

## Present Status of English in Bangladesh: An Effect of Globalization

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**Abstract:** English is used as a lingua franca for global communication. As an independent nation we have to maintain our political, commercial and cultural relation with the rest of the world through English. As a developing country, we have to deal with many international agencies, organizations like the World Bank, United Nations, Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), Asian Development Bank (ADB) and so on. English is the language of information technology that has, in fact, made the whole world a global village. We can now communicate with people thousands of kilometers away in a split second, using such electronic media as the telephone, fax and e-mail. But if we do not know how to use English for the purpose, we will be just cut off from the global information network and condemned to live in isolation. English is the language of the international labor market. English for occupational/professional purposes can help us find good jobs in other countries. The aim of this article is to attempt how English gives us easy access to the ever-expanding knowledge of science and technology, arts and education, innovations and discoveries.

**Key words:** Globalization, access, expansion, constitution, provision, emerge, spread.

### INTRODUCTION

During the British and the Pakistan periods, English was a second language in our country. People in general who were educated or even fairly educated, had to use English for official, professional and educational purposes.

So they developed communicative competence in English through the use of the language of the real life. But from 1971 English has become a foreign language in Bangladesh. A continuous and consistent proliferation of the English language throughout the world made it attain the status of a global language. A language which once a symbol of imperialism was later adopted and diffused for various reasons in different linguistic and cultural contexts. While at one place it performs the role of a link language, at others it is the library language, or the language of science and technology, the language of communication and information, the language of international labor market, etc.

English, therefore, became a language of opportunities. It became a part of almost every curriculum all around. Its role and function can be further briefed in the following two categories, besides others:

- English and its context of use.
- English language teaching for various purposes.

### English and its context of use

This section tries to encompass the spread and expansion of the English language. This section will brief the contexts in which English is being used all over the world for various purposes. Seeing its deep and wide adoption and proliferation, different scholars and linguists have categorized the English language and its context of use under various heads. Some of these are as follows:

Randolph Quirk [1] identifies three contexts of English use:

- ENL (English as a Native Language)
- ESL (English as a second Language)
- EFL (English as a Foreign Language)

### ENL (English as a Native Language)

Usually, English language which a person acquires in early childhood because it is spoken in the family and / or it is the language of the country where he or she is living. Another way, it is the context or countries where English is used as a native language, such as the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The native language is also called the first language or L1.

### ESL (English as a second language)

The role of English in countries where it is widely used within the country (e.g. as a language of instruction school, as a language of business, and government and of every day communication by some people) but is not the first language of the population. Another way, English is used as a second language in almost most of the British colonies like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Philippines, etc. Kachru [2] and Parashar [3] stated some major features of ESL which are as follows:

- English is one of the two or more linguistic codes of the country,
- It has acquired an important status in language policy,
- Functionally purposes and that English has developed a nativized literary tradition in different genres.

### EFL (English as a Foreign Language)

The role of English in countries where it is taught as a subject in schools but not used as a medium of instruction in education nor as a language of communication (e.g. government, business, or industry) within the country. In EFL situations, however English may be more or less prestigious or welcomed in particular places. Many people learn it for occupational, educational and recreational purposes. EFL refers to such countries like Russia, China, Saudi Arabia, etc. It is this context that has given English the status of international language by replacing its other linguistic rivals like French, Latin, etc. In today's world which is considered as a global village, people of our context (say, ENL) are using / learning English in another context (say, ESL/EFL) or even vice-versa. So these contexts of language use/learning are actually not fixed in water-tight compartments. For instance, there are so many Bangladeshis (ESL context) who are using /learning English in England.

Kachru [2] pointed out three concentric circles of English: the Inner circle, the outer circle and the expanding circle. According to this distribution Bangladesh belongs to the outer circle synonymous to ESL. Other countries of the outer circle are Ghana, India, Pakistan, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Phillipine, Srilanka, Tanzania, and Zambia etc. The countries that form the Inner circle is parallel to ENL are the USA, the UK, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. China, Egypt, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Korea, Nepal, Saudi Arabia., Taiwan, etc figure in the Expanding circle as an equivalent of EFL.

In addition to Quirk [1] and Kachru [2], there are some more categories regarding English namely:

- EIL (English as an International Language)
- ECL (English as a contact Language)
- EStL (English as a Standard Language)

### EIT (English as an International Language)

It refers to the widespread use of English as a foreign and / or second language. English is the most widely used international language due to its importance as a means of all sorts of communication. English reached distant parts of the world along with the British Colonizers. The number of speakers of English multiplied like anything. It became the most widely used language. In most countries English is the language of culture and sophistication, commerce, and industry, law and administration, higher education and science and technology. Therefore, English is probably the most widely used means of international communication.

### ECL (English as a Contact Language)

English performs the role of international lingua Franca too by which people of different parts of the world can communicate with each other in order to negotiate. This can be illustrated in the following figure:

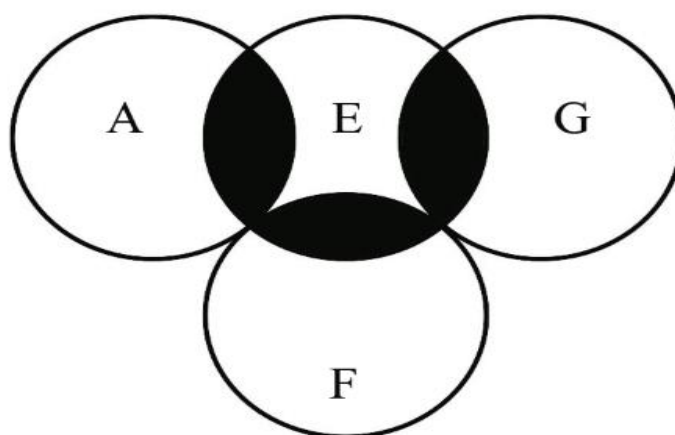


Fig-01: English as a contact language

The above figure shows that English dominated other languages. In order to get and give information, English functions as an instrument which is used by the people of different languages such as Arabic (A), German (G), and French (F), for instance. A language develops as a contact language when groups of people who speak different languages try to communicate with one another on a regular basis. For example, this might occur where foreign traders have to communicate with the local population or groups of workers of different language backgrounds on plantations or in factories [4]

**ESL (English as a Standard Language)**

Standard English is the variety of English language which has the highest status in a community or nation and which is usually based on the speech and writing of educated native speakers of the English language. A standard variety is generally:

- used in the news media and in literature
- described in dictionaries and grammars
- taught in schools, colleges, and universities and taught to native speakers when they learn the language as a foreign language.

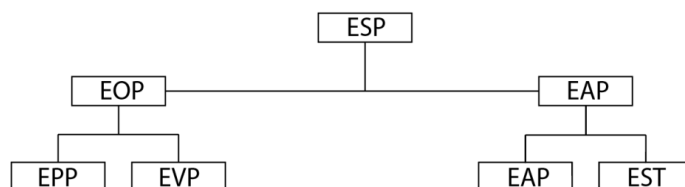
Sometimes it is the educated variety spoken in the political or cultural center of a country, e.g. the standard variety of French is based on educated Parisian French. The standard variety of American English is

known as standard American English and the standard variety of British English is known as standard British English.

**English Language Teaching for Various Purposes**

In the backdrop of the spread, expansion and adoption of English, ranging from the role of lingua franca to a language of science and technology, commerce, administration, medicine, etc English became a language of instruction as well as a compulsory subject taught from primary to tertiary level in almost all the countries of the world. As a consequence over a period of last half century, English has been taught for various purposes in the name of ESP(English for Special purposes), EAP(English for Academic purposes), EST( English for Science and Technology), TOEFL(Test of English as a Foreign Language), IELTS(International English Language Testing Services), TEST( Teaching English as a second Language ), TEFL(Teaching English as a foreign Language ), English for Banking, English for salesman, English for cookery, etc. On the other hand as mentioned above: there are some courses which aim at teaching general language proficiency, called EGP (English for General Purposes).

Johns and Dudley Evans [5] have developed a tree diagram to reflect the purposes for which English language teaching is taking place all over the globe.



**Fig-02: English: Various purposes**

**Status of English in Bangladesh**

In Bangladesh English is not a new phenomenon. Its origin and spread goes back to its political history as a part of the Indian sub-continent under the British Empire. British Empire ruled the Indian sub-continent for about more than two hundred years. As a legacy of the British rule English became the official language of the British India. Its status as the medium of education was confirmed by the approval of Macaulay’s Minute [6] and other language policies following it. English is, no doubt, a necessary language for survival in the modern era. So, English is introduced as an academic subject from class one to graduation in Bangladesh. Now students learn Bengali and English simultaneously. But they hardly have any scope to use English outside the classroom because English is a foreign language to be used and it is not used as frequently in social situations. Regarding

medium of education at lower levels e.g. public school, primary school, most parents fail to send their children to English medium schools , where students can prepare for English Cambridge or “O’ and “A’ level examinations. Only a rich section affords to bear the high cost of this English medium school. Graduates from these schools often remain very weak in Bengali but comparatively good in English. Many of them prefer to get admitted in foreign universities. The Private Universities Act, 1992 allowed the setting up of some private universities, on the American model, so far , where English is used as the medium of instruction. These universities give special emphasis on English because English is of much demand and also to attract students and their money. Though students from these universities have the same level of proficiency as those from the public universities while getting admitted, but at the end of a four year stay in private universities they

acquire a higher level of proficiency which help them to introduce with multinational organizations and agencies (Preface to the book of Revisioning English in Bangladesh Alam et. Al. 2001) Now the growing number of private universities, English medium schools and tutorial centers of different foreign universities and institutions and job. There are various problems of English language teaching in Bangladesh which have accrued through years. English was officially made the second language in 1960 by the Pakistan government and a new secondary syllabus was introduced in 1962 as a first step towards achieving the goal set out by the curriculum committee, that is, "it should be taught as a functional language rather than as literature". To determine the current status of ELT in Bangladesh, we will examine the prevalent trends of ELT. In most educational institutes at the university level, English is being taught as a literature subject-but hardly as language. Starting from class one to class twelve, students are taught to appreciate a literary texts without any sound knowledge of the language itself.

In 1947 the Indian sub-continent was divided into India and Pakistan. Pakistan comprised of two parts East Pakistan (today's Bangladesh) and West Pakistan (present day Pakistan) and English played the role of the only medium of communication for both the regions of Pakistan. After attaining freedom, India opted for Hindi, and Pakistan made Urdu the state language. In the face of evident opposition from East Pakistan culminating in the tragic deaths on February 21, 1952, both Bengali and Urdu were made the state languages.

In 1971" East Pakistan" was separated from Pakistan and turned to be an independent country called Bangladesh. One of the major reasons for the separation of East from West Pakistan was the Urdu- bangle conflict. Hence Bangla became the state language of Bangladesh and the status of English was drastically reduced. Bengali replaced English in all official communications except those with foreign missions and countries and in the army, where English continued to be the official language .Schools, where students had previously been able to sit for secondary and higher secondary examinations in three languages- Urdu, Bengali and English- became single language schools. Attempts were made to translate English books into Bengali to meet the demands of universities [7].

During the Pakistan period, English was used as the second language. In post-liberation Bangladesh, English lost its official status but it enjoys an important unofficial status. English became a foreign language while Bangladesh emerged, considering its importance in our social life. English is now studied as a compulsory subject in the national curriculum through primary, secondary, higher secondary and university levels [8].

Since their independence like India and Pakistan, in the existing of Bangladesh also, English plays an important role in the national life. It is unofficially recognized as a second official/ state language in India, for instance. English was facilitated by constitutional provisions and recommendation of various language commissions even after independence. Khan, Rizwan [9] pointed out that practically, though no such constitutional provisions is made by Bangladesh, English is used by the government , semi-government and private organizations or companies along with Bengali. It is instrumental in interpersonal, commercial and official communication and other academic and library purposes. It can be briefed in a nutshell, therefore, that English is used in Bangladesh, for both international and international purposes.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

The world of English language teaching in Bangladesh is still being dominated by literature. The level of graduates and post graduates level it would be too much for language teachers to expect to get priority over them. Most of the time when a post is vacant and advertised, people with a degree in literature gets preference. And it is only natural because most of the decision-makers are people with degree in literature.

The origin and the expansion of the English language along with the ELT situations in Bangladesh spread through political history. It is observed that Bengali dominates the everyday language use in Bangladesh. But for maintaining the balance with the rest of the world, English plays central role. That is, the expansion of the English language was not wholly a forced phenomenon. Rather, it was the need of the hour for which the missionaries, the natives and the government worked together to meet the need. In the post-colonial phase, Bangladesh policies and planning not only continued but also even extended the use of English in every walk of life. The constitution of Bangladesh did try to replace English by Bengali, but no attempt was made in the practical sense. Bengali language was not ever tried to be brought to the level of English, so that replacement could have been possible. The brief study of ELT in the pre- and post – independent Bangladesh reflect similar type of progress/expansion. All the new methodologies and materials developed during these phases were used mainly in English. A survey of the available literature on ELT shows the extent to which new researches in this area in Britain and America have got upper hand in Bangladesh. As a result ELT in Bangladesh, as elsewhere, now come to realize the difference between the teaching of the second language and that of the mother tongue Bengali.

Despite various American pedagogic influences, Bangladesh's ELT essentially remained committed to the British theorists and has continuously been the recipient of new methods and approaches like

oral, situational, communicative language teaching etc. But unfortunately even now the new theories are hardly able to influence the teaching in practice. For instance, grammar-translation method has been much practiced in some of the places in Bangladesh. Finally, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board have adopted the communicative language teaching method in the secondary level in Bangladesh.

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