



EVOLUTION OF DHAKAIIYA BANGLA

Tracing roots of Old Dhaka’s unique dialect

RBR

The evolution of language is a continuous progression, flowing with civilisation through the ages. Languages develop and change as big cosmopolitans and metropolitan cities become melting pots of ethnicity, culture, and diversity. This mix of people gives their own accent and dialect to the native language of the city they all migrate to, seeking a living.

Now, this was quite a big thought for me to contemplate. I sat down with scholar and researcher Hashem Sufi, who, among other things, is a life member of Bangla Academy, Asiatic Society, founder trustee of Dhaka Nagar Jadughar, and CEO of Dhaka History Research Centre, to talk about “Dhakaiya Bangla”. I wanted to know how this popular accent and dialect came about.

“To know how Bangla evolved in Dhaka, the timeline of its history is very important,” he says.

Dhaka is more than 2,000 years old, and was always a hub of trade that attracted many kings and their armies to come and rule. 750AD to 1160AD Dhaka was a Buddhist Janapad or habitation. Then, from 1160AD to 1229 AD, it was under the Sen dynasty.

The Sultanate dynasty, spanning from 1229AD to 1608AD came from Central Asia such as Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, Afghanistan and Pakhtoonkhwa. Persian was their Lingua Franca (common or spoken language) besides their own individual Mother Languages and Arabic was their religious language.

Followed by the Mughal dynasty from 1608AD to 1757AD, however, 1757 to 1857 was a dual period of Mughal rule and the East India Company. So, historians refer to that time frame as company rule. 1857 to 1947 was solely British rule and then, up until 1971, it was under Pakistani rule.

So many conquests and such diversification of religion, linguistics, and background took the

Bangla lingua through a checkered trajectory, as is the nature of any multi-ethnic, multi-cultural urbanisation.

“The Mughals and British royals sponsored Urdu as their spoken and written language, while general people spoke in Bangla and established ‘Hindustani’ as the Lingua Franca, which was neither Urdu nor Arabic or Persian. Hindustani was colloquial and informal, without any grammar, and it was adopted between speakers whose native languages were different. The East India Company mostly used Hindustani as their trade and travel language.



PHOTO: STAR

“Thus, Mughals introduced Hindi and Urdu languages as Lingua Franca of India. British introduced Hindustani as new Lingua Franca. Dhakaiya Hindustani and not Urdu and Dhakaiya Bangla were the colloquial and dialects of Dhakaiyas, the original inhabitants of Dhaka,” Hashem Sufi explains.

Ancholik Dhakaiya Bangla is an impromptu linguistic mix of many languages and sub-languages. Examples of Dhakaiya accent include; “koi gecchil?”

(where did you go?), “baith gecchilam” (I went home), baith, meaning house, is a pure Arabic word, “ami bi or bhi” (me too) is from Hindustan, “mogor” (but) is “magar” from Persian, and so on. Around 75 percent of people in Dhaka today are outsiders, people from other districts or pocket zones, bringing in their regional language, and adding their accent and pronunciation to the dialect.

The Bangla language was developed during the Sultanate dynasty. Allauddin Hossain Shah sponsored Bangla, though the state language then was Persian.

Now, a clarification is needed regarding the misinformation and wrongly put general perception circling around Dhakaiya Kuttī and Dhakaiya Bangla.

Dhakaiya Kuttī, as defined generally in texts, was said to be the house help of the Nawabs or brick layers, but from a research aspect, these versions are not true. Kuttis were a group of separate professionals.

“In 1770, during the famine caused by the political and administrative failure of East India Company, millions couldn’t eat and migrated to Dhaka. However, they could not join the mainstream workforce, which was dominated by local Muslims and Hindus then, who did not want to share or teach their professional expertise or secrecy with these new migrants. Since these people were farmers, the merchants who exported the rice employed them to clean the husk from the grains by using dhakis or rice pounders, and this process is called kuta in Bangla. And so, the term Kuttī,” Sufi explained.

“While going through East India Company records in the British Library during 1986, I stumbled upon many facts that were known, but distorted or not even known,” Sufi added.

And so, one of my most memorable evenings ended with cups of milk tea, crumb chops, and a visit to old publishing houses in Bangla Bazar, dotted with Hashem Sufi’s brand of witty sarcasm.

Ambitious revenue target in the works

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Proper enforcement of measures can also bump up revenue collection, said Ahmed, also a former NBR chairman.

“However, there is a significant deficit to this end as automation in revenue collection is not functioning properly while the existing laws were not amended adequately.”

The advisory committee has made some proposals for major reforms including separation of VAT policy and administration.

“We are hopeful that the government will take a concrete step

to this end by June. However, even if the proposed reform measures are implemented soon, its result may not come overnight,” Ahmed added.

Development partners, including the IMF, are pressing for reforms, including the separation of VAT policy and administration, reducing tax exemptions and automation in tax administration and collection.

They have stipulated an ordinance that separates the VAT policy from the administration before releasing budget support or loan tranche.

Furthermore, they want to

see specific steps for reduced tax exemption.

For this, the government has raised the VAT rates to 15 percent on nearly 100 goods and services. However, in the face of criticism, the government later rolled back the VAT rate hike from some of the goods and services.

“Raising the VAT rates suddenly on an ad hoc basis was not the right decision,” Ahmed said.

The NBR’s operation of VAT policy and administration under one institution is the main problem.

“They should be separated -- we

don’t want to see any compromised decision,” he added.

According to the IMF’s recent documents, the reforms that the lender wants to see in fiscal 2024-25’s budget include reducing corporate income tax exemptions and depletion allowances and raising previously reduced VAT rates on several products to the full 15 percent statutory rate.

Besides, it also wants to see the introduction of an additional personal income tax bracket for high income earners and the increase in tax rates on tobacco and select products.

BNP leader beaten to death in front of wife

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husband were harvesting mustard near Akshirnagar Housing this afternoon, Afsar, Arshad, Monir, and four to five others attacked Babul.

“They beat him with sticks and SS pipes, seriously injuring him. They even gouged out both his eyes. When I and some locals tried to intervene and take him to a hospital, they stopped us. Only after he became unconscious did they leave the place,” she said.

Babul was later taken to Savar Enam Medical College Hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

Ejaz, a doctor at the hospital’s emergency department, told The Daily Star that Babul was brought in around 3:30pm in an unconscious state with severe injuries to his head, eyes, face, and legs. After examination, he was declared dead.

Locals claimed that Babul had an ongoing dispute with Afsar, Arshad, and Monir over the ownership of a pond, which might have led to his killing.

When contacted, Monirul Islam, officer-in-charge of Dhamrai Police Station, said primary investigations suggest that Babul was killed over a previous dispute. “Preparations are underway to recover the body from the hospital and send it to the morgue.”

Efforts are ongoing to arrest those responsible for the murder, he added. The victim’s wife Yasmin said she would file a case over the incident as soon as she is able.

Meanwhile, this correspondent visited the homes of those she alleged were involved but did not find them there, and their family members were unwilling to provide their contact numbers or make any comments on their behalf.

Myanmar returns 300 more Chinese scam centre workers

AFP, Bangkok

Myanmar handed over 300 Chinese scam centre workers to be repatriated through Thailand yesterday, as authorities intensify a crackdown on the illegal operations.

Thousands of foreigners are expected to be sent home from scam compounds in Myanmar over the coming weeks, with the first batch already flown out on Thursday.

The compounds are run by criminal gangs and staffed by foreigners, many of whom say they were trafficked and forced to swindle people around the world in protracted internet scams.

Myanmar’s junta said in a statement that a second group of 300 Chinese nationals was handed over yesterday via the Thailand-Myanmar Friendship Bridge 2 at the Thai border town of Mae Sot.

‘Ekush teaches us not to bow down’

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and International Mother Language Day 2025 at the International Mother Language Institute in Dhaka.

Serajul Islam Choudhury, professor emeritus at Dhaka University, presided over the event.

Yunus said the day – February 21, 1952 – is an inspiration and a mantra to stand against all kinds of injustice and conspiracies.

“We had to sacrifice a lot to recognise Bangla as the state language. It’s unprecedented in world history for people to sacrifice their lives for their mother tongue,” he said. “The foundation stone of the International Mother Language Institute was laid in Dhaka on March 15, 2001, to protect the spirit and dignity of the mother tongues of all ethnic groups, regardless of race and religion,” he said.

Yunus also discussed the impact of technology on language dominance.

“With the technological advancement of a country, comes the dominance of its language. When Russia launched Sputnik, the world rushed to learn Russian. Similarly, as China advanced, the world started learning Chinese. The leading

country’s language will naturally gain global influence.”

“The world will not be interested in the language of a country that has nothing to offer,” he added.

“If a nation can lead in any aspect, people’s interest in that country’s language will increase – no matter how complex that language is,” said the chief adviser, adding that a nation’s advancement in literature, technology, and science are key to attracting interest in its language.

Yunus also emphasised the importance of preserving all mother languages.

“On Mother Language Day, we have pledged to preserve all mother languages. There are emotional reasons, but there are also reasons of great interest. Now, we do not know which unknown, nameless mother language will completely change the world. If we ignore any possibility, we will make a big mistake,” he said.

He wished the International Mother Language Institute all the success. He also congratulated the recipients of the medals and awardees in the Olympiad held to mark the occasion.

SPs involved in 2018 ‘night time’

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The last general election, held on January 7, 2024, was boycotted by the BNP and several other parties. In many places, AL leaders ran as independents to make the polls appear participatory.

In 2018, opposition parties alleged that ballot-stuffing took place the night before the election.

Transparency International Bangladesh said ballot-stuffing took place in more than one centre in 33 of the 50 constituencies it had surveyed.

In the 2014 election, also boycotted by the BNP, 153 out of 300 lawmakers got “elected” without any vote as they were the only ones running for office in their constituencies.

In another development, Dhananjay Das, joint secretary to

the Public Security Division, was suspended on Thursday on charges of opposing the July uprising and spreading falsehood about the interim government.

Earlier, six trainee ASPs from the 40th BCS have also been dismissed through a notification from the Public Security Division.

They are Ashrafuzzaman, Manas Kirtaniya, Shantu Roy, Sohel Rahman, Kazi Faizul Karim, and Sanjib Deb.

The notification did not mention why they were dismissed.

On October 20 last year, the government suspended the parade of the trainee officers of the 40th BCS. On November 19, the graduation ceremonies for trainee ASPs and trainee sub-inspectors (SIs) at the police academy were postponed.