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The Dysfunctional Bilingualism in Bangladeshi Education and Society

Faheem Hasan Shahed, Ph.D.

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Abstract

There has been constant furor over the declining and ineffective standard of bilingual education policy in Bangladesh. Experts have been arguing for imparting English and Bangla language education to the target groups in terms of need instead of imposing bilingualism to all citizens. This paper investigates and deals with the fundamental question of domain-specific bilingualism for Bangladeshis and shows how the country's present bilingual education system and language policy have been thwarting the formation of effective bilingual workforces. And subsequently the paper argues how both English and Bangla have turned out to be liabilities rather than assets for the Bangladeshi society while the creation of resource personnel for both intra- and international domains still remains a far cry.

Keywords: bilingualism, biculturalism, Bangla, domain analysis.

Introduction

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 14:6 June 2014

Faheem Hasan Shahed, Ph.D.

The Dysfunctional Bilingualism in Bangladeshi Education and Society

106

For many people, the term ‘bilingualism’ relays somewhat a problematic connotation. The actual nuance of the term is not always as clear as it sounds—specifically when we try to talk of producing efficient bilingual personnel in various domains of our national and international lives. Though apparently, bilingualism means a person’s acquisition and consequently her/his ability to use two languages where those ‘two languages’ may or may not include her/his parents’ mother tongue (for example, a Bangladeshi Bangla-speaking parents’ son in Canada who knows English and French, but not Bangla), the issue needs to be understood from pragmatic perspectives.

From a global perspective, as said by Suzanne (1995), most of the people around the world actually speak more than one language, and are therefore multilingual instead of homogeneous. In this sense, even in the Bangladeshi ‘monolingual’ setting, one would find multilingual speech communities—such as the ‘Tripuras’ (speaking Kokborok, Chakma and Bangla), the ‘Sylhetis’ (speaking Sylheti, Bangla and English), the ‘Chittagonians’ (speaking Chatgaiyan and Bangla) and so on.

Suzanne maintains an important point by saying that, most South Asians possess ‘active control over what amounts to complex linguistic repertoires drawn from different languages and varieties’ and thus in these societies ‘multilingualism is not an incidental feature of language use, but a central factor and an organizing force’ in people’s daily lives.

However, since this study refers to Bangla and English as the predominant choice for Bangladeshis’ bilingualism, let us analyze the scenario systematically. A ‘competent bilingual’ in Bangladesh may be any one of the following persons:

1. One who can speak and write English fluently as much as s/he can speak and write fluent Bangla,
2. One who can speak English fluently but has limited writing skills; however on the other hand s/he can write Bangla very well,
3. One who cannot speak fluent English, but can write it appropriately—and can also write Bangla well,
4. One who cannot express oneself properly in verbal or written English, but has very well developed receptive skills in English; she/he can understand everything in English when she/he reads or hears, and she/he can write and speak good Bangla,

5. One who cannot write either good proper Bangla or English, but has the spoken communicative skills in both languages which she/he uses in her/his daily life (e.g. in his job) perfectly,
6. One who has a very solid command of English—be it writing or speaking—but can only speak, and not write, Bangla well.

Many would ask, do all these types equally fit in the definition of bilingualism that is needed or desired in Bangladesh? The ‘wholistic’ or ‘bilingual’ view of bilingualism would provide the answer. Grosjean (2008) clearly narrates that this view which proposes that the bilingual is an integrated whole which cannot easily be decomposed into two separate parts. The bilingual is not the sum of two complete or incomplete monolinguals; rather, he or she has a unique and specific linguistic configuration. The co-existence and constant interaction of the two languages in the bilingual should produce a different, but complete language system. So, according to the wholistic view, the bilingual is a fully competent speaker-hearer; she/he has developed competencies in the two languages to the extent required by his or her needs and those of the environment. The bilingual uses the two languages, separately or together, for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people. Because the needs and uses of the two languages are usually quite different, the bilingual is rarely equally or completely fluent in the two languages.

Added to it is the fact that the status of a person’s bilingualism in monolingual and multilingual settings is never the same. In the latter case, the notion of anyone’s ‘acquiring a second language (L2)’ is as important as that of ‘acquiring the first language (L1)’. People with different mother tongues (MT) discover themselves in an identical platform regarding their need of English as an L2. So, in multilingual settings, bilingualism is less problem-free in the sense that people have the only worry to go for their functional L2 besides their respective mother tongues. And in that situation, they have a clear vision of the ‘extent’ of their required bilingual proficiency; they know what types of L2 skills would serve what types of purposes for them.

But bilingualism in monolingual countries is related to need-based urgencies where there is a perpetual debate regarding the ‘extent’ of acquiring bilingual competence. The case of Bangladesh is a classic one because here, the concept of ‘attaining competence in L2’ has been left undecided and thus marred by controversies. Since Bangladesh internally operates in Bangla and English has a very little social and cultural usage and need, the bilingual proficiency of the Bangladeshis has to be fixed keeping in mind the extent of socio-cultural value of English in the society.

Given the present escalation of global business and the advancement of technology-oriented sectors, developing countries like ours are on the verge of exploring a great opportunity to generate, utilize, sustain and export a workforce who would have the ability to contribute to economic and financial development in the national levels. It is up to us whether or not we would clutch this benefit. Creating efficient bilingual personnel for these domains is, therefore, the only way to do so.

But we need to ask ourselves: ‘How far have we at all identified the ‘domains’ in our intra-national arenas where bilingualism would find its exact spaces?’ And subsequently, we must ask: ‘Have we provided our education system the opportunities to create the ‘groups’ of competent bilingual people to serve those ‘domains’?’

The Goals of Bilingual Education

From the historical point of view, bilingual education system has been the norm, rather than the exception, worldwide. The implicit goals of bilingual education can be listed as follows (Ashworth, 1985):

1. To assimilate individuals or groups into the mainstream of society
2. To unify a multilingual society
3. To enable people communicate with the outside world
4. To gain an economic advantage for individuals or groups
5. To preserve ethnic or religious ties
6. To reconcile different political, or socially separate, communities
7. To spread and maintain the use of colonial language
8. To embellish or strengthen the educational elites
9. To give equal status to languages of unequal prominence in the society
10. To deepen understanding of language and culture

From the above-mentioned goals, it is clear that bilingual education serves at least two groups of students: one, those who wish to learn a second language by choice; two, those who must learn it if they are to prosper within the education system and later in the outside world (ibid).

For example, in Canada, children of immigrants or indigenous minorities have a deep sense of urgency in mastering both French and English in order to grasp the opportunities in the broader Canadian society. These are the ‘first’ group of students. On the other hand, the Anglophone

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 14:6 June 2014

Faheem Hasan Shahed, Ph.D.

The Dysfunctional Bilingualism in Bangladeshi Education and Society

Canadian parents are more and more enrolling their children in French-English bilingual programs because they feel that it would give their children greater economic, educational, social and political advantage. These children belong to the ‘second’ group.

Thus, according to Charles A. Ferguson et al, ‘The implicit goals of bilingual education vary from society to society; they often overlap within a given society and may or may not reflect the aims of the society as a whole.’(ibid)

It is from this perspective that we should judge the Bangladeshi context of bilingual education. Who are the students learning English all over the country? Obviously, they do not represent any homogeneous economic or social strata. So, it is clear that their purposes, and hence motivational orientation of ‘receiving’ English education, are never the same. It has been seen that ‘resentment motivation’ (learning English in compulsion—having no way to avoid it since it is a part of school curriculum) followed by ‘instrumental motivation’ (learning English in order to get good jobs and also grab further opportunities in life) play the key role behind Bangladeshi school children’s learning English (Shahed, 1998). Therefore, it is hard to say how far the aims of a greater Bangladeshi society really match the implicit goals of the existing bilingual education.

Talking about the ten implicit goals mentioned earlier, we can see that except 3, 4 and 8, the rest are not applicable in Bangladeshi social setting for pragmatic reasons. Now, let us briefly evaluate these three ‘applicable’ points by raising some key questions.

As for point 3 (‘to enable people communicate with the outside world’), the aim of introducing a foreign language (English, in this case) in addition to the unifying national language (Bangla), is to enable nationals to interact with foreigners. So, it has to be defined first as to what we should mean by ‘interaction with foreigners’. Do all Bangladeshis have that scope, and then, should all Bangladeshis need that scope? How and why? In which domains of activity?

For point 4 (‘to gain an economic advantage for individuals or groups’), the aim is to provide language skills which are salable in the job market and can put a person ahead on jobs and status. So, it has to be fixed what portions of Bangladeshis need those jobs where English skills are crucial to sustain and develop. What are these sectors, and how to use people in these sectors?

For point 8 ('to embellish or strengthen the educational elites'), the aim is to sustain the elitist approach of English education. It is popularly believed by the linguists that much of the world's bilingual education is primarily for elites — and much of that which is available to all actually begun as education for elites. So, who are the 'elites' in Bangladeshi society and how has English embellished their status? Do they require any distinctive proficiency that must be somewhat different from the non-elites' English skills? How?

These questions are pertinent, but at the same time not quite easy to answer. The whole issue has to be judged on the basis of our public attitudes toward the existing bilingual education system.

But prior to that let us also keep in mind and thereby raise questions with reference to the four categories of 'bilingual education programs' as put forward by Joshua A. Fishman in 1976. Fishman talked about these regarding the MT and the official language (Ashworth, 1985):

Type 1: *Transitional bilingualism* : Students' first language is used in the early classes to the extent that allows them to adjust in school or master the subject matter till the second language is learnt properly for using that as the medium of instruction, after that the first language is dropped.

Type 2: *Monoliterate bilingualism* : Aural-oral skills are developed in both languages. However, literacy skills are developed only in the official language, not in the MT.

Type 3: *Biliterate bilingualism (partial)*: Fluency and literacy are desired in both languages, but literacy in MT is restricted to certain subject matter—normally that are related to the ethnic group and its cultural heritage.

Type 4: *Biliterate bilingualism (full)*: Students must develop all kinds of skills in both languages in all domains.

From the above categories, we see the current Bangladeshi ELT approaches matching 'type 4'. But then, the question remains: whether or not all Bangladeshis need to become 'full biliterate bilinguals'.

The Present Study

A study was conducted through questionnaires and interviews of educated Bangladeshi citizens from various sectors, and also of Bangladeshi students belonging to different educational levels. A stratified random sample of four hundred and fifty (450) people, all employed/working

persons, was chosen from Dhaka city. This population comprised general job-holders (both government and private), businessmen (both small and large-scale), teachers and professionals (engineers, lawyers, doctors, journalists, and so on).

A questionnaire with relevant queries was administered to all the randomly selected people. It comprised numerous statements concerning the existing bilingual education system of Bangladesh, the role of English in general vis-à-vis MT Bangla, the issue of English and power-status-prestige in the Bangladeshi society, and their encouragement to the children regarding English learning.

Apart from these statements, the questionnaire contained questions to elicit the following information: personal background of the respondents, such as age, sex, occupational and financial status; educational qualifications; the extent of their use of English in different domains of activities within and outside their families; the extent of their association with English via media and books. This domain-survey was also conducted with two hundred (200) students of secondary, higher secondary and tertiary levels.

The study had thus the following as the prime objectives: (a) Finding out the extent of their use of English in social and professional lives; and (b) Identifying the problematic aspects of our existing bilingual system. It is categorically, on the basis of these two objectives that we would try to evaluate the efficacy/inefficacy of our bilingual education in creating ideal workforce for our business and technological domains.

The ‘English Domains’ of Bangladeshis

To understand and discuss the issue of rationality of our present bilingual education, the study needed to have a glimpse of the domains of English in the average educated Bangladeshi’s life, and thus the following information was found from the survey:

Table 1: Employed people’s domain (in percentage)

<i>Issues</i>	<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>A little bit</i>	<i>Not at all</i>
Using English in the family	1.3	2.3	2.6	4.1	89.7
Using English outside the family	1.6	2.9	3.2	10.8	81.5

Using English while writing letters	3.5	5.6	5.6	39.2	42.5
Watching TV programs in English	9.8	31.2	31.2	12.3	29.1
Reading newspapers/magazines	2.4	21.8	21.8	18.9	51.6
Reading English fiction/non-fiction items	1.9	3.6	3.6	5.2	87.2

Table 2: Students' domain (in percentage)

In comparison to the senior respondents of the previous section, students, by and large, are more associated with English in terms of one factor: they have to study English regularly as a compulsory subject.

<i>Items</i>	<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>A little bit</i>	<i>Not at all</i>
Using English within the family	1.8	1.4	4.7	6.7	85.4
Using English outside the family	3.2	4.3	8.2	12.5	71.8
Using English inside the classroom	5.9	3.2	2.3	42.4	46.2
Using English with the teacher	6.7	11.8	6.4	33.7	41.4
Using English in diary writing (for those applicable)	20.3	45.8	18.2	7.2	8.5
Watching English news on local Channels	Nil	Nil	Nil	1.4	98.6
Watching English news on foreign channels	12.7	25.3	30.2	15.1	16.7
Watching English movies on TV	92.3	25.3	30.2	15.1	Nil
Watching English movies on DVD	8.1	6.5	52.7	18.5	14.2
Watching English movies on internet	48.5	39.4	8.1	2.4	1.5
Reading English daily newspapers	12.7	23.2	50.8	4.9	8.4
Reading English magazines (local)	1.6	1.8	2.9	13.2	80.5
Reading English magazines (foreign)	14.1	9.6	20.7	2.4	53.2
Reading English fiction books	2.8	10.5	7.8	12.3	66.6

Reading English non-fiction books	Nil	3.8	7.2	15.6	73.4
Listening to English songs	19.7	23.6	38.4	10.2	8.1
Watching sports programs in English	87.2	12.8	Nil	Nil	Nil

Domain Analyses in Brief

It is obvious from the ‘English domains’ of our senior citizens and our students that English has in fact a limited status in their day-to-day work spheres. Precisely, it is a sort of ‘resentment status’ of English in their lives, they have been using English in some specific areas under compulsion, finding no way out to avoid it. They have been staying away from English to a considerable extent (for example, the high percentages of ‘not at all’s in Table 1). Even in Table 2, students’ high percent non-use of English with their English teachers (a little bit usage by 42.4% and not at all usage but 46.2%) and high percent non-reading of English magazines, fiction and non-fiction clarifies the real picture further.

The only sectors where students are highly ‘English-inclined’ are ‘watching English movies on TV’ (92.3% *always*) and internet (48.5% *always* & 39.4% *often*) and ‘watching sports programs in English’ (87.2% *always*). Apparently, this has much to do with the ‘entertainment value’ that is involved in these areas.

Noticeable is the comparatively lower percentage in case of ‘watching English movies on DVD’. The reason is probably the money-factor related to it. One can easily switch on to Star Movies or HBO, as well go to the movie-sites on internet for enjoying English films for free. In fact, the trend is more on downloading action-oriented English movies from internet, as many respondents verbally informed this researcher. However, one does not go to buy DVDs unless one has that ‘integrative motivation’ to watch classic and social English movies; it is because, watching these sort of movies require the understanding and appreciation of the ‘culture’ attached to the dialogues and scenes (in other words, it is the understanding of biculturalism; discussed a bit more in section 6). This effort does not really come through instrumental motivation alone.

As said earlier, English lacks the socio-cultural usage in our society, and thus it is not surprising that students do not use it in and outside their families (Table 2). However, interesting is

the favorable position English enjoys in their diary writing ('always' users are 20.3% and 'often' users are 45.8%). Those who maintain the habit of diary writing have a sort of conscious attitude toward enhancing writing skills, as diary writing is both laborious and planned activity. Probably the students view it as a safe platform (diaries are private and secret) to utilize and practice their English language abilities even if they use improper English. By and large, it is clear that the bilingual domains of an average Bangladeshi are heavily prone to Bangla.

An Overview of the Findings

The responses of the public toward statements eliciting various issues can be put in the following manner. It needs to be kept in mind that the actual number of statements was more which covered other wide-range issues; these are the ones that have close link to the issue of bilingualism.

Table 3: Overview of the outcomes of the survey

Attitude toward our education system					
	<i>Agreed</i>	<i>Slightly Agreed</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Slightly disagreed</i>	<i>Disagreed</i>
1	Our education system has been producing bookish performers, rather than creative and knowledgeable students.				
	81.6	2.7	4.9	2.2	8.6
2	Our politicians are sincere for spreading quality education throughout the country.				
	1.5	6.9	19.3	9.7	62.6
3	Our evaluation system is faulty because it cannot adequately assess the knowledge of our learners.				
	82.6	5.5	3.3	6.8	1.8

Attitude toward Mother Tongue Bangla					
	<i>Agreed</i>	<i>Slightly Agreed</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Slightly disagreed</i>	<i>Disagreed</i>
4	Those who do not require English or do not want to learn English should be educated through Bangla.				
	75.3	14.7	1.5	7.3	1.2
5	All educated Bangladeshis can write good and flawless Bangla.				
	1.6	1.5	8.5	7.4	81.0
6	Since Bangla is our mother tongue every Bangladeshi is automatically skilled in Bangla.				
	4.6	10.6	12.8	68.5	3.5
7	It is not essential for all Bangladeshis to learn English as English is not necessary for all.				
	16.7	42.8	5.7	28.8	6.4

Attitude toward English and Status					
	<i>Agreed</i>	<i>Slightly Agreed</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Slightly disagreed</i>	<i>Disagreed</i>
8	The knowledge of English is essential to be an influential person in the Bangladeshi society.				
	10.5	27.6	11.2	34.5	16.1
9	English will help my child to build his/her career.				
	91.6	6.9	1.5	0	0
10	In our society, the skills of English are related to better economic life of an individual.				

	24.0	36.3	25.7	10.8	3.2
11	English is useful for adding to one's prestige and personality.				
	21.7	53.3	15.8	7.3	1.9

Attitude toward Bilingualism

	<i>Agreed</i>	<i>Slightly Agreed</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Slightly disagreed</i>	<i>Disagreed</i>
12	Those who are learning English should be such that they would be equally skilled in both Bangla and English.				
	68.6	19.8	7.5	4.1	0
13	Those who do not have much skill in English, but have been educated in various disciplines via the medium of Bangla, should not be judged as educated.				
	2.3	4.4	9.6	43.8	39.8

Attitude toward English Language

	<i>Agreed</i>	<i>Slightly Agreed</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Slightly disagreed</i>	<i>Disagreed</i>
14	English should no longer be considered as a language of the colonial rulers.				
	41.6	37.6	2.8	1.4	7.2
15	English is important in the field of trade and business in Bangladesh.				
	51.2	38.5	3.6	3.8	1.6

Attitude toward English-related aspects					
	<i>Agreed</i>	<i>Slightly Agreed</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Slightly disagreed</i>	<i>Disagreed</i>
16	The English medium schools help the learners achieve good command of English.				
	18.8	68.3	7.4	4.3	1.2
17	The English-speaking people of our society do not bother for Bangladeshi Bangalee culture.				
	27.9	38.5	9.3	18.6	5.7

Attitude toward Parental Encouragement					
	<i>Agreed</i>	<i>Slightly Agreed</i>	<i>Neutral</i>	<i>Slightly disagreed</i>	<i>Disagreed</i>
18	As a guardian I try to help my child in his/her English studies.				
	92.8	7.2	0	0	0
19	Since English is a part of my child's school/college curriculum, I encourage him/her to be attentive to English.				
	1.3	39.5	19.4	38.4	1.4

Bilingualism Should Mean ‘Proficiency based on Needs/Domains’

The question one can raise (in the light of the responses from table 1 & 2 and items 1—6 in table 3) is: do we need to make every educated citizen of country bilingual? If we are talking about the need of English for Specific Purpose (ESP) as the solution to the muddle that has been perpetuated, then should it not be a contradictory act on our part to impart bilingualism to everybody? Obviously, this question should be put like this: should not we try to get rid of this present policy of bilingual education from childhood?

This is not an easy task as it sounds. Our problem lies in the root: lack of reliable information. For example, we do not have any reliable answers to questions like: how many Bangladeshis know ‘somewhat English’ as well as ‘somewhat Bangla’? How many of these are rural and urban people? What percentage of people knows English fluently? How many of them use it in their daily affairs on a regular basis? What is then the approximate percentage of bilinguals, who are equally adept in both English and Bangla? And very importantly, what percentage of these capable bilinguals has engaged themselves in activities which contribute to socio-economic enhancement of the nation? Renowned educationist Serajul Islam Chowdhury maintains that everyone in Bangladesh does not need to be bilingual, and to impose bilingualism on all cannot be an ideal situation. ‘Apart from the impracticability of the task, there is the primary question of its desirability. Ideally, bilingualism should be voluntary rather than obligatory.’ (Chowdhury, 1992)

Similar sentiments have been echoed by others as well:

‘...We need to ask ourselves whether our rural farmers, laborers, fishermen, blacksmith and others need to be bilinguals. And do they themselves want to be bilinguals? It is more important to become educated rather than to become bilinguals. It would be extremely regrettable if bilingualism adversely affects one’s possibility to become educated ...bilingualism is necessary for Bangladesh. But not drag the entire population into this necessity.’ (Musa, 1995)

These observations deserve serious attention from all quarters concerned. But for a better realization, let us look into the issue of bilingualism from one’s childhood. Bilingual education is not an issue of just learning two languages; it is an issue of encountering two cultures. Bilingualism necessarily implies biculturalism (Richard, 1976: 43) indicating the individual’s cultural awareness of two social systems--as language carries with it its own history, sociology and cultural norms. In this connection, when a child is faced with bilingualism (and hence biculturalism) in his infant years when he is in the process of developing his L1 skills and norms, he is bound to become a victim of a dilemma of handling the two distinct worlds associated with the two languages. He will never be able to differentiate the norms, functions and styles of the two cultures. According to Clarke (1976), ‘Students’ difficulties in learning an SL stem from their lack of understanding of the social context of the language.’

For Bangladeshi children, English is entirely a different language, carrying an alien culture. Their cultural orientations that have been formed, and are in the process of being formed, receive a setback by the invasion of English. This is a reality, even if we provide any child the best possible teaching by a highly competent teacher. And since we neither have a good number of competent English teachers, nor the supporting resources, the situation is well understandable. Hence, it has been a setback for the average Bangladeshi children to put them into the explosive context of two diverse worlds of MT and English.

Mother Tongue Proficiency to Have Priority

Probably the most interesting responses came regarding the MT issues which deserve prominent attention on the part of policy makers. Irrespective of occupational and economic status, the respondents expressed their dissatisfaction with the state of MT proficiency of the people in general.

As evident from items 5 and 6, a considerably high percentage of respondents maintained that they ‘disagreed’ that all Bangladeshis are automatically skilled in Bangla as it is their MT. A substantial percent of teachers had ‘strong’ disagreement in this regard—perhaps due this fact that as teachers they had a clearer understanding of the students’ skills in Bangla.

The plight can be further apprehended if the responses to the statement ‘all educated Bangladeshis can write good and flawless Bangla’ are taken into account. A vast portion (item 5) ‘strongly disagreed’ to this. Unfortunate as it seems, there is no denying that the overall quality of education has received a setback, otherwise such views would not have been voiced.

This researcher was told by several officers of the Bangladesh Public Service Commission in the course of conversations that such has been the decline that a sizeable portion of the ‘magistrates’ and other probationary civil servants in recent years do not bear the ability to write a full page official draft correctly in Bangla, let alone English.

Indeed, there have been relentless controversies since the post-independence era regarding the issue of MT education, or in other words, the issue of enhancing MT at all levels. Agnihotri and Khanna (1997) mentioned how the 1872 Saddler Commission’s recommendations have been neglected by policy formulators. The Commission at that time asserted, ‘.... We are emphatically of

the opinion that there is something unsound in a system of education which leaves a young man, at the conclusion of his course, unable to write or speak his mother tongue fluently and correctly.’

Though the government constitutionally guaranteed the implementation of Bangla at all levels in 1972, and this was vowed by the successive governments time and again, precious little has been done in true spirit. Rather, there has been an overwhelming complacency in this issue of MT. It seems that both the government and the people have been taking the MT proficiency for granted.

Michael West, educationist and Principal of the Teachers’ Training College in Dhaka during the British colonial era, could realize the fundamental importance of a sound MT education in childhood at the time when English education was reaching its height. Yet he did not hesitate to utter what he experienced himself. Attaining a firm footing in one’s MT has a tremendous implication which can be understood at a later stage. He highlighted:

‘... The national language (MT) expresses a peculiar store of experience, a peculiar analysis of experience, and, being the language of infancy acquired at the time of the first development of the fundamentals of emotional life, its words possess a peculiar evocative (or emotional) value, unattainable by those of any second language. It is obvious therefore that no second language can replace the mother tongue, nor has any culture acquired through a second language has the power to displace the native culture.’ (West, 1926)

Noteworthy is the response to the statement ‘it is not essential for all Bangladeshis to learn English as English is not necessary for all’. The respondents had ‘agreed’ and ‘strongly agreed’ in large number to this (item 7). The response underlay the simple fact: revive MT education, and revive the fallen standard of education as a whole.

This point is further supported by the response to the statement ‘those who do not require English or do not want to learn English should be educated through Bangla’. Item 4 in the table shows the large percentage of ‘strongly agreed’ people in this case. In personal discussion, many respondents wondered why the authorities failed to realize the facts which they could comprehend as ordinary citizens. Many of them particularly pointed to the enormous wastage of time and resources at the primary level, especially in the smaller towns and villages, in the name of imparting English education. ‘Nothing is learned systematically and properly—be it Bangla or English’, lamented many guardians. Given the lack of learning environments, materials and the unskilled and untrained

English teachers, the burden of this ‘alien’ language comes as the greatest disaster for the hapless students.

The UNESCO in 1953 in ‘The Use of Vernacular Language in Education’ referred to MT as the ‘best medium for the teaching of the pupil’, and stressed that ‘psychologically, socially and educationally a child learns better and faster through his mother tongue’ (Shahed, 1998). In fact, UNESCO advocates for MT instruction in the early years of a child because of its role in creating a strong foundation for learning. The use of MT with children at home or in primary school ‘prepares them for the smooth acquisition of literacy in their MT and eventually, the acquisition of the second language at a later stage in their schooling’ (Diaranson, 2013).’ UNESCO’s ‘International Mother Language Day 2013’ program, in strong support toward MT education, aimed at promoting massive production of books in local languages all over the world (ibid). Therefore, the role of MT at the early stages of child’s schooling cannot be ignored.

Our next point in this connection is simple: when it comes to the teaching and learning of an FL (here English), the teaching learning of the MT and that of the FL can support and assist each other (Gurrey, 1970). Whatever methods or approaches would be adopted—be it the MT or the FL—the principles underlying these would be identical. Hence improvement in the teaching of MT is highly desirable at the early stage. Three prime reasons have been advocated in this regard (ibid):

Firstly, improvement in handling language is directly favorable to improvement of all kinds of thinking, such as reasoning and other mental operations that make use of words.

Secondly, nearly all children need instructions and specially devised practice in the use of their MT in order to acquire the ability to express themselves with clarity, ease and correctness.

Thirdly, those children who acquire some skill in using their MT have had a good preparation for acquiring similar skills in using an FL.

These arguments have been put forward in a more scientific model as BICS (Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills) and CALP (Cognitive and Academic Linguistic Proficiency) propounded by J. Cummins (mentioned in Shahed, 2001). He has described BICS as the ‘language of playground’ which takes 2 to 3 years to acquire, and CALP as the ‘language of classroom’ which takes 5-7 years to acquire. Hence, BICS are those language skills which are ‘cognitively undemanding’ and they include known ideas, vocabulary and syntax. On the other hand, CALP,

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 14:6 June 2014

Faheem Hasan Shahed, Ph.D.

The Dysfunctional Bilingualism in Bangladeshi Education and Society

being cognitively demanding, are those that are necessary for literacy attainment and academic success (ibid).

For a successful attainment of proficiency in one's MT, one has to first acquire high level BICS, which will lead to a sound acquisition of CALP. After one has mastered BICS and CALP in one's first language (L1), it becomes easier for one to acquire BICS and CALP in a second language (L2). Cummins terms this idea as 'interdependence'. That is, if students are able to comprehend a concept in L1, they will typically understand it in an L2, even if they cannot express themselves in the correct grammar of the L2. The cognitive aspects of L1 and L2 are interdependent.

It is in this regard that we can highlight the importance of attaining BICS and CALP in Bangla at the early stages. This will not only increase pupils' cognitive and intellectual maturity and make them capable of thinking, deciding or planning, but will also intensify their acquisition of BICS and CALP in English at the later stages.

But under the ongoing circumstances where the pupils have to deal both Bangla and English, the danger is inevitable. They have been losing both sides. Cummin's model has a clear explanation of this problem. Taking 'time out' from learning L1 (Bangla) in order to learn an L2 (English) has a negative impact for any level of learner. For the children who have to learn English before his Bangla CALP is developed, the negative effect operates even more. This impact can only be minimized if his CALP continues to grow in Bangla before English is introduced.

If English could be abolished from the initial stages, and consequently if BICS and CALP in Bangla would be allowed to develop, then the introduction of 'General English' from a later stage can be made accessible. Along with this, options from taking English for Specific Purpose (ESP) courses can be made open where learners can go for ESP according to their aspirations and needs in future lives.

English and 'Status' in Bangladesh

Coming to the interrelation between English and status in the Bangladeshi society, it is evident that the influence of English is all pervasive. It has been estimated that a very insignificant part of our population is bilingual in English. English is used by this relatively small but extremely influential portion of the country's population in the domains of government administration, law, military, commerce and print electronic media.

The responses to the statements concerning the power and status of English reveal the overwhelming agreement on the issue that English will help everyone's children to build up their career (item 9). Subsequently, a high percentage of 'strong agreement' can be noticed in the responses to the statement that 'the knowledge of English is related to better economic life of an individual' (item 10). Agnitotri, Khanna and Sachdev (1998) provided a suitable explanation by explaining how a high level of proficiency in English significantly improves one's chances for easy entry and quick personal growth in higher education, administration, judiciary, journalism and multinational companies.

'As regards the statement 'English is useful for adding to one's prestige and personality', a remarkable number of respondents 'agreed' (item 11). The reason can be assumed as such: written and spoken proficiency is essential to holding key positions in the competitive job arena. Added to these, one requires smartness in one's behavior. The respondents have probably judged the issue of their status (i.e. prestige), smartness (i.e., personality) and English proficiency as an amalgamated totality.

However, in response the statement 'the knowledge of English is essential to be an influential person in the Bangladeshi society', the public attitudes were somewhat mixed as is evident from the tables.

The percentage of 'disagreement' is seen to be quite high. This might have something to do with the interpretation of the word 'influential' by the respondents. Influence can be achieved in different ways according to the nature of contexts. As for example some teachers in a university are highly influential in academic and other decision-making bodies due to their connection with influential authorities outside the domain of the campus. So in this sense, they are influential persons in the society. But their influence may not necessarily match the 'influence' of the 'someone' who, despite being less educated or uneducated, has connections with bureaucratic and political quarters and can enjoy additional privileges that are out of common people's reach. However, it appears that respondents who 'disagreed' have made a clear cut choice of criterion of 'influence' in the Bangladeshi society. To them, political and bureaucratic connections may be the deciding criterion for being influential. English hardly has any role in this regard.

Chowdhury provides a clearer scenario by saying that the acquisition of English happens to be an instrument for gaining both power and prestige, and to limit its knowledge to a section of society would be to deprive others of a right. The basic fact here, as in many areas, is that the state must address itself to the question whether it wants to have a mere egalitarian society or to wider the social gulf further, with the knowledge of English acting as a decisive factor. Politics is not as wide apart from education as we sometimes think, or like, it to be. One interesting observation that he makes is:

‘In the locality I live, there is a school which used to call itself Arafat International School. Recently, it has changed itself into London International School, paying silent tribute to the greater politico-economic pull of London. Bengali yields to English, Arafat to London. Such is the dictation of contemporary history.’ (Chowdhury, 1998)

The Unquestionable Role of English

It is almost trite to mention that English, becoming the language of power and prestige in many countries, has been acting as a crucial gatekeeper to social and economic progress. Therefore, despite everything, there has hardly been any doubt among the majority of the respondents regarding the role and function of English in the global as well as national perspective where outside communication is concerned. As evident from items 14 and 15, the percentage of ‘agreed’ and ‘strongly agreed’ respondents is substantially high in case of all the three statements.

The responses prove some facts. First, the global significance of English should not be undermined by adding a ‘colonial touch’ to it. Second, being the language of wider communication, English will enable us to get closer and closer to the global diversities. And third, due to the inevitable attachment of English to the international trade and commerce, we cannot do away with it particularly in the domain of business.

Some businessmen clarified a point while taking part in personal interviews. In case of all business transactions within the country, there is little English can do. Bangla serves effectively as the medium of intra-national trade and transactions. But in case of international commercial transactions, which have been on the rise ever since the introduction of free market economy, English is the unparalleled medium. Given the high importance of the export-import sector, even for a small-scale industry, one needs business communicative skills in English since one has to depend in many issues on the outside world.

English in international domain in this present context, has obviously played its role to whip out the emotional notion of colonial hegemony of English. Even till the late 1980s, such concepts dominated the Bangladeshi intellectual mindset. However, if one looks at the ‘domains’ of English in today’s world, one would find that apart from being the working language of international organizations and conferences, it is the key language of scientific publication, international banking, economic affairs and trade, advertisement of global brands, audio-visual cultural products (e.g. film, TV, CDs, DVDs, popular music), international tourism, tertiary education, international safety (e.g. ‘air speak’, ‘sea speak’), international law, technology transfer, internet communication and so on. It is also a ‘relay language’ in interpretation and translation (Graddol, 1997). Over sixty countries publish titles in English (ibid). Half of Europe’s business is carried out in English, and more than 66% of the world’s scientists read English. Eighty percent of the world’s electronically stored information is in English. One third of mankind speaks or understands some English, and consequently, world’s forty million internet users mostly communicate in English (Duignan, 2000). English has replaced its arch rivals like French and German in World Organizations and Financial Bodies. 85% of international organizations (including the UN) now use English as their working language (Crystal, 1997). Similar is the case with the World Bank and International Monetary Fund.

All this proves one fact: the role and function of English in the contemporary global agencies have effectively implanted its value in the Bangladeshi public psyche. The concept of ‘colonial touch’, as it seems, has taken an automatic retreat owing to the multidimensional status of English in the broader domains. Nobody supports the depreciation of English at this point. Eminent Indian sociolinguist R. S. Gupta maintains that getting rid of English or stopping the teaching of English would sound like a sentimental nationalistic slogan. ‘Throwing out English would be like throwing out a ready-made instrument that has worldwide influence and impact’ (Gupta, 1999). The remedy according to him is to re-plan our language priorities and teach and learn English in a way which does not lead to a denigration of our own language or a negation of its validity and power and potential. Planning the pedagogy and language use should be done in accordance with such a way as to promote a healthy indigenous based bilingualism in English (ibid).

Gupta asserted on knowing MT well, using it in local, regional, public domains, as well as in private domains of hearth and home should go hand in hand with the teaching, learning and use of English in larger public contexts such as inter-regional or international communication. Learning and using English will in a way, prevent states, nations and policies from becoming insular, and enable

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 14:6 June 2014

Faheem Hasan Shahed, Ph.D.

The Dysfunctional Bilingualism in Bangladeshi Education and Society

them to participate in larger global enterprises depending on their motivation, ambition, skills and competencies.

What Should be Our Aim in Bilingualism?

A question may now be raised: what type of bilingualism do we need then? The answer will be evident from the following table:

Table 4 : Types of Language Choice

Features	Type A	Type B	Type C
	<i>a-modal nations</i> (e.g. Cameroon)	<i>uni-modal nations</i> (e.g. Bangladesh)	<i>multi-modal nations</i> (e.g. India)
Is there is a Great Tradition*?	No	Yes	Many
Reasons for selection of a national language	for political integration	for nationalism	for compromise
Reason LWC is used	As a national symbol	for the transition	as a unifying force
Language planning activity to be done	Standardization	Diaglossia	Modernization
Is bilingualism a goal?	No	No	Yes
Is biculturalism a goal?	No	No	Yes

* The term ‘Great Tradition’ refers to a literary tradition of long standing thought to be great by the people who have it, and considered a part of their cultural heritage.

(Eastman, 1983, quoted in Shahed, 2001)

From the table, it is evident that bilingualism, and consequently biculturalism, cannot be imposed by a stroke of a pen. We in Bangladesh need bilingualism not only for effective connection with the outside world in all spheres, but also to translate our culture, into English and other languages. Keeping in mind what India, China or African states have done over the years, it is time we did the same, i.e., translate the numerous facets of our culture into other through English—and thus transmit our culture into other cultures. This would enable us to establish our dignity in the **Language in India** www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 14:6 June 2014
 Faheem Hasan Shahed, Ph.D.
 The Dysfunctional Bilingualism in Bangladeshi Education and Society

world. And for this, we need appropriately planned ESP curriculum that has to be done in accordance with the relationship of both Bangla and English with the social behavior, aspirations and goals of majority. Bangla and English have to be allocated officially in terms of the functions they will serve in our country where they will be used properly and positively. Studying a language for the sole purpose of ‘crossing the hurdles of examination’, makes that language a genuine liability, which unfortunately, has been the case with both English and Bangla. An interesting survey by some linguists revealed that the English skills of our average university-going students are equivalent to the skills of the students of class seven (Musa, 1995).

In relation to all these, Musa puts forward a very decisive proposition. He says that admitting the importance of language learning (as a whole) in our education system, we must create the opportunity for all to learn any foreign language, as well as to earn their living through that language (ibid). It is in this way that the manipulation of power/status in relation to social class formation can be wiped out.

Conclusion

With the rapid growth of cross-cultural business and technological relationships among nations, and subsequently the increase of immigrant workforce across countries, jobs have become equally demanding and diverse. Bangladesh has a tremendous and dynamic workforce to cope with the infinite challenges of this current global trend. What lacks on our part is the communication efficiency. Now that we are urgently looking to create efficient economic and technological workforce, it is high time we rethought this issue of whom to teach and whom not to teach English, why and how. Prior to everything we need to first fix the appropriate status and the domain-specific usages of both Bangla and English, and restructure our ESP curriculum accordingly. Admittedly, that is the sole gateway to the implementation of functional bilingualism in Bangladeshi society.

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Faheem Hasan Shahed, Ph.D.

The Dysfunctional Bilingualism in Bangladeshi Education and Society