

# PROBLEMS BANGLADESHI LEARNERS FACE IN PRONOUNCING CERTAIN ENGLISH PHONEMES

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## ABSTRACT

Bangladeshi EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners, very naturally, are expected to face problems in pronouncing certain phonemes of English since English is a stress-timed language as opposed to Bangla which is a syllable-timed language. Besides these, there are plenty of factors that are responsible for causing difficulties for Bangladeshi EFL learners in pronouncing specific phonemes of English like fricatives, affricates, diphthongs etc. The objective of this paper is to find out Bangladeshi EFL learners' pronunciation difficulties so that we can devise some strategies to teach them the correct pronunciations. The characteristic differences between the sound patterns of Bangla and English language cause further difficulties for Bangladeshi EFL learners. Some hypotheses are formulated stating the difficulties that Bangladeshi EFL learners might face in pronouncing complex phonemes of English. This study is divided into two parts: segmental elements and supra segmental features. Bangladeshi learners have most problems in pronouncing the fricatives, affricates, diphthongs and vowels. They cannot speak English with proper accent and many aspects of connected speech are also absent in their speech. To reduce these problems, some solutions are suggested here: teachers can devise some tongue twisters, mnemonics, minimal pairs, rhymes to minimize the pronunciation difficulties faced by Bangladeshi EFL learners.

Due to the different phonetic patterns of Bangla and English languages, speakers of Bangla language are supposed to face some difficulties in pronouncing certain phonemes of English. The particular EFL context of Bangladesh makes the situation even more complex. The objective of this paper is to find out Bangladeshi EFL learners' pronunciation difficulties so that we can devise some strategies to teach them the correct pronunciations.

It is a common fact that adults have more difficulty in mastering the pronunciation of a foreign language than children. Grown-ups cannot pick up the characteristic sounds of a foreign language as easily as a child can because of the interference of their mother tongue (O'Connor, 2). As we grow up to be adults, the habits of our first language become too strong in us and we cannot acquire a second language as easily.

The concept of pronunciation may be said to include the sounds of the language as well as stress, rhythm and intonation (Ur, 47). Sounds of the language fall under segmental elements whereas stress, rhythm and intonation are supra segmental features. Problems in the sounds of the

language seem more obvious, but stress and intonation patterns are not to be overlooked also. Even after having learned the proper sounds, a person might not be properly legible if he has not got the correct accent or intonation pattern.

Fricatives are quite common in many languages. Fricatives are consonants with the characteristic that when they are produced, air escapes through a small passage and makes a hissing sound (Roach, 48). In English, there are fricatives (like / ʒ / and / z / ) which do not have any equivalents in standard Bangla, although /z/ has an equivalent in dialectal Bangla. Again, other fricatives (like /f/, /v/, / θ /, / ð / ) are pronounced differently than similar Bangla sounds ( /p<sup>h</sup>/ / b<sup>h</sup>/ / t<sup>h</sup>/ / d<sup>h</sup>/ respectively).

In English, there are six plosive consonants: /p/, /t/, /k/, /b/, /d/, /g/. The complete articulation of plosive consonants consists of three stages (Gimson, 151): the approach or closing stage during which the articulating organs move together to form the obstruction, then there is the hold or compression stage during which lung action compresses the air behind the closure, and finally there is the release or explosion stage during which the organs forming the obstruction part rapidly,

allowing the compressed air to escape abruptly (Gimson, 151). The English plosives /p/, /t/, /k/ have their near equivalents in Bangla, which are /p<sup>h</sup>/, /t<sup>h</sup>/, /k<sup>h</sup>/, because English voiceless plosives aspirate unless preceded by a sibilant. As for English voiced plosives /b/, /d/, /g/, there are exact equivalents in Bangla (/b/, /d/, /g/).

There are only two affricate phonemes in English, /tʃ/ and /dʒ/. Affricates are rather complex consonants. They begin as plosives and end as fricatives (Roach, 48). In Bangla, there are two palatal phonemes similar to these, /c/ and /ʒ/.

There are three nasal phonemes in English, /m/, /n/ and /ŋ/. The basic characteristic of a nasal consonant is that the air escapes through the nose (Roach, 58). In nasal consonants, air cannot pass through the mouth; it is prevented by a complete closure in the mouth at some point (Roach, 58). All three English nasals (/m/, /n/, /ŋ/) have their exact equivalents in Bangla.

In English, there is one lateral phoneme /l/. A lateral consonant is one in which the passage of air through the mouth does not go in the usual way along the centre of the tongue (Roach, 61). In case of lateral /l/, there is complete closure between the centre of the tongue and the alveolar ridge where contact is made (Roach, 61). Because of this complete closure along the centre, air can only escape along the sides of the tongue. This lateral 'l' can be either a dark 'l' where the back of the tongue is raised (for instance, /l/ in /i:l/) or a 'clear l' where the front of the tongue is raised (for instance, /l/ in /li:/) [Roach, 61]. In Bangla, there is a phoneme /l/ that is equivalent to English /l/; they appear different due to the preceding or following vowel.

Moreover in Bangla, suprasegmental feature like 'stress' is not phonemic as Bangla is not a stress-timed language. Similarly, as Bengali speakers cannot speak as fluently as native speakers of English, aspects of connected speech (assimilation, elision, rhythm, linking 'r' etc.) are also supposed to be rare in speeches of Bengali EFL learners. Phonetically, vowel refers to a class of speech sounds in articulation of which there is little or no obstruction to the flow of air, as it passes from the larynx to the lips. Although some English vowels (in this paper, only the vowels of British English (RP) are in consideration) have their near

equivalents in Bangla, vowels like /ə/ and /ɜ:/ have no equivalents. So these might create problems for Bangladeshi EFL learners. English /ə/ has no lip-rounding and is extremely short (Gimson, 127); this particular phoneme has no near equivalent in Bangla; hence Bengali learners might have considerable difficulty in pronouncing this. Again in case of /ɜ:/, an articulation with spread lips is insisted upon (Gimson, 125). Similarly, in Bangla, there is a vowel (ঔ) similar to /ɜ:/; but this Bangla 'ঔ' is rather more open than the English /ɜ:/ in which the slightly higher tongue position should be accompanied by closer lip-rounding (Gimson, 118). The detail analysis of the differences between Bangla and English vowels is beyond the scope of this paper; here the main focus is on the common mistakes made by Bangladeshi learners in pronouncing some English phonemes including the vowels.

Diphthongs are sounds which consist of a movement or glide from one vowel to another (Roach, 21). There are eight diphthongs in English- /ɪə/, /eə/, /ʊə/, /eɪ/, /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/, /əʊ/, /aʊ/. Bengali learners, as foreign learners of English, must always remember that the last part of English diphthongs must not be made too strongly (Roach, 21). Foreign learners should give sufficient length to the first element of the diphthongs (Gimson, 130). Bengali EFL learners are not supposed to be so familiar with pronouncing the diphthongs appropriately, although Bangla has its share of diphthongs as well. However, the differences in pronunciation of Bangla and English diphthongs are caused mainly by the differences in vowels that constitute the diphthongs. Bangla sound system is dominated by monophthongs, not by diphthongs. A vowel which remains constant and does not glide is called a pure vowel (Roach, 21); and one of the most common pronunciation mistakes that result in a learner of English having a 'foreign' accent is the production of pure vowels where a diphthong should be pronounced (Roach, 21).

It is quite natural for the foreign learners to mispronounce some English phonemes which do not match up with those of their own language. For example, Indian learners use too weak a labio-dental contact for /v/, so that the friction is lost and Germans and Hungarians use bilabial friction [β] instead of the labio-dental sound (Gimson, 183). Some foreign learners make dentalized articulation of /s/, /z/ (Gimson, 189); again, Spaniards and

Greeks confuse between /s/, /z/ and /ʃ/, /ʒ/ (Gimson, 189).

Moreover the English phoneme /r/, the usual frictionless continuant having much in common with a vowel, is rarely encountered in other languages (Gimson, 210). In Bangla, there is /r/ sound which is a 'trill', a type of consonant segment resulting from a stricture of intermittent closure (Abercrombie, 49). The Bengali and English trill /r/ are equivalents; the difference lies in the degree to which either is rolled. English /r/ is called retroflex approximant as in pronouncing it, the tongue is usually slightly curled backwards with the tip raised (Roach, 62). It is called an approximant because, in articulating /r/, the articulators approach each other but do not get sufficiently close to each other to produce a 'complete' consonant such as a plosive, nasal or fricative (Roach, 62). And it is naturally supposed to be very difficult for Bengali learners to try to produce retroflex/r/. According to Gimson (211), "a foreign learner should ...approach the RP [r] as if it were a vowel".

There is another /r/ sound in Bangla. This /r/ can be called a 'flap' which occurs when the point of the tongue, after being curled upwards and back, falls forward onto the floor of the mouth, hitting the teeth-ridge on its way (Abercrombie,49).

Again, stressed syllables are prominent, louder, and longer than the other syllables in a word (Roach, 94). Primary stress is the strongest type of stress (Roach, 96). But as Bangla is a syllable-timed language, stress does not make any difference in pronouncing Bangla phonemes; so it is natural that Bengali learners will face difficulties in pronouncing a stressed-timed language like English.

Again, certain well-known English words can be pronounced in two different ways: strong forms and weak forms (Roach, 112). There are roughly forty such words in English, including articles, conjunctions, prepositions, pronouns, auxiliary verbs (Roach, 112). Most native speakers of English find an "all-strong-form" pronunciation unnatural and foreign-sounding (Roach, 112). So to speak naturally and with the proper accent, it is important for EFL learners to be familiar with the contexts in which weak-form words are used. But in Bangla language, there is no such distinction between strong forms and weak forms of certain

sounds; hence it is supposed to be difficult for Bangladeshi EFL learners to master this particular aspect of English pronunciation.

In fluent connected English speech, processes like 'assimilation', 'elision', 'linking' can be clearly visible. When a phoneme is realized differently as a result of being near some other phoneme belonging to a neighboring word, it can be called an instance of assimilation (Roach,138); and sometimes under certain circumstances, a phoneme may be deleted which can be called elision (Roach 142). On the other hand, in real connected speech, we sometimes link words together in special ways, the most familiar case is the use of 'linking r' (Roach 144); that is, when a word's spelling suggests a final 'r' and a word beginning with a vowel follows, the usual pronunciation is to pronounce with 'r' (Roach 144). All these processes are typical of rapid, casual speech. But Bangladeshi EFL learners usually do not speak English so rapidly or casually.

Again, English has stress-timed rhythm, that is, the time from each stressed syllable to the next will tend to be the same, irrespective of the number of intervening unstressed syllables (Roach, 135). On the contrary, Bangla has syllable-timed rhythm, that is, all syllables, whether stressed or unstressed, tend to occur at regular time-intervals and the time between stressed syllables will be shorter or longer in proportion to the number of unstressed syllables (Roach, 135). So it is supposed to be difficult for Bangladeshi EFL learners to speak English maintaining proper rhythm or accent. Furthermore, stress is most commonly indicated not by increased volume, but by a slight rise in intonation, which is another important aspect of the pronunciation of English, often making a difference to meaning or implication (Ur, 49). For instance, if in answer to a question, a person says 'I don't know' in a flat tone, that means he/s really does not know and does not want to talk on that matter anymore; but if he/s says 'I don't know' with a rising tone, it means he/s does not know but is willing to know more about it.

Learners can make pronunciation errors due to various reasons; a particular sound may not exist in the students' mother tongue, and in such cases learners tend to substitute the nearest equivalent they know (Ur, 52). Sometimes students face problems in perceiving pronunciation features that the teachers want them to reproduce ( Harmer,

184) ; for instance, Spanish speakers have difficulties in distinguishing between /b/ and /v/ as there are not the same two sounds in their language (Harmer, 184). Similarly, Bangladeshi learners are supposed to face problems in distinguishing between /z/, /dʒ/ and /ʒ/, as these sounds do not have their exact equivalents in standard Bangla. Likewise in Hebrew, both the /ʃ/ (as in ‘ship’) and /i:/ (as in ‘sheep’) sounds occur, but substituting one with the other does not make any difference in meaning (Ur, 52), and as a result, a Hebrew-speaking learner might not perceive difference between these two sounds in English.

Thus many researchers have delved deep into the pronunciation difficulties of English phonemes and there have also been attempts to guide foreign learners to pronounce these phonemes correctly. In my paper, I would like to focus on some very common problems that Bangladeshi EFL learners face in pronouncing certain English phonemes.

## Segmental Elements

### 1. Problems with fricatives

#### Hypotheses

- 1.1 Bangladeshi learners will have difficulty in pronouncing /f/, /v/ in English.
- 1.2 Bangladeshi EFL learners will face problems in pronouncing /θ/ and /ð/. They will pronounce /θ/ and /ð/ strongly as plosives; but in English, they are pronounced softly as fricatives.
- 1.3 Bangladeshi EFL learners can have problems in pronouncing /z/ and /dʒ/; /z/ is pronounced as /dʒ/.
- 1.4 Bangladeshi EFL learners have problems in pronouncing /ʒ/; /ʒ/ is pronounced as /z/ or /dʒ/.
- 1.5 Bangladeshi EFL learners might have problems in /ʃ/. /ʃ/ is pronounced as /s/.
- 1.6 Bangladeshi EFL learners can have problems in pronouncing /s/; /s/ is pronounced as /ʃ/ or /tʃ/.
- 1.7 In English, glottal fricative /h/ does not occur in word final position; but Bangladeshi EFL learners pronounce /h/ in word final position.

### 2. Problems with plosives

#### Hypothesis

- 2.1 Bangladeshi EFL learners do not make /p/, /t/, /k/ aspirated in initial position.

### 3. Problems with affricates, lateral /l/, approximant /r/

#### Hypotheses

- 3.1 Bangladeshi EFL learners have problems in /tʃ/ and /dʒ/. /tʃ/ is pronounced as /s/; /dʒ/ is pronounced as /z/.
- 3.2 Bangladeshi EFL learners are not aware of the difference between clear ‘l’ and dark ‘l’.
- 3.3 /r/ creates problems for Bangladeshi EFL learners. British accent is non-rhotic as /r/ is not pronounced at the end of the syllable after the vowel. Bangladeshi EFL learners usually pronounce /r/ at the end of the syllable, after the vowel.
- 3.4 Bangladeshi learners cannot pronounce /r/ as retroflex; they pronounce /r/ as trill, because in Bangla, there is trill /r/ sound. They cannot pronounce retroflex approximant /r/.

### 4. Problems With Vowels And Diphthongs

#### Hypotheses

- 4.1 Bangladeshi EFL learners cannot pronounce vowels like /ə/, /ɔ:/, /ʊ:/, /e/ properly.
- 4.2 Bangladeshi EFL learners have problems in pronouncing the diphthongs; they tend to substitute monophthongs for diphthongs.

## Suprasegmental Features

#### Hypotheses.

- a. Bangladeshi EFL learners do not know where to put primary stress in pronouncing words and where the verb form is weak.
- b. The evidences of progressive and regressive assimilation cannot be found in Bangladeshi EFL learners’ pronunciation.
- c. Evidences of elisions can be found in Bangladeshi EFL learners’ speech.
- d. Evidences of linking ‘r’ can not be found in Bangladeshi EFL learners’ speech.

This paper is divided into two parts-

- Segmental Elements
- Supra-segmental features

In segmental level, there were 11 isolated sentences and in supra-segmental level, there was a short passage (see appendix).

The research was conducted on six subjects who were native speakers of Bangla; all of them were first year university students who have come from Bangla medium schools and colleges. Their age range was about 19-21. Three of them were males and three females. Individually each subject was asked to read aloud first the isolated sentences and then the passage and that was recorded on a tape-recorder. The research was conducted on two consecutive days on 16/04/2008 (Wednesday) and on 17/04/2008 (Thursday) in the morning in quiet environment. The subjects were not told beforehand that they were taking part in a research on pronunciation. So they could respond quiet naturally.

## Findings

### 1. Fricatives

- 1.1 In Bangla, there are sounds similar to /f/ and /v/; these are /p<sup>h</sup>/ and /b<sup>h</sup>/. The Bangla /p<sup>h</sup>/ and /b<sup>h</sup>/ are bilabial sounds while English /f/ and /v/ are labiodental sounds. Among the six subjects, 4 had problems in pronouncing /f/ and /v/ as bilabial sounds. They uttered /f/ and /v/ as bilabials. The remaining 2 subjects could utter /f/ and /v/ properly.
- 1.2 Three of the subjects had problems in pronouncing /θ/ and /ð/ properly. They tended to equate these two sounds with similar Bangla sounds /t<sup>h</sup>/ and /d/. But, while in Bangla, /t<sup>h</sup>/ and /d/ are pronounced more forcefully, in English /θ/ and /ð/ are quite soft. And these three subjects uttered /θ/ and /ð/ more strongly than is required. The other three subjects could pronounce these sounds quite properly.
- 1.3 Among the 6 subjects, 5 had problems in pronouncing /z/. They pronounced /z/ as /dʒ/, ('zoo' /zu:/ was pronounced as \*/dʒu:/); that is, alveolar fricative was pronounced as palatal affricate. This is a common problem among Bangladeshi learners. [\* symbol indicates wrong pronunciation]

- 1.4 Three of the subjects pronounced /ʒ/ as /dʒ/ / (\* /medʒə(r)/ instead of /meʒə(r) /). Two subjects pronounced /ʒ/ as /z/ (\* /mezə(r) / instead of /meʒə(r)/; \* /trezə(r) / instead of /treʒə(r) /). And only one subject could pronounce /ʒ/ properly, as a palatal fricative. So /ʒ/ also creates problem for most Bangladeshi learners.
- 1.5 In this research, the hypothesis, that /ʃ/ is pronounced as /s/, is proved wrong as all of the subjects could pronounce /ʃ/ correctly.
- 1.6 Two of the subjects pronounced /s/ as /tʃ/ (\* /tʃa:ntʃələ(r)/ instead of /tʃa:nsələ(r) /). One subject pronounced /s/ as /ʃ/, (\* /ʃɪp / instead of /sip/). And the other three could pronounce /s/ correctly.
- 1.7 All the 6 subjects pronounced /h/ in word final position (they pronounced /a:h/ instead of /a:/).

## Findings

### 2. Plosives

- 2.1 None of the six subjects made /p/, /t/, /k/ aspirated in initial or any position. They pronounced, /pli:z/ instead of /p<sup>h</sup>li:z/ /  
/teik/ instead of /t<sup>h</sup>eɪk/ /  
/keər/ instead of /k<sup>h</sup>eə(r) /

## Findings

### 3. Affricates, nasals, approximants

- 3.1 Two subjects pronounced /tʃ/ as /s/ (\* /piksər/ instead of /pɪktʃə(r)/); and another two subjects pronounced /dʒ/ as /z/ (\* /la:z/ instead of /la:dʒ /; \* /zʌz/ instead of /dʒʌdʒ /).
- 3.2 In this research, it was found that all the subjects were unaware of the difference between clear 'l' and dark 'l'. All of them pronounced 'l' as clear 'l' (with the front of the tongue raised) irrespective of whether the 'l' occurs at the initial or final position in a word.
- 3.3 All the six subjects pronounced /r/ at the end of the syllable, after the vowel (/ ka:r / instead of / ka:/ ).

3.4 None of the subjects could pronounce the retroflex /r/ properly.

## FINDINGS

### 4. Vowels

4.1 All of the subjects had problems in pronouncing these vowels (/ə/, /ɔ:/, /ɜ:/, /e/).

/ə/ was pronounced as /e/ or /ɔ:/ or /æ/ (/*gʌvənmənt* / was pronounced as \*/*gɔ:vɔ:nmənt* /,

/əbaʊt/ was pronounced as \*/*æbaʊt* /).

/ɔ:/ was pronounced as /ɒ/ ( /ɪɔ:/ was pronounced as \*/*ɪɒ* /).

/ɜ:/ was pronounced as /a:/ ( /ɜ:θ / was pronounced as /a:θ /).

Two subjects pronounced /e/ as /æ/ ( /best / was pronounced as \*/*bæst* /).

4.2 All the subjects had problems in pronouncing the centring diphthong /ʊə/; /ʊə/ was pronounced as /ʊ / ( /tʊə(r) / was pronounced as \*/*tʊ(r)* /).

Three subjects had problems in pronouncing the centering diphthong /ɪə/.

They pronounced /ɪə/ as /eə/, ( /fɪəs / was pronounced as \*/*feəs* /).

Four subjects had problems with another centering diphthong /eə/. They pronounced /eə/ as /a:/;

( /skeəs / was pronounced as \*/*ska:s* /).

Four subjects had problems in pronouncing the closing diphthong /eɪ/. They pronounced /eɪ/ as

/e/ ( /feɪs / was pronounced as \*/*fes* /).

The subjects did not have any problem in pronouncing the three closing diphthongs /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/ and /aʊ/.

Five subjects had problems in pronouncing the closing diphthong /əʊ/; they pronounced /əʊ/ as /ɔ:/ ( /məʊst / was pronounced as \*/*mɔ:st* /).

The remaining one could pronounce it correctly.

Thus this hypothesis is quite correct that Bangladeshi EFL learners tend to substitute monophthongs for diphthongs (though the

subjects could pronounce /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/ and /aʊ/ properly).

## FINDINGS

### Suprasegmental features

a. No subject could put the primary stress correctly in words and where the verb form is weak, they could not pronounce that weak form correctly.

b. In the speech of 6 subjects, no evidence of progressive and regressive assimilation could be found.

c. In the speech of four subjects, evidences of elision could be found. They pronounced ‘scripts’ /skripts/ as

/skrips/, (/t/ is omitted here). And they pronounced ‘text’ /tekst/ as /teks/ (here also the final /t/ is omitted).

The other two subjects could pronounce these properly; no evidence of elision was found in their case.

d. In the speech of all of the subjects, no evidence of linking ‘r’ could be found.

Thus we find most of our hypotheses have been proved true; though in some cases, there were some anomalies. Bangladeshi EFL learners have most problems in pronouncing the fricatives, affricates, diphthongs and vowels, although in case of affricates more learners could make the correct pronunciations. The results in case of these four groups of phonemes are summarized in Figure .

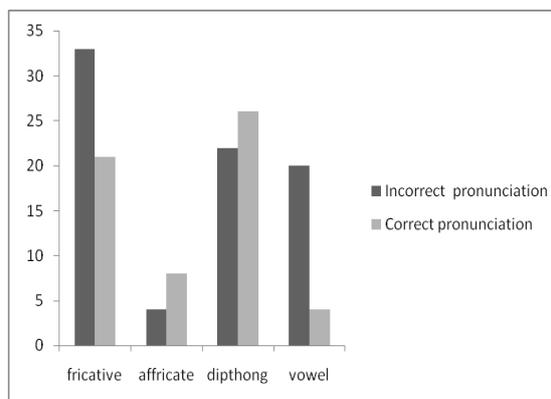


Figure 1: Incorrect/correct pronunciations of 4 groups of phonemes

Among the fricatives, four, out of the six subjects, pronounced /f/ and /v/ as bilabials, not as labiodentals. Almost all of them had problems with /z/ and /ʒ/; they pronounced /z/ as /dʒ/ and /ʒ/ as

either /dʒ/ or /z/. But they did not have any problem with /ʃ /; this /ʃ / phoneme was pronounced correctly. Similarly the phoneme /s/ is also not so problematic for them, although a couple of them mispronounced it as /tʃ /.

In case of plosives, none of the subjects could make /p/, /t/, /k/ aspirated in initial or any position. Affricates were also quite problematic for some of the subjects; a couple of them mispronounced /tʃ / as /s/ and another two mispronounced /dʒ / as /z/. And the subjects were not aware of the subtle variations in the articulation of the phoneme /l/ as clear 'l' or dark 'l'.

None of the subjects could abide by the distributional rule of the phoneme 'r' in BBC accent as they pronounced /r/ in syllable final position (following vowel); similarly none of them could pronounce /r/ as a retroflex approximant.

In case of vowels, all of the subjects mispronounced the English vowels, /ə/, /ɜ:/, /ɔ:/ which do not have any near equivalents in Bangla. And a couple of them also could not pronounce /e/ correctly. Regarding diphthongs, none of them could pronounce the centring diphthong /ʊə/ properly and all of them (except two) had difficulty in pronouncing another centring diphthong /eə/. And half of them could not pronounce another centring diphthong /ɪə/ correctly. So pronouncing especially the centring diphthongs [ɪə/, /eə/, /ʊə/] are problematic for Bangladeshi EFL learners. Similarly, all of them (except one) could not pronounce the closing diphthong /əʊ/ properly; and majority of them (except two) also had problems in pronouncing the closing diphthong /eɪ/. Contrary to this, none of them had any problem in pronouncing another three closing diphthongs /aɪ/, /ɔɪ/ and /aʊ/; thus among the eight diphthongs, all of the subjects could pronounce correctly only these three. Hence in case of diphthongs, the subjects could make more correct pronunciations in total, as is shown in Figure 1. So we can say that the hypothesis, that Bangladeshi EFL learners tend to substitute monophthongs for diphthongs, is quite proved. And regarding supra segmental features, none of the subjects could speak following the correct stress pattern; no evidence of assimilation and linking could also be found. But evidences of

elision could be found in speech of the majority (except two). And this also proves the hypotheses that evidences of correct stress pattern, assimilation, linking cannot be found in Bangladeshi EFL learners' pronunciation, except those of elisions.

It is very crucial for EFL teachers in Bangladesh to be aware of these potential problems while teaching English to learners. Only if they are careful enough and are well aware of the problems learners might face in pronunciation, they can at least try to minimize these. One strategy that can be followed is simultaneous teaching of some Bangla and English sounds. We have seen that Bangladeshi learners have problems in pronouncing the fricatives; hence if, for example, English labiodental /f/ and /v/ and Bangla bilabial /p<sup>h</sup>/ and /b<sup>h</sup>/ are taught to them simultaneously and specific phonetic features of each is described in detail, then learners are more likely to recognize the basic differences between these and would be careful not to mix these up. Similarly, if the teacher teaches English /θ/, /ð/ and similar Bangla sounds /t<sup>h</sup>/ and /d/ simultaneously, learners can be careful in differentiating the English sounds from the Bangla ones and can make more correct pronunciations.

In case of those phonemes which do not have any near equivalents in Bangla, teachers should be even more cautious as it can be harder for EFL learners to even perceive a phoneme if it has no match in their mother tongue. In such cases the teachers can provide the learners with more exposure to correct pronunciations of those phonemes; they can make use of tape recorders or CD players in this regard. For instance, learners can be exposed to native speakers' articulation of phonemes like /ʒ/, /ə /, /ɔ:/, /ɜ:/, /ʊə/, /ɪə/, /eə/, /əʊ/, /eɪ/. Learners can be taught to imitate the correct pronunciations through drilling. Thus teachers can make the learners practice intensively to help improve their pronunciation of English phonemes.

In case of supra segmental features, teachers need to be careful that the learners are speaking or at least trying to speak following the proper accent. Again, more and more exposure to native English speakers' conversations or any such input can help learners get used to the correct accent. And this is

important also because of the fact that variations in tonic accents are related to meaning differences.

Thus it is very important for the teachers in Bangladesh to be aware of the problems Bangladeshi learners might face in pronouncing the English phonemes. Because, only then it is possible for the teachers to devise appropriate strategies to overcome those.

Additionally, teachers can devise some tongue twisters, mnemonics, minimal pairs, rhymes to minimize the pronunciation difficulties faced by Bangladeshi EFL learners. In teaching pronunciation to learners, the first step should be to ensure that learners can hear and identify (i. e. perceive) the sounds the teacher wants to teach

(Ur, 53); and it is also true for intonation, stress and rhythm. Learners' attention can be drawn to particular features of pronunciation by requesting imitation or by making them distinguish between minimal pairs (Ur, 53). For example, it is important for Bangladeshi learners to distinguish between pairs like / ɜ: / and / a: /, / eɪ / and / e /. Hence they can be presented with minimal pairs like the following-

<u>/ eɪ / and / e /</u>	
fade	fed
sale	sell
laid	led
paste	pest
late	let

<u>/ a: / and / ɜ: /</u>	
barn	burn
fast	first
cert	curt
lark	lurk

Contrasting sounds in this way is very helpful for students in that it helps students concentrate on detail, especially when they are listening to hear the small differences between the sounds (Harmer, 189) and such activities are also enjoyable for them.

Moreover, teachers can show learners how particular sounds are made through demonstration, diagrams and explanation and they can also draw the sounds to the learners' attention (Harmer, 185). And once the students can hear or perceive the

sounds correctly, they can produce those properly as well (Harmer, 185).

Some **tongue twisters** can be like the following—

\* (to minimize the problem between /s/ and /ʃ/.)

- 'She sells sea shells on the sea shore'.
- 'Spread the sheets on the seat'.

\*(to minimize the problem of /f/ and /v/)

- 'They carried the fan on the van.'
- 'You can make fun with pun'.

\* (to minimize the difficulty with / ʒ /)

- 'You do not need treasure for pleasure.'
- 'It is really a treasure for someone who can measure his pleasure.'

\* (to minimize the difficulty with / tʃ /)

- 'Terrible chill affected her sweet cheek and chin.'

Some '**minimal pairs**' like the following can also be used –

- 'They *sip* water on the *ship*'.
- 'Put that *pin* in the *bin*'.

If learners practice tongue twisters, minimal pairs, rhymes like these, their difficulties with certain English phonemes can be reduced to a great extent. Regarding the supra segmental features, by shifting the tonic accents, we can express specific meanings; by putting stress on any particular syllable in an utterance, we can convey our mood. Teachers can demonstrate to students how stress patterns in phrases change depending upon what we want to say. Harmer (193) gives the following example: in the sentence, "I lent my sister ten pounds for a train ticket last week", if the primary stress is on 'lent', then this means "I did not give this money to her, but only lent it"; on the contrary, if the primary stress is on 'week', then this means, "can you believe it ? She still has not paid me back"!

Teachers can make students practice stress patterns in various ways; for instance, they can choose appropriate texts and have students read those aloud following the stress pattern (Harmer, 193). Alternatively, students can also take part in performing dialogues which will enable them to identify the main stress in phrases, also in relation to the intonation patterns (Harmer, 194).

It is a known fact that speakers substitute sounds of their own language for the sounds of foreign languages they attempt to speak; as a result, they typically have “foreign accents” (Hyman, 21). Likewise, Bangladeshi EFL learners face problems in pronouncing complex English phonemes; as we have seen, they confuse the three English sounds /z/, /ʒ/ and /dʒ/ as these distinctions are absent in Bangla language. In many cases /tʃ/ is substituted for /s/; /ʃ/ and /s/ are also mixed up. Bangladeshi EFL learners usually do not aspirate while pronouncing /p/, /t/, /k/ in word-initial positions. Most of them tend to substitute monophthongs for diphthongs. Bengali learners are also not familiar with some widely used English vowel phonemes like /ə/ or /ɜ:/. As Bangla is a syllable-timed language, Bangladeshi learners cannot easily master appropriate pronunciation of a stress-timed language like English; they usually cannot pronounce stressed syllables appropriately.

Similarly, as Bangladeshi EFL learners are not used to speaking English so rapidly or casually, aspects of connected speech (like assimilation, linking ‘r’) are generally not found in their speech, although evidences of elision could be found in some learners’ speech.

Thus it is quite natural that Bangladeshi EFL learners will face such problems in pronouncing certain English phonemes as these two languages (English and Bangla) have very different sound patterns.

### Future work

Bangladeshis from different regional backgrounds (for example, people hailing from Chittagong, Noakhali, Barisal, Sylhet and some other districts) have their own dialects and accents. And an interesting fact is to what extent their regional accents affect their pronunciation of English phonemes; this particular area of study is yet to be explored.

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**For Segmental Elements**

1. Please, take care of her.
2. Many students do not like to go to school but they like to be involved in sports.
3. Sip the tea and look at the picture of large ship there.
4. There are varieties of fan on the third floor and also other things, and those were there for sale.
5. The children ate the bread with jam and went to the zoo.
6. The judge tried to get the measure of the valuable treasures that the thief stole from the flat.
7. The Chancellor of the institution was killed in his house though he was loved by all as a person.
8. The government is about to disclose its purpose about the law.
9. She is the best singer on earth.
10. In that fierce night on the tour, any loud voice was scarcely heard and his face was the most terrible.
11. Ah, here is our car!

**For Suprasegmental Features**

Far inside the hall, there is a huge media event. Here are the scripts which include the drama and music. This year, ten boys have been declared as winners; and that boy happens to be my friend who can memorize the whole text on the drama.