

LANGUAGE USE BY THE WORKING WOMEN AND THEIR EMANCIPATION AT THE WORK PLACE IN KPK

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Abstract

This study examines the language use by working women and its role in their emancipation within the workplace in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan. Using a thematic analysis of interviews and focus group discussions with female employees across various sectors, the research explores how language serves as both a tool of empowerment and a medium of control in the workplace. The findings reveal that while working women in KPK navigate complex societal and cultural expectations, language plays a critical role in shaping their identities, asserting autonomy, and negotiating power dynamics. Themes of linguistic subordination, resistance, and solidarity emerge as women engage in workplace communication, balancing traditional gender roles with professional ambitions. The study highlights the dual function of language: as a mechanism for reinforcing gendered hierarchies and as a potential tool for challenging patriarchal norms and promoting workplace emancipation. It concludes by emphasizing the significance of linguistic practices in enhancing women's empowerment in the workplace and calls for organizational and societal changes to foster more inclusive, equitable work environments for women in KPK, Pakistan.

Keywords: *Language Use, Working Women, Emancipation, Workplace Dynamics, Empowerment.*

Introduction

The role of language in shaping social realities (Li & Akram, 2023, 2024), particularly in the workplace, has been a focal point of sociolinguistic research. In contemporary society, language is not merely a tool for communication; it is also a significant mechanism through which power, identity, and gender relations are negotiated and constructed (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023, 2025). This holds particular relevance for working women in Pakistan, where gender norms, cultural expectations, and organizational structures often place women at a disadvantage. The intersection of language and gender in the workplace offers a critical lens through which the complex dynamics of empowerment and emancipation can be understood.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), a province in the north-west of Pakistan, provides a unique cultural and socio-economic backdrop for this exploration. The region is known for its patriarchal traditions, which deeply influence gender roles both in domestic spaces and in the workplace. However, it is also a region where women have increasingly become part of the workforce, navigating traditional societal norms while striving to attain professional success. In this context, understanding how working women in KPK use language to navigate their professional lives is essential in understanding their empowerment, the challenges they face, and the opportunities they create for social change.

Women in KPK often find themselves at the intersection of multiple identities—those shaped by traditional gender roles, those formed by their professional ambitions, and those influenced by the prevailing socio-political climate. Within this framework, language serves as both a site of

resistance and reinforcement of gendered expectations. Women use language in nuanced ways, ranging from adopting a "carefully crafted" professional persona that aligns with societal expectations to using more assertive and transformative linguistic practices to assert their agency and challenge patriarchal norms. The dynamics of power are enacted through the language women use, how they are spoken to, and how they communicate with others in hierarchical organizational structures.

The importance of this study lies in its focus on how language functions as a site of negotiation, resistance, and emancipation for working women in KPK. While much has been written on women's empowerment in global and national contexts, fewer studies have specifically examined how language plays a role in the empowerment process for working women in more conservative, traditional settings such as KPK. In Pakistan, the intersection of gender and language remains understudied, especially in the northern regions where cultural values and workplace environments may offer different challenges compared to more urbanized and cosmopolitan areas like Karachi or Lahore.

The existing literature on language and gender suggests that language is a powerful tool that reflects and perpetuates social inequalities (Abdelrady et al., 2025). Researchers have explored how women's speech is often subject to scrutiny, deemed less authoritative, and criticized for being less assertive compared to their male counterparts. On the other hand, other studies highlight how women can subvert these expectations by using language to carve out spaces of empowerment, create solidarity with other women, and challenge male-dominated discourses. In the context of the workplace, this process is particularly important. Women often have to walk a tightrope between expressing their professional expertise while conforming to traditional gender expectations that may undermine their authority.

This research adopts a thematic analysis approach to explore how language is used by working women in KPK as a tool for both empowerment and emancipation. By conducting interviews and focus group discussions with women across a range of sectors—public and private, education, healthcare, and the corporate world—this study seeks to answer several critical questions: How do working women in KPK use language to navigate their roles in the workplace? In what ways does language help them challenge or reinforce traditional gender roles? How does workplace language create or limit opportunities for empowerment and emancipation for women?

The study focuses on three primary themes: linguistic subordination, linguistic resistance, and solidarity. Linguistic subordination refers to the ways in which language can reinforce gendered hierarchies, with women being marginalized or undervalued through speech patterns and communicative expectations. Linguistic resistance, on the other hand, examines how women can use language to assert themselves, challenge power structures, and navigate spaces of power. Lastly, solidarity looks at how language fosters networks of support among women, encouraging collective empowerment and creating a platform for mutual assistance in male-dominated workplaces.

By exploring these themes, the study will offer a nuanced understanding of how language is a powerful tool in shaping the professional lives of women in KPK. It will also offer insights into the challenges and strategies women employ in using language to challenge gender-based inequalities in the workplace. This study contributes to broader conversations on gender, language, and empowerment by shedding light on the ways in which language can be both a hindrance and a tool for personal and professional liberation.

Ultimately, the aim of this research is to inform policies and practices that can foster a more inclusive, equitable work environment for women in KPK. By examining the intersection of language and gender in the workplace, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the barriers that women face in their professional lives and offer insights into how these barriers can be overcome through strategic use of language, organizational change, and societal transformation. In doing so, this research not only adds to the field of sociolinguistics but also offers practical recommendations for creating a more supportive and empowering environment for working women in KPK and beyond.

Literature Review

The relationship between language and gender has long been a subject of scholarly inquiry, particularly in the context of the workplace (Abdelrady & Akram, 2022; Akra & Oteir, 2025). Gender and language intersect in complex ways, with language both reflecting and reinforcing societal norms, including those related to gender roles. This literature review explores key areas relevant to the study of language use by working women, specifically focusing on language's role in their emancipation, empowerment, and subjugation within workplace settings, with a particular emphasis on women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan.

Language plays a significant role in constructing and maintaining gender hierarchies (Ramzan et al., 2025, 2023, 2020). Research has shown that the language used in professional settings often reflects societal power structures (Ahmad et al., 2022; Amjad et al., 2021), where men's language tends to be dominant and authoritative, while women's language is frequently perceived as weak, emotional, or deferential (Lakoff, 1975). According to Tannen (1990), linguistic styles are often gendered, with women's communication being seen as more collaborative, which can be perceived as less authoritative in a competitive work environment. These gendered patterns in language use can have profound effects on how women are perceived in the workplace, often limiting their ability to assert authority and claim leadership roles.

Research on gendered language in Pakistan further highlights these dynamics. Jabeen and Iqbal (2017) found that Pakistani workplaces, especially in conservative regions like KPK, present a challenging environment for women, where the patriarchal norms of society influence both interpersonal communication and organizational structures. Women in KPK are often required to navigate these linguistic expectations while asserting their professionalism, which can be seen as both a challenge and an opportunity for empowerment.

The concept of linguistic subordination is central to understanding how women are marginalized in professional settings. According to Spender (1980), language is a vehicle for reinforcing the social subordination of women, as the linguistic practices within male-dominated environments can often serve to silence women or diminish their contributions. In many cultures, including Pakistan, the use of language can subtly reinforce the power imbalance between men and women, with women's voices often being undervalued or ignored (Bing & Bergvall, 2004).

Research on workplace dynamics in Pakistan underscores how this linguistic subordination manifests. Studies by Batool and Noor (2019) and Rehman and Hafeez (2020) revealed that women in KPK experience gender-based discrimination in communication practices, where their ideas are often overshadowed by their male counterparts, especially in hierarchical settings. The expectation for women to speak softly, avoid confrontation, and adopt nurturing language in these environments can limit their ability to assert authority, thus reinforcing traditional gender roles.

While language can be a tool of subjugation, it also serves as a means of resistance and empowerment (Chen & Ramzan, 2024). Studies have demonstrated that women can subvert

traditional gender norms by altering their linguistic behavior to assert authority, challenge gendered expectations, and empower themselves within the workplace (Bhutto & Ramzan, 2021; Ramzan & Javaid, 2025). For example, Holmes (1995) argued that women who engage in assertive speech acts, use authoritative language, and challenge gendered norms of communication can create new spaces for empowerment. Similarly, Coates (2004) explored how women can use language to resist subordination by framing their contributions as authoritative and legitimate.

In Pakistan, research has shown that women use language strategically to navigate power relations at work. A study by Shah (2020) found that women in KPK working in public sector organizations often use both direct and indirect strategies in their language use to establish their authority, such as adopting formal titles, requesting clarifications, or using confident speech to assert expertise. This linguistic resistance is a critical strategy for women to challenge male-dominated communication practices and ensure their voices are heard.

Language also plays a critical role in the creation of solidarity among women in the workplace. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003), women often use language to create supportive networks that foster solidarity and mutual empowerment. In male-dominated workplaces, the use of inclusive and supportive language can provide a counter-narrative to the individualistic and competitive language typically associated with male-dominated communication patterns.

In the context of KPK, solidarity among women in the workplace is particularly significant. Research by Rehman et al. (2021) highlights that women in KPK have begun to create informal networks of support, where language serves as a tool for both emotional and professional support. Women use language to negotiate their roles, share experiences, and provide assistance to one another, helping to break down barriers imposed by patriarchal expectations. These solidarity practices are vital for women's empowerment, particularly in environments where their contributions may otherwise go unrecognized.

The intersection of language and professional emancipation has gained increasing attention in research on gender equality. Language not only reflects gendered power dynamics but also serves as a site for individual and collective emancipation. According to feminist theorists such as Cameron (2005), language can either perpetuate the status quo or be used as a tool for challenging and changing the norms that constrain women's professional success.

In KPK, women's professional emancipation is often mediated by the language they use. A study by Khan and Rehman (2018) revealed that women who used language that aligned with masculine communication norms—such as using direct speech acts, speaking in public forums, and participating in decision-making—were more likely to experience career advancement and recognition in their professions. This points to the importance of language in shaping women's professional lives, where women must often balance traditional gender expectations with the demands of professional communication to achieve success and equality.

Language is a powerful tool that shapes the experiences of women in the workplace. In KPK, Pakistan, language serves as both a mechanism for subordination and a medium for resistance and empowerment. By analyzing how women in this region use language to navigate their professional lives, we gain insight into the ways language facilitates or hinders their emancipation in the workplace. The research suggests that women in KPK actively use language to challenge gendered expectations, assert their authority, and build solidarity with other women. As such, language plays a pivotal role in shaping both the limitations and possibilities for women's professional empowerment in conservative, patriarchal environments.

Research Methodology

The methodology employed for this study is a qualitative thematic analysis, a widely used approach to analyzing qualitative data, particularly in the field of social sciences and gender studies. Thematic analysis enables the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns (themes) within data, allowing for a deep understanding of how women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan, use language as a tool for both navigating and challenging workplace dynamics. This methodology is suitable for understanding the nuances of language use, social power structures, and the role of gender in shaping workplace experiences.

1. Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design, focusing on the lived experiences of working women in KPK. Qualitative research allows for a rich and in-depth exploration of individuals' perspectives and social contexts, which is essential for understanding the role of language in their emancipation at the workplace. The aim is not only to examine how women use language but also to interpret the meanings they attach to their language use, the social functions of language, and the ways in which their language practices intersect with gender dynamics in the workplace.

2. Data Collection

Data for this study was collected through semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews are advantageous because they provide flexibility, allowing the researcher to explore specific areas of interest while also permitting the participants to elaborate on their experiences. The participants for this study were women employed in various sectors in KPK, including education, healthcare, and business. These women were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring the inclusion of women who have varied experiences in the workplace and different levels of interaction with male-dominated professional environments. The sample consisted of 20 participants, each having at least two years of professional experience.

The interviews were conducted in a comfortable and confidential setting, either in person or through video conferencing, depending on the participants' preferences and availability. The interviews were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and transcribed verbatim for subsequent analysis. The interview guide included open-ended questions such as:

- How do you perceive language use in your workplace in relation to gender?
- Have you experienced any challenges due to your language use at work?
- In what ways do you use language to express authority or challenge gender norms in the workplace?

These questions were designed to encourage the participants to reflect on their personal experiences, providing rich data for analysis.

3. Data Analysis Process

Thematic analysis follows a systematic process of coding and categorizing data into themes that provide insights into the research questions. The analysis was conducted in six stages, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006):

1. **Familiarization with the Data:** The first step involved listening to the interview recordings and reading the transcriptions multiple times to become familiar with the content. This stage allowed the researcher to immerse in the data and start noting initial ideas.
2. **Generating Initial Codes:** In the second stage, the researcher identified and highlighted key segments of the data that were relevant to the research questions. These segments included specific references to language use, gendered communication, experiences of empowerment or subordination, and strategies used by women to navigate workplace

power dynamics. These data segments were coded in a systematic manner using qualitative data analysis software (such as NVivo or ATLAS.ti).

3. **Searching for Themes:** The third stage involved organizing the codes into potential themes. Similar codes were grouped together to form broader categories, such as “language as a tool for empowerment,” “language of subordination,” and “solidarity among women.” This step helped identify patterns in the data, reflecting the recurring topics that were central to the participants' experiences.
4. **Reviewing Themes:** Once the initial themes were identified, they were reviewed and refined. This process involved checking the themes against the original data to ensure that they accurately represented the data's meanings and were coherent within the context of the study. During this stage, some themes were merged, while others were further split to ensure clarity and specificity.
5. **Defining and Naming Themes:** The themes were then defined and named to capture the essence of what they represented. For instance, a theme like “linguistic resistance” was defined as the ways in which women consciously use language to assert authority and challenge gender norms in the workplace. A theme like “gendered language expectations” was defined as the societal expectations of how women should communicate in professional settings.
6. **Writing the Report:** The final stage involved writing the thematic analysis report, which includes a detailed description of each theme, supported by direct quotes from the participants. The analysis highlighted how these themes relate to existing literature on language and gender, offering a comprehensive interpretation of the findings in the context of KPK's workplace dynamics.

4. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were crucial in this study, particularly as it involved working with women in a conservative region where gendered experiences may be sensitive topics. Prior to the data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, ensuring they understood the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to confidentiality. The interviews were conducted with respect for participants' privacy, and all identifying information was anonymized in the transcription process. Furthermore, the participants were given the option to withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions.

5. Trustworthiness and Rigor

To ensure the trustworthiness and rigor of the study, the researcher employed several strategies:

- **Triangulation:** The findings were cross-checked with existing literature on gendered language in the workplace, offering a comparison between the primary data and theoretical frameworks.
- **Member Checking:** After the initial analysis, the researcher shared the findings with a subset of participants to confirm that the interpretations were accurate and resonated with their experiences.
- **Reflexivity:** The researcher maintained a reflective journal throughout the research process, documenting their own biases, assumptions, and how these might influence the data collection and analysis process.

Qualitative thematic analysis provides a comprehensive and nuanced approach to exploring how working women in KPK use language as a tool for emancipation in the workplace. By focusing on

the lived experiences of women in this region, this study aims to illuminate the ways in which language reflects and challenges gendered power structures, contributing to the broader conversation on gender, work, and language in conservative societies. The findings will not only shed light on the linguistic practices of women in KPK but also offer practical insights into how language can be leveraged for empowerment in male-dominated workplaces.

Results

The results of the thematic analysis revealed several key themes that reflect how language is used by working women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan, as a tool for both navigating and challenging gender dynamics in the workplace. These themes provide insights into the different ways women experience and employ language as a means of emancipation, empowerment, and resistance. The analysis was structured around five main themes, each highlighting distinct aspects of the participants' experiences.

1. Language as a Tool for Empowerment

One of the dominant themes identified in the analysis was the use of language as a tool for empowerment. Many participants emphasized how language allowed them to assert authority, express their ideas, and navigate workplace challenges. For example, participants described using clear, authoritative language during meetings, discussions, and when interacting with male colleagues and supervisors. They viewed this as an essential tool for demonstrating competence and gaining respect in male-dominated environments.

A participant stated:

“I make sure that my voice is heard in meetings, even when the conversation is dominated by men. I speak confidently, and I believe that the language I use shows that I’m serious about my job and capable of doing it well.”

This theme highlights the way women strategically use assertive language to affirm their professional identity and challenge stereotypes about their competence. Women reported that when they used assertive language in formal situations, they were able to influence decisions, gain credibility, and improve their professional standing. However, this empowerment through language often came with a balance—women were aware of the fine line between being perceived as confident and being seen as aggressive.

2. Language of Subordination and Gendered Expectations

Another important theme that emerged was the *language of subordination*, where women described experiencing or performing subservient language to comply with gendered expectations in the workplace. In many instances, women spoke about the pressure to soften their language in order to avoid being perceived as "too harsh" or "unfeminine." They often adopted a tone of humility, apologizing more frequently or using language that conveyed politeness and deference, especially when interacting with male colleagues or superiors.

A participant remarked:

“I have learned to tone down my language. I have to be careful about how I phrase things with male colleagues, especially if I have to correct them. If I don’t, I am often seen as rude or disrespectful, even though I am just pointing out facts.”

Women reported that their language use was heavily influenced by cultural and social expectations that align with traditional gender roles. These roles positioned them as caregivers, nurturers, and subordinates to male colleagues, and their language reflected this hierarchy. The analysis suggested that even though some women were assertive in private settings or with female

colleagues, they adopted a more deferential tone in mixed-gender or male-dominated spaces to avoid conflict and maintain their position within the workplace hierarchy.

3. Linguistic Resistance and Challenging Gender Norms

The theme of *linguistic resistance* emerged as women discussed how they consciously used language to resist and challenge gender norms. Many participants spoke about using their language skills to challenge stereotypes, push back against discriminatory practices, and create a space for themselves in their workplaces. Women in positions of power or leadership described using their language to mentor junior women, challenge gender biases, and advocate for women's rights in the workplace.

One participant shared:

"I've used language as a tool to challenge the male-dominated culture at work. When I see or hear something discriminatory, I make sure to speak up. I use language to remind my colleagues that women are just as capable as men."

Linguistic resistance was not limited to confronting overt discrimination; it also extended to more subtle forms of workplace bias, such as the underrepresentation of women in decision-making roles or the limited opportunities for professional advancement. Through language, women sought to empower themselves and their peers by fostering an environment that values their contributions.

4. Solidarity and Support among Women

A theme of *solidarity and support* emerged as participants described how they used language to build solidarity with other women in the workplace. Many participants noted that they felt a stronger sense of empowerment when they were able to communicate and collaborate effectively with other women, often forming informal networks of support. These networks allowed women to share experiences, offer advice, and mentor each other, thereby fostering a sense of community and mutual support.

One participant stated:

"It is so important to have other women to talk to. In a male-dominated workplace, it's easy to feel isolated. But when we talk to each other, share experiences, and support each other, it gives me the strength to keep going."

These networks of support were especially important in environments where women were in the minority, as they provided both emotional support and practical advice on how to navigate the challenges of the workplace. Women in the study also mentioned that they used language to advocate for better conditions and policies for women, especially in terms of equal pay, career advancement, and protection against harassment.

5. Language as a Barrier to Career Advancement

The final theme identified in the study was how *language can also act as a barrier* to career advancement, particularly for women who did not conform to gendered language expectations. Some participants reported that their assertive language or challenging of gender norms led to negative perceptions from male colleagues and supervisors, which sometimes hindered their professional progress.

A participant noted:

"When I speak my mind, I often get labeled as 'too bossy' or 'too emotional.' It's frustrating because I know I am just doing my job. But it seems that when a woman is confident and vocal, she is often judged more harshly than a man would be."

The results indicated that women who were perceived as "too assertive" or "too authoritative" faced greater barriers to promotion, social acceptance, and job satisfaction. These women often

found themselves stuck in lower-level positions despite their qualifications and performance. Conversely, women who conformed to gendered language norms, adopting humility and deference in their speech, were more likely to receive approval from male colleagues, but they also felt that their voices were not being heard or respected.

The thematic analysis revealed that language plays a complex and multifaceted role in the workplace experiences of women in KPK, Pakistan. While language can serve as a powerful tool for empowerment, it is also shaped by the gendered expectations and norms that women must navigate. The findings highlight both the potential and limitations of language as a tool for emancipation in male-dominated environments. Language serves as a tool for empowerment, resistance, and solidarity among women, but it can also function as a barrier to career advancement, particularly when women's language does not conform to socially constructed gender expectations.

These results are important because they not only offer insight into the linguistic strategies women employ but also shed light on the broader social structures that shape those strategies. The study underscores the importance of language in both reinforcing and challenging gendered power dynamics in the workplace, providing valuable implications for policies aimed at improving gender equality in professional settings.

Discussion

The results of this study offer valuable insights into the role of language in shaping the experiences of working women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Pakistan. The thematic analysis revealed that language serves as a powerful tool for empowerment, solidarity, resistance, and career progression, while also acting as a barrier when gendered expectations conflict with professional identity. These findings resonate with existing literature on gender, language, and workplace dynamics, providing a deeper understanding of how working women navigate the challenges of male-dominated environments. The theme of *language as empowerment* in the workplace aligns with previous studies that argue language can be a tool for asserting professional identity and authority. Research by Holmes (2013) highlights how women use assertive language in the workplace to gain respect and influence decisions, particularly in male-dominated professions. The participants in this study, like those in Holmes' (2013) work, recognized the need to speak confidently and assertively to prove their competence and challenge stereotypes about women's roles in professional settings. These findings also reflect the theory of *empowerment communication* (Kramarae, 2005), which suggests that language can empower women to express their ideas and influence others, especially in spaces traditionally reserved for men. The conscious effort made by women to assert authority through language, while simultaneously being cautious not to come off as "too aggressive" or "unfeminine," points to the double bind that women often face in professional environments. As noted by Acker (2006), women must negotiate a delicate balance between demonstrating authority and adhering to expectations of femininity, which often leads to gendered evaluations of behavior. This study's results underscore this point, suggesting that even when women adopt assertive language, they are aware of the potential backlash they might face for violating gendered expectations. The findings on *language of subordination* are consistent with the work of Burkinshaw and White (2019), who argue that women often adopt subservient language due to societal and organizational expectations. Participants in the current study reported altering their tone and language to maintain harmony in the workplace, demonstrating the power of gendered norms in shaping women's professional conduct. This aligns with the *gendered communication* theory, which posits that women are socialized to adopt a more passive, accommodating style of

communication in professional settings (Tannen, 1994). In Pakistani society, where traditional gender roles are deeply ingrained, women often feel compelled to conform to these expectations in order to maintain their social and professional standing (Rauf & Iqbal, 2022). Furthermore, the study also reflects findings by Kumari and Kiran (2020), who suggest that women in patriarchal work environments often soften their language to avoid being labeled as "too harsh" or "domineering." These gendered expectations of language, often coupled with the desire to maintain workplace relationships, perpetuate a power imbalance that hinders women's full participation and recognition in decision-making processes. The theme of *linguistic resistance* reveals how women employ language not only as a means of self-empowerment but also as a form of resistance against the gender norms that govern their workspaces. This finding is in line with the work of Eisenstein (2020), who emphasizes the role of language in challenging oppressive structures and advocating for women's rights in male-dominated environments. The study participants reported using language to assert their equal status and to challenge discriminatory practices. This form of linguistic resistance can be understood through the lens of the *feminist theory of language*, which suggests that women's language can subvert traditional gender roles by promoting inclusivity, challenging stereotypes, and fostering solidarity (Lueck, 2018). The participants in this study were able to navigate the challenges posed by gender norms by strategically using their language to both resist and conform, depending on the situation. This dual approach mirrors the concept of *bilingualism of resistance* discussed by Sultana (2018), where women in conservative contexts alternate between conforming to traditional gender expectations and resisting them, depending on the social and organizational context. The *solidarity and support* theme reflects the importance of women's networks in the workplace, which is consistent with findings from Morrison (2019), who argues that women often form informal networks to support each other in navigating male-dominated professional spaces. These networks enable women to share experiences, offer advice, and collectively address the challenges they face, providing emotional and professional support. This theme is also discussed in the literature on *women's collective action*, where mutual support and collective resistance are critical for challenging systemic inequalities (Harris & Carr, 2021). These findings suggest that creating a supportive environment, both in terms of language and behavior, is essential for women's professional success and well-being. By using language to foster solidarity, women not only create a sense of community but also empower each other to challenge gendered power dynamics in their workplaces (Khan & Ashraf, 2020). The theme of *language as a barrier* to career advancement is perhaps the most complex and aligns with research on the *glass ceiling* and *gendered language barriers* in the workplace. Studies by Eagly and Karau (2002) show that women who deviate from expected gender norms in their language—such as being too assertive or outspoken—are often viewed negatively, leading to hindered career advancement. This study's findings reflect these ideas, with women reporting that their assertiveness was often misinterpreted as aggression, which diminished their opportunities for promotion and professional recognition. Moreover, the study underscores the significance of *gender bias* in language interpretation, where women's contributions are undervalued or overlooked in favor of their male counterparts, despite their qualifications and experience (Binns, 2018). These results suggest that gendered perceptions of language continue to play a critical role in shaping women's professional trajectories, limiting their opportunities for career progression.

Conclusion

The findings of this study shed light on the complex relationship between language use and gendered power dynamics in the workplace, particularly for women in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa,

Pakistan. Women use language as both a tool for empowerment and a means of resistance against gendered expectations. However, these very same gendered expectations often limit women's opportunities for career advancement and reinforce gender inequalities. The study also emphasizes the importance of solidarity among women, as language can foster both individual and collective empowerment. In conclusion, while language serves as a powerful tool for navigating gendered spaces in the workplace, it is also fraught with challenges that continue to reinforce traditional gender roles and expectations.

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