

Resistance Is Never Insignificant: A Sociolinguistic Perspective

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Abstract: Resistance to potentially problematic behaviors, narratives, structures and incidents has a far reaching impact on the social fabric of society. The first step towards shaking the power structures in the history always started with a resistant word. The current paper attends to the resistant narratives/efforts and intends to provide a platform to assist, guide and channelize the resistance efforts. This would be accomplished by introducing the concept of resistance in this paper and demonstrating its parallel link to power and dominance. Further the paper would propose certain tools, skills and considerations to augment the resistant efforts and improve their effectiveness against the suppressing apparatuses.

Keywords: resistance, insignificant, sociolinguistic, perspective

I. Introduction

Resistance according to Scott refers to everyday individual or collective acts of opposition and self help against domination and they do not need the recourse to political and labour organizations. Even a small act of foot-dragging, false compliance, mimicry etc. would count as resistance through this lens (Scott, 1985). So these small acts or small resistant words are examples of individual everyday resistances and are not insignificant. The instances of the collective, and 'contentious politics' has been the focus of resistance studies often excluding acts by individuals or small groups (see e.g. Ackerman & Kruegler, 1994; Mc Adam et al, 2001; Chenoweth & Stephen, 2011, & Baaz, 2021). Thus, 'contentious politics' with collective actions has been suggested as the only means for the individuals to gain meaning either as leaders, participants or organizers. Through this school of thought resistance has only been

openly limited to those forms that portray collective, public interaction (Castells, 1997; Melucci, 1996 & Lilja, 2021). Although the collective dissent is often generated or co-constituted from single practices of resistance and go beyond mere everyday or individual expressions. Individuals having common perceived interests or grievances and possibly sharing the same identity positions often carry out the acts of individual resistance. Power is challenged by these loosely connected individuals sharing the same knowledge (Foucault, 1980). Individual, everyday resistances may work as a preamble to riots, socio-political movements etc. Thus, more invisible and individual resistance might develop into thereby more visible, organized and large-scale forms of resistance may get their life and origin from more invisible and individual resistances (Lilja et al, 2017).

Research on resistance is exploding globally in the last few years. A lack of focus though is observed on probing the declining tendency of individual resistance specially. While exploring the complicated types, forms and linkages of resistance, research is essentially ignoring its simplest form that is small individual incidents of resistance. A close eyes needs to be kept on the society for its different developments in the individual and social domains. This is how social sciences can gauge evolution of societies in constructive or disruptive directions. Accordingly, then the needed response from the social scientists can be extended on time.

Passive individual response/resistance to problematic situations is observed by the researcher over the last few years in Pakistan. This aspect seems quite under-researched. To validate the aforementioned observation the researcher undertook this study to explore it on a small level.

Logically if small acts of resistance can lead to bigger organised movements of resistance (Lilja et al, 2017), leading to power structures dismemberment; logically the reverse can be deduced that the absence of this individual resistance may lead to perpetuation of the exploitative structures. So a verified observation of passivism/absence of response generation may be taken as measure of societal degradation.

1.1 Objectives

1. To explore the societal trends in individual resistance efforts in Pakistan.
2. To explore the factors that can help to make resistance efforts effective.

2. Methodology

2.1. Conceptual Framework

The Foucault's (1985) concept of resistance and power structures along with Scott's broadened domains of resistance form the conceptual

framework of the study. Michel Foucault's theory of resistance is rooted in his larger body of work on power and its pervasive presence in all aspects of society. According to Foucault, power is not just something possessed by certain individuals or groups, but is rather a diffuse and dynamic force that operates throughout society in ways that are often hidden or obscured. In this context, resistance can be seen as a form of subversion or challenge to dominant power structures. Foucault argued that resistance takes many forms, and can occur in any number of arenas, including workplace, family, and political sphere.

One key aspect of Foucault's theory of resistance is the idea that power relations are never static, but are constantly shifting and changing. As such, resistance must also be fluid, adaptable and able to respond to new challenges and opportunities as they arise.

Foucault also emphasized the importance of understanding the ways in which power and resistance are intertwined. Resistance, he argued, is not simply a matter of opposing or overthrowing existing power structures, but is rather a complex and ongoing process of negotiation and transformation.

Ultimately, Foucault's theory of resistance challenges us to think critically about the ways in which power operates in our own lives, and to actively seek out opportunities for resistance and subversion in order to create more just and equitable societies.

The theory of everyday resistance was proposed by James C. Scott in his book "Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance" (1985). According to Scott, everyday resistance refers to the subtle and often hidden forms of resistance that occur in everyday life, particularly among subordinate groups who lack political power. Scott argues that these forms of resistance can take many forms, including foot-dragging, sabotage, pilfering, feigning ignorance, gossiping, and other acts that are often seen as minor or insignificant. However, he suggests that

these actions can have a significant impact over time, and can contribute to larger social changes. Scott's theory emphasizes the importance of understanding how power operates in society and the ways in which marginalized groups can resist it, even in seemingly small ways. By recognizing the ways in which everyday resistance occurs, Scott suggests that we can gain a better understanding of the power dynamics at work in society and it may work towards more equitable and just social systems.

Predominantly qualitative in nature semi structured interviews were used in the current study as research tools for data collection and subsequent analysis in accordance with the research objectives. For the structured questions simple percentages of the responses were calculated and analysed in the light of selected theories. For the semi structured responses the Braun and Clarke model (2015) of thematic analysis was used. This model consists of six stages, which are:

Familiarization with the data: This stage involves becoming familiar with the data by reading and re-reading the data, and taking notes on initial ideas, patterns, and observations.

Generating initial codes: In this stage, initial codes are generated by identifying and labeling interesting features, patterns, or meaningful units within the data.

Searching for themes: This stage involves grouping initial codes into potential themes by reviewing and comparing the codes and looking for patterns of meaning.

Reviewing themes: In this stage, the themes are reviewed and refined by checking if they accurately reflect the data and if they are coherent and distinctive to each other.

Defining and naming themes: This stage involves defining and naming the themes by creating a clear and concise description of each theme.

Producing the report: Finally, the researcher produces a report of the analysis, which includes a clear explanation of the themes, how they were developed, and how they relate to the research question or aim. The Braun and Clarke model emphasizes flexibility and iterative processes, allowing for new codes and themes to emerge as the analysis progresses. It also encourages a focus on the meaning and interpretation of the data, rather than just counting or quantifying the data.

2.2. Population

The population comprises the teachers of the public sector university, COMSATS.

2.3 Sample

The sample comprised of forty one teachers of COMSATS University, Islamabad campus, from five different departments namely Humanities, Physics, Chemistry, Biosciences, and Computer Sciences. The sample was randomly selected and was convenient sampling. Teachers, cosmopolitan educators, with global outlook, are agents of change (Hansen, 2017). Teachers carry a global outlook and are open to new ideas and approaches. Therefore, for teachers, a direct relationship needs to exist between what happens in the classroom, in the school, and within a wider social domain (Brown, 2015). Thereby selecting a sample from the population of teachers carries a real significance for the current study.

2.4 Interviews

The interview comprised a total of 16 questions with five open ended and eleven close ended questions. The researcher conducted the forty interviews in person and one interviewee sent the filled questionnaire on WhatsApp. The responses of the respondents were gauged. For close ended

questions simple percentages were calculated to observe the resistance trends in Pakistan in the light of the conceptual framework. For the open-ended questions the different themes highlighted by the respondents were added in the study and then analysed in the light of the selected conceptual framework.

3. Analysis and Findings

Ninety seven percent of the respondents agreed that the observation of the decline in individual resistant efforts in Pakistan is valid. Twenty seven of the forty one respondents picked up insecurity as the reason for a decline in the individual resistant efforts of the society. This makes 65 % of the total sample. The participants reported a threat against their life and livelihood as the main reason for which the decline was observed.

Forty out of forty one participants identified the decline of resistant efforts as an indicator of societal decline and referred to this trend as not a viable option for the society. In response to the open ended question regarding the repercussions of missing resistance in society, the respondents indicated that society might cease to exist as a society whereby the phenomenon of isolation and disconnection will prevail. Inflation, frustration, crime, mistrust, culture collapse, class exploitation, lawlessness, insecurity, were different outcomes reported by the respondents as a result of missing resistant efforts in society. It was further added that in the absence of any resistant efforts the boundaries between acceptable and unacceptable social behaviours and actions will vanish and resultantly crime may cease to be identified as crime and criminals may not be identified as criminals for their crimes might no longer be defined as crimes. Further the participants referred to the drift of society to a point of no return both at individual and social level, whereby neither the violating individuals nor the violating society would be left with the indicators to assist them identify the deviant

behaviours and return towards acceptable ones. Foucault similarly argues that we might use resistance as a 'chemical catalyst so as to bring to light power relations, locate their position, and find out their point of application and the methods used' (Foucault,1982, p. 780).

While 65% percent of the respondents picked up insecurity as the main reason for not resisting, a contradictory response came where hundred percent of the respondents indicated the absence of resistance would result into a total chaos, insecurity, lawlessness at overarching mass level of the society. Thereby a logical conclusion would be that earning temporary escape by avoiding individual resistance would actually inflict the non resister with a permanent exposure and vulnerability to perpetual insecurity to the point of no return.

All the participants agreed to the need of awareness efforts to be placed in society sensitizing the citizens for the importance of resistance efforts at their individual level. Similarly, all the participants agreed that resistance efforts do have a positive impact and never get wasted as useless with no effect whatsoever. It is the repetition of many individual performances, which collectively generate a more joint mode of resistance that generate new and alternate understandings of opposition (not the conventional ones). Prevailing as non-organized, serial, still joint phenomena dispersed practices of resistance can lead to major transformations of society.

Multitude of small resistance acts in this case evoked by particular context of power lead to collectiveness (Scott, 1989). To hold greater sway in advancing liberating social change, the resistance efforts must be shared as well. When resistance efforts/narratives are shared with the community and awareness is generated, the effectiveness of the resistant efforts enhances. This way the individual efforts of resistance may gather more audience that bear educated witness which may add critical support for emancipatory

change (Plummer, 1995: 174 & Harris, Carney & Fine, 2001: 9).

Likewise all the participants gave this saturated response that not fulfilling one's obligation to generate resistant efforts leads to a disruption at societal and individual level. A saturated response was again found in the interviews whereby all the 41 participants suggested the right choice of forum to be significant for the effectiveness of resistance. The participants identified different forums that they used for resistance. According to Nelson (2001) a strong performance of resistance comprises renouncing a dominant cultural storyline by questioning it through systematic efforts that may include awareness campaigns in public, lobbying in political sphere for legislative change. Thereby choosing the right forums for resistance efforts with an effective targeted circulation may create a greater impact (Frank, 2010: 3, Delgado, 1989 & Bamberg, 2004: 351).

The researcher categorised four types of resistances for the respondents, namely: Direct Action Resistance, Indirect Action Resistance, Direct Verbal Resistance and Indirect Verbal Resistance. In response to identifying their preferred type of resistance 19 percent of the respondents nominated Indirect Action Resistance; 41percent preferred Direct Action Resistance; 24 percent selected Direct Verbal Resistance; 12 percent picked Indirect Verbal Resistance; and 4.8 percent responded that it depended on the situation. This response reaffirms the observation in response to question pertaining to the reason for resistance decline. About 65 percent of respondents indicated insecurity as the main reason for the decline. In the current response to type of resistance again about sixty percent of the respondents showed their reluctance to Direct Action Resistance which again affirms the sense of insecurity prevailing in the social fabric.

The necessity of awareness, observation as having an important role in making the resistance

efforts effective was appreciated by ninety seven percent of the respondents. The respondents' emphasis was to educate oneself both on the situations as well as academic education. Further the respondents focused on the need of the educating others as well on a particular situation as a factor that may enhance the effectiveness of resistance (Nelson, 2001). So by educating others on the situation, a supportive audience may be generated that in turn may be a key means to destabilize damaging oppressive apparatuses, behaviours and individuals. The emphasis on collaboration, group work and community is needed to turn individual resistant efforts more effective, validated and visible. So, the intentional efforts need to be on the go for educating the intentional audience on the ongoing circumstances under the radar of resistance (Korobov, 2004).

A very interesting but again a saturated response from the participants was the necessity to resist against the problematic impulses inside the resister. Respondents confirmed its effectiveness at both social and individual level whereby demonstrated its absence as counter productive both at individual and social level. 'Agency' is the commonly used concept which now becomes relevant to the concept of resistance after it's broadening through acceptance of more social phenomena than public assemblies. 'Agency' refers to a situation whereby the subject does carry the capacity to resist but the subject does not have to do it. For a subject to act in this situation requires the act of self reflection and resistance that should target the dominant subject positions from within. These dominant subject positions might be the ones that perfectly befit the agendas of the power structures. Individuals in a society pass through the fluid process of subject formation and the subject is never formed decisively in one shape for ever. It keeps on evolving in productive or non-productive directions depending on the level of activity in self reflecting attitude. For a flourished self

resistant attitude the identification of questioning of the dominant discourses may naturally set in, to resist the positioning into a certain shape as per the agendas of the exploitative structures (Lenz Taguchi 2004, p. 16). Thereby caution is needed to monitor the resistant narratives and efforts for their right intention and choice of right words so that resistance itself does not turn into a supporting and perpetuating tool for the exploitative structures.

In response to the question regarding the role of authoritative position for making the resistance effective, all the participants affirmed that for the resister holding an authoritative position, the position is an aid to the effectiveness of resistance. A saturated response in affirmative came from all the participants whereby valid basis for resistance was proposed by them for its effectiveness. The last question of the interview also came with a saturated affirmative response for the resistance efforts bringing mental peace and catharsis for the resister. One of the validity measures often discussed in the study of resistance is the factor of resisters intention. In some situations, even the resister himself/herself is not sure about the intent of the resistance. In some other resisters put an effort to build the intentions of the audience in a certain direction. The space exists for all the domains but resistance would merely become another exploitative tool if based on intentional manipulation and distortion of facts which may lead to chaos just as the absence of resistance would (Bayat, 2000).

4. Conclusion

Corresponding, objective number one, the respondents affirmed that social trends of resistance in Pakistan show a decline in individual resistance efforts pertaining to the predominantly reported reason of insecurity. Though all the respondents did identify falling into a greater abyss of permanent insecurity and lawlessness because of decline in resistant efforts.

Responding the second objective of the study, following suggestions were gauged for effective resistance.

1. No resistance towards the exploitative structure in the society, is no option. Resistance has to be there for society's survival even if it's a single word of resistance.
2. Choice of right forum is recommended for resistance. Choice of right forum also entails the choice of right audience that may primarily lead to effectiveness of resistance. Although even in the absence of relevant forum, flaunting a word of resistance even on the irrelevant forum may not go without significance.
3. Active observation, educating one's own self and others on a situation may positively affect resistance. This will lead to multiple benefits in multiple directions. When the resister is well educated on a situation the content of resistant discourse will become more concrete and solid. Further, a learned resister will educate the audience well, so a bigger and educated witnesses to the situation will be produced that can extend an effective support for emancipatory change. Active observation as per the respondents' response also holds the key to this objective.
4. Academic growth of the resisters was also indicated as a factor that may render the resistance effective by making the resistance an instance of in-depth educated resistance.
5. Inner resistance as a very important domain was identified by the respondents whereby the dominant discourses were recommended to be resisted strongly in the process of self reflection. Self reflection is a constant check for the resister for doing what needs to be done and in a constructive direction and right choice of discourse. A resistance may be generated inside the resister against the use of dominant discourses or actions within their thinking process. Once the dominant exploitative discourses are resisted inside the cognitive

processes of the resisters, the same would mostly follow in the outside world.

6. Valid base for resistance as indicated by a saturated response from the audience is necessary for the effectiveness of resistance. Resistance discourse based on manipulative intent, or forged data tends to be exposed sooner or later and even before getting exposed would not carry the effectiveness of factual resistant discourse.

7. An authoritative position held by the resister as indicated by the respondents may improve the effectiveness of the generated resistant discourse. Resisters thereby are recommended to put an effort for getting to an authoritative position so that their resistance efforts can get support through the position they carry.

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