Thespians in print: Gender portrayal in Pakistani English print media

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Abstract: The depiction of gender in Western media has been widely examined by researchers. This study intends to throw light on the current representation of women in Pakistani entertainment print media. Data were collected from four national newspapers including Dawn, The Nation, Daily Times, and The News for a period of 1 month. The techniques of Multimodal Corpus Linguistics and Content Analysis were opted to process data, and a blend of Feminist Stylistics and Critical Discourse Analysis methods was selected to analyze it. Results showed that women were overrepresented in entertainment news; however, discourse used to portray women was found asymmetrical when compared with that of men. The study attempted to show a wider picture of the gendered role of women in modern Pakistan.

Subjects: Media & Communications; Language & Gender; Language & Power; Discourse Analysis

Keywords: Discourse analysis; gender representation; entertainment news; print media; critical discourse analysis

1. Introduction

The press, like other kinds of mass media, is a mighty instrument of socialization. Its role in the dissemination of information is pivotal and hence can influence people’s thoughts, beliefs, and perspectives. The content and language of the press when examined enables us to appraise its augmentation to gender issues. It can be argued, though, that the choices and tools an ordinary person receives as a consumer of media are not restricted as they appear initially. Further, the gendered messages encoded in print media either semiotically or linguistically are naturalized in

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The present article shows the representation of women in print media. The results showed that women are overrepresented in entertainment news as compared to other news as politics, education, etc.; however, their representation lacks equality in comparison with that of men.
the discourse on gender; they influence not only our experience of consuming news and entertainment but also the construction of gender identities, thus generate a gate-keeping mechanism that eventually circumscribes the degree to which communities become gender—in/exclusive.

We intend to ascertain in a systematic and in-depth fashion how women are depicted in the context of Dawn, The News, Daily Times, and The Nation, four immensely popular English newspapers. One can understand women portrayal in the media if he/she is able to uncover the nature of Pakistani print media, the possible ways to study them and their potential to signify and construct the consumers. To do this, authors will provide, first, a synopsis of the previous research done in the field. Second, we will explain in detail the methodology used in this study, from the initial stages of data collection to the creation of a corpus and its processing. Third, we will present the results shown by the data. Finally, we will analyze the results and draw some preliminary conclusions that will point us in the direction of further research for this project.

2. Literature review

2.1. Gender in print media

Media, language and gender have long been the focus of interest for research scholars in the West. Women representation and their role in news and other mass media have been the subject of research over the last 25 years (Meyers, 1999). Studies showed how language became a tool in producing an image of a person being powerless (Burton, 1982) and sexiest language has a capability to sustain and augment the power relations in a society (Spender, 1980). Previous research included investigation of language use in terms of convention of naming (Spender, 1980), titles, terms of address and vocabulary lacking equivalence, use of generic “he” and “man” to disregard females and semantic derogation of the terms related to females more often than those of males (Schulz, 1990; Yasmin, 2007). These findings are positively relevant to the study of gender in print media.

Media’s power to represent and perpetuate gender constructions at workplaces is recognized by Czarniawska and Rhodes (2006). Mazza and Alvarez (2000) find how media influences working lives and Rhodes and Parker (2008) show that there is a link between media and working life. Female politician’s achievements are trivialized as they usually take less coverage than their appearance (Mavin, Bryans & Cunningham, 2010; Ejaz, 2017). Mavin, Bryans and Cunningham (2010) study on analysis of UK newspapers, government websites showed that media constructions ignore the contribution of female politicians. The limitation of this study was its focus on two leaders only. Research on women athletes exhibits issues of underrepresentation, an emphasis on femininity and negative aspects and focussing on their physical appearance more than of their competence (George, Hartley, & Paris, 2001). Sports is considered a natural domain for males only (Bryson, 1990; Jones, Murrell, & Jackson, 1999). In the field of business, the fashion of representation remains the same. Women as business executives receive similar reporting as she does in other genres. A critical discourse analysis of the American business press displayed the image of women executives quite fractured as compared to their male counterpart (Krefting, 2002). With a little positive description to obscure it, much of the data underpins negative views of women’s competence.

A similar representation of women was observed in crime reporting. Despite the seriousness of genre, studies found a gender-specific reporting. Rasool and Irshad (2006) analysed headlines of crime reports of Pakistani newspapers and their findings supported the prevalent scenario. Women victims have no self-identity as they were labeled as “women”, “mothers”, “wives”, “brides” and reference to their age and marital status was made reporting the news (pp: 33–35).

Television has the widest reach of any medium (Rubie-Davies, Liu, & Lee, 2013) and dramas, movies and advertisements are further ways to construct various identities. Ramakrishna, Mart ínez, Malandrakis, Singla, and Narayanan (2015) analysed variances in linguistic character portrayal with several factors such as gender, race and age. Results showed an asymmetrical representation of gender in movies where male actors had twice as many roles and dialogues
than their female partners. On the other hand, female actors were found younger than male actors. The study implied that gender stereotypes still prevail despite extensive research. Advertising being a tool to reach people (Chafai, 2007) becomes more influential than other genres of media (Piller, 2003). Swilla (2000) examined how lexical choices construct negative stereotypes in research combining content and linguistic analysis. In a content analysis of advertisements in 10 UK magazines, Plakoyiannaki and Zotos (2009) studied the frequency of female role stereotypes appearing in different types of magazine and also the association of female role and product. Their study indicated that women are portrayed for decorative purpose and this portrayal differs in different types of magazines. Female stereotypes were in an association with the product. In another research, it was examined how these stereotypes were propagated sometimes even by women (Sadiqi, 1995) and how do these stereotypes silence women (Jaworsky, 1992). A mixed method of content and Semiotic analysis by Tekvar (2008) found a mixed representation of the traditional and modern image of male and female in their respective magazines. McRobbie (2000, p. 67) finds a “construction of teenage femininity” in advertisements. Chafai’s (2007) work based on comparison of British and Moroccan magazines analysed linguistically and visually and found women represented as mother or wives, as beautiful objects and in dire need of entertainment. An emphasis on appearance was a feature of British magazines whereas family was emphasized in Moroccan adverts. Rubie-Davies et al.’s (2013) analysis of advertisement in New Zealand TV showed a stereotypical portrayal of men and women: men as power player and women as home-maker. However, their study showed that an inclination towards stereotyping was found less than before. Interestingly, early study of Gentry and Harrison (2010) and recent of Winter (2014) found advertising reinforcing stereotypes and that old practices still permeate the media. To limit women to take care of appearance and a portrayal of woman’s body image results in body dissatisfaction (Artz and Venkatesh, 1991). Tiggemann & Mcgill, 2004 in their analysis of research done on gender representation in advertising, invite future researcher to move beyond stereotyping only to other demographic features like culture.

Media discourse analysis is not a widely researched field in Pakistan. Moreover, a majority of the previous studies were quantitative and dealt with numbers only. These and few others based on qualitative in-depth examination using a language analysis ignored the rest of the process; what impact may such representation have on the minds of readers. Moreover, Pakistani culture has distinct features (Yasmin, Sarkar, & Sohail, 2016; Yasmin, Sohail, Sarkar, & Hafeez, 2017; Yasmin & Naseem, 2019a; Abas, Khan, Haider, Iqbal, & Shahbaz, 2018; Khan, Kalair, Abas, Kalair, & Kalair, 2019; Kalair, Abas, & Khan, 2013) and the potential role this culture may play in this representation needs an exploratory study.

Our main research question is as follows:

How women are linguistically and visually portrayed in Pakistani English Entertainment print news?

3. Methodology

3.1. Method of data collection

3.1.1. Text corpus

Daily English newspapers were selected as they are more news-sensitive than monthlies and magazines and inform about the social or political activity in Pakistan. The data were collected from newspapers and two corpora were built with it by dividing it into two categories: news articles (written text) and images (visual text). The researchers selected English newspapers as the concern was in discovering the way the English language can affect the representation of women in Pakistani print media.
The sample was selected from the most popular English-medium newspapers including Daily Dawn, The News, Daily Times and The Nation from 15th of March to 15th of April 2007. Following a probability sampling technique, the sample was comprised of 10 alternate days to avoid any bias as this procedure (taking alternate days’ sample) gives each newspaper equal chance to be selected. The sample size was \( n = 40 \) with interval size \( k = 3 \).

In order to construct the corpus of newspaper articles on Entertainment/showbiz pages, the news related to women was scanned to make digital copies. The original scans were kept, and then the text and images were separated by cropping them out of articles (using Microsoft Office Picture Manager (Microsoft 2010)), and making separate files for visual corpus. The scanned text was then typed and converted into .TXT files to compile a text corpus using Sketch Engine (2012), and then examined through it as illustrated in Figure 3.

3.1.2. Image corpus

Once these images were collected, a random sample was chosen for close analysis using an automatic number generator to select six images from the corpus. Although it is understood that the image and text corpora are minuscule and non-representative, they are used in this case as a way to test out the methodology. To handle the images in the image corpora we created a grid to be able to record details with as much objectivity as possible, based loosely on the idea of a summary table as described by Miles and Huberman (1994), with fields from Machin (2007) and used in combination with the text corpus in much the same way such a table is used in Carrillo Masso (2009) as shown in Figure 1 in which image of Figure 2 is analysed. The grid, we found, was of the utmost importance. Without it, the visual aspect of the representation of women and the element of difference would have been very difficult to deconstruct and analyze.

3.2. Methods of analysis

A mixed-method approach was again adopted to analyze the data. Content Analysis was preferred to find the frequency of gender visibility. Besides this, the location was examined in terms of placement of news at front page, last page, top, bottom of page, while space was measured in column inches. For a qualitative analysis, data were analyzed using discourse analysis methods. For this, one article was selected that was published in all four newspapers. For a detailed analysis, one news item that was common to all four newspapers was selected (as four separate articles, with slightly different illustrations). The features found in this textual analysis were correlated to the corpus as a whole for comparison purposes.

3.2.1. Feminist model of text and model of transitivity

In this research, we employed Mills (1995) approach to “Feminist Stylistics” which deals with the linguistic analysis with a feminist view centering on the way women are described in various texts.
One of the strengths of Mills’ approach lies in its capacity of analyzing linguistic units beyond linguistic stylistics that emphasizes on the classification of patterns of usage in speech or writing. She believes that stylistics lacks consideration of the text in the context: production or critical reception; therefore, she holds extra-textual features of text like gender in the textual analysis which shows how the linguistic forms contribute to producing a character as powerless or altogether disappearing from the scenario through “false generics” (Cameron, 1990).

Mills (1995) feminist model of the text highlights the role of reader which was overlooked earlier in the traditional model which regards the encoded message same as the message decoded devoid of any “fuzziness” in production or reception. Such a perspective gives full control of language to the writer, considering the reader passive and leaving no room for extra-textual analysis that shows that meaning exists in the text only. This view drives to a dangerous view: only the writer becomes responsible and perception of sexism turns to be a personal problem only,
whereas the feminist model permits a study of a greater complexity than the conventional models in stylistics. A feminist model of text immersed in a critical discourse analysis pronounces practices of discrimination that influence the way the text is created.

3.2.2. Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

CDA is a means of discourse analysis employing a variety of approaches and procedures (Orpin, 2005; Wodak & Meyer, 2001). In CDA, interdisciplinary and “transdisciplinary” procedures are combined to examine texts (Fairclough, 2003) and to study the ways dominant discourses not only depict the world but also create it through words. We have already explored SCT above and how gender is “done” in Pakistani media. CDA can be used in different ways to deconstruct institutionalized gender representations in given discourses, and the way these discourses are inculcated and operationalized. We chose CDA for this reason, and for its flexibility, meaning that it can be combined with other methods and techniques in a hybrid or “bricoleurian” approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

The methods commonly classified as part of CDA offer a way to interpret a problem, to narrow down a topic, and to see the motivations behind the discourse in and through different “readings” of a text. CDA in itself is then not a single quantitative or qualitative research method, but rather a critical approach to research methods that seeks to eliminate inequality expressed and legitimized through language use (Wodak & Meyer, 2001:2) by exposing it, and to make social changes through social understanding (van Dijk, 1993b:252).

According to Fairclough (1992, 1993, 2003) and Chouliaraki and Fairclough (1999), CDA can be accomplished by analyzing a text as the primary unit of discourse and looking at its context. The context refers to a text’s accompanying images, which should never be overlooked in an investigation (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996); it also points to the discourses that exist around that text its accompanying photographs, and the sociocultural traditions that cover them both.

For our analysis, we will follow Fairclough’s (2003) approach (which we will briefly describe below), and supplement and complement it by using a project-specific multimodal (image and text) Corpus (which we describe below). Another important element of the analysis will be the combination of CDA with Feminist Stylistics, as outlined above, for a deeper understanding of the tropes revealed by the corpus. We strongly believe that visual images are one of the most important means of representation in discourse studies, and we feel my analysis will benefit enormously from their use.

CDA has traditionally centered on the ideologies existing in discourses. These can be found either in the form of “representations of how things are and have been, as well as imaginaries— representations of how things might or could or should be” (Fairclough, 2003). Present research on the analysis of the portrayal of women in Pakistani entertainment media focuses on the way the discourse “woman” creates other discourses that form a representation of women in mainstream media and their roles.

Fairclough’s (2003) approach to CDA is adopted to meet the desired goal. We will only give a list of the steps to be taken (our terms of reference will be examined in the result section below):

1. Internal analysis of the text:
   (a) Use of text and image Corpus to notice patterns and irregularities in the illustration of females.
   (b) Examine these observations and offer insights into the semantic (meaning) relations between some lexical (vocabulary) items and the text as a whole.
   (c) Relate these insights to insights acquired in visual-semiotic analysis.

2. Positioning the texts in relation to genres.
Following Mills, the text was analysed initially at the word level, where sexism in language is easy to locate. However, words are meaningful only when interpreted in relation to their context, so “patterns of background knowledge” can be found on the discourse level. At the sentence level, we performed our analysis with the help of Halliday’s (1985) model of transitivity, where syntactic choices show how actions are represented. These choices play an important role in the representation of a character: whether the character is passive victim or active agent. Finally, we analyse the texts at the discourse level with help from Fairclough’s (2005) CDA approach.

4. Results and discussion

The mini-corpus we created, although very small, does throw some light on the nature of the language used in the articles that conform it. For example, the pronoun “she” occurred 83 times, whereas the object pronoun “her” is present 106 times. In addition, the most common collocates suggest existential or behavioural processes as further evidenced by the visual corpus, which shows women merely smiling at the camera or posing. Only in two examples (A46-DT-29-3 and A47-DT-23-3) are the females performing an action—reading and smoking, respectively—although it can be argued that these actions are also of a behavioral nature in themselves, as there is no product or outcome.

4.1. Asymmetrical gender visibility

A content analysis of news on Entertainment pages showed a general gender representation in daily Pakistani English newspapers. The graph (Figure 4) shows a striking contrast between the representation of men and women in the media. The higher frequency of men’s visibility shows their dominance in newspapers. Articles related to men only were 76% of the whole news articles. In contrast, only 6% of the news was about women. While 12% of the news talked about both together and 6% were neutral as no gender was mentioned. Women’s reporting in 6% of the total coverage reveals the true picture of their place in society and present finding is in line with Mavin, Bryans and Cunningham (2010) and Ejaz (2017).

Despite the low visibility of women in overall representation, it is interesting to note that they got higher coverage in soft issue like Entertainment pictures (52.75%) followed by Entertainment articles (35.5%) as shown in Figure 5. Men in comparison are mostly visible in hard issues and their visibility in Entertainment articles and pictures is quite small, 36.24% and 22.47%, respectively. One interesting trend is observed in both men and women. Women are more visible in pictures than in news articles while for men situation is vice versa.

Four newspapers were analyzed separately to find out which newspaper gives more coverage to women. Present portrayal echoes the earlier findings of Chafai (2007) and Plakoyiannaki and Zotos (2009) who showed that women are portrayed for decorative purposes only.
News related to entertainment is usually found on the last page of a newspaper which is though less significant than the front page, the most important and eye-catching place for momentous news dominated by men, yet still has more value than middle pages as illustrated in Figure 6.

### 4.2. Asymmetrical gender portrayal

The linguistic forms present the male as an unmarked and female as marked form. The use of affix “-ess” to refer to a woman as Daily Times uses 9 times; examples are “actress Karina” (29/03), ‘Actress gets roles at 97’ (1/04), “Actress Cienaa Miller” and the use of “actress Roohi Bano” in Dawn (23/03) shows women as deviation from a male universal norm. The addition of “ess” has a sense of lack of seriousness about them, especially if compared to male term “actor” which gives an air of professionalism and potential while “actress” gives an impression of amateurism to the person whom they are describing. Other gendered terms include “spokeswomen” used once in DT-(1/4), and sexist, as “girl” occurred 8 times: once in Dawn (1/4) and 7 times in DT while no such equivalent is used for males of this profession.
Titles and terms of address also carry inequality in treatment. Men were addressed with a non-sexist title of Mr only once while women bore titles of Miss 8 times and Ms twice in DT. Naming convention also follows this pattern of inequality. Men were addressed with full name for 41 times, with last name 9 times and with the first name only 10 times whereas women were addressed with full name for 63 times, with last name 38 times and with first name 53 times, which is quite higher than the frequency of men in this regard. Moreover, it is noted that full name was used in the beginning but later they were addressed with last or first name. It is understandable that men and women related to this field are considered familiar with audiences but the striking difference of use of first name for women 53 times as compared to men with 10 times only, showing a synthetic intimacy, or even infantilization of the female subject. Results showed that despite a long struggle against sexist language usage (Spender, 1980), women are not treated equally and asymmetrical representation in media is found a norm.

Male performers were addressed in terms of their profession more frequently (17 times) than female performers (4 times) who were addressed in terms of their relation to men (3 times) and country of birth (8 times). Female performers were described in terms of their age 14 times more than males. It seems that age matters for women only and as 90% belonged to an age group from teen to 20s, it seems significant for a woman to be in 20s if she wants to be successful in this field.

The female body is fragmentized and this feature of fragmentation not only turns a woman into the mere object but also trivializes the status of women in society. The Daily Times in its news ‘Actress gets roles at 97’ uses terms like ‘snow-white hair,’ “rosy red cheeks” and “sweet-as-peaches-and-crème smile” to describe Mae Laborde. Here the elements of the natural world are compared to the woman’s beauty and parts of her body. Woman, here, seems to be composed of a number of separate objects which may be considered beautiful in their own right. Her body begins to assume the qualities of the elements to which it is compared: natural and consumable. Again the description of age, height, features, her being a “fresh new face” is assumed for a woman only. Phrases like “hotter than ever” and “stunned fiancée” used for 97-year-old women signify that she still possesses erotic charm.

Women are stereotyped at discourse level where they are depicted as sexual objects. It was hard to find a parallel headline like “Katrina makes the Japanese go weak” in Daily Times (17/03) for a male actor. Also, sensuality and sexuality did not end here. Further, in the same news where Japanese are described as people from the land of Rising Sun to give an impression of their superiority, Katrina’s beauty is expressed as powerful enough to make them bow before her. In the same newspaper, news about Sienna Miller gives only one message that a woman must be beautiful especially if she wants to be successful in her sexual life. Miller is quoted that she used
“tricks” to look beautiful. The presupposition at work is that a woman in general and especially a female actor must look beautiful and it is deemed essential if she wants to love someone. Even a single mark on her body would be unacceptable. One (woman only) must have an ideal body shape and if not then one must put every possible effort (i.e. putting make-up and spray on all her body, use of lighting, etc.) to show her beautiful. This detail is provided in the words of Miller which shows that women have not only accepted such stereotypes but have also contributed to strengthening them further. No such requirement of ideal beauty is demanded from male actor (Hayden Christensen) who is working with her. There was evidence in the previous literature that confirmed the assumptions that women should appear attractive (Rubie-Davies et al., 2013). It also reminds the reader of Winter (2014) who found women stereotyped as sexual objects and that they must look beautiful to get a husband.

Naomi Campbell’s news published in three newspapers Dawn, The News and The Nation (20/03) is selected for the analysis (app. 1-B). The headline uses the first name of supermodel Naomi Campbell in The Nation, Dawn and full name in The News. First name is used either to show a high level of intimacy with the person addressed or for a person having a lower rank in society. At first sight, later reason does not sound appropriate but a reading of a whole headline reinforces this negative connotation when we read “cleaning woman” (The News, The Nation) where woman is not used with a meaning of adult female. From a feminist point of view, woman is one of those words which are derogated semantically over the passage of time (Schulz, 1990). There is no male equivalent of “cleaning woman” in English. Here it would be interesting to mention Punjabi term “Masi” which stands for “mother’s sister” but now it is used for maid who does the cleaning job. On the other hand, the male relations related to father or mother retained their original meaning.

The first introductory paragraph (The News, The Nation) describes Naomi Campbell’s court orders of cleaning floors as a sentence over her misdemeanor for throwing cell phone at her maid. This paragraph talks about her sentence thus prepares the reader for the detail of her misdemeanor and the ordered sentence. But very next lines with minute details of her dress and shoes, “wearing black patent stiletto boots, brown pants and a knee length black jacket … ” makes the reader confused whether the news is about her penalty or any modeling event. The minute detail of the colour, quality and type of shoes and dress, she was wearing but also the detail of shoes she was holding for cleaning “a pair of paratrooper boots slung over her shoulder” endorses the asymmetrical representation of woman. While another newspaper Dawn provided a detail of the coat she was wearing “a short-fitted coat with a flared bottom”, sunglasses and hairstyle as “dark sunglasses and a newsboy cap over a short hairdo” and her walking style as “traded the catwalk”. Two newspapers of the three (Dawn, The News) mentioned her age as well “36-years old”, ‘Campbell, 36’, as the factor of age has something to do with her behavior or her sentence. Therefore, it rendered the whole matter to a non-serious affair. It is, however, unlikely that any male actor or model would be reported on penalty in terms of age and appearance as was highlighted by Rasool and Irshad (2006).

5. Conclusion
The present research attempts to trace the facts that lead to the exploration of the way women are represented in entertainment news published in Pakistani English newspapers. After compiling the upshot of content analysis of Pakistani English newspapers, it was indicated that women are extravagantly portrayed in entertainment news articles and graphics. However, the textual analysis showed a contradictory outcome whereby women somewhat lag behind men in terms of manifestation and parity. In addition, the study further aims at putting forth the portrayal of gender relations prevailing in contemporary Pakistan through the lens of entertainment print media. This aspect, thus, supplements the dimension of how the meaning-making process proves conducive in giving birth to the Western women in Pakistani fancy. This paper also highlights the position of women as print media consumers and the fact that how they are channelized by virtue of multimodal means of communication as consumers. Finally, this preliminary, pilot study gives a comprehensive touch to the utility of critical discourse analytical approaches,
encompassing Feminist Stylistics, and multimodal corpora to the study of gender relations and international communication.

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