TERMS OF ENDEARMENT AND GENDER APARTEID:
THE CASE OF URDU SONG LYRICS

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Abstract

Language and gender research has enabled us to uncover gender discrimination achieved by investing language with certain ideologies that make gender attributes appear natural and neutral. This research has created the possibility of seeing the biased nature of language used to support male domination. The current study is an attempt to contribute to this line of research by showing how Urdu terms of endearment found in Urdu love song lyrics are clearly patterned on gendered line. The study endorses a social constructivist approach and examines the way gender is being talked about and how men and women are addressed with special reference to Urdu songs. Findings prove that the grammatical as well as semantic structure of these terms of endearment is highly influenced by gender stereotypes and dominant patriarchal ideology.

Keywords

Gender ideology, stereotypes, terms of endearments, power-solidarity cline, Urdu songs
Introduction

The field of language and gender research has shown unabated growth after the 1970's and 1980's feminist movement which resulted in awakened consciousness of gender-based segregations. A great part of this segregation is cultural, and within a cultural paradigm language is seen as the greatest tool to perpetrate the patriarchal scheme of male domination. No matter what turns language and gender research has taken, the primacy of language in defining the difference or variation or diversity in gendered language use remains unchallenged. However, the latest anthropological accounts see the ideological nature of language more clearly. It is within language that the seeds of stereotypes are sown and reaped. Ideology, a term hailing from Marxist tradition, is a tool used to make dominant narrative a commonsensical assumption (Fairclough, 1989). Language and gender research within linguistic anthropology has exposed the pervasive nature of language ideologies or gender ideologies contained within language. These perform the task of subduing women in favour of male domination similar to that which originated in economic exploitation of the working class by the bourgeoisie (Philips, 2008).

A post-modern turn in language and gender research has inadvertently emphasized the introduction of context to generate local accounts of gender representations by disfavouring an overarching global narrative of gender. The researches done in the western societies cannot be made to apply to all the societies. Moreover a variety of contexts should be investigated. These directions have opened a whole array of possibilities for language and gender research, addressing all types of language uses and finding gender ideologies hidden beneath the surface. From mixed sex interaction to professional workplace language use all types of discourse in all types of contexts are being investigated to find local explanations for gendered behaviours as well as gender representations. The struggle to uncover every possible context and every possible genre of communication for ideological content and stereotypical representation of men and women has generated varied forms of research. 'Labelling, naming and addressing' is one area which carries significant traces of ideology; many researchers have pointed out such phenomena (Cf. Brown and Gilman, 1960; Philips, 2008). The present study is an attempt to investigate terms of endearment which come under the categories of labelling and naming in general, and terms of addresses in particular, with special reference to Urdu song lyrics.

The rationale behind selecting terms of endearment used in sweetheart-to-sweetheart relation (the term is borrowed from Philips, 2008) over terms of address in general, or any other type of terms of endearment, comes from the following motivations. First terms of endearment ostensibly fall more on the solidarity end of a power-solidarity cline in the case of romantic love. The idea of a cline or continuum of power and solidarity is introduced by Brown and Gillman (1960) who have proposed that our choice
of pronouns (familiar or formal) depends upon the relative social distance and the degree of intimacy between the participants. A situation like this should supposedly be an equal relation between genders, unlike other relations where solidarity is significantly influenced by a power imbalance. Second, these terms of endearment emerge from a personal preference of addressing rather than a social obligation to address in normative fashion. It is here that gender ideologies should be downplayed generating equivocal results for both genders. We have to see if this is the case.

The reason behind studying this phenomenon with special reference to Urdu songs is threefold. First, they make rich data for such terms of endearments involved in romantic dialogue. Second, they are public and easy to access and document. Third, like the constructed dialogue as internalized model of gender behaviour (Lakoff and Tannen, 1994), Urdu lyrics can also be seen as the expression of socially assimilated patterns for gender positioning. What comes from the pen of a lyricist is a unique blend of his/her creative flight bound with a social chain keeping the flight well in place. Moreover, the gender of the lyricist, which in case of Urdu love songs is presumably male in almost all instances, also plays a role in what emerges. It is by the interplay of all these factors that we get a complex picture of terms of endearment which this study tries to uncover.

The aim of the study is to investigate terms of endearment in Urdu songs to see how they orient along gender lines. The study makes an attempt to see how these terms of endearment fit on the power-solidarity continuum. Moreover, we will try to uncover gender ideology that emerges from social considerations encoded in these terms and which result in stereotyped images of men and women. Attention to any pattern changing over time, with regard to gender ideology inside the terms of endearment, is also the focus of the study.

The findings are expected to present a vivid picture of gender apartheid that permeates in all possible contexts and discourses. Though there is room for a genderless system of addressing, we will show that it never seems to happen in Urdu love songs, which abound in grammatical gender as well as social gender concepts. Although the terms of endearment may exhibit a shift during the past two decades, gender never leaves the picture and remains an instrumental force in deciding upon what to call whom. The major significance of the study is that it contributes to understanding a social phenomenon which is ordinarily considered simplistic.

Language, gender, ideology and stereotypes

A linguistic system is inherently connected to social phenomena, and gender is essentially a part of this linguistics-social wedding (Eckert and Mcconell-Ginet, 2003). Any language
system is continuously influenced by social representations that generate cultural meaning for its user (Cameron, 2008). For example, the ideology of male domination has introduced a private-public dichotomy which views women lacking the skill to survive in the public sphere (Philips, 2008). This realization, once made, has led to a linguistic anthropological tradition of investigating language ideologies that generate and maintain gender systems in society. The insight thus generated is used to answer various gender-based problems. For example, Keenan (1974) has shown how women's forms of speaking are considered less privileged; Brigg (1992) has used language ideologies to make sense of two forms of discourse, 'wailing' and 'curing songs,' associated with women and men respectively. Just as the ways women and men speak are understood as reflections of what they are, how they are called is similarly linked with the roles assigned to them. Such gendered language can also be explained by resorting to the ideology behind its use.

However, the post-modern turn has made us realize the pervasive but divergent nature of ideology. There is no reason to assume that there is a single gender ideology that is uniform across cultures and discourses. Ideologies shift across discourses within a single society (Philips, 2008). The diversity of these ideologies is the motivating force behind taking various contextual details into account to generate context specific picture. Urdu song lyrics may not contain the same idea of gender as is encoded in everyday discourse. Being part of an industry (showbiz) notoriously famous for its divorce from reality, these lyrics may seem to be something contradictory to our basic social practices. However, their effects on the way people think about gender while assigning some term of endearment should not be disregarded (Cf. Cameron, 2008).

The concept of ideology as a system of belief is closely wedded to stereotyped images generated out of ideological beliefs about the role and nature of men and women. Talbot (2008) has shown how these naturalized norms encoded in ideology are used to set expectations for the people. These expectations result in stereotypical image formation which uniformly applies to a whole group. Such image formation affects the way someone is perceived, which in turn affects the way s/he is addressed. It is here that the role of gender in terms of address comes into play. In the subsequent section it is demonstrated how various researchers have taken that fact into account.

Forms of addressing and Gender

Brown and Gillman, in their well-known study, *The Pronouns of Power and Solidarity* (1960), have clearly illustrated that pronouns of address orient on a continuum extending between power and solidarity. This continuum is affected by the ideological dynamic of the time it is used in. Talking about power semantics, they include gender (and sex in their terms) as controlling factors of power other than physical vigour, age and position in an institution.
While power is asymmetric, solidarity is symmetric. Keeping in view their timeline, for them the power associated with the dominant sex is natural; however it signals how gender relations were previously perceived. Use of the pronoun is not the only way in which genders orient to a power-solidarity cline. All types of terms of address and communication patterns are influenced by this scheme. Cameron (2008) has shown how all of the male-female communication in a family can be described as positioning between power and connection (roughly equivalent to Brown and Gillman’s solidarity). This situation can be applied to terms of endearment as well. However a power-solidarity cline is not the only way to describe the phenomenon.

McConnel-Ginet (2008) sees addressing as a social restriction, unlike pronouns of addressing which are required grammatically. She shows how proper nouns used as common nouns label the addressee as having certain characteristics associated with the name. For example, the name Lolita casts young girls as objects of seduction for young men. She demonstrates that labelling practices undermine women’s status as individuals. She suggests a move away from power and solidarity and introduces Community of Practice (A sociological concept referring to a group of people who interact regularly and engage in some common enterprise) as the force deciding which form of address to use. Gender is part of this process where female terms of address are marked, while male terms of address remain unmarked and general.

The terms of address (or endearment) in Urdu/Hindi are an under-researched area. A few researchers have investigated the phenomenon from various perspectives. For example, Mehrotra (1977) has studied the fluidity of Hindi forms of address from a sociological perspective, and he draws the conclusion that the addressing dyad in Hindi is non-reciprocal. He also concludes that, investigated from a sociolinguistic and linguistic dimension, the phenomenon is able to provide a good deal of information about the social structure in which the Hindi language is embedded. No study is found that speaks about how gender is involved with addressing in the Urdu language. The current study uses this research gap as its launching pad and investigates the phenomenon in popular song lyrics, which is yet another area to be explored for gender concerns, especially with reference to Urdu.

A note on research methods

For the purpose of the current study, a specific genre in Urdu songs which may be called love songs is selected as the data resource. These Urdu songs comprise rich data for gender patterns in the form of public expression of bisexual love themes. The data for the current investigation is taken from a compilation of terms of endearment found in Urdu/Hindi classic songs retrieved from https://mrandmrs55.com, as well as from the researcher’s own
compilation of those terms of endearment from relatively recent songs. The list is not exhaustive but contains many of the popular terms that resounded through the classic age of Pakistani cinema, from the post-partition era to the early nineties. The later period lacks the richness of classic era and many terms have fallen out of use, however some of the terms have shown considerable sustainability in Urdu love songs. For the sake of the current study, the focus remains on Urdu terms of endearment that resounded through the Pakistani music scene in the classic and later periods. Comparison between the early and later period is out of the scope of this study as other considerations (apart from gender perceptions) need to be taken into account, including the shift in film-making practices, the rise of commercialism and international influences. English terms of endearment (baby, darling) used in the latest songs are not included in the list as they are borrowed terms and may not reflect a local scenario. The terms of endearment included in the data are adjectives used to define gender; however all the terms included in the analysis are used in song lyrics as addressing terms.

The study is descriptive in nature and falls under ideology studies which investigate linguistic phenomena for ideological trace. It embraces a social constructivist approach of looking at language not only for a differential tendency of talk but also for how men and women are addressed and what is said to them (Sunderland and Litoseliti, 2002). The terms are labelled according to categories, and then those categories are discussed broadly for various themes inherent in them. This task of assigning categories and themes to the data brings the study close to content analysis; however it only retains a qualitative aspect which allows for personal interpretation of the data. The quantitative aspect is left out because of its inadequacy to self-generate interpretation.

Analysis

**Masculine and Feminine Terms of Endearment**

Gender seems to be an essential part of the Urdu morphological system. Like all professional titles and names in Urdu, feminine terms of endearment are also formed by attaching a suffix to a masculine term. Saajan-Sajni, Jogi-Jogan, Sohna-Sohni show the derivative nature of feminine forms. Moreover, it can be seen that derivation makes feminine terms diminutive suggesting the diminished stature of women. Opposite to this usage, any derivation for masculine gender is augmentative and is derived from an already masculine form, for example Saajna, Zaalma and Saathiya. While derived feminine forms are strictly used to address female partner only, a few unmarked forms can be used for both male and female partners. Mehboob-Mehbooba is one of the examples where Mehbooba necessarily means ‘female beloved’ while Mehboob meaning ‘beloved’ can be used for both genders. There are certain forms which strictly lack feminine equivalent. For example Aashiq and Herjaaye do not have any feminine derivative or equivalent. The forms that are
used equally for both genders are masculine as far as grammatical gender is concerned. Sanam, Yaar, Yaar and Saathiya are used reciprocally however, they take masculine verbs and the pronoun. The grammatical gender of many terms of endearment is masculine, even when they can be used to address women. No feminine form is used to address both genders. Nor do we have any masculine derivative derived out of unmarked feminine forms. The relation always seems to go one way.

*The Power-solidarity cline and Urdu terms of endearment*

A sweetheart—to-sweetheart relation is supposedly the most equal dyad which one can think of involving both genders. Moreover it is the most talked about dyad, being part of the most heard genre, i.e. the love song (Philips, 2008). Keeping in view these considerations, the terms of endearment should orient more towards solidarity than the power side of the cline. As discussed earlier, Brown and Gillman (1960) have elaborated that the use of pronouns (and therefore other terms of address) is highly affected by power and social distance between the interlocutors. However, we cannot take power and social distance as absolute categories and it is theoretically viable to consider them as forming a continuum or cline in which the extreme ends are occupied by power and solidarity and in between fall the intermediate cases. While addressing someone, the choice is made by a rough calculation of the relative power and solidarity between the addressee and the addresser. Thus, in a purely equal relation, with a high degree of solidarity, there is a possibility to use familiar forms of address. However, in an unequal relation, with a high degree of social distance, the forms of address will be more formal and deferential. In certain cases, however, both solidarity and power factors come into play. For example, in parent-child relation both solidarity and power factors are high. Now which factor determines the form of address depends upon the particular ideology of the time. A few decades ago the power factor seemed to be winning, but now things are changing and the solidarity factor is being ranked higher than power in western societies. With the hindsight, we can say that there should be a symmetrical form of addressing between lovers as they orient to the solidarity side of the cline; which apparently seems to be the case in Urdu songs. Pronouns tu, tum, aap (forms of ‘you’ for different levels of formality and familiarity) are used reciprocally and symmetrically. However, the formula does not seem to be working when it comes to terms of endearment. The unreciprocality of Aashiq-Mehboob/a (lover-beloved) is one example. The term Aashiq is reserved for a male addressed by a female or by the man himself while mehboob is mainly used for a female partner. The semantics of the terms shows the agency (The volition to act) encoded in Aashiq while passivity (absence of volition and propensity of being receiver only) in Mehboob. The use is normative in Urdu song lyrics. It does not mean that we cannot find any instance where these terms are used the other way round. However, being the dominant mode of addressing the pattern tells a lot about how gender is conceived. Being
the volitional actor the male addressing forms puts him on the power side while being the object of reception Meхаboоb stands on powerless side. This is a curious picture in which we discover a lot of power play under the shroud of solidarity. We will propose a scheme to reinvent the power-solidarity cline to accommodate this picture; however, more cases are needed to prove the point.

**Urdu song** lyrics abound in terms of endearment that put one partner as the perpetrator of power dynamics. Bedardi (callous one), Bekhaber (ignorant one, especially deliberate ignorance), Beimaan (unfaithful one), Baazigar (the gambler), Chitchor (the heart-stealer), Bainii (vengeful one), Zaalma (the cruel one) are all used by women to address male partners. Though all of these are associated with negative traits, it is impossible to miss the element of 'power to act' encoded in them. Under the guise of solidarity we have a whole range of terms of endearment which place men high in the power hierarchy while women are mere lamenters or wailers with no power to act or react in other ways. They are passive receivers of the infidelity perpetrated by men. It is established so far that the apparent solidarity in a sweetheart-to-sweetheart relation is significantly affected by the power which determines whom to call what. Reciprocality in addressing is restricted by the gender of the addressee. This usage cannot be accommodated in Brown and Gillman’s linear model which puts solidarity and power on the extreme ends. The linear model should be conceptualized as a vertical one where gender acts as a filter to upward mobility towards the power end and the power is allowed to flow down to influence solidarity unless blocked by a masculine filter.

**Gender stereotypes and terms of endearment**

The association of masculinity with physical vigour and of femininity with physical beauty gets very clear expression in terms of endearment as found in Urdu songs. In these terms a woman is always addressed as possessing a perfect face and body while men are rarely referred to for their beauty. This usage results in the stereotypical representation of genders, hold them to certain expectations. Haseen (the beautiful) and its derivative Haseena (a beautiful woman) both are used to address a female partner involved in romantic love. We don’t find any equivalent term used for men. All the metaphors of delicacy and beauty are directed towards women. Nazuk (delicate one), Nazukbadan (possessing delicate body), Dilrubba (appealing to the heart), Mahjabeen (Moon-faced) and Chaandni (moonlight) are all feminine terms of endearment and lack reciprocality. This representation not only confirms the stereotypical image of women but also sets certain expectation about how to be a lovable women. Possessing the delicate body and beautiful face becomes the license for receiving love and appreciation from men. This concept of body image and physical attractiveness is linked so invariably with woman that it almost obligates a woman to be beautiful.
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Many feminine terms of endearment ascribe abstract qualities to women. The terms refer to something they are thought of and not something they actually possess. *Jaan-e-eada* (Soul of charm), *jaane-bahaar* (life of spring), and *Jaan-e-chaman* (life of the flower garden) are difficult to imagine for any serious semantic content and seem vacuous. Such terms are used frequently and emphasize the elusive nature of femininity in comparison to masculinity which has more solid grounds. Men, as has been demonstrated earlier, are depicted as possessing qualities which are more tangible and less abstract than feminine terms. They are *baazigar*, *jaadugar*, *bedardi* and *beeimen* by what they actually do rather than what they are thought to be. This disparity in terms of endearment leads to the clue that masculinity is a more serious issue than frivolous femininity.

The stereotyping does not stop here. It reflects the social roles ascribed to men and women. For example *perdesi* and its augmentative form *Perdesiya* (the lover who lives somewhere else), as well as *musafir* (the traveler) are invariably used to address a male partner. These terms cast men in the role of socially mobile individuals whereas non-usage, in the case of women, considers them well tied to the place. Furthermore, such terminology presupposes the role of men as providers of the family who need to travel, while women as rooted within their domestic context. Similarly, *Herjaayii* (unfaithful one) not only confirms a stereotypical image of men as flirts but also suggests a role for men in which they are allowed to initiate relationships with as many women as they want. Women, on the other hand, can only be recipients of relationship offers.

Urdu terms of endearment conform to a common stereotype that associates modesty with woman. *Sharmeeli* (shy girl) and *Jaan-e-Haya* (core of modesty) are female
terms of endearment that perform the task of reinforcing the ideal of a woman’s modesty. Though a positive cultural value, it is not considered important for men to be modest. This social fact is well reflected in terms of endearment as well. The male equivalent, Sharmeela (shy boy), carries a negative connotation and is rarely used as a masculine term of endearment in Urdu songs.

Asymmetry in terms of endearment

In this section, it will be shown how the same trait-cum-term of endearment for male and female partner is used differentially for both genders. Terms of endearment are asymmetric in many ways. A few have been demonstrated in the previous section. Terms of endearment put asymmetrical demands on a woman to be young and lovely in order to be loved. Youthfulness is associated with women with more intensity than with men. Kamsin (youthful one) is used to address woman only, with no such pressure on men to be youthful. However Naujwan (young man) is talked about as an additional feather in a man’s cap. Athara baras (eighteen years) is always considered the best age for a girl while no such parallel is found which specifies the most youthful period for a boy.

Kanwara-Kanwari (bachelor-virgin) is yet another example of clear asymmetry. The feminine term is appreciative whereas kanwara (bachelor) is used as demerit or deprivation. The male partner called kanwara is continuously struggling to get rid of his current status while the female partner is expected to retain her title. If the roles are reversed, the situation will be disruptive, leading to social stigmatization. The same rift can be observed in Sanwariya-gori (dark man-fair girl) divide. Though the other type of pairing is possible, for example Gora-gori (Fair-skinned boy-fair-skinned girl), Gora-Sanwali is hard to find in any song lyrics. The dominant mode of addressing man and woman remain Sanwara and Gori, respectively. This usage may ostensibly be thought of casting an expectation on both genders. But reality is far more favouring of men than women. While brown is a natural skin tone for Asians, being Gori (fair-skinned girl) is a demand, but being Sanwara (dark-skinned boy) is a description.

It has already been discussed how modesty is always expected of woman. The obligation to be beautiful and modest at the same time can be seen in negative connotations associated with a popular term of endearment used for a female partner. Chamak Challo (over-adorned lady), though used appreciatively in Urdu songs, does not carry the same social approval. Here, breaking the social convention is licensed because of the fictional nature of the songs and may lead to social change. The equivalent masculine term is roughly Chail Chabeela (handsome beau) which does not carry any negative connotation. Such examples are not difficult to find, and as they multiply are able to provide significant evidence of gender apartheid existing in our society.
Conclusion

Urdu has rich agreement morphology and a strong grammatical gender system. In the light of these structural and morphological features, it is predictable to say that gender is a necessary part of our talk. This fact gets ample reflection in Urdu terms of endearment. However, as we have seen, it is not the only way to emphasize a gender divide. Terms of address clearly orient along gendered lines and carry a significant load of gender representations. The terms are non-reciprocal and asymmetric, though involved in the most symmetric relation that we are calling sweetheart-to-sweetheart dyad. Urdu terms of endearment are highly based on an essentialist binary understanding of gender and position both genders differentially. Ostensibly, solidarity-carrying terms are greatly influenced by the power hierarchy. Moreover, the terms carry significant amounts of gender stereotyping, thus confirming and emphasizing popular beliefs and expectations about gender roles and nature.

The introduction of English terms (which are reciprocal) may have some effect and need to be studied in detail; however the current study establishes how far they have to go in order to overcome gender ideology. The terms of endearment that abound in Urdu song lyrics are significantly influenced by dominant gender ideology, which positions masculinity as dominant, unmarked and basic and femininity as derived, marked and subservient. This binary leads to gender apartheid, casting men and women into differential and biased roles, which has led to objectification of women. Keeping in view the governing nature of media, gender apartheid is alarming and needs to be pointed out. This study is one attempt to uncover covert and overt gender ideologies, but such attempts need to be multiplied many times to bring about change.

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