L1 Influence on the Spoken English Proficiency of Bengali Speakers

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Introduction

Previous learning experience always affects the present activity and it may act as a guide either to restrict or to reinforce certain efforts in a learning situation. In a Second Language Learning environment, learners are already possessed of their mother tongue ($L_1$) which is likely to play some role in the language learning tasks. With this view in mind, this paper intends to find some influence of $L_1$ on the Spoken English ($L_2$) Proficiency among the Bangladeshi students.

1.1 Background:

Influence of $L_1$ in learning a second language has largely been addressed in the major research domain of Contrastive Analysis and Language Transfer. The field of Language Transfer has a long history of research data. Gass & Selinker quote from Lado (1957, p.2)

... that individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meaning of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture--- both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture, and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and the culture as practiced by the natives" (Gass & Selinker, 1994 p.1).

1.1.1 Contrastive Analysis:

This view of Lado gave to the rise of famous empirical studies in Contrastive Analysis (CA). Gass & Selinker (1994, p.2) comment about Lado's definition of Contrastive Analysis. Contrastive analysis is a way of comparing and contrasting various linguistic features of two languages for example sound systems, grammatical structures, vocabulary systems, writing systems and above all cultural aspects of two languages. Results from contrastive analysis are valid and can be accepted but there are difficulties in interpreting this CA hypothesis in relation to learners’ behaviours. For example, an English speaking

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1 $L_1$> It is also known as Mother Tongue(MT), Native Language (NL).
2 $L_2$> The language which is learnt after $L_1$. It is also known as Target Language (TL).
learner of Italian tends to devoice the first member of the clusters [zm zn, zl], and then adjust them to the English clusters [sm sn sl]. Thus the CA hypothesis predicts learners' behaviours depending on some observational data of some learners under certain unspecified conditions. This is the main limitation of the CA hypothesis and according to Gass & Selinker such prediction of learners' behaviour are made "without careful description and analytical studies of second language learners" (1994, p.2). Again Fisiak (1980, p.1) has given emphasis to linguistic descriptions and has said that comparison between languages should be made to determine similarities and dissimilarities between them. But analyzing two languages in various linguistic aspects like semantics, syntax, phonetics and phonology is clearly different from what influences a speaker of one language might have in learning the other.

1.1.2 Language Transfer:

Gass & Selinker (1994, p.3) view that in spite of this limitation of the CA hypothesis; it can be a good start to understand all the probable range of transfer from one language to another. But the term 'transfer' is rather controversial due to what it actually means and what it does not mean. Odlin (1989, p.27) defines transfer as "the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired". But Kellerman (1983) has a different view of transfer. In a comment about Kellerman's definition of transfer, Gass & Selinker (1994, p.7) point out that Kellerman has focused on the transferability of linguistic elements and constraints on transfer. These constraints on transfer are not merely similarities and differences but are beyond those which involve learners' active
participation for making decision "about what can and cannot be transferred" (1994, p.7).

Odlin (1989, p.25) has also given a description of transfer on negative perspective, in summary:

(a) Transfer is not a result of habit formation since behaviourists' idea of transfer is quite different from the idea of native language influence. The behaviourists believed in the extermination of earlier habits while learning a new one. But this is not the case in language learning as learners do not forget or annihilate their first language.

(b) Transfer is not interference or hindrance only, it can also facilitate in learning a second language. When there are more similarities between two languages, the target language can easily be learnt with little effort. For example, Spanish people can learn English more easily than Arabic people since similarity between Spanish and English provides much flexibility in language learning tasks. To Odlin interference is similar to 'negative transfer' in meaning but he prefers to use 'negative transfer' of the two terms "since it can be contrasted with positive transfer, which is the facilitating influence of cognate vocabulary or any other similarities between native and target language" (1989, p.26).

(c) Transfer is not retreating to native language during difficulty in using the target language.

(d) Transfer can be the influence of all the languages, rather than only of the native language, known to a learner during learning the target language.
Odlin (1989, p.36) has also given a detailed classification of various outcomes depending on the type of transfer which can be summarized as:

(a) Positive transfer facilitates learning of target language depending on its similarities with the native language. It can result in an assimilation or concurrence of linguistic behaviour or features between target and native language e.g. similarities in word order can help in learning syntax of the target language.

(b) Negative transfer is the result of differences between target and native language and can result in errors, underproduction (using very few or no examples of the target language, also termed as avoidance), overproduction (for avoiding tough grammatical rules i.e. relative clause, the learner may create too many simple sentences), miscomprehension due to misperceptions of target language sound or native and target language word order difference.

1.1.3 Native Language Influence:

Corder (1994, p.19) does not agree to use the term transfer or interference for native language influence. According to him these are the theoretical terms different from native language influence and one should be careful in using them. He claims that the presence of native language features in the use of the target language can be explained without addressing the term transfer. To him transfer is a process which can be found only in laboratory experiments and mostly in relation to "sensorimotor behaviour and rote learning" but "nothing remotely comparable with the complexity of language behaviour..."(1994, p.19). Again he believes that interference is nothing but the use of L1
rules in the target language which is not accepted or which produces wrong structures. Since there is no inhibiting process in this type of L1 usage, the term interference should not be used in this particular case of L1 influence. He further says that there are some native language features in the learners' use of target language which are not recognized within the theory of transfer. Corder (1994, p.20) refers to "such phenomena as the avoidance of the use of certain features of the target language by the speakers of certain mother tongues. The absence or rarity of something can scarcely be the result of a process of transfer".

In the same work, Corder (1994, p.20) gives details of language acquisition and when influence of the mother tongue takes place. He sees language acquisition as creating a body of implicit knowledge which works as a basis for utterances in the language. Language acquisition is a creative process where learners make an internal representation of the language by interacting with the language of the environment. This internal representation consists of the regularities of the language that they discover from the language input and is known as interlanguage competence. This is continuously changing and developing as long as learners continue to learn the language and receive sufficient input.

The developmental sequence in the target language is similar for both adults and children. Though this developmental sequence is independent of external process like teaching or instruction, it is not completely free from internal processes like the existing knowledge of the mother tongue. Corder (1994, p.21) views the knowledge of mother tongue "as a cognitive element in the process" which “might reasonably be expected to affect decisively in the order of developmental sequence". He admits that this has also
been similar to the "classical" position as viewed by Lado (1964). That means the range of similarity or dissimilarity between the target and native language can necessarily make the acquisition of target language easier or harder respectively. The idea is that the more similar L1 and L2 are in their linguistic features, the quicker and easier will be the acquisition of L2 and vice versa. However, Corder here makes two points for clarification. In the earlier stage of acquisition in L2, mother tongue influence does not play a crucial role but it does have a significant role in the later development of L2. Some languages are learned more easily and quickly than other languages by the speakers of a particular language. A Bengali speaker can learn Hindi or Urdu more easily than English. This gives us the evidence for language family or language distance. If the target language is more distant from the native language in linguistic aspects, it will take both more time and effort from the learner to acquire it and vice versa. Corder disagrees to the use of the term 'interference' if there is less or no similarity between L1 and L2. He calls this 'little facilitation' but not 'inhibition' or 'interference'.

1.1.4 Language distance:

The idea that linguistically distant languages take a longer period to be learned is supported by Odlin (1989). Though there is very little research in support of this view, data from Foreign Service Institute (1985) of the U.S. State Department can give evidence for this. Various length of language courses were offered to members of the U.S. diplomatic corps. The aim of these courses was to improve language competence to an equal level among the learners of each language. The following list shows that all these languages were of varying level of difficulty to the native speakers of English.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Number of Weeks</th>
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<tr>
<td>Afrikaans</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Indonesian</td>
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<tr>
<td>Amharic</td>
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<td>French</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Serbo-Croatian</td>
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<td>German</td>
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<td>Greek</td>
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<td>Hindi</td>
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<td>Thai</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Urdu</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Quoted from Odlin: 1989, p.39)

It can be seen from this list that learners who spent forty-four weeks of learning Bengali were supposed to be of similar proficiency level to the learners who spent twenty weeks in learning French or German. Thus the existence of language distance becomes clearly evident in this list.

1.1.5 The Superset and the Subset Principle:

The Superset and the Subset principles give some account of language influence in relation to Language distance. The Superset principle contains all the probable examples or steps of a norm whereas the Subset principle contains only part of it. In learning a language, learners seem to assume a limited grammar first, that is, the grammar of a Subset principle either for mother tongue or for the Subset principle itself. Then from the input or from the instruction, learners correct themselves according to the exact rules of the language.
To clarify these two terms, Gass & Selinker (2001:p.172) have used the numerical system. The norm for the counting system is 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10. Now if a person is a member of this society, he will learn this system for counting. Again if another person is a member of a society where the counting system is only with the even numbers i.e. 2,4,6,8,10.. then this second system is the Subset of the first system which is the Superset one. Now if a person from the first society moves to the second one, he will find no use of 1, 3,5,7,9. This person may think that these odd numbers might be possible in this new society but accidentally he is not hearing them. Only when someone tells him about it that odd numbers are not possible at all, may he correct it. Otherwise there is no way for learning it from the input. On the other hand, if a person from the second group moves to the first society he will find the use of new information 1,3,5,7,9 and can therefore modify his previous system with this new system. Here he does not need any instructor to tell him this fact because he will find this from the input. Thus Gass and Selinker (2001:172) comes to the conclusion that "moving from a Subset system to a Superset system requires only that the information be available from the input, whereas moving from a Superset system to Subset system requires additional information (e.g., correction or some prior knowledge about language counting possibilities)". From this explanation given by Gass & Selinker, we can guess of similar things happening in language learning. Speakers of a language with a Subset grammatical system have to learn many new rules of the target language with a Superset grammar whereas speakers from a language with a Superset grammar have to learn about what cannot appear in the target language with a Subset grammar.
1.2 Aims:

The aim of this paper is to investigate those areas in which Bengali is different and distant from English and whether these differences and distance have any influence on spoken English proficiency among Bengali speakers. Languages can be different from one another in almost every linguistic feature, like phonetics, phonology, phonotactics, syntax and semantics. There has been research in each of these features in various languages of the world in relation to English. But as far as it has been noticed, no such research has ever been done on the linguistic relation between Bengali and English at least not in the case of what and how linguistic features of Bengali language influence the spoken English among Bangladeshi students.

It has been found among Bengali speakers that while they are talking in English, they take much time to think and prepare their speech before they produce it into actual speech. The less proficient they are, the more time they take for such thinking and preparing and vice versa. Again their English speech is influenced by some linguistic errors due to the differences between Bengali and English. This essay tries to justify the hypotheses that

(i) there is influence of Bengali (L1) on the spoken English (L2) proficiency among Bangladeshi learners; and

(ii) the most proficient English language users are least or not influenced at all by Bengali.

Since it is a very limited level of investigation with short duration, it has not been possible to do any experimental research or laboratory work with large numbers of students. Rather an interview method has been adopted and six Bangladeshi students
have been asked to attend to separate interviews of 15 minutes to one hour. The interview situation has not been controlled and in the conversations various issues like culture, education etc. in both Sweden and Bangladesh have been discussed. All the interviews have been well recorded for the purpose of analysis. All the students are graduates and currently doing their post graduation in various Swedish institutes. Three of them are studying in the MA programme in English with IELTS score of 7. The forth student is a PhD research student with IELTS score is 6. The fifth student is studying his M.Sc. in International Finance with 5 IELTS band score and the sixth student is doing his M.Sc. in European Political Sociology with no IELTS score.

2. Probable areas of L1 influence:
There has been individual research on semantic and syntactic transfer, phonetics and phonological transfer of various languages to see whether their production of English as a second language is influenced by the mother tongue. While all these research works have been very specific to a particular aspect, this paper tries to find as many probable areas of influence as there can be found from Bengali to English.

2.1 Semantics and Morphology:
Odlin (1989) has rightly pointed out an issue of the relation between language and thought. In learning a second language, learners use their native language for cognitive activities. While it is an open question of how much semantic influence there can be from the native language to the target language, “research does suggest that cross-linguistic

3 IELTS> International English Language Testing System. It is often regarded as a precondition for admission in a foreign university.
differences in structure sometimes reflect differences in thinking. (Odlin, 1989:72). Odlin (1989) also talks about Semantic case, the use of the genitive (possessive) either as a prepositional phrase or as a bound morpheme. Besides, with regard to Bengali speakers, there will also be other issues like the use of empty subjects.

Nan Jiang replicated his previous study of Chinese and English language (2002) with Korean and English (2004) with more detailed experiments for a widespread support for his hypothesis of semantic transfer. In his recent study, Korean speakers performed a semantic judgment task with "two types of related word pairs, some shared the same Korean translation and some did not.” Korean speakers responded to the same-translation word pairs faster than the different-translation word pairs. The quick response to the same-translation word pairs was taken as evidence for L1 (Korean) semantic transfer to the processing, identification and use of L2 (English) words.

2.2 Syntax:
Various syntactic categories come into question while discussing syntactic influence. Odlin (1989, p.85) has talked about word order rigidity, branching direction in relative clauses, formation of negative sentences and interrogative sentences and the use of contracted forms of words in negative and interrogative sentences.

In research of Syntactic Transfer, Chan (2004) has focused on five errors types: (a) lack of control of the copula, (b) incorrect placement of adverbs, (c) inability to use the ‘there be’ structure for expressing the existential or presentative function, (d) failure to use the relative clause, (e) confusion in verb transitivity. The result found in this study showed that many learners had a tendency to think in their native language (Chinese) first
before they produce any utterance in L2 (English). The word order or syntactic structures in their use of English were "identical or very similar to the usual or normative sentence of the learners' first language (L1), Cantonese" (Chan; 2004). In the use of complex structures of L2, syntactic transfers from L1 were particularly common. These transfers were found among the learners of lower proficiency levels. However, highly proficient learners were also found to make syntactic transfer when they found it difficult to use the target language structure.

2.3 Phonetics and Phonology:
Two languages may have similar sound system which may vary significantly in their physical characteristics "including both acoustic characteristics (e.g. the pitch of sound) and articulatory characteristics (how widely the mouth is open in producing a sound)" (Odlin1989, p.112). In a longitudinal study, Keys (2002) found that Brazilian students of EFL tended to palatalize the voiceless alveolar plosive /t/. They made this sound more palatalized as /tl/ when the /t/ sound is followed by the oral vowels /i/ or /u/. This feature is allowed in the Brazilian Portuguese language and is transferred into English in circumstances when it is allowed (/t/+/j/=> /tʃ/). However these learners also tended to palatalize the /t/ sound when it is followed by a vowel like /u, u, / which is allowed neither in Brazilian Portuguese nor in English. But it did occur in his study that learners made such errors in both their L1 and L2. For example, they produced /tlju/ for /tu:/ in their English. Thus the author came to the conclusion that this tendency "contravenes the L1 rule for palatalization". (Keys: 2002). Therefore a phonetic aspect of L2 is influenced by the mother tongue here.
Odlin has also mentioned phonemic differences, segmental errors (i.e. errors concerning vowel and consonant), supra-segmental errors regarding stress, tone rhythm and other factors. According to him stress patterns in pronunciation are essential for listeners to recognize a word "since they affect syllables and the segments that constitute certain nouns and verbs such between COMbine and comBIINE". (Odlin: 1989, p.116). Thus he draws the conclusion that if stress patterns of the target language are not maintained in the production of speech, it may result in confusion and misperception of utterances (1989, p.116). Odlin also mentions Bansal's (1976) opinion about English in India where unintelligibility and misidentification mostly arises due to errors in the stress patterns in the pronunciation in English. With all these issues, a comparison between Bengali and English will be made in terms of initial clusters, aspirated and non-aspirated sounds etc.

3. Linguistic Difference, Its Influence and Data Analysis:

Being a member of a distant language in relation to English, Bengali has different linguistic characteristics from English. This eventually affects learners' performance with 'little facilitation' (Corder, 1994) or 'negative transfer' (Odlin, 1989). There are errors in the use of English of the Bengali speakers which are related to the linguistic rules and aspects of Bengali language. These presences of Bengali linguistic features are more common in spontaneous speech or informal dialogue than in formal speech which is revised several times for correction prior to the actual production.

3.1 Morphology and Semantics:
3.1.1 Third person singular number rule:

In English, the form of the verb varies depending on the person and number of the subject such as *I eat rice* but *He eats rice*. In Bengali, though the form of the verb varies in relation to the person of the subject; no such variation occurs in relation to the number of the person. That is, in Bengali there is no morphological inflection of verb forms in relation to the third person singular number. Examples for comparisons are given below:

(a) *tara bhat khai.*

they  rice  eat.

(‘they eat  rice.’)

(b) *she (/tʃe/) bhat khai.*

he/she  rice  eat.

(‘he/she  eats  rice.’)

Similar is the case for the verb *be* i.e. there is no need to change form of verbs in Bengali for singular or plural number. For example,

(a) *ami cchilam.*

(‘I  was’)

(b) *amra cchilam*

(‘we  were’)

(c) *she cchilo*

(‘he/she  was’)

(d) *tara cchilo*

(‘they  were.’)

Since there is no such morphological inflection or change of verb forms for third
person singular number, Bengali speakers have to learn this as a Superset principle while learning English from the input. It happens that even after seventeen years of exposure to such input through class lectures in the form of instruction, reading materials and listening to materials, they often fail to maintain this third person singular verb marker in their use of English. Therefore, this error of third person singular number can be attributed to the non-existence of such rules in Bengali language. In other words, learners use the L1 rule in their use of L2. This influence has taken place in the speech of both higher and lower level English users in the recorded interview:

(a) All the cultures in Bangladesh is colourful.
(b) What was the places of that travel?
(c) There is many many things.
(d) Because she love me too much.
(e) He give me huge time.

3.1.2 Use of plural number:

In the use of plural number in English, both the determiner and the main word (i.e. noun) become plural in form, for example, a worker but some workers and a man but many men. But in Bengali, the plural marker is used either before the noun as a pre-determiner or after the noun as plural inflection but not both at the same time. For example:

4 onek manush

(‘many men’)

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4 Onek> many, manush> manush
5 *onekgulo manush*

(‘many men’)

(but never as *6 *onek manushera or *7 *onekgulo manushera*)

*manushera/manushgulo*

(‘men / men’)

This difference of plural marker between English and Bengali leads to errors like missing one plural marker either at the pre-determiner position or at the end of head word as inflection. Such errors found in the conversation are:

(a) *What happens on this days?*

(b) *Some kinds of industry.*

(c) *Some organization.*

(d) *Many tourist*

3.1.3 Gender-based Pronoun:

Again, in English, the third person singular pronoun varies in terms of gender such as *he/she, him/her* and *his/her*. But no such variation occurs in the Bengali language, i.e. both masculine and feminine gender share the same form of pronoun like *she* (pronounced as /te/-‘he/she’) as subject, *take* (pronounced as /take/-‘him/her’) and *taar* (pronounced as /tar/-‘his/her’). This lack of gender based pronouns in Bengali influences learners to make errors like saying *he* for *she* and *she* for *he*. For example, in talking about his girl friend, one interviewee said:

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5 *Onekgulo* > many; *gulo* is used as inflected plural marker either after the noun or after the previous plural marker.

6 *onek manushera* > many men. Usually it is not used though it may rarely appear in a speech for emphasis.

7 *onekgulo manushera* > many men. It is never possible at all.
I think Uni, he is my best friend.

He advised me and she helped me to go abroad. (to refer to the same lady)

However this error is more frequent among speakers at lower levels of proficiency though it may occur as a slip of the tongue for all level of users.

3.1.4 Use of empty subject:

Unlike English there is no use of an empty subject like *it* or *there* to express impersonal action or existential position. Examples in English are *It rains* and *There are many universities in Dhaka*. But in Bengali no such empty subjects can be found. Rather impersonal subject or existential place or objects themselves become subject. Examples for Bengali sentences are like:

(a) *bristi porcche*

    rain falling

    (‘It is raining.’)

(b) *dhakai onek biswabiddaloy acche*

    in Dhaka many university are

    (‘There are many universities in Dhaka.’)

Less proficient speakers in the conversation did not use such *there-be* structure in order to show existential location. By using some phrases one speaker said that there are royal palace and other girls’ college in his district in the following way:

*Royal palace, other girls’ colleges here.*

3.2 Syntax

3.2.1 Word order:
The main difference in the syntax of Bengali and English lies in their word order. English is a SVO (Subject + Verb + Object) language whereas Bengali is a SOV (Subject + Object + Verb) language. This basic difference in word order often creates errors of wrong placement of verbs and adverbs in a sentence. In English adverbs may be placed either before or after the main verb depending on the meaning and context for example, *he walks slowly* and *he always walks slowly*. In Bengali, adverbs always come before the verb and if there is any adjective or noun (as object) preceding the verb, the adverb will appear in between the subject and object. Example:

(a) *ami jore dourai*  
I fast run.  
(‘I run fast.’)

(b) *ami khub phool bhalobashi*  
I very much flower like.  
(‘I like flower very much.’)

This difference in the placement of adverbs can explain the wrong use of adverbs like *I very liked because it was my first university life* produced by the least proficient speaker of the conversation.

3.2.2 Use of auxiliary verbs:

Auxiliary verbs in all tenses are the basic markers of tenses in English. To show tense variation in English, these auxiliary verbs are changed with the form of the main verb as well. For example: *I am eating rice* and *I have eaten rice*. But in Bengali, there is no such rule or use of auxiliary verbs, though main verb forms are changed from one tense to
another. Examples for analysis are as follows:

(a) *ami bhat khacchi.* (Present Progressive)

I eating rice.

(‘I am eating rice.’)

(b) *ami bhat kheyecchi.* (Present Perfect)

I rice eaten

(‘I have eaten rice.’)

This difference between Bengali and English directly influences all the learners at the initial stage and less proficient learners all the time so that they omit auxiliary verbs in their use of tense and passive voice in English. The less proficient speakers among the six interviewees made errors like:

(a) *Asia country, others country*** just going on, developing on.*

(b) *When I *** admitted Dhaka University.*

(c) *We *** passing time.*

(d) *They *** facing many problems.*

3.2.3 Formation of negative and interrogative sentence:

The lack of auxiliary verbs also inevitably affects in the negative and question sentence formation. In English, negative sentences are formed by using 'not' in between the auxiliary and main verbs or adjective (in the case of more than one auxiliary verbs, it appears after the first auxiliary verb) and by using 'no' in between the main verb and noun. For example,

He does not go home.
He has no friend.

He is not a good man.

But in Bengali, the negative word is used after the main verb or adjective (to show disagreement) or after the noun (to show non existence). Examples are like:

(a) *ami bhat khai na.*

I     rice  eat not.

(‘I do not eat rice.’)

(b) *ami bhalo nai.*

I      well  not.

(‘I am not well.’)

(c) *taar taka nai.*

his   money no.

(‘He has no money.’)

This difference in the formation of negative sentence often results in the placement of 'not' after adjective or noun among the Bengali speakers. An example can be given from a comment made by the lower proficient speaker of English about his university: "very good not, very bad not." which is a word-by-word translation of Bengali syntactic word order.

The effect of the non-existence of auxiliary verbs in Bengali can also be seen in question formation in English. In English, subject-verb inversion is mandatory in yes/no question whereas in 'wh'-questions, a wh- word is used at the beginning of a sentence with this subject-verb inversion. In Bengali, a separate word is used after the subject for making yes/no question sentence but no subject-verb inversion is necessary. In terms of
'wh' questions, a separate word is used for various 'wh' words and here also no subject-verb inversion occurs. Examples for comparison can be shown in the following way:

(a) *tumi*\(^8\) *ki jao?*

you *ki go?*

(‘Do you go?’)

(b) *tumi kothai jao?*

you *where go?*

(‘Where do you go?’)

Learners of English among the Bengali speakers also tend to miss auxiliary verbs as found in the following sentences:

(a) *What happens on this days?* (Though it may be thought correct but no use of ’does’ is found here and could be an example of L1 influence.)

(b) *Where in India?* (Though it is often said in spoken English, no use of ’be’ verb is found here and thus this could be an example of L1 influence.)

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3.3 Phonetics and Phonology:

3.3.1 Near similar sounds:

Phonetics and phonology are the main parts of direct L1 influence on the pronunciation of target language. Starting with phonetics, there are articulatory similarities in the utterance of some English sounds but some particular sounds are different from the target language sound in a very small but critical way in terms of articulation. The nearer these articulatory organs are to each other, the more the replacement of the L2 sounds occurs with L1 sounds. This replacement of L2 sounds with L1 endows the utterances with

\(^8\) *ki-* is a question word for yes/no questions. It is also used as the meaning for *what.*
particular characteristics and as such one can identify Indian English, Chinese English or African English. However, learners of higher proficiency may often eradicate this L1 influence if they are more attentive to the production of particular sound and if they are more exposed to the native English speech.

There are some sounds in English which are more similar to some sounds in Bengali but which involve different articulatory organs. For example, English has labiodental sounds like /f/ and /v/ whereas Bengali has the bilabial stops /pʰ/ and /bʰ/ are. It happens that in pronouncing those two English sounds, Bengali speakers use both their lips instead of using the upper teeth and the lower lip. Therefore all the words with these sounds are heard as aspirated bilabial plosives rather than /f/ or /v/. Example words can be given from the conversation like fine, very, fish, etc. However native English speaker may confuse these words as aspirated /pʰ/ and /bʰ/.

The English sounds like /z/ /ʤ/ and /ʒ/ are similar to two types of /z/ and /ʤ/ sounds in Bengali. But a sound like /ʒ/ often creates problem for all types of learners at the initial level. They cannot often produce the actual /ʒ/ sound in the word like 'vision'. They produce this sound either akin to /ʤ/ or akin to /ʃ/. So here also confusion may arise to the listener due to this mispronunciation.

3.3.2 Consonant cluster:
Many word-initial consonantal clusters are simplified according to Bengali phonotactics. A common tendency is to use a short vowel sound before these initial consonantal clusters. Words like
In final clusters also, there is a tendency of failing to reduce unstressed vowels.

While this failure may be due to spelling-type pronunciation, it is even found among the highly proficient speakers, though it may be more among the less proficient speakers. For example, a similar chart can be shown in this feature in the following way:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words</th>
<th>British</th>
<th>Influenced by Bengali</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>special</td>
<td>/ˈspeɪʃl/</td>
<td>/ɪˈspeɪʃl/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>/ˈspeɪn/</td>
<td>/ɪˈspeɪn/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>station</td>
<td>/ˈsteɪʃn/</td>
<td>/ɪˈstɛɪʃn/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>school</td>
<td>/skjuːl/</td>
<td>/ɪskul/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3.3 Pronunciation of /r/ sound:

In the pronunciation of the /r/sound, the English language allows several ways of uttering it depending on the position in a word. /r/ is pronounced before vowel sounds particularly at the word initial and word medial position whereas the word final /r/ is not pronounced unless it is followed by a vowel. On the other hand, in Bengali, the /r/ sound is pronounced independent of its position in the word. This difference becomes explicit in the utterance of some English words among the Bengali speakers:
3.3.4 Word stress:

In some supra-segmental sectors as well, the Bengali influence is strongly present especially in the word stress. All the speech of the subjects is devoid of English word stress or if their speech has any stress, those are more similar to Bengali. To notice this, some individual words can be mentioned below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Words</th>
<th>British</th>
<th>Influenced by Bengali</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>River</td>
<td>/ˈrivə(r)/</td>
<td>/rivə/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal</td>
<td>/ˈpɜːsənl/</td>
<td>/parsonal/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Departure</td>
<td>/dɪˈpɑːtʃə(r)/</td>
<td>/departʃər/</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

However this is less found among the speakers who are more exposed to native English speaking environment for a longer period of time.

4. Discussion:

Cross-linguistic influence has been the research domain for many years. How much of this influence is present in the actual English speech of the Bengali speakers is the focal
point of this essay. Probable areas of this influence have been discussed in section two. Most areas of such influence are due to the Superset and the Subset principles existing between these two languages. In the third section, major linguistic differences between these two languages have been focused with concrete examples found in the data analysis of the recorded sample of English speech from the Bengali speakers. In semantics and morphology, English has got plural markers with pre-determiner, head word and other related words directly linked to the noun phrase and this results in the subject-verb agreement with the verb. On the contrary, in Bengali, the plural marker is used either with the pre-determiner or with the head word but not with the both at the same time. This results in the mistake of absence of plural marker either at the pre-determiner position or at the head word position in the use of English among the Bengali speakers. Further there is no verb inflection for using the third person singular number in Bengali. This has major influence in the use of English among the Bengali speakers. They often miss or forget to add such morphological inflection to the main verb for the third person singular number in their English speech. Use of empty subjects are also absent in Bengali which takes extra effort from the learner to learn them. However it is not sure from the conversation whether these are influenced by Bengali or not. Again gender-based pronouns are also absent in Bengali and for this reason learners often make mistake in using he/she in talking about male and female. The categorizations of error of each individual interviewee can be shown in the table below. For the reliability purpose of the result some issues like gender based pronoun and the use of empty subjects have not been included in the table. This has been done since these did not appear in all the conversations or were uncertain in terms of L1 influence.
Table 1: Numbers of Errors in Semantics & Morphology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Level of Proficiency</th>
<th>3rd Person Singular Number</th>
<th>Plural Number</th>
<th>‘There be’ structure</th>
<th>Total Error of each individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 6</td>
<td>No IELTS</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In syntax, the basic word order of Bengali (SOV) and English (SVO) are discussed. This difference results in the wrong placement of adverbs or verbs. Again the concept of auxiliary verbs in all tenses is a complete Superset idea for Bengali people learning English. As a result they often forget to use auxiliary verbs in their natural fluent conversation.

Bengali is a post-verbal negative language where negative word is used after the main verb or after the noun or adjectives. This Bengali linguistic feature is also present in the English speech of the Bengali speakers which can be seen as an L1 influence. However this has been found in one example made by the least proficient speakers. In question formation, there is no subject-verb inversion in the Bengali language. But rather a separate question word is used depending on the type of information and question one wants to make. This results in the absence of subject-verb inversion with the occasional omission of the auxiliary verb. In syntax also, the categorizations of error of each individual interviewee can be seen in the table below. Here again, for the sake of reliability of the result some issues like the use of question formation have not been shown in the table since questions mainly came from the interviewer in all the interviews.
and all the interviewees shared in it in a conversational fashion with no or one or two questions.

Table: 2 Numbers of Errors in Syntax

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Level of Proficiency</th>
<th>Use of Adverb</th>
<th>Use of Auxiliary</th>
<th>Use of Negative Sentence</th>
<th>Total Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 6</td>
<td>No IELTS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bengali influence can clearly be noticed in the phonetics and phonology section. Near-similar sounds with different articulatory organs are the key points for discussion. Bengali speakers tend to produce sounds like /f/ and /v/ as aspirated voiced or voiceless bilabial plosives like /pʰ/ and /bʰ/ whereas in English they are labio-dental fricatives. The /ʒ/ sound is pronounced either as /ʃ/ or /ʧ/ but not as /ʒ/ since it has no phonetic form in Bengali. Again pronunciation of the /r/ sound and its presence in every position in English words produced by Bengali speakers is a clear L1 influence. Two features about phonetics were found to be unsure from the investigation: the insertion of vowel at the beginning of English consonant clusters by the Bengali speakers and the failure to reduce the vowel quality during pronouncing English words. These two features may be either due to Bengali language where these are common trends or due to simplification of pronunciation according to spelling. However, the former is more likely to be Bengali influence since there are rules like shwarabhakti or biprokorshe which allows Bengali speakers to break the clusters for separate pronunciation. According to these rules, words
of consonant clusters are simplified by a process of vowel insertion in between the consonants of a cluster. For example,

*Chandra* (the moon)  *Chondor*   *Chaand*

*Priti* (amity)  *Piriti*   *Pirit*

Table of errors can also be shown for illustration if utterances of sounds can be treated as right or wrong. It is worth mentioning that all the interviewees of different proficiency levels of this paper are highly influenced by the L1 in different phonetic and phonological aspects. However, one can find the effect of individual proficiency here as well:

Table: 3 Numbers of Errors in Phonetics and Phonology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Level of Proficiency</th>
<th>/f/ /v/ as /pʰ//bʰ/</th>
<th>/ʒ/ as /ʃ/ or /ʒ/</th>
<th>Use of /r/ Sound</th>
<th>Consonant cluster</th>
<th>Stress Patterns</th>
<th>Total Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 5</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker 6</td>
<td>No IELTS</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data for this paper has been collected from six students (including the essay writer) studying at various institutions in Sweden. All of them are adult, graduates with various levels in English proficiency from IELTS band score of five to seven. In the analysis of data, it has been found that errors due to L1 influence are present in the speech of all levels of students. While students of higher proficiency make some occasional errors in the subject verb agreement particularly in the third person singular number, plural number, students of lower proficiency levels made errors in more fundamental areas including the above ones. They have made errors in the use of the
there-be structure, auxiliary verbs, adverb position and in the formation of negative and question sentences. In phonetics and phonology also, the difference between high and low level speakers becomes explicit, though all of them are influenced by the L1 at a higher extent. Their way of pronouncing English sounds, words and above all sentences is different from the native English in terms of articulatory devices, stress and intonation.

It has been noticed in this investigation that examples of Bengali influence in the use of English come more from less proficient speakers. All the tables for semantics, syntax and phonetics and phonology can be presented in graphs for a clear picture of L1 influence which may vary from low proficiency level to high proficiency level.

Graph: 1 Numbers of Errors and L1 influence in Semantics & Morphology

Graph: 2 Numbers of Errors and L1 influence in Syntax
While more proficient speakers are also influenced in some morphological features and phonetics and phonology, low proficient speakers are more influenced in all features like morphology, syntax, phonetics and phonology. The essay has tried to find the difference between occasional performance errors by individual person and general errors due to linguistic differences found between Bengali and English. By avoiding the errors due to individual speakers’ weakness in English language, this essay has mainly focused on the common errors made by all learners and has tried to scrutinize those errors whether they bear any Bengali influence. Although this essay has also considered that the speakers might have focused more on meaning and message rather than accuracy, it is not likely that learners do not know the rules of English in their error areas. Rather they know all of those rules and even after that, in a natural fluent conversation, they cannot actively use all of those rules. So in those cases, they tend to make some mistakes and these mistakes are clearly marked by the presence of some Bengali linguistic characteristics. While the less proficient speakers have made these errors more in number, they have also tended to make some unusual errors which are neither due to Bengali nor due to English language.
5. Conclusion:

The essay has found that Bengali influence is present in the actual English speech taken from Bengali speakers. Bengali influence is present in the speech of all levels of proficiency among the Bengali speakers. The first hypothesis of presence of Bengali influence is answered here. Again more proficient speakers have made fewer mistakes in limited aspects in morphology with Bengali phonetic and phonological influence. In contrast to them, less proficient speakers have made more errors in morphology, syntax and they are also influenced by Bengali in phonetics and phonology. Thus the second hypothesis, that is, the most proficient English language users are least or not influenced at all by Bengali is also answered. This essay has been written on the basis of actual data collected from a limited number of students. However, for a generalized and universal acceptance of these two hypotheses, data from large number of students (both young and adult), teachers (both novice and experienced) and other professional people can be collected in addition to some experimental research. Again samples of English speech from both the native speakers of English and the Bengali ESL learners can be compared for more widespread recognition of these results.

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