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**Language, Gender, and Culture in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa: A Case Study of Communication Patterns at KUST**

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**Abstract**

*Language is not only a neutral means of interaction but a strong social tool that organizes, forms and maintains cultural identities and power relations. This research paper examines the dynamic between the language and gender in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) in Pakistan and specifically at the Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST). Although the influence of gender on language and vice versa has largely been examined under the sociolinguistics, little has been done in the context of a given socio-cultural setting, where Pashtun traditions have a tremendous effect on gender-biased communication, that is, in KPK. Based on the classroom observations, focus group discussions and semi-structured interviews with the students and faculty, the present study explores the interaction patterns between male and female students in academic settings and how these patterns are influenced by cultural norms. Results indicate that there are still gendered asymmetries in communication e.g., male dominance in turn taking and female dependence on politeness in communication. Nevertheless, they also point out the new trends of interaction that become egalitarian, especially in English-language classrooms and group projects. This research paper would help to add to current discussion on language, gender and education by placing the analysis within the context of socio-cultural relationships in Pakistan. It proposes that higher education can become a redemptive place where the culture of hierarchies is questioned but the developments remain slow.*

**Keywords:** Gender and language, cultural conventions, patterns of communication, Pashtun community, higher education, KPK, KUST, sociolinguistics.

**Introduction**

Language is not merely a system of grammar or vocabulary, it is a cultural and social practice, which entails histories, values and ideologies. Sociolinguists have long pointed out that language is not merely a conveyor of information, but a matter of creating and re-creating social realities. One of the most examined factors of this phenomenon is this connection between language and gender. How men and women talk, are talked to and are represented in discourse have far-reaching consequences in the reproduction of cultural norms and in the negotiation of power in society.

The discourse of language and gender in the world has gone through various theoretical phases. The initial studies, usually with the same approach of the deficit one, took the view that the language of women was subordinated, so it was predetermined by hesitancy, politeness and authority deficiency in comparison with the language of men (Lakoff, 1975). Subsequently, the so-called difference tendency approach (Tannen, 1990) proposed that men and women use two different types of communication based on different socialization patterns as opposed to being inferior. However, more recently, researchers have switched sides to social constructionist view, which asserts that gender is not performed in a fixed way but rather performed by language, which is inherent in cultural and institutional practices (Butler, 1990). This development underscores the need to analyse both language and gender in localised socio-cultural contexts, as opposed to Western-centric theories.

The interplay of language, gender and culture is especially important in the South Asian setting. The societies in the region tend to follow patriarchal systems that not only determine the gender roles in the family and work place but also the routine communicative behavior. In Pakistan, the use of language is directly related to the factors of respect, honor (izzat), and modesty (haya), which influence the style of expression of people, in particular, women. Gendered dynamics of communication are also observable in terms of educational institutions, media and even the grammatical structure of Urdu and spoken dialects, whereby male forms are often dominant.

The Pakhtunkhwa (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, KPK) is a good example of the dynamics that should be studied. The province is characterized by a large attachment to cultural practices including Pashtunwali, a set of rules of conduct that upholds the value of honor, hospitality, and gender segregation (purdah), and is inhabited by a predominantly Pashtun population. Although the interpersonal relations are influenced by modernization and globalization, which has manifested itself in visible aspects, the cultural values play a crucial role in molding interpersonal relations. Institutions of education in KPK are, therefore, simultaneously representations of traditional norms and arenas in which these norms are challenged and negotiated.

KUST is one such negotiation venue. Being a university that belongs to the public sector, it draws students of rural and urban backgrounds, which is a range of social and cultural groups. The co-ed setting also unites men and women through formal and informal academic exchanges, and it is thus a rich place to examine the issue of how language mediate gender relations. The context of the university is another place where it is possible to see that higher education allows the

disintegration of the traditional gender structures or serious cultural norms remain a factor defining communicative practices.

This paper lies at the cross road between sociolinguistics, gender studies, and cultural anthropology. It illuminates the cultural scripts which govern speech and silence, authority and deference, dominance and resistance, by considering the use of language among male and female students at KUST in classrooms, and in group discussions and informally. It also places such findings in the broader context of the the discourse on gender equality in Pakistan especially in higher education in which language has the potential to perpetuate or pave the way to change. This research is important in that it is focused on two aspects. On the one hand, it records the current gendered practices of communication that reflect the wider social organization in KPK. On the other hand, it accentuates unobtrusive but significant changes in the interaction patterns indicative of slow cultural transformation. These two conditions of tradition and change confirm the complicated role of language in the negotiation of gender identities in the modern Pakistan. This article is a contribution to closing a gap in sociolinguistic research in Pakistan, because most studies of language and gender in Pakistan are in urban centers such as Lahore, Karachi, and Islamabad, or they involve discourse in media and textbooks.

There has been low focus on the higher education in KPK, even though the region has a distinct cultural environment and women are increasingly accessing universities. Not only do the findings deepen the academic debates, but they also have implications that can be put into practice by educators and policymakers interested in increasing the inclusivity of academic environments.

In short, language introduction to this study makes it a cultural practice involving gender and power extensively, puts the study in the context of Pakistan and KPK, and makes KUST an interesting location where the changing patterns of communication can be analyzed. In the sections below, the literature will be reviewed, gaps in the research will be identified and the methodology, findings and implications of this case study will be outlined.

### **Literature Review**

The gender and language study is an interdisciplinary field that crosscuts across sociolinguistics, anthropology, communication studies and gender studies. The past fifty years have witnessed the discussion of the role of language in the creation and reproduction of gendered realities. This review places the present study in the framework of three key strands: (i) general theories and worldviews of language and gender, (ii) South Asian work with a specific emphasis on cultures, and (iii) Pakistan-based studies that point to the influence of patriarchal traditions and institutionalization on the linguistic practices.

#### **The World views on gender and language.**

Early language and gender studies were majorly influenced by western scholars. In her classic work, *Language and Woman Place* (1975), Robin Lakoff proposed the deficit model that stated that hedges, tag questions and politeness markers dominated the speech of women because of their subordinate status in society. In spite of its novelty, the method proposed by Lakoff was subsequently criticized on the grounds that it essentialised the speech of women as weak in nature.

As a reaction, the difference model came into being led to the fore by Deborah Tannen (1990), who contended that male and female speech are different not because of power imbalance but rather because of socialization in different ways. The speech of men was regarded as competitive and status oriented, and that of women was considered cooperative and rapport-oriented. Although it is influential, this model has been deemed simplistic by the fact that it overlooks the importance of power and overlooks gender differences.

The third significant movement was to social constructionism. The theory of gender performativity (1990) by Judith Butler underlined that gender is not an identity but a practice that is carried out by language and behavior. The scholars such as Cameron (2003), Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) noted that patterns of communication are dynamic and bargainable depending on context, culture and institutional set ups, and thus gendered speech can be negotiable. This paradigm offers the best perspective to analyze KPK, in which the use of culture as a mediating force is very strong but still can be disputed in places like university.

The South Asian Attitudes towards language and gender.

Persistently in South Asia, scholars have demonstrated how gendered communication is instantiated in cultural and religious practices. Patriarchal values are often expressed and strengthened in the language used, which employs honorifics, proverbs and metaphorical language. Studies conducted in India (Pandey, 2001; Annamalai, 2010) indicate the silencing of women in both the home and the outside world and how language practices contribute to gender isolation. Likewise, in Bengal, Sultana (2011) records the practice of empowerment of female students and the same school perpetuating the elitist and gendered hierarchies simultaneously through the English-medium schools.

The role of izzat (honor) and haya (modesty), which is directly applied to communicative behavior, is one of the recurring topics in South Asian contexts. The female gender is also supposed to practice modesty, both when dressed, and also when talking, using submissive tones and never challenging. Men on the other hand are supposed to portray authority and assertiveness. There are some patterns in conversational dominance, politeness, and turn-taking, which can be observed as a result of this cultural framing.

Media and literature is another great dimension. Research has indicated that women are often stereotyped in South Asian movies, adverts, and textbooks, which make the normalization of linguistic sexism seem natural (Das, 2016). These images support the idea that women are expected to stay in their designated communicative frames.

The Pakistani language and gender.

Studies in Pakistan exemplify most of these larger regional trends and also point to distinct cultural contexts. A number of studies have analyzed the encoding of gendered meanings in Urdu, English and regional languages. To illustrate, Hussain (2009) states that Urdu proverbs and idioms tend to portray women as feeble, emotional or helpless as this perpetuates the patriarchal ideologies. Likewise, Pashto proverbs portray the female gender as requiring the protection of a male or as trouble-making in case they are vocal-minded, which indicates the highly patriarchal set-up of Pashtun society.

Studying English-language textbooks of Pakistani schools, Mahmood and Saeed (2011) discovered that women were underrepresented in all cases, and were commonly portrayed as domestic servants, whereas men were represented as professionals and leaders. These trends reflect the social discourse at large in which masculinity is synonymous with authority and femininity with obedience.

Khan (2014) at the university level noted that male students took the initiative during classroom discussions whereas females students took a passive role and use politeness strategies to find permission before they could speak up. This observation can be compared to a study by Saeed (2017) at one of the universities in Punjab whereby women said that they self-censored in mixed-gender classes so that no one would consider them immodest.

The Pashto-speaking population has been worked on in KPK and it has served as a great guide on the gendered language. Research that was conducted by Khattak (2018) and Rehman (2020) indicated that gender isolation and cultural practices such as purdah greatly limit the freedom of women in communicative activities in the open areas. Nevertheless, there is also an observation by the two authors that women are now demanding their own way in the academic scenario, especially in metropolitan areas, defying the stereotypes of silence and subordination.

#### **Fresh Changes and Negotiations.**

Although most of the literature describes deep-rooted gender norms, there is an increased awareness of change. Globalization, the introduction to social media, and opportunities to get higher education have provided young Pakistanis with alternative models of communicative. British English-speaking universities, especially, are the environments, where women are able to bargain with other identities than those expected. Research implies that women in such situations can use aggressive tactics, challenge masculine power, and assert control in an academic scene (Jabeen, 2019).

These changes are however, not evenly distributed. They are more apparent in high-end urban institutions as opposed to those in the public sector in culturally conservative societies such as KPK. Such an imbalanced state of affairs highlights the need to have localized research that can reflect the intricacy of gendered communication at a particular situation.

#### **Synthesis**

Three points are illustrated in the available literature. To start with, gendered language is an international phenomenon but applies in different ways, based on cultural and institutional backgrounds. Second, in South Asia and Pakistan, the language customs are highly patriarchal, and they tend to silence or disenfranchise women. Third, higher education is a paradoxical place: it continues to reproduce numerous conventional patterns, but it opens the possibilities of resistance and transformation.

Nevertheless, despite the merits, the scope of such research on the topic of language and gender is still limited in Pakistan. The majority of the literature concentrates on textbooks, media, or urban universities in Punjab and Sindh and comparatively little is paid to KPK higher education. Considering the distinct culture of the Pashtun community, a case study at KUST is a new source

of information on how language reproduces as well as challenges the concept of gendered norms within this area.

### **Research Gap**

As much as substantial literature has been done on the topic of language and gender across the world, and several researches have been undertaken in Pakistan, there is still a significant gap in terms of context-related research in the region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). Much of the literature that exists about Pakistan has been about cities such as Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad and where cultural norms are not exactly the same as the highly traditional Pashtun environment. Language use in the media and textbooks has also received an abundance of studies, but mainly they represent prescriptive discourse as opposed to interaction as it pertains to everyday or academic life.

Moreover, Gendered communication in Pakistan has been treated in previous studies as a fixed phenomenon placing the emphasis on the silence, deference and/or marginalism of women without providing a sufficient consideration of how women dynamically act, resist and sometimes subvert these restrictions. The interaction of cultural practices and the dynamics of academic practices has thus not been well investigated.

In particular, within the framework of higher learning in KPK, the negotiative process of men and women in co-educational universities in relation to the communicative practices is underrepresented empirically. It is noteworthy that universities, such as the Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST) can be characterized as liminal spaces: they are a part of conservative Pashtun society, but their experiences are also shaped by the contemporary educational practice, their exposure to the world of discourses, and their professional equality desires. The research of language use in this respect, thus, serves a significant gap, both in the production of localized knowledge, and in the more broad comparative discussions on sociolinguistics and gender studies.

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework.**

This paper relies on various theoretical ways to crystallize the study of language and gender. The deficit, difference and social constructionist approaches offer a time-related context, although the focus, in this case, is on the current schemes according to which gender is considered dynamic and negotiated through contextual circumstances.

Deficit Theory (Lakoff, 1975): Although essentialism is criticized, this point of view is also applicable to emphasis of politeness markers, apologies, or hedges that are commonly related to female speech. Its applicability in Pakistan is that it demonstrates how the cultural expectations are overlaid on the linguistic traits that reinforce perceived helplessness or powerlessness.

Difference Approach (Tannen, 1990): This theory points out that men and women were raised to different communicative styles. Male assertiveness and female deference within the KPK context might be the results of socialization into culturally conforming gender-specific roles more than they can be natural differences.

Social Constructionism and Performativity (Butler, 1990; Cameron, 2003): The core theoretical prism of the given study is social constructionism in which gender is constructed and performed through discourse instead of being a discernible characteristic. This corresponds to the idea of Judith Butler of gender performativity in which communication acts are always in process of defining what it is to be a male or a female in a particular society. In this view, the subordination of female pupils or supremacy of male pupils at KUST is not established in advance but is reproduced in the process of everyday interaction - and can be changed accordingly.

Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995): In order to reveal the way power works through language, the present study is guided by the concepts of critical discourse analysis (CDA). CDA assists in the examination of not only the surface qualities of talk but also ideologies, hierarchies, and power dynamics that structure who speaks or is heard as well as who voices are marginalized. In a theoretical sense, this study places KUST, a place of cultural negotiation, as traditional Pashtun values of modesty, honor and gender seclusion meet contemporary scholarly routine and discourses of equality in the globalized world. This binary makes it possible to study continuity and change in gendered communication. The framework is thus sociolinguistic (interactional patterns, turn-taking, politeness, etc.) and socio-cultural (meaning of such patterns in the cultural context of KPK).

### **Problem Statement**

In Pakistan, gender inequality is not only displayed in terms of economic or political setting, but also in terms of the verbal communication. In some parts of the country such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, where the cultural practices are especially robust, the interaction between men and women is usually characterized by the hierarchical gender structures embedded in culture. Although gender equality in education is promoted by the policies of nations, the realities of the life of male and female students show that they have unequal voices, participation, and power in academic discourse.

Although the number of women joining universities like KUST is on the rise, cultural dictates of modesty and deference still play a role in determining the manner in which communication is done. Male students, in their turn, tend to represent hegemonic speech patterns which are in line with the general patriarchal rules. This disproportion does not only reflect the structure of society but also restricts the female gender to full access to academic and intellectual life of universities.

Nevertheless, simultaneously, the university environment offers an exceptional situation in which conventional gender roles can be challenged and renegotiated. The English-media instruction, the group work, and the effect of exposure to heterogeneous peers open possibilities of more egalitarian types of interaction. The degree of actualization of these opportunities, and the cultural and linguistic approaches of students in working out these possibilities is, however, under-investigated in KPK.

The issue, then, is two-fold: (1) the continuation of gendered communication modes that are unfavorable to women; (2) the absence of empirical studies that indicate how the patterns are manifested in high education settings in conservative societies. This gap is essential to the

process of comprehending how language perpetuates and disrupts gender norms, and as a factor in informing teaching and learning practices that facilitate inclusivity and equity.

### **Research Objective**

- To examine how cultural norms in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) shape gendered communication patterns within KUST educational institutions.
- To compare the linguistic strategies employed by male and female students in classroom discussions, group work, and informal interactions.
- To investigate whether higher education promotes more egalitarian communication practices in a traditionally conservative context.
- To explore faculty members' perceptions of gendered communication and their role in either reinforcing or challenging cultural norms.
- To contribute to broader sociolinguistic debates on how language both maintains and contests gendered hierarchies in culturally conservative societies.

### **Research Questions**

- 1.What is the difference between the male and female communication styles of students at KUST in the classroom and other informal academic spaces?
- 2.How do cultural norms in KPK affect such communicative practices?
- 3.Do language practices of university students, especially those in English-media environments, show any indication of China-style shifting gender roles?
- 4.What do faculty members think and do about gendered patterns of classroom interaction?

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

The present study has qualitative case study design, and this design enables the use of the study to examine language use in a natural social and cultural environment. The case study approach is specifically appropriate in the knowledge of the complex social phenomena when it is characterized by the lack of clarity on the boundary between the phenomenon and the context (Yin, 2014). KUST was selected as the site of study due to the fact that it is a co-ed and public-sector university that is located in KPK thus being affected by the traditional cultural factors as well as modern academic activities.

The qualitative disposition of this study bases its approach on the assumption that only quantitative measures are inadequate in understanding language and gender. Rather, emphasis is placed on talk, interactional patterns and senses ascribed by participants to their communicative acts.

#### **Participants**

Purposive sampling strategy was chosen to have a wide range of views. The participants included: 40 undergraduate students (20 male, 20 female) representing English- and Urdu-medium courses of social sciences and natural sciences. This guaranteed the inter-disciplinary and cross-linguistic representation.



5 faculty (3 male, 2 female) who had taught a course in English and Urdu, chosen because they had experience with mixed-gender classes.

Students were included on the basis of the following inclusion criteria: (a) a student must be enrolled in regular degree programs at KUST, (b) willingness to participate and (c) a student must be comfortable using either English, Urdu, or Pashto as languages of interaction.

### **Data Collection Methods**

**Triangulation of findings was carried out in a number of ways:**

#### **1. Classroom Observations**

- ◆ Conducted on six courses (three in English -medium, three in Urdu-medium).
- ◆ Attention was given to turn taking, interruptions, address forms, politeness markers and silence.

Observations were non participant by nature in order to cause minimal disturbance and field notes were recorded in detail.

#### **2. Discussions in Focus Groups (FGDs).**

Two FGDs were carried out with male children and two with female children with a number of 8-10 participants respectively.

- ◆ Gender-divided FGDs promoted dialogue devoid of the fear of being judged by the opposite sex.
- ◆ Topics covered classroom activities, experiences of speaking in mixed-setting, and views of cultural norms.

#### **3. Semi-Structured Interviews**

- ◆ Interviewed 5 faculty members to obtain information about their views on gendered communication.
- ◆ Questions were asked about their practices of teaching, the issues in their gender balance and consideration of cultural effects.

#### **4. Informal Side-Discussions.**

- ◆ Informal communication with students in cafeterias and campus areas proved to give contextual insight on the mechanisms of gender dynamics beyond the classroom

#### **.Data Analysis**

The data gathered were interpreted through Discourse Analysis (DA) and through aspects of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The process of analysis included:

1. Transcription: Transcription of audio recordings of FGDs and audio recordings of interviews was done verbatim, whereas the notes of observations were elaborated into descriptions.
2. Coding: The NVivo software was used to code data theoretically. Codes were originally descriptive (e.g., interruption, politeness, silence) and eventually evolved into such analytical themes (e.g., male dominance, female deference, shifts toward equality).
3. Comparative Analysis: There were comparisons of patterns between the English-medium classes and Urdu-medium classes, male classes and female classes.

4. Interpretation: The results were discussed through the theoretical lenses of performativity and difference methodologies and linked micro-level linguistic activities with macro-level cultural values.

### **Validity and Reliability**

In order to increase credibility, the study used triangulation with a mixture of observations, FGDs, and interviews. Member-checking was realized through sharing preliminary findings with a part of the participants to clarify that interpretation should be accurate. The techniques used in peer debriefing with other research workers were also useful in sharpening the categories of analysis. Although the study does not purport to be generalizable, it provides transferable information about situations of comparable cultural and institutional features.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Since the matters concerning gender are sensitive in KPK, the ethical procedures were adhered to:

- ◆ Informed Consent: All subjects signed an informed consent. Verbal explanations were also done so that the female students would feel comfortable.
- ◆ Confidentiality: Transcripts and reporting were done using pseudonyms.
- ◆ Non-Harm Principle: No one was afraid to be culturally overlooked and hence attempts were made to establish safe environments especially in FGDs where people could express themselves without any kind of cultural backlash.
- ◆ Institutional Approval: Authorization to collect data was obtained in KUST administration.

### **Methodology Limitations.**

The case study design is based on one institution and might be restricted in its generalizability. Gender-separated FGDs can have promoted openness, but may have also inhibited the emergence of cross-gender dialogs.

Limitations of cultural sensitivities precluded direct investigation of some subjects, and this could have affected the data richness on certain aspects.

Nevertheless, the multi-method approach is very significant as it gives a deep, analytical insight into gendered communication in KUST.

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic discourse analysis was used to analyze the material that was collected and it facilitated the appearance of patterns of gendered communication in a systematic way. Verbatim, all the observations in the classroom, focus group discussion, and interviews were transcribed. The transcripts have been read through several times, to get acquainted with the information, and in order to define the linguistic and interactional recurring characteristics.

### **Coding Process**

The analysis was carried out in two processes:

1. First-cycle coding Involved the descriptive naming of aspects including interruptions, politeness devices, hedging devices, honorifics, silences, and code-switching. These codes were inductive and some were deductive and were formed through the previous research of the language and gender whereas some were based on the speech of the participants.

2. These descriptive codes were grouped into larger themes in the second-cycle coding, including male dominance in turn-taking, female politeness and deference, silence as a communicative strategy, and changes toward egalitarian roles.

The process of coding is simplified as illustrated below:

A simplified example of the coding process is shown below:

Excerpt (raw data)	Code	Theme
"We understand the lecture, but we don't want to answer when boys are there." (Female student, FGD)	Silence as protection	Silence as a communicative strategy
"Sir, I think maybe this is the answer..." (Female student, classroom observation)	Hedging + deference	Female politeness and deference
"Actually, let me explain it properly..." (Male student, classroom observation)	Interruption dominance	+ Male dominance in turn-taking
"When girls speak in English, boys also listen carefully." (Male student, FGD)	English prestige/neutrality	= Shifts toward egalitarian interaction

This table illustrates how raw excerpts were broken down, coded, and linked to overarching themes.

### Triangulation/Reliability.

To strengthen the analysis, triangulation was used, wherein three types of data, i.e. classroom observations, focus group discussions and faculty interviews, were compared. As an instance, the evidence of male dominance patterns in classrooms was validated by the testimonies of female students in the focus groups as well as by the thoughts of teachers in interviews. At two intervals, coding was revisited, to ensure consistency.

### Interpretive Stage

The last part of the analysis consisted of interpreting these themes in a theoretical sense. Male disruptions and longer speaking turns were placed in dominance theory (Zimmerman and West, 1975) whereas hedging and politeness signs in feminine speech were subjected to the deficit approach patterns (Lakoff, 1975). But context-specific practices, including silence as modesty or code-switching as an identity, were closer to the views of social constructionists (Butler, 1990; Bourdieu, 1991), who treat gender as performance and negotiated in a process of interaction.

### Findings and Discussion

Patterns of influence of gender on the use of language were found to be of a layered nature based on the analysis of a classroom observation, focus groups, and the interviews conducted with the faculty members of Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST). The results indicate that although cultural traditions still enact gendered communicative roles, the higher education is slowly creating spaces of negotiation and change. These dynamics are captured by five inter-related themes.

### 1. Lots of male Classroom Talk.

In observed classes, male students always had longer stretches of floor possession, they initiated more turns, and they were more inclined to interrupt others and instructors. Such dominance was not only accepted but in most cases, it was normalized in the classroom setting.

#### **This is the kind of a dynamic according to a female participant:**

*We are sure we are right, however, at times it is more appropriate to remain silent as boys hate to hear girls argue a lot.*

This was affirmed by a male student:

*Boys tend to talk first, it is natural to us. Girls are less talkative and teachers also question us more.*

This is reminiscent of Zimmerman and West (1975) results on conversational dominance that indicated that male dominance over turn-taking is not a personal option but one that is embedded in socialized interactional patterns. In the study case of KUST, predominance is combined with the local patriarchal principles that justify the male authority during the speech.

### 2. Courtesy and Deference Strategies in Female students.

Politeness and deference in the language of female students were, not only hedged with maybe, I think, but also had prefaces of apologism (sorry, sir) and honorifics. The patterns are similar to the observations made by Lakoff (1975) concerning the language of women, however, in the case of the KUST, the patterns are also useful as the intentional methods of cultural adaptation.

One female student stated:

We do not want to sound arrogant or arrogant. Talking nicely allows our point to be taken.

Instead of being an expression of weakness, these practices are used to show how Goffman (1959) thought of impression management, in which communicating is meticulously edited to balance between disclosing knowledge and being modest. Politeness then is a means of negotiating both gender-based and academic demands.

### 3. Silence as an Actionable Communicative Option.

One of the major gendered strategies turned out to be silence. Female students tended to make no contributions in a mixed-gender classroom, yet they exhibited ability in small women-only groups.

As one participant put it:

*"We are not afraid to speak. and before boys we can be misjudged. So, silence is safer."*

This brings out the silence as not nothingness, but rather an act of protection as a communicative practice, as portrayed by Bourdieu (1991) definition of symbolic power. Silence is used to maintain social respectability and prevent the confrontations that would disrupt gender norms. However, women were fluent and brave in personal settings, which may indicate that their silence is only contextual and not indicative of inability.

### 4. The Negotiation of Gendered Identity and Code-Switching.

The decision on the language change between Pashto and Urdu and English was often gendered, so that the student who chose to switch communicated a masculine meaning. Pashto was used in a joking or competitive manner by male students, which strengthened the masculine solidarity.

Female students would not use Pashto in a mixed group, where they would use the Urdu or the English languages which were deemed neutral and not culturally charged.

A female participant noted:

*"Pashto in class sounds rough. Either Uri or English is more respectful."*

This fits into the Norton (2000) idea of identity construction by demonstrating how acts of linguistic choice are subject to contestations of respectability, modernity and gender. Code-switching is therefore not merely a language move, it is a display of how, in trying to be acceptable in terms of their social identities, students strive to fit the accepted social identities.

### **5. New Change to Egalitarian Interaction.**

Slow changes are noticed in spite of strong hierarchies. It is specifically in English-mediated classes that women were given more space to be assertive. Equality of input was also facilitated in co-operative activities such as group projects and this lowered the pressure of a social performance.

#### **A male student observed:**

When girls speak English, we can hear them. At times they do it better than we do.

The generation gaps were also revealed by faculty interviews. Younger lecturers preferred active support of the female voice, and elderly teachers would rather attribute the woman as naturally shy. These findings suggest that hyperbole of restructuring gendered communication can be educational practice reforms, generation shift and the language of instruction.

#### **Integration with Theory**

All the findings suggest a dynamic tension between persistence and transformation. Male dominance agrees with dominance theory and female politeness and hedging agrees the deficit approach. Nevertheless, tactical application of silence and code-switching is identifiable as a social constructionist manner of gendered communication whereby gendered communication is a situational, negotiated and dynamic one.

The example of KUST may demonstrate that tertiary education is possible to become the place of transformation: the application of the English-based education and modern approaches to teaching can open the channels according to which women can become more equal participants without violating the cultural principles of decency. Through this manner, the gender hierarchies of tradition can be reproduced through the use of language, as well as providing the possibilities of change.

#### **Conclusion**

The research purpose of the paper was to study the confluence of gender and language in the educational and cultural setting of a university in Kohat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan, Kohat University of Science and Technology. The study has provided evidence of some traditional gendered norms that still exist, using classroom observations, focus groups, faculty attitudes, that show that small changes in the direction of more egalitarian communication are starting to emerge in the classroom.

The findings point to the fact that the turn-taking and speech initiation control by the male remains a feature of the classroom discourse. Training to negotiate their presence in a specialized

manner, female students are culturally trained on the modesty norms to use politeness strategies, hedging and even feigned silence. These patterns mirror bigger structures of patriarchy within the Pashtun society and the coded language of the speech is culturally masculine. At the same time, female students demonstrated a strategic agency: their silence was not passive only but a technique of remaining respectable and preserving their intellectual strength at the same time in less dangerous places.

It is noteworthy that the research made the intervention of code-switching as the stage of gender negotiations. Unlike male students who studied Pashto so as to build solidarity and assertiveness, female students were oriented to Urdu and English in the manner that the versions were more neutral and acceptable in a social set-up. The increased application of the English language in academics provided women with a voice in which they could be more assertive and have confidence in younger faculty that were highly concerned with inclusiveness. Such dynamics suggest that the knowledge provided by higher education can extend beyond the academic discourse but symbolic spaces where to re-work gendered hierarchies. Theoretically, the research is all too familiar to the dominance model (male dominance in discourse), the deficit model (female dependency on politeness), and, most importantly, the social constructionist approach, which sees gendered communication as dynamical and situational. These patterns co-existing at KUST show that gender and language do not constitute rigid categories but are changing practices that represent cultural continuity, though not precluding change.

#### **Implications**

There are two implications of this research. In practical aspects, the findings require higher application of gender-sensitive pedagogy in tertiary education. Teachers will be more helpful and will assume an inclusive question stance, will encourage equal contribution and recognize silence as a source of power as a form of communication rather than a weakness. At a larger scale, the research opens up the transformative nature of education in the cultures in which cultural traditions have not yet been broken. Universities like KUST can gradually transform gender and communication attitude by establishing an equal interaction in the classrooms.

#### **Future Projections and Constraints.**

Even though this study can be termed as being quite useful, it was limited to a single university setting. Comparative analysis of different institutions within KPK- or between a public and a private university- would allow a more in-depth examination of the interplay between class, ethnicity and institutional culture with gender and language. Secondly, quantitative information, e.g. of a particular turn length or frequency of interruption, could be employed to complement the qualitative analysis, providing a more detailed picture.

The study can also be utilized in subsequent research to analyze the impact of digital platform and online learning space that is an increasingly important part of university life in Pakistan. These contexts have the capacity to offer alternative gender relations and they might either augment or diminish the inequalities that exist in the face-to-face settings.

#### **Closing Reflection**

Lastly, the paper suggests that language in KUST represents the burden of cultural tradition and at the same time is a pointer of social change. The women voices do not disappear, but they are not so extensive, manoeuvring, and more insistent in the openings provided by education. With more women beginning to take up higher education and pedagogical practices changing, such linguistic negotiations can spread out to other aspects, thus leading to slow but significant changes to gender relations in KPK and Pakistan, in general.

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