

Accent, Status and Decolonization: Perspectives of Bangladeshi Tertiary Students

Aktar, T.*, Hossain, N.
University of Asia Pacific
tasmiah@uap-bd.edu

According to Fuertes et al. (2002), the Accent Prestige Theory suggests that listeners use a speaker's accent as a cue to judge their intelligence, fluency, and social status. This explains the common misconception in Bangladesh that a speaker's English accent determines their intelligence and social standing, especially prevalent throughout the 20th century. Such notions have been facing growing opposition in recent times among the younger generations with a growing acceptance of speaking English influenced by Bangladeshi dialects. By combining quantitative (questionnaires) and qualitative (focus group discussions) methodologies, this paper explores tertiary-level students' perspectives on whether accent serves as a marker of intelligence and social status among their peers and how they see the Accent Prestige Theory through a reflective lens of the colonized part of the subcontinent. The researchers also highlight the viewpoint of tertiary-level students regarding accent bias and the normalization of the usage of English in their own accent as a form of decolonization. The findings indicate that participants prioritize fluency over accent when speaking English as a foreign language. Moreover, students recognize the association between intelligence and accent as a colonial byproduct. Finally, the study discusses how the increasing acceptance of speaking English with a Bangladeshi accent reflects a broader movement toward linguistic decolonization. The researchers believe that the findings of this study will reshape the approaches to teaching English speaking skills in tertiary-level classrooms.

Keywords: Decolonization, Accent Prestige Theory, Accent bias, Native speakers, Non-native English