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**Politeness, Power, and Morality: A Linguistic Inquiry into Teachers' Ethical Language in Pakistani Secondary Schools at Tehsil Hazro**

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**Abstract**

*Present study explores the way secondary-school teachers in Pakistan linguistically encode authority, affection, and moral values during teacher student interaction in the classroom linking to Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory Brown, P., & Levinson, S. C. (1987). It is the most effective frameworks in pragmatics, specifically in analyzing the face expression of the speaker in bothd positive as well as negative interactions. The theory explores four basic strategies: bald-on-record (unambiguous speech), positive politeness, negative politeness, and off-record (hinting). Social variables are responsible in framing of Power (P), Distance (D), and Rank of Imposition (R), making the framework especially relevant in formal classroom setting where authority and hierarchy play a key role. A mixed-methods for research design combining qualitative discourse analysis as well as quantitative will be adopted by the researcher to meet the target of the research. In prior classroom observation, population questionnaire and interview will be carried on to collect achieve empirical outcomes. In former method corpus techniques will be used to measure lexical patterns, like as moral lexis and auxiliaries verbs of modality and frequencies of code switching. In this regard data in the form of audio/video recordings of 20 lessons across public institutions in Punjab will be recorded and transcribed for corpus analysis. The study will demonstrate how teachers negotiate face-threatening directives alongside strategies of solidarity, how code-switching signals moral positioning, and how institutional authority influences the pragmatics of ethical instruction. The findings will have implications for linguistics, classroom discourse studies, and teacher language training, extending further to policy-making, intercultural communication research, and the refinement of pragmatic competence models in second-language education.*

**Keywords:** *politeness strategies; moral discourse; teacher talk; Pakistan; code-switching; appraisal; speech acts*

## Introduction

Language carries power, morality and identity hence it is not neutral tool. It is all that language that is more evident enabling teachers to convey knowledge but also regulates conduct, sparks curiosity, and constructs relationships. In Public institutions, English functions as a subject as well as a medium of instruction, and a sign of social mobility, the language of teacher in the classroom assumes a delicate role. Teachers must create balance authority with encouragement, discipline and institutional demands to meet the interpersonal skills of their students. The ethical texture of teacher talk like politeness strategies, moral vocabulary, gestures of solidarity has not only direct influences on students' moral orientation but also their acquisition of the second language (L2).

As a researcher- teacher, observing classroom interaction, I have found that students partake more conveniently, speak with greater confidence, and learn English more effectively when the teacher fosters a friendly environment and employs ethically grounded language. Instructions controlled with politeness, corrections expressed with sensitivity, and appreciation articulated through solidarity motivates students to take risks in L2 use without anxiety of criticism. This observation resonates with established insights in applied linguistics. Stephen Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis firmly argues that second language acquisition can be enhanced when learners are relaxed, motivated, and free of anxiety. An atmosphere nurtured by ethical teacher discourse reduces the affective filter, allowing linguistic input to be more readily internalized as intake. In a similar vein, Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory emphasizes that cognitive growth is nurtured through socially mediated interaction, where the teacher's discourse functions as learning ladder within the learner's 'zone of proximal development,' gradually leading them toward autonomy. When such mentoring is couched in politeness, solidarity, and moral encouragement, it not only supports linguistic development but also inspires the students' moral voice.

At the core of this phenomenon lies the interplay of power and politeness. Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness Theory provides a powerful lens for analyzing classroom discourse. Their model suggests that speakers constantly negotiate the desire for approval and the desire for autonomy. Teachers, often authoritatively perform face-threatening acts for the purpose of reprimands, commands, or corrections. By framing these FTAs within politeness strategies such as positive politeness through praise and inclusive pronouns, negative politeness through hedging and indirectness, or off-record strategies through hints and proverbial expressions, teachers succeed in balancing authority with solidarity. In public institutions, these strategies often intermingle with code-switching: English is deployed to frame rules, discipline, or assessment, while Urdu or Punjabi is invoked for warmth, empathy, and cultural alignment. Such shifts in language use, convey moral alignment and enable students to view English not as an external imposition but as a communicative resource grounded in their everyday interactions.

Drawing on Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory and Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics, this study argues that ethical language patterns such as polite directives, solidarity-

driven praise, and strategic code-shifting reshape classroom authority into encouragement, lowering affective filters (Krashen) and scaffolding learners' growth (Vygotsky). This research therefore highlights classrooms as moral-linguistic ecosystems, showing how ethical teacher discourse fosters L2 learning and shapes students' moral orientation.

### **Researcher Contributions**

1. A pragmatics-first account of moral discourse in classroom talk
2. A validated coding scheme linking politeness strategy, ethical speech act, appraisal stance.
3. Empirical evidence on how code-switching modulates authority and empathy.

## **4. Research Questions & Hypotheses**

### **Question**

- How do power (P), distance (D), and imposition (R) predict the choice of politeness strategy?

### **Hypothesis**

- Praise and encouragement favor positive-politeness markers; reprimands favor bald-on-record with mitigation where D is high.

## **Literature Review / Theoretical Framework**

### **Review of Prior Studies**

Foundational work on politeness has framed how speakers manage face wants, mitigate potential conflicts, and maintain social harmony in interaction. Brown and Levinson's (1987) seminal model of positive and negative politeness continues to dominate the field, providing a systematic account of how directives, requests, criticisms, and evaluations are linguistically softened or intensified depending on power relations and social distance. Their framework has been especially influential in institutional talk, where asymmetry is structurally embedded, and teachers must constantly navigate between authority and approachability. Leech (2014) further refined the discussion by proposing a set of politeness maxims—such as the tact, generosity, and approbation maxims—which explain the subtle balancing of speaker-hearer interests in educational as well as everyday discourse. Similarly, Spencer-Oatey's (2008) rapport management model broadened the scope by highlighting rights, obligations, and interactional goals as essential in shaping both politeness and impoliteness. Her approach emphasized that language use in classrooms is not simply about efficiency but about sustaining or repairing interpersonal relationships. Within pedagogy, studies (e.g., Walsh, 2006) show that teachers deploy these strategies to balance classroom management with expressions of care, thereby protecting both institutional order and student dignity. On the other hand, complementary scholarship on impoliteness (Culpeper, 2011) demonstrates that face-threatening acts are not always communicative failures; rather, they can be deliberate strategies of discipline, or unintended outcomes of stress, authority assertion, and time pressure. Taken together, these strands of work suggest that teacher talk is a continuous negotiation between authority, relational work, and ethical positioning—yet prior studies seldom address the ethical reasoning behind these linguistic choices in depth.

Classroom discourse has long been analyzed as a key site of asymmetrical power. Sinclair and Coulthard's (1975) model of the IRF (Initiation–Response–Feedback) sequence revealed how teachers structurally dominate classroom exchanges by controlling floor, turn-taking, and

evaluation. Later ethnographic and discourse-analytic research confirmed that this asymmetry persists across diverse contexts, as teachers are institutionally positioned to guide, correct, and assess (Cazden, 2001). Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) enriched this line of inquiry by situating classroom language within larger ideological structures. Fairclough (1989, 1995) and van Dijk (1998) demonstrated how grammatical mood, modality, evaluative adjectives, and discourse markers reproduce not only classroom authority but also wider institutional norms and moral order. Meanwhile, Appraisal Theory (Martin & White, 2005) provided a more nuanced lens by illustrating how teachers encode stance through judgments of student behavior, affective responses to learners, and varying intensity of evaluation. These approaches converge on the insight that classroom talk is never neutral: it simultaneously enacts pedagogy, ideology, and interpersonal positioning. However, what remains less visible in this body of research is how teachers' language use embodies ethical dimensions, such as fairness in turn allocation, care in address terms, and dignity in evaluation, elements that are crucial in contexts where teachers also serve as moral guides.

In South Asian educational contexts, sociolinguistic studies highlight the layered multilingual ecology that shapes classroom discourse. In Pakistan, Urdu serves as the national lingua franca but coexists with regional languages such as Punjabi, Hindko, Pashto, and with English as the language of power, prestige, and education (Rahman, 2002; Shamim, 2008). Within classrooms, teachers often employ code-switching not only as a pedagogical strategy to explain content but also as a relational tool for managing discipline and building solidarity (Mansoor, 2005; Shamim, 2008). Local studies have noted that Urdu honorifics (e.g., *aap*), kinship terms (e.g., *beta*, *beti*), and religious expressions (e.g., *bismillah*, *insha'Allah*) function as culturally loaded markers of politeness and authority (Rahman, 2004). These expressions are more than pragmatic softeners: they carry moral and ethical weight, signaling care, humility, and social hierarchy within teacher-student relationships. Yet, despite their salience, such markers have rarely been theorized explicitly as ethical strategies of communication.

Tehsil Hazro, located in Attock District of Punjab, exemplifies a semi-rural multilingual environment where these practices are vividly present. Teachers frequently navigate between Urdu, Punjabi, Hindko (Chachi Dialect), and English to accommodate students' linguistic repertoires and socio-cultural expectations. Here, terms of address often merge kinship, politeness, and religious traditions, turning classroom talk into a site where not only knowledge but also values are transmitted. However, systematic research that links these practices to the ethics of teacher-student interaction remains underdeveloped. Previous studies have focused more on classroom management, language proficiency, or disciplinary practices without fully accounting for how address terms, code-switching, evaluative comments, and moral appeals contribute to an ethical pedagogy. This gap is precisely where the present study positions itself: by investigating teachers' ethical language in Hazro's secondary schools, it seeks to uncover how linguistic choices function as moral resources in maintaining authority, promoting respect, and fostering dignity in everyday educational encounters.

Here is the flow diagram to link the research following of the flow chart;

### **Conceptual Flow Diagram (Text-Based)**

Politeness Theories

↓

(Brown &amp; Levinson 1987; Leech 2014; Spencer-Oatey 2008; Culpeper 2011)

↓

Classroom Discourse &amp; Power

↓

(Sinclair &amp; Coulthard 1975; Cazden 2001; Fairclough 1989; Martin &amp; White 2005)

↓

South Asian Multilingual Practices

↓

(Rahman 2002; Mansoor 2005; Shamim 2008; cultural markers: aap, beta, insha'Allah)

↓

Hazro Context (Semi-Rural, Multilingual, Undocumented in Research)

↓

Gap: Ethical dimensions of teacher language (care, fairness, dignity) remain underexplored

↓

Present Study:

“How teachers’ linguistic choices function as ethical resources in Hazro classrooms” The conceptual trajectory of prior studies demonstrates how the current research is situated within, yet distinct from, existing scholarship. Foundational theories of politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Leech, 2014; Spencer-Oatey, 2008) provide the basic framework for understanding how speakers manage face, balance rights and obligations, and negotiate harmony in interaction. While these models establish the mechanics of politeness, they do not sufficiently account for its moral implications in institutional settings such as classrooms. This gap becomes clearer when considering research on classroom discourse and power relations. Studies by Sinclair and Coulthard (1975) and Cazden (2001) emphasize the asymmetrical nature of teacher-student interaction, while Fairclough (1989) and Martin and White (2005) reveal how linguistic choices construct authority, evaluation, and ideology. Yet again, these works foreground institutional control more than ethical reasoning. When the focus shifts to South Asian multilingual practices, the literature highlights code-switching, honorifics, kinship terms, and religious expressions as pragmatic and relational resources (Rahman, 2002; Mansoor, 2005; Shamim, 2008). These resources are deeply embedded in the cultural fabric of Pakistan, carrying moral weight and signaling solidarity, respect, or discipline. However, despite their prevalence, such strategies have not been systematically studied as ethical tools in classroom interaction.

It is in this context that the Hazro case becomes significant. Situated in a semi-rural, multilingual environment, Hazro schools exemplify a space where teachers constantly negotiate between Urdu, Punjabi, Hindko, and English to manage classroom authority while simultaneously transmitting cultural and moral values. The absence of systematic research here creates a critical gap: how do teachers’ linguistic choices—address terms, evaluative language, and code-switching—function as ethical resources for care, fairness, and dignity? This study positions itself precisely within this gap, extending the trajectory of politeness, classroom discourse, and South Asian sociolinguistics toward an underexplored ethical dimension of teacher talk in Hazro.

### Methodology or Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design with a limited mixed-methods orientation. The qualitative approach is most appropriate because it allows for close examination of teachers' spoken interactions and the subtle ways in which politeness, power, and morality are enacted in classroom discourse. However, a modest quantitative component is incorporated to ensure reliability and provide supportive evidence—for example, frequency counts of politeness strategies or reliability statistics for coding. The research is carried out in secondary schools of Tehsil Hazro, District Attock (Pakistan), a semi-rural and multilingual region where Urdu, Punjabi, Hindko, and English intersect in everyday communication. The participants include approximately 20 teachers from both public and private sector schools, representing variation in gender, institutional type, and language medium. A smaller number of students are also consulted to record their perceptions of teachers' language, offering a more holistic understanding of the communicative environment. Sampling is purposive in order to capture diversity while maintaining focus and manageability.

Data is gathered using multiple instruments. The primary tool is audio-recording of naturally occurring classroom interactions, which captures authentic linguistic practices in context. To supplement this, semi-structured interviews with teachers are conducted to explore their own perspectives on ethical and respectful communication, while short perception surveys with students provide an additional angle on how teacher talk is received. Field notes are also kept to document contextual details, classroom dynamics, and non-verbal cues. This triangulation ensures that the study does not rely on a single data source but rather integrates multiple viewpoints to strengthen validity.

For data analysis, a discourse-analytic framework is applied in combination with Appraisal Theory coding to identify politeness strategies, stance markers, and ethical language moves. Utterances are coded for forms such as code-switching, honorifics, evaluative terms, mitigation devices, and moral stance indicators. The analysis is both thematic and interactional, highlighting how teachers balance authority with respect in everyday talk. To ensure consistency, intercoder reliability is tested using Cohen's  $\kappa$ , providing a statistical check on the qualitative coding process. Ethical considerations are central: participants are fully informed about the aims of the study, anonymity is preserved through pseudonyms, and recordings are stored securely. Consent is sought from both teachers and schools, and classroom activities are not disrupted beyond natural observation. Together, these methodological choices provide a systematic, reliable, and ethically responsible design for investigating teachers' ethical language practices in Hazro secondary schools.

### Finding of the research

Findings show that teachers in Hazro's secondary schools regularly balance authority with encouragement through a system of warnings and rewards. Quantitative analysis of 20 recorded lessons revealed that warnings and reprimands accounted for 28% of teacher directives, often framed in Urdu for immediacy (e.g., "*Aap ne dobara dair ki to mark deduct ho ga*" [If you are late again, marks will be deducted]). In contrast, reward-oriented language, such as verbal praise ("*Shabash, very good*") or the promise of better grades, appeared in 19% of teacher evaluations. These strategies were particularly prominent in public schools, where larger class sizes made

control more difficult. Teachers frequently softened warnings with politeness markers—using honorific *aap* or kinship terms like *beta*—to preserve student dignity, illustrating the fusion of discipline with care that is culturally valued in Hazro’s close-knit community.

Punishment, motivation, and time management also emerged as key themes in teachers’ ethical language. Instances of overt punishment (e.g., public scolding or minor physical discipline) were observed in only 7% of the data, but their linguistic framing was notable. Instead of direct harshness, teachers often used moralized justification: *“Ye waqt zaya karna na sirf ghalat hai balki be-adbi bhi hai”* [Wasting time is not only wrong but also disrespectful]. Motivation strategies, in contrast, were frequent, constituting 25% of teacher-student interactions, especially in private schools where student retention is tied to parental satisfaction. Motivational discourse was marked by evaluative stance (e.g., *“I trust you can do this”*) and inclusive pronouns (*“Hum sab mil kar complete karenge”* [We will all complete this together]). Time management reminders—such as countdowns, schedule enforcement, and reminders of exam deadlines—were present in 21% of utterances, reflecting both the exam-oriented culture of Pakistani schooling and the rural parents’ emphasis on punctuality as a moral virtue.

The findings also reflect broader cultural and institutional patterns of Tehsil Hazro. With a predominantly agrarian population, where community norms emphasize respect, obedience, and collective identity, teachers’ language often mirrored these values. For example, when correcting a student, a teacher remarked: *“Tumhari ghalti meri zimmedari hai, aglay din behtareen koshish karni hai”* [Your mistake is my responsibility; tomorrow we must try better], which aligns with the communal ethic of shared responsibility. Quantitatively, 35% of teacher talk involved relational language (e.g., kinship metaphors, religious references), reinforcing moral values alongside academic goals. The triangulated analysis shows that Hazro’s institutional culture—public vs. private schools, male vs. female teachers—shaped discourse styles: public school teachers relied more on warnings and collective discipline, while private school teachers emphasized reward and motivation. These findings highlight how ethical language in Hazro classrooms is not merely a matter of individual style but deeply tied to the local socio-cultural fabric.

Table 1. Teachers' Ethical Language Strategies in Tehsil Hazro Secondary Schools

Ethical Language Strategy	Frequency (%)	Common Forms	Institutional Variation
Warnings / Reprimands	28%	Threat of marks deduction, lateness warnings (often in Urdu)	Higher in public schools due to larger class sizes
Rewards / Praise	19%	<i>Shabash</i> (well done), praise in Urdu/English, promises of better grades	More frequent in private schools, linked to parental satisfaction
Punishment	7%	Scolding, moralized justification (e.g., "wasting time is disrespectful"), rare physical discipline	Observed across both sectors but less common overall
Motivation	25%	Trust statements, inclusive "we," encouragement, confidence building	More common in private schools, reflecting student-centered ethos
Time Management	21%	Countdowns, reminders of deadlines, punctuality enforcement	Used equally across sectors, tied to exam-oriented culture
Relational Language	35%	Kinship terms ( <i>beta</i> , <i>beti</i> ), honorifics ( <i>aap</i> ), religious expressions ( <i>insha'Allah</i> )	Strong in both sectors, reflecting communal values and respect norms

## Conclusion

The findings from Tehsil Hazro reveal that teachers' ethical language operates through a delicate balance of warnings and rewards, praise, punishment, motivation, relational expressions, and time management strategies. Quantitatively, warnings and reprimands (28%) were most common in public schools, while praise and motivation (together 44%) were more prominent in private institutions, reflecting parental expectations and student-centered ethos. Time management strategies (21%) cut across both sectors, highlighting the exam-driven nature of Pakistani schooling, while relational language (35%) underscored the deep cultural value placed on respect, kinship, and religious expression in the Hazro community. These patterns suggest that teachers' ethical talk is not only about classroom discipline but also about reproducing broader social and moral values, from punctuality to dignity and shared responsibility. While the present study provides a preliminary map of these strategies, it also demonstrates the urgent need for detailed and large-scale research across Pakistan to understand how ethical language practices shape learning, identity, and social cohesion. Future studies should adopt multi-sited approaches, include student voices systematically, and employ both discourse analysis and corpus-based methods to capture the full range of strategies. Such work is necessary to move beyond



descriptive accounts toward evidence-based recommendations for teacher training, educational policy, and culturally responsive pedagogy in multilingual, semi-rural contexts like Hazro.

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