

## IMPROVING THE USE OF WORDS FOR EFFECTIVE INTERACTION AMONG MARRIED COUPLES: COUNSELLING IMPLICATION

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### Abstract

In interpersonal relationship especially that of marriage, couples sometimes misinterpret a situation that is meant to build, to become a spouse destructive one. For example, when a spouse tries to rebuke or correct a behavior that is not acceptable, the other spouse tends to engage a partner in use of words which are negative and vulgar in nature. The consequence is destruction of the relationship which might have taken years to be built. Based on this observation, the research study was conducted in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, using Diploma students of Institute of Education. The methodology of the study consisted of an experimental post-test, only control group design. A random sampling technique was used to select 30 out of 1,259 students who are in subsistence marriage to participate in the study. A questionnaire titled couple's communication skills inventory (CCSI) section on attending to words was administered. A 4 point likert scale was used for the respondents to rate their responses. A t-test technique of data analysis was used to test the hypothesis. The finding revealed a non-significant difference was established between male and female married respondents. Counseling implications and recommendations were highlighted on the choice and use of words for effective interaction among married couples.

**Keywords:** Words, Interaction, Married Couples, Counselling

### Introduction

The husband-wife relationship sometimes finds itself at war in the choice and use of words to complain about unmet needs or unsatisfactory behaviours. For example, in the process of expressing a complaint, some partners use words which are negative and vulgar in nature, such harsh words are also insulting, obscene, downgrading, put-downs, and belittle of one. These words evoke feelings of pains and anguish which are emotionally hurting or destructive of one's peace. Such words make an individual to feel dejected and unloved. These careless choice and use of words could destroy relationships. Braverman (2012) affirmed this when he reported that, if you do not have a healthy way of expressing your thoughts and emotions to each other, of speaking and being heard, then everything else will ultimately crumble.

Similarly, Colling-wood (2012) asserts that even in the strongest of relationships, there will be times when small irritations can cause serious problems. Improper-speaking to others is a very serious problem in every aspects of life, of which the husband and wife relationship is not an exception. The in-proper choice and use of words can damage a relationship like raging wild fire. For example, according to Kumuyi (2011), a word spoken in anger can destroy permanently a relationship built over many years. Hash and insulting words often lead to strife. Many marriages have been destroyed through wrongful and destructive use of words. Gottman (1994) affirmed by reporting that couples engage in harmful interaction with each other. Similarly, Dagari (2009) also reported that several couples often complained that they do not know what to say or they might say the wrong word or that they are too angry to talk when they are hurting. These attitudes portray difficulties in relationship as a result of the choice and use of wrong words to express self.

Consequently, spoken hurting words are hurtful and devastating. They leave their victims with unseen scars that may take many years to heal. In-proper spoken words can and do hurt and its effects on the individual are in-measurable as well terrifying. Therefore, married couples need to learn about the power of words and its effect on the individual. Morley (1994) concurred that words are the window into the soul and it gives form and expression to our deepest thoughts. Similarly, Strand (2005) reported that words have life and they have power. When spoken, words can literally shape the destiny and future of a person. Words therefore are powerful and have deep and lasting meaning and effects on an individual.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Marriage relationship between husband and wife is designed for companionship, friendship and togetherness, not for rejection or isolation or loneliness. However, the warmth and close supportive relationship that existed between couples which enables them to engage freely in sharing with each other have often disappeared as a result of pains and hurts. In its place, partners engage one another in the use of negative, insulting and vulgar words which only help to rehearse the painful experiences that are hurting to self. Such use of vain words that are abusive, put-downs, degrading cause feelings of pains and emotional anguished (Dagari, 2009). They evoke corresponding responses in the use of inappropriate words to retaliate. These problems usually stem from poor choice and use of words to express how one feels which often ruins relationships. The above consequences point to the fact that married couples do portray a lack of knowledge about the power and effects of words. Thus, there is great danger in wrongful choice and use of words in any situation or circumstance.

This study therefore, sets out to counsel couples on the power of words, how to choose and use words to express a need, want, desire and also how to rebuke a behaviour which is unaccepting.

### Research Question

A research question is set as follows for the study.

1. Does exposure to attending to words improve the level of married couple's interaction?

### Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the study states that:

1. There is no significant difference between experimental and control groups in the level of attending to words of married couples' interaction.
2. There is no significant difference in the level of attending to words between male and female married couples' interaction.

### Methodology

The study was conducted using Diploma Students of 2015/2016 academic session. The population of the students was 1,259, out of which 30 were randomly selected and took part in the study. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire titled "Couples' Communication Skills Inventory (CCSI)" section on attending to words with two parts. The first part is on bio-data while the second part is on attending to words. The questionnaire measured the use of words by both male and female married couples' in their interaction using a 4 point likert scale format rating of responses. The scale is SA, A, D and SD as follows: strongly agreed-4 points, Agreed-3 points, Disagreed-2 point and strongly disagreed -1 point. Descriptive statistical tools of mean, standard deviation and t-test were used to present the result of the hypothesis. The hypothesis was tested at  $p= 0.05$  level of significance and decision was based on (0.05) probability of significance.

### The design of the study

The design of the study is an experimental post-test only control groups. This design according to Kolo (2003) is diagram as follows:

	Group	Variable	Post-test
R	E	X	$O_1$
R	C		$O_2$

The diagram is interpreted as follows:

R=represent random assignment of couples to groups

E=represent experimental group which is given treatment on attending to words

C=represent control group which receives no treatment

X= treatment package on attending to words which is for experimental group only

$O_1$ = administered post-test of experimental group

$O_2$ =administered post-test of control group

In this design, the coded data of treatment group is compared with that of control group which serves as the pre-test. The two groups (E and C) were randomly assigned but none was given a pre-test. For this study, the coded data of married males and females in experimental and control groups were

compared to find out if there is any significant difference statistically in their level of attending to words during interaction. The advantage of this design is that it allows for comparison of various variables of the study such as gender, ages, marriage duration, education status and within groups etc.

The experimental phase consisted of counselling of respondents who are (30) and living in subsistence marriage. The respondents were given a post-test after the treatment package was taught to them for seven weeks. Each session lasted for about one hour per contact period. The outline of each treatment session is as follows:

*Week 1:* Concept of attending and word. The participants brainstorm on the definition of each word. The researcher will make clarification and define each word.

*Week 2:* Verbal abuse: its characteristics. The participants brainstorm on the word verbal abuse, its examples and meanings. The researcher is to make clarification and expand on the points.

*Week 3:* Negative attitude and behaviours: The participants are to brainstorm on what are the negative attitudes and behaviours associated with wrongful use of words. The researcher to make clarification and expand on points made.

*Week 4:* Speaking rules and methods: The participants are to brainstorm on speaking rules and methods. The researcher is to clarify and expand on points outlined by the group members. There was explanation on speaking rules and method.

*Week 5:* Choice of words: use of I-messages. The participants are to brainstorm on how to choose words that express how one feels, wants, desires and needs. The researcher to make clarification and expand on points listed including the need to learn of words about feelings and how to use them in expressing needs, wants, desires and emotions. Use of I-messages should be explained.

*Week 6:* Use of encouragers/affirmation/compliments: The participants are to brainstorm on these words. The researcher to make clarification and expand on the list made.

*Week 7:* Second phase. The questionnaire was administered to the experimental and control group respondents as post-test.

The data obtained (post-test) was subjected to a two tail t-test analysis to determine the level of attending to words of male and female married couples' interaction. That is, to compare the post-test scores of male and female respondents in both experimental and control groups and find out whether there is any significant difference in their level of attending to words during interaction.

## Results

In this section, the result of the test of the hypothesis for this study is presented.

**Hypothesis One:** There is no significant difference between experimental and control groups in the level of attending to words of married couples' interaction.

The result of data analyses is presented as follows in Table 1 below:

**Table 1. Two –tail t-test on Experimental and Control Groups on level of attending to words of married couples**

Status	N	Mean	SD	SEM	t-valus	Df	P
Experimental group	30	2.0727	.34132	0.6232	5.35	58	.000
Control group	30	2.5909	.40638	.07419			

Critical value of 2.048 at 0.05

In Table 1 above, the mean scores and standard deviation of subjects who were exposed to experiment treatment is (Mean =2.0727, SD = .34132) which is lower to those of the control group (M= 2.5909, SD = .40638) who have not been exposed to the treatment. The observed t- value of 5.35 is higher than critical value of 2.048 at 58 degree of freedom. The P value of 0.000 is lower than 0.005 significant level. Therefore, the result showed that a significant difference exist between the experimental and control group. The hypothesis that states there is no significant difference between experimental and control groups in the level of attending to words of married couples is not accepted. The null hypothesis is rejected.

**Hypothesis Two:**There is no significant difference in the level of attending to words between male and female married couples' interaction.

**Table 2: Two-tail t-test on level of attending to words of male and female respondents in experimental group**

Status	N	Mean	SD	t-valus	Df	P
Male	15	2.0970	.2697	0.001	28	.999
Female	15	2.0970	.34611			

Critical 2.048 at 0.05

The result of Table 2 above, showed that male and female respondents exposed to counselling treatment on attending to words had the same mean of M=2.0970 in the level of their interaction. The observed t-value of .001 is lower than the critical t-value of 2.048 at 28 degree of freedom and the level of significance of .999 is higher than 0.05 ( $p>0.05$ ). This result therefore revealed that there is no significant difference between male and female respondents that participated in the experiment. Thus, the hypothesis which states that, there is no significant difference in the level of attending to words between male and female married couples' interaction (experimental group) can be accepted. The null hypothesis is retained.

### Discussion of Finding

The result of first tested hypothesis of this study indicated that there was a significant difference in the level of attending to words between between the experimental and control groups. The null hypothesis

is rejected, the result showed an improvement in attending to words. A possible explanation could be that the experimental group respondents have learnt about how to attend to words in interaction with their spouses while the control group might not have learned anything about attending to words. Thus, the experimental group's mean scores is lower than that of the control group which is higher. This finding is in agreement with that of Holmes (2004) who report that every individual has the opportunity to develop their fundamentals of good communication by using them in daily life. Similarly, Beverly (2006) also believed that couples could learn the necessary communication skills with less effort when they choose to.

The second hypothesis of the study states that there is no significant difference in the level of attending to words between male and female respondents in their interaction. This result implied that both male and female respondents in the experimental study attained the same level in their attending to words. A possible explanation for this could be attributed to the fact that both male and female respondents learnt the same things during the treatment counselling session and that is why they attained the same level in attending to words in interaction (Dagari, 2009). It is also possible that male and female respondents might have experienced similar areas of difficulty in the treatment package and so attained the same level in attending to words in interaction. This finding disagrees with those of Melgosa and Melgosa (2006) who reported that men and women communicate differently.

However, Dagari (1994) reported that male and female respondents might have had an indepth understanding of each other enough to respond effectively to each other's interaction. So also, Holmes (2004) opined that everyone has the opportunity to develop his/her fundamentals of good communication by using them in daily life. Beverly (2007) concurred that couples could learn the necessary communication skills with less effort when they choose to. Also, it might be that male and female respondents are literate and therefore were able to understand the package effectively and use the new knowledge acquired well.

### **Counseling implication**

It is evident from this finding that the procedure for treatment and the attainment of the same level in attending to words by both male and female respondents showed that counselling treatment programmes on attending to words is understood by the respondents at the same level. It also reveals that male and female respondents are aware of the need to choose and use words which express their feelings and thoughts appropriately. Similarly, married couples in the study may interact meaningfully by choosing and using appropriate words that express their thoughts, emotions and enhance their relationship well.

Since marriage thrives on a climate of love and respects, it is important that couples' demonstrate such to each other in their choice and use of appropriate words which clearly express their feelings instead of working on assumptions. This is because marriage is basically a relational experience which flows

on wanting emotional needs. Therefore, married couples are expected in their interaction with one another to choose appropriate words which express frankly their feelings, emotions, wants, desires, needs and thoughts. This becomes necessary to enable both male and female couples spend quality time together, engage in sincere dialogue which is frank and maintain a healthy positive atmosphere which results to a harmonious relationship at home (Dagari, 2009). When this is possible, it can signal the experiencing of quality emotional tie with one another.

Indeed, husband and wife are the nucleus of the society. The children they raised are the future members who would take over from their parents. As such, if the interaction which goes on between parents are negative and harmful through in-appropriate choice and use of words in either expressing self or responding, then, the home will be a wrong model where tension and strife are display daily for their children to see and acquire. The children are affected as they live in a state of fear, strife, use in-appropriate language and inherit confusion. They are also torn a part as to which parent their sympathy should go to. This sows the seed of division in the family. In addition, there is transfer of aggression and aggrieved ones' will not contribute meaningfully to the development of the family and society. Hence, each member of the family needs to learn how to choose and use words properly to express their feelings. The proper choice and use of words gives each member a sense of well-being, cohesion, self-consciousness i.e using words to become conscious of self. This is important because families send out their replica into the larger society. Thus, attending to words is what you say, how you say it, why you say it and even what you do not say and it gives you a feedback.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Words have power as such, there is need to choose and use it properly to build and strengthen relationship for healthy living at home. To improve relationships, married couples' are challenge to practice choosing and using appropriate words that express their exact feelings through the following recommendations:

1. Married couples should create time to be with one another and choose and use words which properly express their needs or wants during interaction without shame or fear.
2. A relaxation time and atmosphere should be created to stimulate easy and free interaction for family members to share their concerns with one another.
3. All married couples should seek for counseling help from time to time. This would enable them learn skills and techniques on how to reduce the use of degrading words and replace them with appropriate words that clearly express their wants, concerns or desires.
4. Couples are to make efforts to learn and use new words which better express their feelings, thoughts, needs wants and desires. They should avoid use of negative and hurting words even when angry and use I-message which allows them to speak about their feelings properly.

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