

Thematic Analysis of Bangladeshi Video Commercials Commemorating International Mother Language Day

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Abstract: This study analyses 62 Bangladeshi video commercials commemorating International Mother Language Day (IMLD) to examine how they construct inclusion, linguistic identity, and ethical representation. Grounded in critical discourse analysis, sociolinguistic justice, and collective memory theories, the study identifies recurring themes like tributes to the 1952 Language Movement, the valorisation of Bangla, and portrayals of regional dialects, minority languages, and individuals with speech impairments. While post-2018 advertisements reflect growing thematic diversities, many remain constrained by monolithic narratives, symbolic tokenism, and occasional historical inaccuracies. The research calls for a participatory development of advertisements and structural commitments to linguistic diversity, extending beyond performative inclusion. By situating IMLD-themed commercials within broader discourses of nationalism and media representation, the study contributes to scholarship on multilingual media, language policy, and the commodification of memory. It also proposes future research into audience reception and institutional uptake to assess the transformative potential of commercial media in advancing linguistic justice.

Keywords: International Mother Language Day (IMLD), Television commercials (TVCs), Online Video Commercials (OVCs), Linguistic Diversity, Language Ideology and Justice, Linguistic Nationalism.

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1. Introduction

Language is central to how people form identities, build a sense of belonging, and negotiate power in postcolonial societies (Norton, 2013). In Bangladesh, the legacy of the 1952 Language Movement continues to influence contemporary debates about linguistic rights and national identity (Thompson, 2007). The day is celebrated on 21st of February every year as International Mother Language Day (IMLD) to honour this movement and to encourage state institutions, cultural organisations, and corporate actors to create messages they claim honour their mother tongue. Online video commercials (OVCs) and television commercials (TVCs) are now a significant location of the staging, circulation, and contestation of collective memory, cultural values, and language ideologies.

The paper reviews 62 Bangladeshi video advertisements published between 2012 and 24 celebrating IMLD. It also examines how these advertisements create themes of language, identity, and inclusion, and the ways they represent, support, or contradict mainstream linguistic ideologies. With IMLD gaining more prominence in corporate branding, people should be compelled to ask whether these depictions lead to greater awareness of linguistic justice in the masses or are simply recycling the same old patriotic symbols with little structural investment in altering the relationship.

1.1 Significance of the study

This study holds importance academically and in practice. It presents a critical and focused examination of the influence of corporate media on linguistic memory in Bangladesh, rather than singular case studies, to track the tendencies and tensions across over 10 years of IMLD-themed advertisements. By integrating critical discourse analysis with theories of collective memory and sociolinguistic justice, this approach also provides an adaptable analytic framework for commemorative advertising in other

postcolonial contexts (e.g., Anderson, 1983; Fairclough, 2001; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). The findings highlight issues such as historical simplification, symbolic tokenism, and performative inclusion, and provide a basis for designing more responsible and context-sensitive campaigns. This paper urges advertisers and corporations to align their public messages with long-term commitments to linguistic diversity and to consider the impact of their work on the broader public discourse regarding language, identity, and rights.

1.2 Research questions

1. What thematic patterns emerge in Bangladeshi advertisements commemorating International Mother Language Day?
2. How do these advertisements use language and symbolism to construct cultural and national identities?
3. In what ways do commercial advertisements integrate social, cultural, and linguistic messages for commemorative purposes?
4. What limitations or missed opportunities exist in these advertisements for promoting deeper linguistic awareness and inclusion?

2. Literature Review

During this review, it became apparent that the number of studies specifically comparing Bangladeshi video commercials with the IMLD theme is limited. Consequently, the literature review draws on an expanded body of literature on language, linguistic justice, media representation, nationalism, and Bangladeshi advertising in general to provide the conceptual and contextual grounds for the current work.

2.1 Defining advertisements as cultural and discursive texts

An advertisement is understood as a paid and mediated form of communication from an identifiable source, designed to persuade, inform, or remind an audience (Richards & Curran, 2002). Television commercials (TVCs) and online video commercials (OVCs) represent the primary formats examined in this study. However, moving beyond this functional definition, critical scholarship emphasises that advertising operates as a form of structured social communication embedded within economic, cultural, and political contexts (Vestergaard & Schröder, 1985). From this perspective, commercials are not merely marketing tools but cultural texts (Leiss et al., 2005) and discursive spaces where language, imagery, and ideology converge to shape and reflect social values, identities, and collective memory.

2.2 Advertising, memory, and national identity

The intersection of advertising and national commemoration forms a critical area of inquiry. Corporate campaigns often appropriate historical narratives and patriotic symbols to build brand affinity, a practice that can lead to the commodification of memory. As Islam (2020) observes, national history is frequently repackaged to evoke a form of “banal nationalism,” in which profound historical sacrifice is simplified into emotionally potent yet politically shallow brand imagery. This process risks depoliticising complex pasts, transforming them into consumable clichés. Similarly, Mostafa and Jones (2021) note that language-themed advertising in South Asia often oscillates between nationalist nostalgia and neoliberal consumerism, creating a tension that, while such ads can reinforce a sense of shared heritage, they may also reduce linguistic pride to a seasonal marketing theme, divorced from ongoing struggles for linguistic justice.

2.3 Linguistic hierarchies and representation in Bangladeshi media

The linguistic landscape portrayed in the media shapes and reflects social hierarchies. In Bangladesh, a clear prestige hierarchy exists, with Standard Bangla and English often positioned above regional dialects and indigenous languages. Sultana's (2020) research highlights how English operates as a marker of modernity and elite status, whereas regional dialects are frequently marginalised or exoticised. This hierarchy is replicated and sometimes reinforced in media representations. While some studies, such as Akter et al. (2024), praise the strategic code-switching in Bangladeshi TV ads for aligning with social tastes, others highlight significant gaps. For instance, Islam (2011) notes that advertising production remains dominated by large corporations, with content rarely featuring authentic experts or moving beyond generic models, limiting the diversity of voices represented.

Furthermore, the representation of multilingualism itself is complex. Rimi's (2019) work on code-switching suggests it can improve message recall and demonstrate cultural sensitivity. However, the inclusion of minority languages and dialects in mainstream commercials remains sporadic and often tokenistic. There is a lack of sustained, structural engagement with the country's full ethnolinguistic diversity in commercial media. This gap is significant because, as Pennycook (2010) argues, language practices are always sites of ideological struggle; their representation in popular media, such as commercials, either challenges or legitimises existing power structures.

2.4. Research Gap

While existing research provides valuable insights into language in advertising and the portrayal of nationalism in media, a focused critical examination of commemorative advertising remains notably absent, particularly in the context of International Mother Language

Day (IMLD). There is a lack of scholarly work that specifically investigates how corporate video commercials mediate the memory of the 1952 Language Movement and articulate contemporary discourses of linguistic identity, diversity, and justice in Bangladesh. This study addresses that gap. It interrogates how IMLD-themed commercials, situated at the intersection of corporate branding, national memory, and language ideology, construct themes of belonging and inclusion. By asking whether these advertisements foster genuine sociolinguistic awareness or engage in symbolic appropriation, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how commercial media participate in and potentially reshape public conversations about linguistic heritage and rights in a postcolonial context.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to investigate how language, identity, and culture are represented in Bangladeshi advertisements created for International Mother Language Day (IMLD). The focus is on interpreting narratives, symbols, and linguistic choices rather than measuring audience responses statistically. The methodology combines purposive sampling of IMLD-themed commercials with an interpretative thematic analysis informed by Braun and Clarke's (2006) widely used six-phase framework, which moves from familiarisation and coding to the development and refinement of themes.

3.1 Data collection

The data collection was purposive and exploratory. Purposive sampling was adopted because the study aimed to examine commercials in depth that explicitly engaged with IMLD. Searches on Google, YouTube, and Facebook using English and Bangla keywords were used to identify relevant commercials. Once a relevant advertisement was located, the platforms'

recommendation algorithms were followed to find related video links. This snowball sampling strategy enabled the discovery of additional IMLD-themed commercials through connections to previously viewed content. In this research, information-rich cases were defined as commercials that clearly framed themselves as IMLD messages. Commercials embedded within long-term initiatives or awareness programmes were excluded because their messaging was multi-layered and not exclusively tied to 21 February. For example, campaigns such as Ispahani Tea's *Banglabid* (Ispahani Tea Limited, n.d.), Coca-Cola's *Coke Studio Bangla* (Coke Studio Bangla, n.d.), Akij Group's *Speed Bangla Likhi Banglay* (Akij Food & Beverage Ltd., n.d.), and Grameenphone's SignLine initiatives, including the 2025 video, were intentionally omitted.

Based on these parameters, the final dataset comprised 62 television commercials (TVCs) and online video commercials (OVCs) that varied in terms of language use, visual style, tone, and target audience, providing a diverse corpus for qualitative thematic and discourse analysis.

3.2 Data analysis

This study employed qualitative content analysis to examine 62 video commercials aired or released between 2012 and 2024 concerning IMLD. Thematic analysis was used to identify and interpret patterns across the data, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. The analysis began with familiarisation, during which all commercials were viewed repeatedly, and initial notes were taken on tone, narrative structure, and salient linguistic and visual features relevant to language, identity, and inclusion. Building on this immersion, systematic coding was carried out across the dataset to capture meaningful elements. These codes were subsequently organised into broader candidate themes that reflected recurring patterns. The themes were then reviewed and

refined to ensure coherence and adequate coverage of the data. Each theme was then defined and named with attention to its internal consistency and distinction from other categories, supported by representative commercials that illustrated its key dynamics. In the final phase, the themes were woven into a cohesive narrative that not only describes how IMLD-themed advertisements work but also interprets them, considering the study's theoretical framework and research questions, thereby linking specific textual patterns to broader issues of linguistic ideology and justice.

3.3 Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in three interrelated strands of theory: critical discourse analysis, theories of imagined community and collective memory, and sociolinguistic work on language ideology and justice. Together, these perspectives position IMLD-themed Bangladeshi commercials not just as marketing tools but as cultural texts that help construct, circulate, and sometimes contest dominant ideas about language, nation, and belonging. They also directly inform the commercials' coding and the themes developed in the analysis.

3.3.1 Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

Drawing on Fairclough (2001), this study treats language as a social practice that both reflects and reproduces relations of power and ideology. CDA is relevant here because IMLD commercials consistently make choices about who speaks, in which language or variety, and on whose behalf. These choices are never neutral.

In practical terms, CDA guides attention to fine-grained textual and visual details in the commercials, such as forms of address (*tui, tumi, apni*), levels of politeness, the alternation between Bangla and English, and the way characters who stammer, use sign language, or

speak in regional dialects are portrayed. When a mother is embarrassed about her “weak” English or a child is discouraged from speaking Bangla, these are coded not simply as emotional moments but as instances where language hierarchies and social shame are being performed. CDA helps unpack how such scenes normalise or challenge the idea that some ways of speaking are more innovative, more educated, or more “modern” than others.

3.3.2 Imagined community and collective memory

The second strand of the framework draws on Anderson’s (1983) concept of the nation as an imagined community and on scholarship on collective memory, including Barthes’ (1972) work on myth. In this study, Barthes’ concept of myth is employed to examine how familiar patriotic signs in IMLD commercials acquire a secondary layer of meaning. For Barthes (1972), myth is a secondary order of signification in which existing signs, such as the Shaheed Minar, the red-black color palette, or archival photographs from 1952, are reloaded with taken-for-granted messages of timeless national unity and unquestioned pride. When brands repeatedly pair these symbols with emotive music and simplified stories of sacrifice, they transform complex historical events into a ready-made “feeling” that can be attached to products, thereby commodifying historical memory. These perspectives are critical because the commercials under study are explicitly commemorative, claiming to honour the martyrs of 1952 and to celebrate International Mother Language Day.

From this viewpoint, recurring images and motifs in the commercials, such as the Shaheed Minar, black-and-white archival photographs, floral tributes, the Bangla alphabet, and the song “*Amar Bhaiyer Rokte Rangano,*” are treated as memory practices rather than mere decoration. Anderson (1983) helps explain how these elements invite viewers to imagine themselves as part of a

linguistic community that shares a heroic past, while Barthes' (1972) notion of myth highlights how powerful symbols, when repeated across brands and years, can become simplified, emotionally charged clichés. This is particularly relevant when IMLD visuals and songs are used in ways that risk reducing a complex, contested history to a ready-made patriotic mood.

3.3.3 Sociolinguistic perspectives on language ideology and justice

The third component of the framework comes from sociolinguistics and critical applied linguistics, especially the work of Bourdieu (1991), Pennycook (2010), and Skutnabb-Kangas (2000). These scholars highlight how languages and varieties are unequally valued, and how these inequalities are tied to broader structures of power and rights.

Bourdieu's (1991) notion of linguistic capital is particularly relevant to commercials that implicitly or explicitly treat Standard Bangla and English as more desirable than regional dialects, indigenous languages, or sign language. When an advertisement suggests that English is necessary to appear intelligent or successful, it participates in the distribution of linguistic capital; when another ad asks viewers to take pride in their regional accent or in sign language, it attempts, at least symbolically, to redistribute that capital.

Pennycook's (2010) emphasis on language practices as sites of ideological struggle is also central to this study. Many IMLD commercials present code-switching, Roman-script Bangla, or hybrid speech as natural features of contemporary life. The framework encourages a critical reading of these practices.

Finally, Skutnabb-Kangas's (2000) work on linguistic human rights provides an ethical lens for evaluating the representation of speakers who are already vulnerable in Bangladeshi society, i.e.,

ethnic minority language communities, deaf signers, and people with speech impairments. When such speakers appear briefly in IMLD commercials, the framework raises questions about whether they are portrayed as full subjects with voices and agency, or as symbolic tokens that enable brands to claim “inclusivity” without addressing structural exclusion. This strand, therefore, connects micro-level narrative details to broader concerns about who is allowed to feel that IMLD, and the language it commemorates, also belong to them.

4. Thematic Analysis of Video Commercials

The analysis of IMLD-themed commercials reveals a nuanced and multidimensional portrayal of language as a site of identity, memory, inclusion, and resistance. Across the campaigns, Bangla emerges as both a national symbol and an emotional register. Simultaneously, the representation of regional dialects, minority languages, and sign language challenges the monolingual view of nationalism. Themes like linguistic pride, ethical language use, and resistance to linguistic discrimination are reinforced through verbal messages, embodied silence, gestures, and emotional tones. Collectively, the commercials present a tapestry of stories that reframe February 21 not just as a celebration of Bangla but as a space for multilingual affirmation.

4.1 Commemoration and national memory

Among the 62 commercials analysed in this study, 18 are explicitly designed to pay homage to the martyrs of the 1952 language movement on International Mother Language Day (IMLD), among which 14 commercials present direct visual or narrative representations of the events of 1952, while four others rely on the iconic song “*Amar Bhaiyer Rokte Rangano*” (Chowdhury & Mahmud, 1970) as a symbolic act of remembrance. Table 1 presents them as follows.

Table 1
IMLD-Themed Bangladeshi Video Commercials Commemorating National Memory

ID	Brand/organisation	Year	Brief description	Key codes/themes
C01	Grameenphone	2012	Fan photo-collage tribute to IMLD	Early visual tribute; mediated memory; corporate nationalism; Shaheed Minar imagery
C02	Grameenphone (Chabial Official)	2014	Children taking flowers to Shaheed Minar	Child participants; floral tribute; intergenerational memory; emotional nationalism
C03	Grameenphone	2014	Global singing of " <i>Amar Bhaiyer Rokte Rangano</i> "	Transnational solidarity; multilingual performance; song-based homage
C04	GaanBangla TV – <i>Defining Moments</i>	2015	Youth holding Bangla alphabet placards	Alphabet symbolism; youth participation; reverence for martyrs

ID	Brand/organisation	Year	Brief description	Key codes/themes
C05	Grameenphone	2016	Individuals in Sierra Leone sing “ <i>Amar Bhaiyer Rokte Rangano</i> ”	Transnational homage; symbolic global recognition of Bangla; song-based remembrance
C06	Aarong	2017	Archival photo montage of Language Movement	Visual archive; aestheticised martyrdom; brand-nation linkage
C07	Ekhanei.com	2017	Narration-focused tribute ending at Shaheed Minar	Narrative remembrance; debt to martyrs; floral homage
C08	BoiBasar	2018	Forgetful child remembers only the <i>Ekushey</i> song	Deeply embedded musical memory; school setting; emotional attachment to sacrifice
C09	Akij Cement (Ads of Bangladesh – AdsofBD)	2018	Children build miniature Shaheed Minar from cement	Intergenerational respect; creative monument; product-memory fusion

ID	Brand/organisation	Year	Brief description	Key codes/themes
C10	Seven Ring Cement	2019	Symbolic Shaheed Minar representation	Stylised monument; visual reverence; cement–memory association
C11	Grameenphone	2019	AUW students from 17 countries sing the song	International student community; shared commemoration; cosmopolitan nationalism
C12	Prothom Alo	2019	Tribute visuals with the song as soundtrack	Media-led homage; montage of respect; song as emotional anchor
C13	Appex Footwear	2020	Reenactment of Language Movement	Historical dramatisation; martyrdom; brand insertion into memory
C14	Symphonymobile	2020	Shopkeeper and foreigner buying saree for Shaheed Minar visit	Global curiosity; everyday storytelling; recalled sacrifice

ID	Brand/organisation	Year	Brief description	Key codes/themes
C15	Rainbow Paints	2020	Audience-driven campaign to repaint neglected Shaheed Minars	Shaheed Minar preservation; participatory commemoration; civic engagement; memory work
C16	Bashundhara Atta, Maida, Suji	2021	IMLD during COVID-19	Continuity of commemoration in crisis; domestic setting; national resilience
C17	HappiHub	2022	Minimalist Shaheed Minar motion graphic with caption	Minimalist tribute; textual emphasis on blood and continuity; solemn tone
C18	Marquis Water Pump	2024	Shaheed Minar with a stanza from <i>Ekusher Kabita</i>	Poetic intertext; monument symbolism; reverent branding

4.2 Promotion of Bangla language and cultural identity

IMLD-themed commercials also engage directly with Bangla's status as a living, everyday language, moving beyond memorialisation to address how people speak, feel, and negotiate linguistic hierarchies in contemporary Bangladesh. As summarised in Table 2, these campaigns range from

narratives of family conflict around English and Bangla to celebrations of dialectal variation, intonational subtlety, and hybrid language practices.

Table 2
IMLD-Themed Bangladeshi Video Commercials Promoting Bangla Language and Cultural Identity

ID	Brand/organisation	Year	Brief label/description	Main codes/themes
C19	Walton	2018	Mother rejects English script at school meeting	English prestige critique; mother-tongue empowerment; family love and language; intertextuality with <i>English Vinglish</i> ; linguistic resistance
C20	Fresh	2018	Different intonations of “ <i>accha</i> ” in everyday scenes	Intonational richness; pragmatics of Bangla; everyday orality rather than history or dialect
C21	HappiHub	2019	Girl’s journey from discomfort to pride in Bangla	Language shame to pride; youth identity; mother-tongue

ID	Brand/organisation	Year	Brief label/description	Main codes/themes
C22	ACI Pure Foods	2020	Regional dishes described in local dialects	<p>appreciation</p> <p>Culinary–linguistic metaphor; celebration of dialect diversity; implicit monolingual nationalism (“one language Bangla”); erasure of non-Bangla mother tongues</p>
C23	Quazi Enterprises Ltd.	2020	Admission interview boy told “Say it in English”	<p>Parental pressure; internalised stigma; reclaiming Bangla confidence; critique of school language hierarchies</p>
C24	Quazi Enterprises Ltd.	2021	<i>Bayati</i> disappointed by entertainment-driven IMLD show	<p>Misaligned IMLD celebration; commodified festivity; cultural authenticity;</p>

ID	Brand/organisation	Year	Brief label/description	Main codes/themes
C25	PRAN-RFL Group	2022	Young woman moving across dialects, scripts, and English	critique of homogenised national days Linguistic hybridity; Roman-script Bangla; Sylheti and regional dialects; inclusive contemporary identity; tension between digital convenience and script preservation
C26	Olympic Industries (<i>Protha</i>)	2022	Boy questions mother over Urdu-only myth	Decline of Bangla in elite homes; English/Hindi media influence; parental language policing; historical distortion (Jinnah narrative); mother-tongue

ID	Brand/organisation	Year	Brief label/description	Main codes/themes
				rights
C27	HappiHub	2023	Bangla compared to a mother's gift	Emotional metaphor; language as nurture; concise IMLD message

4.3 Regional dialects and accent-based identity

Table 3 summarises eight commercials and videos that foreground regional dialects and accent-based identities. These campaigns range from campus-based historical narration in local varieties to hashtag-driven social media initiatives and family-centred narratives about dialect shame and pride.

Table 3
IMLD-themed Bangladeshi Video Commercials Featuring Regional Dialects and Accents

ID	Brand/organisation	Year	Brief label/description	Main codes/themes
C28	Teletalk	2017	Young man embarrassed by his mother's regional speech until peers affirm her dialect as a respected mother	Intergenerational dialect stigma; peer-mediated affirmation; maternal speech as core to identity

ID	Brand/organisation	Year	Brief label/description	Main codes/themes
C29-30	RFL Houseware	2020 a-b	tongue TVC and Facebook video featuring speakers from multiple regions using their own dialects with an explicit “no shame” message	Pride in dialect; anti-shame discourse; dialect as identity; everyday normalisation of variation
C31	IDLC Financing Happiness	2020	“Respect All Accents” TVC on a student ashamed of his mother’s dialect; voice-over calls for honoring all accents and dialects	Respect for regional speech; maternal influence; dialects as contributors to standard Bangla; risk of accent-only framing
C32	Prothom Alo Bondhushava	2021	Daffodil University students narrate the 1952 Language Movement in their own dialects	Academic setting; dialectal narration of history; preservation of local speech forms; valuing intra-Bangla variety
C33	Supercrete	2022	TVC produced entirely in Sylheti,	Sylheti visibility; regional targeting;

ID	Brand/organisation	Year	Brief label/description	Main codes/themes
	Bangladesh		linked to the company's factory location in Chattak, Sylhet	mainstreaming a non-standard variety; challenging standard-only norms
C34-43	RFL Houseware	2023 a-j	TVC with Noakhali–Barishal friends plus extended social media series with celebrities speaking in local dialects	Hashtag activism; mother tongue as identity; Noakhailla/Barishaila pride; emotional narrative of shame vs pride

4.4 Linguistic inclusion and rights of ethnic minorities

Table 4 summarises commercials that foreground minority languages, indigenous speakers, and other linguistically marginalised groups, while also addressing cross-lingual encounters mediated by digital tools. These campaigns range from song-based assertions that Bangladeshi homes speak dozens of mother tongues to narratives about Chakma, Tipra, and other indigenous communities, as well as CSR initiatives for endangered languages and technology-enabled communication across foreign languages, e.g., Russian and Bangla, collectively illustrating how linguistic diversity and accessibility are negotiated within a Bangla-dominant national framework.

Table 4
IMLD-themed Bangladeshi Video Commercials on Minority Languages and Marginalised Speakers

ID	Brand/organisation	Year	Brief label/description	Main codes/themes
C44	Robi Axiata	2015	Song-based tribute asserting that Bangladeshi homes speak 30+ languages, all worthy of celebration on IMLD	Multiplicity of mother tongues; national pluralism; symbolic recognition of 30+ languages
C45	Berger Bangladesh	2017	TVC linking mother tongue to interfaith harmony and ethical coexistence (early gesture toward inclusive linguistic nationalism)	Mother tongue and religion; inclusive nationalism; early nod to pluralism
C46	Berger Bangladesh	2018	Multi-narrative TVC featuring Marma–Bangla–English bilingualism, interfaith prayers, poetry, and sign language	Layered multilingualism; ethnic and religious diversity; sign language visibility; mother tongue as dignity

ID	Brand/organisation	Year	Brief label/description	Main codes/themes
C47	RFL Plastics	2019	Chakma-speaking student mocked for his language until a boy with a stammer denounces using speech to hurt others	Mockery of Chakma; racialised othering; ethical speech; alliance between disabled and minority speakers
C48-50	Halda Valley (trilogy)	2019a–c	Tea-garden workers sing and converse in Tipra/Tripuri, Bagani, and Bangla, stressing mutual understanding and welfare of all tongues	Workplace multilingualism; Bagani visibility; intergenerational understanding; rights of tea-estate languages
C51	Akij Board	2021	Highlights Jaago Foundation's work in endangered indigenous languages, linking furniture donation to mother-tongue education	CSR for minority languages; educational support; structural backing for linguistic rights
C52	Grameenphone	2021	Russian visitor at Rooppur uses an	Cross-lingual communication;

ID	Brand/organisation	Year	Brief label/description	Main codes/themes
C53	Nagad	2022	<p>online translator via a local shopkeeper to overcome a language barrier</p> <p>Indigenous-looking student called “Chengbeng” by Bengali peers, who later accompany him to the Shaheed Minar</p>	<p>digital mediation; technology-enabled accessibility; everyday multilingual encounter</p> <p>Linguistic racism; ethnic slur critique; solidarity across ethnic lines; all mother tongues deserve respect</p>
C54	Star Line Food Products	2023	<p>Children speak Barishailla, Chittagonian, Hajong, and Noakhailla in family scenes, ending with the message “Respect all mother tongues”</p>	<p>Everyday multilingualism; regional dialect plus minority language; child-centred affirmation of linguistic variety</p>

4.5 Ethical use of language in society

Table 5 presents a cluster of commercials that reposition language not only as a symbol of identity but as an everyday ethical practice. These campaigns highlight how pronouns, insults, tone, and even silence can humiliate or humanise others, urging viewers to treat the mother tongue as a medium of care, respect, and social responsibility in both public and private life.

Table 5
IMLD-themed Bangladeshi Video Commercials on Ethical Language Use

ID	Brand/organisation	Year	Brief label/description	Main codes/themes
C55	RFL Houseware	2017	Bhalo Bhashay Bhalobasha portrays everyday scenes where rude speech hurts strangers, elders, and children	Politeness and care; everyday verbal aggression; language as moral obligation; protection of the vulnerable
C56	Olympic Industries Ltd.	2019	<i>Bhasha, Kokhono Kokhono Bhoy</i> shows how tui/tumi/apni mark power, class, and gendered disrespect in daily talk	Pronoun-based hierarchy; fear and humiliation; classed and gendered violence; call for empathetic address

ID	Brand/organisation	Year	Brief label/description	Main codes/themes
C57	BRAC	2019	Highlights gendered verbal abuse in Bangla and argues that IMLD is hollow if language continues to oppress women	Gendered insults; linguistic violence; feminist lens on IMLD; freedom from verbal abuse as language right
C58	GPH Ispat	2020	Bus-scene TVC where a mute woman's handwritten note shames passengers for abusive speech, linked to an online pledge not to misuse the mother tongue	Everyday vulgarity; shock of silence; ethical restraint; personal oath-taking; tying linguistic ethics to national identity

4.6 Inclusion of the linguistically marginalised: deaf, mute, and speech-impaired individuals

A final cluster of commercials foregrounds sign language, deaf schools, and non-vocal forms of expression, insisting that language rights extend beyond sound. While campaigns such as Berger Bangladesh (2018), RFL Plastic (2019), and GPH Ispat (2020) already appear in earlier tables for their broader themes, they also briefly feature sign users or mute characters who expand the notion of who 'counts' as a language user. Table 6, therefore, focuses on those campaigns in which deaf or hearing-impaired communities, silent protagonists, and signing interlocutors are placed at the centre of remembrance of *Ekushey*.

Table 6
IMLD-themed Bangladeshi Video Commercials on Sign Language and Speech Impairment

ID	Brand/organisation	Year	Brief label/description	Main codes/themes
C59	Bisk Club	2017	Nishshobder Shobde Ekush silent short film retelling the 1952 Language Movement through a mute child's perspective	Silence as language; non-vocal resistance; inclusive patriotism; mute child as narrative centre
C60	Daraz Bangladesh	2018	HICARE School students with hearing impairments dream of speaking "pure" Bangla and being fully included	Hearing impairment; aspiration for linguistic inclusion; link to Language Movement legacy
C61	Rainbow Paints	2018	Shaheed Minar of a Sylhet school for deaf children is repainted as an IMLD tribute	Symbolic visibility of deaf schools; honoring history in marginalised spaces; visual inclusion
C62	BRAC	2023	Sign language users narrate the 1952 Language Movement in sign; interpreter explains sign as full	Sign language as full linguistic system; challenging auditory bias; call

ID	Brand/organisation	Year	Brief label/description	Main codes/themes
			language, calling for barrier-free inclusion	for communicative accessibility

5. Discussion

This study has examined how Bangladeshi video commercials produced for International Mother Language Day (IMLD) frame discourses of language, identity, and inclusion. Drawing from a corpus of 62 advertisements released between 2012 and 2024, the analysis identified key themes, including national memory, linguistic pride, regional dialect promotion, minority language rights, ethical speech practices, and the inclusion of sign language. This section addresses the research questions in light of these findings and connects them with relevant scholarly literature from sociolinguistics, language policy, and media studies.

5.1 Thematic patterns in IMLD advertisements

The analysis reveals a shift in thematic diversity across the examined period. Early commercials, particularly those produced before 2018, predominantly relied on familiar and somewhat formulaic motifs such as visual homages to the Shaheed Minar, the use of red and black colour symbolism, and the soundtrack of "*Amar Bhaiyer Rokte Rangano*". These visuals, though emotionally evocative, often lacked narrative depth. As Barthes (1972) warns, overreliance on mythic symbols can lead to a state of symbolic exhaustion, reducing historical memory to aesthetic repetition.

However, from 2018 onward, the landscape of IMLD commercials witnessed notable innovation. Advertisers began incorporating more inclusive and introspective narratives, drawing on regional

5.2 Cultural and national identity construction

5.2.1 *Bangla-English, dialects, and the nation*

Language in International Mother Language Day (IMLD)-themed commercials is not merely a tool for communication but a symbolic marker of national identity and collective memory. These ads often position Bangla as the emotional and historical core of Bangladeshi identity, reflecting Anderson's (1983) concept of the nation as an "imagined community." However, this dominant framing tends to privilege standard Bangla, risking what Pennycook (1994) terms "linguistic essentialism," wherein a single variety is treated as representative of the entire nation. ACI Pure Foods' (2020) IMLD commercial exemplifies this tension by visualising the celebration of regional dishes and dialects to suggest a mosaic of pronunciations and local identities. However, its closing slogan insists that despite these differences, "we have only one language: Bangla, and only one country: Bangladesh", collapsing dialectal and ethnolinguistic plurality into a monolingual national ideal, erasing non-Bangla mother tongues and implicitly aligning unity with Bangla-only nationalism.

While some commercials challenge linguistic homogeneity, their gestures toward inclusivity often lack structural backing. Robi Axiata's (2015) commercial attempted a gesture toward pluralism by asserting that Bangladeshi households speak more than thirty languages, symbolically acknowledging the country's multilingual reality. Campaigns like RFL Houseware's #MayerBhasha (2023) and Supercrete Cement's Sylheti-language TVC (2022) foreground dialectal pride and regional authenticity by centring non-standard varieties as legitimate voices. RFL Houseware's (2023) #MayerBhasha TVC stages a dialogue between a student from the Noakhali region who masks his "*Noakhaila*" accent out of shame and a friend from Barisal who proudly performs his "*Barishaila*" speech, turning their opposing stances into a clear argument that

regional dialects are not defects to hide but core resources of identity and affective belonging. However, such symbolic inclusion rarely extends to institutional practices, such as hiring or workplace communication. In Bourdieu's (1991) terms, symbolic recognition without corresponding structural validation risks remaining merely performative. In a related vein, Prothom Alo Bondhushava's (2021) video at Daffodil University, where students narrate the history of the 1952 Language Movement in their own dialects, frames regional speech as academically and culturally valuable rather than merely folkloric. Teletalk's (2017) TVC similarly depicts a student's embarrassment about his mother's regional speech being gently challenged by his peers, who affirm that maternal language deserves respect as a true mother tongue, while IDLC Financing Happiness's "Respect All Accents" (2020) centres a son ashamed of his mother's way of speaking, affirming regional varieties as contributors to standard Bangla yet, through its focus on "accent," risks reducing dialects to pronunciation alone and overlooking their distinct vocabularies and grammars.

Figure 2

Robi Axiata's 2015 advertisement featuring linguistic diversity in Bangladesh



This disconnect between symbolic and material recognition is powerfully staged in Walton's (2018) TVC, where a mother

abandons a memorised English script at a school meeting and chooses to speak spontaneously in Bangla, rejecting the equation of English with intelligence and reclaiming authority through her mother tongue. Viewed alongside the Bollywood film *English Vinglish* (Balki, 2012) and through Genette’s (1997) notion of hypertextuality, the Walton ad can be read as a deliberate reworking of a shared South Asian story about linguistic inferiority. Quazi Enterprises Limited’s (2020) commercial offers a complementary perspective, showing a boy who has been told to “say it in English” for a school interview but ultimately regains confidence when encouraged to speak Bangla, exposing how parental pressure and school norms reproduce English-centric hierarchies. Together, these ads critique the prestige of English in education and family life while advocating Bangla as a legitimate source of pride and self-worth. However, even as Walton (2018) and Quazi Enterprises (2020) symbolically resist English dominance, English fluency remains a practical prerequisite for upward mobility in the corporate sector, revealing a contradiction that undermines the sincerity of IMLD-themed messaging and underscores the need for deeper organisational introspection (Pennycook, 2010).

Figure 3

Walton’s 2018 commercial showing a mother–daughter reconciliation over language



This tension is dramatised further in Olympic Industries' (Protha – প্রথা, 2022) TVC, which portrays an urban elite household where children's media consumption in English and Hindi sidelines Bangla. When the mother retells a simplified story that a leader once forced "all Bangladeshis" to speak only Urdu, her son's pointed question about why she herself polices his Bangla exposes how parental anxieties can reproduce the very linguistic hierarchies that IMLD is meant to challenge. The ad thus critiques the neglect of Bangla in everyday life, yet its historically inaccurate narration and portrayal of Urdu solely as a language of authoritarian imposition risk turning complex language politics into a moral fable and essentialising linguistic "others," including present-day Urdu-speaking communities in Bangladesh. As Brandt (2014) cautions, in South Asia, language and script are not neutral tools but politically charged symbols. Such simplified narratives can, therefore, deepen, rather than bridge, existing social divides.

5.2.2 Multilingual inclusion, marginalisation, and non-vocal repertoires

A second set of commercials moves beyond Bangla-centric narratives by engaging directly with ethnic minority languages, racialised linguistic stigma, and broader multilingual ecologies. Nagad's (2022) TVC and RFL Plastics' (2019) ad dramatises how ethnic minority-looking students are mocked with slurs such as "*Chengbeng*" or "*Chengchung*" and told their languages sound "Chinese," exposing a wider tendency in Bangladesh to collapse Mongoloid facial features, Sino-Tibetan languages, and linguistic inferiority into a single caricature, even when, as in the case of Chakma, the language actually belongs to the same Indo-European family as Bangla. In contrast, Halda Valley's (2019a, 2019b, and 2019c) trilogy, produced by a tea-leaf company based in Sylhet, celebrates the linguistic diversity of tea-estate workers by

showcasing multilingual communication in Tipra, Bagani, and Bangla, implicitly acknowledging language shift and loss while affirming workers' rights to maintain their own repertoires. This portrayal resonates with descriptions of Bagani ("garden language") as a pidgin that has emerged from the convergence of multiple tribal languages (Kim et al., 2010), and with studies documenting Sylhet tea gardens as multilingual spaces where Sadri, Santali, Oriya, Manipuri, Telugu, Bangla, and other languages coexist and change over time (Islam, 2019; Hossain, 2009).

Star Line Food Products Ltd.'s (2023) TVC similarly normalises *Barishaila*, Chittagonian, Hajong, and *Noakhaila* as intimate family resources rather than curiosities, presenting everyday multilingualism as a core feature of home life. Berger Bangladesh's (2018) multi-narrative spot broadens this frame further by weaving together Marma–Bangla–English bilingualism, interfaith prayer, poetry, protest, and a brief sign-language scene. It moves from a foreigner helped in English at a launch terminal, to a Marma-speaking professional shifting between Bangla, English, and Marma, to moments of Bengali poetic bonding, protest chants, multifaith prayer, and a signing couple, collectively suggesting that mother tongues, whether majority or minority, spoken or signed, anchor dignity, emotional connection, and belonging across both public and private domains. Finally, Grameenphone's (2021) Rooppur Power Plant TVC, in which a local shopkeeper uses an online translator to assist a Russian visitor, adds a technological layer by framing digital tools as pragmatic bridges across languages.

Figure 4
Star Line’s 2023 IMLD commercial depicting family scenes in four different mother tongues



একুশে ফেব্রুয়ারী আন্তর্জাতিক মাতৃভাষা ও জাতীয় শহীদ দিবস



Star Line Food Products Ltd.
 6.19K subscribers

Subscribe

5.2.3 Memory, nationalism, and corporate branding

Moreover, these commemorative commercials often participate in what Islam (2020) describes as a “politics of memory” and banal nationalism, where symbols of national identity, such as songs, flags, martyrs, and monuments, are recycled in emotionally evocative but politically superficial ways. Such portrayals typically sanitise or depoliticise the complex histories of the 1952 Language Movement and the 1971 Liberation War, reducing them to consumable tropes in corporate branding. This is a form of corporate nationalism, where advertisers capitalise on public memory and patriotic sentiment to build brand identity, often without critically engaging with the sociopolitical legacies they invoke. Teletalk’s (2017) 21-taka data offer on 21 February is a striking example of how martyrdom and linguistic sacrifice are folded into a short-term consumption incentive. In sum, IMLD-themed commercials function as cultural texts that both reflect and

shape national identity. They reaffirm Bangla as a unifying symbol, yet often fail to acknowledge or valorise the full spectrum of linguistic diversity that defines Bangladesh. Without structural change, critical reflexivity, and ethical engagement with historical memory, such portrayals risk commodifying patriotism and reinforcing the very exclusions they claim to resist.

Figure 5

Teletalk’s 2017 IMLD commercial exemplifying corporate use of the IMLD spirit for brand promotion



Teletalk International Mother Language Day TVC (মায়ের ভাষাই তো মাতৃভাষা)



Teletalk
8.87K subscribers

Subscribe



216



Share



5.2.4 Sign language, silence, and reconfiguring “voice”

A distinctive strand of commercials challenges everyday assumptions about who gets to “count” as a language user by foregrounding sign language and silence as legitimate forms of expression and belonging. Seen through a critical discourse analysis lens, these ads redistribute voice and visibility toward signers and mute characters, unsettling the taken-for-granted link between linguistic authority, audibility, and fluent Standard Bangla.

Bisk Club's (2017) ad reconstructs the 1952 Language Movement through the participation of a mute child in a two-minute silent film, transforming visual narrative and embodied gesture into forms of resistance and remembrance. This use of silence as protest aligns with Barthes' (1972) notion of myth, as familiar *Ekushey* symbols such as the Shaheed Minar, processions, and floral tributes are re-signified to include those who cannot or do not speak aloud, while still evoking the same patriotic affect. GPH Ispat's (2020) tribute similarly dignifies a mute woman's presence in the commemorative narrative, challenging everyday hierarchies of who counts as a legitimate language user and illustrating Fairclough's (2001) point that discourse can both reproduce and contest social power relations.

BRAC's (2023) video and Daraz Bangladesh's (2018) TVC go further by explicitly centring sign language as a full linguistic system. In BRAC's (2023) case, signers narrate the history and significance of 1952 before an interpreter turns to the hearing audience to insist that, even when many viewers cannot follow, what they are seeing is still unequivocally language. Daraz Bangladesh (2018) contrasts the casual "distortion" of Bangla in everyday use with students from HICARE School for children with hearing impairments, whose dream of speaking "pure" Bangla is linked to the legacy of the martyrs and to a wider aspiration for inclusion in the national linguistic community. Rainbow Paints' (2018) choice to repaint a Shaheed Minar at a deaf school in Sylhet adds a spatial layer to this politics of recognition, placing commemorative care inside an institution that is often peripheral to mainstream *Ekushey* narratives.

Together, these commercials resonate with Skutnabb-Kangas's (2000) linguistic human rights perspective by treating sign language and non-spoken modalities as entitled to equal recognition, not as add-ons to spoken Bangla, and they extend Anderson's (1983)

concept of the imagined community by depicting signers and mute individuals as full bearers of Ekushey's memory rather than symbolic tokens. Similarly, the inclusion of linguistically marginalised individuals such as deaf signers (BRAC, 2023), a mute woman (GPH Ispat, 2020), and a student with a stammer (RFL Plastics, 2019) reflects a broader, more capacious understanding of linguistic diversity, echoing Ladd's (2003) call to recognise deaf and speech-impaired people as linguistic minorities rather than only as disabled subjects. Nevertheless, these representations remain largely symbolic. They are rarely accompanied by efforts to institutionalise sign language education, promote accessible communication, or advocate robustly for disability rights, revealing a gap between inclusive imagery and sustained structural commitments.

Figure 6

BRAC's (2023) IMLD commercial featuring a woman using Bangla Sign Language to honour speakers of all the world's languages



5.3 Integration of linguistic, social, and cultural messaging

Effective IMLD commercials integrate linguistic advocacy with broader ethical and emotional messaging, and BRAC's (2019) video adds a distinctly gendered dimension to this discourse. It shows how women are routinely subjected to verbal humiliation through phrases and insults embedded in everyday Bangla, while ads such as Olympic Industries Limited (2019) and BRAC (2019) together demonstrate how pronouns (*tui/tumi*) and gendered slurs make speech a potent site of power and social control in Fairclough's (2001) sense.

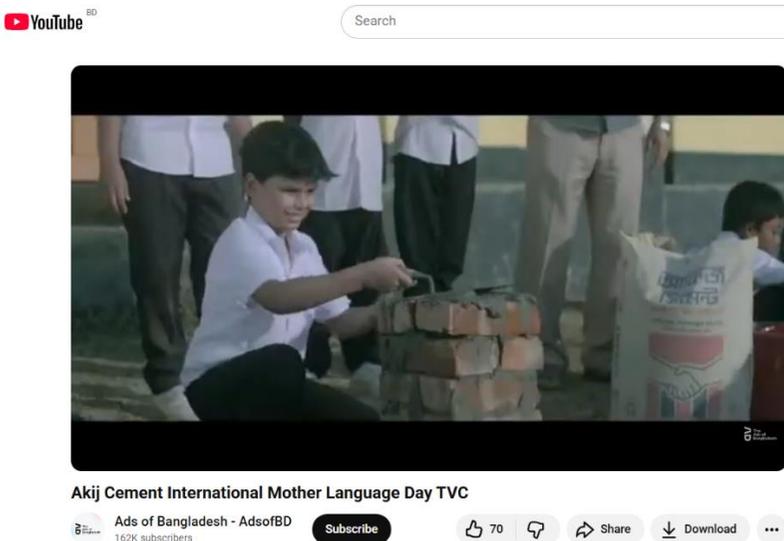
RFL Houseware's (2017) TVC extends this concern with everyday ethics by showing how rude speech directed at strangers, elders, and children violates basic social courtesy. GPH Ispat's (2020) bus-scene advertisement pushes the point further, where a mute passenger's handwritten note contrasts ethical silence with abusive talk, shaming fellow travelers into recognising that the mother tongue can harm as much as it heals, a message reinforced by the brand's *Ekusher Protigga* pledge campaign against linguistic abuse. Together, these commercials suggest that honoring IMLD means treating language not only as a heritage but also as a daily practice of restraint, empathy, and responsibility in both public and private life.

Some brands pair these messages with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives or cause marketing strategies. Akij Cement's (Ads of Bangladesh – AdsofBD, 2018) symbolic construction of the Shaheed Minar and Rainbow Paints' (2018; 2020) campaign to repaint neglected monuments are exemplary in this regard. Such efforts reflect what Andreasen (2006) terms "strategic philanthropy," where brand alignment with a social cause is complemented by tangible action.

However, these are exceptions. The majority of commercials rely on emotional appeals without proposing sustainable interventions. In contrast, Akij Board's (2021) partnership with Jaago Foundation to promote mother-tongue-based education provides a rare example of message-action coherence, illustrating how media narratives can be reinforced through structural support.

Figure 7

Akij Cement's 2018 TVC showing schoolchildren constructing a Shaheed Minar with cement of the Akij brand



5.4 Gaps and missed opportunities in representation

Despite recent improvements in inclusivity, the representation of Bangladesh's full ethnolinguistic diversity in IMLD-themed commercials remains limited. Only four indigenous groups, namely the Chakma, Marma, Hajong, and Tripura, are visibly featured, while other communities, such as the Santali, Oraon, Khasi, and Bihari (Urdu-speaking) communities, and many more, are entirely absent. This exclusion runs counter to UNESCO's (2021) emphasis on the

intergenerational transmission of minority languages as a key pillar of linguistic rights.

Even when non-dominant varieties appear, they are often given only superficial attention. For example, the Bagani pidgin, a contact language developed in Sylhet's tea estates, is briefly referenced in one campaign but left undocumented. As Islam (2019) and Hossain (2009) argue, Bagani represents both linguistic convergence and erosion, shaped by social displacement and labour histories. However, its near invisibility in mainstream media mirrors a broader pattern of neglect. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) warns that such systemic disregard, where languages are neither suppressed nor supported, can lead to what she terms "linguistic genocide."

A further missed opportunity lies in the limited use of linguistic microanalysis within the commercials. Only Fresh (2018) and Olympic Industries Limited (2019) meaningfully engage with the pragmatics of Bangla, analysing elements such as the intonational variation of '*accha*' (translated as 'okay') and the pronominal distinctions among '*tui*', '*tumi*', and '*apni*', all three Bangla equivalents for the pronoun 'you'. As noted by O'Grady et al. (2001) and Mesthrie et al. (2019), introducing audiences to language structure, variability, and social functions has significant educational value. Expanding such efforts could deepen public engagement with Bangla and its dialectal richness.

5.4.1 Ethical contradictions and historical distortions

While many IMLD advertisements aim to inspire national pride and remembrance, some rely on ethically problematic or historically inaccurate narratives to amplify emotional impact. For example, in Grameenphone's (Chabial Official, 2014) advertisement, schoolchildren are shown stealing flowers from a private field to offer at the Shaheed Minar. Although the farmer initially protests, he relents when he learns the children's intent. While framed as an

uplifting tale of patriotic devotion, the ad implies that unethical acts (e.g., theft) can be morally justified if done in the name of nationalism. This raises troubling questions about the ethical boundaries being promoted, particularly to younger audiences, for whom such narratives may normalise prioritising nationalist sentiment over basic civic values.

More concerning still is the voiceover in the same ad, which claims that “Language is our pride, and who else sacrificed their lives for language?” While Bangladesh’s 1952 Language Movement is unique in its historical and political consequences, the absolutist tone of this statement erases other global struggles for linguistic justice. For instance, the anti-Hindi agitations in Tamil Nadu in 1965 resulted in student deaths through self-immolation (Kannan, 2025); the Soweto Uprising in South Africa in 1976 led to schoolchildren being killed for protesting Afrikaans-medium education (Kulik, 2025); and under Franco’s Spain, speakers of Catalan and Basque faced political persecution and casualties (Tarrow, 1990). Erasing these histories fosters an exclusionary nationalism, centred on singular martyrdom while ignoring shared global resistance to linguistic oppression.

In Olympic Industries’ (Protha – প্রথা, 2022) commercial, a dramatised claim was made that “topmost leader of the monsters” ordered that “all Bangladeshis must speak and write only in Urdu,” implicitly evoking Muhammad Ali Jinnah and the Pakistani regime. This assertion lacks historical grounding. While it is true that Jinnah, during his 1948 visit to Dhaka, publicly advocated for Urdu as the sole state language of Pakistan, there is no documented evidence that he issued a categorical directive banning the use of Bangla. As Islam (2008) clarifies, Jinnah’s position reflected the linguistic centralisation policies of the early Pakistani state but did not amount to a direct prohibition of Bangla. Representing his stance in such absolutist terms oversimplifies a complex historical moment and risks perpetuating misinformation.

Rather than promoting critical engagement with language politics, such portrayals contribute to the mythologising of national history and obscure the nuanced socio-political dynamics that gave rise to the Language Movement.

A similar dynamic is evident in Grameenphone's (2016) IMLD commercial, which suggests that Sierra Leone has granted Bangla special recognition or status as a language. However, subsequent fact-checking by Rumour Scanner demonstrates that Bangla has never been recognised as an official or second-official language in Sierra Leone, and that this claim is based on a popular rumor rather than any documented legal or policy change (Rumour Scanner, 2024). This example further illustrates how commemorative advertising can rely on unverified myths to amplify emotional impact, risking the spread of misinformation about linguistic prestige and global solidarity.

Together, these examples reflect a broader trend of banal nationalism in commercial media, as discussed by Islam (2020). Here, emotionally charged yet ethically questionable narratives are deployed to garner symbolic capital, transforming national history into marketable sentiment. While affective resonance may attract viewers, it can come at the cost of historical integrity, ethical responsibility, and inclusive memory.

5.5 Strategic recommendations for inclusive and ethical campaigns

Drawing from the above analysis and grounded in sociolinguistic and media discourse research, the following recommendations aim to guide advertisers, campaign designers, and policymakers in creating more inclusive, accurate, and ethical IMLD campaigns.

5.5.1 Adopt participatory and collaborative frameworks

Lived realities must inform representation. As Brandt (2014) argues, media representation encodes ideological positions on linguistic

legitimacy. To avoid tokenism, brands should co-create content with linguists, ethnographers, sign language experts, and, most importantly, members of the different linguistic communities. This echoes Skutnabb-Kangas's (2000) call for community-led knowledge production. Such partnerships would ensure more authentic and nuanced portrayals of dialects, regional accents, sign languages, and language contact phenomena.

5.5.2 Promote historical accuracy and ethical integrity

Narratives that simplify, distort, or romanticise the past may achieve emotional impact but risk misinforming the public. Advertisers should verify historical claims and consult historians or sociolinguists when drawing from sensitive political or cultural moments. Ethical storytelling means celebrating national pride without sacrificing truth or encouraging questionable moral lessons.

5.5.3 Expand and institutionalise ethnolinguistic inclusion

Current campaigns have disproportionately centred only on a handful of indigenous groups, leaving many communities invisible in the national media landscape. Given that over 40 minoritised languages are spoken in Bangladesh (Ethnologue, 2023), brands should intentionally include underrepresented groups such as Santali, Manipuri, Oraon, Khasi, Mro, and Bihari/Urdu-speaking communities in their narratives. Beyond symbolic inclusion, however, meaningful representation must also address the persistence of linguistic racism. Commercials like those from Nagad (2022) and RFL Plastics (2019) illustrate how racialised mockery, using derogatory terms such as *Chengbeng* or *Cheng Chung*, continues to circulate in media discourse. Such slurs constitute linguistic violence (Piller, 2016) and must be actively denounced through clear editorial standards and inclusive language practices.

At the same time, celebrating dialects and minority languages in advertisements while maintaining monolingual Bangla or English-only norms within corporate environments reflects a symbolic-structural contradiction. As Bourdieu (1991) argues, institutions play a central role in shaping what is considered legitimate language. Corporations must therefore align their internal policies with the inclusive messages they promote publicly. This means permitting the use of regional dialects and minority languages in informal or non-critical workplace communication, offering training on intercultural and linguistic inclusivity, and auditing recruitment practices for bias against non-standard speakers. Without such institutional commitment, symbolic gestures of diversity risk remaining performative rather than transformative.

5.5.4 Use linguistic microanalysis to spark curiosity

Few campaigns explore the rich pragmatics or semantics of Bangla. The "accha" (okay) intonation study in Fresh (2018) and the pronoun choices in Olympic (2019) provide models for public linguistic engagement. These efforts should be expanded and informed by collaboration with linguists to ensure accuracy, while making language variation accessible and engaging for general audiences.

5.5.5 Invest in understudied languages and structural support

Languages like Bagani (Halda Valley, 2019a), a pidgin spoken by tea laborers in Sylhet, receive almost no institutional or media attention. As Islam (2019) and Hossain (2009) note, such languages are rooted in colonial labour histories and persist despite systemic marginalisation. Their continued neglect in policy and media reflects deeper hierarchies of linguistic legitimacy. Drawing on Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), language preservation should be understood not just as cultural conservation but as a matter of linguistic justice,

ensuring that endangered and hybrid languages are transmitted across generations rather than being erased through omission.

Symbolic inclusion alone is insufficient. Without meaningful investment, campaigns risk falling into the realm of “cause-washing,” a term Andreasen (2006) uses to describe superficial alignment with social causes that lack sustained engagement. To move beyond aestheticised nationalism, brands must integrate Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) initiatives that support long-term efforts in language preservation and equity. This includes funding ethnographic research, enabling community-led digital archiving, and producing educational media in minoritised languages. Recent campaigns by brands such as Akij Cement (Ads of Bangladesh – AdsofBD, 2018), Akij Board (2021), and Rainbow Paints (2018; 2020) provide promising examples of how commercial entities can incorporate cultural narratives within broader CSR frameworks. However, to maximise impact, such efforts must be complemented by sustainable initiatives.

6. Conclusion and future research directions

This study explored the thematic, discursive, and ethical dimensions of Bangladeshi video commercials commemorating International Mother Language Day (IMLD). Drawing from a qualitative analysis of 62 advertisements aired between 2012 and 2024, the research revealed an evolving media landscape in which IMLD-themed campaigns increasingly reflect a more inclusive vision of language and identity, particularly since 2018. Nevertheless, these efforts remain confined mainly to symbolic rituals, characterised by superficial representation, ethical contradictions, and a persistent gap between celebratory messaging and institutional realities.

A key shift was observed from monolingual nationalism to more pluralistic portrayals that include regional dialects, sign language, speech impairments, and selected indigenous languages. However,

these portrayals often lack depth, participatory development, and sustained institutional backing. In some cases, commercials deploy emotionally charged yet historically or ethically questionable narratives, such as romanticising theft for patriotic purposes or oversimplifying the vilification of Urdu. These examples reflect what Islam (2020) describes as banal nationalism and the corporate branding of memory, in which national history is commodified for affective and market impact.

To move beyond aestheticised nationalism and achieve transformative cultural impact, future IMLD advertisements must adopt collaborative, community-informed frameworks, align public messaging with internal corporate practices, and support policy-level engagement with linguistic diversity. Ethical storytelling, grounded in historical accuracy, inclusive memory, and critical reflexivity, is crucial for promoting linguistic justice and social cohesion.

Future research should investigate audience reception across linguistic and ethnic communities, examining how IMLD-themed commercials are interpreted, contested, or internalised. Longitudinal studies could assess whether sustained exposure to inclusive narratives affects language attitudes, media literacy, or participation in policy debates. The apparent decline in dedicated IMLD commercials after 2023 and the absence of new standalone corporate IMLD videos in 2025 within this corpus also raise questions that this study cannot answer. Future work could explore why major brands appear less willing to invest in such campaigns, asking whether advertisers are running out of compelling creative strategies or whether IMLD itself is losing symbolic and commercial appeal in the corporate calendar. Audience studies and interviews with creative professionals would be particularly valuable in clarifying whether this downturn reflects temporary fatigue or a

deeper reconfiguration of commemorative branding around language. Further inquiry might examine the institutional uptake of these media narratives, including whether they inform curriculum design, language policy, or corporate social responsibility agendas, and whether IMLD-themed media merely reflect dominant ideologies or actively reshape them toward a more equitable, multilingual society.

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