

## ABSTRACT

Situated within the frameworks of English linguistic imperialism and World Englishes, this doctoral thesis examines the contested status of English in Bangladesh. It pursues two core objectives: first, to investigate the role of English in postcolonial educational policy, institutional and social practices and the linguistic dynamics between language, power, identity, and recognition; and second, to analyse attitudes toward Bangladeshi English, with particular attention to its phonetic features. While English has been widely studied as a tool of global communication, its sociolinguistic influence, economical legitimacy, influence on national identity and the development of its local variety in the Bangladeshi context remain insufficiently explored. This thesis critically interrogates whether English in Bangladesh's postcolonial context functions as a vehicle for global integration and internal unity or as a conduit for colonial hegemony, serving Western interests and perpetuating economic, cultural and epistemic subordination. It also considers the emergence of linguistic resistance in Bangladesh and includes a study on the developmental status of BdE as a distinct variety. Through the analysis of sociolinguistic perceptions, practices and phonetic variation, it addresses a significant gap in understanding how English simultaneously empowers and marginalises communities in the Global South.

The study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating qualitative and quantitative approaches to comprehensively investigate English linguistic imperialism and the status of BdE. Guided by a critical constructivist and realist philosophical stance, it combined interpretivist and post-positivist epistemologies. Qualitative data were collected through focus group discussions with students ( $n = 100$ ) and semi-structured interviews with university teachers ( $n = 20$ ), which were analysed thematically to explore perceptions of English in Bangladesh. The quantitative data included survey responses from students and teachers ( $n = 120$ ), analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, and acoustic recordings ( $n = 10$ ) to identify BdE's phonological features.

The findings illustrate a tension between imposed linguistic hierarchies and an emerging local variety. Educational and national language policies reproduce postcolonial and neoliberal ideologies that equate English with power, prestige, global access and modernity. These macro-level structures influence educational practices, cultural dislocation and personal aspirations in ways that undermine linguistic justice and epistemic sovereignty. While caught within a hegemonic structure, some participants demonstrated critical awareness of ongoing

cultural dislocation and linguistic inequity. Furthermore, a growing, pluralistic awareness of BdE suggested an incipient shift towards a distinct, systematic English variety shaped by Bengali phonological structures. As the acoustic data illustrated, these include a restructured vowel inventory, consistent rhoticity, and L1-influenced consonantal shifts, underscoring BdE's legitimacy within the World Englishes framework of linguistic self-recognition and identity assertion.

These findings also highlight the persistent marginalisation of Bengali in Bangladesh's institutional, educational and socio-economic spheres, reflecting the deeper entanglement of linguistic hegemony, postcolonial governance and global power dynamics. The dominance of English, despite legal and policy-level support for Bengali, reflects not only a failure of policy implementation but also an internalised colonial mentality that privileges foreign epistemologies over indigenous ones. This dynamic not only erodes linguistic diversity and cultural continuity but also reinforces inequitable access to knowledge and opportunity for much of the population while curtailing inclusive national development. The thesis thus underscores the urgent need for inclusive language policy reform, pedagogical pluralism and state investment in Bengali-medium knowledge production. More broadly, it offers a critical lens through which to understand how postcolonial nations can reclaim linguistic displacements. Ensuring the functional centrality of the mother tongue is essential for epistemic justice, equitable development and sustainable cultural identity in an increasingly globalised world.

**Keywords:**

*Bangladeshi English, commodification, ELT industry, English linguistic imperialism, global south, language and power, language policies, lingua franca, linguistic neo-imperialism, post-colonial society*