

Bangladeshi EFL Learners' Approach towards Learning English

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Abstract

Bangladesh is a poverty stricken country with a huge population 'unemployed' in respect of the definition of Economics including both male and female. Government is striving hard to make the people well-equipped with necessary skills and learning in order that they can prove themselves fit for the upcoming challenges of the global economy and newer learning. Accordingly, Government emphasizes learning the English language and parents along with the learners are growing conscious but frequently, fall victim to problems in learning this foreign language. Despite being the inhabitants of a developing country, students dare not speak this language for fear of committing some mistakes rather to marshal it. Here, teachers, students and the teaching-process should co-operate actively with one another in order to attain the accomplished success

Language is a part of national identity, though not static. It acts like a wire through which a human expression can reach another human mind. The proverb goes that "No man is an island", that is, every individual is bound to come into contact with other people. Bengali is our mother tongue by which any of us can reach only the Bengali speaking people. However, no country or no nation can live alone. Then, there emerges the necessity of having some means or languages to play a bridging role. In this world among the millions of languages only few languages have got the status of an international language. Again, among them, English language is the most dominating and influential one. Therefore, in most of the countries it is necessitated to be learned as the second language or the foreign language to run international business or to have higher education.

According to Noam Chomsky, there is a universal core grammar which denotes the embedded similarity among the languages in the world and every human child is born with a heavenly acquisition power to understand or learn any language in which he is exposed to including their mother tongue, i.e. first language (L1) " ...for Chomsky, was that the human infant must be endowed with a highly sophisticated innate ability to learn language " Diane Larsen and Freeman and Michael II Long. (P-114). "He claimed that the child's knowledge of his mother tongue was derived from a Universal Grammar which specified the essential form that any natural language could take". [Rod Ellis : Understanding Second Language Acquisition (P-43)] They can learn any language (L2) whichever they want unlike any other species in the world (except some talking birds, but their ability is not equal to the acquisition power of a human child). Even though, we are to admit that L2 learners specially, adults encounter lots of hazards due to psychological, environmental or Linguistic differences. For example, Bengali learners suffer from such an inferiority complex that, they would be laughed at if they commit some mistakes in grammar or in pronunciation. This, very truly precedes another problem for the L2 learners, that is, they fail to get an English speaking environment, whereas, English speaking people or people from other languages do not have such kind of reaction while learning or speaking Bengali as an L2 learner. Even it surpasses other causes by hampering the confidence level of the students. "Trying to get students to be like a native speaker is ineffective; their minds and their knowledge of language will inevitably be different" and "students can become successful L2 users rather than forever 'failing' native speaker target" (Cook 1999). [page 78: Factors affecting the language learning process among Saudi students]

Bangladeshi people are proud of the fact that, Bengali language (the mother tongue) has also got the status of an international language. Since the independence, Bangladeshi people are striving and struggling with their poverty, unemployment, ill- equipped infrastructural system and industrialization. To be out of this vicious circle, the need to come into contact with international community has no alternative. Therefore, educationists, policy makers and intelligentsia and govt. feel the importance of learning English language. B. Shabbir and M. Qasim, note that – " It is generally believed that English is a medium to obtain, not only the power and the prestige but pragmatic aims in which they (the people) could maximize their ability to be one of the multilingual and multi-structural societies. Some people regard it as a bridge to many advantages related to business, commerce, industry, and economic progress" (P-75-76). In line with B. Shabbir and M. Qasim Nesa (2004) also states- English is the Lingua franca of business, commerce, science arts , literature of the whole (P-8) [Critical Literacy: Theories and Practices, 6.2.2012]

However, we have endeavored to study some genuine difficulties that every Bengali student has to undergo. The native speakers of these two languages certainly belong to two different geographical, social or cultural environments. At the first approach, a Bengali learner will find the English words to be Greek one so also, it will happen with an Englishman. Some examples are showed below-

English word	Bengali word
Go	(Jawa) hvIqv
Eat	(Khawa) LvIqv
Sleep	(Ghumano) ঋgv‡bv

But, if we analyze here any other language from our neighboring countries, for example, in Hindi, “Go” means “Jana” (jawa/hvIqv), “eat” means “khana” (khawa/LvIqv), “sleep” means “sona” (showa/‡kvIqv)- the aural approach of these two languages is most of the times adjacent to each other. Therefore, a Bengali student will grasp Hindi or Urdu faster than English.

Now if we go for analyzing the structure of the two languages, then, we will notice among others, the most predominant complication lies in their alphabets, sounds, pronunciation, capitalization style, articles, preposition, pronoun, subject-verb-agreement, possessive, syntactic structure etc.

Here we would simply bring the salient dissimilarities between these two languages:

(1) English Language consists of 26 alphabets and Bengali Language possesses 49. Of course, any Bengali (L2) learner will face difficulties in spelling particular words. For example, the letter ‘C’ has got different phonemes in different words:

In the word cat/cot C sounds |k|

But in the words like Notice/Voice/Receive it takes |s| sound. When it is used jointly different effect is found.

C+K is taking |k| (ক sound in the words- back, luck.

When ‘C’ is joined with ‘H’ then generally it takes the sound (Cho)চ

But if we look at the word ‘Chemistry’, then it gives ‘K’ sound.

Admittedly Bengali language has got particular letters for particular sound effect. For example, we have:

স for |s|

চ for | |

ক for |k|

Again, in the use of vowels we will have lots of sound effect for the same vowel sound.

In the word ‘Put’, ‘U’ is taking | | sound.

Thus, Bengali learners will, of course, be puzzled by English spelling design.

(iii) Besides, some pronouns in English like ‘You’ have both singular and plural forms. But in Bengali each has different form:

You –Tumi | তুমি | (Singular)

You-Tomra-(তোমরা) (Plural)

Again ‘You’ is for both Nominative and Objective case. As for example,

You(Nominative) are a teacher.

I know you(Objective).

Same confusion may arise in case of “him/ her”.

Among all other parts of speech, preposition itself has got an explicitly confusing place .

In English some prepositions have different meaning like under, below, beneath etc. But in Bengali only a single word is used in place of above words. We also find in case of group verbs, by using different prepositions beside a particular verb, meaning is completely changed. For example:

Look for – find

Look into- enquiry

Look over- scrutinizing answer scripts

Same thing happens to Bengali language too, but there only single word is used for different purposes.

For example: the Bengali version of look is ‘Dekha (‡`Lv)` and here different meaning for the same word is given below:

1.***** (dekho oije ekta pakhi/‡`L H †h GKUvcvWL)

Look, there is a bird.

2.***** (Ami porikhar khata dekhchi/Avwg cixÿvi LvZv †`LwQ) I am looking over the exam scripts. So no extra word or preposition is used in Bengali version. Another thing, which Bengali learners find to be difficult in remembering these grammatical rules for the verb ‘die’. This verb

takes 'of' before disease.

For example: He died of diarrhoea.

3. This verb takes the preposition 'by' before accident.

Example: He died by accident.

. For possessive meaning in English 'apostrophe' or 'of' is used.

For example:

This is Nazrul's poem.

These are the legs of the chair.

Besides, there is another thing that apostrophe cannot be used with inanimate subjects and lower kinds of animals. But in Bengali, a common letter or word [r] (RO = i) or (ER/Gi) ** etc. are used.

4. A very vital problem which the students face in making English sentences is that of mandatory use of auxiliary verbs, particularly in indefinite tenses containing the function of 'to be' verbs.

For example:

I am a student.

Here the presence of 'am' is not necessary for its meaning but is only needed to observe the grammatical rules.

In Bengali there is no such kind of rules and therefore, most of the time they happen to drop it. Another problem is the variation of these auxiliaries in accordance with the subjects which are given below.

'I' (first person) takes the auxiliary verb 'am'

'You' (second person) takes 'are'

'He' (third person) takes 'is'

'They' 'we' 'John and Smith' etc. take 'are'

5. In Bengali language, principal verbs get changed in their spelling according to the subject and tense but they do not take any helping verb like auxiliary verbs

Most complicated fact for the learners in learning English language is subject-verb agreement. Verbs whether 'to be' or auxiliary have to be changed according to the number, person, subject and the tense of the sentence. Singular subjects take singular verbs and plural subjects take plural verbs. In Bengali language these types of rules are absent.

6. Besides, the very rule, that is, in Present indefinite tense after third person singular subject principal verb take 's' or 'es' is certainly a troublesome job for any non-native speaker.

For example:

I go to school but He goes to school. (Present indefinite tense)

The boy is playing. (Present continuous)

The boys are playing. For the plural subject 'boys'

In Bengali evjKwU †Lj‡Q

evjKiv †Lj‡Q

So no changes occur in the word Ô‡Lj‡QÕ

In some sentences both in Bengali and in English language objects act like subjects

In Bengali that very subject is also placed at the beginning of the sentence.

For example:

Brishti pore (বৃষ্টি পড়ে..)

But in English an imaginary subject It/there is used in the English version of the same sentence is

It rains.

Rain falls. (not correct)

There are some sentences in Bengali language which expresses the meaning of 'have' but in English they are made in this way.

Amader deshe anek nodi ache/Avgv‡i †`‡k A‡bK b`x Av‡Q

Our country has many rivers. (incorrect)

There are many rivers in our country.

Here it is to be noted that the verb 'have' also changes according to the number and person of the subject, particularly in present tense.

For example:

I have a book.

You have a book.

He /She/John has a book.

They have a book.

But in Bengali no such change occurs. For every subject only single verb 'asche' is applied.

6. Syntactic order of these two languages is also different.

In English the structure is –Subject + Verb +

I go to school

But in Bengali the structure is- Subject ++ Verb

Avwg zj hvB

I school go.

A very crucial fact for any language learner is that he or she will find it easier when they get some similarity. Undoubtedly dissimilarities predominate. And, then, the students cannot enjoy learning. Therefore, a learner should be made to be enthusiastic in facing newer expression of that language.

For example:

In Bengali, Avgvi Zvov AvQ (amer tara asche)

If we go for its word for word translation then the sentence would be like this-

I have a hurry.

But its English expression is totally different structure in structure –

I am in a hurry.

Another Bengali sentence is like this

Avgv r ekta pukur Ashe

Amader akta pukur asche.

If we go for word for word translation then we will get that our have a pond. Whereas its' English version is –We have a pond.

Again another sentence Zvgvi KvbZzjbv b (tomer kono tulona nai) you have no comparison. (wrong)

The correct translation for this sentence is- You are incomparable.

8. Bengali learners are also in confusion in turning their language into English if the sentence is like this-AvgB KvRU vK iwQ(ami-i kajta korechi)

I have done the work.(wrong)

Here the meaning of the Bengali expression is absent.

In English it is done in the following way-It is I who have done the work.

Notably, here though the subject is 'it' but the verb has followed the antecedent.

9. In Bengali language there are some hyperbolic expressions

KzKziUv ND KiQ

(kukurta gheu gheu korche)

Its English is –The dog is barking. Not, the dog is barking and barking.

Again in another sentence m Mj Zv Mj, Avi wd iGj bv, (she gelo to gelo r fire alona)

Its English version is- He left beg and beggane.

Thus the expression is contracted and certainly a Bengali student becomes less contented.

10.The use of articles specially the definite article is almost invisible in Bengali language.

For example:

Everest is the highest peak of Himalayas. Its Bengali version is Gfv io wngvj qi m e v P k, sM

(Everest Himaloyer shorbochcho sringo)

Thus, in Bengali, no extra word like 'the' is used as is done in English.

11. A very common but less emphasized problem for a Bengali learner is that of capitalization. It is really hazardous for a non native person to keep in mind as to use capital letters at the beginning of a sentence, or while writing the name of a person, place or institution.

The Bengali language has no capitalization and its punctuation conventions are very different from the English language.

It is true of the Arabic language as well. In this regard (Sofer&Raimes, 2002) has commented that "It has no distinction between the upper case and the lower case."

Obviously, for Bengali learners English language learning has become an imperative phobia for which the only solution as acknowledged by the government is to get into it(imperatively) and to make die-hard attempt to get rid of it by having a pass mark. Here the author, of course, admits that being a poor country Bangladeshi government has got financial, strategic and administrative limitations, even though they are sincere enough in making this learning process a successful one. Accordingly, foreign experts are being appointed; NC(National Curriculum in English) is introduced; teachers are compelled to attend workshops; syllabus has also got

frequent changes, still English remains a cursed phobia before the students and parents as well. Thus the above discussion shows the demands of some more steps in order to make its approach to the Bengali learners as a joyous adventure, as it is found in case of foreign learners while learning the Bengali language (L2).

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