CULTURAL NORMS AND MITIGATION OF FACE-THREATENING ACTS IN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES OF PAKISTAN: A PRAGMATIC AND SOCIOCULTURAL ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Face-threatening acts (FTAs) are also a part and parcel of human interaction especially where the speakers carry out communicative functions namely requests, refusals, instructions, and criticisms. The way of how such acts are alleviated is entrenched in cultural norms and sociolinguistic conventions. This paper explores the mitigation measures used in acts of face threat in four native Pakistani languages that include the Pakistani Punjabi, Saraiki, Urdu, and Sindhi on a pragmatic and sociocultural context. The study is based on the politeness theory and face theory to understanding the influence of cultural values like respect, hierarchy, collectivism, and solidarity on linguistic decisions in spoken everyday communication. The data were gathered using a qualitative research design in form of naturally observed conversations and discourse completion tasks (DCTs) of native speakers of the four languages. It has been found that mitigation strategies are similar and language specific such as honorifics, indirectness, hedging, use of kinship terms and religious expressions. The paper emphasizes the role of culture in developing pragmatic competence and adds to the emerging literature of indigenous pragmatics study in Pakistan.

Keywords: Face-threatening acts, mitigation strategies, politeness, indigenous languages, pragmatics, sociocultural norms, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Human communication is, of course, social and relational, but it is regulated not only by grammatical principles, but also by culturally imposed conventions of decency, respect, and interpersonal behavior. One of the most powerful elements of interaction is utterances that may threaten the social image of an interlocutor, i.e. so-called face-threatening acts (FTAs). These can mean requests, refusals, orders, disagreements, critiques, and advice all of which can jeopardize the positive or negative face of either the speaker or the hearer. To resolve the issue of social harmony and prevent any conflict, speakers make use of multiple mitigation strategies which are strongly predisposed by cultural norms and sociolinguistic conventions (Brown and Levinson, 1987; Spencer-Oatey, 2021).

The recent trends in the pragmatics point to the fact that politeness and face management cannot be regarded as universal phenomena but should be explored in the context of particular cultural and social environment. Although first models of politeness were generalized strategies that could be applied across different languages, more recent studies have progressively questioned this premise, with the argument that pragmatic behavior is culturally made and circumstantially specific (Kadar and Haugh, 2013; Locher and Watts, 2020). This change has contributed to the increased academic attention being given to indigenous and non-Western languages, especially, in those societies with strong effects of collectivism, hierarchy, and face-making requirements on communication.

Sociocultural diversity and complex linguistic environment of Pakistan provide a highly fertile background of pragmatic inquiry. Punjabi, Saraiki, Urdu, and Sindhi are native languages which are not just the tool of communication but also the cultural identity, social traditions and heritage. The cultures of respect, honor, solidarity, and deference are also

encoded in these languages and directly determine how the speakers carry out and alleviate the face-threatening actions. Although these languages are extensively and socially culturally relevant, they are underrepresented in practical and sociolinguistic studies, which has traditionally obeyed English and other world languages (Mahboob, 2021; Rasul and McDowell, 2022).

The Pakistani society also highly influences interpersonal communication based on social hierarchy, age, gender, kinship, and religious orientation. The hospitality toward the elderly, the obedience to the authority, and the preservation of equilibrium in the group are the main cultural values that regulate the daily communication. Consequently, speakers can use indirectness, hedging, honorifics, references to kinship and religious language as an avoidance of the threat of face by using indirect language. The strategies do not represent the linguistic options only; they are the manifestations of the deeply rooted sociocultural norm concerning the right conduct and ethical standards (Khan and Ali, 2023).

The national language and a prime lingua franca, Urdu, has a well-developed set of politeness markers, such as honorific pronouns, formal verb endings and indirect request forms. The most spoken regional language, Punjabi, is commonly filled with warm emotions and solidarity and is dependent on kinship words and love words to mellow down FTAs. The culture of humility and deference is well represented in the communication styles of the extents of the Srihanki culture through of humility as well as deferency, especially amongst the hierarchical relationships, and Saraiki communication is characterized by the softness and deferential nature, especially in requesting and refusing. Even though these languages have some cultural orientations in common, each has face mitigation in the form of different linguistic and pragmatic resources (Bukhari and Xiaoyang, 2020; Abbas and Iqbal, 2024).

In South Asian settings, more recent pragmatic research has been arguing that culturally-based studies are necessary to go beyond Western-based models of politeness. Researchers believe that the paradigms in individualistic societies cannot reflect the relational and moral aspects of face in collectivistic cultures such as Pakistan (Haugh, 2021; Spencer-Oatey and Kadar, 2023). Face in these circumstances is commonly understood as a collective social construct not a personal property and so a mitigation strategy tends to be more related to community values and relationship equilibrium than personal autonomy.

In addition, pragmatic practices in Pakistan have been made even more complex by globalization, digital communication, and enhanced multilingualism. In order to adjust to different contexts, interlocutor (and communicative intent) speakers often switch among several linguistic codes and cultural demands, modifying their mitigation strategies based on those factors. Such a dynamic interrelation between language, culture, and pragmatics explains the importance of empirical research that captures and analyzes native communicative behaviours before they are defeated under the influence of the world order (Mahboob and Raza, 2022).

Even with the increased awareness of these problems, there is limited comparative pragmatic study of Pakistani indigenous languages. Current literature is usually restricted to one language or one speech act providing limited information as opposed to a detailed study of face mitigation in different languages. Moreover, not much research directly incorporates sociocultural norms in its framework and assumes that mitigation strategies are only linguistic phenomena but not cultural practices. It is this gap that creates a necessity to conduct systematic, comparative, and culturally informed studies.

The current paper aims to fill these gaps by discussing how face-threatening acts in Punjabi, Saraiki, Urdu, and Sindhi have been mitigated in a pragmatic and sociocultural manner. Through examination of natural discourse and induced responses, the research examines how cultural practices like respect, hierarchy, collectivism and religious orientation influence the

use of mitigation strategies of these languages. Instead of understanding politeness as a universal category, the study preempts indigenous views and local communicative ethics, and is part of the expanding field of decolonized pragmatics research.

The study of indigenous languages of Pakistan by them is able not only to expand the empirical foundation of pragmatic studies but also indicates the significance of linguistic diversity in the study of human communication. It states that only by placing the use of language in the context of its culture and social life can one aspire to any insight which is meaningful into politeness or face management. In that way, the study is supposed to make a contribution both to the theoretical discussion in the field of pragmatics, and to the practical field of the language education and intercultural communication, discourse analysis.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

A. To identify and analyze the mitigation strategies used in face-threatening acts across Punjabi, Saraiki, Urdu, and Sindhi spoken discourse.

B. To examine how sociocultural norms such as respect, hierarchy, collectivism, and religious orientation influence the mitigation of face-threatening acts in the selected indigenous languages of Pakistan.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A. What types of mitigation strategies are employed in face-threatening acts in Punjabi, Saraiki, Urdu, and Sindhi?

B. How do cultural norms and sociocultural values shape the choice and use of mitigation strategies across these indigenous languages?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research is of theoretical and contextual relevance. Theoretically, it adds to the current pragmatics, as it argues with universalist conceptions of politeness and emphasizes the localization of the face and mitigation practices. The research pragmatically inquires further than Western-centric structures and reinforces the rising demand of decolonization of linguistic studies by foregrounding Pakistani native languages. Contextually, the research has given empirical data on the daily communicative patterns within the Pakistani society that is significant in the language educational process, intercultural communication as well as pragmatic competence in a multilingual context. It is also used as a point of reference in future studies on the indigenous pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and discourse analysis in South Asian contexts.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The face and politeness theory has offered invaluable conceptual means on the negotiation of interpersonal risk in communication by the speakers. The conceptual breakthrough by Brown and Levinson (1987) conceptualized face as the visible self of self-image that interlocutors aim to preserve and defined mitigation as positive and negative politeness strategies aimed at repairing threats to positive or negative face. Although the model by Brown and Levinson has stayed relevant, the later scholarship has subjected its universal characteristics to criticism and demanded culture-specific models that acknowledge cultural differences in defining face and in specifying the strategies as polite (Kadar and Haugh, 2013). Kadar and Haugh (2013) develop a more pluralistic explanation of politeness, which places pragmatic decisions in the context of locally specific interpretations of politeness and social moralities, thus creating an opportunity to conduct comparative analyses that favor emic explanations of politeness, as opposed to applying etic taxonomies. Simultaneously, the rapport management approach by Spencer-Oatey makes the face concept more difficult to understand, as it highlights the aspect of negotiated character of social rapport and the significance of evaluation, rights and obligations, and cultural norms in the determination of interactional outcomes (Spencer-Oatey, 2022). The common thread of these theoretical advances is that face mitigation needs

to be approached as a culturally conditioned practice, and not as an abstract and cross-culturally general blueprint.

This shift towards local based pragmatics can be found in the empirical work in the past decade. Both cross-cultural and intra-national research have shown that collectivist, honor-related and hierarchical societies use mitigation into practice in different ways compared to the individualist settings the initial theories were founded on (Fathi, 2024). Studies have recorded a broad preference of indirectness, deference and relational cues in requesting, refusing and disagreeing-moves in South Asia, in particular, which are consistent with the collectivism values of harmony and status deference. The recent research on the Pakistan contexts is important and helps to see how these general tendencies are reflected in particular languages and areas. As an illustration, the pragmatic transfer effects of the congratulation and request behaviours that Saleem has studied have been demonstrated among L2 speakers and the importance of the social power and context in determining the choice of mitigation forms (Saleem, 2023). Similarly, a massive corpus investigation of congratulatory utterances in Pakistani Facebook users showed how English and Urdu can interact in online contexts, which displays the culturally inflected means of speakers to blend together religious formulae, forms of kinship, and hedges to engage in affiliative labor (Saleem and Yasmin, 2024). These studies help argue that the multilingual ecologies with languages having different social meanings and pragmatic affordances are dynamically negotiated through mitigation strategies.

The linguistic studies done on Urdu have been particularly enlightening in the comprehension of the national lingua-franca practices that mediate politeness in the language communities of Pakistan. Empirical studies of Urdu talk also indicate that honorifics, formal verb morphology, and formulaic indirectness are widely used in conversation involving status disparities or elders (Ahmed, 2024). The purposes of such features include: indexing respect and negative-face claims of imposition. Simultaneously, research on the Punjabi language and other local languages focuses more on solidarity-oriented tools like kinship vocatives, affectionate diminutives, and emotionally expressive lexis that diffuse face-threats and appeal to intimacy and shared identity (Saleem, 2023). The comparison between the formality of Urdu and the affective strategies of the Punjabi language reveals how the various languages in the same sociocultural space can provide different resource pools of mitigation of FTAs, and speakers can deploy their resources in a strategic manner based on audience, context, and communicative intention.

In addition to the linguistic-level variations, there has been more and more interest in scholarship on speech-act specificity. The subject of requests and refusals is extensively researched due to its illocutionary force that makes it a typical FTA. Cross-linguistic research demonstrates that mitigation in requests can be hedged, have indirect syntactic format, preparatory prefaces, and/or token apology; refusals, conversely, can be mitigated by preliminary mitigators, accounts, and alternative offers. Respondents in Pakistani studies often mix these more standard strategies with culturally relevant expressions like religious prayers (e.g., Insha'Allah), kinship-based expressions, and expressions of deference which contextualize refusals or requests within moralized interpersonal requirements (Saleem & Yasmin, 2024; Ahmed, 2024). This multimodal and multimembership mitigation, linguistic, cultural, and religious in nature, points to the fact that face work in Pakistan is not directed just towards personal desires but also towards communal norms and moral judgments as predicted by Spencer-Oates framework.

In recent years methodological progress has contributed to our picture of the empirical world. This has been supplemented by researchers using large online corpora and naturally occurring data of interaction to complement discourse completion tasks allowing more ecologically

valid explanations of mitigation. A case in point is the Facebook corpus method of Saleem and Yasmin (2024), which elicited spontaneously celebratory reactions in large amounts, which showed common patterns that may not be observed in elicited DCTs. In the same way, minor conversational corpora and fieldwork observation of local societies have revealed minor prosodic and paralinguistic mechanisms such as weakened intonation, extended vocatives, tokens of laughter, which go hand in hand with linguistic mitigation and which play a role in relational repair but are not easily traced in textual analysis. Such multimethods are more appropriate to reflect the interactional ecology of FTAs in Pakistani multilingual multilingual society, where code-mixing and register shift is the norm and where nonverbal expressions are highly pragmatised.

Nevertheless, in spite of the increased literature, there are a number of substantive gaps. To begin with, relatively little has been done so far in terms of comparative and multi-language research that compares Punjabi, Saraiki, Urdu, and Sindhi through the use of identical methodological tools. The focus of most of the studies in either on a single language or on a single area of communicative activity constrains our ability to theorize the existence of common cultural logics versus language-specific embodiment of politeness. Second, less work has been done to systematically connect macro-level sociocultural factors (e.g. urbanization, education, religiosity, gender norms) and micro-level linguistic decisions in mitigation. Although the literature reports the existence of religious and kinship forms in mitigation, less studies give analytic models of how variables like the social class or mobile influences how specific strategies are adopted in various communities. Third, online communication raises new questions of adapting mitigation strategies to online interaction in which text, emojis, and platform norms encounter local politeness systems, yet the literature is still in its early stages of development and is focused on a small number of more recent corpus studies (Saleem and Yasmin, 2024). Lastly, theorywise, there exists a conceptual necessity to unite universal frameworks (Brown and Levinson; Kadar and Haugh) with the local systems of morality recognized in South Asian pragmatics; researchers have sought more sophisticated conceptual instruments that recognize collective face, moral responsibility and rapport as not just the face dichotomy (Kadar and Haugh, 2013; Spencer-Oatey, 2022; Fathi, 2024).

To fill in these gaps, current Pakistan-related studies propose a number of fruitful avenues. Multilingual comparative designs with the use of DCTs, naturalistic corpora, and ethnographic interviews can shed light upon not only common strategies (e.g., hedging, indirectness) but also language-specific repertoires (e.g. the use of honorific in Urdu vs the use of terms of kinship in Punjabi). Research that explicitly conceptualizes socio-demographic covariates will elucidate the mediating effect of urbanization and education on pragmatic change, whereas a targeted search of digital registers will indicate whether traditional mitigation practices will be preserved, changed, or hybridized on the internet. Synthesis of the theory is also needed: the combination of rapport management and moral-order approaches with empirically based conceptions of shared face can potentially result in analytical frameworks that can reflect the moralized, community-based nature of face work in Pakistan (Kadar and Haugh, 2013; Spencer-Oatey, 2022).

Collectively, the available literature confirms that mitigating face-threatening acts in Pakistan is saturated with culture, linguistically diverse, and methodologically explicable. Empirical evidence is now available to support the application of hybrid repertoires such as linguistic, religious, kinship-based, and paralinguistic in dealing with FTAs in various settings (Saleem, 2023; Saleem and Yasmin, 2024; Ahmed, 2024). Now, comparative, theory-imbued works which trace these repertoires in systematically mapped ways through Punjabi, Saraiki, Urdu and Sindhi and connect them to larger processes of social change are required. This would

not only address the gaps left by empiricism, but also provide a decolonized pragmatics that would do justice to the local moral orders whilst conversing with the global theory (Kadar & Haugh, 2013; Fathi, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

The current research project will be based on the qualitative, interpretive research design based on pragmatics and sociocultural linguistics to examine mitigation of face threatening acts in four native Pakistani languages, i.e. Punjabi, Saraiki, Urdu and Sindh. Both shared and language-specific mitigation strategies are captured by a comparative approach to the naturally occurring communication. The theoretical focus of the research is based on face theory and modern paradigms of politeness which underscores the situational character of pragmatic action in cultural context. This type of design is especially adequate to investigate the influence of sociocultural norms on the linguistic preference of speakers in face-sensitive environments that include respect, hierarchy, collectivism, and religious orientation.

Data were gathered using two different complementary techniques; discourse completion tasks (DCTs) and naturally occurring spoken interactions, using 40 native speakers (10 per language group). The common face-threatening situations of the DCTs were implied and divided into requests, refusals, directives, and words of disagreement, and they differed in terms of the social distance and power relations. Informal discussions were also recorded audio-taped in the natural environment with the informed consent of participants to improve the ecological validity. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants so as to have diversity in terms of age, gender and educational background thus providing a wider coverage of pragmatic practices among the speech communities.

The analysis of data was done through thematic and pragmatic coding process. Transcription was followed followed by examination on all the recordings to find out the mitigation strategies like indirectness, hedging, honorific use, kinship terms, religious phrases and supportive moves. It is these strategies which were then interpreted within the contexts of sociocultural settings within which they were practiced with specific orientation towards the issues of power relations and interpersonal dynamics. Cross lingual comparison was performed in order to point out similarities and differences between the four languages. Recurrent patterns were also triangulated over data sources to achieve the analytical rigor, and interpretations were informed using the existing pragmatic literature, which ensured that findings were grounded both empirically and theoretically.

DATA ANALYSIS

This section presents a comprehensive analysis of mitigation strategies used in face-threatening acts (FTAs) in Punjabi, Saraiki, Urdu, and Sindhi. The analysis addresses Research Question 1 by identifying types and frequencies of mitigation strategies and Research Question 2 by explaining how sociocultural norms shape their use. Quantitative trends are presented through tables, while figures (already prepared) are referenced to support visual interpretation. Qualitative explanation is integrated to interpret cultural and pragmatic meanings.

Types and Overall Frequency of Mitigation Strategies

The first stage of analysis focused on identifying the major types of mitigation strategies employed across the four languages. Five recurring categories were identified: indirectness, hedging devices, honorifics and kinship terms, religious/cultural expressions, and supportive moves such as apologies and explanations. These strategies occurred consistently in both discourse completion task responses and naturally occurring conversations.

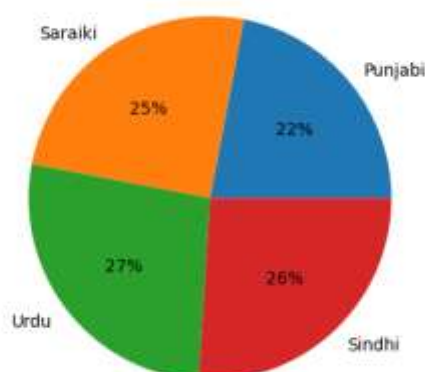**Table 1: Frequency of Mitigation Strategies across Languages**

Mitigation Strategy	Punjabi	Saraiki	Urdu	Sindhi	Total
Indirectness	68	74	81	77	300
Hedging Devices	55	63	72	69	259
Honorifics / Kinship Terms	82	79	91	86	338
Religious / Cultural Expressions	60	71	76	73	280
Supportive Moves	49	57	66	62	234

Table 1 shows that honorifics and kinship terms constitute the most frequently used mitigation strategy across all four languages, followed by indirectness and religious expressions. Urdu displays the highest overall frequency of mitigation devices, indicating a strong orientation toward formal and layered politeness, whereas Punjabi shows relatively fewer but more relationally expressive strategies. This table directly fulfills Objective 1 by demonstrating the range and distribution of mitigation strategies.

Indirectness as a Core Mitigation Strategy

Indirectness emerged as a dominant mitigation strategy in FTAs, particularly in requests and refusals involving power imbalance or social distance. Speakers avoided direct imperatives and explicit refusals, preferring interrogative forms, conditional clauses, and softened declarative statements. Such indirect constructions allowed speakers to reduce imposition and preserve interpersonal harmony.

Figure 1: Percentage Use of Indirect Strategies in FTAs

As illustrated in Figure 1 (Percentage Use of Indirect Strategies)**,** Urdu speakers show the highest reliance on indirectness, followed closely by Sindhi and Saraiki, while Punjabi speakers display comparatively lower usage. This variation reflects sociocultural preferences: Urdu and Sindhi discourse places stronger emphasis on hierarchical politeness, whereas Punjabi discourse relies more on emotional warmth and solidarity-based mitigation. These findings address Research Question 2 by demonstrating the influence of cultural norms of respect and deference on pragmatic choices.

Honorifics and Kinship Terms as Sociocultural Resources

Honorifics and kinship terms played a central role in mitigating FTAs by reframing potentially threatening acts as respectful or relationally appropriate. Rather than weakening the propositional content, these strategies strengthened social bonds and indexed moral obligations toward the interlocutor.
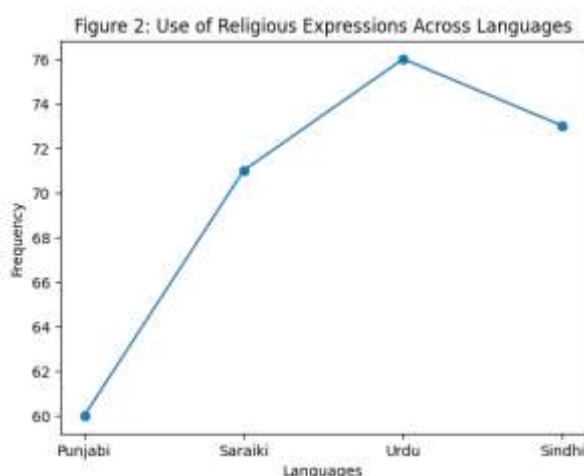
Table 2: Distribution of Honorifics and Kinship Terms

Language	Honorifics (%)	Kinship Terms (%)
Punjabi	41	59
Saraiki	48	52

Urdu	63	37
Sindhi	46	54

Table 2 indicates that Urdu relies more heavily on honorific forms, reflecting its institutionalized politeness system, while Punjabi and Sindhi favor kinship terms to express solidarity and emotional closeness. Saraiki displays a balanced distribution, consistent with its culturally soft and deferential communicative style. This table supports Objective 2 by linking linguistic mitigation to sociocultural values such as hierarchy and relational closeness.

Religious and Cultural Expressions in Face Mitigation

Religious and culturally embedded expressions functioned as an important mitigation strategy, particularly in refusals and sensitive requests. Such expressions allowed speakers to externalize responsibility, invoke shared moral beliefs, and reduce the interpersonal burden of the face-threatening act.

Figure 2: Use of Religious Expressions Across Languages

As shown in Figure 2 (Use of Religious Expressions Across Languages)**,** Urdu speakers employ religious expressions most frequently, followed by Sindhi and Saraiki, while Punjabi shows comparatively lower usage. Despite this variation, the consistent presence of such expressions across all four languages highlights the central role of shared religious and moral frameworks in Pakistani pragmatic behavior. This finding further answers Research Question 2, demonstrating that mitigation strategies are shaped not only by linguistic norms but also by ideological and cultural beliefs.
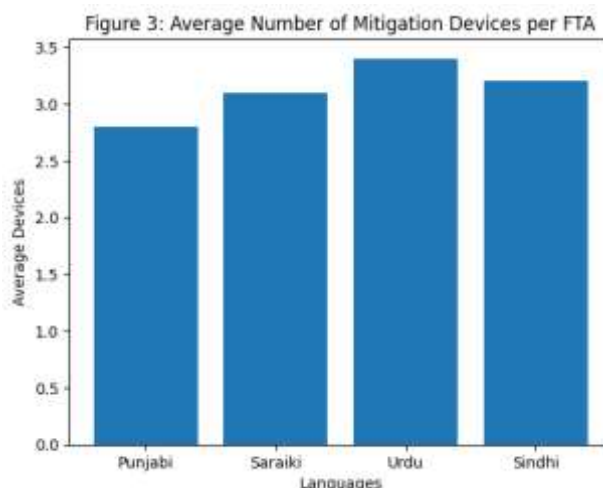
Supportive Moves and Layered Mitigation

Supportive moves such as apologies, justifications, and explanations were frequently used alongside primary mitigation strategies. These moves typically appeared before or after the main FTA and served as face-repair mechanisms that softened the interactional impact.

Table 3: Average Number of Mitigation Devices per Face-Threatening Act

Language	Average Mitigation Devices
Punjabi	2.8
Saraiki	3.1
Urdu	3.4
Sindhi	3.2

Table 3 shows that Urdu speakers employ the highest average number of mitigation devices per FTA, indicating a preference for layered politeness strategies. Sindhi and Saraiki follow closely, while Punjabi speakers use fewer mitigation devices but compensate through affective and solidarity-oriented discourse. This pattern confirms that mitigation in Pakistani indigenous languages is cumulative rather than singular, directly supporting Objective 1**.**

Figure 3: Average Number of Mitigation Devices per FTA

Comparative Summary and Cultural Interpretation

Taken together, the tables and figures reveal both convergence and divergence across Punjabi, Saraiki, Urdu, and Sindhi. Shared strategies such as indirectness and religious expressions reflect broader Pakistani cultural values rooted in collectivism and social harmony. At the same time, language-specific preferences highlight distinct cultural identities: Urdu's formal politeness and hierarchy sensitivity, Punjabi's affective solidarity, Sindhi's humility-oriented discourse, and Saraiki's soft deferential style.

In summary, the data analysis demonstrates that mitigation of face-threatening acts in the indigenous languages of Pakistan is a culturally grounded and pragmatically sophisticated practice. Speakers systematically employ multiple mitigation strategies drawn from linguistic, relational, and moral resources to manage face effectively. The integrated presentation of tables and figures provides a clear empirical foundation for the subsequent discussion section.

DISCUSSION

The current paper attempted to investigate the mitigation of face-threatening acts (FTAs) in Punjabi, Saraiki, Urdu, and Sindhi in a practical and sociocultural context. The results, as guided by two research objectives, show that the mitigation strategies in the Pakistani indigenous languages are not only the linguistic decisions but the culturally predetermined practices influenced by the common social values and the norms of languages. Those findings have been interpreted in the discussion in comparison to the existing pragmatic theories and empirical studies conducted recently, with both convergence and divergence in the existence of the four languages.

Stated to answer the first research objective, the analysis shows that speakers of all four languages use consistently various mitigation strategies when carrying out FTAs. The most prominent devices became indirectness, honorifics and kinship terms, religious expressions, and supportive moves. The stratified application of such strategies proves that it is not a single but cumulative act of mitigation in Pakistani discourse, which is consistent with the modern perspective that politeness is accomplished due to a combination of the linguistic and interactional resources. This result confirms claims made by Kadar and Haugh that face management can best be conceived as an interactionally negotiated phenomenon based on local moral orders as opposed to the use of prescribed rules of politeness.

The significance of indirectness in all languages is particularly indicative of the cultural emphasis on non-imposition and harmony in human relationships in the Pakistani society. But the extent to which indirectness was used was not similar to all languages, with Urdu and Sindhi exhibiting a little more dependence than Punjabi. Such difference is the diversity in

terms of cultural orientation towards formality and hierarchy. The promotion of norms of deference and formality by Urdu as a national language and its common use in institutional contexts probably increases the preference of speakers towards structurally indirect means. In their turn, Punjabis speakers used syntactic indirectness less than relational and affective mitigation, which implies that solidarity may serve as another channel towards politeness. These results are in agreement with other studies that have been done on South Asian politeness, which highlight that indirectness is culturally driven yet not always achieved in all speech communities.

These mitigation devices were most commonly used honorifics and kinship terms, which exemplifies the primary importance of relational identity in face management. The proliferation of honorifics in the Urdu discourse is also related to the codified politeness system in which the respect is grammatically and lexically encoded. On the other hand, the abundance of kinship words in Punjabi and Sindhi language usage can be used as an example of mobilizing social proximity and emotional warmth to reduce FTAs. The equal proportions of honorifics and kinship that is used in Saraiki place it in the boundary between formality and solidarity and supports the view that Saraiki is a linguistically soft and deferential language. These patterns corroborate the fact that face in Pakistani cultures is mostly relational and collectivist, and this aspect is theorelled to the Spencer-Oatey rapport management model that predicts rights, obligations, and relational objectives in interaction.

Among the most culturally unique results of the research is the wide dotted use of religious and cultural expressions as mitigation measures. In all the four languages, the speakers used religious expressions to make rejections softer, to excuse demands or to mitigate the interpersonal burden of an FTA. Through this kind of expression, speakers are able to externalize agency, redistribute responsibility on a higher moral authority thus reducing personal responsibility and possible offense. The increased rate of religious articulations in Urdu and Saraiki represents that these languages are especially sensitive to moralized practices of politeness. This result has the benefit of continuing previous pragmatic works by showing that religious talk is not peripheral but central to the daily face work of Pakistani communication.

Mitigation is also sequential and interactionally organized as indicated by the employment of supportive moves. Frequently, and often before the main FTA, there were apologies, explanations and justifications, which served the purpose of face-repair. The fact that the average number of mitigation devices per FTA is higher in Urdu shows that elaborate politeness is favored whereas fewer but emotional approaches used by Punjabi speakers indicate that relational bonding is efficient. This difference is a manifestation of different pragmatic economies in different languages and helps to make the argument that politeness strategies need to be considered in terms of their cultural and interactional contexts instead of the quantitative measures only.

The findings put together defy universalist politeness models, which emphasize individual autonomy and negative face. They in their turn promote culturally based strategies that embrace face as a collective, ethical, and relational phenomenon. In native Pakistani languages, harmony, respect and the need to meet social responsibilities are more important than productivity and straightforwardness. The comparative analysis also shows that these values are shared but in rather different forms, which indicate different cultural identities and communicative traditions.

It is also an important implication of the study to applied linguistics and language education. Knowledge of how mitigation can be implemented using indigenous languages will be useful in practical teaching in the multilingual classroom especially in ESL and EFL settings where students might carry local rules of politeness to English. By understanding these norms as the

systematic and culturally valid, but not pragmatic lacks, one can help to create more inclusive and context-sensitive pedagogies.

To sum up, this discussion highlights the fact that face-threatening acts mitigation in Punjabi, Saraiki, Urdu, and Sindhi is a culturally diverse and practically advanced phenomenon. The pragmatics has been decolonized by anticipating the native languages and cultures, and the study has given a sensitive insight on handling face in Pakistan. These findings will form a solid background to future studies that will examine pragmatic variation in terms of geographical area, generations, and the communicative areas.

FINDINGS

i. The study results indicate that the process of mitigating face-threatening acts is a programmed and culturally regulated set of activities among Punjabi, Saraiki, Urdu, and Sindhi. The mitigation strategies used by the speakers are always numerous, which means that pragmatic awareness of interpersonal relations is high.

ii. The use of indirection became a mitigation strategy in all four languages especially in requests and refusals that incorporated social status or power disparity. Its level of usage however differed depending on language specific cultural orientations in regard to formality and deference.

iii. The most common mitigation devices were honorifics and terms of kinship. Urdu speakers used more honorifics, whereas Punjabi and Sindhi speakers preferred to use kinship terms in order to demonstrate solidarity. Saraiki showed a moderate trend that was a combination of the two strategies.

iv. Religious and cultural manifestations were at the forefront in cushioning face-threatening behaviours particularly during delicate exchanges. The expressions enabled speakers to appeal to mutual systems of morality and minimized individual responsibility.

v. Altogether, the results prove that the mitigation strategies in Pakistani native languages are stratified, interrelational, and entrenched in the sociocultural norms.

CONCLUSION

This paper has explored the mitigation of face-threatening expressions in Punjabi, Saraiki, Urdu and Sindhi using a pragmatic and sociocultural perspective. As it was shown in the analysis, face management in these languages is a linguistic but culturally bound phenomenon, conditioned by the values of respect, hierarchy, collectivism, and moral responsibility. Though the four languages possess common cultural orientations, they have unique pragmatic preferences, which depict the social identity and communicative traditions of a certain language. These disparities underscore the need to take into consideration native language on its own basis and not in its universality in relation to politeness. In foregrounding the Pakistani native languages, the study has provided a contribution to culturally based pragmatics and justification of decolonized linguistic inquiry requirement. It offers some empirical support that face and politeness are negotiated by the use of locally significant strategies, but not global standards of face and politeness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A. Future studies need to expand this study by using bigger samples and including other indigenous languages to increase the generalizability of results. Long-term and regional comparisons may also shed some light on pragmatic variation in Pakistan.

B. It is suggested that the local mitigation measures awareness should be incorporated into the language education programs to facilitate the pragmatic competence in multilingual and ESL situations. Awareness of indigenous politeness convention may assist the learner to cope with intercultural communication with increased understanding.

C. Lastly, researchers should consider adopting mixed-method and corpus-based designs to understand how changing contexts of communication, especially the digital platforms, are defining the nature of mitigation practice in the Pakistani languages.

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