Linguistic Manipulations in the Bengali Language by the Bangladeshis in Manchester

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Introduction

The present research aims to look at the state of bilingualism among the Bangladeshi community in Manchester in order to examine the changes in the Bengali language due to local influence. There are a large number of first generation Bengali speakers in Manchester, and these first generation speakers are the main bilinguals among the community. Bilingualism among second generation Bangladeshis is moving towards 'language shift', because younger speakers lose fluency in their native language and the dominant language becomes their first language (Baker & Jones, 1998, 151). The research involves undertaking a comparative study of the changes in linguistic behaviour between first and second generation Bengali speakers in that area and to analyse the linguistic manipulations done by both generations in their code-mixed and code-switched expressions.

Bangladeshis in the UK

According to figures published recently by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), almost half of the ethnic minority population in Britain are South Asians, with Bangladeshis being the third highest among them. The Bengali Speech community in Britain consists of two groups – speakers belonging to the Eastern Indian state of West Bengal and speakers belonging to Bangladesh. Most of the Bengali speakers in UK are from Bangladesh, and the present study concentrates only on the Bangladeshis.

The study

Bilingualism is a thriving discipline in contemporary academia, but there is no clear-cut definition of the term. Bloomfield (1933:56) terms it to be 'native-like control of two languages', though Baker, C. and Jones, S.P. (1998:12) suggest this to be a myth. David Crystal (1992:362) opines that command over two languages is often not equal with one language more fluent than the other. Hockett (1958:16) uses the term 'semibilingualism' for those whose second language is at the passive or receptive stage. Contemporary sociolinguists use the term 'language shift' to correlate it with bilingualism. Immigration initially leads to bilingualism, but later moves towards language shift. Susan Romaine (1995:39) calls bilingualism a type of 'transition' to a

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new language. Wardhaugh (1986:99) distinguishes between *stable bilingualism* and *unstable bilingualism* and says that the latter is prevalent in the situation of immigrant communities.

In spite of being one of the largest growing ethnic minority populations in Britain, there has been very little work on the sociolinguistic aspects of Bangladeshis in Britain. We know very little about the state of bilingualism among the Bangladeshis living in this country. A study of this nature may prove to be a starting point for further research in this field. According to figures published a couple of years ago by the Office for National Statistics, Britain's ethnic minority population are growing 15 times faster than the white population (Carvel, *The Guardian*, 21 September 2001). The same research shows that nearly half the ethnic minority population was South Asian, with Bangladeshis being the third highest among them. As Bangladeshis are one of the largest growing immigrant communities in Britain, a study of their linguistic behaviour might be provide significant sociolinguistic insights about Britain today.

Bangladeshis have been coming to the UK for more than fifty years, though most of the immigration took place in the last thirty years. Naturally, the Bengali language now spoken here has undergone some linguistic changes, though the changes are not significant enough to be called as a variety. Moving on to discuss the linguistic changes in the Bengali language by the first and second generation speakers in the UK at different linguistic levels, the following points can be observed:

Phonological Level

The phonological changes are mostly found among the second generation. First generation speakers have retained their original phonological system. Whatever differences exist in their pronunciation from standard Bengali is due to regional difference in Bangladesh; it has nothing to do with their length of stay in the UK.

The most prominent phonological change among the second generation is aspiration of voiceless stops like /p/, /t/ and /k/. This is found mostly among non-Sylheties who do not use Bengali much with their parents or relatives or anyone else. For example, /parbo/ 'I can' becomes /pharbo/, /tiya/ 'parrot' becomes /thiya/ and /kal/ 'tomorrow' becomes /khal/.

Lexical Level

There is a significant change in the lexical level among the second generation from that of the original Bengali in Bangladesh. Due to the influence of English, the difference is sometimes at the vocabulary level and sometimes at the level of morphological construction. The following subtypes emerge in this category:

A. Collocation

A word may be used in a different context than its usual usage. For example, to ask someone if he or she wants tea, some second generation Bangladeshis say: /apni cha chan?/ In English we say, 'Do you want tea?'. So, 'want' has been translated here as

/chan/. But a native Bangladeshi would say, /apni cha khaben?/ Generally, /cha/ 'tea' does not collocate with /chan/ 'want'.

B. Inflection

Some second generation Bangladeshis create new forms of grammatical inflection while talking to fellow generation Bangladeshis. For example, once one of them was heard saying to the other:

'I know that you were *adda maraing*' meaning 'I know that you were chatting'. The phrase /adda mara/ 'chatting' has been inflected by the present continuous marker /-ing/ to create a unique type of expression. Similarly, inflections are also used as plural markers like the expression: 'I think there are a lot of *shubidhas* in it'. The Bengali word /shubidha/ 'advantage' has been given English plural inflection in this case to match the English construction. This type of plural usage is also found among first generation non-Sylheties. In a family discussion, one of them was heard saying: 'There are lots of *chachus* and *chachis* around'. Here, /chachu/ 'uncle' and /chachi/ 'aunty' both have been inflected by English plural marker /-s/. In the same programme, one first generation member also used the term /ukils/ 'lawyers' to mean the plural of /ukil/.

However the first generation speakers mostly tend to use Bengali suffixes with English root words. In the participant observation, they were found using words like /friend-er/ (possessive), /support-tai/ (emphatic), /family-r/ (possessive), /life-e/ (possessive), /late-o/ (emphatic), /desire-er/ (possessive), /rest-to/ (possessive), /break-gulate/ (plural), /feelings-ta / (article), /outcome-ta/ (article) where Bengali inflections have been used with English words.

C. Generic pronouns

One common problem some second generation Bengali speakers face is the use of second person generic terms /apni/, /tumi/, /tui/ which have only one equivalent in English word 'you'. As English does not have this distinction, they often make the mistake of calling elders as /tumi/, whereas in Bengali, the elders are normally addressed by /apni/. Some second generation speakers also make errors in subject-verb agreement, saying /tumi bhat khabo?/ 'Will you have your meal?', where /khabo/ agrees with /ami/ 'I' and /khabe/ agrees with /tumi/ 'you'.

D. Code Mixing

        Code mixing refers to the transfer of linguistic elements from one language to another. In other words, code mixing is a process whereby a word or a phrase of a second language is used in the syntax of a language. Wardhaugh (1992) defines code mixing as "The deliberate mixing of two languages without an associated topic change." Wardhaugh states that code mixing is not a haphazard combination of two languages, rather, "it requires conversants to have a sophisticated knowledge of both languages."

First generation non-Sylheties are the ones who use code-mixing very frequently. Participant observation showed that the first generation use English words or phrases almost in every sentence they utter. Some examples are given below:

1. /unar ja dorkar she bepare amra FULLY AWARE kina/ 'Whether we are fully aware what she needs.'

2. /bektigoto EXPERIENCE theke bolchi/ 'I am speaking from personal experience.

3. /jokhon shujog ashe tokhon shotosfurtobhabe MAXIMUM SUPPORT dewata ESSENTIAL/ 'When opportunity comes, it is essential to give maximum support spontaneously.'

4. /shadhdhota DEPEND kore DESIRE er upor/ 'The ability depends on desire'.

5. /amar CONTRIBUTE korar kichu nai/ 'I have nothing to contribute'.

6. /ei FEELINGS ta shobshomoy jeno thake/ 'These feelings should remain all the time.'

7. /OUTCOME ta ekhono janina/ 'I don't know the outcome yet.'

The second generation does exactly the opposite. They use Bengali words in English sentences while code-mixing. Observations over several days with a group of second generation people evidenced the following code-mixed expressions:

1. Where did you put the TORKARIR BATI? (Where did you put the curry plate?)

2. Don't give too much MOSHOLLA in the TORKARI. (Don't give too much spice in the curry.)

3. He enjoys giving ADDA. (He enjoys chatting.) The interesting thing to notice here is the use of the English word 'giving' to make way for the Bengali word ADDA.

4. You are going to BUJHO your MOJA! (You are going to taste the music!).

5. He has become a BACCHA! (He has become a baby!)

Syntactic Level: Code-Switching

At the syntactic level the only and the obvious manipulation found is code-switching. 'Code-switching' emphasizes movement from one language to another, i.e. the movement takes place at sentence level. To be more precise, sentences of another language are inserted while using a language. Here again, the approaches towards code-switching are different among the two generations. The first generation use English clauses or sentences while using Bengali, whereas the second generation use Bengali sentences in their English expressions.

A. First Generation

The following code-mixed expressions were found in the participant observation:

1. /ami bollam THAT'S GOOD NEWS/ 'I said that's good news.

2. /AT THE SAME TIME er mane ei noy je ------/ 'At the same time it doesn't mean that --------

3. /hothat kore ekla hoe gele SHE MIGHT FEEL LONELY/ 'If she suddenly becomes alone, she might feel lonely.'

4. /tomader kaj ache I DON'T DENY THAT/ 'I don't deny that you have works.'

5. /eto bochor por deshe jete chachche, HE WANTS TO GO WITH FREE MIND/ 'As he is going home after so many years, he wants to go with free mind.'

6. /ei porjaye I GOT FRUSTRATED/ ' At this stage I got frustrated.'

7. /attiyo shojon chara YOU DON'T ACTUALLY FIND MANY PEOPLE/ 'You don't actually find many people other than the relatives.'

8. /jehetu ami shomoy dite parbona, COULD YOU PLEASE LOOK INTO IT?/ 'As I cannot give time, could you please look into it?'

B. Second Generation

As suggested already, the second generation tend to base their conversation in English and use a clause or a sentence in Bengali in between while speaking to first generation.   The following examples provide evidence of this:

1. /Even though we have our own works, AMMU AMADER SHATHE THAKLE that will be the easiest thing/ 'If mother stays with us, that will be the easiest thing even though we have our own works.'

2. /I don't know how it's been because AMI ETO GHONO ASHTEO POCHONDO KORINA because it will create a lot of inconvenience/ 'I don't know how it's been because I don't like to come so often, because it will create a lot of inconvenience.'

3. /I had to wait for repair workers, so ABBUR SHATHE ER AGER DUI DIN I spent two full days/ 'I had to wait for repair workers, so I spent two full days with father before that.'

4. /Ammu (mother) says nothing more to do, CHACHURA BOLE you're not doing enough/ 'Mother says nothing more to do, but uncles say, you're not doing enough.'

It was assumed that second generation Sylhetis often use code-mixing and code-switching between English and Sylheti, and non-Sylheti second generation mostly use English with very little code-switching or mixing. This hypothesis turned out incorrect: the Sylheti second generation know Sylheti quite well and do not need the help of English to communicate as much as non-Sylheties do. It is the non-Sylheties who are the actual code-mixers and code-switchers among the next generation.

Summary and Conclusion

The present paper represents an attempt to investigate the changes in the Bengali language away from its standard form among the Bangladeshis living in this area at phonological, lexical and syntactic levels. It tried to find the similarities and dissimilarities between the Bengali spoken by the first and second generation speakers

in the community. The research intended to see what linguistic manipulations are done by both the generations in their conversations. Interesting results emerged from the use of participant observation.

In short we find that the Bengali language is undergoing some changes in the UK due to local influences. The first generation frequently uses English words, phrases and even clauses while speaking in Bengali. The second generation seems to use these the other way round. They sometimes use Bengali expressions in their own idiosyncratic ways while using English syntax. The end result is that the language is gradually changing from its original form in Bangladesh. However, the change is still not enough to be called a variety.

Both the first and second generation showed interesting manipulation in their Bengali usage at grammatical, lexical and syntactic levels. There are phonological changes, collocational novelties, inflectional innovations, grammatical errors etc. but the most noticeable phenomena are the incidences of code-mixing and code-switching from two separate perspectives by the two generations.

The study represents a initial phase in a much longer-term sociolinguistic project. Research in this area would look at many more different aspects of Bengali usage. A larger, similar kind of study needs undertaking in the Borough of Tower Hamlets in East London where most of the Bangladeshis in the UK are concentrated. The results of such a study might well suggest very many more interesting patterns of language use and language shift not that apparent to us at this stage.

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