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Forms of Address in Pakistani English: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Variation, Usage and Pragmatic Functions

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Abstract

This study investigates patterns, frequency rates and pragmatic functions of address terms in the Pakistani English (PakE) i.e. a non-native variety of English. The research follows a corpus-based approach to investigate address terms used in formal and informal contexts and institutional settings through its own self-compiled PakE texts database. It applies AntConc software to reveal prevalent address terms before conducting a semantic analysis and comparing their utilization patterns against British and American English language patterns. Sociolinguistic interviews extend the research findings with cultural appropriateness analysis and pragmatic motivation data. The users of PakE incorporate address forms derived from both indigenous cultural traditions and colonial influences, thereby reflecting the multilingualism and hierarchical social structures characteristic of Pakistani society. This study develops World Englishes and pragmatics knowledge bases while generating practical learning benefits for Pakistani English language teaching practices.

Keywords: Pakistani English, Address terms, Corpus linguistics, World Englishes, Pragmatics.



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1. Introduction

During spoken communication, people use address terms which serve to identify recipients in verbal exchanges (Muslimawati, 2022). The address terminology in Pakistan includes titles (Mr., Mrs.), kinship terms (Uncle, Aunty), honorifics (Sir, Madam) and proper names. Every culture links address terms to the combination of social position along with local beliefs and relationships between individuals. The rules that determine personal address terms in communication stem from politeness principles as well as factors related to age, gender, social status and relationship familiarity (Soomro & Larina, 2022).

Pakistanis use English along with Urdu as its official language because the language dominates education systems and administrative functions as well as media outlets. Pakistani English (PakE) shows unique characteristics regarding pronunciation together with vocabulary choices and interaction techniques because of its origins from the local languages (Urdu, Punjabi, Sindhi and Pashto) (Anwar et al. 2020a; Anwar et al. 2020d; Shahid, Anwar, & Amin, 2025). The academic research on PakE has expanded recently (Soomro, 2023), although the study of address terms in this variety continues to receive inadequate attention. Through both corpus analysis and interview study this research fills the current gap in literature about address terms in PakE.

Language serves communication needs among people but simultaneously demonstrates social patterns along with cultural backgrounds and human relationships. Address terms function as the primary linguistic component that reveals how social surroundings operate (Hafeez et al., 2023). In social interactions people use address terms to identify others while simultaneously managing relationships besides displaying politeness and representing identity and controlling power structures (Kanwal, Riaz & Shahid, 2023). Address terms consist of various forms which include honorifics (e.g., Sir, Madam), kinship terms (Uncle, Aunty), personal names and occupational titles and pronouns. In every context where speakers select an address term they reveal hidden social messages regarding their relationship with the addressee along with their interpretation of their social situation and cultural behavioral norms.

The use of English as Pakistani English (PakE) within multilingual postcolonial societies of Pakistan brings additional complexities to how the language is used for addressing others. English maintains a strong foothold in governmental functions alongside educational operations and legal frameworks as well as media domains because it symbolizes status advancement and does so through colonial heritage (Usman, Aziz & Bashir, 2023). English in Pakistan develops outside an isolated environment since it interacts dynamically with multiple native languages such as Urdu, (Anwar, 2012) Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Balochi and others (Ali et al., 2021). The phonological and lexical features of PakE together with its culture-based norms of interaction originate from the multiple languages present in the region.

The use of address terminology in PakE shows special characteristics because it derives from local cultural values while adopting indigenous politeness protocols. PakE exhibits a higher frequency of the address terms 'Sir' and 'Madam' compared to their usage in standard varieties of native English. The terms for parental relatives such as "Uncle," "Aunty," "Bhai" (brother) and "Baji" (elder sister) extend their usage into non-blood relationships to express feelings of respect and intimacy toward other individuals. Vital formal Pakistani discourse accepts numerous expressions such as "Respected Sir" and "Most Honorable Madam" which native British or American English speakers might find excessive in their usage (Malik, Mahroof & Ashraf, 2021).

The specific address patterns in PakE result from cultural values that include high power distance together with collectivism and an ingrained system of hierarchical respect as described by Soomro and Larina (2023).

Scholars increasingly recognize Pakistani English as a separate World Englishes variety but research mostly examines structural elements of syntax, phonology and lexicon (Anwar & Butt 2019; Anwar et al. 2020b; Anwar et al. 2020c; Fatima, Anwar & Shahid, 2024). Researchers have analyzed the pragmatic (Arshad, Shahid & Anwar, 2025) and sociolinguistic elements of address terminology relatively rarely. Studies about address terms in Pakistani English use mainly anecdotal or impressionistic methods that lack empirical findings derived from authentic language use data. A corpus-based approach provides researchers with a strong methodology to study frequency distributions together with contextual usage patterns and address term instances in Pakistani English (Nazeer & Gil, 2023).

The study works to address this deficiency by constructing and evaluating data from written and spoken Pakistani English texts (Wang et al., 2024). The present research focuses on address term usage patterns in various communication environments between institutional discourse and informal conversations to identify sociocultural and linguistic forces that influence participant address practices. This study examines how Pakistani English address systems align with Standard British and American English by establishing their similarities and differences. This research analysis brings insights into Pakistani English pragmatic rules while advancing academic understanding within sociolinguistics and pragmatics and World Englishes research.

Address terms within Pakistani English create a pathway to understand the linguistic impact on how people form identities and navigate social differences to keep traditional cultural values alive during the process of globalization.

2. Literature Review

Sociolinguistics and pragmatics allocate major research importance to address terms due to their strong association with social systems and cultural beliefs and interpersonal relationships. Address expressions between speakers across various cultural settings present both confirmation and opposition to social power structures and link to communal ties and fundamental ideological beliefs. This research investigates three interconnected frameworks that include investigations of address terms from sociolinguistic perspectives followed by World Englishes approaches and studies of pragmatic aspects in Pakistani English.

2.1 Address Terms in Sociolinguistic Theory

Ashraf, (2023) presented essential concepts by differentiation of address pronoun meanings into power-based and solidarity-based meanings for European languages. She maintained that language users choose their address forms because they want to confirm social rankings (power) or generate harmonious connections (solidarity). The framework developed by Brown and Gilman (1960) about T/V distinctions in French has become broadly applicable for examining nominal address terms and titles throughout languages and cultures according to Ino et al., (2023).

Research moving forward added several variables to study including gender and age along with institutional positions and politeness methods. Context acts as a significant factor in how speakers choose their address terms because they modify their language according to their assessment of social distance as well as formality and cultural norms. Jamil, (2021) highlighted the social and cultural basis of address system variations that exist between societies since linguistic address

patterns remain part of sociocultural norms while exhibiting significant variations across the same linguistic region because of regional and ethnic factors.

The number of languages spoken within a society creates additional difficulties for address system classification (Mushtaq et al., 2021). Research conducted by Phulpoto, Oad and Imran, (2024) revealed that address terms in language contact situations evolve through borrowing as well as calquing and pragmatic extension to create hybrid forms that combine native and colonial elements. The complexities of address terms create an outstanding resource for studying how language shapes identity along with power dynamics.

2.2 Address Terms in World Englishes

Taking into consideration Kachru's (1985, 1992) World Englishes paradigm, it is essential to focus on the phenomenon of English as it is experienced in postcolonial societies. In this model, there is no single English standard, but global English as a pluricentric language that has different forms associated with the socio-geographical contexts. Such terms tend to become the most conspicuous signs of the process of nativization among all the addressed ones.

For instance, terms such as Sir, Madam, Uncle, Aunt, and Didi (sister) in the Indian context are used in different ways that is appropriate for ICI BrE or AmE (Batool et al., 2022). They may be such expressions which are either borrowed phonetically from the local languages or semantically adjusted in accordance with culturally acceptable patterns of behavior. For instance, "Uncle" in the Indian and Pakistani English means any older male or a stranger or an elder through social relations without reference to family relationship.

From such transitions, it follows that shifts in such examples of pragmatic variation—including address practices—can be portrayed within casual-hierarchical variation empirical frameworks by employing Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model of Postcolonial Englishes. Terms serve as a crucial interface through which postcolonialism is articulated and given linguistic expression.

Research carried out on English varieties has also revealed the usefulness of the socio-pragmatic approach in terms of address strategy. For example, Saleem, Anjum and Tahir (2021) found that Pakistani ESL learners primarily employed apology responses characterized by culturally bound and language-specific semantic patterns. The same has been observed in Nigerian and Ghanaian English where people's perception of respect, age, social relations play the crucial role in choosing the appropriate address terms (Ramzan, Mushtaq & Ashraf, 2023).

These studies show that in WE, address terms are not only borrowed but they are also functionally nativized to conform to the indigenous culture of politeness, kindred and social interaction. They question the idea of the ABC English as a standard for any other and advocate for the recognition of address systems as a part of the cultural linguistics of the particular regions.

2.3 Pragmatic and Sociolinguistic Variation in Pakistani English

Pakistani English (PakE) has attracted a great deal of scholarly interest during the last two decades of the twentieth century. In fact, most of the earlier work was done on phonological and syntactic variations from the 'standard' British English (Jabeen, 2023). Frequency analysis identified the accentuation of the Urdu words and phrases, imitation Urdu idioms and phrasal verbs – 'cousin brother' and 'tension lena'. Nevertheless, the functional aspect of PakE especially with regard to the speech simulation of politeness, address and speech acts has not been explored comprehensively.

Pakistani English users employ pragmatic interference, specifically, influenced by Pakistani Urdu politeness; for instance, they employ greetings and make a request indirectly (Anwar, 2012) . According to them, such kind of writing does not depict linguistic ignorance but certain pragmatic shifts from Urdu into English. For example, ‘Respected Sir’ is a phrase that is often used in letters, employment applications and letters and is rather-over polite or formal English of the West. Open kinship vocabulary is commonly used by the public clinically to address strangers, under the pretext of ‘Uncle’ and ‘Aunty,’ etc., which tallying with the social interacting rules of privatized familialism in South Asia. These terms, though do not exist in day-to-day English used in the Western countries, are vital to the stability and honour in a Pakistani community.

However, most of the research done on address terms in PakE is descriptive in nature and based on gut feeling or small scale observations. First, there is a noticeable absence of indicative, big scale studies based on the actual language usage. In this way, a corpus-based approach is one that offers the best way to systematically investigate how address terms are used in different settings and in varying or formal and informal registers for want of a better term, and back up such qualitative figures qualitatively.

However, a new emphasis on address terms is due because digital communication, as well as globalization, and urbanization are currently changing language in Pakistan. In fact, consideration has to be given as to whether you will find educated younger speakers preserving traditional phonological norms in their endophonic usage, creating new hybrid patterns, or reverting to new globalized address strategies that have been conditioned by the media and education.

Research Objectives

Thus, the following research objectives are set:

- To identify the most frequently used address terms in Pakistani English across various discourse contexts.
- To examine the sociocultural and linguistic influences shaping these forms.
- To compare address term usage in PakE with British and American English corpora.

3. Research Methodology

Specifically, this study adopts the corpus-based approach to research general and specifically, address terms in PakE. Corpus linguistics is an important field that gives an opportunity to analyze real language use, and, therefore, enables both quantitative and qualitative analysis of the findings. The chosen theoretical framework presupposes the compilation of a corpus, as well as corpus-aided, quantitative analysis, and qualitative interpretation of the data supplemented by the sociolinguistic interviews with the participants.

3.1 Corpus Design and Compilation

Since, no large amount of data available that could be used for Pakistani English, the data set for this research was collected from different sources and combined together to form a custom made corpus. The corpus was further planned and developed to reflect a number of types of communication where address terms are typical. The corpus is comprised of the written and spoken texts that have about one million of word tokens. The breakdown is as follows:

Table 1: *Corpus Composition*

Genre/Source	Word Count	Source
Newspapers	300,000	Dawn, The News, Express Tribune
Academic Discourse	200,000	HEC journal articles, lectures
Interviews	150,000	Transcribed interviews with PakE users
TV Shows/Talks	150,000	Political talk shows, morning shows
Social Media Posts	200,000	Twitter, Facebook (public posts)
Total	10,00000	

The study included formal and informal interactions to create an extensive evaluation of social address terms usage in various contexts (such as institutional, media and personal domains).

For analysis we processed all texts which came from ethical sources that underwent anonymization when needed. All spoken texts went through complete transcription that kept important features which define address forms such as honorifics and fillers and code-switching behavior.

3.2 Identification and Categorization of Address Terms

A specific set of prevalent address terms from PakE was studied within this research.

Honorifics: Sir, Madam, Respected Sir, Dear Sir/Madam

Kinship terms: Uncle, Aunty, Bhai, Baji, Chacha, Didi

Professional titles: Doctor, Professor, Engineer

First names and surnames (with and without titles)

Pronouns: You, Tum, Aap (when code-switched)

Manual regular expression tagging in AntConc assisted the extraction of address terms through detection of appropriate word forms and collocates and phrase patterns.

3.3 Analytical Tools and Procedures

3.3.1 Frequency and Distribution Analysis

The quantification methodology started with determining how often address terms appeared throughout different text genres. Frequency lists produced by AntConc software showed the top address forms which allowed researchers to measure their usage differences between formal and informal settings. The results underwent normalization through division by 10,000 words to obtain comparable statistics between the different sub-corpora.

3.3.2 Collocational and Concordance Analysis

The analysis of pragmatic functions and formulaic patterns utilized collocation analysis on specific terms such as “Sir,” “Madam,” “Bhai,” and “Respected Sir.” The calculation of statistically significant collocates in the text depended on mutual Information (MI) and T-score metrics.

Analysis of the “Sir” network (as displayed in Figure 1) shows that respected, please, kindly, and request emerge frequently as collocates which reveal standardized petition-building procedures

in Pakistani institutional English writing (the complete standard is “Respected Sir, I kindly request you...”).

The manual inspection of concordance lines revealed contextual pragmatic patterns which showed that “Uncle” addresses authority figures informally yet “Dear Madam” function differently than “Respected Madam.”

3.3.3 Genre-Based Pragmatic Comparison

Drawings between address terms and classes of texts including academic and bureaucratic and conversational registers were conducted through Key Word in Context and word sketch functions. This method revealed nuanced patterns of genre-specific patterns as well as variations among level of formality and politeness within those classifications.

3.4 Sociolinguistic Interviews

The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with ten speakers representing various sectors of Pakistani English use including students, teachers, civil servants and media professionals to better grasp the speakers' awareness and motivations regarding address terms. Interview topics included:

Preferred forms of address in different settings

Attitudes toward kinship-based and honorific address terms

Influence of Urdu and regional languages on English address usage

Modern adolescents tend to implement new approaches toward how they address others

The researchers employed NVivo analytical software to explore recurring themes about language attitudes and pragmatic choice as they pertain to identity from the spoken interviews with Pakistani English speakers.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The research study maintained standard ethical principles during the entire investigation. All collected spoken data occurred after participants granted their consent while the right to stop participation remained accessible throughout the study. The information received was anonymized while recordings were properly secured.

3.6 Limitations of Methodology

The genre-balanced corpus still presents limited scope for capturing total regional along with socioeconomic diversity patterns within the Pakistan English style. The corpus-based approaches generate useful usage patterns but lack effectiveness when it comes to tracking attitudes and intentions, so interview methods were used as supplementary research tools. Research using larger extended time-based language samples would benefit from broadening their data to include more diverse ethnic regions nationwide and virtual platforms like WhatsApp and TikTok.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Frequency of Address Terms

Table 2: *Top 10 Address Terms in Pakistani English Corpus*

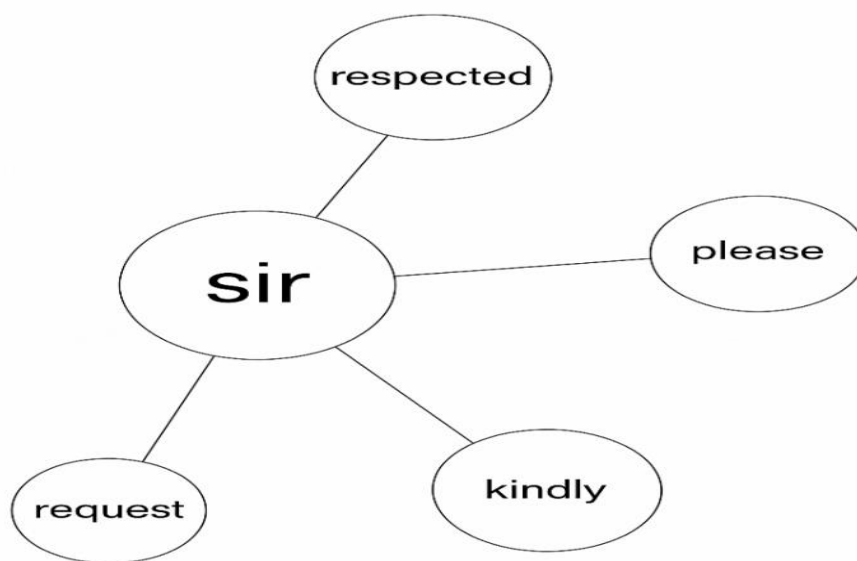
Rank	Term	Frequency	Contextual Use
1	Sir	4,350	Education, workplace, general respect
2	Madam	2,780	Service industry, education
3	Uncle	2,150	Social, informal, respectful reference
4	Aunty	1,960	Informal, often for elder women
5	Respected Sir	1,780	Letters, emails, formal petitions
6	Brother	1,650	Religious, social solidarity
7	Boss	1,400	Informal workplace, peer address
8	Bhai	1,200	Urdu borrowing, peer solidarity
9	Baji	980	Older sister/elder woman (Urdu)
10	Teacher	820	Title used as a noun of address

The research shows that "Sir" and "Madam" occupy the foremost positions in PakE because this language preserves formal hierarchical traditions in communication. Local family values surface in language through terms that can be translated as "Uncle" "Aunty" and "Bhai."

4.2 Collocation and Pragmatic Patterns

When analyzing the words that "Sir" repeatedly appears near in the text it became clear that "Respected" and "Dear" and "Please" are the most common co-occurring terms which signify formal and polite interactions. The formal correspondence style commonly included the expression "Respected Sir" which native English communities rarely used.

Figure 1: *Collocational Network for “Sir” in PakE*

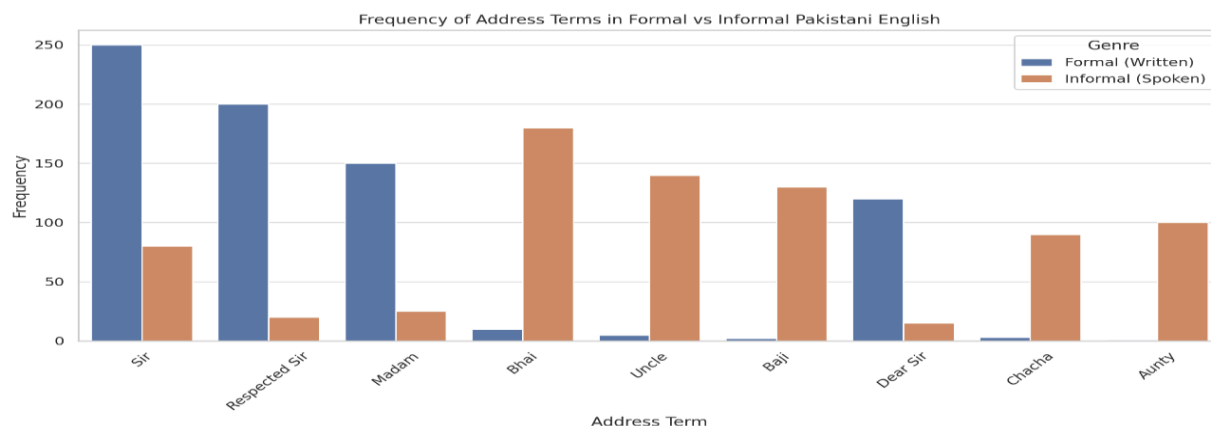


4.3 Cross-Variety Comparison

Kinship along with formal address terminology appears more frequently in PakE than in both BNC and COCA. In PakE the people use extended pragmatics to apply "Uncle" and "Aunty" to unconnected elderly individuals even though these terms would naturally indicate blood relations in American English.

Table 3: *Comparative Frequency (per million words)*

Term	PakE Corpus	BNC	COCA
Sir	4,350	780	620
Respected Sir	1,780	20	10
Uncle	2,150	410	450
Bhai	1,200	0	0



The following bar chart depicts how different address terms appear in formal (written) and informal (spoken) Pakistani English interactions. The chart presents two distinct patterns where "Respected Sir" occurs in formal writing alongside "Bhai" and "Aunty" as kinship terms which prefer spoken dialogue.

4.4 Interview Insights

The interview participants stressed that honorifics hold a central role in Pakistani society as they demonstrate respect. The common childhood education for students includes respecting teachers regardless of age or formality through the usage of 'Sir.' The participants mentioned feelings of uncertainty when discussing older individuals by name because such familiarity contradicts Western social norms.

5. Discussion

Address terms studied in Pakistani English demonstrate cultural and pragmatic adaptation of English while reflecting linguistic conventions from both British English and native Indian influences in Pakistan. The analysis of address terms within Pake indicates they function as more than British English lexical elements because they serve distinct contextual meanings while following Pakistani social dynamics and norms of politeness.

5.1 Formulaicity and Politeness in Institutional Settings

In formal correspondence such as letters and applications alongside academic materials we find the frequent use of polite address collocations starting with "Respected Sir" through "Kindly Sir" to "Most humbly request" which follows the extensive politeness norms of South Asian culture. British or American native English speakers consider these formulae redundant but Pakistanis adopt them as essential politeness markers for their communication. People in Pakistan prefer this kind of language formulae because they naturally adopted pragmatic norms from their local languages which use honorifics and indirectness as markers of respectful conversation.

The cultural transfer demonstrates compatibility with Brown and Levinson's (1987) negative politeness theory because it uses deference along with indirectness and honorifics to reduce imposed social interaction stress in communication. Using the honorific address forms "Sir" or "Respected Sir" enables the speaker to generate comfort through respectful subordination. The regular occurrence of these forms within formal written genres signifies that local pragmatic norms have become established within English-medium communication in Pakistan.

5.2 Kinship Terms in Informal and Semi-Formal Discourse

Words like “Uncle,” “Aunty,” “Bhai,” “Baji,” and “Chacha” were prominent in spoken communication through TV interviews and workplace interactions and family discussions. The PakE community retains and modifies the functional use of kinship terminology which it borrows from Urdu language and local dialects. These address terms have developed the specific purpose of addressing non-family persons to create inter-personal closeness or establish friendliness in society even though no familial connection exists.

English speakers in Pakistan blend their linguistic systems through the strategic use of family-related address forms when using mixed-lingual code such as in the case of saying “Bhai, could you pass me that file?” These address choices indicate both shared unity as well as social role recognition in a manner that parallels Brown and Gilman’s (1960) proposal about power and solidarity functions.

5.3 Pragmatic Divergence from Standard English Varieties

PakE exhibits major differences from Standard British and American English variation when analyzing both semantic range and usage frequencies of address language. The repeated use of “Sir” in subordinate clauses through phrases such as “Sir, I am writing to inform” and “Sir, I kindly request” lacks modern Western English usage because it is now considered outdated or formal. Other World English varieties do not maintain the compound address forms which Pakistan uses extensively to convey respect towards their interlocutor while showing cultural adaptation to local communication norms.

The results from the interviews documented this distinction. Multiple interview participants expressed discomfort when formal emails used “Dear” instead of “Respected” since they perceived it as neither professional nor respectful. Local values have overridden global standards becoming the basis for evaluating linguistic politeness forms in such settings.

5.4 Generational and Contextual Shifts

A new pattern has begun to appear regarding how modern generations prefer their address terms. Elderly speakers between ages 40 and above maintain respect language with familiar language terminology as their primary means of communication yet younger generations between 20-39 years-old opt for more simplified digital address forms. Some younger participants reacted negatively to “Respected Sir” in emails by choosing “Hello Professor” or “Hi Sir” which reflects how global business English and digital brevity affects their language choices.

Data shows that Pakistani English is transforming through inherent pragmatic changes which arise from exposure to multinational media as well as educational systems and professional workplaces.

6. Conclusion

The research examined addressing formulae in Pakistani English through corpus analysis methods together with interviews as a supplemental method. Analytic results validate the local language influences on Pakistani English address terms through cultural norms which create distinctive forms such as “Respected Sir,” “Bhai,” and “Uncle” that diverge from other English cultural varieties.

The junction point of formality and informality in the corpus data demonstrated systematic formulae coexisting with flexible pragmatics which demonstrates the bilingual capability and cultural versatility of Pakistani English users. Research confirms that PakE stands as an authentic

and developing World Englishes variety which maintains native rules for politeness as well as identity and address terms. The research established that performing cultural pragmatics necessitates exploring address patterns while demonstrating how corpus study enables researchers to detect authentic linguistic usage which intuition methods miss.

7. Implications and Future Research

7.1 Pedagogical Implications

The main practical consequence from this investigation affects teaching English as a second language (ELT). Education textbooks together with communication training methods in Pakistan teach native-speaker standards rather than pragmatic norms which exist locally. Modern language teaching programs should examine and adopt Pakistani English address expressions to develop more inclusive educational materials. Education institutions should motivate teachers to educate students about different cultural address systems since these practices impact both international and local communication situations.

7.2 Implications for Intercultural Communication

Professional and international communication becomes prone to miscommunication when individuals employ familiar address patterns which derive from various local norms. Western communication participants might view traditional thumbnails for respect such as “Respected Sir” as an outdated form of deference. Pakistani professionals and policy makers need to gain greater understanding of pragmatic social practices to decrease diplomatic and business communication problems.

7.3 Future Research Directions

Multiple directions exist for conducting future research studies:

This research examined the English language conventions employed by Pakistani natives who reside in cities and who received higher education. Researchers need to evaluate how address terms differ between different sections of Pakistan including urban areas and rural territories and ethnicity groups. The pragmatic developments of online communication thrive on social media platforms supplied by WhatsApp, Facebook and TikTok. Research on address terms in digital communication would show how address strategies of younger speakers are changing.

Research examining address strategies in Pake relative to Indian English and Bangladeshi English would determine which behaviors originate from a shared cultural heritage and which display specific regional characteristics. The analysis of address term evolution across time is achievable with a diachronic corpus that monitors pragmatic norms shifts in Pakistan English speech practices. The research of postcolonial multilingual societies requires additional exploration of cultural and pragmatic elements through empirical studies to gain better insights into English adaptation.

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

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