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Negotiating Multiple Identities at Workplace: A Conceptual Critique of Key Theoretical Perspectives

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Received: December 01, 2025 Revised: December 15, 2025 Accepted: December 29, 2025 Available Online: January 12, 2026 Keywords: Conceptual Critique, Multiple Identities, Theoretical Perspectives, Identity Negotiation, Gender and identity Corresponding Author: Imran Hussain Email: imranhussain.uol@gmail.com	The modern workplace is a dynamic environment where the facade of negotiating multiple identities is constantly evolving due to professional, organisational, and social contexts and cultures. While this area is widely studied, theoretical perspectives remain fragmented and underrated. Therefore, the current study aims to bridge that gap through a conceptual critique of key theoretical perspectives. It seeks to synthesise existing research to highlight how multiple identities are constructed and reconciled within organisational contexts. A conceptual critique approach has been adopted to appraise various theoretical perspectives. The deficit and dominance approaches suggest that the lexical choices, sentence structures, and intonations of men are consistent and perfect, whereas those of women are considered inappropriate due to their lower societal esteem. The difference approach posits that boys and girls grow up in different worlds, even within the same household. Workplace discourse heavily relies on two contexts: societal and situational, while the socio-constructive approach views gender as a constitutive facet that constructs and negotiates identities within a speech community or at the workplace. The findings indicate that identity negotiation is a multifaceted process involving role conflict, cultural assimilation, and effective communicative patterns. Key focus areas include language, gender, power, and discourse in the construction of identity. This study underscores the importance of identity negotiation for personal, professional, organisational cohesion, and intercultural coexistence.

Introduction

There are several framework or mechanic through which a researcher can approach to analyzes and enable negotiation of diverse identities especially at work place. Starting the concept from the very basic approach of biological or innate which is summed up by Sadiqi (2003) as "Gender within the essentialist view was defined by three major clusters of characteristics: innateness, strict binaries, and bipolarization". "Gender was qualified as innate because biological endowments were innate; it was binary given the strict binary opposition between men and women as two undifferentiated groups; and it was bipolar because human beings pertain to one of the two bipolar categories: male or female" (p. 3). Apart from that the way men and women interact, communicate and enact in term of their syntactic, morphological, phonological lexical patterns is pronominal as far as the approaches to differentiate and negotiate diverse level of identities at a workplace.

Sociologically speaking women are not only termed as ladies but enacted and treated in the same fashion in societal and cultural horizon. Their language and utterances are deemed at the disadvantage due to their “with their language conflicting from an implicit male norm.” The chief promoter of this approach was Lakoff and her work has been beautifully summed up by Finch (2003) as “The overall pictures which emerges from Lakoff study is that women’s speech is generally inferior to men’s and reflect their sense of personal and social inferiority” (p. 137). It has been propagated by Lakoff that the women linguistics patterns are at disadvantage due to “expressive of uncertainty, lack of confidence and excessive deference or politeness.” (Finch, 2003, p. 137). Lakoff (1975) has assigned the reasons behind differences of language use as due to societal facets rather than mere linguistics. Innate and gender based difference also contribute to a great deal with regard to lexical choices, sentences structures and intonations of tone, pitch, style and pronunciation of either gender (Wenjing, 2012).

Lakoff deficit modal asserted the notion that women speech or style of expression is defective and inferior when compare to men in the same societal, cultural and contextual linguistics patterns. Due to masculine persona a man in most societies enjoy strength, power, value and status in the society and it is very much evident in the speech or linguistics utterances during his communicative and interactional facet within a speech community in general and at workplace in particular. Hence, they themselves assume a sort of dominance and upper hand over the female gender which is enacted through verbal and bodily language. This dominance is much of a societal and cultural rather than a mere linguistic in nature and hence be treated in the same way. Talbot (1998) termed it as “manifestations of a patriarchal social order” (p. 132) and has criticized this mechanic of analysis. Tannen (1990) distant herself from dominance model and come up with the subsequent notion “Taking a cross-cultural approach to male-female conversations ... without accusing anyone of being wrong or crazy” (p. 47).

It propagates the same notion that the speech and language of men is compact and perfect while that of women is inappropriate because of their low esteem in the society. Wardhaugh (2006) delineated the very notion as “Men use what power they have to dominate each other”. He even went on to say in the same regard that “Lakoff (1975) adopts the position that men are dominant and women lack power”. Lakoff is of the view “an attempt to provide diagnostic evidence from language use for one type of inequity that has been claimed to exist in our society: that between the roles of men and women” (p. 10-11).

Once upon a time there was an integrated concept that men are the real shaper and shakers of business, industry and other bustles of life. They were deemed as boss and women as inferior class who are limited to mere household and domestics chores. But now with a growing realization and awareness brings about by education and elucidation a radical change even within our societal norms and thinking has taken place. Now women are moving ahead in every sphere of life with men. With the growing number of women in the workplace has diminished the persona of gender inequalities and discrimination (Hussain et al., 2025). Now, women have made their identity in every field of activity brining about new dynamic of leadership and conceptual roles. Gender is no more a hindrance to their societal, personal and professional identity.

Six Points - Gender Difference in Language Use

Al-Harashseh (2014) is of the notion that in a same society or speech community men and women are brought up in different fashion and hence their behavior in terms of language consumption and tone is quite diverse and they themselves are. Boys develop into a competitive and target oriented speech pattern while girls are more prone towards cooperative and polite mannerism. In addition, she come up with these six points of difference of language among either gender i.e. male and female

- Status vs sustenance
- Liberty vs familiarity
- Guidance vs comprehension
- Evidence vs feelings
- Order vs suggestion
- Conflicts vs conciliation

Mei-rong (2007) arises the question which it fails to satiate, and it is “why men and women belongs to different subcultures” (p. 9). In addition, Crawford (1995) deemed it as “men and women...are fated to misunderstand each other unless they recognize their deeply socialized differences” (p. 1). As the fundamental of this approach is to address the very basic question why gender develop themselves into diverse subcultures. Tannen (1986) “Male-female conversation is always cross-cultural communication. Culture is simply a network of habits and patterns gleaned from past experience, and women and men have different past experiences. From the time they're born, they're treated differently, talked to differently, and talk differently as a result. Boys and girls grow up in different worlds, even if they grow up in the same house. And as adults they travel in different worlds, reinforcing patterns established in childhood” (p. 60). Furthermore, discourse is a foundation or hub of delineating ideology that can be explicit in objective, impartial and unbiased fashion” (Fowler, 2012).

Though it has a wide range of spectrum included in it but here the researcher is mainly concerned with the discursive strategies that are relevant to workplace in order to negotiate multiple identities constructed through the utilization of language by either men or women in their respective linguistics patterns of interaction categorized as masculine or feminine discourse. Discourse analysis is a systemic mechanic of analysis about the discourse about the utilization of language and linguistics features to express the integrated ideologies, underlying thoughts and implied motives that can be either gender based or identity related. Rashidi & Souzandehfar (2010) pronounced the very notion as “DA focuses on the relationship between language forms and a limited sense of context and tends to be oriented to a narrow understanding of larger social, cultural and social forces that influence our lives” (p.56). Fairclough (2000) has very clearly mentioned that power and ideology is enacted and constructed through language and discourse in the same context and we talk about gender and identity then the implied and underlying meanings of the workplace discourse becomes very much significant. As it is the phenomenon that is the crux of entire episode being carried out through verbal interaction to enact power, values, status and above all the sense of identity.

Scollon (2001) delineated DA as “a program of social analysis that critically analyses discourse - that is to say language in use - as a means of addressing social change”. So, it can be concluded that to signify, conduct, identify and negotiate the concept of identities at workplace is very much integrated and intermingled with workplace discourse. The way language is utilized purposefully by either gender to construct and exert their multiple identities. It can be summed up in the subsequent remark by Van Dijk (2000) “the way the social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are totally incorporated, reproduced, and resisted by, say, the text and talk in certain contexts such as the social and political contexts”. To Butler (1990) gender is “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of a natural kind of being” (p. 33). Many sociolinguists follow the trail laid down by Butler in this regard. The chief among them are Sunderland (2004), Benke (1997), Litosseliti (2006) and Wodak (1997).

Theoretical Consideration of Identities Negotiation

There are several framework or mechanic through which a researcher can approach to analyzes and enable negotiation of diverse identities especially at work place. Starting the concept from the very basic approach of biological or innate which is summed up by Sadiqi (2003) as “Gender within the essentialist view was defined by three major clusters of characteristics: innateness, strict binaries, and bipolarization. Gender was qualified as innate because biological endowments were innate; it was binary given the strict binary opposition between men and women as two undifferentiated groups; and it was bipolar because human beings pertain to one of the two bipolar categories: male or female” (p. 3). Apart from that the way men and women interact, communicate and enact in term of their syntactic, morphological, phonological lexical patterns is pronominal as far as the approaches to differentiate and negotiate diverse level of identities at a workplace.

Deficit Approach

It is a mechanic of gender difference proposed by Robin Lakoff (1975) which asserts the fact that the lexical choices, sentence structure and intonation of men as powerful gadget when compare to women in the same domain. Sociologically speaking women are not only termed as ladies but enacted and treated in the same fashion in societal and cultural horizon. Their language and utterances are deemed at the disadvantage due to their “with their language conflicting from an implicit male norm.” The chief promoter of this approach was Lakoff and her work has been beautifully summed up by Finch (2003) as “The overall pictures which emerges from Lakoff study is that women’s speech is generally inferior to men’s and reflect their sense of personal and social inferiority” (p. 137).

It has been propagated by Lakoff that the women linguistics patterns are at disadvantage due to “expressive of uncertainty, lack of confidence and excessive deference or politeness.” (Finch, 2003, p. 137). Lakoff (1975) has assigned the reasons behind differences of language use as due to societal facets rather than mere linguistics. To her, the role and persona of men is distinctive as compare to women as their compulsions within a social and culture sphere are different. Social status and power vibes are too decisive factors behind the lack of confidence and shaking tone of women as compare to me. Moreover, society is usually male centered which has marginalized women within the four walls of house. Value a culture driven facets has also given men a dominating and female as submissive lexical facets. Innate and gender based difference also contribute to a great deal with regard to lexical choices, sentences structures and intonations of tone, pitch, style and pronunciation of either gender (Wenjing, 2012).

Lakoff deficit modal asserted the notion that women speech or style of expression is defective and inferior when compare to men in the same societal, cultural and contextual linguistics patterns. It asserts the idea of male formativeness. Women as gender are deemed as deviant while men as normal who can have utilized the language and its relevant linguistics patterns. While defining the unequal persona of women with respect to their socializing sigma Lakoff is of the view “an attempt to provide diagnostic evidence from language use for one type of inequity that has been claimed to exist in our society: that between the roles of men and women” (p. 10-11). Hence, women consumption of linguistics gadgets denies the very gender from the notion of power, status and value attached to opposite gender especially in societal workplace (Hussain et al., 2025). Men are termed as the creator of language as women are not good enough to consume language appropriately.

Dominance approach

It is an approach of sociolinguistics that deal with the way men and their language preside over and deem as dominating facet within a social sphere when compare with women in the same context and scenario. It propagates the same notion that the speech and language of men is compact and perfect while that of women is inappropriate because of their low esteem in the society. Wardhaugh (2006) delineated the very notion as “Men use what power they have to dominate each other”. He even went on to say in the same regard that “Lakoff (1975) adopts the position that men are dominant and women lack power”. Deuchar (1988) asserted that the fact that a powerless part of the society must be polite so as to be adjusted within the same community in its linguistics patterns and tone either at societal, personal or professional vista of life.

Due to masculine persona a man in most societies enjoy strength, power, value and status in the society and it is very much evident in the speech or linguistics utterances during his communicative and interactional facet within a speech community in general and at workplace in particular. Hence, they themselves assume a sort of dominance and upper hand over the female gender which is enacted through verbal and bodily language. This dominance is much of a societal and cultural rather than a mere linguistic in nature and hence be treated in the same way. Talbot (1998) termed it as “manifestations of a patriarchal social order” (p. 132) and has criticized this mechanic of analysis. The three interconnected ties of dominance, difference and discourse are related with gender variances expressed and enacted by means of language and related linguistic patterns and how gender is constituted within a specific cultural domain (Hussain et al., 2024) .

Difference approach

Further deficit model has elaborated the concept of gender difference which constituted of two edge vibes i.e. men and women. Tannen (1990) distant herself from dominance model and come up with the subsequent notion “Taking a cross-cultural approach to male-female conversations ... without accusing anyone of being wrong or crazy” (p. 47). Al-Harashseh (2014) is of the notion that in a same society or speech community men and women are brought up in different fashion and hence their behavior in terms of language consumption and tone is quite diverse and they themselves are. Boys develop into a competitive and target oriented speech pattern while girls are more prone towards cooperative and polite mannerism. In addition, she come up with these six points of difference of language among either gender i.e. male and female

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Discursive approach

Within the sphere of gender and discourse the economic and status consciousness is a paramount tool to determine the linguistic patterns and persona of either gender especially that of women. These aspects determine the behavior of either gender to execute and enact within a particular social sphere. Discursive elements are a conscious move from binary discourse to broader perspective of communication (Sattel, 1983). Cameron (2006) consider female as inept communicators as compare to male in the same social and contextual arena as “not because the actual communicative behavior of men and women is thought to have changed but that, male behavior has been re-framed as dysfunctional and damaging” (p. 138).

As a conclusion drawn from this model it can be asserted that there is no major or a paramount difference that do exist due to language and use of linguistic facets in context. It is the societal and personal value and persona that is decisive in this regard to construct and enact gender based differences within the societal norms and values. Though it is assertive to note that there is a striking discrimination as far as vocabulary, tone, pitch, style and syntactic patterns of language either oral or written is concerned (Babalola, 2012). However, other interconnected facets discussed above and avowed time and again in the study are the elements that need to be deem under view while negotiating multiple identities i.e. persona, professional, societal and gender based at workplace within a particular sphere of the context (Ning, 2010).

Lakoff has delineated a quite distinctive persona with regard to gender and linguistic facet of its relevance. To her, difference is the most striking and paramount sigma the way both men and women utter their utterances in societal context. Though other studies confirmed the sigma the other way around and deemed the other facets as decisive rather than mere difference as proposed by Lakoff (1975). To them, gender and sex related differences are more obvious reasons behind this facet of discrimination. Other may deemed psychological and societal norms behind this act of discrimination but still Lakoff stick to her point of view in an assertive and logical fashion quite discriminative and striking. Finally, her model and approach has been criticized by various researchers on the ground of androcentric bias that it has which is a type of multiple and complex nature of bias.

Workplace Discourse

It is a linguistic paradigm that deals chiefly with the concept of verbal interaction relied heavily on twofold contexts i.e. societal and situational. It is very much relevant to the discourse being carried out at workplace between either gender to exert power, interaction or to modify the overall environ prevailing over there. “In supplementary words, it is a mode of probing and perceiving what is going in and around of the chatter embedded in several categories and turfs. Furthermore, discourse is a foundation or hub of delineating ideology that can be explicit in objective, impartial and unbiased fashion” (Fowler, 2012). Though it has a wide range of spectrum included in it but here the researcher is mainly concerned with the discursive strategies that are relevant to workplace in order to negotiate multiple identities constructed through the utilization of language by either men or women in their respective linguistics patterns of interaction categorized as masculine or feminine discourse.

Discourse analysis is a systemic mechanic of analysis about the discourse about the utilization of language and linguistics features to express the integrated ideologies, underlying thoughts and implied motives that can be either gender based or identity related.

Rashidi & Souzandehfar (2010) pronounced the very notion as “DA focuses on the relationship between language forms and a limited sense of context and tends to be oriented to a narrow understanding of larger social, cultural and social forces that influence our lives” (p.56). Fairclough (2000) has very clearly mentioned that power and ideology is enacted and constructed through language and discourse in the same context and we talk about gender and identity then the implied and underlying meanings of the workplace discourse becomes very much significant. As it is the phenomenon that is the crux of entire episode being carried out through verbal interaction to enact power, values, status and above all the sense of identity.

Van Dijk, (2001) in a very clear term implied that the discourse integrates power, ideology, and identity when enacted in societal and contextual arena to enact and signify identities among two genders. Scollon (2001) delineated CDA as “a program of social analysis that critically analyses discourse - that is to say language in use - as a means of addressing social change”. So, it can be concluded that to signify, conduct, identify and negotiate the concept of identities at workplace is very much integrated and intermingled with workplace discourse. The way language is utilized purposefully by either gender to construct and exert their multiple identities. It can be summed up in the subsequent remark by Van Dijk (2000) “the way the social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are totally incorporated, reproduced, and resisted by, say, the text and talk in certain contexts such as the social and political contexts”.

Socio-constructive Approach

The recent and latest mechanic that is developed over the year to tackle gender based linguistics differences and how to negotiate with them is deemed as social constructive approach. It deems gender as a constitutive facet that construct and negotiate identities within a speech community or at workplace. This concept has been coined from Butler (1990) idea of performative notion. It deals gender as a tool or gadget to enact and display behavior by utilizing language to construct its relevant identity in speech community in general and work place in particular. To Butler (1990) gender is “the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of a natural kind of being” (p. 33). Many sociolinguists follow the trail laid down by Butler in this regard. The chief among them are Sunderland (2004), Benke (1997), Litosseliti (2006) and Wodak (1997).

Social constructivists deal gender as a linguistics facet with respect to their respective gender i.e. men or women. It is closely linked with what is said to them, what linguistics features are incorporated in their discourse and how they are interpreted and perceived in their relevant contexts (Pavlidou, 2010). Under post structural approach gender is somewhat being inscribed or talked about in a speech community which includes consumption of language and discourse which is the crux of interaction of multiple gender and identities. Kottthoff, (2010) deemed that gender disseminated in interaction is more paramount than that of stylistic and structural. The formal is a set of belief consisted of values, societal norms, cultural implication, ideology and set of stereotypes. Litosseliti (2006) “distinguish between speakers’ assumed gendered behavior and the range of identities available in the gendered communities that speakers inhabit” (p. 66).

Conclusion

There are several framework or mechanic through which a researcher can approach to analyze and enable negotiation of diverse identities especially at work place. Starting the concept from the very basic approach of biological or innate which is summed up by Sadiqi (2003) as “Gender within the essentialist view was defined by three major clusters of characteristics: innateness, strict binaries, and bipolarization”. Sociologically speaking women are not only termed as ladies but enacted and treated in the same fashion in societal and cultural horizon (Hussain et al., 2024). Their language and utterances are deemed at the disadvantage due to their “with their language conflicting from an implicit male norm.” The chief promoter of this approach was Lakoff. Lakoff deficit model asserted the notion that women speech or style of expression is defective and inferior when compared to men in the same societal, cultural and contextual linguistics patterns. Al-Harashsheh (2014) is of the notion that in a same society or speech community men and women are brought up in different fashion and hence their behavior in terms of language consumption and tone is quite diverse and they themselves are.

In dominance approach sociolinguistics deal with the way men and their language preside over and deem as dominating facet within a social sphere when compared with women in the same context and scenario. Wardhaugh (2006) delineated the very notion as “Men use what power they have to dominate each other”. He even went on to say in the same regard that “Lakoff (1975) adopts the

position that men are dominant and women lack power". Tannen (1990) distant herself from dominance model and come up with the subsequent notion "Taking a cross-cultural approach to male-female conversations ... without accusing anyone of being wrong or crazy" (p. 47). Discursive approach is a conscious move from binary discourse to broader perspective of communication (Sattel,1983). As a conclusion drawn from this model it can be asserted that there is no major or a paramount difference that do exist due to language and use of linguistic facets in context. Workplace discourse paradigm deals chiefly with the concept of verbal interaction relied heavily on twofold contexts i.e. societal and situational. The recent and latest mechanic that is developed over the year to tackle gender based linguistics differences and how to negotiate with them is deemed as social constructive approach (Hussain & Mansoor, 2017). It deems gender as a constitutive facet that construct and negotiate identities within a speech community or at workplace.

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