

Accent Diversity Across Cultures: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Linguistic Variations

Sri Harini S.

I-year student, Fashion Technology
Kumaraguru College of Technology
Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India
Sriharini.24ft@kct.ac.in

Dr. Sreejana S.

Assistant Professor of English
Department of Languages and Communication
Kumaraguru College of Technology
Coimbatore, Tamilnadu. India
sreejana.s.sci@kct.ac.in

Abstract

This qualitative study explores the complex relationship between accent diversity, sociocultural dynamics, and language education through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Specifically, the research focuses on how speakers from regions such as Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka perceive, experience, and navigate accent diversity. By analysing interviews with 15 participants from these states, this study highlights the influence of cultural, social, and geographical factors on accent variation and its impact on communication, identity, and socio-economic mobility. Findings suggest that dominant ideologies favour certain

accents while marginalizing others, leading to inequities in educational and professional contexts. The study advocates for inclusive pedagogical practices and policies that challenge linguistic biases and promote social justice.

Keywords: accent diversity, CDA, identity, sociocultural, socio-economic

Introduction

India's linguistic diversity is one of its most defining features, but this diversity extends beyond just languages to the accents in which those languages are spoken. From Delhi to Tamil Nadu, and from Bihar to Kerala, the way people speak often carries deeper socio-cultural meanings, influencing perceptions of identity, intelligence, and social status. Accents, though often overlooked, play a critical role in shaping communication dynamics and determining social mobility in both educational and professional settings. This study delves into how accent diversity affects individuals in key regions of India—Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Tamil Nadu, Kerala, and Karnataka—by exploring how certain accents are valued over others. Through Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), we uncover how these accent biases create inequalities and how language education can evolve to promote social justice and inclusivity.

1. Literature Review:

Sociolinguistic studies have long documented how accents influence social stratification (Labov, 1972; Bourdieu, 1991). In the Indian context, accent diversity is a reflection of deep-rooted cultural, regional, and linguistic heterogeneity (Annamalai, 2001). Studies by Sarangi (2009) and Sinha (2014) have highlighted the stigmatization of rural and non-standard accents, often associating them with a lack of education or lower social status. Globalization and media further intensify these biases, normalizing urban or "neutralized" accents as the preferred variety,

particularly in corporate and educational settings. Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2013) provides a useful framework for uncovering the power relations embedded within these perceptions, showing how institutions and social practices perpetuate language ideologies that marginalize certain accents.

2. Research Objectives:

- To examine how cultural, geographical, and social factors influence accent diversity among speakers from Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar.
- To analyse the implications of accent diversity on communication, social mobility, and identity in Indian society.
- To explore how power dynamics and dominant ideologies shape perceptions and evaluations of regional Indian accents.
- To investigate the pedagogical challenges and opportunities related to accent diversity in Indian educational contexts.
- To recommend strategies to foster inclusive attitudes toward accent diversity in educational and professional domains.

3. Methodology:

This qualitative study employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to investigate how accent diversity is constructed and perceived among Indian speakers from Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar. The primary data source consists of semi-structured interviews with 15 participants, including students, educators, and working professionals. The interviews were designed to elicit participants' experiences and perceptions related to accent, identity, and discrimination. Thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo software, with coding focused on themes of power, identity, bias, and social mobility. Additionally, media

representations of regional Indian accents were analysed to contextualize participants' narratives within broader discourses.

4. Findings:

4.1 Standard vs. Regional Accents:

Of the 15 participants, seven (four from Karnataka and Kerala, three from Delhi) acknowledged the dominance of urbanized or "neutralized" accents, especially from metro cities like Bengaluru and Delhi, as being associated with professionalism and competence. In contrast, eight participants (from Tamil Nadu, Bihar, and rural areas of Uttar Pradesh) reported that their regional accents were perceived as less professional or even "unintelligible" in formal settings.

4.2 Social Stereotyping:

Specifically, five participants from Kerala and Tamil Nadu recounted instances of being stereotyped or mocked for their regional accents when interacting in Northern cities such as Delhi. Similarly, four participants from Bihar and Uttar Pradesh shared experiences of how Bhojpuri and Awadhi-accented Hindi or English were linked to lower social or educational status.

4.3 Identity and Resistance:

Despite these biases, six participants (three from Karnataka, two from Kerala, and one from Tamil Nadu) expressed cultural pride in their accents. Notably, three educators—two from Bengaluru and one from Chennai—shared how they integrate discussions of accent diversity in their teaching practices to challenge standardization and promote inclusivity.

4.4 Impact on Employment and Education:

Among the interviewees, seven participants (primarily from Tamil Nadu, Bihar, and Uttar Pradesh) mentioned being advised by mentors, peers, or recruiters to "neutralize" their accents during job interviews or oral assessments. This led to reported feelings of insecurity and anxiety around public speaking.

5. Discussion:

The findings reveal a clear trend of accent-based bias rooted in regional hierarchies, socio-economic factors, and metropolitan influence. Metro cities such as Bengaluru and Delhi emerge as gatekeepers of "neutralized" or standard Indian English, reinforcing a form of linguistic elitism. Participants from Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar often find themselves navigating between their cultural identities and societal expectations to conform to standardized accents in professional contexts. The study also highlights the role of media in perpetuating these biases, with regional accents frequently portrayed in stereotypical or comedic roles in popular films and television shows. However, the emerging resistance among educators and professionals who promote inclusive linguistic practices indicates a growing awareness of the importance of valuing all accents as culturally rich and legitimate.

6. Conclusion:

Accent diversity in India is not merely a linguistic phenomenon but a deeply sociopolitical issue that intersects with questions of identity, power, and equity. The experiences of speakers from Karnataka, Kerala, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, and Delhi illustrate the everyday negotiations individuals must make between their authentic linguistic identities and societal expectations. The study demonstrates that accent bias remains embedded in educational, corporate, and media spaces. To create more inclusive and equitable environments, educators, institutions, and policymakers must collaborate to disrupt these biases. Future research could

extend this work by examining how globalization and digital communication platforms are reshaping attitudes toward regional accents in India, particularly among younger generations.

References

1. Annamalai, E. (2001). *Managing Multilingualism in India*. Sage Publications.
2. Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and Symbolic Power*. Harvard University Press.
3. Blommaert, J. (2010). *The Sociolinguistics of Globalization*. Cambridge University Press.
4. Fairclough, N. (2013). *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
5. Labov, W. (1972). *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
6. Lippi-Green, R. (2012). *English with an Accent: Language, Ideology and Discrimination in the United States* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
7. Sarangi, S. (2009). *Sociolinguistic Perspectives on Accent Bias in India*. Orient Blackswan.
8. Sinha, S. (2014). *Language Hierarchies and Accent Discrimination in Indian Workspaces*. Sage Publications.
9. Crystal, D. (2010). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language* (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
10. Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford University Press.