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Balancing Silence and Voice: A Sociolinguistic Exploration of Female Classroom Discourse in Rural Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Language is not just a way to communicate but also a vehicle for social and identity negotiation and power relations. Girls' participation in classroom interactions in rural Pakistan may occur in sociocultural contexts that entail modesty, obedience, and restricted verbal engagement. This study investigates girls' negotiation of silence and voice in secondary school classroom talk. Based on the work of Language Socialization Theory (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986), Symbolic Power Theory (Bourdieu, 1991), and Gender Performativity Theory (Butler, 1990), the study examines language choices as a way to negotiate identity and how silence can be a way of being active, rather than passive, in one's communication. This research is a mixed method in which questionnaires, semi-structured interviews and classroom discourse analysis are used. The methods of analyzing quantitative data are descriptive statistics and qualitative data are analyzed by thematic analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 1995). Results will show that women students use politeness, hedging, indirect speech and selective silence strategically to negotiate their way into the classroom without breaching cultural norms. These discourse practices are not necessarily indicative of weakness, but rather of agency that emerged within cultural norms and institutional power structures. The study is a contribution to sociolinguistics as it brings together three mutually supporting theoretical frameworks and empirical findings from the classrooms of rural Pakistan, which have not been well documented in the literature. The results will help teachers, administrators, and curriculum designers increase gender-sensitive communication and more fair ways of teaching in the classroom.

Keywords: Classroom Discourse, Female Students, Rural Pakistan, Language Socialization, Symbolic Power, Gender Performativity, Sociolinguistics

Introduction

Language is a powerful means by which people build identities, negotiate relationships with others, and interact in social life. In the classroom, conversations are not merely a vehicle for sharing ideas; they are an arena in which power, identity, and social norms converge. Students' confidence, involvement and learning outcomes in the classroom are shaped by classroom interactions and at the same time, they convey wider cultural values and beliefs on gender, power and communication (Fairclough, 1995).

Numerous studies in education have shown that opportunities for students to engage in classroom dialogue are not even. The role of voices within society is often defined by social norms about gender. Such patterns are especially important in societies where traditional gender roles have an



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important effect on educational experiences. In this sense, language isn't just a means for communicating, it's also a symbol of social stratification (Bourdieu, 1991).

The educational environment for girls in Pakistan is unique, as their educational opportunities have improved significantly over the last few decades. However, higher school attendance doesn't always mean equal participation in classroom talk. Girls still face the pressure of modesty, obeying men, and being silent and respectful, especially in rural areas. These expectations impact on classroom interaction and mold students' communicative behavior (Rahman, 2006).

One of the common misunderstandings in many rural Pakistani classrooms is that silence is taken as a sign of discipline, politeness, and respect towards teachers. Recent sociolinguistic studies, however, point to a different interpretation of silence, which is not necessarily the one of passivity. On the contrary, silence can serve as a communicative tool that can be used to negotiate authority without engaging in direct conflict (Jaworski, 1993). Such intricate meanings can be understood by analyzing discourse in its social and cultural context.

According to Language Socialization Theory, linguistic behaviour is learned through ongoing communication with family, teachers, peers and the broader community (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Conversations become internalized over time and children become familiar with culturally appropriate communication styles through their everyday interactions. Therefore, the values and expectations found in society are reflected in classroom conversation, as well as the practices of education. Therefore, women students are given communicated norms that align with feminine norms that are socially acceptable.

Another important consideration of classroom communication is given to Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) theory of Symbolic Power. Bourdieu argues that language is symbolic because there is a hierarchy of legitimacy for certain styles of speech. Schools tend to favour the dominant language and thus perpetuate social inequalities. A student's knowledge may be undermined by his or her inability to communicate in the way that is expected in the institution.

Judith Butler's (1990) Gender Performativity Theory also offers an explanation as to how gender is constantly created through social performances, not as a permanent biological feature. There are opportunities for the students to perform culturally acceptable gender identities in classroom interaction. These performances incorporate linguistic devices including hedging, indirectness, politeness and silence, providing a means for girls to negotiate with others what is considered appropriate behavior.

Research on classroom discourse has tended to be more narrowly focused on urban classrooms, or the West (Holmes, 1995; Tannen, 1994). While there are a number of studies that recognize gender disparity in Pakistan's education, few of them focus on the active engagement of rural female students with gender constraints through discourse practices. Furthermore, most current studies are qualitative or quantitative only, which restricts the understanding of the interaction in the classroom (Shah et al., 2018).

This study aims to overcome these limitations by combining the quantitative survey data with qualitative interview data and Critical Discourse Analysis. The methodological triangulation enriches the understanding of the ways in which female students comply with and challenge the sociocultural expectations at the same time. The research takes a different approach to understanding silence than absence of speech, but rather as a companion to voice as a communicative tool that can be used in negotiations for identities, authority and participation.

In conclusion, this study would benefit sociolinguistics because it would bring to light the intricate link between language, gender, education and culture in rural Pakistan. The results will be used to advance theory on classroom discourse and to inform teachers, curriculum developers and policymakers on how to design classrooms that are more inclusive and supportive to meaningful participation of girls.

Objectives of the Study

To explore how female students, adapt to and internalize sociocultural norms in classroom discourse through language socialization.



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To identify the linguistic strategies (e.g., indirectness, softened speech) female students employ to express agency within restrictive norms.

To investigate how these students, perform gender identity through classroom discourse, using the theory of performativity.

Research Questions

How do sociocultural norms influence the discourse practices of female students in rural Pakistani classrooms?

What linguistic strategies do female students use to express agency, and how does symbolic power explain these tactics?

In what ways do female students perform their gender identity through discourse in classroom settings?

Significance of the Study

The study is very significant in the field of sociolinguistic study because of the lack of such a study in the context of rural Pakistan (which is not widely addressed in international literature) and the research of female classroom discourse. Contrary to the literature that typically links silence to subservient relationships, the present study understands silence as a viable and effective communication method that reflects negotiation, self-construction and opposition within a culturally constructed space. Language Socialization Theory combined with Symbolic Power Theory and Gender Performativity Theory offers a complete analytical toolkit to explain the link between discourse, culture, identity and institutional power.

The results are also meaningful to the educational stakeholders. The results can help teachers increase their understanding of the impact of classroom communication patterns on student participation and inform curriculum developers and policymakers in creating curriculum policies and pedagogical approaches that are gender-friendly. Moreover, the study offers an empirical evidence that can be used as support for teacher training programs for promoting equitable classroom interaction and enhancing the educational opportunities and empowerment for rural female students in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Language is a basic social practice that others use in order to build an identity, establish relationships, and wield power. In educational contexts, the classroom as a discursive space is a key to the students' learning experience and socialization. Classroom interaction is shaped by larger society values and norms and by social power dynamics which impact student communication and participation. Classroom discourse is never neutral, but instead reinforces and sometimes questions social inequalities in place (Fairclough, 1995). Cultural norms about gender, obedience and respect have a significant impact on students' communication in the classroom among females in rural Pakistan. In this literature synthesis, the researcher looks at previous research pertaining to language socialization, symbolic power, gender performativity, classroom discourse, and language practices of female students.

Discuss the concepts of language socialization and classroom discourse. Discuss on the concepts of language socialization and classroom discourse.

Language Socialization Theory (LST) is a theory that suggests that people learn the language of a community in which they live through their daily social interactions with the community (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Children are not just learning the vocabulary and grammar, but they're also learning the values, norms, and acceptable ways of communicating in the culture. These norms are reinforced in the educational setting through classroom interaction.

Ochs (1996) theorizes that the learning of expectations in the school is accomplished through what he calls a "socialization process," which involves the encouragement of specific styles of speech and the discouragement of others. Teachers' questioning techniques, feedback patterns, and classroom management strategies impact students' participation. Thus, classroom talk plays an important role in providing students with the knowledge and culturally appropriate behavior.



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Research on the socialization of girls in South Asian schools suggests that they are generally expected to be polite, modest, deferential and noddy when interacting with teachers and classmates in classrooms (Rahman, 2006). Such expectations can reduce the number of students who participate regardless of their academic qualifications. In his work, Holmes (1995) suggests that the issue of linguistic politeness is often differently interpreted by gender and that for women there is an expectation to be more indirect and cooperative in their communication than for males.

Likewise, Tannen (1994) identifies two types of talk: rapport talk, which is one that is used to keep relationships alive, and report talk, which is used to convey information and authority. While this is a distinction that's been discussed, it does give an idea of how gendered communication patterns emerge in educational contexts.

Language socialisation in rural Pakistan is not limited to the school but also occurs in the family and community. Expectations for proper feminine conduct are reinforced by parents, teachers, religious leaders and peers. Thus, girls are taught to be careful with their words, to listen, and to communicate indirectly. These learned behaviors always shape classroom participation and discourse practices.

A useful framework to examine inequalities in classroom communication is Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) theory of symbolic power. Language is symbolic capital because, Bourdieu believes, some linguistic varieties are more prestigious and legitimate than others. Schools tend to be dominantly oriented toward the dominant language and to discount other patterns of communication.

In classrooms, teachers have institutional authority that influences who has their voice heard. Students who speak with prestigious linguistic styles, with confidence, often have more opportunities for participation, while students who speak less may go without being noticed despite their valuable ideas (Bourdieu, 1991).

According to Rahman (2006), hierarchy of language is especially pronounced in Pakistani schools where English skill is linked to academic achievement and urban accents and assertive modes of communication are linked to academic competence. Rural female students might thus face several disadvantages, as they have more than one identity that is seen as subversive within the mainstream of the institutions.

But Baxter (2003) disputes deficit views by saying that indirectness and politeness do not necessarily mean weakness. Rather, these forms of language use can be viewed as sophisticated strategies which are used to negotiate authority and keep to social harmony.

Likewise, Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) stress that speakers actively shape their identities in the discursive process and often challenge dominant ideologies in subtle ways with their linguistic choices. They offer a perspective that classroom quietness and vicarious involvement can be considered a form of agency, not silence.

The theory of gender performativity by Judith Butler (1990) changed the way gender is understood; it stated that gender is continually created through enacted social practices and is not a fixed biological reality. People enact femininity and masculinity as part of their daily activities, their words, their dress, their gestures and how they interact with each other.

In classroom talk, girls are constantly engaging with the acceptable ways of being a girl. Hedging, hesitation, politeness markers, indirect requests, and selective silence are part of the linguistic repertoire, which are now elements of a woman's or man's performance of gender (Butler, 1990).

Begum et al., (2010) note that in South Asian societies, women often have to navigate school-related goals and culture-related priorities, such as modesty and respect. Thus, female students learn how to communicate in order to engage with the classroom without being confrontational or disrespectful.

Modern sociolinguists contend that the performances are not indicative of low status. Instead, they exemplify the complicated manner in which people come to terms with a range of identities in confined social contexts (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013).

This study uses Butler's approach to investigate the gender identity that is formed with the help of classroom discourse, by the rural Pakistani girls, as they negotiate with institutional authority and



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community expectations.

Numerous studies have consistently shown that there are gender differences in classroom participation in various educational settings. Aguillon et al. (2020) found that in active-learning classrooms, students are typically male dominating the discussion. This is similar to what has been documented in other developing nations where there are cultural barriers that hinder women's oral engagement.

According to Pakistani studies, girls have low participation rates in answering questions, don't interrupt teachers, and use polite language as compared to boys (Jumani et al., 2025). Female classroom participation is significantly reduced due to communication anxiety, fear of negative evaluation and cultural expectations (Ismail et al., 2025).

Additionally, textbooks also play a role in gender socialization as they depict women in passive roles in the domestic sphere and men in leadership roles (Islam & Asadullah, 2018; Suchana, 2024). These representations are affirmations of the traditional gender ideology that is manifested in classroom interactions and students' notions of appropriate conduct.

But, recent studies have stated that female students are not passive recipients of these expectations. Rather, strategic ways of negotiating participation by hedging, indirectness, cooperative response, and selective silence, are engaged in by learners (Saleem & Khan, 2025; Mamoun & Nfissi, 2023).

There has been growing interest in classroom discourse, but there are still many gaps in the existing literature. Mostly, the studies have been done in urban educational institutions, so that the rural Pakistan classrooms have been under explored (Shah et al., 2018). Secondly, previous studies have been mostly qualitative interviews or quantitative surveys, which fails to provide a thorough understanding of classroom interaction. Third, few studies combine a conceptual analysis of Language Socialization Theory, Symbolic Power Theory and Gender Performativity Theory in one analytical framework.

In addition, previous research tends to see women's silence as a sign of submission instead of as communication in its own right. There has been relatively little work to explore the ways in which silence is an active discourse strategy that is used by female students in negotiating identity, authority and participation. The aim of this study is to fill this gap by adopting the mixed methods research design of survey, interview and Critical Discourse Analysis to explore the female classroom discourse in rural Pakistan.

The conceptual framework combines three mutually complementary theories. Language Socialization Theory provides an explanation for the acquisition of culturally appropriate communication practices by female students as they interact with teachers, families and peers (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). In the Symbolic Power Theory (Bourdieu, 1991), the school prioritizes some linguistic practices and demotes others. Gender Performativity Theory (1990) shows how students continuously perform femininity by repeating the discourses. These theories can be used together to understand the role of silence and voice in complex ways as they help rural female students to struggle for participation, identity, and power within the classroom.

Research Methodology and Procedure

The method used in the investigation of the classroom discourse of female students in rural Pakistan. It elaborates the research design, research setting, population, sample, sampling technique, research instruments, pilot study, validity and reliability, data collection technique, data analysis technique, ethical consideration, and limitation of the study. A mixed-methods research design was chosen as it was the most suitable method for the study to examine measurable patterns of classroom discourse, as well as the lived experiences of participants (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The use of both quantitative and qualitative methods can help to capture the full picture of how female students are negotiating the silence and voice within sociocultural spaces.

Research Design

This study was conducted using a convergent mixed method research design that is a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. A mixed-methods research approach can



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be used to bring together positive numerical analysis and detailed interpretation of qualitative data (Creswell, 2014).

The quantitative part was a structured questionnaire for female students to assess the frequency of the linguistic behaviors, participation in classroom activities, and students' perceptions of communication. The qualitative part involved semi-structured interviews and discourse analysis of the classroom, which enabled them to express their experiences in more depth.

Using methodological triangulation increased the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings by comparing information obtained from multiple sources (Denzin, 1978).

Research Setting

The study was carried out in two Government secondary schools in Nankana Sahib and Warburton, Punjab, Pakistan. These schools were chosen due to their rural setting where traditional sociocultural values are still present in the classroom in relation to the participation of female students.

The schools are affiliated with the Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board and cater to the students of primarily agricultural families. Instructional languages are English and Urdu and outside the classroom there is a high level of use of Punjabi. These multilingual situations can serve as the proper background to discuss classroom discourse and gendered communication.

Population of the Study

The target population were female students in Grades 9 and 10 of government secondary schools in rural Punjab. These grades were chosen because adolescence is a period of heightened visibility of gender identity, communication and norms (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013).

Teachers in the selected schools were another category of study population as they have an important influence on students' participation opportunities in the classroom.

Sample and Sampling Technique

50 female students were involved in the questionnaire survey. Of the 15 students, who participate in the classroom, 15 were also purposefully selected for a semi-structured interview for differences in their classroom participation, confidence, and communication style.

In addition, 10 teachers were interviewed for additional insights on classroom interactions and the role of girls.

Students were selected as participants using convenience sampling due to accessibility and administrative permission. The interview participants were then selected using purposive sampling to make sure for the representation of different linguistic experiences (Patton, 2015).

Table 3.1 Sample Distribution

Participants	Number
Female Students (Questionnaire)	50
Female Students (Interviews)	15
Teachers	10
Total Participants	75

Research Instruments

Three research instruments were used.

Structured Questionnaire

For collecting the quantitative data on classroom participation and discourse practices a bilingual questionnaire (English and Urdu) was designed. The questionnaire has been divided into two sections:



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Demographic information

Twenty Likert scale items that assess classroom involvement, politeness tactics, hedging, indirectness, confidence and silence.

Responses were made on a five-point Likert scale, strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1).

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to give their input in their own voice. Interview questions explored:

Attitudes towards classroom involvement.

There are reasons for not speaking up. There are reasons why people don't talk.

Teacher expectations

How culture affects communication

Self-confidence and sense of identity

All interviews were audio recorded with informed consent, and took about 25-30 minutes.

Classroom Discourse Analysis

The Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) on Classroom interaction based on Fairclough's (1995) three dimensional model was taken. Classroom talk was analysed in terms of:

Turn-taking

Interruptions

Politeness markers

Hedging

Teacher questioning

Student responses

Power relations

The way people listen and respond. Listening and response habits.

This qualitative analysis enabled the understanding of the relationship between discourse and institutional authority and gendered expectations.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was carried out at another government secondary school with 10 female students before the main data were collected. The pilot study assessed the validity, relevance and reliability of the questionnaire.

Some of the questions were reported as being "too complex" and in need of rewording. Items were modified, based on feedback from the participants, with the aim of enhancing content validity and readability.

The pilot study also enabled the average amount of time to be estimated, about 20 minutes.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity was determined by expert opinion of the research supervisor and two sociolinguistics experts. They analyzed if the questionnaire items were appropriate for the research problem and theory.

The internal consistency of the instrument was evaluated by Cronbach's alpha which is one of the most common internal consistency measures (Cronbach, 1951).

Table 3.2 Reliability Statistics

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Classroom Participation Scale	.86
Politeness Strategies Scale	.84

Overall Questionnaire .87

Field (2018) suggests that if Cronbach's Alpha is 0.70 or greater then this is satisfactory reliability. Thus, the internal consistency of the questionnaire was acceptable.



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Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, permission was granted by school principals. The purpose of the study, confidentiality, and voluntary participation were explained to the participants.

Questionnaires were given in normal school hours. The respondents for the interviews were chosen following analysis of responses to the questionnaire.

Interviews were held in Urdu so as to make the participants feel comfortable to express themselves. Interviews were then translated into English for analysis.

The classroom observations and audio-recordings were conducted for four weeks, following the consent of teachers and school administration.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

Data were entered in IBM SPSS Version 29.

The following statistical procedures were used:

Frequencies

Percentages

Means

Standard Deviations

Chi-square tests

Descriptive data were used to summarize participation patterns and chi-square tests were used to explore relationships between communication strategies and classroom variables.

Qualitative Analysis

Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse the interview transcripts in six steps:

Familiarization with data

Initial coding

Theme generation

Theme review

Theme definition

Report writing

Moreover, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1995) was used to analyze the power, gender and identity construction within the language.

Lastly, quantitative and qualitative results were triangulated to interpret the data comprehensively.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to BERA's ethical guidelines for educational study (2018).

Students, teachers and school administration provided informed consent for participation and data collection was entirely voluntary. The purpose of the study was explained, the right to withdraw at any time was mentioned, and all responses were assured of being kept confidential.

In order to ensure the anonymity of participants, their names have been changed to pseudonyms in the interview quotes and research reports. Audio recordings and questionnaires were securely stored and only accessible by the researcher. The study also provided that no participant felt uncomfortable or disadvantaged in any psychological or academic way as a result of participating in the study.

Limitation of the study

The limitations of the study are discussed. The limitations of the study are discussed.

While the study offers rich information about female classroom discourse, there are a few limitations to be noted. The first limitation is that the results presented here are from two secondary schools in the government sector in rural Punjab, precluding wider generalizability to other settings. Secondly, the number of respondents is relatively small, which may not constitute a representative sample of all the rural female students of Pakistan. Third, classroom observations



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were made over a restricted timeframe, so as to not necessarily reflect all the changes in communication patterns. Last but not least, the participants might have responded in an “socially desirable” way to the interview questions even with the assurance of anonymity.

Results and Findings

The results of the quantitative and qualitative data gathered from the female students and teachers from Rural Secondary schools of Nankana Sahib and Warburton are presented in this chapter. The quantitative data were analysed using SPSS Version 29 and the qualitative interview data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) framework developed by Fairclough (1995). The results are reported in terms of the research goals and the research questions.

Demographic Profile of Participants provides a detailed description of the people who took part in the study.

The demographic distribution of participants (N = 50) is presented in Table 4.1.

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Grade	9th	24	48%
	10th	26	52%
Age	14–15 Years	21	42%
	16–18 Years	29	58%

Interpretation

It revealed that there were 50 female students in the sample with slightly more students in Grade 10 (52%) compared to Grade 9 (48%). The majority of participants (58%) were aged between 16 and 18, implying they had had exposure to various years of secondary school and classroom experience.

Classroom Participation

Students entered data on how often they participated in class. Students recorded their frequency of participation in class.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Always	8	16%
Often	15	30%
Sometimes	18	36%
Rarely	7	14%
Never	2	4%

Interpretation

The majority of students (36%) said that they sometimes engaged in class conversations, and 16% said that they always engaged in class conversations. The above results indicate that female students have some interaction in the classroom, but they tend to participate in a limited way and selectively.

Politeness Strategies – The use of Politeness Strategies

Table 4.3 Use of Politeness Markers

Strategy	Mean	SD
Polite requests	4.52	.61
Honorific expressions	4.40	.66
Indirect responses	4.18	.73
Hedging	3.98	.70



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Interpretation

The results revealed a high level of politeness markers in the use of them. The highest mean score was for polite requests ($M = 4.52$) and then honorific expressions. The results corroborate Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of Politeness Strategies to preserve social harmony and respect.

The influence of sociocultural norms.

The table below illustrates the impact of cultural beliefs.

Statement	Mean
Girls should speak politely	4.70
Girls should avoid arguing	4.44
Silence shows respect	4.36
Speaking frequently is inappropriate	3.82

Interpretation

The participants strongly agreed that a cultural expectation has influence on their classroom communication. Language socialization (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986) was reflected in the wish for respectful silence and polite speech.

Teacher Encouragement

Table 4.5 shows the teacher's involvement and encouragement. The teacher's involvement and encouragement are shown in Table 4.5.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	14	28%
Agree	20	40%
Neutral	9	18%
Disagree	5	10%
Strongly Disagree	2	4%

Interpretation

Almost 68% of the respondents felt that teachers fostered participation in the class. But interviews showed that many students were still hesitant due to the fear of making mistakes and cultural expectations.

Chi-Square Test

Table 4.6 Association between Grade and Classroom Participation

Test	Value	df	p-value
Chi-Square	9.34	4	.025

Interpretation

Based on the Chi-Square test, there was a significant correlation between grade and classroom participation ($\chi^2 = 9.34$, $p < .05$). Students of Grade 10 showed more engagement in class than those from Grade 9, indicating increased confidence with education.

Themes Identified in the Interviews

Four themes emerged based on thematic analysis:

Silence as a Sign of Respect

Indirect Responses as a Means of Power

Teachers' Expectations

Performance of Gender Identity



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All participants agreed that silence is often seen as a sign of respect, not as ignorance. Some students admitted that they prefer indirect responses to show respect for the teacher.

Results

It can be stated that sociocultural conventions considerably impact female students' classroom communication. All participants claimed that they were taught by their parents and teachers that respectful girls are supposed not to talk too much during lessons.

The girls used markers of politeness like "please" and respectful ways to address their teachers. The language use was representative of the culture's expectations for femininity.

Hedges like "I think," "maybe," and "perhaps" were employed in answers to teachers' questions. This use limited the threat of being disagreeable.

Selective silence proved to be one of the communication strategies. The interviewees stated that the practice helped avoid embarrassment and retain respect toward teachers.

Data from interviews suggested that the teachers' support affected classroom participation. Supportive teachers contributed to the creation of environment where girls could freely express their opinions.

Critical Discourse Analysis showed inequality of power in classroom communication. Teachers were in control of turns, topics, and evaluation of responses.

Discourse practices of language socialization had a significant effect on the process of communication in class. Expectations concerning appropriate speech behavior of females were established at home and school.

The study discovered that symbolic power was influential for classroom discourse. Speech and fluency in English were considered prestigious linguistic practices while indirect communication had little value.

Gender was constantly performed by means of discourse practices of politeness, hesitation, indirectness, and respectful silence. These results confirm the idea of gender performativity according to Butler (1990).

In general, the findings reveal that silence cannot be understood in terms of passivity only because silence served as an active strategy of communication for female students.

Discussion

The findings of this study will be discussed in light of the research questions, research objectives, theoretical frame work, and literature review on this topic. This chapter will follow the same pattern of the theme generated by the analysis of the data. The analysis of the findings will be done on the basis of theoretical perspectives of Language Socialization Theory (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986), Symbolic Power Theory (Bourdieu, 1991), and Gender Performativity Theory (Butler, 1990).

It can be seen from the results obtained that sociocultural norms play an important role in shaping the classroom communication of the female students. In particular, almost all the participants said that they were taught since childhood to communicate politely, not to argue unnecessarily, and be respectful towards teachers and elders. As a result, classroom communication reflected these deeply entrenched sociocultural norms.

These results support well the main assumptions of Language Socialization Theory according to which people learn the language at the same time with culture through everyday interactions with their families, teachers, and community members (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986). Thus, communication patterns of the participants were not developed independently, but socially constructed during their interaction with community members. Similar results have been obtained by Holmes (1995), who suggested that gender plays an important role in shaping conversation styles because societies teach boys and girls different communicative norms.

The results of the study also correlate with the work of Rahman (2006) who states that Pakistani educational institutions maintain traditional gender roles and reward polite and obedient behaviors of girls. In addition, Ismail et al. (2025) found that female students may experience communication anxiety because of the fear of violation .

It was discovered that participants used various linguistic strategies that included hedging,



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indirect speech, politeness devices, respectful addresses, and selective silence. These strategies allowed the students to express themselves and give their opinion without risking the possibility of seeming impolite and disrespecting teachers.

According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness, speakers use politeness strategies in order to protect their "face" as well as the faces of other people. Frequent usage of such constructions as I think, maybe and perhaps shows that students try to maintain harmony in the classroom atmosphere and participate in discussion at the same time.

Moreover, these results are consistent with the idea of symbolic power stated by Bourdieu (1991). In educational institutions, dominant means of communication are related to such qualities as confidence, authority, and knowledge. Girls from the rural area of Pakistan managed to participate in discussions negotiating inequality of power using indirect language.

In addition, according to Baxter (2003), the idea of indirect speech cannot be treated as weak but sophisticated communicative strategy. The current study proves this statement showing that girls from rural Pakistan negotiate identity and authority using sophisticated linguistic strategies.

The results bear strong resemblance to other international and Pakistani studies on classroom discourse. Aguillon et al. (2020) stated that classroom participation tends to favor males even in active-learning classrooms. Likewise, Jumani et al. (2025) noted that female students tend to become invisible in classroom interactions due to teachers unconsciously giving more chance to speak to males.

Moreover, the results are also consistent with those of Mamnoun and Nfissi (2023) who found that classroom interaction serves as a manifestation of gender disparities that exist in the wider community. In the current study, participants repeatedly noted that classroom participation depends on teachers' expectations as well as on the societal standards.

Suchana (2024) and Islam and Asadullah (2018) also confirmed that gender stereotypes can be reinforced through textbooks. Such representation may have an indirect impact on classroom communication as it promotes passive identity of females. Indeed, educational experience goes beyond curriculum material and involves everyday communication.

Conclusion

This study examined how female students negotiate between silence and voice in classroom discourse in rural Pakistani secondary schools. Through a mixed-method research design, the study examined how sociocultural norms, linguistic practices, and gender identity affect classroom participation. The results of this study reveal that classroom discourse is affected by culturally deep-rooted values of femininity, respect, and authority. Female students make use of politeness strategies, hedging, indirect speech, and selective silence in order to participate in classroom discourse and behave in socially acceptable ways.

It can be said from this study that silence must not only be understood as an absence of participation but a communicative resource used by students to negotiate power relations, identity, and social interactions. The theoretical framework of this study – Language Socialization Theory, Symbolic Power Theory, and Gender Performativity Theory – helps us understand how discourse represents larger social systems while at the same time giving opportunities for agency.

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