A Sociolinguistic Study of Swearing Among Children in Tehsil Hazro Distt. Attock

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Abstract
The present research focuses on the sociolinguistic proportions of swearing among children in Tehsil Hazro, a strong traditional rural area of Pakistan that keeps the linguistic diversity. This study explores the linguistics form, function, and the meaning of taboo expression in social context among the school going children between the ages of 9-14 in Tehsil Hazro, Pakistan. Allan & Burridge (2006) say in many societies, People often consider swearing taboo. It plays considerable roles in showing emotions, forming social bonds, and negotiating tone strength. For the purpose of examining the form, function and frequency of swearing along with influence of demographic factors (age, gender, and peer bonding), both the methods, qualitative as well as quantitative are used. The study examines how children apply the swearing words in their different related fields of life such as school, street, playground, class, and home and how swearing works as a tool of solidarity, humour, teasing, and identity recognition in a multilingual peer setting like the rural locality of Hazro. For interpreting the finding, the research bases on the sociolinguistic and politeness/impoliteness theories within the local cultural norms. Findings and results not only provide a rich understanding of language socialization, childhood discourse, and cultural views on taboo speech in rural Pakistani contexts but also exhibit the various communicative purposes , such as aggression, self-display, power assertion humour, teasing, and bonding. By researching this area of language, this research contributes to understand the socialization of language and function of taboo language in childhood deeply.
Keywords*: Sociolinguistics, Swearing, Taboo language, Tehsil Hazro, Linguistic diversity, Peer bonding, Language socialization, Identity, Politeness theory, Impoliteness, Cultural norms, Humour, Group belonging*

1. Introduction

Sociolinguistics, a branch of linguistics, focuses the relation of society with language. Swearing, one of the types of taboo, plays a significant linguistics role not only in the communication of adults but also equally in the communication of children. Language is not only mean of communication but also the source of transmitting emotional meanings of that particular conversation between the participants. Taboo, as stated by many, is a social phenomenon almost exists in every society according to its cultural norms, is prohibited form of language. Swearing is a sub-form of it.

Swearing, with its complex role of communication is impolite and socially prohibited language. Allan and Burridge (2006) are in view that culture defines swear words as taboo and social norms regulate them. Stapleton (2003) explains that swearing is gendered and taboo practice. In children language it plays as a medium of humour, identity marker and solidarity, especially in their peer bondage. Swearing highlights a vast cultural context, religious beliefs and power dynamics In Tehsil Hazro, where Pashto, Punjabi/Hindko, Urdu, and English coexist and make it linguistically a diverse area of Pakistan. Even though its dominance, in Pakistan, especially in smaller town little empirical research has focused on swearing. This article explores children's use of swearing in Hazro as a communicative strategy, examining the linguistic forms, contextual functions, and cultural ideologies that influence its practice. This study also advocates that swearing is not only a simple moral failing but it keeps a meaningful linguistics practice in a society. It explains that how taboo expression become resources for different purposes like humour, solidarity, power assertion, and emotion release.

In western context, swearing is considered a tool of versatile communication and they studied it extensively. Jay (2009) views the cathartic expressive function of swearing while sociolinguist, Eckert (2000) demonstrates in what ways the use of taboo language settles identity and group belonging. In South Asian concern, this research is limited, often discusses the religious, ethical and moral aspects of swearing rather than considering its linguistics importance in social backgrounds. This study, set in a rustic Pakistani context, provides an ethnically informed perception on swearing, capturing the distinct relationship of religious, cultural, and linguistic factors that figure its use. The findings of the study are helpful in understanding language socialization and the competence of children's communication in Pakistani rural setting, where traditional norms link with global media influences.

Research hypotheses

H1 children in Tehsil Haro use swearing for the purpose of teasing, humour, and group-belonging than for direct aggression

H2 Male children use more frequent and more aggressive taboo words in comparison to female children

Research questions

Q1 What are the most common linguistics forms of swearing that children use in Tehsil Hazro?

Q2 what are the ways in which peer bonding, gender, and age (Demographic Factors) shape patterns and frequency of swearing?

Research Objectives

1.	To investigate the linguistic forms, functions, and sociocultural meanings of swearing among school-going children (ages 9–14) in Tehsil Hazro, examining how multilingual practices

(Pashto, Punjabi/Hindko, Urdu, and English) shape their communicative competence and identity construction.

2.   To analyze the influence of demographic variables particularly age, gender, and peer bonding on the frequency, intensity, and contexts of swearing, in order to understand how children use taboo language as a strategy for humour, solidarity, teasing, emotional release, and power assertion within their social networks.

Literature Review

Swearing is a form of taboo, functions significantly in everyday speech to highlight the linguistic competence of the speaker. Karjalainen (2002) argues as swearing, being the form of taboo, is a vast term. Swearing, with its significant and linguistically unique function in communication and cultural expression, has spellbound sociologists and linguists as taboo language. Allan and Burridge (2006) view that societies, due to moral, cultural, and religious beliefs barriers the expression of taboo words   , keeping in view that taboo language often expresses strong expressive responses. It is not only offensive language with verbal aggression but it is also linguistically complex process that plays a vast significant role in communication. Researches make obvious that swearing can be multi-functional as it can be a channel for releasing emotions, a mean for social bonding, and a strong marker of identity (Jay, 2009). Hence swearing is not merely a deviation from culturally, socially and linguistically standard norms but it is also plays an important part of linguistic competence with its functional diversity.

Andersson and Trudgill (1990) argue that swearing is deeply fixed in social framework, signifies cultural discernment of morality, decency and power .From this point of view, swearing is not essentially negative but with variation in its interpretation according to cultural norms, background, and the relationships between speaker, it depends on context. Daly, Holmes, Newton, and Stubbe (2004), in this regard, expressed that even in professional co-working places such as industrial unit , swearing often becomes the marker of solidarity and does not show a sign of disrespect. Similarly, Eder (1990) explains that how same age or maturity level groups use swearing and mock jibes to mediate social stratification and intensify in-group integration.

 The theories of language socialization reiterate that children not only acquire grammar and words but also learn social values and rules that govern language use including taboo utterances. Peer communications, family values, and community norms are various factors that shape this process. Holmes (2013) and Wardhaugh (2010) both emphasize patterns of sociolinguistics, such as frequency and acceptability of swearing, are closely related to demographic factors such as age, gender, and socioeconomic status. For example, research explains that in swearing, boys are more frequent in comparison to girls, partly due to societal prospect and gendered specific norms around language (Jay, 2009). However, this disparity depends on context, and in certain peer environment, girls use swearing as a source of resisting stereotypes or establishing authority (Daly et al., 2004).

Swearing becomes even more complex in multilingual societies where community reflects cultural and linguistic diversity. Rahman (2011) says that in Pakistan, multilingual speakers, when swearing, frequently switch between languages, strategically opting words from varied linguistic stocks to intensify emotional impact or mark group identity. Due to linguistic flexibility, taboo words, alongside the societal changes and local cultural dynamics evolve and do not remain static. In rural area like Hazro, where multiple languages coexist as local, native and these

language are also L1, L2, and mother tongue to community residents (Pashto, Urdu, Punjabi, and Hindko), give deep insights authority structure and intercommunity bonds.

In analyzing swearing, Theoretical frameworks of politeness and impoliteness are significantly helpful. Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness argues that people use language to preserve "face," or social dignity, through tactics that either lessen or threaten interpersonal relationships. From this point of view, swearing keeps ability to act as a face-threatening act (FTA), purposefully challenging values to uphold authority or explicit annoyance. Contrarily, Culpeper's (2011) work on impoliteness depicts that swearing can have affiliative purposes, as it demonstrates familiarity, reliance, or solidarity among peers. So, socially aggressive and social bonding, both the function of wearing highlights the richness of communication.

In South Asia, research on taboo language has largely concentrated on adult communication, political discussions, or urban vocalizations (Baart, 2003; Khan, 2018). Baart's (2003) sociolinguistic survey of Northern Pakistans exhibits that there is strong linguistic diversity in rural communities and different social values around language use, yet children's speech patterns were no explored. Khan (2018) also in the view that in Pakistan, deep power structures, cultural norms, and religious practices shape linguistic practices, all of which influence the acceptability of taboo expressions. Researches from different areas propose that the practices of swearing among children serve useful insight into native mindset concerning moral values, social class status, and ethnic identity (Eder, 1990; Jay, 2009). This highlights the significance of examining swearing in rural Pakistani discourse environment to better understand the complex intersection of cultural distinctiveness, linguistic multiplicity, and peer cohort structures.

Although there is increase in recognition of swearing as a justifiable field of linguistic study, yet there remains a deficiency of study on its use among children in customary, linguistically versatile societies.

Prior research tends swearing as abnormal in children, linking it with divergent behaviour, instead of studying its social and linguistic functions (Jay, 2009). Now, in modern days sociolinguistic explores increasingly underscores swearing as a part and parcel for communicative competence, reflecting creativity, humor, and identity formation (Holmes, 2013). This viewpoint encourages a change from moral judgment to regional understanding, stressing the contextual nature of taboo language. To address this gap, the present study systematically integrates multiple instruments (questionnaire, observation, interviews, and field notes – see Appendices A–D) to provide both quantitative and qualitative insights into children's swearing practices in Hazro.

This research bases on above mentioned theoretical and empirical contributions by studying swearing among school-going children aged 9–14 in Tehsil Hazro. The main focus of this study is on both linguistic forms and sociocultural functions and aims to focus how children steer social relationships and mark their identities through swearing. This study fills the gap in sociolinguistic literature by making a deep analysis of use of taboo expressions among the children of rural areas of Pakistan that is often omitted in linguistic research.

The following few lines describe the researcher review as well as the finding and recommendations of the given research. The context was analyzed systematically and statistically.

Flow Chart : Research Framework

Research Problem

| → Limited studies on swearing in rural Pakistan (focus mostly urban/adults)

| → Need to explore linguistic + social functions of swearing among children

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Literature Review

| → Theories: Politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987) & Impoliteness (Culpeper, 2011)

| → Global view: Swearing as identity, humour, solidarity (Jay, 2009; Eckert, 2000)

| → South Asian view: Mostly moral/religious focus (Rahman, 2011; Khan, 2018)

| → Gap: Children's swearing in rural, multilingual, traditional communities

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Research Questions & Hypotheses

| → Q1: What forms of swearing do Hazro children use?

| → Q2: How do age, gender, peer bonding shape swearing?

| → H1: Swearing serves teasing/humour/group-belonging more than aggression.

| → H2: Boys swear more often and more aggressively than girls.

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Methodology

| → Mixed Methods: Qualitative + Quantitative

| → Participants: 200 children (ages 9–14), balanced by gender & schools

| → Tools: Structured questionnaires, interviews, participant observation

| → Settings: School, playground, home, street

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Data Analysis

| → Identify linguistic forms across Pashto, Punjabi/Hindko, Urdu, English

| → Measure frequency & contexts (playground vs. classroom vs. home)

| → Compare age, gender, peer bonding

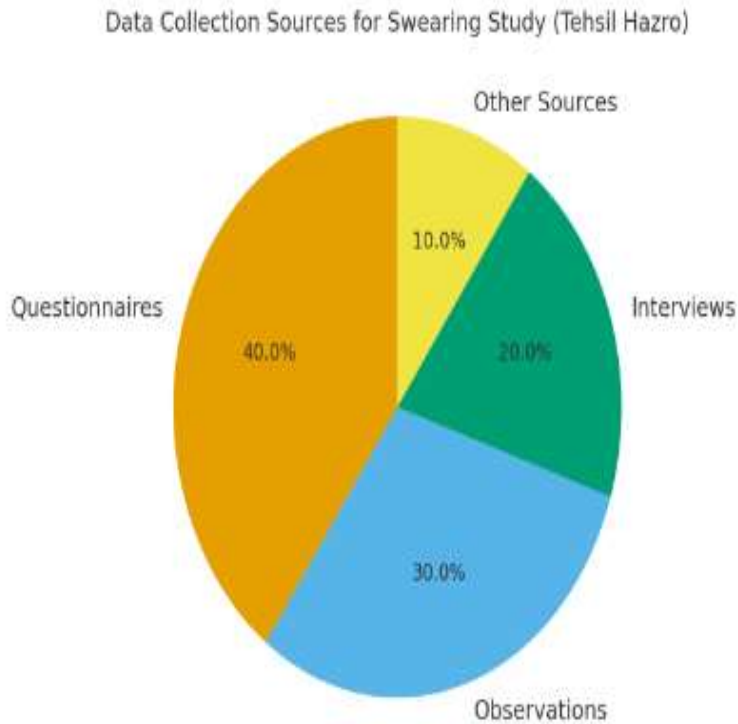| → Interpret with politeness/impoliteness & socialization theories

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Findings

| → Functions: Humour, teasing, solidarity, identity, emotional release, aggression

| → Males swear more, stronger words; females swear less, lighter humour-based forms

| → Older children (12–14) show creative multilingual switching for emphasis

| → Peer groups use swearing to build solidarity + differentiate outsiders

| → Swearing tolerated in informal peer contexts but condemned in family/teacher contexts

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Recommendations

| → Schools: Language awareness programs to guide "context-appropriate" expression

| → Parents: Workshops to encourage dialogue, rather than punishment, around swearing

| → Teachers: Replace swearing with humour/solidarity alternatives in group tasks

| → Community: Religious leaders & elders involved in awareness of linguistic respect

| → Policy: Integrate sociolinguistic learning into curriculum to balance tradition & modernity

Contextual and Research Data in A Diagram

Data Collection Sources for Swearing Study (Tehsil Hazro)

Findings and Recommendations

Aspect Studied	Detailed Findings	Expanded Recommendations
Linguistic Forms	Children creatively use swearing across Pashto, Hindko, Punjabi, Urdu, and English. Pashto/Punjabi dominate in peer interactions; English/Urdu are mixed in for prestige or humour. Code-switching enhances intensity and shows bilingual competence.	Teachers should highlight the multilingual richness of children's speech but guide them toward respectful forms. Introduce classroom discussions on "how words carry weight" to foster awareness.
Functions of Swearing	Swearing often used for humour (jokes, playful insults), teasing (mocking friends), solidarity (peer bonding), and occasionally for aggression (fights, frustration). Peer acceptance is a key driver.	Design role-play classroom activities where students use humour and bonding strategies without offensive terms. Promote "positive teasing" games that replace taboo words with creative alternatives.
Gender Differences	Male children dominate in swearing frequency and intensity, often using	Conduct gender-awareness sessions showing how language reflects respect

Aspect Studied	Detailed Findings	Expanded Recommendations
	physical aggression + strong taboo. Female children swear less and often in controlled peer-group settings, mainly for humour or irony.	and stereotypes. Teachers should monitor boys' excessive aggressive swearing while encouraging girls' confidence in positive verbal expression.
Age Factor	Younger children (9–11) repeat swearing without full understanding, often imitating older peers. Older children (12–14) use swearing more strategically: to assert identity, challenge authority, or display social status.	Early interventions (before age 12) should emphasize the cultural and emotional impact of words. School counselors can run age-specific communication workshops to prevent normalization of aggressive swearing.
Peer Bonding	Swearing plays a strong role in peer group integration. Insults often mark "insiders vs. outsiders." Group acceptance often depends on playful swearing, especially in playgrounds.	Encourage team-building sports, storytelling circles, and peer mentoring programs where bonding happens through positive shared language rather than swearing.
Cultural & Social Influence	Local traditions tolerate boys' swearing in informal peer spaces, while religious/ethical values strongly condemn it in family/school. This creates a "double standard."	Community engagement needed: Imams, teachers, and parents can collectively promote respectful communication. Awareness campaigns should clarify that language creativity can exist without disrespect.
Educational Relevance	Swearing shows children's linguistic creativity and emotional release but disrupts school discipline. Teachers struggle to balance punishment with understanding.	Include sociolinguistic modules in curricula, teaching students the difference between private peer language and public respectful discourse. Teachers should reward respectful humour and discourage aggressive language.

Conclusion

The present study, *A Sociolinguistic Study of Swearing among Children in Tehsil Hazro*, has highlighted that swearing, although traditionally considered a prohibited and immoral linguistic practice, performs significant communicative, social, and cultural functions among children aged 9–14. By combining questionnaires, observations, and interviews, the research demonstrates that swearing is not merely an expression of aggression but is also deeply rooted in humour, teasing, identity formation, and peer bonding. The findings reveal that children in Hazro frequently draw from their multilingual repertoire—Pashto, Hindko, Punjabi, Urdu, and English—to create hybrid forms of taboo expressions that intensify emotional impact and solidify group

solidarity. Gender and age have proven to be important factors: boys tend to swear more aggressively and frequently, while girls use milder, humour-driven forms; older children (12–14) employ swearing with greater creativity and intentionality compared to younger peers (9–11), who often imitate without full comprehension. These insights show that swearing, despite being socially condemned in formal contexts such as schools and families, plays a constructive role in informal peer groups by reinforcing belonging and social hierarchies. Importantly, this study contributes to the growing recognition of taboo language as a legitimate field of sociolinguistic inquiry, especially in rural, culturally diverse, and understudied settings like Tehsil Hazro. It shifts the discourse from moral judgment to functional understanding, suggesting that swearing can serve as both a face-threatening act and a solidarity-building strategy, depending on context. Based on these results, the research recommends early interventions in schools, gender-sensitive awareness programs, and community engagement to guide children toward respectful but creative communication. In sum, this study not only enriches the sociolinguistic literature of Pakistan but also provides practical implications for educators, parents, and policymakers, ensuring that children's language socialization is understood holistically within its cultural and communicative dimensions.

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Research Instruments & Data Sources (Cited as References)

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➢ **Appendix A – Structured Questionnaire**

- A 20–25 item close-ended questionnaire designed for children (ages 9–14) in Tehsil Hazro to measure frequency, contexts, and attitudes towards swearing.

Appendix B – Observation Checklist

- A systematic tool for recording language use in classrooms, playgrounds, homes, and streets, noting frequency, forms, functions, and peer reactions to swearing.

Appendix C – Semi-Structured Interview Guide

- A flexible set of questions tailored separately for children, parents, and teachers to gather in-depth qualitative insights on swearing practices, perceptions, and social reactions.

Appendix D – Field Notes and Other Sources

- Researcher's ethnographic notes from natural settings (schoolyards, neighbourhoods, informal gatherings), including contextual observations not captured in structured instruments.