



## **Attitude towards Southern Bangladeshi Dialects in Formal Contexts**

**Rodshi Jarnaj Raceme<sup>13</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of the study is to reveal the attitude of people toward the usage of Southern dialects in any formal settings. Peoples' attitude can be a reason to select or omit others' language approach. This study searches the attitude of receivers, consequences of that attitude among the dialect users and how the dialects are received. The research has been conducted by using qualitative (interview) data analysis. The tools that have been used here are google keep note, messenger, phone recorder. 7 participants from all 3 southern divisions <Khulna, Chattogram, Barishal> were interviewed to have more tactile outcome about peoples' attitude. Age group, occupation, experience and geographical location was meticulously chosen to achieve an eclectic result. This study reveals partially positive attitude toward the use and users of Southern dialects of Bangladesh respecting human individuality but mostly receivers do not accept the deliberate practice of dialects in formal settings. Study result may help to understand and form future practice about dialects in formal settings. Again, it clarifies the current position of standard variety and dialects in both user and receiver perspectives. Also, the changing dynamics toward local and regional languages are highlighted in this study.

**Keywords:** Southern dialect, dialect, attitude, formal setting, language shift

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<sup>13</sup> Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) at Institute of Modern Languages, Bangladesh ([rodshij@gmail.com](mailto:rodshij@gmail.com))



## **Introduction**

### **1.1) Rationale of the research:**

Starting with the definition of attitude, Sarnoff (1970, p.279) describes an attitude as ‘a disposition to react favourably or unfavorably to a class of objects.’ This study aims to reveal the attitude of the listeners when someone uses their dialects in formal settings. There are certainly innumerable dialects, however, this one will represent the attitude toward the usage of Bangladeshi southern dialects. The researcher intends to address the debate of choosing dialects or standard variety, eradicate the confusion of choosing a media or accepting single media in formal settings, also the influences of the attitude(positive/negative) toward dialect users and dialects would be a parallel concern.

### **1.2) Background of the research:**

It has been very usual to point out languages which are used by people in any formal settings for instance- in media, formal speech, classroom, training centers. Many people are getting hatred, negativity, trolls because of the media they use in public formal contexts (Garner, 2013), also there are mixed attitudes toward the users or speakers (Rac E K & Rešetar S H, 2018) that can influence their normal performance and deport. Yet it is a matter to keep in mind that attitude, perspectives are not fossilized, they are changeable. therefore, this study will view the perspective of the listeners who may show their attitude toward the southern dialect usage of Bangladesh.

### **1.3) Problem statement:**

It is known by the previous studies that there are Prestige issues which discouraged speaker to use their dialectal usage (even it is a word or phrase) in formal settings around the world, Bangladesh has been facing similar problems but those are not addressed. Now this study aims to focus on those issues and related possible hegemony of those issues. The perspectives that triggered the



listeners to avoid dialects and how much logical they are, also their attitude toward the users will be noticed.

**1.4) Purpose of the study:**

The purpose of this study is to highlight the attitude toward the usage of southern dialects of Bangladesh in formal places. Negative attitude can affect the users' activity; this problem kindles the need of this study. The research will show the outcome (whether it will be a positive or a negative feedback) that falls upon the southern dialect usage and users in formal places.

**1.5) Research questions:**

This research will inquire the attitude of the listeners and identify the current reception of dialects in formal settings. Therefore, these are the key questions to initiate the whole research-

- What kind of attitude do the people possess towards the use of southern dialects of Bangladesh in formal settings?
- To what extent do the attitudes cause language shift?

**1.6) Limitation:**

Like every other thing in the universe, the researcher admits few limitations of this research. It was self-funded research so researcher could not gather information from every corner of southern Bangladesh. Researcher had to choose convenience sampling due to cost cutting step and time management strategy. Moreover, researcher could not find many literatures on attitude toward Bangladeshi dialects directly. The limitations are

- Insufficient funding, time and manpower
- Lack of mobility
- Lack of finding enough previous literatures solely on Southern dialects of Bangladesh
- Lack of reaching more participants.



## **Literature Review**

### **2.1) Literature summary:**

After searching a number of sources, the researcher failed to find exact literatures which directly address the attitudes towards dialectal use in formal settings, specifically towards southern dialects in Bangladesh. But there are a number of studies that somehow speaks about the attitude of dialectal use in formal settings. The relevant sections from those studies have been presented below. Research conducted within the Hungarian minority in Serbia (living in Vojvodina) have a positive attitude toward their dialect though they encountered negative attitude toward their dialect from other people. Also, the research has touched on a number of needs like-adopting an additive approach to mother tongue education. Kontra (2015) points out that almost all teachers are engaged in trying to change the speech ways in Hungary and adopt a monolingual variety of it. (Rac E K & Rešetar S H, 2018) Another research conducted within Bangladesh on standard dialect ideology. Milroy (2001) observes that many languages of the world are not standardized and in the case of non-standardized languages, nobody will find the existence of a static and fixed prestige variety. This implies that standard variety is not a “natural process”. The qualitative research showed the uninterested participants who do not want to associate themselves with non-standard variety of Bangla. Speakers believe that non-standard or regional variety does not go with the upper-class identity, they sound impolite though they are not incorrect. Also, the multidialectal linguistic marketplace of urban areas tends to nurture oppressive and anti-people standard dialect ideology. Therefore, a



matter of prestige, opportunity, sign of identity are intertwined with SD ideology. (Hasan S M & Rahaman A, 2014) Research was conducted to reveal the effects of Bangla regional dialects on English pronunciation at the tertiary level in Bangladesh but This study indirectly revealed few expert opinions about using the dialects as well as influences of using dialects in language learning. The research says “Though pronouncing regional dialects sometimes become a sensitive issue in the perspective of the feeling mixed with love and respect for each regional dialect, students should phonate Standard English as English is a lingua franca all over the world. No debate should be presented in support of the influence of regional dialect for speaking English. Students should be motivated and encouraged to pronounce correctly from their primary level by providing qualified teachers. So, teachers, ELT professionals/organizations and governments should come forward to provide qualified, trained teachers with a better environment for letting students listen and speak correct English.” (Rani S & Tina A.A, 2020). Hoque (2009) also mentioned that “Though it is not mandatory to have native-like fluency, it is an art to be able to speak in English as well in standard as possible”. There was research that studied the impact of local language dialect toward the teacher’s language attitude in EFL classroom in South Sulawesi, Indonesia. since Indonesia has a multilingualism culture, it is necessary to find out the language attitude toward English and does dialect prejudice exists during the learning process of English as a foreign language. An attitude toward English differed between females and males (Wati, 2018). A study also reported that Sundanese dialect speakers have no problem with the accent of English; they show positive cognitive language attitude toward English (Wati & Zulaikha, 2019). Dialect Prejudice is a kind of discrimination to the person's vernacular dialect (Nordquist, 2018). In fact, that people in society have the freedom



to express their ideas using dialect (Litt, Martin, & Place, 2015). Regarding previous researches above, the research intended to find out whether or not the dialect prejudice exists in South Sulawesi, especially in the education field. The study reveals that the teachers of South Sulawesi believe standard English has standard written, spoken, grammar form and also standard accent is a part of standard English. This assumption makes the teachers work hard to sound like a native while teaching English as international students in the classroom. In the same line, they expect their student to be able to sound like natives either. This attitude of language caused the dialect prejudice of spoken English. Even though they think that using local dialects when speaking English is not a problem, but they still make an effort to make their students sound more like a native. In this case, in South Sulawesi, dialect prejudice happens in some areas where the researcher conducted the study. In this case, the researcher assumed that having a suitable comprehension toward what Standard English could help curriculum in arranging the demand of which rules of English should be taught at school in order to increase the dialect awareness and reduce the dialect prejudice that can affect students' confidence in speaking English. (Latifa A, 2020) A case study published in a newspaper that says dialects and accents can be barriers for the learners in future prospects. In an article titled, 'Teacher "told to sound less northern" after southern Ofsted inspection' (Garner, 2013), The Independent reported that Ofsted (the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, a UK governmental organization responsible for inspecting schools) told one teacher to tone down her northern English accent. After this inspection, the school established this as one of the teacher's 'targets' to improve her performance, sparking criticism from language societies. A week earlier, another school was reported to have distributed a list of often banned regional phrases, including *ya cor* (you can't) and



ay? (pardon?). These phrases were seen as a threat to students' future prospects (Galloway N & Rose H, 2015 p.174). Further, research was intended in America that studied whether the Southern dialect of American English affects native and non-native English speakers listening comprehension also its goal was to discover students' perception about speakers of non-native dialects. A series of listening comprehension and discussion questions were asked to students to identify whether dialectal variation affected their listening comprehension and what opinions and perceptions they had about speakers of Standard American English and Southern American dialect. The result showed both native and non-native English speakers face difficulty to understand listening to a passage read in southern dialect compared to standard form. Einstein's (1981) that Standard English produces the most comprehensibility. The study hence proved dialects indeed have effects on the listener's attitudes toward a speaker for both native and non-native audiences moreover, affected the comprehensibility of non-native English speakers. Overall, both Native English Speakers and non-native English speakers tended to rate a non-standard dialect speaker more 'negatively' than one of the Standard American English dialects. The native speakers in this study were able to answer more listening comprehension questions correctly for the Southern dialect than the non-native English speakers; therefore, it was concluded that the dialect affected only the non-native English speakers. (Gold, M. A. 2015)

## **2.2) Research gap:**

As there is a lack of data and research on Southern dialects of Bangladesh, researcher's attempt is to fill this empirical gap through the study. From all the literatures above, few facts can be noticed. The literatures enlighten about attitudes toward different language dialects in formal situation at least at a point. Some of them are concerned with general, instructors' or learners' perspective.



Indirectly somehow, they have accepted one decision about the dialect usage in different settings. There is no region-specific study about attitude toward the dialect users. Now the researcher of this study has aimed to focus some points which were not the primary concern of those given literatures.

1. Bangladeshi context

2. Attitude toward the dialect users

3. the result of the attitude upon the dialect users.

4. Southern dialects of Bangladesh

Therefore, this research aims to address mentioned points expecting an outcome regarding the attitude and impact.

### **2.3) Theoretical framework:**

The theoretical framework shapes the aspect to look at any situations. Eisenhart defined a theoretical framework as “a structure that guides research by relying on a formal theory...constructed by using an established, coherent explanation of certain phenomena and relationships” (1991, p. 205). This research is intended to look at the realities of dialectal use in formal settings through the theoretical lens to get clearer idea.

#### **2.3.1) Chosen Theory:**

The researcher has chosen the language ideology framework which was shaped through multiple collaborative development in American linguistic anthropology. Michael Silverstein (1979) has enriched it through his perspective that defined linguistic ideologies as "sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure



and use". Among the ‘‘set of beliefs’’, how language ideologies often directly link to power, social control and social hierarchies, where certain dialects or languages are considered superior.

### **2.3.2) Application of Language Ideology Framework in this research:**

Application of language ideology framework would help to look at the present situation of southern dialects in formal contexts. By applying this framework, the research moves beyond describing attitudes as simply positive or negative, instead situating them within broader social, formal aspects. Also, this theory would help understand if any kind of prestige issues, stigma is causing speakers to code-switch into standard Bangla. The framework would help interpret the responses not as isolated preferences but as products of ideological conditioning.

## **Methodology**

### **3.1) Research worldview:**

This study is grounded in interpretivism. Max Weber, in his theories suggests Interpretivism is a research philosophy that assumes reality is socially constructed and can only be understood through human interpretation. In this study, Interpretivism will acknowledge subjective reality of receiving southern dialects in formal contexts through the knowledge which will be co-created through interaction or interpretation. By using this worldview, the research will explore the social reality and individual perspectives of southern dialects in formal contexts.

### **3.2) Research methodology:**

This research has been based on qualitative method by keeping the grounded theory in mind. The researcher interviewed to collect data from the participants. The interview included both physical and online configuration which included open and close ended questions. It was a semi-structured interview.



### 3.3) Data collection tools:

The research data was collected from the southern divisions of Bangladesh which are Chattogram, Khulna and Barishal. The researcher collected data from the participants through Q&A session. Some participants were interviewed face to face, some through online as per researcher's convenience. The tools which have been used are:

- Google Keep note
- Messenger
- Phone recorder

### 3.4) Participants:

The participants of this research were from three different divisions and different zillas. This research was not paid research, again, the researcher could not travel due to cost issues, so, easier access was prioritized. Noticing the convenience, cost and access, the researcher chose convenience sampling to select participants. The participants were the people who have exposure to different formal setting and southern dialect users, so that the research data can be related to the research objective. The information about participants is given below:

- Number of participants- 7
- Age- 20-60 approximately
- Profession-Student (3), Social worker (1), job holder (Banker-1, Businessman-1), Lawyer-1
- Divisions-Khulna, Chattogram, Barishal
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**Table 1.** Factual information about the participants

|                      |                                                                                      |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Participant 1</b> | participant no 1 is a sub-branch manager of DBBL bank. He was born and brought up in |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|



|                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|----------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                      | Khulna. His birthplace was in Bagerhat, Fakirhat upazila, Khulna. He has been working in Khulna and Barishal for more than 12 years. <Age 55+>                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Participant 2</b> | participant no 2 is a university student. She is a student of English for Speakers of Other Languages at The University of Dhaka. She was born and brought up in Khulna. She moved in Dhaka around 2020. <Age 22>                                                                                                |
| <b>Participant 3</b> | This participant is a university student. She studies in English for Speakers of Other Languages at The University of Dhaka. She was born in Kaunia, Barishal but brought up in Dhaka. She has occasional contact with Barishal. <Age 23>                                                                        |
| <b>Participant 4</b> | Participant 4 is an advocate as well as a renowned businessman in Barishal. He has been socially involved in Nalchhiti, Barishal and few other places. For his business purpose, he roams around the country. He was born and brought up in a union named Surjopasha, Nalchhiti, Jhalakathi, Barishal. <age-53+> |



|                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Participant 5</b> | Participant 5 is a student of Physics, Dhaka University. She was born and brought up in Rangoon, Chattogram. She has moved in Dhaka around 2022. <22+>                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Participant 6</b> | Participant 6 is an NGO officer. She has been working in different NGO. Currently she is working in Youth Ending Hunger, Bangladesh as a district facilitator in the wing named People against violence everywhere. She had also worked in Bangladesh secretariat. She has work experience of more than 25 years. <Age nearly 60> |
| <b>Participant 7</b> | Participant 7 is an advocate of Dhaka high court. He is from Barishal. He has clients from multiple districts. He was born and brought up in Jhalakathi, Barishal but has been living in Dhaka for 16 years. He has maintained a balanced contact with both Dhaka and Barishal. <age 42>                                          |

**3.5) Sampling:**

For selecting participants', researcher has used convenience sampling as per researcher's expedience. Yet there were number of facts which were taken care of to avoid biasedness, Participants were chosen from three Southern divisions of Bangladesh (Khulna, Barishal, Chattogram). Researcher took care of age group of the participants so that no particular age group can overshine in this research (Gen Z and Millennials were included). The participants' birthplace and workplace all are in Southern Divisions but there were participants' whose birthplace was in southern divisions but they grew up or lived in different places. They were included so that their perspective can be noticed. Two perspectives of the participants would be noticed, - what they faced while using dialects in formal places and their attitude toward southern dialects users The participants were both known and unknown to the interviewer. Known participants were selected to observe their prior activity to identify the authenticity of given data.

**3.6) Ethical consideration:**

The researcher asked participants' consent before taking interviews and noting the answers. The participants were voluntary participants. Participants' privacy and confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms. The study does not discriminate against any particular group or individual that is why researcher tried to include different profession, different age group, different background of the participants. The study questions were gently selected to avoid face threatening possibility or psychological harm towards the participants. The researcher tried her best to avoid data manipulation or biasedness. To conclude, the possible ethical points were carefully noticed throughout this whole research to gain a guilt free outcome.



## **Result and Discussion**

### **4.1) Findings from the data collection**

In this section, pseudonyms have been used to conceal the identity of the participants. In a formal interview, Mahdi (participant 1) opined his perspective about the usage of southern dialects in formal situation as well as how he was treated when he used dialects in formal places. Mahdi have been working in banking sectors for more than a decade. When he was asked about dialectal usage in formal situation, his ideology was that – in Bangladeshi context, it's not very hard to understand dialects. So, if somebody uses dialects in formal situation, he would not bother. He also added that when he used to talk in Khulnai dialect, some teachers from his university<Khulna University> used to teach them not to use it. He thought that it was their ego but for these reasons he had never pulled himself back from any activity or never felt disheartened. He said Dialects are symbols of their roots. He doesn't believe that it is necessary to control peoples' tongue. Another person Pakhi <participant 2> was asked about how she would feel when she would see people using dialects in formal situation. She told the researcher that she would be disappointed at first but she might be compassionate. Also, she added that growing up with Khulnai accent and dialect sometime brought her mockery and embarrassment in formal situations like presentations; She faced comments from classmates as well. It forced her to change her language application in formal settings hugely (tried omitting dialectal use). When it comes to accepting dialects in formal places, she strictly denied the idea. She thought that there could be several dialects in Bangladesh. It would be difficult to communicate smoothly if dialects are used in formal situation. She added that she had respect for dialects but it's not logical to use it in formal settings. Similar attitude has been noticed in Sharif <participant 4>. He said he would not even notice if someone uses dialects in formal situation. He added that he has complete acceptance if somebody



uses dialects but when researcher asked him about accepting it in formal settings legally, he answered in negative, saying that different dialects have different word and sentence formation; It can create confusion. So, it is okay if someone uses it but it shouldn't be a practice to use it in formal situation. Also, he opined that he'd never felt inferior due to dialectal usage in formal situation. When it comes to communication problem using dialects, Heera<participant 6> shared her perspective that she feels proud when someone uses dialects as it represents their individuality, origin, roots but the problem is, there are many dialects which are complex to her, she exemplified that she doesn't understand Sylheti but she appreciates when somebody uses it. So, her point is, Dialects should be accepted at a length in which it will be comprehensible to the receivers and it is not possible for a receiver to own all the dialects. She has respect for dialect but she said that, in formal situation we should let standard dialect or standard language to work as a "lingua franca". There is an interesting fact, so far it has been noticed that Mahdi, Pakhi, Sharif, Heera have shown positive attitude and acceptance toward Dialect though they had reasons to avoid it in formal settings. On the other hand, some people thinks if someone is using dialects in formal situation that means he does not have the ability to communicate in standard language. They consider it as binary opposites, for example- Jorina <Participant no 5> opined "if someone is using dialect in a formal situation, I believe he is an illiterate therefore he does not know how to use it so, he is using dialect." She again said "I do not use dialects in formal situation at all. I think the receiver will not receive it positively and it is about prestige also, it may lose my face value as well. Also, it reflects family background." This type of perspective was seen in two more participants <Participant 3 & 7>. Abida & Piyash. Piyash said that he would not mind but he would think that he doesn't have the knowledge to carry



himself formally in terms of language usage. Whereas, Abida said that she would have a negative impression in his mind but she would try to take it easily. Piyash prefers using dialect where it is normal to use, like in his own village where everyone speaks in dialect in an informal situation rather standard form will seem unnatural at that situation. He added that he tries to avoid his southern dialect, dialectal accent in formal situations like workplace, in courts, in schools of his kids. In this term, Abida said that as she was brought up in Dhaka, she did not adapt Barishali dialect at all, she feels a bit off when someone uses it with her randomly. Abida and Piyash both have respect toward individual choices, dialects and languages but they do not prefer it to be used in formal situation. They think that the purpose of using standard language or standard dialect to serve a smooth communication which will be understood by Bangladeshis all around the country. If dialects are accepted, it will be difficult for the receiver to understand different dialects as he cannot know all the dialects by himself. The researcher tried to relate the similarities by comparing data among participants' attitude toward Southern dialects. One thing to notice, researcher has not used the term southern dialects continuously in this study since this study is only focused on southern dialects of Bangladesh.

#### **4.2) Discussion and Results**

From the data collected from interviews, which have been presented in other section earlier, some facts can be noticed. Though there are several types of participants, some of them were living in the southern divisions and some were not. Still the majority of participants<Only one denied> agree with the actuality that dialects can be a barrier to smooth communication and hence should not be used in formal situation. Primarily in this study, researcher showed some evidence of prestige, class and societal issue that influenced the attitudes toward dialects, but from the collected data it has been seen that the language hierarchy and prestige issue was not that much strong, rather



participants defended their argument on the basis of serving the purpose of a language. The negative attitude that the researcher found was – 2 participants believes that if somebody knows standard dialect, he must have used it in formal situation, they don't use it because they do not have the education and ability to do that. Among all the participants'' 2 people said they felt discouraged because of negative attitudes of the receivers against dialectal use. Also, Participants agreed that they might not support dialectal use in formal situation but they have empathy towards their choice. Participants presented few points which forced them to accept dialect in formal situation. Those are:

- Dialects can be barrier to smooth communication
- If dialects are accepted in formal situation, the purpose serving would be difficult
- Bangladeshi dialects are understandable to some extent but there are lots of morphological, syntactic differences that cannot be removed immediately and it needs some prior ideas to understand the differences. So, it will create confusion.
- First impression is created through the overall appearance as well as language, dialectal words can hamper the impression as it would not be easily understandable.

Therefore, the study reveals, irrespective of age, gender, education, profession, almost all of the participants oppose the acceptance of dialects in formal situation, however the hierarchy or the ideology of high-class language has been decreased. People are accepting other peoples' language choices, their self-identity, that is why it can be said that the attitude toward the use of southern dialects and its users are not negative but the acceptance in formal settings is highly discouraged. From the majority point of view, People are okay if someone unintentionally mixes standard form and dialectal form but solo use of dialectal form is not welcomed at all.



## **Conclusion and Implication**

The researcher conducted this study with a presumption that negative attitudes might be seen in term of using southern dialects in formal situation which was the past scenarios supported by multiple sources. However, this has been proved partially true. In this study, the researcher found that majority of people do not have negative attitude toward dialectal use in formal settings but they do not agree to establish the practice of using southern dialects in formal settings due to its possibility of intelligibility and comprehensibility issue among the receivers. The researcher also tried to show if negative attitudes changed users' activity but there was very less cases about this but there are still people who do not use dialects by their own to save their face value and neat lifestyle. Also the study contributes to sociolinguistics by showing how language ideologies shape perception of dialects, offering a South Asian case that enriches global discussions on language and identity. Socially, the research reveals how speakers of southern dialects negotiate stigma, code-switching, and pride, exposing the tension between marginalization in formal contexts and cultural value in community life. This has implications for identity formation and social equity, as it marks linguistic discrimination as a form of inequality. To sum up, this study shows positive attitude toward the usage and users of Southern dialects of Bangladesh respecting human individuality but do not accept the deliberate practice in formal settings.



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