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## The practice of using corporate English in the official sector of Bangladesh

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**Abstract**--The beginning of English language in Bangladesh had an agitated past as well as an indifferent but overwhelming present. Till now, Bangladesh is largely considered as a monolingual country where English is intensely important for international communication. The British people took an Action project to enhance the use of their language, which is English as a tool for better access to world employment. This was one of the biggest reasons behind establishing English as an International language of the world. In this research the researcher intends to highlight the problems and prospects of corporate English inside Bangladesh. The research sites were located at different corporate houses of Dhaka city. Both quantitative and analytical methods have been incorporated in the study in analyzing the data. Based on these, some proposals have been made to create awareness and to minimize the problems of using English at the corporate level of the employees. Although, there has been a sustained debate in Bangladesh whether English is used as a foreign language (EFL) or second language (ESL), and till now it is found that the function of English in the country is much closer to that of the foreign language in most of the important places of the country. Due to industrialization and important financial connections with the outer world the presence of English has always been there. The all-embracing state of English in Bangladesh now is undeniable. The function of English in various sectors of Bangladesh such as- Educational field, Government sectors, courts, garments, private organizations, mass media and communication etc. reveal the excellent use and effect of English in the lives of people in this country. Hence, a lot of private job sectors are trying to establish an English environment that is feeling the necessity to keep English as a second language inside their workplace.

**Keywords**--Corporate English, workplace, environment, employee, practice, training, communication.

## Introduction

In Bangladesh, corporate or business English is a new concept among most of the working people. According to their concern, it is a part of their MBA course so they do not have any separate idea about such concepts. That is why, still they don't consider the necessity of training their employees as well as applying it inside the official environment both in government and private organization. In the corporate environment it is now an undeniable issue to have a sound knowledge in Business English. In recent times, both oral and written English communication skills are being emphasized because of the growing needs of effective international exchanges in the context of a globalized world (Khan, 2007). In the current competitive job market, communication skill is an integral part for any successful career, both in national and international settings (*ibid*). According to Hasan (2006), presently English is used in different fields by a considerable number of people for various purposes, and most of the correspondence of day-to-day communications are largely dependent on it. Unfortunately, despite being a compulsory subject from primary to higher secondary level of education, people are not comfortable using it (Khan, 2007). The present study aims at identifying various kinds of issues arising in the usage of all types of skills of English to communicate with the employees in the corporate section in Bangladesh with a view to suggesting some possible solutions and means to overcome those (Yamao & Sekiguchi, 2015; Yang et al., 2015).

## Literature review

From the very beginning of the revolution, language has been one of the main streams of communication among people. Since then, the discovery of various types of language started to occur and humans became habituated with it. Among all these languages, English is one of the most valuable languages in the entire world and considered as an international medium of communication. Nevertheless, nowadays English has become the global language of business as well.

## Background history

The history of English in Bangladesh has a historical moment. The people of Bangladesh were very typical and ethnic. They have no idea about foreign countries, their language and culture. Although, they were happy with their simple life. The land of our country was very fertile for cultivation. Here manpower is available at a cheap rate. Thus, The British Colony had known the message and they came to Bangladesh (Hadi et al. 2013). Before the division of India and Pakistan in 1947 they had started to rule us. Hence, the citizens of our country thought they got an educated ruler to control and develop our land but the intention of the British Colony was not fair and as the days went by the picture became clear to all of us. In that time there was a variation of language. Muslims were using separate institutions to learn. Hindus were also using another school to learn (Sergeant et 2017). So there were boundaries to different religions. Muslims read in MADRASA and Hindus read in PATHSHALA. Muslims did not accept it easily. In that case they became delayed. They thought the English is Christian language. By this British offered that who learn English

they will get a great job (Naik, 2018). Hindus respond to it early. In this system the language is established. They started to learn it. According to the promise of the British, they get a job and also improve their career.

As one of the parts of undivided India, it shares the same colonial history of British rule for two hundred years with its neighbor countries- India and Pakistan. Although in 1947, after independence from the British colonial rule, Bangladesh became a part of Pakistan till the Liberation war in 1971. During those two hundred years, English was the language of the rulers only, which gradually became more important than the native language (Tynjälä, 2008; Harun, 2001). An arbitrary attempt of the government of Pakistan to declare Urdu as the state language for East Pakistan in 1952 eventually led to the revolution to separate the two parts and Bangladesh was able to keep Bangla as the native tongue. In 1948 Jinnah declared that “Urdu, and only Urdu” will be the official language for both West and East Pakistan and this led to a continuous unrest in this Bangla speaking area. As a result, political activists and students of Dhaka University as well as other educational Institutions protested on 21 February, 1952. Many students were shot on that day. At last, in 1956, Bangla was declared as the state language of East Pakistan. In 1999, UNESCO declared 21 February as the International Mother Language Day to tribute the language movement of Bangladesh. As Bangladesh is the only country which fought for their mother tongue.

Chowdhury & Kabir (2014) report that, the Constitution of Bangladesh was written in 1972 and it was declared that from then on Bangla will be used as the language of administration and judiciary. They also mention that Bangla was to be used as the medium of instruction in the education sector. Dr. Quadrat -e- Khuda formed the first Education Commission in 1972 and at the same year the study of English at the primary level and tertiary level was withdrawn. Only at secondary level it remained as a subject to be studied. After that, again the necessity of English education was made compulsory in all the education levels of Bangladesh and till now it remains the same (Zuccato et al., 2000; Zambrano-Monserrate et al., 2020). Although, regarding most of the English classes Farooqui (2007), reports “classes were taught in Bangla, with little active use of English language.” Also, there are permanent Basic English courses not only in the department of English but also in all the departments of the institutions of tertiary level but still most of the university lectures were given in Bengali. Nevertheless, it has been said that there were a lack of sufficient vernacular and translated books to support (Islam, 1975). Eventually this situation led to the use of both Bangla and English languages in academic and corporate institutions but created a lack of basic English because Bengali is still under practice among them. Regarding this situation, Sultana & Hoque (1995) said that during this period there was no clear directive of the English language policy which previously had a great impact on the Educational system of Bangladesh.

There was an article in “Sahitya Samayiki” of the newspaper “Prothom Alo” written by Mahbub Alam. Here he writes that Bengalese were motivated to learn English for high status in society and government jobs. He adds that although there were not enough English books and teachers, they learn a kind of English that can help them only to run normal conversations. This early exposure of the

English language to the Bengalese before they could learn it properly made its base weak. Its results were twofold. The Bengalese who learn English with great care spending a long time, were found to overuse English mixing with Bangla.

Overall, today 1.75 billion people speak English at a useful level inside the whole world—that's one in four of us. Multinational companies such as Airbus, Daimler-Chrysler, SAP, Apple, Alcatel-Lucent, and Microsoft in Beijing have mandated English as the corporate language. Furthermore, any company with a global presence or global aspirations would be wise to do the same, says HBS professor Tsedal Neeley, to ensure good communication and collaboration with customers, suppliers, business partners, and other stakeholders. Multilingualism is efficient and can take important interactions in official places and help to get in the way of achieving key goals. The need to coordinate tasks, work with customers and partners worldwide has accelerated the move toward English as the official language of business no matter where companies are situated and what the first language of the country is (Andriitso et al., 2021). Andrew Fenner has labeled it IBL (international business language): 'In a European context, IBL is the sort of English a Norwegian would use when trying to communicate with an Italian in English a Norwegian would use when trying to communicate with an Italian in Belgium. In other words, it is a medium of lingua franca used between those people for whom English is not their mother tongue, but the only common language in which any sort of communication is possible (Hussain et al., 2018; Jo & Shim, 2005). Its grammar and syntax vary, being modeled on those of the language of the person speaking in each case' ('Lingua Anglica: The Emergence of International Business English', *Language International*, 2: 1, 1990).

Similarly, Bangladesh is not an exception on this matter. As per the history, after the independence Bangladesh has also recognized the importance of using English in terms to get its existence in this competitive world; especially in the corporate field. For this reason, Bangladesh has started a compulsory education system in tertiary level no matter in which department the learners are studying but still now they are not considering to implicate Business English as a separate subject. As a result, most of the organizations do not recognize the necessity to train Corporate English or the daily usage of the Corporate English language to their employees. Though, this case study has been shown that some of the private organizations are taking some initiatives but most of them are not now much aware about it (Eyrich et al., 2008; Meltzoff, 1999). As well as, the government offices are also not concerned of such kind of training in English inside their official environment.

## **Objectives**

The main purposes of this paper is:

1. To find out the actual meaning of Corporate English.
2. To discuss the usage of Corporate English in various types of official sectors of Bangladesh.
3. To identify the problems and prospects of corporate English.
4. To find out the benefits of English for business communication in Bangladesh.

5. To identify the major difficulties faced by the employees especially when they do the oral communication or write something in English.
6. To search the medium of English that has become the means of communication in most of the private owned companies in Bangladesh.
7. To identify the language skill of employers & employees.
8. To check the availability of English training courses in the official sector of Bangladesh.
9. To discuss the effect of lack of English proficiency in their career prospects.
10. To discuss the environment of practicing the English language at the workplace.
11. To discuss the historical background of English in Bangladesh.

### **Methodology**

In this paper, the people were already concerned about the purpose of the research and the researchers also obtained their appropriate consent before giving the task. The research was quiet straightforward with the organizations as well as with the participants of it. Therefore, a separate, deliberate process for obtaining consent was not much needed here.

Although, the researchers did not have any direct contact with the participants. Thus, it totally held online. The authors asked the permission to sent the questionnaire to the respected corporate organizations via email and gave a submission date to complete it. Furthermore, all the personal details of the participants and the names of the corporations kept hidden. As the research topic does not carry any risk and fully free from ethical and legal issues. The participation is confined to one small task. It only included a survey or questionnaire which the participants could complete by simply using a pencil or in the computer.

This is a quantitative research based on different types of corporate organizations inside Dhaka. The data has been collected through questionnaires related to corporate English and some of the officials have been interviewed to collect their opinions concerning the problems faced by them. All the activities of this research have been conducted in a formal setting. The researchers went to the offices individually and took the interviews of the employees with the questionnaires. The interviewers also participated enthusiastically and provided feedback which includes both positive and negative effects of it. Next, the collected data has been critically analyzed, especially focusing on the problems of practicing English as a corporate language in Bangladesh specifically after their training.

As this is small-scale research, the researcher has collected the data through questionnaires at the office hours. The questionnaire contains several multi choice questions and one open ended question to find out the opinions of the employees. Most of the interview findings have been calculated and converted to numerical data for transparency. Among all the interviews few ones have been selected for the study to be analyzed and presented in order to shed light on employers' opinions with regard to the use of corporate English in the official sector of Bangladesh.

## Sampling

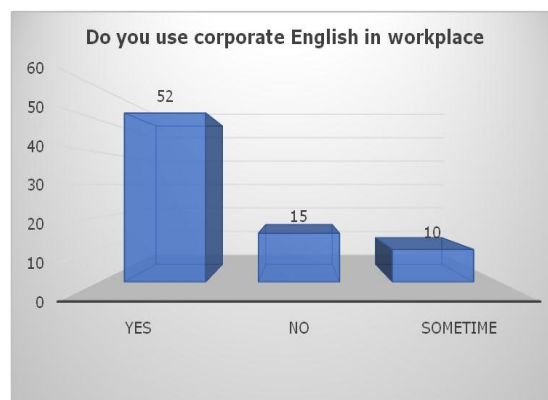
It is quantitative research. Here, the researchers have used both primary and secondary resources to complete their research. However, maximum data has been collected from different types of corporate organizations situated in Dhaka the capital of Bangladesh. Most of the employees of these organizations participated in the survey very prominently and showed their positivity towards it. To collect the final data of the survey, the researcher has chosen the employers from the following sectors:

1. Government sector
2. Private bank sector
3. Multinational company
4. Garments Sector
5. Advertising Agency Sector
6. Law Agency
7. IT sector

## Hypothesis/Analysis

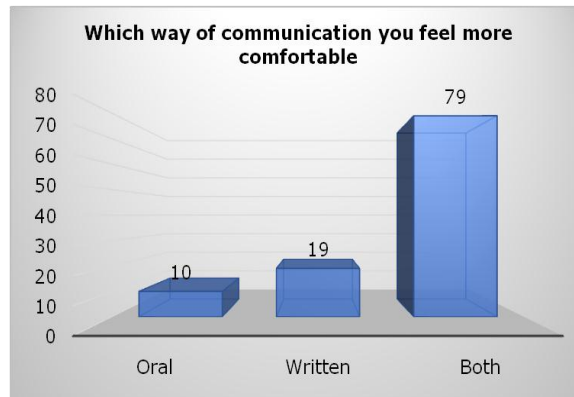
The researchers made their questionnaire keeping in mind to identify what is the actual scenario of using Corporate English at the workplace in Bangladesh. The questions included in the questionnaire are made in such a way that it can easily be found out. To find out clearly, the researchers included ten questions set in the format of multiple-choice questions where the employers had given three to four options to choose and pick a desired answer from those. Among those, the researchers have chosen five top questions and answers to go further in this paper. After the survey, the researchers have found that most of the employees are not comfortable to use Corporate English specifically they have lots of failings in speaking and writing. In the last descriptive question-answer, they have stated their feelings for the necessity of special training programs to develop their speaking and writing ability.

1. Do you use corporate English in your workplace?



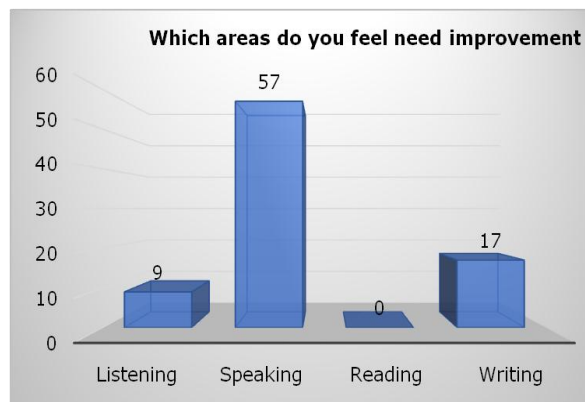
In this question around 52% workers answered **'YES'** which clearly identifies that they are practicing using Corporate English in their office. This number of employees is almost half of all of them. Thus, it is a good sign that people of Bangladesh are improving themselves in using English gradually in their daily official life.

2. Which way of communication do you feel more comfortable?



In this question, the researchers tried to indicate in which medium of English language the employees are more comfortable. Basically, the actual motive of this question is to find out their ability in which skill they are best at. Here, almost 79% of employees answered **'BOTH'** which reflects a positive sign that most of them are skilled and fluent enough in both oral and written skill. However, if we compare these two skills, oral communication is less active than written one.

3. Which areas do you feel need improvement?



In this part, the researchers wanted to find out in which part they need the maximum number of training to improve themselves. In this question, more than half about 57% of laborers tick on the area of **'SPEAKING'**. In explanation they replied that a lot of them have to deal with the foreign customers orally which gets difficult for them for their failings in correct pronunciation and knowledge of

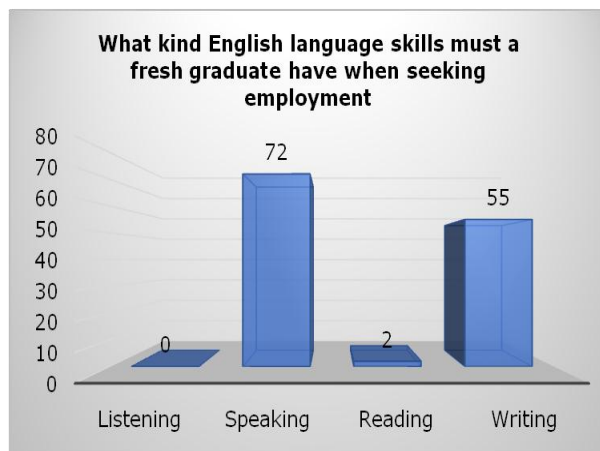
vocabulary. Because of this, sometimes they need to use a google translator or dictionary app to make their language stable to others.

4. Which skill in English do you consider to be important for your organization?



While asking about the most important skill to the employees in consideration to their workplace, around 52% and 56% of them identified **'SPEAKING'** and **'WRITING'** skills. The amount of importance is almost the same which seems more training is needed to develop these two skills especially among the employees which they find difficult to deal with inside their office.

5. What kind of English language skills must a fresh graduate have when seeking employment?



As in the previous question almost 50% of individuals answered that they need to improve themselves in speaking and writing among all the four skills of English Language; it is obvious that the feedback of question number 5 will also be the same. While answering about the improving skills of the freshers they added importance to look for the improvement on specifically these two skills and the percentage is 72% for **'SPEAKING'** and 55% for **'WRITTEN'** respectively.

According to the analysis, it can be described that most of the people can feel the necessity of an English Training Program and prefer using English as a Corporate language inside the office. Although they use Corporate English most of the time but still lack some of the skills. A huge number of employees expressed their need for improvement in speaking and writing. In addition, most of them gave emphasis on speaking ability for the fresh graduates while seeking for employment.

### **Discussion/ Findings**

After the survey stated above the researchers have found the following problems:

1. Lack of using English at the office by the employees  
As most of the employees are from Bangla Medium, their basics in English are not strong. That is why they feel hesitant and low while using English inside their office. Sometimes the office environment is also not friendly enough to cooperate with them for their failings in it. As a result, it creates a sort of negative impact on them and keeps them aside inside the workplace.
2. Create Communication Gaps among the Workers  
Failings in basic English makes a barrier to the employees to communicate effectively with their colleagues. Because of this, English is being practiced less during their work. This creates a communication gap among all of them which leads to a non-English environment.
3. Insufficient Number of Training Programs Arranged by the Organizations  
Both Government and Private Organizations arrange less training sessions or programs for their employees. Hence, the private sectors try to imply more sessions than the government ones. They also try to keep it in their practice among the employees especially while dealing with the foreign buyers. On the flip side, the Government offices arrange less training than the private ones. Although, they held but cannot keep the balance inside the office environment.
4. Lack of Emphasis of the Organizations to the Workers  
In addition, the maximum number of organizations do not put much pressure on the employees to speak in English. According to them, if the employees are only concerned about the dealers coming from other countries it is alright with them. As a result, the staff are not interested in using corporate English inside the office.
5. Inertia of using English of the Employees with the Colleagues  
Though the organizations create training platforms for their employees, still most of them show their unwillingness to use it with their colleagues. Their lack of activity in using Corporate English creates a sort of sluggishness among themselves which makes a boundary and slows down their usage of the target language.
6. Major Difficulties of the Employees  
From the above survey it has been found that most of the employees found major difficulties in speaking like- correct pronunciation or accent and writing like- any official draft, notice, memorandum, email or application. Especially in translation, vocabulary and some basic grammar which causes a boundary using English in front of others.

## **Problems**

If we observe the current scenario from the above survey the following problems easily catch the eye. Recently the private companies are arranging a lot of training and as a result employees are trying to communicate through English. Team Leaders and Instructors of the companies are also concerned about it. Beside this, the environment of an office is also important. Most of the workplaces are setting new rules for speaking English. Although some of them still hesitate to communicate anywhere in English.

To compare and contrast, the Government offices arrange less training sessions than the private sectors. Also, they do not bother to take it as a practice seriously. They prefer Bangla more comfortably than English. Not only in speaking but also in other office activities are being conducted in Bangla. According to them it is not very necessary as they do not have any specific decorum to follow when using English. All these create a lack of knowing proper sound, shyness and less cooperation with others.

Furthermore, the major difficulties of them are proper word selection and its suitable practice. The employees of private organizations have a prejudice that the maximum number of the common people do not have any knowledge about the usage of proper corporate English in the workplace. Even a lot of them are not aware of the term in itself. It can be said that the problem lies mostly in our education system, which doesn't teach us the actual way of communication and real path to acknowledge all the four skills of the English Language. Hence, this field still has options for further research and this paper might be a help for the future researchers later on.

## **Solution**

Through the research observation of the statistics, below suggestions could be added:

- To aware the Bangladeshi individuals about the necessity of Corporate English
- To improve the basic practice of English inside the workplace
- To increase the number of training in the office
- To give more concentration from the ground level of educational life
- To arrange different counseling programs, seminars and workshops by the organizations to reduce employee inertia
- To improve employees' speaking ability in both Government and Private companies
- To improve personal ability in attempts to improve themselves
- To provide proper guidelines about Corporate English for fresher's in the corporate offices

## **Conclusion**

From the research we have found that Corporate English is less used in the organizations inside Bangladesh. However, English is the second language of Bangladesh but still it is acting the part of a foreign language here. Although

English in all spheres has received great attention over the last 50 decades, its use has become essential for anyone who is interested in improving his/her chances of communicating internationally. Unfortunately, the standard of English in Bangladesh is not up to the mark. Even the maximum number of people hesitate while using it. Even till now many English teachers here in Bangladesh can not speak in English fluently in their classes. Moreover, students who are applying for jobs could not get a better opportunity in the job field because of their inefficiency in English. Hence, it is taught from the very beginning of their education system. Though English is used in our classes, most of the time it is not taught and understood in a perfect way. In the present, because of industrial development, English has become a medium of Lingua Franca inside Bangladesh like some other countries in Asia. Nowadays, Corporate English is used in more or less every occupation in Bangladesh. It is true that English language skills have an important role to play in a person's success in the material world. Furthermore, communication skills in English are becoming more and more important with concepts such as open market economy and globalization. Hence, the main motive of uttering an international language is to communicate effectively with other people whose mother tongue is not Bangla especially and to be enlisted within the international Business world. It is what helps us to get work done and progress towards the future. So, it can be said that knowing English is a must for a third world developing country like ours. Thus, the necessity of Corporate English should be clearly explained to the general people of our country who feel interested in learning and using it properly.

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