

**PERCEPTIONS ON THE IMPACT OF LANGUAGE USED
BY MALE AND FEMALE ADMINISTRATORS AS A TOOL
FOR NEGOTIATING POWER IN ZIMBABWE'S
INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER LEARNING: A CASE OF
BULAWAYO PROVINCE**

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to analyse the language used by male and female administrators as a tool of negotiating power in institutions of higher learning of Zimbabwe. The research assessed the nature of language used by administrators and how this had a bearing on the type of leader one becomes. Descriptive survey design method was used. Four institutions of higher learning comprising two colleges and two universities were used. Subordinates and administrators were chosen to be respondents of the research questioner. Stratified sampling based on gender, organizational hierarchy and academic status was found to be convenient in sampling the research subjects. Simple descriptive qualitative analysis aided by graphical and tabulation presentations were used to analyse data. The major findings were that differences exist in the way male and female leaders use language to negotiate power. Some of these differences emanate from gendered societal language use. These differences were observed to be impacting on the leadership style one employs in their leadership career. It is therefore imperative that there

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is need for change of attitude in the modern society where male language should not be considered as a yardstick to judge women's language when negotiating power. Women leaders should harmonize their authority with the language they use for them to save as effective leaders.

Key terms: Administration, Institutions of higher learning, Language, Management & Power

1.0 Introduction

Human beings can communicate with each other and exchange so many signals through body language, which only our imagination set limits. However our main system of communication before anything else is language. Language is a system of communication based on words and the combination of words into sentences which can be interpreted differently according to differing circumstances. Language has been manipulated to serve mans' agendas on different forums and leaders have also relied on language as a tool of negotiating power. Men and women in leadership have been judged, criticized and even respected due to their use of language. However the nature of men's and women's language have been said to be different and this has had a bearing on women's leadership. Women continue to aspire for leadership positions in all spheres of governance in both the public and private sector. However it has not been easy. Some countries like South Africa have made much progress within a short space of time in their efforts toward a gender-neutral society, but for others like Zimbabwe the pace has been much slower. It is therefore in this regard then that this paper set to assess if these differences in language have a bearing on leadership style of the two genders.

1.2 Background of Study

It is with great realization that language is a tool of power, control, and domination (Bafumo, 2006). Famous leaders in the history of mankind have been celebrated for their remarkable use of language. Even today, they are being quoted and constantly referred to by politicians and academics. Language defines leaders. Martin Luther King, Jr's iconic phrase, "I have a dream..." is a perfect example. Even setting aside the powerful context of the event in which he spoke, the language he used clearly identified Martin Luther King as a leader. He did not say that he had a "good idea," or a "thought to share." Nor did he say he knew "the way" to a better America. Like

great Americans before him, King had a dream. His carefully crafted words powerfully conveyed the passion of his beliefs, and he earned a place in history for helping to right a great wrong in the nation.

Similarly, the likes of Franklin Delano Roosevelt led the American nation out of the depths of the Great Depression and to victory in World War II. He used language masterfully by speaking directly to the American people to calm their fears and rally their support for the dual challenges of rebuilding America's economy and defending freedom. He assured Americans who were out of work and on the immediate horizon that "We have nothing to fear but fear itself." (Bafumo, 2006) His fireside chat encouraged and uplifted Americans. A grateful nation elected Roosevelt to the Presidency an unprecedented four times. These and others such as Hitler, Kwame Nkrumah and Joshua Nkomo were able to command a great following through their exceptional use of language. Even today the likes of President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe and Janey Williams of Women of Zimbabwe Arise [WOZA] are known to command prowess in language. Great challenges are eminent in management especially for women in positions of leadership. The way power is manifested by men and women in positions of leadership interested the researcher. Being aware of the different power bases, the research seeks to analyse the trends on language used to ascertain power and show if there are any similarities and differences.

With the background that language is gendered or gender specific, that is, men and women possess different linguistic skills and prowess, a number of researches have been done on those lines. For instance, a 1980 study by William O'Barr and Bowman Atkins looked at courtroom cases and witnesses' speech for women, Lakoff in 1975 studied women's language and Dale's 1990 study on teenager speeches. However, this research seeks to take another dimension of exploring the linguistic practices of women and men and see if these differences have a bearing when it comes to leadership especially the portrayal of power. With prominent statements such as;

It is harder for women to give orders.

It is natural for men to be in command.

Women pay a double price to be boss.

I would rather have a male boss. (Bafumo, 2006:10)

The study therefore sought to find if these emanate from any observations made in the use of language by both men and women.

Also, coming from a traditional, patriarchally dominated society where the norms or opinions indicate that ‘Women's language is described as weak, unassertive, tentative, and women are presented as losers and as victims.’ (Coates 1998), this then creates an unfair starting or breaking ground for women leaders.

Furthermore, some researches on language and gender across a number of languages have also equated the speech of women with powerlessness (Coates 1998). For instance, the Japanese women speech is said to be soft, polite and indirect, in sum, as powerless. Thus, this in turn creates problems for women who command. Thus with this kind of background the research sought to trace and see if those trends were eminent in leadership with specific attention to the language used to show and command power.

However, some researches that have been done have brought out different views. For instance, the Barr and Atkins’ (1980) study of basic assumptions about what marks out the language of women, in researching what they describe as “powerless language”, found that language differences are based on situation-specific authority or power and not gender (Coates, 1998). Of course, there may be social contexts where women are (for other reasons) more or less the same as those who lack power. But this is a far more limited claim than that made by Dale Spender (1990), who identifies power with male patriarchal order in the theory of dominance.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Traditionally in Zimbabwe like most African states, leadership has been a preserve of men and in recent years we have had women being afforded opportunities to lead as a way of balancing up the leadership platform. However women have been criticized and have been labelled not so good leaders. In many instances they have been described as lacking authority. Authority, a key characteristic of leadership, can be derived from the way one speaks and since language has been said to be gendered, it is in this regard that an investigation was set to assess if the language used by male and female leaders in organizations has an impact on their leadership qualities in diverse environments they work under. Solemnly it is paramount that for the purpose of this study, only institutions of higher learning were sampled.

1.4 Research Questions

The broad research question which guides the study was finding out the nature of language used by man and women in positions of leadership to negotiate power in institutions of higher learning. However specific questions were:

1. What differences exist in the language used by male and female leaders?
2. How do these differences in language used by male and female workmates impact on negotiating power?
3. What is the perceived impact of the language used by administrators on the leadership qualities and style of an administrator?

1.5 Methodology

This study sought to analyse the language used by male and female administrators as a tool of negotiating power in institutions of higher learning in Bulawayo province. The descriptive survey design method was used. Four institutions of higher learning, that is, two colleges and two universities were used. Subordinates and administrators were chosen to be respondents of the research questioner. Stratified sampling method was found to be convenient in sampling the research subjects. This was based on gender, organizational hierarchy and academic status.

Table 1.5.1 Institutions used

Institution	Number
Universities	2
Tertiary colleges	2

Table 1.5.2: Sample Composition

Representative Groups	Number of Male Participants	Number of Female Participants
Administrators	20	20
Subordinates	20	20

The research used qualitative research design through the questionnaire for collecting data. Data collected was analysed using simple descriptive qualitative analysis aided by graphical and tabulation presentations.

1.6 Presentation of Results and Discussions

The data was presented and discussed based on a number of thematic frames which were derived from the research questions.

1.6.1 Demographic Presentation

The table below summarizes the demographic results of respondents collected from two universities and two colleges located in Bulawayo province.

Table 1.6.1: Total Respondents' Demographic Breakdown

	Subordinates	Supervisors	Total	Representation
Female	20	14	34	42,5%
Male	20	26	46	57,5%
Total	40	40	80	100%

This table illustrates results based on demographical data and it shows that from the 40 subordinate respondents chosen, 20 were male and 20 female which make the results gender balanced. However, from these results it was noted that when it comes to leadership positions, the distribution changes. From the 40 administrator respondents, 14 were female whereas 26 were male. This translates to 35% of administrators being female while 65% of the administrators were male. The total respondents therefore, point to 42.5% (34) total females and 57, 5% (46) male respondents out of the total population of 80 respondents. This then showed that leadership or positions of responsibility in the institutions is male dominated.

1.6.2 What differences exist in the language used by male and female leaders?

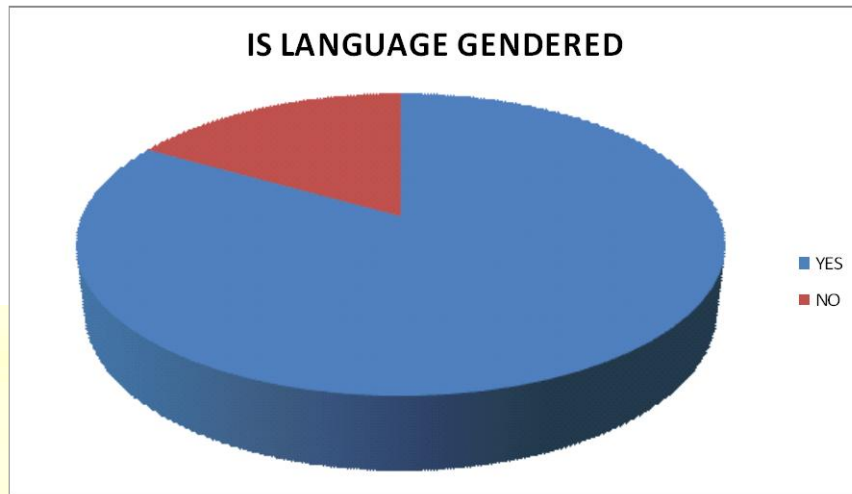


Figure 1.6.1 Is language gendered

The research findings showed that 83, 3% of the respondents felt that the language is gendered, that is males speak differently from females. However, the 16, 7% perceived that language was the same for both males and females. The respondents in the 16, 7% category tended to say that education helps people speak in a similar way no wonder the males and females in leadership position spoke in a similar way. This could have been due to that in most situations they are at par in the level of education as evidence showed that at colleges from the 17 total supervisors 14 had at least their first degree and 8 had or were working towards their masters' degree regardless of their gender.

In the universities evidence showed that from the 23 supervisors, that is, 8 females and 15 males, 20 had at least a master's degree, although about 5 had or were working towards getting their doctorate (PhDs). According to the respondents, education empowers females to be at par with their male counterparts and they then use language in a similar way. The 83.3% who thought the language is gendered, that is, male and female administrators speak differently. They thought that the cause of these differences emanates from the fact that socialization and the gender roles that these people have in the society influences the way they speak even at their work places. Thus the language of administrators is gender specific, female and male in leadership posts speak differently.

1.6.3 How do the differences that exist in language used by male and female leaders impact on negotiating power?

Table 1.6.2 Nature of Male and Female language

Nature of male language	Frequency	%	Nature of female language	Frequency	%
Powerful	69	86.26	Powerful	21	26,25
Weak	11	13.75	Weak	59	73.75

Distribution of the nature of male and female language									
	Sex of respondents	Nature of female's language				Nature of males language			
		Powerful		Weak		Powerful		Weak	
	Female	15	44,1%	19	55.9%	26	76.5%	8	23.5%
	Male	6	13%	40	87%	43	93.5%	3	6.5%

Sixty nine, (86.26%) respondents said that the language of men is powerful and 11(13.75%) said it was weak, whereas 21(26.25%) described the language of women as weak and 59(73.75%) as powerful. The 21(26.25%) respondents who described the language of women as powerful noted that those with powerful language were women holding high level posts in the institutional hierarchy. They also attributed this powerful nature of women's language to the level of education one has acquired. Thus, the higher the level of education the more powerful one's language is. Most of the males, (40 respondents), who described the language of females as weak had a number of things to say about women's language. They noted that the language was manipulative, that is the female supervisors tended to manipulate the situation to their favour and use the feminine attributes to get what they want. Some of the responses that were given by the respondents as examples of manipulative language of women were:

“My dear, mind doing this for m ...” typical female boss expression

“Come on gentlemen can't you see ...” whereas man would just say, “Gentlemen! ...” typical male boss expression.

These, then show the manipulative nature of women's language in the work environment. They tended to use language that appeals to the sensitive nature of their counterparts or subordinates. These findings are consistent with the reason why the few respondents especially the male ones preferred female supervisors. They alluded to the fact that a female supervisor is more understanding or empathetic, and they usually used susceptible language or what might be called "motherly language" unlike the males who tended to be confrontational.

1.6.4 Relationship of Language and Administrative Posts

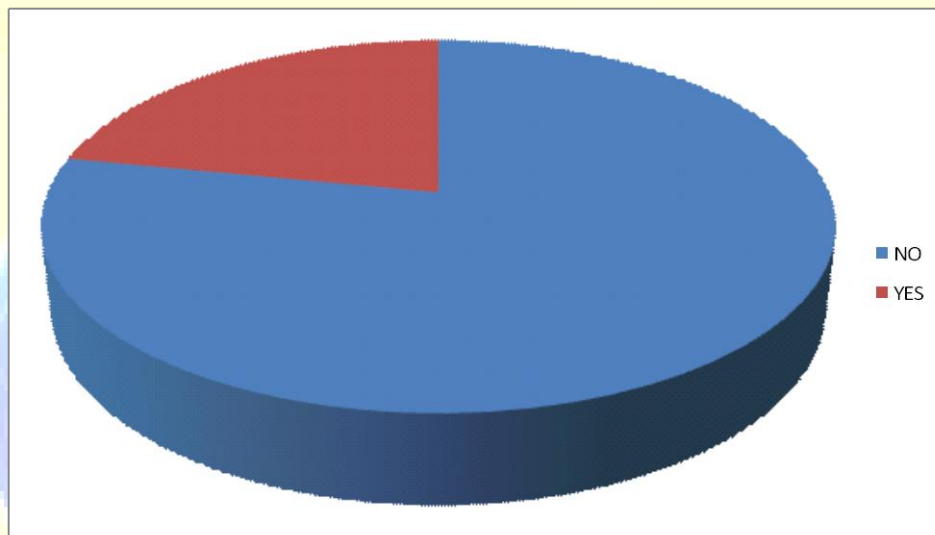


Figure 1.6.2 Relationship of Language and Administrative Posts

From the 32 subordinate respondents of interviews, 78.1% said the differences in language between male and female did not have a bearing on the position one held in the institution. 21.9% thought these language differences had a bearing on ones' position. These results show that there is no correlation between position of authority and the differences in language as these positions of leadership are attained through merit and educational achievement. However, it was noted by 85% of respondents as they supported their view on the relationship between language and leadership style, that men, because they are men, the way they speak puts them at an advantage over women leaders as they use language more assertively. This sentiment concurs with what Zimmerman and West (1991) note that when they say men's power is directly transposed onto the conversational forum. They argue that men enjoyed power in society and conversations, and the two levels are seen as part of a single sociopolitical system. Language is then seen as a medium through which a woman's subservient place in society is maintained and reinforced.

1.6.5 Relationship of Language and Leadership style

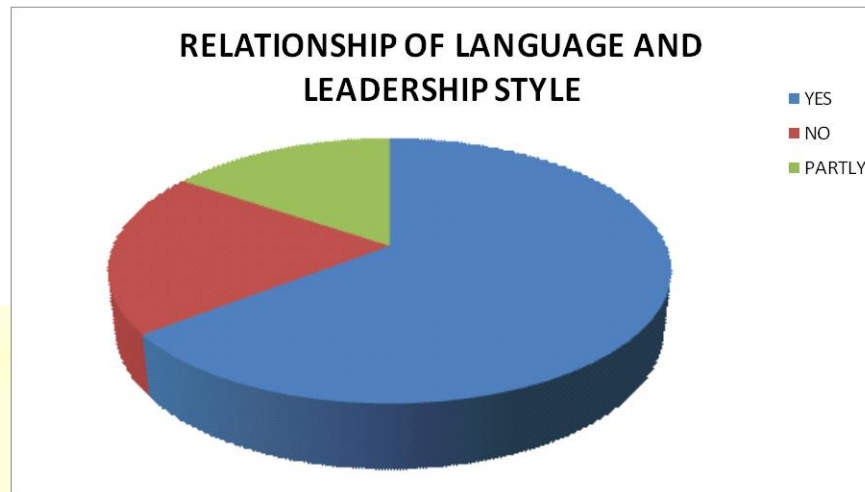


Figure 1.6.3 Relationship of Language and Leadership style

These results show that 65% of the respondents felt that there was a relationship between language and leadership style whereas 20% felt there was no relationship between the two only the personality of a leader had a bearing to the leadership style. 15% felt there was partly some relationship although some other factors came into play. These results support Shaw's (2004) beliefs that the personalities of managers have a bearing on how they use language and in turn impacts on the style. Shaw (2004) describes how extroverts think loud and this in turn sends their subordinate running before a command is even issued. These are the same leaders who are later seen as authoritarians.

1.7 Conclusions and Recommendations

1. What differences exist in the language used by male and female leaders?

The study observed that male and female leaders used language differently in their bid to negotiate power in their leadership roles. The researcher conclusively observed that males in leadership positions use influential language in negotiating power whereas women tended to use manipulative and rather too authoritative language as a way of negotiating power in the institutions of higher learning. However, it was noted that the higher the level of education which a woman attains and the more prestigious the leadership posts, the more powerful language she commands and is able to negotiate power using language in the same realm of societal bondage of language expectations as men.

2. How do the differences that exist in the language used by male and female leaders' impact on negotiating power?

The researcher concluded that the differences that exist in the use of language between men and women tend to affect the way male and female leaders are perceived. Due to the societal norms and expectations of women that make women play second fiddle to men are contributing factors to the way women's language is described and viewed in the administration realm. Society still expects women to be subtle and to use soft language even in the leadership realm. Thus women leaders are confined to these expectations and breaking away from these norms is a tall order for some of them. Hence the research conclusively observed that women, due to their language use are said to be weak leaders whereas men are said to be powerful leaders. Also, with some women to break the barriers of societal expectations in language use, they tend to overuse authoritative language as they try to negotiate power. Educational empowerment was seen to assist female leaders to ascertain powerful language that they can use as leaders.

- 3 What is the perceived impact of the language used by the administrators on their leadership styles?

The research concluded that the language used by administrators has an impact on the leadership style one tends to use. The way a leader speaks or uses language has a bearing on the style he or she employs in the leadership career.

1.7.1 Recommendations

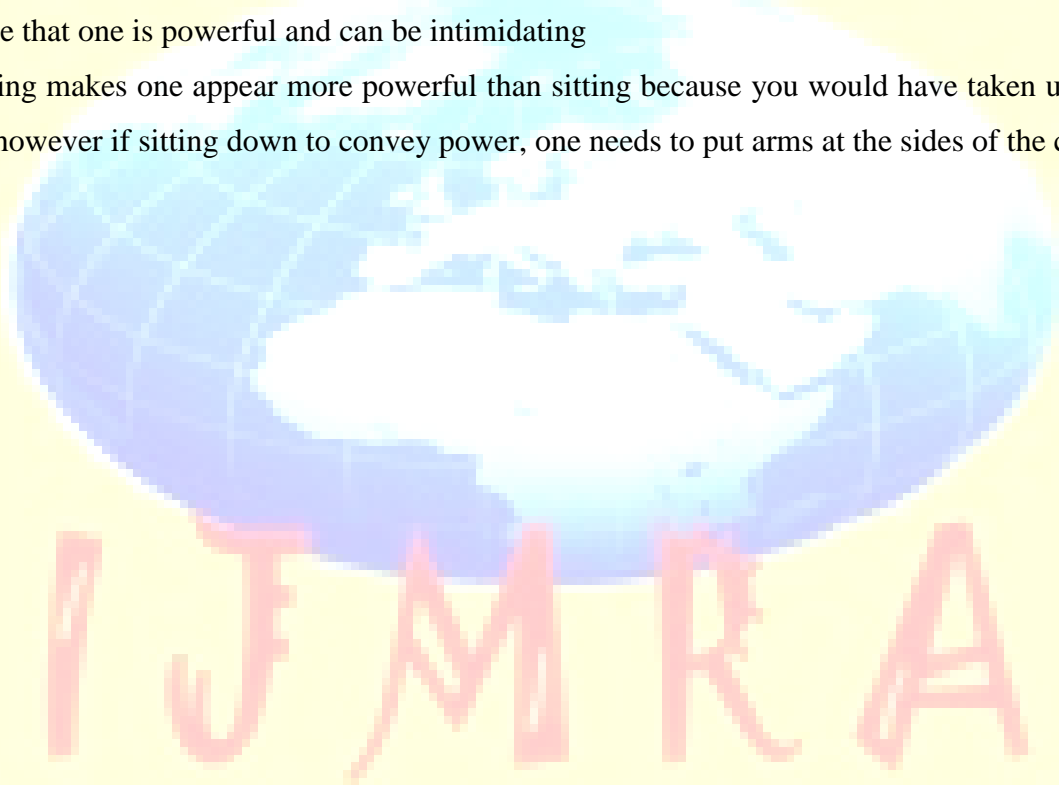
The researcher recommends the following to various stakeholders:

1. Language can be used to negotiate power in administration and it has an impact on the leadership style one tends to use, thus men and female leaders can ascertain power effectively using language.
2. Men and women should be given equal opportunities to lead and when they do, male yardsticks should not be used to judge female leaders' use of language as this disadvantages female leaders.
3. Education emancipates ones language especially women's, thus female leaders should be allowed to upgrade themselves as much as this will instill assertiveness in their language.
4. There is need for change of attitude in the society to embrace the women leadership and in turn appreciate the language they use.

5. To women leaders, manipulating authority and using authoritative language does not make them powerful leaders instead they tend to be bullies that instill fear instead of respect to their subordinates. They should harmonize their authority with the language for them to save as powerful leaders.

7. Besides the verbal language that is used to negotiate power, there is body language that can be manipulated by leaders both male and female to aid their negotiation of power. For instance the following can be incorporated to enhance power in one's language;

- . Make steady eye contact as one speaks, this shows that a person is confident
- . Holding hands in a pyramid shape especially touching your mouth with forefingers sends a message that one is powerful and can be intimidating
- . Standing makes one appear more powerful than sitting because you would have taken up more space, however if sitting down to convey power, one needs to put arms at the sides of the chair.



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