

## Journal of Social Signs Review

### Transgender Discourse: Analyzing the Interplay of Linguistic Features and Identity of Transgender Individuals in Mardan

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#### Abstract

This study analyses the language used about transgender people in Mardan, with an emphasis on how the use of language contributes to identity construction. The study hence seeks to use Judith Butler's performativity theory to seek to explain the role that language has in the formation of transgenderism. Utilizing the method of qualitative content analysis, the study analyses diversified texts such as media, personal stories, and public debates to examine how and to what extent language can both enable and exclude TS/TV people. The study demonstrates how gender is constructed and enacted to argue that language is essential in defining and performing transgender identities and, thereby, understanding the social factors that define the lives of transgender people in Mardan.

**Key Terms:** Gender, Identity construction, Language, Mardan, Performativity, Transgender.

#### Introduction

Transgender people have received more attention around the world through discourse that seeks to explain their existence and the subjection they face due to social acceptance of their identity (Stryker & Whittle, 2006). Language, being one of the key ways people interact with each other, has a significant role to play in creating and expressing transitional gender roles. However, more research should be done on the particular aspects of the language that affect and construct

transgender subjectivities in Mardan. It is one of the cities in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan where one can observe the historical sociocultural context of the region being in transition from patriarchal culture to contemporary Western culture among young generations. These intersections make up a different social space for transgender people, who, due to their gender, work, interactions, or education, experience different measures of social acceptance and resistance. In this context, language can either facilitate or hinder the recognition of transgender individuals (Bucholtz & Hall, 2004). A deeper comprehension of the language aspects of the transgender population in the district of Mardan will help elucidate additional factors related to society and culture.

Therefore, the objective of this research is to investigate how different linguistic factors intersect with the identities of transgender people in Mardan. In this way, since the study focuses on the construction and containment of transgender identities, the research aims to identify the main linguistic practices that play a crucial role in the subject's identification and recognition by society. Also, the research will look into the social attitudes and social rejection associated with these linguistic items so that the investigation of the problems that transgender people in Mardan encounter can be understood on a broad spectrum. In this regard, the study thus intends to make a further contribution to the ongoing research on transgender concerns. It may serve to support policy and practice initiatives and interventions seeking to enhance social acceptance of transgender people.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Over the past few years, the topic of both transsexual and transgender people has become more acute due to cultural changes that have led to greater awareness of gender identity in modern societies. This study therefore seeks to establish how language relates to the identity of transgender people in the context of the region of Mardan, Pakistan, where there has been documented sociocultural and legal marginalization of transgender people.

The research problem that forms the focus of this study is to explore how linguistic variation in the context of transgender people in Mardan influences and is influenced by their transformational processes of identity. Previous research also indicates that due to social prejudices and legal restrictions, the psychological self-images and interactions of transgender people are prejudiced and limited, thus affecting their quality of life. Furthermore, as stated by Hussain et al. (2023), the

languages also comprise affectionate terms, pronouns, the way of speaking, and other aspects used by transgender people, thereby demonstrating their progression through the phases of identity.

Thus, by exploring the use of these linguistic features and the construction of identity among some transgender people in Mardan, Pakistan, this research paper seeks to advance the understanding of language and gender about social inclusion.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is important as it tries to fill a huge gap in knowledge on linguistic aspects of identity among non-western transgender individuals. Since this research explores how language defines and reflects the realities of transsexuals in this society, it is crucial to focus on Mardan. Besides, the study will also contribute to the existing literature by adding a cross-cultural perspective to the link between language and identity, thereby expanding the area of transgender research beyond Anglo-American frameworks.

### **The Rationale of the Study**

The rationale for this research lies in the absence of research on the development of trans identities in non-western societies and the centrality of language in constructing their trans identities in Mardan, Pakistan. Even though the problems of transfixed individuals get considerable attention from researchers, transfixed people in culturally peculiar environments are left relatively unknown, including how certain linguistic characteristics impact their identities. The discussed dynamics of leveraging tradition against modernity can be investigated in Mardan due to its sociocultural context, which is characterized by both conservative heritage and growing tendencies towards liberalization.

Language acts as an important function in the constructive formation of self-identity and societal acknowledgement of the transgender. As a result, the objective of the current research is to explore the way linguistic practices strengthen or marginalize transgender identities in Mardan. The identified outcomes will be used to design and implement policies and strategies that ensure social acceptance in society. Moreover, the study will help expand knowledge in the field as it looks at the relationship between language and identity, particularly in a non-Western context.

### **Research Objective**

To understand how the linguistic features employed by the transgender people in the Mardan region contribute to their personal as well as social construction of

identity.

### **Research Question**

In what way does the language affect the identity and social acceptance of transgender people in the city of Mardan?

### **Method of Data Analysis**

For analyzing the data, the research used qualitative content analysis as a method to breakdown the data into meaningful conclusions. Qualitative content analysis (QCA), on the other hand, is used in the study of text materials to determine latent themes, code patterns, and meanings. It entails sorting data and labelling them in a way that will help the analyst come up with significant concepts and understand the context of such concepts. In this respect, while quantitative content analysis is concerned with frequency and quantity indicators, it stresses the depth and richness of identified patterns and connections, which enable a much better grasp of the topic at hand (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

Qualitative content analysis is best applied in the study of social phenomena since the approach can be employed to investigate the details of the communication process. The method is cyclical and recursive and therefore entails going through multiple cycles of coding to obtain an adequate level of analysis (Schreier, 2012).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The research study is guided by Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (1990) specifically focused on the realization of gender through language and acts. Thus, according to Butler, sex is inauthentic and arbitrary, as it is not biologically determined but socially constituted through an individual's reiterative linguistic and behavioral overturning. This theory will assist in understanding how the transgender people in Mardan enact their gender through certain uses of language and how the enactment affects the response from society.

Thus, by drawing on these theoretical frameworks, the study seeks to investigate how various aspects of language construct and are constructed by the trans\* identities in the context of Mardan and understand the relationship between language and sexual identity in the assistant researcher.

### **Literature Review**

Language and identity are major areas of interest in sociolinguistics and gender studies, whereby how people create and portray their personalities and genders through the languages used has been widely studied. This review aims to examine narratives surrounding language that construct trans identities with an emphasis

on Western and non-Western cultures, bearing in mind the paper's specific context, Mardan in Pakistan.

The theory of linguistic construction of identity argues that identity is instead a relatively flexible construct that is socially constructed and reconstructed in interactional practices. Bucholtz and Hall (2004) posited that language is a primary resource that people use to create and criticise identities in themselves and society. Eraser and Reserve Fargan argue that identity is not fixed but constantly constructed and reconstructed in interaction with sociocultural context. For deciphering how the transgenders among them build their identities, particularly through language, this framework is very important in depicting that the process of identity formation is fluid. It therefore becomes a way by which people can express and explain their sex and gender roles concerning their experiences and status in society.

Another theory that expands such an understanding is Judith Butler's (1990) concept of performativity, according to which gender is not an essential attribute but rather an impersonation based on the constant reiteration of paralinguistic and performative practices. Butler, for instance, opines that gender is not something that one is born with but is enacted in society. This perspective is important in understanding how transgender individuals navigate and communicate their gender since gender is not an inherent quality of an individual but something that is constantly done. This paper examines Butler's Theory as a useful framework for female and male impersonation about the transformation of the world through language and other performative practices.

Especially in Western cultures, there is significant literature that has examined the use of language and how its features affect transgender identities. Stryker and Whittle (2006) give precise details on how transsexuals employ language to make their gender congruent with the social one. In their works, they are concerned with the signifying features, such as the pronouns and the chosen names, as being fundamental to the formation of TS identities. Language is significant in the transgender process to mark one's gender identity and establish correspondence between perception and recreation. For instance, the use of chosen names and pronouns empowers the transgender; it rejects society's ways and norms, which they do not expect. This finding reaffirms the need to look at how language is used in the legitimation and accreditation of the subjectivity of trans\* peoples in Western societies.

However, although the existing research could offer some help when it comes to

Western nations, there seems to be a lack of data on the transgender discourse in non-Western countries. For instance, South Asia's culturally and socially informed views of gender blur with contemporary aspects to form an unusual context for transsexuals. Another qualitative study of interest is Reddy's (2005) paper focusing on the life narratives of hijras in South India, a social group considered third gender in terms of South Indian culture and religion. It is in this context that this study reveals how hijras are endowed with features of both language and culture. For instance, the linguistic markers and the rituals enable hijras to manage their identities in the context of South India. The study conducted by Reddy is informative on the way that contemporary and pre-Mutiny colonial factors shape transgender people's embodied performance and regulation of their sexuality in South Asia. As a result, it shows that the language and identity of hijras are associated with cultural and social aspects, which makes the understanding of the construction of transgender identities in this particular case more detailed.

However, the lives of transsexuals in Pakistan are best understood within the context of traditional Islamic values and the growing influences of modernity. Khan (2016) explains gender and sexuality in Pakistan, focusing on the condition of transgender people and how they experience identity in such a culture. According to Khan, his study shows that language has a significant function in helping or hindering TS's experiences and how others acknowledge them. The analysis shows that language is perpetuating stigma and, at the same time, presents possibilities for affirmation. For example, insulting language and the use of such terminology that excludes the very existence of transgender individuals or limits their presence only to the circle of 'deviants' can only make the situation worse; on the other hand, studies show that the use of affirming language and inclusive linguistic practices may open all sorts of opportunities for these people. This meant that how language in Pakistan operates is significant towards the formation of transsexualism.

The study of the topic of transgender people is set in the context of Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The traditional values of Mardan blended with the modernism of Pakistan, make the state unique for transgender people. To date, there is a dearth of research related to Mardan City that targets the discourse of transgender people in particular; however, examining the general condition of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa can be informative. Traditional norms in the region present many challenges to the acknowledgement of transgender identities, which impact the language use of such individuals. However, social factors, for instance, media



and activism in the present society, can offer channels of language use and individuals' self-definitions. Such a blend of a more conventional and a twenty-first-century background renders this framework relevant for exploring how trans people integrate themselves via words. The present literature review shows how language plays an important part in the formation of transgenderism in various cultures. Combining sociolinguistic concepts on the construction of language and performance with the studies of identities in transgender discourse in both Western and non-Western societies offers the best empirical understanding of how transgender identities are shaped through language. This study will provide a detailed account of the linguistic practices of the participants in Mardan, which will help scholars understand the processes of gender identity construction and their acknowledgement among transgender people in different cultural regions. Thus, by enriching the theoretical knowledge regarding language and identity in the academic literature, this study will contribute to the discussion of matters concerning the transgender community and initiate the Better Acceptance policy, focusing on the improvement of the social inclusion of these individuals.

### **Data Analysis**

**Data Collection.** The researcher selected specific words from the data that she collected for her MPhil research through interviews with transgender persons randomly. This paper focused on those terms from the interviews that are important in the context of this research.

Originally, the data in Pashtu, the researcher used a direct method to translate the terms into English and transcribe into Pushto

### **Sega (ژبه): Language**

#### **Pashto Meaning: Zuban**

**Analysis:** Language use forms a core aspect of developing an individual's identity. Speaking of the linguistic feature in the transgender community, language can be used as a marker to distinguish one's self from other gendered groups. Thus, using specific terminologies helps in developing the notion of togetherness and unity of the community and, at the same time, gives out their identity to the rest of society. The use of the word "sega" for language is unique and different from the terms used by other people and is thus significant in marking the transgender community as a spate community with its distinctive features.

### **Hijragan (هجران) Transgender**

#### **Pashto Meaning: Hijragan**

**Analysis:** The term 'Hijragan' itself is fundamentally about core business social

identity. Acceptance and incorporation of terms in everyday conversation among members of the general public and even among the trans population can impact the outlook of society and thus society's relation to the trans population. This particular term, when repeated frequently across different platforms (e.g., social functions, media, day-to-day activities), signifies the existence of a transgender person.

**Kotiyani (کوتیانی): Trans**

**Pashto Meaning: Hijra**

Analysis: In the same way as 'Hijragan', 'Kotiyani' is a specific term, and it is useful for carrying out the activity of identity construction. How it is being utilized by transsexuals and how society receives them affects their identification and acceptance within the community.

**Sowa (سولے): Beautiful**

**Pashto Meaning: Khkuli**

Analysis: This work captures how specific terms like 'Sowa' can make the subject, (transgender) individuals experience and be perceived in a certain way. Words that may try to praise or put down someone's appearance can affect the way that person feels about themselves. Such terms as 'Sowa', when encouraged, can help to reassure the newborn's gender identity and the overall acceptance within society.

**Kajry (کاجری): Feet**

**Pashto Meaning: Khepe**

Analysis: Such physique-related terms as 'Kajry' can be enabled in the calibrative praxis of gender identity. Such terms, when used, for example, when referring to beauty, dance, or movement, may enlighten or prejudice how transsexuals reveal their gender through gestures and clothing.

**Dochny (شونډی) - Lips**

**Pashto Meaning: Shondi**

Analysis: Like 'Kajry', 'Dochny' is considered to be performative, which are terms connected with certain parts of the body. The perception of particular features of a body in language might thus mirror and construct the gender roles existing in society.

**Rasky (سترگی) - Eyes**

**Pashto Meaning: Starge**

Analysis: It is significant to deal with the terms related to facial features and their role in the performative construction of identity, for example, the term 'Rasky'. Subsequently, the reorientation of beauty standards or expressions that focus on



the eyes influences how the TG population may perform their self-affirmation or which way they are judged by society.

**Ripar (جامی) - Dress**

**Pashto Meaning: Kapre**

Analysis: Some of the most common clothing terms embrace 'Ripar', which is an obvious vessel for gender performances. Clothing that is worn is an act of performing one's gender, as it conveys the identity of the wearer. Transgender people believe that when assuming some clothing, strengthens gender identity and reciprocates acknowledgement from society.

**Firqa (ده بنځو جامی) translated as ladies dress**

**Pashto Meaning: Mzilikazi wordt gekend as Khazo kapre.**

Analysis: particularly the ladies' dresses, 'Firqa' brought out the display of clothes in gender roles. Being dressed in 'Firqa' can also be performing a conscious choice to claim a female or frankly feminine gender among the transgenders.

**Paki (څه) - Yes**

**Pashto Meaning: Kha**

Analysis: Interactions like 'Paki' might be as small as an affirmation that is said by people daily. Speaking nicely in conversation can be beneficial to transgender people in terms of gender identity affirmation from people around them.

**Joban (زبردست): Wow, Amazing**

**Pashto Meaning: Wow**

Analysis: Sometimes trans use exclamation terms, for example, 'Joban' as performativity, to indicate admiration and acceptance. The inclusion of such terms when referring to transgender persons will therefore help in boosting their feeling of being appreciated and embraced in society.

**Wadmy (سل روپی): 100 Rupees**

**Pashto Meaning: 100 Rupees**

o Analysis: However, monetary terms are not free from performativity as well since they constitute the reality they measure. It is important to note that the ways that people talk about and conduct economic transactions with trans people can signal and may reflect how trans people are viewed in society overall, especially where trans people may be economically oppressed.

**Dasora (دس روپی) –Ten Rupees**

**Pashto Meaning: For a stipend of ten rupees**

Analysis: Like the case of 'Wadmy', the use of money-related terms can depict the

economic stratum hovering above, specific transactions involved, and interactions between the transgenders and society.

**Neemty (پنځوت روپۍ)** It is a form of currency of Pakistan in the denomination of 50 rupees.

**Pashto Meaning:** There is a poor and simple menu that contains very limited items like tea for twenty rupees and fifty rupees for breakfast.

**Analysis:** Such a term as Neemty can help expose the economic relations within the transgender community as well as their relations in society and consequently the treatment they receive from society.

**Katka (لاکھ) 1,00,000**

**Pashto Meaning: Hundred Thousand**

**Analysis:** 'Katka' is a larger AMP-arian term and can refer to important economic transactions or phenomena; it is plausibly performative since it displays the economic potentialities of trans\* people.

**Zabar (بازار) Market Place**

**Pashto Meaning: Bazar**

**Analysis:** When it comes to visibility and interaction in society, such terms as 'Zabar,' associated with public spaces, can be performative. Transgender people's experiences in such settings may impact their societal acknowledgement and self-creation.

**Jok (وېښته) - Hairs**

**Pashto Meaning: Wekhto**

**Analysis:** Some of the terms include 'Jok', which is an aspect of hair that can be included in an act of gender performance. Haircuts and hair care can significantly reflect a person's gender-related disposition and the extent to which the gender is recognised.

**Lisky (وېښته) - Body Hairs-**

**Pashto Meaning: Female corpulence**

**Analysis:** Lisky point out that body hair is another significant performance of genders. Language regarding body hair or the absence of it together with its removal or styling can also be evident in how a TG person develops and performs his/her gender.

**Marah (میرہ) is the word used for a boyfriend or husband in Seraiki.**

Pashto means Ashna/ Hawand, which means female companions.

**Analysis:** Titles like 'Marah' are not real in the construction of social and personal relations. These terms can represent the acknowledgement of the relations of the

TS people and can be recognised as an important stage of the formation of their identity.

**Gurai (ملگری): Friend**

**Pashto Meaning: Malgare**

**Analysis:** Like ‘Sangata,’ Gurai reestablishes social bonds and can even be theatrical in fulfilling the social role of having one’s social support and approval affirmed both within and outside of the transgender community.

**Madri (مور): Mother**

**Pashto Meaning: Mor**

**Analysis:** That being said, family terms such as ‘Madri’ can be an act within the chosen family and different systems within the transgender population. The latter can be well captured by other terms that point to the nurturing roles and relationships that transgender people form and sustain.

**Padre (پلار): Father**

**Pashto Meaning: Plar**

**Analysis:** In the same manner as ‘Madri,’ there is a performative dimension about the assumed role and relation within the family for ‘Padre’. Such terms can refer to the idea and integration of transgender individuals into the family as a socially accepted norm.

**Segay (ژبه) Language**

**Pashto Meaning: Zuban**

**Analysis:** Language is quite performative where it is concerned with the formation of an identity as well as the enunciation of the same. The specific terminology and language used to regard their transitions by transgender persons can be actions that build and present their gender to others.

**Saneeb (نصیب): Fate**

**Pashto Meaning: Naseeb**

**Analysis:** Pronouns that directly connote destiny or something similar to it—Saneeb can be an epitome of what people with such names consider their destiny to be. In the transgender community, such terms can be taken to mean that the concerned transexuals have accepted or are content with the stances they have taken in society. It can also represent the preconceived notion that there is a specific way to be regarding aspects of life and interactions with others.

**Sarpedale (پير): Fatty**

**Pashto Meaning: Parsedale**

**Analysis:** This kind of descriptive term related to body size, for example, ‘Sarpedale,’ is to some extent performative in the treatment of identity and sexual character. Such terms may still refer to beauty standards and acceptance or lack of them in society. Such terms may have a psychological effect on the transgendered because they influence their perceptions about their bodies and the reactions of other people.

**Chely (جینی): It is possible and acceptable to refer to any woman in the Persian context.**

**Pashto Meaning: Khaza**

**Analysis:** Interpersonal terms such as ‘Chely’ refer to people doing or enacting social positions and categories. The ability to be classified as a ‘Chely’ can indicate that society approves of the subject’s gender and his/her relationships, strengthening the subject’s position in society and his/her identity.

**Full Suwa (دیر بیکلی) (Sa’adah in Arabic English Translation) Very Gorgeous**

**Pashto Meaning: Dera khkuli**

**Analysis:** Full Suwa is an example of an intensifier that reasserts the verbal rituals that compliment beauty. For transgenders and other sexual minorities, getting such compliments assists in the formation and recognition of the correct societal identity given by their gender.

**Sangeetara (ملگری): Friend**

**Pashto Meaning: Malgare**

**Analysis:** Titles such as ‘Sangeetara’ extend the friendship aspect that nurtures the togetherness in the transgender group. All these terms are performative in the ways they help establish support networks to manage identity and how one interacts with society.

**Guru (مشر): Master**

**Pashto Meaning: Masher**

**Analysis:** (words like ‘Guru’) may function in leadership to claim and enact forms of respect and authority within the community. The inability of this society to deny the leadership roles of these people and place them among ‘Gurus’ can socially empower these persons and affirm their existence within and outside their kind.

**Naina (جینی) – This is a name that belongs to the female gender, or it is commonly used to refer to the lady.**

**Pashto Meaning:** Naina used for trans To be employed, for transferring To work for passing across

**Analysis:** Using such terms as 'Naina' is highly performative because such terms are most likely associated with one's identity. Thus, assuming a female name is a potent strategy for expressing one's gender. Acknowledgement of such names by society is important in the affirmation of transgender existence.

#### **Damtob (دمتوب) - Dancing**

**Pashto Meaning:** Gadedal

**Analysis:** Damtob is an example of an activity terms that can be performative of culture and gender. You dance to be seen and to participate; for the transgendered, to dance or be acknowledged as good at it affirms one's gender and societal integration.

#### **Nato (جینی) - Girl**

**Pashto Meaning:** Jinai

**Analysis:** Such gender-specific terms like nato are regarded as basic when establishing performative strategies of an identity. Employing such terms for the referred transgender persons can reinforce one's identified gender and social norms, thus enhancing community recognition and acceptance.

#### **Conclusion**

The linguistic factors are the most important in making and receiving the identity of transgender people in Mardan. In other words, within the context of the performance of gender, one can identify and build their roles. It is established that those terms that refer to physical appearance, interaction with other individuals, commercially productive endeavours, and status positions are especially important. Compliments and words of appreciation can build up morale and acceptance within society, whereas improper or degrading words can hurt one's morale and acceptance by society.

Thus, when examining these terms via Judith Butler's performativity model, we can understand how frequent discursive practices keep constructing and acknowledging gender-variant people. Thus, the presented comprehension underlines the role of language in constructing the lives of transsexual people and the significance of a language that does not marginalize members of this community in society.

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