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## Language information

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### Urdu

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Language information booklets provide teachers of EAL learners with some information on their first languages (or languages of previous education) and on cultural aspects. Typical differences between these languages and English have been highlighted to make teachers aware where these learners might need additional support.

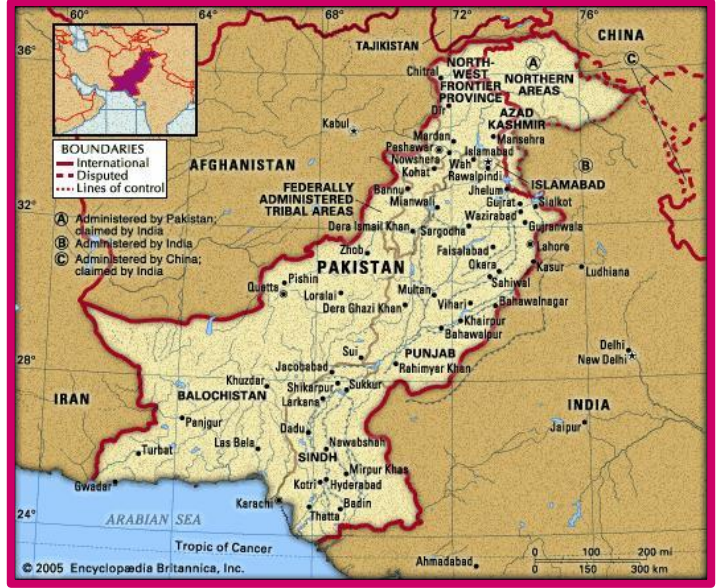
It is important to note, however, that these are guidelines and that individual learners may not find the areas mentioned here difficult.

For more specific information on languages and their scripts you may want to visit <http://www.omniglot.com/>.

If you wish to print this booklet for colleagues working with EAL learners from this language background, we recommend you use the booklet settings on your printer.

# اردو - Urdu

## Maps



Pakistan. [Map]. *Encyclopædia Britannica Online*. Retrieved 13 September, 2014, from <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/media/61665>

## Writing sample

This is Article 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Urdu:

تمام انسان آزاد اور حقوق و عزت کے اعتبار سے برابر پیدا ہوئے ہیں۔ انہیں ضمیر اور عقل ودیعت ہوئی ہے۔ اسلئے انہیں ایک دوسرے کے ساتھ بھائی چارے کا سلوک کرنا چاہیے۔

All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.

(Listen to a recording on <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/urdu.htm> .)

## Facts

Language family	Indo-European (Indo-Aryan branch)
Number of speakers	104 million speakers (first and second language)
Official language	Pakistan (along with English), some states of India
Minority language	United Arab Emirates, UK and USA
Writing system	Modified Arabic script (Nastaliq style)
Main religion	Islam

## Names

Females have a personal name which always comes first. It is followed by another personal name or a female title (e.g. Begum, Bibi). Traditionally women do not change their name when they are getting married. However, being exposed to the western conventions, married women nowadays may adopt their husband's name.

Males often have two names, a personal name and a religious name. Either name can come first. It is considered inappropriate to use the religious name on its own. Children often take their father's personal name as their family name. The personal, the full name or the family name may be used in Urdu with the title of respect (**sahib** for Mr. or **sahiba** for Ms.) which follows the name.

## Cultural differences

Learners from the Indian sub-continent are likely to be used to a lot more formal discipline in school than students in the UK. They may also regard written work as more important than oral contributions and may be reluctant to join in classroom discussions.

Teachers are highly respected in Pakistani culture. This is reflected in the formal way they are addressed. Urdu speaking students who are new to English may be unsure of how to address their teachers. Since there are various forms of requesting something, ranging from rude imperatives to very polite ways of asking, Urdu speakers may not always add **please** and **thank you**, and should not be stigmatised as being rude.

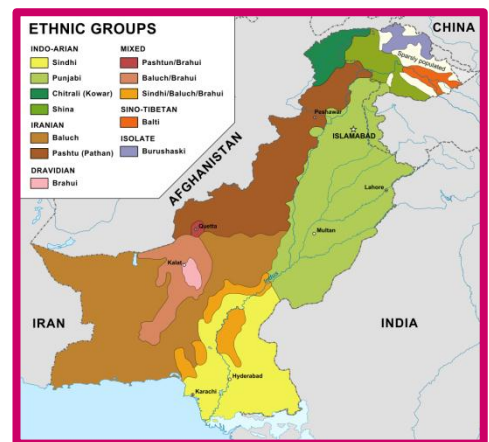
# Language and people

Urdu is an Indo-European language which developed as a lingua franca for the army, tradesmen and immigrants in the Indian subcontinent. It shares grammatical features and vocabulary with Persian, Arabic, Turkish and Sanskrit. (**Zaban-e-urdu-e-mu'alla** means **language of camp and court.**) Urdu and Hindi are almost indistinguishable when spoken in everyday situations but refer to the different cultural roots regarding the writing system. Whereas Hindi is written in the Devanagari script and is heavily Sanskritised, Urdu bears more Persian features and is still written in the modified Nastaliq ('hanging') Arabic script, a calligraphic Arabic script, which Iran has replaced by the Naskh (letters written on a horizontal line).

In Pakistan, Urdu is spoken as a first language mainly in big cities like Karachi and Lahore. Most people in Pakistan learn the local language (Punjabi [c. 50%], Sindhi, Pushtu, Balochi and others) as their first language and Urdu when they start school. This implies that people from Pakistan speak and are literate in Urdu if they attended school in their home country. It is also common within the heteroglossic Pakistani society to translanguage, i.e. to use multiple languages simultaneously and mix them in order to communicate efficiently.

As a country Pakistan has had a troubled history since it gained independence from Britain together with India in 1947. It is a multiethnic country that is politically

unstable and has an ongoing conflict with India about the Punjab. Life styles and value systems tend to vary greatly between more westernised urban areas and more traditional rural areas.



[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages\\_of\\_Pakistan#mediaviewer/File:Pakistan\\_ethnic\\_map.svg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Languages_of_Pakistan#mediaviewer/File:Pakistan_ethnic_map.svg)

## Education

Since English is used alongside with Urdu as an official language in Pakistan and is highly regarded within the middle and upper classes, families who can afford it send their children to English medium schools. There all or some subjects are taught in English.

The school system in Pakistan is modelled according to the English system, but standards of education may vary substantially in rural and urban areas.

# What may be new, unusual or difficult for Urdu speakers when learning English

## Phonology

Although being used to a more complex sound system and a greater variety of phonemes, Urdu speakers may face difficulties in pronouncing the following sounds as there are no or no close matches in their sound system:

- ◆ **th** may be pronounced **d**
- ◆ **r** may sound like an Italian or American **r**
- ◆ **w** may be pronounced like **v** and the vowels may be pronounced the same, so that the word **very** may sound the same as **wary**
- ◆ the words **bard**, **bed** or **bade** may be said instead of **bad**
- ◆ words like **sorry** and **saw** may get the same vowel sound as **laugh**
- ◆ diphthongs in words like **coat** may sound the same as the monophthong in **court**
- ◆ certain consonant clusters are unfamiliar to Urdu speakers and they tend to put a short vowel sound in between, most famously perhaps is to pronounce the word **film** as **filam**.

## Grammar

- ◆ Even though Urdu as an Indo-European language bears various similar grammatical features with English, there are distinct differences which may lead to errors and interferences.
- ◆ As there are no articles in Urdu the omission of articles is a common error for learners.
- ◆ Word order: the verb in Urdu is in last position in the sentence; there are no prepositions in Urdu but postpositions, i.e. **on the table** becomes literally translated **table on**.
- ◆ Urdu does not distinguish between a female and a male pronoun, Urdu speakers may therefore refer to a female with **he** or to a male with **she**.
- ◆ Pronouns are often omitted in Urdu as the form of the verb provides the information as to person, number, gender and level of respect. Learners may apply this convention to English and therefore appear to speak in incomplete sentences.
- ◆ The semantics of Urdu tenses are similar to English, but the morphology (how the tenses are formed) is very different. For example, auxiliaries have a different function in the morphology of the tenses and learners may therefore use English auxiliaries incorrectly. Although Urdu has a similar tense system to English, there are differences in usage. That means that learners of English have to learn how to use the English tense system. For example, they may use the past instead of the present perfect: **They went to school just now** instead of **They have just gone to school**. Urdu speakers also have to learn how to use tenses in reported speech. They may say **She said she will call** instead of **She said she would call**.

## Writing

As Urdu is written in a modified Arabic script, learners of English who are literate in Urdu have to get used to the Roman script and the left-to-right orientation. Teachers may make the following observations:

- ◆ When learners form Roman letters they often start on the right.
- ◆ Misreading letters with mirror shapes, e.g. **p** and **q** and **d** and **b** is quite common. Another common reading and writing mistake is exchanging two letters: **twon** instead of **town** or **form** instead of **from**.
- ◆ The Arabic script does not write short vowels – it is similar to how people often write when texting in English, e.g. **txt** instead of **text**. Consequently Urdu speakers may sometimes omit them.
- ◆ As there are no upper and lower case letters in Arabic, the distinction between upper and lower case letters is likely to cause problems for learners.
- ◆ Gaps between words are not as clearly marked in the Nastaliq style of Arabic as they need to be in the Roman script; learners may therefore omit spaces between words.
- ◆ Punctuation is a fairly recent introduction in Urdu and some punctuation marks are inverted. Even literate Urdu speakers may therefore struggle with punctuation in English.

## Vocabulary

The history of Urdu indicates that its etymological origins are diverse. Besides Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit there are a great number of English words often used alongside with the old Urdu words. Learners from Pakistan have therefore an advantage to learners from other countries as they usually have already acquired a good basic vocabulary. Also, in the Indian sub-continent a lot of technical terms and subject specific vocabulary is English. This means that young learners may be familiar with the subject-specific language in science, but may struggle with everyday vocabulary.

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