

Standard English in Bangladesh: A legacy of colonization

Abdul Awal

University of Lodz, Poland

e-mail: abdulcontactresearch@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The paper aims to reveal the debate between Standard English (SE) and Non-Standard English from a sociolinguistics perspective in Bangladesh. The validity of so-called Standard English is examined in the light of post-colonial reaction linguistically. The legitimacy of accepting local varieties of English as Global English is investigated with due socio-political references. The myth and reality of Standard English in ELT (English Language Teaching) has priority in this paper and it reveals how so-called Standard English is associated with Linguistic Imperialism. The paper examines the sociolinguistic reality of English in Bangladesh from the perspective of 'My English (ME)', which is a linguistic revolt against Standard English (SE). It describes the saturation of English in various domains to understand the place of English in the local linguistic ecology in Bangladesh. Certain linguistic and non-linguistic factors are highlighted here, which may interrupt determining English variety status in Bangladesh. As education is a required field where English has a predominant presence, not only as a language for learning but also as a language in which Bangladeshi learners are anticipated to develop practical proficiency, it is high time to establish rights to our own variety of English under the umbrella of Global Englishes. In Bangladesh, thus, the practice of learning Standard English is a colonial legacy. Apart from the mother language, people have been learning English since the British became successful in colonizing this land and its citizens.

Keywords: *Standard English; My English; colonialism; Linguistic Inferiority Complex; non-standard English; Linguistics Human Rights.*

INTRODUCTION

According to sociology, language is an essential and integral part of social culture. In human life, food, dress, religion, politics, music, and marriage are the elements of culture, and language is no exception. Just as a person has the right to choose their dress and lifestyle, they also have the right to choose the language they speak, and they have the freedom to choose their language. Linguistics

and linguistic Human rights claim that the discrimination of one language against another is a social prejudice. It is called linguicism.

In the same way, it is also linguistic prejudice to discriminate between one type of language and another, or to consider one type as standard and the other as non-standard. The Creole continuum

reminds us that a language is a human behaviour and consists of what people do rather than in theoretical models (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 1889). It means one cannot determine that no one can define the correctness of a language by its theoretical model. Overall, Standard English (SE) is the variety of English that is imposed by English-speaking countries.

One symptom of market forces is the major effort by 'English-speaking' states to expand their intake of foreign students. Higher education is increasingly seen as a market opportunity, a sector that the British Government seeks to expand by 8 per cent per year between 2004 and 2020. The British economy benefits by £11 billion directly and a further £12 billion indirectly (British Council). Over half a million foreign students attend language schools in Britain each year. The English Language Teaching business is of major significance for the British economy. (Phillipson, 2009, p. 5)

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The standard form of any language is a social construction invented by powerful social groups who perpetuate and promote it for the economy and commercial benefits. Native English speakers promote Standard English to exert their influence on sociocultural aspects worldwide. They are the language stakeholders; they control its

maintenance and shape its direction (Davies, 2003, p. 1). Standard English is to protect the interests of native speakers. 'Standard English' is not a widespread phenomenon, as the 'standard English' in America is different from the 'standard English' in England. The colonisers spread their Standard English as a linguistic colonialism mission in British-India. The centrality of English and English language teaching is at the heart of the colonial enterprise. (Pennycook, ENGLISH AND THE DISCOURSES OF COLONIALISM, 1998, p. 68). A significant number of people in Bangladesh know English as a second language as well. In Bangladesh, English newspapers and English medium education are available. Extensive use of English in various business trades can also be noticed. The main feature of Bangladeshi English is found in its phonology. It differs considerably from British or American English. The root sounds of British English have been changed to middle-edge sounds in Bangladeshi English. In addition, other phonetic differences are noticeable. Moreover, Bangladeshi English has some different vocabulary and different styles.

Moreover, the term "standard English" is a fallacy. Since then, it has become an artificial linguistic imposition as well as a colonial legacy and linguistic domination. People generally do not want to

tolerate the evolution of language. Rather, they often consider evolution a distortion. In general, the destiny of language is that it will change. Nevertheless, the change in language is prolonged. It is virtually impossible to follow. Decades later, perhaps, the change is visible in the new generation's written language, word of mouth. It is difficult for those accustomed to the old standard to accept it. The matter can be seen from another angle. People accustomed to the standard form of a particular time usually think of that form as "authentic." When words from other languages enter that language form, it is often thought that the virginity of the language is being destroyed. However, it should be kept in mind that the form they thought was 'authentic' is also a mixed form. There can be no such thing as 'authentic' language, just as there can be no authentic race or culture. It is a fact that all the languages of the world speak it. Thus, the practice of learning Standard English is a colonial legacy in Bangladesh. Apart from the mother language, people have been learning English since the British became successful in colonizing this land and its people.

History of Standardization in English: England to Bangladesh

Though English enjoys an elite status in Bangladesh, the history of English practice in the Indian subcontinent is not so long. The

foundation for the eventual introduction of English to the subcontinent was laid on December 31, 1600, when Queen Elizabeth granted a charter to a few merchants of London, giving them the monopoly of trade with the east, primarily with the Dutch East Indies. The East India Company was essentially a small company of adventurous and enterprising merchants which had originally been conceived in 1599. (Kachru B. B., 2005, p. 33) The conquest of the English language in Bengal began in the 1930s, first establishing an English factory at Balasore in Kolkata and later at Hughli. The decree issued by Sultan Shuja for the East India Company in 1751 marked the beginning of British political domination in the region and India; that is when the use of the English language also started in this region.

The term "Colonial Lag, is the ideology coined by linguist Albert Marckward (1958), which says that colonial varieties of a language change more minorities than the variety spoken in the mother country. Colonial lag is a potential factor in distinguishing colonial varieties from their home counterparts in all language levels: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics and lexis. (Bauer, 2002, p. 14). For instance, we see that British English is less conservative than other varieties in different countries worldwide in form and manner. Previously, English

speakers of various dialects enjoyed equal status in Britain, both officially and socially. However, standardization happened in the eighteenth century for several socio-political reasons. The crystallization of Standard English was the concept of the eighteenth century in the regimes of Queen Anne (1702-1714) and King George (1714-1727) by the name of fixing the English language. Some conservative writers, including Jonathan Swift and others, were among the Standard English promoters. This standardization is not natural, but artificial language engineering. Critics claim that these eighteenth-century developments are central to the judgmental attitudes towards non-standard speech which arose then and which fed directly into the nineteenth-century Victorian condemnation of regional and local accents. (Hickey, p. 5)

Then, in 1835, Lord McCall's famous Minute first gave official approval to English in India, including teaching Western subjects. Lord Bentinck's decision later made it compulsory for Indians to be taught in English. However, English education in Bengal began as a commercial language between English representatives and native collaborators from the first contact between the Indians and the British.

In the early stages, English learning was scattered and based on personal effort and circumstance;

later, it spread through the establishment of various schools. English schools were established in the seventeenth century, mainly for the education of European children. The first public English school was established in Calcutta in 1831 by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. In 1859, Rev. Kiernander founded another English school with 47 students; at the end of the year, the number of students increased to 164. Until the establishment of the Free School Society of Bengal in 189 AD, Calcutta became a centre of learning through English. In addition to missionary schools, many English schools were established in and around Calcutta. However, these commercially established schools were different from the missionary schools. In addition to the accounting and bookkeeping required to get a job under the British Government, these schools provided training in reading and writing English.

At that time, the dominance of English in public life in Bangladesh was seen vividly. There were many varieties of English existing at that time. For example, Anglo-Indian English, Babu English, Burgher English, Bearer English, Boxwallah English, and Butler English. Due to the necessity of imposing Standard English in Bengal, English language teaching at the university level started. At the university level, English education was started in 1857

in all degree colleges under Calcutta University. The establishment of Dhaka University in 1921 facilitated English education in East Bengal. At that time, English was the medium of instruction in all departments except language departments. English was one of the 12 departments starting from the inception of the university (Sinha, 198).

Before English, Arabic and Sanskrit were the languages of religion in India, and Persian was the language of the state. When English rule began in India, English became the new language of the colony. The education system in the region has long been divided. For those who wanted to stay in religious practice, there was a madrasa or an ashram. For those who wanted to be rulers or accomplices of the rulers, the state language was English first, then Persian. For a long time, after the founding of the British, both Hindu and Muslim groups opposed the teachings of the West. Many people later realise they squandered their time. That is why the culture of English education developed under the leadership of Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar and Syed Ahmad Khan. In the nineteenth-century society in Bangladesh, the impact of Standard English is found in an old example; Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay was also concerned about the dangers of Bengal. He wrote, 'Bengali gentleman children speak to each other in English, write letters in English, and

perhaps not far off the day when people will also write Durga Puja festival invitations in English." English as a colonial language was dominant in that society. '

Conversely, the Bangla medium was introduced in public universities in 1972, and it was going on. There was also an interest and an organization to develop and enrich the Bengali language. The work of preparing and translating textbooks into Bengali for higher education was progressing rapidly. On the other hand, at present, in Bangladesh, those activities for the development of the Bengali language have been reduced gradually. The interest now is in English. For instance, students and teachers in public universities are now moving very fast through English. As well as they do not want the national interest or public interest. Hence, only the English medium has been running in private universities from the beginning. Under the pressure of the situation, "Bangladesh Studies" has been introduced in them. Nevertheless, it is also taught in English as a medium of instruction.

Linguistic Inferiority Complex

First, linguistic inferiority means the psychosocial tendency of speakers of a social group in society to feel that their language or linguistic verity is less prestigious or inferior to other languages or language verities. In particular, it happens in a society where one language dominates over

another language. Today, English language education is totally Standard English based. Therefore, other varieties get less prestige, and they are not accepted in an official and social context. Notably, it is a linguistic prejudice to judge a man in society by his linguistic variety or language. Thus, the English varieties of post-colonial countries, including Bangladesh, are suppressed in English Language Teaching. As an example, English-language teachers in Bangladesh do not dare patronize local varieties anyhow. Therefore, students in Bangladesh who are not good at Standard English feel a linguistic inferiority complex that negatively affects their academic and professional careers. For example, the critic writes, "No one pays attention to what you say unless you speak English, because English is the language of power." (Ombudsperson for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Gret Haller, 1999). People value the existence and practice of the Standard English language in Bangladesh. Physical colonization can be more cemented when one can colonise a population psychologically through a cultural transformation. Historically, all the colonizing nations have done this by introducing their languages to a new land that they went in to invade. Consequently, the value of Standard English has multiplied more than ever before in the times of the globalization of economics and

business, and thus it turns on psychological colonization among Bangladeshi people.

Standard English: Linguistic arrogance and Brutality

As language is a crucial part of culture and a fundamental social element, no language should be confined to an artificial tool by the name of standardization. Like many other cultural elements, language has been practiced in individual choices and individual ways. Cultural elements have beauty, and they are furnished on the open platform. Thus, when we talk of 'mastery' of the standard language, we must be conscious of the terrible irony of the word, that the English language itself was the language of the master, the carrier of his arrogance and brutality. (Pennycook, 1998, p. 6). As an example, in Bangladesh, shyness and fear of mistakes are facts and barriers to learning English. Consequently, they are the cause of promoting only Standard English and highly discouraging other varieties of English in the classroom in Bangladesh. Thus, English appears to English language learners in Bangladesh as linguistic arrogance and with a brutal face.

The fear is most acute in rural areas, where 70% of our total population lives, as well as among students from these areas. English is an alien subject to study. This fear of English is so deep rooted that if you

ask them a very simple question like 'What is your name?' They lose their faces and stop talking. (Bhattacharjee, 2008, p. 17)

Learners in Bangladesh think that English is a language of perfection and teachers patronize Standard English as the only way to speak and promising career. English education offers learners with a direct access to social prestige and allow them to enter into the world of richness and supremacy (Soboleva, 2015, p. 89). Therefore, learners cannot dare to speak in English with comfort. Bangladeshi learners always seem to have English beyond their control.

It is clear that Standard English is just a Linguistic Norm that must be varied from one territory to another. It will be a burden and a linguistic domination if English-speaking countries impose their linguistic territorial norms such as Standard English on other territories. In today's world, Standard English behaves similarly to Colonial English in non-English speaking countries. It focuses more on linguistic norms rather than the mutual intelligibility of peculiar languages. Colonizers planted Standard English to expand their linguistic colonialism so that they could rule over the culture of colonized people largely.

Why non-standard English needs

Linguistic human rights are a necessary (but not sufficient) prerequisite for the maintenance of linguistic diversity. Violations of linguistic human rights, especially in education, lead to a reduction of linguistic and cultural diversity on our planet. (SkutnabbKangas, 2000, p. xii). By preserving the non-standard varieties existing within society, we can preserve the cultural and linguistic diversity of that dialect and its speakers. Each dialect is present within a different society or social group. The way a person speaks--for some people--is who they are as a person; thus, by keeping these dialects, they can have a sense of who they are and express themselves in their own way. As a society, we would probably like to preserve all of these dialects to promote diversity. However, particular dialects are viewed stereotypically by society, and thus people who speak the "correct" dialect look down upon those who do not and treat the speakers of the non-standard dialect as if they are less intelligent. Thus, by encouraging speakers of a non-standard dialect to switch to the standard dialect, they will be treated fairly and equally.

The norms of the standard language are not distributed equally; that is, not everyone performs them equally well, and some will know very little about them. This leads

inevitably to misunderstandings, to sanctions, to stigmatising and so on. But there is also a good deal of give and take, meaning that members do, in practice, give permanent importance to membership and accept that within membership there will be variation. Variation can then be regarded as acceptable, eccentric, lovable, human or whatever, but somehow tolerable as long as that variation is not used as an excuse for abandoning the norm or for setting up new ones. (Davies, 2003, p. 134)

According to post-colonial critics, mimicry is used to portray the ambivalent relationship between colonisers and colonized. (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, *Post-colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2000, p. 124) The term can be used in language teaching in Bangladesh when the colonizers encourage the colonized people to adopt their cultural habits, assumptions, institutions, and values, resulting in a simple reproduction of those traits. In the English-language, education in the Indian Sub-continent, including Bangladesh, results from a 'blurred copy' of the colonizer, not very far from mockery with language. It is the reaction of colonized people to colonizers linguistically, in the larger sense. Mimicry of the English language is one of the roots of multiple varieties of English in colonized countries. Therefore, it locates a crack in the certainty of colonial dominance, an uncertainty in

its control of the linguistic behaviour of the colonized. The English variety of colonized Bangladesh is like 'almost the same but not white.' This reaction is to the ambivalent and multilayered relations between colonizers and colonized people. Different regional non-standard varieties are being developed to mimic the linguistic colonizers largely.

Standard English (SE) and 'My English' (ME):

After all, for language change to occur it is necessary for people to be different and for each of their grammar is to be different. Equally, it is necessary for individual grammar is to change over time. It is this language variation within and between individuals that allows for and reflects language change. (Davies, 2003, p. 127)

In addition, the word "language" is an abstract noun that does not allow any ownership. Hence, there is no ownership of love, mercy, honesty, chemistry, physics, biology, and many others. Likewise, the English language is like all other abstract elements. Then everyone belongs to every language in his or her own way. There are approximately 380 million native speakers of English and more than 700 non-native speakers of English (English Language Guide, 2008) all over the world (Christen, 2008). Therefore, English is not the property

of native speakers at present only in a democratic sense too.

As in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Caliban and Prospero's relationship can be seen as a form of colonization. Caliban had once put his faith in Prospero and loved him dearly, but once, Prospero arrived on the island and took advantage of Caliban, and he enslaved him. Overall, Caliban is a potential character. He would do all the hard work for Prospero, and he was given some food in return. Conversely, Prospero is just like a colonial lord. As can be seen in the second act of *The Tempest*, Lord Prospero says with pity and hatred, "He is a complete fool, whom I have taught with great difficulty." Caliban protested using that language, even though he tolerated the regime in silence. 'You have given language; I will curse you, I will curse you in this language.' In other words, Caliban is protesting a kind of language against Prospero's colonial rule. In the same way, the English gave colonized people and the rest of the world an English list of grammar and semantics with great difficulty, praising them in a gurgling voice. Nevertheless, recent African literature, using that English, has done the opposite.

Just as the research would like to present the term 'My English (ME)' to protest the international domination of Standard English

worldwide, 'My English (ME)' promotes the individual right to speak and construct English with their comforts. To be sure, 'My English (ME)' can be developed based on comprehensibility and interpretability within speakers. In addition, the critic claims that it is wise to disentangle these and intelligibility only one of the three dimensions of understanding. The other two are comprehensibility and interpretability. (Kachru & Smith, 2008, p. 61). It can be developed nationally as well as individually. It denotes the absolute rights of an individual over the English language. Hence, it will pave the way to eliminate linguistic slavery from the domination of Standard English (SE). To own a language is to be affirm oneself through it and to adapt it to your own meaning and wishes. (Widdowson, 1994)

For instance, one of the finest examples, Amos Tutuola (20 June 1920 – 8 June 1997), made his debut in 1952 with his novel *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*. Amos Tutuola took the English language, grammar, and expression to the soil of Africa by pointing a finger at the conventional grammar of the English language. Although acclaimed in England and the United States, his 'broken English' and primitive style of English were widely condemned in his motherland, Nigeria. Many believe that there is a stereotype of an uneducated, wild, and uncultured African in Tutuola's

English. Nevertheless, those who believe in post-colonial theory are different. In this different English, they see protests against the colonial power. Taban and Liang are one of them. He said: Is he ungrammatical? Yes. But James Joyce is more ungrammatical than Tutuola — Let Tutuola writes 'no grammar' and the hyenas and jackals whine and growl. This search story, based on Yoruba folklore, was later written in Yoruba English or Pidgin English. The novel is controversial, but it has been translated into more than a dozen languages as one of the essential texts in the African literary canon. Research on World Englishes recognizes multiple Englishes in their own right, providing new meaning and vocabulary to describe Englishes that have been marginalized (Kubota, 2015, p. 23).

Even so, in Bangladesh, English is a compulsory subject at primary, secondary, and higher secondary levels, but learners cannot achieve communicative competence because of the barrier of so-called Standard English. If only Standard English is accepted in English language teaching in Bangladesh, it will be a barrier and be considered a cultural domination to the Lingua Franca. Accordingly, the spirit of global communication competence will be destroyed by it.

Besides, the paper claims that speaking Standard English in our

everyday lives is not an indication of wealth, education, or social standing. Those sales clerks at the upscale store can speak the dialect that they know. There is no reason to speak in Standard English, especially if their customers can understand him, regardless of whether or not they speak Standard English. If they look down on them for it, it can be social prejudice. They use non-standard English because they are comfortable with it, just as a man can use Standard English when writing things like this. After all, he is comfortable with it, but others have the right not to speak in Standard English.

Moreover, the standardization of a language is always artificial. Therefore, every nation needs its language to be written in newspapers and spoken in TV news. Conversely, a standard language is not supposed to replace the local variants. People should speak the language they can use and produce. Nonetheless, the standard language is a linguistic and cultural dominance tool. Different countries have made different decisions on standardization. Such as, the standard Italian language is based on the Tuscan dialect. That is why we do not see it necessary to speak standard Italian when one is non-Tuscan if the situation does not require it. Additionally, written Finnish is a mixture of dialects, and thus, it is no one's native language. Again, it would be unnatural to speak

standard Finnish as an everyday language.

Equally important, Standard English is a linguistic imposition by native speakers on the rest of the speakers worldwide. For instance, phonetics and phonology are biological products closely related to the physical organs and are not similar in all people worldwide. Hence, all do not easily articulate reception and perception of a native-like sound. This deviation is primarily biological and draws the map of the local linguistic variety of English. Differently, it will cause a phonological variation from region to region, even individual to individual. Similarly, in the English speakers and learners in Bangladesh, it is found that the sounds that have been found deviated from standard Received Pronunciation are summed up in the following sequence. (Hoque, 2010, p. 217).

1. An English short vowel becomes a long one.
2. Some diphthongs become monophthongs or lengthened monophthongs.
3. Some labio-dental fricatives become bilabial plosives or bilabial aspirated plosives.
4. An alveolar fricative becomes a palato-alveolar fricative
5. A voiced palatal plosive becomes a voiced palatal-alveolar affricate or vice versa.

6. A dental fricative becomes a dental plosive.

7. An alveolar plosive becomes an alveo-retroflex plosive.

Linguistic human rights promote accepting all linguistic deviations physically, socially, culturally, as well as individually. Following the stream of Global Englishes, Bangladesh has very little sense of the local verity of English in limited spaces. For instance, English in Bangladeshi print and electronic media is an emerging English variety in world English territory. This new localized variety exists in Bangladeshi print and electronic media. People speaking Bangladeshi copy the localized English used in Bangladeshi print and electronic media. The reservoir of Bangladeshi English may be small, but the new variety of English emerging here is completely Bangladeshi English. It is hoped that the next research will define English language variety existing and used by Bangladeshi people in a broader context. (Hossain, Hasan, & Meraj, 2015, p. 913)

CONCLUSION

To wind up, the present day is the period of capitalism. As such, we understand very well that the owner of capital wants to make language a product like everything else. The Bangladeshi variety of the English

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language, like many other languages around the world, is in poor health today due to the influence of language imperialists known as Standard English (SE). It is high time to develop English-language textbooks

with the Bangladeshi Variety of Bangladesh. Equally important, ELT teachers should use all varieties of English in their classroom practice.

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