

## ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION PROBLEMS OF THE TERTIARY LEVEL STUDENTS IN BANGLADESH: A CASE STUDY

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### ABSTRACT

It is quite natural that the learners of English as a second or foreign language encounter problems in their pronunciation. This paper analyzes some problems concerning pronunciation of English learners in Bangladesh. Using mixed methods methodology, the paper provides some problematic English vowel and consonant sounds the tertiary students make, on the basis of sources like interview of students and recording it for collecting pronunciation samples, questionnaire distributed to the teachers for collecting opinions regarding students' English pronunciation, reading a passage that contains some words of problematic pronunciation and presentation of some selected tertiary students. The data collected from above sources have been analyzed following the Standard Pronunciation system of English. On the basis of findings, some pedagogical implications and recommendations have been presented for the students and the teachers to improve existing English pronunciation problems of students gradually.

**Keywords:** Tertiary students, English pronunciation problems, L1 interference, Bangladesh.

## INTRODUCTION:

In Bangladesh, English has been in use for more than four centuries, first as the language of the early merchants, missionaries and settlers; then as the language of the British colonial power; later as the associate official language in the postcolonial Pakistan period and finally – in the last few decades after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971- as the most important and widely used perceived second language. Even it has been about seventy years since the British left the Indian sub-continent; it continues to play an important role in numerous domains of Bengali life. Numerous newspapers, journals and magazines are published in English in Bangladesh. English also enjoys a very privileged position in the education sector. English-medium education, with higher education, particularly in private sector, is often accessible only through English. As a result, the teaching of English has turned into a profitable business. In job sector, too, English is a determining factor. Therefore, in The National Education Policy 2010, English Education has been given much priority to build strong, confident and international based citizens and nation to compete with modern world.

The policy suggests to take appropriate steps from the very early stage of education to ensure English writing and speaking skills with further emphasis in the forthcoming classes as per needs. English is also suggested to be taught as a compulsory subject at the degree level of all colleges and universities. The study also recommends to appoint English teachers to high schools and higher education for ensuring better English education. In the policy, English is also suggested to remain as a medium of instruction in higher education along with Bangla. (National Education Policy 2010).

Thus, while the demand of English, on the whole, is soaring, the spoken English with correct pronunciation is the most neglected area in Bangladesh. Let alone secondary and higher secondary students, even tertiary students of Bangladesh have so many unfixed problems in pronunciation. L1 interference is dominantly present in their English pronunciation. Thus, their pronunciation is influenced by different Bangladeshi dialects and standard Bangla as well. As they are not familiar with International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbols, they cannot differentiate between Bangla and English phonology. Moreover, they do not get much motivation to improve their English pronunciation by the teachers. Therefore, with the aim of dealing with pronunciation difficulties of Bangladeshi tertiary learners of English, the present study surrounds the following questions:

1. What English sounds do the tertiary students of Bangladesh face problems to produce with?
2. What kinds of factors are responsible for the difficulties of English pronunciation by the students?
3. How much influence do the dialects of Bangla have on English pronunciation of the students?

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Various researchers showed that English pronunciation problem is a common phenomenon in many countries where English is a second or foreign language.

In tracing out difficulties faced by Bangladeshi speakers of English, Rahman (1996), in a study, has found that in Bangladesh, English is spoken with an accent related to the mother tongue which pays little attention to sound patterns, stress, rhythm and intonation system of English. Haque et al. (1990, as cited in Rahman, 1996, p.15) shows that a Bengali vowel is not conditioned by length. On the other hand, length distinguishes English vowel sounds /i:/, /ɪ:/, /ɔ:/, /u:/, /ʊ/. Bengali speakers do not usually make any distinctions between long and short vowels. For example- they pronounce /fʊl/ and /fu:l/ in the same way. He again found that the chief difficulty for a Bengali learner is using the weak forms /ə/ and /ɪ/ in unstressed syllables. This is not usually observed by a Bengali speaker.

Along the same context, Mujaffar (1999) observes that Bangladeshi speakers pronounce the voiced palatal plosive /z/ and the voiced palato alveolar affricate /dʒ/ as allophones of same phoneme. The speakers read the letter 'z' as /dʒ/ and the letter 'j' as /z/. Thus, he presents some mispronunciation of Bangladeshi speakers of English in some consonant sounds like /f/ and /v/; /z/ and /dʒ/; /θ/ and /ð/; /t/ and /d/, etc. In his observation, students commonly adopt the labiodentals /f/ and /v/ as the bilabial aspirated plosives /p<sup>h</sup>/ and /b<sup>h</sup>/, even some speakers take them as bilabial plosives /p/ and /b/. He thinks the mispronunciation is due to the absence of them in the Bangla phonemic inventory. The voiceless aspirated dental plosives /θ/ and /ð/ tend to be the voiced dental plosives /t<sup>h</sup>/ and /d/ to the Bengali speakers. Bangladeshi students have also problems with consonant clusters /sp/, /st/ and /sm/. These are dealt with by prosthesis or epenthesis of a glottal stop or a vowel.

Banu (2000), in a study, has drawn some phonological distinctions in both vowel and consonant sounds of Bangladeshi speakers. She observes Diphthongs /eɪ/ and /əʊ/ of BRP are replaced by monophthongs /e:/ and /o:/, though there is a tendency to lengthen this monophthongs. For example, day /de:/, say /se:/, hate /he:t/ etc. The

BRP central vowels /ʌ/ in words like bus, mother, cut, hut are made more lax and open and the result is almost like an /a/ like bas, kat, madar, hat. The BRP /ɜ:/ in word like bird, girl, etc. are transformed into lax /a/ and /bɑrd/ and /gɑrl/ become homophonous with middle vowel of smart and heart. She also observes Bangladeshi speakers have a tendency to substitute some un-aspirated English consonants with aspirated sounds. As English fricatives /f, θ, ð, v, z, ʒ/ are absent in the Bengali inventory of phonemes; /f/ becomes /ph/, /θ/ becomes /th/, /ð/ becomes /d/, /z/ becomes /dʒ/ and /ʒ/ becomes /ʒ/ or /dʒ/ in the English pronunciation of Bangladeshi speakers. The realization of /v/ as /bh/, a bilabial aspirated stop, is very common. For example, loving /lʌbhʊŋ/, very /bheri/ etc. The alveolar series /t/ and /d/ are somewhat retroflexed by Bangladeshis, especially those from the south. The /z/ becomes /dʒ/ and /dʒ/ becomes /z/, so we hear zoo like jew or giraffe as ziraffe. She also states, unlike English, Bengali rhythm is based on arranging long and short syllables, not stressed and unstressed ones. Thus, there is more of a spelling pronunciation amongst Bangladeshi speakers of English.

**In this regard, Cook (2002) thinks learner's L2 is affected by their L1 for the following:**

1. Sounds: learning of pronunciation depends on aspects other than the phoneme, for example: distinctive feature.
2. Syllable structure: L2 learners simplify use consonant clusters and add extra 'epenthetic' vowels, often to fit the first language.
3. Voice onset time: L2 learners gradually acquire the L2 way of voicing stop consonants. Their first language is affected by their knowledge of the second language.
4. Intonation: L2 learners are still capable of discriminating tones. L2 learners have strategies for dealing with new intonation (2002, pp.69-83).

In another study, Zhang and Yin (2009) analyzed some frequently occurring pronunciation problems faced by the Chinese learners of English. In their observation, the following factors influence their pronunciation: L1 interference; Learners' age; Learners' attitude; Prior pronunciation instruction; insufficient language of English phonology and phonetics and words which displayed a sound and spelling disparity.

However, they have observed it is L1 interference which causes maximum problems for producing correct English by the Chinese speakers, though other factors are also more or less responsible. Same factors are also relevant to the English pronunciation of Bangladeshi tertiary students.

In a similar study, Hoque (2010) has found out detailed phonemes in English on which there is strong influence of local varieties of Bangladesh. He has brought out the following:

- i) An English short vowel becomes a long one: /e / ~ /e: /
- ii) Some diphthongs become monophthongs or lengthened monophthongs: /əɪ / ~ /o:/ and /eɪ / ~ /e: /
- iii) Some labio-dental fricatives become bilabial plosive or bilabial aspirated plosive: /f/ ~ / p/, /f/ ~ / p<sup>h</sup>/, /v / ~ /b / and /v / ~ / b<sup>h</sup> /
- iv) An alveolar fricative becomes a palato-alveolar fricative: /s / ~ / ʃ/
- v) A voiced palatal plosive becomes a voiced palato-alveolar affricate or vice versa: /z / ~ /dʒ / and /dʒ / ~ /z /
- vi) A dental fricative becomes a dental plosive: /θ / ~ /t /
- vii) An alveolar plosive becomes an alveo-retroflex plosive: /d / ~ /t /.

From his findings, it is obvious that Bangladeshi L2 learners have so many problems in English pronunciation and L1 interference is one of the crucial facts.

In another study, Hoque (2011) has brought out some mispronunciation of Chittagonian English learners of Bangladesh and he has observed that some students replace / d / with / t /, for example- bad / bæd / is pronounced as / bæt /, good /gud/ as /gut/. They also commonly replace /tʃ/ with /s /, observed in the pronunciation of actually /æksuæɪl/, which /huɪs/, much /mʌs/, child /saiɪd/, tacher as /ti:sɑr/, etc. It happens, according to him, because the sound is absent in Chittagongian. Again, some Chittagonian speakers of English utter /c/, a symbol presenting sound between /tʃ/ and /s/, instead of /tʃ/. Some Chittagonian speakers are likely to replace plosive /p/ with fricative /f/. Some students were found to utter people /pi:p/ as /fi:fɒl/, /fi:fɒl/, /fifɒ l/, parents /peərənts/ as /færents/, and capable /keɪpəb/ as /kæfe:bɒl/. It happens, as the sound is absent in Chittagonian variety. Some other students replaced /ʃ/ with / s /, e.g. socio / sɔsɪo /. Some others tend to replace /dʒ/ with / s /, in word like age /eɪdʒ/ as / eis /. Some others tend to replace / dʒ / with /z/. The tendency has been observed in the pronunciation of age /eɪz/ and /ez /, joy / zɔɪ /, enjoy /enzɔɪ/, etc. Some others replace /z/ with /dʒ/ which can be observed in words like busy /bɪdʒɪ /, zero /dʒuru/. Replacement of / z / with / s / is also observed in use /iʊs/, as /æs/, is /ɪs/, and cases /kæses/. Some are habituated to pronounce silent /h/ in words like

which /hʌts/, where /hɔːr/ and, /hɔːr/, when /hɔːn/, what /hɔːt/, why /hwaɪ/ and /hɔː/ etc. Replacement of /θ/ with /t̪ (፳) / has been found in thank /tæŋk/ and in both / bɔːt/. Replacement of /θ/ with /t̪ (፳)/ is observed in thousand /t̪hauzænd/, etc. So, differences are distinguishable in the above discussion.

Nuhiu (2012) has studied a range of pronunciation difficulties encountered by the native Albanian learners. Over a questionnaire survey, her study has found the problems with a bunch of particular English sounds. The overall student performance shows that 35% of the students have pronounced back vowels correctly, while the rest 65% have pronounced with slight distortion of [o] in the words like: *lot, plot*, etc. The case of [æ], as in the words; *cat, man, sad*, etc., has also appeared to be pronounced in different variations, all due to the L1. This sound has been mostly pronounced like [e] in the words; *bet, head, let*, etc. While 66% of the tested students have had a successful pronunciation, 34% have pronounced this sound in an incorrect way, due to the influence of the L1. The case of /UR/ and the /IR/ pronounced like [ɜ]\* - or, usually followed by an [ɪ] in the cases of *bird and purple*, appears particularly difficult for students with a lower language skill abilities. The sound / U / should be pronounced as [ʌ] in the words *bug/dug/hug*, etc., is found different in pronunciation. 65 % present an accurate pronunciation and the rest 35% have performed in a wrong way. The sounds /OO/ [u] and /OO/ [ʊ] - in *cool-* in *good*, as they are spelled, are pronounced like the Albanian /u/. In this regard, the tested students never make the difference between the double <oo> in word like *floor*, and some other less common words with the Albanian /o/. The case of [A] in the words like; *father, cat, about, pay*, [E] in the words like; *bet, get*, etc., [I] in *machine, big*, and the [O] in *toe, and cost* which has recognized a variety of pronunciations proves a pretty high level of the influence of the Albanian /A/E/I/O/.

The students' performance also shows some difficulties in pronunciation of the diphthongs /aɪ/ in the words *sky, buy, tie*, etc.; /ɪə/ in the words *bier, pier, hear*, etc.; /eə/ in the words *Blair, blare, br'er*, etc., and /ʊə/ in the words *allure, amateur, amour*, etc. of French origin, but not in cases of the words such as; *manure, mature, moor*, etc. of English origin. Further on, pronunciation difficulties have appeared with the performances of /əʊ/; in the words *oh, no, so or phone*, and in some words of foreign origin as well as typical ones such as; *aglow, ago* and further on, the words like; *aero, aggro aikido, airflow, air show, Alfa*, etc., due to the influence of the L1. Students' less exposure to English media and music are also responsible for their pronunciation problems.

Thus, Nihui's analysis shows that there is a strong influence of L1 in the pronunciation of some English vowels. Like Albanian speakers of English, L1 influence on English pronunciation is also observed among Bangladeshi tertiary students.

Moreover, the native Albanian students have tendency to produce an overall soft variation of the *plosive consonants*, like /p/,/t/,/d/,/g/, etc. replacing them with soft sounds, unlike English ones, occurring as homophones in the case of: /t/ and /d/ which are typically pronounced as dental stops as in the words like *tide, time, develop*, etc.; to pronounce /p/,/ t/,/ k/ as un-aspirated stops; to replace [ŋ] with [ŋj] ("*singer*" rhymes with "*finger*") or as /n/ (combined with the above tendency makes the words "*king*" and "*keen*" homophones); to replace word-initial /sm/ with [zm], e.g. *small* [zmɔl]; to pronounce the final /g/ as a strong [g] which is against the English pronunciation rules; to pronounce /g/ in thing like /k/ in *think*, etc. and to add /h/ to some vowel-initial.

In explaining the reasons behind such problems, Mostafa (2013) has told that, unlike in Bangla, in English syllable structure, it is common to have consonant clusters in onsets and codas; for example, in the words *black* [blæk], *ask* [æsk], *bump* [bʌmp], and *black* [blæk] there are two consonant clusters in onset and [æsk] and [bʌmp] each has two consonant clusters in codas. "In English, there can be a cluster of maximum three consonants in a syllable-onset and a cluster of maximum four consonants in a syllable-coda" (Roach, 2010, p.67). On the contrary, in Bangla, onset consonant clusters are rare, and coda consonant clusters are nonexistent. Therefore, English words with clusters of more than two consonants in onsets or codas (for example, "Next" [nekst], "Lapsed" [læpst], "String" [stɪŋ]) might be problematic for Bangladeshi learners of English to pronounce because of their unfamiliarity with such complex onset and coda clusters in their L1.

Ismael, Mahadin & Masri (2015) investigated the pronunciation problems were (omitted) faced by the undergraduate EFL learners at Al-Balqa Applied University from different regions and different social classes of Jordan with different English consonant sounds. Providing consonant sounds in English and Arabic, the researchers have tried to know the reasons and have noticed that reasons like lack of exposure to the target language, negative attitude towards English and English phobia, passing the age of critical period and influence of the mother tongue lead to these pronunciation errors. The participants were given six words containing the same consonant sound in different positions and asked to say the following words loudly to investigate the pronunciation problems of these letters and sounds:

1. P: /p/: initial position: pen, pencil, pool, place, plate, plain/ medial position: lipstick, hamper, aspire, stamper, camper, eclipse/ final position: hop, lamp, cramp, help, stamp, sharp;
2. V: /v/: initial: vein, veal, voice, Venus, vile, vertical/ medial: shovel, shrivel, liver, havoc, avoid, lovely/ final: move, love, shove, stove, grove, and cove;
3. CH: /tʃ/: initial: chair, change, charge, chop, chain, channel and final: teach, watch, church, hatch, reach, and catch;
4. X: /z/: initial: xylophone, Xerox, Xenon, xanthan, xenophobia, xebec
5. S: /s/: medial: cast, task, cost, castle, last, trust and final: case, chase, lapse, lass, class, and bliss;
6. C: /f/: medial: deficient, efficient, sufficient, proficient, omniscient, beneficent;
7. X: /gz/: medial: exact, example, exam, exhaust, exaggerate, exalt;
8. S: /z/: medial: television, leisure, vision, measure, treasure, closure;
9. Ng: /ŋ/ final: belong, swing, ring, wing, sting, thing;
10. G: /g/ /dʒ/:initial: gentleman, gym, giant, gesture, germ, gene and final: huge, fudge, ledge, badge, hedge, pledge.

The results indicate that: 1. /v/ sound was mispronounced as /f/ in all positions. 2. /p/ was mispronounced as /b/ in all positions. 3. /z/ was mispronounced as /ks/ only in the initial position. 4. /s/ was mispronounced as /z/. Students could not recognize the different sounds of /s/ when it falls in the medial and final positions. 5. /f/ proved to be problematic for students in the medial position. It was mispronounced as /k/. 6. /g/ followed by /z/ which is a cluster sound of the letter X. This cluster was mispronounced as /ks/ in the medial position. 7. /tʃ/ was mispronounced as /f/ in the initial and final positions. 8. /z/: was mispronounced as /dʒ/ and as /f/ only in the medial position. 9. /ŋ/: was mispronounced as /n/ only in the final position. 10. /dʒ/ was mispronounced by students as /g/ in the initial and final positions.

Along the same vein, Uddin and Manjur (2015) have studied the influence of Bangla dialects on English pronunciation and they have surprisingly noted that except few regions (i.e. Noakhali, Sylhet and Chittagong) the pronunciation of the same speech of the people of different surveyed regions was almost the same. In these particular three regions, English pronunciation is identical with their own dialect. For example, in Sylhet, students use frequently the sound (Kha) instead of (Ka) and in Noakhali region students have a tendency of using /p/ sound instead of /f/ sound. In case of Chittagong, they pronounce /s/ sound instead of /tʃ/. If other zones are considered, any rigid isogloss cannot be set rather those zones can be tagged with dialect continuum. It has been found that the people of other regions except Noakhali; Chittagong and Sylhet are almost same in their English accent. They have observed that in all the zones in Bangladesh /z/ sound is a common problem of pronunciation.

From the international studies, this article got benefitted much with the ideas of some problems of L2 learners in producing correct English throughout the world. Our study resembles Albanian speakers' problem of L1 interference in their pronunciation of English found in Nihui's (2012) study and our study observes the same factors found for Chinese speakers' English pronunciation problems in the study of Zhang and Yin (2009), but goes further in many other respects. From the study of Ismael, Mahadin & Masri (2015) we have come to know that absence of some English sounds in the L1 of Jordanian speakers causes problems in their English pronunciation. We owe to the studies of Hoque (2010, 2011), as his studies have paved the way to the planning of this research. But his study of 2011 centers around the Chittagonian speakers only and his study of 2010 doesn't reflect the opinions of teachers. We have found some same problems found in Banu's (2000) study, but our study goes further with some other problematic areas of mispronunciation. Moreover, her study doesn't reflect any rigorousness of factors responsible for mispronunciation. Thus, some researchers only brought out the phonemes in which learners face problems at the time of pronunciation. Some other researchers only brought out the factors behind the wrong pronunciation without any survey. But no researcher has worked to find out both problematic phonemes and factors behind wrong pronunciation.

Therefore, along with the contribution of previous studies for the development of this research, this study has been designed to particularly bring out the nature of pronunciation problems of tertiary students in Bangladesh and factors behind these problems.

## METHODOLOGY:

### Settings and Participants:

This study has been conducted with 35 students of various districts from different departments of five universities in Bangladesh. Presentation of 10 students has also been observed by the researchers. Ten teachers specialized in language and linguistics from five universities have also been provided with a structured questionnaire to have complementary information and to know their opinions regarding pronunciation problems of the students. A mixed method methodology has been adopted by the researchers for this research.

### Data Collection:

The data for this research have been collected from the following sources:

1. Some students have been asked to read a passage containing and some words of problematic pronunciation like- Education, teacher, verb, again, poison, examination, van, flower, etc. have been recorded.
2. The researchers have also observed the presentation of some selected tertiary students at their classrooms and some mispronounced words have been picked.
3. Some students have been interviewed with some questions to find out their problems in English words while speaking English spontaneously.

At first, permission was sought formally from the teachers and students to collect data. The interviews of the students were recorded with their permission. It was assured to the interviewees that their identities would be kept confidential. It took almost ten to fifteen minutes to interview.

## DATA ANALYSIS:

The data from students' interview, class observation and reading test show the following pronunciation problems among the tertiary students in Bangladesh.

### Pronunciation problem with vowel sounds:

According to the position of cardinal vowels and durations, the vowels are of two kinds- short and long vowels and students make mistakes to differentiate between these two types of vowels.

1. It has been observed that 3 students pronounced *daughter* /dɔ:te(r)/ as /dɔte(r)/. A good number of students were found to pronounce *do* /du:/ as /du/. Two students uttered *police* /pə'li:s/ perfectly, 4 students uttered /pəlis/ and another 20 students uttered /polis/. *Short* /ʃɔ:t/ was pronounced as /ʃɔrt/ by 12 students. 2 students pronounced *father* /fɑ:ðə(r)/ as /fɑðə(r)/. One student uttered *first* /fɜ:st/ as /fɛst/. From this analysis, it is obvious that students got puzzled and interchanged between long and short vowels while pronouncing English words. Rahman (1996), in this context, has found that the quality of a Bengali vowel is not conditioned by length. On the other hand, length distinguishes English vowel sounds: /i, i:; ɒ, u, and u:, ɔ:/.
2. In the interview and reading test, nearly all students pronounced the word *examination* /ɪg,zæmɪ'neɪʃn/ as /eg,zæmɪ'neɪʃn/. Moreover, in following words, one short vowel was replaced by another one by the students: *network* /netwɜ:k/ as /nætɜ:k/ (by 2 students), *son* /sʌn/ as /sɒn/ by 1 student, *else* /els/ as /æls/ by 1 student, *away* /əwe:/ as /æ:we:/ by almost 20 students, *again* /ægeɪn/ as / ægeɪn/ by 15 students, *women* /wʊmən/ and *what* /wɒt/ as /wɒmən/ and /wɒt/ by 25 students. 2 students uttered *young* /jʌŋ/ as /jɒŋ/.
3. English diphthongs comprise of two English vowels. The students interviewed mispronounced a number of diphthongs. 24 students out of 27 pronounced *potato* /pətetəʊ/ and *day* /deɪ/ as /pɒteto/ and /de/. 20 students pronounced *tasty* /teɪsti/, *make* /meɪk/, *late* /leɪt/, *poor* /pʊə(r)/, *here* /hɪə(r)/ as /testi/, /mek/, /let/, /pʊə(r)/ and /heə(r)/. Likewise, Hoque (2010) observed that Some diphthongs become monophthongs or lengthened monophthongs: /eɪ / ~ /o: / and /eɪ / ~ /e: / by some Chittagonian learners.
4. "A diphthong and a pure vowel constitute a triphthong or 3 pure vowels constitute a triphthong (Roach,2010, p.23). Students pronounced the triphthongs at their convenient way, not following the structure of pronouncing triphthong. Almost all students pronounced *player* /pleɪə(r)/ and *lower* /ləʊə/ as /pleə(r)/ and /ləə(r)/. 1 student, in her presentation, uttered *fear* /feɪə(r)/ as /fɒə(r)/.

### Pronunciation problem with consonant sounds:

Incorrect pronunciation of consonant sounds has also been observed. They have been affected utmost by the sounds of mother tongue of the students.

1. Bilabial consonant 'p' and 'b' are mispronounced. 2 students uttered *paragraph* /færagrɑ:f/, *poison* /fɔɪzən/ and *apple* /ʌfl/ instead of /pærəgrɑ:f/, /pɔɪzən/ and /æpl/. Similarly, *department* /dɪpɑ:tmənt/ was pronounced as /dɪfɑ:tmənt/. The students were from Feni. Sultana and Arif (2007) have also observed that the people hailing from Noakhali pronounce P as F. So when a person from this region reads partner, he has to make sure of not reading it as fartner.
2. Mujaffar (1999) has observed that English labio-dental fricative /f/ and /v/ are absent in Bangla phonemic inventory, that is why students commonly adopt these sounds as the bilabial aspirated plosives /p<sup>h</sup>/ and /b<sup>h</sup>/. Therefore, some students pronounced *leaf* /li:f/ as /li:p<sup>h</sup>/. Some others pronounced *verb* /vɜ:b/ as /b<sup>h</sup>ɜ:b/ and *very* /ve:ri/ as /be:ri/.
3. The sounds of English consonant clusters are also problematic for some students to produce correctly. We have observed that students face problems in uttering /sp/, /st/, and /sm/. Words like *student* /'stju:dənt/, *speech* /spi:tʃ/, *structure* /strʌktʃə(r) were pronounced with prothetic adaptation, i.e. adding a vowel sounds before consonant clusters like in /æstju:dənt/, /æspi:tʃ/, /æstrʌktʃə(r)/. Hoque (2011) also has observed that some consonant clusters receive vowel sounds before or within them in the speech of Chittagonian English learners: /st/~ /æst/ and /sm/~ /æsm/
4. Palato alveolar consonants are displaced by other consonants. The pronunciation of *teacher* /ti:tʃə/ as /tisə/, *actual* /ækʃuəl/ as /æksuəl/, *enjoy* /endʒɔɪ/ as /enzɔɪ/, *age* /eɪdʒ/ as / eis /, *question* /kwesʃən/ as /kwesʃən/ was observed. The word *search* /tʃɜ:tʃ/ was pronounced as /sɜ:tʃ/ by almost 5 students. Likewise, Hoque (2010) observed that students from Kushtia, Hobigonj and Borishal make this kind of mistakes in pronunciation.
5. The inter-dental consonant /θ/ was mispronounced by some students. They pronounced *thank* /θænk/ as /tænk/. 1 student uttered the alveolar consonant /d/ as /d<sup>h</sup>/, e.g. *data* /deɪtə/ was pronounced as /d<sup>h</sup>ətə/.
6. Some consonants were uttered by some students in a very unusual way. For example: /'mɒnstə(r)/ as /mɒnestər/, /'ɪntrəstɪŋ/ as /'ɪntɹəsɪŋ/, /lɪtrɪʃʊə(r)/ as //lɪtɹɪʃʊə(r)/. Contractions were also uttered erroneously by few students. Example: aren't /ɑ:nt/ and isn't /ɪznt/ were pronounced as /ʌrɒnt/ and /ɪzɒnt/.

### Problems in Minimal Pair:

Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics (1987, P.178) defines- "In minimal pair, two words in a language differ from each other by only one distinctive sound which also differs in meaning." So students sometimes inter-mingle one word with the other at the time of pronunciation. So, the meaning or the structure of the sentence is changed by the students because they cannot differentiate the minimal pairs. Students made problems in following sounds: surpass~surpasses, ask~asks, disclose~disclosed, discuss~discusses, undisturb~undisturbed, get~gets, etc.

### Problems in Elision, Stress and Intonation:

There are some words in English in which some sounds disappear under certain circumstances. Students of tertiary level sometimes face this kind of problem and they mispronounce some English words by omitting a single sound from a word. They utter /skripts/ as /skrips/, /æktz/ as /æks/, here the phoneme 't' has disappeared. Students don't pronounce stressed words perfectly. For example: (interesting) /'ɪntrəstɪŋ/ as /ɪntərəstɪŋ/, (literature) /'lɪtrɪʃʊə/ as /lɪ'tɹɪʃʊə/, (tourist) /'tu:rist/ as /tu:rist/. So, in producing some words, students don't pay heed to the stress and intonation patterns of English language. For example, the word (import) /ɪmpɒt/ is pronounced by students with a long stress in the first syllable when the word gives noun meaning and with long stress utterance at the final syllable when the word gives verb meaning.

### Analysis of Teachers' Questionnaire:

Questionnaire has been prepared to collect teachers' opinions about students' English pronunciation.

Analysis of statements set in Likert scale.

1. There is a strong influence of dialects of the students' native language on English pronunciation; but if they try, they can overcome their English pronunciation problem.  
Around 70% teachers agreed that the students can overcome their problem if they give their effort to improve their pronunciation. Again, 30% teachers strongly agreed on this point and they also believe that the correct pronunciation of English is hampered by the influence of dialects.
2. Every educational institution should strictly follow the standard pronunciation of English.  
On this point, 50% teachers agreed, 30% participants strongly agreed and they believe in that case the condition of pronunciation by the student will surely be developed. 10% teachers strongly disagreed, because

they think as English is a second language in Bangladesh, students should be given the scope to pronounce English in their own way. 10% teachers disagreed on this point.

3. Students are aware of their English pronunciation from their school level.

The majority (50%) of participants disagreed in the point. It means students are unaware of their English pronunciation from the early level of their educational life and the impact of this unawareness is observed at the tertiary level too. Whereas 30% participants strongly disagreed, 20% agreed on this point and they think that students are aware of their condition of English pronunciation but they do not practice it perfectly.

4. Some students cannot understand their English pronunciation problem and they strongly deny accepting their problem. So they never improve their English pronunciation.

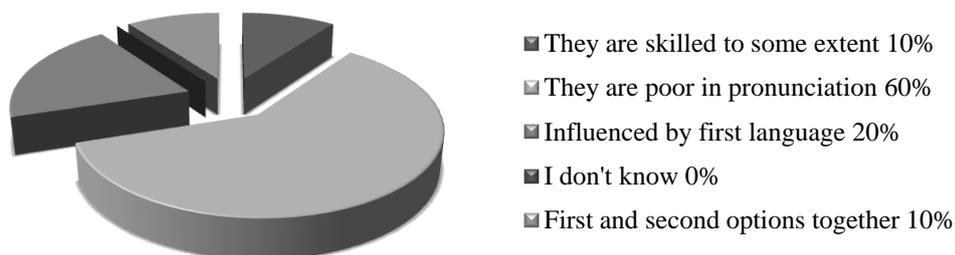
60% teachers agreed on the point and they think that is why the students don't want to improve their pronunciation. So to solve the problems of pronunciation, they themselves realize their problem. 10% participants disagreed on this view and they said that students can understand their own pronunciation problem. 20% participants are not sure about this matter. Another 10% strongly agreed on this point.

5. English teachers of college and university levels are specialized enough on phonetics and phonology to make their students aware of English pronunciation.

40% participants strongly disagreed, whereas 60% teachers disagreed on this point. So, first of all, teachers should be more efficient in pronunciation and only then they will be able correct their students' English accent.

**Analysis of questions in the questionnaire:**

Q.1. What do you think about the present condition of English pronunciation of Bangladeshi tertiary students?



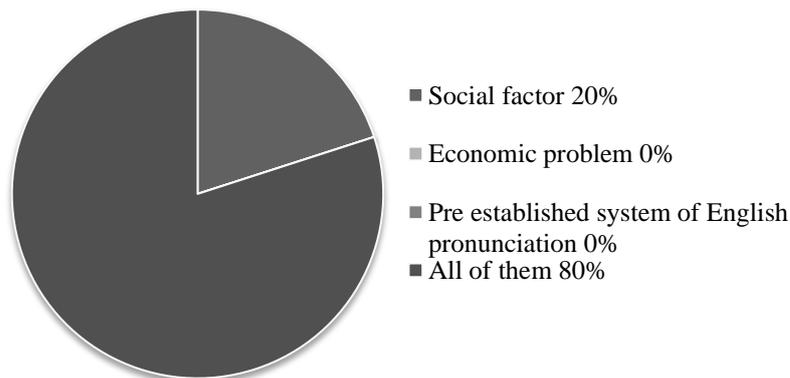
The above figure shows that about 10% think students of tertiary level are skilled in pronunciation to some extent, whereas 10% participants think there is a strong influence of first language on English pronunciation. 20% teachers opine that they are skilled in pronunciation as well as their pronunciation is influenced by first language. The figure also shows about 60% teachers think that students are poor in pronunciation; that is why they cannot produce correct English.

Q.2. According to you, what is the most determining factor for the present condition of English pronunciation of Bangladeshi tertiary students?



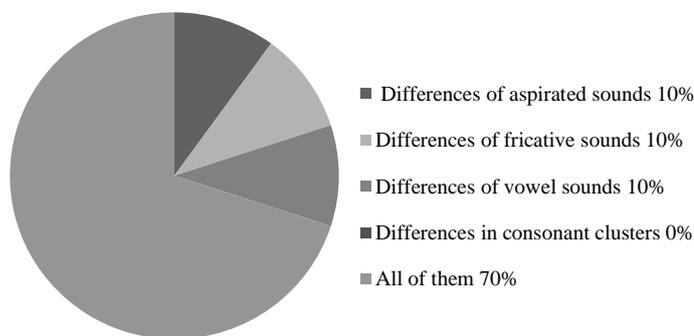
The above chart shows that 90% teachers agreed on the point 'all of them', that means, students have lack of IPA knowledge, practice and efficient teachers and also said that first language interference in second language is strong. Only 10% teachers said that lack of efficient teacher is the main problem in English pronunciation of Bangladeshi tertiary students.

Q.3. What factors are responsible for the problem of English pronunciation?



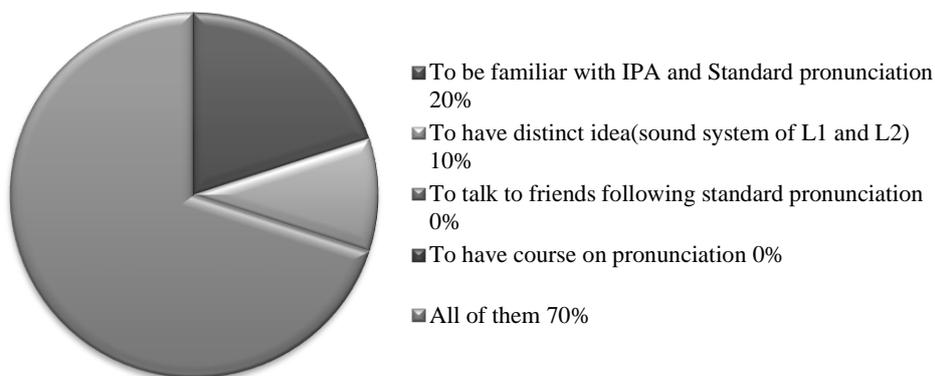
Various factors are responsible for the poor condition of English pronunciation of tertiary students. 20% teachers said that for this social factors are responsible. When a student tries to practice English speaking with his friends or family, he/she does not get a good feedback from others; that is why he or she is not motivated to continue practice. 80% teachers agreed that social factor, economic factor and pre-established system of English pronunciation are responsible for English pronunciation problem.

Q.4. What differences have you noticed between English and Bangla sound systems



The chart shows that 70% participants agreed the difference between Bangla and English sounds are observed in aspirated sounds, fricative sounds, vowel sounds and consonant clusters. 10% participants agreed that the difference is only in aspirated sounds, another 10% agreed that the difference is in fricative sounds and other 10% agreed that the difference is in vowel sounds.

Q.5. What is your suggestion to improve English pronunciation of tertiary Bangladeshi students?



The above chart shows that 70% teachers suggested the students to be familiar with IPA and standard pronunciation, to give the students distinct ideas of first and second language sound system, inspire them to talk to friends following standard pronunciation and to have any course on pronunciation to improve their English pronunciation. 20% said that only familiarity of the students with IPA and standard pronunciation is enough to improve their pronunciation. 10% said that if students can have distinct idea of different sounds of two

languages, they will be able to improve their pronunciation.

In reply to this open ended statement-“Our existing English teaching system is appropriate for improving English pronunciation of the students”- the participants suggested some important points to overcome the pronunciation problem faced by the students of tertiary level. Some teachers suggested that teachers should be more efficient in English sound system to make the students good at pronunciation and the classrooms should be well equipped with modern technology which can assist our existing teaching system to improve English pronunciation. Other teachers told about the deficiency of our existing teaching system for pronunciation. The students don't have sufficient listening input and the input they receive is lack of standard. Some others said that the present education system hardly gives any importance to pronunciation, so authority should introduce courses from the very beginning of tertiary level to improve students' pronunciation gradually. Some other said that students should have more exposure to the target language incorporating listening of the real life situation. One participant said that there is no special training or courses in the educational institutions to improve student's pronunciation in second language. On the other hand it is also told by participants that our approach to learning pronunciation is biased, it is neither American nor British.

### SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS:

#### Problems found in English vowel sounds:

- Some long vowels turn to short ones: /i:/ ~ /i/, /u:/ ~ /u/, /ɔ:/ ~ /ɔ/, /ɜ:/ ~ /ɜ/, /ɑ:/ ~ /ɑ/.
- Some short vowels undergo interchange between them: /ɪ/ turns to /e/, /e/ turns to /æ/, /ə/(close front vowel) turns to /æ/(front vowel), /ʊ/(central vowel) turns to /ʊ/(back vowel), /ʌ/(back vowel) turns to /ʌ/(central vowel).
- Some diphthongs turn to short vowels: /eɪ/ (closing diphthong) ~ /e/(front vowel), /ʊə/(centring diphthong) ~ /ʊ/, /ɪə/(centring diphthong) ~ /eə/(another centring diphthong).
- Some triphthongs become diphthong or other vowels: /eɪə/ ~ /eə/(centring diphthong), /əʊə/ ~ /o:ʌ/.

#### Problems found in English consonant sounds:

- Bilabial plosive /p/ turns to labio dental fricative /f/.
- Labio dental fricative /f/ and /v/ also turns to bilabial aspirated plosive /p<sup>h</sup>/ and /b<sup>h</sup>/
- Palato alveolar affricate consonants /tʃ/ and /dʒ/ turn to alveolar consonant /s/ and /z/
- Alveolar consonant /d/ is produced as aspirated alveolar consonant /d<sup>h</sup>/(ᵀ)
- Inter dental fricative /θ/ turns to alveolar consonant /t/(ᵀ)
- Some vowels are added within the consonants.

#### Problems found in minimal pair:

- Plural marker 's' is dropped
- Third person singular number marker 'es' is dropped
- Past tense marker 'd' or 'ed' is dropped

### Factors Responsible for Poor Pronunciation:

There are some factors which are responsible for poor pronunciation of English. From interaction with the teachers and students the factors that this study brings out are: social factors, such as- students are not motivated by the friends or the family members or even by the teachers to produce correct English; lack of efficient teachers in phonetics and phonology; lack of using modern technology at the educational institutions; economic factor; lack of motivation; students' lack of exposure to the target language; poor pronunciation standard of the teachers; massive L1 interference and pre-established systems of English pronunciation.

Contextually, Shuchi (2013) has told that all English teachers are not aware of this problem. She thinks some teachers are not much cooperative, some others are indifferent to the students' problems with correct English. Some teachers blame lack of awareness for low Standard of English. From the teachers' view, she has found, either the students or the teachers are unaware of it. Only the teachers should not be blamed; students themselves are responsible for failing to produce Standard English.

### Pedagogical Implications:

From this study, it is hoped that the teachers will get proper information about students' pronunciation problem in English. Students will also know their problematic areas where they face problem while pronouncing English words. Therefore, both teachers and students may make importance to practice English pronunciation correctly.

Teachers will not only think about the problems of the students but also give necessary suggestions to the authority of their respective institutions regarding English pronunciation of tertiary students. On the other hand, a comparative analysis between Bangla and English sound systems may give the students and teachers a chance to detect the differences of sound systems of two languages to avoid L1 interference in pronunciation.

Moreover, Penny Ur's (1996, as cited in Howlader, 2011, p. 277) following suggestions to overcome pronunciation problem by L2 learners are also important: recorded model of sounds; recording of learner speech and contrast with native model; imitation drills; repetition of sounds; choral repetition of drills; varied repetition of drills (varied speed, volume, and mood); learning and performing dialogues; learning by heart of sentences, rhythms, jingles; jazz chants; tongue twisters and self-correction through listening to recordings of own speech.

### RECOMMENDATIONS:

English pronunciation of Bangladeshi tertiary students is really a major problem. A strong determination of the students and their teachers' motivation will help them to solve this problem radically. Therefore, this paper provides some recommendations to improve students' pronunciation:

- Conceptualization theory in pronunciation can be used to enable learners of tertiary level to give them the chance to come to an ideal level in using the language with all its components;
- Correct L2 input should be given more and more;
- drilling would be helpful for the students;
- Modern instruments should be used to improve pronunciation;
- Stress and intonation can be taught as a property of individual words;
- The students should be taught that writing symbols and sound symbols are different and spelling is not pronunciation;
- Teachers should be trained on phonetics to aid students improving their pronunciation and
- Authorities of institutions should propose more spoken courses at the beginning of the tertiary level.

### CONCLUSION:

Since English is a globalized lingua franca, the students should be motivated to follow the standard pronunciation. They should be encouraged to follow the standard form of English pronunciation. The study reveals that Bangladeshi students, especially tertiary students, have had many obstacles on the way to the correct pronunciation of English, most of which are due to L1 interference. Therefore, they should have a balanced idea about the sound systems of both L1 and L2. In spite of many limitations regarding data collection, analysis, findings and recommendations, we hope that this study will motivate the EFL/ESL students as well as the teachers to take steps to improve students' fluency in English pronunciation.

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