

Students' Practiced Language Policies: A Linguistic Ethnographic Study

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Abstract

Language policy research has traditionally focused on macro-level policies while language practices have been studied vis-à-vis macro policies to ascertain the success or failure of the policies. Policy as practice has only recently been conceptualized. This new strand of research argues that the real language policy of a community or institution resides in its practice. Language-in-education policies have traditionally advocated keeping learners' first language separate from the target language fearing cross-contamination and hoping that this makes learning more effective. This "two solitudes" approach largely ignores what really happens in the classroom. Ethnographic research, however, shows that learners switch codes fluidly. The term "translanguaging" has been coined to describe such usual and normal practice of bilingualism without diglossic functional separation. Drawing upon the theories of practiced language policy and translanguaging, and adopting linguistic ethnography as method, I explored the "implicit and deducible" rules of language preference, that is, the practiced language policies of students in two language classes at the University of Dhaka. The findings show that students orient to a practiced language policy in which translanguaging is the norm and boundaries between languages become permeable.

Keywords: Practiced language policy, Translanguaging, Bilingualism, Linguistic ethnography

Research on language policy and language-in-education policy in Bangladesh and elsewhere has traditionally focused on macro-level policies and their implementation. Language practices have usually been studied vis-à-vis policies to understand the success or failure of the latter. As such, language practices have been seen as distinct from policy, which is usually thought to exist only at the macro level. Policy as practice has only recently been conceptualized. This new strand of research builds on Spolsky's argument that language policy comprises three interrelated elements: language management, language beliefs, and language practices (Spolsky, 2004). Language management, also called declared language policy (Shohamy, 2006, p. 68), refers to the formulation and proclamation of an overt policy, usually in the form of a formal document about language use (Spolsky, 2004). Language beliefs, also called "perceived language policy" (Bonacina-Pugh, 2012, p. 215), are what people think should be done while language practices are what people actually do.

Language policy (LP) research, however, has not given much importance to policy as practice. It is mainly concerned with declared language policies. This notion of policy was popular with the scholars who saw language policy as "solutions to language problems" (Fishman, 1974, p. 79) in the postcolonial states. A more recent approach, dubbed as perceived language policy (Shohamy, 2006, p. 68), views policy as a set of beliefs and ideologies, that is, what people think should be done (Spolsky, 2004). It demonstrates that language policies are ideological processes which help promote and maintain unequal power relationships between majority and minority language groups (Tollefson, 2006).

The most recent approach to language policy emphasizes what really happens in people's real language practices. Termed as "practiced language policy" (Bonacina, 2010; Bonacina-Pugh, 2012), this approach highlights that a policy can be found within language practices. Language policy is seen as an interconnected process of proclamations, beliefs, and practices (Bonacina-Pugh, 2012). This conceptualization incorporates practice as a core component of policy, for the "real language policy" of a community resides in "what people actually do" (Spolsky, 2004, p. 14). A practiced language policy consists of the implicit and deducible rules of language preference which people orient to in communication (Bonacina-Pugh, 2012).

Language-in-education policies (LIEP) have traditionally advocated keeping learners' first language separate from the target language fearing cross-contamination and hoping that this makes learning easier. This "two solitudes" approach (Cummins, 2005, p. 588) has been dominant in the policy discussions. This stance largely ignores learner preferences and voices. Ethnographic research in real classrooms, however, shows that learners switch codes flexibly. The term "translanguaging" (García, 2007) has been used to describe such usual and normal practice of bilingualism without the functional separation in language use. Translanguaging has been found to be used by teachers and students in the classroom for identity performance and lesson accomplishment (Creese & Blackledge, 2010).

Research on practiced language policies in the context of Bangladeshi tertiary education is very rare or almost non-existent. Although a number of scholars have studied language policy and language-in-education policy in Bangladesh (e.g., Hamid & Erling, 2016; Hamid, 2009; Rahman, 2010; Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014), they have mostly focused on declared and perceived language policies. The present research addresses this gap in the literature. I look into the practiced language policies of students in two English language courses at the University of Dhaka. Personal experience and observation suggest that English language courses mainly have an English-only declared language policy.

The English-only declared language policy is evident from the curriculum policy, methodology and materials policy, and evaluation policy, which have been included by Baldauf and Kaplan (2005) among their seven key areas of policy for language-in-education planning. In all these areas the investigated courses follow an English-only declared language policy. However, research in the context of Bangladeshi higher education suggests that English-only policies are creating language-based discriminations and are affecting learners' classroom participation, power negotiation, and identity formation (Sultana, 2014). Moreover, bilingual instruction has been found to be more effective than monolingual instruction in helping adult learners learn English, at the same time being preferred by them (Akhter, 2018). In contrast with the language policy, students mostly hail from rural Bangladesh and evaluate their own English skills to be inadequate to cope with the curriculum at the university (Akhter, 2008). It could be argued, using Bourdieu's (1991) terms, that the background of the students often do not match with the dominant cultural capital.

Given the conflict between the declared language policy and students' cultural capital, the question arises "What language policy do the students in the English language classes at the University of Dhaka adopt?" More specifically, "Do they follow an English-only or a bilingual language policy?"

I seek answers to such questions adopting a qualitative case study approach to research using linguistic ethnography as methodology. The main objective of this inquiry is to find out students' practiced language policies in the language classes at the University of Dhaka. In other words, my aim is to explore whether students in the English language classes translanguange or use only the first (L1) or the target language (TL).

Evolution of language policy research

Language policy research emerged as a discipline in the 1960s. In the early days language policy used to be viewed as the “organised pursuit of solutions to language problems, typically at the national level” (Fishman, 1974, p. 79). Since then scholars have used the term to mean different things, resulting in an absence of consensus on the definition. There has been a terminology conundrum, too. Some scholars use the terms “language policy” and “language planning” interchangeably, often conjoined or hyphenated as language policy and planning or “language planning-policy” (Tollefson, 1991, p. 17) while others consider policy to subsume planning (e.g., Ricento, 2000). Cooper (1989), drawing upon Kloss (1969), offers a three-fold model of language policy in which status planning refers to the allocation of languages or language varieties to specified functions, corpus planning refers to the activities that bring changes in language form, and acquisition planning refers to the activities for language spread by increasing users. Spolsky (2008, p. 27) uses the term “language education policy” and “language-in-education policy” for the third category which is concerned with who should learn what language or language varieties. This approach to language policy, termed as the traditional approach (Ricento, 2006), views policy as a top-down process and focuses on the macro-level. Policy from this perspective is often a verbal or written statement in the form of a constitutional clause, law or a verbal or written declaration. That is why Ball (1993, p. 10) calls this approach to language policy “policy as text.”

Language practices from this perspective have usually been observed and interpreted in relation to the given macro policies to get an insight into the match or mismatch between policies and practices. An alternative to this formulation of language policy has been proposed by Spolsky (2004), who considers practices as one key component of policy. He argues that language policy consists of three interconnected elements: language management, language beliefs, and language practices. He defines management as “the formulation and proclamation of an explicit plan or policy, usually but not necessarily written in a formal document, about language use” (Spolsky, 2004, p. 11). Language beliefs are “what people think should be done” while language practices refer to “what people actually do” (2004, p. 14). Language management, he points out, often contradicts people's beliefs and practices. Language practices, which are the “observable behaviours and choices ... constitute a policy to the extent that they are regular and predictable” (Spolsky, 2007, p. 3). He argues that in order to understand the real language policy of a community, one needs to investigate what people actually do. Spolsky does not propose details of any methodology for studying policy found in practices although he does indicate that ethnography of speaking might be used for this purpose (Spolsky, 2007).

Since the 1980s, the traditional approach discussed above came under significant criticism. The main criticism against “policy as text” was that it viewed language policy as a politically and ideologically

neutral process (Tollefson, 1991; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996) that result in modernization and social mobility. A critical approach to language policy was developed since the 1980s, which Ball (1993, p.10) terms as “policy as discourse.” From this point of view, language policy is a set of beliefs and ideologies, in other words, “what people think should be done” (Spolsky, 2004, p. 14). This approach moves away from models of language policy, instead investigating the ideological processes and discourses of power and inequality that underlie language policies. Taking the notion of ideology from critical social theory, this approach to language policy holds that “all language policies are ideological, although the ideology may not be apparent or acknowledged by practitioners or theorists” (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996, p. 406). Bonacina-Pugh (2012) uses the term “perceived language policy” to refer to the conceptualization of language policy as discourse (p. 215).

Critical approaches to LP took an interest in studying language-in-education policies, seeking answers to questions such as “how do language policies in schools create inequalities among learners? How do policies marginalise some students while granting privilege to others? How do language policies in education help to create, sustain, or reduce political conflict among different ethnolinguistic groups?” (Tollefson, 2002, p. 3, 13-14). Most of the research from this perspective, however, investigated macro-discourse on the national or institutional level, rather than micro-discourse of actual practices.

Following Spolsky’s comprehensive framework for language policy discussed above, the most recent approach to language policy focuses not only on text and discourse but also real language practices. There have been a few significant studies in recent years, exploring what has been termed “practiced language policy” (Bonacina, 2010, Bonacina-Pugh, 2012; Papageorgiou, 2011). Highlighting the idea that a policy can be found within language practices and building on Spolsky (2004; 2007), Bonacina-Pugh (2012) offers a new conceptualization of language policy: “language policy is an interconnected process generated and negotiated through texts, discourses and practices” (p. 216). This conceptualization incorporates practice as a key component of policy based on the argument that the “real language policy” of a community resides in “what people actually do” (Spolsky, 2004, p. 14). A practiced language policy, Bonacina-Pugh (2012) argues, consists of the “implicit and deducible rules of language choice from which speakers draw upon in interaction” (p. 218). Studying practices can help discover the implicit rules that underlie interaction and thus make them explicit (Bonacina-Pugh, 2012).

Discovering the real language policy requires a methodology that looks into actual language interaction. While Spolsky put forward the idea that real language policy resides in practice, he did not detail any particular methodology for studying actual language use apart from indicating that ethnography of speaking may be useful. Bonacina (2010) and Bonacina-Pugh (2012) suggest the use of Conversation Analysis (CA) as a tool to study practiced language policies, arguing that Conversation Analysts describe “the interactional routines speakers engage into in talk-in-interaction” (Bonacina-Pugh, 2012, p. 218). These routines are organized in a conversation on a turn-by-turn basis. She uses CA tools such as sequential analysis of talk-in-interaction, membership categorization analysis, and deviant cases analysis to discover the practiced language policies of the

students of an induction classroom for newly-arrived immigrant children in France and concludes that “what influences language choice and alternation acts is the implicit knowledge of what is usually done” (Bonacina, 2010, p. 248).

While language policy has been traditionally studied from a sociolinguistic perspective, the new strand of policy research, that is, practiced language policies, has resulted in a convergence of research on LP and language education, code-switching, and translanguaging. Moving between languages in the language classroom has been usually viewed negatively, although there is little empirical evidence to show that monolingual classroom practices are actually superior in helping learners learn the target language (Cummins, 2008). There is “near consensus” in English language teaching discourse that use of the target language (TL) should be maximized (Turnbell & Arnett, 2002, p. 211). Empirical research, on the contrary, shows that first language (L1) *is* used in second language (L2) pedagogy and serves important communicative and learning purposes. Sampson (2012), for example, found that Spanish-speaking English learners in Colombia use code-switching in the L2 classroom for useful communicative purposes such as expressing equivalence, metalanguage, floor holding, reiterating, and socializing. García (2007, p. xiii) prefers the term “translanguaging” to code-switching to describe the normal practice of “bilingualism without diglossic functional separation.” Studying language practices in complementary schools in the UK from an ethnographic perspective, Creese and Blackledge (2010) found that teachers and students practice fluid bilingualism for identity performance and teaching-learning purposes. Participants in their study engaged in translanguaging, where “the boundaries between languages become permeable” and “overlapping of languages” rather than “separation of languages” was usual. (Creese & Blackledge, 2010, p. 112).

However, studies of situated language use in the classroom as discussed above have not been abundant. Moreover, most of the studies that did explore language use *in situ* focus on the pedagogic uses of translanguaging. Looking into the underlying policies of practice – the “implicit and deducible rules of language choice” (Bonacina-Pugh, 2012, p. 218) – has been scarce in the literature. Building on the work of Spolsky (2004, 2007, 2008), Bonacina (2010), Bonacina-Pugh, (2012) on language policy, and the work of García (2007), and Creese and Blackledge (2010) on translanguaging, I explore the practiced language policies of the students in the language classrooms of two departments at the University of Dhaka.

Methodology

I took a qualitative case study approach, adopting linguistic ethnography as methodology. Linguistic ethnography (LE) draws upon sociolinguistic and anthropological work on language and society, especially Hymes' (1972) work on ethnography of communication which offered a frame of reference for the analysis of language use in the context of the complex dynamics of social life. LE holds the view that language and social life are mutually shaping and that “close analysis of situated language use can provide both fundamental and distinctive insights into the mechanisms and dynamics of social and cultural production in every day activity” (Rampton et al., 2004, p. 2). While ethnographers traditionally try to “get familiar with the strange,” LE researchers attempt to “get analytic distance on what's close at hand” (Rampton, 2007, p. 590). LE has more

connection with UK applied linguistics than anthropology and takes “language rather than culture as its principal point of analytic entry into the problems it seeks to address” (Creese, 2008, p. 234).

Linguistic ethnography seemed to be an appropriate methodology for this research for a number of reasons. First, it offered me the opportunity to look into what is close at hand in the setting of the University of Dhaka where I teach. Second, as I intended to explore policies of situated language use in the language classroom, ethnography seemed to be the most suitable method for collecting data. Third, linguistic ethnography combines tools from linguistics with ethnography. This was particularly useful because I mainly analyzed language practices in order to discover the implicit language policies.

The data was collected from language classes in two departments at the University of Dhaka through audio-recording of selected participants over two months. Students were doing a variety of language learning activities in the sessions in which they were recorded. Moreover, photographs were taken of students’ notebook pages containing language activities.

Students’ practiced language policies at the University of Dhaka

The current research was conducted at the University of Dhaka where most departments offer basic English language courses to their undergraduate students from an understanding that most new students have “poor standards of English proficiency” (Chaudhury, 2013, p.32). Data was collected through linguistic ethnography of two groups of students. One group comprised 90 sophomore students of a department from the Faculty of Biological Sciences, which I call Group A. They were taking a 2-credit foundation English language course titled FC-2 – Functional and Communicative English. The other group consisted of 94 first year undergraduate students of a department from the Faculty of Science, which I call Group B. They were taking a 50-mark non-credit course called English Language. The classes for both courses commenced in January and ended in September. Each group of students had 30 hours of class time over the mentioned period. I was teaching both the courses as a part-time teacher for the two departments.

The lessons included activities on the four language skills while the main textbook used in the class was *Endeavour: An Introductory Language Coursebook* written by Sinha *et al.* (2014). Sixteen pairs of students were selected as key participants. They were audio-recorded over a two-month period. Besides, photos were taken of around 50 student notebooks containing language work. The audio-recorded activities included a variety of tasks: a comprehension check activity based on a reading passage, a task on paragraph writing, a vocabulary task, a grammar exercise, and a re-ordering task.

The recorded lesson quoted in Extract 1 below involved a comprehension check activity based on a passage on William Shakespeare’s biography. In this activity, learners were instructed to choose the most appropriate words or phrases from the passage to complete the given incomplete sentences. Students were asked to work in pairs, discuss and write the right answers in one notebook. Extract 1 shows that both the students – Dalia and Shukhi (all names have been changed to ensure anonymity of the participants) from Group A – used both English and Bangla throughout the activity – for different purposes. English was used both for communication and as a target of learning. Bangla was used for most of the procedural concerns and discussions about the task.

For example, Shukhi's started the communication in English but combined it with utterances in Bangla to discuss how much of the task had been done and what the answer for the next item was: "should we write it? Shakespeare's father (.) **likhchi** (.) mother inherited (.) **ki hobe seta bol**". In a later turn, Shukhi referred to the procedures of the given task where they were asked to write answers in one notebook after working together: "**ekjon likhbe** (.) **thik aache? ba tui lekh**". One use of the L1 figured prominently in the findings: Bangla was used to make sense of English. For instance, the two students were trying to complete the sentence "Shakespeare was baptized in" They had initially written a date as an answer, but later, through their discussion in Bangla, they realized that the preposition before the missing word or phrase is "in," therefore making a date unlikely as an answer. It is their discussion in Bangla through which they arrived at the right answer – "Shakespeare was baptized in Holy Trinity Church." The L1, it could be argued, was used as a process through which L2 is explored and learned. Students moved smoothly between the languages where both languages appeared normative. Neither Bangla nor English was viewed as deviant. Rather, both languages were deemed useful and students translanguaged throughout the conversation. In all the transcriptions, talk uttered in English is shown in plain font and talk uttered in Bangla is shown in bold font. Also, all original transcriptions are followed by free translation into English.

Extract 1

Plain font: talk uttered in English

Bold font: talk uttered in Bangla

Dalia: **ekhane ekta aache hocche**

Shukhi: Shakespeare was born on Stratford-upon-Avon probably on April 23 (.) **kintu ekhane family niye kichu bola nei (.) kothay baptize hoyeche seta bola aache.**

Dalia: hmm

Shukhi: should we write it? Shakespeare's father (.) **likhchi (.)** mother inherited (.) **ki hobe seta bol**

Dalia: **naam tou na (.) accha tahole (.1)**

Shukhi: **baptizeta thik aache (.) baptize ki chilo? 26 April 1564 (.) accha akhon kheyal kor (.) baptize je –**

Dalia: **ei! in lekha tou!**

Shukhi: **ha (.) in lekha (.) taile? ha (.)** in Trinity Church **hobe**

Dalia: **ekhane tou date dise**

Shukhi: Holy=

Dalia: =Holy Trinity Church

Shukhi: **ekjon likhbe (.) thik aache? ba tui lekh**

Dalia: **amra discuss kori**

Shukhi: Holy Trinity Church (.) **accha (.) tarporer ta? ki hobe seta bol**

Dalia: **There's one here which is**

Shukhi: Shakespeare was born on Stratford-upon-Avon probably on April 23 (.) **But nothing is mentioned here about his family (.) where he was baptized is mentioned**

Dalia: hmm

Shukhi: should we write it? Shakespeare's father (.) **have written that (.)** mother inherited (.) **tell me what to write here**

Dalia: **It's not about her name (.) well then (.1)**

Shukhi: **the one on baptize looks fine (.) what was there on baptize? 26 April 1564 (.) now notice here (.) about baptize –**

Dalia: **hey! it's in written here!**

Shukhi: **yes (.) in written here (.) then? yes (.) it will be** in Trinity Church

Dalia: **they have given date here**

Shukhi: Holy=

Dalia: =Holy Trinity Church

Shukhi: **one person should write (.) okay? or you write**

Dalia: **let's discuss**

Shukhi: Holy Trinity Church (.) **okay (.) the next one? tell me what that one will be**

Contrastive analysis might have been very unpopular with the proponents of language teaching methodologies since the late twentieth century, but the data in this study shows that learners do contrast lexical items in order to attain the accurate level of vocabulary knowledge. This can be seen in Extract 2:

Extract 2

Plain font: talk uttered in English

Bold font: talk uttered in Bangla

Shukla: I write it down and we (.) we discuss

Nisha: turn up **hocche** err (..) come (..) arrive (..) arrive

Shukla: **oh asha! (..) abirbhuto howa**

Nisha: **abirbhuto**

Shukla: appear? turn up (..) [appear?]

Nisha: [appear]

Shukla: I write it down and we (.) we discuss

Nisha: turn up **is** err (..) come (..) arrive (..) arrive

Shukla: **oh coming! (..) appear**

Nisha: **appear**

Shukla: appear? turn up (..) [appear?]

Nisha: [appear]

In the activity shown in Extract 2, Nisha and Shukla from Group A were discussing a vocabulary activity in which they were asked to find out the appropriate meanings of the given words using a dictionary and the reading passage from which the words were taken. The extract shows that Nisha and Shukla were trying to find the meaning of “turn up.” They got “come,” and “arrive” in the dictionary, but they also used Bangla equivalent “asha” and “abirbhuto howa” from a bilingual dictionary. Exploring all these words in English and Bangla, they finally decided to write “appear” as their preferred meaning for “turn up.” The expression “o asha!” in an animated tone by Shukla could be explained to demonstrate the student’s happiness in finding a Bangla equivalent of “turn up.” It appears that she understood the phrase better after knowing the Bangla equivalent. As in Extract 1, the use of Bangla was not seen as a deviation from what was normative. The students used both English and Bangla spontaneously while sticking to their ultimate goal of writing the meaning of the phrase in English. They explored the meanings in both the languages and by doing so they seemed to achieve a clear understanding of what the phrase means. The use of a bilingual practiced language policy through translanguaging is readily apparent.

A similar situation was found when the same activity was done by Orpa and Kaniz from Group B. Shown in Extract 3, the two students used Bangla to make sense of English. They successfully found out the correct form of English using both English and Bangla as resources. Kaniz used the Bangla word “prishthoposhokata” for the English “patronize” while being aware that she needed an English synonym or definition for the word: “prishthoposhokata (.) ei rokom ekta jantam (..) kintu kono synonym aache.”

Extract 3

Plain font: talk uttered in English

Bold font: talk uttered in Bangla

Orpa: attached to (.) attracted to (.) **holo eta** (..) **eta ki** patronize?

Kaniz: patronize (.) yes (..) **prishthoposhokata** (.) **ei rokom ekta jantam** (..) **kintu kono** synonym **aache**

Orpa: back **hobe** (.) **karon ekhane** patronize **bolte** –

Kaniz: **o o o** (.) okay (..) **paisish?**

Orpa: **paisi** (.) as per me (.) it's back up (..) support

Kaniz: support **tou oboshshoi!**

Orpa: support (.) back up **likhi**

Orpa: attached to (.) attracted to (.) **it's done** (..) **is this** patronize?

Kaniz: patronize (.) yes (..) **patronize** (.) **knew something like that** (..) **but there must be a** synonym

Orpa: **it should be** back (.) **because here** patronize **means** –

Kaniz: **oh oh oh** (.) okay (..) **got it?**

Orpa: **got it** (.) as per me (.) it's back up (..) support

Kaniz: support **definitely!**

Orpa: **let's write** support (.) back up

Similar to what Creese and Blackledge (2010) found in their study on the translanguaging practices in community schools in the UK, the students here used Bangla to discuss the activity and other procedural concerns. This could be found in Extract 3 where Orpa said, “attracted to (.) holo eta (..) eta ki patronize?” and “back hobe (.) karon ekhane patronize bolte –.” Boundaries between the two languages appeared permeable; that is, students moved between the languages flexibly. Doing that, they finally arrived at “support” and “back up” as the correct meaning of “patronize.” In both Extract 2 and Extract 3, students used Bangla as a process for achieving learning goals in English. It is important to note that the students did not deviate from their objective in the activity, which was writing down the meaning of the given words in English. In order to achieve that goal, they oriented to a practiced language policy in which they used both Bangla and English for communicative and learning purposes.

Extract 4 below shows two students, Shobuj and Nayan from Group B, completing a grammar activity. In this activity students were asked to change the given sentences into active or passive. They were also asked to notice any change of focus when they changed one into the other. They were additionally instructed to note which sentences could not be changed from active to passive or vice versa. The transcript shows that Shobuj and Nayan tried to transform the sentences using both Bangla and English. Using both the languages, they tried to find a good subject in their attempt to write a suitable active sentence. Even after transforming the sentence, Nayan said, “juddher por tara deshtake notun kore shajalo arki” apparently to reinforce the understanding of the meaning. As found in Extract 1, Shobuj and Nayan used Bangla to discuss the task and procedural concerns, as in “eta hocche it diye korte hobe (..) it (.3) na na it na (.2) last a ki it ache? ekta joto bhalo subject ana jay toto bhalo.”

Extract 4

Plain font: talk uttered in English

Bold font: talk uttered in Bangla

Shobuj: The city was (.) rebuilt after the civil war

(.8)

Nayan: **lekhsō? (.) city dewa ache (.) tai na::? (.) fole (.2) oi shohorer people jara (.) nogorbashi tader ki bola hoy? (.2) oirom ekta kichu (..) people dile hoy kintu common hoye gelo**

Shobuj: people (..) rebuilt after (..) people rebuilt the city (.) after=

Nayan: =rebuilt the city

Shobuj: people rebuilt the city after the civil war

Nayan: **juddher por tara deshtake notun kore shajalo arki**

Shobuj: the city was rebuilt (.) **eta** passive **aache**

Nayan: more (.) action was [deemed (.) deemed]

Shobuj: [demd (.) deemed] unnecessary (.)

Nayan: **eitaou** passive=

Shobuj: =**shobi** passive (..) more action was deemed unnecessary (.4) **korao jayna**

Nayan: **eta hocche it diye korte hobe (..) it (.3) na na it na (.2) last a ki it ache? ekta joto bhalo subject ana jay toto bhalo**

Shobuj: **accha ota baad de (.) pore**

Shobuj: The city was (.) rebuilt after the civil war

(.8)

Nayan: **written that? (.) city is the given subject (.) isn't it? (.) therefore (.2) the people of the city (.) what are people who live in the city called? (.2) something like that (..) we could write people but it would be common**

Shobuj: people (..) rebuilt after (..) people rebuilt the city (.) after=

Nayan: =rebuilt the city

Shobuj: people rebuilt the city after the civil war

Nayan: **It's like saying they rebuilt the country after the war**

Shobuj: the city was rebuilt (.) **it's in the** passive

Nayan: more (.) action was [deemed (.) deemed]

Shobuj: [demd (.) deemed] unnecessary (.)

Nayan: **this one is also** passive=

Shobuj: =**all are** passive (..) more action was deemed unnecessary (.4) **can't be transformed**

Nayan: **we have to do this with it (..) it (.3) no, no, not it (.2) does it have it at the end? the more effective subject you have, the better**

Shobuj: **okay, let's leave it alone for now (.) later**

Extract 5 shows two students Runi and Tani from Group B working on a writing task in which they were asked to put the given sentences in the correct order to produce a well organized paragraph. Similar to other extracts, discussion about the task and procedural concerns were done using Bangla.

Extract 5

Plain font: talk uttered in English

Bold font: talk uttered in Bangla

Runi: **eta first line**

Tani: **first a hobe hocche** in general Internet email is considerably more reliable than the postal service (.) in general (.) **eta first**=

Tani: =**eta first** (.) **dui number** (.) however during 1997(.) AOL and Microsoft Network (.) to name just the big players (.) had severe mail outages resulting in the delay (.) and in some cases loss of email

Runi: **accha (.) eta shobar last a deya bhalo hobe**=

Tani: =and many corporate mail servers have had growing pains too (.) experiencing holdups and the odd deletion.

Runi: **amar mone hocche eta**

 Runi: **this one will be the** first line

Tani: **first line will be** in general Internet email is considerably more reliable than the postal service (.) in general (.) **this one will be the** first=

Tani: =**this one will be the** first (.) number **two** (.) however during 1997(.) AOL and Microsoft Network (.) to name just the big players (.) had severe mail outages resulting in the delay (.) and in some cases loss of email

Runi: **well (.) this one should go last**=

Tani: =and many corporate mail servers have had growing pains too (.) experiencing holdups and the odd deletion.

Runi: **I think this one**

Out of the sixteen pairs of key participants, only two pairs used English exclusively. In the recorded conversations, there was hardly any evidence of what Amir and Musk (2014) called language policing, that is, “the mechanism deployed by the teacher or pupils to (re-)establish the normatively prescribed target language as the *medium of classroom interaction* in the English as a foreign language classroom”(p. 100). Students were found to use both L1 and L2 naturally and flexibly. In the recorded tasks there was no mention or policing of which language should be used. They seemed to use whichever language they deemed useful in the given context. Using L1 was not seen to be a deviation from what is normative. These findings are similar to those of Bonacina-Pugh (2012), who found that students oriented to a practiced language policy rather than a declared or a perceived language policy. The findings are also similar to those of Creese and Blackledge (2010), who reported that teachers and learners practiced fluid bilingual pedagogy adopting a translanguaging approach. The most important aspect of the translanguaging pattern was that students used L1 to make sense of L2. Students of both classes exhibited the same pattern of language policy: they oriented to a practiced language policy rather than follow the declared language policy as found in the syllabus, materials, and evaluation.

As part of the linguistic ethnographic research, photos were taken of around 50 student notebook pages containing a vocabulary task. Here too, learners were found to use both languages. For

doing the task most of the students used English-Bangla-English electronic dictionaries installed on their mobile phones while many also used English-Bangla dictionaries. Only a few of them used English-English electronic dictionaries. Figure 1 and 2 illustrate two students' completed vocabulary task which is the same task as mentioned in the discussion on Extract 2 and 3. Figure 1 shows a notebook page from Ratan (Group A), who wrote both English and Bangla meanings for most of the words. For example, for the word "conjecture" he wrote "guess," and "assumption" in English and "onuman" and "andaz" in Bangla. Again, for "notwithstanding" he wrote "jodio" and "tothapi" in Bangla, and "though" and "if" in English. In most cases he used the Bangla equivalent before the English synonym or definition.

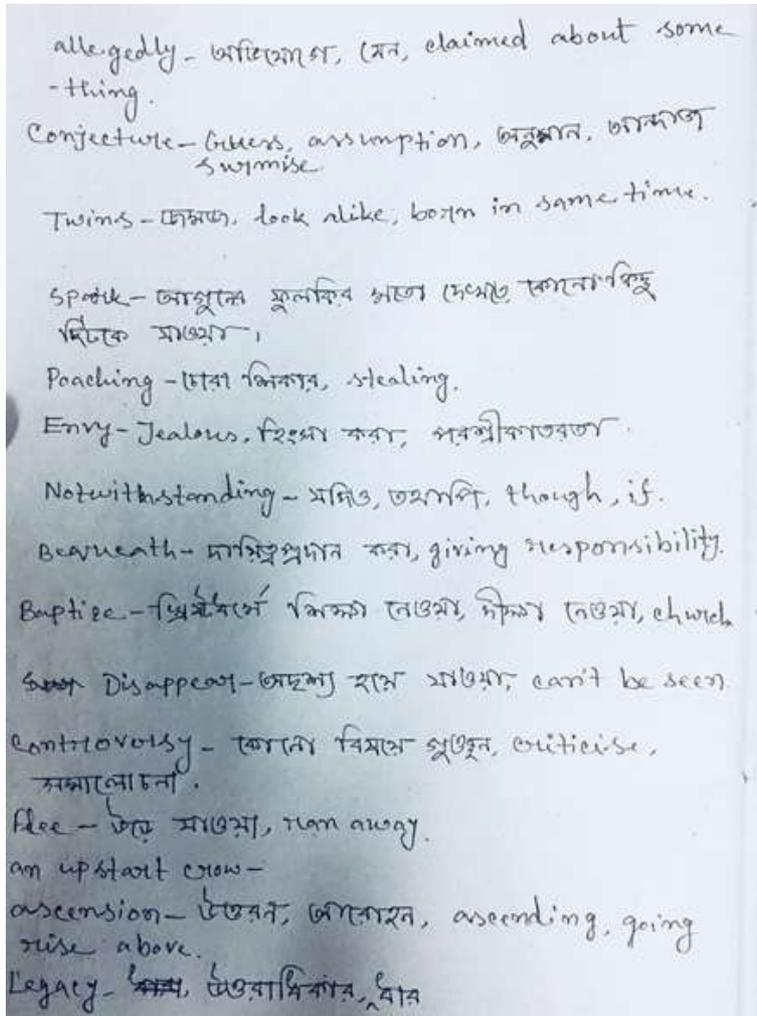


Figure 1: Students' completed vocabulary task_1

Figure 2 shows Sumon's (Group B) work on the same vocabulary task discussed above. Unlike Ratan, Sumon wrote the meanings only in Bangla. For example, he wrote "somorthan kora" for

“patronize” and “jibonchoritkar” for “biographer.” Most other students’ notebooks containing the same vocabulary activity fall under one of these two patterns: students wrote the meanings either bilingually or the English word was written with one or more Bangla equivalents. Only a few students wrote the meanings monolingually in English. These findings echo the ones from the audio-recorded tasks: students adopted a bilingual practiced language policy.

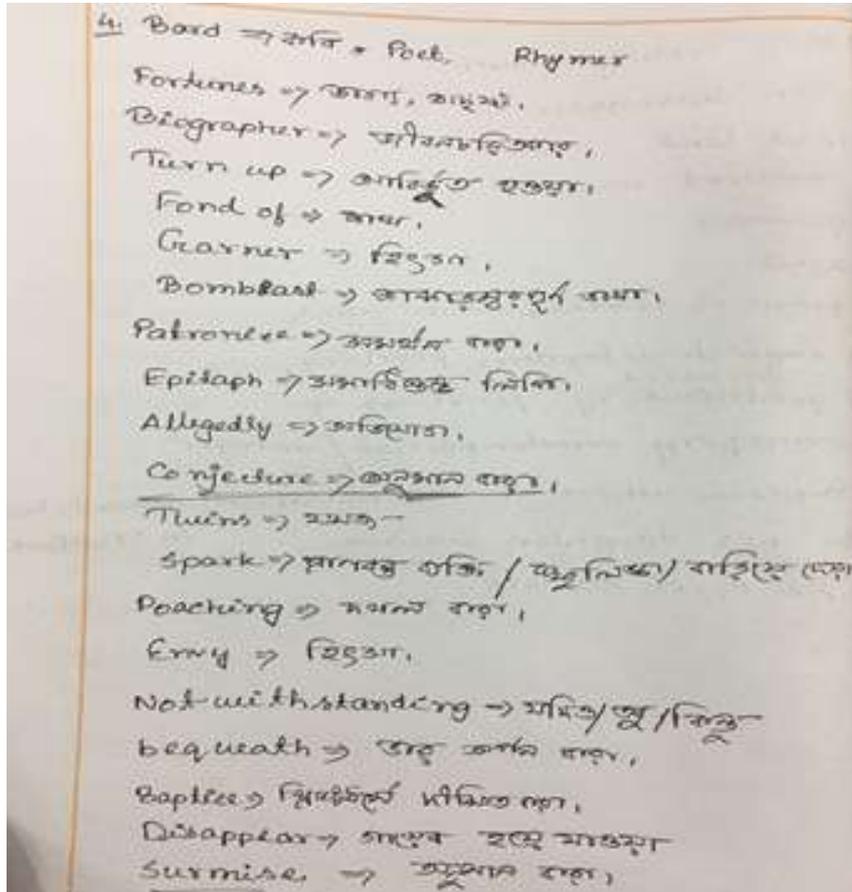


Figure 2: Students’ completed vocabulary task_2

Contrary to the popular belief in English language teaching that the use of L1 hinders L2 learning, students’ bilingual practices in this study did not seem to hinder learning of the target language items. Using both English and Bangla, they achieved the language learning goals – be it learning new words or forms, or comprehension of the reading passage.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have shown that language policy research traditionally focused on declared and perceived language policies. Building on Spolsky’s (2004, p. 14) stance that “real language policy” of a society can be found in “what people actually do,” I explored the de facto language policies of students in two language classes at the University of Dhaka. Spolsky opines that language

practices, “constitute a policy to the extent that they are regular and predictable” (2007, p. 3). In the linguistic ethnographic research, I attempted a close analysis of students’ language choices to find out whether there is a regular and predictable pattern in their language choices. The findings show that students use both Bangla and English in their attempt to learn English. They go back and forth between languages flexibly; in other words, students adopt a translanguaging approach for communication and learning. They fluidly switch between languages and use whichever language they deem useful in the given context. Neither L1, nor L2 is seen as a deviation from the norm. Students orient to a practiced language policy in which L1 has an important role to play in the L2 classroom. For example, students regularly use Bangla to make sense of English words and constructions. They use Bangla as a process to find the appropriate English terms. They also use Bangla to discuss the task and deal with procedural concerns. Based on these findings, one could argue quoting Cook (2001) that while “no one will quarrel with providing models of real language use for the students ... (this is) not necessarily incompatible with L1 use in the classroom” (p. 409). The translanguaging patterns in this study indicate that students make use of both L1 and L2 for communicative purposes and for achieving the L2 learning goals.

Learner voices are often unheard in the language-in-education policy research. Similarly, in the context of Bangladeshi tertiary education, students’ preferences are rarely considered while deciding on curriculum, syllabus, materials, and classroom pedagogy. By exploring learners’ practiced language policies, this study attempts to address this gap in teaching and research. However, this study was small scale; further research is necessary to ascertain conclusively the de facto language policies of students in Bangladeshi L2 classrooms.

Transcription conventions

These transcription conventions are adapted from Jefferson (2004).

- ? A question mark indicates a rising tone which may (or may not) indicate a question.
- ! An exclamation mark indicates an animated tone, not necessarily an exclamation.
- (..) Pause of about 0.5 second
- (.) Micro pause
- (.1) A dot and a number in parentheses indicate a pause in seconds within or between turns
- [] Left and right square brackets indicate overlapping speech.
- = An equal sign indicates a latching between turns, i.e., no break or gap between turns
- A single dash indicates a cut off either because of an interruption or self-repair
- : A colon indicates stretching of the previous sound
- Dashes indicate the end of the original transcription and the start of a free translation into English

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