VICTIMIZATION AND ASYMMETRIC GENDERED POWER RELATIONS: A LINGUISTIC INVESTIGATION OF HARASSMENT COMPLAINTS REGISTERED IN LAHORE

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Abstract

This paper presents an investigation of the linguistic choices employed in harassment complaints submitted to the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women and four police stations located in Lahore during 2017-2018. In a patriarchal society such as Pakistan’s, where a woman’s honour epitomizes the whole family’s honour (Atakav 2015, 52; Sharlach 2008, 96), sexual harassment, a stigmatizing issue is hardly ever reported (Ali and Kramar 2015, 241). This paper, using Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis’s (Lazar, 2005, 2007) theoretical perspective of asymmetrical gendered power relations mirrored in harassment complaints, explores the form and severity of harassing practices which had prompted women in Lahore to report them. In order to unwrap the complex interplay of gender and power, linguistic features of the complaints are examined through Fairclough’s text

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analysis (1989, 1992), the first dimension of the 3D model which explores lexical choices such as adjectives, adverbs, culturally informed metaphors and metaphorical extensions, which are embedded in grammatical structure exemplified through transitivity analysis. In this paper, harassment complaints are analysed as important documents invested with socio-cultural gender ideologies that underline the need for dismantling gender oppression to achieve social transformation.

Keywords

Feminist critical discourse, harassment, lexicogrammatical analysis, and gendered practices.

Introduction

Harassment complaints mirror abusive gendered practices endemic in a deeply entrenched patriarchal society such as that of Pakistan - a society where women in some cases are exploited in the name of religious and cultural norms. As language permeates most social practices (Carbó et al. 2016, 2) and is, significantly, used as a tool to oppose, challenge and question the authority of the dominant group (Negm 2015, 285), complaint discourse arising out of dissatisfaction triggered by transgressive behaviours also embodies resistance by reminding people about transgressed norms of behaviours which need rectification (Laforest 2002, 1596).

In Pakistan, the phenomenon of violence against women (VAW) is rationalized and normalized, preventing women from reporting abuse. According to the annual report of the Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCP 2017, 50) more than 3,400 cases of various forms of violent crimes against women were registered in Punjab province during the first six months of the year 2016. Since the report relied on only reported cases, the actual number of unreported cases is unknown. Moreover, females are reluctant to approach the formal system (police and courts) owing to cost, delays, hassles, public embarrassment and overall sense of insecurity concerning law enforcement agencies (Abbas 2012, 22).

Sexual harassment is “a pervasive form of VAW which encompasses other forms of violence” (Fitzgerald 2017, 1). Fitzgerald and Hessan-McInnis (1989, 312) and Till (1980, 11) proposed a model to delineate sexual harassment which comprised three different dimensions: unwanted sexual attention, gender harassment and sexual coercion. Unwanted sexual attention is verbal or nonverbal behaviour ranging from “repeated and non-reciprocal” requests for dates; disturbing calls, letters or emails; touching, holding and
cornering; and sexual imposition or assault. However, it is different from sexual coercion which refers to explicit or subtle, bribes or warnings which make job benefits conditional on sexual cooperation. Gender harassment, on the other hand, refers to verbal and nonverbal acts which denigrate women but do not force them to gain sexual favours (Gefland et al. 1995, 168).

Harassment, in domestic and professional spheres, is prevalent all over the world and Pakistan is no exception. Over the last a few years, the Pakistani Government has expedited its efforts to protect women’s rights. To curb the flow of harassment cases particularly at workplace, the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace Act was signed in 2010 by the then Prime Minister, Yousaf Raza Gillani. The key motive was to produce an environment at the workplace which is free of harassment, abuse, and coercion for female employees. All organizations, public or private, were required to develop an internal Code of Conduct along with a proper complaint/redress system for cases of offensive behaviour. The act (2010, 11) defines harassment as any form of unwanted sexual advance, demand for sexual favours or any form of communication (oral or written) or physical behaviours or attitudes of sexual nature which may interfere with employees’ performance or create a threatening or offensive workplace environment. It also includes all attempts to bully the complainant if she refuses to accept sexual favours. Even though, according to Nauman and Abbasi (2014, 563), the law is in its infancy and is not yet able to instil fear of penalties and punishment in men, this act is nevertheless perceived as an effective step to help protect women against bullying or harassment at the workplace (Mahmood and Ahmad 2013, 25).

In 2014, the Punjab Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) was established by the Government, following from the PCSW Act, 2014, to consolidate Pakistani women’s protection and empowerment. Since then, this organization has been actively functioning to respond to women’s pleas and ensure that laws and policies to empower women were revised and reviewed, and opportunities for women’s socio-economic development and to eliminate discrimination against women were expanded (PCSW 2015). This organization provides a toll-free helpline available 24/7 to facilitate the registration of complaints, which are first investigated and then addressed in collaboration with organizations run by the government, civil society or private organizations. The present study analyses some complaint letters from victims of violence and harassment and is coordinated by PCSW and the above-mentioned police stations.

Recently, there has been another development in the Government’s response to VAW in the Punjab Protection of Women against Violence Act 2016 to reduce incidents of VAW. Despite various legislative measures, the number of such cases has not significantly declined. For instance, the number of cases pertaining to sexual violence reported in the media or by
human rights activists from 2004-2016 was 4734 (HRCP 2016, 6); in the first six months of 2017, more than 3,400 cases were registered in Punjab province alone (HRCP 2017, 50), calling the authorities’ attention to the effective implementation of the legislative measures.

The present research study aims to investigate lexico-grammatical choices used by complainants while reporting harassment, which is otherwise a stigmatizing event that could inhibit women from reporting due to fearing loss of honour (Sharlach 2008, 96; Zia 1994, 18). Lexico-grammar, a key concept in Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), refers to a level of linguistic structure where lexis, or words, and grammar, or syntax, are not considered as independent, but rather as mutually dependent (Sardinha 2019, 1). The interfacing of grammar and words is an offshoot of “grammarians’ dream,” which treats lexis as final choices in grammatical systems and aims to convert the whole of linguistic form into grammar, defining lexis as the “most delicate grammar” (Halliday 2002, 54). Therefore, this study contributes to the existing literature on harassment by examining how complainants construe and represent their experience of being harassed or abused through the use of lexis, such as adjectives, adverbs, similes and culturally informed metaphors integrated in grammatical structure, as exemplified in transitivity analysis, which enables them to describe gendered practices in an implied or explicit manner.

Literature Review

The concept of sexual harassment varies according to the cultural and religious norms of a society (Merkin 2008, 280). Gelfand, Fitzgerald, and Drasgow, on the basis of their exploratory research on sexual harassment, define it as a multidimensional construct (1995, 167-177). Generally, it refers to unwanted sexual experiences, including sexual contact, coercion, forcible rape, or drug-facilitated assault or rape (Pinchevsky, Magnuson, Augustyn, and Rennison 2019, 1). In a workplace context, MacKinnon (1979, 66) categorizes sexual harassment as hostile and quid pro quo harassment. A hostile environment constitutes an environment in which employees are exposed to unwelcome sexual demands, while quid pro quo refers to seeking sexual favours in return for various kinds of benefits, e.g. promotion or money (Tata 1993, 200; Terpstra and Baker 1986, 472).

In a Muslim society such as that of Pakistan, female modesty and shame is a distinct and dominant cultural aspect (Syed 2008, 183); this socio-cultural factor presents women with the challenge of handling sexual harassment (Ali and Kramar 2015, 243). As harassment is stigmatized, women find it difficult to report or even discuss (Ferdoos 2005, 37; Yasmin and Jabeen 2017, 318), mainly because the male-dominated society blames women for incidents on account of their attractiveness (Ali and Karmar 2015, 241) or perhaps inciting the incident. Another reason that has aggravated the situation is the lack of explicit and proper harassment complaint and redress systems in professional organizations, as most of
them mainly fulfil formal requirements, keeping employees unaware of any redress concerning harassment (Ali and Karmar 2015, 245).

Rape means dishonour for a woman and makes her unacceptable as a partner for any other male. In rape cases, the victim is refrained from reporting the rapist due to the concept of family honour used as a specific patriarchal tool (Salman, Abdullah and Fahim 2016, 90). Loss of virginity stigmatizes a woman, irrespective of whether she was a victim or a seductress² (Atakav 2015, 52).

Studies conducted on South Asian countries also reveal that sexual harassment is widespread in both formal and informal sectors. However, it is generally not reported and widely discussed (Haque, Sarker and Rahman 2019, 937) or ignored by women treating it as “trivial and routine” (Rahama and Jahan 2015, 56). Moreover, complexity of legal procedures, limited focus on the constitution of complaint redress committees and lack of clarity about the operational details of workplace harassment law deter women from reporting harassment (Shakthi 2020, 48).

Studies focusing on various aspects of sexual harassment include the characteristics of sexual harassers (Pina, Gannon and Saunders 2009, 126-138), rape discourse linked with the treatment of rape by a justice system which categorizes rape committed by a stranger as ‘real rape’ (Ehrlich 2002, 6), and culture-specific interpretation of sexually harassing behaviour (Butler and Chung-Yan 2011, 751; de Haas and Timmerman 2010, 717; Hunt et al. 2010, 667; Tyler and Boxer 1996, 110). Most studies encompass the thematic analysis of narratives by harassed women. Harassment complaint narratives is an underexplored area. Other studies focus on the forms of sexual behaviour characteristic of multidimensional incidents (Welsh 2000, 127), factors influencing the lodging of harassment complaints (McDonald, Backstrom and Dear 2008, 181), the socio-cognitive processes involved in complaining about immoral sexual behaviour following the end of a workplace romance (Pierce et al. 2004, 78) and the factors affecting the settlement of harassment complaints (Worley, Charlesworth and McDonald 2013, 99); none analyse the language of complaints. The focus, thus, has been more on the type of complaints and reasons for their rejection by the authorities. Extensive linguistic investigation is an underexplored area.

In Pakistan, studies on sexual harassment, especially workplace harassment, focus on the psychological effects of harassment (Muazzam, Qayuum and Cheng 2016, 44; Yasmin and Jabeen 2017, 314-19), the correlation between turnover intentions, absenteeism and job satisfaction and harassment (Merkin and Shah 2014, 9-11; Salman, Abdullah and Saleem 2016, 93-5), factors contributing to harassment and rape (Jabeen et al. 2017, 38-40; Nauman

² Non-marital consensual sex is considered an offence by Pakistan Penal Code 2016.
Others mainly explore how prevalent harassment is in Pakistan (Ali and Kramar 2015, 240-9; Sadaruddin 2013, 122-5). However, a study investigating women’s complaints against harassment and exploring the linguistic features used to describe abusive practices and the underlying complex gender ideology informing the complaining discourse is long overdue.

To fill this research gap, this study began by raising the following research questions:

1. How are abusive, gendered social practices articulated through lexical and grammatical choices?
2. How implicitly or explicitly do women describe their harassing or violent abuse in their complaints?

The present study is theoretically underpinned by Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) to address these questions by analysing gender victimizing practices described in harassment complaints (See Figure 1). FCDA studies unequal power relationships between males and females found in discourse, keeping in mind praxis related to gender and power (Lazar, 2005, 2007). The first is the complexity of gender and power relations, which considers discourse within a particular culture and time period in order to understand gender roles and images since gender is a complex phenomenon for which a “historically and culturally contingent analysis” of gender is needed (Lazar 2007, 148). Moreover, it examines textually represented gendered practices which are either produced or resisted discursively. The second area is discourse in the (de)construction of gender, which deals with the discursive nature of social practices to uncover how ideologies are discursively represented (Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999, 25). It also aims to expose how gender-based power relations and ideology are discussed and challenged/resisted through discourse. The third area is critical reflexivity, a significant feature of late modern societies (Giddens 1991, 52) which refers to the awareness of prevalent social practices in a society which helps individuals shape their own practices.

Methodology

The present study employs Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA) as a theoretical perspective to critically analyse abusive gendered practices and hegemonic power relations prevalent in different institutional and cultural contexts as manifested in women’s complaints against violence and harassment. The study considers three praxes of FCDA: complexity of gender and power relations, discourse in the (de)construction of gender and critical reflexivity to examine how gendered practices are victimizing women, and how these women are trying to resist them by raising their voices.
The study uses a mixed-methods approach for linguistic analysis of the complaints. For the qualitative analysis, Fairclough’s first dimension of the three-dimensional model, the text analysis, is used to identify the various forms and severity of gendered abusive practices stemming from asymmetrical gendered power relations articulated through linguistic features. According to Fairclough (1989, 25), text analysis focuses on the “formal properties” of the written text which include lexical items, transitivity and various stylistic features such as simile and metaphor. The analysis of grammatical choices is mainly carried out through transitivity analysis based on Halliday’s Systemic Functional Grammar (1970). It explores how people construe their experiences and express them through language. As an integral part of ideational function, transitivity is realized through six process types: material, verbal, relational, behavioural, mental and existential; however, this research mainly focused on material and verbal processes in order to explore both explicit and implicit description of gender abusive practices.

The analysis of lexical items includes words having culture-specific meanings (Fairclough 1992, 237); adjectives describing the perpetrator and his verbal/physical abuse; adverbs describing victimizing practices; and stylistic features like metaphors and similes.
The findings of the study are triangulated by the quantitative analysis of the data carried out through Part of Speech (POS) tagging focusing, particularly the most frequently used adjectives and adverbs. Since 85% of the data is in Urdu, and there is no software which carries out frequency calculation and distribution, a natural language processing software was developed in co-operation with the Department of Computer Sciences, CUI, Lahore Campus.\(^3\)

The findings of qualitative and quantitative linguistic investigation of the complaints are interpreted in light of FCDA principles to explore discursively-represented gendered power relations ingrained in the socio-cultural context.

**The Sample**

The sample of 30 harassment complaints was purposively selected from the archives of five government organizations: PCSW, and four Police Stations located in Lahore which receive a large number of complaints from women, which were the Women’s Police Station, the Gender Based Crime Cell- Civil Lines Division, the Model Town Police Station and the Saddar Police Station. Harassment complaints are classified as sexual or non-sexual harassment complaints. Sexual harassment is defined by the anti-harassment act (2010, 11) as any undesirable attention, request for favours or other form of communication of a sexual nature. According to Frisch (2014, 1944) “non-sexual harassment” refers to the denigration, ridicule, defamation or unequal treatment of a male or female which is not aimed at sexual cooperation. The sample consists of 21 sexual harassment complaints (10 workplace & 11 miscellaneous) which pertain to rape, assault, unwanted physical touching and sexual remarks, while nine are non-sexual harassment (two workplace & seven miscellaneous) complaints concerning mainly blackmail, false corruption accusations and violence after a marriage proposal had been rejected. Twenty-four sample complaints are in Urdu and six letters of complaint are in English.

The complaints concerning sexual harassment/abuse were selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- Complainants were adults in the age group 20-40 years old.
- Complaints were registered in Lahore during 2017 and 2018.
- Only written complaints, of a minimum of 100 words, were selected which had been either submitted by the complainant or her lawyer.

\(^3\) The software may be used by future researchers with different corpora. Efforts are being made to increase base corpus size to broaden its scope.
Complaints were excluded:

- If they were in the form of a completed pro-forma because they did not provide enough details for textual analysis.
- If they were by walk-in complainants or were made through helplines because these were generally prepared on the complainants’ behalf and did not represent the complainants’ perspective.

Ethical Considerations

A confidentiality agreement was signed to ensure that the complainants’ names and addresses, and the names of the organization/institution or any other identifying information would not be disclosed in any form of publication. Moreover, a consent form ensuring that PCSW and the above-mentioned police stations had consented to providing complaint letters, along with permission to mention their names in the paper, were also signed by the officials concerned.\(^4\)

Data Analysis

The lexico-grammatical choices employed in the complaints were analysed by considering the first dimension of Fairclough’s three-dimensional framework (1989, 1992)-text analysis-as a tool to examine the complainants’ texts as fragments of discourse and in terms of their transitivity, modality, theme, lexical choice and metaphors.

Fairclough’s text analysis is based upon Halliday’s Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (1985) which studies how language is connected with its various functions in social contexts. The main use of language is functional as it is employed to attain certain objective(s). Van Dijk (2006) believes that Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) functions to aid the understanding of how texts generate meaning, not merely based on grammatical rules, but also as lexical items, subject (speaker or writer) or animate/inanimate objects. The connection between SFG and discourse analysis is derived from the notion of considering language as a tool of social semiotics explained in Halliday’s works (1970, 1985). For Fairclough, discourse is representational as well as an instrument of social change contributing to the creation and recreation of the subjects, objects and relations which prevail in the social world.

\(^4\) Complainants submitted to the police stations were public records. The authorities gave their full consent to use the content of complaints for the purpose of research because anonymity of the complainants was preserved. Moreover, consent of the complainants at PCSW was obtained to avoid ethical issues.
Material processes dominate harassment complaints, which overwhelmingly refer to practices establishing physical relationships between the event and participants involved. Material processes are processes ‘of doing’ or ‘of action’ (Eggins 1994, 230), involving an Actor (an entity or a person) who performs an action and a Goal (the one that is the target of that process or the one “to whom the process is extended’ (231). Material process is either creative or transformative. A creative material process brings a Goal into existence while a transformative process affects a pre-existing Goal. For the analysis of the complaints, those clauses were selected which depicted abusive practices foregrounding the Actor (perpetrator), Process (harassing action) and Circumstantial elements (manner and intensity of the act) ultimately affecting the Goal (complainant or her relative). Table 1 displays instances explicitly depicting harassing or violent acts which underscore the gravity of the abuse. The action is mainly of the transformative variety performed to affect a pre-existing Goal (complainant).

Explicit Depiction of Harassment

In Table 1, the first two examples come from workplace harassment (rape) cases in which the complainant was raped by her supervisor at her female colleague’s home. The actions described involved enforced physical contact between the Actor (supervisor) and Goal (complainant) whose reaction (see Table 1, example 1) includes material and verbal processes. The actor “sir,” who is the complainants’ supervisor exerted force by grabbing her hand and pulling her down. Her description of the action as “zabardasti” (by force) and “mera hath daba kar” (he grabbed my hand) both vividly describe the coercive act that the complainant was subjected to. Even though throughout the complaint, nowhere she mentions that she had been raped, her supervisor’s remarks about her defamation as an unmarried woman and the grave consequences of having a medical check-up (see Table 1, example 1) if a complaint is lodged against him represent the dual standards of this society where a woman’s honour is lost even though she has been subjected to sexual violence.

Another instance of forced physical contact involving overt gestures (Table 1, example 3) shows how the complainant describes the objectionable action along with the aggressor’s comments “Yeh tu maamooli kaam hai ho jaye ga; mujhe kabhi daftar ke bahir milo” (This is no big deal; it will be done; just see me outside the office). When the complainant resisted, the perpetrator replied “Kaam tu phir aisi hi ho ga” (This is the only way to get it done). This type of harassment is categorized as “quid pro quo” (MacKinnon 1979, 51).

Some complaints, especially those about sexual assault or rape, describe the forced physical contact in detail (see Table 1: examples 4 & 9). The material processes involved exertion of force in order to stop complainants moving to render them helpless. The shocking fact is that a relative was involved in such a heinous act. Other complaints highlight
harassing acts involving tearing off a complainant’s dress or pulling away her dupatta (long scarf). In Pakistan, the dupatta is the symbol of a woman’s honour (Hussein 2013, 117), so pulling it away is not considered a minor offence, but an attempt to dishonour a woman, especially if her dupatta is snatched in public. Moreover, tearing off her clothes also indicates the complainants’ helplessness and victimization (See table 1, example 8).

In some instances, material processes include either a complainant’s displacement from or confinement within her territory (personal/professional). In Table 1, example 5, the complainant is pushed out of the factory because she did not positively respond to her supervisor’s sexual advances, which is an example of “hostile” harassment (MacKinnon 1979, 53) indicating that lack of compliance in such cases yields grave consequences. In the 11th example, the complainant, who was the owner of a beauty parlour, was dragged out of it because the perpetrator was concerned about the stagnant water in the street for which she was held responsible. Another complaint (see Table 1, example 7) described how she and her family members were subjected to wrongful confinement which, once again, refers to the helplessness of the female gender.

Harassment coupled with violence often leads to extreme forms of injury. A number of complaints described the intensity of the ruthless violence the complainants were subjected to. In Table 1, the 6th, 12th, 13th, 14th and 15th statements vividly depict how brutally the complainants were physically tormented. They were beaten up, dragged out of the house, abducted and slapped hard, resulting in injuries such as a fractured shoulder.

Implicit Depiction of Harassment

The statements mentioned above are examples extracted from harassment complaints. The depiction of the harassing act implies it is the “process”, which is depicted as ghalat harkat (misbehaviour) (See Table 4.2: 1) which reduces the severity of the assault. Though the complainant does not elaborate upon the intensity or gravity of the misconduct, resistance in response to the misconduct “mein ne shor machaya” (I screamed) refers to the level of the sexual assault.

In statements 2 and 3, extracted from a workplace harassment complaint, the complainant uses the passive voice so as not to disclose the identity of all the perpetrators whom she refers to as jail ke kuch ganday anaasir (some morally corrupt jail/prison staff).

Despite having been exposed to continuous harassment for the last eight years, she refrained from disclosing the perpetrators’ names, probably owing to their power and status. She specifically refers to only two staff members who harassed her recently as she said “Dono ahalkaron ne heelay bahanon se fidviya ko behlana phislana chaha (both staff members tried to
lure me through various means); however, throughout the complaint she does not elaborate upon the nature of the actions. Instead, she continually describes the abusive practices in vague terms such as mujhey pareshan kiya gaya (I was molested); mukhtalif qism ke heelay bahano se tang kiya jaata hai (molested on the basis of lame excuses).

In some complaints, the depiction of abusive practices is implicit because the complainants do not provide details of the action. Material processes involves fahash harkaat (vulgar actions), na jaez tareeqay (illegal means), heelay bahanay (lame excuses) and “victimization” through abusive practices without explaining the details of these material processes.

**Verbal Processes**

Verbal processes refer to communication between a Sayer and an Addressee, where some message, the Verbiage, is communicated. Verbal processes are actions related to the transmission of information (Saragih 2005, 8). In particular, the process includes saying, commanding, asking, and offering and can include physical actions such as “scream” and “shout.” In the complaints, the complainants use verbal processes to describe how they were verbally harassed by the perpetrators or how they verbally resisted abuse.

**Complainants’ verbal resistance against harassment**

A few examples are given in Table 3. The first three examples show resistance in response to sexual assault. The complainant screamed, which enabled her to get out of the perpetrator’s grasp. Another instance of resistance combined mental, behavioural and verbal processes: Aap ye na socho (Mental Process) ke mein aap ko muaaf kar dun gi (Behavioural Process). Mein aap ki shakayat (Verbal Process) office mein kamn gi (Don’t you ever think that I will forgive you. I will lodge a complaint against you in the office). This is the response of an employee who was raped by her supervisor. She warned him that she would never forgive him and would definitely report the abuse ta ke kal ko koi aur larki aap ki hawas ka shikar na banay (so that nobody else will be the victim of your lust). This shows that the complainant was not only concerned about her honour, but she was also concerned about the preservation of women’s honour in general. As this was a case of hostile harassment, she had to face serious consequences as she wrote “Mein ne sir ki ghalat harkat wali baat sab ko batai aur is baat per sir ne kaha is ne meray saath badtameezi ki hai aur ab mein ne bhi is ko nokri par nai rakhna” (I told everybody about his immoral act, as a consequence of which he said that I had misbehaved with him and now I will lose my job). To raise a voice against abuse, the complainant informed everyone about her supervisor’s immoral act, i.e. sexual assault, after which he accused her of misconduct and threatened to dismiss her. Throughout the complaint, the
complainant used strong adjectives to describe the assault, but she did not explicitly describe the incident in detail.

**Verbal harassment by perpetrators**

Verbal processes describe the verbal harassment the complainants were exposed to. In a number of complaints, the complainants claimed they had received numerous threats pertaining to murder, defamation and losing their jobs. Most threats exemplified hostile harassment, where the complainant was threatened with job termination if she did not begin an illicit relation with him. Other harassment cases also involved threats of murder, termination of jobs and withholding salaries.

In most complaints, verbal processes indicate the type of harassing and abusive language used by the perpetrator. Most complainants complained about the use of vulgar and indecent language and being called filthy names (See Table 3, examples 7, 8 & 9). A few complainants also gave the harassing comments made, e.g. “Notice the girl sitting beside you”; “Do you live with your husband or alone”; “Where can we meet after the meeting”; “Where will you stay in Lahore tonight; shall we arrange that for you”; Don’t you like your husband and the in-laws？” Though all these comments do not carry any overtly indecent words, they refer to the possibility of getting involved in an illicit relationship. Such comments indicate the plight of the complainant who was kept from 9:30 am to 7:30 pm in an office and confronted by “a spate of irrelevant, tortuous and humiliating questions and remarks.” Other verbal processes in the complaints include requests for justice to obtain redress, such as “I humbly request you to grant me justice and give me redress” and “I request you to take the necessary action against the culprit.” Thus, transitivity analysis reveals how complainants construe and represent their experience of being harassed or abused by looking at their lexicogrammatical choices to describe the gendered practices in an implied or explicit manner.

**Lexical Choice**

Lexical choice is analysed to focus on the 'key words' invested with local cultural significance, yielding meanings which are variable and changeable according to the spatio-temporal context (Fairclough 1993, 236). A very important word used in harassment complaints is *izzat* (honor), which is a matter of concern in almost all the complaints, where either the complainants plead for the protection of their honour or mourn their lost honour. They stress the fact that they are honourable people who have been wronged. In many instances, their parents say that their lifelong earned respect has been tarnished by their daughter’s rape. Atakav (2015, 52) observes that “honor” permeates Muslim culture and seems to be associated
with women’s virginity, which is the primary responsibility of her male relatives (father, brother or husband) to protect; they should monitor women's activities related to love, marriage and sexuality. Patriarchal discourse revolves around the concept of regulating female lives. The power and continuous involvement of Islamic ideologues at the state and cultural levels places the ‘honour discourse’ in a broader religious context, making the concept of honour highly relevant to women’s lives in Pakistan (Rouse 1994, 11). In Pakistan, a woman’s chastity is the symbol of the honour of entire family. Sex outside wedlock dishonours a woman, regardless of whether the interaction was consensual or not (Sharlach 2008, 96). A report of the All-Pakistan Women’s Association (1988) states that being a woman is bad enough, but being a raped woman is horrendous. The offence of rape renders the victim and her children socially debased and filthy (quoted in Sharlach 2008, 97).

_Zina bil jabr_ (rape with force) is the term used for the taboo topic of rape, and is used only by lawyers or journalists, rarely by a lay person. ‘Loss of virtue’ or ‘loss of honour’ are the euphemisms which are more commonly used (Zia 1994, 18). Therefore, the complaints written by lawyers use the term _zina_ (rape), while those written by lay people use the word _ziadti_ (rape) which is discussed in detail in the section on metaphors. The adjectives used in the complaints tend to describe the perpetrators’ character and their physical or verbal abuse.

![Figure 2. Frequency of Adjectives Describing Harassment](image-url)
Figure 2 shows the adjectives used to describe verbal and physical torture such as *gandi* (bad), *ghaleez* (vulgar), *fahash* (obscene), *nazeba* (indecent), *ghalt* (immoral), *man gharat* (fabricated) and *jhooti* (fake). A number of adjectives are used to describe the harassers such as *zalim* (cruel), blackmailer, *juraim paisha* (criminal) and *mushkook* (suspicious) who pressurized to keep *na jaiq taaluqat* and made *qatal ki dhamki* (murder threats). In all the complaints, the most frequently used adjective is *sakht* (strict), as the complainants request the concerned authority to take strict action against the accused or subject him to strict punishment.

![Frequency of Adjectives Describing Harassment (English Complaints)](image)

**Figure 3. Frequency of Adjectives Describing Harassment (English Complaints)**

Figure 3 shows that most adjectives used to describe the verbal harassment by the complainant are negative, such as irrelevant, indecent, vulgar, intimidating, offensive and humiliating, making it difficult for the complainant to remain in the dirty and immoral place where she had experienced harassment. In some complaints, the complainants were threatened with fake *challan* (a ticket incurring fine in case of rule violation) filed against them.
The complainants have also used adverbs to describe the intensity of the action performed by the perpetrators. They have mostly used intensifiers which, according to Bussman (1996, 22) and Herwig (1998), are those adverbs that usually fall into the subclass of adverbs of manner, which probably fall into semantic fields such as fright and disgust, reality and unreality, quantity and size, value and truth, power and violence, mental diseases, uniqueness and upper and outer location (Lorenz 2002, 152; Claudi 2006, 360; Bordet 2015, 5). For the list of adverbs used in the complaints, see Table 4.

**Stylistic Features**

Styles are realized through quite a range of linguistic features, like vocabulary choice and metaphor – one area of vocabulary is intensifying adverbials such as ‘dreadfully’, ‘awfully’, ‘frightfully’, and so forth, as well as swear-words (Fairclough 2003, 162) when used to identify and describe a particular event.

**Metaphors**

Metaphor is a pervasive linguistic and cognitive phenomenon for transmitting social meanings and cultural presumptions and can be a strategic tool of persuasion to suggest one’s perception of reality as being above that of others (Ezeifeka 2013, 178). Our ability to compare experiences generates metaphorical expressions. This comparison is done cognitively through mappings or projections between domains or spaces. Conceptual structure can be distinguished at two levels: conceptual metaphors are comparatively well-established associations between conceptual domains in terms of mapping from a source domain onto a target domain (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 200). For example, in a harassment complaint, a complainant said, “When they were not able to find any dirt on me, they resorted to a lame excuse that General Sales Tax (GST) and Income Tax had not been deducted from the purchases made.” In this example, the metaphor “dirt” is used to connote the “guilt” or “corruption” she was accused of. So, the source domain in this metaphor is “guilt” and the target domain is “dirt” which aptly conveys the intended message because “dirt” makes you as unclean as guilt or accusation. An idiomatic phrase “rolling stone” is used as a metaphor in a harassment complaint, where the complainant was made a “rolling stone” between the secretary and the government officers meaning she was frequently sent to and fro between the above-mentioned people unnecessarily. So, the source domain was the frequent visits between the secretary’s office and the complainant’s office and the target domain was the rolling movement of a stone. Another idiomatic expression used as a metaphor was “black sheep” to refer to the government officers who harassed the complainant despite her being associated with a “highly esteemed government office.” The
source domain was “corrupt people” and the target domain was “black sheep.” In another example, a complainant uses the word “transparent” to connote fair dealings as she said, “In a mutually transparent fashion, the required furniture was purchased.” Hence, the source domain is “fair dealing” and target domain is “transparent.”

Another type of metaphor is discourse conceptual metaphors, which are socially constructed and are specifically associated with particular political and social discourses. They are often derived from common conceptual metaphors; however, the target domain is linked to a particular political or social context (Hart 2014, 138). For example, “long scarf” or dupatta in the Pakistani context symbolizes a woman’s “honor” (Hussein 2013, 117). A complainant describes her sister’s dupatta being pulled away by the complainant. Even though removing the dupatta was described literally, as a physical act, this action connotes her defamation or humiliation. Likewise, in one of the complaints, the complainant quoted the perpetrator’s comments which fall into the category of discourse conceptual metaphor. The perpetrator said “You’re not a young girl; you are a mother of two kids;” now, “mother of two kids” connotes that since she has kids, she is not as innocent as a maiden, hence, indirectly asking her to understand his intention to have an illicit relationship with her. So, “mother of two kids’ is used metaphorically to connote “loss of virginity”, which grants him the opportunity to take advantage of her. Another metaphor that has specific meaning in the Pakistani context is chadar and chaar dewari (veil and four walls), implying that the proper place for a woman is veiled and within the four walls of her home (Sharlach 2008, 107). Chadar is sometimes translated as “veil” or “scarf” connoting a woman’s honour, while chaar dewari (four walls) refers to the “house” which protects a woman’s life as well as her honour. One of the subjects of complaint was “Ijraa FIR baraey blackmailing aur jinsi harassan aur chadar aur chaar diwari ko pamaal karna…meri izzat pamaal, ghar ko kothi khana qaraan” (Request for filing FIR for blackmailing and sexual harassment and violation of veil and four walls..., my honour lost and house declared a brothel). The complainant used this metaphor to connote that her honour and sense of security have been abused by the perpetrator. She also used the metaphor of Kothi Khana (brothel house) to connote that her house had been visited by unwanted people with evil intentions, which in turn has snatch away her peace of mind and put her honour at stake.

A very important type of metaphor is “metaphorical extension”, defined as the extension of meaning in a new direction by adopting an original popular metaphorical connotation. It refers to a hidden comparison stemming from the transfer of the name based on similarity. In this method of describing concepts, one thing is likened to another by referring to it as if it were something else (Henning 1995, 4-5). A very interesting example of metaphorical extension is the word ziadti whose literal meaning is “excess.” In 35 harassment complaints, this word is used 19 times in either its singular or plural form, having three senses: “excessive mistreatment”, “sexual assault” and “rape”, all of which are extensions of
the word “excess.” Table 5 presents the concordance analysis of the word *ziadti* which shows how it is used in the complaints and what meaning it conveys. It shows that the word *ziadti* has different meanings in different contexts. In some complaints, it is used to connote mistreatment/maltreatment, unfair/unjust/cruel act, rape, sexual assault (rape attempt), oppression and wrongdoing. Hence, the word whose literal meaning “excess” may convey metaphorically extended connotations.

**Simile**

The difference between simile and metaphor is among the oldest and most tenuous, as well as the most widely recognized in rhetorical theory. For many analysts, the distinction is almost minimal—Aristotle believes that simile is a kind of metaphor as there is a slight difference between them (Ross 2010, 93). From traditional perspective, the main difference has been in terms of form because simile makes explicit what is merely suggested by a metaphor. Since the distinction between the two is apparently superficial, theorists have attempted to define one figure in terms of the other (Israel, Harding and Tobin 2004, 129).

In the complaints, few similes are used by the complainants; however, the ones used are highly intense. For example, in a workplace harassment complaint, the complainant said, “They were using indecent and vulgar language with me as if I were a prostitute.” She compared their language with that used to a woman of low moral character, which implies that their language had sexual connotations. She also compared the government office to a brothel as she said “I felt as if I was not in a highly esteemed and respectable government office but in a very dirty immoral place”, implying that in a government office, people do not expect to hear vulgar language.

In one instance, the perpetrator compares the act of committing rape to killing, but implies that rape is a less serious crime, as he said, “*Mein ne tumharay saath kiya kiya hai? Tum tau aisi hay ho jaisay mein ne tumhein goli maar di ho* (What have I done to you? You are behaving as if I fired on you).” This example shows that for him, sexual abuse is not as damaging or harmful as the act of killing, without acknowledging the trauma and torment the girl had gone through.

**Discussion**

The linguistic analysis unveils the socio-cultural constructions of gender oppression and deconstructs the complex relationship between gender, power and discourse which is shaped by the cultural context. The women’s complaints mostly focus on overt types of “gender asymmetry or sexism” (Lazar 2007, 148). In the Pakistani cultural context, the relation between gender and power is very complex. For instance, the parameters for evaluating a female’s character are different from those used in evaluating a male in Pakistani society. In
a complaint against workplace rape, the complainant quoted her abuser, “Mein tu shadi shuda mard hun mera kiya jaey ga; tum kanwari larki ho tuhari izzat chali jaey gi” (I am a married man; so, nothing will happen to me, but since you are an unmarried girl, your reputation will be at stake). This statement exemplifies our society’s dual standards of judging a person’s character based on gender. A married man guilty of adultery deserves humiliation more than a female rape victim. However, the overriding concern with a woman’s virginity and chastity irrespective of consensual or non-consensual interaction (Atakav 2015, 52; Sharlach 2008, 96), sets different standards of piousness for men and women.

Gender and hegemonic relationships become more pronounced in workplaces where female employees in the minority suffer at the hands of a male majority (Ott 1989, 41). The complaints state two instances, that of a female police officer and a government officer, where a female worker was harassed by male employees on account of being alone at the workplace. Despite enjoying high status and authority, both females were victimized by hegemonic masculinity, which exemplifies the interplay of gender and power.

This research also deconstructs discursively represented gender victimizing practices, highlighting exploitation of women’s vulnerability, especially when she is away from her hometown. One harassment complaint highlights how a female employee endured a “spate of irrelevant questions” about her relationship with her husband and in-laws by an official when she went to an official meeting in another city. The official took advantage of her vulnerability and harassed her verbally and psychologically. As FDA explores how gendered relations of power and gender ideology get (re)produced, discussed, and challenged during the representation of social practices (Lazar 2007, 182), the harassment complaints mirror the conventional ideology that dictates how females should act.

Lexical choice used in complaints relays strong culturally invested connotations. For instance, ziadti (see “Lexical choice”) exudes different connotations in legal, sociological and cultural contexts. In the legal context, it is institutionalized as “rape” which is a sexual crime punishable by life imprisonment or fine according to Act No. XLIV, 2016 (Lodhi 2016, 790). While in newspapers or other forms of media communication, the meanings of ziadti range from harassment and assault to rape, where meaning is generally inferred through linguistic and social contexts. In everyday life, ziadti may merely refer to mistreatment or unfair conduct. Despite implicating various meanings, its literal meaning, “excess”, subsumes excessive mistreatment, misdemeanour and crime.

Harassment is an underreported issue due to society’s overriding concern about women’s honour (Ali and Kramar 2015, 229); therefore, women generally refrain from reporting it. For instance, in the same complaint as above, the complainant managed to call her brother to her rescue and reported the case because her family became involved in it.
Explaining why she was reporting the harassment, she stated, “such things had been happening to me over the last few years, but I was facing them without sharing them with my family. But, since my family has got involved now, I want to face the situation head on and want such people to be brought to justice.” Despite women having embarked upon the journey of independence and empowerment, sexual harassment is still considered a stigmatizing issue. Lazar (2007, 153) is of the view that feminists need to be critically reflexive of their own theoretical positions regarding concepts of emancipation and equality. The act of filing complaints against violence and harassment indicates that Pakistani women are becoming conscious that their rights are being violated (at home or in the workplace) and they need to take steps towards positive transformation at both the micro- and macro levels.

Conclusion

The lexicogrammatical analysis of harassment complaints unwrapped the form and severity of abusive gendered practices rampant in Pakistani society. Transitivity analysis unveiled explicit and implicit discursive representations of harassing practices through material and verbal processes, highlighting enforced physical contact, harassing comments and verbal resistance. The complaints are invested with culturally informed metaphors such as dupatta (long scarf) and chadar aur chaar dewari (veil and four walls) as symbols of women’s honour (Atakav 2015, 52; Sharlach 2008, 96) and sense of protection; kothi khana (brothel) symbolizes the invasion of a woman’s chastity. Cultural metaphorical extensions such as ziadati (excess), whose meanings range from mistreatment and oppression to sexual assault and rape, are significant in construing the form and severity of the abuse. The complainants used extremely negative adjectives and adverbs to describe the intensity of verbally or physically harassing practices.

Women’s harassment complaints are important documents invested with sociocultural gender ideology underlining the need for dismantling gender oppression for societal transformation. Linguistic investigation of harassment complaints, a neglected area, can significantly facilitate the understanding of the complexities of harassing practices which generally remain unreported due to the stigma attached to harassment. Moreover, analysis of harassing comments quoted in complaints can contribute to raising consciousness among students and employees about avoiding offensive language in educational institutes and workplaces. Finally, such complaints may be used as case studies to be included in the syllabus of various management courses, especially Human Resource Management, in order to sensitize and educate students about the current state of harassing practices in the Pakistani context and help them develop strategies to deal with such cases effectively when in management positions themselves.
| Sr. # | TRANSL. | Actor | Goal | Process | Circumstances |
|-------|--------|-------|------|---------|---------------|
| 1     | TRANSL. | Sir   | Me   | lay down | Mera hathi zabardasti daba kar (Manner) |
| 2     | TRANSL. | Who   | Mere | Kissing | by grabbing my hand forcefully |
| 3     | TRANSL. | He    | my face | started kissing |
| 4     | TRANSL. | My sister's brother-in-law | Apna hathoon aur tangos se jakra | with intent to commit rape |
| 5     | TRANSL. | Us ne | my sister | pushed (us) out (of the factory) |
| 6     | TRANSL. | He    | my clothes | started beating (me) up and tried to drag (me) |
| 7     | TRANSL. | Us ne | three of us | gun point pe (Manner) |
| 8     | TRANSL. | Mr. ne | my clothes | at gun point |
| 9     | TRANSL. | Us ne | my clothes | by force |
| 10    | TRANSL. | He    | tied up (my arms and legs) and started raping me. |
| 11    | TRANSL. | Who   | parlor se bahar le janaay laga | by force |
| 12    | TRANSL. | He    | Taken out of the parlor | Dug me by the arm |
| 13    | TRANSL. | My left arm/shoulder | was cracked |
| 14    | TRANSL. | Meri mein ko | Thappar main shuru kar dhey |
| 15    | TRANSL. | Asad ne | gahban se pakar liya |

Table 1: Material Process: Explicit Depiction of Harassment/Rape
| Sr # | TRANSLATION | Actor                        | Goal          | Circumstances                                      | Process                                |
|------|-------------|------------------------------|---------------|---------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| 1    | Union ne    | nauru saath                  | ghalet harkat karnay ki koshish ki | tried to misbehave                           |
|      | TRANSL.     | He                           | Fidviya ko    | aeye din (Extent) na jaisa tareejoon se (Means)  | blackmail or harassment jata hai       |
|      |             | The compliant/complainant    | every now and then through illegal means        | blackmailed or harassed                |
| 3    |             | Fidviya ko                   | Ask joga se doosri joga (Location)              | trasfer kiya jata reha                  |
|      |             | The complainant              | from one place to another                      | was transferred                        |
|      |             | Dovse abatkaron ne            | Mokhlasin heley beharon se (Means)             | Behlaamne phaslaama chaha              |
| 4    |             | Both police officials        | the complainant                                  | tried to lure me                       |
|      |             | Us ne                        | Through various means                            | Fiahsal harkoat keen                    |
|      |             | He                           |                           | Performed vulgar actions                |
|      |             | Us ke chhotay bhat ne        | Meri bethi ke saath                               | Zyadhi karnay ki koshish ki            |
|      |             | His younger brother          | my daughter                                       | tried to rape                          |
| 7    |             | Mujheyy                      | Naarva rovyey ko by aheive behaviour (Means)    | iesha ne banya gaya                    |
|      |             | I                            | Have been victimized                             |
| 8    |             | Us ne                        | Naat jat    | taalopot qaim karnay pe najboor kiya              | forced (her) to develop illicit relation |
| Sr | Saye | Target | Receiver | Verbal Process | Verbiage | Circumstance |
|----|------|--------|---------|----------------|----------|--------------|
| 1  | Mein | me     | Shor    | Schooled      | ghata    | Ghatak wali baat |
| 2  | Mein | sir    | sab ko  | batai          |          |              |
| 3  | Mein | Ap k1 | everybody | have told      | about the immoral act | Office |
| 4  | Woh  | mujhey| Khatap  | tamasha na banao |          | In office |
| 5  | Unben | to me | kaha   | Not to make a scene |          |              |
| 6  | He   | Said  | Dhankeya ko deen | Ke dekho hom tumharey saath kya kartap hain, dhankiya di | See what we will do with you and he threatened me |
| 7  | Us shakha ne | mujhey | Garch aur ghialee | Parlour ke bahar kharay ho kar | While standing outside the parlour |
| 8  | Un done | mercy | ne galiya deon |          | called me names |
| 9  | U no | Istanan ki | Vulgar language |          | called me names |

Table 3: Verbal Process: Resistance against Harassment
Table 4  
Frequency of Adverbs in Harassment Complaints

| Sr # | Adverbs                     | Transl.          | Frequency |
|------|-----------------------------|------------------|-----------|
| 1    | Badamezi se                 | rudely           | 5         |
| 2    | Imandaari se                | honestly         | 1         |
| 3    | Bilawaja                    | unreasonably     | 1         |
| 4    | Zabardasti                  | By force         | 9         |
| 5    | Daray daray                 | fearfully        | 1         |
| 6    | Jaan boojh kar              | deliberately     | 3         |
| 7    | Thori thori der baad aa kar| frequently       | 1         |
| 8    | Ghair qanooni taur per      | illegally        | 1         |
| 9    | Fori                         | Urgently         | 1         |

Table 5  
Concordance analysis of ziaadi exemplifying metaphorical extension

| Sr # | Extract from the complaints                                                                 | Translation                                                                 |
|------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1    | Meri beti ke saath ziaadi hai                                                                 | My daughter has been raped.                                                |
| 2    | Fadvi ke saath hone wali ziaadion ko aazaala kya jooy                                        | Please compensate the complainant for the mistreatment.                    |
| 3    | Meri bhanji ke saath zana karnay ki koshish kar ke sakhat ziaadi ki hai                         | (He has) committed an unjust act by sexually assaulting my niece.           |
| 4    | Meri beton ke saath bari ziaadti hai                                                          | My daughters have been subjected to mistreatment.                          |
| 5    | Aur apnay karpay bhi utaar kar ziaadti karna shuru kar di                                    | And started committing rape after taking off his own clothes too.           |
| 6    | Meri beti ne mujhey saray waqay se aagah kya aur batlaya ke manoon ne meray saath ziaadi ki hai | My daughter informed me about the entire incident that her maternal uncle had raped her. |
| 7    | Meray betay ne bhi mujhey bataya ke manoon ne meray saath bhi ziaadi karnay ki koshish ki hai | My son also told me that his maternal uncle sexually assaulted him too.     |
| 8    | Meri beti ke saath ziaadi kar ke aur chhotay betay ke saalzatadi karnay ki koshish kar ke sabhi ziaadi ki hai | It has been highly cruel on his part to have raped my daughter and sexually assaulted my younger son. |
| 9    | Baar saal ke us ke zulm o ziadion ki tafeel haab zail hai                                     | The details of the wrongdoings of the last 12 years are given below.        |
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