

So-Called “Standard” English Accent: Experiences and Preferences of Tertiary Level Students of Bangladesh

Sunjida Kabir¹

BRAC University

Manuscript Received: 29/01/2022

Accepted: 30/11/2023

Published: 08/02/2024

Abstract

In ESL or EFL countries like Bangladesh, many students are concerned about their pronunciation because it affects their self-esteem. To address this sensitive yet under-researched issue, this paper delves into the benefits and challenges faced by Bangladeshi tertiary level students regarding “standard” American and British English accents. Qualitative data analysis involved conducting semi-structured interviews with six undergraduate and postgraduate students of a Bangladeshi private university. Findings revealed that proficient language participants had more positive experiences and views on “standard” English accents, while those with lower English competence expressed less confidence. Both those with low and high English proficiency were aware that the use of a “standard” English accent is beneficial for job purposes and for conforming to social norms of adhering to a “standard” variety. Finally, it was found that a Bangladeshi English accent may help create a distinctive identity. However, some participants opined that going above and beyond to create a Bangladeshi English accent is neither worth it nor warranted, as Bangla is quite a stable language.

Keywords: English accent, American English, British English, standard accent, standard variety

¹sunjida.kabir@g.bracu.ac.bd

Introduction

Irrefutable is the influential existence of English, as the language is a veritable global lingua franca. Unfortunately, one significant consequence of globalizing the English language is that Anglophone countries impose dominance over other countries by claiming their English as the “standard” English (Seidlhofer, 2013). In addition, according to postcolonial, sociolinguistics, and World Englishes scholars like Pennycook (2007), the act of adapting the English language as a global language, and the subsequent result of English varieties—mixed with national language varieties—has become a debatable topic. On this matter, Phillipson (1992) notes that much of the world views English as a superior language, marking a distinction between English and other languages. Moreover, “standard” English has been given importance in the academic field while other varieties of English languages are being devalued (Dewey, 2007; Widdowson, 2002). Thus, the dominance of “standard” English instigates English linguistic hegemony which imposes non-native speakers to speak in “standard” English (Yano, 2009).

Nonetheless, the term and the concept of “standard” English, how it is defined, and how it is connected to the language learning and teaching aspect are important socio political issues for the Bangladeshi EFL sector. As most of the learners of Bangladesh are from a Bangla medium background, they inherently sound different from the native English speaker (Begum & Hoque, 2016). Besides, Hoque (2010) mentions that L2 speakers are not obliged to have a native-like accent; rather, it is an “art” to mimic speakers of native English nations.

Put another way, it is a common scenario for the EFL learners of Bangladesh to face a constant struggle with their accent and lower their affective factors while delivering any English speech (Suchona & Shorna, 2019). Hence, it affects their speaking and learning process at the tertiary level by dint of the feeling of local varieties of an English accent that is influenced by local dialects (Tina, 2020). Although many researchers emphasize comprehensibility as the primary focus of the L2 speaking (Derwing,

2018), L2 speakers often wish to have native-like pronunciation (Tokumoto & Shibata, 2011). For instance, Uddin and Monjur (2015) find that Bangladeshi university students hold strong negative attitudes toward their L1-influenced English accent and desire to sound like Anglophone speakers. They further explain that this perception emerges because the young generation of Bangladesh has the tendency to follow the western culture and they think that talking in a “standard” English accent is a sign of intelligence and smartness.

In light of the circumstances above, this paper explores the experiences of tertiary level students of Bangladesh regarding “standard” English accents—in particular, British and American English; along with it, the study will also look into their preferred English accent. To that end, the following research questions are conceptualised:

A: What positive and negative experiences have Bangladeshi tertiary level students had due to their English pronunciation?

B: What English accent do Bangladeshi tertiary level students prefer to use?

Literature Review

This section reviews the existing research on “standard” English accents, how the concept of a so-called “standard” English relates to World Englishes, and how it is perceived globally as well as in Bangladesh.

The Concept of “Standard” English

People consider “standard” English as the model for written or spoken situations. The concept of a “standard” English accent is defined slightly differently by different scholars. First, Farrell and Martin (2009) specify that “standard” English refers to a language variety that is understandable by all English users and learners. The next statement is from Trudgill (2011), who states that “standard” English is usually used in writing and particularly in printing—that is, it is expected to be used in the education sector by all L1 and L2

speakers of the world. He also adds that “standard” English is not related to pronunciation and therefore should not be labeled as merely an accent. Rather, it can be considered as a sub-variety of English that is usually referred to as a dialect (Trudgill & Hannah, 2013). MacArthur's (2013) definition summarizes the former two linguists' views: “standard” English is well-received, comprehensible, and has great value in native English countries, and its format is also followed while printing as written norms are similar worldwide.

However, the existence of a so-called “standard” English is a debatable topic. According to Seidlhofer (2013), there are countless elements of controversy, perplexity, and questions about the notion of “standard” English. There are mainly three reasons behind the complication of “standard” English. Farrell and Martin (2009) explain the first and second reasons. First, there is no globally recognized governing forum that instructs what should be or what should not be included as a “standard,” and, moreover, there is no correct representation of the statement of “standard” English. Some languages do have such an authorising body, such as the Bangla Academy in Bangladesh whose main goal is to implement a national language policy, promote and develop the Bangla language, and publish the Bangla dictionary (Banu, 2000). Along with it, there is also the Academie Francaise whose core purpose is to maintain the “standard” and everything concerned with the French language (Marlina, 2014)—something which “standard” English lacks.

Second, there is a common misconception that non-native learners should learn and follow the “standard” English norms, but there are no specific “standard” patterns of what ESL or EFL students need or desire to learn. Thirdly, a rationalism emerges from answering the question as to which particular variety “standard” English constitutes. To answer this, Meierkord (2004) states that “standard” English is in a “constant flux.” As McArthur (2001) elaborates on the statement by saying that the Queen's English variety was considered “standard English” in 1990. Therefore, the privilege of having the “standard” variety was held by British royals. However, after the Second World War in the 1930s, the answer changed and both British and American were termed “standard”

English. Finally, from the start of the next century, due to the globalization of English and the growing population of users, the variety which was once claimed “standard” began to fade—examples include Australia, Canada, and the Philippines.

Monocentric View versus Pluricentric View

The monocentric view is imposing the superiority norm of the Anglophone countries and their cultures toward the English varieties and cultures (Doan, 2014). This approach supports Kachru’s (1985, as cited in Kachru, 1986) model where he had given superiority to native English speakers, who constituted the inner circle. In Kachru’s (1985) “Three Circles Model of World Englishes,” he classifies and distinguishes the different English speakers in each circle. Kachru’s model depicts that people of the inner circle use English as their native language, and so they create linguistic norms which spread to the other circles; the outer circle people usually challenge the norms and try to make some modifications to them, but the people of the expanding circle usually learn English as a foreign language, adhere to the rules created by the inner circle and modified or disputed by the outer circle. Hence, it is clear from his model that, according to Kachru’s model, native-speaking countries of English hold ownership of the English language. However, several World Englishes scholars like Widdowson (2002) and Timmis (2002) oppose Kachru’s model of World Englishes because they believe that approximately 80% of English speakers worldwide constitute outer and expanding circle speakers. The pluricentric view arises from the debates which can be defined as the shift from acknowledging native-like proficiency to communicative competence as the medium of teaching and learning goal (Marlina, 2014; 2017). In the pluricentric approach, students are introduced to many different English varieties and their cultural contexts (Tizzano & Rauer, 2019).

Some linguists, such as Kuo (2006), also express that as there are varieties of English sprouting gradually, we do not need to only follow “standard” English, and hence can use the term World Englishes. Based on the above circumstances, there has been a manifestation of different types of language ideologies which are at

odds with each other. Although the idea of adopting a “standard” English accent is criticized and World Englishes have flourished, some speakers will always hold on to the “standard” way of learning English (Rudianto & Mubarak, 2018). Indeed, more so than the theorists and scholars, the masses’ opinions are the most relevant in sociolinguistics and World Englishes. Overall, the majority of speakers who belong to Japan, Korea, and China share the monocentric view (Tajik & Mojtabaei, 2019) whereas other countries like Pakistan, India, and South Africa generally embrace the accent of their countries (Timmis, 2002).

Global Attitudes toward Standard English Accents

There are both positive and negative aspects of learners’ perceptions of “standard” English. Much research about learner attitudes toward “standard” English shows that they are being judged by others due to how they speak, be it their native or foreign language (Graddol, 2006; Seidlhofer, 2013). A native-like accent is consistently connected with pejorative connotations, which often lead to discrimination (Gluszek & Dovidio, 2010). Timmis (2002) also agrees and reports that many American job-seeking applicants face discrimination during interviews because they have a so-called non-standard English accent (Munro, 2003). Espinosa (2017) has explored the non-native English accent of one LFC (Liverpool Football Club) personality: Ana Botella. Botella’s first language was Spanish, and when she delivered a speech to the International Olympic Committee, her Spanish-English accent garnered heavy criticism in Spain. Even though her speech was intelligible, it was diverging much from the pronunciation norm of the LFC (Liverpool Football Club). Moreover, Dragojevic et al. (2019) find that besides accent, other speech aspects impact judgments. In particular, the authors compare and contrast moderate and heavy accented speech. The participants of that study rate the moderately accented speech much more highly, but the authors opine that this is due to a lack of intelligibility of the heavily accented speech, as opposed to arising out of stereotypes.

In the context of Denmark, one study is dedicated to exploring the attitude of Danish EFL learners toward native English

accents (Ladegaard & Sachdev, 2006). Most of the participants express a preference for the British English accent, though they also view the American English accent in a positive light. In the context of Poland, Szpyra-Kozłowska and Szpyra (2012) conduct research on whether L2 learners would give priority to good English pronunciation or ought to try developing a native-like accent. Most of the participants agree that good English pronunciation is enough, and that a native-like accent is not necessary. Similarly, in a cross-national study comprising Italian, Polish, and Spanish students (Nowacka, 2012), it is found that most international students believe that possession of a “standard” English accent plays an important role to make them feel competent users of the English language.

Nonetheless, Jenkins (2006) herself is also aware of that fact and suggests learners receive exposure to various varieties of English so that they will learn some tolerance. She claims that when learners come to know various varieties of English, their illusion of “standard” English accents being superior would shatter. Hence, the notion that there is a so-called standard English accent remains a presumption because of the socio-psychological aspects of spoken standards, biases that cannot be easily overlooked (Jenkins, 2006).

Attitudes toward “Standard” English Accents from Bangladeshi Context

Kerswill (2006) defines “non-standard” English to comprise various varieties of spoken English throughout the globe. Similarly, the Bangla language has its own variety and is enriched with various regional dialects. Therefore, it is quite natural for Bangladeshi English learners to speak with their own accent, and their articulating speech organs are affected by their dialectic differences (Hai & Ball, 1961). One of the reasons behind this is that the learners are not introduced to English phonetic features at school or college, and so they unconsciously use pronunciation related to their L1 instead of trying to adopt the pronunciation of the L2, which later becomes noticeable in their university and professional life (Banu, 2000; Hai & Ball, 1961; Mujaffar, 1999; Rahman, 1995). Rani and Tina (2020) also discover similar findings in their research where they mention that due to most students’ Bangla medium background, they do not

get the sufficient motivation to pronounce correctly, and the teachers also lack proper English proficiency. According to Sultana and Arif (2007), some reasons behind L1 learners' mispronunciation of English include the following: first, most students usually do not know proper knowledge of the letters and intonation of words; second, most do not know, while spelling a word, where to give emphasis on the pronunciation; third, most are not able to apprehend either fricatives or phonological divisions of words in a satisfactory manner.

Despite all the characteristic features of a Bangladeshi English accent, Haque's (2009) study urges that a "standard" English accent adds extra value to the speaker in the ears of the listener, and the speaker can have the advantage of having both social status and cultural value; therefore, according to him, Bangladeshi learners of English should consider and set a goal to adhere to a "standard" English while communicating with others.

Research Gap

Briefly, this section has explored and discussed various factors related to "standard" and "non-standard" Englishes, the attitudes of learners toward them, students' pronunciation problems because of their different language varieties, phonetic ignorance, and the drawbacks while speaking in their own dialects. In Bangladesh, some research exists on students' fluency (Eiten et al., 2019), accuracy (Kamal, 2013), and also pronunciation (Begum & Haque, 2016). However, there is a line between pronunciation and accent, as the former relates to the specific enunciation of sounds whereas the latter is a broad spectrum of how words are pronounced due to sociological and geographical divides (Koshal, 2014)—making research on accent more relevant to the discipline of World Englishes. Furthermore, there remains a dearth of qualitative research surrounding the experiences of tertiary level learners' experiences of and preferences for "standard" English accents and how these can influence all (e.g., social, career, and academic) sectors.

Methodology

Research Design

This is an inductive qualitative research study with the focus of exploring Bangladeshi tertiary level students' experiences with and preferences of English accents. This type of emic perspective on undergraduate and post-graduate students' attitudes toward "standard" English accents can be achieved through a qualitative research method including open-ended questionnaires. In particular, semi-structured interviews were taken, and data analysis involved making codes and generating themes from the interview transcripts.

Recruitment of Participants and Ethical Issues

One male and five female private university students constitute the sample size of this study. One participant is a BA in English student, and the rest are currently pursuing their MA in English. Four participants are from Bangla medium and two are from English medium background. Although all participants have their own accents because of their background—as depicted in the table below—all are well aware of "standard" English and various English accents, and all have also completed the courses Sociolinguistics and Psycholinguistics both in their undergraduate and postgraduate lives. They have also attended many international seminars, and even some of their teachers may have native-like accents. Since "standard" American and British English accents constitute the main focus of this research, I have selected participants who have knowledge about the function of the "standard" English accents, so as to investigate their attitudes and experience regarding the research topic.

Moreover, the researcher has taken the consent of the participants for their role in this study. They were informed explicitly that their personal information will not be used in this paper or elsewhere. Furthermore, a pseudonym is used for each of them.

Table 1: Participant Profile

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Education Background	Current Education Level
Noyon	Male	English Medium	MA in English
Sazia	Female	English Medium	BA in English
Sharmin	Female	Bangla Medium	MA in English
Lamia	Female	Bangla Medium	MA in English
Toma	Female	Bangla Medium	MA in English
Faiza	Female	Bangla Medium	MA in English

Data Collection Procedure

This qualitative study uses semi-structured interviews according to the research questions. The interviews were taken online via Zoom. The invitation link for the video conference was sent out to the participants on Facebook Messenger, and upon their acceptance of the invitation, the Zoom session commenced. The researcher only started recording after the participants were ready. The time range for five of the interviews was 8-14 minutes, but for one participant—Noyon—it went over 40 minutes. No significant challenges were faced during the interview sessions.

Data Analysis Procedure

This study has selected Creswell's (2017) six steps of exploring and explaining qualitative research. According to these six steps, first, all the data was organized that was collected from the questionnaires, and then the researcher started to explore and analyze it. The study further gathered all the analyzed information to meet the study's objectives.

As qualitative research is explanatory research, the researcher has to be reasonable in order to explore the findings (Creswell, 2017). In this regard, while analyzing the collected data, whenever the researcher became confused with the answers of the participants, she talked to the participants in detail for more clarification. As she could not meet them personally because of the different locations, she contacted them through phone calls. She wrote down the important key points during phone calls and implemented them while analyzing their answers. Besides, for the purpose of this interview, the researcher has studied various English accents so that she can identify the differences and explain them to the respondents if required. Whenever this study discovered a new or important fact, she made sure to check the previous information and made the link between every piece of information—in other words, integrating the generated codes to make themes and sub-themes, which are finally presented in this paper in sub-sections.

Findings

This section is designed to explore students' experiences toward "standard" English accents and their preferred English accent. Excerpts of the six participants' answers are presented below under certain topics which came forth during data analysis. These topics are based on the two core research questions which underpin this study.

Background Influence

This subsection discusses the relevant background information of the participants which turned out to hold influence over their perceptions of English accents.

English Medium vs. Bangla Medium

Two of the participants, as mentioned, have an English medium background, and the rest from a Bangla medium background. This background information was found to be relevant to the findings. For example, both English medium participants—Noyon and Sazia—said they feel no shame regarding their English accent, while some Bangla medium participants—Faiza and

Sharmin—did admit to feeling it. Moreover, the English medium participants said they can conveniently identify the English accents people use. Furthermore, these two also held more positive views on “standard” English accents—both American and British—though they both preferred the American accent. On the whole, the English medium participants appeared to have a better understanding and appreciation for American and British accents, though they also tolerate the Bangladeshi English accent.

English Language Usage

When asked about the hours they put into practising the English language, there were a variety of findings. Faiza and Toma replied that they hardly have practice. The other participants’ answers ranged from one hour to more than three hours of practice. Lamia, though coming from a Bangla medium background, had the most English-speaking practice, since she is an English tutor. Sazia is also a student tutor and hence has extensive English practice, while Noyon goes out of his way to accrue English-speaking practice as he has a YouTube channel. Another notable response came from Sharmin, who said that she speaks in English spontaneously out of excitement with university friends.

Connections were found between the English language practice of participants and their perspectives and challenges of English accents. For example, Faiza and Toma—having low to no practice—experience shame and difficulty in speaking in English. The other participants have more positive perspectives and face fewer challenges.

English Language Exposure

Two interview questions were dedicated to determining the participants’ English language exposure throughout their lives. One question was asked to find out any relevant experience the participants have had with teachers who spoke English as their mother tongue, and the other question was directed at any, if at all, relevant experience with friends who spoke English as their first language. Three participants—Lamia, Toma, and Faiza—had no native English teachers in their lives, while Noyon had more than

five, and Sazia also had several. This may be a result of their English medium background, but Sharmin—a Bangla medium student—also recalled having three native English speakers. Regarding friends, she and Noyon had several, and Sazia had two, with Lamia and Faiza having none.

After analysis, it was found that those who had native English friends or teachers or both faced less difficulty with a “standard” English accent than those who did not. For example, Noyon remembers having an Australian friend who used to pronounce “h” as “heich” instead of “eich.” Such awareness of and contact with native English speakers appeared to make the participants more easily able to identify different English accents and appreciate them more as well.

Experience with Using English Accents

This subsection discusses the findings relevant to the first research question of exploring the experiences of Bangladeshi tertiary level students regarding their English accents. It was found that the participants’ experiences were mostly negative.

Pressure to Conform to Social Norms

In order to fit into society, one needs to abide by the structured norm set by the society, and this paper showed that participants are naturally trying to follow the “standard” accent to fit in the community. For example, Faiza, Lamia, and Sharmin try to sound like Americans. Especially Sharmin thought that when a person sounds like a native speaker, it seems very natural; otherwise, it sounds a bit “alienated” and evident that the person is a second language speaker. She does not want that, and she wants people to consider her a native speaker. She tries to add some “stress” whenever she speaks, tries not to stammer much, and tries to watch a lot of TV series so that she can imitate the American English accent and sound like them. In contrast, Sazia claimed that she could not decide which accent to adopt. In her opinion,

I can’t choose to sound like them. Since I witness many varieties of English, I think it is quite impractical to mimic

all the rules of a single variety. So, if I choose to talk like an American, she cannot do so. I'm comfortable with my mixed accent.

In addition, Noyon shared his ideology on this by saying that some pronunciation needs to be taught but not pronunciation for all words; that there should be freedom given to people how they want to sound.

Another major finding that this study shed light on is that all participants agree that “standard is representative.” For instance, Noyon and Lamia claimed that in the office, there is a “stigma” that speaking in the “standard” accent is more professional and more formal, even while speaking in Bangla there is a tendency to have to speak in “Shuddho” Bangla. Particularly, Sharmin believed that when people speak in a “standard” language variety, there is less fear of judgement. However, when their Bangla accent gets added to it, their insecurity rises. Therefore, she is afraid of being in a situation like this and afraid of people asking about her origin—that is, where she is from. She continued that if she speaks like a native speaker, anyone would not bother to ask such questions or would be less interested to ask about the origin, and therefore she would be judged less for her accent.

The Matter of Shame

It is a common phenomenon that if L2 language speakers perceive sounding better while speaking in English, they feel less affected by affective filters. For instance, except Sharmin and Faiza, the rest of the participants claim that they do not feel ashamed of their English accent. Lamia shared her one experience regarding this where she said that she once talked to some foreign teachers, where she felt that her accent was quite good—something which encouraged her to talk more. In her words-

Once I went to my student where most of the teachers were foreigners. For some reason she and I had to go there and communicate with them. While communicating I felt that I was speaking in a good accent. As all the teachers there had an American accent too, my accent naturally accommodated

theirs which made me feel confident while talking with them.

In addition, Noyon was once praised by his best friend regarding his American-dominant accent with some mixture of Bangladeshi English accent. His best friend said she is impressed and amazed by his “spontaneous natural accent.”

On the other hand, Sharmin reported feeling inferior by her accent when her Bangladeshi English accent interferes with her English speaking. She repeatedly apologized to her American friends for her “not so great” English accent, but to her utter surprise, her American friends consoled her by saying that “they’re sorry because of not knowing Bangla.” Thus, the shame of having a “non-standard” English accent may be due to one’s inner anxiety rather than external factors.

Preference for the “Standard” English Accent

This subsection discusses the answer to the second research question of which English accent is preferred by Bangladeshi tertiary level students.

Overwhelming Support for “Standard” American English

When asked to share their perspectives of “standard” accent, most participants showed preference for a “standard” English accent. Sharmin, Lamia, Faiza, and Noyon mentioned that a “standard” English accent is preferred in the job sector. In Sharmin’s undergraduate life, she had a classmate who was “pretty famous just because of her accent” though she was not a standout student. However, Sharmin continued, due to the possession of a privileged accent, the girl always received offers for hosting programs. Noyon also referenced one of his friends who was able to work at a call center job in Bangladesh due to his American accent.

Another popular answer behind the preference of a “standard” English accent was the opportunity of going for higher studies abroad. Sharmin, Noyon, and Lamia all mentioned this positively. Noyon provided many other reasons for his preference for

the American English accent. His particular “standard” accent hinges on his childhood experiences of watching professional American wrestling shows and also cartoons with American English dubbing. In his words,

It’s all about how you grow up; if you grow up having some sort of ideals, you will carry on to those ideals in your future; it can be anything: it can be cooking, it can be harmful things like smoking; it depends on how you’re treated. You tend to treat people back the same way. It’s a natural tendency to fit in. As I grew up watching American television, I love how they pronounce things, like the aspirated phonemes, like instead of take, they say “t(h)aik”; it’s not “p,” its “ph”; I love how they pronounce “pig” as “p(h)eg.”

Noyon also tried taking the other perspective by wondering whether there would be any problem with rejecting the “natural” Bangladeshi accent of speaking English. He said that just because some people prefer a “standard” English accent—whether American or British—it does not mean that our own language, Bangla, is suffering.

Another participant—Sazia—voiced her preference of the American English accent over the British one. She said the former is clearer than the latter, and also that she does not like that the /r/ is dropped or remains subtle in British English, like in “wataa.” As for why she likes the American accent in particular, she recalled a previous experience of trying to imitate the American accent to bond with an American cousin. She mused about how the American cousin’s accent was so different from her teachers’ English accent at school, and so she tried imitating it. Sazia also mentioned that she does not dislike British English in particular as she watches both British and American TV shows. She feels she currently has a mixture of British and American accents, though she prefers the latter, as mentioned.

Consciousness of Individual Identity

Despite a preference for the “standard” American English accent, the participants held differing perspectives toward the role of English accent on Bangladeshi identity. Lamia and Sharmin said that a national accent that would serve as an identity marker for Bangladeshi people is desirable. In Lamia’s words, “Rather than hiding, we can flaunt and feel proud of our natural accent.” However, Sharmin admitted that she is unable to discern a Bangladeshi accent, though she can identify an Indian accent.

The other participants, however, had ambivalent to positive views on a “standard” English accent. Sazia, for instance, said “everyone should have their own variety of English,” and that it does not matter which accent someone has as long as it is comprehensible. She also elaborated on this by citing the United Nations and how different people have different English accents outside of the “standard” American or British accent.

Noyon once again tried to wear the hat of both parties and philosophized about the duality of individual identity versus worldwide recognition. He opined that Bangla is not an endangered language like the Chakma language, and so no language policy needs to be taken to uphold the “standard” of Bangla and fashion a separate Bangladeshi English accent. In other words, according to him, since Bangla is more than stable already, the promotion of a “standard” English accent will not put the national language in jeopardy.

Discussion

The previous section has presented and analyzed the themes of this study. Now, let us take a holistic look at them and try to link them with a World Englishes perspective.

This section has found several notable results. First, all the participants agree that with a “standard” accent, people can be benefitted academically, economically, and socially. Hence, having a British or American accent has its clear advantage, and not having a “standard” accent has several inconveniences—for instance, a non-native-like accent is pejoratively viewed, and sometimes even

discrimination manifests (Dovidio et al., 2010; Haque, 2009; Seidlhofer, 2013). Noyon suggested one reason for the underlying factor of discrimination which is that from our childhood we are being “institutionalized” to think that an American or British accent is superior among all the English varieties, and hence, we are subconsciously trying to imitate “standard accents”—particularly, either the American or British—but almost never the Bangla accent.

Another reason might be, according to Noyon, that many people consider that “masking” or trying to speak in a “standard” accent makes them feel superior or makes them feel more educated. In one of the research studies that he is currently conducting—on accent and fluency—he finds that Bangladeshi people are rating the American accents higher than the Bangladeshi accents, even when it is the case that the fluency is higher in a Bangladeshi accent than in the American accent. Dragojevic et al. (2019) have conducted research along the same lines and uncovered a number of speech elements, besides accent, that lead to negative evaluations of L2 speakers. The authors show that when listening to audio clips of mild and heavy native-like accent speakers’ speech, the participants judge the former group more negatively based on their intonation while delivering a speech.

Not to mention, while taking interviews, the researcher noticed that the two participants who belong to English medium background were quite natural and spontaneous during the interview compared to the participants of Bangla medium background. In addition, Bangla medium participants did not give any stress on any word while talking and two of them had a noticeable Bangla-English mixed accent. One of the reasons behind this is that the Bangla medium students do not have any subjects related to English phonetic features and, therefore, their mixed accents become noticeable in their university and professional life (Banu, 2000; Hai & Ball, 1961; Mujaffar, 1999; Rahman, 1995).

Finally, all participants considered that everyone should have their own variety of English or “a hybrid identity,” just like English as a Lingua Franca (ELF). According to the concept of ELF and many current World Englishes scholars (Canagarajah, 2006;

Sridhar & Sridhar, 2018), English is a global language and, therefore, no one can claim ownership of it. One of the participants, Noyon, gave an example where he mentioned that people are now accepting various accents globally. He further added that when we watch BBC or any shows or movies, we normally used to hear an American accent, but now the scenario is changing. BBC English is allowing other accents which were not allowed before and about 50 years ago, “it was not allowed at all.” Even at present, Noyon continued, there are many main characters in stories (of course, some of the characters are exceptions) that do not speak in or have a “standard” accent, and, slowly, people are starting to appreciate them. Hence, it contradicts Frank’s (2004) opinion, who regards ELF as an “American genre,” subscribing to the notion that English only serves American interests.

Based on the above circumstances, it is evident that adopting a “standard” English accent has been both praised and criticized by Bangladeshi tertiary level students. Hence, some speakers will always hold onto the “standard” way of speaking and learning English (Rudianto & Mubarak, 2018). On the flip side, most participants view this to be a matter of individual preference: that whether or not someone prefers a “standard” English accent is their own decision, a decision which should not be restricted by external sociolinguistic factors.

Conclusion

In an attempt to find out Bangladeshi tertiary level students' experiences of and preferences for “standard” English accents, this article revealed that participants have positive attitudes toward “standard” English accents. However, in answer to the first research question, the experiences which Bangladeshi tertiary level students have had regarding their accent are negative, as some participants have insecurities about having a “non-standard” English accent and face pressure to align with social norms of speaking in a “standard” English accent. Despite this, in answer to the second research question, every participant preferred the American accent over the British accent, and some also looked forward to a future with a recognized Bangladeshi English accent. Again, some participants

shed light on the fact that there is no emergency or even any requirement for a Bangladeshi English accent to form, as Bangla is already a well-established language.

Limitations and Recommendations

Even though the qualitative findings of this study show students' positive attitudes toward "standard" English accents despite negative experiences because of them, some sectors still need to be explored to support this finding. The experiences of undergraduate students who come from Bangla medium background need to be observed as Bangla medium students face difficulties with their accent most after being exposed to the international environment where students' comprehensibility and intelligibility are judged based on their accent. Moreover, another limitation of the study was the online interview setting and the limited period of time of this study. If the researcher could take live class observations of the participants, data triangulation would result in further validation of their statements.

Further research is recommended in the same field, but this time focusing on pre-teens who have not reached their critical period yet. Such a study can then compare and contrast findings of secondary level students—teenagers—and pre-adolescent children with a focus on pronunciation, as pronunciation is one of the only established language features which is widely considered to become fossilized after the critical period (Yi, 2021). It would further be interesting to explore others' (for instance—school and college teachers', and corporates') attitudes toward "standard" English accents to contribute more to this study.

Finally, implications of this study can include the fact that exploration of these twin research aims can pave the way to discovering ESL students' experiences and deep-held beliefs of English accents at the tertiary level.

References

- Banu, R. (2000). Bangladeshi English: A new variety. *Journal of the Institute of Modern Languages*, (1999-2000), 53-68.
- Begum, A., & Hoque, M. A. (2016). English pronunciation problems of the tertiary level students in Bangladesh: A case study. *Researchers World*, 7(4), 50.
- Canagarajah, A. S. (2006). Negotiating the local in English as a lingua franca. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 26, 197-218. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190506000109>
- Creswell, J. (2017). *Research design: A qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches*. Thousand Oaks, California: SAGE
- Derwing, T. M. (2018). Comprehensibility. *The tesol encyclopedia of english language teaching*, 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118784235.eelt0012>
- Dewey, M. (2007). English as a lingua franca and globalization: an interconnected perspective. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 17(4), 43-80.
- Doan, N. B. (2014). Teaching the target culture in English teacher education programs: Issues of EIL in Vietnam. In *The pedagogy of English as an international language* (pp. 79-93). Springer, Cham. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-0612766>
- Dovidio, J. F., Gluszek, A., John, M. S., Dittmann, R., & Lagunes, P. (2010). Understanding bias toward Latinos: Discrimination, dimensions of difference, and experience of exclusion. *Journal of Social Issues*, 66(1), 59-78. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.15404560.2009.01633.x>
- Dragojevic, M., Tatum, N. T., Beck, A. C., & McAninch, K. (2019). Effects of accent strength expectancy violations on language attitudes. *Communication Studies*, 70(2), 133-150. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2018.1526815>
- Eiten, E. U. H., Parvez, M. H., & Khan, K. Q. (2019). Conscious Use of Code-switching to Improve Fluency in Spoken English of Bangladeshi Students. *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews*, 7(6), 247-254. <https://doi.org/10.18510/hssr.2019.7645>

- Espinosa, J. A. C. (2017). " A Relaxing Cup of Lingua Franca Core": Local Attitudes Towards Locally-Accented English. *Atlantis*, 11-32.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26330868>
- Farrell, T. S. C., & Martin, S. (2009). *To Teach Standard English or World Englishes? A Balanced Approach to Instruction*. English Teaching Forum <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ923448>
- Frank, T. (2004). Supranational English, American values, and East-Central Europe. *PMLA*, 119(1), 80-91.
<https://doi.org/10.1632/003081204X23548>
- Gluszek, A., & Dovidio, J. F. (2010). Speaking with a nonnative accent: Perceptions of bias, communication difficulties, and belonging in the United States. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 29(2), 224-234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927X09359590>
- Graddol, D. (2006). The hegemony of English as a global language: Reclaiming local knowledge and culture in China. *Convergence*, 40(1-2), 117-131.
- Hai, M. A., and Ball, J (1961). *The sound structures of English and Bengali*. Dhaka: Dhaka University Press.
- Hoque, M. A. (2010). The influence of the local varieties on the sound patterns of English: a case study of Bangladeshi tertiary students. *IJUC STUDIES*, 7, 197-220.
<https://doi.org/10.3329/iucsv7i0.1226811>.
- Jenkins, J. (2006). Current Perspectives on Teaching World Englishes and English as a Lingua Franca. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1), 157–181.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/40264515>
- Kachru, B. B. (1986). *The alchemy of English: The spread, functions, and models of non native Englishes*. USA: University of Illinois Press.
- Kamal, S. M. (2013). A paper on English article accuracy of EFL learners: An investigation. *Journal of Teaching English for Specific and Academic Purposes*, 1(1), 21-28.
<http://espeap.junis.ni.ac.rs/index.php/espeap/article/view/23>
- Kerswill, P. (2006). Standard English, RP and the standard-non-standard relationship. *Lancaster University*, 18.

- Koshal. (2014, December 15). *Difference between accent and pronunciation*. Compare the Difference Between Similar Terms. <https://www.differencebetween.com/difference-between-accent-and-vs-pronunciation/>
- Kuo, I. C. (2006). Addressing the issue of teaching English as a lingua franca. *ELT journal*, 60(3), 213-221. <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/cc1001>
- Ladegaard, H. J., & Sachdev, I. (2006). 'I like the Americans... But i certainly don't aim for an American accent': Language attitudes, vitality and foreign language learning in Denmark. *Journal of multilingual and multicultural development*, 27(2), 91-108. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434630608668542>
- Marlina, R. (2014). The pedagogy of English as an international language (EIL): More reflections and dialogues. In *The pedagogy of English as an International Language* (pp. 1-19). Springer, Cham. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-0612761>
- Marlina, R. (2017). *Teaching English as an international language: Implementing, reviewing, and re-envisioning World Englishes in language education*. USA: Routledge.
- McArthur, T. (2001). World English and world Englishes: Trends, tensions, varieties, and standards. *Language teaching*, 34(1), 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444800016062>
- McArthur, T. (2003). World English, Euro-English, Nordic English?. *English Today*, 19(1), 54-58. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S026607840300107X>
- Meierkord, C. (2004). Syntactic variation in interactions across international Englishes. *English World-wide*, 25(1), 109-132. <https://doi.org/10.1075/eww.25.1.06mei>
- Mujaffar, T. B. (1999, January). On gees and zeas: A Comparative Phonological Study Towards Better English Pronunciation. In *Proceedings of the International conference on National and Regional Issues in English Language Teaching: International Perspectives (ELTIP)* (Vol. 31).
- Munro, M. J. (2003). A primer on accent discrimination in the Canadian context. *TESL Canada Journal*, 38-51. <https://doi.org/10.18806/tesl.v20i2.947>

- Nowacka, M. (2012). Questionnaire-based pronunciation studies: Italian, Spanish and Polish students' views on their English pronunciation. *Research in Language*, 10(1), 4361.
- Pennycook, A. (2007). The myth of English as an international language. *Disinventing and reconstituting languages*, 62, 90-115.
- Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford University Press.
- Rahman, H. A. (1995). Problems of pronunciation for Bengali learners of English. *Journal of the Institute of Modern Languages June*, 96.
- Rani, S., & Tina, A. A. (2020). The Impact of Bangla Regional Dialect on the Pronunciation of English at Tertiary Level. *Humanities & Social Sciences Reviews*, eISSN, 23956518.
<https://ssrn.com/abstract=3573592>
- Rudianto, G., & Mubarak, Z. H. (2018). Influence Of Vocabulary Mastery On Reading Comprehension Skills For Non English Major University Students In Batam. *JEE (Journal of English Education)*, 4(2), 93-107.
<https://journal.upp.ac.id/index.php/JEE/article/view/522>
- Seidlhofer, B. (2013). *Understanding English as a lingua franca-Oxford applied linguistics*. UK: Oxford University Press.
- Sridhar, S. N., & Sridhar, K. K. (2018). Coda 2 A bridge half-built: Toward a holistic theory of Second Language Acquisition and world Englishes. *World Englishes*, 37(1), 127-139.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12308>
- Suchona, I. J., & Shorna, S. A. (2019). Speaking problems in English and solutions: Scrutinizing students' perspective. *International Journal of English*, 8(1), 34-41. <https://doi.org/10.34293/english.v8i1.661>
- Sultana, R, & Arif, H. (2007) Self-Correction: A Possible Answer to Misspellings in English. *Journal of the Institute of Modern Languages*.
- Szpyra-Kozłowska, J., & Szpyra, J. (2014). *Pronunciation in EFL instruction* (Vol. 82). Multilingual Matters.
- Tajik, L., & Mojtabaei, N. (2019, January). " I Love the American Accent": An Inquiry into ELT Teachers' Perception of Teaching in Light of

- Global Flows. *Journal of Language Horizons*, 2(2), 125-150.
<https://doi.org/10.22051/lghor.2019.26383.1128>
- Timmis, I. (2002). Native-speaker Norms and International English: a Classroom View. *ELT journal*, 56(3), 240–249.
<https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/56.3.240>
- Tizzano, E., & Rauer, A. (2019). Teaching English with a Pluricentric Approach: a Compilation of Four Upper Secondary Teachers' Beliefs. *DiVA*.
<https://www.divaportal.org/smash/record.jsf?dswid=8454&pid=diva2%3A1494351>
- Tokumoto, M., & Shibata, M. (2011). Asian varieties of English: Attitudes towards pronunciation. *World Englishes*, 30(3), 392-408.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467971X.2011.01710.x>
- Trudgill, P. (2011). *Sociolinguistic typology: Social determinants of linguistic complexity*. UK: Oxford University Press.
- Trudgill, P., & Hannah, J. (2013). *International English: A guide to the varieties of standard English*. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203785225>
- Uddin, N. & Monjur, S. (2015). The Influence of Regional Bangla Dialects on English Pronunciation of Bangladeshi EFL (English as a Foreign Language) Learners: A Review. *International Journal of Arts, Humanities and Management*, 1(12), 1123.
<http://ijahms.com:80/03.12.20151.pdf>
- Widdowson, H. G. (2002). The ownership of English. In *Enriching ESOL pedagogy* (pp.405-416). Routledge.=
<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/978141060627332/ownership-english-widdowson>
- Yano, Y. (2009). The future of English: Beyond the Kachruvian three circle model?. In *Global Englishes in Asian Contexts* (pp. 208-225). Palgrave Macmillan, London.
<https://doi.org/10.1057/978023023953113>
- Yi, P. (2021). The Role of Theory in SLA Empirical Research on the Critical Period Hypothesis. *Studies in Applied Linguistics and TESOL*, 21(1).<https://doi.org/10.52214/salt.v21i1.8396>