

Problems of Oral Communication in English among Bangladeshi Students

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Abstract

In the mainstream institutional contexts of Bangladesh, students do not have much scope to practice English outside their classrooms. The lessons they have in the classes are not enough to help them speak English effectively. Although English is a compulsory subject from the primary to the higher secondary level of education, students are not sufficiently exposed to opportunities for speaking English. As a result, many students do not possess adequate oral communication skills in English. In the current competitive job market, communication skill is an imperative for any good career, both in national and international settings. It is generally assumed that shyness, pronunciation difficulty, inadequate knowledge of grammar and inappropriate use of vocabulary items badly affect learners' oral communication. The present study aims at spotting different kinds of problems of spoken English of Bangladeshi students with a view to suggesting some possible ways and means to overcome them.

Introduction

The study of oral proficiency in English is a neglected area in Bangladesh. In the academia some emphasis is put on reading skills of English to cope with the demands of higher education. 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 globalised world. Understanding more about what kind of oral discourse takes place in the classroom and how teachers tackle them appear to be the main impetus behind

such study. The present English teaching and learning situation in the country gives rise to serious concerns that need to be redressed with a better academic and professional outlook, an outlook that is pragmatic and context-sensitive in order to address the problems of oral communication. Furthermore, cross-cultural understanding among users of English all around (native and non-native) the world needs to be developed that it can promote mutual understanding in communication. A knowledge of the syntactic rules of the target language does not necessarily ensure effective communication. Richards and Sukwivat (1985) have outlined several aspects of cross-cultural conversational competence and discussed how these may be influenced by transfer of native language interaction patterns. They have discussed different facets of communication highlighting some comparative issues like conventional usage in conversation, conversational routines and language transfer, differences of social situation, power paradigm, interactional dimensions of conversation, politeness and face, presentation of self, and so on in the context of Thai, Japanese and American cultures. However, the views underscore the area of conversation that needs to be explored in the light of various aspects of oral discourse; in particular its phonological, morphological, semantic and syntactic categories in order to trace how utterances occur and what level of mutual intelligibility is required for smooth communication.

A successful oral communication can be characterized by its spontaneous use of sub-skills in speaking, intelligible pronunciation, right choice of words, phrases, appropriate sentence constructions and finally, contextualised use of meanings. Slight deviation from any of its categories may not always result in communication breakdown or misunderstanding between interlocutors. However, serious deviations of these categories might lead to an unsuccessful end of a conversation. Sometimes, effective use of speaking strategies, timely use of discourse markers, mutually acceptable body language, and less psychological interventions can sustain a conversation, but again, one might need training or effective initiatives to apply these. The current study will delve into the facets of oral expression of non-native speakers of English along with its tentative solutions in the end.

Literature review

Teaching oral communication skills has been a recent phenomenon with the increase of EFL learner population, especially in the big cities of Bangladesh. The introduction of the new English curriculum in the secondary and higher secondary level, the recent mounting rate of students and job seekers going overseas and the constant demand of communication skills in the internal job

markets demand that the field of English teaching and learning be more effective. As the area of English Language Teaching (ELT) in this fashion is a recent phenomenon here, hardly any investigation has been carried out as to what problematic features characterize the spoken discourse of Bangladeshi speakers of English. However, with the influence of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the last few decades, a number of studies were undertaken highlighting the fascinating paradigms of spoken English in different cultural contexts. Brown and Yule (1983), Bygate (1987), Pattison (1987), Ellis & Tomlinson (1987), and Nunan (1989) have all looked at the facets of spoken English with varied observations and perspectives. However, Richards & Sukwivat (1985) have shed light on cross-cultural issues that also appear to be crucial in foreign language speaking. Lightbown and Spada (1999) mention second language learning theories and some psychological factors affecting oral production in foreign language. On the other hand, Harmer (1998) discusses this issue with more practical orientation of teaching spoken English. Horak (1999) investigates the issues of oral assessment and outlines the findings relating to the prevalent factors students come across in foreign language speaking situations. Recently, Chowdhury (2000) has outlined how grammaticality of English language influences English language production and pleads for training of learners, revision of the language syllabus and meaning-focused teaching which might be indirectly beneficial to students' spoken English provided right measures are taken in teaching in the country.

Methodology

The study is based on the data obtained from 29 undergraduate level students' interview excerpts that were transcribed into a computer while the author was conducting their viva tests in a Spoken English course. Written responses to a structured and open-ended questionnaire given by 10 experienced EFL teachers were also used for this purpose.

Students at East West University are required to take a course called 'Oral Communication Improvement Skills' in which their oral proficiency in English is assessed through an interview thrice every semester. The data were taken from selected extracts that had been collected earlier for giving feedback to the students. This feedback was mainly based on phonological (pronunciation), morphological (word), semantic (meaning), and syntactic (sentence) problems. Data from extracts have been sorted out under the categories mentioned above. Some of the sorting might have overlapping features mainly in morphological, semantic and syntactic categories; however, a brief explanation of overlapping

features was made in the analysis of data. Responses to open-ended structured questions (see Appendix A) relevant to the topic have been collected from 10 experienced bilingual EFL teachers in order to get a broader view of the problems that our students face while speaking English. Suggestions were also sought from these experienced teachers as to how students can overcome these situations. Data collected from both students and teachers were used for a qualitative analysis.

Summary of the findings

The respondents (total number-29) were called two at a time for the interview; during the interview their fluency, range of expressions, pronunciation and accuracy levels were assessed. They were asked a variety of questions requiring them to describe, narrate, explain and clarify the given topics. While conducting the interview, the researcher was able to spot some problem areas mainly related to unintelligible pronunciation, inappropriate choice of words and phrases, obscure meanings and faulty sentences; spotting these problem areas provided him useful feedback to rectify their oral communication problems in English as well as gave him potential data for this study. Therefore, only those relevant features (see Table 1) were immediately transcribed and later used for discussion. Besides, teachers' opinions and suggestions (see Table 2) in the light of already identified difficulties regarding student talk were sought in order to get a broader overview of the problems and possible solutions. In addition to many common problematic areas of student talk, teachers pointed out some other features that appear to be pedagogically significant.

Students' responses			
Phonological (pronunciation)	Morphological (word & phrase)	Semantic (meaning)	Syntactic (sentence)
<i>Sons,/sons / people /ph_pholl/ Sugar /sug_r/ bouquet /buket/, bury/ /b_r_/ grew/greul, flew/fleul/ potato /potetol/ nation /ne_nl/ present(v)/prezentl, threw/threul,</i>	<i>I can't cook (make) tea. Abroad (foreign) education. Previous (old) friend, 3 'nong' bus (bus number 3), 'bishal' (Bangla word for huge) building, visa price, (visa fees) form cost (fee), feel boring (bored), moffossil (Bangla</i>	<i>I will try my best (often said in Bangla in a response to an invitation; is just the literal translation from L1 to L2). I come from Shantinagar (means: I live in Shantinagar. I want to talk about one of my girl friend.</i>	<i>What are you doing in your free time? (what do you do in your free time) Are you like playing cricket? (Do you like playing cricket) I am admit in this university. I can't like fish. (I don't like fish) Have you any idea about village life.</i>

Phonological (pronunciation)	Morphological (word & phrase)	Semantic (meaning)	Syntactic (sentence)
<p><i>driven</i> /draɪvnl/, <i>kettle</i> /kɛtl_/, <i>boat</i> /bot/, <i>coat</i> /kot/, <i>decade</i>/d_kedl/, <i>entrepreneur</i>/ lɛntɛ rprɛnɛr/ <i>democracy</i> /d_ mɔkrɛs_/ <i>history</i> /h_stɔr_/ <i>congratulations</i> / k_ngr_t_ule_n /, <i>fashion</i> /fɛs_n/, <i>search</i> ch_rch/</p>	<p><i>word for small town)</i> <i>area, Bush is a</i> <i>dangerous public</i> <i>(man). I cordial</i> <i>(cordially) request</i> <i>you, last (end) of the</i> <i>road, They mashed</i> <i>(smashed) Baghdad.</i> <i>She is very proudy</i> <i>(proud) of her mother.</i> <i>we're very frustration,</i> <i>Safe your time,</i> <i>America is very</i> <i>jealousy (jealous).</i> <i>after some way (some</i> <i>distance), few way</i> <i>(little distance),</i> <i>'achcha', 'hae',</i> <i>'maney', 'tou', (all</i> <i>Bangla filler words)</i> <i>big oil stations</i> <i>(refinery), Army has a</i> <i>honourable (decent)</i> <i>life. Over-crossing is</i> <i>unavailable</i> <i>(prohibited), You can</i> <i>mobile (give a call at</i> <i>my mobile) me.</i> <i>American army doing</i> <i>very hardly (hard</i> <i>job), but can not</i> <i>success (succeed). My</i> <i>house 'nong' (Bangla</i> <i>word for number)</i> <i>besides (beside) ladies</i> <i>stadium, What are the</i> <i>criteria (criteria)? I</i> <i>read the last (latest)</i> <i>magazine, We round</i> <i>(moved around) the</i> <i>whole Chittagong city.</i> <i>I can't choice (choose)</i></p>	<p><i>(I want to talk about</i> <i>one of my female</i> <i>friends). More than in</i> <i>front of, (further</i> <i>ahead), Bush don't</i> <i>know what is</i> <i>Saddam; Saddam is</i> <i>'son of father'</i> <i>(translation of Bangla</i> <i>idiomatic expression</i> <i>which means 'brave</i> <i>son'), he is (Bush</i> <i>polluted (perhaps,</i> <i>destroying) the world.</i> <i>He want Iraqi people</i> <i>relief (relieved) from</i> <i>Saddam. My cousin is</i> <i>army (an army</i> <i>officer). I go for</i> <i>marketing (when I go</i> <i>shopping). They</i> <i>(army) have to strong</i> <i>in English and</i> <i>punctual.</i> <i>In private job</i> <i>somebody can not late</i> <i>for office. Lower</i> <i>service holder (Low</i> <i>paid job). You can</i> <i>anybody say my name,</i> <i>near to my house.</i> <i>Then return back</i> <i>home. He was minded</i> <i>seriously. (He felt bad</i> <i>about it) Before</i> <i>somedays ago. Another</i> <i>brother is reading in</i> <i>this university. Give</i> <i>more additional news.</i> <i>But I am poor marks</i> <i>in English. Al Jajira</i> <i>not my dish. I am</i></p>	<p><i>Went for shopping.</i> <i>Batsman are taking</i> <i>runs. Many people,</i> <i>childs and women</i> <i>killed. Everybody</i> <i>read Bangla medium</i> <i>school. Bush want all</i> <i>country in his hand,</i> <i>isn't it? How I</i> <i>approach your home?</i> <i>My sister's marriage</i> <i>ceremony date fixed.</i> <i>What should I told</i> <i>the taxicab? Would</i> <i>you free next day?</i> <i>Where, I start from</i> <i>where? If the ball go</i> <i>in the bar, they have</i> <i>one goal. There have</i> <i>very facility in the</i> <i>army. Yes, I am</i> <i>meaning that. My</i> <i>older sister read in</i> <i>Dhaka University. I</i> <i>do not gone to other</i> <i>universities, you can</i> <i>preparation, Then you</i> <i>got a rickshaw,</i> <i>Another brother</i> <i>coaching for cadet.</i> <i>Bush said war held</i> <i>short time. When a</i> <i>terrorist saw a civil,</i> <i>they hijack. Sometime</i> <i>army can tight them.</i> <i>How many days you</i> <i>want my camera?</i> <i>After two hours later.</i> <i>I broken my leg. I</i> <i>have passed my HSC</i> <i>in 2002. I am come</i> <i>from Comilla. I too</i></p>

Phonological (pronunciation)	Morphological (word & phrase)	Semantic (meaning)	Syntactic (sentence)
	<p><i>my subject. Many past (former) students credit transferred (transferred credits) to other foreign universities. I and my friend (my friend and I) gossiped (chatted). I may die (drown) in the river, what is the fare (cost) of the journey. No surity (security) of permanent job. My mother learnt (taught) me that. Our country gained independency (independence) fighting with Pakistan. Put tea plant (leaf) in the kettle. Bus will left (drop) you in Kamlapur. They are responsibility (responsible). Private job is costly (lucrative).</i></p>	<p><i>arranging my sister's wedding. More or less good. (it's ok) I am not doing anything. (a response from a student who did not grasp the meaning of 'how are you doing?'). I worked until 3 O'clock at night (in the morning)</i></p>	<p><i>much afraid. I want to education MBA outside university. Corruption is create by government. I am also agree with you. I don't chance in NSU (I didn't get chance at NSU) Some time private job cancelled,</i></p>

Discussion of students' interview excerpts

Data from the interview excerpts in the viva test of students were the main source of discussion here. The data that seemed to be revealing some interpretive message in relation with four linguistic categories mentioned before were considered more important and thus transcribed. Therefore, data presented here cover four categories (For detailed data, please see Table 1) along with their relevant words, phrases, meanings and sentences. Under phonological category phonetic transcriptions are given. The following data are of some selected extracts from the interview in which students talked about the following topics: introducing each other, describing family & friends, current affairs, inviting a friend on an occasion, describing a person, comparing, giving direction and

instruction, requesting, talking about future plan of career etc. Non-native pronunciations, appropriate words, meanings and sentences are given in the bracket (See Table 1). For the convenience of analysis in the following discussion phonology, morphology, semantics and syntax will be narrowly termed as pronunciations, words, meanings and sentences respectively.

Pronunciation

Variety of phonological differences in L1 often influences learners' L2 pronunciation patterns. However, if the learner's L2 pronunciation is comprehensible to the interlocutors of his/her own culture and also in cross-cultural settings; conversation can continue. If the conversation is hampered because of unintelligible pronunciation, then it is likely to cause communication problems. It is not a realistic goal to target native speaker-like accent, stress and intonation for ESL/EFL learners. On the other hand, many learners may not get enough opportunities to interact with the natives, in most cases they interact only with speakers of the same culture. Sometimes they may even have to interact with speakers other than ones with an English speaking background. Therefore, understanding cross-cultural issues and gaining more experience of interaction may give them better confidence in speaking. Brown and Yule (1983, p. 53) make an important point in this connection.

In this stressful task the student needs all the support he can get from the teacher, not criticism of relatively extraneous features like pronunciation. ... It is very hard for teachers, especially those particularly interested in pronunciation, to hear a student consistently making a pronunciation error. If this occurs, the teacher should note the error along with other segmental and suprasegmental problems and deal with it separately, after the task the student is concerned with is completed.

If learners have to improve their fluency, frequent interruption for pronunciation or grammar error by the teacher may not lead to increased fluency or accuracy. Unstressed pronunciation (*potato* /pəteto/), no rise and fall while pronouncing (*congratulations* /kəŋgrætʃuleɪns/), no use of diphthong (*make* /mek/, *nation* /neɪn/, *boat* /bot/), and L1 influence on L2 pronunciation are the main problems of English pronunciation. Most learners tend to produce pronunciation following English spelling patterns. For example: *son* /son /, *bury* /bʌr/, *grew* /greu/, *bouquet* /buket/, *kettle* /ketl/, *history* /hɪstor/ etc. Moreover, some students having regional dialect background especially, those from Sylhet, Chittagong, Noakhali, and Rajshahi-ChapaiNawabganj region, have different

kinds of pronunciation difficulties. Some examples are *people* /pʰiphoh/, *police* /phulij/, *fashion*, /fesʌn/, *search* /chʌrch/ (For more data please see Table 1). Stress and intonation are hardly found in their pronunciation perhaps because students' L1 Bangla is basically an unstressed language. As a result, utterances occur unstressed and are delivered without any rise or fall regardless of the mood the particular expression is being conveyed in. The findings of such study imply a need for formal phonological instruction in the class that might improve overall pronunciation difficulties of students.

Words

Students sometimes use noun words for verbs (*choice* for choose, *loss* for lose, *success* for succeed), adjectives for verbs (*you have to careful/ it will safe your time/ they can't late for office/ army can tight them*), because they do not know the rules for conversion of parts of speech. Sometimes they construct unusual collocations (*visa cost, past student*), perhaps because they tend to depend excessively on the literal translation without knowing that such phrases are unusual. In case of prepositional use they tend to take the literal meaning of words and are reluctant to consider exceptional cases (for example: *I went for shopping. He wants to go to home*), No use of preposition (*we listen music, our class starts 10.30*) in their expressions is very common. Double use of synonymous words (*after 2 hours later, before few days ago, repeat again please, more additional news*) sometimes occur in their expressions. Wrong choice of words (*big oil stations* for refinery, *tea plant* for tea leaf, *marketing* for shopping), faulty use of adjectives (*prowdy, crowdy, independency, jealousy*) are also common due to overuse of other adjectives with y ending and also lack of practice and awareness. Furthermore, lack of experience in using suffixes and prefixes, overuse of synonyms or antonyms, over dependence on translation from L1 to L2, absence of appropriate strategy in communication appear to be the main reasons for these kinds of expressions. They are likely to misconstrue meanings and in extreme cases communication may break down. Why do these utterances occur? Possibly because students either do not know appropriate words or are not used to uttering those words in real life situations.

Meanings

Misleading meanings are often causes for communication breakdown that may be for over dependence on translation, lack of cross-cultural understanding, polysemous words, homophones, and traditional ways of language expressions. Students often sound bookish in their utterances such as, *my sister's marriage ceremony will be held 3rd April*. Formal and informal boundaries, politeness issues,

notional differences in language use, (e.g. *1 O' clock at night* instead 1 O'clock in the morning), idiomatic expressions, use of slang words and euphemistic expressions are perhaps the other reasons for misleading listeners in some conversational situations.

Sentences

Lack of knowledge and practice of tenses often lead to faulty construction of sentences (e.g. *I have passed my HSC in 2001*). Students often mix up present perfect and past simple, present continuous and present perfect continuous tense in their expressions. Passive voice (*corruption is create by the government, or I am admit in this university*), word order, questions & tag questions (*isn't it?* - which is a literal translation of L1 tag question), positive and negative agreement, second and third conditional sentences, reported speech, dependence on L1 syntactic patterns, absence of auxiliary verbs (*for example: I broken my leg, another brother coaching for cadet college*) are common mistakes in their sentence construction. Direct translations, lack of strategy application in conversation are also reasons for inappropriate constructions of sentence.

Some overlapping features have been traced in morphological, semantic and syntactic areas due to several problems evident in those particular expressions. For example: in *'Al Jajira not my dish'*- the possible intended meaning is, I can't watch *Al Jajira* channel on my TV. This particular expression has all three categories of mistakes.

Psychological factors

Learners' shyness, nervousness, inhibition and narcissism result in many external syndromes. These are mainly clearing throat, scratching head, unnatural facial expression, repetition, fumbling, pauses, false start, avoiding eye contact, losing normal color of skin, shaking hands and legs, sweating, feeling thirsty, showing unusual gestures, finishing a description abruptly or briefly, leaving the sentence incomplete or half way through. A recent study dealing with adult Bangladeshi students reveals (Wahid 2002, p. 13) that language shock, culture shock, motivation and ego-permeability often hamper students' speech production in foreign language communication. As she sums up "... students have shyness and lack of confidence in their oral communication of English. They take less [sic] initiative and hardly believe in taking any risk of speaking". When students try to speak English, they often fear that their expressions might sound funny and wrong and that as a result, peers will laugh at them. They are sometimes haunted by doubts as to whether their words actually reflect their ideas. As the adult

learners are conscious about their weaknesses, they fear public impression and criticism. They often think that speaking on impromptu topics is more risky and tend to consider this a situation when they may lose face. Teachers can inevitably intervene in removing such erroneous notions about speaking. Moreover, frequent practice in speaking in English on familiar topics, friendly and stimulating classroom environment, informal conversation with friends, who have better proficiency in English, might reduce students' psychological burdens in speaking.

Fluency and accuracy in oral speech are crucial. It is not unusual to meet students with reasonable fluency but their accuracy level is unfortunately very low. Should we prioritize fluency at the cost of accuracy or emphasize accuracy at the cost of fluency? Hadley's (1993, p. 283) comments seem to be significant in this regard.

Attention to accuracy does not imply a classroom environment where grammar rules reign supreme and correction is rigidly imposed. Rather, the proficiency-oriented classroom is one in which students have ample opportunities to use language creatively and to obtain appropriate feedback with which they can progressively build and refine their interlanguage to approximate the target language norm. This feedback is provided in an atmosphere characterized by acceptance or error as a necessary condition for linguistic growth, an atmosphere in which the teacher is seen as a valuable resource in language learning process.

Other factors

Body language difference (such as, showing the thumb, shrugging, nodding head and waving hands), lack of communication strategy knowledge, shortage of useful vocabulary, English filler words, inadequate knowledge of phonology and communicative grammar, lack of perception and politeness issue are commonly regarded as the main problems of English conversation. Discourse markers have not been used in the excerpts although they are indispensable components of oral discourse. Some understanding and training of oral discourse features are important as students appear to be unaware of many of them such as back channeling, status, face, turn taking, interruption, filler words, non-linguistic words, hesitation devices and pauses.

Some more important data

Students sometimes use native words to complement their intended meaning (*for*

example *Markin* military attacked Iraq or phrase like *bishal* building and session *jot*. Here words 'markin', 'bishal' and 'jot' are from their L1 and meant to qualify Americans, huge and jam respectively. They also use Bangla filler words like 'maney' (means), 'tou' (filler word), 'achha' (a word for positive feedback), 'hae' (yes in informal sense) etc in their speaking, as they are not much aware of equivalent English filler words. Redundant use of words is another feature of students's spoken English. For example, *more additional news, after two hours later, before some days ago*. These utterances occur possibly because of their carelessness about what and how they speak.

Table 2

Teachers' responses

Phonological (pronunciation)	Morphological (word & phrase)	Semantic (meaning)	Syntactic (sentence)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Students often consider many Bengali letters are equal to English letters -tend to pronounce words depending on English spelling patterns - some students pronounce 's' as 't' for example; search is /ch arch/ -do not follow stress patterns of English pronunciation. -Regional accents of the Bengali pronunciation get in the way of pronouncing words. -They especially have troubles with letter 'b' & 'v' and 'g', & 'z'. Sometimes 'g' becomes 'z' and 'b' becomes 'v' or vice versa. -Usually there is no rise and fall in 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -use unusual collocation like little building - use noun for verb like 'I can't admission in public university, mum choice for me' - use hardly, lately for adverbs of hard and late. Example: I worked hardly. - Can not convert words from one part of speech to another. - Use very limited words, do not know appropriate synonyms. For example: On Eid ul Aha Day Muslims kill cows. - Do not know difference between parts of speech especially between nouns and verbs - Do not know how to use prefixes and suffixes with words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Use synonyms for equal substitution -tend to get the literal meaning like girlfriend for female friend -get the idiomatic meaning literally like 'you have to put up with this change of class time. -Says one thing to mean the other. For example 'My father understood me this point.' Instead 'Father made me understand this point.' -Sometimes they are misinformed of the appropriate meaning of words. For example, slang means abusive words. - use bookish English instead of colloquial expression. For example: Have you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -do not follow sub-verb agreement -do not add 's' or 'es' in case of 3rd person singular present simple tense -can not use words orderly in a question sentence for example; Your class is what time? - Can not construct second conditional sentence like 'If I am the Prime Minister of the country, I will kill all corrupt politicians.' - In conversational situation hearers listen silently. They are not used to giving oral feedback to the speaker. - While framing sentence, use wrong tense and wrong preposition. - Often use Bangla

Phonological (pronunciation)	Morphological (word & phrase)	Semantic (meaning)	Syntactic (sentence)
<p><i>expressions.</i> -Students' pronunciation is influenced by regional dialect especially students from Sylhet, Chittagong, Noakhali, Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj have got this difficulty. - Usually do not pronounce words with diphthongs. For example in pronouncing make, boat, they use single vowel sound. - Do not use long vowel sounds. For example, bird, father, food etc. - L1 habit constantly interferes while speaking in English</p>	<p>- Sometimes can not distinguish meaning between sometime & sometimes, and beside & besides. - Use substitution of nouns for verbs or vice versa or use adjectives for adverbs. - Do not always use 's' in case of plural and sometimes use 's' in exceptional/unnessary cases. For example, womans, childs, and informations and equipments.</p>	<p><i>finished your work?</i> Instead, Are your finished? - Do not get the nuances of meaning. For example dislike and hate or like or love. - Can not distinguish meaning between listen/hear, watch/see, speak/talk etc. - Sometimes construct unusual collocation like 'girl police' for policewoman, 'funny eating' and 'laughing story' for delicious meal and interesting story. - Often use the same adjective.</p>	<p><i>syntax and sometimes do not use auxiliary verbs.</i> - While making sentence they have troubles of using prepositions, adverbs - Tend to translate literally from L1 to L2. - Sub-verb agreement, tenses, prepositions always create a big problem in speaking English.</p>

Discussion of teachers' response

Pronunciations: Most teachers agree that many students are often not familiar with stress patterns, intonation. Sometimes they confuse bilabial sounds in their L1 with the labio-dental in L2 (for details, see Table 2). They take F and V equivalent to *Pha* and *Bha* letter in their L1 Bangla. There are other differences of sounds between L1 and L2; for example, long and short vowels in English and some consonants (g, j and z) are problematic. They often tend to pronounce English words based on spelling and syllables (for example, Wednesday) although these do not always correspond with the pronunciation. Students have problems with consonant and vowel sounds as well. On the other hand, students often believe that their pronunciation has to be like a native speaker, preferably up to American standards.

Now a day, however, with the rapid increase of cross-cultural communication in English, both speakers (native and non-native) are expected to be equally

respectful and accommodating toward each other's cultural identities. As regards pronunciation, the most reasonable attitude is that it should be mutually acceptable or intelligible to the interlocutors. In this regard, some varieties of world Englishes, regardless of their native and non-native origins, should be familiarised among students in the class through audio support as non-native varieties of English are coming into their own.

Words

Students have difficulties in converting different parts of speech. They often fail to distinguish between a verb and a noun or a noun and an adjective, for example, 'choice' and 'choose' and 'responsibility' and 'responsible'. Furthermore, they often face difficulties in using the right word or phrase and consequently keep speaking on using limited vocabulary to convey a topic somehow. Alternatively, they sometimes, take shelter in circumlocution, being unable to use the exact word or phrase.

Meanings

Students often cannot contextualize words and phrases. Unfamiliarity with commonly used phrases and idioms, overuse of words from formal and informal use, and slang and taboo words, lack of extensive reading habits and tendency to translate it directly often mislead them. Overdependence on literal translation from L1 to L2 without considering cultural and social differences is also one of reasons why meaning often does not get across.

Sentences

Students face difficulties in arranging words in a sentence. Framing complex and question sentence appear to be the basic problem as far as their oral communication is concerned. Sometimes paying more attention to sentence construction hampers fluency. In addition, they make wrong collocations and consequently often sound inadvertently funny. Dissimilar linguistic features linguistic (specifically in case of auxiliary verbs, sub-verb agreement, pronoun, preposition, tenses, word order in L1 sentences) between L1 and L2 might also interfere in way of L2 sentence construction.

Apart from the above responses, teachers also gave some thoughtful suggestions regarding how students, teachers and institutional systems can combindly bring some changes in order to promote satisfactory development in oral communication in English (for details, see in Appendix B).

Implications and conclusion

It is undeniably true that language teachers have to be well aware of learners' problems and difficulties in language use. In addition, in order to increase their perception and skills, teachers have to undertake training so that they can provide better opportunities for effective learning. ELT training materials should include components relevant to the problems emerging from classroom teaching situations. Cross-cultural understanding has often been a neglected area in the teaching-learning contexts and consequently students, while using English, do not perceive cultural differences that exist in foreign language culture properly. On the other hand, teaching spoken English does not appear to be as easy as it is generally thought to be. Brown and Yule (1983, p. 25) elaborate,

Spoken language production, learning to talk in the foreign language is often considered to be one of the most difficult aspects of language learning for the teacher to help the students with. The practical problems are obvious. In written production, each writer can get on by himself, without disturbing the rest of the class, at his own speed. In comprehension classes, whether written or spoken, the whole class can receive the same stimulus at the same time and each student can do whatever task is required of him by himself. In the production of speech, however, each speaker needs to speak. He needs to speak individually and ideally he needs someone to listen to him speaking and to respond to him.

Teaching pronunciation is not often given due importance perhaps because non-native teachers of English are not able to teach the exact pronunciation of vowel and consonant sounds. However, Wong (1993, p.119) responds to this allegation thus "... if the goal of teaching learners is to enable them to communicate in English, we can see that communicative effectiveness depends not only on the pronunciation of these vowel and consonant sounds but on being intelligible speakers". She further declares, "Non-native speakers of English typically have an advantage over native speakers in that they can learn to perceive and manipulate rhythm and intonation more easily than native speakers, for whom these are unconscious features (ibid)".

Furthermore, enhancing perception and awareness regarding different oral discourse features, body language and the use of speaking strategy are considered to be useful tools in English oral communication. Speaking strategies can be an effective tool in overcoming communication difficulties. Recently, a study dealing with Bangladeshi immigrants living in New Zealand shows positive feedback about strategy training. Khan (1998, p. 31) has stressed its academic importance thus:

In situations where language curriculum and course contents are to be designed for the non-native speaking background learners, strategies of communication can be taught for effective use in their real life situation. This will improve learners' confidence in selecting and implementing appropriate strategies in communication.

The problems spotted under the categories seem to be the most common phenomena in oral communication of English among our students. Outside these investigations there might be some other features that may hamper communication. However, as the interlocutors belong to the same culture and L1 background, many of their expressions, despite being problematic, have got some positive acceptance and thus communication may not suffer total breakdown or abrupt postponement. Current study might enhance awareness among English teachers, researchers, course designers, language policy makers and non-native speakers of English with a view to providing effective support in the language classroom. Future study in the same area with a greater volume of data might offer more interesting and insightful observations for all who think oral communication in English matters.

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Appendix A

Dear Colleagues:

I am carrying out a small-scale research entitled 'Problems of Oral Communication in English among Bangladeshi Students' which will be presented in an international conference soon. May I request you to write few sentences in the given space about the following questions? Data obtained from you will be kept confidential and used only for this research purpose. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

01. What, in your experience, are the common problems our students face while speaking in English? Could you please briefly write under the following categories?

Pronunciation:

Word & phrase:

Meaning:

Sentence:

02. What would you suggest to overcome these problems?

Appendix B

Teachers' suggestions

Suggestions from experienced teachers may appear to be of some significance. Here, teachers have made the following suggestions in response to question 2 (See Appendix A) to overcome the problems our students face while speaking English.

- Students should be taught different stress patterns and intonation of English speech.
- They have to be familiar with different syntactic forms of English sentences.
- They should be encouraged to speak more in variety of situations uninterruptedly.
- At least six months intensive English language training at the beginning of undergraduate program will be more effective.
- Frequent practice in spoken English with good friends will be very useful
- Extensive reading and listening might improve speaking quickly.
- Reading whatever is at hand, watching BBC & CNN and other English TV channels and using a good monolingual dictionary and consultation with someone who knows better English, may be useful.
- Teaching small group (25-30 students) based on needs based syllabus, will be effective for learning.
- There should be a special emphasis on increasing useful vocabulary.
- Occasional discussion on notional difference between Bangla and English culture and language is important for raising cross-cultural understanding
- Graded English courses with integrated skill development should be offered rather than separate spoken English course.
- More listening practice with different accents can improve students' exposure to varieties of English

- Students should be frequently engaged in debate, set & extempore speech making, presenting seminar, story-telling situations so that they can individually expose themselves to speaking as well as reduce their shyness and nervousness.
- Occasionally, they should be made aware of common mistakes, unusual collocation, translated version of Bangla phrases & idioms and inappropriate questions.
- *As adda* in Bangla culture is very typical can be applied to chatting in English under the banner of 'Adda in English' or 'English Conversation Club' where students can informally speak on any agenda and gain their fluency.