

TONE AND RESPONSE TO PUBLIC SLOGANS: A SOCIOCULTURAL APPROACH

Minahil Toseef¹, Iqra Shabbir², Atiqa Shahid^{*3}

^{1,2,*3}Department of applied psychology school of professional psychology university of management and technology.

^{*1}s2022141001@umt.edu.pk

DOI:<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17265019>

Keywords

Article History

Received: 13 August 2025

Accepted: 23 September 2025

Published: 04 October 2025

Copyright @Author

Corresponding Author: *

Atiqa Shahid

Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative research is to know why there are differences in the tone of written slogans within the same city. In some areas slogans are written politely and in some areas, they are harsh and rudeness. Also neutral tone is used, this difference raises the question? Our research aims to find out this difference and also find which kind of slogans people follow and also identify whether the difference is due to public behavior or mismanagement of our government. And how these slogans represent cultural behavior or other domains. Total six participants volunteered for the research out of which two was from start of the city, two from mid Lahore and two from the end of the Lahore. The in depth interviews were conducted of them and analysis was done through Interpretative Phenomenological approach. The results of IPA showed five superordinate themes which were sociolinguistics, enlightenment, modulation, environment and institutional functioning.

INTRODUCTION

Public slogans and civic messages are widely used in urban and rural settings to raise awareness, control behaviour and strengthen social norms, especially on the issues of cleanliness, public order and discipline. However, the efficacy of these messages is often quite different between different communities. One aspect that determines this variation is the tone of the slogans: from polite and respectful to direct, or even harsh.

Language mostly acts as a reflection of a society, which includes showing complex interplay between geographical location, social class, cultural identity, and communicative purpose. This linguistic diversity becomes particularly evident in urban areas where different neighborhoods of a city can display very different linguistic patterns; these patterns are, in fact, a reflection of the socio-demographic, cultural, and historical aspects of particular areas. The study of linguistic landscapes (described as "the visibility and

salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region") has emerged as an important methodological tool for understanding how language use is spatially distributed in urban contexts (Landry & Bourhis, 1997).

Spatial variation in language use within cities has been well documented across many urban contexts around the world. Sociolinguistics as a discipline separate from dialectology was developed through the study of language variation in the city, on the model that the urban environment is a unique laboratory for investigating the effects of social factors on language choice (Labov, 1966). Linguistic landscape research has examined both the causes of the linguistic landscape and the influence of the linguistic landscape upon the broader social and cultural phenomenon (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009) in case studies of major cities worldwide.

Lahore, the cultural capital of Punjab and Pakistan's second largest city, serves as an ideal case study to explore the issues associated with spatial linguistic variation in the context of Pakistan. The historical separation of the city into different districts from the traditional Androon Lahore (Inner City) with its centuries old cultural legacy to the newer commercial and residential localities provides natural dividing lines for linguistic analysis. The hypothesis for the research is based on the idea that these different areas would use different levels of linguistic formality and cultural expression, combined with the notion that central and peripheral areas tend to use more standardised and formal linguistic expressions while areas like Androon Lahore use more culturally embedded and colloquial language.

Linguistic landscape research has paid close attention to the correlations among written languages in public spaces and the sociodemographic composition of a city (Wang et al., 2020), which is a suitable framework for exploring how spatial location affects the linguistic decisions in urban slogans. Spatial and temporal variation has been found which strongly implicates the physical and socio-economic environment on linguistic diversity (Grieve et al., 2022) lending support for the theoretical underpinning for exploring area-based linguistic variation.

Objective

This qualitative study attempts to explore the spatial difference of language use of slogan language in Lahore, specifically to explore whether areas like Androon Lahore use more direct, colloquial or dialect-oriented linguistic forms than the more formalized and standardized linguistic forms perhaps found in the central and outer city areas

Literature Review:

Mubarok et al. (2024) conducted a study on “politeness on public signs in Japanese and Indonesian train cars- a study of linguistic Landscape. The study was about comparison of expression of politeness used in Japanese and Indonesian trains the aim was to do the comparison how politeness is expressed and what are the situations in which polite tone are used in public signs in Japanese and Indonesian trains. It was qualitative research that involved three types of signs, the prohibition ones,

warnings and instructions. The results showed that any sign in Japanese trains used word khudasai or please and the Indonesian signs involves use of prefix 'di'. Also the Japanese signs all included polite expressions irrespective of the types of sign. The Indonesian trains had direct expressions in all type of signs and there were use of two expressions in all types of sign that was the prefix 'di' and the lexical 'mohon'. The study also indicated that the degree of politeness depends upon the situations like the danger or threats signs are more explicit and less polite and the warnings and instructional signs are more polite and less explicit.

The study on “Situating impoliteness revisited: Blunt anti-epidemic slogans and conflicting comments during the coronavirus outbreak in China” was conducted by Yanmei Han in 2021. In this study china health system use blunt slogans in coronavirus campaign and people reactions to them were analyzed closely. Chinese people called these slogans “Yinghe” or “hard core” that were implemented by the government. This study explore why people behavior or thoughts change as they focus on area of the slogans. Results of the study was that Harsh or hard core slogans that representing the death etc. were initially more impactful in rural area like Henan and then gradually start to change. Being impolite is not being just rude its connected to culture, politics and situation Etc. Suggestion of the study was that we should emphasize it more in rural area in special cases where situation demonstrating the people.

Meis and Kashima (2017) conducted the study on the topic "signage as a tool for behavioral change: Direct and indirect routes". The research aimed to explore how a public signage design and tone can have an influence on human behavior specifically in promoting compliance with desired social norms. The study compared the direct or explicit and indirect or polite sign messages and their effects on simple and complex behavioral settings. After the series of experiments the researchers found that the signs that have clear visuals and close proximity to the target behavior and polite tone were more successful and have an effect on behavior. The study revealed that signs tone may not be sufficient in guiding behavior but when paired with appropriate cues polite signs can achieve strong behavioral outcome.

Yu Hou et al. (2022) conducted study on “Gentle or rude? A study on China's publicity of epidemic prevention and governance of urban and rural areas based on anti-epidemic slogans”. This study highlights that when corona virus is spreading all over the world, china mostly the problem was knowledge gap between rural and urban areas. The aim of the study was to do comparison that what type of slogans was used and how people react to it and to know the difference between rural and urban areas on virus information. Result of the study was that people in rural areas obeyed harsh and rude slogans easily and agree to implement them while urban society's people not rate it much even they accept that these slogans represent how serious the situation is.

Research Questions

1. Have you ever noticed different types of slogans written either on walls or other things?
2. What types of slogans they are?
3. Have you ever considered a difference of tone of signs or slogans in different areas of Lahore?
4. According to you what can be the reason behind this difference?
5. Is the slogans used here are harsh or polite and according to you which one is effective?
6. Do you think that it matters a lot that how people actually understanding the particular slogans regardless of harsh or polite language?
7. Do you think that it matters a lot how people actually understand particular slogans regardless of harsh or polite language?

Research design

A qualitative research method was employed using the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) to explore participant interpretation of public slogans. The researcher evaluated the phenomenon while striving to set aside personal biases (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, 2025) in this study aim

how differences exist in different areas of Lahore and who they perceived whether the difference is due to public behavior or miss management of our government.

Participants

Data were collected from a sample of six participants from different areas of Lahore. Participants were selected from different areas of Lahore two participants from Androon, Lahore like Anarkali and Baghwanpura, two participants from mid of the Lahore central Lahore like Johartown and wapdatown, and two participant from end of the Lahore like Raiwend and Behria town according to pre-determined criteria. The sample included both male and female who had been living on this areas. These criteria align with the principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), which typically employs small, homogeneous samples to gain deep insights participants experienced with this difference of slogans.

Procedure

After designing the interview protocol, participants were recruited from the different areas of Lahore. Only those who were willing to participate were selected. The informed consent was taken prior the interview and it was clearly stated in form that the interview audio will be recorded. Participants has a right of withdraw from the study at any time for any reason. The participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were interviewed about their own experiences and point of view about the topic, and all interviews were conducted in a manner that ensured privacy. The interviews were transcribed and translated into English from the native language Urdu. The non-verbal gestures and expressions were also document, during the data collection.

Master table for themes

Superordinate Theme	Subordinate Themes	Interpretative Narrative
Sociolinguistics	- upper social class - lower social class - Way of communication - reputation	• I have seen people speaking in rude language in this area

Superordinate Theme	Subordinate Themes	Interpretative Narrative
Enlightenment	- educated - uneducated - Awareness - limited understanding	• Due their working class or lower social status usage of harsh words became normal for them • The people from upper class likes to be respective by others that why there slogans are in respective way. • The education level of people from andrron area is low to which they do not have proper understanding of these things • People from societies or end city have higher level of education that helps understandings thing better • Due to lack of awareness they do not understand their responsibilities
Modulation	- strict tone - Politeness - numbness - assertive demands	• If slogans are not rude people here will never follow • The have tried polite tone here before but no one listen • People from my area like polite tone to communicate. So the also prefer slogans in polite tone.



Superordinate Theme	Subordinate Themes	Interpretative Narrative
Environment	- peaceful environment - chaotic environment - personal nature - observed behavior	• people observe other and think that if others can do I can also • the people in this area only think about themselves and have no sense of responsibility to their surroundings • people from societies do not exhibit this behavior as their environment discourages it, and promote discipline • Here there is no proper system of parking or disposing of garbage. • The authorities do not keep check and balance that is why people violate rule • In the mid-city or end of the city authorities keep an eye on people behavior and punish those who break the rules
Institutional functioning	- lack of governance - negligence of authorities - proper system - proper management by government	

Sociolinguistics:

This represents the role of social class in the difference of language across areas of Lahore city. The difference is not only about language it also tells for which type of people these slogans are written and from what social background they belong.

According to the participants, “the areas where the slogans are written in rude or harsh form, the residents of those areas are primarily from the lower or working class because their form of communication is bold and straightforward, and they think that if they speak or write in this tone, they will be heard and taken seriously”. (P3) For them, usage of that tone of language may only be the key to representing their emotions. The emotionally expressive slogans show

the cultural adaption of that area as the participant said: “I have seen many people from the mid-city or the old Lahore side to use this type of language daily because they are mostly from working class or belong to lower class, and they mostly communicate in this way due to which their slogans are also in this form and they do not mind that language as it's their way of communication.” (P5)

One of the participants said that: “I have noticed that Androon or lower social class areas slogans are written in a harsh language.” (P4)

The slogans of upper social class areas are written in formal and respectful ways, for instance, the rewind side or the societies of Lahore city. One participant

responded: "The form of communication is respectful as well, and people like to communicate in polite ways, even if it's through slog-ins, as politeness and subtle language represent good manners." (P2) Also, the people of this class want to maintain their social class and the reputation they built over time, so the slogans are written in subtle language so the authorities know that people will follow them as the participant says: "the people of the upper social class like to be respected by others, and the slogans are written respectfully because they have the idea that they will follow them because if someone sees them disobeying those slogans than it may hurt their reputation." (P1)

According to participant: "areas like raiwind side people have very polite language and understanding and they easily understand it as they belong to upper social class so they follow slogans written in polite language" (P4)

Another participant responds that "as people of end Lahore have higher social class so they have to implement it on themselves as they linked it to their reputation." (P3)

Enlightenment

This highlights the importance or role of education in building awareness and helping people understand what are the rights and wrong. It actually represents the standards of people who obey the slogans or disobey them despite the nature of the language.

Upon reviewing the participant responses, it has been found that in Androon, most people are not very educated, as they do not have proper understanding and don't know what their responsibilities are. There are times when they do understand the point but still do not follow it, saying that this is not their concern; in short, they avoid it. To them, rude language and rude tones somehow work for them, as it is tailored to their level of competence.

People in Androon are largely concerned with their business, so they escape from rules and regulations. As the participant said: "Due to less education, these people did not properly understand their responsibilities, and what will be the effect of their actions" (P2). It shows that their actions bring negative consequences to others, like throwing garbage on roads and public areas that can cause diseases in people, which shows that limited education may lead

to various actions whose results could be unpredictable.

Participant said: "people who are illiterate do violations like parking in no parking area or throwing garbage even in the presence of don't throw slogans" (P5)

The slogans written on the wall, their tone don't matter whether they are harsh, polite, or neutral for people because they had to follow it; they did not focus on the tone. Educated people have knowledge that negligence/violation may lead to serious effects while obedience may serve humanity or reduce the chances of crime and violations.

Rewind side people are mostly educated, so they understand that perspective, as they usually talk to each other in a soft language, so slogans written in polite language are more. "As a participant said, highly educated people understand the slogans written on the walls or boards, etc., as they have awareness" (P1). Polite or neutral language could be more effective if anyone could understand it in the right way.

According to participant: "people who have awareness know that parking here is not suitable as it is a no parking area." (P3)

"I have seen mostly people throwing garbage on roads even while travelling but if I talk about myself, I keep it to myself until I find a bin to throw it" (P6)

Modulation:

This cluster mentioned the importance of language in understanding or following the rules and regulations. The tone of language demonstrates what type of people belong to that area and what actual language suits them and represents them.

From participant responses, it is evident that strictness is more common in Androon Lahore. One major factor is that for those people strictness is the only way to lead them to obey the rules and regulations. It is normal for them to use harsh language which was observed while conducting the interviews with people as they are not willing to talk to anybody even though they are free, which demonstrates how rude they are. So, for rudeness, only strict actions are the solution. The participant pointed out: "If I am not rude, people will never follow or listen to me. Politeness could be used, but the factor is that no one understands with politeness here [P2]."

Participant respond that “Masha Allah if I talk about people from places like congested muhallas they do not listen and throw garbage, so harsh language is only the option left for them.” [P4]

Another participant said: “people write slogans in harsh tone as they considered it’s only the way to convey their message and people will follow only in this way as they become tired to use polite tone.” [P5]

“The people of that area are used to it so strictness is the only option left for them but, too much strictness can lead to more crimes due to ego perspective as people take it on themselves.” [P1]

Politeness could resolve many types of conflicts between people. Being rude is not always a good gesture at all. As we look into the people of Rewind side, they are so respective towards each other, as they love to and politely talk with one another as its part of their daily life. While if we talk about Johar town, the slogans are not rude and not very polite but, are neutral and they also prefer neutral and polite language that can be used to point out or highlight any slogans. One of the participants said: “Not every time we have to use harsh language, we can use polite or neutral people need to understand it if they know about it” [P6].

Participant said: if I look about religious places in societies here slogans are written in a polite way that don’t keep shoes there, don’t talk loudly and don’t waste water people of that area clearly understood it. Interviewing in the areas of Lahore is a clear demonstration of people, the tone they use and understand, and what is suitable for them as it represents them.

Environment

The theme represents the role of the environment that leads to differences in tone used in slogans across the city. The tone of slogans and whether they will be followed mostly depend on the environmental factor and collective values of that area.

The environment in mid-city or old Lahore is primarily chaotic and busy, and everyone focuses on their work and life that's why they don't care about their surroundings and focus to a great extent on the things that bring them benefits. The participant said “It is very common for people to park their bike in front of homes or no parking area just because they find it near themselves or people throw their garbage

in front of public place because they focus on their place cleanliness but not the others”[P2]. Another factor is observation-based behavior, which means when someone observes that throwing garbage anywhere or parking vehicles anywhere is common in this area and mostly no one reacts to it they think it is normal. This behavior forces them to write slogans in harsh words and also with some fine or punishment to make people understand it, as according to participants “from the day they have been being fine for parking in front of homes they started following the slogan”[P4] meaning that the people there mostly understand through harsh words or punishments.

The environment at the end of the city is mostly peaceful as there are fewer markets and vendors. The people of those areas keep in mind to not violate any rule or slogans because they have a sense of responsibility towards the environment and also, they learn through observation and to follow the slogans and following them is common for those people so the authorities use slogans in respectful ways because they know that people will follow them. According to the interviewee, “The slogans here are mostly written in subtle and respectful ways because here people know what is right and wrong and they follow the rules of the areas. They have an understanding that violating them will only bring them shame and nothing else” [P5] meaning the environment of these people determines that the slogans should be in respectful ways as the people of these areas understand them easily.

“Every person has different level of understanding or have different nature its not depend on area. I mostly saw that in shops its written don’t borrow things or don’t do parking here its means that they are stopping to do those actions it’s on you how you are taking that point or slogans as everyone has right to express his emotions as its their belonging.” [P3]

Institutional functions

The theme represents the role of government in the areas of Lahore. The implication of fines plays an important role, especially regarding parking or other public orders, yehi sb sy barStrictness in busy market areas helps to improve traffic or garbage issues in other areas.

According to the participant “in Andiron Lahore the role of government is not very strong and visible, also

there is no proper system for these things due to which people find it easy to violate the rules and regulations. These areas have lack of proper monitoring and control.” [P6]. Areas don’t have proper parking spaces to park the vehicles and also other garbage throwing system. The streets of those areas are very narrow which results in people managing on their own. The absence of proper checks and balances creates so many issues. People can act however they want without any fear or hesitation. The participant stated “Authorities do not take part here properly just fine sometimes. This is not proper. He suggests that the government should make proper parking spaces and rules to resolve these issues” [P1].

One of the participants said: “there is no check and balance in areas like Anarkali, Urdu bazar so people consider that they have freedom, they can break rules and regulation so rude slogans or tones prefer to use here.” [P2] one interviewee said that “due to current government policies it’s become easy for female they could come and they did not have to face harassment which is the clear representation that this area of people only understands strictness.” [P4]. Compared to the middle of Lahore Rewind has a more organized or well-managed government and authority system. “The implication of rules and regulations encourage people to follow the laws and these people know that if they break those rules and laws, they have to pay a price for it”. In the interview, the interviewee stated that “in our society we have proper guidelines and system that we must follow as their violation can lead to serious risks” [P3].

One of the participants reported “if we look on areas like central Lahore societies there is a proper system that if people do violations, they have to face the consequences of it” [P5].

Discussion

The present study explores how people with slogans experience social and psychological impacts, as well as their coping strategies. The main argument is that the effectiveness and reception of public slogans are deeply shaped by sociolinguistic, enlightenment, modulation, environment, and institutional factors, which were identified as six superordinate themes from the data of six subjects.

One of the central arguments of this research is that superordinate themes appear when subjects describe

how language and slogans change in different parts of the same city. In both urban and rural settings, public slogans and civic messages aim to raise awareness, regulate behavior, and enforce social norms such as cleanliness, public order, and respect for the law. However, the impact of these messages differs across communities. A crucial factor behind this variation is the tone of the slogans, which ranges from polite and respectful to direct or rude. In Lahore, for example, working-class areas are accustomed to direct language in communication and slogans, while education level further influences how slogans are received or followed. Environmental conditions also play a key role: when surroundings are neglected, people are less responsive to public slogans, regardless of their presence.

The findings suggest that strict enforcement in busy markets improves adherence to public slogans, affecting issues like traffic and waste management. This supports the main argument that the tone and effectiveness of public slogans are significantly influenced by the social and environmental context. Slogans are generally more polite, formal and respectful in places where personal cleanliness, order and civic duty are traditionally important and are often associated with middle or upper-class settings. On the other hand, areas of social and economic challenges have more direct and usually more vehement language to ensure the message is heard and taken seriously.

REFERENCES

- Landry, R., & Bourhis, R. Y. (1997). Linguistic landscape and ethnolinguistic vitality: An empirical study. *Journal of language and social psychology*, 16(1), 23-49.
- Labov, W. (2006). *The social stratification of English in New York city*. Cambridge University Press.
- Shohamy, E., & Gorter, D. (Eds.). (2008). *Linguistic landscape: Expanding the scenery*. Routledge.
- Hong, S. Y. (2020). Linguistic landscapes on street-level images. *ISPRS International Journal of Geo-Information*, 9(1), 57.
- Väisänen, T., Järvi, O., Toivonen, T., & Hiippala, T. (2022). Mapping urban linguistic diversity with social media and population register data. *Computers, Environment and Urban Systems*, 97, 101857.

- Mubarok, M. H., Hayati, N., & Haristiani, N. (2024). Politeness on Public Signs in Japanese And Indonesian Train Cars-A Study Of Linguistic Landscape. *Chi e Journal of Japanese Learning and Teaching*, 12(2), 86-94.
- Han, Y. (2021). Situated impoliteness revisited: Blunt anti-epidemic slogans and conflicting comments during the coronavirus outbreak in China. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 178, 31-42.
- Meis, J., & Kashima, Y. (2017). Signage as a tool for behavioral change: Direct and indirect routes to understanding the meaning of a sign. *PloS one*, 12(8), e0182975.
- Hou, Y., Wei, T., Zhan, Z., & Wang, F. (2022). Gentle or rude? A study on China's publicity of epidemic prevention and governance of urban and rural areas based on anti-epidemic slogans. *Cities*, 130, 103901.

