

Students' Attitudes towards English: The Case of Life Science School of Khulna University

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Abstract

Attitude to language is a construct that explains linguistic behaviour in particular. It may be positive or negative as well as instrumental or integrative. It varies from favourably to unfavourably or vice-versa in language learning and acquisition, choice and use of language in different domains and hence, it is important in the question of survival and development of a particular language and in the chances of success in language policy implementation. Thus, this study aimed at investigating attitude of the undergraduate students of Life Science School of Khulna University towards English language. The study was worthy of doing because the target population study English language course as part of foreign language policy of Bangladesh as well as the medium of instruction policy of the university. The data of this study were collected through a questionnaire survey administered upon a total of seventy nine randomly selected samples. Upon the completion of the collection of data, these were analyzed, computed and tabulated using SPSS. The findings suggest that the respondents were found to be positive towards English language and this could be attributed to the fact that respondents were instrumentally motivated towards English.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, attitudes, instrumental, integrative and linguistic behavior.

1. Introduction

Bi-/multilingualism allow people to grow up with access to two or more languages and this allows people to show different attitudes towards languages. Attitude in general is a hypothetical psychological construct which defines or promotes certain behaviours and explains their direction and persistence. Allport (1935) defines, “attitude is a mental or neural state of readiness, organized through experience, exerting a directive or dynamic influence upon the individual’s response to all objects and situations with which it is related” (cited in Baker, 1992:11). Attitude is a convenient and efficient way of explaining consistent patterns in behaviour. It often manages to summarize, explain and predict behaviour (Baker, 1992). Attitudes, according to Crystal (1997: 215), are the feelings people have about their own language or the languages of others. Thus, attitude to language is a construct that explains linguistic behaviour in particular.

The evaluation that a particular language is harsh, sweet, difficult, easy, international, local, prestigious or vernacular is due to the variation of attitudes towards the language. Therefore, attitude change is an important notion since attitudes are affected by experience. There may be both positive and negative feelings attached to a language. The major dimensions along which views about languages can vary are ‘social statuses’ and ‘group solidarity’ (Hohenthal, 2003). Baker (1992: 11) quotes Ajzen (1988) who says, attitude is ‘a disposition to respond favourably or unfavourably to an object, person, institution, or event’. It means that if a speech community shows their unfavourability to a particular language, that language is unlikely to survive and vice-versa.

Language attitudes vary in nature. People show attitudes of varying nature such as attitude to the variation of language; attitude to minority language and dominant language; attitude to foreign and second language; attitude to a specific language etc. Whatever the nature of attitude, it has two components: instrumental and integrative (Baker, 1992). Instrumental attitude refers to showing attitude to a particular language for self achievement and recognition. As Hohenthal (2003) reports that attitude to English in India is instrumental: English is perceived as a useful language to know mostly because of job opportunities and for education. People favour a particular language when they find that the language is a tool to achieve high status, economic advantage, basic security and survival and matters related to self-orientation. Integrative attitude, on the other hand, concerns someone’s attachment with a particular speech community. People show such attitude in order to be identified as a member of the desired community. Hogan-Brun & Ramoniene (2005) found that the state’s inclusive language and citizenship policies in Lithuania have led to the consolidation of society which has positively affected attitudes amongst the minority communities to learn the state language and to integrate. However, instrumental and integrative orientation to language attitudes are not necessarily opposite and alternatives, rather complementary to each other. A person may be motivated in different strengths by both orientations (Baker, 1992). But, what is the attitude of the undergraduate students of Life Science School of Khulna University towards English language—instrumental or integrative; positive or negative? The present study assumes that attitude of the population towards English is positive and instrumental in orientation because though the learning of English started as a historico-political accident in this sub-continent but it becomes an academic-economic reality in the contemporary Bangladesh. Thus, this study finds it relevant to investigate attitudes of the undergraduate students of Life Science School of Khulna University towards English.

2. Statement of the Research Problem

The undergraduate students of Life Science School of Khulna University study compulsory English language course as part of the foreign language policy of Bangladesh. Besides, they

learn and use English language as it is the medium of instruction of the university. Their interest, aptitude and motivation for learning English and the chances of success in foreign language policy and medium of instruction policy implementation depend to a large extent on the favourable attitudes towards English language. But an extensive literature survey suggests that the attitude towards English of the undergraduate students of Life Science School of Khulna University has not been studied before. Thus it is of relevance to discover the attitudes of the target population towards English language.

3. Objectives of the Study

Attitude towards languages is extensively studied phenomenon in sociolinguistics. It is the attitude towards language that appears to be important in the restoration, preservation, decay or death in the life of a language (Baker, 1992). Attitude has been a subject of research interest among the sociolinguists and social scientists over the years and they have done significant contributions. The findings of different attitude studies state that attitudes vary from favourably to unfavourably or vice-versa in language learning and acquisition, choice and use of language in different domains and thus, surveys of attitudes provide social indicators of changing beliefs about language and the chances of success in language policy implementation. Attitude has been studied from various perspectives with reference to a number of languages in a variety of settings such as attitude towards mother tongue; attitude towards a second or foreign language; attitude towards national language; attitude towards varieties of languages; attitude towards language in education policy; relationship between attitudes and motivation; the relationship between attitudes and learning strategies; the relationship between attitudes and level of achievement and so on. This study also aims at investigating attitude of the undergraduate students of Life Science School of Khulna University towards English and hence, the specific objective of this study is to discover the attitudes of the undergraduate students of Life Science School of Khulna University towards English.

4. Literature Review

A bulk of studies on language attitudes with various dimensions have been conducted over the years across the world such as attitude towards different languages (e.g. Balcazar, 2003; Malallah, 2000; Marley, 2004); attitude towards mother tongue (e.g. Tuwakham, 2005); attitude towards a second or foreign language (e.g. Lai, 2005); attitude towards national language (e.g. Lai, 2009); attitude towards varieties of languages (e.g. Al-Kahtany, 1995; Assaf, 2001; Benson, 1991; El-Dash & Tucker, 1975; Gibb, 1999; Karstadt, 2002; Starkes & Paltridge, 1994; Zhou, 2002); attitude towards language in education policy (e.g. Amamio, 2000); relationship between attitudes and motivation (e.g. Bernaus, Masgoret, Gardner, & Reyes, 2004; Donitsa-Schmidt, Inbar, & Shohamy, 2004); the relationship between attitudes and learning strategies (e.g. Gan, 2004); the relationship between attitudes and level of achievement (e.g. Graham, 2004); beliefs and attitudes about target language use, first language use and anxiety (e.g. Levine, 2003); attitudes towards language and language learning at secondary and tertiary levels (e.g. Yang and Lau, 2003); attitudes towards debatable usages between teachers and their students (e.g. Lee, 2001a), attitudes of native speaker teachers and non-native speaker teachers towards disputable usages (e.g. Lee, 2001b) and so on. Some of these studies obtained information on what are the attitudes of the people towards languages while other studies explored the determinants of attitudes, i.e. what constructs and changes attitudes of the people. Besides, the relationship between attitudes towards languages and motivation for learning languages has also been explored by some studies. This section presents a synthesis of the existing related studies which traces the current debates on the issues under study and gives up-to-date overviews of the subject.

Integrative values of attitudes have been identified in many studies such as Borromeo-Samonte (1981); El-Dash & Busnardo (2001); Hogan-Brun & Ramoniene (2004, 2005) and

Tuwakham (2005). Borromeo-Samonte (1981) studied Filipino college students' attitudes towards English. The results showed that the students favoured English and such attitudes were influenced by their integrative motivation as they could easily identify themselves with the culture. A similar finding was obtained by El-Dash & Busnardo (2001) in Brazil. Results reveal that the majority of the Brazilian adolescents favour English to the Portuguese language in terms of status and solidarity. Favouring the English language over the native Portuguese is attributed to the general perception of English as a prestigious international language and as symbolic use among adolescent peer group. In 2004, Hogan-Brun & Ramoniene conducted a study in Lithuania. The study suggested that in their pragmatic attitude, the parents perceive integrative learning as being of instrumental value and favour their children's accommodation to the majority society as a necessary process for success in life in today's changed environment. Tuwakham (2005) also found that attitudes towards Yong language appeared to be quite consistent throughout the Yong community in Thailand which indicates Yong peoples' understanding of the integrative attitude. It can be found from these studies that people show their concern of attachment to particular languages or speech communities for solidarity and integration.

Instrumental orientation of language attitudes were identified by a number of studies such as Al-Haq (2000); Lai (2005, 2009) and Majumder (2005). Al-Haq (2000) conducted a study to investigate changes in the attitudes of Jordanian university students to the Hebrew language. He found that motivation towards learning Hebrew among the Jordanian university students is apparently instrumentally-oriented, i.e. they are religiously and nationally motivated. In Hong Kong, Lai (2005) found that the respondents feel the most integratively inclined to Cantonese (the vernacular variety), and they perceive English (the colonizers' language) as the language of the highest instrumental value and social status, while Putonghua (the language of the new ruler) is rated the lowest from both the integrative and the instrumental perspectives. In 2009, Lai also found that from integrative perspective the interviewees ranked Cantonese first as they liked the language most, English second, and Putonghua the third while from instrumental perspective, the findings showed that English was the most important language in Hong Kong as it is a symbol of power, a gate-keeper for higher education and job opportunities, and a language of upward and outward mobility. In the same line Majumder (2005) too found that the Oriya migrants' attitude towards English language exhibits the instrumental motive of the people: language for better education and job opportunity as well as a marker of 'global status.' It is apparent from these studies that people show their concern of attachment to particular languages or speech communities for their individual or community success, achievement, power and status. But whether people are concerned with either integrative or instrumental or both the perspectives, their perceptions are complementary to each other. The present study however hypothesise that the attitudes of the undergraduate students of Life Science School of Khulna University are instrumentally oriented.

From the above brief literature survey it is apparent that people may have either integrative or instrumental or both types of attitudes towards languages. But, an extensive literature survey suggests that what are the attitudes of the undergraduate students of Life Science School of Khulna University towards English language have not been explored yet. The present study therefore intends to fill up this identified research gap and thus, the specific objective of the study is to discover the attitudes of the undergraduate students of Life Science School of Khulna University towards English language.

5. Methodology

The study is non-experimental. It was designed on the conceptual framework of mentalist point of view. In the research of language attitude, two theoretical approaches are used and they are 'behaviourist view' and 'mentalist view' (Fasold, 1984). According to behaviorist view, the attitudes are dependent variables which must be studied by observing users' responses to certain languages, i.e. their use in actual interactions whereas according to

mentalist view, attitudes are internal mental state which cannot be observed directly but have to be inferred from users' behaviour or their self reported data. The data of this study were collected through a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire survey method was preferred because (i) this method is suitable for empirical research; (ii) the data collected through this method is easily quantifiable; (iii) this method gives informants enough time to provide well thought out answers; (iv) this offers greater anonymity to the informants; and (v) this requires low cost and saves time. The questionnaire was prepared by the researchers adapting ideas from the instrument of previous studies (e.g. Hohenthal, 2003) and modified according to the objectives of this study. In preparing the questionnaire, caution was exercised to ensure the standard and quality of the questions. The researchers were concerned about the reliability, clarity, practicality, and administerability of the instruments. A pilot survey was also conducted to examine the feasibility of instrument for this study. The questionnaire was administered upon a sample of seventy nine undergraduate students of Life Science School of Khulna University, a public university situated in the south-western region of Bangladesh. The sample was selected randomly from all the seven Disciplines of the School namely Agrotechnology Discipline, Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering Discipline, Environmental Science Discipline, Fisheries and Marine Resource Technology Discipline, Forestry and Wood Technology Discipline, Soil Science Discipline and Pharmacy Discipline. Upon the collection of data, these were analyzed, computed and tabulated using SPSS. The percentage values and frequencies were computed through descriptive statistics.

6. Result and Discussion

The following sections discuss the result of the study. It includes a description of the demographic profile of the respondents followed by a discussion on the attitudes towards English language of the undergraduate students of Life Science School of Khulna University.

6.1. Demographic Profile of the Respondents

The total number of respondents of this study was seventy nine. All of them were undergraduate students of the Life Science School of Khulna University. They belonged to Agrotechnology Discipline, Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering Discipline, Environmental Science Discipline, Fisheries and Marine Resource Technology Discipline, Forestry and Wood Technology Discipline, Soil Science Discipline and Pharmacy Discipline of the School. The distribution of the respondents as per Discipline is given in table 1 below:

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents as per Discipline

Discipline	Total respondents	Percentage
Agrotechnology	10	12.7
Biotechnology and Genetic Engineering	14	17.7
Environmental Science	10	12.7
Fisheries and Marine Resource Technology	18	22.8
Forestry and Wood Technology	14	17.7
Soil Science	04	5.1
Pharmacy	09	11.4
Total	79	100.0

6.2. Attitudes towards English Language

Respondents' attitudes towards English language were obtained through the use of a five-point Likert scale questionnaire with 5= strongly agree (SA), 4= agree (A), 3= neutral (N), 2=disagree (DA), and 1= strongly disagree (SDA). The respondents were asked to provide their opinion on seventeen statements regarding their attitudes towards English language.

Among the statements, the first four statements elicited respondents' perception and impression about English and their responses about liking and disliking of English language which is shown in table 2 below. 69.62% respondents strongly agreed and 27.85% of them agreed that they like speaking English. The majority of the respondents (30.38% strongly agreed and 36.71% agreed) stated that someone seems to be educated when one speaks English. In the same line the majority of them (29.11% strongly agreed and 40.51% agreed) stated that when someone speaks English it creates a good impression for him. Respondents liking of English language as well as the speakers of English language were counter checked through the statement no. 4. A majority number of the respondents (31.65% disagreed and 50.63% strongly disagreed) stated with disagreement that they dislike people who speak to them in English. It indicates that respondents like English language and they like those who speak English. Thus, it can apparently be said that the respondents have positive attitudes towards English language.

Table 2: Respondents' Attitudes towards English (%)

Sl. No.	Statements	SA	A	N	DA	SDA
1	I like speaking English.	69.62	27.85	2.53	-	-
2	When someone speaks English I think he is educated.	30.38	36.71	17.72	11.39	3.80
3	When someone speaks English it creates a good impression for him.	29.11	40.51	21.52	7.60	1.26
4	I dislike people who speak to me in English.	1.26	3.80	12.66	31.65	50.63

Statement no. 5 & 6 obtained respondents' opinion on global status and importance of English language which is shown in table 3. Most of the respondents (56.96% strongly agreed and 39.25% agreed) opined that English is an important lingua franca in globalization. They also reported with commendable percentage (54.44% strongly agreed and 43.04% agreed) that it is needed to increase the use of English in this era of globalization. It is apparent from the data of the table that the respondents recognize the global status and importance of English language in this era of globalization and global communication network. This is indeed an expression of positive attitudes of the respondents towards English language.

Table 3: Respondents' Attitudes towards English (%)

Sl. No.	Statements	SA	A	N	DA	SDA
5	English is an important lingua franca in globalization.	56.96	39.25	2.53	1.26	-
6	We need to increase the use of English in this era of globalization.	54.44	43.04	1.26	1.26	-

Statement no. 7 & 8 elicited respondents' opinion regarding instrumental value of English language which can be seen in table 4. Most of the respondents (69.62% strongly agreed and 29.12% agreed) stated that speaking English is an advantage. They also opined (63.29% strongly agreed and 32.92% agreed) that knowledge of English offers advantages in seeking good jobs. It is apparent from the responses of the respondents that they realized that

knowledge of English offers advantages in this era of globalization when getting a good job, securing a better social position and personal establishment is very competitive.

Table 4: Respondents' Attitudes towards English (%)

Sl. No.	Statements	SA	A	N	DA	SDA
7	Speaking English is an advantage.	69.62	29.12	-	1.26	-
8	Knowledge of English offers advantages in seeking good jobs.	63.29	32.92	2.53	-	1.26

Attitude towards a particular language can be deduced from the respondents' patterns of language choice and use as well as their intention of using the language in different domains of use. Statement no. 9, 10, 11 & 12 obtained respondents' choice of English language in media domain which is shown in table 5. A majority of the respondents (24.05% strongly agreed and 53.17% agreed) opined that there should be more TV and radio programmes in English. They also gave their responses with similar percentage of frequency (32.92% strongly agreed and 48.10% agreed) that they liked to read more newspapers and magazines in English. 30.38% of the respondents strongly agreed and 50.63% of them agreed with the statement that English should be used in advertisements, public signs, map etc. besides Bangla. However, a distinctive pattern of choice was found when they gave their opinion regarding the statement that only English must be used in advertisements, public signs, map etc. The patterns of the response were: 25.32% strongly agreed, 29.12% agreed, 17.72% neutral, 17.72% disagreed and 10.12% strongly disagreed. This pattern of choice indicates that though the respondents had shown a positive attitude towards use of English or an increase in the use of English in media but they did not prefer an exclusive use of English rather they were found to show their loyalty to their mother tongue/state language Bangla as well. It can be understood from this pattern of preference that the respondents want that English and Bangla should go hand in hand in media.

Table 5: Respondents' Attitudes towards English (%)

Sl. No.	Statements	SA	A	N	DA	SDA
9	There should be more TV and radio programmes in English.	24.05	53.17	17.72	2.53	2.53
10	I would like to read more newspapers and magazines in English	32.92	48.10	16.46	1.26	1.26
11	English should be used in advertisements, public signs, map etc besides Bangla.	30.38	50.63	13.93	5.06	-
12	Only English must be used in advertisements, public signs, map etc.	25.32	29.12	17.72	17.72	10.12

The respondents showed their positive attitude towards English language in office domain as well which is shown in table 6 below. Like media domain, the respondents opined (44.30% strongly agreed and 41.78% agreed) that all official documents should be both in English and Bangla, i.e. English and Bangla should go hand in hand in official use. Such a pattern of choice for English indicates a positive attitude of the respondents towards English language.

Table 6: Respondents' Attitudes towards English (%)

Sl. No.	Statements	SA	A	N	DA	SDA
13	All official documents should be in both Bangla and English.	44.30	41.78	11.40	1.26	1.26

Like the media and office domains, respondents' patterns of language choice and use as well as their intention of using the language in education domain were obtained through the statement no. 14, 15, 16 and 17 which can be found in table 7. A majority of the respondents (32.91% strongly agreed and 41.78% agreed) stated that they liked to study more English though 20.25% of them remained neutral in their opinion. As far as the medium of instruction in tertiary studies is concerned, 31.65% of the respondents strongly agreed and 53.17% of them agreed that English should be the medium of instruction in tertiary studies. While an option between English and Bangla is available, over 62 % of the respondents (32.91% strongly agreed and 41.78% agreed) opted for English and 21.51 % of them reported neutral opinion. This was observed while they reported with regard to the statement that if an academic text is available in English and Bangla, they will read the text in English. Finally, the majority of the respondents (43.03% strongly agreed and 40.51% agreed) reported that they need English in order to succeed in higher education. What is apparent from table 7 is that the respondents have a positive attitude towards English language as they are inclined to the increase use of English language in education domain.

Table 7: Respondents' Attitudes towards English (%)

Sl. No.	Statements	SA	A	N	DA	SDA
14	I would like to study more English	32.91	41.78	20.25	3.80	1.26
15	English should be the medium of instruction in tertiary studies.	31.65	53.17	13.92	1.26	-
16	If an academic text is available in English and in BM, I will read the text in English.	32.91	29.12	21.51	11.40	5.06
17	I need English in order to succeed in higher education.	43.03	40.51	15.20	1.26	-

Conclusion

The undergraduate students of Life Science School of Khulna University study compulsory English language course as part of the foreign language acquisition policy of Bangladesh. Besides, they use English for academic purposes as English is the medium of instruction of Khulna University. This study found it relevant to discover the attitudes towards English of the target population because the implementation of the foreign language acquisition policy of Bangladesh as well as the medium of instruction policy of Khulna University can be influenced by their attitudes as they are the stakeholders. The result of the study shows that the respondents have positive attitudes towards English language. They reported that they like English language and they like those who speak English. They were of the opinion that those who speak English create good impression. The respondents reported that they recognize the global status and importance of English language in this era of globalization and global communication network. The result also shows that the respondents realized that knowledge of English offers advantages in this era of globalization when getting a good job, securing a better social position and personal establishment is very competitive. The respondents reported that they want to choose and use more English in the domain of media, office and education. Though they supported increase in the use of English language but they did not want exclusive use of English rather they wanted that English and Bangla should go hand in

hand in their use in different domains. As far as education domain is concerned, the respondents opined that English should be the medium of instruction in tertiary studies and they need English in order to succeed in higher education. Above all, it can be said that the respondents were found to be positive towards English language and this could be attributed to the fact that respondents were instrumentally motivated towards English.

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