

Helping Learners with Common English Difficulties

پښتو

Pashto

Introduction & Background

This guide is designed to support ESOL tutors, volunteers, and staff working with **Pashto**-speaking learners. It outlines the most common challenges these learners face when learning English and offers practical examples, explanations, and exercises to support more effective communication. The aim is to build understanding, patience, and confidence in supporting **Pashto** speakers on their learning journey.

Pashto

Pashto, Dari, and Farsi languages are spoken in Southern and Central Asian countries. Dari, Farsi, and Pashto are all Aryan (Iranian) languages belonging to the Indo-European language family. While Dari and Farsi are two accents of the same language, Pashto is a different language. Dari, Farsi, and Pashto both use the Arabic Alphabet, but they are completely different from the Arabic language

Pashto speakers often face specific challenges when learning English due to differences in grammar, phonology, and sentence structure between the two languages.

Pronunciation & Phonology

1. Sounds missing in Pashto

- English /v/ → Pashto has /w/, so “very” → “wery”.
- English /θ/ (think) and /ð/ (this) → replaced with /t/, /d/, or /s/:
 - “think” → “tink”, “this” → “dis”.
- English /p/ exists in Pashto but less frequently, sometimes pronounced inconsistently in loanwords.

2. Consonant clusters

- Pashto syllables usually have simpler structures; learners may insert vowels:
 - “street” → “istreet”, “school” → “eskool.”

3. Final consonants

- Words ending in consonants can be tricky; learners may add a vowel:
 - “cat” → “cata.”

4. Vowel differences

- English has more vowel sounds than Pashto. Learners often confuse:
 - /ɪ/ vs /i:/ (“ship” vs. “sheep”)
 - /ʌ/ vs /ɑ:/ (“luck” vs. “lock”)



Grammar & Syntax

1. Articles (a/an/the)

- Pashto does not use definite/indefinite articles. Learners often omit or misuse them:
 - “*I bought book*” → “*I bought a book.*”

2. Tenses & aspects

- Pashto verbs focus more on aspect than tense, so English perfect and continuous tenses are tricky:
 - “*I have eaten*” or “*I am eating*” may be confused.

3. Word order

- Pashto generally uses **SOV (Subject-Object-Verb)**. English is **SVO**, leading to:
 - “*I the book read*” instead of “*I read the book.*”

4. Plural forms

- Irregular English plurals (child → children, foot → feet) are confusing.

5. Prepositions

- Pashto often uses postpositions, so English prepositions are tricky:
 - “*I am waiting you*” → “*I am waiting for you.*”

Vocabulary & Expression

1. Direct translation

- Learners may translate idioms or phrases literally:
 - “*I am feeling bored*” might become “*I feel boredom*”.

2. Politeness & register

- English formal/informal distinctions differ from Pashto, so learners may sound overly formal or abrupt.

Writing System

1. Pashto uses the Arabic-derived script

- Switching to Latin alphabet for English can slow reading/writing fluency.

2. Right-to-left vs left-to-right

- Learners must adjust from writing right-to-left in Pashto to left-to-right in English.

Sociolinguistic Factors

- Pashto speakers often learn English in school or via media; exposure varies.
- Dialect differences in Pashto (e.g., Kandahari vs. Peshawari) can slightly affect pronunciation in English.

Summary

Pashto speakers generally struggle with:

- **Pronunciation:** /v/, /θ/, /ð/, vowel distinctions, consonant clusters.
- **Grammar:** articles, tenses, word order, irregular plurals, prepositions.
- **Writing:** Latin alphabet, left-to-right direction.
- **Vocabulary:** literal translations and idiomatic expressions.

Common mistakes Pashto speakers make in English

Pronunciation Mistakes

1. /v/ → /w/
 - “very good” → “wery good.”
2. /θ/ (“think”) and /ð/ (“this”) replaced
 - “think” → “tink”, “this” → “dis.”
3. Consonant clusters
 - “street” → “istreet”, “school” → “eskool.”
4. Final consonant vowels added
 - “cat” → “cata”, “desk” → “desku.”
5. Vowel confusion
 - “ship” vs. “sheep”
 - “luck” vs. “lock”



Grammar Mistakes

1. Articles omitted

- Incorrect: “I bought book.”
- Correct: “I bought a book.”

2. Verb tense errors

- Incorrect: “I go school yesterday.”
- Correct: “I went to school yesterday.”
- Incorrect: “I have eat lunch.”
- Correct: “I have eaten lunch.”

3. Word order (SOV → SVO)

- Incorrect: “I the book read.”
- Correct: “I read the book.”

4. Plural errors

- Incorrect: “Childs are playing.”
- Correct: “Children are playing.”

5. Preposition mistakes

- Incorrect: “I am waiting you.”
- Correct: “I am waiting for you.”
- Incorrect: “I go to home.”
- Correct: “I go home.”

Vocabulary & Expression Mistakes

1. Literal translation from Pashto

- Incorrect: “I have hunger.”
- Correct: “I am hungry.”
- Incorrect: “I have thirst.”
- Correct: “I am thirsty.”

2. Over-formal expressions in casual speech

- “I request you to help me in this matter.” → better in casual conversation: “Can you help me?”

3. Idioms / fixed phrases

- Incorrect: “It rains cats and dogs.” (literal translation not understood)
- Learners may try: “It rains dogs and cats” or “It rains heavily” (simplified).

Writing Mistakes

1. Spelling influenced by phonetics

- “wery” for “very”
- “eskool” for “school”

2. Word order issues

- Literal translation from Pashto SOV: “*I homework did yesterday*” → “*I did homework yesterday.*”

3. Direction adjustment

- Beginners may accidentally mix left-to-right and right-to-left letters when writing English.

Examples in Conversation

- **Pashto speaker:** “*I go school yesterday.*”
→ Correct: “*I went to school yesterday.*”
- **Pashto speaker:** “*This book very interesting.*”
→ Correct: “*This book is very interesting.*”
- **Pashto speaker:** “*I am waiting you.*”
→ Correct: “*I am waiting for you.*”

Summary

Pashto speakers’ most common mistakes are in:

- **Pronunciation:** /v/, /θ/, /ð/, vowels, clusters, final consonants
- **Grammar:** articles, verb tense, word order, plurals, prepositions
- **Vocabulary/Expression:** literal translations, idioms, over-formality
- **Writing:** Latin alphabet, spelling, direction

Teaching Strategies for Pashto Speakers Learning English

Pronunciation Strategies

1. Minimal Pairs Drills

- /v/ vs /w/: *very – wery, visit – wist*
- /θ/ vs /t/: *think – tink, three – tree*
- /ð/ vs /d/: *this – dis, that – dat*
- /ɪ/ vs /i:/: *ship – sheep, sit – seat*

2. Consonant Cluster Practice

- Start with inserted vowels: *eskool → skool → school*
- Gradually reduce vowel additions in clusters: *istreet → street*

3. Final Consonant Awareness

- Drill words ending in consonants: *cat, desk, lamp*
- Emphasize not adding extra vowels: *cat ≠ cata*

4. Recording & Playback

- Students record themselves reading sentences and compare with native speakers



Grammar Strategies

1. Articles (a/an/the)

- Visual aids: *a cat* (any cat) vs. *the cat* (specific cat)
- Fill-in-the-blank exercises: *I saw ___ apple, ___ sun, ___ cat*

2. Verb Tense Awareness

- Use timelines for past, present, future
- Storytelling activities to practice past tense: “What did you do yesterday?”

3. Word Order (SOV → SVO)

- Sentence rearrangement exercises: *I the book read* → *I read the book*
- Pair work to build correct sentence structure

4. Plural Forms

- Drill irregular plurals: *child* → *children*, *man* → *men*
- Games: memory match or “plural hunt” in the classroom

5. Preposition Practice

- Teach prepositions in chunks: *wait for someone*, *go to school*, *sit on the chair*
- Role-playing to reinforce correct usage

Vocabulary & Expression Strategies

1. Idioms & Common Expressions

- Introduce common English phrases and idioms gradually:
 - *“It’s raining heavily”* vs. literal translations
- Visual or story-based explanations

2. Politeness & Register

- Teach difference between formal and casual English:
 - *“Can you help me?”* (casual) vs. *“I request your assistance”* (formal)
- Role-play scenarios: asking for directions, ordering food

3. Avoid Direct Translation

- Encourage thinking in English structures, not word-for-word from Pashto

Writing Strategies

Challenges: Latin alphabet, spelling, SOV → SVO transfer

1. Spelling Practice

- Focus on tricky consonants and vowels: very, school, desk
- Dictation exercises using minimal pairs

2. Guided Writing

- Sentence frames first: I went to ___ yesterday.
- Build up to paragraphs using word banks

3. Direction Awareness

- Highlight left-to-right writing orientation
- Use lined paper to guide placement of letters

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Speaking & Listening Strategies

1. Dialogues & Role Play

- Everyday situations: shopping, traveling, asking questions
- Encourage peer correction and self-correction

2. Stress & Intonation

- Clap or tap syllables to practice stress patterns
- Compare stress shifts in meaning: I didn't say he stole the money

3. Listening Exposure

- Short videos, songs, or podcasts with repetition
- Shadowing exercises: repeat immediately after native speaker

Cultural & Confidence-Building

1. Acknowledge Dialect Influence

- Different Pashto dialects may affect pronunciation
- Use familiar vocabulary to ease learning

2. Safe Speaking Environment

- Peer groups, pair work, and games reduce anxiety
- Correct gently, focus on communication first

3. Celebrate Multilingual Skills

- Pashto speakers often juggle multiple languages – emphasize this advantage

Summary

For Pashto speakers, focus on:

- **Pronunciation:** /v/, /θ/, /ð/, vowel distinctions, clusters, final consonants
- **Grammar:** articles, tense, word order, plurals, prepositions
- **Vocabulary/Expression:** idioms, literal translations, register
- **Writing:** spelling, Latin alphabet, direction
- **Interactive, communicative practice** is key

Common Pashto phrases

Greetings & Basics

- سلام (Salam) → Hello / Peace
- څنگه یی؟ (Tsenga ye?) → How are you? (to a man)
- څنگه یی؟ (Tsenga ye?) → How are you? (to a woman – same pronunciation, context matters)
- زه روغ یم، مننه (Za rogh yem, manana) → I'm fine, thank you
- د خدای په امان (Da Khoday pa aman) → Goodbye (lit. "Go in God's protection")

Introductions

- ستا نوم څه دی؟ (Sta num tse de?) → What is your name?
- زما نوم ... دی (Zma num ... de) → My name is ...
- ستاسو سره لیدل خوښ شو (Staso sara leydal khush shwo) → Nice to meet you



Politeness

- **مننه** (Manana) → Thank you
- **ډیره مننه** (Dera manana) → Thank you very much
- **مهرباني وکړه** (Mehrbani wakra) → Please
- **بخښنه غواړم** (Bakhshna ghowaram) → Sorry / Excuse me



Food & Drink

- **اوبه** (Oba) → Water
- **کافي / چای** (Kafi / Chai) → Coffee / Tea
- **زه وږی یم** (Za wogha yem) → I'm hungry
- **زه تشناب یم** (Za tashna yem) → I'm thirsty



Getting Around

- **چیرته دی ...؟** (Cherte de ...?) → Where is ...?
- **دا څومره قیمت دی؟** (Da tsomra qeemat de?) → How much does it cost?
- **ښي اړخ** (Khi arakh) → Right
- **کين اړخ** (Keen arakh) → Left

Polite Closings

- **امان** (Da Khoday pa aman) → Goodbye
- **روغ اوسئ** (Rogh osay) → Stay well / Take care
- **سهار مو پخیر** (Sahar mo pakhair) → Good morning
- **مانبام مو پخیر** (Makham mo pakhair) → Good evening
- **شپه مو پخیر** (Shpa mo pakhair) → Good night

Notes:

- Pashto has dialect differences (e.g., Kandahari vs. Peshawari). Some words or pronunciations may vary slightly.
- **Politeness is important**, so adding Mehrbani wakra (please) or Bakhshna ghowaram (sorry) is common in everyday conversation.