



Linguistic Taboos in the Pahari Culture: A Sociolinguistic Analysis

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Abstract: *The present study aims to explore the linguistic taboos prevalent in the Pahari society. This research adopts qualitative approach because of its scope in socio-cultural norms and settings. The data collected for this study is based on observations made by the researchers from the Pahari culture in a local setting. The Politeness theory (Brown and Levinson 1978, 1987) has been used in this research as a theoretical framework. Three types of taboos have been explored; religion related taboos, decorum related taboos, and morality related taboos. The taboos present in the Pahari culture are not only verbal but non-verbal also and there are certain examples of cultural specific category of taboos.*

Keywords: *Linguistic taboos, Sociolinguistics, Pahari Society, Politeness Theory.*

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Introduction

In a society language is primarily used to meet the needs of its society either positively or negatively. In sociolinguistics, language behaves like a double edged weapon and its use must be very tactful. It is a tool to determine moral conduct of society and its speakers because it is used to appease, repair, sway and obliterate the very form of its society. To avoid negative consequences of a language, the speakers set linguistic norms that guide them at all levels of linguistic expressions. When a speaker breaches the set linguistic norms of its society, he/she is viewed as one who uses taboo in his/her speech.

Words become taboos when they are taken as offensive, odious or distasteful by the listener. For Apt (1994) words become taboos when they are believed to be flabby and ailing for linguistic usage and are entirely banned in daily public discourse. Their usage in public is taken as breaching certain ethics and morals. Taboos are set because they are thought to be improper and inappropriate in public discourse. According to Wardhaugh (1992), taboos entail a moral code and the violation of them can be harmful to the public face of an individual. Linguistic taboos are the words that cause embarrassment, discomfiture, awkwardness and aggravate shame and offend the listener's beliefs either verbal or non-verbal. Almost all the languages of the world have linguistic taboos but they are not universal except a few. Every language, with diverse cultural and social norms, has taboo words varying from culture to culture.

Like other languages taboos are also present in the Pahari language and its speakers avoid taboos in their speech either willingly or hesitantly owing to the sensitive nature of them. Taboos are observed by all the member of the society and violation of certain taboo words brings severe penalty. Obscenity, vulgarity and blasphemy are taken as severe offense in the Pahari culture. Similarly, there are certain food and gift taboos in the Pahari culture where violation of these taboos is taken as a heinous act and the offender is never tolerated. Their usage is avoided at a considerable level, but they picturesque social norms and religious beliefs of society. Speakers of the Pahari language avoid various types of taboos that come under the categories of religion, modesty and decorum related taboos in terms of social contexts. These taboos are not only verbal but non-verbal also. These taboos are of varying nature and are present in food, gift exchange, social set up and moral standards of the Pahari speaking society.

Background of the Study

Pahari is an Indo-Aryan language; a subgroup of Indo European languages as stated by Massica (1991). Pahari is one of the ancient languages spoken in South Asia. It is a native language of the people living in the hilly areas of Nepal, of Himalaya region, Himachal Pradesh of India. It is also spoken in Northern areas of Pakistan and in the State of Azad Jammu & Kashmir (Shakeel, 2004).

Pahari is mother tongue of people of Azad Jammu & Kashmir with various dialects having varying stress and intonation patterns and pronunciation. It has various dialects like *Mirpuri*, *Poonchi* and *Pothwari* as stated by Ahmad (2002) all these dialects have considerable differences in their vocabulary and pronunciation. Pahari language shares many common characteristics with its sister languages and the same is the case with the cultural norms and values. As the population of Azad Jammu & Kashmir is mainly Muslim thus, their religious and linguistic taboos are strongly influenced by their belief. Certain expressions are strictly avoided in the Pahari culture and this study will describe those taboos which are prevalent / observed in the Pahari culture. This research aims to answer the following research questions:

Research Questions

1. What are different religion related, decorum related, and morality related taboos present in the Pahari culture?
2. How verbal and non-verbal taboos practiced in the Pahari culture are different from other societies?

Limitation of the study

The present study is limited to the taboos being practiced in the Mirpur division of Azad Jammu & Kashmir. In this division *Mirpuri* dialect of Pahari language is spoken. The study will focus only on description of verbal and non-verbal taboos related to religion, decorum and morality.

Literature Review

As stated by Farb (1974), "any word is an innocent collection of sounds until a community surrounds it with connotations and decrees that it cannot be used in certain speech situations" (p. 91). Taboos are the words, beliefs, thoughts and people that are avoided by any society because mostly they are unmentionables. Similarly, there are also certain things that are not talked about in a plain way and according to Wardhaugh (2011) they are

talked other way round as euphemisms because these expressions allow the speaker to talk about unpleasant and unmentionables. Chu (2009) opines that these unmentionables are completely shunned in polite discourse because they imply such strong and influential implications. As sex and exertion related words are taken as taboo words around the globe and Trudgill (1986) calls these as the most common taboos among the English speakers.

Honxu and Guisen (1990) studied taboos in the Chinese culture and found that taboos are related to superstitions and customs along with hierarchical powers. They discussed three types of taboos as absolute, quasi and non-taboo. Al-Khatib (1995) has focused on linguistic taboos present in the Jordanian Arabic in their relation to social context and also highlighted those factors that affect their usage. He also explored how taboos are created, developed, violated and replaced in Jordanian society. He concluded that there are certain cultural parameters and social norms that are conditioned with these taboos.

Taboos present in Oromo culture are an interesting phenomenon of the Oromo people. Mbaya (2002) conducted a study of taboos in Oromo culture and brought to light very interesting aspects on linguistic taboos present there. According to him, *laguu/ lagacha* is a customary term that avoids addressing person by their names that are related to each other in marriage. Mbaya (2002) observed that the wife will never call her husband by his name but with following honorific, *he/they, head of my family*. Similar phenomenon is also observed in Pahari culture where wife avoids calling her husband by his name.

Khan and Pervaiz (2010) have studied the changing nature of certain taboos with reference to Pakistani context. They conclude that linguistic taboo change regularly while certain religious taboos are changing at a low speed. They found considerable differences among younger and the older generation as the younger generation is more willing to use taboo words than the older one.

The Yamani society avoids usage of tabooed words and replaces them with euphemisms; the use of standard Arabic terms, jargon and other strategies. This aspect has been highlighted by Qanbar (2011) that there are cultural and religious norms and conditions that govern these taboos. She divided these taboos into two categories namely, general and context specific. In an Islamic society, Islam has greatly influenced the norms and cultures of

that society and this aspect has been highlighted by Ahmad et al. (2013) in the Pashtoon context. They have explained why certain words are considered taboos in society and why certain taboo words are accompanied by particular conventionally-fixed words. Pahari culture is also an Islamic one and it shares the same religious taboos as by other Islamic cultures. He has also highlighted strategies taken by the Pashtoon speakers as to how to avoid these taboos.

Gao (2013) has investigated ‘bodily excretions, death and disease, sex, four-letter words, privacy and discriminatory language’ taboos in English and stated how English speakers avoid using these taboo words. In order to avoid these, different strategies are used which include euphemisms and round about ways.

Fakuade et al. (2013) investigated linguistic taboos in Igbo culture and classified these taboos into five broad categories, “morality-related linguistic taboos, veneration-related linguistic taboos, decorum-related linguistic taboos, religion related linguistic taboos and fear-related linguistic taboos” and they concluded that these taboos are not taught in school curriculum and Igbo textbooks.

Aliakbari and Raeesi (2015) explored linguistic taboos in Iranian society and showed how Iranian people use different strategies to avoid usage of taboo words. They concluded that, there is a great deal of similarity in most of the linguistic taboos between the Iranian society and other Muslim societies as both Iran and these Muslim societies are driven by Islamic doctrines and values. The same is the case with Pahari society which is also driven by Islamic norms. But the difference lies at the level of specificity of culture, and specific identity related to that culture.

The present research is an attempt to explore different linguistic taboos that are embedded in the Pahari culture. No previous work has been done on the topic, so this study will be a pioneering work to describe various types of taboos present in Pahari society.

Research Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This study adopts qualitative approach as this approach provides information about cultural norms, values and attitudes of a specific population in a particular social setting. The present research describes the phenomenon of linguistic taboos in Pahari culture and is based on personal observation. As observation is, “the systematic description of events,

behaviors, and artifacts in the social setting chosen for study” (Marshall & Rossman, 1986, p. 79) thus the present research is based on observation. The researchers observed the community; however, the researchers did not take part as participants, rather they simply observed sampled participants or situations. As one of the researchers is a native of the Pahari culture, it was easy for her to get into the community to analyze the phenomenon of taboos in real settings. Note book is taken as a recording device for getting the required data.

The Politeness theory postulated by Brown and Levinson (1978, 1987) and the concept of ‘face’ proposed by Goffman (1955) rightly fit into analyzing taboos of Pahari speaking society. The Politeness theory states that a participant engaged in interaction is taken as Model Person (MP). According to them a Model Person is “a willful fluent speaker of a natural language, further endowed with two special properties: rationality and face” (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 58). This theory endues two aspects of ‘face’ positive face and negative face. Positive face is linked with an individual’s want and priority to be aspired and appreciated during interaction while negative face is taken as “the basic claim to territories, personal preserves, and rights to non- distraction” (ibid, p.61).

This concept of face makes politeness double natured, i.e. positive politeness and negative politeness. Positive politeness is used to appreciative selfimage of the participants while negative politeness by lessening and mitigating face act during disapproval and threat. Thus, taboos are used to ease such situations. This concept of face and politeness truly fit into the present research.

Data Analysis

The data has been analyzed at three levels.

Religion Related Taboos in the Pahari Culture

As the majority of the Pahari society is Muslim, so the religious taboos are greatly influenced by Islam. Things that are prohibited by Islam come under the category of general taboos but there are certain context related taboos that are not general taboos but when they are seen in religious context, they become taboos.

General Religious Taboos

General taboos are those that are absolutely forbidden. These unmentionables or forbidden taboos are mostly verbal. The violation of these taboos brings unrest in the society and severe penalty is expected. They include following taboos:

- Terms referring disrespect to Allah/Religious figures
- Words that do not refer the Holy Books appropriately
- Talking about secrete parts of body and sex
- Taking food and other edibles with left hand

Table 1. Religion Related Taboos

Taboo Words	English Translation
Shatan /ʃɑʃʌN/	Satan
Janmi /dʒəNmi/	One who has been doomed
Kafr /kɑfr/	Non- Muslim
Khanzir /χəŋziɾ/	Pig
Harami /həɾami/	Illegitimate

The words given in the table are taboos and there usage is absolutely forbidden and when used, are taken as a euphemistic expression. In Pahari society certain nonverbal taboos are also in practice and their violation brings severe punishment. For many other cultures, they are not taken as taboos but as Pahari culture is Islamic so here referring to these terms is taken as taboo. They also include food and gift taboos which are as follow:

- Drinking Wine, alcoholic and all other intoxicants. (Food Taboo)
- Slaughtering animals non-ritually. (Food Taboo)
- Eating meat of those animals that is not permissible in Islam. (Food Taboo)
- Greeting with left hand
- Eating edibles with left hand
- Giving wine or alcohol as a gift. (Gift Taboo)

- Offering *Kaffan* as a gift. (Gift Taboo)
- Taming pig at home and using its meat.
- Shaking hand with person of opposite sex.
- Courtship

These examples of food, gift and custom related taboos have shown that these taboos are universally taken as taboos in Islamic world. But there are a few taboos that are no more taken as awkward in other Muslim cultures like shaking hand with person of opposite sex, but in Pahari culture they are taboos and their violation brings disapproval and embarrassment.

There are certain verbal and non-verbal taboos that are not forbidden in Islam but the speaker of the Pahari language associate them with religion and thus these fall under the category of context specific taboos.

- Laughing during a funeral
- Taking ones' female's name publically.

Morality Related Taboos

Morality taboos are such taboos that are embedded in moral grounds. These taboos are not allowed to be used publically.

General Morality Related Taboos

These taboos are devised on moral grounds and they are disapproved publically in all situations. They include verbal and nonverbal taboos.

- Talking to a person of opposite sex in presence of elders. (Verbal Taboo)
- Starring at a person in a social gathering. (Non- verbal Taboo)
- Starring at a person of opposite sex. (Non-verbal)
- Addressing a person of opposite sex with honorifics like *yaar*, *jigaar*, *jani*. (Verbal Taboo)
- Winking the eye at the female. (Non-Verbal Taboo)
- Winking the eye by the female. (Non-Verbal Taboo)

The given examples showed that moralities related taboos are more gender specific. The violation of such taboos violates set morals of society. In Pahari culture, there is a total dislike and disapproval of such verbal and non-verbal taboos.

Context specific Morality Related Taboos

In the Pahari culture words referring to some physical defects and low social status are neither approved nor appreciated in front of one who is directly related to it. These words are not taboo in normal discourse but in specific contexts they become taboos.

Table 2. Morality Related Taboos

Taboo Words	English translation
Anna /əṇṇ̃/	Blind
Kana /kṇṇ̃/	Blind to one eye
Ganja /gṇṇ̃/	Bald

Decorum Related Taboos

General Decorum Related Taboos

Fakuade et al. (2013) stated that decorum related taboos are those which “hurt people’s feelings because they devalue the thing being referred to.” These taboos are used to criticize, disapprove, frown upon, and ridicule others. These taboos are mostly used to criticize a person’s unruly behavior and actions. There are certain professions also, those are devalued by speakers and they do not like to be a part of those professions so they abhor and hate them. In this way, these have become taboos. Apparently, decorum related taboos seem quite funny but people believe in them since ages and their nature is only noticed when they are violated.

Table 3. Decorum Related Taboos

Taboo Words	English translation
Shokha /ʃɔχ̃/	One with showy nature
Shodha /ʃɔd̃h̃/	One with mean nature
Lunda /lɔṇḍ̃/	Flirty
Charsi /tʃɛɽ̃ʃi/	One who is addicted to hashish
Marasi /mɽ̃ɽ̃ʃi/	Juggler/ joker
Kanjar /kṇḍ̃ɽ̃/	One who dances

Chura /tʃʊɾɑ/	One who cleans drains
Khusra /kʰʊʂɾɑ/	Eunuch
Pangi /pəŋgi/	One who cleans drains and gutters

Context Specific Decorum Related Taboos

Decorum related taboos include certain context specific taboos. Context specific taboos are such that are not taboo words and phrases but in certain contexts they behave like taboos. In Pahari culture, even disliked traits of animals are not appeased and their names are taken as taboos when a person behaves awkwardly and becomes intolerable for others.

Table 4. Context Specific Decorum Related Taboos

Taboo Words	English Meaning
Kuta /kʊtə/	Dog
Khota /kʰʊtə/	Donkey
Ghaan /gʱɑːŋ/	Cow
Dand /dʌŋd/	Ox
Uloo /ʊlʊː/	Owl
Soor /suːɾ/	Pig

Conclusion

As the purpose of study is to highlight various types of taboos prevalent in Pahari culture, the analysis of taboos words in Pahari society explored various kinds of taboos. It has also given an insight into socio-cultural norms of the society. This study has revealed that speakers of the Pahari not only share certain Islamic taboos of other the Muslim societies but owing to specific cultural categories local taboos are also characterized with religious touch. Thus these unique taboos show that the Pahari culture is embodying its own cultural characteristics which are different from the norms of other societies.

This brief paper has also investigated various taboos in social contexts. The results have shown that the Pahari speakers not only observe taboo words but there are also certain non-verbal expressions falling under the category of taboos. Certain taboos have revealed that they are no more taboos in other parts of world and in Pakistan but they are still considered taboos in Pahari society.

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