

English as a Southern language

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the epistemologies of the Global South and the sociolinguistic reality of English in postcolonial Bangladesh, this article conceptualises English as a Southern language. This conception recognises the imperative of English for postcolonial societies in an English-dominant world while also emphasising the necessity of breaking away from its hegemony as represented by so-called native speaker or Standard English norms. It is argued that since English works as the principal epistemic tool for knowledge construction and theorising in most disciplines, decolonising knowledge and epistemology in favour of Southern perspectives may not be achieved without decolonising the language in the first place. While English as a Southern language builds on the paradigms of world Englishes, English as a lingua franca, and translanguaging, the proposed conception also seeks a notable departure from them. Calls for the co-existence of epistemologies of the North and South need to recognise English along the same lines. (English as a Southern language, epistemologies of the South, English in Bangladesh, English and representation of the world)*

INTRODUCTION

I am arrive by passenger train Ahmedpur station and my belly is too much swelling with jackfruit. I am therefore went to privy. Just I doing the nuisance that guard making whistle blow for train to go off and I am running with 'lotah' [a small water container] in one hand and 'dhoti' [a piece of unsewn cloth worn by a traditional Hindu male] in the next when I am fall over and expose all my shocking to man and female women on plateform. I am got leaved at Ahmedpur station.

This too much bad, if passenger go to make dung that dam guard not wait train five minutes for him. I am therefore pray your honour to make big fine on that guard for public sake. Otherwise I am making big report! to papers. (Ashok 2014)

This extract is part of a letter written by Mr. Okhil Chandra Sen to a divisional railway office in British India in 1909 and is currently on display at New Delhi Railway Museum. The fame attributed to this epistolary text is due to its functional achievement, regardless of the quality of the English: the complaint led to the introducing of toilets in trains in India. Thus, the letter is a display of the Indian man's history-making by using a kind of English that was accessible

to him. He exploited this version of English to represent his embarrassing moment and share it with the railway authorities of his time and with the rest of the world since then.

The text is clearly deviant from a typical native or Standard English representation. It uses a version of English to represent the speaker's life and reality in his social context. From the point of view of language acquisition, the language output 'fails' to conform to standard rules of English. It also violates the boundaries of languages (discussion follows) by inserting Bangla words into English. However, from a functional point of view, the language is successful in communicating meaning to the audience. If the language 'failed' in form, it excelled in function, although the functional achievement was contingent upon the linguistic generosity of the audience, who gave it a chance to survive in a language regime that usually has no room for such apparent linguistic aberrations.

What can we do with such Englishes? Despite some recent changes, so-called non-standard Englishes have been invisible in formal domains such as media and publication in local and international outlets and in formal literacy practices. Their invisibility may give the impression that we live in a perfect linguistic world free from linguistic idiosyncrasies. The construction of this linguistic world as pure, homogenous, and morally upright means that those who fail to conform to the expectations of English and English use can be denied access (see Ammon 2000). The assumption is those seeking entry to this protected space should be able to identify with the required register, regardless of their social, economic, or educational circumstances.

In attempting to make sense of the sociolinguistic reality of Englishes in the Global South, I would like to subject such assumptions to critical scrutiny. From a sociology of language perspective, the language capital displayed by Mr. Sen can be related to Tsuda's (2020) English-based 'class system', which includes four groups of English speakers: The native class, the ESL class ('middle class'), the EFL class ('working class'), and the silent class. Tsuda would identify English speakers such as Mr. Sen as belonging to the working class 'because they suffer from the labor of learning English for many years, often for a lifetime' (2020:257). This can be linked to the question of social class in applied linguistics (Block 2014, 2015) in general and the sociology of English learning (Hamid 2009) in particular. For Tsuda, the silent class has nothing to do with English, while the middle class are speakers of different varieties of Englishes such as Indian English or Singaporean English. In my view, while the top and the bottom rungs of Tsuda's class hierarchy are useful, the middle rungs need to be reconceptualised more broadly for postcolonial societies such as Bangladesh in order to have the ESL and the EFL groups forming one class to be distinguished from the English-educated ELITE class who identify with Standard English and disown local and vernacular ways of using the language of power and prestige. Essentially, this class hierarchy is about 'unequal Englishes' (Tupas 2015) within the Outer Circle and between the Outer and the Inner Circle.

Being inspired by the ideas and implications of Southern theory (Connell 2007) or the epistemologies of the South (Mignolo 2009; Comaroff & Comaroff 2012; Santos 2012; Pennycook & Makoni 2019), this article seeks to examine ways of using English by the linguistic majority in the world. Based on this examination, I venture into conceptualising English as a Southern language. This conceptualisation represents creative and meaningful ways of using English regardless of its formal properties, highlighting the plurality, multiplicity, and localness of English in a globalised world. I use Southern English to re-characterise the use of non-native Englishes in order for a more explicit recognition of their parallel existence and identity alongside native Englishes. This focus has affinity with ‘non-native speakers’ right to linguistic peculiarities’ (Ammon 2000:111), but I am mainly pursuing an epistemological argument. This is not denying the origin of Southern English from its native or Northern roots. However, the spread of the language in the past few centuries and the prevailing sociolinguistic reality calls for the autonomy of non-native varieties. This autonomy-claiming conceptualisation of English may not be innovative, as the massive literature on non-native Englishes under various paradigms such as world Englishes (WE) and English as a lingua franca (ELF) is essentially based on such arguments (Seidlhofer 2011; Kachru 2013). My conceptualisation is indebted to these paradigms, but I seek to view English in a slightly different light. Instead of prioritising my focus on either the user (as in WE) or the use (as in ELF) of English (Kirkpatrick 2020), I consider both at the same time. This allows me to note the identity of the English user (e.g. middle class, as above) and the purpose of their English use concurrently. My framing also aims for more visibility of the ways of using English by Southern speakers.

My conceptualisation also draws on the emerging movement of translanguaging (e.g. Canagarajah 2013; Garcia & Li Wei 2014; Otheguy, Garcia, & Reid 2015; Li Wei 2018), but the former promises to be more inclusive. Key features of translanguaging include linguistic flexibility, dynamism, borderlessness, and creativity. Many translanguaging scholars also deny the existence of ‘named languages’ (see Cummins 2021 for a critical overview). While linguistic border-crossing is a central feature of Southern English, such a conceptualisation also recognises the social existence of language together with its borders (Wolff 2018), as can be understood from some of my examples. Southern English may also have no issues with naming languages or using named languages in pursuing linguistic diversity, equality, and justice (see Grin 2018; Wolff 2018; Cummins 2021).

I explore the Southern character of English, taking Bangladesh as an instance of the Global South. Based on the examples of real-life language use that I analyse, I argue that it is futile to expect the English in these situated uses to be a shadow of the Inner Circle English that may frame these practices as instances of ‘failed English’, as they flout the norms of Standard English (Seidlhofer 2011; Wang 2013; Seidlhofer & Widdowson 2018). Such judgments are unhelpful and irrelevant, as

these uses of English have gone through historical and linguistic incubation and have declared their existence in the world.

Southern English is conceptualised in opposition to native Englishes, the latter being collectively understood as the standard, metropolitan varieties. Admittedly, there is a potential for creating a North-South dichotomy here, but I would argue that differentiating Southern English from its Northern counterpart is necessary. That said, I do not intend to present Southern and Northern Englishes as mutually exclusive, as some Southern speakers (the elite class, as above) may be willing to and can afford to adopt Northern English (Wang 2013). Much has been written about the politics of English and world Englishes (Saraceni 2020). Many conceptions of English are available in the literature which refer to such dimensions as racial (native, non-native), acquisitional/educational (foreign, second, and additional), nationalistic (British, American, Indian), geographical/regional (local, global, international, Asian, African, American, European), communicational (lingua franca, language of wider communication), geopolitical (colonial, post-colonial), and functional (language of knowledge, science, commerce, technology). However, viewing English from a Southern perspective may be desirable in the context of the growing reception of Southern epistemologies on the one hand and giving visibility to invisible Englishes on the other. My conceptualisation is also a way of responding to the class, inequality, and politics of English.

SOUTHERN THEORY AND SOUTHERN ENGLISH

I use *Southern theory* as a representative of the various epistemologies of the South discussed and debated in the past couple of decades (see Rosa 2014; Milani & Lazar 2017 for reviews). The theory was first put forward by the Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell (2007), although it can be traced back to earlier calls for decolonising knowledge and epistemology in favour of local and indigenous perspectives (Smith 1999). Connell's Southern theory was inspired by her critique of mainstream social science theories that claimed universality despite their inherent provinciality. As she argues:

Its [social science's] dominant genres picture the world as it is seen by men, capitalists, by the educated and affluent. Most important, they picture the world as seen from the rich capital-exporting countries of Europe and North America—the global metropole. (Connell 2007:vii)

This Northern theorising can be seen as a case of epistemic violence. Even though the majority of the people in the world were ignored by this knowledge-making process, such theories have been claimed to be universal and applicable to the Global South and the North alike. This theorising was made possible by the broader context of the culture of imperialism (Said 1993) within which the Western epistemological enterprise responded to the colonised world. Connell argues that the 'idea of a universal science of human behaviour and society has a

certain grandeur, and a certain usefulness' (2007:viii). However, this 'supposed universality' (Santos 2012) constructed by the 'hubris' of the 'zero point' epistemology (see Mignolo 2009) is ultimately flawed, as it is based at best on partial data and forged in the context of power, inequality, and questionable ethicality. Southern theory seeks to redress the epistemic harm by according the theorising power to the Global South. This is also an acknowledgment of the potential intellectual capacities for theorising by the South which should be allowed to attain epistemic sufficiency and independence from the North.

What is the meaning of South, and what is the theory underlying Southern theory? Rosa's (2014) review of seminal works by Connell (2007), Santos (2014), and Comaroff & Comaroff (2011) provides helpful answers to such questions. Rather than considering it a geographical entity, the South is used as a metaphor to refer 'to a specific epistemological form that could be defined by its negative and repairing relationship to colonial capitalism' (Rosa 2014:853). The South stands for epistemic and—by extension—'political marginality' (Milani & Lazar 2017) and may exist in the geographic South as well as the North (Pennycook & Makoni 2019). The theory in Southern theory is somewhat more controversial, as it has different meanings for different scholars, which 'are by no means an all-encompassing or coherent singular body of work; rather, they are a motley assemblage of ideas, concepts and lenses' (Milani & Lazar 2017:309). As Rosa (2014:863) points out, 'For Santos, theory is epistemology; for the Comaroffs, theory is practice; and for Connell, theory is academic social thought'. Rosa also argues that 'the way in which South and theory are present in all of the texts analyzed makes it impossible to bring them together in a stable, permanent way' (Rosa 2014:863). In his critical evaluation, rather than a theory, Southern theory needs to be viewed as 'a critique', 'a project' which is part of the 'new spirit' in contemporary social science. Along the same lines, Milani & Lazar (2017) consider Southern theory as 'perspectives' or 'viewpoints'.

As the reviews of works by Milani & Lazar (2017) and Rosa (2014) suggest, Southern theory is to be taken as an ontological and epistemological orientation, which questions the epistemic given in favour of more critical, inclusive, and ethical alternatives. It questions Northern theoretical positions by asking who has benefitted from such theorising and who is marginalised and left out. It does not seek to exclude the North or Northern understanding, as the South cannot exist without the North (Connell 2007; Santos 2012; Pennycook & Makoni 2019). However, it aims to address the epistemic harm that has been committed by the Northern view at the expense of the Southern perspectives. Southern theory is ultimately about the question of inequality with reference to, among other things, the politics of knowledge. The theory does not endorse the continuation of this epistemic violence which it seeks to redress by arguing for more appropriate theorising with reference to context and contextual givens (Ndhlovu 2021).

When this understanding of Southern theory is applied to English, the sociolinguistic reality of English in a globalised world cannot be grasped by continuing the

so-called native speaker norms and the prescribed rules of language use and communication. The phenomenon of English is different from Northern and Southern perspectives simply because while it generally refers to monolingual ability in the North, it is an essential part of multilingual repertoires in the case of the latter. Ontologically, we are talking about different linguistic realities. What is ‘real English’ in the North may not be relevant to the South (Seidlhofer 2011). English in the case of non-native speakers exists alongside their other languages; it cannot be given a singular identity from Southern perspectives. At the same time, Southern perspectives on English extend beyond translanguaging or identifying features of English that may justify national linguistic labels.

Southern theory as outlined here bolsters my argument for Southern English. It is mainly English, more than any other colonial language, that has been used to theorise in the social sciences and other disciplines in the past few centuries. It is the main language for research and publications (Ammon 2006; Cargill & Burgess 2008). As the principal linguistic infrastructure for theorising, English has served as a tool for epistemic violence. Therefore, decolonising the hegemonic language is a prerequisite for decolonising knowledge and theory-building. Without decolonising English, no other decolonising projects related to theory, epistemology, discipline, or pedagogy can be achieved (Mignolo 2009; Mignolo & Walsh 2018; Macedo 2019). Similar to Northern theorising in the social sciences, Northern English has ignored the majority of speakers of English in an English-dominant world, who are its non-native speakers (Kachru 1992; Seidlhofer 2011). Like the apparent grandeur and usefulness of the idea of the universal science of human behaviour and society, native English has been promoted as the global standard. English as a global lingua franca is often represented as a global imperative (May 2016). However, this is ultimately an elitist and nonegalitarian view, as the so-called standard language is not the language of the majority.

Why Southern English?

If ‘the global South is entitled to have its own view of the world (and of the global North)’ (Santos 2012:45), it needs a language for this viewing that can be called its own. Although the arrival of English in the Global South was not a matter of choice for Southerners, it has become a viable tool—in some cases the only one—available to them to make sense of their world. However, it cannot be the same English. If language as a tool is in the epistemic service of its user, it has to be the user’s servant, not their master. Instead of serving their needs, hegemonic English has the potential to colonise them. Therefore, decolonising the language is a logical first step. As Leonard (2017, cited in Pennycook & Makoni 2019:127) argues, ‘Decolonizing applied linguistics suggests first of all the need to decolonize “language”—or the way that language is framed in linguistics and applied linguistics—as part of any reclamation project’. There is a need to ‘develop new narratives, new words, new grammars, and new vocabularies’ (Ndhlovu

2021:197–98) to replace ‘the images, metaphors, symbols, language and approaches of the coloniser’ (2021:195). Taking off the imperial garb from English is imperative as the language is at the heart of epistemic struggles in the Global South. As Pennycook & Makoni (2019: 123, original emphases) argue:

Global South perspectives are encapsulated in struggles for basic, economic, political, and social transformation, struggles that are relevant to applied linguistics because they are intellectual and political contestations ‘OVER language, ABOUT language, IN language and FOR language which enables and promotes the consciousness and organization upon which such transformation depends’ (Jones, 2018, p. 3).

Grounded in such theoretical underpinnings, the idea of Southern English is based on a linguistic and sociolinguistic reality as well. We can think of English as a singular entity only in an abstract, impersonal sense. In reality, there are many Englishes in the world, as scholars have argued. This diversification, fragmentation, and localisation of English is an inevitable consequence of the global spread of English over the past centuries. The more the language has spread, the more it has lost its original character and identity. The context of learning, socialising, and use has a significant impact on the kind of English that evolves locally. Southern English is based on the argument that the linguistic environment in which people learn and use English will shape their English and their way of using it, which will be different from Englishes in other places. This is far from a radical argument because we have seen this substantiated by the emergence of various native varieties of Englishes such as American English, Canadian English, Australian English, and South African English from the original British English.

The autonomy of the transplanted varieties of English is asserted by their difference from each other as well as from British English. Along the same line, Southern English can assert itself by its deviation from native varieties of English. The difference between Southern English and its Northern counterpart is expected to be more pronounced than that between the native varieties of Englishes. This is due to the difference in the language environment in which language acquisition and socialisation take place. Despite their linguistic and pragmatic differences, all native varieties of English are underpinned by similar Judeo-Christian Western traditions. However, non-native Englishes are learned and used in diverse linguacultural contexts that refer to a vast range of linguistic, religious, cultural, and ethnic traditions. Southern English is considered a way of recognising and asserting the phenomenal differences between Northern and Southern Englishes.

Although such differences are the foundational basis for the WE paradigm, Southern English provides a way of addressing some of the criticisms of WE. WE is critiqued for its alleged focus on form, based on the view of language as a system (Saraceni 2015; Wright & Zheng 2018). Scholars argue that what is needed is a ‘language as practice’ view (Pennycook 2008; Prinsloo 2012; Sewell 2019) which enables seeing language as it is used by its speakers (Tupas & Bernardo 2021). Southern English may be a way of merging the system and practice views of English to emphasise how English is used by Southern speakers and how this use

differs from Northern ways (Wang 2013). Southern English does not seek conformity to any preconceived notion of system or form; it refers to attitudes and tendencies which mark its difference from the metropolitan variety of English.

This conceptualisation of Southern English seeks to emphasise its ontological and epistemological independence from its native counterpart. Instead of taking English as a given, it is constructed by Southern speakers in and through its use. Due to its geographical and sociocultural displacement from its original home, English has been subjected to a new linguistic ontology. As a tool for making meanings and constructing identities, it has adopted a different and differentiated sociolinguistic identity. This nativisation of English means that instead of governing its users in the Southern settings, English has come to be governed by them. Their epistemological engagement in constructing truths about self and society with recourse to English cannot be the same as native speakers' engagement in Northern settings. Like Southern theory that points to the provinciality of Northern theories and argues that these theories have to be reconsidered in making sense of life and experience in the Global South, Southern English has similar motivations. As the growing body of literature on WE, ELF, and translanguaging has argued, Northern or native varieties of English are inadequate to talk about life and reality in the Southern parts of the world. If every language or variety provides a cognitive lens on the world, Southern English deserves linguistic autonomy because the language produces different perspectives on life and society.

ENGLISH AS A SOUTHERN LANGUAGE IN BANGLADESH

The Bangladesh polity has received limited attention in English language scholarship internationally. One of the reasons for this is the Southern identity of the nation (Hamid & Baldauf 2013). English first arrived in Bangladesh in the wake of British colonial rule and has grown in significance since then. With a population of over 170 million, Bangladesh has one of the largest school-age student populations in the world. The dominance of English in education is indicated by the compulsory use of the language in the Year 1–12 national curriculum. The dominance is also marked by the private English-medium stream of education for the upper classes running parallel to the mainstream general education in Bangla and a stream of Islamic education called the madrasa system (see Hamid 2016). Shadowing English-medium schooling, mainstream education has also introduced an English version of the national curriculum, which has been embraced by well-resourced schools mainly in urban settings. Finally, the growth of the English-medium higher education in the private sector has added to the demand and supply of English across the country (Hamid & Baldauf 2014).

Sociolinguistic investigations of English in Bangladesh are scarce (Banu & Sussex 2001; Sultana 2014, 2019). Equally scarce is research on world Englishes (Banu 2000; Hamid & Hasan 2020; Hamid & Jahan 2021). Banu (2000) made

the first notable attempt to identify features of Bangladeshi English, pointing to linguistic creativity and innovations. A handful of other researchers have followed this research agenda, making modest contributions (see Hamid 2022 for review). However, this research is informed by the WE perspective and is subject to the criticisms previously outlined (see also Pennycook 2020).

Against this background, this section analyses examples of Southern ways of using English in Bangladesh. Instead of relying on metropolitan norms or standards, which are probably untenable or impractical anyway, these local uses represent the manipulation of English in meeting communicative needs (Seidlhofer 2011; Wang 2013). These examples are selected from different domains of language use, and no claims are made about their generalisability. The key point to note about them is that these uses have survived the process of linguistic/editorial gatekeeping, if any has occurred. Like the letter in the opening of the article, these examples have served their communicative goals, and they are not going to be corrected based on external norms.

English representing Southern life and society

English use in Bangladesh is mainly local, as communication is geared towards local audiences to meet local needs. A major source of this (written) use of English is the locally produced English textbooks for the Year 1–12 curriculum and the English version of textbooks for other subjects of the same curriculum. The local flavour of English in these educational resources cannot be missed, as these are written by local authors who have been educated in the local system of education. Example (1) selected from *English for Today* for Years 9–10 (Shams, Haider, Roy, Majumder, Razzaque, & Shahazadi 2018:56) is a representative case, which describes the life of a village woman who lost her house to the erosion of the river Jamuna.

- (1) **Not long ago Meherjan had everything—a family, cultivable land and cattle. The erosion of the Jamuna gradually consumed all her landed property. It finally claimed her only shelter during the last monsoon. It took the river only a day to devour Meher's house, trees, vegetable garden and the bamboo bush. She had a happy family once. Over the years, she lost her husband and her family to diseases that cruel hunger and poverty brought to the family. Now, she is the only one left to live on with the loss and the pain. The greedy Jamuna has shattered her dreams and happiness.**

The text pictures rural agrarian life in Bangladesh by referring to families, cultivable land, and cattle. The narrative evokes the image of the destructiveness of a river which is also a common feature of rural life. The description reflects the influence of Bangla in its rhetoric to ensure the authenticity of the text. The river is represented as a monster, a common metaphor in Bangla folk literature. The monster is represented as ruthless, which devoured the woman's dwelling and shattered her dreams.

The local flavour of English can be noted in example (2) from the Year 7 English textbook, which describes Paul, an international NGO worker in Bangladesh, visiting a local student in a village.

- (2) Paul went to meet Kobita and her family the next day. He was in his blue trousers and a grey T-shirt. Kobita's mother Ms Shahana was a shy woman and she was reluctant to come to Paul. But Paul greeted her warmly in his newly learnt Bangla, "Kemon achen"? Ms Shahana loved hearing a foreigner speaking Bangla. She welcomed Paul to her house. Kobita started talking to Paul. She wanted him to write something for her school magazine. As they were talking, Ms Shahana prepared quite a number of Bangladeshi dishes. She served him lunch at noon. Paul had plain rice, chicken curry, fish bhuna, dal and salad for lunch. He liked the tastes of all those delicious items except the dried fish *bhorta*. (Hoque, Shams, Haider, Roy, Razzaque, & Parvin 2017:90)

The text presents a realistic picture of rural life and culture. A foreigner visiting a rural home might have been rare in the past, but this may not be so rare at present as a consequence of globalisation and global movements of people. The text is noted for its simplicity of language, which flows smoothly, capturing the not-so-common encounter of the local and the global. The example can be seen as representing the North-South co-existence (Milani & Lazar 2017), generating the phenomenon of Southern English. English is utilised as a local resource, like a local dish, as there is no felt need for marking Bangla words for food such as fish *bhuna* (fish curry), although the author makes an exception for fish *bhorta* (spicy mashed fish).

Exploring how English is used by teachers and students in the classroom may be illuminating for documenting Southern features of English. Occasionally, local textbooks provide written representation of spoken language use in the form of dialogue and group discussion. Example (3), extracted from the Year 7 English textbook, provides some insights. The text shows interactions between a teacher and a student. The topic of the classroom discourse is bargaining.

- (3) (Hoque et al. 2017:32–33)

Hridoy: What is bargain or haggle teacher?

Shahana: Suppose you want to buy a shirt or a dress in a shop in the market. You ask, "How much is this?" The shopkeeper says, "330 taka." But in many cases, this price is more than the real price. So you offer 200 taka or even less. The shopkeeper says, "No, I can't sell it for 200 taka." Then you offer 225 and he may still say, "No, it'll be a loss for me." This process of asking for and offering more or less money is called 'bargaining' or 'haggling'.

The teacher's explanation is marked by the authenticity of the cultural practice of bargaining, even when it is expressed in English, as it is transformed into a local language. This English-only text can be read as the literal translation of an interaction in Bangla that seeks to explain what bargaining is.

Even when English is used in more formal domains such as academic publishing, Southern English may not be infrequent. Examples (4) and (5) are selected from the *Primary Education Journal* (see Ziauddin & Rahman 2019), published by the National Academy of Primary Education (NAPE) located in an eastern district called Mymensingh. This is the only journal in the country for publishing research on primary education funded by the government. It is published exclusively in English, targeting both local and international audiences. Contributions to the journal are noted for their use of English.

The issue of the journal in question includes a co-authored paper (Ziauddin & Rahman 2019) entitled ‘Deprivation in Education of Child Laborer in Dhaka City’. Example (4) is the abstract of the article.

- (4) The aim of this paper is to discuss the causes particularly how child laborer work and their consequence hamper them to achieve education as their basic human right. If anybody is deprived of education in childhood then he/she can never grow up with honor and dignity in a society. This study finds facts through which children lose their invaluable childhood and their fundamental right to education subsequently they are also deprived of their physical, mental, and emotional progress. The ongoing child labor is the product of our concurrent social mechanism and limited attention from policy implementation by the policy makers. Apart from that opportunity inequality is also identified, in this study, as one of the major causes of child labor deprivation of education in Dhaka city.

In general, the abstract, written exclusively in English without ‘mixing’, meets the genre requirements as it tells what the paper is about (educational deprivation of child labourers), its significance (education being essential for a life with honour and dignity), findings of the study, and their consequences for child labour in the Bangladeshi capital city. However, some of the language choices, expressions, and styles deviate from the expectations of a research article for an international audience. For example, the first sentence does not conform to the rules of pluralisation. The second sentence reflects a strong statement which is usually avoided in academic work in the social sciences and humanities. In the third sentence, ‘facts finding’ may not be used to describe the aim of a qualitative case study. However, since the abstract has gone through the editorial process, it deserves reading as is, without calling for judgment. Since some of the linguistic and stylistic features of the text do not conform to what is usually expected of a journal published in the metropole, this can be seen as a local way of using English in the academic domain.

The above article reports on case studies of five children in the city of Dhaka. The fifth case is partially reproduced in example (5) for analysis.

- (5) Sagor is a 9 years old boy and works as a Tokai. He doesn’t know whether his father or mother is still alive or dead and even his birth place or address. In his earlier days, he

would stay in Komlapur railway station with his grandmother. She was the only survived person of Sagor as a close relative. After every one or two weeks he used to meet her and pay a little amount of money from his earnings because she was old and couldn't work anything except begging. After her death, Sagor now stays at Mogbazar area at different nights in different places. He wakes up very early in the morning basically after Fajar azan and starts his job to search for waste paper, recycling paper, plastic elements, iron/rod, and polythene. By searching the whole day he is able to collect 5 to 10 kilograms of valuable wastage to sell. Thus he goes to Mogbazar railway line where one of his clients stays to buy waste paper from the Tokai. (Ziauddin & Rahman 2019:41–42)

The case study succeeds in recording the miserable life of street children in Dhaka. This is achieved by using English in a local way, meeting the obligation of reporting, using whatever linguistic resources the authors may have had access to. Although the journal is targeted at both local and international audiences, local references and expressions are frequent. There is little evidence of conformity to the rules of standard grammar. An international audience may not be familiar with the Bangla word *Tokai* for street urchins. Similarly, the insertion of *Fajar azan*, which refers to the call for the early morning prayer for Muslims, may indicate the violation of linguistic borders, which is the focus of the next subsection.

English as part of the local linguistic ecology

As a Southern language, English is not a lone linguistic offspring in Bangladesh; instead, it is part of a linguistic family with siblings and cousins. English constitutes one component of individual and societal linguistic repertoires. Sometimes the languages constituting the repertoires are counted; other times counting may be immaterial. In some contexts of communication, English may be used as the only language (English only). The English language newspapers and magazines published in Bangladesh are one of the main sources of exclusive use of English. In a country where mixing languages is legally prohibited (see Hamid & Rahman 2019), media houses may avoid doing so and thereby avoid the risk of being the target of a regime whose democratic norms have almost completely disappeared. However, all print and electronic media in Bangladesh in all languages have to rely on English for gathering news from external sources. In other words, Bangla language media also need English for news making, although their news products are published only in Bangla. Nevertheless, the media may reflect their multilingual character in important ways. For example, both print and digital versions of both Bangla and English newspapers publish advertisements in either language. More importantly, the leading English daily called *The Daily Star* publishes their paper in English and Bangla on the same official website (<https://www.thedailystar.net/>).

(6)

The Daily Star বাংলা
বৃহস্পতিবার • ২১ মে ২০২০ • ৬ জ্যৈষ্ঠ ১৪২৭

The Daily Star
Thursday, May 21, 2020 | YOUR RIGHT TO KNOW

Using English together with and alongside Bangla is common in public spheres. Public signs and billboards utilise multiple languages in creative ways for commercial purposes (Banu & Sussex 2001). Figure 1 was captured from a tailoring shop in a hotel in Bangkok which is frequented by Bangladeshi visitors. The Bangladeshi-owned shop tries to attract mainly Bangladeshi customers. The multilingual sign reflects the deployment of multiple languages, including English, Bangla, and Arabic, serving various purposes simultaneously: communicating the business to a wider audience (in English), attracting the niche clientele (in Bangla), and projecting the identity of the business owner (in Arabic). Thus, identity and instrumentality are combined in this multilingual and multimodal public communication in the business setting. Interestingly, the sign does not use Thai, the official language of Thailand, which is probably redundant, as it cannot be linked to instrumental or commercial purposes.

The tailoring shop also sells SIM cards for mobile phones to visitors and tourists residing in the hotel as an additional business. This business message is communicated in English in all upper cases: SIM CARD HAVE. This is a literal translation of the



FIGURE 1. Shop sign in a hotel in Bangkok (captured by the author).

Bangla expression *sim card achhe*. This Southern way of using English may have served the commercial purpose of attracting Bangladeshis with mixed levels of English. An equivalent standard form such as ‘SIM cards available here’ or ‘We sell SIM cards’ might have placed a higher level of linguistic demand on some customers.

When situations demand an exclusive use of English or Bangla, particularly for written communication, Southern speakers may conform to the situational demand. However, in those situations, English use may still reflect its hybrid identity as the other languages might shape and colour this hybridity. Together with its siblings and cousins, English may assert a collective identity. Technology magazines, which have flourished in Bangladesh in the past few years, may provide evidence. These magazines publish their content in English as well as Bangla without necessarily mixing the two languages in the same version. However, English only in such cases is deceptive because the Bangla style and rhetoric cannot be missed. Consider example (7) which is the editorial of the December 2014 issue of a tech magazine published online from Dhaka. The text sought to say farewell to the year 2014 and to welcome 2015. It is in English in form and appearance but essentially in Bangla in terms of rhetorical style.

- (7) The year 2014 is almost end and 2015 is knocking the door with new hopes. We may did something wrong during this year or still making mistakes, that's mean we are making new things, trying new things, learning, living, pushing ourselves, changing ourselves, changing our world. We're doing things that we never done before, and more importantly, we are Doing Something. (Nahar 2014, cited in Hamid & Hasan 2020:311)

The editorial does not seem to abide by common rules of grammar. There seems to be no alignment between different conceptions of time (past, present, and future) and the corresponding grammatical features. However, the new year's message is communicated effectively to the readership.

Mixing languages in different ways has also entered more formal educational resources. Example (8) is reproduced from primary English textbooks which include a page entitled ‘Teacher instructions’ (Kabir, Rahman, Haider, & Roy 2018:v). The two languages are given peaceful co-existence in the set of instructions for teachers teaching English.

- (8) **English For Today** পাঠ্যপুস্তকের পাঠভিত্তিক শিখন-শেখানো কার্যাবলি শ্রেণিকক্ষে কার্যকর করার সময় শিক্ষার্থীরা যেন পরস্পর বিভিন্নভাবে **interact** করতে পারে, শিক্ষক তা অবশ্যই নিশ্চিত করবেন। এই উদ্দেশ্যে শিক্ষক শিক্ষার্থীদের দিয়ে **pairwork, groupwork, chain drill, role play** ইত্যাদি করাবেন।

On other occasions, Bangla words may simply be written in English assuming that these would be acceptable in English. This is particularly the case for talking about cultural concepts and expressions (Hamid & Jahan 2021). In example (9), local musical genres are written in Bangla which probably cannot be translated

into English in the absence of such categories of songs in Western cultural traditions. However, this use of English may also be motivated by a desire to push the traditional boundary of the English language, which is forced to accommodate concepts from other languages.

- (9) We have a rich history and collection of folk songs in Bangladesh. Of them Palligiti, Bhatiali, Bhawaiya, Jari, Sari, Gambhira, Lalongiti, Palagaan and songs of Hason Raja are very popular. The traditional musical instruments are usually played with these songs. (Hoque, Banu, Majumder, Razzaque, Shahzadi, & Banu 2018:2)

Similar practices are noted in textbooks for non-language subjects written by authors who are subject experts without commensurate language expertise. The two mathematical problems in example (10) reflect the Southern use of English in two ways. First, the problems are local, referring to life and social practices in Bangladesh. Second, Bangla concepts are integrated into English without any indication of the linguistic borders of the two languages.

- (10) Sujan had 70 *taka* and 50 *paisa*. His mother gave him 95 taka to buy fish. How much amount did Sujan have? (Khan, Motin, Begum, & Uddin 2018:81)

Reza is inviting 6 friends to his house. He has 85 *boroi*. How many *boroi* will each friend get? Is there any remaining *boroi*? (Khan et al. 2018:72)

In the first problem, *taka* and *paisa* are units of the local currency which are used as English words. The second problem refers to the counting of *boroi* (plums). Although an English equivalent of *boroi* is available, the Bangla word is deployed without any concern for its acceptance. In all of these cases, translation from Bangla is a key strategy, which can be argued to be one of the defining features of Southern English.

In textbooks for these other, non-language subjects, communicating the content (ideas and messages) seems to be the key aim. This is achieved by using a local variety of English which reflects minimal concern for formal or structural accuracy understood in a traditional sense.

English clothed in additional linguistic garments

If orthography is the clothing of language, English may wear multiple clothes, not just the Romanised script, in the Global South. For many people in Bangladesh, English (as well as Arabic as a foreign language) is made sense of mainly in and through Bangla. Transliteration of English (and Arabic) into Bangla is a common practice with educational and pedagogical aims. The position of English as a compulsory subject in education has led to the production of commercial guidebooks which often transliterate English texts into Bangla for use by students as well as



FIGURE 2. Poster of the Bangladeshi film *Common Gender* (source: <http://onlinecinplex1.blogspot.com/2016/03/common-gender-bangla.html>).

teachers particularly in rural and high-poverty schools. English pronunciation poses a serious challenge for teachers and students alike in Bangladesh (Rahman & Chowdhury 2019). Writing the pronunciation of English words and texts in Bangla is the main strategy for dealing with the challenge. As a consequence, many students internalise the outcomes of the divergence of the two phonological systems.

However, transliteration is not necessarily the result of linguistic deficiency. In some cases, the aim may be to produce special effects in communication. Consider Figure 2, which is a poster for a Bangladeshi film entitled ‘Common gender’ written more prominently in Bangla than in English. This language choice may have been motivated by a number of factors. Bangladeshi films usually do not attract educated middle- or upper-classes in their audience. An English title written in English may fail to appeal to the target audience from lower-classes. Strategically, in a Muslim majority society, the topic of transgender and non-traditional forms of gender identification has yet to be widely accepted. This can be understood from the local word for transgender (*hijra*) which appears to be derogatory. A movie with the title *hijra* may not be appealing because of the social meaning that *hijra* has come to be associated with. By contrast, using the Bangla meaning of common gender (*uvoy lingo*) may not be catchy enough. Therefore, ‘common gender’ may have been the best choice and may have another motive as well. If the notion of transgender forces us to think beyond the gender dichotomy, its transliteration may encourage people to go beyond the dichotomy of English and Bangla. Giving English a new garment, then, is metapragmatic and ideological.

Asserting distinctiveness from native English and local linguistic elitism

English, as it is used in Bangladesh, is not a singular or homogenous communicative tool; the language can be located at different points on the ‘cline of bilingualism’ (Kachru 1965) or ‘lectal range’ (Platt 1978). Both Kachru and Platt identify three points on the continuum. While Kachru labels these points ‘zero point’ (minimal bilingualism), ‘central point’, and ‘ambilingual point’, Platt calls them ‘acrolect’, ‘mesolect’, and ‘basilect’. Each of the points is a tentative measure of the distance between the sociolect used by non-native speakers of English and the native variety called Standard English. Arguably, some uses of English approximate the Inner Circle English which are typically owned by the established elite minority who are educated in elite English-medium schools. Often this schooling serves as the stepping stone for their students to pursue higher studies in Inner Circle countries (Hamid & Jahan 2015). Members of this social group (see Jahan & Hamid 2019) often identify with Standard English and cosmopolitan worldviews and maintain distance from the local variety of English and local social values and norms.

In her examination of linguistic globalisation in the Indian call centre industry, Sonntag (2009) argues that the ownership and originality of Indian English as used in call centres is asserted not in relation to American English demanded by American customers but in relation to the English of the established Indian elite. Thus, she talks about two groups of English-speaking elites in India: the established post-colonial elite with social privilege, who identify with Inner Circle English, and the emerging elite with less privilege, who speak Indian English. The emerging English-speaking Indian elites are ‘vernacular elites’ who received their education in vernacular medium schools in a context of English-vernacular divide reflecting social divides (Ramanathan 2005; LaDousa 2014).

Similarly, Southern English in Bangladesh is associated with the Bangla-medium educated mainstream community and its originality can be asserted vis-à-vis post-colonial English of the established elite. As in India and other postcolonial societies, there have been unending debates on the medium of instruction (English medium versus Bangla medium) in Bangladesh often enacted in letters to the editor of English newspapers, online Google groups, and social media (Jahan & Hamid 2019). As instances of language ideologies, language in these debates serves as a proxy for non-linguistic phenomena such as class, being, and belonging. However, the debates also draw on questions of language, variety, and communicative repertoires. For example, while the Bangla-medium educated group may represent their English-medium educated other as incomplete Bangladeshis with limited proficiency in the national language, the latter represents the former as hopeless locals with limited knowledge of English. The debates construct distinct linguistic repertoires for each group: while the English-medium educated group are represented as English-dominant bilinguals, the other group is seen as Bangla-dominant bilinguals with clear implications for further education and life chances in a globalised world

(Jahan & Hamid 2019). English is an essential component of both linguistic repertoires, but, as it is argued, it is not the same variety of English. The EM-educated group identifies with Inner Circle English, as can be seen in example (11).

- (11) We, English medium students pronounce English words the way we have been taught by our teachers or as specified in the pronunciation guides in the Oxford dictionary. (Hamid & Jahan 2015:90)

The BM-educated group is represented as being affiliated with Bangladeshi English because of their schooling in the mainstream Bangla medium system. A concrete example in (12) illustrates their affiliation with Northern and Southern Englishes respectively.

- (12) While the Bengali Medium students will say that ‘The teacher took a test today,’ the English Medium students will say that, ‘The teacher gave a test today.’ (Jahan & Hamid 2019:98)

The first example reflects Southern English as it is a literal translation of the equivalent expression in Bangla, while the second one reflects the Northern way of talking about a teacher giving a test to their students. Thus, the English as discussed in this article is Southern in two ways. In a macro sense, mainstream English in Bangladesh is Southern in relation to Inner Circle English, which is dominated by the Bangla-medium educated group. It is also Southern in relation to the local pockets of Inner Circle English represented by the English-educated postcolonial elite.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article has examined the situated use of English in Bangladesh taking examples from different domains. Considering the nature and functions of the language in these contexts, English can be conceptualised as a Southern language with four major characteristics. The features of English underlying the examples suggest that there is a blurring of the identity (world Englishes) and instrumentality (English as a lingua franca) functions of English (Kirkpatrick 2020). These uses may not neatly fit into any matrix of local and global, mundane and specialist, and written and spoken variations of language use (Mahboob 2018). However, it is possible to use the ‘descriptive’ (Cummins 2021) category of Southern English to accommodate the reported uses. These examples do not suggest calcified North-South borders in linguistic terms, as they are found to meet and interact, as would be expected in a globalised world. Nevertheless, the distinctiveness of the locally grown and nurtured Southern English cannot be missed. Southern English also shows translanguaging, but it is not all about linguistic border-crossing or denying.

The Southernness of English can be attributed to the imperative of using English in the various contexts of communication. The necessity of representing life and

society in the local context forces indigenisation and re-invention of the language. This may point to an important feature of English as a global and a local language, labelled ‘glocal English’ (see Pakir 2000). English is global only in an abstract sense in which the language is understood as a code for communication and identification. It is essentially a local language as the abstract code is given life through its deployment in local communicative needs and purposes. In this sense, as a global language English does not exist; it exists only in a local way with all its formal and functional peculiarities (Pennycook 2010). The local way of using English is neither singular nor uniform; it reflects varying degrees of learning, owning, and nativising English. Southern English is one way of capturing this local manifestation of English and its appropriation. At the same time, viewing English through a Southern lens allows us to consider the relationality of English as a local practice—in relation to Northern English and to its local identification by the postcolonial elite. As Milani & Lazar (2017:310, original emphasis) argue, ‘a focus on the specificities of the South is geared to SPEAKING BACK to the North, and thereby enhancing a reflexive practice on the geopolitics of knowledge production’.

Arguably, Southern English is an expression of agency. Regardless of whether users of Southern English formally name it/claim its ownership, it is their English and their way of doing things with the global code in order to meet their needs. Agency is the *raison d’être* for the divergence of non-native Englishes from the native variety, which can be noted in: (a) forcing the language to be a meaningful medium of communication, and (b) concretising the language in local practice and thereby giving it an essentially local identity. These agentive processes distinguish the local way of using the language from all other ways of using it in Inner, Outer and Expanding Circle contexts. It is non-conformity to any given norms that ensures the agency and creativity (Seidlhofer 2011; Wang 2013).

The notion of agency may not be undermined if we acknowledge that Southern ways of using English are the result of, among other factors, learning the language in the local context with understandable acquisitional peculiarities. The outcomes of English teaching in Bangladesh and the Indian subcontinent are less than ideal (Hamid & Erling 2016). Schooling and its outcomes are also mediated by socio-economic contexts of schools and the levels of economic and cultural capital brought to schools by students. The significance of the socioeconomic context of English learning can be appreciated by pointing out that different linguistic markets for English have produced different forms of linguistic capital (Hamid 2016). For instance, while elite English-medium schools produce globally competitive student ‘products’ (Hamid & Jahan 2015; Jahan & Hamid 2019), such outcomes may be unthinkable for mainstream Bangla-medium and religious schools.

However, my aim in this article is not to consider Southern English from a pedagogical or educational perspective; I am more interested in investigating the sociolinguistic reality of English from an epistemological perspective, drawing on Southern theory. My main argument is that we make sense of our world and

construct truths about ourselves and our society using the knowledge, experiences, and tools that we have access to. In other words, our use of English is reflective of our linguistic repertoires and life circumstances. Considering this, we are faced with an epistemological dilemma: Should people construct truths using the language that is part of their life (real language, from their point of view), or should they do so using an abstract code which is not part of their life and linguistic repertoire? Can they truly make sense of their world by using a FOREIGN code? If Okhil Chandra had to write his letter to the railway department using British English or Babu English, could he have done that? What would he do if he knew that the letter was acceptable only in British English, not in his own English?

Epistemological (as well as ethical) questions such as these are relevant to ask in relation to various formal domains such as media and publication in Inner, Outer and Expanding Circle contexts. The linguistic homogeneity demanded and maintained in these domains has created an artificial world which is unreflective of how people use language to construct their reality of life and society. This linguistic regime has been maintained by silencing people's epistemic urge and often denying them access to these domains on the basis of language, among other reasons. The domain of international publication is a particular case in point where academics from non-native English-speaking backgrounds have faced obstacles in getting access (Ammon 2006; Cargill & Burgess 2008; Cheung 2010; Flowerdew 2019; Kubota 2020) due to, among other reasons, their ways of using English for academic works. Although the requirements of native/standard variety of English may have eased somewhat in recent years, they are still likely to be rejected on the grounds of language. Native English still serves as the norm even though non-native speakers of English have outnumbered its native speakers globally. This gives validity to Southern theory in relation to English, as discussed in this article, and the conceptualisation of English as a Southern language.

I acknowledge that my argument for Southern English is open to the criticism that it has been advanced not by using Southern English or epistemologies of the South but by relying on a more metropolitan form of English and theories and methodological choices from the North. This criticism applies to all scholars who argue for world Englishes or English as a lingua franca or translanguaging or Southern theory and publish in Northern outlets. The situation points to the North-South divide in knowledge construction, justifying the call for greater recognition of Southern perspectives on English, knowledge, and knowing. At the same time, my argument for Southern English is not a call for excluding Northern English or theorising; it is about the recognition of various perspectives or the ecology of knowledges (see Rosa 2014; Milani & Lazar 2017).

Exploring the question of how the ecology of knowledges or Englishes can be incorporated into the domains characterised by linguistic purism falls beyond the scope of this paper. However, Young (2010:115) provides an interesting example of doing academic writing in Black English. He argues that writers should use

their own English, thereby suggesting bringing down the rigid linguistic walls in favour of flexibility, dynamism, and less purity:

The BIG divide between vernacular and standard, formal and informal be eroding, if it aint already faded. And for many, it's a good thing. I know it sho be for me.

One can read Southern English here, as in the opening example from colonial India.

NOTE

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