

## **Stereotypical Gender Differences in Matrimonial Choices: A Study of Marriage Bureau Websites in Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines stereotypical language expressions used in the matrimonial discourse in the advertisements of marriage bureau websites in Pakistan. A corpus-based analysis of language attitudes was carried out on data taken from a range of marriage bureau web pages. Language patterns were analyzed using the Wordsmith concordance to reveal patterns of overtly-expressed language attitudes. It discusses how differently but stereotypically the adjectives and nouns are selected by both the genders for their self-discourse as well as for choosing their desired spouses. This study is also based on theoretical considerations of gender differences in language use and it helps in understanding the trends in matrimonial discourse in Pakistani cultural context.

**Keywords:** *Gender stereotypes, Matrimonial choice, Cyber language, Self-disclosure*

## **Introduction**

### **1.1. Background of the Study**

People, offering matrimonial services to make perfect match, are highly privileged in Pakistan. It is an amazing and marvelous service and a growing profitable business in Pakistan. Some renowned and latest online marriage bureaus in Pakistan that include shaadee.pk, pakistanimatrimony.com, shaadi.org.pk, getrishta.com and many more are classified websites that bridge the gap between the prospective clients and marriage bureaus. The desirous clients can search the latest free classified advertisements from marriage bureaus operating in Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Faisalabad, Rawalpindi, Multan, Peshawar, Quetta and other major cities of Pakistan. In fact, the increase in online matrimonial websites is a recent phenomenon taking place in this region since 1990s, with the economic liberalization and institutional privatization (Munshi, 2001). People are encouraged to post their free marriage proposals for brides and grooms ads.

The present study is a discourse analysis of the matrimonial advertisements posted on these online marriage bureau websites. Unfortunately, in this part of the world matrimonial websites have received very less attention from the researchers. Hardly any study can be found referring to the online matrimonial website in linguistic research studies (Hankeln, 2008). This study deals with the use of stereotypical gendered language represented through the use of various nouns, adjectives and phrases. It analyses the gender based discourse used by men and women to represent their matrimonial choices on these online marriage bureau websites. It also describes how they present men

and women with society appealing adjective and noun phrases.

## **1.2. Stereotypical Gender Representation**

A stereotype is a simplified pattern with limited characteristics for the convenience of simple explanation and reference (Dat, 2006). Being a practice of representation, stereotyping includes generalization, diminution and naturalization. However, some theorists (e.g. Dyer, 1977; Hall, 1997) understand it together with *social typing* where people are classified according to the details of the culture where they spend their life, the position and the social status they hold, the groups and societies they belong to, the common personality features and so on. Hence, the individuals are attributed with the features of their classificatory details. Such stereotyping is widely practiced in almost every sphere of social life including scholarship, media, literature and education. The field of language and gender is no exception to this stereotypical representation in text, talk and performance. According to Talbot (2003) “within the field of language and gender, the term ‘stereotype’ is often used to refer to prescriptions or unstated expectations of behavior, rather than specifically to representational practices” (p.472). In fact, gender stereotyping is closely linked with feminist and gender ideologies prevailing in a certain linguistic community. The studies conducted in the recent years have explored the cultural and structural patterns working as underlying causes behind the stereotypical gender behaviors (Sanchez de Madariaga, 2010). However, according to DeLamater and Myers (2007), stereotyping exaggerates group differences and underestimates within group variability. In fact, the gender stereotyping usually represents the shared social beliefs, behaviors and practices. The stereotypical beliefs dictate the men’s and

women's role in the society. Bandura (1986) believes that such role modelling can be understood as a strong social phenomenon which ultimately affects the gender differences in social and occupational life.

The study is based on the general perception that the gender differences in Pakistani people are clear in their discourse, with special reference to the situation when they talk about their desired spouse personality. This study attempts to understand the gendered discourse: how differently young men and women talk about themselves and opposite gender using various adjectives and nouns to represent their spousal choices in the advertisement on the online matrimonial websites. Smith (1985) concludes that the advertisements have a very powerful influence on the choices if they directly address to the *wants* of men and women. Various studies have been conducted to improve the efficiency of such advertisements, with the special focus on applied psychology and human behaviors. This study aims at describing how differently the young men and women desire to see the features and qualities in their prospective spouses and how stereotypically they represent these matrimonial choices using a variety of adjectives and nouns. The similar differences are explicit when they are presenting themselves as candidates for ideal spouse. For instance, Yourstone, Lindholm, Gran and Svenson (2008) suggest that it is generally assumed in most cultures that men are more aggressive and uncompromising in their choices whereas women are usually characterized by passivity and communal traits. These gendered preferences are usually expressed in their lexical and syntactic choices.

### **1.3 Study Questions**

In the perspective of theoretical considerations of stereotypical gender differences in language use by Pakistani young men and women for their self-discourse as well as for choosing their desired spouses, the study is based on the following questions:

1. What stereotypical choices are preferred by the young men and women talking about themselves in the advertisements of online marriage bureau websites?
2. What stereotypical choices are preferred by the young men and women talking about their matrimonial choices in their desired spouses?
3. What stereotypical choices are preferred by the young men and women presenting themselves with society appealing noun and adjective phrases?

The study questions were directly put forward without making any specific hypotheses so that the data should speak itself and the results should reflect various social and cultural influences in matrimonial discourse in Pakistani societal context. The study proved significant as it presented the socio-cultural patterns of Pakistani youth in their matrimonial choices. The study can be expanded to further explore the ideological, religious and political influences in the feminist gender construction in the Pakistani youth discourse in general and especially the matrimonial discourse.

## 2. Methodology & Data Analysis

A corpus-based analysis of language attitudes was carried out on data taken from a range of marriage bureau website pages. Language patterns were analyzed using the corpus analysis software Antcon concordance hints to reveal patterns of overtly-expressed language attitudes. The analysis has clearly shown that language is a tool to convey social beliefs and preferences. The corpus-based analysis of language attitudes involves noun and adjective descriptions in this study. It examines how commonly young men and women show stereotypical linguistic attitudes and expressions of language variations especially in the use of nouns, pronouns, adjectives and adverbs while talking about their matrimonial choices. It is a corpus-based approach to analyze language-related attitudes towards the use of nouns, pronouns and adjectives; however it can complement the traditional methods and approaches. In a similar study, Hamid, Keong, Othman, Yasin and Baharuddin (2013) have investigated the occurrence of gender stereotyping and linguistic sexism in the corpus of Qatari primary school textbooks.

On certain websites there are lists of classified advertisements looking for gorgeous and well educated spouses. These marriage bureau websites have reserved a separate section for desired candidates to present themselves, sometimes filling out the templates of various kinds of demographic information. This study has sampled [www.getrishta.com](http://www.getrishta.com) as a representative website of marriage bureau websites in Pakistan where the linguistic data can be found for understanding the various gendered based preferences in selection of suitable spouses by Pakistani young men and women. As an important and much accessed website,

[www.getrishta.com](http://www.getrishta.com) provides better opportunity to search the suitable life partner. Proposals (*rishtay*) from various ethnic and religious backgrounds, like Shia, Sunni, Punjabi, Urdu speaking, Pathan, and Sindhi families are advertised online through this website. Finding the soul mate is now easy with *www.getrishta.com*. One can access good looking, honest, beautiful, educated, confident, family oriented or independent brides' *rishtay* at *www.getrishta.com*. This website is valid for various cities of Pakistan including Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Hyderabad, Quetta, Peshawar, Multan, Rawalpindi, and Faisalabad to name a few. One may post prospective brides and grooms in Pakistan on matrimonial advertisements free of cost at *www.getrishta.com*.

The population of this study was unmarried young men and women who post their *rishta* registration on marriage bureau websites. The method of random sampling was employed to collect the data from [www.getrishta.com](http://www.getrishta.com). This study has selected only those advertisements which were posted by unmarried young men and women. In total, 20 advertisements by young men and ten advertisements by young women were randomly selected from the various sections of the websites.

The example of the data collected is as follows (The example texts have been quoted without editing):

**Table 1***Example data by girls*

<b>BASIC INFO (SEEMI)</b>		<b>GENDER</b>	<b>FEMALE</b>
Age	32 Years	<i>Height</i>	5 feet & 4 inches
Physique	Slim	<i>Complexion</i>	Very fair
Religion	Muslim Sunni	<i>Caste</i>	Araain
Mother tongue	Punjabi	<i>City</i>	Sialkot
Country	Pakistan	<i>Other nationality</i>	None
Education	Masters In Education	<i>Profession</i>	Not working
Job/Rank/position	Seemi is family oriented girl and not a working lady	<i>Life Style Standard</i>	Modern
<b>LOOKING FOR</b>			
Age	35-40	<i>Marital Status</i>	Divorced
Complexion	Fair	<i>Height</i>	5 feet 8 inch
City	No Preference	<i>Life Standard</i>	Modern
Education	No Preference	<i>Profession</i>	No Preference
Native Preference	No Preference		
Other requirements	No		



### **Example Description by Girls**

#### *Roze's Profile*

About Me : Assalam O Alikum..I want a happy married life, a sincere and trustworthy partner. who will understand my thoughts and me as well :) and trust me. In short, I think marriage is a life time commitment and it's not only about love. It's a mixture of love, trust, responsibilities and family. I want strong bonding between me and my husband. I love my family so I want a life partner who respects them and do care about them as well. I am a fun loving person I love going out, walking on the beach and parks and I also love to travel to other countries. I really love sleeping in my free time. I also love reading novels and Islamic books, sometimes watching movie, writing and love shopping as well. I believe that good understanding between the wife and husband is really important thing in this relation. I want to enjoy my whole life with my life partner in this world and hereafter too. and YES I don't believe in Dowry system :) Contact me if you're serious.

**Table 2***Example data by boys*

<b>BASIC INFO (ASIF BASHIR)</b>		<b>GENDER</b>	<b>MALE</b>
Age	31 Years	Height	5 feet & 10 inches
Physique	Slim	Complexion	Fair
Religion	Muslim Sunni	Caste	ARIAN
Mother tongue	Punjabi	City	Lahore
Country	Pakistan	Other nationality	None
Education	Intermediates In Commerce	Profession	Private Firm
Job/Rank/position	Asstt. Student Affairs in a Medical College. Belong to a landlord family.	Life Style Standard	Modern
<b>LOOKING FOR</b>			
Age	20-30	Marital Status	Never Married
Complexion	No Preference	Height	5 feet 0 inch
City	Lahore	Life Standard	Simple
Education	No Preference	Profession	No Preference
Native Preference			
Other requirements	Girl with a good family background		

### **Example Description by Boys**

Salaam

Shadi k liye divorced widow ya single female chahiye. I am a male syed and my age is 42 but look younger than my age with pleasant personality. I am educated and doing job in a company as manager sales. My salary is 22000. I am resident of Lahore Punjabi speaking family. I am still single never married it's a late marriage case. I want to marry a girl with age 27 to 33 from middle class or poor family first divorced widow seperated spinster and in last a single girl from a family who are worried for their daughter for marriage and if she is divorced separated or spinster I will preffer to get Allahs blessings about families with single girls demands high and as per my situation I wany to nikaah simply but I can preggers a single girl also who likr to make relation and looking someone nice rather than a landlord. from our side no demand about jahez just the girl should be good looking beautiful with good seerat and understanding one. It's our plan to marry soon so looking for a family who agree for simple nikaah. If this all clicks then anyone can contact from your side How many family members you are. Your cast your sister/daughter detail and family detail Where do you live must write. If anyone is there contact me I am waiting  
Thanks

Hassan

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- (*The example texts have been quoted without editing*)

### **3. Results And Findings**

The data was scrutinized so that it could be available for language analysis in the *KeyWords* tool of AntConc in the conformity with the general principle that *KeyWords* has proved a reliable tool for comparing language samples, by texts or corpora. The study results were helpful in identifying the stereotypical gender based difference in matrimonial choices in connection with the use of nouns and adjectives in the matrimonial advertisements posted by men and women. As Kennedy (1998) notes that in the case of corpus-based research, the evidence is derived directly from texts. After opening the file, *concordance* lines were generated by direct search input clicking the *Concordance* tab, with the help of Input word in the textbox and clicking the *Start* button. The example of the result from AntConc is as follows:

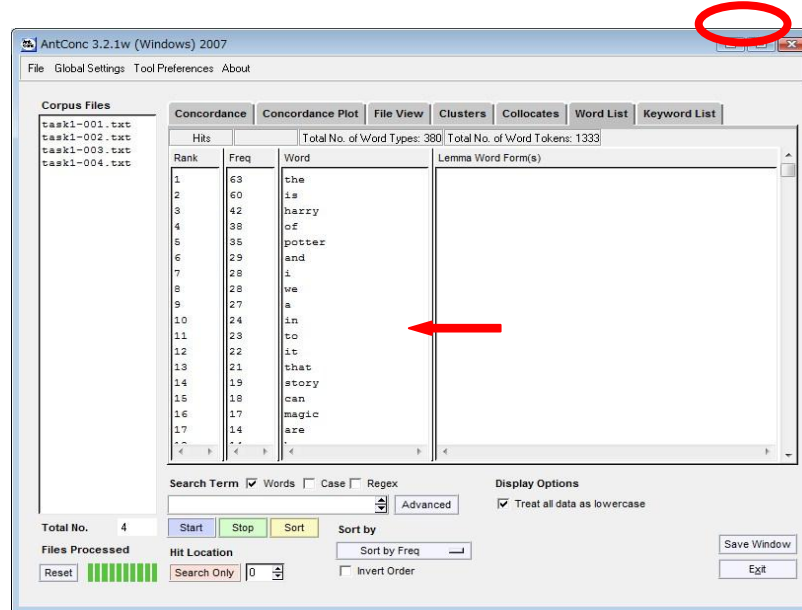


Figure 1. Example of the Data Generated by Antconc

In this study, the researchers found some of the features available for language analysis in the *KeyWords* tool. Its results were helpful to identify not only the differences across texts but also within texts to explore the study in connection with nouns and adjectives. This study has intended to introduce some of the basic features of *KeyWords*, *Concordance* and *Frequencies* to report on some studies by marriage bureau website data collection in which the use of nouns and adjectives is evident. In technique of comparing and contrasting corpora by comparing the frequencies of the words in them has shown the use of language by young men and women about their life partners' merits and abilities. The data was categorized as follows:

### 3.1 Men's Stereotypical Matrimonial Choices

This section presents what young men talk about themselves in presenting themselves as prospective husbands with society appealing nouns and adjectives. Similarly, this section also puts forward what young men talk about their prospective life partners and what stereotypical gender based matrimonial choices they desire to see in their prospective wives. The corpus analysis proved to be an effective tool to find out comparative and contrast analysis in this study of language and gender in connection with adjectives and nouns used by young men. Men are mostly considered to be more powerful and authoritative in their choices while women are more compromising on their ideals and choices (Bahiyah et al., 2008). Linguistic anthropology has been observed in text analysis in the use of nouns and adjectives.

Mostly men were not found interested in demanding *jahaiz* (dowry); just the girl should be good looking, beautiful with good *seerat* (character) and understanding one. In the demands by men, the woman is not acceptable as wife if she is backward in her thinking approach. She should be able to adjust in all situations and keep a balanced personality. Similarly, she should be neither abnormal in thoughts nor absent-minded. She should be acceptable in society in liking features, having socially acceptable features, accurate in dealings, adaptable in unusual features, adventurous in aesthetic desires. The results may be interpreted with the stereotypical assumption regarding men's socially dominant role; for instance, Tao (2008) reports that individual characters with influential and active roles are shown by the males, whereas the females are represented as defensive and dependent.

Describing the social aspects of her personality, the men were of the opinion that she should be bold in social status features, not quarrelsome with any relation, not aggressive in economic aspects, agreeable in use of typical mother tongue, alive in social acceptable features, ambitious for socially acceptable features, amused and amusing in every color of life in modern as well as ancient dogmas, not angry in practical conduct in social contacts, not having annoyed tone and behavior, relaxed and not anxious for any discriminatory aspects. Some of the men have also expressed the disliking matrimonial choices which they do not want to see in their prospective wives. They do not like the girls as their wives if they wear bad and barbarous dresses, speak bluntly and not caring of their husbands.

**Table 3***Examples from men 's preferences*

<b>RANK</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>WORD CHOICE</b>
19	35	Beautiful
21	33	Younger (age)
22	32	Slim
27	30	Simple
32	31	Educated
35	31	Honest
38	29	Caring
39	26	Decent
44	22	Sincere
46	21	Fair
48	21	Job
49	19	Modern,
53	17	Understanding
57	17	Faithful
59	17	Loyal
62	15	Warm
66	15	Intelligent
68	14	Sensitive
71	14	Balanced
83	13	Compromising



### **3.2 Women's Stereotypical Matrimonial Choices**

This section presents what young women talk about themselves in presenting themselves with society appealing nouns and adjectives as prospective wives. Similarly, this section also puts forward what young women talk about their prospective life partners and what matrimonial choices they desire to see in their prospective husbands. In this study, the researchers have found some of the features of language analysis in the *KeyWords* tool of Wordsmith by the help of AntConc software. The researchers have presented some arguments related to the use of adjectives by young men and women with the help of comparing word frequencies, techniques for extracting a representative result of key words for analysis. Corpus is an effective tool to find out comparative and contrast analysis in a refined and latest technique of modern era in language and gender research methodologies. The special use of language descriptions in connections with nouns, adjectives and pronouns has been shown in the analysis.

The women have used the adjective preference to show care for height, profession, family size, complexion and life standards. They have used adjective *fair* to describe the ideal wishes in their life partners as fair complexion, fair in dealings, fair in occupation, fair in social contacts, and fair in all affairs. The results may be interpreted with the stereotypical assumption regarding socially dominated role of women; for instance, Ghorbani (2009) in his conclusion, reports that women always take sensitive social roles as compared with men. In this context, the use of adjective phrases like decent family, well educated, calm and sincere gave the sensitive approaches of women. These choices also lead to the stereotypical perception that women are less materially focused

and hence they focus more on emotional attachments (e.g., Diekman&Murnan, 2004). About physique, the adjective of *average* has been found popular and it indicates the balanced selection of maturity level. Likewise, the adjective *slim* has been very frequent to show majority of women's ideal talk about their life partners.

**Table 4***Examples from women's preferences*

<b>RANK</b>	<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>WORD CHOICE</b>
21	27	Loving
21	26	Caring
22	26	Polite
24	25	Respectful
29	24	(good) Job
33	22	(good) Natured
36	21	(high) family
37	20	Educated
39	20	Qualified
43	19	Romance
46	13	Funny
49	12	(Not) Cheating
52	11	True
59	10	(Not willing) Dowry
63	10	Emotional
64	09	Understanding
64	09	Sensitive
67	08	Strong
68	07	Single

### 3.3 Wide-ranging Matrimonial Choices

The results have also presented the wide-ranging matrimonial choices by both men and women. Mostly men want to marry the girls with age 27 to 33 years without specifying from middle class or poor families. Some prefer to get *Allah's* blessings about families and want *nikaah* simply. Some have no demand about *jahez*, just the girl should be good looking, beautiful with good *seerat* and understanding. A few women plan to marry soon, so looking for a family who agrees for simple *nikaah*. Some have been found interested in family members sister/daughter detail and family detail. This way, a list of individual choices can be worked out from the data analysis.

## 4. Conclusion

This study carried out the corpus-based analysis of stereotypical gender based language attitudes towards matrimonial choices and for this purpose the data was taken from marriage bureau website pages. It examines common young men's and women's representation of their matrimonial desires especially in the use of nouns, pronouns, adjectives and adverbs. Mostly young women were found interested in social phenomena in social context in the approaches of the description in adjectives seeking in their life partners as giving stereotypical preference to requirements of native profession, understanding between husband and wife, friendliness in life exposures, flexible approaches towards life, maturity in attitude, decency and calmness in temperament, optimism in approaches towards life, love, emotions, tolerance and faith in relationships. Young men have also presented stereotypical choices, for instance, young age, beautiful and younger looking girls, cool and calm,

decent, obedient, slim and smart and educated. Diversity of approaches is observed by the adjectives as in contacts, well behaved independent, nice, city life with modern manners. A long list of matrimonial choice has been reflected in the use of special adjectives, like educated, simple, honest, sharing hand, modern looking, caring, loving, mature, decent, sincere, faithful.

This study can be expanded to other modes of discourse analysis and can be used to understand various cultural and social patterns. Further studies can be carried out to see how feministic ideologies are working implicitly behind the linguistic selection of matrimonial choices by Pakistani young men and women. This study also presents the scope for critically analyzing these linguistic choices to know how various power structures are being propagated and ideological realities are being constructed as hidden agenda behind these stereotypical matrimonial choices. The study is significant in understanding the matrimonial trends in Pakistani cultural context and how these trends may affect the socio-economic structures of Pakistani society.

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