

# Language Barriers among Taiwanese National Champions

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## Abstract

The study investigated experiences of archery national champions regarding their use of English language at the international athlete village. The slowly growing recognition of the issue in the language barrier was discovered. Three female elite archery athletes were selected that met the criteria for national champion status was based upon previous experiences of competing in the international games. The use of semi-structure interview technique was implemented to be the main method of gathering research data. The study identified several language barriers to communication difficulties. The findings indicated language barriers become issues and had debilitating effect in communication through English language.

**Keywords:** language barrier, communication

## 1. Introduction

In sports psychology, barriers include the aspects of athlete's experiences of interfere with the ability or skills they have (Anderson, 2000). Charlie Wilson, the Jays' director of minor league operations stated it's a major part of a player's growth, a player cannot reach his full potential on the field until he has a full grasp of the English language (Metro, 2010). The existing literature has not been critically examined with regard to athletes' needs of language skills. Furthermore, social interaction creates a daily challenge to national champions while they need to use the international language to develop a social discourse.

The study investigated various circumstances in which language barriers confront the archery national champions living in the athlete village. While the sensation of international sports has been awarded by the crowd, the researchers cannot ignore the utility of the language ability for national sports champions. The first goal of this study was to explore how the language barrier encounters among national archery champions at the athlete village. The second goal of the study was to reveal how the national archery champions react to the various circumstances of their language barriers. Language barriers have a weakening effect on the oral performance of speakers of English.

The intent of this study was to investigate if language barrier is the main obstacle for archery champions to communicate and develop a social interaction with foreign competitors and staff. Language is a key element for athletes to access the environment and to communicate with anyone they have great chances to meet and see at the athlete village. Language is also the means by which staff, competitors, and physicians can learn about athlete's concerns, emotions, and illnesses which assist greatly in delivering effective assistance to the athletes. The essentialness of conducting this research was to understand archery national champions' experiences of language barriers in order to apply or modify practical curricula or training to minimize athletes' hurdles in speaking English.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Language Barrier

Language barrier makes verbal communication ineffective and creates linguistic distance between social interactions. In consequence, linguistic barrier generates a wall by athletes from seeking for help and satisfying their needs. According to Ma (2010) a language barrier is generally referred to the circumstance when people who do not share a common language try to communicate with one another. Isphording and Otten (2014) stated "differences and diversity between languages impose major obstacles for human communication" (p.2). The causes and the effects of the language difficulties were discovered through this study. Language skills have been

analyzed as being a vital determination for social interaction. Sasaki, Suzuki, & Yoneda (2006), stated communication means people who have the ability to code and decode a language system. Therefore, language barrier becomes possible obstacle for athlete national champions to communicate with foreign competitors and staff when they live in the international athlete village. McCroskey (1992) claimed that language barrier can be the fear that associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons (p.16). Communication gaps and language barriers are recognized as the impacts of the development in mastering complex skills to care for culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and interpersonal relationships (Zabar, Hanley, Kachur, Stevens, Schwartz, Pearlman, & Kalet, 2006). The slowly growing recognition of the issue in the language barrier among archery national champions was investigated in the research. The existing literature has not been critically examined with regard to athletes' needs of language skills.

### *2.2 Athlete Village*

English ability is particularly important means for athletes to have personal interactions with foreign competitors, judges, and medical staff while living at the athlete village. For instance, satisfying the needs of medication and therapy for athletes before and after the games requires English ability to express their necessities.

Dietary intake can play a significant role in sports performance and post exercise nutrition recovery. Athletes from a range of countries live in a purpose built village and eat the majority of their meals in a large communal dining hall (Pelly & Burkhart, 2014). However, performance-based eating is not always the primary focus of an athlete. Other factors, such as therapeutic requirements, religious beliefs, cultural background, personal preferences (e.g., avoidance of red meat) or aesthetic qualities such as taste and familiarity (Kittler et al., 2012, as cited in Pelly & Burkhart, 2014) also influence an athlete's food choices. Food provision for athletes is a challenging responsibility. Catering must provide for a wide range of food preferences, accommodate cultural and religious diets, and ensure that safe and appropriate food is available for athletes (Pelly, O'Connor, Denyer, & Caterson, 2011, p.321). In order to provide quality food and special dietary for gratifying athletes, successful and significant sponsorship and applicants are required. Pelly, O'Connor, Denyer, et al (2011) stated that as the number of events, nations, and athletes increase, a more diverse and complex menu is needed. Specialized departments within Olympic organizing committees are now dedicated to food and beverage service (p.322).

Being a host of an Olympic Games, challenges for creating the image of world-class athlete village require thoughtful and human friendly environments. Muñoz (2006) stated that "architecture most clearly places itself in the service of creating the image that the host city aims to project internationally, building typologies, formal languages specifically conceived to highlight given values of modernity and specific values of the place" (p.175). According to Tang (2008) interviewed Ping-Pong champion, Deng Yaping, the winner of four Olympic gold medals in table tennis. Deng stated that the Olympic Village should be a home for athletes to as the first and foremost accommodation. Therefore, Tang (2008) stated village administrators should make athletes feel at home with the most considerate service.

### **3. Methodology**

The process of research involved semi-structured face-to-face interviews. The philosophical approach had taken in this research leans deeply toward the phenomenology. Creswell (2009) stated that "phenomenology research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the lives of individuals and the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants" (p. 3). Therefore, the procedure comprises the researcher understands the lived experiences by studying a small number of participants. Selection of participants was conducted via purposive sampling procedures. Participants who were selected allowed the researcher to learn a great deal about the language barriers encounter among national archery champions at the athlete village. Three female elite archery athletes were selected for interviews in the study. The selected participants were contacted, informed, and invited to take part. The informants ranged in age from 24 to 35 years. The criteria for archery national champion status were based upon previous experiences of attending international competitions. Before their participation, written consent and interview guide with confidentiality of information were emphasized and obtained from each individual. This study attempted to investigate the language barriers among archery national champions at the international athlete village. Furthermore, the researcher applied multiple data collection strategy in order to have an in-depth research of participants' lives in order to establish different views of phenomena. The researcher conducted 6 interviews for the data collection from three archery champions. Meanwhile, the study is restricted to (number) archery national champions. The restrictive findings of the study will be inappropriate to be generalized to other sport players.

### **4. Findings and Discussion**

The initial deductive analysis organized the elements within the problematic communication, unbenefited facility

provision, restricted catering services, security, or direction phases of the language barrier experiences. However, the researcher intended to avoid “limiting the emergence of new findings and themes, an inductive approach” (Ince & Bowen, p.1777) was applied as well. This involved a process of open coding, which Corbin and Strauss (2008) defined as “breaking data apart and delineating concepts for blocks of raw data” (p.198). Thus, open coding categories were selected and coded as various language barrier elements. These can be seen in Table 1 and 2 in which 5 language barrier elements (Theme 1), 3 elements of communication behaviors (Theme 2) are described and illustrated.

As regards the elements of language barrier, the first key element is communication. Communication skill is the main factor that influences human discourses. Problematic communication was common issues identified by all the participants. Three participants responded that they definitely experienced communication difficulties. The second key element is facility provision. Due to the language barriers, participants were not able to benefit from the facility which was provided by the competition organizers. For stance, participants did not go to the laundry room or the entertainment center. This confirms the findings of Ma (2010), who noted a language barrier is generally referred to the circumstance when people who do not share a common language try to communicate with one another. People who face language barriers have trouble understanding each other and expressing their actual thoughts.

The first key element of communication behavior is avoidance. Three participants refused to give themselves a chance to speak or use English due to the insufficient language skills. They could not easily understand the direction or had trouble communicating with other athletes who speak English to them. This confirms the findings of Sasaki, Suzuki, & Yoneda (2006), who reported communication means people who have the ability to code and decode a language system. As a result, the participants prevented any further interactions with other foreign athletes. This could explain that participants lacked for confidence in understanding and speaking English, or had negative learning or communicative experiences in the past. The second key element of communication behavior is embarrassment. Participants’ responses revealed psychological stresses resulting from the conversation. All participants expressed very clear experienced embarrassment in speaking English at different scenarios at the athlete village, such as taking a bus, going to the laundry room, dining at the restaurant.

Table 1. Language Barriers and Communication Behaviors

Theme 1: Language Barriers	
The experiences of language barriers	
Categories	
Communication	Problematic communication was common issues identified by all the participants. They definitely experienced language barriers when they housed at the athlete village. <i>My English is not so good; I have difficulties communicating with others (athletes from other countries) all the time. I feel unhappy because I can't express what I really want to say to others.</i> <i>Other athletes are not able to understand me and I am not able to understand them either.</i>
Facility provision	Participants were also not able to benefit from the facility which is provided from the competition organizers. One participant stated, <i>We attended the competition at the Athens Olympic. One of my friends forgot that he put half of the chocolate bar that he did not finish in his pocket. After the competition, the chocolate bar melted due to the hot weather in Athens (hahaha..laughter). There was a huge dark spot right on his crotch (hahaha...laughter). He did not want to go to the laundry room by himself and we did not want to go to with him either because it was not close to the apartment we stayed. We needed to take a bus and spoke English in order to get there, so we gave up. We asked him to wash them by hands (smile).</i>
Friendship	Language barriers prevented participants from making friends with other athletes. They were also not able to benefit from the information exchanging on archery skills. One Participant stated, <i>If I have proficient English skills, everything would be different. I would like to make friends with them (competitors), and I would like to exchange some information about how to improve archery skills. Furthermore, I would invite them to practice with me before and after the competition. I think it would be fun.</i>
Catering Services	Due to language barriers, participants were chosen to eat food that they were familiar with for every meal without asking for explanation or introduction from the waiter or waitress. One participant stated,

*I couldn't tell what was in the dish, but I saw some foreign athletes were eating them. I didn't know how and what to say to the waiter or waitress for ordering the same food. So I ate the same dish for every meal.*

Security	Language barriers restricted participants' rights in claiming their personal belongings when they went through the security checking point at the entrance of the athlete village. One participant stated, <i>When I went through the checking point, the security asked me to explain what was in my backpack. I took out everything and used every English word I knew with my body language to clarify the items. Sometimes, I gave my stuff away because the security did not understand me</i>
Theme 2: Communication Behaviors	
Elements of communication Behaviors	
Avoidance	Participants refused to give themselves a chance to speak or use English due to the insufficient language skills because they could not understand the direction or trouble communicating with other athletes who spoke English to them. Therefore, they intended to avoid interacting with foreign athlete. One participant stated, <i>When other athletes approached and started speaking English to me, I would just say sorry I don't know and not to wait for them to finish their conversation. I was not able to understand them anyway; I did not want to waste our time. I tried not to interact with foreign athletes such as sitting far away from them at the dining center</i>
Embarrassment	Participants' responses revealed psychological stresses resulting from language barriers. <i>I felt embarrassed when I spoke English, so I tried not to speak up. I normally asked my coach or athlete friends to be my interpreter. I felt awkward and embarrassed when foreign athletes came to me and tried to exchange his team uniform or pin with mine after the game. This was the time I could only understand "exchange" this English word because they spoke too fast. They normally tried to have a long conversation with me. Unfortunately, I was not able to communicate with them.</i>
Low Confidence	Participants were particularly affected by the insufficient language skills due to the experiences of interacting with foreign athletes and the negative impact of previous learning experiences. One participant stated, <i>When I was a junior high school student, I made up my mind to study and learn English well. Unfortunately, I was discouraged by the English teacher. I gave up learning and speaking English. Consequently, I tried not to interact with foreign athletes at the village. If I couldn't express what I really wanted to say, my mood was in the mopes. I did not want to affect my emotion during the competition.</i>

## 5. Conclusion

The results indicated that the language barriers, the dissimilarity between the origin and destination languages, have a distinctively negative effect on the archery national champions. The ability to speak English is a complex mission for our national champions. Language barriers were often influenced by various factors and variables. The researcher concluded that all the participants did not feel positive about speaking English at the athlete village. The interviewees in the study often experienced embarrassment and low-confidence in speaking English. This result confirms the findings of Ispording and Otten (2014), who stated the differences and diversity between languages impose major obstacles for human communication. The study identified and supported that archery national champions' language barriers is spotted not only in the athlete village but also in other settings. In other words, the results prove the existence of the language barriers among the archery national champions were obvious and serious.

The trigger for language barrier was often the interactions with other foreign athletes and staff. The research also pointed out participants' behaviors and emotions showed variation in reactions to embarrassment and avoidance in speaking English. The avoidance of interaction with foreign competitor's prior the game could be interpreted as the fear of negative emotional impact during the competition. As a result, the findings also confirmed that the strongest feeling of giving up on learning and applying English in the daily life settings was placed in the reaction to their fear of exposure to unfamiliar environment and destination language. The confidence or the lack of it seemed to be an essential factor predicting speakers of English performances. Based on the results, the archery national champions should understand that language barrier was an issue and had a debilitating effect in

communication through English language. Therefore, it is significant for archery national champions to figure out the solutions in order to adjust and minimize their language barriers.

In conclusion, findings correspond in part with the theory which established in the literature. The methods, approach, and instrument produced an authentic data. Although, the shortage of sample was the weakness of the study, the study was carried out systematically and reliably. The approach used to investigate factors contributing to language barriers and as well to the relative importance of the communication behaviors.

Finally, coaches and instructors of national champions should start to consider providing effective English lessons for preparing athletes attend competitions in real life purposes in order to develop their confidence in speaking English. National champions need more opportunities in applying what they had learned in the course besides their professional skills. When the language skills are improved, they will be able to gain international friendship, archery skill, and communication strength. Further research could be conducted by increasing the number of participants. Implementing larger numbers of informants provides the researcher more data to generalize findings.

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