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A Study of Subjectivity in the Verbal Communication of University Teachers

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Abstract

Subjectivity is the attribute of being predisposed or guided by personal sentiments, tastes, or opinions. Oral communication is significant in communicating ideas, knowledge, and insights and also promotes active learning and critical thinking, especially in institutions of learning. Nevertheless, it is noted that the oral communication of individuals is remarkably subjective, which is a sign of social degradation. Plenty of research has been done to find Subjectivity in written student discourse, but the field of finding Subjectivity in oral discourse among university teachers is an uncharted territory. Thus, drawing upon Allan Mckee's textual analysis model within the larger canopy of Emile Benveniste's theory of Subjectivity, the present study seeks to explore Subjectivity in the oral discourse of university teachers qualitatively. The results indicate the prevalence of subjectivity in verbal communication of university teacher. Self-referring

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pronouns, emotive language, and generalizations lacking scientific evidence were all frequently employed by participants. In addition, a great majority of the wording was imprecise and depended on anecdotal evidence and abstract terms. In practical terms, these findings show the necessity of systematic oral communication education in university and pedagogy that places a high value on developing objective discourse skills, criticalness, and rhetorical consciousness. Through examining how pedagogical interventions influence the establishment of subjectivity in teachers' speech over time and across disciplinary contexts, future research can proceed from here.

Keywords: Subjectivity, Verbal Communication, Emotive Language, University, Teachers' Discourse.

Introduction

Speaking is among the most significant aspects employed in an academic environment to exchange ideas, improving the thinking process as well as the entire learning process. It is against this background that this study posits that teachers are calculative social actors in shaping the intellectual climate in academic institutions depending on their engagement with their students. Therefore, the aforementioned form of interaction, e.g., verbal conversation between teachers at a university level, has been evolving, with fewer scholars giving attention to subjective elements of the conversation. Bias renders message content more subjective, and this in turn changes the transmission and reception of the message. Although the issue of Subjectivity in a student's written assignment has been treated in numerous previous studies, the study has accorded Subjectivity in the context of verbal communication between students and

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instructors a certain focus, which has bridged an essential research gap. Hence, this study seeks to bridge the aforementioned gap by concentrating on the subjectivity of teachers' language use at the university level by determining the linguistic signs that reflect their bias, feelings, and attitudes in the communication process. This chapter covers an introduction to the study with the first heading background, followed by the problem statement, research aims, and objectives, then research questions, the significance and lastly, the limitations.

Verbal communication is employed in academic settings for sharing ideas, opinions, and information. Verbal communication can allow professors to research, discuss, and analyze complicated issues, topics, and concepts in order to simplify them and present them as easy to comprehend in the classroom. This is important to help facilitate understanding, student engagement, and critical thinking. It has been demonstrated that verbal communication plays a significant role in cognitive growth, allowing people to absorb information through conversation and social engagement (Vygotsky, 1978). Therefore, classroom teachers' oral communication has a purpose that goes far beyond the transmission of information since it models the activities and skills involved with critical thinking, reason giving, and problem-solving—all functions essential for students' acquisition of future success (Mercer & Littleton, 2007).

Problem statement

It has been observed that oral discourse frequently exhibits a high degree of Subjectivity, which makes it difficult to understand as a positive indicator of societal composition. Instilling a scientific mindset in society is largely the responsibility of academic institutions. Despite this, not much research has been

done on subjectivity in teacher discourse. Thus, the aim of the current study is to investigate subjectivity in university teachers' oral discourse.

Aim of the study

The aim of the study is to investigate subjectivity in university-level instructors' verbal communication.

Research Gap

While a lot of research has been done on the subjectivity of students' written language use, not as much has been done on the subjectivity of university teachers' spoken language use. Prior studies have primarily examined written communication, leaving out other elements that reveal a teacher's bias and feelings toward the student, such as body language, vocal intonation, and verbal delivery. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to determine and investigate the subjective language that university-level educators use when speaking.

Research Objectives

- To investigate the various kinds of pronoun that university-level instructors employ in their spoken discourse.
- To investigate the use of emotive language in university-level teachers' spoken discourse

Research Questions

1. What kinds of pronouns are employed in university-level teachers' spoken discourse?
2. How often do university-level teachers use emotive language in their spoken discourse?

Significance of the Study

Depending on the needs identified in the study's findings, training sessions can be planned for various subject areas. Teachers can be the target of awareness campaigns on various social media platforms, with a focus on objective perspectives in all the various discursive domains in light of the findings. Given the results, more research can be done to examine the social factors underlying the located subjectivity.

Literature Review

The French linguist Emile Benveniste sent it as a given truth in human language in his landmark work *Problems in General Linguistics* (1971), contending that language is intrinsically subjective due to its close connection to the speaker's location and identity. Every speaking act, he underlined, establishes the speaker's "I," placing her or herself as the subject of what is spoken. According to Benveniste, Subjectivity in language is an essential component of linguistic interchange rather than only an incidental feature. He claimed that pronouns, such as "I" and "you," are mechanical devices and function as a border between the interviewee and the listener and references to their presence. This is consistent with the viewpoint that language is a tool that cannot be utilised in a vacuum since it provides a wealth of information about the personal generating the written or spoken word.

According to Benveniste's theory, Subjectivity is also ingrained in language structure; for instance, he claimed that verbs, tenses, and modalities usually have subjective meanings because they convey the speaker's attitude, level of certainty, or uncertainty about the message teacher's constant use of "I believe"

or "in my opinion" can unintentionally introduce a subjective element into their explanation.

Methodology

1. Research Design

The research design was qualitative since the participants needed to explain how they understand adversity in these situations. It aimed to identify the typifications of university teachers' subjectivity in oral discourse. Qualitative research was suitable for this study because it allowed for considering subjective aspects of language use that might not be revealed through quantitative data. In this study, the author focused on closely reading the language used in interviews during which teachers shared their thoughts, feelings, and opinions.

2. Theoretical Framework

The analysis is based on Emile Benveniste's theory of Subjectivity, a subjective, one-of-a-kind view of language. Benveniste argues that the character of Subjectivity — when it is nothing but a linguistic phenomenon located somewhere between pronouns and speech acts, in the asymmetries of how one talks about oneself and others — is coextensive with language itself. The analysis focused on these elements.

3. Population and Sample Size

This study's population consisted of university teachers from different departments of Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad, Pakistan. The university had various fields of study, so it was a rich ground for investigating the subjectivity of academia across disciplines.

4. Sampling Techniques

A simple random sampling technique was used to ensure a representative population sample. This approach provided each teacher in the population an equal selection opportunity, avoiding any bias of a specific department or teacher attribute in the sampled data. Data was collected using a random sampling method that also reduced selection bias and increased the representativeness and **Subjectivity** of the data.

5. Data Collection Methods

In this study, the primary data collection method was in-depth interviews. Interviews were chosen as the data collection method because they allowed teachers to convey their opinions and experiences in their own words. Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were designed to encourage teachers to reflect on their verbal communication in the academic context.

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Analysis

- **1st Interview**

During this interview, the interviewee explores multiple aspects of Pakistani women's rights evolution, focusing on cultural and religious influences

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alongside educational factors and legislative performance. This analysis examined the linguistic elements presented in the interview through intertextual references and ideological positions using multiple intertextual terms, including negative/positive appreciation, xenoglossia, nominalization, and other critical devices.

Consensual Pronouns, Opinion invoking – The phrase '**Give me one educated woman**' is an example of meaning shared by using consensual pronouns, which engage the audience in the speaker's opinion that educated women can transform societies. This type of pronoun helps generate references that make the audience members feel they have something in common.

First-Person Singular Pronoun ("I") Thus, the usage of "I" demonstrates a relatively high tendency to subjectivity. The interviewee seems to state his opinions, factually identifying themselves as a nominee, for instance, '**In my opinion, it is a positive trend.**' This framing implies that the interviewee provides their point of view on some of the women's progress in gaining their rights. **First-Person Plural Pronoun ("We")**: Here, the use of the first-person plural pronoun '**we**' gives the utterance a societal dimension. For instance, '**We have oppressed women in the name of religion.**' This social standpoint changes the entire society's focus, implying that everyone is involved in what is being said in some way, directly or indirectly. **Second-Person Pronoun ("You")** The interviewee does not use personal pronouns very often; however, he occasionally employs the second person, thus making the audience the direct addressee of the statement, such as '**But men are not ready for all these things.**' It helps the audience put themselves in the shoes of the person under discussion; hence, the interview is subjective.

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Emotive language is used to produce a response from the audience and to show how the interviewee feels about the particular issue under discussion.

Sweeping statements oversimplify complex problems, and several sweeping statements in the interview present the interviewee's opinions on women's rights and social justice.

The following research questions are pertinent to this analysis of the verbal discourse of university-level teachers. As an answer to the first question, which concerns the types of pronouns used in the verbal discourse of university-level teachers, the interviewee uses the first person singular **"I"** to state personal opinions and the first person plural **"We"** to report about the actions of the presented society. This makes the subjectivity of the discourse higher here because it covers the personal and society at large. Regarding question 2 about the use of emotive language, the interviewee employs emotive words like **'suppress,' 'inequalities,'** and **'patriarchal structure.'** Such words express people's negative and critical attitude toward the existing culture, demonstrating the interviewee's emotions.

As the current analysis evidences, the interviewee uses various linguistic features to express personal opinions and attitudes towards women's rights in Pakistan, and overall, the discursively developed highly subjective text is used. Regarding the types of pronouns in the verbal discourse of the interviewee, they address question 1 by using a first-person singular pronoun (**"I"**) to voice their personal opinions, such as when they say, **"I think it's a positive trajectory."** The use of the personal pronoun implies that the interviewee expresses their subjective viewpoint. Since the first person plural pronoun **'we'** is used widely, such as in **"we have tried to suppress women in the name of religious values."**

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Despite the effort of the interviewee to use the personal pronoun I and we to refer the society as a whole to purportedly bring in the aspect of collective responsibility or participation in the matter at hand, the structure of the sentences beginning with personal pronouns are a linguistic evidence of the interviewee for placing themselves and their opinion at the priority whereby their personal self-colors the comment through their subjective self-perception.

In answer to the second question concerning the uses of emotive language, the interviewee actively uses strong words like '**suppress**,' '**inequalities**,' and '**patriarchal structure**' to express displeasure as well as frustration with existing structural systems. That is why the use of such terms as '**suppress**' seems to reflect the injustice or oppression of women and '**inequalities**' highlights the existence of the various forms of discrimination faced by women. The sexist implication of the word "**structure**" points to the fact that this is a systematic patriarchy. Such words bring out the interviewee's feelings, positioning the interview not merely as research but as a survey anchored on the respondent's emotions against social injustice.

Therefore, the interviewee employs personal pronouns, emotive language, sweeping generalizations, and a combination of concrete and abstract concepts, resulting in high subjectivity in the observed discourse. This subjectivity is an outspoken passion for supporting women's rights. Thus, the interview is not only a platform to address gender issues in Pakistan but also a call for change in social and political circumstances. The personal beliefs and opinions reflected in the interview gradually transformed the conversation into a call for change in Pakistani society.

- **2nd Interview**

During the interview, the interviewee gives his perception of the transformation of women's rights in Pakistan, the difficulties a woman encounters, culture and religion, and education. I will consider subjectivity, which means analyzing the types of pronouns used, affective expressions, the presence of hasty generalizations, levels of concreteness, and the degree of subjectivity manifested by the language chosen.

The following research questions have been addressed in this analysis concerning the university-level teachers' verbal discourse: **According to Question 1**, other kinds of pronouns are described, first-person singular (**"I"**), first-person plural (**"we"**) as well as second-person (**"you"**) which reflect the speaker's attitude and involve the listener to the conversation. As for question 2, emphatic vocabulary is analyzed, such as **"suppress"** and **"too much hype,"** which convey passion and refer to the severity of social problems.

Thus, this study demonstrates that the interviewee employs the following subjective lexis: personal pronouns, emotive words, superordinated statements, and the combination of nominalization and abstraction to reveal her/her point of view on women's rights in Pakistan. Using the first singular pronoun, 'I,' and the second person plural, 'we,' helps the interviewee express a personal opinion and simultaneously show the public views. The words chosen here, such as 'suppress,' 'inequalities,' and 'patriarchal structure,' reveal the author's emotions and concerns and turn the interview into a research activity and a form of protest against social inequality.

It is quite possible to point out the highly subjective nature of the interview, so the person under discussion shares her and his discretionary

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opinions and attitudes concerning gender issues, culture, religion, and education. This structuring of the conversation takes the interview beyond the mere transfer of information into a viewpoint toward change in society. In sum, the interview is not only an advocacy for gender bias but also a political appeal to promote social justice in Pakistan, where the interviewee showed her immense concern for women's rights.

- **3rd interview**

This interview is mainly about the advancement of women in Pakistan and various issues women face when violating their rights in some areas of Pakistan, particularly Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. As regards the issues of women's rights, culture, and religion, specific Pashtun culture and the effects of the Islamization of Zia-ul-Haq are explored in the interview. The interviewee also talks about the advancements in education with special reference to women's rights, but laws that aim at poverty are not supported. In the entire interview, the interviewee makes liberal use of personal anecdotes to elaborate on the issues about the rights of women in Pakistan

First-Person Singular Pronoun (“I”): The interviewee uses the first person pronoun to share opinion and information ‘Personally’ and ‘to the best of my understanding’. This type of personal pronoun pertains to a single and particular egocentric perspective. In the use of the first-person plural pronoun (“We”), more complications are exhibited. In statements that affirm that the community is faced with many problems, including; “we are confronted by a lot of problems,” here is an implication that those ailments affect the society. Though the interviewee tries to mask their subjectivity, it is shown by the fact that “we” remains the subject of

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the sentence. The speaker continues to assert their opinion while masking it with the use of the plural personal pronoun instead of the singular personal pronoun. In place of the sentence spoken by the interviewee,

Intense emotions in the Interview “Face a lot of problems” This creates an overall negative connotation to overseas stress on various female problems and issues, including safety or lack of education. “Lack of awareness” uses the connotation of rebellion and disappointment due to insufficient knowledge of women’s rights and equality. “Security issues” and “insecurity” create the feeling of danger and form the build-up of protection as a worrying problem for women. Frequency of Sweeping Statements: “Education can improve women’s rights.” This indicates that a problem exists in society, and education can solve it in a simplified way because it eradicates the actual problem. “There are many problems.” This is just a list of some challenges a woman in life may encounter. It is rather general and does not elaborate on exploring each problem. Specificity of the Interview some of the language used in the communication includes specific terms like security issues and lack of education, which explain the challenges facing women in some parts of the world. Approximation of the Idea: Some other language involves slogans like implementing laws for women’s rights. These are generalized and do not prompt one to take immediate and tangible action for example. The interview was more subjective when compared to the subjectivity level in all the discourse sections. The interviewee uses first person, positive adjectives, and a personal attitude to support the idea of women in Pakistan. It is impossible not to mention that cultural and regional colours influenced the two narratives and their attitudes to the matter to state that the perceived point of view in favour of social change through the process of receiving knowledge is

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undoubtedly subjective. It is not just how Hymes formulated his ideas and knowledge but how he raised an idea or hypothesis that can be impartially written in a piece of literature; the very core of the discourse is a plea.

This aspect can be seen from the actual interview, in which the interviewee assumes high levels of subjection and uses numbers of I and emotive language. Despite employing generalizations and ambiguous terms that make the argument easier to hear, the speaker's concentration on some concrete facets of Pakistani reality (security and education) offers concrete arguments against women's rights in Pakistan. This interview focuses on women's rights and appeals to social justice and change.

Findings

1. International Relations

To the first research question, the same issue was seen in the International Relations department. In group discussions, the interviewee presented their opinions on gender, using "I" and similar pronouns. An interviewee told us, "I believe there is a global problem of gender inequality," showing their energetic work in assessing political processes everywhere and handling gender equality matters. However, use of first person plural pronoun "we" was observed in the discourse of these teachers. They presented their own opinions as facts while attempting to hide them behind stances or attitudes of the society by using first person plural pronouns.

In response to research question number two, highly emotional language and terms such as 'inequality,' 'discrimination,' and 'oppression,' among others, were used to create an emotional appeal. These words focus more on the need to

acknowledge gender injustice worldwide. These terms have been chosen to appeal to the audience's emotions, make them sympathetic, and address issues about gender rights. Therefore, statements such as “Gender equality or women’s rights are universal concerns” when deemed to express that women have been denied their rights for centuries do deny the cultural, political, and social differences related to gender discrimination across the world. Such generalizations oversimplify the issue of gender inequalities and erode important concepts that distinguish regions within a country.

2. Gender Studies

In response to research question number one in the Gender Studies department, concepts such as “I think” or “I believe” were dominant in the Gender Studies department. These expressions also highlighted that the emission was highly personal in that interviewees were giving their opinions on the current topical issue of gender equality. For instance, “I believe that women should be given equal rights because it is good for society” demonstrates a belief in women’s rights, which is a perception of the general norms in society. Third, it emphasized collective responsibility, where words like ‘we’ were commonly employed. A statement like, ‘We should fight imbalances in the gender issue’ makes the impression that a collective effort is needed, however, in these instances; teachers were disguising their own opinion as stances of society. Instead of objectively stating facts or specific problems, they made statements using pronouns that attempted to hide their biases but actually did not conceal them.

Responding to research question number two in the Gender Studies

department, it was observed that the use of adjectives in the Gender Studies interview was relatively high. Expressive words like “empowerment”, “oppression”, and “patriarchy” were employed to make women understand the resulting emotions of gender inequality. The former includes terms such as ‘empowerment’ that present a positive change towards a better state; on the other hand, the latter consists of terms like ‘oppression’, which creates a negative perception of the current state of gender relations. These emotive terms are used as an incitement to revive the audience’s emotional response to the importance of the matter. However, statements like ‘Gender is an important component for societal change’ or ‘Women’s rights have been violated for years’ are mere generalizations that do not look at facts prevailing in a particular culture or geographical region about gender bias. These sweeping statements offer no relativity needed to explain the issue of equal rights for men and women in various situations.

3. History

In response to research question number one in the History department, only first-person plural groups were applied to refer to a collective of like-minded people who were to be responsible for the improvement of gender inequity situations. For instance, ‘It is time to study gender constructed oppression’ draws the attention of people to the fact that gender injustice must also be traced back to the past. In the past tense and terms of gender roles, terms like ‘they’ and ‘women’ were used, thus making the speech relatively impersonal. Most of the time, the experiences and personal histories are not offered in statements such as ‘They were denied the right to vote’, which presents gender inequality as an

empirical reality.

While answering research question two, emotive language in learning History was not as intense as in Gender Studies; however, terms such as ‘oppression’, ‘legacy’, and ‘injustice’ fostered an emotional approach to Gender Studies’ subject, namely gender inequality. These emotive terms were more historical than personal expressions of anger concerning society today. The statements in the explanations for the History interviews, like ‘Women have never had rights in any society’ or ‘The struggle for women’s rights is still ongoing’, are just because the histories of gender inequality generalized the issue of gender relations and ignored specific times captured from history.

Conclusion

In this research paper, it was found that university teachers often use first person plural pronouns to share their opinions in verbal communication, hence making the subjectivity in their discourse very high. The language study showed that using the pronouns “I” and “we” indicate the thoughts belonging to the interviewee. Words such as “I think,” “I believe,” and “In my opinion” are widely used to indicate that what is said is the teacher's view. Meanwhile, they also make use of first person plural pronoun “we” to present their opinion disguised as the stance of their community/society, which makes the communication subjective and biased. These expressions must be kept in mind because they stop the statement from being objective.

As observed during the study, it is possible to differentiate the interviewee’s thoughts when they utilize words such as “I think,” “I believe,” and “In my opinion”. These are discernable as first person singular pronoun is used to

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explicitly indicate to the listeners that the speaker is sharing their own opinion. However, the problem arises once teachers make use of first person plural pronoun “we” to express their opinions. The use of “we” camouflages personal attitudes as those belonging to the society/community, increasing the subjectivity of the discourse. The use of the first person plural pronoun “we” in teachers’ discourse is forcibly used in such a way where it shows that teachers are speaking from a certain community or from the standpoint of society as a whole, even though they are not. However, teachers do not seem to consciously distinguish between their own opinions and those that they want to communicate from the perspective of the society.

Analysis of the teacher’s discourse revealed that the language they utilized was subjective as its diction frequently contained emotive words, thus making their discourse high in subjectivity. As the interviewees language showed such subjectivity, it is understood that when they introduce a topic, communicate an issue or lecture in a classroom, they are similarly introducing that same subjectivity to their listeners. Not only is the teacher’s communication biased and objective, they are also relaying on the same subjectivity to others, especially to students in the classroom who are not encouraged to be critical of their teachers.

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