

## Exploring the Linguistic Problems of Toastmasters Club Pakistan

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### Abstract

*Pakistani Toastmasters, while delivering speeches in English language, face a considerable number of difficulties. These difficulties arise on a syntactic, semantic and phonological levels and make it difficult for Pakistani Toastmasters to effectively express themselves in English language. This research explores the linguistic problems faced by the Pakistani Toastmasters and investigates the reasons behind those problems. The population for this research was taken from Lahore Toastmasters Club and by following the qualitative research paradigm, this research not only investigated the linguistic problems of Toastmasters but also offered solutions to uproot them.*

**Keywords:** *Linguistic Problems, Toastmasters Club, Pakistan.*

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### Introduction

English language is the medium of communication in all Toastmaster clubs and those who speak English either as a second or a foreign language, face difficulties. The problems reach the zenith when they have to address the audience. Sometimes these problems are accompanied by confusion and embarrassment (Samer, 2016). Pakistani Toastmasters, being non-native speakers of English, find it hard to deliver a speech in the English language. The most obvious problem is the problem of intonation. A good speaker is the one who designs and delivers his speech in such a way that it

inspires the audience. It is not difficult to write a speech beautifully but intonation can be a problem. Poor Intonation causes misunderstanding and leaves a poor impression on the audience (Rusadze & Kipiani, 2015). Intonation has a vital role in public speaking but Pakistani public speakers find it difficult to create the desired effects on the audience because of their intonation. Mostly, they are unable to follow the pattern of rising and fall but when doing so, they do it inappropriately. The sentence structure of English is yet a challenge to non-native English speakers but once it mingles with anxiety, the problem reaches a new level. Stress is yet another problem for the speakers since

understanding the stressed syllable either needs a profound knowledge of the phonology or a great deal of time spent in the company of native speakers. The vocabulary used by these people is also poor, and with the limited number of words, they are unable to fully express themselves. Mother tongue interference is also a big challenge that needs to be considered (Hassan, 2011). Toastmasters club receives members from linguistically diverse backgrounds and all of these languages interfere in their ways. Proper use of collocation is the essence of a good speech but Pakistani Toastmasters find it difficult to find proper collocation for different words while delivering speeches. The young generation is usually tilted towards the modern variation of English since they keep watching movies and also prefer informal language when they are talking to their friends. The excessive use of informal and slang language is another hindrance to speech. Their linguistic items mainly remain confined to the highly informal variation of English and when they have to use formal language, they hardly find anything to say, and thus, an effective speech becomes difficult. Apart from these major problems, there are many minor problems that Pakistani Toastmasters face while delivering a speech in English language.

Different factors contribute to the aforementioned problem. Some of them have their roots deep in the methods that were used to teach English in their school time. Others just occur naturally because of the linguistic

differences between the mother tongue and the English language. The physiological development of the vocal cords of these speakers also makes it difficult to pronounce the sounds of a new foreign language that belongs to a new family. There are some attributes of a language that are difficult to teach. Intonation, for instance, is very much difficult to teach (Rusadze, 2015). The difficulties in getting familiar with the intonation patterns of the target language are often due to the non-equivalence of the intonation structure of the mother tongue (Cruz-Ferreira, 1983). In short, there are numerous reasons behind the existence of all these problems.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Language is a big problem for Pakistani Toastmasters since English is a foreign language for them and, at the same time, they are supposed to deliver a speech in English language. While delivering a speech in English language, these speakers face difficulty and find it hard to effectively express themselves.

### **Objectives of the Research**

1. To explore the linguistic problems of Pakistani Toastmasters
2. To investigate the reasons behind these problems

## **Research Questions**

1. What are the language-related problems of Toastmasters in Pakistan?
2. What are the reasons behind the problems faced by the Toastmasters in Pakistan?

## **Delimitations of the Research**

It is nearly impossible to cover the entire Toastmasters clubs of Pakistan, so, the researcher selected only Lahore Toastmasters club.

## **Rationale**

Language has become a major issue for Pakistani Toastmasters and because of having a foreign language as a medium of communication, they find it difficult to deliver an effective speech. The linguistic problems they face are far greater than the problems faced in interpersonal communication since it is only the language that can influence people. In interpersonal communication, messages can be conveyed even if mistakes are being made but there is less room for mistakes in a speech. Apart from that, the ultimate goal of the speech is to influence others and people cannot be influenced until and unless the language is used properly. Numerous researches are conducted on the psychological aspects of these speeches but the linguistic aspect has been entirely neglected. The researcher believes that exploring the problem to the depth, investigating the reasons and

providing solutions will be much beneficial for Pakistani Toastmasters.

## **Significance of the Research**

The English language is a big problem for Pakistani Toastmasters. The research has investigated all the factors that become problematic for Pakistani Toastmasters. The primary focus is to explore the reasons for the problem and provide solutions. The finding of the research may not only help Pakistani Toastmasters to identify the reasons for their problems but also proper direction maybe given to them to uproot the problem.

## **Literature Review**

Enhancing oral communication is the primary focus of the most modern researches. Different studies have uncovered different aspects of oral communication and the major problems have also been highlighted. Anxiety and other psychological factors have been playing their roles to make group communication difficult. Once these factors blend with linguistic problems, say (Eiadeh, Rehman & S a m e r , 2 0 1 5 ) , e f f e c t i v e communication becomes difficult. If someone is confused, anxious and embarrassed, and, at the same time, if he is not well familiar with the target language, then group communication can never be effective. The fear of making mistakes and vocabulary also become a hindrance while talking to a mass audience. According to Heriansyah (2012) poor vocabulary and the continuous fear of making

mistakes are the main cause of making mistakes while talking to a group. When someone with a poor vocabulary and a deep fear tries to deliver a speech, it would be challenging to influence the audience.

Apart from the above-mentioned reasons, there are plenty of other reasons that keep creating hurdles for public speakers. Sometimes, the speakers do not have ideas to share with the audience, sometimes their minds go blank and lack of exposure is yet another challenge that speakers face quite frequently (Sharma, 2018). If the speakers have enough ideas, good exposure and good coherence of thoughts, they would never find public speech so difficult. Other similar problems are found out by (Hadijah, 2014) and she made it clear that pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary are the main reasons that students are unable to communicate effectively. Lack of fluency, comprehension and speaking practice also contributes to the problem. In this way, they find it extremely difficult to communicate in English language and group communication becomes even more difficult.

## **Methodology**

### **Theoretical Framework**

The researcher used Lasswell's communication model as a theoretical framework. The theory was developed to analyze mass communication or group communication. The theory says 'who says what to whom through which

channel and what the outcome is' (Lasswell, 1948). 'Who' means the one who addresses the audience, 'what' means the contents being used for communication and to whom' means the audience that listens to the communication. By 'channel' he means the medium of communication and by 'with what effect' he means the feedback of the audience. Mass communication or group communication is effective only when the model is followed properly but the communication would be ineffective even if one of these components is being compromised.

### **The Design of the Study**

The research has followed a qualitative paradigm. The researcher interviewed and observed the target population to collect the necessary data and analyzed them manually through content analysis.

### **Data Collection**

Since the research is about the problems of Toastmasters, the researcher took 10 Toastmasters from Lahore Toastmasters Club. To obtain the required data, the researcher used interviews and observations as data collection tools. The obtained data was analyzed through data analysis. The research used a semi-structured interview technique to make sure that the necessary information was obtained and additional information was elicited by asking extra questions if needed. The researcher also used a less structured observation technique and

played a dual role by participating as a table-talk speaker to make the participants comfortable.

### **Ethical Consideration**

All of the participants participated voluntarily and no one was forced to be a part of the research. The researcher, before conducting interviews and observation, took permission from the president of the club. The researcher also requested the participants for their permission to record the interviews. More importantly, the research prioritized the anonymity and confidentiality of all the participants.

### **Data Analysis**

Through observation and interviews, it was obvious that the English language is the major problem of Pakistani Toastmasters. Be it syntax or semantics, phonetics or phonology, problems could be seen in each aspect of spoken language. Apart from all these linguistic challenges, many other psychological problems could be detected but the research is delimited to language-related problems.

### **Intonation**

The first, and probably the biggest problem was the problem of intonation. Almost all of the Toastmasters found it hard to follow English intonation properly. Intonation is very much ambiguous in terms of its definition and no one has ever been able to give a satisfactory definition but

most of the people define it in terms of a low and high pitch of the voice of a speaker. There were also some idiosyncratic attributes, as could be seen among Pakistani Toastmasters, that made the concept of pitch even more difficult. Some people would go for high and low pitch, others simply make their voices heavy and light to follow intonation. In short, intonation was understood through the pitch of the voice and pitch means high and low voice in speech. It was more than obvious that the intonation of Pakistani Toastmasters was quite unnatural. For instance, "yes" is a word that has more than one possible meaning (Merriam-Webster's Dictionary, 2016) and the meanings entirely depend on the intonation. Being the non-native speakers of English, Pakistani Toastmasters interchangeably used different possible intonations of this particular word and, as a result, a question seemed like a statement. When a Toastmaster wanted to ask a question through a "yes" word, as commonly used in English language, the unnatural intonation made the listener believe that it was a general statement not a question and prefer to stay silent. In this way, the communication became ineffective since it did not follow Lasswell's model of communication. The speakers address the audience through the medium of the English language but the final step is incomplete which means no feedback is received from the audience because of being unfamiliar with the intonation of the English language.

The main reason behind this problem is the difference between the attributes of

the native language and the target language of the speakers. Almost all of the regional languages of Pakistan are somehow different from the English language. All these languages belong to the Indo-Iranian family and their segmental and suprasegmental features are different from the features of a language that belongs to the Indo-European family. The Toastmasters, being the speakers of Pakistani languages, extend the features of their languages to the English language and thus, intonation becomes unnatural and communication becomes ineffective.

### **Collocation**

The proper use of collocation is the essence of a good speech. No matter it is normal communication or mass communication, finding the collocating words is simple in one's mother tongue but once he starts communicating in a language other than his own, it becomes challenging. The same happened to Pakistani Toastmasters when they delivered speeches in English language. Numerous unusual collocations were detected in their speeches. For instance, instead of saying "correct and incorrect grammar", one of the members said "effective and ineffective grammar". In each meeting, it is the responsibility of the grammarian to introduce a new word and those who use that particular word in his speech are much appreciated. The newly introduced words are usually difficult and incorporation of these words leads to many unusual collocations. A new word 'cajole' was introduced by the

grammarian and throughout the session, many wrong collocations were made by different speakers. Another member used the word "tangible" with "time" which is altogether incorrect. Tangible is something that is concrete or perceptible and it is impossible to percept or touch time. Unusual collocations make a speech ineffective since the contents used for communication are not appropriate and the second point of Lasswell's model emphasizes the same idea that communication cannot be effective until and unless the contents are appropriate. The problem has its roots somewhere in our education system. Our educational institutions do not make sure that the students learn from every aspect of the target language and as a result, the students remain incompetent.

### **Informal Language**

The next problem was somehow unexpected and unique. The younger generation is usually tilted towards the modern variation of English language because they keep watching movies and, with time, they develop a taste of speaking the highly informal language. Even in their social circles, they prefer those people who share the same taste with them and, in this way, their language becomes highly informal. When these types of people join the club, they encounter enormous difficulty to adjust to the formal variation of English language. The vocabulary they have is entirely informal and they are unable to find suitable contents to express themselves



and thus, communication becomes ineffective. The reason for this problem is pretty simple. They keep watching English movies and communicate with their friends in a highly informal language. Hence, their speaking skills improve but their vocabulary is inappropriate to use in formal occasions.

### **Coherence**

Coherence appeared to be yet another serious challenge faced by Pakistani Toastmasters. During the speeches, the speakers usually proceeded from one idea to another and there seemed to be no logical connection in the ideas given by the speakers. It is mostly dealt with the table-talk speakers who are supposed to deliver speeches without any prior preparation. Even the regular members faced the problem of coherence, as was revealed through interviews. When a person delivers a speech without coherence, he compromises two important points of Lasswell's model of communication. Firstly, the content used in delivering a speech gives no meaning because of the scattered ideas. Secondly, the audience would not understand what the speaker wants to say and, as a result, no positive feedback is received from the audience. It usually happens due to our approach to the target language as revealed by one of the participants. We think in our mother tongue, translate it into the target language and then speak to the audience. This process either takes too much time or leaves us in a situation where we do not know what to say and,

in confusion, say whatever comes to our mind regardless of the meaning and coherence.

Apart from all these problems, many other common problems were noticed. These included grammatical problems, pronunciation problems, vocabulary issues and mother tongue interference. Over generalization of grammatical rules happened quite frequently for instance, 'suicided' and 'weakest' etc. Correct use of prepositions and articles were also confusing for them. An intrusive article was also used by one of the participants quite frequently. e.g. "at the end of the very session" and "some of the my friends" etc. Stress was yet another challenge for almost all of the participants. Sometimes their intended meanings were not understood because of inappropriate use of stress. Pronunciation seemed to be even a greater challenge for all the participants. Some of them were stuck between different accents of English; others were not clear about the correct pronunciation of different words. For example, instead of saying "/k??zi/", "/k?l?g/", "/pr?za?d/" and "/?p?t?m?/", they said, "/ku?z?/", "k?l?g/", "/pr?sa?d/" and "/?p?d?m/". The reasons behind these problems seem difficult to explore since everyone belonged to a different educational and cultural background; however, one thing was clearly understood that these problems were somehow the product of the educational system which needs to be changed.

## **Conclusions**

To conclude, English being a foreign language, appears to be a serious problem for Pakistani Toastmasters since they are supposed to deliver speeches in the English language. While delivering speeches, these speakers find it difficult to effectively express themselves. Intonation, as proved in the chapter on data analysis is the major problem of Pakistani Toastmasters and almost all of the Toastmasters find it hard to follow English intonation properly. It was also explored that the reason behind this problem was the difference in segmental and suprasegmental features of English and Pakistani languages. The second important problem was the use of unusual collocations and it was also evident that Pakistani Toastmasters' inappropriate use of collocations made their speech ineffective. This problem occurred because of their unfamiliarity with English language and the ineffective education system. The next problem was related to the modern variation of English language. Our younger generation is tilted towards the modern variation of English which is highly informal to be used in Toastmasters club. Coherence was yet another serious challenge faced by Pakistani Toastmasters. During the speeches, the speakers usually switched from one idea to another and there was no visible logical connection between the ideas given by the speakers. Apart from all these major problems, there were many other common problems that Pakistani Toastmasters faced while delivering

speeches in English language. These problems are related to vocabulary, stress, pronunciation and grammar. Mother tongue interference and over generalization also seem to be problematic. Hence it is proved that there are many problems that Pakistani Toastmasters quite frequently face while delivering speeches in English language.

## **Recommendations**

The recommended area for further study is to approach syntactic, semantic, pragmatic and phonological problems separately. Comparative study of paralinguistic and prosodic features of English and Pakistani languages can be done and their effects on Toastmasters can be a good field of study.

## **Possible Solutions to the Problems**

It is difficult to entirely uproot these problems but if certain steps are followed, these problems can be minimized to a great extent. For intonation, it is not possible for all Toastmasters to do a course in English phonetics and phonology but it does not mean it is the only choice. A good practice of pitch and its ups and down with a little research can easily make them familiar with the basic attributes of English intonation. Some senior Toastmasters are seen who are well familiar with English intonation without doing any course. What they have done is a little research and good practice. The problem of coherence can also be tackled by practice, preparation



and visualization. It can also be minimized by creating a mindset that does not involve the mother tongue and directly thinking in the target language. Modern variation may not remain a problem anymore since there are many writers, like Mark Manson and Amy Alkon, who use highly informal language in their books. There are probabilities that it might be extended to public speaking in future.

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