

## Linguists' Perspectives on the Role of Linguistic Knowledge in Treating Speech and Language Disorders

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### **Abstract**

The main purpose of the current research is to find out linguists' opinions regarding the use of linguistic expertise in the treatment of speech and language disorders. The viewpoint of linguists was obtained through a semi-structured interview. 32 linguists were interviewed who were PhDs and PhD candidates from several universities located in the Punjab. Thematic extraction and interview coding were done manually and some NVivo software tools were used to analyze the qualitative data. The results revealed that 25% of linguists believe that the contribution of linguistic knowledge in the treatment of speech and language disorders is very important, whereas 75% believe it to be insignificant. The findings indicate that Pakistani linguists are contributing less to the management of language and speech impairments. Only 3.12% of linguists have stated that they are interested in speech-language difficulties. The study recommends that linguists should learn more about linguistic

disabilities and conduct further studies on speech and language disorders.

**Keywords:** Linguists, Linguistic knowledge, Perceptions, Speech and language disorders

### **Introduction**

According to Syed and Hasan (2014), English language instruction is the main area of study for degrees in linguistics and Pakistani students typically do research into the fields of sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and applied linguistics. Even while linguists occasionally work with forensic scientists or speech-language pathologists, there doesn't appear to be a systematic collaboration or interdisciplinary approach between linguists and those who treat or manage speech-language disorders. This prompted the researchers to look into the potential for interaction among linguists as well as speech-language pathologists as a result of all the previously listed factors. The field of clinical linguistics has a wealth of research output that is of some interest to speech-language pathologists. Thus, the common ground between linguistics and speech therapy is clinical linguistics. Clinical linguists apply their theoretical knowledge about linguistics to the real world by combining it with information collected in clinical situations. This interaction offers strategies for appropriate intervention as well as supports the classification of speech and language disorders (Ball & Muller, 2009). Linguistics contributes in the form of language knowledge, while Speech Therapy provides cases for Clinical Linguistics. Thus, linguists' role and expertise are crucial for both speech-language pathology and clinical linguistics. In the present study, the researchers have investigated the perception of linguists about the role of linguistics knowledge in the field of speech and language therapy or pathology.

Pakistani linguists appear to have restricted their research in the field of language instruction or language teaching. As a result, it is discovered that the majority of studies focus on topics related to teacher training, teaching methodology, and syllabus design. In Pakistan, a linguist's primary function is considered to be that of classroom instructor. In Pakistan, there are

few studies on linguistic impairments. Language impairments were studied by Maqbool (2002), Naz (2005), Khan (2006), and Aftab (2012), among others. According to Aftab (2012), there does not appear to be a systematic effort in Pakistan to identify dyslexic children early on in general education. The review of the research done in the field of applied linguistics reveals that Pakistani linguists have a bit lop-sided view of their field. On the other hand, researchers like Mwihaqi (2002) believe that applied linguistics is an "aspect of speech-language pathology," and she encourages linguists to participate practically in these programs. She has developed a contribution strategy that enables linguists to assist speech-language pathologists by offering seminars and workshops. Additionally, in her opinion, linguists might be useful in speech therapy. A linguist is therefore welcome to contribute to this field. However, linguists seem to view the issue as being more intricate. Since they appear to believe that language pathology and speech therapy are outside of their purview, linguists do not consider themselves as having a place in disciplines like speech-language pathology. It appears that they think the treatment of speech and language disorders falls under the purview of special education. A strong foundation in linguistics is required for treating speech and language impairments. That is why, linguistics is a significant topic covered in the speech as well as language pathology curriculum. In their investigation of potential applications for linguistic knowledge, Stork & Widdowson (1974) note a growing interest in the role of linguistics in the education of speech therapists and the identification and management of language disorders.

Mwihaqi (2003) makes the idea that linguists possess the necessary background to launch a speech pathology program. She asserts that the success of such projects depends on the linguists' professional commitment combined with assistance from the appropriate departments. In this regard, the researcher offers linguists some specific recommendations to help them significantly contribute to speech-language pathology. Many linguists have made significant contributions to the field of speech and language pathology through their input on phonology and assessment of language disorders. Ball

(1997) has written extensively on a variety of subjects including clinical phonology and clinical linguistics. Multimedia clips and audio recordings of various samples of abnormal speech can be found within his digital repository of disordered speech. His collaborative efforts with David Crystal on (LARSP Language Assessment, Remediation, and Screening Procedure) have expanded its language coverage to other languages worldwide. Ball additionally concentrated on the transcription of disturbed speech along with nonlinear phonology. American linguist David Ingram (1989) investigated syntax, grammar, and phonology in particular relation to both normal and abnormal languages. His studies on phonological disabilities provide insight into how a kid learns the phonological structure of language. Renowned for her expertise in linguistics or phonetics, Pamela Grunwell has made an important addition to studying speech and language disorders. She has tackled speech impairments associated with cleft palate, and her study on Analyzing Cleft Palate Speech is founded on postgraduate research under her supervision. Sara Howard, a specialist in clinical phonetics, particularly has written many articles about phonetic transcription, cleft palate speech, and linked speech. The Handbook of Clinical Linguistics has her co-authorship. For knowledge sharing to assist both speech therapists and linguists, Howard is an advocate for collaboration between the two professions. The researchers devised the following research questions to explore the connection between linguistics and speech and language pathology:

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the perception of linguists about the role of linguistic knowledge in the treatment of speech and language disorders?
2. Do Pakistani linguists think that they can practically contribute to the treatment of speech and language disorders?

### **Methodology**

For the current study, the qualitative research methodology was chosen. An interview with linguists who discussed the function of linguistic expertise in speech pathology was done for this reason.

### **Population and Sample**

The objective of this research was to learn how linguists feel about using their expertise to treat speech and language impairments. Linguists were invited as participants to hear their thoughts on the significance of linguistic knowledge in the process of treating communication issues. All Pakistani linguists hailing from the Province of Punjab were included in the study's target population. The convenience sampling method was adopted to select the desired sample. 32 linguists with PhDs in linguistics, PhD candidates, MPhil degree holders, and MPhil candidates made up the sample from the Punjab region. They are affiliated with departments of different public and private institutions in Punjab, they all either work there or study there.

### **Research Tool**

In qualitative research, the researcher often does not have sufficient knowledge of the issue being investigated. In such circumstances, the researcher requires a thorough understanding of the study problem, and interviews are a great tool for achieving this. To gain access to every aspect of knowledge that is currently known about the treatment of language disorders, Interview tools were used for data collection. In this regard, semi-structured interviews were used to collect data.

### **Results**

Due procedures of collection and analysis of qualitative (text-based) data were adopted to record the results of the data obtained from the interviews. Through tables and word clouds the significant points have been highlighted. The detailed account of the results is as follows:

#### **Knowledge of linguists in the Field of Speech-Language Pathology**

About 72% of the sample (linguists from various linguistics departments of Punjabi institutions) admitted that they had not taken any classes on speech and language disorders. 28% of those surveyed admitted to reading articles or taking classes on speech and language difficulties. The results significantly point out that Pakistani linguists belonging to the Punjab region have less knowledge or information about speech and language disorders and no significant content is included in the curriculum of linguistics about these

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topics. The number of those who have some knowledge of SLP (speech-language pathology) is very small.

Table I. *Courses taught in speech or language disorders*

Course Taught Percentage	Frequency
Yes	9 28.2
No	23 71.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>32</b> <b>100</b>

When asked what they had read concerning language difficulties, they



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Fig I: *Topics studied about speech and language disorders*

Language researchers have examined articles on dyslexia, aphasia, and other language problems, as seen in Fig. I. Additionally, they state that psycholinguistics and language development both deal with speech and language issues. This demonstrates how little room there is for speech and language impairments in the curriculum of linguistics. These results indicate

Pakistani linguists' focus on sociolinguistics and the teaching of the English language. Their curricula cover a few subjects that are relevant to communication problems.

**Practical Contribution of Linguists in the Treatment of Speech & Language Disorders**

Some of the linguists have claimed that they can assist with the treatment of speech and language difficulties. The use of the phrases *significant*, *considerable*, *vital*, *effective*, and *important* has drawn attention to the significance of the relationship between linguistic expertise and the treatment of disorders of speech and language. Without linguistic understanding, it is impossible to address linguistic issues. The linguists have compact knowledge of language and their insights on language assessment can be crucial for speech therapists. They can create plans for treating the diseases. The table below provides a summary of the responses to this inquiry:

Table 2. Theme about the knowledge of linguistics by linguists

<i>Theme about the knowledge of linguistics by linguists</i>	
Keywords	Quotes
Substantial Key Vital Important Great Helpful Effective Basics	Therapists can pinpoint the underlying reasons for speech and language issues with the help of linguistic understanding (Linguist 4).  The use of language knowledge can be obtained by linguistic knowledge (Linguist 3).  Understanding language difficulties is facilitated by linguistic expertise (Linguist 15).

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	<p>In terms of articulation difficulties, phonetic knowledge is important (Linguists 8 and 14).</p> <p>Linguistic expertise enables us to distinguish between regular and irregular language (Linguist 9).</p> <p>Linguistic expertise assists in the development of treatment plans (Linguist 20).</p> <p>Treatment of language and speech disorders can benefit from linguistic understanding (Linguist 19).</p>
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*Perception of Linguists about Speech & Language Disorders*

Table 3: Perception of linguists about speech & language disorders

<b>Perception of linguists about speech &amp; language disorders</b>	
<i>Keywords</i>	<i>Statement Phrases</i>
Barriers	Physiological & psychological barriers in utterance (Linguist 4).
Difficulty	Difficulty in comprehension, speaking, and listening of the language (Linguist 1).
Disorders	Aphasia & Stammering (Linguist 5)
Conformity to norms	When the patterns of speech do not conform to the sociolect utterance (Linguist 9).
Disability	Disability to understand or produce the language (Linguist 23)



According to the results, it is revealed that linguists are aware of speech as well as language disorders and believe that disorders of languages are characterized by a person's "inability to comprehend or produce language." Linguists believe that individuals with speech and language difficulties use particular words that are not typically used in socially acceptable conversation. Aphasia, reading or writing difficulties, dysarthria, stammering and dyslexia, hearing loss, and language disorders are only a few of the speech and language disorders that they have named. According to the research, Pakistani linguists have a good awareness of speech and language disorders, but they still need to expand their skills and knowledge in the subject. Linguists' responses reveal that Pakistani linguists are making very little contribution to the field of speech and language pathology. There is little research being done on communication disorders in the linguistic departments of Punjab. Linguists are not taught many courses on speech and language disorders and the discipline of clinical linguistics is just briefly touched on in the syllabus. Linguists are aware of the importance of linguistic knowledge in the treatment of speech and language disorders, but due to their focus on other topics like ELT, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and discourse, they are unable to pay attention to this field. There is a need for clinical linguistics may be made part of the syllabi of MPhil and PhD linguistics and research in the area should be encouraged by the linguistic departments.

### **Discussion**

#### **Linguists' Knowledge in Speech Language Pathology**

Language education, sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, and especially applied linguistics all appeared to be areas of interest for linguists in Pakistan. Applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, or psycholinguistics appear to be of interest to the majority of the linguists. The result demonstrate that Pakistani linguists are primarily engaged in language education since they often equate applied linguistics with English as a Second Language. Many linguists appear to be interested in sociolinguistics as well. Practical domains including

forensic linguistics, computational linguistics, and clinical linguistics have the least trend. In their analysis of linguistic research in Pakistan, Syed and Hassan (2014) note that Pakistani linguists are drawn to sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and applied linguistics. In the majority of circumstances, English Language Teaching (ELT) and applied linguistics are considered interchangeable terms. Nearly all of the linguists in Pakistan have MA English degrees and work as English language or literature teachers. In this regard, their inclination naturally leans toward the branch of linguistics that is related to language instruction. In response to a different interview question, additional causes for a lack of interest in harder topics were also covered. This pattern is observed in developed nations where linguists appear to be fascinated with the English language. (James (1993); Hrehovk (2005).

#### **Perception of linguists about the Role of linguistic knowledge in the treatment of Speech & Language Disorders**

According to linguists of Pakistan, there are no specialized courses they take on speech and language difficulties. Some of them have admitted that their research has given them some knowledge about speech and language difficulties. The domains of language disorders like dyslexia and other disorders were just touched by mistake. Few of them appear to be aware of things like aphasia and stuttering. Clinical linguistics was not covered in their investigation. The majority of them believe it has to do with speaking and articulation. Linguists know the bare minimum concerning linguistic problems that co-occur with other disorders. Most linguists appear to view it as a medical issue that needs to be handled by a specialist with medical understanding when it comes to treatment. The vast majority of people are also aware that these disorders can be addressed by professionals called speech and language therapists who, by using various language intervention approaches, help these people communicate effectively. The results also demonstrate the need for Pakistani linguists to improve their understanding of the management of speech or language disorders. One approach is to encourage the inclusion of clinical linguistics in linguistics programs in Pakistani universities. Additionally, they with the help of speech therapists

working in their divisions should lead courses and seminars on speech-language pathology.

### **Conclusion**

In the light of the findings of the study, it can be concluded that Pakistani linguists are more focused on ELT, sociolinguistics, and studies related to discourse analysis. Much of their research revolves around these themes. Though some linguists think beyond these limited fields and try to explore new areas like forensic linguistics and computational linguistics, yet speech and language disorders are not their favorite topics. In the present study, speech-language disorders were recently identified as a field of interest by only 3.12% of linguists. Linguists themselves believe that they are not making enough of an impact on the field of speech-language pathology because of their propensity to concentrate too much (50%) on teaching language. However, they have the realization that they can make significant contributions to this discipline and that there is a lot of room for them to grow. They are positive about the prospects of collaboration between linguists and speech-language pathologists. Based on the results, the researchers suggest adding more linguistics modules to speech therapy curricula. The communication and cooperation between linguists as well as speech-language pathologists need to be improved in order to bring improvement in the treatment of speech and language disorders.

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