

Women's Self-Representation in Pashto Gender Proverbs: A Critical Sociolinguistic and Feminist Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

Pashto proverbs are a vital component of Pashtun cultural heritage, and they carry out the traditional knowledge, social values, and expectations of daily language. Gender-related proverbs serve as an instrument for the study of the representation of women in the family, marriage, social position, household life, and cultural standards. This article investigates how women are represented in Pashto gender proverbs by a qualitative study on the basis of secondary sources. The article employs critical analysis of sociolinguistic and feminist discourse to explore the relationship between language, gender identity, and patriarchal social expectations. The discussion will look at ways in which proverbial expressions can reinforce traditional gender roles, convey social perspectives, and reflect broader cultural assumptions. It also distinguishes the representation of women in proverbial language from their own self-representation, acknowledging that textual representations cannot automatically be regarded as evidence of women's personal experiences or beliefs. The paper argues that looking at gender proverbs can help understand the relationship between language and how cultural transmission and gender relations flow in Pashtun society. Given that the study was based on secondary sources, the study's findings are interpretative rather than the original findings of the interview/fieldwork.

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1. Introduction

Language is a vital component of culture since it communicates dialogue that may reveal negotiations, strategic intentions, shared experiences and collective beliefs of social values. Proverbs are especially important for cultural knowledge's expression in short and memorable ways, which can be passed on through generations. In Pashtun society, Pashto proverbs are a common feature of daily talks, family relations, public gatherings, or moral or social discussion. They can express advice, criticism, humour and expectations for appropriate behaviour. Gender-related proverbs are particularly relevant because they provide insight into the descriptions of women and men and the cultural perceptions of social roles (Sanauddin, 2015).

Proverbs are more than a decorative expression; it can work like a form of social communication. Their familiar wording may confer authority in conversations, enabling speakers to support arguments, provide advice, or comment on dialogue that may reveal negotiations, strategic intentions, or the behaviour of others. Because proverbs often contain

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collective wisdom, they can also be a widespread or accepted representation of certain social assumptions. But their meaning depends on their use's circumstances, including the relationship between speakers and the social purpose of the interaction (Mieder, 2004).

The structure of the family, marriage, honour, family duties, and social status closely links the representation of women in traditional forms of expression. Certain proverbial phrases relating women to expectations about obedience, modesty, motherhood and dialogue may reveal negotiations, strategic intentions and family's reputation. These representations can reflect the established social norms and help maintain the expectations of gender. Nevertheless, the existence of a gender expression does not demonstrate the fact that each speaker or participant adopts its message, nor does it reflect the full diversity of the experience of women (Khan et al., 2015).

To understand the relationship between language and gender, we need to examine the representation of women in Pashto proverbs. It provides a way of looking at how cultural expressions communicating ideas about dialogue may reveal negotiations, strategic intentions, identities, responsibilities, and social status of women. At the same time, a distinction must be made between the representation of women in proverbial expressions and the perspective of women. A phrase intended to express women's convictions about themselves is not necessarily meant to express these. This distinction is of key importance for this article (Lazar, 2005).

This article examines dialogue, which may reveal negotiations, strategic intentions, and representation of women in Pashto gender proverbs through a qualitative examination of secondary academic sources. It focuses on a critical feminist perspective and sociolinguistic discourses to interpret how meanings related to gender roles, patriarchal expectations, family relations, social identity, and dialogue may reveal negotiations, strategic intentions, and potential relationships between proverbial language and dialogue.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Proverbs as Cultural and Linguistic Expressions

The proverbs are commonly known as concise expressions of collective experience, practical knowledge, and social observation. While preserving cultural heritage elements, their figurative language and memorable structures enable them to circulate in their everyday communications. Meanings may be direct, metaphorical or context-dependent and therefore are appropriate to language while recognising that the expressions of the relationship between proverbial and real social outcomes require literature and sociocultural analysis. Therefore, proverbial language's investigation requires both its wording and communicative function (Norrick, 1985).

Proverbs are cultural in meaning and do not represent an immutable or universally shared worldview. Different speakers can use the same proverb for various purposes, and the audience can interpret it in different ways. A proverb can be used to establish a society's expectations, criticise actions, express irony, or challenge another speaker's argument. Such a variation is important in looking at gender-related expressions, because the social meaning of these expressions may depend on the context of use (Mieder, 2004).

2.2 Gender Representation in Pashto Proverbs

Research on Pashto proverbs has investigated the relationship between proverbs, gender identity, and social expectations. Gender expressions can convey culturally familiar assumptions about the roles, skills, and responsibilities of women and men. These expressions provide material for studying how language gender distinctions can be reflected and replicated within a specific cultural setting. Its analysis concerns the social meaning of the descriptions of women and men (Khan et al., 2015).

Pashto gender proverbs were also discussed regarding patriarchy and language sexism. The scholarship emphasises that dialogue can reveal negotiations and strategic intentions, as well as the importance of reviewing proverbs as expressions of both written texts and social interactions. When taken into account in isolation, a proverb may seem to transmit a fixed cultural message, and its use in the dialogue may reveal negotiations, strategic intentions or disagreements. This distinction helps to avoid proverbial language being treated as a simple and complete record of social reality (Sanauddin, 2015).

2.3 Gender, Social Norms, and Women's Position

Gender-related proverbs could reflect social expectations about the role of families, the behaviour and engagement of women in public life. Their significance can be examined in terms of education, economic opportunities, psychological experiences and social relationships. Such an analysis could help highlight the cultural rationales expressed through language, while also acknowledging that understanding the relationship between proverbs and real social outcomes requires evidence beyond the language itself (Farid & Dinakhel, 2023).

The study's added value is also shown by more gender and language research, which has demonstrated the ability to study how common language practices facilitate the construction of gender identity. Language can generally or naturally make gender distinctions, even if it involves certain social and historical conditions. This perspective provides a useful basis for investigating how proverbial expressions represent women and how such portrayals tie into expectations about womanhood and social behaviour (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013).

2.4 Feminist Perspectives on Language and Gender

Feminist language approaches address how language images may mirror the inequality of social relations and gender perceptions. They are concerned about the description of women and men, their social importance, and the impact of recurring models of representation. This approach helps to recognise assumptions that are based on expressions in the analysis of proverbs without taking into account that each use has the same meaning or effect (Lazar, 2007).

The studies of language and sexism also highlighted the links between language conventions and social attitudes. Gender expressions can reproduce stereotypes by associating women or men with narrowly defined features and functions. A critical analysis must, however, distinguish between the existence of language stereotypes and the use of such stereotypes in particular interactions, as well as the measurable impact on individuals or communities (Mills, 2008).

2.5 Research Gap

The current scholarship is the basis for Pashto proverbs studies in terms of language sexism, gender identity, and the social status of women. The self-representation concept, however, requires careful treatment. Published proverbs and scientific interpretations may indicate how women are portrayed. But they do not provide an automatic understanding of how women understand, negotiate, or reject such images. A study based on the secondary literature can conceptually study differentiation, while direct claims would require first-hand interpretations of women (Sanauddin, 2015).

Therefore, this paper uses the self-representation of women as a critical topic instead of attempting to document the voices of empirical women. It examines the gender assumptions and representations discussed in published research and looks at what those representations can and can't establish about women's identities. This approach offers a focused basis for interpreting existing literature while acknowledging the need for further research that includes female accounts (Lazar, 2005).

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Critical Sociolinguistics

Critical sociolinguistics investigates the linguistic and social structures of the relationship, including the manner in which linguistic practices reflect cultural values, social identities and power relations. From this perspective, proverbs serve not only as expressions of traditional wisdom but also as forms of social communication that convey expectations and can be disseminated. Their meaning is shaped by the contexts they are being spoken and understood about (Fairclough, 1992).

The proverbial analysis of language benefits from attention to social discourse and practice. Language can help to maintain social conventions by presenting certain categories and ideas as familiar and legitimate over and over again. This perspective draws attention to ways in which women and men are portrayed, roles which are assigned to them and assumptions on which these descriptions might be based in gender-related proverbs (Fairclough, 1995).

3.2 Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

Feminist critical analysis of discourse offers a basis for studying the linguistic representation of women and men and for establishing gender identity and relationships with inequitable social relations. The analysis draws attention to the ways in which ordinary expressions and certain expectations regarding the behaviour, roles, and status of women are normalised. This perspective is applicable to Pashto gender proverbs, which contribute to identifying basic assumptions while simultaneously recognising that interpretations can vary depending on the speaker and the situation (Lazar, 2005).

An approach to feminist discourse also explores how gender's meanings can be reproduced, negotiated, or questioned by communication. Women have different experiences, and traditional expressions have different effects. Instead, it promotes a careful study of the linguistic form of the relationship between the social context and power's balance between the genders (Lazar, 2007).

3.3 Gender as a Socially Constructed Identity

This article also argues that, through recurrent cultural practices and manifestations, gender is socially constructed. From this perspective, social expectations, rather than firm assumptions about female and male capacities, characterise gender roles. Proverbs may be involved in this process by describing certain behaviours as customary, appropriate, or socially valued. However, under changing social circumstances, their meanings may be negotiated or reinterpreted (Butler, 1990).

Another thing that is relevant is ambivalent sexism's concept because specific gender beliefs can combine seemingly positive depictions of women with assumptions which limit their social independence or roles. With expectations of obedience and dependency, the expression of praise for women's caring, family and respectful relations can coexist. This framework can contribute to the interpretation of the complexity of gender representations without limiting any positive expression or negative meaning to a single definition (Glick & Fiske, 1996).

4. Methodology

The study uses a qualitative and secondary source-based research approach. The study examines relevant books, research papers, journals, and other academic documents to analyse the representation of women in Pashto gender proverbs. The study uses a descriptive and interpretive methodology which uses critical sociolinguistic and feminist discourse analysis to research gender roles, the identity, patriarchal values and social perceptions of women that are reflected in those proverbs. The material will be thematically analysed to identify recurring patterns and interpret their significance in the Pashtun sociocultural context.

5. Analysis and Interpretation

5.1 Women's Representation and Traditional Gender Roles

Gender-related proverbs can help clarify the traditional expectations of women in society. Women may be represented in proverbial language in relation to marriage, family responsibilities, household life and social responsibility. Such representations may reflect distinctions between the responsibilities of women and men. These expressions are significant from a critical sociolinguistic perspective because they transmit social expectations in a concise and culturally recognisable form (Khan et al., 2015).

However, the portrayal of women through traditional roles should not be interpreted as a complete presentation of their real lives. Proverbs is a cultural expression which can maintain certain perspectives, including traditional or patriarchal assumptions. The experiences of women could be more varied than those offered by these expressions. Therefore, gender-related proverbs analysis should distinguish between cultural representation and real social reality (Sanauddin, 2015).

5.2 Patriarchy and the Construction of Women's Identity

Patriarchal social relations can affect a language that describes the identity and duties of women. Where proverbial expressions link the female social value to the family's reputation, obedience, marriage or the prescribed conduct, it may reflect expectations as determined by the male-dominated social structures. These expressions are relevant for feminist analyses, providing examples of how gender assumptions can be spread in everyday language (Lazar, 2005).

A link between the proverb and patriarchy is not always consistent. A proverb can be repeated as familiar cultural wisdom without consciously taking into account the consequences for gender. The same expression can be called in question, criticised or used in humour in another context. Therefore, the analysis should look at the social conditions of the proverbial expressions and not only the content. This approach avoids the suspicion that every proverb has the same meaning and effect in all its settings (Sanauddin, 2015).

5.3 Marriage, Family, and Social Expectations

Marriage and the family are important contexts in understanding proverbial expressions in relation to gender. Traditional statements can express expectations regarding the responsibilities of women in marriage, their relationships with family, and how they behave inside the household. This presentation shows how cultural language connects women's identity to family roles and community expectations. They also provide material on how traditional norms relate to the status of women (Khan et al., 2015).

One feminist interpretation examines how these expectations can affect women's identification with identity and individual choices. If women are mainly represented by their family relations, other dimensions of their lives such as education, economic participation, personal aspirations and public involvement may be of lower focus. It is rather an analytical concern than a statement that all Pashtun families or communities are interpreting proverbs in the same way (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013).

5.4 Language, Social Power, and Cultural Transmission

Proverbs can convey social beliefs by repeating and acknowledging them through generations. Their familiar wording can confer authority to ideas they express, especially when used to support advice, criticism or judgement of social behaviour. Thus, proverbial language can help maintain cultural expectations, including gender norms (Mieder, 2004).

Language is a negotiating area, however. A proverb has a social meaning that may change the speaker's purpose, and the public's reaction may change the speaker's purpose and the public's reaction. While certain expressions could be questioned or rejected, others could be reinterpreted in a changing social context. Therefore, a critical analysis requires considering both the potential for the reproduction of proverbial gender expectations and the potential implications that can be challenged (Sanauddin, 2015).

5.5 Women's Self-Representation and the Limits of Proverbial Evidence

The self-representation concept of women requires great care. A proverb that is related to women does not necessarily give women an understanding of their identity or of their own experiences. Instead, it may reflect a collective tradition, some kind of social perspective, or some conventional expectation. Therefore, the analysis of proverbial language may identify the images of women, but it cannot automatically identify how women interpret them themselves (Sanauddin, 2015).

A study which is dedicated to women and self-representation would benefit from direct evidence, including interviews, focus groups or the feminine interpretation of individual proverbs. This material might clarify whether women accept, adapt, challenge or reject traditional expressions. Since this article is based on secondary sources, the conclusions are

limited to the published material that is being evaluated and should not be presented as direct findings of interviews of women or of original field work (Lazar, 2007).

5.6 Social Implications of Gendered Proverbs

Gender-related proverbs can be investigated in the light of the social, educational, economic and psychological situation of women. Their relevance lies in how they can express or spread their beliefs about the roles, skills, responsibilities and social behaviour of women. These themes constitute the basis for discussing the relationship between language and gender inequality and at the same time avoiding the presumption that proverbial expressions only determine the social outcomes (Farid & Dinakhel, 2023).

More broadly, the analysis should reflect cultural language's importance as part of the social environment that recognises gender identities. The critical scrutiny of proverbs can stimulate reflection on inherited assumptions and forms of daily communication. Such thinking does not require Pashto cultural heritage to be abandoned; it enables researchers to distinguish between the cultural values of proverbs and gender expectations, which can be expressed in specific words (Mills, 2008).

5.7 Proverbial Meaning and Contextual Interpretation

A proverb's meaning can not always be established solely by its wording. Speakers can use familiar expressions to reinforce their arguments, create a sense of humour, critique behaviour, or establish common reference points. Thus, the same proverb could play a different role in different dialogues. This contextual element is important for gender analysis, as the message from the proverb may not completely reflect the aim or interpretation of the speaker (Norrick, 1985).

Research using proverbs as manifestations of society puts greater emphasis on the use of various expressions in relationships which are influenced by such factors as age, gender, social status and social circumstances. This perspective will help investigate how proverbial language can be mobilised in the discussions of identity and authority. It also warns against speaking of a proverb like a direct and unchanging statement to the beliefs of a whole community (Sanauddin, 2015).

5.8 Cultural Continuity and Changing Gender Relations

Proverbs promote cultural continuity, keep the language familiar, and foster knowledge between generations. Cultural practices and social expectations can change in a similar way as opportunities for education, economic participation, communications technologies and social relations become more and more developed. Ongoing use of the proverb does not necessarily mean that its meaning remains constant or that it has been interpreted the same way by all community members (Mieder, 2004).

Therefore, a critical study of Pashto gender proverbs can take into account both its cultural importance and its gender-specific assumptions that it is capable of conveying. The analysis could examine the means of preserving, modifying or challenging inheritance expressions in contemporary contexts, rather than using traditions and social changes as mutually exclusive forms. Additional empirical study is needed to determine how men and women are now using and interpreting some proverbs in the various Pashtun communities (Fairclough, 1995).

6. Conclusion

The representation of women within the Pashto gender proverbs was examined using a qualitative approach on the basis of secondary sources in this paper. Discussions focused on traditional gender roles, patriarchal expectations, marriage and family, social power, cultural transfer and the distinction between the representation of women and their self-representation. The critical perspectives of sociolinguistic and feminist discourse offer useful approaches to interpret social meanings associated with proverbial language related to gender.

Discussions show that proverbs can reflect and expand cultural expectations regarding the identity and responsibilities of women. However, meanings can vary depending on the context, the speaker, and the audience. The experiences and beliefs of all women should not be considered direct evidence. The self-representation concept, in particular, requires women themselves to express their opinions and interpretations. Since it was based on secondary sources, it proposed an analysis which was based more on literature than on original empirical conclusions. Future research involving interviews with women and contextual analysis of proverb usage might further explore how women understand, negotiate, and respond to gendered expressions in today's Pashtun society.

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