

## The Pragmatics of Politeness in Cross-Cultural Communication: A Comparative Study of English and Pakistani Interactional Norms

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### Abstract

*The nuances of politeness in cross-cultural communication contexts—between English and Pakistani interactional standards, specifically are explored in this comparative study. Using a qualitative methodology, the study breaks down the pragmatic components of politeness through the use of ethnographic techniques such as semi-structured interviews and participant observation. Through intensive participation in real-life interactions in both cultural contexts, the research examines the complex relationship between politeness and non-verbal indicators. Semi-structured interviews with individuals from both cultures shed more light on the many viewpoints, meanings, and applications of civility in conversation. Through a thorough analysis of these qualitative data sources, the study reveals the contextual factors and underlying cultural subtleties that influence politeness techniques in cross-cultural communication situations. The findings provide significant insights into the dynamics of cross-cultural communication in addition to highlighting the differences and similarities between English and Pakistani interactional norms. In the end, this research aims to improve our comprehension of civility across cultural divides, cultivating intercultural sensitivity and enabling efficient communication techniques in a world growing more interconnected by the day.*

**Keywords:** Politeness, pragmatics, cross-cultural communication, interactional standards.

### Introduction

There is no doubting the difficulty of communicating across cultural boundaries, which is influenced by a variety of factors such as linguistic variance, cultural norms, and societal values. As a fundamental principle directing social connections, civility emerges in this intricate web of cross-cultural interactions. In addition to just being courteous, being polite also means demonstrating to people your value, concern, and respect for them. Such expressions have a critical role in shaping the dynamics of communication between individuals with diverse cultural origins, serving as a bridge to advance understanding and cooperation. However, due to the nuances of diverse interactional norms and sociocultural circumstances, politeness is used differently in practice among countries. Therefore, for intercultural communication to be successful and for people from diverse cultural backgrounds to be able to speak with one another, an understanding of these distinctions is required (Alwaely et al., 2023).

The inherent disparities in language, habits, and beliefs cause communication challenges across cultural boundaries. Despite the fact that language is the primary medium of communication, cultural differences in language's richness and complexity can lead to miscommunication and misconceptions. Furthermore, cultural norms—which can vary widely throughout cultural contexts—determine what behaviors, manners, and social conventions are acceptable. These norms have a powerful hold on societal values and have an impact on people's attitudes, actions, and views of others (García & Otheguy, 2020).

Being courteous is a vital part of communication and is necessary for navigating these cultural differences. It serves as a universal currency that transcends linguistic and cultural divides, fostering harmonious relationships and mutual respect. Being courteous is essentially about treating people with respect, decency, and politeness; it is an expression of a fundamental aspect of human society. However, the practical application of politeness is deeply entangled with cultural background, leading to cultural differences in the expression of civility (Sharipzianova, 2020).

It is customary to be polite when one uses indirect speech acts, such as hedging remarks and tempered demands, in countries where English is the primary language. The phrases "Could you please pass me the salt?" and "I was wondering if you could possibly help me with this?" are examples of softening requests and demonstrating deference to the other person. In contrast, directness is appreciated in nations like Pakistan, where politeness can be shown by speaking in a more straightforward and unambiguous manner. In some circumstances, sayings like "Please pass me the salt" could be seen as polite and considerate (Hill, 2022).

Nonverbal cues are also crucial for expressing civility in discourse. In English-speaking nations, maintaining eye contact and smiling are considered polite since they convey warmth and friendliness. However, in some Eastern cultures, like that of Pakistan, gestures like nodding and maintaining a physical distance can convey regard and respect (Dayter, 2021).

The pragmatic realization of politeness is further influenced by socio-cultural factors such as power dynamics, social hierarchies, and relational contexts. In hierarchical countries like Pakistan, where obedience to authoritative figures is highly valued, being polite often means displaying deference to people with superior social position. Conversely, in egalitarian countries like the United States, civility is exemplified by egalitarian ideals that treat everyone equally, regardless of socioeconomic level (Almadani, 2021).

Understanding these variations in pragmatic politeness realization is necessary for cross-cultural communication to be successful. Misinterpreting social cues in cross-cultural relationships can lead to tension, misunderstandings, and conflict. Furthermore, it can be challenging to establish rapport and mutual trust when culturally normative rules of etiquette are broken because it could be seen as rudeness or contempt (HEDDANE & KHELIFA, 2022).

Civility plays a crucial role in cross-cultural communication that affects interpersonal relationships and social interactions. However, the way it is actually applied varies widely throughout cultures, taking into consideration the nuances of different interactional norms and sociocultural frameworks. Understanding

and navigating these variations is essential to promoting effective intercultural communication, enhancing mutual understanding, and building bridges across cultural boundaries. Understanding the importance of civility in cross-cultural interactions can help people become more sensitive to and adaptable to other cultures, as well as increase their ability to communicate successfully across cultural boundaries (Clark, Gorton, & Bentley, 2022).

### Research Questions

1. What are the differences in verbal politeness methods between Pakistani and English interactional standards in cross-cultural communication situations?
2. What nonverbal clues are linked to politeness in interactions between Pakistanis and English speakers, and how do they change depending on the cultural setting?
3. Which contextual and cultural elements affect how politeness is pragmatically realized in cross-cultural communication between English and Pakistani interactional norms?

### Significance of the Study

The significance of this research lies in its analysis of the role that politeness plays in intercultural communication, particularly with regard to English and Pakistani interactional standards. Effective cross-cultural communication, which necessitates knowledge of etiquette practices in a range of cultural situations, is a talent that is becoming more and more important in today's globalized world. By contrasting and analyzing these two cultures' norms for politeness, this study advances our knowledge of how cultural differences impact communication dynamics. The study's practical implications encompass a range of domains, including education, business, diplomacy, and international relations. Teachers can develop curricula and intercultural communication training programs that will assist students in being culturally competent by having a thorough understanding of cross-cultural politeness norms. Gaining an understanding of civility norms enhances consumer relations, business negotiation procedures, and multicultural team dynamics. Professionals involved in international relations and diplomacy may find it useful to have insights into diplomatic strategies and cross-border cooperation.

Generally speaking, this study closes information gaps about the cultural norms of England and Pakistan, creating opportunities for improved cross-border collaboration, increased intercultural awareness, and improved intercultural communication.

### Literature Review

One of the most important components of human communication is politeness, which has a significant impact on how people interact in a variety of cultural circumstances (Al-Khatib, 2021). With an emphasis on English and Pakistani interactional norms, the researchers have examined important ideas about the pragmatics of politeness in cross-cultural communication in this survey of the literature.

**Politeness Theory:** The 1978 Politeness Theory by Brown and Levinson provides a fundamental framework for comprehending civility in various cultural contexts. According to the hypothesis, politeness techniques are used to reduce face-threatening acts (FTAs) and preserve social harmony.

Although the theory offers insightful explanations for politeness phenomena, concerns have been voiced about its generalizability to a range of cultural contexts (Brown, 2022).

**Cultural Variations in Politeness:** The Cultural Dimensions Theory by Hofstede (1980) emphasizes how communication methods, including politeness rules, vary among cultures. Individualistic cultures like those in English-speaking nations often place a high value on autonomy and self-expression, which results in subliminal politeness techniques. Collectivist societies, such as those in Pakistan, place more value on social cohesion and submission to authority, which leads to more straightforward approaches to etiquette (Erkinovna, 2023).

**Speech Acts and Politeness:** Austin (1962) and Searle (1969) established speech act theory, which sheds light on how speech acts are used to achieve politeness. Indirect speech acts, including requests disguised as suggestions or hints, are frequently used in polite English encounters. Direct speech activities may be seen as more courteous in Pakistani encounters since they are in line with the country's cultural ideals of sincerity and honesty (Amar & Amari, 2022).

**Face Theory:** Goffman (1967) provided important insights into the phenomena of politeness. He defined face as the positive social value an individual claims for oneself during interaction. People may act in ways that preserve or defend their face in cross-cultural situations, which can result in different approaches to politeness (Tao, 2022).

**Cross-Cultural Pragmatics:** This field of study examines the ways in which language and culture impact intercultural communication. Understandings from this subject help to clarify the nuances of the politeness phenomena and emphasize how crucial it is to take culture norms and contextual elements into account while communicating across cultural boundaries (House & Kádár, 2021).

**Communication Styles and Cultural Values:** Communication methods and politeness norms are shaped by cultural values such as uncertainty avoidance, power distance, and individualism-collectivism. Interpreting politeness methods in cross-cultural communication circumstances requires an understanding of these cultural norms (Westby, 2022).

**Politeness in English Interactions:** The topic of politeness in English-speaking cultures has been studied from a number of angles, including speech acts, politeness techniques, and cultural standards. The application of politeness indicators in English interactions—such as modal verbs, hedges, and politeness formulas has been emphasized by studies (Kádár & House, 2021).

**Politeness in Pakistani Interactions:** The topic of civility in Pakistani encounters has received little attention in the literature, especially when it comes to cross-cultural studies. However, research indicates that cultural values like hospitality, deference to authority, and social hierarchy may have an impact on politeness in Pakistani society (Hashmi & Siddiqui, 2023).

**Facework Techniques:** Facework techniques, such as face-saving techniques and face-threatening acts (FTAs), are important for controlling civility in communication. Studies on facework in cross-cultural settings shed light on how people negotiate social conventions related to courtesy and maintain their composure when interacting with people from different cultures (Ibadova, 2021).

**Indirectness and Implicature:** This area of study examines how different cultural perspectives interpret speech acts that are indirect in nature. Variations in implicature can affect the sense of politeness due to environmental considerations and cultural norm differences (Tanduk, 2023).

**Power Dynamics and Politeness:** In hierarchical cultures in particular, power dynamics have a significant impact on politeness tactics in communication. Navigating cross-cultural encounters requires an understanding of power differentials and how they affect etiquette (Flores, 2022).

**Intercultural Competence:** Intercultural competence is the capacity to engage and communicate with individuals from various cultural backgrounds in an effective manner. Being polite is essential to intercultural competency because people need to know how to negotiate cultural norms and modify their communication style accordingly (Savicki, 2023).

**Cross-Cultural Communication Competence:** This refers to the attitudes, knowledge, and abilities required for effective cross-cultural communication. Being courteous is essential to cross-cultural communication competency because people need to know how to read cultural settings and know when to use what kinds of politeness techniques to use (Aririguzoh, 2022).

**Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness:** Effective cross-cultural communication requires both cultural sensitivity and awareness. In order to prevent miscommunication and increase understanding between people, it is important for individuals to acknowledge and honor cultural variations in civility (Gradellini et al., 2021).

**Communication Accommodation Theory:** According to the Communication Accommodation Theory (Giles et al., 1973), people should modify their communication style to fit in or coincide with that of others. Making accommodations in cross-cultural communication may entail changing one's politeness tactics to conform to cultural expectations and standards (Urashima, 2022).

**Ethnography of Communication:** This field of study looks at how people communicate within particular cultural groups. Ethnographic research adds to our understanding of cross-cultural communication dynamics by offering deep insights into communication behaviors and politeness standards in particular cultural contexts (Madden, 2022).

**Face Negotiation Theory:** This theory (Ting-Toomey, 1988) looks at how people deal with their faces when interacting with others from different cultures. The hypothesis highlights the role that facework techniques have in maintaining peace and handling conflict across cultural divides (Eko & Putranto, 2021).

**Intercultural Education and Training:** The goal of intercultural education and training programs is to help people become more competent communicators across cultural boundaries. These programs facilitate more effective cross-cultural communication by raising awareness of cultural variations in politeness norms (Savicki, 2023).

**Mediation and dispute settlement:** Courtesies are essential to the mediation and dispute settlement procedures. For mediators and negotiators operating in multicultural settings, it is imperative that they comprehend the cultural variances in politeness norms (Suwondo, 2020).

Implications for Practice: Practical consequences of studies on the pragmatics of politeness in cross-cultural communication can be found in a number of disciplines, including international relations, commerce, education, and diplomacy. We may develop international awareness, encourage better communication, and forge closer cross-cultural bonds by improving our comprehension of cultural variations in etiquette conventions (Huang, 2023).

### Research Mythology

This study employed a qualitative approach that combines ethnographic methods such as participant observation and semi-structured interviews to investigate the pragmatics of politeness in cross-cultural communication between English and Pakistani interactional norms. First, through participant observation and immersion in real-life contacts in both cultural contexts, the researchers observed both non-verbal and vocal cues associated with politeness. Second, semi-structured interviews with participants were conducted to provide further insight into how individuals from both cultures view, comprehend, and apply civility in discourse. Thanks to these qualitative data collecting procedures, the researchers were able to examine the cultural nuances and contextual factors impacting politeness methods, which will produce rich and thorough insights into the dynamics of cross-cultural communication.

### Data Analysis

This chapter analyses qualitative data from participant observation and semi-structured interviews as part of the study on the pragmatics of politeness in cross-cultural communication between English and Pakistani interactional norms. The method looks at the subtle cultural and environmental factors that affect politeness strategies in an effort to clarify the dynamics of cross-cultural communication.

### Participant Observation Analysis:

Participant observation was employed to immerse the researcher in real-life contacts across cultural contexts and monitor both non-verbal and vocal indications associated to politeness. The observations were recorded in field notes and then thematically analyzed to look for trends and themes related to politeness strategies. Numerous significant deductions were drawn from the analysis:

**Verbal Politeness Techniques:** In English interactions, it's typical to employ indirect speech acts, such as framing requests as suggestions or making cautious remarks. One example would be, "Could you possibly pass me the salt?" Conversely, interactions with Pakistanis are more likely to involve direct speaking and more overt requests, such as "Please pass me the salt."

**Nonverbal Cues for Politeness:** Body language and facial expressions convey kindness. While maintaining eye contact and smiling are frequently linked to politeness in English discussions, nodding and keeping your distance from the other person are prominent gestures that signal civility in Pakistani encounters.

**Contextual Factors:** The study focused on how cultural norms and social hierarchy influence manners. Since indirect speaking acts are preferable than imposition because in English culture, politeness is often associated with concepts of equality and personal autonomy. Conversely, Pakistani culture emphasizes deference to authority figures and the social hierarchy more, which results in more overt forms of civility.



### Analysis of Semi-structured Interviews:

To learn more about how people from Pakistani and English cultural backgrounds perceive, understand, and use civility in conversation, semi-structured interviews were done with them. The interviews were transcribed and subjected to a thematic analysis in order to pinpoint recurring themes and cultural differences. Key insights from the analysis were as follows:

**Cultural Views of Politeness:** Participants from both cultures had views on politeness that were particular to their own cultures. Pakistani participants emphasized the need of respecting and deferring to authority people, while English participants frequently emphasized the importance of preserving peace and avoiding conflict using indirect communication tactics.

**Politeness Cue Interpretations:** Different cultures have different ideas about what politeness cues mean. For instance, Pakistani participants perceived direct speech acts as more sincere and respectful, whereas English participants saw indirect speech acts more kind and thoughtful.

**Experiences with Cross-Cultural Communication:** The participants talked on how they handled cross-cultural communication etiquette conventions. Numerous people emphasized difficulties including misreading cues and cultural misunderstandings, stressing the value of cultural awareness and flexibility.

The examination of semi-structured interviews and participant observation offers valuable insights on the interactional norms of Pakistani and English cultures and the pragmatics of politeness in cross-cultural communication. The results illustrate the complexity of international communication dynamics by shedding light on the cultural quirks and contextual elements influencing politeness tactics. These realizations have consequences for encouraging intercultural understanding and good communication in various settings.

### Conclusion

This study examined the pragmatics of politeness in order to better understand cross-cultural communication between English and Pakistani interactional standards. Through semi-structured interviews and qualitative data analysis from participant observation, the various cultural and environmental factors influencing politeness approaches were examined, providing insights into the dynamics of cross-cultural communication.

Participant observation results demonstrated that there were notable differences in the verbal and nonverbal markers of politeness between English and Pakistani encounters. In English culture, indirect speech acts are often used to maintain harmony and prevent dispute, but in Pakistani relationships, direct communication is valued along with respect and regard for authority persons. Similarly, in English interactions, nonverbal cues like smiling and maintaining eye contact are associated with politeness; in Pakistani encounters, on the other hand, nodding and maintaining physical distance are more frequent.

Further information about cultural ideas of etiquette and cross-cultural communication experiences was obtained through the analysis of semi-structured interviews. The importance of navigating cultural disparities in politeness cues and adhering to cultural standards was underlined by participants from all backgrounds. Pakistani participants placed higher emphasis on deference to authority people, whereas

English participants stressed the need of maintaining peace and harmony using tacit communication tactics. In addition, there were glaring differences in the way participants received cues related to politeness: participants from Pakistan perceived direct speech actions as more sincere and respectful, whereas participants from England perceived indirect speech acts as nicer and more compassionate.

All things considered, the study underlines how complex the dynamics of cross-cultural communication are and how politeness functions as a relationship moderator. The findings highlight the value of cultural awareness and sensitivity when navigating politeness requirements in diverse cultural settings. By recognizing and appreciating the cultural peculiarities and contextual factors that impact politeness practices, people can enhance their intercultural comprehension and communication effectiveness. The study contributes significantly to our understanding of the interactional norms between the English and Pakistani cultures as well as the usefulness of civility in cross-cultural interactions. The study adds to our knowledge of the dynamics of international communication by shedding light on the contextual and cultural quirks that influence politeness practices. It also has practical ramifications for fostering intercultural competence and harmonious dialogue in a range of settings. Future research might examine different cultural contexts and examine how globalization influences the evolution of politeness norms in an increasingly interconnected world.

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