



#PERSPECTIVE

Rewriting the narrative: Valuing diversity in speech and expression

Accents and dialects weave colourful threads in our cultural identity.

Yet, despite their significance, people with linguistic variations often find themselves subject to ridicule and discrimination. It's time we addressed this.



Accents are the way someone pronounces a word while dialects refer to the way one speaks. This includes pronunciation as well as vocabulary and grammar. Accents may vary depending on the locality in which the speakers reside, their ethnicity, or even social class. Dialects, however, refer to a variety of languages and it is the characteristics of a particular group of speakers.

It is 2024. Globalisation is a term we are familiar with but even today people make fun of people's speech. It is disrespectful to the individual and the entire community of people who speak the dialect or share the accent. It is hard enough to adapt to a new place without the added pressure of people mocking you for the way you speak!

The modern world has created this impression that speaking in your local dialect is **unsmart**, although it has nothing to do with one's intelligence. It is time to point out that we celebrate 21st February as Martyr Day, as well as International Mother Language Day. The emphasis is on the words: Mother Language.

One's mother tongue is what their mother speaks; what their mother taught them. This can be standard Bangla, Chatgaiya, Sylheti, Dhakaiya, etc. The only thing that should matter is the fact that it is your mother tongue.

Professor Abdur Razzaq, one of the finest scholars Bangladesh has ever produced, always spoke with an old Dhaka accent. He had embraced his roots and he was proud of it. The same can be found amongst all great men; they recognise their roots and they are not afraid to embrace it. This is the exact same approach one should take regarding their accents and dialects.

Interviews for jobs or any other reason are where we need a complete change in our mindset. If someone speaks in a dialect



or accent, it is thought to be a disadvantage but recruiters should think differently. A candidate should be judged based on their merit, not their accents.

At universities, presentations are valued considerably. And many students become self-conscious during presentations because of their accents. Some teachers are too harsh in this regard and that does not make things easier. This is just another form of prejudice that is often validated with the excuse of smartness.

Teachers should keep an open mind and recognise that accents are normal. Similarly, even if they prefer standard Bangla, they should at least give the students a chance to recover. After all, it's not possible to just master a new accent overnight.

So, the next time you are making fun of someone for their speech, remember that you too have an accent (by definition,

everyone does). It may be indistinguishable in your ears but it's very conspicuous to others and nobody likes their mother tongue being disrespected.

By Ashif Ahmed Rudro
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If someone spoke English with a British Accent (Let's say Yorkshire accent. There are so many British accents and dialects just like there are so many Bangla accents and dialects). Certainly, they would be considered smart in Bangladesh simply because of this particular accent. Why is there prejudice against having a native Bangla accent? How is having a British accent any different than having a Bangla accent? By definition, both are just ways of pronunciation.