

A Critical Discourse Analysis of Media and Public Narratives on Domestic Violence: The Case of Osinachi Nwachukwu

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Abstract

Domestic Violence is a social phenomenon that has drawn the attention of all of sundry. So many women suffer harsh domestic violence these days. Until her death, Osinachi Nwachukwu suffered severe domestic violence (DV) from her husband. This study attempts a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of media and public narratives on domestic violence Osinachi Nwachukwu experienced that eventually led to her demise. Data are drawn from the internet and subjected to a CDA and content analysis. Leaning on Grice's Theory of Conversational Implicature (TCI), the study argues that domestic violence has traces to, or arises partly from, the violation of communicative principles, and lack of rational co-operative conversation among partners. The analysis demonstrates that Osinachi's failure to look at her marriage and the DV she suffered through the lens of CDA, which would have propelled her to quit the abusive marriage and stay alive, led to her untimely death. The study recommends compulsory divorce or separation for women suffering DV or GV in a love union or other contexts if they have sought help from religious organizations, state institutions and non-governmental organisations and the violence persists.

Keywords: Domestic violence, Critical discourse analysis, Osinachi, Abuse

Introduction

It is quite surprising that domestic violence (DV henceforth) against women is a seemingly imitated norm among many men these days. In this article DV would be used interchangeably with gender violence (GV henceforth). That is, the two terms are used to refer to the same subject matter. On daily basis, there are reports of women being strangled, beaten to death, stabbed, butchered, slaughtered or murdered gruesomely in one way or the other. Husbands and other male lovers have been repeatedly reported to have abused their wives and other categories of female lovers in various regards. They abuse them sexually, physically and verbally for many years. And, in many cases, they end up taking the lives of the same women they claim to love. Incidents of gender/domestic violence in Nigeria include women and men battery, torture, acid baths, rape and death (Ahmed, 2021).

The Guardian Nigeria reported that on 27 February, 2021, domestic violence against women was on the high side, particularly the physical form (Gulloma, 2020; Ahmed, 2021). Against the foregoing backdrop, this study aims at showing how effective language use for a critical discourse analysis of reported cases could cause a deserving change, as women get warned against staying back or taking chances in any violent marriage or relationship ridden with gender violence. Gender violence against women is an extreme manifestation of gender inequity, often targeting women and girls because of their vulnerable status in society, which is reinforced and perpetuated by structural patriarchy (Zain, 2012).

The Spate of Domestic Violence

Different studies confirm as well as frown at the rising cases of domestic violence against women, as in the case of Osinachi Nwachukwu. The UK Government (2013) describes domestic violence and abuse as any incident or pattern of incidents of coercive control, threatening behaviour, violence or abuse between those aged sixteen or over, who are or have been intimate partners or family members regardless of gender or sexuality. For this study, domestic violence is simply any form of cruel and violent behaviour towards and against a person of the opposite sex. In other words, this study considers domestic violence as an intentional and a persistent abuse of anyone (a woman, a child or even a man) to such an extent that the victims suffer pain, distress, injury, harm, deprivation or abuse of their human rights.

As Adebayo and Kolawole (2013) observes, cases of violence against women mostly go unreported, because the victims prefer to suffer in silence. It is observed that the social context of violence against women in Nigeria is related to the traditional African patriarchal society that defines the gender power structure (Okeh, 2007; Besong, 2017). The situation is such that even in cases in which the man is guilty, the female relatives of the man are usually the first to accuse the woman and pronounce her guilty, irrespective of the obvious signs of physical abuse. As such, husbands alone are always at the right side of every family or marital feud. Being submissive to a husband

or a male lover is often misconceived and misinterpreted by many. One way through which a woman shows submissiveness to her husband is by changing her surname.

Core Factors behind Domestic Violence

There are many factors responsible for domestic violence. These include wickedness, polygamous family situation, hatred for no cogent reason, the tendency for child-labour, torturing the child as to get back at his/her mum or father, learnt and internalised violent habit, alcoholism, drug addiction, and so on. Beyond the home, domestic violence obtains in school, workplace, church, mosque, on the street, at a recreation centre, and what have you— anywhere. Also, domestic violence tampers with and severely harms victim's emotion, personal dignity, psyche, health, finance or financial status, rights, morality, and physique. In the course of the domestic violence, the victim suffers persistent torture, insult, humiliation or criticism, pain, tension, assault and battery, bodily abusive attack, poverty (feminisation), incapacitation, rights deprivation, sexual harassment, etc. As evident in various cases of DV, there are more cases of women being abused and battered by men than cases of DV by women against men. One recent example of domestic violence against men is that of Maryam Sanda, who killed her husband in 2020.

Although more women than men suffer DV, men also suffer DV from some women. Studies affirm the reality that women also abuse men on gender basis (Cook, 2009; Dienye & Gbeneol, 2009; Oladepo, Yusuf and Arulogun, 2011; Kumar, 2012; Adebayo, 2014). That is, men also suffer domestic violence from women. In most circumstances, for fear of being rather ridiculed by men and women alike, abused men do not cry out that they are suffering DV from their women (Adebayo, 2014; Oladepo, Yusuf & Arulogun, 2011). This is quite almost the same with most female sufferers of DV, who rather keep quiet and suffer DV up to the point of losing their lives to the abusive relationships. Different factors account for gender violence suffered by women across cultures. Often times, references are made to culture and religion as the grounds for which females have to be treated as inferior beings by males. Many scholars condemn these (Okpeh, 2007; Besong, 2017; Iloanya, 2019).

The gender stereotypical teachings about and the rigid precepts stipulated for women in male-female relations make it almost impossible for women to get out of an abusive marriage or the like relationship. Sources indicate that patriarchy is a strong factor behind the gender woes suffered by women of different cultures and religions, especially cultures and religions in Nigeria and many other developing nations (Ellens, 1994; Okpeh, 2007; Ochelle, 2014; Afella, 2016; Chimakonam, 2018). Patriarchy gives relevance to males alone and upholds sexism against women. It is agreed that patriarchy makes women more vulnerable to abuse, murder and other social, economic and cultural constraints (Omonubi-McDonnell, 2003; Albert, 1996). As Ellens (1994) has observed, disproportionate male-female ratios in some professions make it difficult for several women to interact well with their male colleagues. Therefore, the ideal or supposed smooth relations between males and females are disrupted by the disproportionate relations between them on gender lane (Ellens, 1994).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Grice's (1967) Theory of Conversational Implicature (TCI) in linguistics. Grice's (1967) Theory of Conversational Implicature (TCI) was the first to identify and distinguish the phenomenon of 'implicature'. The key underlying assumption of Grice's theory is that in rational, co-operative conversation, people follow the principle of co-operation. Since his 1967 publication, Grice's original account has been a subject of criticism and resultant rethinking. *Logic and Conversation* was published in 1975. This paper became one of the classic treatises of pragmatics, a sub-discipline of linguistics. As Haberland and Mey (2001) rightly observe, the paper succeeded for two reasons. First, it can be regarded as the first truly serious attempt to clarify the difference between what is expressed literally in a sentence and what is suggested by an utterance of the same string of words. Second, the components of the notional and inferential framework that Grice set up to characterise various kinds of utterances content were intuitively appealing (Haberland & Mey, 2001).

Most of the body of Grice's publications (Grice, 1975, 1978, 1989a, 1989b) contain an attempt to clarify the intuitive disparity between what is expressed literally in a sentence and what is merely suggested or hinted by an utterance of the same string of words. To distinguish the latter from the former, Bottyan (n.d.) presents Grice's usage of the neologisms 'implicate' and 'implicature' and refers to the linguistically coded part of utterance content as 'what is said'. Implicature, Fraser (1980) explains, is etymologically a word derived from 'imply', with its cognate noun being 'implication.' For Mbah et al. (2016), "implicature is the aftermath of a successfully inferred meaning from utterances and past communicative experiences that seem to violate the four maxims of co-operative principles" (p. 226). Although the violated principles are not spelt out in the definition, it is understood that utterances have two or more levels of meaning, which have bearing to past communicative experiences, and when they are not strictly based on communicative principles of co-operation between the speaker and the listener, violation arises. The violation amounts to misrepresentations.

Conversational implicature is of utmost interest to this study, because persons in relationships engage in conversations. Gender violence like domestic violence does not occur without one form of conversation or the other between the partners. Most times, it is in the course of conversation that trouble ensues, following misunderstanding and/or clash of interests. Most often than not, their interests clash, as most men exhibit masculinity and patriarchal tendencies, ideals, dispositions, impositions and what have you. As Grice (1978, 1989b) informs, the sum of what is said in a sentence and what is implicated in an utterance of the sentence is called the 'total signification of an utterance. Implicature covers a number of ways in which literally unsaid information can be conveyed. Leaning on the meaning of implicature and Grice's theory of conversational implicature, this study argues that the implication of not walking out of an abusive relationship is suffering various forms of gender violence up to death, as in the case of Osinachi under study.

Not quitting an abusive dating or casual love relationship implies being ready to tolerate an abusive marriage. And, bearing domestic violence and other forms of life-threatening marital anomalies as well as those of dating and other forms of love relationship implies being willing to die for the marriage, the dating or the other love relationship, as in the case under study. Also, using language effectively to do a critical discourse analysis of the case would imply digging out realities about and varied perspectives on it. It also implies using language effectively to make other women realise that they need not hesitate quitting an abusive and violent relationships; for if they live rather than die, they could get into a non-abusive and non-violent relationship that would give them consolation, change their experiences and better their lives. The absence of co-operative conversations between women and men, particularly those in marital and other love relationships, is what largely causes the conflict that metamorphoses into a bitter, violent and destructive interpersonal conflict in such relationships. The implication is the violation of the co-operative principles of conversation, which Mbah et al. (2016, p. 226) talk about.

One of the credits of Grice's Theory of Conversational Implicature (TCI) is his postulation that in rational co-operative conversation, people follow the principle of co-operation. This implies that any conversation that does not follow this principle, among others, is either irrational completely or less rational. The birth of Neo-Gricean and Post Gricean is another credit to Grice, which makes his TCI significant beyond his time. In what scholarly reiterates Grice's postulation in consistent practical context, Bilmes (1986) observes that 'in everyday talk, we convey propositions that are not explicit in our utterances but are merely implied by them.' This implies that meanings of propositions in what we communicate are implied rather than explicit. By talking about conversation and/or communication principles, language use, context and several other concerns, it is quite clear that TCI, like WoTAF, aptly captures the situation under study and thereby suits the study.

Situating DV in the Thrust of CDA

All human activities, including relationships are only possible with language use. Discourse analysis of any subject matter also involves language use. In being discursively critical, using language effectively, critically and technically is a requisition. Accordingly, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), one of the numerous approaches to language study, emerged from critical linguistics and critical semiotics (Tranchese & Zollo, 2013). It emphasises the relationship between language and society. The knowledge of the relationship between language and society gives an understanding of the functional transformation in form of changes that language undergoes as society uses it as a social system and subjects it to various uses, contexts and conditions.

CDA is an interdisciplinary study of gender issues, using combined approaches. Linguistic knowledge and approaches are applied to the conventional (or non-linguistic) analysis of gender issues, such as issues of domestic violence against women in society. It is an indisputable fact that the relationship language has with society is demonstrated and realised in gender relations between males and females, which give rise to issues of domestic violence in society. It follows that how language is used in a society determines to a large extent the kind of gender relations that obtain in that society. In the course of subjecting language to various uses, contexts and conditions, the society profiles women on gender lane and thereby conceives them with gender prejudices. The chauvinistic conception of women grounds the maltreatments and cruelty meted out on women by so many men in society.

Language, culture and gender constructions (i.e., gender labels and roles) are socially constructed and their constructions have effects. Language, culture and gender constructions share existential and linguistic relationships in terms of complementary functionality. Such is what Fairclough (1989, p. 37) calls 'dialectical relationship' between discourse and social structures. Language is a form of social practice or system, while CDA is a system of language study that engages in critical social research involving critical considerations of language use. As Tranchese and Zollo (2013, p. 142) note, 'the aim of critical social research is to better understand how societies produce beneficial and detrimental effects and how the detrimental effects can be mitigated or eliminated,' with a view to achieving 'contemporary social changes and their effects,' which improve different conditions human being find themselves in.

It is to that end that this study sees to the detrimental effects of gender constructions, which involves language use, in ideologies, thoughts and discourses that together form the internalised notions grounding sexism and domestic violence against persons of the opposite sex folk. The two-way relationship between phenomena and society implies that discourse shapes events, situations, social systems and institutions of society and vice versa. That is to say discourse is also socially constructed and shaped in line with the societal or existential embodiments of a people (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258; Fairclough, 1989, p. 37), and the embodiments are phenomenal. CDA also engages in critical social research, aimed at ameliorating woes of marginalisation suffered by oppressed groups. Women make up an oppressed group in society. Their oppression is evidenced in the cruel treatment meted out on them by men, as in what violent/abusive men do to their women, either as wives or other categories of lovers.

The domination of women, merely on gender basis, is what makes it possible for the alarmingly rising rate of abuse and domestic violence women suffer, including being killed anyhow by their men. Patriarchy is the base of the power domination by men over women in marriages and other love relationships, and at home, workplace, various socio-political and settings, and so on. The power domination allows for continuous abuse and deprivation of the rights of women, with little or nothing significant done for redress. Power domination is political. In what lends credence to the above, Orwell (1946, p. 2) holds that 'all issues are political issues.' This means that gender issues are also political. They have political undertone, one of which is power domination of women by men across cultures and ages.

It is observed that the aim of every political discourse analysis is to expose how political events, acts and processes are organised, structured and expressed, and what kinds of possible influence or effects they may exert on the political cognitions of the public at large (Anderson, 2014). In the same vein, Seidel (1985, p. 45) has noted that all kinds of discourse are political, because each discourse serves as a site of struggle, whereby there is a 'semantic space in which meanings are produced and/or challenged.' The space created by gender discourse has remained a site for struggle between men and women, and the produced meanings that give rise to challenging the status quo. Domestic violence could be sexual, physical, psychological, social, financial or political. Women mostly suffer physical, sexual and verbal forms of domestic violence. These have grave implications on them. The effects are just all-round on women. Every day, women are being killed by their husbands, former partners, boyfriends, and even male relatives. The killing reduces female population undeservingly. Both mass media and new media reports of the incidents of gross domestic violence women are widespread.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Here, selected data on Late Osinachi's suffered DV from several new and traditional media are presented and analysed concisely.

Data 1: Osinachi Nwachukwu, killed by her husband

The case of Osinachi seems to have gained the highest attention of activists and state agents. The case (with charge number: CR/199/2022) was filed on 20 May, 2022 by Mrs Yewande Gbola-Awopetun, the Head, Sexual and Domestic violence, Department of Public Prosecutions of the Federation, Ministry of Justice, at the High Court of the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. Late Osinachi was a gospel singer, well-informed, educated and well-to-do woman. She was the breadwinner of her home. Yet, she had been suffering chronic gender-based domestic violence right from the day one of their marriage. The situation was such that her husband abandoned her all to herself alone while in labour for the birth of their first child. Neighbours helped her out. She suffered same situation for the second child and had to stay with her parents during childbirth and for four months afterwards. That was the first time her mother and several other family members advised her not to continue with the abusive marriage. She refused, reminding them that they should not put asunder in what God had joined together. The abuse suffered by Osinachi was a very terrible one.

An artiste with two cars, she could barely drive the cars. On several occasions, she was deprived of merely sitting on her own car to and from the church. The man never allowed Osinachi to use or drive her two cars from her fans and hard-earned money. There was a day her husband pushed her out of her own car and drove off, while the car was in motion. On that day, she got attacked and robbed of her phone and money by armed-robbers. She was often beaten, battered, abused, humiliated and dehumanised by her husband. On some occasions, the man would force his children to beat their mother, who he held or matched to the ground. In other words, Osinachi used to be abused and beaten by her husband, who would sometimes ask their children to beat their mother. Sometimes, he would hold and press her down for the children to step on and beat her. He trained the children to see domestic violence as a normative practice that is not wrong.

Data 2: Comments on Social Media

WHY DID SHE CHOOSE TO STAY?

Most women choose to stay in toxic marriage because of their kids. But what they don't know is that, such marriage can send them to early grave living those same children all by themselves in this cruel world.

Well so so sad! Why did you remain with him .with all your talent & intelligence..now that you are No more your kids with bé motherless, your soo call husband will definately get himself another wife.. May her soul RIP

were the voices that kept telling her the truth she didn't want to hear. She stayed! Keep God out of this honestly. What has God got to do with bad decisions?

Using the case of Osinachi, the above data demonstrate the highest point of effective use of language and critical discourse analysis to condemn the ill-acts by men against their women and such women's continuity with the marriage or the other love relationships. We are informed that most women choose to stay in s and other love relationships for the sake of their children. Abusive and gender violent marriage and other love relationships are described in strong term as toxic marriage and other love relationships. Being toxic implies that such a relationship is harmful, deadly and contaminated with violent acts. The person informs us that women who stay back in toxic marriage for the sake of their children fail to think critically and realise that staying back could easily send them away from this planet to where the same children would never see them again. Therefore, instead of staying back and dying for such an abusive relationship, it is better for them to quit it and live, so they could still be seeing and taking care of their cherished children. Only living parents remember children; the dead ones do not.

The second person also faults the late Osinachi for staying back and highlights the implications of staying in such a relationship. The implications include making the same cherished children orphans untimely, as staying in the toxic relationship or union brings forth untimely death to their mother, as in the case of Osinachi under study. Staying poses serious threat to or abruptly ends the abused woman's innate skills, attributes, talent, potentials and life. Despite losing one's life a toxic marriage, in the name of love and other factors, the abusive man is bound to remarry soon afterwards or have affairs with other women. Thus, it is hilarious and ironical to stay back in any abusive and violent marriage or other love relationships up to the point of losing one's life to it. It is with critical discourse analysis that the implications are creatively thought out, unveiled and highlighted by anyone who does so. And, language is effectively used as such to communicate the innermost critical, creative and rational thoughts about abusive and violent relationships and the imperative of quitting any relationships of that kind.

Also, another person condemns religiosity and blaming of God for the misfortune that the deceased would have avoided long ago, by walking out of the relationship for the sake of her safety, health, life and cherished children. For this person, it is irrational to align the misdeed to God, who had kept warning Osinachi through fellow human beings, since He would not come down from Heaven to physically warn anyone against anything. He warned her through human voices, but she ignored the truth. As such, God has to be kept out of the whole mess rather than being blamed. It was a case of taking a bad decision and thereby being humanly responsible for the decision. Osinachi took a bad decision staying in the marriage until it claimed her life. Her husband also took bad decisions often and on beating, maltreating, molesting and abusing her at all times.

Conclusion

Generally, as in the case of Osinachi, although religious and cultural factors are why most women stay back in their abusive relationships, characterised by unceasing brutality and various forms of abuse from their men, their personal frailties, choice and indecisiveness are what take precedence in the situations. These are why such women do not report these cases or walk out of such relationships. All in all, besides combating DV with strong severe penalties and legislative measures, women should always evaluate their relationships and find their way-out of the one that is abusive and gender-based violent. Despite being educated, exposed, popular and well-to-do, Osinachi stayed back in her abusive and gender-based violent marriage and got abused and subjected to DV by her husband until her death at last. She exemplified what most women in abusive and gender-based violent marriage and other love relationships did/do and finally lost/lose their lives to such relationships.

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