

## *English in Bangladesh after independence*

### Dynamics of policy and practice

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Since the creation of Pakistan in 1947 and the later emergence of Bangladesh as an independent nation in 1971, English has continued to be in constant use in spite of national policy directions favouring Bengali. Political and social changes have affected the importance, domains, and nature of English use in Bangladesh.

The Language Movement of 1952 and the legislative action taken since 1971 provide the key background to the policy decisions and the current status of English. The language policies adopted in Bangladesh, including the Language Act of 1987, have been characterised by an emphasis on 'Bengali in all spheres', which in turn has affected the use of English in different domains of Bangladeshi life and culture. This effect can be clearly seen in four major formal domains of Bangladeshi life: administration, education, law, and the media. The role of English in different domains in Bangladesh, as revealed by primary documentation, shows an unusual situation where the complementary use of English and Bengali, including widespread code-switching on multiple levels, prevails for complex socio-political reasons. Language policy documents, government memoranda concerning the use of Bengali in offices and courts, and frequent reminders and justifications for the use of Bengali, reflect some frustration on the part of the policy-makers at the uncertain progress towards promoting Bengali at the expense of English, and what were perceived as unusual delays in the implementation of the Act.

The detailed description of these domains contribute to a characterisation of the role and status of English in its complex interactions and co-existence with Bengali in contemporary Bangladesh.

#### ENGLISH ON THE SUBCONTINENT

At first glance the state of English in Bangladesh<sup>1</sup>—let us call it 'Banglish', as a shorter form of Bangladeshi English—can look very similar to the state of English in other countries of the Indian subcontinent.

The subcontinent offers three distinct experiences of English in the post-colonial era. The removal of British rule was followed almost at once by debates to remove English progressively from its position of prestige, authority, and dominance in public life, administration, law, education, media, cultural, commercial, and everyday life. The three big players (omitting Nepal because of its independent status, and smaller states, like Bhutan, on account of their size) are India, Pakistan and Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka. The status of English in India and Sri Lanka has been well documented elsewhere and lies outside the scope of this chapter.

Bangladesh achieved independence from British rule in the partition of 1947, which created East and West Pakistan as a new sovereign nation ruled from Islamabad in the western half of the country. In the early years after 1947 the two-member Pakistan state tried to follow the standard post-colonial practice of installing Urdu as a national language in place of English. In West Pakistan, Urdu was taken as a *lingua communis*, where it was in fact in a minority when compared to the larger populations speaking Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, and Baluchi: it is still the first language of only about 8 million people, most of them immigrants from India. Urdu took the place of English, and policies were enacted to 'Urdify' those areas where English had been predominant. This process took considerably longer than the Muslim nationalists would have liked: centuries of rule by Anglophone models had anchored English deeply within the structure and fabric of life in East and West Pakistan. In East Pakistan (later Bangladesh) the Bengalis also demanded that Bengali should be a state language alongside Urdu. The larger population of Bengalis spoke a single language, with a further block of speakers to the west in West Bengal, which remained part of India. The imbalance

between West Pakistan and East Pakistan eventually brought about the dissolution of the united country, but only after the deaths of several million in East Pakistan in the name of their country, culture, and language.

In retrospect, the whole concept of East and West Pakistan as a unitary nation looks strikingly naive. They shared a strong Muslim allegiance, a fear of domination by India, and a wish to distance themselves from the memories and aftermath of British rule. But ethnically, linguistically, and politically, West Pakistan and East Pakistan were roped by violence together, and eventually fell by violence apart.

In Bangladesh, English went the way of former colonial languages. After Partition it was suppressed in favour of Urdu in both East Pakistan and West Pakistan. But Bangladeshi resistance to Urdu and the rule from West Pakistan translated partly into some support for English, almost on the coat-tails of support for Bengali. After Independence in 1971 both Urdu and English were officially removed from their public roles, most dramatically and violently in the case of Urdu in reaction to the top-down policies of the former administration from West Pakistan. English continued in Bangladesh, however, in a number of public and private roles. As has been found elsewhere in post-colonial polities (Platt and Weber 1980; Ting (in preparation)), English cannot be disestablished at once: it takes time to generate homeland language vocabulary, structures, and discourses for administration, the law, the media, and commerce. But in 1971 English was obviously well on the way to being usurped. The fact that it has retained so much of its former roles and prestige is the motivation for the present study.

Independence in 1971 left Bangladesh in a unique position among subcontinental Englishes. In the other countries of the region, English is the favoured foreign language, but does not have the special status that it has in India. In post-Partition Pakistan the language situation was more like Sri Lanka, with two competing languages. But after 1971 Bangladesh became the only country in the region where there is an overwhelming majority who are ethnically homogeneous and are speakers of a single national language. This enormously simplifies language policy and management.

It also puts a special complexion on the relationship of Bengali to English. In Bangladesh there is no sense of English being a lingua

franca of ethnic neutrality, as there is in India. The face-off is directly between English as an established language of administration, and the national language Bengali, supported by policy lines favouring its introduction in all spheres of life.

The introduction of Bengali, however, has been both protracted and incomplete. There are many obvious causes. One, as we shall see, has to do with the specific character of the entrenchment of English: it is still very visible in public in Bangladesh, especially in Dhaka and most especially in upper middle-class areas. Another has to do with education and literacy: literacy rates in Bengali are still only around 37.4 per cent (Bureau of Statistics 1998) and literacy rates in English perhaps 2–3 per cent. These figures present significant difficulties for policy-makers and politicians who are trying to establish a national language with full functionality.

In this chapter we document two complementary tendencies in language policy and practice in contemporary Bangladesh. On the one hand we have the policy-driven goal of extending Bengali throughout public, commercial, and private use. This process is advancing. As Bengali increases, so English recedes. But on the other hand there is renewed support for English in education, culture, and commerce.

## **BANGLISH: THE DATA**

The broad-brush picture of English in Bangladesh is of a waning imperial prestige model, complemented by an emerging prestige impetus of international English. English in Bangladesh is strongly linked to socio-economic status. In independent Bangladesh, English is principally an international language and is most evident in areas like commerce, tourism, science, technology, and education, where Bangladesh interacts with the international community, or reacts to the prestige presence of English. The continued presence and vitality of English in Bangladesh are all the more surprising.

### **Data #1: administration**

Our first set of data comes from the domain of legislation, policy, and administration. Bangladesh declared the mother tongue to be the state language in the 1972 Constitution. Repeated orders and directives, verbal and written, were issued by the government to ensure the

use of Bengali in official matters. Eventually The Bengali Language Introduction Act 1987 was passed. The Act clearly stated that Bengali was to be used in all spheres and at all levels for government purposes.

The implementation of this policy did not follow a smooth path. It proved problematic to disestablish English swiftly, and time was needed to de-Anglicise the administrative documentation, procedures, and practice, and to phase in the new structures in the homeland language. While the bureaucrats who filled key positions in the first Bangladesh government had been trained earlier in English, the political leadership—the men who led the Bengalis to fight for a new country—were nationalists. Many were grass-roots politicians who had spent years in jail, had come from landed rural backgrounds, and were experts in political oratory in the vernacular. Their natural language was Bengali. Thus, in the early years of the new government of Bangladesh, there was an anomalous linguistic situation: the officials of the government generally preferred English, whereas the leaders, the ministers—champions of nationalism—wanted to establish the use of Bengali within the government realm. Many bureaucrats who belonged to the English-trained elite group continued to use English, often with some embarrassment (*Daily Star* 3 November 1997).

In the existing linguistic situation of Bangladesh, permission was given for the use of English when necessary. At least for a decade or so after Independence, there is no doubt that a dual-language policy was *de facto* in practice. There was also considerable overlap in the use of English and Bengali. The prevalence of English in various administrative functions as they appeared in government handbooks, manuals, book of rules, and other publications, was deep-rooted and ubiquitous.

The *Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh* is perhaps the single most important document of the nation. Article 3 of the Constitution states clearly: 'The state language of the Republic is [Bangla]' (1996, p. 6). The substitution of the word 'Bengali' by 'Bangla' through an amendment in 1988 testifies to a late de-colonising impulse apparent in the expunging of the Anglicised 'Bengali'. 'There is an authentic text of the Constitution in Bengali, and an authentic text of its authorised translation in English; but in the event of conflict between the two texts, the Bengali text shall

prevail' (*Preface to the 1996 Constitution*). Thus, a Bangladeshi national is free to choose either version of the Constitution, but the primacy of the Bengali version is stated in unequivocal terms.

However, despite the primacy of the Bengali version over the English, what is interesting is the nature of the physical production of the Constitution. In its most recent edition, both the English and Bengali versions have been amalgamated and published together, including all the amendments and revisions up to 30 April 1996. Starting with the Preface, through the Contents page, and right up to the last page of the Constitution, the verso pages are written in Bengali, and the word-for-word and paragraph-for-paragraph translation of the English version appears in the recto pages. In other words, the amalgamated edition of the Constitution is a classic bilingual text. While Bangladesh is certainly not a bilingual nation, the persistence of certain forms of bilingualism, such as in the Constitution, is a recognition of the historical significance of English in documents of importance, and an acknowledgment of the international prestige of English.

Despite repeated government orders stating that laws, rules and regulations, instructions, and training manuals must be immediately translated into Bengali, the flouting of such orders with impunity was a common practice. Instances of varied English use within the administration are numerous.

For instance, a 1983 handbook was entitled *Compilation of the Fundamental Rules and Supplementary Rules made by The President including Orders, etc., Issued by the Bangladesh Government, Auditor General, etc.* The cover page states that it is the first edition of a reprint. The Preface to the reprinted edition of 1983 contained the Preface to the first edition of 7 February 1951 in Karachi, written by the Secretary to the Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Finance, as well as the Preface written on 16 November 1964 in Rawalpindi in Pakistan. The Foreword to the 1983 reprint, written by the Secretary of the Finance Division, unabashedly states: 'This is an exact reprint of former *Compilation of the Fundamental Rules and Supplementary Rules made thereunder Volume 1, First Edition, 16th November 1964 without any amendment or modification in the Rules except that—(a) Wherever the words "Bengal", "East Bengal", "East Pakistan", "Pakistan", appear, they shall be deemed to have been replaced by the word "Bangladesh"*' (our italics). In other words, this

handbook was originally written in English for the Ministry of Finance in Pakistan in 1951, and was reprinted in English without changes for the Ministry of Finance in Bangladesh in 1983. Certainly, this example says something about bureaucratic dynamism; it also indicates that civil servants were in no great hurry to implement the government's decision to bring about complete language change. This is especially true in situations where government projects are undertaken with donor money, the donor stipulating that handbooks and other written material be available in English.

At the same time it must be emphasised that there is no doubt that after the Bengali Language Introduction Act of 1987, the process of the Bengalisation of the bureaucracy made much greater headway. It is estimated that about 80 per cent of all official letters and correspondence were written in Bengali for internal purposes; meetings were conducted in Bengali, and the agenda, the minutes, as well as the resolutions, were executed in Bengali. Various official circulars issued by the Bengali Language Implementation Cell after 1987 to other departments and ministries were also invariably in Bengali.

An interesting feature of many government documents is an overlap of both English and Bengali within a single text. In most such hybrid texts, the English sections were extracted from other texts and simply inserted into the framework of a letter or document that is technically written in Bengali (Shikka Unnayan Manual 1996). Such hybrid texts are becoming increasingly common in the government and other autonomous organisations in situations where it is necessary to refer to laws, ordinances, and rules that were written earlier (during British or Pakistani times) in English.

Interestingly, such hybrid texts were not only in tune with the spirit of the Act of 1987, the formal aspects of such documents being in Bengali, but they also conveniently fell back on the use of English excerpts, with parts of sentences and words inserted in documents otherwise written in Bengali. Justifications for such hybridised usage is to be found in a recommendation made by the Bengali Language Implementation Cell in 1984, which allowed the use of English words and sentences when no Bengali equivalent was either available or suitable for immediate translation (Memo No BBK-57/83-40 (500), dated 12 January 1984—was issued by the Bangla Language Implementation Cell known as Bangla Bastobayan Kosh, from the Ministry of Establishment, People's Republic of Bangladesh).

Again, various departments and ministries of the government routinely distribute hundreds of different forms, certificates, licences, and other kinds of documents. It is estimated that there are over 20 000 governmental forms, out of which only 3000 had been translated into English in 1984. The task of translating 17 000 forms would be time-consuming and expensive, which forced the Cell to recommend that 'until such time that forms translated into Bengali are available, forms written in English should be filled in Bengali. In addition, replies to letters written in English should be in Bengali, unless the recipient is a foreign organisation or foreign individual' (Memo No Ba Ba Ko-57/83-40 (500), 12 February 1984, p. 86).

While a great degree of success has been achieved in introducing Bengali at all levels within the bureaucracy, the entrenched nature of English within bureaucratic functions has made the complete elimination of English both impossible and undesirable. There are numerous instances of random, arbitrary, and individual uses of English in offices, particularly by civil servants trained in English who use English with competence and confidence, and for whom English is irrevocably linked with prestige. Historical pressure from the colonial past and demands of a future, where English is recognised as a global language, guarantees the continuation of English within the government in varying ways.

### **Data #2: education**

After Bangladesh became independent in 1971, one of the first domains to be affected by the government's Bengalisation effort was the domain of education, particularly at the primary and secondary levels. All English-medium schools were abolished in 1972. The abolition of English-medium schools was accompanied by a corresponding removal of English from all public service and departmental examinations in pursuance of the policy of Bengalisation of the administration. A Bengali-medium educational system supported well the effort of Bengalising the administrative and legal structures. The Act of 1987 had clear ramifications for the position of English and Bengali in the educational system.

At the tertiary level, however, the banning of English overnight was not possible; English was allowed to continue parallel with Bengali as the language both of instruction and examinations.

Although at present English is studied as a compulsory second language subject from Class 1 to Class 12—for about 50 minutes every day—a combination of factors has resulted in the overall decline of English among high school and college leavers. Some of these factors include de-emphasis of the importance of English within the school curriculum, poor teaching, low contact hours, and poor curriculum and methodology.

In tertiary education, English has an optional and non-statutory status. As a result, university education has begun to suffer because it had been traditionally English-medium in the sense that not only were the lectures delivered mainly in English, but books and journals were also available mostly in English. While it was simply not practicable for the universities to switch completely to Bengali, the presence of Bengali-medium students with inadequate proficiency in English affected several aspects of university education. Bilingual lectures and switching back and forth between Bengali and English became a common form of classroom communication. In 1997 the University of Dhaka reintroduced compulsory remedial English language courses for all first-year students of all departments.

English-medium schooling has always been a privilege of the minority. In Bangladesh the abolition of English-medium schools created a vacuum for the English-educated elites and would-be elites who could not bring themselves to send their children to Bengali-medium government schools, which generally catered for the middle and lower middle classes. The demand for English-medium schools for the children of the wealthy, the *nouveau riche*, and others who considered English education important for the future of their children led to the rapid establishment of English-medium schools in the private sector—the growth of a parallel English-medium educational system. In the last 20 years or so, English-medium schools have become a phenomenal growth industry caused by the rising concern at the decline of English in Bengali-medium schools. The demand for English, which must be learned and learned well for personal advancement and better jobs, also created a lucrative market for 'coaching centres' that have mushroomed at almost every street corner. There is naturally an ever-widening difference in English language proficiency between the products of the English-medium schools—the English-educated 'caste', as Tickoo calls it (1996, p. 228)—and the vast number of students who exit from government-

sponsored Bengali-medium secondary and higher secondary institutions. The two systems create what may be seen as a linguistic divide between those who have 'ownership' of English and those who do not.

The proliferation of private English-medium schools and various kinds of English-teaching schools was followed in the 1990s by the establishment of a number of English-medium private universities. The government of Bangladesh passed the Private Universities Act 1992 to enable a larger percentage of students who pass the higher secondary examination each year to have the opportunity for higher education. Since the promulgation of the Act in 1992, 16 private universities have been established, the latest in 1996. Although the charters for the private universities have no reference to the language of instruction to be used, what is interesting is that all these are English-medium institutions.

The private universities, in fact, are a natural extension of the English-medium schools, and therefore very elitist in their admission policies. At least 20 per cent of the English-medium school-leavers seek admission to these private universities. According to figures available, the total enrolment of students in the 16 private universities was a mere 3823 students, whereas the total enrolment in the 11 government universities in 1996 was 66 461 (excluding Bangladesh Open University).<sup>2</sup> What is clear from these figures is that the private universities were established with the goal of providing English-medium higher education for the well-to-do. The annual tuition fee for students studying in the University of Dhaka, the premier government-funded tertiary institution, is about Taka 240 (\$A80) annually, whereas the annual tuition fees for North-South University is Taka 105 000 (\$A3500). Elitism in education is expressed not only in terms of the fees paid but also in terms of the overall exclusiveness of the environment, not the least of which is the use of English in the classroom and wherever possible outside the classroom.

The banning of English-medium schools in 1972 and the de-emphasis on the overall teaching of English in government schools, followed by the introduction of the Language Act of 1987, have contributed significantly to the serious decline in the standard and status of English in Bangladesh. It is a decline that corresponds ironically to the global spread of English in the rest of the world and the growth of English-medium schools, private universities, and

Table 7.1 Private universities at a glance

University	Affiliation	Number of students	Tuition per academic year	Degrees	Courses
North-South University	George Washington University	1000+	Tk 105 000 (approx.), inclusive of other fees	4-year Bachelor degrees; 1-year MA, MBA	Economics
	Colorado State University				Accounting
Independent University	University of Illinois	400	Tk 112 500 (inclusive of other fees)	4-year Bachelor degrees	Computer Science
	University of Southern Indiana				Finance
AMA International University	University of Warwick	120	Tk 23 900	4-year Bachelor degrees	Marketing
	University of Michigan at Ann Arbor				International Business
University of Asia and the Pacific	Free University, Brussels	Admission pending; maximum of 20 in each program	Tk 80 000, Engineering; Tk 72 000, BBA	4-year Bachelor degrees	Environmental Science
	Asian Institute of Technology				BBA
Darul Ehsan University	State University of New York	1500	Tk 26 000, BBA, BED, MED; Tk 75 000, Medical School; Tk 80 000, Dental School	4-year Bachelor degrees; 1st year Masters, MPhil	BEEd, MED, BBA
	Moscow State University				MPhil in Arabic
Central Women's University	Ecole Supérieure de Commerce de Paris (ESRC)	100 (approx.)	Tk 20 000	BA, BSc, MA, MSc, MBA	Dental School
	University of New England (Armidale, New South Wales, Australia)				Medical School
AMA International University	University of Warwick	120	Tk 23 900	4-year Bachelor degrees	Engineering
	University of Michigan at Ann Arbor				Computer Science
Darul Ehsan University	Free University, Brussels	Admission pending; maximum of 20 in each program	Tk 80 000, Engineering; Tk 72 000, BBA	4-year Bachelor degrees	Business Administration
	Asian Institute of Technology				Management
Central Women's University	State University of New York	1500	Tk 26 000, BBA, BED, MED; Tk 75 000, Medical School; Tk 80 000, Dental School	4-year Bachelor degrees; 1st year Masters, MPhil	Information Systems
	Moscow State University				Economics
AMA International University	University of New England (Armidale, New South Wales, Australia)	Admission pending; maximum of 20 in each program	Tk 80 000, Engineering; Tk 72 000, BBA	4-year Bachelor degrees	Marketing
	University of Michigan at Ann Arbor				Finance
Darul Ehsan University	Free University, Brussels	Admission pending; maximum of 20 in each program	Tk 80 000, Engineering; Tk 72 000, BBA	4-year Bachelor degrees	Business Administration
	Asian Institute of Technology				Business Studies
Central Women's University	State University of New York	1500	Tk 26 000, BBA, BED, MED; Tk 75 000, Medical School; Tk 80 000, Dental School	4-year Bachelor degrees; 1st year Masters, MPhil	Computer Science
	Moscow State University				Civil Engineering
AMA International University	University of New England (Armidale, New South Wales, Australia)	Admission pending; maximum of 20 in each program	Tk 80 000, Engineering; Tk 72 000, BBA	4-year Bachelor degrees	Women's Studies
	University of Michigan at Ann Arbor				Engineering
Darul Ehsan University	Free University, Brussels	Admission pending; maximum of 20 in each program	Tk 80 000, Engineering; Tk 72 000, BBA	4-year Bachelor degrees	Computer Science
	Asian Institute of Technology				Business Administration
Central Women's University	State University of New York	1500	Tk 26 000, BBA, BED, MED; Tk 75 000, Medical School; Tk 80 000, Dental School	4-year Bachelor degrees; 1st year Masters, MPhil	Management
	Moscow State University				Information Systems
AMA International University	University of New England (Armidale, New South Wales, Australia)	Admission pending; maximum of 20 in each program	Tk 80 000, Engineering; Tk 72 000, BBA	4-year Bachelor degrees	Economics
	University of Michigan at Ann Arbor				Marketing
Darul Ehsan University	Free University, Brussels	Admission pending; maximum of 20 in each program	Tk 80 000, Engineering; Tk 72 000, BBA	4-year Bachelor degrees	Finance
	Asian Institute of Technology				BEEd, MED, BBA
Central Women's University	State University of New York	1500	Tk 26 000, BBA, BED, MED; Tk 75 000, Medical School; Tk 80 000, Dental School	4-year Bachelor degrees; 1st year Masters, MPhil	MPhil in Arabic
	Moscow State University				Dental School
AMA International University	University of New England (Armidale, New South Wales, Australia)	Admission pending; maximum of 20 in each program	Tk 80 000, Engineering; Tk 72 000, BBA	4-year Bachelor degrees	Medical School
	University of Michigan at Ann Arbor				English
Darul Ehsan University	Free University, Brussels	Admission pending; maximum of 20 in each program	Tk 80 000, Engineering; Tk 72 000, BBA	4-year Bachelor degrees	Bangla
	Asian Institute of Technology				Economics
Central Women's University	State University of New York	1500	Tk 26 000, BBA, BED, MED; Tk 75 000, Medical School; Tk 80 000, Dental School	4-year Bachelor degrees; 1st year Masters, MPhil	Geography
	Moscow State University				Political Science

Source: Star Weekend Magazine, 14 June 1996

coaching centres in Bangladesh. Predictably, voices of alarm have sounded from time to time, most noticeably in the columns of English-language newspapers. What is clear is that a renewed stress on English education is recognised as necessary by people at all levels of society. The government's rethinking of the role of English within the education system was evident in its decision to reintroduce English at the tertiary level by passing legislation in 1992. The objective was to better equip graduates for the job market, and generally raise academic standards to higher levels. While there is no doubting the government's recognition of the importance of English and the need to improve standards of English, it may be argued that such measures are too contingent and piecemeal to be truly effective.

### *Data #3: law*

The legal system in Bangladesh, like that in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and other former British colonies, is a legacy of the British legal system. Evidence of that legacy is most noticeable in the court procedures of Bangladesh, which are clearly British; English being the language of legal higher discourse. But, as in other domains in Bangladesh, the use of English within the judiciary is not unproblematic: it is challenged, debated, questioned. While English continues to be the language of the higher courts, Bengali is more and more replacing English as the language of the lower courts.

During the Pakistani period (1947–71), the language of the Appellate Division and the High Court was English, in continuation of the tradition left behind by the British. After the Independence of Bangladesh in 1971, English continued to be used as the preferred language. Most of the laws are written first in English (in many cases, no Bengali translations are available), books on law are mostly in English and are British publications, and the small number of lawyers and judges in the higher courts are very competent in English, with many of them having been trained at Lincoln's Inn in England. It is now estimated that at least 90 per cent of the written submissions made and almost all the judgments passed by the judges in the higher courts are made in English.

Twenty-five years after Independence only two linguistically historic judgments in Bengali have so far been delivered by the High Court. A news item in a local English daily under the headline 'HC judgment delivered in Bangla' states: 'A division bench of [the] High

Court yesterday delivered two judgments in two criminal cases in Bangla instead of English'.<sup>3</sup> What is interesting about these judgments in Bengali is that they have to be justified as deviations from normal practice of passing judgments in English with the argument that 'there is no bar in delivering judgment in Bengali' and that the 'state language' of the republic is Bengali. Sections of the press hailed these judgments as linguistic landmarks. An editorial of a local English daily gushed: '*Chamatkar!* [Marvellous!] ... On Thursday they delivered the verdicts on two criminal cases in the High Court Division in Bangla—a watershed in our legal history for never before a verdict at the High Court had been delivered in any language other than English. We are all praise for the inspiration and imagination behind the change in the medium of the verdict' (*Daily Star*, 16 February 1998).

The Bengali verdicts—exceptions to the rule—are only a demonstration of the widespread use and tenacity of English in the higher judiciary. In the lower courts, on the other hand, the prevalence of Bengali is well established; it is the use of English that is often a question of debate. The verdict of a Division Bench of the High Court was clearly given as follows: 'English shall continue to be the language of the subordinate judiciary of the country parallel to Bangla until the Government directs otherwise. The government may declare what the language of the subordinate courts shall be' (*Daily Star*, 29 November 1991). The news was carried under a front-page headline that stated: 'English to Continue in Courts'.

Two fundamental points about language use in the judiciary may be made. The first is that English is the major language of the higher courts, but the use of Bengali has not been debarred. And second, Bengali is the major language of the subordinate courts, but English can also be used whenever desired. This situation demonstrates the considerable independence of the judiciary, not only in the continued use of English in the High Court and Appellate Divisions, but also in the High Court's ruling that English can be used in the subordinate courts as well. The Act of 1987 notwithstanding, the place of English in the judiciary is assured, at least for as long as the system continues to be modelled on the legal system of the United Kingdom. It is estimated that there are about 20 000 lawyers in Bangladesh today; roughly 18 000 (90 per cent) practise in the lower courts, while about 2000, 10 per cent of the total number—

perhaps the best in profession—practise in the two higher courts. Less than 10 per cent of the latter group (about 2 per cent of total practising lawyers), about 150 in number—the elite of the elite—have degrees from the Inns of Court in the UK and are naturally very proficient in English. It is on this group, along with the support of the others who practise in the higher courts, that the future of English in the judiciary rests.

Ever since the abolition of Persian as the language of the courts in 1772, laws in India up to 1947, in India and Pakistan after 1947 (Kachru 1983), and in Bangladesh from 1971 up to 1986, have almost invariably been drafted in English. This means that in addition to the Supreme Court Rule Book, the Civil Procedure Code, and Criminal Procedure Code, and various publications from the Supreme Court—all are written in English. Lawyers and judges have to deal with hundreds of laws from 1900 onwards, which are also all written in English. It is obvious that the entire legal system of Bangladesh stands on this substantial intellectual foundation whose linguistic bias is inescapably English. As long as this socio-linguistic context prevails, the perpetuation of English within the judiciary is almost a necessity.

#### **Data #4: media**

This section focuses on the place and use of English in the media, particularly as it is used in newspapers, on radio, and on television. When Bangladesh became independent in 1971 there were only two English newspapers: the *Pakistan Observer* and the *Morning News*. The *Pakistan Observer* became the *Bangladesh Observer* and the *Morning News* disappeared. By 1977 there were three English dailies, and within three more years there were seven. The government media list of newspapers for July 1998 gives a total of 231 newspapers, of which 11 are in English and 220 in Bengali.

The combined circulation of six major newspapers is estimated at around 127 650, which is slightly over 0.1 per cent of the total population. This gives some idea of the overall position of English newspapers in relation to the total population. The readership of English-language newspapers is limited mostly to the urban centres and the English-educated elite of the country (*Statistical Yearbook* 1980, p. 507). It is also significant that all but one of the English newspapers are privately owned. The only government-owned daily,

the *Bangladesh Times*, ceased publication in 1997.

State-sponsored radio (*Bangladesh Betar*) and television programs are mainly in Bengali with a small English component. The use of English is most noticeable in the various national news bulletins that are broadcast daily. The radio broadcasts 18 daily news bulletins, of which 14 are in Bengali and only four in English. For the five-minute bulletins, there are 12 in Bengali and only two in English. But for the 10-minute bulletins, significantly, there are two in English and two in Bengali. An equal amount of airtime is given to news commentary and news review in Bengali and English.

In addition, there are a few other programs specifically designed for English listeners. The External Services broadcast *In and Around*, *Youth Forum*, *Horizon*, and *World Music*—all programs broadcast specifically in English totalling no more than 20 hours per month. Compared to the total average broadcasts of 160 hours every day, 20 hours of English programming per month gives an idea of the relative unimportance of English in the radio. The overall impact of the radio on the spread and use of English in Bangladesh is therefore likely to be quite restricted. The majority of listeners are rural people with no knowledge of English.

The presence of English on the state-sponsored television station is likewise minimal. In Bangladesh there is only one national network with only one channel. However, a number of foreign (Indian) channels are available through cable television. The use of English and Hindi in these channels is considerably higher than in the national network and this is likely to have significant impact on viewers in future. The main language of BTV telecasts is Bengali: all announcements, talk shows, entertainment and educational programs, and advertisements are made in the vernacular. The most important English program broadcast every day is the daily half-hour evening English news, which is followed by a longer one-hour Bengali news. Some time is also allotted each day to a number of imported American and British programs. A chart of various English programs shown by BTV during April–June 1998 is given in Table 7.2.

Out of a total of eight hours and 45 minutes of broadcast time every day (excluding the half-hour English broadcasts every day), from 3 p.m. to 11.45 p.m., between 80 and 120 minutes are devoted to imported English programs on the first four days of the week.



Table 7.2 English broadcasts on BTV

Day	Type	Name	Time	Min.
Sunday	Cartoon	Woody Woodpecker	3.20 p.m.	25
	Film series/ shows	The New Adventures of Robin Hood	9.30 p.m.	30
	News	News at Ten	10.00 p.m.	30
	Local news	The news	11.35 p.m.	5
Monday	Documentary	Zoo Adventure	3.20 p.m.	25
	Sports	Sports program	3.45 p.m.	15
	News	News at Ten	10.00 p.m.	35
	Mini-series	Shin Totsukawa	11.00 p.m.	30
	Local news	The news	11.35 p.m.	5
Tuesday	Sports	Sports program	3.20 p.m.	40
	News	News at Ten	10.00 p.m.	35
	Local news	The news	11.35 p.m.	5
Wednesday	Cartoon	Captain Planet	4.15 p.m.	30
	Film series	The Mysterious Island	9.30 p.m.	30
	News	News at Ten	10.00 p.m.	30
	Local news	The news	11.35 p.m.	5
Thursday	Cartoon	Kimba the White Lion	4.15 p.m.	30
	News	News at Ten	10.00 p.m.	30
	Film show (short film)	Tekwar	10.30 p.m.	60
	Local news	The news	11.35 p.m.	5
Friday (morning session)	News	The news	10.00 a.m.	5
	Cartoon	Enid Blyton Adventure Series	10.05 a.m.	20
(second session)	Film series	The New Adventures of Sinbad	8.35 p.m.	25
	News	News at Ten	10.00 p.m.	30
	Series	The X Files	10.30 p.m.	30
	Local news	The news	11.35 p.m.	5
Saturday (morning session)	Debate (fortnightly)	English debate	9.20 a.m.	45
	Feature film	Movie of the week	10.15 a.m.	115
(second session)	Sports	Sports program	4.10 p.m.	30
	News	News at Ten	10.00 p.m.	30
	Film show	The Legendary Journey of Hercules	10.30 p.m.	60

Source: TV Guide, April-June 1998

English programs on Thursday nights are over two hours, while during the weekends (Friday and Saturday) there is a total of over six hours for the combined morning and evening sessions. The increased English programming during the weekend probably reflects the demand for such programs from younger viewers.

On the whole, therefore, BTV's English telecasts comprise slightly over 10 per cent of its total programming; this is a much higher percentage of English content than in radio broadcasts. This must be qualified with the observation that since 1993 a number of English programs have been dubbed into Bengali, presumably for the benefit of an increasing number of viewers with lower competence in English. These include *The Sword of Tipu Sultan* (1993), *Time Tracks* (1994), *Dark Justice* (1995), *The Jungle Book* (1995), *Arabian Nights* (1995), and *Akbar the Great*. One movie shown every Friday (*Movie of the week*) is shown in English. Since television was first introduced in 1964 during the Pakistan era, American and English programs have enjoyed great popularity with urban viewers. Popular TV shows like *Ironside*, *Hawaii Five-O*, *Get Smart*, *MASH*, *The Six Million Dollar Man*, *The Bionic Woman*, *McGyver*, *Dallas*, *Dynasty*, *Northern Exposure*, *L.A. Law*, *NYPD Blue*, *Law and Order*, *Yes Minister*, *Upstairs Downstairs*, and *Remington Steele*, to name only a few that have been shown in the last three decades, were televised in English without being dubbed, and were much appreciated by viewers. The current practice of dubbing may be indicative of a real fall in English proficiency, or simply a perception among BTV programmers that dubbing is necessary to attract a greater number of viewers.

A survey conducted by the Press Institute of Bangladesh (1996) to gauge the opinion of viewers on the dubbing of English programs actually revealed that the majority of respondents (79 per cent with tertiary degrees) enjoyed English movies that were dubbed in Bengali. Certainly, this survey reveals something about the general decline of English proficiency in Bangladesh. The dubbing of English programs might be seen as an extension of the overall process of Bengalisation undertaken in other domains of the government.

The relatively small English component in BTV programs is understandable in the context of a largely monolingual nation. This was more than compensated by the BBC and CNN news and documentaries in English telecast every morning by BTV from 1992 to 1996. The introduction of cable television in 1995 further opened

the floodgates of foreign cultural and linguistic influences. Of the 12 different channels now in operation—BBC, Channel V, Star Plus, Star Movies, Star Sports, PTV, Zee India TV, DD 7, ATN, Sony ET, Zee TV, and TNT Cartoon—some are exclusively in English, some combine English programs with Hindi, while some others employ an increasingly popular style of Hindi-English code-switching. Those with access to cable TV hardly watch BTV any more. Whatever the cultural effects of this invasion of hybrid American-Bombay pop culture, dance-and-music shows, and Hindi and English movies, English is likely to be the winner in the long run.

Again, as in education, it is those who are relatively better off who benefit from the large amounts of English through cable TV. This encourages the perpetuation of a dual system: an elitist system in which a few have access to English education and English television, and a general system with poor quality English teaching and English television programs dubbed in Bengali.

#### *Dynamics: interpreting the data*

In the title of this paper we specified the 'dynamics' of the current status of English in Bangladesh. The word is deliberate: Banglish is in motion, and simultaneously in a number of different directions in a number of different dimensions.

The first of these dynamics concerns the interplay between government policy and what actually occurs in the everyday marketplace of language. The government, in spite of encouragement from the strongly nationalist side of the political spectrum in Bangladesh, has allowed the policy's implementation to develop in a rather hands-off way—unlike, say, the strongly interventionist attitude of the French government in taking legal action under the *Loi Toubon* against people who fail to use authorised Gallic expressions in favour of proscribed foreign, usually English, ones (Machill 1997). Here the attitude of the Dhaka government has been pragmatic and to some extent permissive, as we also see in the implementation of Malaysian national language policy in Sarawak (Ting (in preparation); Ting and Sussex 1999a, 1999b). To outside observers it might appear that the government has not been pursuing the Bengali language implementation policy as strenuously as might have been expected. In reality, the government has probably been proceeding as fast as it felt was feasible, focusing rather on the longer term results of a peaceful

phasing-in of Bengali, perhaps in the context of a possible eventual (negotiated?) accommodation with English. Whatever the motivation, however, the data that we have presented show that the various targets for Bengali language planning have not been responding quickly or fully. It is more likely, however, that the timetables set or implied in the legislative documents have simply turned out to be unrealistic. It may well have been resources—whether human, financial, or physical—that have been lacking. With a significant number of senior civil servants, administrators, and business leaders whose first formal language is English, and whose competence in the parallel Bengali registers is uncertain, the process appears to have lacked leadership. It also appears to have lacked planning and follow-up. The evidence presented above does not suggest a strongly authoritative or punitive attitude towards non-compliance in Bengali-language implementation. The implementation is certainly occurring, but it is tending to find its own pace, and to be driven to some extent by the urgency felt by those further down the policy chain.

The second dynamic is related to the first, and concerns the range and reticulation of language roles. While Bengali had a virtually complete scale of roles in the spoken language before Independence—with the exception of some formal and administrative occasions when English would be used—its written registers were significantly incomplete. The domains that we have surveyed above—administration, education, law, and the media—constitute a major tranche of a viable language's written repertoire. Taken together with religion, where Arabic dominates, Bengali was coming from some way back in the field when the policy-makers voted to institute it forthwith as a national language. The religious domain is unlikely to change, and Bengalis are not displeased. The other domains are shifting in the direction of more complete and more competent Bengali implementation, but they still have some way to go.

The third dynamic concerns the changing role of English for the population of Bangladesh, and to some extent the changing demographics of Bangladesh. The older generations who were educated in English-medium schools are now starting to reach retiring age. Within a decade the public service, education, business, and other fields will start to see senior figures for whom English is not only a foreign language, but also a not-so-competent foreign language. This

will inevitably combine with the professionalisation of Bengali, and its encroachment into areas where English was formerly dominant.

Against these three dynamics there are three powerful opposing forces working for the retention, and indeed expansion, of the role of English.

The first of these is quasi-oxymoronic: it is a dynamic of inertia. This is the weakest of the dynamics favouring English, but its effects are clearly seen in many sectors of language use in contemporary Bangladesh. We have already reviewed the result of centuries of British control of education, the legal system, and public administration. In spite of the best efforts of the Bengali nationals, it has proved difficult to generate new lexis, registers, and texts in Bengali with anything like the desired speed. In addition, there is a subtle but unmistakable effect of prestige. It is not surprising, after such a long period of authority, that English should have accumulated such an aura.

The second dynamic favouring English has to do with the sheer kinesis of modern English on the international stage. The extent and impetus of this juggernaut is described by Crystal in *English as a Global Language* and by McArthur in *The English Languages* and does not need repeating here. What is important is the timing. Just as the English-dominant generations in Bangladesh are starting to move towards retirement, the pressure of international English is moving to replenish the English stimulus, this time from without, but with renewed emphasis.

The third dynamic on the English side involves English in the subcontinent and the emergence of norms within this geographically heterogeneous group of countries. Here the status of English in India as a co-official language is more than merely symbolic. It would be premature to talk of a sentiment of cohesion or co-ownership of subcontinental English by its speakers, writers, and consumers. But there is an important sense in which English has a position of authority in the region, one that attracts both respect and pride, as when Arundhati Roy won the Booker Prize in 1998 with *The God of Small Things*, written in English. Subcontinental English provides a direct entry point to international English, while at the same time emphasising a regional distinctiveness, one which preserves local values and registers in the face of the faceless, homogenising tendency of globalising Anglo-American culture. The

precise indicators of this feature are not yet clear: it would be necessary to conduct some specific research on language loyalty in relation to attitudes to both international English and the mother tongues of the subcontinent. We can be confident, however, that the English and Englishes of the subcontinent will continue to be pluricentric, with parallel recognition of models from Britain and North America (with a characteristically subcontinental favouring, perhaps almost sentimental, for British models), combined with the standards of educated English use by inhabitants of the subcontinent itself.

Either way, it appears certain that the resurgence of English will continue. Riding on the back of international global English, the status of English in Bangladesh is holding, and indeed increasing, its prestige. Private language schools, business schools, and practice in many domains, all confirm the imperative of English, first for international commerce, but also for a number of spheres within Bangladesh itself.

Interpreting these data presents several difficulties. In particular, has there been a shift in the overt and covert relationship of English vis-à-vis Bengali over the almost three decades since Independence?

Although Quirk (1985) has at times expressed reservations about the usefulness of the distinction between ESL and EFL, these notions do provide a helpful way of viewing some of the shifting language relations between English and Bengali. Under British rule English-language competence was restricted, but vital: remember that the total level of English literacy in modern Bangladesh is only around 2–3 per cent. A small number of upper-class Bengalis were English-dominant bilinguals. Their less-than-native language levels in Bengali have tended to retard the implementation of Bengali in all areas of the public service. A second group were bilinguals with English and Bengali as approximately co-first languages. A third group had English as something like ESL, with English as a non-native language, but one that was spoken by a significant community of peers in professional and social contexts. English was learnt rather than acquired, but for many of these speakers their English was very competent. Then there was a larger group for whom English was a foreign language. They were not regularly in contact with English in use, and their language levels were correspondingly more restricted. Beyond these was a large proportion of the population with

marginal, and partial pidgin, English (for instance, for commercial purposes). (These speakers would have more or less enough English to be addressed by the code-mixed commercial signs.) And finally there was the mass of the population, not literate in Bengali and with only a few words, if any, of English.

After Independence this picture has undergone some significant shifts. The profile of Bengali in public life has risen noticeably. As we have remarked, some of the senior older English-dominant managers and public figures are moving into retirement, and with them some of the infrastructure and context for Bengalis with English as a first or co-first language. For more Bengalis English is a foreign language, though a strongly favoured one. The opening up of education and increased literacy are also encouraging new access to instruction in and on English, supported by the very active commercial area in English instruction. For upper-echelon Bengalis the drive to acquire excellent English seems to be as strong as before. How this will translate into language performance, in the face of a stronger and professionalised Bengali presence, will be worth watching.

### FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR ENGLISH IN BANGLADESH

The pressures for an English-competent population in many walks of life in Bangladesh will have two major consequences. The first will be a continued and growing presence of English as a Foreign Language in the education system in Bangladesh, parallel to that in most non-Anglophone countries. International English is becoming an imperative that few can afford to resist. And second, provided that the place of Bengali is not threatened by co-existence with English, we anticipate a gradual reinstatement of the characteristic mother language English/second language English profile of the upper echelons of Bangladeshi society that was seen under British rule. The continued presence and vitality of English in Bangladesh nearly three decades after Independence is an indication of the persistence of English in the face of what in practice has not been a terribly aggressive nativisation policy for Bengali. If we are right, the presence of English in this socio-economic stratum will tend to become more like that of India, with co-existing English and the local language, with the exception that in India, English has a domestic role that is

not mirrored in Bangladesh. This goal should be achievable peacefully and with important implications for the future well-being of Bangladesh in terms of international contacts and cultures. Were we in the business of language policy and planning we would commend this model to the legislators and planners in Dhaka.

*The future of English in Bangladesh has many points in common with other post-colonial countries where English is being reassessed against a single dominant national language. Bengali itself is secure. As the world's sixth or seventh largest language it has the numbers and the national base to guarantee its future. The question is rather one of roles and profile in its relations to contemporary globalising English (Crystal 1997), and the particular roles that English will be allowed, or that English will take, in Bangladesh in future.*

Banglish will continue to be pluricentric, within the particular multiple profile of prestige models and 'centres' that is emerging on the subcontinent. But if the cadre of English-speaking Bengalis continues to increase, and in the new EFL framework that is emerging, then we are likely to see what Crystal foresees in *English as a Global Language*: the Banglish norm assuming greater prominence, perhaps in concert with the norms of English in Pakistan, India, and Sri Lanka as part of an evolving model of subcontinental English. *There are many features that unite English in this part of the world: grammatical features like *furnitures*; lexical features like *prepone*; phonological features like retroflex consonants and their effects on surrounding vowels, and, more particularly, the characteristic syllable-timing; stylistic ones like a certain conservatism of usage; and in the proportion of modifiers to heads, which is typically higher in the more decorated norms of subcontinental English.*

*This subcontinental English is then sub-divided into regional varieties, one of which is Banglish. We confidently expect that English will continue to encroach both on Bengali and on Banglish; that Bengali will continue to encroach on Banglish too; and that at the centre of this intersection Banglish will flourish and evolve. The most favourable model for language health in Bangladesh appears to be functional bilingualism, particularly in administration, education, law, the media, and commerce. The dynamics of this language situation are far from being played out.*

## NOTES

- 1 Bangladesh has a population of 120 million. Its national language is Bengali (also known as Bangla), an Indo-European language. The population is overwhelmingly Muslim and almost all are ethnic Bengalis.
- 2 *Annual Report 1996*, Bangladesh University Grants Commission, pp. 52–8, 162.
- 3 'HC judgement delivered in Bangla', *Daily Star*, 3 February 1998, p. 12, col. 7.

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