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LANGUAGE, GENDER, AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN HIGH- AND LOW-CONTEXT SOCIETIES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATION PATTERNS AND CULTURAL FEATURES IN THE USA AND SAUDI ARABIA

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ABSTRACT

The current paper explores the communication style in high and low context cultures by exploring the connection between language, gender and identity in two opposite culture context the United States and Saudi Arabia. The study uses the concept of contextual communication proposed by Hall (1976) and cultural dimensions introduced by Hofstede (2008) to find out ways in which cultural norms affect verbal and nonverbal communication practices. Specifically, it examines the interactional characteristics of silence, politeness strategies, naming patterns, eye contact, and participation in the society have a different working in a society of either individualistic or collectivistic orientation. This paper claims that the patterns of communication are deeply rooted within the structure of social and cultural expectations, particularly, in the gender roles. In low-context societies such as the United States, communication is usually straightforward, clear, and individualistic where assertiveness and verbal involvement are normally an indication of competence and confidence. Conversely, high context cultures, like Saudi Arabia, place importance on indirectness, relational harmony, and contextual awareness, silence, respect of hierarchy, and indirect speech can be signs of politeness and social awareness. The analysis also shows that gender norms influence the ways people conduct their interaction by determining the degree of involvement, power, and exposure in the open discourse.

Keywords: *High/Low-Context Culture, Communication Style, Cultural Features, Individualism, Collectivism, High/Low-Context Messages*

Introduction

Hall (1959) defines culture as the way of life of a people: the sum of their learned behavior patterns, attitudes and material things. Culture is often subliminal; an imperceptible control mechanism operating in our thoughts (Hall, 1983). A cultural norm refers to acceptable conduct in society and acts as a guideline for behavior, dress, language, and mannerisms in a situation.

According to Wikipedia, 'culture is an umbrella term which incorporates the social behavior and norms found in human societies, as well as the knowledge, beliefs, arts, laws, customs, capabilities, and habits of the individuals in these groups. Humans acquire culture through the learning processes of enculturation and socialization, as shown by the diversity of cultures across societies. A cultural norm refers to an acceptable conduct in society; it acts as a

guideline for behavior, dress, language, and mannerisms in a situation, which serves as a model for expectations in a social group. Accepting only a monoculture within a social group involves risks, just as a single species can wilt in the face of environmental change due to a lack of efficient responses.

Research Questions

1. How do high-context and low-context orientations shape communicative practices in the United States and Saudi Arabia?
2. How are communicative practices gendered across both contexts?
3. How do silence, directness, gaze, politeness, and naming function as indexical markers of identity?
4. How do contextual norms generate intercultural misunderstandings?
5. How can contextual communication theory be conceptualized through an intersectional lens?

Objectives

The purpose of this article is to analyze and interpret different communication styles and cultural features in the USA and Saudi Arabia. Awareness of such differences can lead to a better understanding and more effective cross-cultural communication. This article aims to contribute to foreign language education, cross-cultural communication, bilingualism and multiculturalism.

- To analyze and interpret communication styles and cultural features in the USA and Saudi Arabia.
- To contribute to cross-cultural communication, bilingualism, and multicultural awareness.
- To examine how language practices construct cultural and gendered identities.
- To explore gendered norms in silence, politeness, eye contact, and naming practices across cultures.

Literature Review

Hall conceptualized cultures along a continuum of contextual reliance, arguing that high-context societies depend heavily on shared background knowledge, implicit cues, and relational understanding, whereas low-context societies privilege explicit verbalization. However, critics have noted that the model requires refinement to avoid cultural determinism.

Hofstede's individualism–collectivism dimension complements Hall's theory by linking communication style to broader value systems. Individualist cultures prioritize autonomy and clarity, while collectivist cultures emphasize relational harmony and social cohesion. Yet such macro-level frameworks must be contextualized within lived interactional realities.

Sociocultural linguistics reconceptualizes identity as emergent and indexical. According to this approach, linguistic forms do not simply reflect identity; they actively construct it. Gender, from a performative perspective, is constituted through repeated discursive acts rather than fixed attributes. Thus, communicative choices are central to identity construction.

Politeness theory and rapport management frameworks further demonstrate that communication involves the negotiation of face, dignity, and relational positioning. These theories highlight how indirectness, mitigation, and deference strategies may function differently depending on cultural and institutional contexts.

Recent work in intercultural pragmatics emphasizes co-construction of meaning and challenges static cultural categorizations. Instead of viewing culture as deterministic, scholars advocate examining how individuals draw upon cultural resources dynamically in interaction.

Research Gap

Despite extensive scholarship, three gaps remain evident. First, high- and low-context research often treats culture as homogeneous and insufficiently theorizes gender as a mediating variable. Second, many comparative studies remain at the macro-descriptive level without analyzing specific interactional resources such as silence, gaze, and naming as identity-indexing mechanisms. Third, comparisons between the United States and Saudi Arabia frequently focus on business etiquette rather than discursive

identity construction. Addressing these gaps requires a theoretically integrated framework.

Theoretical Framework: Language, Gender, and Identity

Language is a primary site for the construction and negotiation of identity (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). Identity is dynamic, interactionally achieved, and context-dependent. Gender is understood as a social practice rather than a biological given (Butler, 1990). Linguistic behavior both reflects and reproduces culturally sanctioned gender roles.

In high-context cultures, meaning is embedded in shared assumptions and social relations, often reinforcing gendered expectations of modesty, deference, and hierarchy. In contrast, low-context cultures promote explicitness and verbal assertiveness, which may align differently with gender norms. Integrating Hall's theory with sociolinguistic approaches enables a multidimensional analysis of language as a cultural, gendered, and identity-shaping resource. The context is defined circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood.

According to Edward Hall (1959/1976), "The cultures of the world can be compared on a scale from high to low context". He divides cultures into individualistic and collectivist ones.

An Individualistic culture is a society characterized by individualism, prioritizing the individual over the group. Individualistic cultures are concerned with the self, emphasizing independence rather than group identification.

A Collectivist culture focuses on the needs and goals of the group rather than on individual needs and desires. In such cultures, relationships with other members of the group and the interconnectedness between people play a central role in each person's identity.

Edward Hall asserts that individualistic and collectivist cultures communicate differently, and that a high-context message in a collectivist culture is one in which most of the information conveyed rests in the context of the interaction. This means that the *setting, the topic, and other situational factors* are interpreted as carrying a large part of the message, depending on the participants' statuses. Listeners from high-context cultures/collectivists tend to interpret what others say as an expression of the context; that is, they find meaning in factors external to the speaker.

Body language and gestures are part of the context, too (e.g. smiles, the speaker's posture, etc.). Hall says that in such a message, "very little is in the coded, explicit, transmitted part of the message". He means that the verbal statement, i.e., "what is said," doesn't convey what the speaker intends to communicate. To fully understand what is said, the listener has to rely heavily on working out what the speaker's intentions are.

In individualistic cultures, a low-context message involves words and phrases that carry the main message. If the listener can understand the grouping pattern of these words and phrases, they can comprehend the main idea of what the speaker wants to communicate. Listeners from low-context cultures not only pay attention to the literal message in the words and phrases the speaker uses but may also decode interpretations of the speaker's meaning based on their personality. There is a strong relationship between high- and low-context communication and individualistic and collectivistic cultures. A majority of individualistic cultures prefer low-context messages, while most collectivistic cultures involve high-context ones. This dimension is defined by Hofstede (2008) as "the degree to which individuals are integrated into groups. The individualist side includes societies in which the connections between individuals are loose. On the other hand, collectivist societies are characterized by people who are integrated into strong, cohesive in-groups, often extended families.

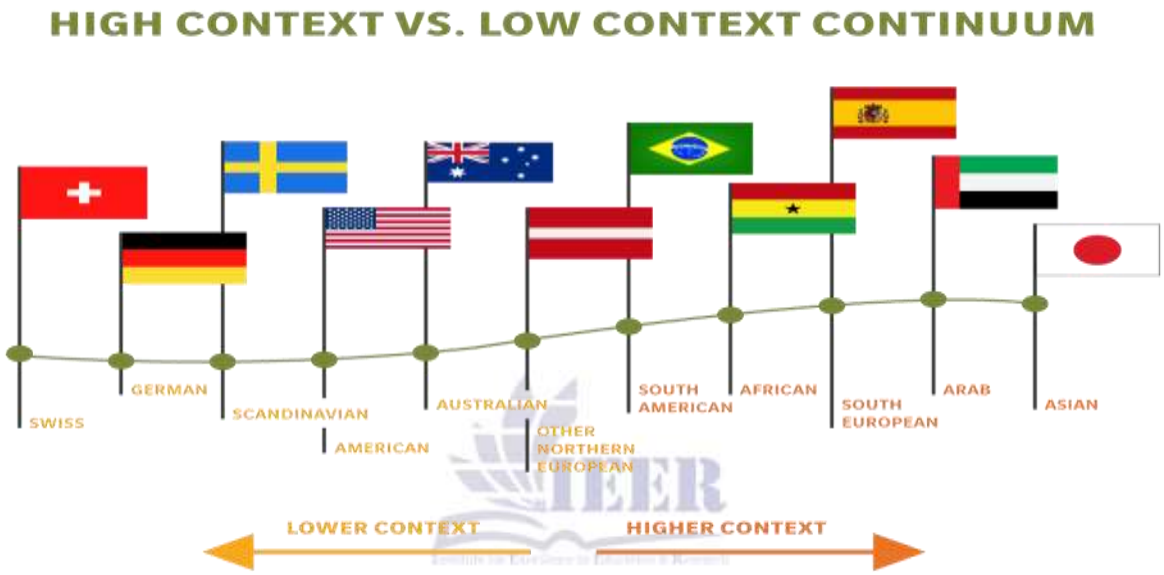
High-context cultures make a greater distinction between insiders and outsiders than low-context cultures do, and don't perceive people as individuals as much as they see them as group members. The United States is one of the cultures that involve low-context messages. The Arabs and most Asian cultures are generally at the high-context end of the continuum. It's

noteworthy that arriving at intentions is not just about conveying linguistic expression. It always requires the listener's interpretive powers to comprehend what the speaker wants to communicate. So mutual assumptions provided by the context always matter to some extent.

High-Context and Low-Context Cultures

According to Edward Hall (1959/1976), cultures can be compared along a high-to-low context scale. High-context cultures rely heavily on implicit messages and shared understanding, whereas low-context cultures depend on explicit verbal communication. There is a strong relationship between high- and low-context communication and collectivist and individualist cultures, as supported by Hofstede's (2008) individualism–collectivism dimension.

Here is an overview of cultures with high and low-context continuum. Fig 1



Hall (1976) categorizes cultures into high- and low-context cultures to understand their basic differences in communication style, values, relationships, work ethics, and cultural issues. Communication style pertains to ways of expressing oneself, and cultural issues refer to certain societal factors, such as a country's status, history, religion, and traditions. Cultural issues also involve Hofstede's (2008) individualism vs. collectivism dimension.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretive research design grounded in sociocultural linguistics and discourse analysis. Rather than relying on large-scale quantitative datasets, the study employs illustrative data to examine how language, gender, and identity are interactionally constructed in high- and low-context cultures. This approach is particularly suitable for identity-oriented research, where meaning is derived from patterned communicative practices rather than statistical generalization.

The methodological framework is informed by Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociocultural linguistic model of identity, which conceptualizes identity as emergent, relational, and indexical. According to this framework, identities are produced through social interaction, indexed through linguistic and paralinguistic features, and negotiated in relation to power and ideology. In the present study, communicative practices such as silence, politeness strategies, eye contact, naming conventions, and turn-taking are treated as indexical resources through which speakers perform gendered and cultural identities.

The illustrative data presented in this article consists of reported observations, discourse examples, and small-scale pilot survey tendencies drawn from intercultural communication

contexts in the United States and Saudi Arabia. These data are not intended to be statistically representative; rather, they serve an analytical purpose to highlight recurring sociolinguistic patterns that align with Hall's high- and low-context communication model and with existing research on language, gender, and identity.

I have presented below the salient features of high-context and low-context societies and the differences between them.

Table 1: Main differences between high-context and low-context societies

	Low-context	High-context
Example countries	US,UK, Canada, Germany, Denmark, Norway	Japan, China, Korea, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, France, Italy, Spain,
Communication	Direct/Verbal over non-verbal, truthful	Indirect/Non-verbal over verbal, truthfulness is subjective
Relationships	fragile bonds with family and community, focus on individual needs	Affiliation to family and community, long-term relationships, focus on collective needs
Work ethic	Task-oriented	Relationship -oriented
Sense of time	Highly organized	flexible
Knowledge	Explicit, conscious	Implicit, not fully conscious
Decision Process	Logical,linear, rule-oriented	Intuitive, relational
Business Outlook	Competitive	Co-operative

Deconstructing low- and high-context societies

Within the context of viewing cultures as low-context and high-context societies, Samovar and Porter (1991) argue that the interpretations of messages that we develop are based on three sets of constructs.

1) Belief/ value/attitude systems
2) World view
3) Social organization

They go on to break down these constructs in the following pattern.

Beliefs, values, attitude systems. Our beliefs are what we accept as a source of knowledge (for example, it could be the Bible, the Qur'an, even animal entrails or tea leaves, etc.). Our values are the merits of our society; they involve certain rules that a culture has subconsciously adopted to avoid conflicts within a given society.

World view. For Porter and Samovar, a worldview pertains to a culture's moral principles and values it implements in its daily life, such as God (religion), humanity, and the world of nature.

Social organization. Social organization refers to how a culture organizes itself, the institutions it establishes, and its values. It also involves issues such as the use of space, the concept of time, and what these mean to us. Whether a culture is high- or low-context depends on how all these paradigms are interpreted within a given culture, but social organization is particularly important.

Areas of potential differences

In a cross-cultural communication, there are five interactional elements that speakers must consider how to handle:

1. If and when silence is valued,
2. How and what's appropriate in common conversational exchanges varies,
3. What counts as politeness?
4. How to make requests?
5. How power differentials are verbalized?
6. How do these elements function in different societies is illustrated?

There are two main reasons for choosing these elements.

First, they are all obvious components of interpersonal talk across cultures. For example,

requesting that someone may do something for you is something you often have to do.

Second, there are approaches about which different cultures can have various ideas about what's a suitable approach and what's not. Politeness is discussed on its own, but you'll see how it affects almost all ingredients of conversation as well.

Analytical Discussion:

Importance of Silence in Western and Eastern Culture:

When should you remain silent and when not? Remaining silent unless you're invited to speak is preferred in many collectivistic cultures, especially if you are the less dominant person in a relationship. By Western standards, people from many Asian cultures are considered too silent or hesitant to speak up for themselves. "So and so doesn't hold up his end of the conversation," some Westerners may think. But in some Western cultures, such as among some Scandinavians, silence is the best choice unless the person has something urgent to say. Finns also prefer to say little. In Sweden, silence is greatly valued. Even five to six sentences in a conversation will be enough for a good discussion, according to Ellen Fredsted. In Arab and Asian cultures, silence is highly valued, depending on the situation. For example, in a family gathering with parents or the elderly, a certain level of respect is always maintained while being silent in front of them, or saying just a few polite words is highly regarded.

On the other hand, for most North Americans, silences maintained for very long are a sign of some kind of failure of connection between the speakers. A consultant recounted an incident in which his professor organized a group of Indians and assigned them a topic to discuss. "Most did not participate and those who did participate knew the least," the narrator says. Those who knew the most said such things as "I don't know, what do you think, I guess so. That sounds all right to me." At the other extreme, in Antigua, the West Indies, loud talk is frequent and talk can become a competition of who can rule the conversational floor.

Gendered Interpretation of Communication Practices

Silence functions as both a cultural and gendered practice. In collectivist societies, silence often signals respect and deference, expectations more strongly imposed on women and younger speakers (Tannen, 1994). Eye contact norms similarly regulate gendered behavior. Naming practices and address forms further reflect patriarchal lineage and identity formation in Saudi culture, while American conventions emphasize individual identity.

Table 2: Gendered Use of Silence in High- and Low-Context Cultures

Context Observed	Practice	Identity Interpretation
USA (Low-context)	Silence interpreted as disengagement; verbal participation encouraged	Assertiveness indexes competence and confidence
Saudi Arabia (High-context)	Silence valued as respect, especially from women and younger speakers	Deference indexes relational and gendered identity

In American corporate meetings, female professionals often use mitigated directives such as 'I was wondering if we could consider...' or 'Maybe it would be helpful to...' These hedges function strategically to balance authority with approachability. Male counterparts may employ direct imperatives without similar evaluation, illustrating the persistence of a gendered double bind even within a low-context system.

In Saudi corporate environments, indirect phrasing may reflect relational awareness rather than insecurity. A female employee addressing a senior male manager may preface suggestions with collective references or respectful framing. This aligns with hierarchical and modesty norms embedded within high-context communication.

In U.S. university classrooms, active participation and sustained eye contact are interpreted as

engagement. Women are encouraged to speak assertively; however, research indicates that overly assertive women may be labeled negatively, revealing subtle gendered expectations within ostensibly egalitarian systems.

In Saudi educational settings, classroom dynamics may shift between same-gender and mixed-gender spaces. Women often display strong verbal participation in same-gender environments, while adopting moderated interactional styles in mixed contexts. Silence may signal cultural appropriateness rather than lack of knowledge.

Gaze practices highlight ideological differences. In American leadership culture, sustained eye contact signals confidence. In Saudi contexts, particularly in cross-gender interactions, moderated gaze may indicate modesty and moral propriety. These nonverbal differences illustrate how identity is embodied through culturally specific norms.

Address forms further differentiate communicative systems. First-name address in the United States indexes equality and reduced power distance. In Saudi Arabia, titles and patronymics reinforce relational hierarchy. Professional titles held by women may signal evolving gender roles within institutional contexts.

In digital communication, American women may employ expressive punctuation and emoji to maintain relational warmth in professional emails. Saudi digital discourse may integrate formal greetings and religious expressions, demonstrating continuity between offline and online identity performance.

Interpersonal conflict management also varies. American women may engage in direct negotiation strategies emphasizing clarity and personal stance. Saudi communicative practice may favor mediation through third parties or indirect signaling to preserve relational harmony.

Low-context cultures typically value individualism over collectivism and group harmony. Individualism is the prioritization of individual needs and goals over those of a social unit or group. (Triandis, Brislin & Hui, 1988; as cited in Pryor, Butler & Boehringer, 2005, 248).

Another prominent feature often observed as distinguishing these two cultural contexts is the concept of politeness. In a low context culture, it is considered polite to ask questions and present logic that, in a high context culture, often seems too personal and even rude. (Tella, 2005; see also Tella, 1996.) Hall and Hall (1990) place Japan at the top of the list of High-context cultures.

Table 3: Gendered Request Strategies Across Cultures

Culture	Speaker	Example	Pragmatic Feature
USA	Female	"Could you review this by today?"	Mitigated politeness
USA	Male	"I need this reviewed today."	Directness
Saudi Arabia	Female	"If you have time, it would be helpful…"	High indirectness
Saudi Arabia	Male	"This needs attention."	Context-dependent authority

Explanation (for understanding):

Communication patterns of different cultures:

Let's analyze American and Saudi Arabian cultures, their values and communication patterns in detail.

USA — Communication Style

The United States is a low-context, individualistic society. Americans are direct, verbal communicators who value explicitness and clarity. They prefer direct eye contact, casual greetings, punctuality, and individual autonomy. Professional environments encourage open discussion regardless of hierarchy, reflecting low power distance and strong individualism.

Direct Communication

Americans are direct and verbal communicators, paying less attention to body language. Their speech is generally quite enthusiastic and convincing. Americans are usually assertive and like to speak for themselves. They may speak at

higher volumes in public spaces, grow uncomfortable with long pauses or silences, and often try to fill the gap in conversation. Modern generations prefer communicating via social media, using quick, short messages.

Eye Contact

Americans prefer direct eye contact that exhibits cordiality, candidness and affability. Making eye contact with a stranger without smiling, it means you are unfriendly. Many Americans smile when passing strangers on the street as a simple gesture of goodwill.

Personal Space

Americans always prefer a reasonable amount of personal space, so try not to trespass on it during a conversation. It is best to nod or make gestures to show you are listening throughout a conversation. Silence for long intervals is not preferred during conversations.

Greetings

Greetings are usually casual or unceremonious, with first names often used in initial introductions. A firm handshake, direct eye contact and a smile are the hallmarks of greetings in American culture, especially in business contexts. Being the first to offer your hand reflects warmth and confidence, though a warm handshake may feel awkward in informal settings. Many people hug to greet close friends and family. Americans generally prefer to smile in gatherings and appreciate it when it is reciprocated. If you are a newcomer, you are expected to introduce yourself to those around you.

Many Americans are usually greeted by saying "How are you?" This is usually a greeting rather than an inquiry about someone's health. The common response is "I'm good, thanks. How are you?" Giving a deeply personal or less positive answer can make the situation uncomfortable if you are not very familiar with the person. While moving the conversation further, Americans often ask people about their job or profession e.g., "So, what do you do?"

Family Structure

Individualism influences many aspects of American families. They believe that you are who you choose to be, as they emphasize personal choices, so divorces, remarriages, and and live-in relationships are very common. The average American family is regarded as a nuclear family (husband, wife, and children) with extended family living separately. The slogans such as ' My Life, My Rules' and 'YOLO'(You only live once)have their basis in American culture, with more emphasis on enjoying your life to the fullest and following your heart's desires. They host family gatherings at special events or festivals.

People are open-minded, self-reliant, and personally responsible for their choices since they respect individual freedom. Women are given equal rights in all walks of life.

Naming

American names follow Western naming conventions: [personal name] [middle name] [family name]. For example, Hillary David Clement. Some Americans address each other by using their last name. For example, a friend may call a man named Joe David just 'David' without including 'Mr.' Children can sometimes call even their parents by their names instead of mom, dad, etc. Occupational titles e.g., teacher, engineer, driver, are seldom used as Americans usually prefer to call everyone by their name and may include 'Mr./Ms./Mrs for older people.

Table 4: Naming Practices as Identity Markers

Feature	USA	Saudi Arabia
Surname after marriage	Common	Rare
Patronymic identity	Minimal	Central
Public use of female names	Commonly used publicly	Often avoided in public contexts
Address forms	First-name basis	Titles and kinship terms

Basic Etiquette

It is often considered offensive to ask a direct question about someone's salary, weight, or age. Non-Americans can interpret being friendly with a stranger as rude or too direct, but it's simply the level of friendliness that they're comfortable with.
Sense of time: Americans put great emphasis on punctuality, as they believe "time is money" and should be valued like a treasure. They are intolerant of any form of delays and appreciate being well-organized.

Business outlook
Americans are highly professional and competitive in the workplace. Punctuality reflects your professionalism, especially if you're chairing or hosting the meeting. Anyone present at a meeting can voice their opinion regardless of age or business hierarchies. They would appreciate any novel ideas (acceptable or not) being discussed in a meeting rather than remaining passive and silent.
Americans are generally argumentative, open, and highly influential communicators. Their professional ties are much stronger than personal relationships.
The details above clearly show that American society is an archetype of Hall's theory of low-context cultures.

Saudi Arabia- Communication Style
Saudi Arabia is a high-context, collectivist society rooted in Islamic values. Communication is indirect and implicit, with heavy reliance on context, paralanguage, and non-verbal cues. Social relationships, honor, and family play a central role in interaction. Gender norms regulate eye contact, space, and public behavior, reflecting broader cultural ideologies of modesty and respect.
According to the parameters set in Hall's theory, Saudi Arabia is a collectivist and high-context country and it won't be an exaggeration to assert that Saudi culture is the antithesis of American culture. Its values are mainly rooted in Islamic beliefs and ideologies,, reflected in all walks of life. Let's analyze the salient features of Saudi communication patterns.

Language & communication: Arabic is the official language of Saudi Arabia, but English is the second language in educational institutes. Within the non-Saudi population, languages such as Urdu, Hindi, and Bengali are also spoken. "The Arabic language itself communicates the Arabic culture, that of emotion." (Deresky, 137). The language contains many adjectives and words that invite exaggeration and overexpression. Loud speech is commonly used for its dramatic effects. How something is said is often more important than what is actually said.
Saudi Arabia is a high-context culture in which feelings and views are not overtly communicated. Saudis prefer more indirect, implicit statements,, where individuals may need to interpret the message's intended meaning in context. Different assumptions are made in the decoding process, based on knowledge of the person communicating, the situation, or,, more likely, both. This form of communication is challenging for Americans to comprehend because they are accustomed to a more explicit, precise, and direct style.
There is a high degree of paralanguage in Saudi Arabia. Paralanguage refers to how something is expressed rather than its content. It reflects in the culture's embellished speech, wordy expressions and high-volume talking. They communicate through body movements. For example, if someone is sick, you are expected to say *salamat* (Stay safe), which is equivalent to 'Get well soon' in English. Still, you won't just receive the response ' Thanks', instead, you will be reciprocated gratefully with ' Allah yasallimik', which means ' May God protect you, too.' If someone does a favour to you, you are expected to pray for him with words like '*jazak Allah khair*' , so *shukran* (Thanks) is not just enough.

Sense of time
Arabs are polychromic in relation to time, as they may focus on several things at once and may be highly distractible. Saudis are likely to go "off-topic" and abruptly switch subjects in conversation. They can easily switch from business discussions to small talk. They prefer socialization over time, so it is expected that

conversations involve chitchats before getting to the main motive behind the conversation.

Eye Contact

Direct eye contact is acceptable between members of the same gender, and indirect or no eye contact is best between genders. Indirect eye contact between members of the same gender, however, can be misinterpreted as ignoring, so there is often a high level of intensity in this area.

Business etiquette

Relationships or contacts are highly valued for any business dealings. The decision-making process is usually slow and the outcome can be biased or based on connections. Arabs place great importance on their honor and dignity. You should be well-dressed with an amicable presentation for a business meeting.

Saudi culture is tolerant of being late. They have flexible schedules, and the staff in public organizations has a tendency towards procrastination. Meeting discussions are not open to every participant until trust has been established. Exchanging gifts is not usually part of initial business meetings until relationships have been established.

Greetings

Men shake hands. Good friends greet with a strong handshake and a kiss on each cheek. Women generally hug and kiss close friends, otherwise, they greet cordially with hellos. When Saudis greet each other, they take their time with conversation, asking how they're doing (*kaif al haal*) and then about their family and other stuff (*kaif bazoora*). A smile and certain short, structured good wishes are imperative while greeting friends.

In Saudi Arabia, just like the majority of Islamic countries, the most common form of greeting is a handshake and the phrase "Assalaam alaikum" (May peace be upon you), which is responded to as "Wa alaikum assalaam" (And peace be upon you). Handshakes are most common in business settings and they are always used with the right hand.

Friends of the same gender often greet with kisses on the cheek. The left hand is stretched to the other person's right shoulder while bending a little to give three kisses on the cheek (either right or left cheek). This is a norm while meeting close friends and at social events, but not common when you are first introduced to someone.

Saudi male friends may greet each other by touching noses. It indicates trust, affection and reverence in the friendship. It is only performed when people are genuinely faithful to one another. Elders are highly respected in Saudi Arabian society. They may be greeted with a kiss on the forehead.

People prefer to be addressed by their titles – particularly if they are your senior and/or elder (e.g. Mr/Mrs., Uncle/Aunt, Doctor, and Professor).

It is polite to address colleagues or superiors with the title 'Abu', which means 'the father of…', followed by the name of the father's eldest son (e.g., Abu Abdullah, Abu Omar). This indicates familiarity and respect.

Dining Etiquette

Saudis usually socialize with expatriates in restaurants and international hotels. After some intimacy, you may be invited to the home. Saudis are very generous and hospitable to their guests. They would offer you Arabic coffee and dates at regular intervals during a gathering. You will be served a lavish spread of food during lunch or dinner. They have separate sections for both genders.

Esteemed guests are often served with the most valued pieces, such as a sheep's head. There is little conversation during meals so that everyone may savour the food.

Family Structure

Like any other collectivist society, family is a central pillar of Saudi Arabian society. Saudis are loyal to their family and provide all kinds of support to their female family members. They may give up certain interests for their family's good fortune.

Traditionally, the entire extended family is expected to live together as a tribe or clan.

However, the nuclear family structure is prevalent now due to rapid urbanization over the last few decades.

Parents and elders are highly respected in Saudi culture. Conventionally, adult children live with their parents until they get married. Saudi Arabian culture is highly patriarchal, although they respect women and their rights. Still, women are not fully free to make personal choices, especially in choosing dress code in public or mixing with male members of the society.

Saudi culture highly regards parents and elders, and any form of disobedience is disliked. Parents support their children until they are married and fully independent. Extended family members enjoy close bonding with the rest and support each other.

Male and female members gather with their friends or relatives every weekend for a meeting known as 'majalis'. They may meet over coffee or dinner.

Naming

In Saudi Arabia, names follow the lineage of names passed through the male side of the family. Children will be named after their father, grandfather, etc. Saudi women traditionally do not adopt their husband's names after getting married. Most Saudis use Arabic naming conventions. This is formatted as: [personal name] [father's personal name] [grandfather's personal name] [family/tribal name](16)—for example, Abdullah Ahmed Saud Al-Utaibi (male), Rania Hassan Awad Sindi (female).

Sometimes names may have a conjunctive word e.g., *ibn/bint,* between two names, e.g., Muhammad ibn Abdullah. This means "Muhammad son of Abdullah," or Nora bint Hassan, or Umm Ahmed. Saudis usually dislike sharing their female family members' names with their male friends. They always address their parents as *Mama, Ummi, Baba, Abu, abu* and strangers are also addressed with respect as ' *ya sheikh, ya shabab, ya mama, ya binti.*

Gendered Norms and Contextual Performance

In American professional discourse, directness is frequently associated with competence and efficiency. However, research demonstrates that women often navigate a discursive double bind: assertiveness may enhance perceptions of authority while simultaneously attracting negative evaluations. Silence in such contexts may be interpreted as disengagement, reinforcing expectations of visible participation.

In Saudi communicative settings, indirectness frequently signals relational awareness and respect. Silence may index thoughtfulness or deference, particularly within hierarchical or mixed-gender environments. Gaze practices are shaped by modesty norms, illustrating how communicative behavior is embedded within moral and religious frameworks.

Naming practices further illustrate contextual differences. First-name address in the United States indexes egalitarianism and reduced power distance, whereas titles and patronymics in Saudi Arabia reinforce hierarchy and relational identity. These practices are not neutral but encode social values.

The analysis demonstrates that identical communicative forms may produce divergent interpretations across contexts. A direct request may signal clarity in one setting and impropriety in another. Similarly, lowered gaze may index respect in one culture and insecurity in another.

Intercultural misunderstanding arises when communicators interpret behaviors through their own contextual expectations. Such misunderstandings are intensified when gender norms intersect with cultural assumptions. Therefore, effective intercultural engagement requires reflexive awareness of contextual variability.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that communicative practices are not neutral but socially patterned and ideologically informed. The comparison of American and Saudi cultures reveals how language functions as a key resource for constructing cultural and gendered identities. Understanding these dynamics enhances intercultural competence and critical awareness of power relations embedded in language use.

This expanded analysis demonstrates that contextual communication models must be reframed through gendered identity performance. Communicative behaviors are culturally situated performances embedded within ideological structures. Future empirical research may employ discourse analysis and ethnographic methods to deepen understanding.

To conclude, we can assert that certain key principles of Hall's theory of high vs. low context cultures are valid, interesting, and may provide a deep insight into the complexities of cross-cultural communication. The deep insight into individualistic and collectivist societies helps unfold the norms and values prevalent in every culture, thereby minimizing the intercultural communication gap for educational growth, the development of business ties, or the flourishing of the tourism sector.

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