

Linguistic Transition and Challenges for Tertiary Level Students: A Private University Scenario

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Introduction

Linguistic Transition is shift of medium of instruction from one language to another in our case from Bengali to English. The use of English has increased with the emergence of private universities in the late 90s in Bangladesh. With the aim of producing smart English-speaking graduate, the authorities of private universities have been inspired to conduct English-Only classes excluding Bangla. But the students who have not heard much English spoken in their schools and colleges have now been in a class where almost no Bangla is allowed. This journey from “all Bangla” to “no Bangla” in English language teaching policy at tertiary level had confusing impact upon the students.

In all the significant domains of the society in Bangladesh including government, education, law, administration, everyday communication, the media, as well as entertainment Bangla is the functional language (Imam, 2005 in Rouf, 2012). In the primary (Year 1-5), secondary (Year 6-10) and higher secondary (Year 11-12) education of the Bangla-medium schools, the medium of instruction is Bangla. However, universities, specifically the private ones, have started to emphasize on English. These private universities have strict rules about the enforcement of English and remedial English courses for the students who are weak in English have also been offered (Islam, 2013). But, the initiative is perhaps not so rewarding for all the students especially on the fresher’s (first and second semester students). However, “English has remained a source of failure, frustration, and low self-esteem” for many students (Tsui, 1996, p. 246 in Afroze, 2014). Many of the students take a long time to adjust with the English-only environment of the university. Even they struggle to pass all the prerequisite English courses and they also do not perform well in the courses in which they need

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to read and write in English. Because of the English-only environment of universities, many students suffer a lot and go through emotional turmoil. The experiences of these students indicate a dissonance between the pedagogic practices of these universities and the students' linguistic competence (Sultana, 2014).

So the main purpose of this study is to find out the effects of this linguistic transition among the fresher's at tertiary level at private universities in Bangladesh. It is not only the students who are facing problems, but also the academics who teach them, they are facing problems too. For this reason, this study also tries to find out what are the challenges teachers are facing because of linguistic transition. This study also aims to point out some possible strategies that could be followed by the students and teachers to make the transition smoother. So the significance is that, the study will help to find out the effects of linguistic transition on fresher's and will also help to generate some strategies to make the transition smoother.

Central Research Questions

1. What are the effects of linguistic transition on fresher's at tertiary level at private universities in Bangladesh?
2. What are the challenges teachers' facing because of linguistic transition at tertiary level at private universities in Bangladesh?
3. What are the possible strategies that could be followed by the students and teachers to make this linguistic transition smoother at tertiary level at private universities in Bangladesh?

Literature Review

Education system of Bangladesh

The education system of Bangladesh broadly divided into Primary, Secondary and Higher Education stages. General, Madrasah and technology are the three domains of tertiary level. Autonomous public Universities, private Universities, Madrasah and colleges under the National Universities are the four different types of Educational institutions at tertiary level (Education Ministry of Bangladesh in Khan and Akter, 2011).

Linguistic Transition at tertiary level in different universities around the world

Kantanis (2000) study conducted a on some Australian universities on the significance of social network, social skills and communication competence in first year students' adjustment in linguistic transition. Several factors like age, gender, socioeconomic class play a crucial role to make transition to university study complex (Evans, 2000). Along with this, transition from school to university involves adjusting to different learning environments and assessment systems, different perspectives on disciplined-based knowledge, and different teaching practices (Pargetter *et al.* 1995, in Rouf, 2012).

All the above studies depict the different factors of transition in tertiary education including social and students' own experience, teaching style and practice in western and eastern universities though, none of them worked on the transition of private universities of Bangladesh where the medium of instruction is English but maximum students' come from the Bangla medium background and face difficulty to cope up with.

Linguistic Transition at tertiary level at private universities in Bangladesh:

Linguistic transition has manifold effects on fresher's and these effects are mostly negative. As most of the students come from Bengali medium background, they feel puzzled, hesitate and shy to talk in English initially (Krashen, 1983 in Rouf, 2012). They have high affective filter that affects their overall performance in the first two semesters – because it has been observed that anxious learners have a high affective filter, which prevents learning (Krashen, 1983, in Rouf, 2012). Linguistic transitions create problems for the learners in case of speaking and their shyness creates a communication gap between students and teachers. Some students even avoid meeting or talking to their teachers as they have to communicate in English (Krashen, 1983 in Afroze, 2014). Students do not understand the class lecture and cannot comprehend the reading materials in English. Students also do not perform well in the courses in which they need to read and write in English (Sultana, 2014).

Islam (2013) finds that tertiary level students sometimes prefer Bangla to make lessons more understandable because it helps to understand the content of the subject. They do not get words to express their ideas in English as they do not have sufficient vocabulary and even they do not know how to organize their ideas following correct structure.

Challenges faced by the teachers because of Linguistic Transition at tertiary level

It is not only the students but teachers are also facing problems because of linguistic transition at the tertiary level (Kantanis, 2000 in Afroze, 2014). In order to make learners competent and confident, the speaking/conversation courses and activities are included in the syllabus but most of the teachers face problems to make the speaking class interactive. As the fresher have lack of proficiency in speaking, they do not want to speak in front of the whole class. As a result, teachers need to talk more than it is supposed to be and sometimes teachers use Bangla as well to make the class interactive. But in ESL /EFL classrooms, students are obliged to use the target language within the classroom for any kind of communication (Chowdhury, 2012).

Along with speaking skills, producing cohesive written essays, or other such scripts in a well formed coherent style is not in the repertoire of typical Bangladeshi students probably because they have not received any instruction on such writing skills in their secondary or higher secondary

level. Students' lack of proficiency makes difficulty for the teachers to comment on each and every mistake because there are lots of aspects to comment on in writing. And it becomes difficult to generalize the writing task of the students because the mistakes are different (Shamsuzzaman & Everatt, 2016).

Methodology

This study used mixed-method approach and questionnaire survey is used to gather information about the effects of linguistic transition from a greater number of students in several universities in Bangladesh. In addition, a number of open-ended questions were included in the survey questionnaire for further in-depth analysis based on the factual information derived from the questionnaire survey. Thus the mixed-method approach ensured 'multi-level' analyses for the study. Then for the purpose of the study, face to face, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the teachers to investigate their perceptions and experiences regarding the central research questions. 4 classes (two from first semester and two from second semester) were also observed to get the real scenario of effects of linguistic transition.

The theoretical framework of the research study is based on 'Affective Filter Hypothesis' which is introduced by Stephen Krashen (1983). It is a hypothesis of second-language acquisition theory which says that all learners in the process of acquiring a second language have an invisible filter inside of them that has the potential to result in anxiety, stress, and lack of self-confidence. This invisible filter is theoretically called the affective filter and it is a very important factor in language acquisition (Du, 2009). If the student is not motivated, if self-esteem is low, if anxiety is high... if he thinks that language class is a place where his weaknesses will be revealed (not a place where he will get new input), a block goes up and that block is "affective filter" (Krashen, 2011 in Ni, 2012).

Results and discussion

Teacher's response to the interview questions

Question	Response
1. Medium of instruction	All the teachers mentioned that they use English as a medium of instruction as per the rule of the institution
2. Whether students are comfortable with the English medium instruction or not	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers said that many students are not comfortable with English medium instruction because of their Bangla medium background and to make their student able to understand the content, they translate it into Bangla • They also mentioned that some students though get the content in English, because of their lack of proficiency and peer pressure, they cannot ask question. As a result, sometimes they feel frustrated and lose motivation as well. According to them, teachers need to maintain the English environment after 2-3 classes.

Question	Response
3. Students can follow and understand the English instruction or not	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 20% teachers said that students can follow their instruction in English • Rest of the teachers mention that they cannot understand the command given in English. Some students come to teacher's office hour to request them to repeat the instruction while they keep silent in the class where teachers repeatedly ask them whether they have any confusion or not as they fear to lose face while asking question in wrong English. • Teachers also feel that they need to have patience and give extra effort to overcome this situation
4. What kind of problems students face for this linguistic transition?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students cannot learn, they misunderstand the concept sometime • They need more time to understand and if affect their exam • Some students do not have any problem in listening, they can understand the instruction but they cannot speak properly. They do not know the use of proper word in a situation. For e.g. they say can you big this topic for us? Instead of saying can you elaborate the lecture for us? • They sometimes get demotivated to participate to might get mocked • Mixed classroom also creates problem for students. English medium students sometimes lead the class • They miss content, coherence • In terms of practicing four skills of language, one needs to agree, disagree, and counter argue with the topic to learn. Students with low proficiency keep passive which make them unable to learn properly
5. Participation of students that require English	<p>According to teachers, it depends.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some students hesitate in few classes, later on they participate • While talking to teacher, they try to use English but among them, they use Bangla. • Group work with the restriction of using English only may sometimes make students shy and demotivated • Teachers need to divide the group with mix ability students so that only the good speakers cannot dominate the class • A student may have the good idea over the topic but because of less confident and peer pressure,

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Question	Response
	<p>they may keep quiet in group work and that is why sometimes individual task is more fruitful to make students participate in class</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students from Dhaka city may feel more enthusiastic to participate in English rather the students from outside the Dhaka though it also depends on student's proficiency level.
<p>6. Students do not participate in discussion because of low proficiency in English</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They get judgmental by their low proficiency which makes them frustrated, shy and unconfident as well. As a result, they avoid to participate to avoid being mocked. • Inferiority complex, friends mocking make students fearful • Sometimes they feel that if they participate and their ideas contradict teacher, they will be punished in grading • To encourage students and flourish their ideas, using Bangla cannot be restricted. In such case, first they can express ideas in Bangla, then can translate it into English
<p>7. Do students perform badly in exam because they cannot express/write their ideas properly?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beginner level students do have the lack of language such as- insufficient vocabulary, lexical, proper emotion to express their ideas in exam. • Cannot follow the lecture, high affective filter make them unable to perform better in exam. • Sometimes big class size make students deprived from the encouragement of the teacher. • Sometimes students cannot understand how to organize the answer which contribute to do bad in exam
<p>8. Do students feel demotivated, frustrated, anxious, shy and nervous because of their low proficiency in English?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All of the teachers agreed with the fact that students go through a psychological trauma because of their low proficiency in English especially in service courses. Students of core courses are more confident. • Students should not be judged. They can be given group work first, when they will be confident enough, they can be asked to work individually. • Teacher need to take the responsibility to make student comfort to learn and overcome the psychological pressure. They can aware students that marks will be deducted if anyone laughs at others.
<p>9. Do teachers face any problem because of linguistic transition? If yes, what are they?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers need more time to complete the syllabus. As they translate and repeat the instruction and also think of different level of students, it needs more preparation to take the class.

Question	Response
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers also sometimes get demotivated as they always have the exposure with the students of low proficiency. • If teachers always concentrate on low proficient student, high proficient student will lose their enthusiasm. That's why teachers need to balance the material and task which is definitely challenging for them • Teachers give the low level students extra task to complete at home and check it in office hour which make their time constraint though teachers said that if a student improves, it makes them motivated and happy.
10. Does motivation from the teachers can make the students feel confident?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers feel that motivation is the key word in teaching. Students believe in their teacher the most. Teachers also know their student properly which make a good relation between teacher and student. • As students always look forward to good comment, teachers encouraging words will definitely make a difference in their level of proficiency. • Some teachers say that students can only be motivated if they are enthusiastic • Teachers can decrease their nervousness by insisting and exposing them in English and make them able to aware the importance of English in future.
11. Does practicing English more and more can overcome this situation? How?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English need to be learnt as a language. It can be a part of student life style. • The more exposure they have, the more proficiency they will have. Even they should start practicing it from the root level. • They can talk to themselves in English. They also can got to their teacher's office hour and meet the teaching assistant to practice English. • Teacher can also take some variations in teaching to give students a English environment. • To improve productive skills like speaking and writing, students definitely need to focus on the receptive skills means listening and reading. • Teacher can work as a facilitator but students need to do the work mainly to learn English at tertiary level
12. Steps to make the linguistic transition smoother	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modifying, rectifying and upgrading high school and higher secondary syllabus, activity connected with purpose can make the transition smoother.

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Question	Response
	<p>For example- in syllabus, there is dialogue practice but students are asked to write the dialogue where dialogue practice should be practiced orally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching students how to learn rather how to memorize. will improve their language • Using interesting topic related with learner's real life will make English learning interesting. They can be asked to analyze the language ads in basic language course to make the task interesting and nurture their creativity. • Teachers need to be more welcoming, accumulating and trained to make the linguistic transition smoother.

Finding from students questionnaire

Question	Response
1. School and College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90% students are from Bangla Medium school and college. • 5% are from English Medium background and other 5% belong to English Version.
2. Medium of instruction in university classroom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 67% of the students said that the medium of instruction in their university classroom is English • 33% said they get instruction both in English and Bengali.
3. Whether they are comfortable with the English medium instruction or not	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 81% of the students said that they are comfortable with English Medium Instruction because they have good listening skills to understand the lectures given in English, their teachers give them clear and easy instructions. • 14% students said that they are not at all comfortable with English Medium Instruction. • Other 5% students are comfortable with English Medium Instruction but sometimes it become difficult because of Bangla Medium background and choice of unfamiliar word of their instructor
4. Whether they can follow and understand the English instruction or not	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 86% students understand the English lectures but other 14% said that as they are weak in English and as lectures are completely given in English it becomes difficult for them.
5. Does EMI make their student life complex for the first few semesters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10% strongly agree with the statement • 33% said that they agree • 23% replied that they are not sure about it • 24% said that they disagree and other • 10% replied they are strongly disagree with the statement.

Question	Response
6. Whether linguistic transition make them psychologically weak	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 76% said that students from English Medium background are more confident than them • 24% students said no in their answer
7. Whether linguistic transition affects their academic result or not	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 33% said that they understand English and can manage lessons with the help of the teachers. • 67% students said that linguistic transition affects their academic result.
8. Participation that requires English	71% students said that it becomes difficult for them to participate in class/group works in English. Other 29% said that they do not face difficulties in class/group works because of English.
9. Communication gap between students and teachers	76% students feel that English Medium Instruction creates communication gap between students and teachers because students cannot understand lectures and cannot make their teachers understand that they did not understand because of their lack of proficiency.
10. Whether teacher can make them feel confident in using English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All of them agreed that teachers can make them feel confident and can cooperate with them, appreciate their effort, make them feel confident etc. Teachers also can give them sugarcoated feedback with smiling face, can give them confidence while they got stuck and can talk to the students directly to make them feel comfortable as teachers know student's level.
11. Whether they prefer dual medium instructions to make the lessons easy to understand	43% said that they strongly agree, 48% agree and 9% of the students disagree with the idea.
12. Steps to make the linguistic transition smoother	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% of the students said that by reading English news paper, journals, listening to English songs, news; watching English movies with subtitles can make them able to learn English better • Students should be exposed to English by reading quality English books; speaking English with friends even if they are wrong can help them to overcome public speaking fear. • Teachers can give the lectures and instruction in easy and simple language and there should be a friendly relationship between teachers and students • Teachers should help the students to think in English not to translate in English from Bengali.

Findings from Classroom Observation

Classes were observed to get to know about the actual scenario of linguistics transition. The medium of instruction in all the classes was English mainly. Teacher talked mostly in English but it is noticeable that some students were asking question by using Bangla though teacher replied in English using a very simple structure.

It is found from classroom observation that 10% students were from English medium background and they were very confident and presentable. They maintained eye contact, gesture with their organized speech but a major part of the class was from Bangla medium. It is noteworthy that the whole class remained quiet and listen to them while proficient students were presenting. On the other hand, when some students were struggling to speak fluently and accurately, the class was also losing their attention and started whispering though the teacher was encouraging them and making them confident. With the encouragement of the instructor, the less proficient students also tried to speak what they made as speech. In the whole class, it is observed that teacher's feedback and motivational words made the class very interactive and live. Peer pressure made the weak students more shy as they felt that others would laugh at them in their mistakes even that fear became true as some students were laughing and gossiping in their presentation but teacher's interruption made the class silent.

Discussions

By analyzing all the findings from teachers' perceptions, students' perceptions and classroom observations, it can be said that because of linguistic transition students do not understand the class lectures given in English, they do not get the content, and cannot organize and write their ideas in examination. They get judgmental by their low proficiency which makes them frustrated, shy and unconfident as well. As a result, they avoid participating to avoid being mocked. Sometimes they feel that if they participate and their ideas contradict teacher, they will be punished in grading. Teachers also sometimes get demotivated as they always have the exposure with the students of low proficiency.

Conclusion and recommendations

By the conversation with teachers, students some strategies are found to make the linguistic transition smoother. Most of the participants mention about modifying, rectifying and upgrading the high school and higher secondary syllabus and activity that improve learner's communication need to be introduced for getting a linguistic transition smoother. Along with this, following recommendation are also noteworthy to follow to getting rid of the challenge of linguistic transition for fresher's of tertiary level.

- Students are needed to encourage learning rather memorizing and can use interesting topic so that learning can take place without getting extra conscious about grammar, fluency and also the proficiency of other friends and they can connect it with their living style.

- Teachers can cooperate with learners, appreciate their effort, make them feel confident and can also give them sugarcoated feedback with smiling face and to encourage and flourish student's ideas, using Bangla cannot be restricted. In such case, first they can express ideas in Bangla, and then can translate it into English.
- Finally, it can be said it is important both for the teachers and students to contribute to make this linguistic transition smoother. Teachers need to be more welcoming, accumulating, motivating and trained and students need to be more enthusiastic, hard working, motivated to make the linguistic transition smoother.

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