

Original Article

Language, Gender and Identity: A Meta-analysis of Negotiating Multiple Identities at Workplace

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ABSTRACT: *Among the most recent and illustrious paradigm with regard to negotiating multiple gender identities in the workplace all over is the approach of Social Constructivism. This paradigm of analysis is an exclusive approach to assess the gender based identities i.e. muscular and feminine. It deals entirely with gender differences, operational identities of genders and negotiating multiple identities. In view of this approach societal norms, values and cultural dynamics are the determinants facets in term of gender role and persona which can be either ideal or at least appropriate. this regard, gender performance, societal norms, cultural values, inclusiveness, individual potential and adjustment levels of either gender will be kept in view as dynamics of analysis. Role of language, especially linguistics choices i.e. lexical facets, sentence structure and discursive strategies enable to analyze and negotiate multiple identities that are regarded as personal, societal, professional and gender based delineated through discourse and interaction. Keeping this view, meta-analytical review of related literature with respect to related studies are presented keeping in view language and identity, multiple identities, the mechanic of negotiating multiple identities, language and gender, relation of language, gender and identity at workplace, role of social norms and culture in determining the above-mentioned features and concepts of social constructivism will be integrated. The study has progressed from general to specific pattern to build point of view.*

KEYWORDS: *Multiple Identities, Workplace, Gender Difference in L Use, Identity Construction via L, Negotiating Identities.*

1. INTRODUCTION

By design and by default human beings either men or women carry diverse level of identities. It is the need and among the imperative want of each man and woman to hold such identities especially in the workplace of their choice. Whenever an attempt is made to diverge or reduce such layers of identities the ultimate result is in chaos and confrontation among co-workers. He even went on to comment that “Singular identity is an illusion and those who cultivate violence promote the single identity concept and exploit it by ignoring connectivity and affinity which might allow the other identities to coexist” (Iqbal, 2017). He further delineated the concept that in order to avoid conflicts it is imperative to bring into display the relation between identity and self as to him human beings are “multi-identified”. He added that the concept of single identity, with regard to men and women, is an illusion which doesn’t actually exists. In his study he has highlighted diverse levels of challenges faced by the concept of multiple identities. The roles of regional, local and religious issues are the chief among those challenges. He concluded his findings that the way the concept of plural or multiple identities in Pakistan is dealt in will determine the future prospect of Pakistan.

Khan & Kirmani (2018) in their study provide a glimpse of academic level discourse being voiced for the activism of women in Pakistani culture over the decades. It is noted that mostly these voices come from the feminist movements bringing into light various social, economic and political issues that project negative image of woman. Their study explores the recent trends in gender justice movements which are undertaken distinctly from feminist movements. Their study comes up with the findings that such initiatives enables women to assert their gender as well as personal and social identity in their surroundings and context which may be based on domestic or workplace responsibilities. Bousfiha (2018) outlined how individuals from either gender tackle his or her multiple identity by keeping emphasis on two tiers i.e. entrepreneurship and the next one is the role each one has as a occupation. Though the study is conducted in an academic setting which is relatively passive as far as challenges regarding to negotiating multiple identities are concerned academic, yet they do exist even at a miniature scale. The conclusions of the study are indicative of the fact that everyone behave the way it is inherent in his or her identity irrespective of their role, environ and background.

Zimman (2014) studied the patterns of transgender men to signify the role of language with their respective narratives as “on the power of language to redefine the body in the face of compulsory gender and sexual normativity” (p. 14). Pitch of voice, linguistic representation of intonation and speech acts patterns integrate the sigma of language, gender and identity at diverse levels. Researchers like Lexi Webster (2016) and Laura Horak (2014) have identified social media like Twitter, Facebook and similar internet sources as paramount sources and diversified facets as identity transformation and identification at multiple layers. It is concluded by both researchers that they consume “normative discourse to perform and negotiate their identities” in

various spheres and activities of their daily life and societal workplace and social gatherings, respectively, for diverse identity construction. (2014) is of the notion that in the same society or speech community, men and women are brought up in a different fashion and hence their behavior in terms of language consumption and tone is quite diverse, and they themselves are. Boys develop into a competitive and target-oriented speech pattern, while girls are more prone towards cooperative and polite mannerism. In addition, she comes up with these six points of difference in language between the two genders, i.e. male and female

Kotthoff (2010) deemed that gender disseminated in interaction is more paramount than that of stylistic and structural. Formal is a set of beliefs consisting of values, societal norms, cultural implications, ideology and a set of stereotypes. Litosseliti (2006) “distinguish between speakers’ assumed gendered behavior and the range of identities available in the gendered communities that speakers inhabit” (p. 66). Social constructivists treat gender as a linguistic facet with respect to their respective gender, i.e. men or women. It is closely linked to what is said to them, what linguistic features are incorporated in their discourse and how they are interpreted and perceived in their relevant contexts (Pavlidou, 2010). Kato & Kodama (2017), in their review study about women in the workplace, have reviewed certain recent developments of managerial practices in the workplace and their consequences upon the female gender. “Performance work system, work-life balance, rate race model, social responsibility practice and individual incentive” increase diversity and enhancement among various gender based identities among males and females. The conclusion of the study indicates prime challenges related to the construction of identities on three methodological tiers: how to gauge managerial practice, account for the endogeneity of those practices and the mechanism to minimize the bias during selection.

2. LANGUAGE, GENDER AND IDENTITY

Discourse being carried out at the workplace is a process or mechanism to get into the concept of dealing with diverse identities. Hence, language acts as a tool to bring a bridge between the interlinked concepts of gender, identity and diverse domains of identities, especially at the workplace, as we are aware of the fact that language is a medium that is essential to converse, apart from taking into account the concept of gender while negotiating identity-related concepts. Gender is also a dominating factor as far as the concept of identity is concerned in a particular societal and cultural sphere. Gender defines and demarks the role each gender plays, bearing in view the societal and cultural norms along with stereotypical thinking in a broader context. Milani (2010), while talking about the role of linguistic patterns with respect to identity, is of the view that “individuals do gender in different ways by creatively deploying linguistic means which will allow them to orient themselves to available images or models of masculinity and femininity in a specific socio-cultural context” (p. 119).

It is the societal norms and thinking domains which determine which persona is appropriate for men and women in a particular canvas. Due to existing and deep-rooted stereotypes, the discourse being conversed at the workplace is also a key facet that is gender-centered, i.e., it is the gender role being associated by the societal setups that demarcates the criteria for the interaction and consumption of language between either gender at the workplace. In the society where the current study is conducted, things related to gender, communicative persona and interactive language at the workplace have gone through a major transformation in the last few decades. In addition, the concept of mere gender has also taken the shape of multiple identities that are not merely restricted to gender; rather, it has included personal, social, professional and identities from diverse fields of activities. It has also modernised from mere gender to societal, professional and personal personas of genders.

With respect to gender, the domains or career-related opportunities for men and women have widened to a great extent in the recent past. Women have progressed from selected professional arenas of teaching, nursing and household duties towards a larger canvas of careers of their liking. They are now making their way into business, military, civil service, armed forces and media industry, to name a few professions. Keeping in view their current and up-to-date dynamic roles, their workplace discourse and interaction with the opposite gender have also undergone a major transformation (Hussain et al., 2023). They have become more vocal and confident as compared to their previous linguistic and discursive persona. With growing influence, they are being posted and administered at the pace of authorities and administrative domains, especially in academia where they are serving as teaching faculty, vice chancellors, deans, heads of departments and registrars at various public and private sector educational institutes.

In spite of the fact that things have modified and changed to a major degree, typical thinking and stereotypical personas at the workplace and in public are a matter of concern to be dealt with. The current study is a step towards the exploration of the way how diverse identities are negotiated at the workplace by focusing on the prime facets of workplace discourse in order to keep a balance between gender and other related identities at the workplace. The way language and other interactive tools are being consumed at the workplace by women and men to interact and negotiate whether it is masculine or feminine in nature and essence. That is also dependent on the particular state, context and situation. So, there is a close nexus being emphasized among language, gender and identity construction and negotiation.

It is imperative to note that how linguistics and discursive patterns of men and women are interpreted, and meanings are derived in a workplace, is key to constructing and negotiating diverse levels of identities. Their discursive patterns, lexical

behaviors, sentence consumption contribute to the overall process of how men and women converse and negotiate their multiple identities, i.e. personal, professional and societal, especially in the workplace. So, the role of language is paramount in the construction of workplace identities. At the workplace, these identities are deemed and negotiated as the products of interaction and conversation through the utilization of linguistic features between men and women.

With regard to the construction of the social world, language plays a pivotal role. It is through the utilization of linguistic phenomena that ideas, concepts, perceptions and identities are established and constructed due to the far-reaching influence of language in the construction of the social world; it is deemed as a central nexus in relation to its negotiation of identities at the workplace, which can be either personal, social, professional or gender based. Without proper and suitable consumption of linguistic patterns, interaction and relations of either gender can't flourish at either spectrum. It is more critical and imperative when it comes to workplace discourse. Without communicative and interactive discourse, the workplace will not be able to achieve what it is meant for (Hussain, 2024). It is through the consumption of language that we come across the nature, value, status and worth of other human beings in any domain of human activity other than the workplace. Hence, the role of linguistics is crucial and critical for the construction and negotiation of diverse levels of identities.

The concept of identity is a complex and interlinked facet that cannot be seen and viewed in a fixed and static manner. There are diverse layers in which resides the identity of a person, which is much more than mere character and personal traits. It is centrally linked and intermingled with societal norms and cultural values. Over the period, the concept of diverse levels of individual identity has been evoked. Individuals have multiple identities which are varied and diversified, bearing in view the contexts and situations. It is much broader and widening than mere classification of identity on the basis of gender, race, class and careers of an individual. So, the identity of a person is multi-layered, having diverse shades and interpretations (Hussain & Mansoor, 2017). It cannot be enclosed under a single heading. It can be either personal, social, professional or depending upon diverse contexts. In addition, the concept of gender has also taken the shape of multiple identities that are not merely restricted to gender; rather, it has included personal, social, professional and identities from diverse fields of activities. It has also modernized from mere gender to societal, professional and personal personas of genders.

As language is deemed the soul of every speech community, so are the patterns followed by each gender to construct their social, personal and professional identity. Hockett (1958), while defining the same notion, is of the view that "each language defines a speech community: the whole set of people who communicate with each other" (p. 58). Trudgill (1992) even went one step ahead when he commented "a community of speakers who share the same verbal repertoire, and who also share the same norms for linguistic behavior, including both general norms for language use of the type studied in the ethnography of speaking, and more detailed norms for activities such as style shifting" (p. 92).

3. NEGOTIATION OF MULTIPLE IDENTITIES AT THE WORKPLACE

3.1. IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION

Identity construction and negotiation of multiple identities is a process of interaction among individuals, especially at the workplace, through which the individual persona of a person belonging to either gender is constructed and viewed as dynamic. Hence, language is utilized to create self-image. It is established, constructed and visualized through workplace discourse. These identities are dynamic and have changed over time and contexts as far as interaction and working communications are concerned. The lexical choices, patterns of vocalization and dialects individuals choose during interaction at the workplace is utilized as a tool for particular identity construction. For the current study, an interactional approach of socio-linguistics and social constructivism has been adopted as the chief approaches for negotiating multiple identities. At the same time, the gender and performance model has been extracted for the study of identity and negotiation of identity at the workplace.

As an established facet, negotiation is not a one-way process; rather, it is a pattern of behaviours involving more than one factor. Negotiation of identity is carried out between individuals in a workplace context by means of interaction and working discourse. So, while working in a similar setting, both men and women, apart from professional vistas, have to negotiate with one another in a co-operative and conducive way. For that, they have to choose their communicative patterns and lexical formats in accordance with the co-operative principles and teamwork rather than asserting their individual or personal personas. In the midst of a variety of choices and diversified patterns of interaction, they negotiate with each other in the most professional way (Hussain et al., 2024). For that, both men and women have to cope with certain challenges at the workplace, but it is a part of identity construction and negotiation.

Another imperative feature is that the workplace is the most dynamic place where identities are being constructed and negotiated. It is mainly because at such venues diverse levels of identities come into play their pivot role because here individuals of either gender have to communicate and interact through workplace discourse by drawing a nexus between their personal, professional and societal identities. For that intent, each individual has to make adjustments in accordance with the scenario, contexts and workplace position. They are also associated and interlinked with socio-cultural and contextual factors that determine and negotiate multiple identities. Discourse being carried out at the workplace unearths how men and women negotiate their professional roles to construct their relevant identities.

Giles (1979) propagated the criteria of adjustment among co-workers so that they can be better able to communicate, interact and have an improved professional vista. In this regard, he highlighted the need to flourish and adjust “language, pronunciation, speech rates, pauses, utterance lengths; and vocal intensities to promote smooth communicative exchanges”. Street & Hopper (1982) proposed that divergence does occur in communication within the members of either gender in a speech community, here termed as the workplace, at the point when “speakers dissociate with or show disapproval of others by making their speech diverge from that of others”. Divergence on the part of the speaker is an attempt to make his or her linguistic tone different to make him or herself more prominent, different, appealing and independent. So, it can be either convergence or divergence on the part of speaker, either partially or fully.

“Accommodation” or adjustment is another significant feature that is highlighted by researchers to negotiate multiple identities, especially in terms of linguistic patterns, at the workplace. Either mutually or separately, the ultimate objective of workplace communication and interaction is to accomplish common goals in an ample and fruitful manner, keeping within the limits of cooperative performance. Here, gender and performative role along with status and value need to be adjusted to interact in a friendly and conducive environment. Diffusion of position, power and value leads to change in behavior and linguistic patterns and tone that can be key as far as negotiation of identities is concerned, especially at the workplace of common and mutual goals to be achieved (Holmes, 1995; Hussain, 2017). Speech or interactional accommodation has a great deal to do with the social constructivism on the part of people of multiple identities.

3.2. LANGUAGE GENDER INTEGRATION

The integration of language and gender in the workplace is a matter of immense interest for researchers, especially during the last few decades. It is an admitted fact that the way both genders interact and use linguistic patterns greatly affects the concept of identity construction. It is also brought to light by researchers that miscommunication occurs between males and females due to a number of reasons. The chief among them are psychological, biological and the patterns of lexical choices. Abdelhay (2008), during his study, found out that both males and females are aware of these differences, and he concluded the mechanism of “speech accommodation” between genders in order to negotiate multiple identities, especially at the workplace, to smoothly run the business of personal, societal and professional communication.

So, she has concluded the mechanism of “speech accommodation” among genders in order to negotiate multiple identities, especially at the workplace, to smoothly run the business of personal, societal and professional communication. It has been researched for a few decades how males and females interact at the workplace, accompanied by their various social contexts and how these are interconnected with gender, class, value, status and other socio-cultural dynamics. Lakoff (1975) deemed the concept of linguistic construction of either gender and concluded that women's language is inferior while that of men is normal and can be taken as societal norm and as a medium for standardization. Tannen (1994), Cameron (2007) and Labov (1972) disseminated the difference between men and women as due to the social class, position and value each one enjoys within their speech community. To these researchers, the language and linguistic forms are developed as a speech culture among males and females in which they do reside.

Along with linguistic patterns and intonation, gender is another influential parameter to determine identity or the construction and negotiation of identities (multiple social, personal and professional). It is deeply rooted in societal norms, cultural implications and workplace environments. Gender with its relevant identities is “constructed, performed, represented and indexed” (Sunderland, 2004, p. 22). It is executed by means of semiotic clues of either oral, visual or textual. Preece (2016), while delineating the concept of identity with respect to gender, remarked that it is “an altogether more complex phenomenon as a result of the mobility and diversity in the social worlds” (p.3). However, it is still categorized mainly on the criteria laid down earlier, i.e. the utilization of linguistic strata, either oral, textual or visual. It has been summed up by Joseph (2016) as “labels that people attach to themselves and others to signal their belongings” (p. 19).

Women as a gender and their relevant identity are determined by various personal, gender and societal norms and class identification. Their beliefs and behaviors are determined by the way they act, react and enact in any particular context, especially at the workplace. In this regard, families and societal patterns play a vital role (Damaske, 2016). (2011) integrated the concept of social class in this regard as “a dimension of the self that is rooted in objective material resources (income, education, and occupational prestige) and corresponding subjective perceptions of rank vis-a-vis others. Social class reflects individuals’ mental representations . . . of who they are, how they should relate to others, and what they should be doing . . . [leading], in turn, to specific patterns of action and cognition”. In addition, the persona of social class is pivotal in assigning meanings and façades with regard to the role of women and their identity in the societal context (Kraus, 2012). Holvino (2010), while delineating the notion of gender and identity, has concluded that researchers and scholars of gender related studies integrate other dimensions of race, ethnicity and moral values along with societal, personal and professional persona of identity.

3.3. DISCOURSE LINKED IDENTITY

Barrett (2002), while delineating the concept, encapsulated the idea that ideologically speaking, the concept of identity and the way it is considered and constructed is closely linked to discourse. So, the role of language, discourse, societal patterns and

cultural implications are interlinked facets in identity negotiation (p. 28). Cultural, historical, psychological and even medical implications are integrated in recent concepts to diversify the concept of identity and its relevant areas of negotiation in the modern era of life. Moreover, the role of language and discourse is still paramount in constructing, diversifying and establishing various layers of identities in either the personal or the professional and societal arena. Besnier (2003) is of the notion that code-switching by either gender, along with diversities of speech patterns and various contexts, are the utilizing tools utilised to either marginalize or to oppress the opposite gender, especially while talking about the concept in the workplace (p. 296).

In the changing wave of identity negotiation, the role of gender, context and societal norms plays a pivotal role. Queer linguistics highlight the significance of various linguistic patterns and phenomena of language, the way it is utilized to construct diverse identities. In view of this, linguists' identity is not static; rather, it is fluid and multiple in nature, which can be identified and mainstreamed within the societal norms and cultural diversities within a given context (Baaker, 2008, p. 192). So, the nature and essence of identity and the way it is constructed through the utilization of language in a particular context and under various societal patterns is a complex facet.

Identity cannot be singled out as a mere solo facet; rather, it consists of multiple but interwoven senses of identities, especially when we talk about identities at the workplace, i.e. personal, professional and societal, along with gender identity. Roles and persona of each individual at his or her respective workplace are deemed significant in a collaborative and integrated concept in negotiating multiple identities at the workplace (Ramarajan, 2014). He has further institutionalized relevant perspectives in this regard, like "social psychological, micro-sociological, psychodynamic, and critical". In addition, he has highlighted a quad-level identification of identity at the workplace. One, personal identity; second, working identity; third, societal identity; and last but not least, nonwork identity. These are interconnected and inseparable as far as the concept of multiple identities at the workplace with respect to their negotiation is concerned (Hussain et al., 2025).

3.4. SOCIETAL NORMS

In addition, in each culture and speech community, there are certain limitations imposed either by culture, community or societal norms that determine the stereotypical behaviours and linguistic patterns of that speech community. These stereotypical norms are inherited by each generation and are represented through their linguistic formation and patterns of expression. Flay (1997) delineated the concept that "Generalized representations made a priori without empirical or rational foundation, bringing to judge individuals according to their categorical appearances and resistant to supply the information, stereotypes will serve as the basis for social stigmatisation processes, in other words the value judgments (p. 57). In addition, Dendane (2007) asserted that these notions are ingrained in our mind at a very tender age and remain with us in our unconscious mind forever.

It is but natural that in an environment where different genders come from multiple contexts and backgrounds, and a speech community, communication obstacles and hindrances may occur. It may lead to miscommunication and misinterpretation on the part of hearers as well as the listeners. Tannen (2001) asserted and concluded in her remarks that "communication between men and women can be like cross-cultural communication, prey to a clash of conversational styles" (p. 4). Such facets of interaction happen because women are more prone to intimacy and connective language while men are more anxious towards status and dominating linguistic tone. Maltz and Borker (1982) deemed it due to the interference of diverse and distinctive cultural dynamics and gender roles in a subsequent remark: "inabilities to understand each other are not any one person's fault, but rather the result of wrongly interpreting communication according to one's own sub-cultural rules" (p. 205). Another possible reason may be "minimal response" from either gender during the communicative process at the workplace.

4. CONCLUSION

Essentially, there are two dynamics in how males and females consume language to communicate and interact at the workplace, and the second is related to how they exert language as a tool and medium to influence and dominate others either professionally or in terms of gender and identity. Fasold (1990) in this regard is of the view that "when people use language, they do more than just try to get another person to understand (their) thoughts and feelings. At the same time, both people are using language in subtle ways to define their relationship to each other, to identify themselves as part of a social group" (p. 1). Apart from that, each individual, irrespective of gender and other dynamics, has his or her own style or way of linguistic patterns, which is deemed his or her own style and may consist of intonational patterns, turn-taking, and pauses. Alvesson (2010) has encapsulated the idea that the facet of identity and identification, especially in the workplace, is somewhat an idea that has been a source of keen inquisitiveness among the researchers of managerial studies for a long time.

Identity and identification are a matter of mutual working relations, as stated by Brown (2015), as "informed conversations across field and paradigmatic boundaries" (p. 23). There are two sorts of identity; one is inclusive, which consists of personal, interpersonal and somewhat collective in nature and essence, while the second one is static versus dynamic in nature. Wille & De Fruyt (2014) concluded that there is a direct and interwoven link between identity and the working environment, as it is an arena where workers spend more of their work. That can either motivate and groom their diverse and multiple identities, i.e.

personal, societal and professional or make them the other way around. A similar concept is quoted by Pearson (2012) in his study, along with other researchers who hold identity recognition as an innate and cognitive phenomenon, and hence people like to attach positive value and impression with their persona at either level of their proposed activities.

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