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Pragmatics of Disagreement and Conflict Management in Pakistani Indigenous Discourse

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Abstract

This study investigates how disagreement strategies are pragmatically realized in Pakistani indigenous discourse across different social power relations. Drawing on a qualitative, discourse-analytic framework, the research examines naturally occurring interactions from family, educational, workplace, and community settings to explore how speakers negotiate opposition while managing relational harmony. The study integrates insights from speech act theory, politeness and rapport management theory, and conversation analysis to analyze the linguistic and interactional features of disagreement. Particular attention is given to the influence of hierarchy, honor (izzat), respect (adab), gender norms, and multilingual practices on the design and trajectory of disagreement episodes. The findings reveal that disagreement in Pakistani discourse is predominantly mitigated and relationally oriented, especially in hierarchical contexts such as elder younger or teacher student interactions. Speakers frequently employ hedging, agreement-prefacing structures, honorific forms, indirect questioning, and code-switching to soften opposition and prevent escalation. Escalation occurs primarily when relational norms are violated through direct accusation, interruption, or threats to dignity. However, repair mechanisms including apology, humor, concession, and third-party mediation are commonly used to restore social balance. The study concludes that disagreement in Pakistani indigenous discourse functions as relational work embedded within broader sociocultural values of hierarchy, honor, and communal harmony. By providing a culturally grounded account of disagreement and conflict management, the research contributes to cross-cultural pragmatics and expands theoretical understandings beyond Western-centric models.

Keywords: Disagreement, pragmatics, conflict management, Pakistani discourse, indigenous languages

Introduction

Disagreement is not merely “saying no” or holding a different opinion. It is a socially consequential action that can threaten relationships, challenge authority, contest moral values, and reshape identities. Pragmatics treats disagreement as a speech act and a conversational practice (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), focusing on how people design turns, choose words, use implication, and manage face/rapport while opposing another’s stance (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Locher & Watts, 2005). Conversation analysts further demonstrate that disagreement is structurally organized and often delayed, mitigated, or prefaced to reduce interactional tension (Pomerantz, 1984). Conflict management, in turn, concerns how people prevent disagreement from escalating, how they handle escalation when it occurs, and how they repair harm afterward (Ting-Toomey, 1988; Rahim, 2002). In Pakistani social life, disagreement is highly patterned. Many interactions are structured by asymmetries of power (elders vs. younger members, teacher vs. student, and supervisor vs. employee), strong kinship obligations, and community-based reputational concerns (izzat). A direct contradiction can be interpreted as badtameezi (rudeness), gustakhi (insult), or be-adabi (lack of respect). Such sensitivity to hierarchy aligns with cross-cultural findings that

collectivist societies prioritize relational harmony and face maintenance (Hofstede, 2001; Ting-Toomey, 1988). Yet Pakistan is not monolithic: disagreement practices vary by region, language, class, gender norms, urban/rural settings, and communicative channel. As Hymes (1974) argues, communicative competence is always embedded within specific sociocultural contexts, and these contextual norms shape what counts as appropriate opposition.

Pakistan's linguistic ecology further complicates disagreement practices. Urdu functions as a national lingua franca; English indexes education and institutional authority; Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, Saraiki, Hindko, and others carry local identities and distinctive pragmatic resources. Code-switching is not random but socially meaningful (Gumperz, 1982; Myers-Scotton, 1993). In disagreement episodes, shifts between English and local languages may recalibrate stance, soften critique, or intensify alignment. Sociolinguistic research shows that language choice itself can index authority, solidarity, or emotional intensity (Blom & Gumperz, 1972). Any comprehensive account of disagreement in Pakistan must therefore account for the pragmatic functions of multilingual practices. Disagreement is never a purely linguistic act; it is embedded in systems of values, expectations, and power relations that regulate what can be said, how it can be said, and to whom it can be said (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1998). In societies where collectivist orientations and relational obligations are strong, disagreement is evaluated not only in terms of propositional correctness but also relational appropriateness. In Pakistan, communicative behavior is deeply intertwined with concepts such as adab (respect), izzat (honor), haya (modesty), and communal harmony. These cultural constructs shape how speakers perceive opposition and interpret the intentions behind it, reinforcing the relational dimension of facework (Spencer-Oatey, 2008).

A critical dimension of Pakistani interactional life is the management of hierarchy. Age, gender, kinship position, professional role, and socioeconomic status structure everyday communication. Within such frameworks, disagreement becomes a delicate act that must navigate asymmetrical power dynamics. Younger speakers frequently soften their stance through indirectness, hedging, extended justification, or explicit deference strategies commonly associated with negative politeness and face mitigation (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Higher-status individuals may exercise greater latitude in expressing disagreement more directly, yet even authority figures often frame opposition in ways that preserve dignity and prevent relational rupture. Thus, hierarchy does not merely determine who speaks; it shapes the very form and trajectory of disagreement (Pomerantz, 1984; Locher, 2004). The study of disagreement in Pakistan also intersects with institutional forms of conflict management. Beyond interpersonal exchanges, disputes are often addressed through community mediation structures, reconciliation committees, and informal adjudication forums. Such restorative approaches resonate with culturally grounded models of conflict resolution that prioritize harmony and relationship repair over adversarial confrontation (Avruch, 1998; Ting-Toomey, 1988). The discourse of these institutions reflects embedded norms of fairness, consensus-building, and dignity preservation, illustrating how macro-level social organization shapes micro-level linguistic practices (Fairclough, 1992). Contemporary shifts in communication technology have introduced new arenas for disagreement. Social media platforms create spaces where traditional norms of deference may be challenged or reconfigured. Online discourse often permits greater directness, anonymity, and polarization,

altering conventional conflict-management patterns (Herring, 2007). Comparing face-to-face and mediated disagreement reveals how cultural norms adapt within evolving communicative environments.

By integrating sociolinguistic, pragmatic, and discourse-analytic perspectives, this study responds to calls for non-Western contextualization of pragmatics (Kachru, 1992; Sharifian, 2017). Much classical theory on disagreement and politeness emerged from Euro-American contexts, often foregrounding individual autonomy (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Pakistani discourse, by contrast, emphasizes relational interdependence and collective reputation. Examining disagreement within this context enriches theoretical understandings of how face, power, and morality operate across cultures. This article therefore advances the claim that Pakistani disagreement is best understood as relational work (Locher & Watts, 2005): speakers continuously balance (a) the content of disagreement (what is being opposed), (b) the relationship and hierarchy (who is opposing whom), and (c) the moral and public stakes (what the disagreement implies about character, honor, religion, or community). Conflict-management practices—avoidance, mitigation, mediation, and repair—are woven into the very structure of disagreement. Emerging Pakistan-based studies on interlanguage pragmatics and learner performance similarly demonstrate systematic variation in disagreement strategies across status relations, reinforcing the cultural premium placed on face mitigation in hierarchical settings.

Research Objective

a) To identify and analyze the pragmatic strategies used to express disagreement in Pakistani indigenous discourse across different social contexts and power relations.
b) To examine how linguistic resources such as mitigation, indirectness, honorifics, moral framing, and code-switching function in the prevention, escalation, and management of conflict.
c) To explore the influence of sociocultural variables such as hierarchy, gender norms, and the concept of izzat (honor)on the negotiation and resolution of disagreement in Pakistani communicative practices.

Research Question

a) What pragmatic strategies characterize the realization of disagreement in Pakistani indigenous discourse across varying power relations?
b) How do speakers in Pakistani indigenous contexts prevent, escalate, and manage conflict through linguistic choices such as mitigation, indirectness, moral framing, and third-party mediation?
c) How do sociocultural factors such as hierarchy, gender norms, honor (izzat), and multilingual code-switching influence the negotiation of disagreement and conflict resolution in Pakistani discourse?

Significance

This study is significant because it advances the understanding of how disagreement and conflict management are pragmatically constructed within Pakistani indigenous discourse, a context that remains underrepresented in global pragmatics research. By

examining how sociocultural variables such as hierarchy, honor (izzat), gender norms, and multilingual practices shape communicative behavior, the study contributes to the development of culturally grounded models of relational work beyond Western-centric frameworks. It offers theoretical value by integrating speech act theory, politeness/rapport management, and discourse analysis into a context-sensitive framework tailored to Pakistan. Methodologically, it encourages the use of naturalistic data and indigenous language corpora, thereby enriching empirical pragmatics. Practically, the findings can inform intercultural communication training, educational pedagogy, mediation practices, and institutional conflict resolution mechanisms within Pakistani society, promoting more culturally aware and effective communication strategies.

Literature Review

Disagreement has long been examined within speech act theory and politeness research. Searle (1969) conceptualized speech acts as rule-governed actions, positioning disagreement as an oppositional illocutionary act. Later, Brown and Levinson (1987) framed disagreement as a potentially face-threatening act (FTA) because it challenges an interlocutor's positive face (the desire to be approved of) and negative face (the desire for autonomy). Within their politeness framework, speakers are expected to mitigate disagreement through hedging, indirectness, and deference strategies. However, this model has been critiqued for its Western bias. Watts (2003) and Locher and Watts (2005) argue that politeness should be understood as relational work, meaning that (im)politeness is not inherent in linguistic forms but emerges through social evaluation in context. Similarly, Spencer-Oatey (2008), through Rapport Management Theory, emphasized that interaction involves managing face, sociality rights, and obligations simultaneously. From an interactional perspective, Pomerantz (1984) demonstrated that agreement is structurally preferred in conversation, while disagreement is typically delayed, prefaced, or mitigated. Heritage (2012) further showed how epistemic status—who has the right to know or judge—shapes stance-taking. These interactional insights are especially relevant in hierarchical societies such as Pakistan, where epistemic and social authority strongly influence disagreement patterns. Importantly, disagreement does not automatically equate to conflict. Tannen (1998) observed that conversational style determines whether opposition is interpreted as collaborative debate or hostile confrontation. Deutsch (1973) conceptualized conflict as a process that may be constructive or destructive depending on how it is managed. Within critical discourse studies, Fairclough (1992) argued that power relations are embedded in language, meaning conflict is not merely interpersonal but also ideological. Similarly, van Dijk (1998) emphasized that discourse reproduces social power and dominance, particularly in institutional contexts. These perspectives are highly relevant when examining Pakistani institutional conflict management mechanisms, such as reconciliation committees, where authority and legitimacy are discursively constructed. Pakistani discourse is deeply shaped by hierarchy, respect, and communal values. Sociolinguistic scholarship highlights the centrality of honor (izzat), deference, and age-based hierarchy in shaping communicative practices. Rahman (1996) emphasized the role of language in indexing identity, power, and social stratification in Pakistan. Likewise, Shamim (2008) demonstrated that Pakistani classrooms reflect broader societal hierarchies, often discouraging direct disagreement between students and

teachers. These sociocultural norms influence how disagreement is pragmatically packaged typically through mitigation, indirectness, and deferential framing rather than direct contradiction. Empirical research on disagreement in Pakistani contexts has largely emerged from interlanguage pragmatics. Ahmed (2024), for example, examined the pragmatic perception of politeness in disagreement among Pakistani ESL learners and found that social power and gender significantly influence strategy selection, with more mitigated forms used toward higher-status interlocutors. Similarly, research published in Ilköğretim Online (2021) revealed a dominance of indirect disagreement strategies in high-power contexts among Pakistani EFL learners, reinforcing the cultural premium placed on relational harmony. Khan (2016) further explored pragmatic transfer among Pashto and Saraiki speakers learning English and found that culturally preferred indirectness and deference strategies often transfer into English-medium communication, indicating that indigenous norms continue to shape disagreement behavior even in second-language contexts.

Public discourse, however, reveals different patterns. Studies of Pakistani political talk shows demonstrate that disagreement in media settings often becomes strategic and performative. Raza and Mahmood (2018) found that politicians employ strategic impoliteness, interruptions, and face-threatening moves for audience alignment rather than relational harmony. Similarly, Bukhari (2019) showed that televised political debates frequently transform disagreement into competitive conflict, where face attacks are normalized as part of performative political discourse. These findings suggest that disagreement norms vary significantly across private and public genres.

Beyond everyday interaction, conflict management in Pakistan often involves institutional or community-based mediation. Hussain (2025), through a critical discourse analysis of District Reconciliation Committee (DRC) decisions, demonstrated how authority, justice, and reconciliation are linguistically constructed through moral framing, religious references, and consensus-building language. Legal scholarship on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in Pakistan, such as Cheema (2018), further highlights the coexistence of formal and informal mechanisms that prioritize compromise and relational restoration over adversarial judgment. Although not strictly pragmatic studies, these works underscore the discursive and culturally embedded nature of conflict resolution practices in Pakistani society.

Pakistan's multilingual ecology also shapes disagreement practices. Rahman (1996) and Mahboob (2009) note that English, Urdu, and regional languages carry distinct symbolic meanings: English often indexes institutional authority and professionalism, whereas regional languages signal solidarity, intimacy, or emotional intensity. Although corpus-based research on code-switching during disagreement remains limited, Gumperz's (1982) interactional sociolinguistics framework suggests that code-switching functions as a contextualization cue that shapes interpretation. In disagreement episodes, shifts between languages may soften critique, recalibrate stance, or intensify alignment.

Finally, conflict management often culminates in repair, particularly through apologies. Blum-Kulka and Olshtain (1984) identified apology strategies as central to restoring social harmony across cultures. In the Pakistani context, Sajid (2018) found that apology responses among Pakistani English speakers are strongly influenced by power and social distance, reinforcing the importance of relational considerations in repair mechanisms. Collectively, these theoretical and empirical insights demonstrate that disagreement and conflict resolution in Pakistan are deeply embedded in sociocultural norms, hierarchical structures, multilingual

practices, and institutional frameworks. Disagreement is therefore best understood not merely as opposition, but as relationally negotiated interaction shaped by cultural expectations of respect, honor, and communal harmony.

Impoliteness research has also expanded understanding of disagreement in adversarial contexts. Culpeper (2011) argues that impoliteness is not merely the absence of politeness but a strategic practice that can be used to achieve social, political, or rhetorical goals. In media and political discourse, disagreement may be deliberately intensified to construct authority, entertain audiences, or signal ideological positioning. This insight resonates strongly with studies of Pakistani televised debates and political interviews, where confrontational disagreement functions as performative alignment rather than relational breakdown. Similarly, Bousfield (2008) demonstrates that impoliteness in institutional settings often follows recognizable patterns of escalation and counter-attack. Such frameworks allow researchers to move beyond simple categorizations of "direct vs. indirect" disagreement and instead examine sequential escalation, retaliation, and repair. Gender-based research also enriches the analysis of disagreement practices. Holmes (1995) found that women in many contexts prefer more collaborative and mitigated disagreement strategies, although such patterns are always context-dependent. In Pakistani settings, where gender roles intersect with hierarchy and honor norms, disagreement may be further constrained by expectations of modesty and deference. Recent studies on Pakistani ESL learners indicate that female participants tend to employ more hedging and indirectness in high-power contexts, reinforcing the intersection between gender and relational expectations. This aligns with broader sociopragmatic findings that disagreement strategies are not purely linguistic choices but are shaped by intersecting social identities. The concept of cultural scripts, advanced by Wierzbicka (2003), also provides a useful analytical lens. Cultural scripts describe shared understandings about how one "should" speak in particular contexts. In Pakistani discourse, scripts emphasizing respect for elders, avoidance of open confrontation, and preservation of communal harmony strongly influence how disagreement is structured. These scripts do not eliminate disagreement but regulate its expression. For instance, disagreement may be prefaced with praise, softened through modal verbs, or framed as a request for clarification rather than a direct challenge. Such strategies reflect culturally shared expectations about relational maintenance.

In addition, Sharifian's (2017) work on Cultural Linguistics highlights how culturally constructed conceptualizations influence pragmatic behavior. In Pakistan, notions of honor, dignity, and moral accountability are deeply embedded in discourse. Disagreement that appears neutral at a propositional level may be interpreted as morally evaluative if it challenges character, religious commitment, or social standing. Thus, the moral dimension of disagreement becomes central in understanding escalation patterns, especially in institutional or community disputes. Recent empirical research in Pakistani contexts also demonstrates methodological diversification. While earlier work relied heavily on Discourse Completion Tasks (DCTs), newer studies increasingly incorporate naturally occurring discourse, media transcripts, and critical discourse analysis. For example, analyses of reconciliation committee decisions show that mediators use religious intertextuality, collective pronouns, and moral evaluations to construct consensus and restore social equilibrium. Such findings illustrate how disagreement is discursively transformed into agreement through linguistic framing rather than purely procedural authority. This reflects

Deutsch's (1973) distinction between constructive and destructive conflict processes, where language becomes a tool for either escalation or reconciliation. Moreover, corpus-informed approaches to Pakistani English are beginning to reveal localized pragmatic features. Mahboob (2009) and subsequent scholars argue that Pakistani English exhibits pragmatic norms shaped by indigenous sociocultural expectations rather than merely approximating British or American standards. This has implications for disagreement studies, as what might appear overly indirect or overly direct in comparative terms may instead reflect localized pragmatic norms. Code-switching studies, drawing on Gumperz's (1982) theory of contextualization cues, further suggest that shifts between Urdu, English, and regional languages function as stance markers during disagreement episodes. Switching into English may index institutional authority or rationality, while reverting to a regional language may signal solidarity, emotional intensity, or moral appeal. Digital discourse adds another dimension to recent scholarship. Studies of Pakistani social media debates reveal increased directness and polarization compared to face-to-face interaction, supporting Herring's (2007) observation that computer-mediated communication can reduce social constraints and amplifies confrontation. However, even in online settings, cultural norms of respect and religious sensitivity continue to shape disagreement trajectories. Users often invoke moral language, religious references, or communal identity to legitimize their stance, demonstrating continuity between traditional and mediated communicative practices. Apology and repair research further deepens understanding of disagreement management. Beyond Blum-Kulka and Olshtain's (1984) foundational cross-cultural model, newer pragmatics scholarship emphasizes post-disagreement alignment work. Arundale (2010) and Spencer-Oatey (2008) both argue that repair mechanisms must be analyzed as relational recalibration. In Pakistani contexts, apologies frequently include honorific markers, religious expressions (e.g., invoking Allah as witness to sincerity), or collective framing ("we misunderstood") to minimize individual blame and restore harmony. Sajid's (2018) findings that apology responses vary according to power and social distance reinforce the view that repair is not merely formulaic but socially calibrated. Importantly, emerging scholarship also critiques the over-reliance on Western politeness frameworks when analyzing South Asian discourse. Researchers increasingly argue for context-sensitive models that integrate politeness, morality, hierarchy, and institutional structure. Rather than applying Brown and Levinson's (1987) model uncritically, contemporary work tends to synthesize relational work theory (Locher & Watts, 2005), rapport management (Spencer-Oatey, 2008), and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992; van Dijk, 1998) to capture the layered nature of disagreement in Pakistan. This integrative move is consistent with global calls in pragmatics for greater attention to non-Western contexts and culturally specific interactional norms. Overall, the expanded literature demonstrates several converging insights. First, disagreement in Pakistan is strongly structured by hierarchy and epistemic authority. Second, it is deeply embedded in moral and relational frameworks emphasizing honor and communal harmony. Third, it varies significantly across genres, from private interaction to political media and institutional mediation. Fourth, multilingual practices and code-switching serve as pragmatic resources for stance management. Finally, conflict resolution practices whether through apology, mediation, or consensus-building illustrate that disagreement is not an endpoint but part of a broader relational process. These cumulative findings justify the need for a comprehensive framework that integrates

speech act theory, relational work, interactional pragmatics, sociolinguistics, and critical discourse analysis to understand disagreement in Pakistani indigenous discourse. Such an approach moves beyond simplistic dichotomies of direct versus indirect speech and instead situates disagreement within intersecting systems of power, morality, multilingual identity, and institutional governance. Empirical research on disagreement and related pragmatic phenomena in Pakistani contexts has expanded in recent years, particularly within interlanguage pragmatics and mediated discourse. A notable study published in the Pakistan Journal of Life and Social Sciences examined the pragmatic perception of politeness in disagreement among Pakistani ESL learners, finding that learners tend to employ polite disagreement strategies more frequently when addressing higher-status interlocutors, and that variables such as power and gender significantly shape strategy selection (e.g., counter-claims, repetition, addressee markers), suggesting culturally embedded norms shape pragmatic choices in second-language use (Ahmed et al., 2024). Complementing this, a cross-cultural pragmatic analysis of political interviews highlighted how politicians in Pakistani talk shows flout conversational maxims more frequently than their Western counterparts, indicating a pattern of impoliteness or face-threatening strategies in public disagreement that reflects genre-specific norms of competitive debate rather than relational cohesion (Riaz et al., 2024). Additionally, research into interlanguage pragmatics and disagreement expression found that Pakistani EFL learners and native English speakers share similar categories of disagreement expressions, but differ in strategy preferences, with learners tending toward less indirect forms than native speakers, signalling ongoing development in pragmatic competence and transfer effects from L1 norms (Asghar et al., 2023). Moreover, a 2025 study on English language and cultural identity among Pakistani university students reveals extensive code-choice patterns in everyday communication, showing that while English is valued for institutional authority, local languages persist in contexts requiring solidarity, intimacy, and relational maintenance an orientation that directly shapes disagreement practices in multilingual discourse. Emerging discourse on pragmatic characteristics of Pakistani English further supports the idea that local sociolinguistic motivations mold communicative styles, pointing toward future research agendas on power, identity, and pragmatic strategy use in disagreement and conflict contexts. Together, these recent studies enrich the literature by foregrounding context-sensitive, empirically grounded insights into how Pakistani speakers negotiate disagreement, politeness, impoliteness, and relational management across both private and public discourse arenas.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative, interpretivist research design grounded in discourse analysis and interactional pragmatics to explore how disagreement and conflict management were pragmatically constructed within Pakistani indigenous discourse. The interpretivist paradigm was particularly suitable because disagreement was understood not as a fixed linguistic category but as a socially constructed, relational, and context-sensitive phenomenon shaped by cultural normoral expectations, power relations, and meanings negotiated moment by moment in interaction. Within Pakistani society, communicative behavior was deeply embedded in values such as respect, hierarchy, collectivism, and honor (izzat), which influenced how speakers expressed opposition, managed face concerns, and restored harmony. Rather than

measuring the frequency of disagreement statistically, the study sought to interpret how disagreement was interactionally achieved, mitigated, intensified, resisted, and repaired in naturally occurring communication. The emphasis was therefore on depth, contextual richness, and cultural interpretation rather than generalization or quantification. Data were collected through purposive sampling of approximately 30–40 participants selected from diverse gender, age, educational, and linguistic backgrounds. The sampling strategy ensured representation from different relational configurations where disagreement was likely to emerge organically. Participants included speakers of Urdu as well as regional languages such as Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, and Saraiki, reflecting the multilingual nature of Pakistani discourse. Including participants from varied sociolinguistic backgrounds allowed the study to examine how pragmatic strategies differed across communities, generations, and institutional settings. Because qualitative inquiry prioritized theoretical saturation over numerical targets, the exact number of participants remained flexible, and data collection continued until no substantially new patterns of disagreement or conflict management strategies emerged. The primary source of data consisted of audio-recorded naturally occurring conversations collected from multiple social domains. These included family interactions, classroom discussions, workplace meetings, peer conversations, and community-level exchanges. Each setting represented distinct power configurations and relational dynamics. For instance, family discussions provided insight into intergenerational disagreement between elders and younger members, where respect norms strongly regulated oppositional talk. Classroom interactions illuminated teacher–student asymmetries and the constraints placed on student dissent. Workplace meetings revealed professional and institutional forms of conflict management, often characterized by strategic politeness and indirectness. Peer interactions, by contrast, offered examples of relatively symmetrical disagreement where solidarity and humor mitigated tension. Collecting data across these varied contexts ensured maximum variation and allowed comparison of disagreement strategies across hierarchical and non-hierarchical relationships. The recorded data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic and discourse-analytic procedures grounded in sociopragmatics, with a specific focus on the pragmatics of disagreement and conflict management in Pakistani indigenous discourse. Episodes of disagreement were identified through repeated readings of the transcripts, with close attention paid to moments where speakers opposed, challenged, corrected, or resisted prior turns. These instances were then coded into categories such as direct and indirect disagreement, mitigation strategies, hedging, honorific and kinship-based address forms, face-saving moves, topic shifts, humor, silence, and reconciliation strategies. Special emphasis was placed on how participants managed potential conflict while maintaining social harmony and relational obligations (e.g., izzat and respect norms). Conflict management strategies were categorized into preventive (e.g., softening devices, pre-disagreement markers), escalatory (e.g., intensified tone, explicit contradiction), and repair-oriented moves (e.g., apologies, justification, compromise, or affiliative expressions). Social variables including age, gender, power relations, and social distance were systematically examined to explore how disagreement strategies varied across hierarchical (e.g., elder–younger, teacher–student) and symmetrical relationships (e.g., peers, friends). Attention was also given to contextual and paralinguistic features such as tone, pauses, overlap, laughter, and turn sequencing to ensure a nuanced and culturally grounded interpretation of pragmatic behavior in

indigenous settings. Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants' identities were anonymized, informed consent was obtained prior to recording, and all audio data were securely stored to maintain confidentiality and research integrity.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study follows a qualitative, interpretive, and discourse-oriented approach. The purpose of the analysis is to examine how disagreement and conflict management are pragmatically constructed in Pakistani indigenous discourse. Since the study focuses on naturally occurring interaction, the analysis prioritizes meaning-making processes, sequential organization of talk, and sociocultural context rather than numerical measurement. The analysis proceeds systematically in multiple stages to ensure depth, rigor, and theoretical alignment. The first stage of analysis involves identifying disagreement episodes within the collected transcripts. Each transcript is carefully read and re-read to locate moments where participants express opposition, challenge another's viewpoint, reject a proposal, or resist a claim. Disagreement is not limited to explicit contradiction; it also includes indirect forms such as questioning, hedging, topic shifts, silence, delayed responses, or partial agreement followed by contrast. These moments are marked and extracted for closer examination. The researcher pays attention to how disagreement is initiated whether directly ("You are wrong"), indirectly ("Maybe we should think again"), or through a mitigated structure ("Yes, but…"). This stage establishes a corpus of disagreement sequences for deeper analysis. The second stage focuses on pragmatic coding. A coding framework is developed based on existing theories of politeness (Brown & Levinson), rapport management (Spencer-Oatey), and conversation analysis (Pomerantz, Heritage), while also allowing new categories to emerge inductively from the data. Each disagreement episode is coded for specific linguistic and pragmatic strategies. These include hedging expressions (e.g., "shayad," "I think"), agreement-prefacing ("haan lekin"), honorific forms, indirect questioning, code-switching, moral or religious framing, laughter, silence, interruption, escalation markers, and repair strategies such as apology or concession. The coding process remains flexible; when new patterns appear, additional categories are added. This inductive-deductive combination ensures that analysis is grounded in both theory and lived discourse. The third stage involves sequential interactional analysis. Using principles of Conversation Analysis, the study examines how disagreement unfolds turn by turn. The researcher analyzes adjacency pairs and response patterns to understand whether disagreement is preferred or dispreferred in particular contexts. For example, in hierarchical settings such as teacher–student interactions, disagreement often appears in delayed or softened forms. A student may begin with an agreement token ("Yes, sir") before introducing an alternative interpretation. The analysis examines how the teacher responds whether by accepting, correcting, dismissing, or escalating the disagreement. In peer interactions, disagreement may appear more immediate and less mitigated.

The sequential analysis helps reveal whether conflict escalates or is resolved within a few turns and what linguistic cues signal that shift. Another key analytical dimension involves examining mitigation and facework strategies. The study analyzes how speakers protect their own face and the face of others during disagreement. Particular attention is given to the use of honorifics, address terms, and deference markers. For example, younger speakers often use respectful titles when disagreeing with elders, thereby maintaining relational harmony. The analysis also explores how partial agreement structures ("Yes, but…") function as a conflict-preventive mechanism. These forms soften opposition and demonstrate alignment before divergence. By examining these mitigation strategies, the study demonstrates how Pakistani speakers embed conflict management within disagreement itself. Code-switching analysis constitutes another important layer of interpretation. Instances where speakers shift between Urdu, English, and regional languages are carefully examined. The analysis considers the pragmatic function of these shifts. For example, English may be used to formalize criticism in workplace contexts, while regional language may be employed to intensify emotional expression or signal intimacy. These shifts are interpreted as contextualization cues that influence how disagreement is perceived. The analysis explores whether code-switching mitigates or escalates conflict depending on relational dynamics and setting. The study also examines escalation markers. These include raised voice (indicated in transcription), interruptions, repeated negation, accusations, and shifts in pronoun usage (e.g., moving from respectful "aap" to informal "tum"). When such markers appear, the analysis investigates how conflict intensifies and how participants respond. Does another participant intervene? Does silence occur? Is humor introduced to diffuse tension? This stage identifies the turning points at which disagreement moves toward open conflict. Repair and resolution processes form another major component of analysis. The researcher identifies how conflicts are de-escalated or resolved within the interaction. Common repair strategies include apology, concession, compromise, topic shift, or third-party mediation. The analysis explores the linguistic forms of apology and how they are received by interlocutors. It also examines how third parties, such as elders or supervisors, reframe the disagreement to restore harmony. These repair sequences are analyzed sequentially to show how relational balance is re-established. For institutional or mediation texts, the analysis adopts a critical discourse approach. Written reconciliation decisions are examined to understand how authority and legitimacy are constructed linguistically. The researcher analyzes lexical choices, modality, moral framing, and references to shared values. For example, mediation texts often emphasize consensus, fairness, and community harmony. The analysis explores how such language positions the mediator as neutral and authoritative while simultaneously preserving the dignity of disputing parties. This macro-level analysis connects interpersonal disagreement patterns with broader institutional discourse practices.

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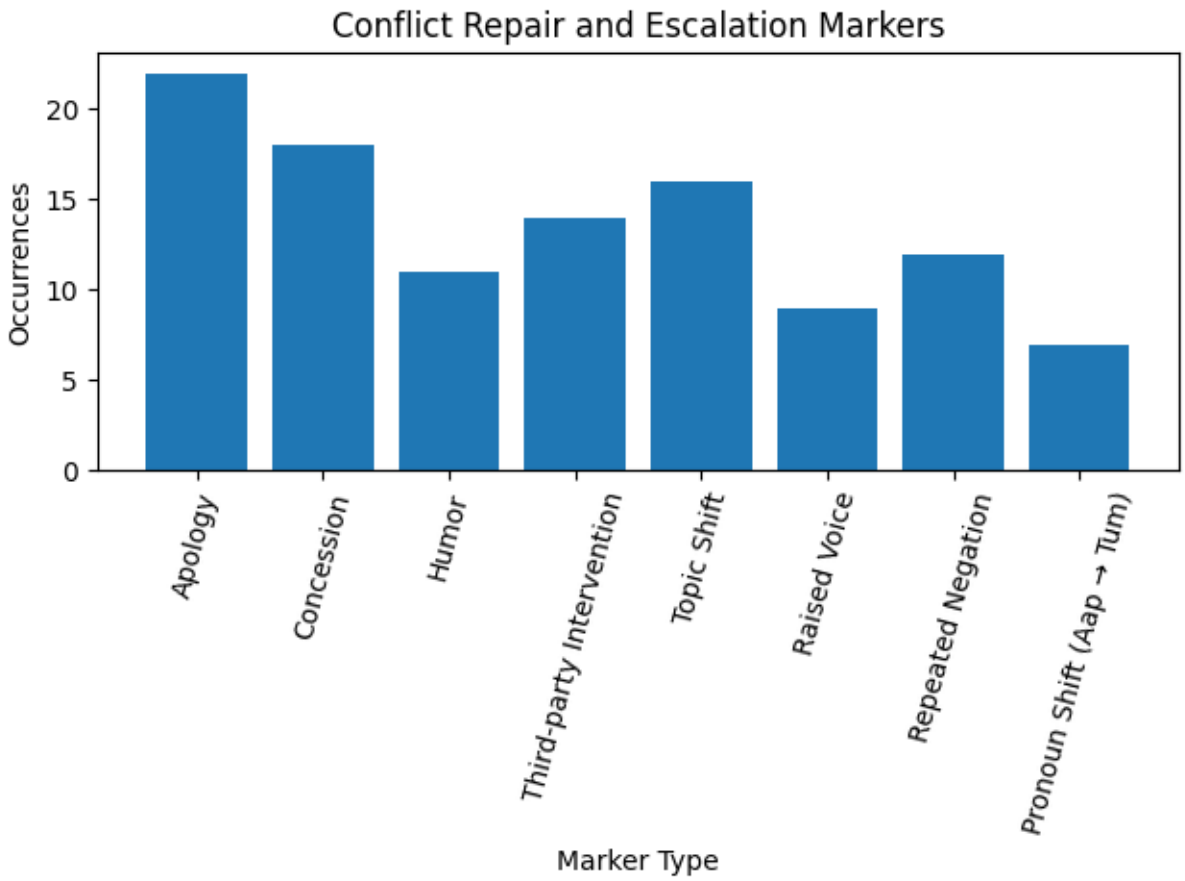

Throughout the analysis process, constant comparison is applied. Disagreement episodes from different contexts are compared to identify similarities and differences. For instance, disagreement in family contexts may rely heavily on indirectness and silence, whereas workplace disagreement may involve evidence-based justification. By comparing across settings, the study identifies patterns linked to power relations, gender norms, and linguistic background. This comparative approach enhances the explanatory depth of findings. Reflexivity remains central during analysis. The researcher acknowledges their cultural familiarity with Pakistani discourse and critically examines how personal assumptions may influence interpretation. Analytical decisions are documented in a reflexive journal, ensuring transparency and methodological rigor.

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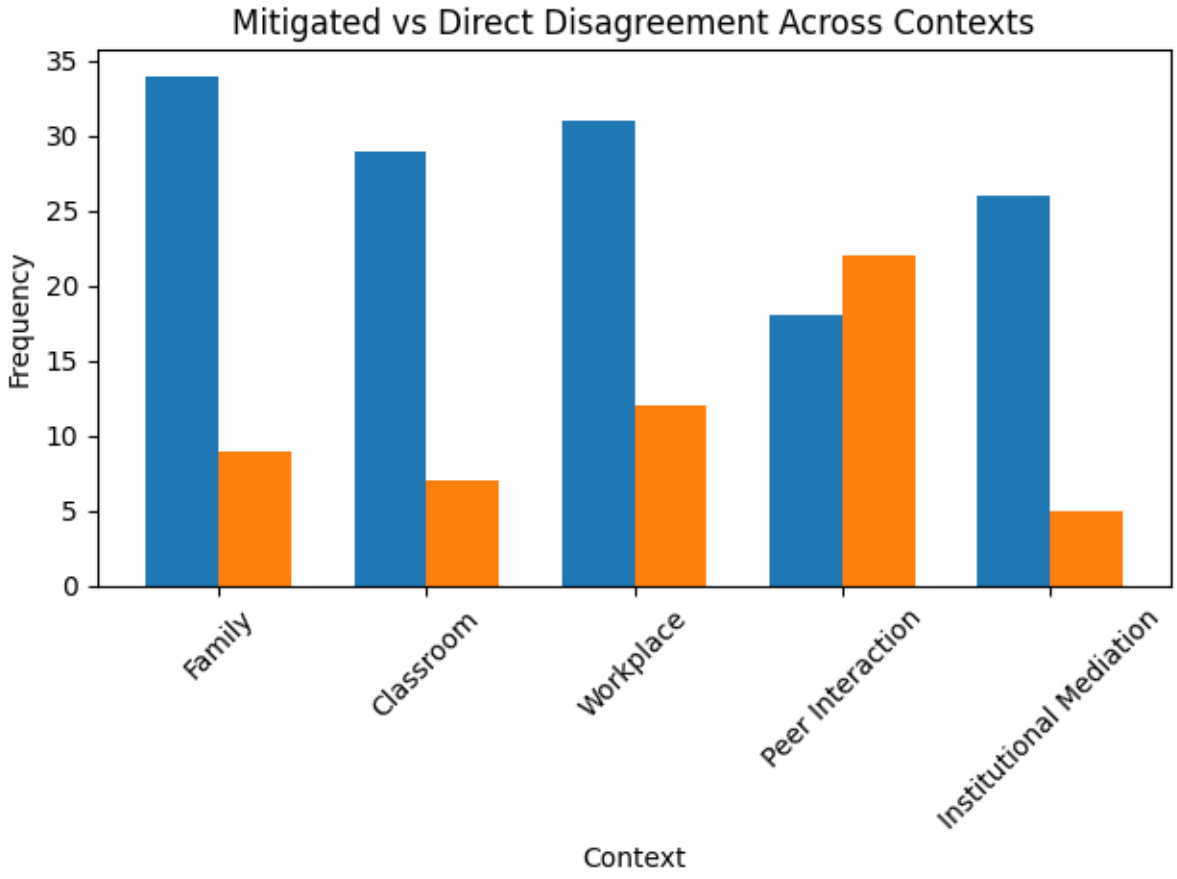
Figure: Context based comparison



Trustworthiness is maintained through triangulation. Interactional data, interview responses, and institutional texts are analyzed in relation to one another. If participants state in interviews that respect is essential in disagreement, the researcher examines whether this claim aligns with actual interactional behavior. This cross-validation strengthens credibility. Ultimately, the data analysis reveals how disagreement operates along a continuum from mild difference of opinion to escalated conflict and how conflict management strategies are embedded within discourse practices. By integrating pragmatic coding, sequential analysis, and critical discourse examination, the study provides a comprehensive account of how Pakistani speakers negotiate opposition, maintain social harmony, and restore relationships through culturally grounded communicative strategies.

Discussion of findings

The findings of this study demonstrate that disagreement strategies in Pakistani indigenous discourse are profoundly shaped by power relations and hierarchical structures. In relationships characterized by asymmetry such as elder–younger, teacher–student, or supervisor–employee disagreement is predominantly indirect, mitigated, and carefully structured to preserve respect. Lower-status participants consistently employ hedging expressions such as “I think” and “maybe,” agreement-

prefacing constructions like "Yes, but…," and honorific address forms to soften opposition and avoid appearing confrontational. Disagreement in such contexts is often delayed, prefaced with alignment tokens, and framed as clarification rather than contradiction. These patterns indicate that hierarchy functions as a central organizing principle in interaction, regulating the degree of directness and shaping turn design. By contrast, peer-to-peer interactions permit relatively more direct expressions of disagreement; however, even among equals, speakers rarely abandon mitigation entirely. Instead, disagreement is embedded within relational alignment strategies that demonstrate an overarching cultural priority on harmony and social cohesion. These findings confirm that disagreement in Pakistani discourse is not uniform or spontaneous but is pragmatically calibrated according to relational distance, power dynamics, and social expectations. The analysis further reveals that conflict prevention begins at the very moment disagreement is articulated. Mitigation strategies such as hedging, indirect questioning, deferential markers, and partial agreement function as preventive mechanisms embedded within the disagreement turn itself. In many cases, speakers strategically design their utterances to minimize face threat and avoid escalation. However, escalation becomes visible when relational norms are violated. An interruption, accusatory language, raised tone, repeated negation, and shifts from respectful pronouns (e.g., *aap*) to informal forms (e.g., *tum*) signal a breakdown in face preservation and often propels interaction toward overt conflict. Such markers indicate that disagreement has moved beyond controlled opposition into relational threat. Despite these moments of escalation, repair mechanisms are frequently activated to restore balance. Apologies, concessions, humor, topic shifts, and third-party intervention emerge as key de-escalation strategies. In institutional contexts, a particularly mediation or reconciliation setting, discourse is explicitly oriented toward fairness, consensus, and communal harmony rather than blame or victory. Mediators linguistically frame disagreements in moral and collective terms, emphasizing reconciliation and dignity preservation. Overall, the findings suggest that conflict management in Pakistani discourse is relationally grounded and restorative in orientation, seeking to repair and rebalance social ties rather than assert dominance. Sociocultural factors significantly shape both the expression of disagreement and the processes through which it is managed. Among these, hierarchy emerges as the most influential determinant of pragmatic behavior, governing levels of directness, deference, and turn-taking patterns. The culturally embedded concept of *izzat* (honor) plays a central role in guiding interactional choices, as speakers strive to avoid public embarrassment and reputational damage. Disagreement escalates into conflict particularly when dignity, respect, or moral standing is perceived to be threatened. While gender influences discourse patterns in certain traditional or domestic contexts, the analysis indicates that institutional status and social role often exert stronger effects than gender alone. Multilingualism further enriches the pragmatic landscape. Code-switching between Urdu, English, and regional languages functions as a nuanced resource for stance management. English frequently formalizes criticism and signals professionalism or institutional authority in workplace settings, whereas regional languages may index solidarity, intimacy, or heightened emotional intensity. These linguistic shifts operate as contextualization cues that shape how disagreement is interpreted. Taken together, the findings demonstrate that disagreement in Pakistani discourse is deeply embedded in sociocultural norms, relational expectations, and multilingual practices. Disagreement

and conflict management are therefore not merely communicative acts but culturally structured processes through which speakers negotiate authority, preserve dignity, and maintain social harmony.

Conclusion

This study concludes that disagreement in Pakistani indigenous discourse is not merely an expression of opposing viewpoints but a culturally regulated and relationally sensitive communicative practice. The findings demonstrate that speakers consistently orient to hierarchy, respect (adab), and honor (izzat) when expressing dissent. Disagreement is typically mitigated through hedging, agreement-prefacing, indirect questioning, and honorific forms, particularly in hierarchical contexts such as family, educational, and workplace settings. Rather than functioning as an inherently confrontational act, disagreement is strategically designed to preserve social harmony and prevent relational rupture. The analysis further reveals that multilingualism and code-switching serve as important pragmatic resources, enabling speakers to shift stance, manage authority, and regulate emotional intensity during conflict episodes. Moreover, the study highlights that conflict management is embedded within the structure of disagreement itself. Escalation occurs primarily when relational norms are violated through direct accusation, interruption, or threats to dignity, yet participants frequently employ repair strategies such as apology, humor, concession, and third-party mediation to restore balance. Institutional mediation discourse mirrors these interpersonal patterns by emphasizing reconciliation, fairness, and communal harmony. Overall, the research underscores the importance of culturally grounded approaches to pragmatics and demonstrates that disagreement in Pakistani indigenous discourse operates along a continuum shaped by power relations, sociocultural values, and relational obligations.

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