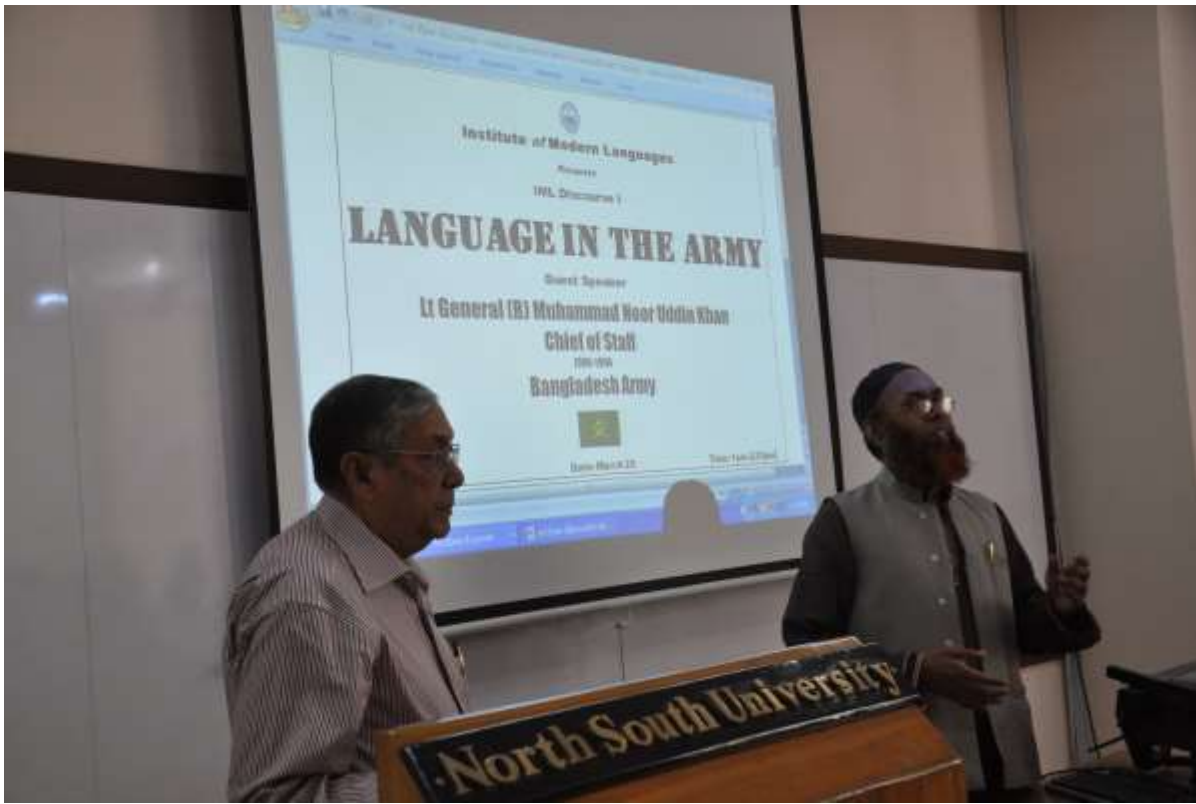


IML Discourse on Language in the Army

Language is a means of social and strategic communication, but it can also serve as a means of reflection, since it empowers humans to think in terms of not only images and impulses, but also words, as well as a means of action. The nature and the use of language divide people into different social or occupational speech communities. Just as diplomats, lawyers, and doctors, members of the armed forces belong to a unique occupational speech community as their use of language displays a substantial variation in terms of norms of interaction, rules of interpretation as well as syntax and lexis. These were among the highlights of the welcome speech of Mohammed Shahedul Haque, Head of Institute of Modern Languages at NSU in a special event of the Institute's high-profile lecture series *IML Discourse I*.

The Institute of Modern Languages presented *Language in the Army* on 25 March, 2012. The discourse was an event of the lecture series *IML Discourse I*, an academic innovation, that brings students close to the occupational experience of language, and inspires students' research into language and language behavior from novel perspectives by enriching them with the valuable thoughts of eminent personalities who make a careful, intelligent and strategic use of language to achieve their objectives in their respective fields of activity.

The Head of IML said that the armed forces especially the Army of a nation form an important occupational speech community with distinct and sophisticated language behavior very different from those of other occupational communities. The modern military terms and concepts almost certainly display the strength of English as a means of strategic communication. The Bangladesh Army upholds the dignity of our nation not only by performing brilliantly in the worldwide peace missions and responding to natural disasters and political emergencies in the country, but also by giving the due share of respect to the Bengali language in various areas of activity in the military administration.



The honorable guest speaker **Lieutenant General (Ret.) Muhammad Noor Uddin Khan**, Chief of Staff, Bangladesh Army (1990-1994) and a Minister, Bangladesh Government (1996-2001) discussed the issues

relating to 'Language in the Army' with his lifelong observation and experience of language in Bangladesh Army. The objective of his intriguing discourse was to explain the state of English and Bangla language in different eras in the military administration of Bangladesh. The event was attended by a good number of IML and English Department students of NSU as well as Dhaka University.

A Brief History of the English Language

To bring his discourse topic into the context, General Khan first gave a brief overview of the history of the English language. He stated that three Germanic tribes - the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes - invaded Britain during the 5th century. At that time the inhabitants of Britain spoke a Celtic language. But the invaders pushed them towards west and north - mainly into what are now Wales, Scotland and Ireland. The Angles came from England and their language was called Englisc - from which the words England and English are derived. These tribes spoke Old English (450-1100) that did not sound or look like English today. About half of the most commonly used words in Modern English have Old English roots. In 1066, William the Conqueror, the Duke of Normandy (part of modern France), invaded and conquered England and paved the way for Middle English (1100-1500). This language was a blend of French and English.

Towards the end of the Middle English, a sudden and distinct change in pronunciation started, with vowels being pronounced shorter and shorter. The invention of printing brought about the standardization to English. In 1604, the first English dictionary was published. He also pointed out that the main difference between Early Modern English (1500-1800) and Late Modern English (1800-Present) is vocabulary. Late Modern English has many more words due to the adoption of foreign words from many countries and creation of new words as the outcome of the Industrial Revolution and technology.

This history reveals that English language could embark on this journey from the Old English to the Modern English as the Germanic tribes invaded the British soil. Therefore, the history of the English language is intertwined with the history of the military expeditions of the mankind.

English in Bangladesh

General Khan explained how English has become an international language and made thoughtful remarks on the state of English in South Asia. He mentioned that English is used as a second language in many countries, but in Bangladesh, the status of English is between ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language). He elucidated, "The English have left us but English has not - though the British people have left us but their language English has not left us...The simple fact today is that knowledge of English can bring laurels for us in a rapidly expanding scientific world where research findings on science, medicine, engineering and even genetic are transferred through English. In our country till date, knowing English can be the key to top jobs and big money. The reality today in Bangladesh is that people worry about their kids and nation worries about their next generation."

Bangla as Mother Tongue

The General cast light on the Liberation War and the Language Movement Day and thus pointed out that in modern history, no other nation has perhaps had to struggle so much, shed so much blood, and yet be victorious to be able to hang on to their right to speak their mother tongue as Bangladesh. Therefore, for our existence and identity, we need to admire Bangla and use Bangla. That is why the Bangladesh Government introduced the *Bangla Procholon Ain (1987)*. Except in the case of foreign relations, in all other cases records and correspondences, legal documents, proceedings in courts and other actions shall necessarily be written in Bengali, by Government offices, courts, armed forces, semi-government and autonomous institutions everywhere in Bangladesh.



Language in Bangladesh Army

The former Chief of Army explained that the coexistence of English and Bangla in Bangladesh influences the military administration as well. During the Pakistan period, in the Army, English was the medium of instruction, command, and correspondence except for the communication with troops where Urdu was used.

Since the raising of Bengal regiment, he said, efforts have been on to use Bangla for command of troops and in parade which was materialized sometimes in late 60s when Bengali words of command for parades were introduced. Roman Urdu i.e. Urdu written in English letters was used for the instructions to the troops and for their training including promotion examinations to the higher ranks, Lance Corporal, Corporal, Sergeant and Junior Commissioned Officers (JCO). Roman Urdu was also used for Bengali troops and soldiers in other wings of the armed forces.

The former Chief of Army informed the class that the use of language went through a drastic change after the Liberation. After the Independence, Bangla was accepted for words of command in parade, orders and correspondence in battalion level and below, and verbal orders and operational orders in battalion level and below.

He said that Bangla is used for pamphlets, booklets, and training manuals, for laws, rules, regulations, and books including the Bangladesh Army Orders (BAOs) of the Chief of Army Staff as well as for medium of instruction for troops in all arms and services training schools as the Bengali troops used Bangla with the Bengali officers and among themselves.

Nevertheless, English continues to dominate in the military doctrines, operational directives, and training directives from Army Head Quarters down to brigade level, and in operational orders, training instructions, and correspondence up to brigade level.

English is also used in Staff College and in its entry examinations, as a medium of instructions in all arms and services training schools for officers including Cadet training in the Military Academies, for training officers going on UN missions as well as for officers attending courses in English speaking countries.

The unforgettable discourse had a lively question and answer session at the end. A student raised a question why Bangla had not replaced English in the Army completely. The former Chief of Staff replied, as the Bangladesh Army sends troops to foreign countries, importance of English cannot be ignored. Moreover, good command in English assists to make a positive impact and good rapport internationally.

In response to a query on the use of code language in the Army, he said that use of code language and abbreviations is necessary in the Army, as it allows the personnel to save time and ensure confidentiality of the military strategies.

While answering a question relating to psychological factors in issuing command, he said that ensuring conformity is of great importance in the Army and officers always keep this in mind when giving a command.

In response to an interesting question about use of derogatory slangs, the former Chief of Staff informed the class that the use of all types of impolite and derogatory forms of expressions including slangs are officially disallowed and discouraged by the military administration, but since life in the Army is very different from that of the general people, use of forceful language sometimes turns out to be conducive to training the new recruits (cadets). Language understood as impolite and derogatory often assists trainers to break the barrier between the trainer and the trainee and instill subordination in the new recruits which is part of their training. Use of slangs disappears once the training is over and the cadets join the Army as officers.

Thus, Lt General (Ret.) Noor Uddin Khan's lifelong observation and experience of language in the Bangladesh Army enlightened the students and made this intriguing discourse a great, unforgettable experience for the audience.

(Written by the RIT)