the vanguard of the fight towards gender parity and national development. The attributive relational process type which abounds in the data mainly seeks to reshape the demeaning image attributed to women in
the Nigerian society with a view to soliciting for their empowerment at all levels.

With the aforementioned findings, the study concludes that the existence of gender gap at all sectors of the Nigerian economy has resulted in gendered poverty among the populace. The study, therefore, underscores the expediency of gender inclusiveness in the alleviation of poverty and in the efforts towards national growth and development.

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