



# Postgraduate Students' Perception of the Language Varieties on Dialect Among Their Classmates

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**Abstract.** Language variety can be something beyond a single language and something less than a dialect. A specific variation of a language is a unique collection of 'linguistics items' or human speech patterns-sounds, words, and grammatical features related to external factors- a geographic region or a social group. It is a qualitative investigation employing synchronous internet interviews. This online synchronous interview study investigates the perspectives of linguistic variants among postgraduate students of a university in North Sumatra. Findings are comparable to previous research that sought to identify contributors to the achievement gap. Differences in linguistic backgrounds may substantially impact speech and academic performance. The findings show that the achievement gap may be partially attributable to differences in task complexity: children from outside the city who speak a different dialect are more likely to struggle with English learning. This study concludes that the respondents' perceptions are as follows: dialect influences the learning process, hinders learning spoken English, and speaks the language as they mature. Consequently, dialect might cause listeners to be perplexed when they hear an English speaker utilizing it.

**Keywords:** Language variation · postgraduate students · perceptions · dialect

## 1 Introduction

We recognize that every group in society speaks a distinct language, as described by Wardhaugh [1, 2]. Even though multiple societies utilize a language. It does not imply that the two languages share a comparable lexicon or structure. Numerous patterns of language use are known as language variation, and it is intimately related to the culture of the civilization. The measuring of stylistic variance is a central concern in this field of language study. According to Labov [3], "the most pressing difficulty to be resolved in the assault on sociolinguistics structure is the quantification of the style component." Different people communicate themselves differently, and the same person may convey the same thought quite differently while addressing different audiences, utilizing other modalities, or addressing different topics.

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R. N. Indah et al. (Eds.): AICOLLIM 2022, ASSEHR 725, pp. 401–410, 2023.

[https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-002-2\\_38](https://doi.org/10.2991/978-2-38476-002-2_38)

Languages are diversified, meaning that each language spoken by a group of individuals belonging to a linguistic society is not merely one or two languages but varies. Hudson [4] described a variety or code as a group of linguistic objects having a similar social distribution, such as English, French, American English, London English, and football commentators' English. According to his definition, a variety can be a language, dialect, or register. Consequently, a mixture of varieties or code modification refers to the changing or switching between languages, dialects, and registers by multilingual speakers throughout a conversation [4].

Members of society often represent a range of socioeconomic standings and cultural backgrounds. As Trudgill [5] noted, "Many linguists focused on the idiolect, which was believed to be more regular than the speech of the community as a whole." However, selecting specific speakers and extrapolate their cultural background to the rest of the speakers is impossible. The speech of a single speaker (their idiolects) may vary significantly from that of others with similar backgrounds. These distinctions influence the range of a person's language usage when conversing. Because the background and surroundings are not the same, the language utilized differs, resulting in frequently distinct variants. Language variations are generated not only by the diversity of speakers, but also by the diversity of social interaction activities.

In this instance, it relates to the formation of student language, particularly in the Postgraduate Program. The purpose of this study is to determine how pupils perceive the linguistic diversity of their classmates. The researcher chose this topic because a person who speaks in dialect dilutes the meaning of English, causing others to become confused and work harder to comprehend what they are saying. Therefore, to avoid misunderstandings, students must use English as much as possible and possess proficiency in the target language.

## 2 Literature Review

### 2.1 Language Varieties

Linguistic variety can be neither a single language nor a dialect [1]. To sum up, a linguistic variety is the distinct arrangement of "linguistic objects" (such as sounds, words, and grammatical traits) that are associated with an extra-linguistic component (such as a geographical area or a social group). Problems with the idea of "diversity" can be easily solved by investigating each group's unique language features and patterns.

Language diversity arises as a means of communication (the choice of word or diction and the grammatical structure). Both strategies facilitate communication to achieve mutual understanding between the sender and receiver. Two perspectives exist in the language variety. First, language diversity can be seen as a result of the diversity of social structures and linguistic functions. Second, language diversity has served as the interactional instruments for the diversity of social activities.

A language variety, often known as a lect or a code, is a specialized dialect. According to Hudson [4], a variety is "a collection of linguistic objects having comparable distribution." According to this definition, national variants such as Canadian English, regional versions such as London English, and the English used by football commentators are all types [2]. Linguists now prefer the term variety over 'dialect' and 'accent'

due to the negative connotations associated with the former terms [6]. Due to socioeconomic, ethnic, gender, age, and educational disparities, there is social variance within each geographical variety [7].

Dialect is defined as “a language variety connected with a geographically or socially determined group of people.” Dialects are natural linguistic phenomena, and every individual speaks a distinct dialect [8]. Accordingly, one cannot speak a language without also speaking its dialect. The term dialect is frequently reserved for stigmatized language variations [8]. To avoid negative connotations, we refer to the differences in linguistic patterns of geographical regions and/or socially designated groups as language varieties.

## **2.2 Dialect**

Dialectology studies different forms of language, particularly regional or socially restricted variations. Dialectology, as defined by Richard et al. [9], is the study of linguistic variety at the local level. Dialectology in this context investigates all aspects of the language, from vocabulary to pronunciation to grammar to usage to social function to creative expression. It covers a wide range of topics related to language variation, from the definition of dialect as a language variety through the study of subdialects.

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### **2.2.1 Social Dialect**

There will always be a subset of the population that separates itself from the majority based on their social status, regardless of where you go. Holmes [10] describes dialect as “the speech of people from different socioeconomic groups, characterized by vocabulary, syntax, and pronunciation that set it apart from standard English.” There may be some variation in the kinds of groups made and the regions where they’re made. This theory explains how a language’s vocabulary, syntax, and pronunciation can shift from one dialect to another through time and space. It suggests that these shifts follow a predictable pattern as they move from one social group to another.

### **2.2.2 Geographical Dialect**

Dialect is not just a result of socioeconomic status, but also of place. You’ll need to speak the local language. There is a possibility that dialects on the geographical periphery are mutually intelligible, but that even if they aren’t, they will be connected through a chain of mutual intelligibility; dialects are not mutually intelligible, but the cumulative effect of linguistic differences will be such that the greater the geographical separation, the greater the comprehension [11]. It emphasizes the importance of cooperation among speakers to preserve their unique dialects and geography’s role in shaping spoken languages. Mutual intelligibility of a geographical dialect was affected by factors such as exposure to the other language, education level, and motivation to understand others.

### 2.3 Speaker Variety

There are no two individuals that speak identically. The languages of a group of speakers vary according to a person's health, disposition, and social circumstances [12]. Thus, it is clear that language diversity plays a significant role in society. The objective of language diversity is to facilitate communication in society and to foster mutual understanding (the choice of word or diction and the grammatical structure). Furthermore, a language's vocabulary, dialect, and grammatical characteristics can be related with external elements, such as a geographic region or social group. Thus, we can determine a person's origin based on their language. Therefore, language diversity does not separate society.

### 2.4 Perception

Perception is “a) how you think about something and your conception of what it is like; b) how you perceive things using your senses of sight, hearing, etc.; c) the intrinsic capacity to understand or notice things quickly,” as defined by the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. Perception is the act of becoming aware of and making sense of sensory information, according to the fields of philosophy, psychology, and cognitive science. Perception means “receiving, gathering activity of taking possession, and mental or sensory perception” in Latin, which comes together with the related word *percipio*.

The mental act of considering a phenomenon is called perception [13]. The sensory organs are the starting point for perception. The brain undergoes this action in conjunction with accepting information or signals. The five senses are the primary means individuals engage with the world. The human body has five senses: sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch. People interact with their environments through their senses, which are processed in the brain and sent along the nerve system. Furthermore, a sensation is also known as a type of perception. As defined by Koentjaningrat, perception is the outward manifestation of mental processing in the form of an observation of an external reality.

According to the literature, student perceptions of their classrooms have been found to be credible [14] and predictive of student achievement [15]. Teaching motivation is likely reflected in students' perceptions of the classroom setting. Adolescents' willingness to study largely depends on their impressions of the classroom, which are formed through interactions between young people and their teachers [19–21].

### 2.5 Previous Study

The first study is titled “Perception of Dialect Variation in Noise: Intelligibility and Classification.” [22]. Results showed that differences in speech intelligibility between dialects were greatest in environments with low signal-to-noise ratios and smallest in those with high signal-to-noise ratios. No interaction between speaker and listener dialect was found, with General American speakers being the most understandable at all noise levels and Mid-Atlantic speakers being the least. In contrast, even with moderate amounts of noise, dialect categorization performance was subpar. Listeners can compensate for dialect variance in the acoustic signal to the point where some cross-dialect intelligibility disparities are negated, despite relatively weak explicit dialect categorization abilities. However, at greater noise levels, participants cannot compensate for dialect heterogeneity

in the acoustic signal, and intelligibility gaps emerge between speakers of different dialects for all listeners.

The second study deals with effects of regional dialect on oral-nasal balance and nasality perception [23]. Differences in nasality between different dialects have been studied before, but the impact of regional dialect on listeners' subjective evaluations of nasality has gotten surprisingly little attention. Comparing the Inland North (IN) and Midland (M) dialects of the United States, this study looked for linguistic variation in the production and perception of nasality across dialects. Twenty-six persons spoke either IN ( $n = 15$ ) or M ( $n = 11$ ) and took part in the study. Comparisons of oral-nasal balancing characteristics and nasality perception were made across languages by measuring the mean nasalance of various speech stimuli with nasometry and by gauging listeners' perceptions of the nasality of synthetic vowel stimuli using direct magnitude estimation (DME). Although both the IN and M groups had equal mean nasalance scores for standardized passage readings and sustained vowels, IN listeners consistently and substantially had higher DMEs (more nasal) than M listeners. The results provide evidence for regional differences in nasality perception within individual languages. More study is needed to discover whether and how differences in nasality perception exist across different languages and how these differences manifest in subjective assessments of hypernasality and the degree to which it is perceived to be problematic.

### 3 Method

It is a qualitative investigation employing synchronous internet interviews. This online synchronous interview study investigated the perspectives of linguistic variants among postgraduate students. Due to the pandemic, online synchronous WhatsApp interviews [25] were conducted in place of in-person interviews with research participants. Furthermore, due to the computerized data collection, time was saved and transcription errors were reduced [26]. Importantly, this strategy allowed the researchers to customize the interview timing to the participants' requirements. In other words, the researchers investigated individuals during online interviews to obtain the information concerning participants' actions, experiences, and opinions in their language.

#### 3.1 Participant

This interview study included graduate students in their second semester at a state university in North Sumatera, Indonesia. Participants were recruited from a WhatsApp study group of twelve students on a volunteer basis. Students interested in this study were instructed to initiate private chat with the researchers. Eight of the twelve students that joined the WhatsApp group were between the ages of 23 and 50 and willing to participate. They were six female students and two male students.

#### 3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Distribution of online semi-structured interviews to continuing postgraduate students was used to collect data. The interview question inquired about the student's impression

of linguistic variants on dialect among his or her fellow graduate students. Students gain new perspectives as face-to-face learning methods replace virtual learning methods (online classes). To evaluate participants' perceptions, all data on technological, socio-cultural, and instructional constraints were analyzed using semi-structured interviews. Daily, the researcher interviewed two to three subjects. From March to April 2021, participants were interviewed online using WhatsApp for twenty to thirty minutes. The participants' responses consist of 25–100 words written in Indonesian. After the interview data collection, a transcript of each participant's comments was retyped and translated into English. Then, repeatedly read the interview data to identify the necessary key points. The following step is to write transcripts in a table structure to encode, sort, and identify essential facts.

## 4 Findings and Discussion

This research examines the student's perception of language varieties on dialect among their classmates in the post-graduate program.

### 4.1 The Impact of the Dialect on Students

Respondent stated that some of their friends speak English with a dialect. The dialect has the most significant impact on the pronunciation of a learner. Absolute communication competence is contingent upon perfect pronunciation. If a person is familiar with the sound structure of their friend's dialect, they will be better able to comprehend their friend's concerns. Multiple Indonesian tribes speak distinct languages. Each tribe has its own vernacular, which serves as a means of identifying its people. For instance, some of the respondent's Batakese-speaking friends will also speak another language.

Exploring geographical English dialects is a past investigation. The study concludes that by learning dialect, students will discover the intrigue and excitement of the American language [27]. Although we only have one language to communicate our thoughts and feelings, we participate in that process by choosing from a variety of lexical, oral/aural, and syntactic options that are appropriate for the linguistic group to which we belong and with which we are attempting to communicate.

Respondents said that accent, tension, intonation, rhythm, inspiration and exposure, mood, instruction, age, personality, and mother language influence are among the characteristics that can influence pronunciation while applying English in the learning process. This is in line with the finding of Baker and Burri that the experienced teachers of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) advise on fundamental pronunciation qualities that negatively affect students' comprehensibility [28]. Consequently, there are aspects pertinent to this paper, particularly dialect.

### 4.2 Dialect as Obstacle to Learn Speaking

Respondents claimed that several things contribute to English-learning difficulties. First, dialect can contribute to difficulty in learning Standard English. As a foreign language student, you will notice that Indonesian has numerous dialects. There will be interference

between the first and second languages. According to the answer, some students with local accents spoke several English words differently. The teachers selected “to some extent” for this perspective. It appears they were not at fault.

The dialect impeded studying Standard English; the participants were perplexed by the student's dialect or dialectal sound in the classroom. The remaining teachers were frequently bewildered by their students' native speech. Differences in spoken language abilities (such as phonological awareness, vocabulary size, and vocabulary entry difficulty) have a well-documented effect on early reading [29, 30]. Much attention was paid to whether dialect differences affect reading learning [31].

### 4.3 Speaking a Language with Their Growing

Bahasa was cited as the first language of the respondents. In their world, most children speak Bahasa as their first language. Beginning in kindergarten, children begin to learn English. Every educated family is conscious of their children's language skills. Consequently, they take additional measures to guarantee that their children master traditional Bahasa. According to the Batakese participants, they were raised speaking traditional Bahasa. Due to their families and institutions of education, they taught traditional Bahasa. Social divisions have significantly contributed to this. Since the participants came from a variety of social classes. Most respondents indicated that they were raised speaking a local or Medan dialect. Since they grew up in a city or town, this is the case. No one spoke English as his or her native tongue.

These effects are not dialect-specific; instead, they reflect aspects of standard English. There are hundreds of homophones in spoken English, which listeners can decipher quickly and accurately. The impact of dialect on orthography is to make an already opaque and inconsistent orthography for English pupils even more opaque and inconsistent. The empirical question is whether these opacity increases significantly affect the comprehension or production of oral language. For example, latencies to read words like DOVE and WIND, which have a single spelling but two pronunciations, are longer for monolingual English speakers than for terms with a single pronunciation [32]. It is because it is more difficult to choose between alternative pronunciations.

This study had the limitation that the effect of students' perception of the language varieties on dialect among their classmates was investigated using a survey. It does not employ other research instruments. The participants were recruited on a volunteer basis from a WhatsApp study group of twelve students. The study suggests that dialects influence how people learn and use standard English pronunciation. Dialect use and fluency in spoken language are not mutually exclusive, as Terry and Scarborough [33] found. It may have an impact on reading proficiency [34].

Lastly, our findings are consistent with other recent research that sought to identify contributors to the achievement gap. Differences in linguistic backgrounds may substantially impact academic performance and oral communication. The findings show that the achievement gap may be partially attributable to differences in task complexity: children from outside the city who speak a different dialect are more likely to struggle with English learning.

## 5 Conclusion

Every Indonesian tribe speaks its distinct language. Additionally, each tribe has its own vernacular, which acts as a means of identifying its members. Based on the data, the respondents' perceptions are as follows: dialect influences the learning process; dialect is a barrier to learning spoken English and speaking the language as adult learners. As a result, dialect can generate confusion among listeners when they hear someone speaking English with a dialect.

In conclusion, our research identifies how dialects can affect a student's language learning abilities. The majority of language-based debate on the achievement gap has been on whether to designate low oral language abilities as "deficits" [35]. Nevertheless, this current research examines how dialect variability affects the difficulty of language acquisition.

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