

BANGLISH ON FM RADIO: A CRITICAL STUDY OF A BI-LINGUAL TREND VIS-À-VIS THE COMPLEX OPERATION OF CULTURE INDUSTRY

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Abstract

With the boom in electronic media worldwide, there have been lots of cultural ramifications taking place lately. Where media provides a platform for the Business corporations to promote their products, it is also a space for cultural dissemination. Bangladeshi media, FM Radio to be specific, formulates most of their programs targeting on city-dwelling young generations. Most of the channels broadcast their program in Bangla language as Bangla is the native and official language. But the radio jockeys (RJ) frequently use English words in their speeches in a specific way. It is found that the English words introduce a "change of scale or pace or shape or pattern into human association, affairs, and action" among the Bangladeshis. The Bangla language is being 'Englishized' day by day through the speeches of radio jockeys. This paper critically analyses the cultural products, FM Radio programs and their contents and tries to bridge it with the complex operation of political economy. This research contends that bi-lingual practice in radio programs is the output of the conglomerate phenomena where the media is in exchange with their own interests with the business corporations. This paper is a discourse analysis drawn heavily from Marshal McLuhan's "The media is the message" and Adorno and Horkheimer's essay "Culture Industry: Enlightenment as mass deception".

Key words: Banglish, Media and Message, Culture Industry, Political Economy

Introduction

The article is concerned about the transformation of Bangla language which collides with English language and creates a new unofficial language named 'Banglish'. In Bangladesh, modern standard Bengali or Bangla is the official language; hence English functioned as de facto co-official language, especially in media, government, education etc. It is considered that language has a complex connection to history and power. From the historical and political backdrops, we see the process of Bangla becoming the main

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language of this geographical arena and its critical negotiation with power and its subsequent loss of 'originality'. This dynamics is hugely 'designed' by hegemonies power politics. The media produces discourses (cultural products) and disseminates it to a vast number of audiences. These discourses create knowledge and this way, media propagates its power through knowledge. This paper puts its focus on FM radio and one of the most 'celebrated' trends of this media, Banglish. Through selecting contents from a diverse source, this paper analyzes them and critically studies it with the light of some critical essays. At last, the article contends that the 'modern' linguistic trend is the consumerist product and how FM Radio as a media conveys its 'message' and ultimately serves the purpose of culture industry.

Bangla is an Eastern Indo-Aryan language which belongs to the Indo-European language family. Bangla is the state language of Bangladesh. The evolution of Bangla is divided into three historical phases: Old Bangla (900/1000-1350), Medieval Bangla (1350-1800) and Modern Bangla (1800). The most primitive illustration of old Bangla is to be found in the poems of the Charyapada. Shrikrnakirtan or Shrikrnasandarbhā of Baru Chandidas is an example of the early form of medieval Bangla. An incursion of Perso-Arabic words into the language took place at this point of evolution. Bangla also borrowed from Sanskrit, English and other languages in the modern Bangla phase (Banglapedia, 2017). The Bangla language identity crisis starts with political occurrence and as a result Bengali culture has been influenced by foreign expedition. Meanwhile, during British colonization, English became the authorized language. The fact is that culture is controlled by the power which has an impact on Bangla language. Language, being a quintessential part of culture, is hegemonies. Sometimes to fight against the cultural identity crisis, language works as a weapon. We observe the upheaval in 1952 and again we realize how politics, culture and language are inter-connected. As discourse is produced mainly by the ruling power and discourses produce knowledge. This way, knowledge colonizes the language and as a result, knowledge is power. Today, to control the power, media is the medium to control the culture as well as language. Media works as a watchdog to decide which sections of discourses are to get accessed, which one is not to. Therefore, media is a huge space for cultural disseminations to take place among the general public.

In post-independent Bangladesh, still English has a strong influence on Bangla language. Diversified class consciousness also is at work in this regard. Upper class or ruling power negotiates with the foreign powers for multi-purpose functions of which economic purpose is the prime. As we know, media is hugely controlled by the powerful 'giants', they use the media as a platform to disseminate the ideology they opt for. Therefore, we see the dissemination of a particular propaganda spreading in human mind in the guise of different media formats. There comes the emergence of a Bangla of an 'exotic' kind that we refer from the very beginning as Banglish. Media creates the propaganda which seems

to be a new style of hegemony. Media ‘engineer’ public opinion or their philosophy to control their mind-set. Banglish means the combined language of Bangla and English and this particular trend is the best example of media’s domination.

Materials and Methods

The radio jockeys of Bangladeshi radio channels are the main participants of the study. The primary data collected directly from the speeches of RJ language were taken into account in this research. The data were balanced between male and female radio jockeys. Data were collected from twelve radio channels. The researchers observed the RJ languages of twelve different programs. A thirty minute program was selected from each of the radio channels.

The English words that are used in the speeches of the radio jockeys are counted and compared with that of the Bangla words on the basis of percentage. The data are presented in pie chart. The collected data have been analyzed and critically evaluated through other theoretical works. So, this research is a discourse analysis that studies the media products and delves inside the very system of industry.

Results and Discussion

The following statements are taken from the mainstream FM media channels that reach to a vast number of audiences. These ‘Banglish’ contents reflect the mixed lingual expression in Radio Jockeys’ speeches. We can notice how they infuse English words in Bangla language and then repeat it. Varied statements of RJ languages of different channels dated on March 2016 are provided below (Examples from each channel only):

Radio Jockeys’ statement analysis

Welcome the listener, apanara shunchen radio (Welcome listeners, you are listening radio). ABC Radio, 89.2 FM, Time 1:04 AM.

Apnader send kora request theke song choice kore playlist a deyaholo (The songs of the play list are selected as per your request). Asian Radio, 90.8 FM, Time 6:09 PM.

Apnara message kore shunte cheyechen akta song (You messaged me saying you would love to enjoy songs). BBC Bangla, FM 100.0, Time 7:08 AM.

Shuntethakun, my show (keep listening my show). Colours Radio, 101.6 FM, Time 3:21 PM.

Aktu wait korun akta call pick korei fire ashche with you (Wait for a while, I will pick a phone and come back). Once again apnader thanks to stay with me (Once again, I would like to thank you for your staying with me). Peoples Radio, 91.6 FM, Time 8:10 AM.

Ok, shuru krche ajker show (Ok, I would like to start my today’s show). Radio Aamar, 88.4 FM, Time 12:45 PM.

Stay tune with me, shunte thakun sobosomoy (Stay tuned with me, keep listening all the time). Radio Bhumi, 92.8 FM, Time 11:40 AM.

Hello bondhura, Thursday night thakun amar sathe with my show (Hello friends, stay tuned with my Thursday night show). Radio Foorti, 88.0 FM, Time 12:56 PM.

Dear listeners, now apnader ekhon ekti song shunabo (Dear listeners, now let us enjoy a song). Radio Shadhin, 92.4 FM, Time 1:10 AM.

Bhalo thakben, bhalo rakhben, keep smiling (Be well, keep someone well, keep smiling). Radio Spice, 96.4 FM, Time 12:10 PM.

Do or die, life e hotasha bole kisunei (Do or die, there is nothing despair in life). Radio Today, 89.6 FM, Time 2:10 PM.

Amar program kemon laglo bondhura? (Dear friends, how is my program? Let me know, please). Radio Dhoni, 91.2 FM, Time 11:10 AM.

The phenomena of use of English language by twelve most popular FM Radio channels is shown in Fig. 1. As mentioned earlier, these media use English besides the official language, Bangla. This chart gives a comparative study of consumption of English language in popular media.

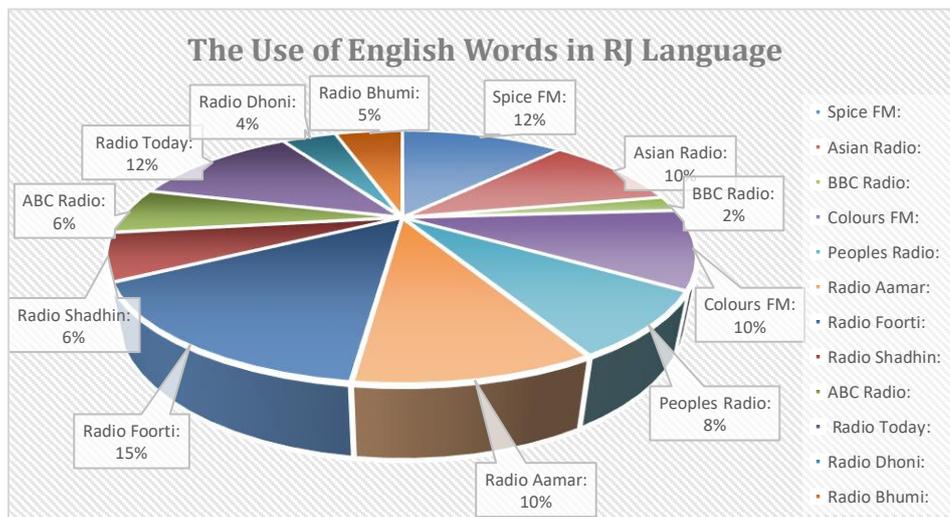


Fig. 1. The use of English words in RJ language in Bangladesh FM radio channels

The RJ of Spice FM speaks 12% of his words in English. About 10% of the words of Asian Radio RJ are in English. The radio jockeys of BBC Radio, Colors FM, Peoples Radio, Radio Aamar, Radio Foorti, Radio Shadhin, ABC Radio, Radio Today, Radio Dhoni, Radio Bhumi use 2, 10, 8, 10, 15, 6, 6, 12, 4, and 5% English words in their speeches, respectively (Fig. 1).

McLuhan (???), the pioneering figure in electronic media, contends that the medium is the message. By it, he refers to merely a method to understand a new technological

environment by studying media. He proposes media itself is the focus of the study because it plays not only on the content rather media itself is the message. With this statement he presented the new form of media and its impact on culture. McLuhan states the media as 'the scale and form of human association and action'. Medium as the juicy piece of meat refers how the societal values, norms and ways are changed with the technology and how technology works through knowledge. Referring to different kind of structures, he writes:

For the "message" of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs. The railway did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure. This happened whether the railway functioned in a tropical or a northern environment, and is quite independent of the freight or content of the railway medium. The airplane, on the other hand, by accelerating the rate of transportation, tends to dissolve the railway form of city, politics, and association, quite independently of what the airplane is used for.

Today, the world has become a global village. Global village is a term used by Marshall McLuhan in his work, *Understanding media: The Extension of Man* published in 1964. Here he shows how the globe becomes village through electronic technology. He states in his book, 'The next medium, whatever it is it may be the extension of consciousness- will include television as its content, not as its environment, and will transform into art form. He emphasises on not only the content rather the content itself works. In the late 19 century, television works as the medium for message and it turns the media into global village. Through this, media creates social sphere where it shares the message in the global village. Now, media works for globalization. Advance technology such as internet works instead of television. So, the influence of media creates an effect on culture. If we see, now the culture has been shaped by the media has an impact on language. It gives its credit to the advancement of communication system and technology. Every country is dependent on others for trade and commerce, education, politics etc. As a result, we have to constantly communicate with other countries and speakers of other languages.

Bangladesh has to depend on foreign aids because we are not self-sufficient. Bangladesh is considered to be a monolingual country in which more than 98% of the population are speakers of Bangla language. However, there are more than ten languages in such a small country like Bangladesh. Monipuri, Urdu, Chakma, Santali, Mandi, Rakhaine, Tripura and Marma are just some of the other languages present in Bangladesh. So, having relevant and crucial value language plays a weighty role for communication. Again to reiterate McLuhan's concept, the mechanism of media is a concept that creates a network, which is communication. Thus, according to McLuhan, these media play a significant role in our language. If we notice this keenly, we can observe that how these media control or dominate the world with its power, as we know knowledge is the power.

Radio has vocational education and it also connected with communication or media. In Bangladesh the role of radio seems connected to Marxism. Consumerism is somehow promoted through this media. This time consumerism has a great impact on language. The topic of the article is about the language adaptation through mass media especially in the radio. Entertainment plays a vital role to shape the culture. Bangladesh is a country where adaptation is easy for illiteracy. In a country with a high rate of illiteracy mass media plays a function for educating the people. Radio works as a strong media to influence the common people is evident during the liberation war. For example, Shadhin Bangla Betar Kendro had a strong influence to rejuvenate the commoner in 1971. If we keenly notice we can see how the discourse creates with the name something concerned very much about power. So radio is the source where millions of people are able to unify on a platform that they are common receiver of a particular message.

The mass media especially radio is a quicker medium to deliver the information and education. Its popularity reaches regardless sex, gender, high class, low class. Recently in Bangladesh radio works as popular culture. It has an influence on the young generation. Except Bangladesh Betar, the Ministry of Information has licensed almost 28 private radio stations in 2015. The broadcasting is in Bangla but most of the radio jockeys are trying to make a new unofficial language or changing the definition of popular culture by using Banglish language has an impact on the culture. Firstly they fix their targeted audience who are mostly under 20. This targeted audience adapt the culture which is a mixture of high and low class. Theoretically Karl Marx's class distinction comes here. How does consumerism work to promote the product? Radio works for consumerism in Bangladesh. The radio jockeys use a different language called Banglish which is combination of Bangla and English so the young generation can use this new language and adopt them in their daily life. They are trying to make it a style though it is a politics of consumerism. There is a prejudice that English is called the language of upper class and also standard form of language because of colonization. The way people welcome the guest is an influence of the radio. Thus radio inertly props up the idea to use this language. The most interesting thing is sometimes the radio management board calls the superstar for the promotion of the radio. They also use this language to popularize their program. Today radio is called a device walks along with your journey. Radio works as an entertainment outside of our home.

In the highly conglomerate world, culture has merged with business, therefore, it has been termed as 'culture industry' by Theodore Adorno and Max Horkheimer. This Industry "offers a vision of a society that has lost its capacity to nourish true freedom and individuality- as well as the ability to represent the real conditions of existence." (During, p. 31) It represents a 'fake demand' of the audience to serve the purpose of capitalist propaganda. To strengthen the operations of culture industry, it tries to infuse the cultural elements of the partner business companies. We see the emergence of 'Djuice culture', a sub-culture promoted by a popular phone company, Grameen phone on which Telenor, the largest telecommunications company in Norway has 55.80% share (Web, 2016,

“Grameen phone”, para1). In this trend, the young generation is presented in a very westernized, casual way which indicates the overwhelming acceptance of the western culture, i.e. attire, accents, human relationships, etc.

The same way, the promotion of ‘Banglish’ in FM Radio is just another extension of the westernized culture which ultimately serves the consumerist bonanza. This lingual fusion is targeted to the teenage generation who are given the idea that if they are very much in this practice, they can be considered as ‘smart’, ‘modern’. This representation has deep connection with the international commercial groups who promote their products in these media. Bangladesh cannot reject native language to uphold its business. Here, a ‘hybrid’ language, jointly composed with Bangla and English lingual elements, finds its way. Now the question arises, ‘how to market this cultural form?’ The business conglomerates put huge focus on creating the fake demand of the consumers and naturalizing the demand. The radio channels project their programs as something very ‘trendy’ and ‘modern’, since the demand of English in this highly globalized world is undeniable. They represent their programs to be the common interest of every modern, city dwelling young generation and promote the stereotypical lingual phenomena. The programs are repeated frequently as ‘demanded’ and this way, the trend is naturalized. When the audience finally sees that there are hundreds of others who like the programs, they do not ‘dare’ to raise questions. As Adorno and Horkheimer says:

It is claimed that standards are based in the first place on consumers’ needs, and for that reason were accepted with so little resistance. The result is the circle of manipulation and retroactive need in which the unity of the system grows ever stronger. No mention is made of the fact that the basis on which technology acquires power over society is the power of those whose economic hold over society is greatest. Interestingly, there is another operation of the Radio media that ‘grabs’ the ‘public throat’ of any question. As McLuhan points out the critical function of the very media that is used over the contents of it, the radio evolved as a huge space with a large number of listeners. But these vast numbers of listeners never question the function of media as they think they are provided with ample choices. Adorno and Horkheimer (???) describe how the radio media works:

The need which might resist central control has already been suppressed by the control of the individual consciousness. The step from the telephone to the radio has clearly distinguished the roles. The former still allowed the subscriber to play the role of subject, and was liberal. The latter is democratic: it turns all participants into listeners and authoritatively subjects them to broadcast programs which are all exactly the same. With the emergence of cell phone, the audience can communicate directly and their voices are ‘heard’ but they never actually point the finger at the strategic functions as they are already ‘hypnotized’ with the apparently ‘democratic’ choice provided by the FM radio. The audiences may share their opinions with all the listeners, but all of it is very much related to the theme of the program. They accept wholeheartedly the ‘trend’, in this case, Banglish without any protest. This naturalized trend

therefore goes forth without being questioned and ultimately, serves the capitalist interest. The capitalist powers go on promoting these new trends until it becomes a dominant culture, or at least sub-culture. So, we observe that the Banglish trend promoted by FM Radio channels is just a well-functioning outcome of a 'Global Village' phenomenon that is naturalized through using the power of media and therefore, it has a far-reaching effect on the Bangla Language. The native language (Bangla) is challenged and modified with this trend and ultimately it causes a huge cultural negotiation.

Conclusion

The cultural trend is infused with new forms of expressions and strategies to 'produce' a mass entertainment. These cultural productions, in fact, are the product of the larger scene of political economy. The FM Radio programs standardize a particular linguistic trend to disseminate the idea of 'literate City dwellers' and present it as a trending fashion of the mass people. The culture industry projects the choices of the powerful class as the common trend of the society and therefore, it is 'normalized' as mass culture. The paper critically analyses and connects it with critical dimensions of cultural studies. Besides, with the statistical data collected from FM Radio channels, this paper analyses it and contextualizes with the theoretical aspects of political economy.

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