

A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF PARENTAL COMMUNICATION AND SOCIETAL STEREOTYPES

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Abstract

It has been observed language and communication are the tools that contribute to the societal norms. A significant number of studies are available on discourse analysis but limited research is available to explore the discourse analysis of parental communication, the way parents communicate to their sons versus their daughters. Thereby, applying qualitative methodology using Fairclough's Three-dimensional model, the current study aims to explore the discourse analysis of parental communication. The study highlighted that daughters are often addressed with empathetic language while sons are communicated with assertive and goal-oriented tone. The communication pattern aligns with the traditional South Asian norms.

Keywords: Discourse analysis, Parental communication, Societal norms

Introduction

Language is a system of communication to share ideas, feelings, and thoughts. It is an essential part of society. Hence, language is not impersonal, it is a blend of social, cultural, and historical influences that change a person's view and identity (Baker & Cornelson, 2018). Society constructs attributes, roles, and expectations for a specific gender. So, it is a socially constructed phenomenon. Gender influences the way we use and comprehend a language and how language influences us (Gygax et al., 2019a; Morgan, 2004).

Gendered communication is the use of words, phrases, and tones that is particularly inclined to a gender. It connotes attributes to specific gender. Emotions are associated with women, while men are less associated with emotions in a communication. In a communication men use words to communicate while women use non-verbal communication too (Times, 2023).

The concept of Gendered discourses are the portrayals and assumptions that men and women will behave in certain gender ways. Gendered Discourses investigate different gendered 'ways of seeing the world' and how our identity may be constructed through the use of different discourses, whether written or spoken (Sunderland 2004: 20–22).

Parents make up the mind of a child through the way they communicate with the child. Language is a tool that serves as a critical tool for conveying ideas, values, and emotions within families. It builds up the cognitive and social development of a child. Parental communication provides a framework where a child is introduced to societal norms and gender roles (Cameron, 2008). The pattern of use of language influences a child's perception along with behavioral expectancies. Gender ideologies are raised from the home by the interactions of the boy or girl at home with their parents (Tannen, 1994; Sunderland, 2004). The parental interaction creates a relationship between language and societal structures, then parental discourse catalyzes societal stereotypes (Gee, 2014). The exploration of gender language is vital in the context of parenting. Parents are reinforcing societal norms

consciously or unconsciously. By exploring how parents interact with their sons versus daughters, we can understand how gender discourses are constructed in the family context.

Literature Review

Parents play an essential role in making the viewpoint of their children, through communication with them. Communication is not only a way for the transmission of information but it is a tool for transmitting norms, values, ideas, and identities. Communication impacts the individuals' viewpoints, and how individuals see themselves and relate to other individuals. It transfers the cognitive content (Zajonc & Adelman, 1987). Parents communicate ideas and beliefs with their children through daily interactions. These ideas and beliefs shape the minds of the children. It influences their understanding of gender roles and societal expectations. The everyday communication shapes the identity of a child and builds the perception of gender roles (Wood, 1995; Tannen, 1990). Parental communication conveys how gender norms are conveyed and transmitted within the families (Eagly & Wood, 2012).

Gendered Communication and Domestic Interactions

A significant number of studies have explored the interactions between gender and communication within a family. Parents are the primary pivots for creating gender roles. It depicts the social inequalities in family structures Jayachandran (2015). In communication, parents build gender roles and boost the norms of societies that build assertiveness in boys and passiveness in girls. These linguistic patterns have lasting impressions on a child's behavior. Gendered conversational styles emerge in a family interaction and are then maintained. It is observed that parents unconsciously change their tones, word choice, and conversational strategies based on the child's gender. Males are often addressed with the language of achievement or independence, on the other side females are encouraged to add empathy and relational bonds. Hence, gendered conversational styles can emerge from the families Tannen (1990).

Gender norms are flexible. It can be changed in the adolescence. In educational institutes gender stereotypes can be challenged. The same change can be made at homes. Parents can break all gender norms while communicating to their children at homes Dhar et al. (2022). By focusing on linguistic patterns, parents can build an egalitarian attitude in their children.

Role of Language in Gender Norms

Language is a powerful tool and can shape the perceptions of individuals. The early discrimination in gender provides a ground for the societal norms that remain for the long term. Parents choose linguistic features like words based on a child's gender. The word strong is used for boys and kind for girls. These linguistic choices from the home make up gender stereotypes. It leads the way in building societal norms Frawley (2008). Research on the techniques of language socialization provides more proof of this phenomenon. Parents frequently use different speech patterns while speaking to boys and girls. Ochs and Schieffelin (1984) emphasize how language represents cultural ideas. Boys, for example, could hear more directive communication that emphasizes action and control, whereas girls are frequently addressed in ways that emphasize care and obedience.

Socio-Cultural Contexts and Regional Variations

The socio-cultural setting plays a significant role in the construction of gendered language. In South Asia, it is seen that parenting styles are influenced by the traditional family norms that are adopted from societal expressions. It is believed that parents frequently encourage patriarchal ideas by treating their children differently based on their gender. The use of language by parents contributes to societal expressions Sharma (2020). South Asian families' language usage promotes societal norms through storytelling, advice, and everyday

communication Ahmed (2018). It is important to address these norms to create a more equitable environment. By changing discourse within families, particularly in patriarchal societies, gender stereotypes can be challenged. Then, in socio-cultural settings, gender equality can be promoted Jayachandran (2015).

Gendered communication has major effects that go beyond the home and influence societal structures. Everyday interactions act as "gender displays," emphasizing cultural norms involving masculinity and femininity Goffman (1979). Parents help to establish these standards when they rely on gender-specific language, tones, or instructions.

The long-term effects of gendered communication on children's development are also highlighted. According to gender schema theory, children learn gendered direction from their surroundings and create mental models that direct how they see gender roles. These schemas have an impact on social interactions, behavior and employment objectives Bem (1983).

Analytical Frameworks for Gendered Communication

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) provides a framework for examining linguistic features. Fairclough's (1995) three-dimensional model is relevant in analyzing linguistic features. It includes analysis of text, discourse practice, and social practice. Halliday's (1994) Systematic functional linguistics (SFL) provides a framework to analyze the functions of language in communication. It identifies the tone of language.

Challenges and Opportunities

To eliminate gendered discourse, individuals need to make an effort and society needs to change. The ability of actions to change attitudes, indicates that parents, educators, and policymakers are pivotal in this process Dhar et al. (2022). By increasing awareness of subconscious biases in language, families may overcome preconceptions and promote more inclusive environments.

The review of the literature indicates that gendered communication within families is both a reflection and reinforcement of societal norms. Linguistic patterns, tone, and discourse strategies used by parents significantly shape children's perceptions of gender roles. It is influencing their development and societal contributions. By applying frameworks like CDA and SFL, researchers can uncover the precise ways in which language reflects inequality. Thus, a significant number of studies are available on gendered language in various settings but limited research is available to explore the linguistic features in parents' communication with sons versus daughters. Hence, it will be explored how daily interaction at home contributes to societal norms.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative approach that is used to collect non-numerical data (Bhandari, Scribbr, 2020). to explore how parental communication differs on the basis of the child's gender. This approach is satisfactory to choose for investigating data from daily routine.

Data Collection

The observation method was used as the primary means of data collection. Five families were purposefully selected to ensure differences in their communication styles. The researcher observed each family in their natural environment. The main focus was on interactions between parents and their children during routine activities. Notes were taken to document linguistic features, tone, and discourse strategies. The researcher conducted informal, open-ended discussions with one child from each family after the observation phase. It was purposefully done to comprehend the communication pattern. These informal discussions were aimed to investigate the child's perception of their parent's communication. It was tested whether they aligned with the researcher's observations.

Justification for Methodology

The observation method was chosen because it allows the researcher to capture authentic and spontaneous interactions. Discussions with the children provided an additional perception. It enabled the triangulation of data and validation of research (Bhandari, 2022).

Ethical Considerations

To ensure ethical conduct, the families were informed about the study's purpose and methodology. Consent was obtained from all participants, and pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality. The children's participation in discussions was voluntary.

Research Questions

1. What linguistic features and discourse strategies do parents use to communicate with sons versus daughters?
2. How does gendered language from parental communication contribute to the promotion of societal stereotypes?

Data Analysis and Findings

This section presents the analysis of notes taken by observation and discussion with the children. The data analysis contains three main headings, textual analysis, discursive practice, and social practice. The textual analysis provides the linguistic features and tone of daughters and sons comparatively.

1. Text Analysis (Description)

The qualitative data collected from observation and informal discussion with children shows that parents use phrases like "میرے جگر کا ٹکڑ" (my precious child) and "میری نازک بیٹی" (my delicate daughter) for their daughters. It depicts sympathy and emotional closeness. These terms emphasize daughters as cherished and emotionally valued. Parents use gentle and empathetic tones with their daughters. These phrases and tones promote societal stereotypes that portray daughters as delicate and affectionate creatures. It is observed that statements like "ہمیشہ ہمت سے کام لینا" (always be courageous) are also stated by parents for their daughters. This type of statement is not uttered by the majority. Indeed, it shows empowerment within a protective shell.

Parents use phrases like "میرا شیر پتر" (my lion-hearted son) and "تم کسی کام کے نہیں" (you're useless) for their sons. It reflects a duality of encouragement and strictness. They use an assertive and directive tone with their sons. These types of praising words or phrases are tied to competence and achievements. It is observed that sons are accountable for expenses as compared to daughters. A phrase made by a participant in the discussion for boys is "خرچے کا حساب دینا پڑتا ہے" (you have to account for expenses). Parents mostly say "focus on your career" to their sons which highlights the societal expectations that sons are providers.

From the textual analysis, it is observed that the language and tone that are made by parents are based on gendered expectations. Polite, gentle, and encouraging language is more frequent with daughters while assertive, directive, goal-oriented and sometimes strict tone is dominant with sons. The language of the notes that are observed from multiple families reflects emotional stereotypes as daughters are associated with empathy and delicacy while sons are associated with strength and accountability.

2. Discursive Practice (Interpretation)

Parents use some phrases that are tied to situational contexts. It is observed that parents use the phrase "بیہادر بیٹا" (you are brave, my son) to their daughters. This phrase is used for being praised for the achievements. This attempt by parents is an attempt to instil confidence but remain in line with traditional gender stereotypes. From the informal discussion with children of the observant families, it is interpreted that there is a contrast in responses for daughters and sons for going outside. The observed data reflects the dominant discourse in

South Asian culture that stresses emotional dependency for daughters and financial strength for sons. These are reinforced in education, media, and even traditional beliefs. The element of power dynamics is also interpreted in the home discourse. The authoritative tone used with sons establishes hierarchical relationships. It encourages responsibility and independence. The empathetic tone with daughters suggests a relationship based on care and emotional bonding. Some phrases as “boys don’t cry” and “girls work in kitchen” are also observed. These phrases are not personal but patriarchal. It helps in the interpretation of societal ideology and power relations among society. Phrases uttered by parents are not for communication only in fact it is the ideological constructs across society.

3. Social Practice (Explanation)

Parental communication varies based on cultural context. These patterns are deeply rooted in South Asian societal norms. Sons are traditionally seen as future breadwinners, while daughters are perceived as emotionally driven and requiring support. The cultural emphasis on security for daughters reflects broader societal structures that prioritize women's safety but can also limit their autonomy. The language and tone that is used with daughters in this cultural context fosters emotional dependency and at the same time promotes societal norms. Hence, it impacts on identity formation. The use of harsh and strict language with sons fosters internalized pressure. Sons remain unable to express themselves. It promotes the stereotypes of emotional stoicism. In a few families, there are contradictions like the encouragement of daughters for independence with certain boundaries. And use of polite words like "buddy" for sons is the acknowledgement of emotional needs within a strict boundary.

The analysis of observed data shows that parents use dual discourse for communication at their homes. Protective and empathetic language for daughters while directive and assertive language for sons. It is perfectly aligned to the gender stereotypes. The use of a gentle tone for daughters and an authoritative tone for sons also depicts the cultural norms in parental communication. Parental communication acts as a microcosm of larger societal structures. It shows traditional roles but also shows signs of evolving norms. Encouragement for daughters to be independent exists but is framed within societal safety concerns. The linguistic features and discursive strategies used by parents in home discourse promote societal stereotypes and norms.

Conclusion

It is concluded that the language patterns used in parental communication are based on gender and are associated with traditional norms and beliefs in South Asian contexts. The analysis of linguistic features and discourse strategies in parental communication shows that gendered communication from home discourse promotes traditional stereotypes. Daughters often receive empathetic, delicate, and polite communication that portrays them as emotionally delicate. On the other hand, sons receive assertive, directive, and goal-oriented language that fosters strength and responsibility. Therefore, parental communication mirrors and promotes societal gender roles.

The limitation is that the study also highlighted emerging contradictions that can be observed in only a few families. Some parents encourage daughters' independence, though within protective boundaries. Similarly, occasional empathetic expressions toward sons indicate a subtle shift in recognizing emotional needs. The future research could explore interventions to promote equitable communication within families that ultimately can contribute to societal transformation.

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