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Language and Gender in Pakistan: A Social Constructionist Approach

Abstract

Gender and language are two different topics but are connected or related in every department and field, specifically linguistics. It is becoming an exciting approach for linguistics researchers to find their relationships and how they depend on or influence each other. It focuses on how men and women speak based on syntax, phonology, and semantics. It also focuses on how power or dominant gender can affect the conversation. This article aims to investigate the influence of gender on Language in Pakistan through the lens of the social constructionist approach. It discusses the effects of social differences on language, conversational style, genders' attitudes towards language, and community of practice. The other factors that the research will reveal are politeness and vocabulary.

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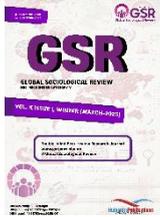


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Cite Us



### Title

## Language and Gender in Pakistan: A Social Constructionist Approach

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### Abstract

*Gender and language are two different topics but are connected or related in every department and field, specifically linguistics. It is becoming an exciting approach for linguistics researchers to find their relationships and how they depend on or influence each other. It focuses on how men and women speak based on syntax, phonology, and semantics. It also focuses on how power or dominant gender can affect the conversation. This article aims to investigate the influence of gender on Language in Pakistan through the lens of the social constructionist approach. It discusses the effects of social differences on language, conversational style, genders' attitudes towards language, and community of practice. The other factors that the research will reveal are politeness and vocabulary.*

**Keywords:** Language, Gender, A Community of Practice, Politeness, Community

### Introduction

This research aims to find out the nature of the relationship between gender and language. It also deals with the dominance approach, i.e., which gender is dominant in terms of language. Sociolinguistics approaches are used to find out these fractures and their relationship. Pakistan is generally a

male-dominant society; this also affects our research findings, as social features highly affect language and other linguistic factors.

Society needs to develop relationships and learn virtues, morals, and respect for gender. Pakistan society shows male dominance in society, and female' notions are usually ignored. Our purpose is to



discover how these factors affect and bring changes in language and make Pakistan society gender-biased.

### Objectives of Research

There is a close relationship between gender and language. The relationship is developed because of society, the social roles, and how gender is trained. This factor further leads to changes in vocabulary, thought, register, styles, and politeness. The way language is used for the opposite gender reflects the attitude towards the other gender; thus, the social norms or social roles affect the language structures. The article aims to discover how language develops/changes as social roles change. The article aims to find out significant reasons or causes behind the close relationship between gender and language and how society is involved in this process. Many languages are being spoken in Pakistan, but the present study considers the relationship between gender and Urdu and Punjabi.

The main research questions are:

1. Why are the conversational styles of men and women different?
2. How are Pakistani languages gender-biased?
3. How do the social norms in terms of gender discrimination affect these languages?

### Literature Review

Language and gender have been an area of interest for many researchers. Many sociolinguistics approaches are used to find the relation between gender and language. (Lakof, 1973) He was the first to produce results in this; he concluded that women's speech has different features from men's. He also stated that women's speech is more powerless and weaker than men's. He also produced the term linguistics distinction. Which language can discriminate? He also stated that men are good at topic selection in communication.

(Wardhaugh, 2010) Researches show that when we compare gender linguistics skills, we evaluate women's speech compared to men's speech, which makes women's speech powerless.

(Holmes, 1993) Studies show that women's speeches are less confident than men's. He also found out that women use more compliments in speech than men. Women do not like to use dominating and authorizing ways of communication. Men want to get things done. According to him, women are status-conscious; hence they use standard language.

(Talbot, 1998) Further said that there are two cultures, each for one gender, and their socialization differs according to their culture. He further criticized the dominance approach in linguistics. He also noted that language leads to discrimination; as we know, we use three words for women to show their social status, Mrs., Miss, and Ms; on the other hand, only one word, Mr., is used to tell the social status of men.

(Cameron, 2002) He also criticized this dominance theory and proposed the new term 'two-way dominance' according to the situation. In some scenarios, women are dominant, and in some, men are dominant.

According to gender theory, there is a difference between men and women; the differences are based on dialect, linguistic features, and communication competence.

(Fishman, 1980) He said that men are better than women in cross-sex communication.

Not much work is done in Pakistan, but many researchers still tighten their hands on this topic. (Rind, 2015) Said Pakistani women faced problems while learning a language, as they are considered to hold gender and social values.

Qureshi (2014) said that the language used in Pakistani textbooks shows male dominance and that women are confined to their homes.

Studies show how society affects language, and there is a strong relationship between gender and language.

(Shah, 2015) She said Pakistani women lack quantitative approaches to language because their lifestyles are different from men's, and they lack experience.

Ashraf, Zahid, and Amjad (2023) did a critical discourse study of tomboy characters in Pakistani dramas. They found that language shows how society

feels about people who don't fit gender norms. The study was theoretically supported by Fairclough's three-dimensional "Critical Discourse Analysis" model (1989). The researchers used a straightforward random sampling design to gather episodes from two distinct Pakistani dramas for the study, which was based on a qualitative methodology. The study's findings demonstrated how society views tomboys negatively. They experienced prejudice, were perceived as less feminine and capable, and were frequently shut aside from community groups and gatherings. The study came to the conclusion that tomboys could be role models for females who might not fit into the mold of standard gender norms.

In their analysis of the language employed by female characters in Pakistani dramas, Kiani, Umar, and Sultan (2023) showed how discourse reflects societal ideals and contributes to gender construction. The study examines the gender differences in how male and female characters are portrayed in these dramas as well as how media discourse contributes to the traditional portrayal of women in Pakistani Urdu dramas. It also brings attention to the shifting patterns within the Pakistani context. Five linguistic elements are highlighted in the study: tag questions, lexical hedges, adjectives, polite expressions, and the usage of questions to depict female characters in Pakistani Urdu dramas.

Raza, Pervaiz, and Arshad (2023) investigated gender dynamics and linguistic discrimination in Punjabi proverbs, demonstrating how language upholds gender roles. Language is the most effective tool for cross-cultural communication. One of the stylistic devices used in poetry and speech to express a particular cultural group's perspective is the usage of proverbs. This study looks at how Punjabi proverbs talk about women and uphold traditional gender roles. Four main questions concerning women's representation, cultural associations, and the effects of patriarchy and power dynamics are posed by the study using Bakhtinian theory (1981). The goal of the study is to identify women's roles, explain cultural meanings, and show how proverbs uphold uneven power structures. In order to learn what Punjabi speakers, especially the elderly, thought of these

proverbs, the researcher spoke with them personally. Proverbs were collected for the study from a Punjabi proverb dictionary. The study found that women are often seen as weak and dependent, whereas men are usually viewed as strong and competent. Respect is reserved for moms only. This study adds to our understanding of how language and culture influence how we view men and women.

In their feminist stylistic analysis of Sidhwa's *An American Brat* and Hamid's *Exit West*, Qayyum, Saeed, and Qadar (2024) looked at how language fosters gender roles and stereotypes. The article's main focus is on how the novels *An American Brat* and *Exit West* use language choices that involve sexist language and traditional gender roles. The author examines elements such as word choice, sentence structure, and character interaction using a feminist stylistic framework, especially Mills' model, to show how language in literature both reflects and occasionally challenges patriarchal ideals.

### Research Methodology

This particular research regarding gender and language takes place in the Pakistani environment. The sociolinguistics technique Community of practice examines the relationship between language, gender, and society. It is the best technique to find the relationship between gender, language, and the community. This technique will be used by keeping in view the Social Constructionist Approach; according to this, the community is a combination of the culture, norms, and spirit given by the community members, and language is just the part of that community that changes over time according to the demand and the norms of society.

The community of practice is a modern technique that came after the dominant approach faced criticism in sociolinguistics. In this technique, researchers or observers from the same society observe the people, how they are engaged with activities, and how they use language to address one another and perform daily tasks. Researchers also observe how members of the community develop language competence. This method is appreciable as the same members of the community act as observers, and they can observe

more accurately because they share the same linguistic knowledge and social experiences.

This technique is carried out in places where many people can be observed simultaneously so that we can get accurate data. Using this method, Pakistani social and Pakistani literature will be observed. This technique demands the active engagement and observation of observers.

### Research Findings

The difference between the men's and women's speech patterns and conversational styles varies in phonetics, vocabulary, and politeness. This difference has also led to lexical and syntactic variations. Language should be a source to reflect diversity and equality, but this is not observed in Urdu.

### Urdu Literature and Vocabulary

We have observed that the Urdu language is somehow a gender-biased language like English. We have seen the words like *himmat-e\_mardan*, *mard Ki zubaan*, *mard ho to samane ao* and *marde momin*. We have listened to and seen these phrases in the Urdu language frequently, which show man's power and dominance; it shows that man is a symbol of power and bravery.

On the other hand, in order to insult someone, phrases like *auraton ki tarhan choriyan pehni hain*, *duration wali baat*, *auraton ki tarhan gher main behte ho*. These phrases show that women are considered inferior, and this cultural prestige is also observed in language.

Particularly in Urdu literature, poets are seen referring to women as soft creatures like

### Gulab:

#### Social Status

It is observed that men are not status-conscious, and primarily women are status-conscious. Because women are status-conscious, hence they always use standard language. Specifically, it is observed that when women in Sialkot go shopping, they try to speak Urdu, not Punjabi, even though they do not have practice speaking Urdu; on the other hand, men

go with the causal language. Women tend to change their accents according to their needs. Men do not like long conversations and give minimal responses.

However, they want to show themselves superior.

### Politeness

Women are seen to fulfill the principle of politeness more than men. We have seen in Pakistani society women standing out of the house, taking part in long conversations, and using different linguistic terms to make communication enjoyable. They avoid direct responses, while men give direct and minimal responses. Women like to give compliments because they do not want a negative face. However, men's talk is still appreciated and admired more than women's.

### Conversational Styles

It is observed that the conversation styles of men and women are different. Men's style is loud, deep pitch, relaxed, and powerful, while women's style is soft, high pitch, and powerless in Pakistani society. Women discuss their matters to gain sympathy. Men enjoy their social dominance during their conversations. When men talk to women, they listen to them carefully and respond to what is said, but men tend to interrupt more.

Women avoid making solid assertions, and men like to do that. Women like to take turns while talking but men like long pauses during the conversation. However, men can handle the communication platform better than women. Men are competitive, and women are cooperative during the conversation.

### Reasons Behind the Differences

There are some reasons which were observed for gender differences in language. Women's style is cooperative and smooth because this is what society wants from them. Society controls genders' conversational styles. In Pakistan, there is social dominance of men, and hence they have language dominance as well. So it is seen that men express this language dominance; hence their conversation is not cooperative. Language behavior is adopted from social behavior. Men and women have different linguistic

features because of different socialization and linguistic patterns. Women and men have different roles in Pakistani society; hence it is highly observed in language. Men's role is to run faster and achieve their goals; hence their style is competitive, while women's conversational style is cooperative because this is their social role. Languages exhibit a change with a change in speakers' social roles and the nature of society; when the gender's social roles differ significantly, we observe that there is linguistic discrimination.

### Linguistic Discrimination

Linguistic discrimination starts in society and schools. We have seen how Urdu literature plays its role in creating gender dominance. Moreover, in Pakistani society, there is an obsession with sons, so in language, when generally we have to address someone, we say, "beta baat suno". Similarly, women are asked to take nursing, teaching, medical etc., but jobs like soldiers, police and pilots are considered more suitable for men.

In our society, we have seen that men use curse words during fights and even in regular conversation, but women are not appreciated if they do this.

Urdu is a mixture of languages. It has many words borrowed from the English Language, and English is a gender-biased language; for example, words like policeman and chairman are used to reflect male dominance.

In Urdu, women are considered as *sinf-e-nazuk*; this means weak gender. Thus, the Urdu language is also considered a gender-biased language.

### Recommendations

The dominance of gender is due to cultural practices; it changes with time and dramatically influences language and other linguistic features. Due to differences in social roles, men and women use different linguistic features. Urdu is the national language of Pakistan and hence should not be gender-biased. It is a modern indo-Aryan Language, but due to dominance in the society of men, Urdu is a gender-biased language.

The notion of prestige should be eliminated from society. Gender practice should be done on an equal basis to eliminate male dominance in the Urdu language.

Linguistic discrimination should be eliminated especially from textbooks. Government should make language neutral in courts, literature, schools, assemblies, and parliaments.

Language is part of society like other traditions; it reflects the person's identity, so it should play a neutral role. Language should not be used to judge someone's role in society. Urdu is a developing language; it needs support from its native speakers to show progress; this can be done by focusing on the actual job of language, that is, communication.

According to Fishman, most of the time, conversation fails because males do not respond to female questions. These gaps should be filled in order to improve the standard of society and language as well.

### Conclusions

There is a strong relationship between language and gender. The sociolinguistics technique community of practice explains the relationship between gender and society. This study shows that stereotypes and society's prestige are reflected through language. When there are differences in the social roles of men and women, then conversation style will also differ. There is variation in the conversational style and language competence of people of the same community because of politeness, different vocabulary, different socialization, prestige, male dominance, and the difference in phonetics and syntactic style.

Urdu is a gender-biased language; it shows men's power. English and Urdu are two different languages, but both have a sense of gender biases. There are issues like power in the gendered language. In this modern world, men and women are considered equal; that is a global perception, and social perception should be changed to eliminate gender biases. Language should not be used to degrade someone's social status or role.

Gender is a factor, it cannot be eliminated, but it could be controlled to some extent. Social factors are reflected in language. The gender biases in language show cultural psychology. Female liberation is needed to dissolve male dominance in language. We have to be concerned about this relationship between language and gender to maintain equality and peace in our society.

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