

**A SYSTEMIC FUNCTIONAL MULTIMODAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF
SELECTED FEMINIST MULTIMEDIA IMAGES ON *FANPOP.COM***

BY

OLUWASEUN MERCY ENIOLA

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UNIVERSITY, ILE-IFE, OSUN STATE, NIGERIA**

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Author: OLUWASEUN MERCY ENIOLA
Title: A Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis of Selected Feminist
Multimedia Images on *Fanpop.com*
Degree: M.A (English Language)
Year: 2016

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This is to certify that this research was carried out by ENIOLA Oluwaseun Mercy, with registration number ARP13/14/H/0429 in the Department of English Language, Faculty of Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, under my supervision.

Dr. I. E. Olaosun

Supervisor

Date

Prof. Niyi Okunoye

Head of Department

Date

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ABSTRACT

The research identified and classified the feminist orientations in the selected posts on *fanpop.com*. It also described the visual and linguistic devices used in articulating these orientations and related the linguistic devices to the attitude of the *fanpop.com* users in relation to their ideological orientations. This was with a view to characterising the form and content of the constructions of feminism in the online forum.

The study employed both primary and secondary sources of data. The primary data consisted of 60 multimedia images posted on *fanpop.com* between January 2013 and April 2015. The site was selected based on the observation that its scope of feminist multimedia constructions is eclectic and unrestrained just as feminist orientations are. Also, the time span was designed for the purpose of currency (not of authorial production but of user's postage). The secondary data comprised books, journal articles and the Internet. The theoretical framework used in carrying out the analysis was O'Halloran's model of Systemic Functional Multimodal Discourse Analysis.

The results of the study showed that in the interpersonal category of the metafunctions, imperatives were used in protests and campaigns to command actions against sexism and patriarchy in all their forms. Declaratives were also used to serve as an expression of feminist belief (equality), and aspiration (the pursuit of gender equality) while constructing their sense of self, their exploitations and their opportunities. Feminists also employed interrogatives to stimulate debates and thereby start and/or revisit certain assumptions about gender. Also, exclamations were used as expressions of assertiveness and resoluteness. The study also found that aggressive verbal posts and modals were respectively used to reiterate feminist resolution to deconstruct existing gender order and expressions of necessity and logical obligation to the

feminist cause. The use of relational processes attributed women with liberating and assertive traits which free them from enslaving patriarchal notions. The study also found that feminist use of colour, facial expressions, typography, sign categories and non-verbal actions to express such concerns as emphasis on equality and a blurry line of gender demarcations, the celebration of ideological diversity, the correction of false feminist notions, and the need for education and a continued struggle against gender prejudices.

The study concluded that the use of *fanpop.com* as a platform for propagating feminist ideology has a far-reaching effect in advocating encompassing gender equality

CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

Gender and several matters relating to it are age-long matters and they have been given expressions in such domains as religion, culture, politics, economy, and recently, the online community. Over the years, feminists of diverse orientations have articulated their concerns primarily through writing (essays and fiction), campaigns, protests amidst other activities. These media serve as the platform for propagating and disseminating several forms of feminist education.

In the literary tradition, there are such works as: *The Yellow Wallpaper* (1892) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *A Room of One's Own* (1929) by Virginia Woolf, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (1981) by Bell Hooks, *Female Eunuch* (1970) by Germaine Greer, and *Sexual Politics* (1970) by Kate Millet. What these works have in common is an exposé of diverse feminist ideologies and visions while condemning patriarchal and sexist notions. However, these texts respectively explore: the need for freedom; education, marriage, and social status; the sexist nature of black civil rights movement and the racist nature of the white feminist movement; the sexual repression of women; and the patriarchal bias that underlies literary productions. One major limitation of the literary medium is accessibility of these texts (and sometimes its language) to readers in countries other than the place where they were published.

Another important medium of feminist evangelism is activism through campaigns and protests. Such feminist activists as Emeline Pankhurst (one of the founders of and the leader of the British Suffragette Movement), Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti (foremost Nigerian women's

rights activist, fought for voting and equal rights for women in Nigeria, also at the forefront of Nigeria's anti-colonial struggle for independence), Susan B. Anthony (played a pivotal role in the 19th century women's rights movement to introduce women's suffrage into the USA), Emma Goldman (campaigner for birth control and rights), Grace Greenwood (first woman reporter on the *New York Times* payroll, advocated social reform and women's rights), Roshini Thinakaran (filmmaker, focusing on the lives of women living in post-conflict zones), Victoria Woodhull (suffragist, innovator, first woman to run for U. S. Presidency), Eva Cox (social commentator on women in power, women and work and social justice), Elizabeth Evatt (legal reformist and juror, outspoken on inadequacy of Australia's Sex Discrimination Act), Eileen Powell (trade unionist, women's activist and important contributor to the "Equal Pay for Equal Work" decision), Marianne Hainisch (proponent of women's right to work and to receive education), Widad Akrawi (writer, doctor, advocate for gender equality and women's empowerment and participation in peace building and post-conflict governance), Nawal el-Saadawi (writer, doctor, advocate for women's health and equality in Egypt), Engy Ghozlan (coordinator of campaigns against sexual harassment in Egypt), Ruth Bré (advocate for matrilineality and women's rights, founder of League for Maternity Leave), Jyotiba Phule (social reformer, critic of the caste system, inspired widow-remarriage initiative, founded a home for infant girls to discourage female infanticide in India), Fatima Lodhi (Pakistani women's rights activist who addressed colorism), Malala Yousafzai (advocator of girls' education in Pakistan) etc.

The success of activism in a particular country can have the effect of being replicated in other countries of the world suffering identical plight. However, the potential of activism being replicated in another area without being combined with another medium of feminist activity is largely limited. The result of the success in an area of activism will naturally lead to the

exploration of “fresh” visions, hence it can be concluded that feminists have changing concerns. The afore-listed feminist activism can be said to be quite successful as it is notable that feminists are no longer clamouring for voting rights or political inclusion. However, lack of girl-child education and women empowerment, inadequate or lack of birth control, patrilineality, violence against women, unequal political presence, child marriage, are still the order of the day in many countries of the world.

There is no gainsaying that the literary tradition, as well as the use of campaigns and protests to propagate and reiterate feminist ideologies and visions has been successful. However, because feminism has taken and is still taking on various shapes and dimensions, there has been the need to fuse and at the same time extend the frontiers of the medium through which these visions and ideologies are articulated, hence, the use of multimedia images where the more traditional mediums and new ones come into play. This is one way in which the Internet has been used to explore the limitations of earlier traditions.

One of the several Internet domains where feminist views are articulated is *fanpop.com*. In this online community, participants use quotes from famous essays and speeches, pictures of protesters (with various captions, from the simple to the scathing), comical constructions, memes (an idea, a behaviour, style, or usage that spread from person to person within a culture), pictures of diverse campaign activities, and statistics presented along with captivating and related images. All these help in appropriating feminist inclinations to the contemporary feminist who may not necessarily be interested in long and “boring” essays or speeches but “on-the-go” facts and statistics. For instance, an image of an under-aged girl breastfeeding a child with the caption “a child mothering a child” or an image of another under-aged girl decked in wedding regalia with the caption, “46% of girls in India are child brides” immediately and effectively drives home the

For more information, please contact ir-help@oauife.edu.ng

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