

# Review Article

## Cultural Diversity and Communication in Nigerian Workplaces: A Strategic Framework for Inclusivity and Collaboration

### ABSTRACT

The increasing cultural diversity in Nigerian workplaces has intensified the need for effective communication strategies to manage intercultural interactions and foster inclusiveness. This study examines the implications of cultural and linguistic diversity within Nigerian organizations, addressing the complexities of navigating ethnic, religious, and linguistic differences. The Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), Social Identity Theory (SIT), and Intergroup Contact Theory provide foundational frameworks for understanding and managing these dynamics, with CAT highlighting how convergence and divergence in communication styles can bridge or amplify social divides. Through a detailed analysis of Nigerian workplace environments, this paper identifies key communication challenges, including language barriers and identity-driven in-groups, while proposing strategies rooted in CAT, SIT, and Intergroup Contact Theory to enhance collaboration and reduce tensions. Recommendations for organizational management, such as language training and structured intergroup activities, aim to foster a more inclusive and productive environment, acknowledging both the opportunities and challenges posed by Nigeria's unique socio-cultural landscape.

**Keywords:** Cultural diversity, Workplace inclusiveness, Nigeria workplace, Linguistic Identity, Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), Social Identity Theory (SIT), Intergroup Contact Theory

### INTRODUCTION

A study at Stamford University, which collected data from regions including China, Greece, Chile, Indonesia, Russia, and Aboriginal Australia, found that language plays a central role in shaping thought processes. People who speak different languages often think in unique ways, while those who share a language tend to think similarly (Boroditsky, 2015, Obot 2015). Language, therefore, is not only a tool for expression or sharing information but is also a constructive force in forming thought (Obot 2015). However, the increasing prominence of cultural diversity in modern Nigerian workplaces reflects the broader globalization and demographic shifts in the country. Nigeria's rich cultural landscape, which includes over 500 languages and numerous ethnic and religious groups, presents both opportunities and complexities for organizations striving to maintain effective communication and cohesion among employees (Kori-Siakpere et al., 2024; Jejenywa et al., 2024). As diversity grows, so does the need for communication frameworks like Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), which offers an

adaptable model for fostering inclusiveness and managing cultural variances (Giles & O'Garra, 2007). With over 500 languages and 250 ethnic groups (Kori-Siakpere et al., 2024), the Nigerian workforce reflects this heterogeneity in terms of language, ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic status. Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo are the three dominant ethnic groups, but several smaller ethnicities significantly contribute to the socio-cultural landscape (Lewis et al., 2015) such as Tiv, Urhobo/Isoko, Ijaw, Ekpeye, Kalabari among others. While diversity enriches Nigerian organizations, it also presents serious management challenges. According to Oluwabamide and Jegede (2008), cultural diversity often manifests in the workplace through subtle divisions and miscommunication between employees of different linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. Moreover, as Nigeria becomes increasingly integrated into the global economy, the need for effective intercultural communication has never been greater (Song, 2017). Globalization demands that businesses address the complexities of managing diverse teams to remain competitive and innovative (Kalra & Szymanski, 2023). Nigeria's diverse workforce, while fostering innovation and creativity, also poses communication challenges due to language differences, ethnic identities, and religious beliefs. These variances often affect interpersonal interactions, creating both opportunities for growth and challenges in team cohesion. Addressing these dynamics with strategies grounded in CAT and supported by additional intercultural theories such as Social Identity Theory and Intergroup Contact Theory, is crucial for Nigerian organizations seeking to thrive in a multicultural setting (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Allport, 1954). This paper provides a detailed examination of Nigeria's cultural diversity and explores how it influences workplace dynamics. Drawing on a broad range of literature, it identifies the challenges Nigerian organizations face, including language-based barriers and ethnic conflict, theoretical frameworks such as CAT, SIT and Intergroup Contact Theory and proposes strategies for managing these issues effectively.

### **GILES' COMMUNICATION ACCOMMODATION THEORY (CAT), SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY (SIT) AND INTERGROUP CONTACT THEORY AND THEIR RELEVANCE TO WORKPLACE DIVERSITY**

Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT) is a widely used framework that explains how individuals adjust their communication styles to foster social harmony, reduce conflict, or maintain distinct group identities (Giles & O'Garra, 2007). Originally developed in sociolinguistics, CAT has become relevant in multicultural and multilingual settings, particularly in managing intercultural communication. In the context of Nigeria's diverse workplace environment, CAT offers valuable insights into how individuals and organizations can navigate linguistic and cultural differences to enhance collaboration and teamwork. CAT posits that individuals modify their communication behaviors in two primary ways: convergence and divergence (Giles & O'Garra, 2007). Convergence refers to an individual's attempt to align their communication style with that of the interlocutor to reduce social distance, build rapport, and foster mutual understanding. Conversely, divergence occurs when an individual deliberately emphasizes linguistic or cultural differences to maintain social distance or assert identity. CAT also introduces the concept of over-accommodation, where speakers make excessive adjustments in communication that may come across as patronizing or condescending (Gallois et al., 2018). In Nigeria's multicultural work environment, CAT

helps explain how individuals manage communication challenges arising from linguistic diversity (Cletus et al., 2018; Umemezia&Agbonifoh, 2017).

Furthermore, CAT can be contextualized within a broader framework of intercultural communication theories. Social Identity Theory (SIT), for instance, emphasizes the role of group identity in influencing social dynamics, explaining why employees may align with colleagues from similar ethnic or linguistic backgrounds, potentially leading to workplace divisions (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Intergroup Contact Theory also provides insight, suggesting that positive interactions across diverse groups can improve mutual understanding and reduce prejudice, thereby supporting CAT's goal of achieving accommodation (Allport, 1954). Employees in Nigerian organizations often use strategies aligned with CAT to promote inclusiveness or maintain their group identity, depending on the social dynamics at play (Ayeni, 2020). By situating CAT, SIT and Intergroup Contact Theory within this theoretical landscape, we can better appreciate its strengths and limitations as a tool for addressing intercultural communication in Nigerian workplaces. These theories recognize that accommodation behaviors are influenced by social, cultural, and contextual factors and can impact the dynamics of interpersonal and group relationships.

## **IMPACT OF CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY**

### **Language Diversity and Communication Challenges**

Language is fundamental to effective workplace interactions, but Nigeria's extensive linguistic diversity introduces complex communication challenges. While Khanus (2007) asserts that cultural diversity enhances organizational performance, he also acknowledges the costs, especially regarding training and education. Nigerian organizations increasingly invest in language training to bridge communication gaps, a necessary expense given that over 526 languages are spoken nationwide (Kori-Siakpere et al., 2024). Although English and Pidgin English are generally accepted as professional languages, not all employees have fluency in these languages, which can lead to misunderstandings and decreased productivity (Ayeni, 2020). According to Onyokoko and Onuoha (2019), language differences often create fault lines that divide employees based on linguistic familiarity, ultimately fostering the formation of exclusive subgroups within the workplace. These cliques can hinder team cohesion as employees align with those who share their native language, leading to exclusion and fragmentation within teams (Kalra & Szymanski, 2023).

Diversity and inclusion, although often discussed together, represent distinct objectives within organizations. Tienda (2013) highlights the difference: diversity focuses on the representation of varied identities and backgrounds, while inclusion ensures the integration and meaningful participation of these groups. However, achieving inclusiveness in a linguistically diverse environment is challenging without structured communication strategies. CAT (Communication Accommodation Theory) by Giles provides a relevant framework for Nigerian workplaces, where employees must often adapt their communication style to bridge linguistic divides. CAT's concepts of convergence (aligning one's language with that of

others) and divergence (accentuating one's linguistic distinctiveness) are directly applicable here. For example, in the Nigerian banking sector, employees frequently use Pidgin English as a lingua franca to bridge communication gaps, facilitating convergence across linguistic divides (Onyokoko & Onuoha, 2019). Yet, employees may diverge to assert their ethnic identities in contexts where they feel culturally marginalized, which can inadvertently reinforce divisions.

To address these challenges, organizations are encouraged to implement CAT-based training that equips employees with skills to adjust communication styles for fostering inclusiveness and reducing social distance (Giles & Ogay, 2007). Sarkar (2010) adds that diversity needs situational tailoring rather than a "one-size-fits-all" approach, underscoring the necessity for Nigerian organizations to adopt flexible communication strategies. A more nuanced understanding of diversity, as suggested by Awbrey (2007), includes both "vertical diversity" (which views differences in a hierarchical manner) and "horizontal diversity" (which treats diversity as simple variation). In Nigerian organizations, fostering a "horizontal" view may help mitigate tensions by encouraging employees to see linguistic and cultural differences as a source of varied perspectives rather than a basis for superiority.

### **Ethnic and Religious Divisions**

Nigeria's ethnic and religious diversity adds another layer of complexity to workplace dynamics, where employees' affiliations often shape group dynamics and cohesion. Many Nigerian employees gravitate toward colleagues with similar ethnic or religious backgrounds, which can sometimes escalate into conflicts marked by bias, stereotypes, and, in extreme cases, diminished productivity (Umemezia & Agbonifoh, 2017). Kori-Siakpere et al. (2024) highlight that ethnic alignment in the workplace often leads to tensions among different groups. Similarly, religious diversity primarily among Muslims, Christians, and indigenous practitioners further complicates workplace interactions, as differences in values, ethics, and interpersonal expectations can result in misunderstandings or even discriminatory behavior, thereby affecting morale and productivity (Rasul & Rogger, 2015). CAT's divergence principle becomes crucial in contexts where employees feel the need to maintain cultural distinctiveness. In Nigerian banks, for instance, employees sometimes form cliques around shared ethnic identities, using divergence as a means of preserving cultural ties.

This tendency can be observed in cases where employees speak their native languages within ethnic circles to reinforce identity, which aligns with Unzueta et al. (2012) insights into social dominance motives within diversity. Divergence in communication can, however, lead to unintended consequences. When managers over-accommodate by attempting to speak in unfamiliar dialects to connect with diverse groups, the efforts can appear exaggerated or insincere, resulting in misunderstandings (Gallois et al., 2018). Hampden-Turner and Chih (2010) argue that achieving organizational harmony between diversity and unity requires reconciling contrasting values, an approach that can help Nigerian organizations

mitigate the tension between inclusion and distinct ethnic identities. Effective communication strategies, especially those that balance accommodation without overstepping cultural boundaries, are essential in Nigerian workplaces. Integrating principles from both CAT and Intergroup Contact Theory, Nigerian organizations can encourage structured team-building activities that promote inclusive communication and bridge cultural gaps. By fostering intergroup interactions and emphasizing shared professional goals, organizations can help employees from different backgrounds view their cultural diversity as an asset rather than a source of division (Allport, 1954; Faranani, 2013).

## **MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES IN MULTICULTURAL SETTINGS**

Managing diverse teams requires an understanding of the cultural nuances that shape employee behavior. Salvi and Bamford (2007) highlight that the connection between language and business extends beyond trade and influences all aspects of the workplace. According to the authors, one of the consequences of globalization is that skills in other languages have come to play an important part at all levels of the business hierarchy, no longer merely at the top. Managers must navigate conflicting cultural norms, such as the collectivist orientation of some ethnic groups versus the individualist tendencies of others (Kori-Siakpere et al., 2024). Kalra and Szymanski (2023) argue that multicultural managers are better equipped to handle these challenges, as they can act as boundary spanners who bridge cultural gaps. However, the cost of managing diversity can be high. Organizations often need to invest in diversity training, language programs, and cultural sensitivity workshops (Aluko, 2003). The use of interpreters and cross-cultural consultants is also common in multinational companies operating in Nigeria. Despite these costs, Rasul and Rogger (2015) highlight that diversity enhances creativity, innovation, and problem-solving, making it a valuable asset for businesses.

## **Opportunities for Leveraging Diversity**

While cultural diversity presents challenges, it also offers numerous opportunities for Nigerian organizations. Diverse teams bring together different perspectives and experiences, fostering creativity and innovation (Aluko, 2003). Fajana and Ige (2009) note that cultural diversity, driven by globalization and international interdependence, has allowed Nigerian organizations to benefit from international labor mobility. Despite challenges to Nigeria's global reputation such as terrorism and banditry its organizations have gained from liberalized international policies that facilitate the cross-border movement of skilled workers. This mobility has provided Nigerian organizations with access to new ideas, innovative practices, and highly experienced personnel. Kori-Siakpere et al. (2024) emphasized that organizations with inclusive practices are more likely to attract and retain top talent, as employees feel valued and supported because when language diversity is managed effectively, can enhance communication and collaboration. However, Obono (2003) and Aluko (2003) highlight that cultural diversity creates a rich pool of talents, skills, and experiences. As a result, organizations with diverse teams perform better than those with a more uniform culture. The corporate sector in Nigeria benefits the most from this diverse talent pool, which includes people of different races, genders, ages, backgrounds, lingua franca, academic

qualifications, and religions(Onyokoko et al., 2019; Jejenywa et al., 2024). Additionally, cultural diversity promotes adaptability and resilience, as employees learn to navigate different cultural contexts (Kalra & Szymanski, 2023).Globalization and labor mobility have strengthened Nigerian institutions by enhancing adaptability and competitiveness, equipping them to respond effectively to various challenges (Fajana& Ige, 2009). Furthermore, cultural diversity helps organizations address operational issues such as outsourcing, service delivery, and resource allocation more efficiently, broadening the range of solutions available to tackle complex problems.

### **CAT AND WORKPLACE INCLUSIVENESS IN NIGERIA**

CAT also explains how employees can foster inclusiveness in diverse workplaces. By adapting communication styles to accommodate others, employees can create environments that respect cultural differences while promoting teamwork and productivity (Ayeni, 2020). In Nigerian workplaces, this accommodation is crucial, given the linguistic diversity and ethnic complexities that characterize the workforce. Employees who actively converge toward shared communication norms help reduce intergroup tensions and enhance mutual understanding (Kalra & Szymanski, 2023). Meanwhile, organizations that encourage the use of CAT strategies, such as language training and cultural awareness programs, are more likely to succeed in managing diversity (Aluko, 2003).

#### **Convergence: Bridging Communication Gaps with English and Pidgin English**

Convergence in CAT refers to adapting one's communication style to create rapport and reduce social distance. Nigerian employees often converge toward Pidgin English or standard English, which serves as a practical lingua franca across diverse ethnicities. This adaptation is common in organizations where employees from different linguistic backgrounds work together, particularly in large cities where diversity is more pronounced (Ayeni, 2020).Converging toward a lingua franca like English or pidgin English promotes cohesion and minimizes misunderstandings, making collaboration more effective (Ayeni, 2020) at workplace especially in a neutral environment where their employees are from different regions. For example, Pidgin English serves as a practical example of convergence in the Nigerian workplace. Employees from different linguistic backgrounds often switch to pidgin to create a common ground for communication (Kori-Siakpere et al., 2024).

In Nigeria, it is difficult to find a citizen who cannot communicate in English or Pidgin English, as the case may be. These are among the major spoken languages in the country, despite its linguistic diversity. In some cases, differences in pronunciation often reveal the region a speaker originates from; however, the message is still understood by listeners, both young and old. Although Pidgin English is neither taught nor used in schools or universities, it is widely spoken across every region of the country.Ayeni (2020) emphasizes that the use of pidgin English and other common languages helps bridge linguistic gaps, enabling employees to work together more efficiently. This shared language facilitates teamwork by reducing the barriers posed by regional languages and dialects.In banking and service sectors, this

linguistic convergence has been observed to enhance customer relations and minimize communication errors, particularly when clients and staff come from varied backgrounds (Onyokoko & Onuoha, 2019). The use of a lingua franca, such as Pidgin English, helps minimize misunderstandings and fosters inclusiveness, as it allows employees to communicate in a neutral language. By converging toward a shared language, employees reduce social distance, thus facilitating smoother collaboration and interaction. Organizational leaders are encouraged to support this convergence by providing language training and encouraging the use of neutral languages in the workplace (Faranani, 2013).

### **Divergence: Preservation of Ethnic and Cultural Identity**

In some instances, Nigerian employees emphasize their cultural or linguistic differences by communicating in their native languages, especially when working with colleagues from their own ethnic group. This practice aligns with the divergence aspect of CAT, where individuals assert their identity by maintaining linguistic distinctiveness (Kalra & Szymanski, 2023). While divergence can help employees feel connected to their heritage, it may also result in exclusion and division if not managed properly (Giles & Ogay, 2007). On the other hand, over-accommodation occurs when employees or managers make excessive attempts to adapt to another person's linguistic or cultural preferences, which can be perceived as insincere or condescending (Gallois et al., 2018). For instance, managers attempting to switch between local dialects or overly simplifying their language may inadvertently offend employees or undermine their own authority. Nigerian organizations must be cautious in balancing accommodation efforts to ensure they foster genuine connections without overstepping cultural boundaries.

### **Over-Accommodation and its Risks**

Over-accommodation occurs when individuals make excessive adjustments to their communication style, which may seem patronizing or inappropriate. In Nigerian workplaces, managers sometimes attempt to communicate in dialects they are unfamiliar with, leading to misunderstandings or perceptions of insincerity. For example, when managers from the southern part of Nigeria attempt to speak northern dialects to build rapport with employees, this may be seen as condescending rather than inclusive (Gallois et al., 2018). Organizations need to educate managers on effective accommodation strategies that respect cultural diversity without overstepping boundaries, to avoid reinforcing stereotypes or creating tension (Jejenewa et al., 2024).

## **SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND INTERGROUP CONTACT THEORY IN THE NIGERIAN CONTEXT**

Social Identity Theory (SIT) and Intergroup Contact Theory (ICT) offer additional perspectives for understanding the complex interplay of ethnic and religious identities in Nigerian workplaces. SIT explains the tendency of employees to form social categories, resulting in in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In Nigeria, this is often observed in workplaces where employees align with those sharing similar backgrounds, leading to challenges in communication and team dynamics

(Oluwabamide & Jegede, 2008). Intergroup Contact Theory suggests that structured and positive interactions between groups can reduce prejudices and foster better understanding (Allport, 1954). Nigerian organizations could benefit from applying ICT principles by encouraging structured, inclusive activities that promote cross-cultural understanding and reduce bias. Such activities could include team-building exercises that emphasize shared goals over individual identities, facilitating greater cohesion and collaboration within the organization (Cletus et al., 2018).

### **CASE STUDY: INTEGRATING CAT, INTERGROUP CONTACT THEORY, AND SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY IN NIGERIAN BANKS**

The Nigerian banking sector exemplifies the complexities and potential of managing workplace diversity in a highly multicultural environment. Banks in urban centers like Lagos and Port Harcourt employ staff from a broad range of linguistic, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, which frequently leads to challenges in communication, team cohesion, and inclusiveness (Onyokoko & Onuoha, 2019). A study conducted in Port Harcourt among seven major banks highlighted that linguistic diversity often caused communication breakdowns, misunderstandings, and delays in decision-making. Employees frequently formed subgroups along linguistic and cultural lines, creating exclusive in-groups that obstructed broader team collaboration and reduced productivity (Onyokoko & Onuoha, 2019). To navigate these challenges, we will apply Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), Social Identity Theory (SIT), and Intergroup Contact Theory as frameworks for fostering inclusiveness and reducing social distance among employees. Each theory provides a unique perspective on the dynamics of workplace diversity, yet together, they offer a comprehensive approach to addressing both communication barriers and cultural divisions. Onyokoko & Onuoha's (2019) findings reinforce the idea that effective communication is vital in a diverse workplace. Their research indicated that banks that prioritize clear communication practices can mitigate misunderstandings related to language and culture. The study also revealed that when management fosters an environment of shared responsibility, employees feel more included and are likely to perform better, regardless of their background.

Specifically, the research found strong correlations between effective communication and workplace diversity dimensions such as ethnicity, gender, and culture. This suggests that when banks improve their communication strategies, they can enhance collaboration among diverse teams. Additionally, the study indicated that employees perform best when given equal opportunities and clear job descriptions, highlighting the importance of inclusive practices. By integrating CAT, SIT, and Intergroup Contact Theory, banks can create strategies that promote better understanding and collaboration among their diverse staff. For instance, CAT encourages individuals to adjust their communication styles to reduce social barriers, while SIT emphasizes the importance of identity in group dynamics. Meanwhile, Intergroup Contact Theory suggests that positive interactions between different groups can lead to greater acceptance and collaboration. The findings from Onyokoko & Onuoha (2019) provide valuable insights into managing workplace diversity in Nigerian banks. By applying these theories, banks can not only

address communication issues but also foster an inclusive environment that leverages the strengths of their diverse workforce.

## **INTEGRATING CAT, SIT, AND INTERGROUP CONTACT THEORY FOR COMPREHENSIVE DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT**

The integration of CAT, SIT, and Intergroup Contact Theory provides Nigerian banks with a robust, multi-theoretical approach to managing workplace diversity. Convergence strategies from CAT reduce language barriers by encouraging the use of English or Pidgin as neutral languages, promoting inclusiveness across linguistic divides (Giles & Ogay, 2007). Meanwhile, SIT's understanding of in-group/out-group dynamics highlights the psychological factors behind cultural subgroup formation, which banks can address through structured interactions to transform ethnic loyalties into organizational unity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Finally, Intergroup Contact Theory offers actionable solutions by promoting positive intergroup engagements through team-building exercises and cross-functional meetings, reducing prejudice and fostering a collaborative work environment (Allport, 1954).

### **Application of CAT Principles: Convergence and Over-Accommodation**

CAT's concept of convergence where individuals adapt their communication styles to align with a common language has proven effective in reducing the formation of exclusive linguistic subgroups. Many Nigerian banks have promoted the use of English or Pidgin English as a lingua franca to bridge communication gaps and encourage collaboration across ethnic lines. This approach allows employees to connect more effectively in customer service interactions and internal communications, minimizing misunderstandings and enhancing inclusiveness (Ayeni, 2020; Cletus et al., 2018). However, over-accommodation, where excessive efforts are made to adapt one's language or behavior, has sometimes had adverse effects. Managers in Port Harcourt, for instance, attempted to speak in local dialects to connect with diverse teams, but these attempts were perceived as insincere or patronizing. This form of over-accommodation reinforced communication barriers instead of alleviating them, emphasizing the need for balance in adaptation strategies (Gallois et al., 2018).

### **SIT and the Formation of In-Groups and Out-Groups**

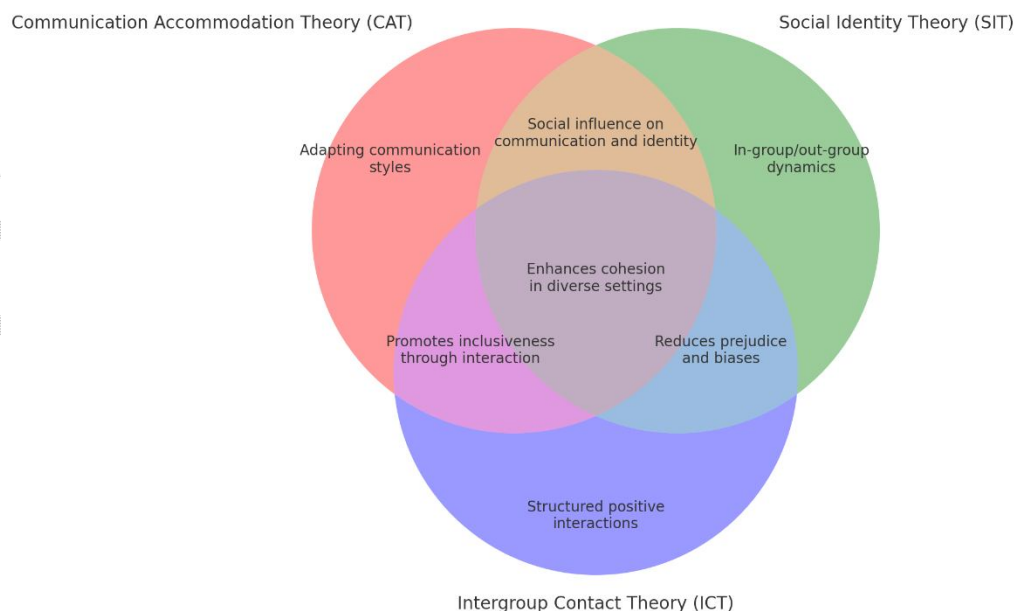
Social Identity Theory (SIT) offers insight into how employees in Nigerian banks often align themselves with colleagues of similar linguistic and ethnic backgrounds, forming in-groups. These in-groups provide psychological safety and a sense of belonging, as Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo employees, for instance, often bond over shared cultural identities. However, the formation of in-groups also creates visible divisions within the organization, resulting in the perception of other ethnic groups as out-groups, leading to decreased team cohesion and collaborative breakdowns (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Kori-Siakpere et al., 2024). This dynamic is particularly pronounced in Nigerian banks, where employees from specific ethnic backgrounds tend to communicate more freely within their in-groups, sometimes switching to native

languages or dialects. However, this divergence can alienate out-group members, who may feel excluded, thus negatively affecting productivity and overall team morale (Kalra & Szymanski, 2023). This in-group preference aligns with Unzueta et al. (2012) findings on social dominance motives, suggesting that employees may interpret diversity primarily through horizontal distinctions seeing difference as mere variation rather than integrated into a unified organizational culture (Awbrey, 2007).

### Promoting Inclusion Through Intergroup Contact Theory and Structured Interactions

In response to the divisive effects of in-group and out-group dynamics, some Nigerian banks have adopted strategies based on Intergroup Contact Theory. This theory posits that structured, positive interactions between members of diverse groups can reduce prejudice and foster greater understanding and trust (Allport, 1954). For instance, in Port Harcourt, banks have implemented team-building exercises and cross-functional projects that require collaboration between employees from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. These structured activities encourage employees to interact beyond their usual in-groups, promoting shared goals over individual cultural identities and fostering a more inclusive workplace culture (Onyokoko & Onuoha, 2019; Jejenewa et al., 2024). In Lagos, similar practices include organizing regular cross-functional meetings that bring together staff from different departments, which has helped reduce linguistic and cultural silos. These meetings encourage employees to view diversity as a collective strength and to leverage each other's unique perspectives for enhanced decision-making. By creating spaces for positive intergroup contact, Nigerian banks reinforce the value of diversity and provide opportunities for employees to form connections across cultural divides (Faranani, 2013; Cletus et al., 2018).

CAT, SIT, and ICT in Nigerian Workplaces



**Figure 1: Venn diagram for CAT, SIT, and ICT in Nigerian Workplaces**

## **STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE**

### **1. Promoting Inclusive Communication through Language Training**

Given the linguistic diversity in Nigeria, it is essential for organizations to invest in language training programs that facilitate effective communication across diverse groups. Language training not only improves comprehension but also enhances employees' ability to communicate effectively in English or Pidgin, which are widely spoken across Nigeria (Umemezia&Agbonifoh, 2017). Encouraging the use of a neutral lingua franca can also help reduce language-based subgrouping and promote inclusiveness in the workplace. By providing language resources, companies can empower their employees to communicate effectively, reducing the likelihood of misunderstandings or language-based divisions (Cletus et al., 2018). Organizations should encourage the use of shared languages and provide language training programs to improve communication skills. Facilitating team-building activities promotes trust, cooperation, and mutual respect among team members. Creating cross-functional teams that bring together diverse skills and perspectives helps address complex challenges and drive innovation. Additionally, knowledge-sharing initiatives and mentorship programs foster professional growth and learning across cultural and linguistic boundaries, enhancing collaboration within the organization (Kori-Siakpere et al., 2024). The adoption of common languages such as English and pidgin English can help reduce communication barriers and foster teamwork.

### **2. Developing Multicultural Leadership and Encouraging Intercultural Competence**

Organizations should prioritize the recruitment and development of multilingual and culturally competent leaders. These leaders can act as boundary spanners, facilitating communication between diverse teams and promoting inclusiveness (Kalra & Szymanski, 2023). Intercultural competence training includes educating employees about Nigeria's diverse cultural landscape, helping them understand the importance of accommodating differences in language and communication style without over-accommodating (Jejenywa et al., 2024). By fostering cultural awareness and sensitivity, employees can better adapt to diverse communication needs, promoting mutual respect and reducing conflicts (Aluko, 2003). The use of intercultural communication frameworks such as CAT, SIT and Intergroup Contact Theory can help employees develop the skills needed to navigate cultural differences. Ayeni (2020) suggests that fostering intercultural competence can enhance teamwork and collaboration in diverse settings.

### **3. Implementing Diversity Training Programs**

Offering language classes or workshops enhances communication skills across the various languages spoken within the organization. Ehwarieme et al. (2024) highlight that such training helps eradicate negative attitudes toward performance and productivity. In addition, cultural sensitivity training educates employees about differences in norms, values, and practices. Managers and team leaders should also receive training to equip them with the skills needed to effectively manage diverse teams, resolve cultural

conflicts, and foster an inclusive environment. Training programs focused on cultural sensitivity and awareness can mitigate the negative effects of stereotypes and biases. These programs should emphasize the value of diversity and promote mutual respect among employees (Aluko, 2003). Structured team-building activities can bridge cultural gaps, fostering greater cohesion among employees from diverse backgrounds. Cross-functional teams that bring together employees from various departments can also promote collaboration and leverage diverse skill sets to drive innovation (Onyokoko & Onuoha, 2019). These teams benefit from diverse perspectives, which can lead to more innovative problem-solving and a stronger sense of unity. CAT's convergence principle can further enhance the effectiveness of these teams, as employees align their communication styles to create a shared understanding and reduce intergroup tensions (Kori-Siakpere et al., 2024).

#### **4. Establishing Policies for Flexibility and Inclusiveness**

Flexible work arrangements, such as remote work options and adjustable hours, can accommodate employees' cultural and personal needs. For instance, some Nigerian employees may observe religious practices that require specific accommodations, and flexible scheduling can help them balance work with cultural or religious obligations. Flexible work policies not only improve employee satisfaction but also foster an environment of respect and inclusiveness. Technology also plays a vital role in supporting virtual communication, enabling cross-cultural teams to collaborate effectively despite geographical distances (Cletus et al., 2018). It is essential that all employees, regardless of their background, understand the organization's goals, objectives, and expectations. Clear communication of job responsibilities and performance metrics ensures transparency and accountability. Organizations should also set realistic, achievable goals that leverage the unique strengths and capabilities of their diverse teams, encouraging each employee to contribute meaningfully toward collective success. Flexible work arrangements, such as remote work or adjustable work hours, accommodate employees' cultural and personal needs. A supportive work environment that values work-life balance and respects cultural or religious observances encourages greater engagement and satisfaction. Technology plays a vital role in enabling virtual collaboration and communication among geographically dispersed teams, further fostering inclusiveness and efficiency (Kori-Siakpere et al., 2024).

#### **CONCLUSION**

Effective management of cultural diversity in Nigerian workplaces requires an understanding of the nuanced ways in which language, identity, and group dynamics influence communication. CAT, SIT, and Intergroup Contact Theory offer valuable perspectives on fostering inclusiveness through strategic convergence, identity awareness, and structured intergroup contact. This study concludes that organizations can harness the benefits of diversity by encouraging a balanced approach to communication, promoting respect for cultural identities, and facilitating positive interactions among diverse groups. Implementing flexible language policies, intercultural training, and inclusive leadership are essential steps toward creating a cohesive workplace that leverages Nigeria's rich cultural fabric. These

strategies not only enhance productivity but also contribute to a more inclusive organizational culture, positioning Nigerian workplaces for success in an increasingly globalized economy.

### **Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)**

Author(s) hereby declares that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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