



LANGUAGE ALTERNATION TO SCAFFOLD LEARNING IN EMI CLASSROOMS

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Introduction

- Research in EMI (English as a medium of instruction) contexts has claimed (e.g. Mazak & Donoso, 2015; Trodson & Dashwood, 2018), that teachers and learners draw on their first language (L1) to scaffold learning.
- Along the same line, this research investigates the role of L1 in English medium lectures at one of the Bangladeshi EMI universities.



Bangladesh

- ❧ Bangladesh is a South Asian, multilingual country with a monolingual policy.
- ❧ The constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh 1972 adopted Bangla as the state language (Article 3).
- ❧ Although the constitution did not mention anything regarding the status of English, the national educational policy (2010) recognizes its usage as a media of instruction in the educational context.







The national education policy (2010) writes:

*“At this (secondary) level, the media of instruction will be Bangla, **but as per the competence of any educational institution, it may also be English.** For foreigners, there will be provision for teaching of easy Bangla lessons”*(p.13)



The national education policy (2010) writes:

“Curricula and syllabi of higher education will be updated to meet international standards. In order to expand tertiary level education, it is essential to translate standard books of modern knowledge and science into Bangla. Recognizing the national importance of such a program, urgent steps will be taken. English will remain as a medium of instruction in higher education along with Bangla” (p. 24).



EMI in Bangladesh

∞ EMI in higher education was first introduced in Bangladesh in 1992.





Context

- ❧ North South University was the first to introduce the EMI.
- ❧ The university's official document (NSU Academic Information and Policies) states that the medium of instruction is English and English is the language of instruction in all courses.





NSU Academic Information and Policy document writes,

Medium of Instruction

English is the medium of instruction. Since many students come from the Bengali medium, the University offers remedial courses to increase their proficiency in English. The number of remedial courses a student is required to take is determined on the basis of the English Placement Tests. North South University strictly requires the student to pass the English remedial courses before taking other courses. Depending on the number of English remedial courses it may take more than four years for a student to graduate with a bachelor's degree (p.6).



Context

- It has been observed that an increasing number of universities in non-English speaking countries are using EMI.
- Research in these contexts has revealed that the implementation of EMI is not without difficulties as learners experience problems accessing curricula in a language they have inadequate proficiency in and consequently participants **draw on their first language to scaffold learning.**





Context

- ☞ Most students attending these institutions come from educational backgrounds where the medium of instruction was **Bangla**.
- ☞ Therefore, they can be considered **emergent bilinguals**.





Research Questions

1. How do lecturers and learners at this university cope with the demands of teaching/ learning in a medium that they have not been adequately prepared for? Is **language alternation used as a scaffolding strategy?**
2. If yes, what **forms, shapes and interactional sequences** does language alternation adopt?





Pedagogical theory (Scaffolding)

- Scaffolding denotes a temporary structure erected to provide temporary support during the construction, maintenance, and repair of buildings.
- However, using the word in the field of pedagogy refers to the momentary support provided by the teacher to assist learners in completing an assigned task.





Methodological Framework

- ❖ General methodological framework: Linguistic ethnography / Interactional sociolinguistics
- ❖ Data collection
 1. Field notes taken during interview and observation
 2. Data
 - Observational data
 - Classroom recordings
 - Interviews





Methodological framework

- Data collection (25 classrooms observed online due to COVID restrictions).
- 23 semi-structured retrospective interviews were conducted with the participants in-person at North South University.





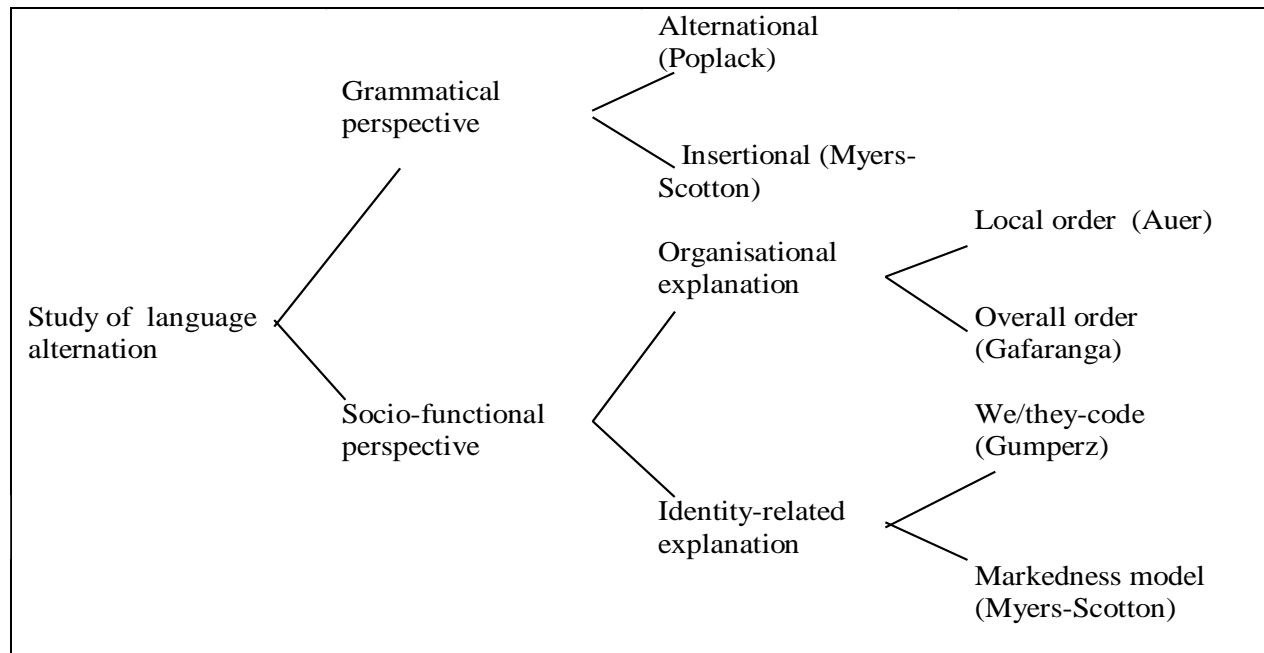
Analysis

- Conversation analysis (interactional data) + thematic analysis (interview data).



Theory of language choice (the *overall order model* of language alternation (Gafaranga, 2007: 85))

Language alternation is orderly at the overall level of talk organisation.





Analysis

- To analyze classroom recordings with a focus on the use of Bangla, a conversation-analytic approach to code-switching was adopted.
- To reveal instances of scaffolding in bilingual classroom interactions, sequential analysis was conducted.
- First, a teaching focused episode was identified to reveal the scaffolding pattern.
- Then, 23 semi-structured retrospective interviews were conducted with the participants and analyzed thematically.





Results

- Teachers' opinion regarding language alternation
- Students' opinion regarding language alternation
- Community members opinion regarding language alternation



Teachers' opinion regarding language alternation

- Planning scaffolding

“you cannot expect sophomore undergraduate students to understand terms such as monoparous, nulliparous and multiparous,” Dr. S.



Teachers' opinion regarding language alternation

- Planning scaffolding

“Students seldom receive information uniformly when paraphrased even in simple English in comparison to Bangla. Their brain receives and process information faster in their mother tongue than in a foreign language. Students acquire knowledge spontaneously when explained in their L1. Paraphrasing often makes content ambiguous and perplexing and as a result it makes the learning instrumental,” Dr. K.



Teachers' opinion regarding language alternation

- Bangla to encourage class interaction

*“Their incompetence makes them shy and nervous.”
As a result, “they predominantly remain silent,” Dr.S*



Teachers' opinion regarding language alternation

➤ Bangla to encourage class interaction

“One of the students in today’s class was asking questions in English and I could not understand. Probably he could not phrase it in English appropriately. Then I said, “I do not get you. Can you speak Bangla so that I can understand your question?” That student subsequently repeated the question in Bangla and I was surprised by how befittingly he verbalized his query. His Bangla was quite standard and I was really impressed by his intelligent question,” Dr. K.





Teachers' opinion regarding language alternation

➤ To aid comprehension

"I explained the term parity by elaborating on the concept in Bangla. I elucidated to them that parity means how many times a female can conceive. However, parity also means equality and in this context it means the ability to conceive. So it is a danger to let them find the meaning on their own. It could be a disaster if they envisaged 'parity' meant 'equality' in the context of the designated public health topic," Dr. S.



Students' opinion regarding language alternation

➤ Bangla as an additional resource

- ❖ Students reported that teachers used Bangla to provide '*life relevant*' examples to clarify newly introduced concepts. They frequently used the terms '*relatable*', '*engaging*' and '*easy to understand*' to describe those teachers who use Bangla to support their comprehension.





Students' opinion regarding language alternation

➤ Bangla as an additional resource

*“The same is applicable for the **term ‘behavior modification.’** It was not clear to me until Dr. S provided a relatable example in Bangla regarding the reckless behavior of the road cleaners of Bangladesh. They work without safety measures and they have to modify their behavior in order to prevent accidents,” NFFS asserted.*



Students' opinion regarding language alternation

- Problem with English designation

One of the participants, ANKMS pointed out an instance where he had problems with the exact English term but the concept was already familiar. He asserted,

*“it was I who asked Dr. S to tell the meaning of **circumcision**. I heard ‘**circumcision**’ for the first time. But we are very familiar with this Muslim ritual of performing circumcision.”*



Community members opinion regarding language alternation

➤ Bangla as an additional resource

*“some **concepts** are better explained in Bangla. It has a different essence. I often find English explanations dry and instrumental,”*
NZMS reported.



Community members opinion regarding language alternation

➤ Problem with English designation

One of the participant, NZMS clearly mentioned,

*“I observed students having problems listening to elaboration in English. But I mainly had problems with specific **terms** of business.”*



Conclusion

- This research shows that using Bangla helps students to understand English medium lectures.
- Therefore, policy implications can be informedly drawn whether to encourage, tolerate or else reject the use of Bangla in EMI higher education classrooms.
- Moreover, the research specifies and adds detail to the often-stated claim that, in EMI contexts, L1 can be used as a scaffolding strategy.
- It shows that, in its function as a scaffolding strategy, L1 works either as an additional resource to usual scaffolding strategies found even in monolingual teaching situations or as a scaffold in its own right.



Some possible questions

- What is the **aim** of the current investigation?
- Is it **important** to know participants' opinion?



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