Gender Linguistics Challenges in the Naming of Occupations in Hindi

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Abstract: *Gender is a socially constructed concept. The concept of gender depends on the socially constructed roles assigned to males and females. Language plays a significant role in human life and it is the prime bearer of thoughts and concepts to each other and over time. Gender and language is a diverse and expeditiously developed area and a popular discourse in academia. Over time gender traits are shifts but linguistic terms are still unavailable in many languages to cover this variation. Gender linguistics is an umbrella term which defines the way and style of talking being male and female in one side and language used to talking about male and female on the other. The term gender has been adopted in later feminist approaches especially after the literary and philosophical movement of post-structuralism to cover all social beings according to its sex and assigned social role. In Gender discourse, the transformation of gender roles in occupation draws the attention of social scientists during the last three to four decades. Therefore in the field of linguistic research regarding gender is going around these debates and differences. In this paper, we are going to discuss the naming terms of occupations in Hindi and the realignment of signifier-signified relationships among them over time.*
Keywords: Gender, Sign, Signifier, Signified, Arbitrariness, Structuralism, Post Structuralism, Feminism, Gender Stereotype

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I.   Introduction:

As a social creature human beings are divided into a gender which is based on the role assigned by the society according to sex. This gender division is related to power politics and language is the prime medium in this respect to maintain these debates and roles. Social discourses changes through time but the process is dilatory and sometimes it is too drear until any movement takes place. Human history is the witness of this fact that every social movement demands sacrifices for the transformation of society. Although the concept of gender developed rapidly in the academic discourse the fact is that it still needs a lot of transformation in the real world. As we mentioned that language is the prime bearer of social beliefs and norms therefore any social transformation demands a linguistic intervention. In the Hindi language, we have two linguistic genders that influence almost all the parts of speech in the language. Then what about the third gender? Isn't it a linguistic exclusion of a third gender person? Isn't it the toughest struggle for gender identity where at least linguistic sustenance is not available? In a very heart touching interview of Gauri Sawant, a Mumbai based transgender activist has said about her real-life struggle for gender identity. From the last three to four decades we have seen that occupational inclusion of gender is increasing i.e. there is associability seemed in all occupations which are stereotypically assigned to specific gender like male and female and the exclusion of the third gender in the occupational world before. Despite this inclusion the scarcity of new words of naming the occupation that helps to make a clear image beyond gender, stereotypical images stay in mind due to long-standing. Saussure stated it as a signifier-signified relationship of signs which becomes rigid over time. Before entering the gender linguistic debate first we have to elaborate on the concept of signifier and signified of Saussure's Structuralism, the great linguistic movement that shapes modern linguistics.

Signifier and signified

Signification is the basic idea of structuralism that includes a wide area of discourse. Signification takes place with the actions or events having some semantic quality. The phrase "signifying practices" incurs that specific sense. Running, quarreling, writing, or readings, discussing something are all examples of meaningful occurrences. All those meaningful occurrences that can be writing or documented are text. A text can be a story, an article, a poem, a notice, and much more. Structuralists believed that any text or any meaningful occurrences are possible to analyze within their particular cardinal structures. The specific discourse of structuralism is first

introduced by Ferdinand de Saussure a Swiss linguist in19th century. This significant branch of linguistics introduced by Saussure is called structural linguistics. The famous book of Saussure 'The Course in General Linguistics' published after his death is the collection of his classroom lectures which accumulated by some of his disciples. Even after the rise of post-structuralism the structuralism traits still open for debate to the scholars. The very basic and most significant concept of Saussure's structuralism approach is the concept of Sign.

Saussure defines Sign as the basic constituent of language. Sense has been deciphered in terms of the interrelationship between signs and its referents. The essence of Saussure's model of exploring meaning is that his idea of examined language independently of its referents. Therefore he puts that sign implant the signifying element and its meaningful content. Therefore Saussure divides sign into two aspects i.e. signified and signifier. Signifiers are the sound images of linguistic signs and signified is the object or concept signifying by the signifier. Saussure defines that the relationship between signified and signifier is arbitrary. It means that there is not necessarily any logical relationship between signified and signifier. This arbitrariness is become a trait in social discourse and adopted as words in a language to decipher meaning. This is the reason that meanings of words change historically, and according to its social and individual discourse. Saussure puts that signal is "arbitrary concerning its signification, with which it has no natural connection in reality" (Saussure, 2001, p.69) Saussure focuses on three basic points about arbitrariness: 1. Linguistic signs consist of two elements, a signal, and a signification; 2. the signal and the signification are both psychological, therefore sign is a two-sided psychological entity, 3. the relationship between the signal and the signification is arbitrary or unmotivated. After the establishment of the relationship between signal and signification, no personal influence can change the subjectivity of that particular term. "The signal and the signification themselves are arbitrary. This is not directly mentioned by Saussure in his Course in General Linguistics but is implied by his elaboration on the value of the signal." (Duan, 2012, p. 54-59). In the theory of linguistic relativity by Sapir and Whorf implies this arbitrary nature of signals. This theory explains the different world views possessed by persons or communities according to our language despite living in the same world. Languages have a specific combination of sounds and rules employed to explore the world differently. Saussure's concentration on synchronic linguistics can be realized.
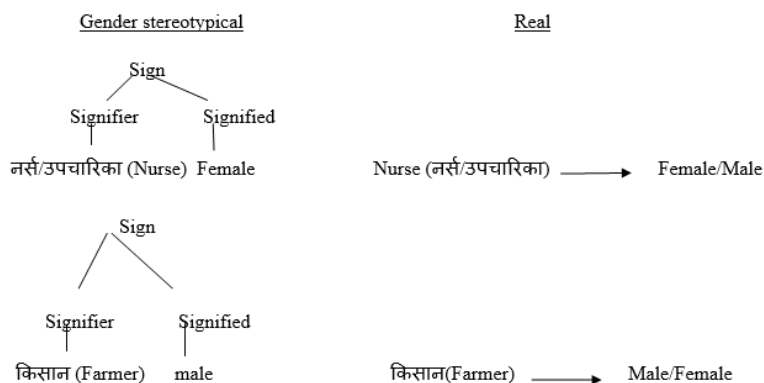
II. Literature review:

The linguistic debates in gender discourse endeavor to reveals gender discriminations in respect of language. How language is used as a medium of discrimination occupied a major area of linguistic research in gender discourse. Dale Spender examines how uses of language promote patriarchy or a man-made world in her famous work 'Man Made Language'(Spender, 1980) that consider as a cornerstone in feminism. In the paper titled 'Gendered language' (Jakiela & Ozier, Owen, 2018) Jakiela and Ozier, reveal the negative relationship between the prevalence of gender language and labor force participation of women. Litosseliti in her book 'Gender and Language: Theory and Practice' (Litosseliti, 2006/2013) effort to framing the academic study of gender language by analyzing the discourse from a different angle. These are some significant research in this area. In our research paper, we endeavor to discuss the naming terms of occupations that promote gender stereotype roles in society.

Methodology: The qualitative descriptive research methodology has been applied in this paper.

The naming of occupations in Hindi: Signifier-Signified Relation

An occupation is generally a term used for a work for which payments can be made. A few decades back women and third gender are excluded from many professions and occupations and they had very little option to choose. But through time the occupational world expanded regarding gender. Now it seems the inclusion of women, men, and the third gender in different jobs previously not occupied by those genders. But there still seems a gender stereotype because of the relationship between words and image that naturally becomes stable in mind which sometimes makes the process tardy to break up the stereotypical image of related profession or occupation. Here are some examples that are shown bellow-

Gender stereotypical   Real

Sign
Signifier   Signified
नर्स/उपचारिका (Nurse)   Female   Nurse (नर्स/उपचारिका) ⟶ Female/Male

Sign
Signifier   Signified
किसान (Farmer)   male   किसान(Farmer) ⟶ Male/Female

We know that gender role assigned according to the biological sex of people. In this gender division of labor, women are entrusted in the reproductive works wherein many times never get any remuneration whereas on the other hand men are assigned for the productive jobs for which they get remuneration. Despite the same labor even sometimes double that of men women stay marginalized because of unpaid and reproductive labor. One of these reproductive labors is the caring of people for which the nursing profession has a significant role. For a long time the women dominance of the nursing profession can seem but through time man started entering into this field. But the word Nurse still creates a female image in our minds. Even we address a nurse as a sister. The same has happened to the word 'Kisan'. Farming is a collective work. In India, we can see that almost all the family members including male, female, and the children are involved but the term 'Kisan' is still cannot able to create such a collective picture and only signified a male image in our mind. Therefore to the recognition of those laborers, specific terms should be made so that they will feel inclusive and proud of their jobs. There is some other examples shown bellow-

Signifier	Signified	Real
कसाई (Butcher)	Male	Male/Female
उपन्यासकार (Novelist)	Male	Male/Female
कलाकार (Artist)	Male	Male/Female
कुम्हार (Potter)	Male	Male/Female
सरपंच (Sarpanch)	Male	Male/Female
कुलपति (Vice Chuncellor)	Male	Male/Female
दुकानदार (shop keeper)	Male	Male/Female
वकील (Lawyer)	Male/Female	Male/Female/Transgender
पुलिस (Policeman/ Police officer)	Male	Male/Female/Transgender
प्रिन्सिपल (Principal)	Male/ Female	Male/Female/Transgender
राजनीतिज्ञ (Politician)	Male	Male/Female/Transgender
सैनिक (Soldeir)	Male	Male/Female/Transgender

In the case of the naming of occupation, it should be in a neutral form so will be useful for all genders without any hesitation of adopting any occupation or profession. In the case of languages (like Hindi) of two gender systems, a neutral term is grammatically difficult. In such a situation, it should be better to avail terms for each gender and we must go beyond grammatical gender in this respect to built new terms. There is another fact in the case of Hindi where the term is feminine (e.g. Police) in grammatical gender but because of the male domination of that occupation, the gender stereotype picture is depicted in mind as male. In the feminist debate of equality between man and woman, this terminological issue is in height of discussion. In this trend, these feminist ideologies like to adopt terms previously used for men and prefer to use such words by leaving the women indicated words of such professions. A good example of this is the word 'Actor'. Now women in the acting profession are called an 'Actor' replacing the term 'Actress' used before. But it seems more challenging to

maintain gender identity. We should have words for men and women otherwise being neutral terms depicts as a human being. Languages of two gender systems adopt the male terms for all, not the female terms. So isn't it better to use separate terms for each gender so that it helps to maintain gender identity? If we realize the signifier-signified relationship we will be aware of terms because it creates images in mind that are important for identity. If we have no words to indicate women in the particular profession then the image of women left out over time and it will become more destructive for gender equality as well as gender identity. Therefore we must have to enlarge the area of words regarding the naming of occupations not to limit this for adopting a particular male depicted word.

III.   Conclusion:

It can be said that the relationship between signifier and signified is the relationship between sounds or words and images. A signifier is a representative of the signified object or concept. These concepts and images become rigid in mind and hardly can be removed or transformed through time. This same case happens in gender discourse. Gender roles transformed and shifts but to catch up on the traits we have a lack of words in the Hindi language. Again in the world of occupation, we seek the gender-neutral words for linguistic inclusion of the third gender and other. Despite the richness of the Hindi language we still have to depend on English and sometimes borrowed terms from other languages. Sometimes few words are coined but lack of its public dispersion people do not know about those terms and left out over time. Government intervention and gender linguistic sensitive policy-making can help in this respect. For example, the word 'divyang' is now widely used in place of 'apang'. Such linguistic intervention and inclusion is necessary to popularize and public dispersion of new terms and breaking gender stereotypes in real life.

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