



THE ETHICS OF SPEECH: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ANNEMARIE SCHIMMEL'S SPIRITUAL DISCOURSE AND DEBORAH TANNEN'S CONVERSATIONAL STYLE

Dilnavoz ISROILOVA

Researcher

Marifat Street 103/1. Navoi, Uzbekistan, 210101

E-mail: alstrameria00@gmail.com

Abstract: This article analyzes the ethics of speech by comparing Annemarie Schimmel's spiritual discourse analysis and Deborah Tannen's sociolinguistic approach to conversational style. Even though scholars' attitudes and research focus may differ in some points, they both emphasize moral reflection embedded in interpersonal communication. Schimmel's mindset of examining Islamic concepts of adab (etiquette), ikhsan (kindness), and akhlaq (social morals), and Tannen's relational empathy, indirectness, and conversational rituals could be a harmony in studying the spiritual and moral basis of conversational discourse. Examining their works and shared focus on “ethics of politeness,” this study argues for spiritual awareness and social compassion within speech. This integrated perspective enhances theolinguistics by illustrating how faith-oriented and relational methodologies in language can cultivate respect, avert emotional distress, and reinforce harmonious family dynamics within Muslim settings.

Keywords: theolinguistics; ethics of speech; politeness strategies; islamic communication; gender and discourse

Introduction

Language is not just a tool for communication; it is also a source of showing individuals ethical consideration, moral perspectives, and faithful consciousness. In this regard, theolinguistics builds a bridge between faith and social behavior by embedding the theological and linguistic basis of discourse and applying divine

principles to day-to-day speech. Thus, this study aims to examine two scholars' works; although their papers came from different traditions, they align on one point—the moral dimensions of communication.

“This means that in language there are multiple ways to express a single idea, and choosing the appropriate form—finding the most suitable expression for a particular thought and communicative situation—depends on the speaker’s command of the language, their skill, competence, knowledge, and spiritual refinement. If one fails to adequately assess the context of communication, the linguistic form chosen to convey the thought, no matter how correct or beautiful it may be, will not achieve its intended purpose. Such an expression may even lead to misunderstanding or trouble. The sense of refined and graceful speech, along with the ancient tradition of devotion and respect toward it, originated in very early times, especially in the ancient East. The fact that this principle has preserved its essence to the present day testifies to the magnificent place that language and speech occupy in the life of any society” (N. Makhmudov, 2009).

Discussion

Annemarie Schimmel, one of the foremost scholars of Islamic mysticism and culture, viewed language not only as a communicative system but also as a sacred vessel through which divine truth is reflected. Her works – such as *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (1975), *Islam: An Introduction* (1992), and *My Soul Is a Woman* (1997) focus on revealing the spiritual power of each word uttered by individuals. For Schimmel, language as a source of communication could build a picture of oneself's faith, attitude towards God, and inner soul.

In *My Soul Is a Woman* (1997), Schimmel explores the intricate intersection of gender, culture, and communication in Islam. She finds that women's styles of expression are shaped not just by religious morality but by deeply ingrained social expectations. Referring to nineteenth-century South Asian texts such as “*Tahzibu’n-niswan wa tarbiyatu’l-insan*” (The Polishing of Women and the Education of Humanity) by Shahjahan Begam, the Princess of Bhopal, and “*Bihisht*





Zewar” (Paradisiacal Ornament) by Ashraf 'Ali Thanawi, Schimmel observes how these books “formed an integral part of a young Indian girl’s dowry for many years. They taught her how to behave properly in all of life’s myriad situations, always in keeping with the strict moral and theological precepts of the Deobandi school... including how to write respectful letters to one’s parents, how to avoid the innumerable superstitious customs that have managed to slip into Islam, and how to properly pursue knowledge of the true faith” (Schimmel, 1997).

By these examples, Schimmel is indicating that Muslim society's communication is not just linguistic form—it is an act of moral and religious consciousness. Speech is, for her, not a neutral action but an action of moral intention driven by adab (etiquette), ihsan (benevolence), and akhlaq (moral virtue). Speaking, therefore, becomes a test of the interior refinement and religious consciousness of the believer. Schimmel's reflection cross-references language and theology, showing that every word is accountable by the Creator. Her vision thus anticipates the goals of theolinguistics by revealing that speech acts are both communicative and devotional.

Deborah Tannen, a renowned sociolinguist and discourse analyst, conceptualizes language as a representation of social meaning and human relationships. Her books—namely, *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation* (1990), *Talking Voices* (1989), and *The Argument Culture* (1998)—investigate how speakers' styles of conversation convey empathy, hierarchy, and moral negotiation. To Tannen, communication is not just the transfer of information but also the negotiation and maintenance of social relations. Any such interaction, direct or indirect, is a demonstration of the speaker's moral attitude towards others.

The "rapport-talk" and "report-talk" theory of Tannen differentiates communication for relationship-building from one for information transmission or for exerting power. Women, she argues, employ rapport-talk to establish a feeling of affiliation and emotional closeness, and men employ report-talk to assert status

or to signal independence. Yet Tannen believes that these are not deficiencies but alternative cultural styles that must be understood by empathy and contextualism.

Her concept of "rituals of conversation"—recurring, socially meaningful speech acts such as polite apology, compliment, or indirect refusal—illustrates that moral responsibility in language is learned and socially ratified. As an example, Tannen's idea of indirectness is not lying but tact; it helps people keep the peace and avoid fights. In this case, being polite is a moral act—it's a way of showing that you care about other people's feelings through language.

Tannen's analysis encompasses not only gendered speech but also the overarching ethics of communication. In *The Argument Culture*, she criticizes modern societies for putting more value on debate and disagreement than on understanding and compassion. She argues that when speech is used primarily to win rather than to connect, communication loses its human and moral dimension. Her call for a "culture of dialogue" echoes deeply with Schimmel's *adab* and *ihsan* ideal: both writers long for talk that promotes respect and does no harm.

According to her sociolinguistic point of view, Tannen thus makes small talk a moral exercise. Her relational outlook fills out Schimmel's religious one, as both writers indicate that moral communication is not produced by domination or by convincing, but by empathy, humility, and shared knowledge.

Conclusion

Both Annemarie Schimmel and Deborah Tannen, though being from two disparate scholarly traditions—one Islamic mystical and the other sociolinguistic—both share a profound concern with the ethical dimension of human discourse. For Schimmel, language is divine, an instrument that embodies godly attributes and moral accountability. Tannen, however, conceives language as a social action through which empathy, respect, and harmony in relationships are negotiated. Whereas Schimmel's approach is metaphysical and theological, that of Tannen is



relational and pragmatic; and yet both arrive at an identical ethical point: speech is a burden, and words kill or heal.

Schimmel's pattern of adab, ihsan, and akhlaq resonates with Tannen's politeness, empathy, and conversational tact. Moral communication for Schimmel is derived from religion—it is a sign of the individual's spiritual training and inner purity. For Tannen, it is a by-product of knowledge about others—it is a social practice based on a sense of difference and the avoidance of conflict. Both theorists, therefore, consider politeness not as shallow linguistic form but as a by-product of ethical awareness. Their shared emphasis on politeness as an ethics implies that communication cannot be severed from values: how we speak betrays the quality of our ethical and emotional knowing.

By putting Schimmel's spiritual linguistics and Tannen's relational sociolinguistics into conversation, this study proposes an interdisciplinary framework for theolinguistics—a field that combines faith-centered and human-centered methodologies of speech. This integration points out that language is simultaneously a spiritual practice and a social act. Speech, when guided by compassion and moral awareness, is an act of worship theologically and an act of care sociolinguistically.

At a moment when dialogue so often is commandeered by combativeness, aggression, and misunderstanding, both Tannen and Schimmel remind us that moral communication begins with humility and empathy. Their theories converge in one universal precept: language, when purified by moral intention, can restore harmony within cultures and among human beings.

References

1. Makhmudov, N. (2009). Til va nutq madaniyati [Language and Speech Culture]. Tashkent: O'qituvchi.





2. Schimmel, A. (1975). *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
3. Schimmel, A. (1992). *Islam: An Introduction*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
4. Schimmel, A. (1997). *My Soul Is a Woman: The Feminine in Islam*. New York: Continuum.
5. Tannen, D. (1989). *Talking Voices: Repetition, Dialogue, and Imagery in Conversational Discourse*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
6. Tannen, D. (1990). *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*. New York: William Morrow.
7. Tannen, D. (1998). *The Argument Culture: Stopping America's War of Words*. New York: Ballantine Books.

