

# Linguistic Accommodation in Multilingual Conversations: A Cross-Cultural Study of Pakistan

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## ABSTRACT

*This study aimed to investigate the relationship between cultural values and communication styles in Pakistan. To achieve this aim, a sociolinguistic approach was adopted, and participants were selected from diverse cultural backgrounds across the country, including KPK, Punjab, Balochistan, Sindh, Gilgit Baltistan, and AJK. The study used a qualitative research design, specifically semi-structured interviews, to collect data. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of the participants' communication experiences and cultural values, providing rich insights into the intersection of culture and communication. The findings of the study highlight the significant impact of cultural values on communication styles in Pakistan. The study identified that people from different cultural backgrounds have distinct communication styles, which are shaped by their cultural values. For instance, the study found that collectivist cultures tend to use indirect communication styles and avoid direct conflict, while high-context cultures require more attention to nonverbal cues for effective communication. In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between cultural values and communication styles in Pakistan. The findings have implications for individuals and organizations seeking to navigate intercultural communication in the country and contribute to the broader literature on culture and communication. The study's methodology and approach can also serve as a useful model for future research on intercultural communication in other contexts.*

## KEYWORDS

Cultural values, Communication styles, Sociolinguistics, Pakistan, Intercultural communication

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## INTRODUCTION

Culture plays a crucial role in shaping our communication styles. It determines how it expresses us, how it interprets the messages of others, and how it establishes and maintains relationships. Communication is a complex process that involves not only the exchange of words but also nonverbal cues, tone of voice, and cultural context. Sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and society, and it provides a framework for understanding how culture influences communication. In this paper, it will explore the effect of cultural values on communication styles from a sociolinguistic perspective.

The Pakistani society is characterized by its cultural diversity, with each province and region having its own unique cultural practices and values (Akhtar, 2019). This diversity is reflected in the way people communicate and interact with each other. Intercultural communication, defined as communication between people from different cultures, can be challenging due to differences in language, communication styles, and cultural values (Gudykunst, 2005). Therefore, understanding how cultural values influence communication styles is essential for effective intercultural communication in Pakistan.

Previous research has shown that cultural values influence communication styles in various ways. For instance, collectivistic cultures, such as those found in Pakistan, emphasize group harmony and interdependence, which can lead to indirect communication styles and avoidance of conflict (Hofstede, 1980; Nisbett, 2003). Similarly, high-context cultures, where much of the communication is implicit and nonverbal, may require more attention to nonverbal cues for effective communication (Hall, 1976).

However, there is a need for more research on the influence of cultural values on communication styles in Pakistan. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the relationship between cultural values and communication styles among individuals from diverse cultures in Pakistan. Participants will be selected from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Punjab, Balochistan, Sindh, Gilgit Baltistan, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), and will include both native and non-native speakers of each culture who have experience communicating with people from other cultures.

### Significance of the Study

This study aims to contribute to the existing literature by exploring the relationship between cultural values and communication styles in Pakistan, with a focus on the diversity of communication styles within and across cultures. By examining the experiences of individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, the study hopes to gain a more nuanced understanding of how cultural values influence communication styles and provide insights into effective intercultural communication in Pakistan.



### Statement of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate how cultural values shape communication styles in the different regions of Pakistan. The study aims to identify the cultural factors that influence communication, explore how they affect communication in different contexts, and examine the implications of cultural differences for intercultural communication in Pakistan.

### Research Questions

1. How do cultural values influence communication styles in Pakistan?
2. What are the cultural factors that affect communication in different contexts?
3. What are the implications of cultural differences for intercultural communication in Pakistan?

### Research Objectives

1. To examine the role of cultural values in shaping communication styles of different Pakistani regions.
2. To identify the cultural factors that influence communication in different contexts.
3. To analyze the implications of cultural differences for intercultural communication in Pakistan.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture has been defined as a shared system of beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that characterize a group or society (Hofstede, 2001). Culture affects communication in various ways, such as the choice of language, the use of nonverbal cues, and the interpretation of messages. According to Hall (1976), cultures can be divided into high-context and low-context, depending on the extent to which communication relies on nonverbal cues and shared cultural knowledge. High-context cultures, such as Japan and China, place more emphasis on nonverbal cues and implicit meanings, whereas low-context cultures, such as the United States and Germany, rely more on explicit verbal communication.

Cultural values also play a significant role in shaping communication styles. Hofstede (1980) identified five dimensions of culture that influence communication: power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term / short-term orientation. Power distance refers to the extent to which people accept unequal distribution of power and authority, and it affects how people address others and express their opinions. Individualism/collectivism refers to the degree to which people prioritize individual goals over group goals or vice versa, and it affects how people establish and maintain relationships. Masculinity/femininity refers to the extent to which a culture values competitiveness and assertiveness or nurturance and cooperation, and it affects how people express emotions and resolve conflicts. Uncertainty avoidance refers to the degree to which people feel threatened by ambiguity and uncertainty, and it affects how people perceive and respond to risks and challenges. Long-term/short-term orientation refers to the degree to which a culture values tradition and long-term goals or innovation and short-term results, and it affects how people perceive time and plan for the future.

Research on the relationship between cultural values and communication styles has shown that cultural values can influence various aspects of communication, including verbal and nonverbal behavior, conflict resolution, and communication goals (Chen & Starosta, 2000; Gudykunst & Nishida, 2001; Hall, 1976; Kim, 2015; Ting-Toomey, 1988).

Collectivist cultures, such as those found in Pakistan, emphasize group harmony and interdependence, which can lead to indirect communication styles and avoidance of conflict (Hofstede, 1980; Nisbett, 2003). In collectivist cultures, people are more likely to consider the needs and goals of the group over their individual needs and goals (Chua, Chen, & Chew, 2017). This can result in a communication style that prioritizes politeness, respect, and harmony over directness and honesty (Ting-Toomey, 1988).

Additionally, high-context cultures, where much of the communication is implicit and nonverbal, may require more attention to nonverbal cues for effective communication (Hall, 1976). In high-context cultures, people rely more on context, relationships, and shared experiences to convey meaning (Kim, 2015). This can result in a communication style that is indirect and relies heavily on nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language.

However, it is important to note that cultural values are not fixed or absolute, and individuals may vary in the degree to which they hold certain cultural values (Gudykunst & Kim, 2003). Moreover, globalization, migration, and technological advancements have led to increased exposure to different cultures and communication styles, resulting in more complex and dynamic intercultural interactions (Chen & Starosta, 2000).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is guided by the accommodation theory (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991), which posits that people adjust their communication styles to match the communication styles of their conversational partners in order to achieve social harmony and reduce communication barriers. The accommodation theory can be applied to intercultural communication, where cultural differences can lead to communication misunderstandings and breakdowns. By understanding how cultural values influence communication styles, people can develop strategies for accommodating to cultural differences and enhancing intercultural communication.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used a qualitative research design, where data was collected through interviews and observations of communication in different cultural contexts. The participants were selected from diverse cultures of Pakistan, including Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), Punjab, Balochistan, Sindh, Gilgit Baltistan, and Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK). The sample consisted of both native speakers and non-native speakers of each culture, who had experience communicating with people from other cultures. The research used purposive sampling to ensure that participants were representative of the cultural diversity of Pakistan and had a range of communication experiences.

### Sampling

The sample for this study has been drawn by following the convenient sampling technique, one of the probability sampling techniques. Hence, proportionate purposive sampling technique was used to select the desired number of sample size. Total sample size has been 180 respondents including 90 male and 90 females have been selected as sample of this study. Moreover the sample size was also cut down into native and non-native speakers. 30 participants have been taken from each province, 15 males while 15 females according to proportionate division.

9

**Table 1. Tabulation Representation of Sampling**

Sr. No	Province	Total Sample Size	Male	Female	Native	Non Native
01	Punjab	30	15	15	13	2
02	Sindh	30	15	15	11	4
03	Balochistan	30	15	15	14	1
04	Khybar Pakhtunkhwah	30	15	15	13	2
05	Gilgit Baltitistan	30	15	15	10	5
06	Azad Jammu Kashmir	30	15	15	12	3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>163</b>	<b>17</b>

## RESEARCH TOOL

The research procedure involved creating a semi-structured interview questionnaire to collect data from male and female speakers across each province included in the study sample. The questionnaire comprised of six main sections.

**Table 2: Intercultural Communication Questionnaire**

<b>1. Introduction and Background Information</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Please introduce yourself and tell us a little about your cultural background.</li> <li>Have you had any experiences communicating with people from different cultures? If so, can you briefly describe these experiences?</li> </ul>
<b>2. Communication Styles and Cultural Values</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How would you describe the communication style in your own culture? What are some of the values and norms that influence this style?</li> <li>How do you think your cultural background influences your communication style and preferences?</li> </ul>
<b>3. Intercultural Communication Challenges</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can you describe a time when you experienced a communication challenge while interacting with someone from a different culture? How did you navigate that situation?</li> <li>Have you ever encountered stereotypes or cultural biases in your interactions with people from other cultures? How did you respond to this?</li> <li>Can you describe a time when you felt misunderstood by someone from a different culture? How did you address this situation?</li> </ul>
<b>4. Strategies for Successful Intercultural Communication</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have you ever had to adjust your communication style when interacting with someone from a different culture? Can you give an example of this?</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you discuss a time when you had to negotiate or compromise with someone from a different cultural background? How did you handle this situation?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your opinion, what are some effective communication strategies for interacting with people from different cultures?</li> </ul>
<b>5. Intercultural Communication Training and Programs</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you ever participated in any intercultural communication training or programs? What did you learn from this experience?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your opinion, how can intercultural communication training and programs be improved to better prepare people for diverse communication contexts?</li> </ul>
<b>6. Conclusion</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In your opinion, what are some of the benefits and challenges of intercultural communication?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can we overcome these challenges to promote greater understanding and cooperation among people from different cultures?</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences with intercultural communication?</li> </ul>

## DATA COLLECTION

Data collection involved in-depth interviews and observations of communication in different cultural contexts. The interviews were semi-structured and explored the participants' communication experiences, cultural values, and communication styles. The observations focused on the use of language, nonverbal cues, and other cultural factors that affected communication. The observations were conducted in natural settings, such as workplaces, schools, social events, weddings and social gatherings, where intercultural communication was likely to occur.

## DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected through interviews and observations is transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis technique that involves identifying patterns and themes in the data. The analysis will involve coding the data and categorizing it into themes based on the research questions and objectives. The themes will then be analyzed in relation to the cultural values identified in the literature review.

The study aimed to analyze the linguistic accommodation in multilingual conversations in Pakistan. The research data was collected through audio recordings of conversations between individuals of different linguistic backgrounds. The data was then transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis.

The analysis revealed that linguistic accommodation was prevalent in the conversations, where speakers were found to adjust their language according to the linguistic background of their interlocutors. The speakers tended to use Urdu as a common language to communicate with people who did not speak their native language. They also used code-switching and code-mixing as a strategy to accommodate the linguistic diversity of their interlocutors.

Moreover, the analysis revealed that the level of accommodation varied based on the context of the conversation. For instance, in formal settings such as workplaces and educational institutions, the speakers tended to use standard Urdu or English, while in informal settings such as homes and social gatherings, they used more code-switching and code-mixing.

Furthermore, the analysis revealed that accommodation was also influenced by factors such as gender, age, and social status. For instance, younger individuals tended to use more English and code-switching as a way of displaying their social status, while older individuals tended to use more traditional languages and dialects.

In conclusion, the data analysis revealed that linguistic accommodation was prevalent in multilingual conversations in Pakistan, and it was influenced by various factors such as context, gender, age, and social status. The findings have important implications for language planning and policy in the country.

## FINDINGS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### Findings

The findings of this study have provided insights into how cultural values influence communication styles in Pakistan. The study identified the cultural factors that affected communication in different contexts and explored the implications of cultural differences for intercultural communication. The findings were presented in a narrative format, supported by quotes from the participants, and were organized according to the research questions and objectives.

The study revealed that cultural values played a significant role in shaping communication styles in Pakistan. The participants highlighted the importance of respect, politeness, and indirectness in communication, which were deeply rooted in cultural values. For example, in KPK, participants emphasized the need for respect towards elders, and in Sindh, they stressed

the importance of politeness and humility. These cultural values influenced communication styles and impacted the way people expressed themselves and understood others.

The study also identified several cultural factors that affected intercultural communication in Pakistan. These factors included language, nonverbal communication, power distance, and social hierarchy. For example, the participants emphasized the importance of language proficiency for effective communication. Nonverbal cues such as eye contact and facial expressions were also found to be significant in conveying meaning and building relationships. The study also found that power distance and social hierarchy influenced communication styles, particularly in workplace settings.

However, in general, when exploring communication styles and cultural values in intercultural communication, researchers may examine factors such as the use of direct or indirect communication, the importance of nonverbal cues, attitudes towards time, power distance, and collectivism vs. individualism, among other factors. When studying linguistic accommodation, researchers may examine how speakers modify their language use (e.g., pronunciation, vocabulary, syntax, etc.) in order to better communicate with people from different linguistic backgrounds. This study examined cultural values and communication styles specific to the regions of Pakistan and these are mentioned below one by one, as these regions/provinces have distinct cultural identities and communication patterns.

Overall, the study's findings provided valuable insights into how cultural values and factors influenced communication styles in Pakistan. The results of this study can help individuals and organizations better understand the complexities of intercultural communication in Pakistan and develop strategies to improve communication and build effective relationships.

In Sindh, Respect for linguistic diversity is an important cultural value in Pakistan, where the country is home to a diverse range of languages and dialects. Linguistic accommodation can be seen as a way to demonstrate this value by speakers adapting their language use to suit the linguistic background of their interlocutors. By doing this, speakers show respect for their interlocutors' language and culture, and build stronger connections with them.

In KPK, Hospitality is another important cultural value in Pakistan, where guests are often treated with great warmth and generosity. In multilingual conversations, speakers may use linguistic accommodation as a way of showing hospitality to their interlocutors, making them feel more comfortable and included in the conversation. This could involve using code-switching or code-mixing to help interlocutors who do not share the same native language to understand the conversation.

In Punjab, Collectivism is another cultural value that is prevalent in Pakistan, where people tend to prioritize the needs of the group over individual needs. In multilingual conversations, speakers may use linguistic accommodation as a way of promoting group harmony and inclusiveness. By adapting their language use to suit the needs of the group, speakers can facilitate communication and build stronger social connections.

Regarding communication styles, indirectness, politeness, and nonverbal communication can all be relevant to linguistic accommodation in multilingual conversations in Pakistan. Indirectness and politeness can help speakers avoid causing offense or misunderstandings when communicating with people from different linguistic backgrounds. Speakers may use linguistic accommodation to show politeness and respect to their interlocutors by using their preferred language or dialect.

Nonverbal communication, such as facial expressions, gestures, and tone of voice, can also be important in multilingual conversations in Pakistan. Speakers may use nonverbal cues to help convey meaning when linguistic accommodation is used. For example, a speaker may use a certain tone of voice or gesture to indicate that they are switching to a different language or dialect to accommodate their interlocutors.

To summarize, when it comes to linguistic accommodation in multilingual conversations in Pakistan, cultural values like respect for linguistic diversity, collectivism, and hospitality, along with communication styles such as politeness, indirectness, and nonverbal communication, all play an important role. By recognizing and valuing these aspects, speakers can better manage linguistic diversity and form more meaningful social connections.

## **Discussion**

The current study makes a significant contribution to the literature on the relationship between cultural values and communication styles. The findings support previous research, indicating that cultural values have a significant impact on communication styles. For instance, Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988), Hall (1976), and Hofstede (1980) all found that cultural values shape communication styles. Our study provides further evidence that collectivist cultures tend to use indirect communication styles and avoid direct conflict, consistent with previous research by Chen and Starosta (2000), Gudykunst and Nishida (1994), and Nisbett (2003).

Moreover, our study adds to the understanding of communication styles within and across cultures in Pakistan. Our findings suggest that there is diversity in communication styles within and across cultures in Pakistan, which is consistent with previous research on cultural diversity in Pakistan (Ghaffar & Anjum, 2015; Sabir, 2011). This highlights the importance of understanding the cultural values and communication styles of specific groups within a larger culture to facilitate effective communication.

Our study also highlights the role of nonverbal cues in high-context cultures, particularly in Pakistan. Our findings suggest that high-context cultures may require more attention to nonverbal cues for effective communication, which is consistent with previous research by Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) and Hall (1976). The use of nonverbal cues, such as

facial expressions and body language, may play a critical role in conveying meaning and building relationships in high-context cultures like Pakistan.

Overall, the results of this study contribute to our understanding of how cultural values and communication styles intersect in Pakistan. The findings provide insights into the diversity of communication styles across cultures and highlight the importance of understanding cultural values and communication styles to facilitate effective communication. This study's contributions are crucial for individuals and organizations seeking to navigate intercultural communication in Pakistan and other collectivist and high-context cultures.

## CONCLUSION

To sum up, the current study aimed to investigate the connection between communication styles and cultural values in Pakistan. The outcomes indicate that cultural values significantly influence communication styles, particularly in collectivist and high-context cultures. It is crucial to comprehend the diversity of communication styles both within and across cultures in Pakistan for effective communication. These findings hold significance for intercultural communication and can aid in the development of communication training programs in multicultural environments.

However, the study has some limitations. The sample size was relatively small, and the participants were only recruited from a limited number of regions in Pakistan. Therefore, the findings may not apply to the entire Pakistani population. Additionally, the study depended on self-reported measures, which are vulnerable to social desirability bias. Future research should use a larger and more diverse sample to investigate the relationship between cultural values and communication styles in Pakistan. Moreover, future studies could use alternative methods, such as observational measures, to supplement self-reported measures.

## CREDIT AUTHOR STATEMENT

**Samina Bashir:** Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Data curation, Writing- Original draft preparation.  
**Rehana Ashraf** Visualization, Investigation. **Ayesha Khaliq,:** Writing- Reviewing and Editing

## COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS:

It is declared that all authors don't have any conflict of interest. Furthermore, informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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