WHO NAMES THE WORLD FOR US? WOMEN'S REPRESENTATION IN SINDHI TEXT BOOKS AND THEIR ASCRIBED ROLES

*Saima Murtaza Pandhiani**
Dr. Sumera Umrani†
Dr. Misbah Bibi Qureshi‡
Dr Panhwar Farida§

ABSTRACT

The objective of this study is to examine the representation of women in Sindhi school text books and what values and ideologies are portrayed in and through school text books. The study has employed Critical Discourse Analysis as a research framework, specifically utilizing Critical Language Study as a tool of analysis. This framework enables the researcher to unearth how social meanings and dominant ideologies are (re) produced and legitimized in and through language. The paper unfolds the stereotypical gender roles ascribed to women in Sindhi language texts and the unfair and inexcusable picture of women projected through them. These texts are reflective of institutionalized discrimination of women in Pakistani society because of which women are marginalized and rendered powerless to the serious concerns of life. The work is centered round linguistic representation of women and their social positioning through text books. The findings of the study indicate the presence of patriarchal ideology and gender discrimination in Sindhi text books because of which women's rights are sacrificed to sustain a form of paternalism.

Keywords: *Gender Roles, Stereo types, discrimination, Social positioning.*

INTRODUCTION

This Qualitative study examines the social positioning of women and their ascribed gender roles within the frame work of Sindhi language text books for schools. Through Critical Discourse Analysis this study examines what

* Lecturer, Institute of English Language and Literature, University of Sindh, Jamshoro.

† Associate Professor, Institute of English Language and Literature, University of Sindh, Jamshoro.

‡ Professor, Institute of Gender Studies University of Sindh, Jamshoro.

§ Assistant Professor, Institute of English Language and Literature, University of Sindh, Jamshoro

identities and roles of women these texts portray and what is expected of Pakistani women in the society and in life in general. Additionally, the study suggests the potential implications of teaching such a discourse to both male and female population.

Rationale Behind the Study

The study aims to explore how women are portrayed in Sindhi language textbooks and what kind of women the society and state want to produce i.e. efficient wives and home makers. The study looks at what ideology is underpinned within the text, which projects stereo typical gender roles and reinforces unequal power relations in the society among women and men.

Research Questions

- How women are represented in Sindhi language text books?
- What are the gender roles ascribed to women in Sindhi language text books?

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study has the following objectives:

- To examine the representation of women in Sindhi school text books.
- To explore the status of women as portrayed in Sindhi texts.
- To examine the stereotypical gender roles ascribed to women in Sindhi language texts and the unfair and inexcusable picture of women projected through them.

The purpose of the current research is to explore what gender roles and identity are promoted through text books at school. It aims to examine what social practices and ideologies are created and legitimized in and through the text books. The paper explores gender imbalance from a Critical Discourse Analytical point of view.

The paper has been divided into the following sections:

1) Justification of CDA for the present study through theoretical review.
2) Theoretical Frame work and the approach employed for CDA.
3) Selection of the Text, Text Production and Reception Model.

4) Textual Analysis and Methods for Investigation.
5) Findings and Conclusion.

Text as Discourse

Fairclough (1989) says: *"I use the term Discourse to refer to the whole process of social interaction of which text is just a part"* (p.28). In his point of view text analysis is part of discourse analysis. Texts are not socially neutral enterprises. They are, rather, messages to and about the society. Texts are just not reflection or imitation of truth; they are living economic, social, political and cultural activities. Wodak (2002) regards text linguistics and sociolinguistics as an integral part of CDA .We can understand a society and the power relations at work in it by examining its text production and reception .Since text is a living socio cultural reality , a systematic study of what values , ideologies and cultural weight it carries is of pivotal importance for a scholar of Critical Linguistics .Through their form and content , by omission and exclusion , texts signify a particular version of reality for its readers and it's the readers job to problematize and read the text critically . This whole process is called *Selective Tradition* by Williams (Williams, 1961, p.12), who believes that "text is someone's selection, his vision of legitimate knowledge and culture …. So as to enfranchise one group's cultural capital to disenfranchise another's".

Text and the World

Text maps the world for us, and explains and clarifies it. We are connected with the world through the text. It is supposed to carry rational, reasonable and credible knowledge. In Fisk's (Fisk, 1987) view:

> *"Knowledge is never neutral; it never exists in an empiricist, objective relationship to the real. Knowledge is power, and the circulation of knowledge is part of the social distribution of power. The discursive power to construct a common sense reality that can be inserted into cultural and political life is central in the social relationship of power"* (p.176).

It is evident from the quote above that text book is a part of a system of enforcing a sense of duty, morality and for cultural regulation. Down (1988) states, "*Textbooks … dominate what students learn. They set the curriculum and often the facts learned, in most subjects. For many students, textbooks are their first and sometimes only early   exposure to books and to reading.*

The public regards textbooks as authoritative, accurate and necessary" (*p.231*).

Texts are not simply delivery systems of facts; they are conceived, designed and authored by real people with real agendas in their sight. They play a major role in defining who we are and how we are expected to behave in the society. Our attitudes, ideologies and values systems are formed through them. Students formulate their identities, acquire social mores and set goals through the text. Texts are designed by institutions as a means of social control as well to achieve a kind of social regulation and to monitor conduct of the learners.
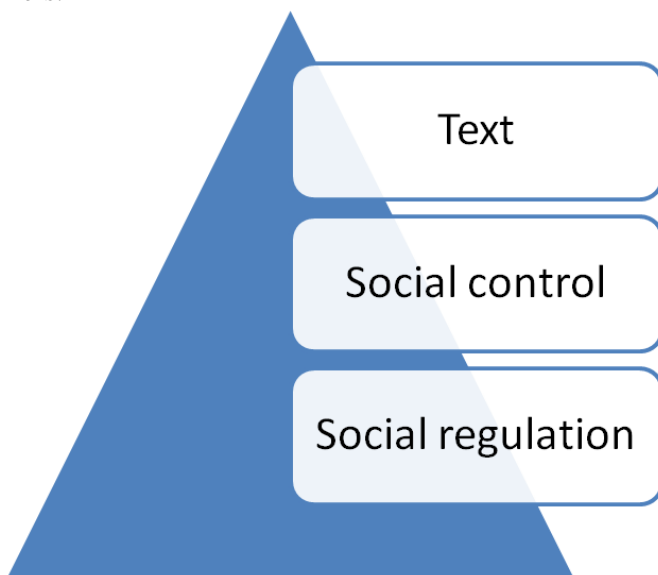
Figure: 1.1

Due to all above mentioned reasons We have chosen the text 'Sughar Zaal' from Sindhi language textbook for class Eighth, published by Sindh Text Book Board, taught at all public schools and private schools in Sindh as well.

Theoretical Framework

The purpose of this study is to encourage symptomal reading and generate critical thinking and engagement of the reader, with a view to highlighting the inequalities of communication through text books. This work falls within the parameters of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Dijik (2003) believes, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a type of discourse analytical research

that primarily studies the way power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context. CDA is particularly interested in language and unequal power relations. These power relations may arise out of authority and hierarchy or may stem out of the leading ideology of the time. Language and ideology are closely linked together because language is the commonest way to behave in a social setting and dominant ideologies are expressed through language. Exercise of power is thus performed through ideological workings of language. CDA aims to analyze not just propositional meaning of a text but also the underlying ideological assumptions at work. CDA examines language in use by considering "*who uses language, how and why and when*" (Dijik, 1997, p.208). Hicks (1996) suggest that it is through discourse that a young person learns *"how to be a student*" (p.117). This process also includes "socially appropriate ways of acting, valuing and thinking" (p.117). Texts determine the ideal social roles and attitudes for learners as they function as the most popular and basic tool of socialization of individuals.

CDA practitioners aim to analyze ways in which language is used to position individuals in the society and how it constructs social groups and individuals.

Fairclough and Wodak (1997) describe the tenants of CDA as:

1) It addresses social problems.

2) Power relations are discursive.

3) Discourse constitutes society and culture.

4) Discourse does ideological work.

5) Discourse is historical.

6) Link between text and society is mediated.

Discourse Analysis is interpretive and explanatory; therefore, discourse is a form of social action. Having established the relationship between language, discourse, power and ideology above, it's essential to draw a frame work for the current study. The present work has used point 1 and 2 of the above model for text analysis. The forthcoming analysis of text is more specifically based on Fairclough's (1989) three dimensional framework; description which consists of textual features, interpretation based on discursive practice and explanation rooted in social practice. Below is a description of this framework.

Approaches towards CDA: Critical Language Study (CLS)

CLS was put forth as a method for CDA in the phenomenal work of Fairclough, Language and Power (1989). The approach is critical as it problematizes power relations between language, power and ideology and examines social interactions as discourse whether in text or talk. He puts forward the idea of discourse as text, interaction and context. The cornerstones of CDA are discourse, ideology, power, however, in modern context ideology, racism, hierarchy and gender are all considered relevant fields for interpretation of texts. Although, methodologies differ greatly in all these studies, research in CDA examines overt as well as covert relations of power and conflict in the above mentioned domains. Fairclough (1989) has defined three dimensions of CDA in examining Language and Power which are as follows:

a) Description, which is concerned with formal properties of a text.

b) Interpretation, which examines the relationship between text and its interaction with the social context.

c) Explanation, where the analyst connects the linguistic and social findings with the prevalent cultural phenomena.

Text	Interpretation	Interaction
	Context	Social conditions of interpretation
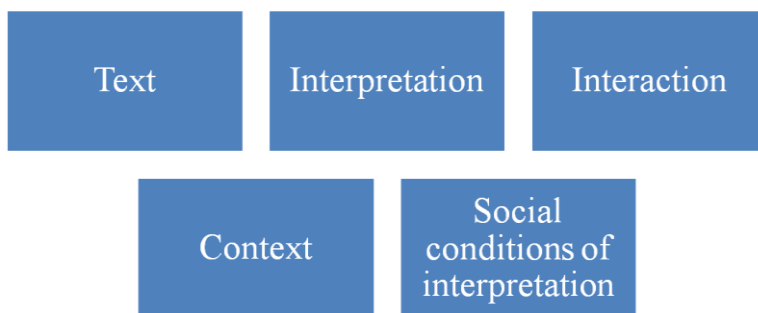
Figure: 1.2

According to CLS not just text but text production, its interpretation and interaction with the society at large and the social conditions of text production and interpretation are to be borne in mind while analyzing the text. The interaction of the text with the society and the social context in which it is produced is of key importance for CDA practitioners. Discourse is not an isolated textual or dialogic structure. Rather it is a complex communicative event that embodies a context, featuring participants (and properties) as well as production and reception process (Dijek, 1988). The

practitioners of CLS emphasize upon the total function of language. This method not only renders text for comprehension but it also connects discourse to the co-text and con-text in which a text is created.

Discourse as Social Practice

Language shapes our social identities and our knowledge, values, beliefs and interactions all shaped by language in return. An examination of this complex phenomenon is possible through CLS as it examines critically the significance of the role language plays in creating, changing and maintaining the relations of power theoretically, and on the practical plans it shows how language influences the dominance of one group over the other. It examines the influential role language plays in legitimizing social inequalities. It also clarifies and denaturalizes the hidden power relations and ideological processes that exist in texts. In text analysis the analyst must keep a close look at the analysis of the context, which is represented not only by, the immediate environment in which a text is produced and interpreted but also the larger societal context including its relevant cultural, political, social and other facets (Huckin, 1997).

The present study aims to analyze Pakistani textbooks from the view point of gender positioning that shows a bias against women in not just as they are portrayed in the texts but also in their ascribed roles and in what is expected of them at home and in the society.

Textual Analysis: Description

The text under analysis is Sughar Zaal or Efficient Wife; designed for eighth graders. The lesson uses simple language to create a particular image of an efficient wife. The lesson is in third person narrative, which is a well thought out choice to make the qualities of an ideal wife stand apart. The language is simple and easy so that the students understand and identify with such qualities. The tone is informal as it creates a domesticated image of women.

The word Ghar (Sindhi equalant for home) has been repeated several times to make a clear connection between an efficient woman and a happy home , creating a strange analogy that the happiness of a house hold is equally proportionate to the level of efficacy of a wife .Referring to the cleanliness of the house wife , the lesson states that an efficient wife works all day long to keep it clean and orderly and not even a single mosquito or fly is to be found in her house .The lesson uses the metaphor *Rooh Khe Raaht* (meaning a pleasure for the soul) for such a household.

The writer states the qualities of a good wife as, she is hard working, diligent, self-sacrificing and she cooks, cleans, stitches cloths with hands and does embroidery exceptionally well. Since she is busy in domestic chores all day long, she has no time to think of the world around her. She rather hates such things. Whatever she earns by her stitching and hand embroidery she uses it for the welfare of her households. She rather saves money to feed and serve unexpected guests as well.

Some of the qualities attributed to efficient wives are repeated throughout the text i.e. they are experts at cooking and cleaning, they are excellent at hand embroidery. An efficient wife must save money for guests and relatives as well. In addition to this she must also be kind and helping towards the neighbours and must be carefree when it comes to the affairs of the world or her surroundings. These qualities are expressive of what culture demands of women and what is socially accepted and desirable for women in Sindhi society in particular and Pakistani society in general.

Gender Roles: Ideological Portrayal of Women

The texts give symbolic representation of power in such a way that it appears common sensical and thus not problematic at all. Texts create such images of women which are desired by the state / the powerful elite. Such a representation of power via language has been termed as *'symbolic violence'* by Bourdieu (1986). In the view of Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) gender is not a biological trait; it's rather the social practice that we perform. Feminists (Hekman 2004; Siegel, 2007) believe that female is a social rather than natural construct. Women are socialized to be women from the time of birth in such a way that they internalize patriarchal values which otherise them from the male population, making them a different gender from them. Gender references the expectations regarding appropriate behaviour from members of a society. It is not the biological traits one is born with but the socially constructed categories; masculinity vs. femininity that the society expects (Giddens, 1997). These are the general beliefs of a community regarding the gender roles and practices of men and women or other genders. Gender identity is generally considered as one's identification with social roles as a female or male. Gender classifications and labels are given to most of the people at the time of birth or even before that. Gender identity gives people access to different social networks, hence, all social communication of individuals' takes place within these parameters. Gender is embedded in the very structure of the society where we live and is reinforced by the very text books we read. Lazar (2000) believes that gender ideology is hegemonic

as it appears normal and consensual to the majority. Text books play the most significant role in the construction of these gender ideologies. The text book under examination demonstrates the duties that a woman is expected to perform. She is supposed to cook, clean and be submissive and polite. These duties are all in line with this dominant ideology of patriarchal structure of Pakistani society.

Lexical Analysis

The very analysis of the linguistic categories used in the text reveals ideological function.

According to Fairclough (1989), the discursive participants' choice of words must be studied in relation to their experiential, relational and expressive value as they manifest power relations. Larar (2000) is of the view that power relations reference struggle and a clash of interests which manifests themselves through various modalities and presuppositions. The choice of words, themes and grammatical features all have ideological functions to perform within a given piece of text.

Experiential Value of Linguistic Features

The experiential value of words stands for events and relations as they exist in the world (Fairclough, 1989). Experiential value of word denotes three elements: actions, events and attributions. The lesson is entirely in third person narrative so it can be assumed that the agent (women) is implicitly present not explicitly. Woman's realm is limited within the home so her activities must also be confined to the private sphere. Obedience and submission are defined as the key qualities of a good woman in this lesson.

Experience of social world by the experiential value of vocabulary reveals how one experiences the social order. The lessons start with a very problematic statement way, it, that a house is like a miniature state and all its citizens are worried about its progress (which is not so in majority of cases). The welfare and prosperity of a house depends entirely upon an efficient wife. One can sense here that both these words welfare and progress are contested terms and hold different meanings for different people and in no way a certain group of people (read marginalized group in case of women), can be held responsible for them. The text presents an exploitative nature of duties in quite a common sensical manner. Wife must be efficient. It's not an ideal role rather the only role for women. The identity of women is defined by the discharge of her duties within the four walls. Woman's credibility

depends upon her loyalty to the house hold.

Expressive Value of Linguistic Items

Presupposition plays a major role in the analysis of expressive value of words. It is presupposed that only that house will be happy which has a hard working woman in it in the form of an efficient wife. Women are portrayed as docile, un thinking and uncritical beings not as free agents. Women must earn, but the earnings should be spent on the welfare of the house, even on hospitality towards guests but not on the women themselves. Since men are powerful authority within the house, it can be pre supposed that they will order how they money should be spent.

The discursive representation of women in texts can further be understood by the use of modality which defines their gendered roles. It's interesting to note how reality is distorted to create an agreeable role for women in the society. The lesson defines the values systems related with women. It's understandable for Asian especially, Pakistani women as they are regarded as primary caregivers. There is an issue with this approach as it's a male centered sexist stance.

Relational Value of Linguistic Items

The relational value of sentences is mainly determined by what modes are used in a given text to convey a specific message. Declarative modes questions and imperative modes are most common ones in this regard. The lesson is full of declarative suggestions regarding the nature and character of ideal women. The primary job of women is to care for the family. The adjectives used for defining women make their role clear; devotion to family and physical labor. Women in this lesson appear as devoid of any voice, power and authority, striped off any intellectual capability, women appear in the form of domestic slaves.

CONCLUSION

The text under discussion reveals the dichotomous standards of femininity and how women are socialized by text books, society and culture as a certain group apart from others. Women locate themselves in a larger social structure as members of an altogether different group because of the otherization caused by text book knowledge they receive at school. In this way gender becomes too important a factor in determining the social positioning of the students. Institutions of family, community, school and texts create certain

perceptions, expectations and behaviors that marginalize women from the rest of the society. Text, in this context is used to create certain gender perceptions, practices and relations that provide a key to judging women as efficient or otherwise. In Pakistani schools text explains the roles, rights, duties and status of women in the society and sets parameters for judging them. A child's socialization at school starts through texts like the one reviewed above. These texts contribute to the devaluation of women's lives and commitments. Such biased discourses distort the picture of gender relations prevailing in the society and present a perverted worldview for both male as well as female learners. Because of these discriminatory discourses the learners become incapable of exploring, challenging, discovering and (re) shaping their identities. Females are presented as Human Subjects, who cannot express themselves as complex, powerful human beings, whereas males are provided with biased criteria such as the one given in the text under discussion, to label women as efficient or inefficient.

REFERENCES

Dijik, T.V. (1997). *Discourses as Process and Structure*. Thousand Oaks,CA:Sage.

Dijik, T. V. (1988). *News Analysis, Case Studies of International and National News in Press* (Fascmile Edition ed.). Routledge Communication Series.

Dijik, T. V. (2003). *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis.* Blackwell Publishing.

Down, A. G. (1988). A Conspiracy of Good Intentions:America's Textbook Fiasco. In H. Tyson –Bernstein, *Americas' text book fiasco.* Washington DC: The Counsel for Basic Education.

Eckert, P. and McConnell-Ginet, S. (2003). *Language and Gender.* Cambridge University Press.

Fairclough, N. (1978). *Language and Power.* NewYork: Longman.

Fairclough, N. and Wodak, R. (1997). Critical Discourse Analysis. In T. V. Dijek (Ed.), *Discourse Studies. Multidisciplinary Introduction :Discourse as Social Interaction* (Vol. 2, pp. 258-84). London: Sage.

Fisk, J. (1998). *Reading the Popular.* Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Giddens, A. (1997). *Sociology* . London: Polity Press

Hicks, D. (1996). Contextual Inquiries: A Discourse oriented Study of Classroom Learning. In D. Hicks (Ed.), *Discourse Learning and Schooling* (pp. 104-141). New York : Cambridge University Press.

Huckin, T. (1997). Critical Discourse Analysis. In T. Miller (Ed.), *Functional Approaches to Written Texts. Classroom Applications.* Washington D.C: United States Information Agency.

Hekman, S. (1999). Identity crises: Identity, identity politics and beyond. In S. Hekman (Ed.), *Feminism, identity and difference* . Portland: Frank Gass & Co. Ltd.

Raymond, W. (1961). *The Long Revolution.* London: Chatto& Windus.

Siegel, D. (2007). *Sisterhood Interrupted: From Radical Women to Girls Gone Wild.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Wodak, R. (2002). Aspects of Critical Discourse Analysis. (L. Erlbaum, Ed.) *ZFAL, 36*, 5-31.

Textbook Analyzed in the Paper

Sughar Zaal. Sindhi at hoon Kitaan (2005). Sindh Text Book Board. Jamshoro. Sindh. Ilmi Printers. Karachi.

Translation of the book title and Lesson analyzed:

Sughaar Zaal (Efficient Wife). Sindhi textbook for 8th class.