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**From Bengali to English: Sequential Bilingualism of a
 Second Generation British Bangladeshi**

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Keywords:	Subtractive Bilingualism, Sequential Bilingualism, Second Language Acquisition, Ethnic Identity, Language Maintenance, Language Shift
Abstract:	<p>The paper discusses sequential language acquisition of the researcher's daughter Safa who transformed from a monolingual Bengali speaker to an almost monolingual English speaker in a few months after moving to the UK. Safa was born in Bangladesh and was a monolingual Bengali speaker until she was 3:9 when the family moved to the UK. Unlike most research on sequential bilingualism, Safa's transition from Bengali to English went through a period of an invented language, which she developed and used for a few months. Safa then underwent language shift as Bengali became her passive language. Safa's loss of fluency in Bengali was mainly due to the absence of Bengali linguistic environment, because her family lived outside the community. Safa's mother's indifference to Bangladeshi ethnicity and her parents' positive attitude towards Britishness meant that her decline in Bengali did not cause them much concern. Despite the lack of proficiency in Bengali, Safa still retains a strong ethnic Bangladeshi identity. Tabors and Snow's (1994) four-stage developmental process of sequential second language acquisition has been applied to find the similarities and differences in Safa's case, while language maintenance and shift theories have contributed to the study of the process of her language shift.</p>

Second language acquisition and bilingualism

Second language acquisition (SLA) implies that the learner has already acquired their first language to a certain degree of competence before learning another language. According to some research adults and children do not learn a second language in the same manner and at the same speed. The popular view, supported by the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) (Lenneberg, 1967), and other subsequent studies (Oyama 1978; Patkowski 1980; Johnson and Newport 1989) claim that children acquire second language much quicker than adults. However, this early sensitivity hypothesis has been challenged by quite a few recent studies. Singleton finds a huge variation in this hypothesis, which “fatally undermines the status of CPH as a scientific hypothesis” (2007, 48). Moskovsky (2001) argues that CPH is more applicable to first language acquisition. Bialystok (1997) finds insufficient evidence to suggest that maturational factors can play any significant role in the mastery of a second language. Some studies even found evidences of native-like attainment among late learners showing negative correlation between age and second language learning (Birdsong & Molis 2001; White & Genesee 1996; Birdsong 1992).

There are many theories on second language acquisition. The *Behaviourist theory* emphasizes the interference of L1 on L2 learning. The *Acculturation theory* (Schumann 1978) argues that successful learning takes place when there are fewer social and psychological distances between L1 and L2 speakers. Chomsky's *Universal Grammar theory* (1976), though it applies mainly to L1 acquisition, is also used in second language acquisition study as his proposed biological Language Acquisition Device relates to the mental faculty and can be applicable to L2 acquisition as well. Krashen (1978), being influenced by the mentalist approach, distinguishes between language learning and language acquisition emphasizing the mental ‘input’ required in language acquisition. The *Interactionist* theorists claim their views to be more powerful ‘because they invoke both innate and environmental factors to explain language learning’ (Larsen-Freeman and Long 1991, 266). All these theories focus mainly on the acquisition of L2 structure, but rarely discuss the complexities of second language acquisition, particularly child language acquisition.

Bilingualism is a direct consequence of second language acquisition, which is a well-established field of enquiry in contemporary academia, but there is no clear-cut definition of the term. Bloomfield (1933, 56) terms it ‘native-like control of two languages’, though Baker and Jones (1998, 12) find this claim to be a myth. David Crystal (1992, 362) argues that

command over the two languages is not equal and feels that one language is often more fluent than the other. Hockett (1958, 16) uses the term 'semibilingualism' for those whose second language is at the passive or receptive stage. Suzanne Romaine (1995, 39) calls bilingualism a type of 'transition' to a new language.

Language maintenance and shift

Bilingualism is a complex phenomenon in an immigrant situation. The older generations who migrate to a new country tend to retain the linguistic identity of their home country, but the younger generations who are brought up in the linguistic environment of the adopted country often lose fluency in their heritage language and the dominant language becomes their first language (Baker & Jones 1998, 151). Joshua Fishman (2005) suggested a taxonomy of outcomes in this situation - language maintenance, shift, and relatively stable bilingualism. It is observed that immigration initially leads to bilingualism, but later moves towards language shift. Wardhaugh (1986, 99) distinguishes between *stable bilingualism* and *unstable bilingualism* and says that the latter is prevalent in the situation of immigrant communities.

Different aspects of language maintenance and shift emerge from studies in this area in different parts of the world. Slavik (2001) finds decrease of participation in community activities, particularly by the youth leading to quick assimilation of Maltese into Canadian culture. Al-Khatib's (2001) work on the Armenians in Jordan concludes that language maintenance is the result of a conscious choice while language shift is a highly subconscious phenomenon. Modarresi (2001) worked on Iranians in the United States where intense pressure of Americanization among the young Iranians led to acculturation, which the first generation tried to resist through introduction of cultural ceremonies, media outlets and books in home language and culture. Yagmur & Akinci's (2003) work found that high rate of in-group marriages contributed significantly in maintaining the Turkish language in France. Mukherjee's (2003) work on the Bengali women in Kuala Lumpur argues that even by integrating with the host community it is possible to maintain the language due to the loyalty towards the home language. Remennick (2003) terms integration as 'additive' rather than 'replacive' and observes that most of the young Russian immigrants in Israel integrated with the host society and added Hebrew to their linguistic repertoire. Nercissian's (2001) study of

two ethnic minorities in Iran finds that depending upon the number, community density and sociolinguistic environment, different immigrant communities living in the same country might have varied code choices. Al-Azami's (2005) research on Bangladeshis in Manchester observes some parents talking to their children in their own language, but not ensuring that the children use the same language with them. As a result, parents and children are often found speaking in two languages while talking, each using the language in which they are fluent. However, a recent study suggests that this does not necessarily prevent children from becoming bilingual in the long run, provided parents continue to give input and arrange for children to spend some time in settings where they have to speak the heritage language to monolingual speakers of that language (Thomas 2012).

In most English-speaking countries there is intense pressure on linguistic minorities to shift to the dominant language since minority languages are viewed as unimportant or problematic, and English is assumed to be the more valuable option. There is no coherent national policy to promote foreign language learning and teaching in Britain and the curriculum ignores the fact that there are many pupils with multilingual backgrounds (Lamb 2001, 5). Kenner et al.'s (2008) study on British Bangladeshi children in London's East End finds that many ethnic minority children are in danger of losing the advantage of growing up as bilinguals due to insufficient support to develop their mother tongue. The study recommends the need for these children to do academic work in mainstream schools bilingually, '... in order to fully develop concepts and skills in mother tongue as well as English' (121). The status and prestige of different languages are important factors that contribute to the bilingual competence of immigrant children, and the power and prestige of English often undercut the value and motivation to use the child's heritage language (Kohnert 2008, 11). However, studies have shown that second and third generation children and young people prefer to adopt multilingual and multicultural identities when given the opportunity, but their heritage languages are usually given low status in the wider society (Creese et. al. 2006; Mills 2001).

Early childhood bilingualism: simultaneous versus sequential

Research on child language acquisition has mainly focussed on monolinguals in spite of bilingualism strongly prevalent around the world. Scholars like Swain (1972), Meisel

(1990), McLaughlin (1978), Padilla and Lindholm (1984), Romaine (1995) looked at how children acquire two languages together (Simultaneous Bilingualism), while scholars of Sequential Bilingualism (Tabors and Snow 1994; Ervin-Tripp 1974; Hakuta 1974) researched on what happens to children when they learn a second language after three or more years of acquiring their first language. The development paths of simultaneous and sequential bilingualism are different. In simultaneous acquisition the child learns both the languages in the same way as a monolingual child, whereas in sequential acquisition the child learns the second language after three years as being a monolingual.

Language development in sequential acquisition depends on the characteristics of the child and the language learning environment the child encounters (Tabors and Snow 1994). Unlike simultaneous bilinguals the child goes through the process of first language acquisition in the first three years, and then suddenly finds itself in a situation where they need to learn the vocabulary and syntax of a new language in a new linguistic environment. Tabors and Snow (1994, 106-113) gives a four-stage developmental process of sequential second language acquisition: (1) *Home language Use* (child continuing to use home language even when everyone speaks a different language); (2) *Nonverbal Period* (child becoming silent when realizing that the home language use is not working); (3) *Telegraphic and Formulaic Speech* (child using the new language through telegraphic speech that involves use of formulas); and (4) *Productive Language* (child creating their own phrases and thoughts in the second language).

Most studies on simultaneous acquisition show that acquiring two languages simultaneously has no negative effects on their cognitive development. In many cases the process of bilingual acquisition is similar to that of monolinguals (De Houwer 1990; Meisel 1990; Deuchar & Quay 2000; Yip and Matthews 2007). Early childhood bilingualism facilitates children to develop metalinguistic awareness much earlier than a monolingual child (Weikum et al. 2007; Kenner et al. 2008) and ‘... allows infants to maintain sensitivity to language differences in visual speech’ (Werker and Byers-Heinlein 2008, 146). They conclude that the reason why bilingual infants are successful in negotiating the two languages is the power and flexibility of the developing mind, which is capable of learning two languages in the same way as one (149).

Sequential bilingualism, on the other hand, may have positive as well as negative effects leading to either additive or subtractive bilingualism (Lambert 1977). Cummins (1994) elaborates this distinction referring to additive bilingualism as the addition of L2 while L1 language and culture is still at a proficient level, and subtractive bilingualism as the replacement of L1 by L2 with L1 language and culture gradually diminishing. Kohnert (2008, 10-11) suggests that an MOM model (Means, Opportunity and Motive) is important for sequential bilingualism to succeed referring to a combination of the child's neurobiological systems, the linguistic environment that surrounds them and their personal preferences. 'When one or more aspects of MOM is weak, either language – or both – may be affected' (11).

The study

This paper discusses the process of sequential bilingualism of the researcher's second daughter Safa who migrated with her family from Bangladesh to the UK at the age of 3:9. Safa was born in Bangladesh in 2001. She acquired her mother tongue Bengali and spent her first few years in an almost monolingual Bengali environment. As part of former British India, English enjoys a prestigious position in Bangladesh, but it is not a language that is widely used in everyday conversation. The researcher was a teacher of English and his wife was also fluent in English; yet they never used that language at home. Safa's elder sibling Naba also used Bengali at home despite going to an English medium school and knowing the language very well. As Safa had little exposure to English in Bangladesh she grew up speaking only Bengali.

When Safa's parents migrated to the UK in 2005 her age was 3:9. Immediately after her arrival into the UK, she found herself amidst many of her cousins in Manchester due to a family wedding. Safa's elder sibling was already fluent in English, so she had no problem communicating with her cousins, but Safa was unable to understand them in the same way. As a result, she became rather quiet. This conforms to the *non-verbal period* by Tabors and Snow (1994, 107) when the child, realizing that speaking their home language will not work, goes into their shell and rarely speaks and uses nonverbal means to communicate. However, Safa's first exposure to English, though quite abrupt, was not as challenging as many immigrant children are faced with. In spite of suddenly finding herself in an English speaking environment, she could still communicate with most of her cousins in Bengali, though they would always speak to each other in English as it was their language of fluency. Safa was

unable to take part in most discussion among her cousins, as she could not understand English.

Sequential bilingualism: Safa's transition

Children are actively engaged in second language acquisition during this receptive period learning sounds and words of the new language, but not verbally communicating (Tabors and Snow 1994, 111). In her doctoral research Tabors (1987, as quoted in Tabors and Snow 1994, 109) mentions two strategies applied by preschool children learning a second language – *spectating* (active observation) and *rehearsing* (when they work towards producing, but not yet making the actual communication). Saviile-Troike (1987) used the term *dilingual discourse* when a child continues speaking their home language whether or not others understand it. This was certainly the case with Safa as she continued speaking in Bengali with her cousins initially, and unlike the findings in Saviile-Troike's study, Safa's cousins were able to understand her. However, Safa soon realised that she was not able to communicate with them most of the time as they spoke in English, so she became quiet and started to observe how they spoke. Within a couple of weeks, Safa moved from the *spectating* stage to the *rehearsing* stage making active effort to speak in the new language.

The invented language

In contrast with most studies of sequential bilingualism (Tabors and Snow 1994; Ervin-Tripp 1974; Hakuta 1974 etc.) where children's 'non-verbal' period continues for a few months, Safa took only two weeks to come out of her shell. Here the researcher discovered a unique aspect of Safa's second language acquisition that was not found in any previous study. While children in some other studies used *telegraphic* and *formulaic* speech (Tabors and Snow 1994, 111) during this time, Safa invented a new language. She was found speaking to her dolls, and sometimes to others in her own invented language, which did not make any sense to the adult listener. Observing carefully, the researcher found that she was using a lot of aspirated sounds like 'ph', 'th' 'kh' 'ch' etc, which is a common feature in English. Safa also mixed some Bengali sounds with the English ones, like /□/, which though present in English, has much higher frequency in Bengali.

Kenner, et al. (2008 121) observed that children's bilingualism lead to heightened metalinguistic awareness, consolidated through explicit discussion of differences between language structure in mother tongue and English. Safa was in the process of bilingualism, but still showed metalinguistic awareness that English voiceless plosive consonants /p/, /t/, /k/, /tʃ/ are pronounced with aspiration, i.e., with an extra puff of breath. Interestingly, Bengali also has aspirated consonants, but they are all separate phonemes as opposed to allophones in English. Bengali has 20 plosive phonemes while English has only 8, which is why the frequency of voiceless aspirated plosives is significantly less in Bengali compared to English. This type of awareness was also observed in Kenner et, al.'s (2004, 136) study on six-year-old children's biliteracy in London where a Spanish-speaking child invented spelling that showed awareness of subtle differences between Spanish and English in symbol/sound relationships.

The transitional stage from first to second language in sequential bilingualism is an extremely important stage of second language learning that may last a long time or be brief. Espinosa (in press) suggests that any language assessments conducted during this stage of development may result in misleading information that underestimates the child's true language capacity. Safa's transition took relatively longer as she continued with her self-invented language (named by the researcher as *Aspirato*) even when she started nursery school in London two months after her arrival into the UK. Her teacher was amused to see how perfectly she could communicate with other children where they would use English and Safa her *Aspirato*. Although Safa's *Aspirato* sounded gibberish to an adult listener it made complete sense to her who used it for communication with her peers in school. She would always use *Aspirato* while playing with her dolls and even sometimes used the language with her parents.

In a short family video clip Safa is found repeating the expressions *baby shu* and *no baby shu* several times. This was recorded during a family trip to North Wales a few weeks after Safa came to England where the weather was very windy and everyone was concerned that Safa could catch cold as she was new to English weather. Apparently by saying *baby shu* Safa wanted to protest people's over-protectiveness and say, "Do you think I am a baby? She then seemingly answered the question herself by saying *no baby shu* probably meaning 'I am not a baby'. Here the word *shu* is an invented expression, but she used it in a communicative

context by repeating *baby shu* and *no baby shu* respectively several times in a 20-second clip. Using the pidgin-like expression ‘no’ to denote ‘I am not...’ is not an uncommon phenomenon. Safa not only uses *no baby shu* several times, but ends her argument by saying, *no no no* suggesting a consistent pattern of emphasis. Throughout this part of the clip Safa uses her body language and intonation patterns consistently with what she seemingly wanted to communicate. It was difficult however, to guess what she was trying to say after that apart from repetition of aspirated plosives /k/ and /t/. Some of those invented words like *akilo*, *kuchula* and *lickung* were used quite randomly.

Children are able to make decisions of their choice of language, and Safa had made a decision to make English her main language, as she wanted to be part of her school. Dodson (1972) talks about ‘preferred language’ while referring to bilinguals’ choice between the languages at their disposal. In Safa’s case, English was her obvious preferred language because her first language Bengali had little relevance beyond her home. Like any other child of her age she wanted to fit into the environment in school without being looked at differently. Safa used *Aspirato* because she had thought that was English. Within a couple of months after starting her nursery Safa started to speak proper English and her *Aspirato* gradually diminished.

Family language policy

In monolingual societies family language policies help in early childhood bilingualism. Simultaneous acquisition is a direct consequence of family language policy where parents consciously choose to expose two languages to their children from birth. This type of language planning is even more important in an immigrant situation as minority languages can only be maintained through conscious efforts within families (Pauwels 2005, 125). According to Curdt-Christianson (2009, 352) family language policies are a ‘deliberate attempt at practising a particular language use pattern and particular literacy practices within home domains and among family members’. However, not all parents plan bilingual upbringing of their children in detail and this lack of planning often has detrimental effect on children’s bilingualism, particularly in an immigrant situation (De Houwer 2009). Safa’s parents did not have a detailed plan on their children’s bilingualism and thought that speaking to their children in Bengali would be sufficient for the children to maintain the language. Consequently, within a few months of moving from Bangladesh there was a complete

turnaround in Safa's language competence. English increasingly became her main language with Bengali gradually declining even though her parents never stopped speaking to her in Bengali. Safa definitely had help at home in her English from her elder sibling Naba whose English competence helped her settle in school very quickly. The researcher observed that both their daughters spoke to them in English even when their parents used Bengali. In one year, Safa almost lost the ability to speak meaningful Bengali sentences though she could understand the language perfectly well. Safa's situation was an example of 'subtractive bilingualism' (Lambert 1981) with her second language English replacing her mother tongue Bengali as the main language.

Linguistic Consequences

One of the inevitable consequences of second language acquisition is codeswitching. It is common among immigrant communities who regularly find themselves in a situation where they have to switch between their heritage language and the language of the dominant community. Thompson (in Alladina and Edwards 1991) found that the Philippino community in the UK evolved a popular form of communication between them known as 'Taglish' - a mixture of English words and phrases while speaking Tagalog. Deve (in Alladina and Edwards, 1991) observed extensive codeswitching among the Gujarati community in Britain. Al-Azami (2005) found that the first and second generation British Bangladeshis frequently used code switching by inserting words, phrases and clauses of one language into the syntax of another. It was found that the first generation would code switch with Bengali being the base syntactic structure while the second generation would insert Bengali expressions in their English constructions. Safa began to codeswitch when she started speaking a little English, but her base syntax shifted from Bengali to English during her transition. Initially Safa would insert English words in her Bengali sentences. For example, one of her first codeswitched sentence was, *ami toy die play korte chai 'I want to play with toys'* where the English words 'toy' and 'play' were inserted in a Bengali sentence. Later on, Safa would use sentences like, *Can you cook chingri mach please? 'Can you cook prawn please?'* Here, she inserted the Bengali phrase *chingri mach* 'prawn' into the English sentence as English, by then, became her stronger language.

Another feature in Safa's language was hybrid constructions where she would add an English suffix to a Bengali word. Al-Azami (2005) found this phenomenon among second generation British Bangladeshis who frequently used expressions like *adda maraing*

'chatting' or *shubidhas* 'advantages' where -ing and -s forms were used to denote a progressive form and a plural form respectively. Safa was seen using the progressive form more often during her transition period and whenever she struggled to find an English word she would use the Bengali word with an English progressive suffix. For example, the Bengali word *ador* 'cuddle' would become *adoring* 'cuddling', *ghura* 'to turn around' would change into *ghuraing* 'turning around' etc.

Ethnic identity

There is a strong correlation between language and ethnic membership. Baker and Jones (1998, 113) suggests that ethnic identity can be 'expressed, enacted and symbolised' by using the ethnic language. Self-evaluation of ethnic membership contributes significantly in terms of attitude towards heritage language. Those who evaluate their ethnic identity positively have a positive attitude towards the ethnic language (Jaspal and Coyle 2010, 207). In contrast, lack of strong ethnic feeling can affect language maintenance in an immigrant situation. Sometimes, religious culture is preferred when one needs to choose between religion and ethnicity, particularly among Muslims. This applies to Safa's parents who consider themselves to be Muslims over and above everything else; therefore they avoid some Bengali cultural practices that contradict with their Islamic belief. Geaves, while referring to this dichotomy between ethnicity and Islam says:

'It is a central issue not only for Muslims in Britain seeking to establish self-identity in a new land, but also in that it links what is developing here to the struggle taking place in Islamic communities throughout the world'. (1996, 71)

While the researcher has an overall positive self-evaluation towards his ethnicity, his wife feels less emotional as a Bangladeshi, as she grew up mostly outside Bangladesh. As a result, Bangladeshi ethnicity was neither strongly encouraged nor discouraged at home. Due to her lack of strong ethnic feeling Safa's mother did not insist that she should continue to speak Bengali during the crucial first year of the family's arrival into Britain. She was more interested in Safa learning Arabic so that she could understand the Quran than retaining her Bengali. Safa's mother was a full-time housewife in the first eighteen months after coming to the UK and her lack of strong ethnic feeling was a significant factor behind Safa's gradual decline of Bengali competence.

However, ethnic feeling can develop with or without competence in the heritage language. Kenner et al.'s (2008) study on British Bangladeshi children in Tower Hamlets,

London found children identifying strongly with their ethnicity despite some being less proficient in their heritage language. May's (2000) study shows strong sense of Welsh identity even by those who cannot speak Welsh. Contemporary research shows some form of departure from a simplistic binary approach taking into account global youth culture and using the term 'new ethnicities' (Harris 2006; Jaspal and Coyle 2010). Second generation immigrant children generally develop multiple identities and feel proud of their British identity as well as retaining a strong ethnic identity. This aspect was clearly evident when Safa proudly called herself 'British Bangladeshi' after the family took oath as British citizens. Safa developed her multiple identities naturally and neither her own lack of Bengali competence, nor her mother's indifference to Bangladeshi ethnicity affected her conscious choice.

Safa's parents also found themselves caught up in wider power relations regarding language use in a society that caused difficulties for them as well as Safa in maintaining Bengali. Lazear (1999) found that in immigrant situation, integration is most rapid when parents take into account the adverse effects of segregation on their offspring. Similar results were found in Remennick's (2003) work on post-1989 Russian-speaking immigrants in Israel where host language acquisition was the principal tool for integration and socioeconomic mobility. Safa's parents consciously chose to make Britain their new home and integrate into the society. Their positive attitude towards Britishness meant that she was never discouraged to speak English at home. This positive attitude towards integration and their failure to ensure Safa's use of Bengali at home contributed to Safa becoming a passive user of her heritage language.

Linguistic environment

Living in a densely populated area of the same linguistic group is greatly beneficial for language maintenance for younger children. Fishman (1985, 158) suggests that if a community has a large number of speakers its language has a better chance of survival in the 21st century. The Linguistic Minorities Project (1985) in Britain found that residential settlement patterns, size, and concentration of linguistic minorities are important factors for language maintenance. Safa's family lived in Greater London in the first few years after coming to Britain, but did not live in Tower Hamlets or any other area with a sizeable Bangladeshi community. There were very few Bengali speakers in every area Safa's family lived since arriving in Britain, so she had little scope of practising the language outside home.

Similar to Verma's (in Alladina & Edwards 1991) work, neighbourhood, linguistic environment and television all played important role in Safa's clear shift from Bengali to English.

It is always difficult to maintain a language if the linguistic environment is not favourable. Al-Azami's (2005) study on Bangladeshis in Manchester found a clear distinction between the majority Bangladeshis who come from Sylhet – a north-eastern region in Bangladesh, and people from non-Sylheti background. The study found that the usefulness of Bengali, particularly among the non-Sylhetis, is decreasing and the language is not spoken anywhere other than in limited situations. Second generation non-Sylhetis in that study expressed embarrassment to use Bengali outside the household out of frustration due to imperfect competence. Most first generation Sylhetis had little opportunity to learn English in Bangladesh, so the younger generation needed to converse with them in Bengali, whereas non-Sylhetis arrived from Bangladesh already speaking English as well as Bengali; hence, their children could manage by speaking only English to them. The other reasons why Sylhetis were able to maintain their language better included having community media, living in communities with denser social networks and frequently visiting Bangladesh. As a descendent of non-Sylheti Bangladeshi Safa also showed similar reluctance to speak in Bengali as her limited vocabulary hindered her efforts to continue conversation in the language.

Frequently visiting the country of origin is a very useful way to preserve the linguistic identity of the younger generation of an immigrant community. Language maintenance and shift research highlights this as an important factor to prevent language shift. For example, Dalphinis (quoted in Alladina and Edwards 1991) discusses the tendency of West Africans in Britain to send their children to their native countries for a few years only to learn the language. Safa also boosted her Bengali proficiency significantly after a visit to Bangladesh in 2009 where the environment enabled her to use more Bengali. Her Bengali vocabulary, which was her main weakness, improved significantly and her grandmother informed the researcher that Safa's Bengali accent was even better than that of her elder sister.

As the younger generation move towards language shift, parents take several steps including sending their children to complementary schools to learn their heritage language. Community language schools play a vital role in controlling language shift among the younger generation (Alladina and Edwards 1991). Many children in Tower Hamlets in

London attend Bengali complementary schools – the area popularly known as ‘Banglatown’ (Kenner et al. 2008, 123). Kenner and Ruby (2012, 63) observe that teacher-student relationships in these classes are more informal with varying learning approaches catering for both the teacher and the learner. Learning the heritage language at home can also make useful contributions to children’s bilingualism as found in Ruby et al.’s (2010) study. The study likens a grandmother’s role in the learning process with that of a conductor of an ‘orchestra’, where each child is given a role to play collectively contributing in the overall learning.

In Tower Hamlets, London the local authority has a ‘Mother-tongue Section’, which provides support to complementary schools through funding some schools and publishing teaching materials. Safa had no opportunity to attend a complimentary school as there was no such facility near their area. The school where Safa spent most of her primary school life has 95% white English children. All of Safa’s friends are native English speakers with most of them being white English. In her extended family, none of her cousins speak to her in Bengali. As her parents did not enforce Bengali at home, Safa had little linguistic environment to practice Bengali. The eventual consequence was that her Bengali competence would remain at a receptive level.

Extended family reaction

Safa's transformation became a cause for concern for many members of the researcher’s extended family. Some first generation family members blamed her parents for not taking Safa’s weakness in Bengali seriously enough. They thought that she should have been forced to speak the language. This is a common trend among immigrants where the first generation not only maintain their native language, but insist that their children also learn their heritage language. When Safa’s grandparents came to visit one year after her family moved from Bangladesh, they were quite shocked to find Safa’s lack of proficiency in Bengali. Safa spent her first few years in Bangladesh living in the same house with her grandparents, so her grandparents had developed deep affection towards her. Safa’s grandmother is not fluent in English, so when she discovered a lack of communication with Safa, she decided to teach her Bengali, and insisted that she would not speak to Safa if she did not speak in Bengali; but it did not work. Realising that her grandmother was trying to impose Bengali on her, Safa began to avoid her. The researcher made his parents understand

that at that moment Bengali was hidden inside her as a passive language. He convinced them that forcing her to speak Bengali might be counter-productive.

Present situation

Safa is now eleven. In the last couple of years Safa's inclination towards Bengali has increased significantly. She has started to make deliberate efforts to speak the language. She now uses Bengali much more frequently, which shows that she is claiming back the Bangladeshi aspects of her linguistic identity. She even speaks some Bengali to her one-year-old little sister. Due to her strong ethnic feeling she is willing to improve her competence in the language. Despite not enforcing Safa to speak Bengali her parents do realise the importance of being bilingual and therefore, encourage her to speak Bengali at home. However, Safa's Bengali is still well below the level of a fluent Bengali speaker. Her family continues to live in a white English majority area, so she does not have any Bengali linguistic environment other than her parents. Her positive attitude to Bengali means that if she has more exposure to Bengali, then her proficiency level is expected to increase. The reality is that it is highly unlikely that she would ever be able to appreciate Bengali literature unless she moves back to Bangladesh in future.

Discussion and conclusion

The present research contributes to the area of sequential bilingualism emphasising that every child has their own individual way of learning a second language sequentially after acquiring their first language. Safa's transition from Bengali to English conforms in many ways to existing research, but has some distinctive differences in quite a few aspects. While applying Tabors and Snow's (1994) four-stage development in sequential bilingualism the most unique aspect found in the present study is the invention of Safa's own transitional language *Aspirato*. The language, which sounded gibberish to an adult ear, made complete sense to Safa as she used it with her dolls as well as with her classmates in school for communicative purposes. The length of time Safa remained at the 'non-verbal' stage was also much shorter than most studies in the area. She only took two weeks to come out of her shell and make active efforts to speak the target language. Although codeswitching is a common aspect among bilingual children, Safa's codeswitching transformed from Bengali base syntax to English base syntax within a few months. Another important aspect not found in sequential bilingualism research is the role of Safa's mother's lack of strong ethnic feeling. Her lack of concern about Safa's Bengali competence allowing Safa to use English at home in the crucial

first year of Safa's upbringing in the UK, along with both her parents' positive attitude towards integration eventually speeded up her decline in Bengali competence.

The present study also supports existing research in the field, which suggests that enough exposure to the heritage language through practice at home with parents and grandparents, mixing with neighbours who speak the heritage language, attending community language schools, visiting the home country, exposure to community media, and having relatives and friends from the same linguistic background are essential supporting tools for language maintenance among the younger generation. It also argues that, although very important, ethnic affiliation is not entirely dependent on language maintenance.

Word count: 7,042

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