

HAGGLING ENCOUNTERS IN DHAKA'S LOCAL-SERVICE BUSES: THE UNCHARTED DISCOURSE

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Abstract

In the micro socio-economic set up of Bangladesh haggling has traditionally occupied a central place. It has particularly been significant in the case of buying and selling goods or certain services. While haggling in the purchase and sale of goods is common, it is less so in the case of the purchase and sale of services. One of few instances of haggling in service encounters is in public transport, more specifically in 'local-service' buses. Therefore, this particular area of social discourse is an interesting case for research and the present study analyses these haggling exchanges. Through a critical discourse analysis, the research, in the first place, attempts to bring to the fore the strategies of haggling that passengers and conductors usually employ to get a win over the bus fare. The study then seeks to unveil the phenomenon of power vis-à-vis haggling, and afterwards analyses haggling's viewpoints. I conclude by offering suggestions for future research.

1. Introduction

The mass transportation system in Bangladesh's capital Dhaka mainly comprises of buses which can be categorized as counter-service and local-service providers. Counter-service buses are the ones that have ticketing system for travelling. In such service passengers purchase tickets from their nearby bus stop and ride in the vehicle from there. Since a bus fare is paid through purchase of a ticket, there is no space for haggling over fare in counter-service buses. On the contrary, local-service buses are known for their ticket-free, cheaper, and flexible rate of fare. Travel charge is flexible in the sense that it can be negotiated to a certain extent by bargaining. These buses are generally named after the route number they travel through the metropolis. For instance, the local-service bus commuting through the Sadarghat—Gabtoli—Sadarghat route is known as *Shaat number* (number seven) as number of the corresponding route is seven. In local-service buses fare schemes for various destinations prevail as *de facto*. Therefore, although a ticketing system is absent in these vehicles, the fare rates are known amongst regular passengers and bus-conductors. Unlike the counter-service bus, the local-service bus picks up people from anywhere on its way. Inside the vehicle the bus-conductor remains busy in collecting fares. He collects fare manually from each passenger one to one. Commuters usually pay the fare only after the conductor asks for it. Still, some passengers as exceptions pay the due even before the conductor asks for or even if he misses to ask for. Notably, due to the overloaded state of local-service

buses conductors often miss few of the passengers' fare even after dealing with them on a one to one basis. However, the ticket-free transportation system renders local-service buses a hotbed for haggling over fares every now and then. So long as both passenger and conductor adhere to the *de facto* fare scheme, the process of fare payment and collection proceeds smoothly. Whenever the passenger tries to pay lower than the regular fare or the conductor claims more than the usual, altercation in the form of haggling takes place.

The present research investigates haggling exchanges in Dhaka's local-service buses and unearths the dynamics of the discourse. The broader aim of this investigation is to contribute to the sparse literature on haggling in the public transportation domain. In its approach, the study seeks answers to the following questions:

1. What strategies do passengers and conductors adopt while haggling?
2. What is the nature of power and how does it operate in public transport haggling discourse?
3. How do hagglers view the act of haggling?

2. Narrowly studied discourse of haggling encounter

The limited number of studies on haggling encounters is situated mostly in marketplace contexts (for instance, see Alexander, 1982 & 1986; Anderson, 1969; Beals, 1975; Cassady, 1974; Cook, 1982; Davis, 1973; Firth, 1966; Geertz, 1963 & 1978; Katzin, 1960; Rees, 1966; Szanton, 1972 etc.). There are barely any in the public transportation domain. As an example, Bourdieu's ethnography in an Algerian context reports the nature of trading exchanges there. Marking the Algerian society "ignorant of capital and capitalistic mechanisms", the researcher finds market trading in the corresponding milieu as a celebration of human relationship beyond a mere deal. Market encounters there, for Bourdieu, are "personal, direct, and specific...in the absence of capital and a labor market" (1962, p. 103).

In their ethnographic work Alexander and Alexander (1987) scrutinize Javanese market places or *pasar* in Indonesia to analyze market trading. In portraying the Javanese trading landscape the researchers maintain that the price of products in the *pasar* is conceptualized as a range and that the bottom of the range is known as *tempil*. Whereas buyers intend to purchase at the *tempil* level of the price range, vendors attempt to drive the unwary consumers away from the *tempil* level as much as possible. Thus, the tug of war between buyer and seller amounts to haggling. To win the bargain both the parties adopt certain bargaining techniques alongside the auxiliary assistance of lying—a quintessential trait of haggling in Javanese marketplace. The authors identify two types of haggling techniques: verbal and non-verbal. The verbal bargaining technique comprises 'maintaining sales patter' and 'switching currency units', while the non-verbal technique entails 'interchanging items', 'walking off', and '*tambahan/tombokan* (adding extra)'. However, the price of certain commodities in Javanese markets is significantly influenced by seasonal factors. For instance, the price of woven hats (worn

when harvesting) climbs by a third as the harvesting season nears. During such time sellers set higher prices and haggle strenuously. They know that the demand for the product is high, so another buyer would be interested to purchase even if the present one declines to pay the price charged. Though vendors do not usually compromise the price at such time, in slack business periods they do to retain turnover. Furthermore, Dewey (1962) reveals that the range of bids and the intensity of bargaining are low when commodities are standardized and their supply is regular. Contrarily, the bidding range and the haggling intensity increase when the quality and the supply of produce are fluctuating. Nonetheless, a haggling encounter features one purchaser bargaining with only one vendor at a time. As haggling commences, other traders do not interrupt. The noisy and acrimonious bargaining sessions in the *pasar* generally close with sellers' "elaborate thanks and handshakes" (Alexander & Alexander, 1987, p. 47).

Most other research on retail encounter adumbrates the generic structure (pattern or stages) of the haggling exchanges (see Ventola, 1987; Eggins & Slade, 1997 etc.). As an example, Mitchel's (1957) study, one of the pioneering works on haggling in retail marketplace territory, identifies the common stages of trading deals in animal and cereal markets. The researcher investigated the Bedouin Arabic language for seven months and discovered five core phases which constitute the retail transactions. The five stages include: salutation, enquiry, investigation, bargaining, and conclusion.

Very few studies in marketplace contexts concentrate on the interactional strategies of the two sides (see Cassady, 1968; Geertz, 1979; Khuri, 1968; Uchendu, 1967 for example). Such investigations mainly find out the tactics that hagglers employ to win bargains. To exemplify, Moseti's (2010) research in multilingual Iranian setting unveils 'code mixing', 'honorific', and 'face and politeness' as the key haggling strategies in the corresponding milieu. Alo and Soneye, on the other hand, remark that 'code switching', 'employment of phatic communion (greeting)/ imperatives/ declaratives/ interrogatives', 'extensive usage of pidgin', 'flouting of 'co-operative maxims'', and 'under evaluation of product(s)' are the five socio-pragmatic features of haggling exchanges in Nigeria's urban marketplaces (2014).

Besides investigating the interactional strategies Ayoola (2009) focuses on the notion of power embedded in discourse of haggling. Since language happens to be the finest medium for indexing any kind of social difference (Fairclough, 1989), the concept of power is common in every discourse; and it is expressed through 'syntactic/textual metaphor' (Kress, 1985). The intricate nexus between language and power can better be perceived from Kress's words:

Language is involved whenever there is contention over and challenge to power. Power does not derive from language, but language may be used to challenge power, to subvert it and to alter distributions of power in the short or the longer term. (1985, p. 52)

Taking stock of this, Ayoola (2009) attends to unveiling the nature of the power operant in the discourse of bargaining alongside identifying the bargaining strategies. He collects data from meat stalls in Nigeria's Lagos metropolis and analyses a number

of haggling encounters. The researcher discovers that buyers and sellers both employ verbal as well as non-verbal tactics in outdoing each other for optimum benefit. Hagglers particularly employ ‘humor and ribaldry’, ‘dysphemism and euphemism’, ‘pleas, abuses, swearing’, ‘cajoling, flattery, and flirting’ as strategies of haggling. Using the strategies, vendor, on the one hand, encourages customer to buy at a price that gives the former a good profit margin. The customer, on the other hand, persuades the vendor to sell at a price which the former considers a bargain. In this way, haggling amounts to a verbal power play. As a non-verbal power practice, hagglers take complementary assistance of persuasive diction, subtle threats, and veiled intimidation alongside the bargaining strategies. Many a skillful customer walks away to check the price elsewhere, while the vendor continues calling and pleading him/her to return to purchase the product at the former’s desired price. Thus, the interactors frequently attempt to practice power on each other—an act which Ayoola analyses as “capacity of either party in the interaction to produce an effect on the other” (p. 392). In the process, few-second-long to several-minute-long haggling often turns adversarial. Importantly, however, features such as age, sex, appearance, and demeanor of a customer often reflect real or imagined power in a haggling exchange. Therefore, while well-groomed, nicely turned out, round cheeked, and smooth skinned customers are courteously addressed, the ones with opposite qualities, from unprivileged class, including children and women, often face maltreatment in a typical haggling encounter.

3. Methodology of the current investigation

This qualitative study employs ethnographic field observation (Dornyei, 2007) to generate data. The data include 90 instances of haggling encounters between conductors and passengers. From the 90 conversations nine representative instances have been selected using the process of ‘quota sampling’ (Cohen *et al.*, p. 114) for detailed analysis. Besides, 21 conversation sessions with conductors and commuters, derived through ‘informal conversational interview’ (Patton, 1980, p. 206), are also indexed in the data bank. Amongst the 21 interviews 11 are with passengers, 10 male and one female, age ranging between 20-50 years. Notably, out of the 11 riders, six are students (including the female passenger) and five are various professionals such as small businessmen, community health worker etc. The other ten conversations are with conductors (all male) aging around 14-38 years. However, all the data have been recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for about a period of twenty four months.

For data analysis the present qualitative study deploys Norman Fairclough’s three-dimensional approach to discourse analysis (1995). The analytic framework primarily concentrates on “description of the language text”, “interpretation of the relationship between the discursive process and the text”, and “explanation of the relationship between the discursive and the social process” (p. 97). In other words, description, interpretation, and explanation of haggling exchanges are key here to decoding the discourse of haggling.

4. Strategies of haggling adopted in Dhaka's local-service buses

Amongst all the instances of service purchase and sale in Bangladesh only public transport, specifically local-service buses, provide scope for haggling. To manipulate haggling encounters in their own favor passengers and conductors both frequently employ some tactics. The haggling strategies are: alternate identity creation, slangs and physical abuse, reasoning, subterfuge, and cajoling.

(i) *Alternate identity creation*

One of the most frequently used strategies to influence haggling is the creation of alternate identity by passengers. In utilizing this strategy they identify themselves with people from a particular occupational background of the society. Commuters generally adopt the alternate identity of student and 'staff'. Identifying themselves as either of the two, travelers assume a secondary identity in the bus alongside the primary identity of passengers. Both the alternate identities have significance in Bangladesh's social context. This enables the two classes of people to enjoy certain social benefits such as concession in public transport fare. Many riders therefore try to avail the advantage while haggling by identifying with students or bus staffs. Haggling exchange A presents how a passenger, who identifies himself as a student, succeeds in paying half of the fare simply by assuming the alternate identity.

Haggling exchange A (Original Bengali in square brackets)

Conductor	Bus fare please [Mama bharada].
Passenger	(Hands over a 10 taka note)
Conductor	Where will you go [Koi jaiben]?
Passenger	I will go to Mirpur [Mirpur jaamu].
Conductor	Where have you started from [Koi theka uuthsen]?
Passenger	From Gulistan [Gulistan theka].
Conductor	The fare from Gulistan to Mirpur is 20 taka [Gulistan theka Mirpur bish taka bhara].
Passenger	Take the fare for a student [Student bhara raakho maamaa].
Conductor	Okay, it's alright then [Aaicchhaa thik asay].

The encounter documents the significance of student identity in Bangladesh society. Although the actual fare for travelling from Gulistan to Mirpur is 20 taka, with the identity of student the passenger cuts half of the cost. While haggling and justifying his payment, the commuter neither explicitly identifies himself as a student nor displays any evidence of his assumed identity. Instead, he provides hint by saying "Student bhara rakho maamaa" (take the fare for a student). The conductor infers the passenger's alternate identity from the utterance and waives half of the fare. Interviews with conductors and passengers reveal that due to students' brave and crucial contribution to Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971 they have historically been esteemed. Therefore as a token of gratitude they are facilitated with half fares while travelling. In fact, for the same reason freedom fighters are offered full discount in fare in local-service buses. Nonetheless, students are considered to be financially dependent and vulnerable; this perception too allows them to pay half of the fare (personal communication with conductors and passengers, 2015).

Some commuters alternatively identify themselves as ‘staff’ who travel for free. Here ‘staff’ refers to those who work in public transport either as conductor or as driver. Since the ‘staffs’ belong to the same class as bus conductors, as a sign of solidarity the former receives absolute discount in bus fare. Hagging exchange B mirrors similar a case.

Hagging exchange B (Original Bengali in square brackets)

- | | |
|-------------|---|
| Conductor | Pay the fare, if you have not paid [Bhara na hoilay diyen]. |
| Passenger | I’m bus staff [Staff]. |
| Conductor | Which transport do you work in [Kon gaarir staff]? |
| Passenger | I have an identity card provided by the bus-owners’ |
| association | [Malik shomitir card asay]. |
| Conductor | Show me the evidence [Card taa theyhee]. |
| Passenger | (Brings out the identity card from his pocket, displays it, and quietly withdraws from the conversation throwing his look outside). |
| Conductor | (Instantly moves to other passengers to collect fare). |

In the encounter the conductor asks the passenger to show his identity document to verify the claimed identity. Since some passengers tend to cheat by assuming fake alternate identities to escape fare, conductors often ask students or ‘staff’ to display identity cards to verify the alternate identities.

However, an alternate identity as a hagging strategy does not offer success to commuters in the latter part of the day. Particularly from evening onwards, student travelers have to bargain hard to get concession in fare. In this vein, conductors opine that educational institutions in Dhaka close by the afternoon. Hence all students should return home before sunset and there are supposed to be no student passengers after twilight (personal communication with conductors, 2015). Thus, for conductors the alternate identity of student is a temporal concept which is valid from dawn to dusk on working days only. Yet, male students often win hagging encounters after dusk or on weekends with such strategies as persuasion and flattering, physical/verbal fighting (elaborated later) and so forth. Contrarily, female students struggle to win the bargain when educational institutions are closed. As most female travelers do not use any other effective hagging strategy except alternate identity on weekends or after dusk, they usually have to pay the full fare at these times. Hagging exchange C, however, marks a completely different and rare case in which the conductor appears speechless when a female student rider, to the conductor’s utter surprise, counter argues while hagging and wins the show.

Hagging exchange C (Original Bengali in square brackets)

- | | |
|-----------|---------------------------------------|
| Conductor | Have you paid the fare [Bhara oisay]. |
| Passenger | No [Naa]. |
| | (Gives the conductor 12 taka) |
| Conductor | Where will you go [Koi jaaiben]? |
| Passenger | I’ll go to Mirpur [Mirpur]. |

Conductor	Where have you got in from [Koi theka uuthsen]?
Passenger	From Gulistan [Gulistan].
Conductor	The fare from Gulistan to Mirpur is 24 taka [24 taka bhara]. You need to pay 12 taka more [Aaro 12 taka than].
Passenger	Isn't the student fare 12 taka [Student bhara 12 taka na]?
Conductor	There is no student fare at night [Raaitayr bela student bhara nai]. (Extends his hand towards the passenger to get the money)
Passenger	Do you mean that students become rich at night to pay the full fare [Kan, raiteyr bela ki student ra borolok hoiya jai]?
Conductor	(Takes his hand back and moves to the next passenger with a look of astonishment)

The conductor above appears utterly shocked to find the woman student passenger replying to his statement "Riateyr bela student bhara nai" (There is no student fare at night). He initially takes it for granted that she would pay him the full fare, but the rider's rhetorical form of counter reasoning "Kan, raiteyr bela ki student ra borolok hoiya jai" (Do you mean that students become rich at night to pay the full fare?) dumbfounds him. What renders the rhetorical question more striking is its implied meaning. The rhetoric implies that the conductor's logic for not accepting student fare at night because of educational institutions being shut is feeble and foolish; therefore the conductor is foolish as well. The commuter's verbal punch here is less direct but with the interrogative tone of the rhetoric, the attack strikes deep. Hence, the conductor promptly pulls back his extended hand without haggling any further.

(ii) Slang and physical abuse

Some passengers become abusive when the conductor refuses to accept less than the regular fare. This results in passengers losing their guard and abusing the conductor by means of slang. When the conductor verbally resists the former, the verbally abusive haggling sometimes escalates to physical abuse. Haggling exchange D testifies such a case in which the passenger physically abuses the conductor to make him accept less than the actual fare, without providing any valid reason for paying less.

Haggling exchange D (Original Bengali in square brackets)

Conductor	Brother, bus fare please [Bhai bhara da].
Passenger	Here it is [Ei lawo]. (Hands over a 10 taka note). Going to go to Gulistan [Gulistan jaamu].
Conductor	Haven't you started from Mirpur [Mirpur theka uuthsen na]?
Passenger	Yes [Haw].
Conductor	In that case you have to pay 12 taka [Tailey baaro taka bhara].
Passenger	You must take 10 taka [Dosh taka disi, rakh].
Conductor	The actual fare is 12 taka, so why would I have to take 10 [Legal bhara baaro taka, 10 taka rakhum kan]?
Passenger	I have ordered you to keep 10 taka [Koisi na dosh taka raktay].
Conductor	You need to justify why I would accept 10 taka as bus fare from you [Dosh taka rakhum kan koiben to].

- Passenger You son of a bitch, move away from here [Oi kuttar baccha, jaa eihan theka].
- Conductor Why are you swearing [Gaali than kan]?
You must pay 2 taka more [Aaro dui taka than].
- Passenger You are again begging 2 taka [Tui abaar dui taka chaas]!
(Starts smacking the conductor).

The physically violent haggling as above generally ends with other passengers' interfering. After the termination of physical aggression, the commuter waits for his destination to be reached. On the other hand, the conductor, in beaten and tormented condition, goes back to his duty of collecting fare from other riders. In some cases, while the physically abusive commuter gets off the bus the conductor calls out after him in anguish.

In most instances it is the passenger who, to win a bargain, starts assaulting the conductor physically. Physical abuse does not take place at all if the conductor, even after being bombarded with slang by the passenger, remains non-reactive. Verbal and physical abuse remain completely missing when female travelers are involved in haggling. Though elderly commuters seldom [verbally] abuse conductors, the latter does not usually exhibit vengeful behavior because of the former's social status of *murubbi*— senior citizens of society who are respected due to their age and prudence. Conductors in such situations, with an expression of repugnance, simply remind the aged about society's expectation of courteous behavior from the latter. The same is documented in haggling exchange E below.

Haggling exchange E (Original Bengali in square brackets)

- Conductor Uncle, would you please pay the fare [Chaachaa bharada diyen]?
- Passenger What is the fare to Bashundhara [Bashundhara koto]?
- Conductor It is 15 taka [15 taka]?
- Passenger (Hands over 14 taka)
- Conductor You need to pay 1 more taka [Aar koi chaachaa].
- Passenger Keep the 14 [14 taka rakh].
- Conductor Why would I take 14 [Kan]?
Give 1 taka more [Aaro 1 taka than].
- Passenger Go away, you son of a prostitute [Jaa khankirpu].
- Conductor If you don't have money, then say that; you ought not to swear. You have become old enough; so you should speak and behave properly [Taka na thaklay koiben naai; gaali than ka. Boyosh to kom oilona; mukta thik koren].

(iii) Reasoning

When passengers or conductors feel that the amount of fare being demanded or being paid is unreasonable, they employ reasoning to win bargains. Passengers do reasoning by calculating the fare in terms of distance they travel. In contrast, conductors do reasoning by claiming that their income is insufficient to meet day to day expenses after clearing the bus-owner's due at the end of the day. Haggling exchange F below exemplifies an instance.

Haggling exchange F (Original Bengali in square brackets)

- Conductor Pay your bus-fare [Bhara than].
- Passenger (Hands over 4 taka)
Have got in from Gulistan, will go to Farmgate [Gulistan theka uuthsi, Farmgate jabo].
- Conductor Fare from Gulistan to Farmgate is 6 taka [Gulistan theka Farmgate bhara chhoy taka].
You have to pay 2 more taka [Aaro dui taka deben].
- Passenger Why would I give you 2 taka more [Dui taka demu kan]?
Actual fare is 4 taka; I travel regularly at that rate [Chaar taka bhara, roj jaai].
- Conductor It is not only you who travels regularly but we also run bus every day in this route [Aapney roj jaan, aamrao roj chaalai].
6 is the regular fare, so you must pay 2 more [Chhoy taka bhara, dui taka than].
- Passenger How can the fare be 6 taka [Chhoy taka bhara kemnay hoy]?
What's the fare scheme from Gulistan to Shahbag [Gulistan theka Shahbag koto]?
- Conductor 2 taka [Dui taka].
- Passenger What for Shahbag to Farmgate [Shahbag theka Farmgate]?
- Conductor The fare is 2 taka [Dui taka].
- Passenger So how is the total fare 6 taka [Tailay chhoy taka bhara kamne]?
- Conductor We can't profit much if you calculate thus. The bus-owner has to be paid 4,000 taka everyday [Omney bhaingaa hishab korlay poshaina bhai. Maliker joma deyon lagey diney chaaeer hazaar taka].
(Afterwards concentrates on other passengers).

It is important to note that in Dhaka metropolis a local-service bus is hired from its owner for a day by a bus-driver and his conductor. The bus is hired under a contract that a certain amount of money, determined by the bus-owner, has to be paid as rent at the end of the day. After clearing the owners' due, whatever sum of money remains is shared by the driver, his conductor, and sometimes a helper— who assists the conductor by verbally calling passengers to get in the bus. Each gets a certain percentage of money according to his status in the social hierarchy. Since the driver holds a higher position on the ladder than the conductor or helper, the former decides who would get how much. Understandably the driver earns more than the conductor and the helper (Personal communication with conductors, 2015).

However, in another form of reasoning passengers tend to question the sitting-service facility offered by some local-service buses. Although the local-service category runs through the metropolis in over loaded condition in general, some buses run on a sitting-service basis. These vehicles carry the number of passengers equal to the number of seats available. Thus, on the ground of providing better service the particular local-service buses charge riders more than the regular fare. Breaking

the rule when these buses carry extra passengers, conflict arises. Some of the sitting passengers bargain over the extra fare being charged, questioning the sitting-service facility. In the following exchange, a commuter, who travels sitting, reasons against the increased fare, although the conductor successfully defends his position through counter logic.

Haggling exchange G (Original Bengali in square brackets)

Conductor	The fare please [Bharada diyen].
Passenger	(Hands over the conductor a 5 taka note)
Conductor	Why have you paid this much [Koto thelen]? 8 taka is the fare; please give 3 taka more [8 taka bhara; aaro 3 taka than].
Passenger	Sitting-service buses can charge 8, but this one is a local-service provider [Sitting bhara 8 taka, tomar gaari to local]. This bus is carrying standing passengers; that's why you deserve the local fare rate of 5 taka [Tomar garitay lok darai jai; tumi local bhara paba].
Conductor	The standing passengers have got in the bus forcefully [Jor koira uthse]. What can I do [Ki kormu]? Please give another 3 taka [Than, aar 3 taka than].
Passenger	Lock the door as soon as all the seats are filled up, so nobody extra can forcefully get in [Dorjaa bondho rakba, tailay aar uutbo naa]. (Finishing his words the commuter hands over 3 more taka to the conductor and the latter approaches other passengers)

The exchange denotes that reasoning is an influential bargaining strategy which is used by both passengers and conductors. In justifying his initial payment of five taka the commuter points towards standing riders and utilizes that as a reason. On the other hand, to defend his position, the conductor brings forth the logic of forceful boarding by retorting “Jor koira uthse” (The standing passengers have ridden in the bus forcefully). Thus the former shifts the blame on standing riders and succeeds in proving himself innocent. A conductor, in this vein, admits that the bus door is often kept open intentionally after the seats get filled up. This is done to exploit the counter logic of forceful boarding by commuters (personal communication with conductors, 2015). Notably, during haggling when any aware passenger asks conductor about the reason for keeping the entrance open even after having all the seats filled, the latter remains quiet. The conductor at that point ceases haggling and turns to other commuters to collect fare.

(iv) Subterfuge

There is a tendency among some bus-conductors, if not many, to cheat passengers while haggling to maximize profit. In utilizing the strategy conductors charge passengers an increased amount, usually adding two to five taka extra to the actual fare. The former

applies the strategy only on those who are not aware of the cost for their respective destinations. Whenever any passenger enquires about the fare the conductor spots him/her as new in the route and attempts deception, exploiting his/her ignorance of fare scheme. Travelers who learn about the fare scheme by asking fellow passengers, who regularly travel the route, instead of conductors avoid being deceived. Such a case is evident from haggling exchange H in which the conductor tries to win the bargain by means of subterfuge, although the passenger dismisses the attempt.

Haggling exchange H (Original Bengali in square brackets)

Conductor	Your bus-fare please, brother [Bhaarada diyen bhai].
Passenger	How much is the fare from Farmgate to Mohakhali [Farmgate thekay Mohakhali koto]?
Conductor	5 taka [Paach taka].
Passenger	Actual fare is 3 taka, why are you claiming 5 [Tiin takar bhaara paach taka kan]? You would have cheated me today had I not known the real fare scheme [Ashol bhaara naa janlay to aaij amaray thokaita].
Conductor	Okay, you pay 3taka [Aicchaa aapney tiin taka e than]. (Receives 3 taka from the passenger and leaves the spot)

The exchange above indicates that conductors using the strategy of subterfuge act quite confidently. In response to the commuter's query regarding the fare the conductor, without any hesitation, charges more than the regular. When, however, the passenger catches his ploy red-handed, the conductor gives up by requesting the actual fare. Though conductors often get caught while employing subterfuge, they hardly seem bothered about the consequences such as losing face. They keep applying the strategy on as many travelers as possible solely for extra income and thus for a better living standard (personal communication with conductors, 2014).

(v) Cajoling

Some passengers and conductors use cajoling as a means of gaining some benefit in haggling. In employing this strategy conductors use terms of endearment such as *maamaa* (maternal uncle), *bhaai* (brother), *aapaa* (sister), *khaalaa* (aunt), *chaachaa* (uncle) etc. to address passengers. By building up a rapport with the latter, the former attempts to draw more fare than the regular. Similarly commuters, particularly those short of money to pay the due fare, address conductors as *maamaa* (maternal uncle) and *baabaa* (father) as a strategy of cajoling during haggling. Usually passengers older than the conductors use this strategy. Younger or similar aged commuters who lack cash usually do two things to win a bargain: they either inform the conductor about the matter explicitly or adopt either of the strategies between alternate identity and verbal/physical abuse. However, with the help of such a flattering strategy both the haggling parties attempt to create a sense of kinship. They do so to soften the minds of haggling counterparts, in turn, to gain an edge in bargaining (personal communication, 2015). In haggling exchange I a conductor persuades a passenger prior to Eid-ul-Fitr— the biggest religious festival in Muslim-majority Bangladesh.

Haggling exchange I (Original Bengali in square brackets)

Conductor	Bus fare please [Mama bharada].
Passenger	(Hands over a 5 taka note) I want 2 taka as change [Dui taka dao].
Conductor	Where will you go [Koi jaaiben]?
Passenger	I will go to Hajipara [Hajipara].
Conductor	The fare is 5 taka dear [Paach taka bhara mama].
Passenger	Is the fare from Malibag to Hajipara 5 taka [Malibag theka Hajipara paach taka]?
Conductor	Eid is nearing [Shaamnay Eid mama].
Passenger	You can charge more on Eid day [Eid ar din beshi raaikho].
Conductor	We will be off on Eid day [Eid ar din gaari chaalamu naa mama]. (Moves to other passengers)

Use of flattering as a bargaining strategy rises among conductors significantly on days of festivities. For example, on religious occasions such as Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-ul-Azha, Durga puja, Christmas and on national holidays such as Pahela Baishakh (first day of Bengali new year), they pursue passengers noticeably to pay more than the regular fare. Conductors claim the extra penny as *bokhshish* or a bonus. It is their argument that since they do not get any kind of festival bonus from their employers, conductors look to earn something additional—the *bokhshish*—on those days through flattery (personal communication, 2015).

5. Nature of power embedded in the haggling strategies

Based on the analysis of haggling exchanges above it can be insinuated that the bargaining strategies entail power which is discursive in nature. This inconsistent character of power can best be understood from a Foucauldian understanding of the concept rather than from a more traditional theoretical understanding.

As a usual practice traditional strands of critical theory, such as Marxism, treat the idea of power in a one-dimensional way. According to Berg (2009), power in such theories is a concept which is practiced over a ‘pre given’ weaker and powerless object (i.e. the working class) by a powerful and hegemonic subject (i.e. the upper class). Power is thus a ‘top down’ practice and is exclusively repressive in nature. Hence, practitioners or analysts who look into power through the lens of Marxism or similar other critical theories have a uniform objective—to identify the agent of power as well as the inlet[s] where power is manifested.

In contrast to the above singularist view, French social theorist Michel Foucault conceptualizes power discursively (Berg, 2009). For Foucault, in every social practice, including haggling, power has a plethora of roles to play. Berg reduces Foucault’s discursive understanding of power to two main points. First, power is discursive as it has both repressive as well as productive role in every social action. To be specific, in a given social encounter power not only “prevents action or controls existing agents and outcomes” but “creates new actions, events, agents, and outcomes” (p.

216). Second, power is discursive as it holds a flexible outlook towards the notions of subject and object of any social interaction. In a particular social encounter power does not have a constant subject or object; rather their position is subject to change. Such interchangeable role of subject and object is an outcome of power's overarching role in a given social interaction. By nature power infiltrates every bit of the social practice and thus produces new subjects and objects instead of "operating between pre-given subjects and objects" (Berg, 2009, p. 215).

A close reading of the haggling strategies at this stage unfolds two key features of power as explained by Foucault. First, in the action of bargaining power is repressive as well as productive; second, during haggling power belongs to no exclusive, single agent. To speak of the first trait, haggling strategies imbued with power are not only repressive but also productive in nature. While one set of strategies prevents a party of hagglers from winning bargain, the same party fetches win with the help of the other set. To illustrate, subterfuge and cajoling— the two strategies used by conductors — bring loss to passengers in bargain. Thus the two strategies exhibit repressive power to commuters. Haggling strategies mark productive power for riders when alternate identity and slangs/physical abuse assist them to win over conductors. Power executes the same repressive and productive roles for conductors too. It acts repressively when alternate identity and slangs/physical abuse impede conductors from winning a bargain. Power assumes a productive form when subterfuge and cajoling bring them win. Interestingly, however, reasoning is the only strategy out of the five which holds repressive and productive power together. For instance, based on the distance travelled, passengers' reasoning over conductors' demanded fare incurs the latter loss but fetches the former win (see haggling exchange F). Contrarily, conductors' reasoning over commuters' objections regarding sitting-service facility helps the former win but brings the latter defeat (see haggling exchange G). This is how reasoning implies repression and production both for each haggling party. The table below provides an overview of the discursive characteristic (in terms of repressiveness and productiveness) of power embedded in the haggling strategies.

Table 1. Repressive & productive nature of power at a glance.

Strategy of Haggling	Nature of Power (Passenger's perspective)	Nature of Power (Conductor's perspective)
Alternate identity	Productive	Repressive
Slangs and physical abuse	Productive	Repressive
Subterfuge	Repressive	Productive
Cajoling	Repressive	Productive
Reasoning	Productive & Repressive	Productive & Repressive

To talk about the second trait of power, in a Foucauldian sense, no single subject or non-reciprocal agent occupies the supreme position in the haggling encounters. In other words, neither passengers nor conductors can be considered as the only source of power. Agency of power rather shifts with the change in haggling strategies. As an instance, when alternate identity and slangs/physical abuse are in action passengers tend to be in charge of power. Using the two strategies, commuters shape power productively and win the bargain. On the contrary, when subterfuge and cajoling appear in the scene the power agency shifts towards conductors; and it assists them in winning haggling encounters. However, the strategy of reasoning can render both conductors and passengers the subject or resource of power in a single encounter. For example, in encounter F the agent of power alters twice within one haggling session: first, on the ground of distance travelled when the passenger reasons over the fare being demanded; second, when the conductor throws counter reason to defend the demand. In the two occasions there emerge two different agents of action. The passenger becomes subject as he successfully utilizes the power of reasoning not to pay the extra fare. Likewise the conductor turns into the agent of power as he has a counter reason to retort to the commuter and thus avoid silent defeat.

6. The hagglers' view on haggling

Conductors and passengers have their own reasons behind involvement in and conceptions of the act of haggling. Both the parties share the view that their participation in the bargaining process to be just based on certain backstage factors. The socio-economic composition of contemporary urban Dhaka is one of those background factors which mold their haggling behavior significantly.

Conductors' perspectives on haggling

Conductors evaluate bargaining as pragmatically necessary and a morally justified action on their part. It is practically relevant on the ground of their unstable financial condition. In Dhaka's local-service buses a conductor generally serves on daily payment basis. His unfixed income usually ranges between 150-300 taka per day, depending on the amount left after the bus-owner and the driver pocket their shares. A conductor's earning drop further when many passengers ask for a waiver in the fare. Since bus-owners do not usually discount riders with alternate identity when drawing dues for a day, ultimately the conductor has to bear the burden of waived fares. To ensure a sustained and relatively stable inflow of income, thus, to meet all practical necessities, the former bargains hard. A 28-year-old conductor echoes this in an interview:

The bus-owner does not consider students or freedom fighters when calculating his share. If I take less from a student rider, I have to pay for that. That is why I have to bargain even if I do not like it. It is useless if I cannot earn 300 taka every day, isn't it? [Maalikay student bhara bujaynaa, muktijoddha bujaynaa. Student bhara raakhlay aamaar pocket theka thayon laagbo. Tai bhalo naa laaglay o bhara nea jhogra kortay oy. Daily 300 taka naa thkalay poshai?]

Some conductors consider it morally just to haggle with passengers carrying an alternate identity as students. The former perceive that male travelers who pay student fares waste their saved money on purposes such as smoking, gossiping with friends on mobile phones, and so forth. Since these student riders do not use the money for productive causes such as education, the conductors think there ought to be no moral obligation on their part to accept student fares. Consequently some conductors bargain with student passengers strenuously. Those who do not haggle with student commuters hold a rather positive outlook towards the student entity. They believe that students are the future change makers of the country. Therefore they deserve society's support to be self-dependent so to take charge of their family, in turn, of the society and the country. One 38-year-old conductor adds:

There are so many students whose parents cannot afford their wards' education. Those children work hard, work as tutors to earn money and provide for their education. If we take student fares from them, they will be able to pursue better education with the saved money. Becoming educated, they will be able to serve their parents and the country. [Onek baap-maa poraar khoroch ditay paarayna. Oi shob polapaan koshto koira tuitiony koira poray. Aamraa student bhara rakhlay ora poiraa maanush hoia baap-mayer sheba korte paarbo, dehsher sheba kortay paarbo.]

Nevertheless, all the conductors interviewed admit their exploitation of the two strategies as corrupt practice. They confess that the use of reasoning to justify standing travelers' places in sitting-service buses and the employment of subterfuge to earn extra from irregular commuters on a given route are unethical; but they adopt such unfair means only to boost their incomes. A 25-year-old conductor maintains:

A few extra passengers in sitting-service buses mean some extra pennies. The regular sitting-service trips bring decent money, but a few extra passengers ensure healthy income. The latter practice is not fair I know, but the extra riders make my earnings really nice. [Sitting-service a duida passenger beshi uthailay koyda beshi aye hoy. Sitting jaatri nilay bhaloi bhara uthay. Dui-akjon beshi nilay aamaar kisu thakay. Eidaa thik naa; kintu dui-akjon baarti nilay incomedaa bhalo hoy.]

In reflecting on the reason behind such deceitful action, conductors highlight the difficult socio-economic reality and dishonesty of some travelers as their motivation. As discussed earlier, conductors barely make incomes above 300 taka per day. With the money earned it often becomes difficult for them to provide for their families. Especially when they are the lone earners in their families with a number of dependents, conductors feel the pressing need to maximize earnings by cheating passengers while haggling. Some commuters' unscrupulous activities such as traveling without paying a fare or riding with fake alternate identities (to have the fare waived) also lead conductors to commit fraud. Due to the overloaded conditions of the buses conductors often fail to collect all the passengers' fare. They cannot always also check commuters' alternate identity. Dishonest riders exploit conductors' failure and travel either without paying

or paying less on the grounds of alternate identities which are false. To compensate for the loss conductors tend to cheat other passengers. The same is reflected in a 20-year-old's words:

There are some passengers who would not pay the fare if I do not ask for it. There are some who identify themselves as students although in appearance it is clear that they are service holders. There are also some who would pay less for no reason but would swear and beat me if I ask for the just fare. To make up for such losses sometimes I have to cheat other commuters. [Koto jaatri asaay bhara na dea naima jai ami naa jigailay. Koto asay koibo student. Dekhlay e kawon jai beda chakri kore. Abaar koto asay hudai kom debo. Bhara chailay gaali thay, maaray. Oida poshanayr lega onno passenger ar theka beshi loitay hoy aar naailay diuda manush beshi tultay hoy.]

Passengers' perspectives on haggling

Passengers, like conductors, find bargaining over fares relevant to their cause. Some commuters view haggling as essential, as it empowers them to speak against conductors' unreasonable demands and helps them pay the proper fare. This category of passengers considers the entire local-service bus setting including conductors as corrupt. Hence a 45-year-old government employee reiterates the significance of bargaining in the following manner.

All the conductors of local-service buses have thieving instincts. They are so greedy. Some of them are addicted to drugs. Fighting with them is customary if one wants to pay the right fare. [Local bus ar shob conductor hoilo chor. Ogo khida ato beshi j jotoi bhara uthak ogo pet bhoray naa. Aegulir moddhe kotoguli asay heroinekhor. Ogo shathay roj bhara nea genjaam baadhbo.]

Travelers from various other professional backgrounds mention the rising cost of everyday life in Dhaka as their motivation for bargaining. They note that Dhaka's contemporary economy is marked with inflation. This renders many middle-class commuters anxious to save every single penny which often drives passengers towards unnecessary haggling.

Dhaka's life is so expensive that I literally struggle to bear my family expenditures. Moreover, when I find a conductor demanding five taka for a small distance, which should be two taka, I lose my patience. Then I rebuke the conductor; sometimes I beat him even. [Dhaka shohoray khoroch ato beshi j shongsahar chalatay himshim khaai. Taar upor bus a uthlay conductor jokhon olpo durottayr 2 takar bhara 5 taka chai, tokhon matha thik thaakayna. Tokhon chilla-chilli kori; majhay majhay maaeer o dei.]

Riders with alternate identities, particularly students, get involved in haggling to save for various expenses. The six student participants in this study report that the majority of the Dhaka resident students depend on their parents (or guardians) for

expenses such as mobile phone bills, internet usage bills, pocket money etc. Having no source of income, the students have to meet all such expenses from a 'low' budget allocated by their family. So that they can spend a bit more liberally, students try to accumulate some more money in every possible way. In this respect they consider claiming their alternate identity during bargaining as an effective way out. There are also some students from impoverished families who have to afford a certain portion of their educational cost themselves. To help finance their educational expenses by saving money these students choose haggling. On this note, a 23-year-old female student rider comments:

Ideally it is the state's responsibility, alongside my parents, to ensure my civil rights such as education. None of them can execute their duties properly, so I have to provide tuition to earn, to live, and to study. In my everyday struggling journey, my student identity helps me save money to a certain extent and makes my life easier.

Conversation with the passenger above further reveals the reason behind the absence of female haggling in Dhaka's local-service buses. The social structure of Bangladesh is male-dominated and so is that of Dhaka. This patriarchal characteristic of the metropolis categorizes female passengers, who bargain and thus make their voice heard, as fishwives or low-class women. To avoid being labeled as such and to save face most women travelers avoid haggling in local-service buses. They would rather remain reticent and pay whatever the conductors ask for, even if the amount is unjust.

7. Implications

Conductors' and passengers' bargaining over fares in Dhaka's local-service buses reveals a number of significant aspects regarding Dhaka's socio-economic landscape. First, accumulation of capital is the common and sole interest of both haggling parties. Only to accomplish this goal the two interacting bodies get involved in bargaining. They receive fuel from factors such as economic disparity, increased daily expenses and the like. Being driven by these 'pragmatic' needs, both conductors and commuters employ certain haggling strategies to win the show. Since both parties' aims here are to achieve 'justice' in a 'reasonable' manner, conductors' cheating of travelers or the latter's violent behavior towards the former remains 'valid' to both the haggling counterparts. Second, Dhaka's patriarchal social structure restricts women from participating in haggling. The male-dominant society ascribes female haggling as 'fishwives' and perpetuates subjugation and economic subordination to men. Third, the age of haggling is a crucial determinant of how strenuous a bargain can be. Haggling sessions are more intense in the presence of relatively mature (in terms of age) conductors and commuters. With aging arise more responsibility and material needs; and to meet them grown-up representatives from the both the parties tend to bargain hard.

8. Conclusion

Discoveries of the present research can be crucial on a number of points. The study can help us understand sociolinguistic and socio-cultural practices related to haggling in contexts similar to Dhaka. The investigation also creates grounds for future research. Particularly, there is scope for studying haggling in Dhaka's other public transport such as human driven rickshaws and CNG-run auto rickshaws. Adumbrating the generic structure or stages of haggling exchanges is another research-worthy area to elicit a structural understanding of the discourse. Moving beyond bazaar/marketplace-based research on haggling, other diverse fields can also be explored. In this vein, investigation on haggling in land purchases and sales in South East Asia can add a new dimension to the discourse. It is necessary for social-science researchers to conduct a wide range of investigation to bring the uncharted discourse of haggling to light. From such research we can start to draw a convincing and comprehensive theoretical framework of the entire discourse.

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