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## LINGUISTIC SEXISM IN 'RISHTA CULTURE' OF PESHAWAR: A FEMINIST STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF MATRIMONIAL ADVERTISEMENTS IN NEWSPAPERS

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### Abstract

*This study looks at the language of matrimonial advertisements in Mashriq and Express newspapers in Peshawar to investigate the implicit linguistic sexism against women. A qualitative methodology is paired with a content analysis approach to examine twenty-two advertisements, eleven from each newspaper from June 2022 to February 2023. The language of the two most widely read newspapers has been observed to perpetuate and strengthen the mainstream discourse that expects women to fulfill certain criteria set by the patriarchal society for being marriageable. The present work investigates the use of semantically derogatory lexical items and lexical asymmetry at the word level; presuppositions, inferences, and readymade/set phrases at the sentence level, and adjectives (beautifiers, religious, cultural), characterization, fragmentation, and focalization at discourse level in the language of the ads through the lens of Sara Mills's Feminist Stylistics (1995). The findings suggest that the language of print media at the word, sentence, and discourse levels plays an important role in reinforcing the stereotypes about women which authenticates the existing social hierarchies as natural and inevitable. The work is significant in delineating the inherent sexism against women entrenched in the lingua-franca of Peshawar, i.e., Urdu, keeping in view the notion of matrimony within socio-cultural and socio-religious contexts of Peshawar. The study critiques the language of advertisements, written, edited, and published by the males, for the males. It calls for language reforms in language at the institutional level, at the level of gatekeepers of language.*

**Keywords:** Feminist stylistics, language, discourse, sexism, stereotypes

## Introduction

Sexism, according to [Vetterling-Braggin \(1981\)](#), (as cited in [Mills, 2008, p. 1](#)), involves "the practices whereby someone foregrounds gender when it is not the most salient feature". Sexism cannot be brushed under the carpet by the naïve idea that it is the result of an error of an individual's incognizance or lack of understanding of the concept. It becomes apparent when one gender is treated as invisible, their experience invalidated, their individual identity unacknowledged, their idiosyncrasy disregarded and generalized based on clichéd assumptions. Their distinctive attitudes, capabilities, skills, and talents get subsumed in the truisms developed and reinforced by the dominant sex ([Mills, 2008, pp.1–2](#)).

Ambivalent sexism is operated through ideological state apparatuses which, through constant reiteration, have normalized the sexist beliefs and norms that are now part of the unconscious of societies' discourses ([Diler, 2018, p. 53](#)). However, as a site of struggle itself, the ideology of sexism is countered by yet another doctrine—feminism, that accepts nothing less than equal rights for both genders in all domains of social life ([Biana, 2020, p. 3](#)). Hence, feminism and sexism are not mutually exclusive and cannot be studied separately.

Considering the religious and cultural backdrop of Pakistan, Feminism does not receive a welcoming stance in the country and is accused of furthering Western agendas in the guise of equality for women ([Serez, 2017, pp. 67–68](#)). Critics advocate for a more inclusive feminism that brings the underrepresented middle and working-class women to the center from the peripheries. In Pakistan, progressive feminism and Islamic feminism have always been at odds with each other which paves the way for controversial debates and conflicting tendencies ([Husain, 2023, para 3–8](#)).

The present work examines how [Mills's \(1995\)](#) Feminist Stylistics assists in bringing to light the misogynous and sexist instances

employed in the language of matrimonial ads in newspapers in Peshawar.

## Problem Statement

The study problematizes the notion of linguistic sexism in advancing patriarchal standards to judge women's eligibility for marriage in newspaper matrimonial ads.

## Objectives

1. To identify the nuances of linguistic sexism that strengthen the existing patriarchal social hierarchies in newspaper matrimonial advertisements.
2. To examine how [Sara Mills's \(1995\)](#) Feminist Stylistics reveals the emerging patterns of sexism at word, sentence, and discourse levels in the language of the advertisements.

## Delimitations

The matrimonial ads of only two newspapers are selected to make a manageable analysis of linguistic sexism at the levels of word, clause, and discourse. Also, only those ads chosen for the present study that pertain to the linguistic criteria established in [Mills's \(1995\)](#) framework in the language of print media in the context of Peshawar only.

## Literature Review

[Yasmin, Sohail and Mangrio \(2015\)](#) used a feminist stylistic toolkit to explore linguistic sexism in the depiction of female victims in *Dawn* and *Express Newspapers*. The newspapers are seen as perpetuating stereotyped identities for women and victim-blaming them for the horrendous crimes they are confronted with at the hands of men. The language of print media places all the blame for the assault on the female victim's vulnerable state ([Yasmin et al., 2015, pp. 211–212](#)).

[Ahmad, Qureshi, and Akram \(2022\)](#) uncovered linguistic sexism in ten articles published in *Daily Dawn*. They observed that almost all articles contain instances of sexist language including adjectivization, affixation, gender marking, and different naming strategies for women and men ([p. 109](#)).

Yasmin, Masso, Bukhari, and Aboubakar (2019) looked for the sexist representation of women in *Dawn*, *The Nation*, *Daily Times*, and *The News* by using Feminist Stylistics and Critical Discourse Analysis. They found women as more visible in entertainment news while men take most of the space in news articles. This asymmetrical representation of women and men produces a sexist meaning-making system that is readily consumed by the audience, particularly, women (Yasmin et al. 2019, p. 10).

Matrimonial advertisements in newspapers serve as an interesting site to witness the strengthening of stereotypical gender roles, expectations, and conventional yardstick to measure the suitability of a potential spouse. The study shows that physical attractiveness for females and financial stability for males remain the prominent qualifications for being marriageable. This polarization further consolidates the already established standards of judging women and men from a unified lens of beauty and income respectively (Warrich, Qamar, & Huma, 2020, pp. 9–11).

Print media matrimonial advertisements are reckoned as a comprehensive genre to analyze a community's socio-cultural and socio-religious frameworks. These advertisements render insight into the thought patterns of a diverse population of a region and give an insider perspective of the value and belief system of that community (Aruma, 2018, p. 152).

Khan and Ateeq (2017) compare English and Urdu newspapers to see the identity construction of both sexes in matrimonial ads. They argue that women's education is declared by them but they, in return, do not demand educational qualifications from male candidates. Men, on the other hand, are upfront in their demands for women who are educated, beautiful, homely, and cultured (pp. 13–14).

Demberg (2014) investigates sexist language in *The Daily Mail* with the help of

Mills's (1995) feminist stylistics toolkit at the word and discourse level. She mentions a key take of Mills regarding overt linguistic sexism which maintains that despite all feminist efforts towards language reformation, sexism is still prevalent and requires persistent actions to be countered and minimized eventually (1995, p. 8).

The literature review as discussed above suggests that the permeating presence of linguistic sexism in print media not only influences a culture but also reflects the constructed realities and truths about a particular gender in society. Newspaper advertisements play an important role in disseminating ideologies that work in favor of the dominant class, group, or, in this case, sex. Given that the content of newspaper ads and reports is consumed by the general public, it actively contributes to the social conditioning of people's consciousness. As a result, the language used in these ads functions to subtly reiterate sexism against women; reproduce the stereotype; promulgate biased narratives, and preserve the mainstream patriarchal norms as natural. The present study investigates linguistic sexism in matrimonial ads in order to explore the reinforcement and authentication of the stereotypes about women from a feminist stylistic viewpoint.

### Research Design and Methodology

Purposive sampling was used to collect eleven advertisements each, from two widely read online Urdu newspapers in Peshawar, namely *Mashriq* and *Express* from June 2022 to February 2023. Content analysis of purposefully selected ads helps ensure that their language aligns with the features of sexism discussed in Mills's (1995) Feminist Stylistics. The amalgamation of purposive sampling and content analysis helps substantiate the presence of linguistic sexism in the selected matrimonial advertisements. Qualitative methodology is used for a subjective reading of the content of the selected ads. It allows the researchers to

discover the motifs and meanings implicitly or explicitly manifested in the selected text.

### Theoretical Framework

Mills (1995) proposes three levels, the level of word, sentence, and discourse, to examine linguistic sexism in texts. The present work selects those ads that contain sexist strategies advanced in Mills's (1995) model. The elements of sexism put forth by Mills and the ones chosen for this research include semantically derogatory titles and lexical asymmetry at the word level, readymade phrases, presuppositions and inferences at the sentence level, and fragmentation, focalization, adjectivization, and characterization at the discourse level.

### Significance of the Study

The present study focuses on the role of language used in matrimonial ads in strengthening sexist prototypes. This consequently amplifies the essentialisation of females as the inferior sex, always subject to manmade standards of perfection. The present work focuses on the linguistic features of the matrimonial ads acting as agents of sexism in constituting a misogynous reality. Moreover, it brings in a fresh perspective by addressing linguistic sexism in Urdu matrimonial ads in newspapers of Peshawar utilizing Mills's (1995) feminist stylistics. Therefore, the study is significant in providing a rich insight into how Urdu serves both as a lingua franca of the city and as a medium to perpetuate misogynous beliefs through matrimonial ads in newspapers.

For analysis, the selection of a set linguistic criteria e.g., derogatory words that propagate sexism against women and feeds the vested interests of patriarchy in the sociocultural context of Peshawar also makes the present work significant. The analysis of language from word to discourse in matrimonial ads helps reflect the societal mindset and cultural impetuses that drive the usage of sexist lexical choices by advertisers. The emphasis on language at word, phrase, and discourse level addresses and counters the misogynistic

proclivity that runs deep in the discourse of the city.

Thus, the present work highlights the ideological underpinnings and ulterior motives of manmade language that establishes, maintains, and reinforces patriarchal parameters of matrimonial eligibility for women. The ramifications of such a quandary are nothing but a firm retention of existing social hierarchies as ubiquitous.

### Data Analysis

This section presents an analysis of data from selected newspapers to investigate the linguistic realization of sexism at the word, sentence, and discourse levels.

### Linguistic Sexism at Word Level

At the level of the word, we can trace the use of lexical asymmetry and semantically derogatory titles like 'bewa' (widow), 'talaqyافتا' (divorced), and 'banjh' (infertile/barren) to introduce women either as candidates for marriage or as advertisers looking for a spouse. When compared with the description of males as advertisers or as potential candidates, it is observed that only in one case the male equivalent Urdu term for a widower is used i.e. 'randwa' (widower) (see Figure 3.0).

Women, both as advertisers and as candidates, are described twelve times. In all twenty-two ads, eight times female advertisers introduced themselves with the title 'bewa' (widowed). Only once are they described by male advertisers as 'bewa' (widowed) and 'banjh' (barren), whereas twice as 'talaqyافتا' (divorced)? The high number of females calling themselves 'widow' suggests the internalized sexism where women believe their marital status defines them. A woman is not considered an individual in herself with a completely independent identity. She is required to classify her marital or relationship status that cannot purely be dichotomous as married or unmarried but may also include being separated, divorced, or widowed.

This shows the unequal power relations in the androcentric naming patterns discussed by



insinuates the notions of purity, refrainment from premarital sexual affairs, or celibacy. All these meanings refer to women as nobodies and put them in inferior subordinate positions, as subjects of patriarchy. This counts as a reason why 'kunwari' (virgin/single) falls under the rubric of linguistic sexism at the word level; that is because it is woven into the fabric of masculine hegemony over the meanings, language and discourse of society.

It is also important to critique the long-term effects these sexist lexical items e.g., 'talaqyافتا' (divorced), 'banjh' (barren/infertile), or bewa (widow) in the language of the following ads (see Figures 1.2 and 1.3) can have on women's lives. The recurrent usage of these terms makes them conventional and normal in the discourse that a non-resisting reader does not even think of the underlying stigmas employed in them. They readily consume the language, internalise its connotations given by the dominant authorities, and act upon them which ultimately gives rise to a society based on sexist principles and misogynistic attitudes.

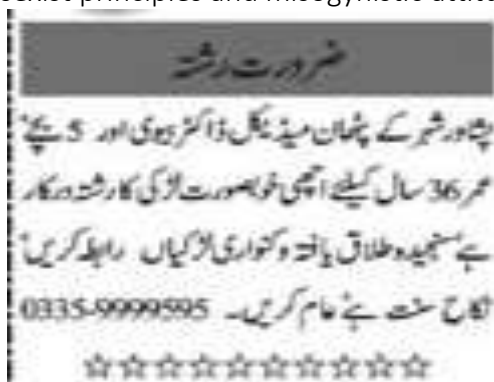


Figure 1.2



Figure 1.3

The effects of singlehood on Pakistani women are not confined to social exclusion, isolation, being pitied by relatives, and being cast aside in social gatherings. It extends to the psychological and emotional health of women worsening due to the indifference, disinterest and discriminatory attitude of friends and family (Sultana, Zeeshan, & Ahmed, 2021, p. 11). Society places married women on a pedestal and looks down upon single unmarried women, making them feel like damaged goods, outplaced, unwanted, and a subject of gossip.

Besides single women, divorced women are no less shunned by society. They are equally marginalized in Pakistan as Sultana (2017) observes: "Divorced women experience social disgrace as people around them, without understanding the real factors that lead to divorce, blame the women as stubborn, quarrelsome or of bad character, unable to maintain their marriages" (p. 228). This sheds light on the victim-blaming culture of Pakistani society that turns a blind eye towards the circumstantial factors of divorce, and rather holds the woman accountable for not being able to keep her marriage intact.

Figure 1.3 features the word 'banjh' (childless, barren) which implies sexism considering how the notions of disgrace and dishonour are attached to Pakistani women who 'suffer' from infertility. Mumtaz, Shahid, and Levay (2013) argue that "infertility is a highly stigmatizing attribute in this society ... this stigma is gendered with women suffering greater stigmatization and its consequent abuse and harassment ..." (p. 5). Such mistreatment explains Mills's (1995) claim that language itself is not inherently sexist. It is the stereotypes and taboos that are part of societal customs and cultural norms that make the lexical items of a language sexist. It is the dominant ideologies ingrained in the discourse of a society which help us in classifying different terms as misogynistic such as bewa (widow), talaqyافتا (divorced), and banjh (infertile).

At the word level, linguistic sexism also becomes apparent in the asymmetrical usage of certain lexical items e.g., referring to women as 'girls' but men as 'men'. Mills (1995) asserts, "The term 'girl' has further problems since it is frequently used asymmetrically; it is used as one term in a binary opposition men: girls (rather than men: women)" (p. 74).



Figure 1.4

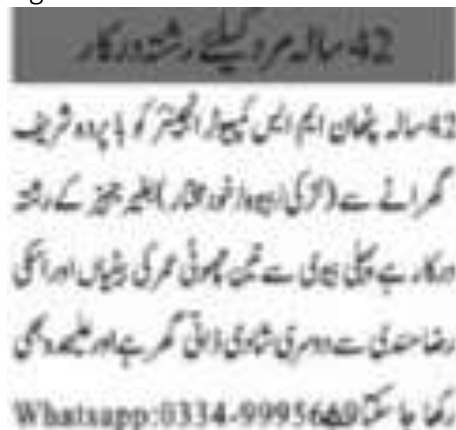


Figure 1.5

On one hand, in Figures 1.4 and 1.5 we can clearly mark the prejudicial language markers e.g., 'larki' (girl) being used to refer to a young woman preferably in her twenties. On the other hand, men are introduced with a gender-free term 'shakhs' (person) or referred to as 'mard' (man) which implies the ideas of maturity and adulthood. Within the Pakistani context, the lexical item 'larki' (girl) has the connotations of a young unmarried woman under the age of thirty. In Figure 1.5 the instance of non-parallel treatment of women and men in the language is obvious where the male is referred to as a 'mard' and the female

as 'larki'. This lexical asymmetry is a clear indicator of linguistic prejudice against women that has ageist undertones. The meanings of 'young' and 'unmarried' have an androcentric tendency that inclines to fit women in the glass sandals made by the male chauvinist society.

### Linguistic Sexism at the Sentence Level

At the phrase or sentence level too, our data encompasses instances of linguistic prejudice as discussed by Mills (1995): words themselves make sense in relation to their context ... and their context, ... the history of their usage, and also the background knowledge which is needed for their making sense ... set phrases are curious elements because they are posed as common sense knowledge which is incontestable. (p. 98)

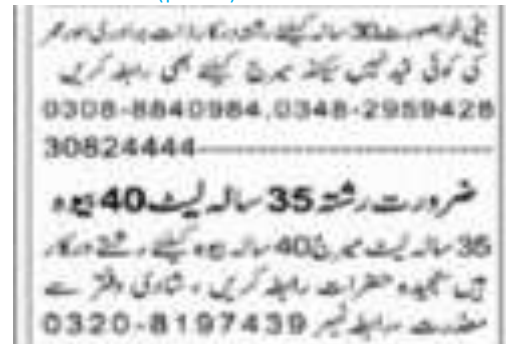


Figure 1.6



Figure 1.7

The instantiation of the set phrases such as 'late marriage' in Figures 1.6 (second ad out of the two) and 1.7 indicates the ageism rooted in the language. What is more upsetting is that it is women advertisers themselves who use these readymade ageist phrases. It resonates with the concept of internalized misogyny that has made women immune and numb to sexist language to such an extent that they do not resist using it for themselves.

The language of advertisements is a clear manifestation of the internalized sexism by women who willingly respond to the misogynous interpellation of age standards set by male chauvinist society. By doing this they literally contribute to keep the patriarchal ideologies of beauty and youth alive. This attitude makes them view themselves from a male's perspective which does not let them see beyond the miserable future of instability that they otherwise can avoid by getting married at the 'right' age. Figures 1.6 and 1.7 possess the readymade sexist phrase 'late marriage' for women who are under the age of forty and thirty. Not even one ad uses this phrase for a male both as a candidate or advertiser.

Another linguistic realization of sexism at the level of sentences or phrases is prevalent in the advertisements in the form of inferences and presuppositions as discussed by Mills (1995): "Phrases can be interpreted only in their ideological context. By making explicit the presuppositions and inferences necessary to make the phrases make sense, it is possible to think through the implications of what is being asserted (p. 104)". In Figure 1.2 the addition of the sentence 'nikah sunnat hai, aam karein' (Nikah is sunnah. Make it common) is nothing less than a religious push to encourage women, whether single or divorced, to consider the proposal because it is sunnah. The advertiser is presupposing that:

1. "Nikah" (marriage) is not "aam" (common) among people;
2. Illicit relationships between women and men are widespread;
3. It is difficult for divorced women to find a suitable match to remarry, therefore, they should seriously consider the first proposal that comes their way even if the man is already married and have a family.
4. Not only divorced but single women have also been invited to contact the male advertiser which again presupposes the unavailability of good proposals even for single women.

The inference, however, is that a woman accepting the man into marriage will fulfill the Sunnah and thereby will prove herself as a good follower of Islam. In order to fully make sense of this sentence and its placement in this ad, we need to be conscious of the ideology working behind it. The sentence is included in the ad just to maneuver women into considering and eventually accepting the proposal because it is better from a religious viewpoint to marry an already married man with kids than to remain single or divorced for the rest of their lives. If the male advertiser sincerely wanted to help a divorced woman by marrying her, giving her a proverbial roof and a good life (from an Islamic standpoint) he could have kept single women out of it. Nevertheless his intention of helping a divorced woman by marrying her as his religious duty becomes doubtful since he has kept his options open for marrying single women too.

This is what makes the advertisement questionable to a certain extent. It is obvious that the advertiser simply intends to capitalize on the religious add-on to remarry a single woman who must be 'achi' (good) and 'khoobsurat' (beautiful) too. The inference here can also be that *women* are supposed to follow the sunnah more than men and that they are the ones who are supposed to normalize marriage no matter what the marital status of the man is.

Other examples of linguistic sexism at the sentence level can be seen in the use of the readymade phrases "soum-o-salah ki paband" (woman regular in prayer and fasting) and "khof-e-khuda wali larki" (God-fearing girl) in Figures 1.8 and 1.9 respectively. Once again the language of the advertisements implies that women need to be more practicing followers of Islam. It is not just the men imposing religious demands on women but also women themselves as can be seen in Figure 1.8. The woman advertiser, in an attempt to present herself as an ideal candidate for marriage, mentions her religious



beliefs and practices. It supports the dominant chauvinist ideology that expects women to be the culture carriers and religion bearers for future generations.



Figure 1.8

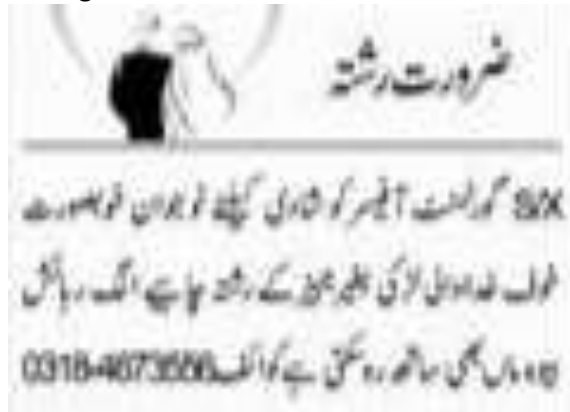


Figure 1.9

According to Mills (1995): women are particularly subjected to the effects of ideology ... These systems of belief are not simply imposed upon women, but women themselves actively take part in them and appropriate and reject them according to their investments and interests in them ... An ideology, in this view, is a sequence or set of statements ... which individual subjects will negotiate, affirm, and/or resist. (p. 116) What Mills (1995) means is that women are equally a part of the dissemination of patriarchal domination. Our data has ample manifestations of this. Most of the advertisements (see Figures 2.0 and 2.1) by widows do not place demands on male candidates to be single, highly educated, belonging to a certain ethnicity or caste, young, or religious because apparently, the burden of possessing all such qualifications falls on females only. In case of being in the

position of candidates, males are described by female advertisers either as 'sanjeeda hazraat' (serious gentlemen), 'khuwahish-mand hazraat' (desiring gentlemen), 'karobari log' (businesspeople) (see Figures 1.6 and 1.7) or no title is used altogether.



Figure 2.0

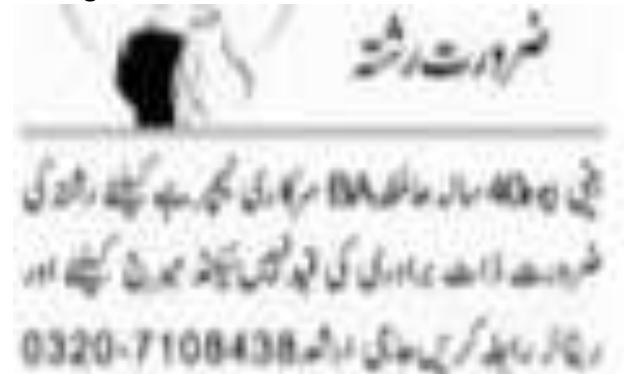


Figure 2.1

### Linguistic Sexism at the Discourse Level

The present study focuses on different elements of linguistic sexism that add to the strengthening of stereotypes about women in a discourse. These elements are characterization, adjectivization, focalization, and fragmentation.

Characterisation, as defined by Mills (1995) is when "female and male characters are described differently" (p. 124) in texts. In our data, females (both in the roles of candidates or advertisers) are described with cultural and religious adjectives, beautifiers, and in relationship to men—their marital status. Contrarily, men are described more with reference to their professions and

financial status and lesser in terms of beauty. In the role of candidates, women's education is not as foregrounded as it is in the role of advertisers e.g., in Figures 1.0, 1.1, 2.0, and 2.1, women mention their profession and education i.e., 'sarkari teacher' (government teacher), 'Matriculation' and 'F.A', 'B.A'. This entails the lack of importance given by men to the literacy and education of women in Pakistan. Nonetheless, despite the indifferent attitude of men, women's mention of their academic status reflects their consciousness of the importance of education. The demands put forward by male advertisers mostly center on the physical beauty of the potential female candidate and her religious standing as shown in the following advertisements.

Figure 2.2 lists different religious adjectives such as 'deendar' (devout), 'alma' (learned scholar), 'madrassa hafiza' (one who has memorized Quran by heart), and 'qaria' (reciter). The characterization of women in this ad is different from that of the man who is described in concrete terms. His profession (a retired army officer) and financial status (to be able to afford a separate house in a posh area) are not overlooked. Conversely, all that is required of the woman is to be angelic, virtuous, and a devout religious person. Her identity and whole personality are weighed merely by religious adjectivisation. Similarly, Figures 2.3 and 2.4 also feature adjectives like 'deendar gharana' (devoutly religious family) and 'momina' (true believer) which further confirm the difference in the representation of men and women and authenticates the social stereotypes of women as religion carriers whereas men are naturally excused of any such responsibility as long as they are wealthy or financially stable.



Figure 2.2

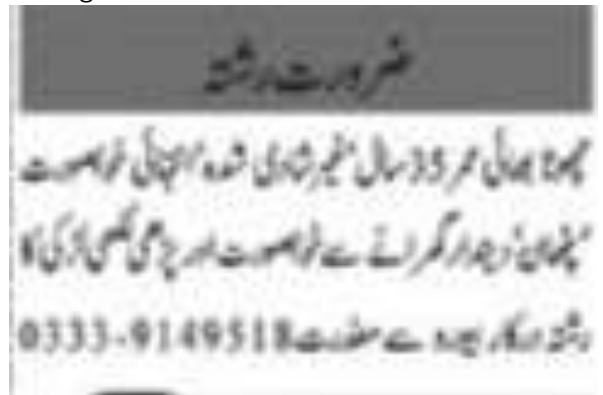


Figure 2.3



Figure 2.4

Figures 1.4 and 1.5 also characterise women with religious adjectives e.g., 'baparda' (veiled), 'shareef gharany se' (belonging to a decent/upstanding family) and the sentence 'tarjeehan larki hijab, niqab lenay wali ho toh behtar' (preferably, the girl practicing veil and hijab would make a better candidate). Such adjectivisation puts women under the pressure of being morally upright and decent not only as individuals but also as the representatives of their family's reputation and social standing. In addition to religious

adjectives, the language of the ads also includes cultural adjectives e.g., 'moazzaz gharana' (noble family), 'khandani larki' (well-born/of noble descent) (see Figures 2.5 and 2.6) which contribute to the construction of the stereotypical image of women as the guardians and bearers of honor and integrity of the family.



Figure 2.5



Figure 2.6

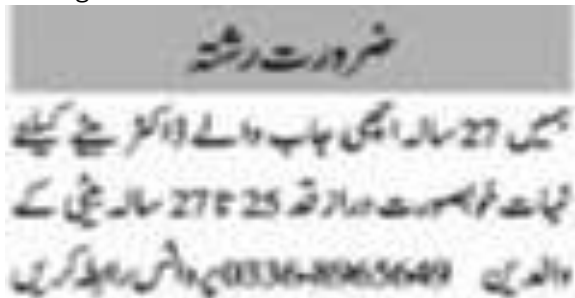


Figure 2.7

Apart from the different adjectives used for both the sexes, female and male characterisation also includes how “women are generally described in terms of their relations to other people ... or with respect to their appearance ... whilst men are referred to with respect to their occupations” (Mills, 1995, p. 126). In the present study, too, the evidence to Mills’s (1995) argument is seen in Figures 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.9, 2.7, 2.8, and 2.9 where the male advertisers introduce themselves as

‘medical doctor’, ‘mard doctor’ (male doctor), ‘achi job wala doctor’ (well-paid doctor), ‘computer engineer’, ‘sarkari mulazim’ (government officer), ‘businessman beta’ (businessman son), ‘maali tor per mustehkam shakhs’ (financially stable person), ‘foreign qualified’, and ‘American national’. On the contrary women are either introduced as ‘bewa’, ‘talaqyافتا’, ‘banjh’, or ‘beti’, thus, trivializing their existence and identity to their relationship with men e.g., in Figures 1.0, 1.1, 1.3, 1.5, 1.6, 1.8, 2.0, 2.1, and 2.7.

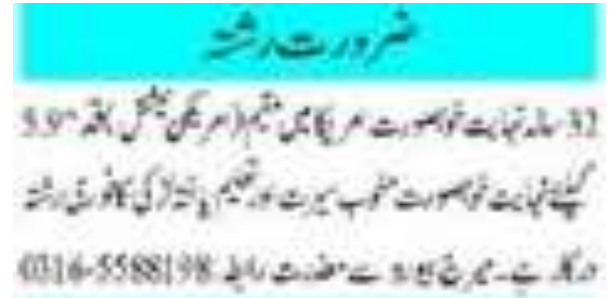


Figure 2.8

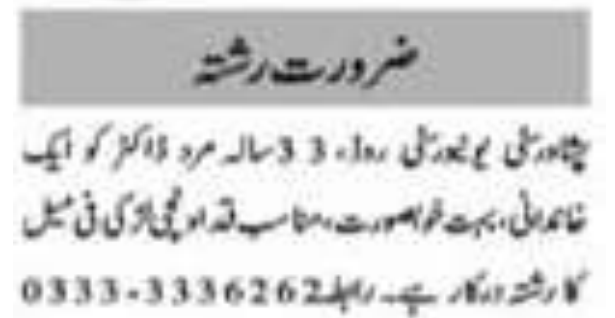


Figure 2.9

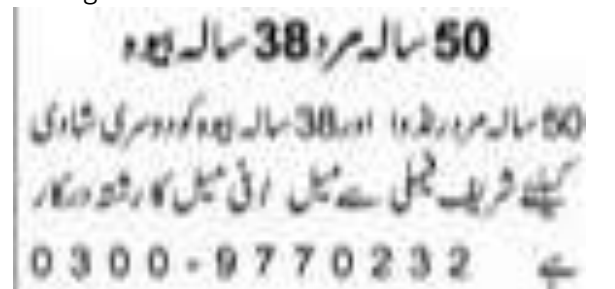


Figure 3.0

Mills (1995) also discusses fragmentation and focalization as elements of linguistic sexism that can be identified in texts’ analyses. She defines them as: fragmenting the female body ... has two primary effects. First, the body is depersonalized, objectified, reduced to its parts. Second, since the female ... is not represented as a unified conscious physical

being, the scene cannot be focalized from her perspective ... her experience is written out of the text. (p. 133)

She continues, "Fragmentation of the female tends to co-occur with male focalization" (1995, p. 135). The data in this study lays out before us the fragmentation of females both as advertisers and as candidates. In almost all of the advertisements, female beauty is objectified with a focus on their height and attractive facial features.

Little to no importance is given to her personality as an individual, her education, or the qualities that make her a good human or a compatible partner. She is fragmented by herself and male advertisers as 'bohot khoobsurat' (very beautiful), 'munasib qad' (normal height), 'oonchi larki' (tall girl), (see Figure 2.9) 'nihayat khoobsurat aur khoobseerat' (beautiful and of good behaviour) (see Figure 2.8), 'khoobsurat pukhtun betiyan' (beautiful Pashtun daughters) (see Figure 3.1), 'nihayat khoobsurat' (extremely pretty), 'daraz qad' (tall) (see Figure 2.7), 'nojawan khoobsurat' (young, beautiful) (see Figure 1.9), 'achi khoobsurat' (nice and beautiful) (see Figure 1.2), 'khush-shakal' (good looking) (see Figure 1.4). Beautifiers are used for males too in Figures 2.3 and 2.8, but not in the same proportion as for females.

Our data shows that female advertisers view themselves from males' perspectives. Their reference to beauty and in some cases good behavior validates Mills's (1995) amalgamation of the concepts of fragmentation and male focalization. The females simply trade on the idea of beauty to be considered as prospective candidates. Not only do they make their beauty their selling point but also the widows refer to their 'khudmukhtar' (independent) status as well so as to suggest their financial stability.

Some of the lexical indicators of their wealth include Figure 1.0 (second ad out of three) 'zati makaan' (owns a house) 'dukanein' (shops), 'silai school' (sewing training

center/vocational institute), Figure 2.0 'zati 4 acre raqba aur bangla' (owns 4 acre land and bungalow) and Figure 2.6 'job holder'. They objectify themselves by the beauty and wealth that they believe can most probably attract male candidates.

Hence, we go beyond the level of lexical items and look at the level of discourse, for the ideologies produced, reproduced, and maintained about how females should represent themselves and be represented by others in the texts. To look for focalization in the texts is to "examine ... lexical or syntactic indicators ... where the lexis or syntax seems peculiarly appropriate to the consciousness of a particular character" (Mills, 1995, pp. 142–143).

In all the advertisements discussed in this study, we can see that the females are mostly spoken for by their family members and even the male advertisers have mentioned for the women's *families* to contact. An example of this appears in Figure 2.7 when the ad reads, "beti ke waldein rabta karein" (The girl's parents may contact). Contrary to this, the males in most cases use the direct address as in Figure 2.8 where the ad says, "nihayat khoobsurat, khoobseerat taleemyafta larki ka fori rishta darkar hai" (proposal of an extremely beautiful, good-natured, and educated girl is required on urgent basis), Figure 1.9 claims, "bewa maa bhi sath reh sakti hai" (widow mother can also stay (with the woman post marriage)).

This syntactic construction constitutes the male advertiser in the position of power since he will let the woman's mother too to stay in his house. Here we can clearly identify the speaker as a male who has the authority and the ability to confer a favor upon the female and allow her mother, if a widow, to move in with them. We, as readers, read the language of these advertisements and are hailed by it into subject positions.

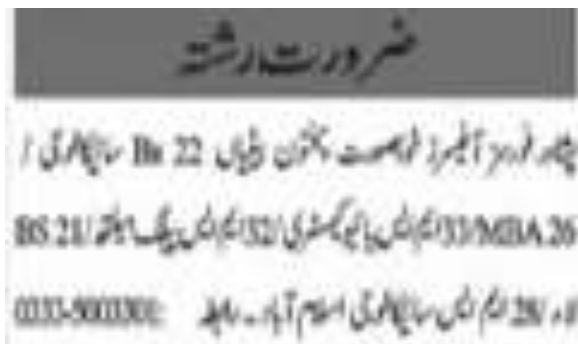


Figure 3.1

### Conclusion

In countries like Pakistan, women still carry the burden of social stigmas and stereotypes about their sex which have been deeply embedded in our discourse and ideological frameworks. Continuous and consistent efforts have to be made before the milestone of a fair and just society is achieved where women will be free of the social and cultural conditioning done by manmade language schemata.

As far as print media is concerned, we cannot claim that much awareness or change about gender-inclusive language use is being disseminated through newspapers. This mode of information still largely conforms to the normative standards of patriarchal supremacy in language. On the bright side, however, we can see a silver lining in the language of selected advertisements; women, besides their physical attractiveness, bring forward the attributes that matter to them e.g., their professional status and academic qualification, and above all, their financial independence.

Although such advertisements are still like a drop in the ocean, however, it cannot be denied that even a small change or a step towards a better narrative can go a long way. This study concludes that we as a society need to be conscious of the fact that we need to write a better history and a better story for the generations to come. Pragmatically this can be accomplished when the state is involved in taking initiatives for gender-free language reforms in education and mass media. Our languages need stories that do not revolve around the rotten beliefs and norms of

misogyny and patriarchy; and phrases like 'battle of sexes' need to be subverted through perseverance and determination for a better future.

### Recommendations

Further research can be carried out to make comparative analyses of Urdu and English newspapers in Peshawar and their representation of linguistic sexism in matrimonial ads. Also, Urdu newspapers other than *Mashriq* and *Express* can also be studied to explore any similarities or differences in their projection of sexist elements in matrimonial advertisements.

### Note

Please accept an excuse due to the blur on pictures of newspapers' advertisements added in the paper.

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