Native Language in Pronunciation of English in Bangladesh: An Impactful Overview

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Abstract: The purpose of this qualitative study is to find out how Bengali speakers in Bangladesh pronounce English when speaking it as a second language. The study collects data from various secondary sources, including books, journals, blogs, and documents from numerous websites. The collected data are further supplemented by studying English discussions in academic contexts. The study also discovers how Bengali speakers' pronunciation of English is directly affected by their first language. By collecting and analyzing rich data on the pronunciation challenges encountered by Bengali speakers, this study focuses on the underlying factors contributing to these challenges and proposes recommendations for pedagogical interventions to enhance English pronunciation proficiency in Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

The phonological patterns of a person's native language are known to have an impact on how English is spoken as a second language, resulting on regional variances in ESL pronunciation (Munro & Derwing, 1999). In Bangladesh, where Bengali is the primary native language and English is usually taught as a second language, it is crucial to comprehend how the local language affects ESL pronunciation. It is necessary to look into the distinctive influence of Bengali on English pronunciation among Bengali speakers in Bangladesh because English is essential for communication, education, and employment prospects.

This qualitative study proposes to explore the direct impact of Bengali, the native language also known as L1 in pronouncing English, the second language or L2 in Bangladesh. The study attempts to offer beneficial insights that can help enhance the proper English pronunciation in the context at hand by studying the difficulties and factors in action. Teachers and language experts can create intensive techniques to solve the pronunciation issues Bengali speakers have by being aware of the specific phonological distinctions and transferring the effects between Bengali and English.

2. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the research titled "Native Language in Pronunciation of English in Bangladesh: An Impactful Overview" delineates the intricate interplay between an individual's native language and their pronunciation proficiency in English, particularly

in the context of Bangladesh. Drawing upon theories of language acquisition, phonetics, and sociolinguistics, the framework seeks to explore how the phonological structures and speech patterns of Bangla influence the pronunciation of English among Bangladeshi speakers. By examining factors such as phonetic transfer, language interference, and sociocultural variables, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in English pronunciation among Bangladeshi learners, thereby offering insights for language educators and policymakers to enhance English language instruction tailored to the linguistic needs of this specific population.

2.1 The Influence of Native Language on Pronunciation the Second Language

The Influence of Native Language on pronunciation the Second Language has undergone extensive studies and is well acknowledged (Flege, 1995). When learning a new language, phonological system differences between languages can have transfer effects that cause problems with the pronunciation of sounds that are unavailable in the native language or the translation of phonetic rules from the native language into the second language (Trofimovich & Baker, 2006).

Pronunciation is the vital issue in the acquisition of any secondary language. The correct pronunciation is quite essential for meaningful communication. With a shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered classrooms and a focus on broader communicative competencies, intelligible pronunciation has gained recognition (Uddin & Monjur, 2015). It is tough to emphasize the significance of the proper pronunciation in communication. Pronunciation errors often stem from mother tongue influence and differences in sound systems between the native language and English.

Bengali-speaking learners of English face linguistic challenges in phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. These linguistic difficulties arise from variances regarding their target language as well as a teaching process itself. Addressing these challenges requires appropriate measures in the teaching process, including syllabus construction, teacher qualifications and training, materials development, equipment use, and testing (Maniruzzaman, 2010).

2.2 The Impact of Bengali on Pronunciation of English

The impact of Bengali on English pronunciation has been extensively studied, especially among Bengali speakers in Bangladesh. Rahman (2003) discovered that Bengali speakers face challenges in producing certain English sounds, such as /θ/ and /ð/, due to the absence of these sounds in Bengali. Additionally, the impact of Bengali intonation patterns on English prosody has been observed (Mukherjee, 2010). These findings emphasize the significant role played by Bengali in shaping the pronunciation of English among Bengali speakers.

The learner's mother tongue is widely acknowledged to affect target language pronunciation and plays a crucial role in explaining foreign accents. Mistakes often occur in the target language due to interference from the native language, particularly in aspects such as aspiration, stress, and intonation. Because of this, second language learners struggle in trying to produce sounds that are unavailable in their native or first language.

Rahman's (1996) study revealed the challenges Bengali English speakers have to face. There is little focus on sound patterns, stress, rhythm, or English intonation systems, and English is spoken with a mother tongue-influenced accent. He also demonstrated that

Bengali vowels are not conditioned by length, whereas English vowels /iː i, ɔː ɔ, uː u/ are distinguished by their length. Bengali speakers typically do not differentiate between long and short vowels.

Another researcher, Muzaffar (1999), found that Bengali speakers demonstrated a variety of pronunciation differences, including the mispronunciation of consonants like /f/, /v/, /z/, /dʒ/, /θ/, /ð/, /t/, and /d/ as well as the pronunciation of /z/ and /dʒ/ as allophones of the same phoneme. Bengali students also struggle with consonant clusters /sp/, /st/, and /sm/; they frequently overcome the difficulties made by adding a glottal stop or a vowel. Certain English fricatives are substituted because they don't exist in the catalogue of Bengali phonemic, such as /f/ becoming /ph/, /θ/ becoming /th/, /ð/ becoming /d/, /z/ becoming /dʒ/, and /ʒ/ or /dʒ/. It is important to realize that /v/ or /bh/ is a bilabial aspirated stop. In addition, Bangladeshis have some retroflection of the /t/ and /d/ alveolar series. Unlike English, which emphasizes stressed and unstressed syllables, Bengali rhythm focuses on the arrangement of long and short syllables. Due to this, English speakers from Bangladesh frequently mispronounce words.

As the second language and the first language have many similar sound patterns, pronunciation is made smoother. "The greater the distance between the first language and the target language, the more challenging pronunciation becomes and there are significant variations in sound patterns between English and Bengali" (Taher, 2019, p.10). Pronunciation teaching faces two main problems; neglect and reactive rather than strategic planning. "Teachers of pronunciation require a solid theoretical knowledge base, practical classroom skills, and access to effective classroom activities" (Kelly, 2006, p-13). The neglect of pronunciation instruction may not stem from a lack of interest among teachers but rather from uncertainties about how to teach it. Grammar and vocabulary generally take priority, despite the fact that inexperienced or trainee teachers might demonstrate a lot of interest in pronunciation. However, language learners frequently show enthusiasm for pronunciation because they consider it as a way to improve their communication abilities. Despite the interest of both teachers and students, pronunciation training is frequently disregarded.

2.3 Factors Affecting Pronunciation Acquisition

For Bengali learners, several factors affect their pronunciation. The interference of the first language, Bengali, is a significant factor. Individual learner variations and sociolinguistic factors are affecting the acquisition of second language pronunciation. Individual learner factors such as age, motivation, and language aptitude have been found to impact pronunciation acquisition (Levis, 2006). Sociolinguistic factors, including exposure to native and non-native speakers, the educational environment, and cultural attitudes toward pronunciation, can also influence pronunciation outcomes (Levis & Moyer, 2004).

In line with that, Brown (2001) highlights factors such as native language, age, attitude, psychological factors, former pronunciation instruction, inadequate knowledge of English phonetics and phonology, stress and intonation issues as influencing pronunciation. A case study by GM Abu Taher also addressed the interference of Bangla to English, learners' age, attitude and psychological factors, innate phonetic ability, motivation for proper pronunciation, and stress and intonation factors in the target language, are identified as reasons for pronunciation problems among Bengali speakers (Taher, 2019). It is crucial to explicitly address these issues during the teaching process, focusing on linguistic elements, to mitigate mother tongue interference.

According to Brown (2001), the influence of the learners' native language is a significant factor contributing to L2 interference. Bengali learners face challenges in pronunciation due to the interference of their first language, lack of practice with certain sounds in their mother tongue, and other factors such as age, attitude, and psychological factors. Addressing these factors explicitly in the teaching process can help to mitigate pronunciation difficulties and improve pronunciation outcomes.

2.4 Previous Studies on Bengali Speakers of English in Bangladesh

Limited research has focused on the pronunciation of English among Bengali speakers in Bangladesh. However, Hoque (2010) conducted a study in a Bangladeshi university setting, revealing that phonological differences between Bengali and English, along with limited exposure to English outside the classroom, contribute to pronunciation difficulties.

The impact of the mother tongue on target language pronunciation is widely acknowledged, with specific errors occurring in aspiration, stress, intonation, and sound production when certain sounds are absent in the native language.

Rahman (1996) analyzed the stress, sound patterns, intonation and systems rhythm of English and found that Bengali English speakers frequently use a mother tongue-influenced accent. Bengali speakers, unlike English, do not differentiate between long and short vowels, according to Begum and Hoque (2019).

Muzaffar (1999) identified several mispronunciations among Bengali speakers of English, such as the confusion of /z/ and /dʒ/ sounds, reading the letters "z" and "j" interchangeably, and challenges with consonant clusters. Additionally, the absence of certain English fricatives in the Bengali phonemic inventory leads to substitutions or modifications in pronunciation.

Having trouble pronouncing words is a result of the differences between native and foreign sound patterns. Variations in sound patterns between English and Bengali contribute to the challenges faced by Bengali speakers (Taher, 2019). In fine, the pronunciation challenges of English faced by Bengali speakers arise from phonological differences, limited exposure to English, as well as the influence of the mother language. Proper attention to pronunciation instruction, including theoretical knowledge and practical teaching skills, is necessary to address these challenges effectively. Based on the existing literature, this study purposes to deepen our sense of the influence of Bengali on English pronunciation among Bengali speakers in Bangladesh. By analyzing the challenges faced and the strategies employed, this research seeks to inform recommendations for improving English pronunciation in this context.

3. Research Methodology

This research methodology involves a qualitative approach based on secondary data analysis. In this analytical study, several related researches have been taken into consideration to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic. The data for this study is collected from various sources such as articles, reports, and blog views available on the internet. By utilizing these existing sources, the study aims to analyze and synthesize information to gain valuable insights and draw meaningful conclusions. This methodology allows for a thorough examination of the existing knowledge and provides a foundation for further analysis and discussion on the topic.

4. Analysis
4.1 Phonological Disparities

The impact of the native language, Bengali in the pronunciation of English as a second language in Bangladesh is undeniable. The challenges faced by Bangladeshi students in attaining English pronunciation can be summed up.

Firstly, they are unable to distinguish between long vowels and short vowels. They exchange both for a single vowel from their native language. The middle vowel, " 'e," is another problem for them. Third Bengali vowel 'ae' generally takes its place. Another difficulty area is with diphthongs, where students typically split the vowels into two separate vowels. They are pronounced independently as various vowels. Sometimes, they only pronounce the first vowel clearly before dropping the other. As a result, all of them lead to a great deal of misunderstanding. In native speaker's communication, it becomes quite evident (Islam, 2018).

We must have knowledge of the variations between the vowels in both Bengali and English to understand the challenges faced by Bangladeshi English language learners. According to Hai and Ball (1962), some English vowels are absent from Bengali and vice versa. Long and short vowels are specified in the Bengali script, although they are not kept in the pronunciation. While it is unlikely in English, the mixing of short and long vowels has no effect on meaning. It could be a mistake to employ the short vowels in long ones or inversely. When the long and short vowels are switched, the meaning may vary completely. These two languages' diphthongs differ as well.

It is difficult to learn all the sounds in a second language. Understanding one's flaws is essential for achieving mastery. A. K. M. Mazharul Islam (2018a) recommends notifying students of their difficult concerns and educating them on the differences between vowel sounds in both the native and target languages. Besides, making sure that students are aware of all vowel sounds, their place, and manner of articulation, identifying major problematic sounds, treating them one at a time, giving them regular reinforcement, giving them a native or alike model, training the teachers, exposing them to phonetics, and teaching students phonetics at the primary level of education are all examples of effective phonemic awareness strategies (Islam, 2018b).

4.2 Impact of Regional Variants of Native Language

In a recent research work, GM Abu Taher (2019) demonstrated that Banu (2000) had identified particular phonemes in English on which local variants of Bangladesh had a significant influence. He's revealed the following:

1. A short vowel in English becomes a long one: /e/ ~ /e:/
2. Some diphthongs develop into prolonged or monophthongs: /əʊ/ ~ /o:/ and /eʊ/ ~ /e:/
3. The diphthongs /eɪ/ and /əu/ of BRP are substituted by /e:/ and /o /
4. The central vowel /ʌ/ in words like bus, cut, and hut are weakened and rendered more open, creating a sound that resembles /a/ in phrases like bas, kat, and hat.
5. Lax /a/, /bard/, and /garl are created from BRP /ɜ:/ in words like bird, girl, etc. Bengali speakers frequently aspirate some English consonants that are un-aspirated.
6. The labio-dental fricatives /f/ /p/, /f/ /ph/, /v / /b/, and /v / /bh / change into bilabial plosives or bilabial aspirated plosives.
7. When a palato-alveolar fricative develops from an alveolar fricative: /s / ~ / ʃ/
8. Voiced palatal plosives can change into voiced palato-alveolar affricates, or the other way around: /z/ ~ /dʒ/ and /dʒ / ~/z /

9. A dental fricative changes into a dental plosive: /θ / ~ /t /
10. The transition from an alveolar to an alveo-retroflex plosive: /d / ~ /t /.

Their study clearly demonstrated that Bengali learners have difficulty in pronouncing English, and L1 interference is one of the main causes.

Hoque (2010) has highlighted various mispronunciations of Bengali language and he has noted that some students substitute / t / for / d /, such as-bad / bæd / is sounded as / bæt /, good /gud / as /gut/. They also frequently substitute "s" for "t," as seen in the pronunciation of words like "actually," "which," "much," "child," "teacher," and "ti:sr," among others. He claims that this occurs because Chittagongian does not have the sound. Once more, some Bengali English speakers pronounce /c/ instead of /t/, a sign representing a sound between /t/ and /s/. It's likely that some Chittagonian speakers will switch from the plosive /p/ to the fricative /f/. Some students were found to pronounce people (/pi:pl/) as "people," "f:fl," and "færents," as well as "capable" (/ke:pbl) as "kfe:bl." This occurs because the Chittagonian variant lacks the sound.

In some students' pronunciations, the following changes are evident where the distinctions are identified more easily;

Changes happen …	For example-
/ʃ / with /s/,	e.g. socio /sɔsɪo/.
/dʒ/ with /s/,	age /eɪdʒ/ as /eɪs/.
/dʒ/ with /z/.	age /eɪz/ and /ez/, joy /zoʊ/, enjoy /enzoʊ/, etc.
/z/ with /dʒ/	busy /bɪdʒɪ/, zero /dʒɪru/.
/z/ with /s/	use /ɪus/, as /æs/, is /ɪs/, and cases /kæses/
pronounce silent /h/	ich /huɪs/, where /hɔjʌr/ and, /hɔja:r/, when /hɔjen/, what /hɔwʌt/, why /huaɪ/ and /hɔaɪ/ etc.
/θ/ with / ṭ (ত)/	thank /ṭæŋk/ and in both / bɔ:ṭ/
/θ/ with /ṭh (থ)/	thousand /ṭhauzænd/

Uddin and Manjur (2015) were surprised to discover that, with the exception of a small number of regions (Noakhali, Sylhet, Asam, and Chittagong), people's pronunciations of the same speech varied little across the investigated areas in their study on the impact of Bangla dialects on English pronunciation. In these four places, English is pronounced similarly to the regional dialect. For instance, Sylheti students usually substitute the sound (Kha) for (Ka), while in the Noakhali region, they frequently substitute the sound (p) for (f). The /s/ sound is used in Chittagong in place of the /t/ sound. When further zones are considered, no solid isogloss can be identified; instead, a dialect continuum can be used to identify those zones. Chittagong, Sylhet, and Asam residents, with the exception of Noakhali, all speak English with a remarkably similar accent. It has been noted that the pronunciation of the letter "z" is a prevalent issue throughout all areas of Bangladesh (Taher, 2019). Dialects should be valued since they are a source of pride for local populations. English is an international language and so it is the most widely spoken language in the world, learners should be motivated to adopt the pronunciation in a standard way when communicating.

It is obvious that the native tongue has the greatest impact on a learner's pronunciation. The teacher will be better able to identify the pupils' problems if he is familiar with the native language's sound system. As the students freely incorporate their various native accents into the English classroom, their English pronunciations seem strange. It becomes quite difficult

to master English pronunciation because of this. The teaching of pronunciation has two major issues: "Firstly it tends to be neglected. And secondly when it is not neglected, it tends to be reactive to a particular problem that has arisen in the classroom rather than being strategically planned" (Kelly, 2006, p.13).

4.3 Impact of Bengali Phonetics on English Pronunciation

The Bengali speakers have a substantial impact of the Bengali phonetic structure on the pronunciation of English. Compared to English, Bengali has a small set of vowel sounds and the list of consonants also differ. When Bengali speakers attempt to learn English, this disparity in phonetic systems leads to pronunciation problems.

Vowels are the most notable variance between the languages Bengali and English. In Bengali eleven phonemes are there including short and long but in English there are fifteen vowel phonemes. As a result, Bengali speakers may face challenges in producing the English vowel sounds correctly and consequently do errors in pronunciation.

Besides, in the consonant sounds both the language have differences, such as English has aspirated and unaspirated voiceless stops, like /p/ and /b/, but in Bengali there is no aspirated stops. This contrast in consonant phonetics brings challenges for Bengali speakers while struggling to produce these sounds in English.

Moreover, the syllable structure is also different from Bengali to English. Consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) is the typical simple syllable structure of Bengali but English allows more complex syllable patterns. It also has the use of consonant clusters at the beginning and end of words. English words containing such clusters found difficult for the Bengali speakers and results in mispronunciation.

Despite these obstacles, research indicates that Bengali speakers can become more proficient in pronouncing words correctly in English with focused training and practice. Pronunciation issues can be resolved with the help of techniques like specific teaching of English phonetics, concentrated practice of troublesome sounds, and audio-visual materials catered to the requirements of Bengali learners.

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5. Findings

Improving English pronunciation for Bengali speakers involves targeted strategies that address specific phonetic challenges while also considering learners' linguistic backgrounds and learning preferences. Here are some effective strategies:

1. **Phonetic Training**:
   o **Phonetic Awareness**: providing explicit instruction on English phonetics, focusing on sounds that are challenging for Bengali speakers, such as vowel contrasts (/i/ and /ɪ/) and consonant clusters (/str/ and /spr/) may bridge the gaps in mispronunciation of English.
   o **Minimal Pairs**: Repetitive exercises on minimal pairs may help the learners to distinguish between similar English sounds that may not exist in Bengali, such as /v/ and /w/, through auditory discrimination tasks.

2. **Modeling and Imitation**:
   o **Modeling by Proficient Speakers**: Exposing learners to recordings or live models of proficient English speakers to demonstrate correct pronunciation and intonation patterns may help in improving the pronunciation.
   o **Shadowing**: Encouraging learners to shadow (repeat immediately after) native speakers, imitating their pronunciation closely to develop accurate articulation and rhythm.

3. **Feedback and Correction**:
   o **Individual Feedback**: Providing individualized feedback on learners' pronunciation errors, focusing on specific sounds or patterns that need improvement may bring positive response.
   o **Self-Monitoring**: learners self-monitoring strategies can help them to identify and correct pronunciation errors independently, such as using online pronunciation tools or recording and listening to their own speech.

4. **Practice Activities**:
   o **Drills and Repetition**: Incorporating pronunciation drills and repetition exercises into lessons to reinforce correct pronunciation patterns and build muscle memory.
   o **Dialogues and Role-plays**: Engaging learners in communicative activities such as dialogues and role-plays that require authentic pronunciation practice in context.

5. **Integration into Language Learning**:
   o **Integrated Pronunciation Instruction**: Integrate pronunciation instruction seamlessly into language learning activities, rather than treating it as a separate skill.
   o **Authentic Materials**: Use authentic materials such as audio recordings, videos, and podcasts to expose learners to natural English pronunciation in real-life contexts.

6. Recommendations

There is no substitute for consistently using proper pronunciation when speaking English. Even though English, the most widely spoken language, is mostly used for communication, understanding, and self-expression depends greatly on generating perfect pronunciation. Teachers should use caution when pronouncing words in order to ensure that students are exposed to proper pronunciation.

Following the examination and discussion of the aforementioned data, the following recommendations are addressed for solving the issues:
- Audiovisual aids should be used
- Students should be given the opportunity to speak;
- While learning to spell, students should also be taught the proper pronunciation;
- A specific course on English pronunciation with enough sessions can be offered;
- An IPA chart should be set up;
- The teacher should organize a workshop or a specific class on teaching English pronunciation.
- The group or peer-led activities, such as role plays, simulations, etc.
- Concentrate on good communication and comprehension while honing your pronunciation.
- Finally, teachers need to improve their pronunciation skills so that they can correct the English accents of their students.

The significance of pronunciation in communication is very fundamental, just as vocabulary and grammar. Right now, poor pronunciation shows that English has been influenced by mother tongues. Mother tongue interference is the most common cause of pronunciation mistakes, while there are other potential causes as well. Pronunciation problems may arise because English and the local language use distinct spelling symbols and sound systems. Bengali native speakers will be able to pronounce English correctly if the influence of their mother tongue or native language can be lowered.

7. Conclusion

This qualitative study has shed light on the influence of the native language Bengali on the pronunciation of English as a second language in Bangladesh. Through an analysis of specific phonological differences, common pronunciation errors, and the impact of native language interference, this research has provided valuable insights into the challenges faced by Bengali speakers when learning English pronunciation. Additionally, the study has explored the role of individual learner factors and sociolinguistic factors in shaping pronunciation problems or outcomes. The findings highlight the need for language educators and curriculum designers to develop effective strategies and pedagogical approaches to address pronunciation difficulties resulting from native language interference. By considering the recommendations arising from this study, it is possible to enhance English language instruction in Bangladesh and improve the pronunciation skills of Bengali speakers. Ultimately, this research contributes to the broader understanding of second language acquisition and lays the foundation for future studies in this area.

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