

**RESEARCH PAPER****English Language a Breeding Ground for Differences among Genders: A Sociolinguistic Perspective****¹Tehreema Hassan * and ²Dr. Zohaib Zahid**

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Corresponding Author zohaib.zahid@iub.edu.pk**ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the complex dynamics of language within Pakistani society, centering on perceptions and experiences related to language dominance and proficiency. Despite English being acknowledged as a dominant language, the study uncovers unexpected trends challenging conventional expectations. Utilizing a quantitative method of research design involving students for collection of data. This investigation sheds light on linguistic discrimination, emphasizing its prevalence and impact on social interactions and perceptions of intelligence against the assumption of superior access to English resources for males, the study uncovers nuanced language strategies. Males, despite potential access, often prefer subordinate language, while females strategically incorporate English elements. The perceived correlation between linguistic skills, power, and social influence prompts a reevaluation of traditional gender roles. The perception that males are more competent or authoritative when using English is reinforced by a prevailing belief that language abilities, especially in English, are evaluated through a gendered lens in Pakistani society.

Keywords: Conventional Expectations, Language Dominance, Language Intelligence, Potential Access, Traditional Language Roles**Introduction**

In Pakistan use of English language for communicative purposes has become more a status symbol than a skill. English served as a dividing line between the intelligent and less intelligent, intellectuals and less intellectuals, civilized and uncivilized people. The historic belief that English is a language of intelligent, educated, and progressive people results in linguistic superiority of the this culturally-dominant language and makes the fluent speakers of English to view others as culturally inferior and undeserving of social respect and acceptance. It also creates a feeling of inferiority among the non natives and as a result they try to dissociate and distance themselves from their own cultures (Schmid, 2001). These social attitudes resulted in superiority of English speakers and language, and identity confusion and internal shame for those who can't converse in English. It is typically a sign of affluence, a rich family background and being schooled at prestigious institutions. English language is used not only to create differences but also to dominate others.

Today, English remains a highly valued skill in Pakistan, with many people aspiring to learn it for its economic and social benefits (Haider, 2021). It is the medium of instruction in most private schools and universities, and is also used in official government communications and documents (Khan, 2017).

Literature Review

Leading Scholars in the Study of Language and Gender

Numerous scholars have extensively explored the topic of language and gender. Among these scholars, Robin Lakoff (1975) examined how language is used to perpetuate gender stereotypes, while William Key (1975) delved into the distinct linguistic strategies employed by men and women to assert their authority and social status. Deborah Tannen (1990) introduced the concept of "genderlects" and explored the distinct conversational preferences and patterns of men and women. Bonvillain (2000) extended this exploration cross-culturally, considering the impact of different cultures on gendered communication. Freeman and McElhinny (1996) focused on the language of power dynamics, analyzing how language can assert dominance and control in various contexts. Coates (1993) specialized in language and gender in the workplace, studying how language usage can influence the status and opportunities of women in professional settings. Kramarae (1981) contributed to feminist linguistics, emphasizing language as a tool for women's empowerment, and explored language within the context of gender and race, examining the intersection of these factors and their effects on communication. These scholars, among others, have collectively enriched our understanding of the multifaceted interplay between language and gender, spanning numerous dimensions of linguistic expression and its impact on societal gender roles and dynamics.

Gender as a Social Variable

Variables, as defined by Kerlinger (1995), are attributes or conditions that researchers can observe and control. They encompass a broad spectrum of factors, including demographics like gender and age, and psychological aspects such as anxiety and achievement. A variable, according to Galtung (1967), serves as a yardstick for evaluating individual units of analysis. McBurney and White (2007) defines it as an aspect of a testing condition that can vary or exhibit different characteristics in diverse conditions.

In the domain of sociolinguistics, the inclusion of gender as a social variable took place during the early 1970s, aligning it with other influential factors such as age, class, nationality, ethnicity, religion, and region. Researchers, guided by scholars like Wodak (1997), initially directed their focus towards examining the distinctions in speech sounds and conversational styles between men and women.

Gender and Sex

British sociologist Anthony Giddens and provides distinct definitions for "sex" and "gender," characterizing "sex" as biological or anatomical differences and "gender" as psychological, social, and cultural distinctions between males and females (1989:). Coates (1993) and Cameron (2006) distinguish between sex and gender. Coates posits that gender comprises socially constructed categories determined by sex, while Cameron adds that gender encompasses culturally accepted qualities and behaviors within a community, whereas sex pertains to biological differences between males and females. Sadiqi (2003) delved into the exploration of gender within the realms of linguistics and various social sciences.. It functions as a social construct shaping individuals into socially recognized men and women, assigning them roles and cultural values (Bonvillain, 2000).

Social Construction of Sex and Gender

Taking a social construction perspective into account, it is important to acknowledge that both sex and gender are viewed as statuses shaped by societal constructs (Lorber and Farrell, 1991). According to them sex is a continuum involving chromosomal, gonadal, and hormonal factors influenced by environmental conditions (Fausto-Sterling, 1985).

Unquestionably a social construct, gender is used to mould persons into social men and women and assign them duties and cultural values (Bonvillain, 2000).

Gender as Performance

"Doing gender" is a concept introduced by West and Zimmerman (1991) that underscores the repetitive and systematic nature of gender as a social accomplishment. It involves a complex set of socially guided actions and interactions through which individuals manifest masculine and feminine qualities. West and Zimmerman (1987) propose that gender is not an inherent trait but rather a performance enacted through actions and language. Judith Butler's work further accentuates gender as a social construct, shaped by linguistic expression. Eckert (2003) has highlighted the role of language in shaping gender identities, emphasizing its capacity to either conform to or challenge societal norms regarding masculinity and femininity. Meanwhile, Eckert and McConnell-Ginet's (2003) research also underscores the influence of language in the expression and construction of gender identities, shedding light on how individuals navigate established gender-related conventions.

Material and Methods

The participants in this study were selected from renowned educational institutions in Rahim Yar Khan, Pakistan, where English serves as the medium of instruction. A total of 250 students were engaged in the study, representing graduate, postgraduate, and undergraduate levels. The data collection process for this study involved the distribution of a comprehensive questionnaire among the participants. The questionnaire distribution took place among the undergraduate students from the specified institutes in Rahim Yar Khan. Quantitative analysis will involve the use of SPSS software to process and interpret the questionnaire responses. Ethical considerations were paramount in the execution of this research. Clear information regarding the study's objectives and procedures was provided to participants, emphasizing voluntary participation, and informed consent was obtained before their involvement. Participant identities were safeguarded through unique codes, ensuring strict confidentiality with personal identifying information excluded from the study.

Data Analysis

The data collected through the questionnaire is analysed through SPSS by applying simple frequency test and represented through tables

Table 01
English as Dominant/ Superior Language

Gender	Total	A		SA		N		DA		SDA		
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Student	Male	47	18	38.3	20	42.6	4	8.5	5	10.6	0	0
	Female	183	77	42.1	96	52.5	8	4.4	2	1.1	0	0

The majority of respondents, comprising 44% of the sample, explicitly agreed that English holds a dominant position. Additionally, a substantial proportion, constituting 47.7%, strongly agreed with this perspective. These findings indicate a robust consensus among participants regarding the elevated status of the English language. A smaller percentage, 4.7%, adopted a neutral stance on the matter, suggesting a minor degree of ambivalence. Conversely, a mere 3.7% expressed disagreement with the notion of English as a dominant language. Collectively, the data underscores a prevailing sentiment within the surveyed population affirming the influential and superior role ascribed to the English language in the societal context of Pakistan.

Table 2
Language Leads to Power and Dominance

Gender	Total	A		SA		N		DA		SDA		
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Student	Male	47	19	40.4	18	38.3	6	12.8	3	6.4	1	2.1
	Female	183	104	56.8	71	38.8	5	2.7	2	1.1	1	0.5

A considerable 53.0% of respondents agree that language proficiency correlates with power and dominance, emphasizing the perceived significance of linguistic capabilities in societal structures. Additionally, 39.0% express a strong agreement, reinforcing the prevailing sentiment regarding the influential role of language proficiency. A small proportion (5.0%) maintains a neutral stance, suggesting ambivalence, while only 2.3% and 0.7% disagree and strongly disagree, respectively, with this notion. This nuanced distribution underscores the salience of language proficiency as a conduit for societal influence. Cumulatively, with 92.0% in agreement or strong agreement, the data accentuates the pervasive acknowledgment of the link between language proficiency and societal dynamics within the Pakistani context.

Table 3
Linguistic Discrimination

Gender	Total	A		SA		N		DA		SDA		
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Student	Male	47	22	46.8	15	31.9	8	17	2	4.3	0	0
	Female	183	88	48.1	59	32.2	23	12.6	11	6	2	1.1

A significant portion of the respondents, 76.7%, acknowledge experiencing linguistic discrimination based on language proficiency. Specifically, 47.0% agree, and an additional 29.7% strongly agree with the assertion, emphasizing the prevalence of this issue within the surveyed population. Conversely, only 5.0% disagree and a minimal 0.7% strongly disagree, indicating a relatively small portion of respondents who do not perceive linguistic discrimination based on language proficiency as a personal experience.

Table 4
English Creates Uncomfortable Environment

Gender	Total	A		SA		N		DA		SDA		
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Student	Male	47	19	40.4	18	38.3	6	12.8	4	8.5	0	0
	Female	183	95	51.9	80	43.7	6	3.3	2	1.1	0	0

A substantial 48.7% agree, and an additional 43.0% strongly agree with this assertion, highlighting a considerable consensus on the potential discomfort caused by the use of English for dominance. A minimal 6.0% maintain a neutral stance on the matter, suggesting some level of ambivalence or uncertainty regarding the impact of English language dominance. In contrast, only 2.0% disagree, and a negligible 0.3% strongly disagree, indicating a small proportion of respondents who do not see the use of English as a source of discomfort for non-proficient individuals. Cumulatively, with 91.7% in agreement or strong agreement, the data emphasizes a widespread acknowledgment of the discomfort created by the use of English to assert dominance, according to the perspectives of the respondents.

Table 5
Men proficiency Level is Higher Compared to Women.

Gender	Total	A		SA		N		DA		SDA		
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Student	Male	47	17	36.2	9	19.1	10	21.3	8	17	3	6.4
	Female	183	47	25.7	24	13.1	63	34.4	45	24.6	4	2.2

A notable portion of respondents, 45.0%, agree (30.7%) or strongly agree (14.3%) that in mixed-gender settings in Pakistan, men tend to speak English more, even if their proficiency level is higher compared to women. Nearly three-fourths of respondents (74.7%) express some level of acknowledgment or neutrality on this issue. Conversely, 22.3% disagree, and 3.0% strongly disagree with the assertion. This data suggests a division of perspectives, indicating that a significant number of respondents perceive a gender-based discrepancy in English language usage in mixed-gender settings, where men may speak English more frequently despite potential differences in proficiency levels.

Table 6
Linguistic Discrimination

Gender	Total	A		SA		N		DA		SDA		
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Student	Male	47	20	42.6	14	29.8	9	19.1	3	6.4	1	2.1
	Female	183	77	42.1	48	26.2	40	21.9	16	8.7	2	1.1

Based on the survey data, a notable 68.0% of participants agree (42.7%) or strongly agree (25.3%) that they have witnessed linguistic discrimination based on someone else's language proficiency. A substantial portion, 22.3%, maintains a neutral stance on the issue, while 8.7% disagree, and 1.0% strongly disagree with this assertion. This data emphasizes the significant acknowledgment within the surveyed population of instances of linguistic discrimination tied to language proficiency.

Table 7
English Language by Males and Females

Gender	Total	A		SA		N		DA		SDA		
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Student	Male	47	19	40.4	12	25.5	8	17	7	14.9	1	2.1
	Female	183	79	43.2	49	26.8	33	18.4	15	8.2	7	3.8

As per the survey results, a significant 66.7% of participants agree (42.3%) or strongly agree (24.3%) that there are differences in the use of the English language between males and females. Additionally, 18.3% maintain a neutral stance on this issue, while 11.7% disagree, and 3.3% strongly disagree with this assertion. This data underscores a notable recognition within the surveyed population of perceived differences in the use of English language based on gender.

Table 8
Males Use More Subordinate Language

Gender	Total	A		SA		N		DA		SDA		
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Student	Male	47	13	27.7	12	25.5	13	27.7	7	14.9	2	4.3
	Female	183	84	45.9	58	31.7	21	11.5	15	8.2	5	2.7

As per the survey results, a significant 72.3% of participants agree (42.7%) or strongly agree (29.7%) that males use more subordinate (Urdu/regional) language in natural communication than females. Additionally, 15.7% maintain a neutral stance on this issue, while 9.3% disagree, and 2.7% strongly disagree with this assertion. This data underscores a notable perception within the surveyed population of gender-based differences in the use of subordinate languages, such as Urdu or regional dialects, in natural communication.

Table 9
Females use more subordinate (Urdu/ regional) language

Gender	Total	A		SA		N		DA		SDA		
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Student	Male	47	9	19.1	10	21.3	12	25.5	12	25.5	4	8.5

Female	183	54	29.5	40	21.9	38	20.8	45	20.6	6	3.3
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The survey results reveal that 46.7% of participants agree (27.3%) or strongly agree (19.3%) that females use more subordinate (Urdu/regional) language in natural communication than males. Additionally, 24.3% maintain a neutral stance on this issue, while 25.0% disagree, and 4.0% strongly disagree with this assertion. This data suggests a perception that there may be gender-based differences in the use of subordinate languages, such as Urdu or regional dialects, in natural communication, with a leaning towards agreement.

Table 10
Dominance of English Language

Gender	Total	A		SA		N		DA		SDA		
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Student	Male	47	24	51.1	10	21.3	6	12.8	6	12.8	1	2.1
	Female	183	85	46.4	62	33.9	29	15.8	7	3.8	0	0

The survey findings indicate that 76.7% of participants agree (46.3%) or strongly agree (30.3%) that the dominance of the English language in Pakistan reinforces and strengthens existing power structures and inequalities. Moreover, 16.0% maintain a neutral stance on this issue, while 6.3% disagree, and 1.0% strongly disagree with this assertion. This data suggests a prevalent perception within the surveyed population that the prominence of the English language contributes to the perpetuation and consolidation of prevailing power dynamics and inequalities in Pakistan.

Discussion

The study provides profound insights into language dynamics in Pakistani society, shedding light on perceptions and experiences related to language dominance and proficiency. An overwhelming majority, constituting 91.7% of respondents, recognizes English as a dominant or superior language, underscoring its widespread privilege. Moreover, 92.0% believe that language proficiency, especially in English, is linked to power and dominance, revealing a perceived correlation between linguistic skills and social influence. The influence of the English language in Pakistan unfolds through various themes. Seventy-five participants emphasize the historical context of colonization, highlighting the lasting impact of colonial dominance and the perceived cultural superiority of English by open ended question. This underscores the deep-rooted connection between historical legacies and the societal influence of English, intertwining language with power dynamics and cultural standing. Additionally, subsets of participants acknowledge the practical advantages, symbolic value in representing status and social dominance, and global significance associated with English. These diverse perspectives collectively contribute to a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted role of English in shaping societal perceptions in Pakistan.

The study delves into the complex dynamics of linguistic discrimination, highlighting various dimensions of its impact in Pakistani society. Notably, 76.7% of respondents share personal experiences of linguistic discrimination, highlighting the prevalence of this issue. The discomfort arising from the use of English to assert dominance is underscored by an overwhelming 91.7% of respondents, emphasizing the potential ramifications on social interactions. This linguistic hierarchy extends to perceptions of intelligence, with 79.3% agreeing that individuals proficient in English are perceived as more intelligent or capable. Moreover, over 80% acknowledge the likelihood of non-native English speakers experiencing feelings of inadequacy or inferiority, highlighting the psychological toll of language barriers. Beyond personal encounters, 68.0% of respondents have observed linguistic discrimination in society, indicating a broader and systemic problem. Importantly, 76.7% recognize that the dominance of English reinforces existing power structures and inequalities, demonstrating an awareness of the socio-political

implications of language dynamics. The demographic distribution, primarily comprising females (78.7%) and students (76.7%), adds nuance to the discussion, suggesting potential variations in perspectives based on gender and occupation. This comprehensive examination unveils the intricate interplay of language, power, and societal dynamics, emphasizing the need for nuanced approaches to address linguistic inequalities and promote a more inclusive future.

Conclusion

The result findings reveal a significant consensus among participants, emphasizing widespread acknowledgment of the discomfort caused by using English for dominance. The majority agrees that this practice creates unease for those less proficient, further highlighting negative psychological effects and contributing to feelings of inadequacy and inferiority among non-native English speakers. Additionally, the study indicates a prevalent perception that the dominance of the English language in Pakistan reinforces existing power structures and inequalities, contributing to the perpetuation of prevailing dynamics.

The findings reveal a significant gender-based perception within the surveyed population regarding competency and authority associated with English language proficiency in Pakistani society. A majority of participants agree or strongly agree that males are considered more competent or authoritative when they speak English compared to females. This perception is reinforced by a prevalent belief that language abilities, particularly in English, are evaluated through a gendered lens in Pakistani society.

Recommendations

Given the higher agreement percentage on females' English language use, further research is crucial to understand motivations and consequences, prompting a reassessment of traditional gender roles in linguistic dominance in Pakistan. Further research about investigating the influence of regional variations within Pakistan on perceptions of English and exploring the effectiveness of specific educational reforms in mitigating psychological hierarchies associated with language will be helpful to explore the in-depth analysis.

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