

Language loss constructs cultural barriers for Bangladeshi-American youth

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ANISHA IQBAL

Bangladeshi immigrant communities face the challenge of cultural preservation in the fast-paced melting pot of America. Through assimilation and isolation, Bangladeshi-American youth now grapple with the obstacles of language loss – a phenomenon that creates a cultural disconnect and strains family relations.

“What most Bangladeshi people don’t realise is that the United States is home to many cultures with people from around the world. In Bangladesh, it’s mostly Bangalee people. When there is more diversity, it becomes more difficult to preserve a culture completely,” said Afnan Salahuddin, a 17-year-old from Maryland.

Language is a cornerstone of culture, carrying a community’s collective history, traditions, and values. However, the increasingly prevalent language divide presents a significant challenge for Bangladeshi-American youths. As generations grow up in predominantly English-speaking environments, Bangla struggles to find its place. Adopting English as the primary language of communication in schools, combined with the influence of American culture, has resulted in the erosion of Bangla proficiency among these youth. This loss of language holds profound consequences that impact cultural identity, create an inability to engage in deep conversations, and minimise meaningful connections with family members.

“While at big family gatherings, I sometimes have difficulty finding the right words to express myself in Bangla, so sometimes I choose to stay quiet instead of sharing my thoughts,” said Areebah Jahin, a 20-year-old from Virginia. “In Bangladesh, my American accent is very clear at times, and sometimes my family will make fun of it and

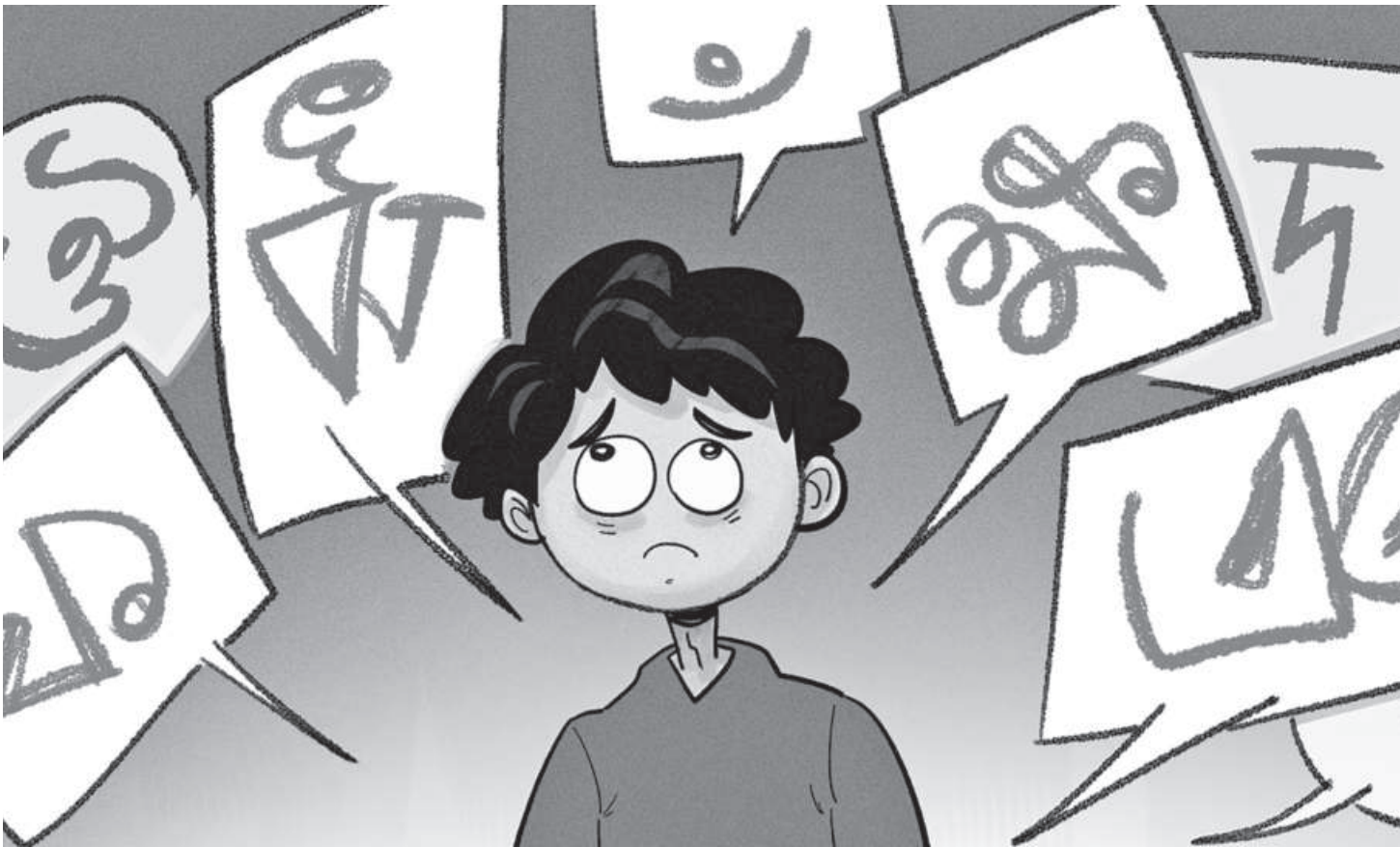


ILLUSTRATION: REHNUMA PROSHOON

unknowingly hurt my feelings, which initially deters me from wanting to speak Bangla even more.”

Amid this language divide, Bangla language schools have emerged as an invaluable resource for those seeking to maintain their linguistic and cultural roots. These schools play a vital role in providing instruction in the Bangla language, fostering a sense of belonging, and preserving Bangladesh’s heritage.

“A few years back, my family and I visited Bangladesh. It’s been a long time since I’ve talked to my relatives in Bangladesh, but I barely talked to them during the visit. I barely knew how to speak Bangla, which was the only

language they knew,” said Obonti Zaman, a 15-year-old from Virginia. “I then started Bangla school, and in only a month, I learned the basics of how to converse in Bangla. When I went to Bangladesh again, I could talk to my family more easily. Of course, I wasn’t perfect, but it did help build a stronger bond between me and my family in Bangladesh. Knowing Bangla has also made me feel more connected to the history and culture of my parents and relatives.”

Zaman takes Bangla language classes at the Bangladesh Center for Community Development, which serves the greater Washington DC metropolitan area. Not only does the school provide basic language/

communication classes, but it also provides opportunities for students to participate in cultural activities such as Bangladeshi dance, music, and performance.

“Learning Bangla and engaging in Bangladeshi dance and singing broadened my knowledge of my culture and made me better understand the traditions in Bangladesh,” said Zaman. “Learning about Bangladeshi holidays and events in Bangla school helped me connect to those different aspects of the culture. Understanding the traditions and culture helped me find a sense of who I am and what my culture is.”

While some Bangladeshi-American youths have been lucky enough to attend Bangla

language schools, others face a more uphill battle with Bangla proficiency. The inability to speak fluently in Bangla can lead to feelings of disconnection and a sense of loss regarding cultural identity, often grappling with how to embrace heritage while simultaneously navigating an English-speaking society.

“My schedule doesn’t allow for me to dedicate time to specifically learn Bangla since I am preoccupied with school and extracurriculars,” said Salahuddin. “Because of that, I feel guilty for my inability to read, write, and speak my mother tongue fluently.”

While fluency in the Bangla language remains an ideal goal, there are alternative paths that Bangladeshi-American youths can take to foster cultural connection despite language limitations. Activities such as celebrating cultural festivals, engaging in traditional customs, and preparing traditional meals can serve as powerful reminders of their heritage. Storytelling, intergenerational dialogues, and engaging with cultural media can also help bridge the language gap and nurture a deeper understanding of their roots.

“Poetry is a significant part of Bangladeshi culture, something I didn’t know until after reading and writing Bangla. I was introduced to so many poems and poets, like Kazi Nazrul Islam and Rabindranath Tagore,” said Nahli Zaman, an 18-year-old from Virginia. “I was already interested in Western poetry, but now I have a whole other branch to discover.”

In a globalised community, preserving language and culture within immigrant communities is more crucial than ever. It is empowering to feel connected to one’s history and heritage through language, and by recognising the impact of language loss, Bangladeshi-American youths can navigate the complexities of cultural identity and bridge the language barrier.

“It’s okay not to be connected to Bangladeshi heritage right away. It does take time, especially if you are growing up in a community that doesn’t speak Bangla. But try to introduce yourself to the traditions slowly. You will get there if you have the correct mindset and are willing to embrace your culture,” said Zaman.

The curious case of DONALD TRUMP



Dr. Mostofa Sarwar, professor emeritus at the University of New Orleans, is former dean and ex-vice chancellor of Delgado Community College and former commissioner of the governing board of Regional Transit Authority of New Orleans

MOSTOFA SARWAR

Donald Trump seems to be great at turning a silly affair into a legal nightmare for himself. According to the Presidential Records Act, when a US President ends his term, he is required to return government records from the White House to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). It took one and a half years for Trump to complete this simple task. Some time in May 2021, NARA’s investigators discovered that Trump had not sent all the government records in his possession. NARA knew that at least twelve boxes were missing. They also knew two documents that had previously garnered tremendous media attention during his presidency were missing. One was the “Love Letter” from North Korean President Kim Jong Un, and another was the Hurricane Dorian tracking map that was illegally altered by Trump with a sharpie.



FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

Trump has displayed an extraordinary sense of self-importance by claiming that he is a “stable genius” who can command an army better than generals in a war, discover the remedy for Covid-19, end the Russia-Ukraine war, and solve economic woes. But we know his record as US president proves the opposite.

Officials at NARA sent an email to Trump’s attorneys asking about the remaining government records. They received 15 boxes. Fourteen were filled with classified documents. Trump’s attorney was unable to attest that all documents were returned. NARA referred the case to the Department of Justice (DOJ) which later issued a subpoena to Trump

asking for all classified documents. FBI agents and a DOJ attorney retrieved documents as per the subpoena from Trump’s attorney at Mar-a-Lago in Palm Beach, Florida. But the DOJ determined that Trump unlawfully continued to hoard additional sensitive documents even though his attorney, Evan Corcoran, gave them a signed letter saying that all documents were returned. The DOJ then requested a magistrate judge to issue a legal search warrant which was granted. With the search warrant in hand, federal agents raided Mar-a-Lago and recovered more classified documents.

Later, the DOJ convened a grand jury to figure out whether there were any violations of federal law and a need to indict Trump for committing a crime. Trump tried his best to impede this process. The attorney general appointed Jack Smith as special counsel to investigate this case. Smith is reportedly an efficient prosecutor who keeps a low profile but leaves no stone unturned during investigations.

Although it is not needed for prosecuting cases relating to the Espionage Act, a question arose

any rules. He can fire his gun on Fifth Avenue. Nothing would happen to him.

His niece, Mary Trump, a clinical psychologist, gave a fair analysis of her uncle’s maladies. She indicated that her famous uncle suffers from narcissistic impulses. Trump has displayed an extraordinary sense of self-importance by claiming that he is a “stable genius” who can command an army better than generals in a war, discover the remedy for Covid-19, end the Russia-Ukraine war in less than a day, and solve economic woes in no time. But we know his record as US president proves the opposite. Another trait of narcissistic personality disorder is a lack of empathy for others, and Trump has shown this characteristic by throwing many of his associates under the bus. The latest example is Kayleigh McEnany, who served Trump as his press secretary. His constant lying and cheating is characteristic of charlatans and con artists. He thinks he deserves entitlement and special treatment. His hoarding of classified documents attests to this narcissistic trait and led him to a legal nightmare.

He has been indicted with seven counts by the US Department of Justice reportedly under the US criminal code Section 793 for espionage and obstruction of justice. According to Section 793, “Gathering, transmitting or losing defense information... shall be fined under this title or imprisoned not more than ten years, or both.” This law completely bypasses the question of classification or declassification. The possible defense argument that Trump can declassify documents in his mind or by waving his fingers now stands moot.

In a recent story in Newsweek, Matt Cannon quoted George Conway, a conservative activist, who has argued that being jailed for something “so stupid, pointless and silly” as keeping classified White House documents would be “fitting” for the former president whom he dubbed “a nihilistic moron.”

In spite of all these legal issues, Trump reigns supreme in opinion polls among all possible Republican candidates for the presidential election of 2024. In Five Thirty Eight’s poll (moving average on June 9), Trump garnered whopping 53.8 percent against DeSantis’s 21.3 percent, who is his closest competition.

How can one interpret this strange phenomenon? Trump is already convicted in a civil suit for sexually harassing and defaming a woman. He was arrested in a criminal case for falsifying business expenses relating to hush money payments to a porn star. Now he is indicted for another alleged criminal offence for stealing and hoarding classified documents. But still, he is very popular in the Republican Party.

Is he the re-incarnated Wizard of Oz with modified DNA – a charlatan who can perform a few tricks and conjure up an aura of greatness? It does not matter how many lies he spews, how many crimes he commits, how many women he harasses – he remains the most popular leader of the Republican Party. It is a travesty of common sense.

Several decades of mendacity, cheating, bullying, and getting away with it are finally catching up with Trump. The Mar-a-Lago wizard, perhaps, will be punished in the court of law, but he remains awfully popular among the Republican masses.

Media companies and comedy shows will have a field day on June 13, 2023, when Trump will undergo the process of surrender, arrest, and arraignment at the Federal Courthouse in Miami, Florida. This is the first time a US president or former president will be indicted on a criminal charge.

CROSSWORD

BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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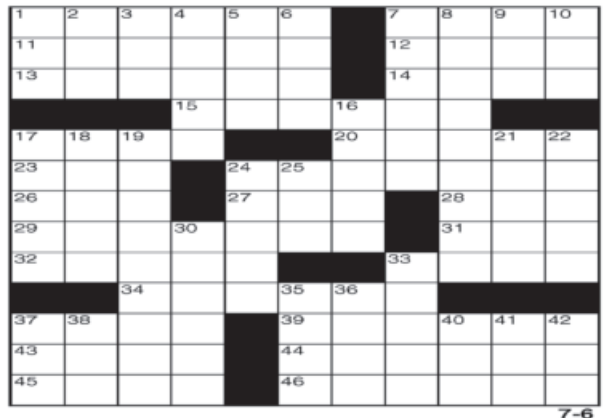
38 Road hazard

40 Bounder

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YESTERDAY’S ANSWERS

P	A	P	A	S		P	E	C	A	N
A	L	E	R	T		A	L	O	N	E
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