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Enhancing Regional Connectivity: Russian Language and Pakistan's Eurasian Engagement

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Abstract

The contemporary epoch is characterized by unpredictable global scenarios that are convincing every country on the global stage to invest extensively in connectivity prospects. The word “connectivity” illustrates the ability and capacity of any existential element especially societies or countries of being connected. Regional connectivity is the most pivotal and evident kind of connectivity, which is crucial to expedite and accelerate economic development, strengthen relationship between countries, and enhance the propagation or amalgamation of cultures. The prospect of regional connectivity between Eurasia and South Asia, especially, Pakistan confers a great opportunity to expand their critical and strategical role in the global arena. The connectivity process between both regions has undergone different paths. However, none of the paths based on hard connectivity has given a desired result of grater proximity. Apart from all the hard connectivity initiatives, soft connectivity, initially, especially linguistics, can play a vital role in galvanizing proximity between Eurasia and Pakistan. Linguistics can foster meaningful cross-cultural connections and professional collaborations efficaciously.

The primary and imperative goal of this research paper is to examine the role of Russian language for Pakistan as a strategic tool to expedite integration with the Eurasian region. This linguistic potential can expedite economic, diplomatic, and cultural collaboration. With the close and critical

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examination of different aspects of linguistics, this study has explained how proficiency in the Russian language can facilitate the trade spectrum, academic collaboration, and multilateral diplomacy between both regions. Russian language can act as lingua franca in the process of connectivity between Eurasia and Pakistan. To further elucidate the impeccable role of linguistics, the research explores the Russian linguistics as soft power mechanism bringing into effect Joseph Nye's soft power theory to investigate how linguistic proficiency can accelerate the process of integration between two regions. It also highlights numerous key challenges in implementing Russian language education faced by Pakistani institutions and provides analogies and policy road map for mitigating the obstacles.

Keywords: Soft connectivity, Hard connectivity, Eurasia, Pakistan, Russian Language, Regional connectivity

Introduction

The proximity between two regions in the face of close connectivity can facilitate the flow of trade, ideas, culture, and investments that create opportunities for the people of both sides. Regional connectivity has a huge impact on regional development and mutual economic growth. Regional connectivity has been the pivotal pillar of geoeconomics in the 21st century.¹ The ultimate connectivity between two regions simultaneously drives accessibility and connectivity, which are different to each other, yet, in some ways they are correlated concepts. These cross-country connectivity initiatives promote trade, transit, and energy flows which is crucial for any nation's firm standing in broader geopolitical landscape.²

In this broader context, connectivity between Pakistan and Eurasia has great potential. It is also worth mentioning that Russian language used to serve as an administrative and cultural medium in Eurasia during the reign of the USSR. Its relevance in the contemporary epoch is not only acknowledged by its historical roots but also by evolving pragmatism and consideration within the large circle of younger generations. That sensitive

¹ Martin Sokol. "Regional Connectivity" in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography* (2009). <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-08-102295-5.10116-7>.

² F. Javid. "Challenges and Opportunities for Regional Connectivity: Afghanistan's Role Between Pakistan and the Central Asian Region". In *Analyzing Global Responses to Contemporary Regional Conflicts*. (IGI Global, 2024). <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-2837-8.ch013>.

legacy is inspecting the value of soft power which is more crucial to understanding cross regional engagements.

Eurasia is a region of rich natural resources and integration platforms like the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization. These platforms offer multifaceted avenues for collaboration beyond their traditional and cultural ties.

The revival of the silk road under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) within the wider Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) aims to enhance trade and connectivity between both regions. In the historical perspective, Pakistan has served as a crucial transit link in the ancient silk route, and it has actively facilitated trade between Asian and the European region.³ Despite all historical and contemporary significances, Pakistan and Eurasia's approach is just limited to the hard connectivity ventures not towards soft connectivity initiatives. The absence of a strong institutional framework for the implementation of soft connectivity initiatives is in return exacerbating the challenges for hard connectivity initiatives between both regions. Strengthening this aspect can allow both regions to diversify their foreign policy orientations and participation in other regional frameworks. Investing excessively yet moderately in soft connectivity initiatives, especially, in linguistics, can play a crucial role in bridging trust gaps, facilitating proximity, and promoting long term collaboration. This paper explores the avenues of cross-cultural understanding through linguistics and the enhancement of regional connectivity through linguistic tools. It attempts to address the following questions:

1. What are the fundamental challenges the South Asian region especially Pakistan is facing in its engagement with Eurasia? And what measures should be taken to expedite the connectivity process between Pakistan and Eurasia?
2. How can the proficiency in Russian language be instrumentalized for enhancing soft power diplomacy/soft connectivity and regional connectivity between Eurasia and Pakistan?

³ A. I. Khan. "The Geopolitics of China-Pakistan Historical Connectivity and Its Economic and Strategic Significance." *China Quarterly of International Strategic Studies* (2022): 1–15. <https://doi.org/10.1142/s2377740021500123>.

This research paper has followed a qualitative research design to conduct an in-depth analysis of the Russian language and Pakistan's Eurasian engagement. All sources directly resonate with the research questions mentioned above. Efforts were made to include sources from diverse geopolitical viewpoints. Conscious efforts were made to mitigate bias and provide a balanced analysis. Credible publications were prioritized. A two-pronged analytical approach has been applied in this research namely, thematic analysis and process-tracing.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The concept of soft power has now become entrenched in the vast conceptual field of international relations. According to Joseph Nye (1990), power in the global context is not limited to military, economic or political strength. In reality, the power also lies in the ability of nations to attract each nation through cultural, traditional, ideological, and linguistic appeal. Joseph Nye highlights the importance of attraction rather than coercion.⁴ Unlike hard power or connectivity, soft connectivity works through persuasion, attraction, and credibility. Soft power works as a functioning tool that shapes perspective and fosters cooperation among nations. It galvanizes the importance of non-violent competition and propagation of attractive national image in the international sphere.⁵

In this context, linguistics serves as the most essential tool of soft power. It helps to convey the flow of cultural identity and historical memory that enables nations to understand and establish emotional and pragmatic connections, excelling beyond traditional primitive diplomacy. Soft power allows nations to participate in intercultural understanding that facilitates greater communication in trade and politics. Many scholars have argued that soft power, particularly linguistic proficiency, not just enhances mutual trust but also builds long-term partnerships based on mutual respect and

⁴ S. Yigit. "Soft Power: An Enduring Notion in Contemporary International Politics" (IGI Global, 2024), 163–178. <https://doi.org/10.4018/979-8-3693-2444-8.ch011>.

⁵ D. I. Issabekova & A. Kurmangali. "Theoretical and Methodological Aspects of the 'Soft Power' Policy" [«жұмсақ күш» саясатының теориялық-әдістемелік аспектілері]. *Habarşy - Abaj Atyndaғы Almaty Universiteti* (2023): 38. <https://doi.org/10.51889/2959-6270.2023.82.2.004>.

shared perspectives.⁶ The application of this theory on Pakistan's Eurasian engagement helps us to examine the nature of its involvement in this particular framework. This theory provides a solid conceptual foundation to analyze the strategic role of soft power or soft connectivity within the broader context of regional connectivity.

The Myth of Hard Connectivity

Stalled Hard Connectivity Project

Eurasia's quest for the transit routes and Pakistan's energy-constrained status have vigorously pushed and naturally aligned both regions for robust and multidimensional collaboration. Over the last ten years, numerous official visits and dialogues have taken place reflecting the entrenched ties between both regions. A considerable number of investments have been made in multiple regional connectivity projects (mainly infrastructure projects) till date. Nonetheless, the ethereal echoes of those over-prioritized infrastructure projects have fallen short of their intended outcomes.⁷

The series of stalled and underperformed projects, like TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline) and Casa-1000, have dispelled the optimism of hard connectivity. Regardless of proactive interests from both sides, billion-dollar projects have not even seen an iota of any progress due to technical, logistical, and financial impediments. Since the establishment of both projects and other of a similar nature, every year the stakeholders pursue renewed hope of revitalization, but it gradually vanishes beneath the geopolitical conundrum and financial restraints.⁸ Lately, Afghanistan, under the Taliban-led regime, along with Turkmenistan has sought to renew the construction efforts related to TAPI. As a tentative step forward, the

⁶ Li Lin & H. Leng. "Joseph Nye's Soft Power Theory and Its Revelation Towards Ideological and Political Education." *Humanities and Social Sciences* 5 no. 2 (2017): 69. <https://doi.org/10.11648/J.HSS.20170502.13>.

⁷ U. N. Khan (2023). "Pakistan's Road to Central Asia: A Perspective through the Prism of Transit Trade Treaties." *IPRI Journal* 23, no. 01 (2023): 138–159. <https://doi.org/10.31945/iprij.230106>.

⁸ A. R. Rahmany & K. R. Shani. "The Geopolitical Implications of the TAPI Pipeline for Regional Stability in Afghanistan." *International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research* 6 no. 6(2024). <https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2024.v06i06.31615>.

outlook has remained uncertain due to embedded and unforeseen intricate realities.⁹

Geopolitical distrust

Besides Kabul-Ashgabat mutual endeavor to accelerate the long-stalled TAPI pipeline, Islamabad and New Delhi have adopted a skeptical and suspicious posture of a spectator towards the revitalization efforts, prognosticating the debilitating credibility of the project. Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline is aimed to export and transport 33 billion cubic meters of natural gas annually from Turkmenistan's Galkynysh gas field (one of the world's largest natural gas fields) to Afghanistan (Herat and Kandahar), Pakistan (Quetta and Multan) and, ultimately, to India, terminating in Fazilka, in Indian Punjab, adjacent to India-Pakistan border. Regarding the structure of the transit routes, New Delhi's primary distress revolves around Islamabad taking leverage in any potential conflict by simply cutting off the gas supply to coerce New Delhi.¹⁰ This profound fear impeccably resonates with India's recent suspension of Indus Water Treaty with Pakistan, in the aftermath of the Pahalgam attack. Conversely, for Islamabad, proactive participation of New Delhi in the project is quite mandatory. India's participation could help Pakistan in saving transit fees up to \$200–300 million per year. India still clings on its strategic fright of logistical and security challenges, making the completion of project more elusive.¹¹

Here arises certain critical questions: Why is there a potential confrontation or a set of grievances more likely to deeply affect the progress of any or this hard connectivity project? Why is such a robust infrastructure project, built of steel and concrete, so vulnerable to any intricate predicament? To address this dilemma, policymakers need to critically inspect the underlying loopholes embedded in this project. This concrete hard connectivity project seems inherently fragile due to the absence of the scaffolding provided by

⁹ S. Afzal. "The revival of the TAPI pipeline: A milestone for regional connectivity and economic growth." *Modern Diplomacy* (December 5, 2024). <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/12/05/the-revival-of-the-tapi-pipeline-a-milestone-for-regional-connectivity-and-economic-growth>.

¹⁰ M. Ritchie. "India-Pakistan Conflict Darkens TAPI Pipeline." *Energy Intelligence* (May 7, 2025). <https://www.energyintel.com/00000196-aaa5-d691-af97-bbe5d8740000>.

¹¹ B. Patro. "India Should Take a Proactive Interest in the TAPI Pipeline." *Stimson Center*, (November 6, 2024). <https://www.stimson.org/2024/india-should-take-a-proactive-interest-in-the-tapi-pipeline/>.

soft connectivity. Although all participants of the project especially Pakistan and Turkmenistan have tried to foster proximity through soft connectivity initiatives, yet, their impact remains marginal.

Lack of soft connectivity

There exists a plethora of soft connectivity mechanisms for turning hard connectivity ambitions into reality, mitigating the risk of geopolitical confrontation disrupting the project execution, and navigating the labyrinth of bureaucratic delays. Still, Pakistan and Eurasia are underestimating this critical aspect. Each side needs to understand that if hard connectivity is a ladder to achieve regional connectivity, then soft connectivity forms the step of that ladder. Without these steps, it is impossible to reach the pinnacle of regional connectivity. One cannot climb a ladder without steps, only hang on it. Much like the many stalled projects in the region. Thus, hard connectivity without soft connectivity remains merely a myth.

Underutilized regional platforms

Several key institutions in the region always remain underutilized in advancing collaborative efforts across and beyond the region. Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) hold significant standing in the region. Yet, the impact for consolidating the engagement is rare. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (often presumed as a bloc) has the immense potential to de-risk and humanize the hard connectivity projects like TAPI. The stakeholders can leverage the SCO for trust building and coordinated framework. The SCO can serve as the most viable path for long-stalled project's completion and its functioning mechanism. For Pakistan, the SCO has emerged as one of the most valuable platforms; the summit it hosted last year significantly enhanced the country's credibility and standing on the international stage.¹²

Similarly, the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) offers an institutional framework for greater integration between Pakistan and the Eurasian region. Nevertheless, Pakistan is not an official member of the EAEU. However, its emerging engagement underscores the EAEU's potential in linking the Eurasian heartland with Pakistan. Both regional organizations

¹² Z. K. Safdar. "A New Era in Eurasian Connectivity." *Pakistan Today*. (October 18, 2024). <https://www.pakistantoday.com.pk/2024/10/18/a-new-era-in-eurasian-connectivity/>.

present multiple complementary avenues for promoting inclusive and sustainable connectivity.¹³

Findings and Discussion

After evaluation of the connectivity aspects, this research paper attempts to propose some crucial findings and discussions. The findings and discussions study the preconceived notions, conspicuous facts, and analyses vis-s-vis the Russian Language and Pakistan's Eurasian Engagement. They evaluate the research questions as well.

Soft Connectivity: The Antidote to Hard Connectivity Vulnerabilities **Linguistic Exchange as the foundation**

The most fertile spot for sowing the seeds of linguistics is the educational sector. Fortunately, that seed had already been sowed in Pakistan in the shape of Russian Friendship House and many Russian language centers in Pakistani institutes. For instance, the Russian language institute in the National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad was established in 1971.¹⁴ Some other notable examples are the Allama Iqbal Open University (Islamabad), Federal Urdu University of Art, Sciences, and Technology (Karachi), University of Karachi etc. Teaching Russian language is not just an academic tool, in fact, it is a strategic tool for deeper Eurasian engagement. The language proficiency among Pakistani students, diplomats, professionals, and academicians can open direct communication and collaboration with Russian partners. This language proficiency can mitigate the excessive reliance on third party for interpretation. This can further allow nuanced understanding of policies and negotiation for sustainable bilateral and multilateral cooperation. Urdu and Russian linguistic exchanges can further reinforce the mutual understanding of cultural values and norms for establishing long term intellectual and cultural bridges between both the regions.¹⁵

¹³ Jeremy Garlick. Beyond Central Asia: The ever-expanding influence of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization *Euro Hub 4 Sino* (2025). <https://doi.org/10.31175/eh4s.fa95>.

¹⁴ Department of Russian Language NUML, Islamabad. (2025). <https://www.numl.edu.pk/departments/183>.

¹⁵ E. M. Gavrishyk. "Analytic review of Russian language courses implemented in various academic institutions of Pakistan." *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review* 7 no. 4 (2023): 383–396. [https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2023\(7-IV\)33](https://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2023(7-IV)33).

However, a complex historical root is also attached to the linguistics across the heart of Eurasia. Linguistic exchange allows for the potential of complex relationships with the Russian language across Eurasia. Russian in the post-Soviet states carries an association with the Russian imperial and Soviet periods with links to governance, cultural authority, and central political control. But appreciating the shift in the perspective of the younger generations in the region is crucial. The older generations of these societies viewed the language solely in the context of oppression and control, while the younger generations, especially in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan understand the language from a practical standpoint as a utility to a job, opportunity in the region, and key to access technologies and education. The instrumental legacy of the older generations is left behind. The Russian language, once associated with the empire, is now predominantly viewed as an enabler for integration in the economic and labour Markets of Eurasia. It is in this context of modernity that we must appreciate that collaborations for the purposes of language with the region is not a reproduction of the past complex anxieties, but rather a tool to take advantage of modern opportunities.

Cultural and academic collaboration

Building stronger ties between academics and scholars can offer both regions numerous chances to promote increased regional connectivity. By involving both areas in literary events, art exhibits, and cultural festivals, cultural cooperation can also be extremely important. To honor the lasting influence of their well-known poets, such as Alexander Pushkin from Russia, Allama Iqbal from South Asia, and Abai Qunanbaiuly from Central Asia, both regions could, for instance, collaborate to host poetic festivals. Academia and scholarly collaboration are also essential components of soft connectivity. Establishing an intensified relationship between academia and scholars can provide multiple opportunities for both regions to foster greater regional connectivity. Multidimensional research and policy memos have the potential to redesign and reevaluate government's tentative efforts towards soft connectivity, which remain disproportionately low compared to investments in hard connectivity. Progressive collaboration between academia and think-tank can serve as the rational source for depoliticizing the hard connectivity projects and routes that can bypass sensitive conflict zones. The effective instrumentalization of soft connectivity is directly proportional to the effective operationalization of hard connectivity.

Digital and media cooperation

Proficiency in the Russian language enable media professionals from both sides to participate effectively in digital and media cooperation. This proficiency can play a vital role in digital diplomacy. Digital collaboration can create intercultural dialogues that can bridge the perceptual gap that often hinders regional connectivity. Collaborative academic blogs, bilingual digital journals, and media integrative mashups could serve as instruments of soft power focused on the Russian market for articulation of ideas by Pakistani academicians, journalists, and policy makers, thereby reaching post-Soviet intellectuals. Initiatives of this kind help create an integrated communicative sphere that nurtures the continuation of the soft power approach and reinforces Eurasian digital cohesion.

Tourism and business interaction

Being proficient in Russian helps in travel and business. Russian-speaking networks ease everyday relations between the countries. Tourists enjoy guided Russian-speaking tours and Russians have easier visa permissions to the countries. It smooths business negotiations and helps with Eurasian joint ventures. It helps to unlock Russian infrastructure and energy expertise in projects like TAPI and CASA-1000. Knowing Russian helps Pakistani business people by helping them understand Eurasian systems and laws. It shows the link between knowing the language and profit.

Russian Language as a Lingua Franca to Galvanize Regional Connectivity

Even three decades after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russian language still holds official and semi-official status in several Eurasian countries. There Russian language works as the medium for administrative and commercial communication. Around 255 million people in the world can understand and speak in Russian.¹⁶ In Kazakhstan, more than 80% people speak in Russian. In Kyrgyzstan, the Russian language holds a significant official status. In Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, it has the status of a commercial and academic language while, at the same time, having a significant role in other parts of Eurasia.¹⁷ This predominant presence of

¹⁶ "10 most spoken languages in the world in 2025." ICLS (August 20, 2024). <https://www.icls.edu/blog/most-spoken-languages-in-the-world>.

¹⁷ Cholpon Beishalieva. "Echoes of Empire: The Resilience of Russian in Central Asia." *Eurac Research* (July 16, 2024). <https://www.eurac.edu/de/blogs/mobile-people-and-diverse-societies/echoes-of-empire-the-resilience-of-russian-in-central-asia>.

Russian language provides a sustainable collaborative and communicative infrastructure.

Engaging with Russian speaking sphere offers a practical path for Pakistan to broaden its strategic outreach. Russian language can be used as the lingua franca for smooth coordination, documentation, and policy dialogue. Efficient language learning can allow Pakistan to adjust itself in the wide communication ecosystem of Greater Eurasia. This can further mitigate the exacerbating friction, developing cross-border initiatives rooted in mutual linguistic comprehension.

In addition, Pakistan can access the Eurasian knowledge, which sometimes remain untranslated. Russian language as lingua franca can create a linguistic pluralism as well as making linguistics as the cornerstone for regional integration initiatives. It can further lead to discursive connectivity based on unity in diversity which means the alignment of regional perceptions and complicated concepts through a shared cultural expression. Unlike English being the global lingua franca and Chinese as the emerging one, Russian may not be the emerging global lingua franca, however, it still retains unparalleled importance across Eurasian region due to a particular historical legacy. Alongside English and Urdu, Pakistan with the tool of Russian language can strengthen its position in multilateral dialogues and economic networks.

Pakistan has enjoyed and is still enjoying historical, cultural, and religious connections with Central Asia. It has provided Pakistan with a consolidated base for the operationalization of soft power. However, it remained underutilized. Pakistan can go for an unconventional yet pragmatic approach to complement its revival of cultural capital while simultaneously engaging with the Eurasian region through Russian as a regional lingua franca. For instance, Pakistan can create a distinguished space that can amalgamate its historical affinity along with a freshly acquired linguistic competence. It can help Pakistan to assert its own cultural agency through joint cross-cultural efforts and ventures.

Conclusion

To conclude, in the contemporary epoch, regional connectivity is no longer define as transport corridors and multibillion infrastructure projects. Projects like TAPI and CASA-1000 are paramount to Eurasian and South

Asian regions. However, without soft connectivity initiatives, it is difficult to achieve the hard connectivity goals. Soft connectivity initiatives can act as an antidote to hard connectivity vulnerabilities that hinder the proximity between Pakistan and the Eurasian region. The effective instrumentalization of soft connectivity is directly proportional to the effective operationalization of hard connectivity projects. Proficiency in Russian language can bolster Pakistan's engagement with Eurasia by instrumentalizing cultural, academic, digital collaboration, tourism, and business interactions. Pakistan's fluent engagement in Eurasian economic, academic, and media sphere can reduce its dependence on intermediaries, constructing more genuine relationships built on trust. The Russian language can add an additional symbolic value to language learning paths. This can lead to shared cultural and intellectual traditions and people-to-people connections and collaborative inquiry. Within these cooperative frameworks, the process of learning the Russian language setup a wide space for Pakistan to generate progressive narratives and become an important voice in the Eurasian information space.