

Bengali (Bangladeshi Standard)

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Bengali (বাংলা /banla/) is an Indo-European language (Indic branch) spoken by over 175 million people in Bangladesh and eastern India (Dasgupta 2003: 352; Lewis 2009). The speech illustrated below is representative of the standard variety widely spoken in Dhaka and other urban areas of Bangladesh.

Consonants

Plosives and affricates contrast in voicing and aspiration. Although displayed in one column, the articulation of the postalveolars varies by consonant type (see ‘Conventions’ below). Barring rare exceptions, /d^h h/ do not occur word-finally and /ŋ/ does not occur word-initially (Dasgupta 2003: 358–359).

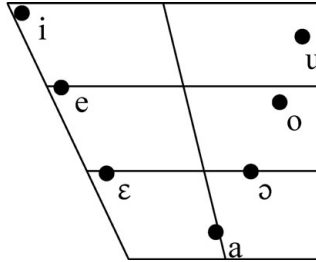
	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b b ^h		t d t ^h d ^h		t d t ^h d ^h	k g k ^h g ^h	
Affricate					tʃ dʒ tʃ ^h dʒ ^h		
Nasal	m			n		ŋ	
Fricative		f		s	ʃ		h
Approximant					ɹ		
Lateral approximant				l			

p	pati	পাটি	‘grass mat’	tʃ	tʃal	চাল	‘rice’
b	bati	বাটি	‘bowl’	tʃ ^h	tʃ ^h al	ছাল	‘peel’
b ^h	b ^h ati	ভাটি	‘kiln’	dʒ	dʒal	জাল	‘net’
t	tak	তাক	‘shelf’	dʒ ^h	dʒ ^h al	ঝাল	‘spicy’
t ^h	t ^h ak	থাক	‘let it be’	f	faʃ	ফাঁস	‘noose’
d	daɡ	দাগ	‘stain’	s	saf	সাফ	‘clean’
d ^h	d ^h ak:a	ধাকা	‘shove’	ʃ	ʃaʃ	শ্বাস	‘breath’
t	tak	টাক	‘bald spot’	h	haʃ	হাঁস	‘duck’
t ^h	t ^h akuɹ	ঠাকুর	‘lord’	ɹ	ɹaʃ	হ্রাস	‘reduction’
d	dak	ডাক	‘call!’	l	laʃ	লাশ	‘corpse’
d ^h	d ^h ak	ঢাক	‘cover!’	m	maʃ	মাস	‘month’
k	kaʃ	কাশ	‘wild sugarcane’	n	naʃ	নাশ	‘destruction’
k ^h	k ^h aʃ	খাস	‘you eat’	m	amaɹ	আমার	‘my’
g	gaʃ	গাস	‘you sing’	n	anaɹ	আনার	‘for bringing’
g ^h	g ^h aʃ	ঘাস	‘grass’	ŋ	daŋaɹ	ডাঙার	‘of dry land’

Vowels

Vowels are plotted below based on F1 and F2 frequencies averaged across six speakers. Vowel length is not contrastive, except across morpheme boundaries. The contrast between oral and nasal vowels observed in Kolkata Standard Bengali (Masica 1991: 118) is not characteristic of Bangladeshi Standard, presumably due to Eastern dialect influence (Majumdar 1997: 108).

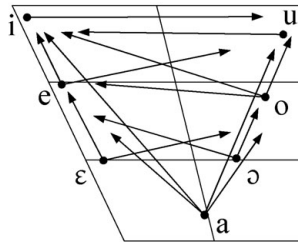
i	ɖiʃ	দিস	‘you give’
e	ɖeʃ	দেশ	‘country’
ɛ	ɖɛkʰ	দেখ	‘look!’
a	ɖaʃ	দাস	‘slave’
ɔ	ɖɔʃ	দশ	‘ten’
o	ɖoʃ	দোষ	‘blame’
u	ɖuʃo	দু’শ	‘two hundred’



Diphthongs

Diphthongs contrast with heterosyllabic vowel sequences (Islam 2000: 95; Dasgupta 2003: 356–357), as in /gaj/ গাই ‘I sing’ vs. /gai/ গা-ই ‘body (emphatic)’ and /ʃoɛ/ শোয় ‘lies down’ vs. /ʃoe/ সয়ে ‘having tolerated’. There is no high-mid vs. low-mid distinction in off-glides, so diphthongs such as /aɔ/ may vary between [aɔ] and [aɔ̃]. Off-glides are produced with a higher tongue position than corresponding nuclear vowels; compare /ʃo/ শো ‘show’ vs. /ʃoɔ/ শোও ‘you lie down’ (cf. /ʃɔ/ স ‘tolerate!’, /ʃɔɔ/ সও ‘you tolerate’). Some speakers monophthongize /ɛɔ/ to [ɛ]; compare the two recordings of /nɛɔ/ ন্যায় ‘justice’. Vowel sequences not included below can only occur across syllable boundaries, e.g. /bie/ বিয়ে ‘wedding’, /kua/ কুয়া ‘well’.

i + u	piw	পিউ	Piu (name)
e + i	nej	নেই	‘I take’
e + u	d ^f ew	ডেউ	‘wave’
ɛ + e	nɛɛ	ন্যায়	‘justice’
ɛ + o	nɛɔ	নেও	‘you take’
a + i	paj	পাই	‘I find’
a + e	paɛ	পায়	‘finds’
a + u	paw	পাউ	‘sliced bread’
a + o	paɔ	পাও	‘you find’
ɔ + e	ʃɔɛ	সয়	‘tolerates’
ɔ + o	bɔɔ	বও	‘you flow’
o + i	ʃoj	সই	‘signature’



o + e	ʃoɛ	শোয়	‘lies down’
o + u	bow	বউ	‘bride’
o + o	ʃoɔ	শোও	‘you lie down’
u + i	ʃuj	সুই	‘needle’

Stress

Stress is not marked in broad transcription as it is consistently word-initial. While stress is neither contrastive nor phonetically salient (Chatterji 1921, Goswami 1944, Ferguson & Chowdhury 1960, Anderson 1962, Bykova 1981, Kawasaki & Shattuck-Hufnagel 1988, Hayes & Lahiri 1991, Lahiri & Fitzpatrick-Cole 1999, Michaels & Nelson 2004, Selkirk 2006), it is associated with phonological alternations and plays an important role in the intonational system, as it is associated with the postlexical pitch accent (Khan 2008: chapter 2).

Geminates

Excluding /d^h g^h ŋ f s h ʎ/, all consonants can occur geminated within morphemes, and are transcribed with the length diacritic /:/ . Singleton /d d^h/ do not occur after tautomorphic vowels except in ideophones and loanwords, e.g. /ɔd/ রোড ‘road’.

p	k ^h apa	খাপা	‘shrinking’	k:	tik:a	টিকা	‘kabob’
p:	k ^h ap:a	খাপ্ৰা	‘enraged’	k ^h	ʃak ^h a	শাখা	‘branch’
b	abaɾ	আবার	‘again’	k ^h :	ʃak ^h :aɾ	সাক্ষাৎ	‘meeting’
b:	ab:aɾ	আব্ৰাৰ	‘dad’s’	g	b ^h ago	ভাগো	‘you flee’
b ^h	ʃub ^h o	শুভ	‘auspicious’	g:	b ^h ag:o	ভাগ্য	‘luck’
b ^h :	ʃob ^h :o	সভ্য	‘civilized’	tɕ	batɕa	বাঁচা	‘surviving’
t̪	aɾa	আতা	‘custard apple’	tɕ:	batɕ:a	বাচ্চা	‘child’
t̪:	aɾ:a	আত্ৰা	‘soul’	tɕ ^h	biɕ ^h a	বিছা	‘spread!’
t̪ ^h	mat ^h a	মাথা	‘head’	tɕ ^h :	itɕ ^h :a	ইচ্ছা	‘desire’
t̪ ^h :	miɕ ^h :a	মিথ্যা	‘falsehood’	dʒ	ʃodʒa	সোজা	‘straight’
ɖ	biɖaɕ	বিদায়	‘farewell’	dʒ:	ʃodʒ:a	শয্যা	‘bed’
ɖ:	biɖ:aɕ	বিদ্যায়	‘in wisdom’	dʒ ^h	budʒ ^h o	বুঝো	‘you understand’
ɖ ^h	baɖ ^h o	বাধো	‘you resist’	dʒ ^h :	ʃodʒ ^h :o	সহ্য	‘tolerance’
ɖ ^h :	baɖ ^h :o	বাধ্য	‘obliged’	m	ʃoman	সমান	‘equal’
t	k ^h ata	খাটা	‘toiling’	m:	ʃom:an	সম্মান	‘respect’
t:	k ^h at:a	খাট্ৰা	‘sour’	n	kana	কানা	‘half-blind’
t ^h	pat ^h a	পাঠা	‘send!’	n:	kan:a	কান্না	‘weeping’
t ^h :	pat ^h :o	পাঠ্য	‘text’	ʃ	biʃe	বিশে	‘twentieth day’
d	soda	সোডা	‘soda’	ʃ:	biʃ:e	বিশ্বে	‘in the world’
d:	ad:a	আড্ডা	‘meeting place’	l	ɽulo	ভুলো	‘you pick up’
k	tika	টিকা	‘vaccine’	l:	ɽul:o	ভুল্য	‘comparable’

Conventions

Postalveolars

The postalveolar region includes three distinct tongue configurations: apical for plosives and /ʎ/, laminal for the affricates, and domed for /ʃ/. The plosives /t t^h d d^h/ are variously described as ‘cacuminal’ (Islam 2000: 90), ‘cerebral’ (Majumdar 1997: 166), ‘retroflex’ (Ramasmami 1999), ‘retroflex alveolar’ (Ray, Hai & Ray 1966: 6), ‘not true retroflex’ (Haldar 1986: 22), ‘alveolo-retroflex’ (Hai 1960), ‘approaching the alveolar region’ (Chatterji 1970: xxxiii), ‘more apico-alveolar . . . than the true apico-palatals of sister languages to the west’ (Dasgupta 2003: 359), and ‘simply alveolar’ (Tunga 1995: 139). The affricates /tɕ tɕ^h dʒ dʒ^h/ are variously characterized as ‘palatal affricates’ (Ramasmami 1999, Islam 2000: 91), ‘apico-dental hissing sibilants . . . [or] affricated plosives’ (Ray et al. 1966: 81), ‘palatal . . . made with the front of the tongue’ (Chatterji 1970: xxxii), ‘dental affricates’ (Haldar 1986: 26), ‘alveolo-palatal affricates’ (Dasgupta 2003: 359), and ‘dental-palatal plosives’ or ‘dorso-alveolar’ affricates (Tunga 1995: 131). Palatographic evidence indicates dorso-alveolar affrication (Hai 1960). The fricative /ʃ/ is described as ‘mediopalatal’ (Alam 2000: 43; Islam 2000: 91) and ‘palato-alveolar’ (Dasgupta 2003: 360).

Rhotic

Bangladeshi Standard Bengali has only one rhotic /ɹ/, as is the case in most Eastern dialects (Dasgupta 2003: 359; Masica 1991: 97); however, some speakers may maintain a marginal /ɹ/ vs. /r/ distinction in formal registers due to influence from Kolkata Standard. The rhotic /ɹ/ can be realized as a tap [ɾ], especially following dentals (Dasgupta 2003: 359), and both realizations can be devoiced [ɹ̥ ɾ̥] in codas. Consonants are often lengthened following /ɹ/.

Fricatives

Unlike Kolkata Standard, Bangladeshi Standard contrasts /ʃ/ and /s/ word-initially, e.g. /siʃka/ সিরকা ‘vinegar’ vs. /ʃira/ সির ‘syrup’, in medial clusters, e.g. /astʃe/ আস্তে ‘softly’ vs. /aʃtʃe/ আসতে ‘to come’, and word-finally, e.g. /bas/ ব্যস ‘enough’ vs. /baʃ/ বাশ ‘bamboo’ (Masica 1991: 98; Islam 2000: 91; Dasgupta 2003: 360). In word-initial and word-final clusters, /s/ is common and /ʃ/ is rare, e.g. /sioʃa/ স্রোতা ‘listener’, /desk/ ডেস্ক ‘desk’. As intervocalic singletons and geminates, /ʃ/ is common and /s/ is rare, e.g. /dʃʃi/ দোষী ‘guilty’, /dʃʃi/ দস্যি ‘rogue’. The fricative /f/ is variously realized [f ɸ pʰ] (Dasgupta 2003: 360).

Clusters

Although uncommon in native words, clusters are found in initial, medial, and final position, e.g. /stʃi/ স্ত্রী ‘wife’, /ʃɔŋskriː/ সংস্কৃতি ‘culture’, /gɔndʒ/ গঞ্জ ‘marketplace’.

Transcription of recorded passage

ek diŋ utːoɪ haɔa eboŋ ʃuɪdʒo tɔko koɪtʃʰilo tadeɪ modʰiːe ke beʃi foktʃiman.
 ʃej muhuːtʃe bʰai tɔadoɪ pɔa ekdʒon poʰhik tadeɪ dike hete aʃe. haɔa aɪ
 ʃuɪdʒo ɪdʒi hɔe tadeɪ modʰiːe dʒe ʃej poʰhikeɪ gaɪ tɔadoɪ kʰolaːtʃe paɪe, tʃakej
 beʃi foktʃiman dʰaɪdʒo koɪa hɔbe. eɪ pɔa utːoɪ haɔa tʃaɪ ʃɔb foktʃi die bojtʃe
 ʃuɪu koɪe, kiŋtu ʃe dʒɔtʃoj dʒoɪe boe tɔtʃoj poʰhik tʃaɪ tɔadoɪ tʃepe dʰoɪe ɪakʰe.
 beɪtʰo hoe haɔa tʃaɪ tʃeʃta bɔndʰo koɪe. eɪ pɔa ʃuɪdʒeɪ pala. ʃuɪdʒo tʃaɪ gɔɪom
 tʃap tʃɔɪaɪe. poʰhikti ʃɔŋge ʃɔŋge tʃaɪ gaɪ ʃalti kʰule fele. ɔboʃeʃe utːoɪ haɔa
 mene niːtʃe baɪdʰo holo dʒe tadeɪ dʌdʒoneɪ modʰiːe ʃuɪdʒoj beʃi foktʃiman.

Orthographic version

এক দিন উত্তর হাওয়া এবং সূর্য তর্ক করছিল তাদের মধ্যে কে বেশি শক্তিমান। সেই মুহূর্তে ভারী চাদর পরা একজন পথিক তাদের দিকে হেঁটে আসে। হাওয়া আর সূর্য রাজি হয় তাদের মধ্যে যে সেই পথিকের গায়ের চাদর খোলাতে পারে, তাকেই বেশি শক্তিমান ধার্য করা হবে। এর পর উত্তর হাওয়া তার সব শক্তি দিয়ে বইতে শুরু করে, কিন্তু সে যতই জোরে বয় ততই পথিক তার চাদর চেপে ধরে রাখে। ব্যর্থ হয়ে হাওয়া তার চেষ্টা বন্ধ করে। এর পর সূর্যের পালা। সূর্য তার গরম তাপ ছড়ায়। পথিকটি সঙ্গে সঙ্গে তার গায়ের শালটি খুলে ফেলে। অবশেষে উত্তর হাওয়া মেনে নিতে বাধ্য হল যে তাদের দু’জনের মধ্যে সূর্যই বেশি শক্তিমান।

English translation

One day the North Wind and the Sun were disputing who was stronger between them. At that very moment, a traveler wearing a heavy shawl came walking towards them. The Wind and the Sun agreed that the one who could take the shawl off from the traveler’s body would be considered the stronger. After this, the North Wind started to blow with all his strength, but the more forcefully he blew, the more the traveler kept his shawl held tightly around him. Defeated, the Wind ended his effort. After this, it was the Sun’s turn. The Sun scattered his warmth. The traveler immediately took off the shawl from his body. In the end, the North Wind was obliged to acknowledge that of the two of them, it was the Sun who was stronger.

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