Code-Mixing in Bangladesh: A Case Study of Non-Government White-Collar Service Holders and Professionals

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Abstract: Since the British rule there has been somewhat harmonious coexistence of English and Bangla, the state language, in Bangladesh, which is a monolingual country. Here substantial command over English is considered as a linguistic passport to the arena of globalization and competitive white-collar job market, especially the non-government ones. The booming of multinational companies along with the private ones in the recent years has acted as a socio economic factor underlying the increasing awareness in learning English. This job related factor has given English language the status of career oriented language with a colonial tinge of aristocracy and high prestige triggering Bangladeshi people to learn English not for mutual communicative purpose but to compete the job market. In Bangladesh English is associated with better white-collar job, which earns a person social prestige. Here, a person’s socioprofessional identity can be better understood from the nature of his spoken language. White-collar service holders and professionals, in Bangladesh, are found to mix Bangla and English in their conversation. This article is mainly based on Wardhaugh’s (1992:107) definition of conversational code-mixing which “involves the deliberate mixing of two languages without an associated topic change.”

Introduction

The history of English in the language behaviour of Bangladeshis (Bangladesh was a part of the then undivided India) dates approximately 500 years back when the British landed on the then India along with their language. The then Indian people had to learn English, which was an official language, to get a better job in government sector and students had to have a very good command over English because most of the books of occidental knowledge, history, philosophy and technology were written in English. In 1947 the British colonial rule in the then India ended but surprisingly English continued to reign the linguistic domain. In 1952 the then Pakistani rulers attempted to establish Urdu, neglecting Bangla, which agitated the then East Pakistanis (now Bangladeshis) and it resulted in the Language Movement of 21 February 1952 when police fired on the agitators. Bangla was declared as one of the state languages of the then Pakistan at the cost of the martyrdom of patriots. It is a matter of great honour that 21st February has been declared as International Mother Language Day by UNESCO on 17 November in 1997 and it is the first ever formal step to recognize the honour of mother tongue. So naturally Bangla language is simultaneously an issue of both sensitivity and pride among Bangladeshis. After the Language Movement in 1952, the official activities used to be carried out in English to avoid language clash in two regions (East Pakistan and West Pakistan), On 16 December, 1971 the Pakistanis were ousted from the soil of Bangladesh and so was their language Urdu, but English still remained in the language behaviour of the Bangladeshis. In 1987 the then President H M Ershad established Bangla Procholon Aeen (Bangla Introduction Act), which formally gave Bangla the official status of being used in all administrative activities of the government. Since then Bangla language has been used in much wider fields than ever before. Surprisingly this has not extinguished English. Though in the constitution of Bangladesh there is no declared place for English yet the use of English is found in some government events or activities if the situation demands.

In Bangladesh English is taught, in primary, secondary, higher secondary and tertiary levels, in all three categories of education system: Bangla Medium, English Medium and Madrasa system. In most Bangla medium schools and colleges the medium of instruction is Bangla and English is an obligatory subject, but Dakhil madrasas, recognized by the government, give much more importance on Arabic than Bangla and English. In the English
medium schools the medium of instruction is solely English though Bangla is taught to the students. There is compulsory English course in tertiary level also. At university levels, though there is a scope to choose the Bangla medium in public universities, in private universities the medium of instruction is English. So it is natural that students from all these categories have varied ranges of proficiency in English.

English has a strong demand in white-collar job market especially in multinational companies, UN projects, renowned NGOs, private banks and renowned private companies, which is evident in their job advertisement and it has created a strong motivation among the Bangladeshis to be proficient in English.

Review of literature:
Spolsky (1998:45) says, “…… it is very common that people develop some knowledge and ability in a second language and so become bilingual. The simplest definition of a bilingual is a person who has some functional ability in a second language. This may vary from a limited ability in one or more domains, to very strong command of both languages.”

Wardhaugh (1992:107) says, “Conversational code-mixing involves the deliberate mixing of two languages without an associated topic change.”

Hudson (1996:53) defines code-mixing as a case “where a fluent bilingual talking to another fluent bilingual changes language without any change at all in the situation.” He also says, “To get the right effect the speakers balance the two languages against each other as a kind of linguistic cocktail.”

According to Haugen (1953:280), “The strongest possible motive for language learning is the need of associating with the speakers of the language”.

Stanley Lieberson (1981:173) says,” The linguistic demands of the work-world are among the most important forces influencing the acquisition of a second language”.

Objective
The objective of this research article is to find out the causes and patterns of code-mixing among the target group.

Data for the study
For collecting primary data 60 white-collar service holders and professionals have been chosen. The respondents include officers of multinational and private companies and NGOs, engineers, researchers and journalists. According to Labov (1996:25), sociolinguistics takes into account the data on the age, sex, education, occupation, and the ethnic membership of the speakers studied. So sociolinguistic parameters such as age, sex, participants’ parents’ home districts, income, habit of reading newspaper, watching TV channels etc have been considered. Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, has been chosen to collect primary data from, because people from almost all districts gather here and it has endowed the city with a cosmopolitan atmosphere. It is not only the only home district of the Dhakaiyas (the original inhabitants of Dhaka) but also the second home district of the people from almost all districts.

Methods
To illustrate the patterns and to find out the causes of code-mixing of the target group the following sociolinguistic methods have been adopted:

Questionnaire Method
To conduct this research each of the respondents has been asked to fill up an elaborate questionnaire. The names and identities of the respondents have been symbolically used in this article in order to maintain confidentiality.

Interview Method
In this method the respondents have been asked to talk about their family members, their aim in life, their view on particular recent sociopolitical or cultural issue, how they spent their last vacation or festival and such like and their narrations have been recorded.
Observation Method
In order to overcome the shortcomings of questionnaire method and interview method, close observation of the target group has contributed a lot to explain the phenomenon.

Findings of the research
The collected data have been analysed by SPSS software (version: 12). The figures in bar diagrams and pie charts are explained, in some cases, with the help of instances provided by the respondents individually. The information gathered from interview and observation is used to explain the bar diagrams and pie charts.

Influence of Environment
Legend:
1 Yes
2 Sometimes
3 No

Official environment plays an important role for the occurrence of code mixing. In the multinational companies and in most private companies and banks the language of documentation is English though in multinational companies the language of communication is also English. The companies especially the multinational ones where English is used for verbal communication and documentation, the employees’ switch to English takes quite often the form of long narrative, though the extent of mixing varies depending on the situation of formality (official meeting) and informality (talking about official matter with colleagues). In order to coat their speech with the exact tone (for example, seriousness, emphasis, sometimes some superiority feelings) they have been observed to mix Bangla and English. For example, a team leader is found to give instructions to the team in English and to switch to Bangla, while explaining the instructions, followed by another to switch to English to remind the team of the key points.

Reasons for language shift
Legend:
1 Spontaneous
2 To draw the attention of others
3 To show off
4 To impress for professional purpose
5 To impress the opposite sex
6 To alienate a particular group/to take the advantage of knowing a separate language
7 Lack of translation equivalent
8 Medium of education or training in English
9 Euphemism
ii) To draw the attention of others: In the perspective of Bangladesh, English sometimes helps people to draw others’ attention. From the bar diagram it is found that 45% code mixing occurs for this reason. The target group is reported to use English in an educated and sophisticated atmosphere, which gives them a special image and separates them from the others of their surroundings.

iii) To show off: From the statement of the respondents it has been found that they insert English words while conversing in Bangla to show off their status. To them it is taken for granted among Bangladeshis that the ability to use English is a proof of good background, education and social status. Using English gives them an opportunity to let others know about their qualifications.

iv) To impress for professional purpose: According to the respondents, the dexterous use of English helps them to impress their clients and customers and the bar diagram shows that 92% language shift is triggered by this purpose.

v) To impress the opposite sex: The data analysis shows that 21% code mixing occurs to impress and attract the opposite sex, which is mainly found among the young people. Sometimes English helps them to enhance their smartness and image, which, they claim, helps them to get boy or girl friends.

vi) To alienate a particular group or person from conversation: The Bangladeshi bilinguals switch to English in order to isolate themselves from those who do not know it which also helps to establish solidarity among themselves. For example, Ms Rehnuma works at an NGO. She has two audacious domestic helps who always cause her much psychological pressure but she cannot do away with them as they look after her kids in her absence and do the essential domestic chores. It has been observed that one day her colleagues visited her house. They all were conversing in Bangla but when Ms Rehnuma started to talk about her miserable condition caused by the audacity of the two domestic helps she switched to English, though not the whole passage, only the words and sentences related to the situation were in English and so did her colleagues so that the maids could not understand that they were being criticized. This is one of the advantages of knowing a separate language.

vii) Lack of appropriate translation equivalent in Bangla: 17% occurrence of code mixing is due to the lack of appropriate translation equivalent in Bangla.

viii) The medium of instruction in a particular language: As in Bangladesh most of the books at higher education levels
are written in English, the professionals switch to English while talking about their taught subjects. In most multinational and private companies and also in private banks the trainings are conducted in English. Before launching a product or service the briefing is done in English, which elicits the use of English language while dealing with those related situations or topics.

ix) Euphemism: In Bangladesh many English words are used for euphemistic reasons as the equivalent words in Bangla sound odd or sometimes relate to somewhat unpleasant matter, which people talk indirectly or with low voice. For example English “toilet” or “fresh room” is frequently used instead of Bangla *paykhana*, which has another meaning-to excrete.

**Arena of Code Mixing**

Legend:

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<td>3</td>
<td>Club</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Every situation</td>
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<td>Out in shopping mall</td>
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<td>Writing SMS</td>
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<td>Adda/chat</td>
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<td>Family party</td>
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**With whom code-mixing occurs:** From the data analysis it is found that that code-mixing among the respondents occurs while conversing with parents, siblings, relatives, colleagues, friends and even with the outsiders.
Patterns of code-mixing:

i) Intra word (within word):
   a) **English root word, Bangla suffix**: /concept-ta/ (article), /help-tai/ (emphatic), friendship-er (possessive), /vacation-e/ (preposition), /assignment-gula/ (plural) where Bangla inflections have been used with English words.

   b) **Bangla root word, English suffix**: In the word /bhab-ist/ (the meaning is moody) the combination is made by the use of Bangla abstract noun bhab (mood) with English suffix (-ist).

   This kind of mixing is in vogue among the younger generation.

ii) Inter word (inserting English word or phrase in Bangla sentences or utterances): The words in italics are Bangla words.

   - *Amra kono ashanurup response pachhina.* (We are not getting any positive response)
   - *Tomake promise korte hobe je tumi amake help korbe.* (You will have to promise that you will help me)
   - *Amaderke very soon ei package launch korte hobe.* (We need to launch this package very soon.)
   - *Or kono personality nei.* (S/he doesn’t have any personality).
   - *O life e shine korbe* (S/he will shine in life).

iii) **A recorded sample of inter sentential code-mixing:**

   Nazia: Reshad, *apnar internet banking-er form-ta ekhono amader branch-e ashenai.*
   (Reshad, your internet banking form hasn’t reached our branch yet).

   Reshad: It’s ok. *Amar kono tara nei. Tomader notun package-gulo shombondhe ektu bolo.* (I am not in a hurry. Please tell me about your new package.)

   Nazia: Ok. They are all very new—just launched today. I don’t know much yet. I do have the fliers. The packages are for the students. I will insist all to open this account.

   Reshad: What is the special about it?

   Nazia: It’s a prepaid account like prepaid phone card. You just put your money and use it anywhere with a good discount.

   Reshad: Are these access accounts?

   Nazia: Yes. They are.

The above conversation between Nazia and Reshad, who are doing executive MBA at IBA (Institute of Business Administration), University of Dhaka, presents a very good example of code-mixing that is influenced by education environment and the medium of instruction or training in job environment. Nazia (a banker) and Reshad (a civil engineer) are found to start the conversation in Bangla but as soon as their conversation shifts to official or banking matter they are found to switch to English which is due to the lack of translation equivalents in Bangla and the use of English as a medium of training in bank.

![Figure 5. Bar diagram of language alternation types.](image-url)
The following pie chart shows the treatment received by the respondents from others in reaction to their mixing Bangla and English.

Legend:
1 Criticised
2 Not criticised
3 Confused (could not recall any such thing)

The following pie chart exhibits the mental state of the respondents while mixing two languages.

Legend:
1 feel happy
2 not happy as it is not a matter of happiness
3 Confused (never thought about it)

Limitations:
This research has some limitations. In some cases the information provided by some respondents' in the questionnaires does not match with the information gathered from the observation of their language behaviour. For example In order to assert that they are very much fluent in English they seemed to have exaggerated their language alternation levels. Besides, it would have been much potential if the information were collected from other districts in Bangladesh as well. Moreover, the recorded speech of the respondents could have been analysed more minutely. This research area has been restricted to only non-government white-collar service holders and professionals, as a result of which the presence of code-mixing among other categories such as students, housewives, businessmen, government service holders and all other workers has not been covered. There is a scope of wider studies in future.

Attitude towards code-mixing:
From the interview of respondents and several other people from different occupational background it has been found that Bangladeshi people have a complicated attitude of contempt and high value towards English. Some Bangladeshis seem to consider
alternation between Bangla and English in their conversation as debasing their mother tongue because in Bangladesh Bangla language is the strong symbol of national solidarity. They claim that English should never be used for mutual communication among Bangladeshis be it in professional environment or in family surrounding or kinship atmosphere. Some are ready to accept language alternation only in official environments. Many intellectuals are against code-mixing apprehending that it will eclipse Bangla, which is an essential part of Bangla culture.

Wardhaugh (1992:108) says, “Monolinguals are likely to be very critical of code-mixing. They may even use derogatory terms to describe the perceived results, e.g. Franglais (French and English in Quebec), Fragnol (French and Spanish in Argentina), Spanglish (Cuban Spanish and English in the USA), and Tex-Mex (English and Mexican Spanish in Texas).” The mixing of Bangla and English is pejoratively termed as Banglish but ironically from the recorded conversation it has been found that those who condemn code-mixing cannot not resist interjecting the elements of English in their speech.

There is another group who considers code-mixing as snobbery. They feel offended and sometimes even humiliated or insulted at the mixing of two languages. Wardhaugh (1992:98) thinks that people have mixed feeling of both admiration and envy towards the bilinguals.

On the other hand, some group feels very comfortable to mix two languages in conversation and from the data analysis it is clear that there work various psycho-social reasons such as the tendency to show off or to draw others’ appreciation because knowing English, which still retains its status of aristocracy, is considered with much importance and as a matter of prestige. One interesting matter is that almost all bilingual Bangladeshis remain always concerned lest they should make any mistake in English, as they feel shy at it. But this case doesn’t happen if they make any mistake in any other foreign languages such as French, German, Russian and even Hindi.

Ms. Ayesha Sultana, professor at the Department of Philosophy, University of Dhaka, has attempted to give explanation about such mixed attitude of Bangladeshi people towards English. According to her, since the onset of the British rule, English has been viewed as the language of ruling class who belong obviously to upper class. From her own experience she says that any native civil servant, her father too, would try to pronounce the British accent so that they might not be ridiculed. Despite the same post or qualification or eligibility the British personnel used to get much more honour than the native civil servants, which developed a kind of inferiority complex among them. The native civil servants would consider the manners and behaviour (including language behaviour) as the standard, which they attempted to introduce into their families especially to their children. A native civil servant father would want his daughter to be British lady like. Since then on, English has, thus, become the language of master or gained symbol of upper class. That feeling of inferiority complex is still present in us as a result of which some mock at code mixing.

An assistant professor of English Department in a renowned private university in Bangladesh thinks that the code mixing in most cases occurs due to the lack of sufficient command over English. According to his opinion most of these people (who mix two languages) are compelled to resort to Bangla, though they start their conversation in English, due to the lack of sufficient linguistic incompetence in English.

Comments of some respondents in the questionnaire
i) “I am very conscious of my nationality. I am proud of being a Bangladeshi. I am pretty concerned about my own language Bangla. I love to speak purely in Bangla while speaking to any Bangali but as an educated person I don’t mind to use English when it is necessary.”

The speaker teaches English in a private university.

ii) “Sometimes it helps me to express myself better”

The speaker teaches English in a private university.
iii) “Using English with Bangla is a matter of convenience, not happiness”
The speaker is a banker.

iv) “We should use only one language for communication. Banglish should be avoided”
The speaker is an engineer in a private company.

v) “Though several times I have been considered as a snob by my friends and relatives, I continue to mix two languages because I want to practice English.”
The speaker works in an international NGO.

vi) “It is spontaneous. As I know a separate language, I don’t want to confine myself to one language. Sometimes I can express my emotion better by mixing two languages.”
The speaker is a marketing executive of a multinational company.

vii) “As English is the most used international language, so it should be practiced in written form and verbally. I feel good to use English according to situation”.
The speaker is an engineer at a multinational company.

viii) “Mixing Bangla and English is not a matter of feeling satisfied- it’s a matter of easy communication. It’s objective is to convey my message easily to others and I am ready to use any language or sign.”
The speaker works as Disbursement and Financial Analyst in an international organization.

ix) “I think, to cope with the globalization we have to learn English and use it in our everyday conversation.”
The speaker works in a telecommunication company.

x) “I use English while talking to other Bangladeshis for the better interpretation of my feelings and thoughts.”
The speaker works in a private bank.

xi) “I feel easy and comfortable in conversation by mixing two languages.”
The speaker is an architect working in a private firm.

xii) “I believe it’s an art to mix English with Bangla.”
The speaker works in a private bank.

xiii) “It is normal. There is nothing special in mixing Bangla and English.”
The speaker works in a telecommunication company.

**Conclusion**

This research reflects the increasing interest of Bangladeshi people in English language but this phenomenon is not alarming for Bangla language. Bangla language with its rich literary and cultural heritage has nothing to lose from such phenomenon.
References


