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English Pronunciation Practice Poems
for Bangalees
Mushfiqur Rahman

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 MOSC mobile school

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Dedicated To

My Grandson

Idriis Rahman

Foreword

Learning or teaching pronunciation of a foreign tongue is a difficult task. I have taught English Pronunciation to Bangalis and other non-Native English Speakers and struggled when I tried to make them conceptualise those English sounds which are not present in their native languages. In this process I found that instead of demonstrating the pronunciations of different sounds and words to the learners and asking them to repeat after me it is far easier and effective to let them learn the sounds automatically and gradually on their own by taking part in fun activities they enjoy like reciting funny poems, singing contemporary songs and acting etc.

I remember the famous “hashi khushi” book by Jogendra Sarkar which helped me and my siblings learn the very difficult Bengali Alphabet with poems like

অ অজগড় আসছে তেড়ে
আমটি আমি খাব পেড়ে
ইদুর ছানা ভয়ে মরে
ঈগল পাখী পাছে ধরে
ওল খেও না ধরবে গলা
ঔষধ খেতে মিছে বলা
এক্সা গাড়ী খুব ছুটেছে
ঐ দেখ ভাই চাদ উঠেছে

I wished I had similar English poems which I could use to teach Bangalis the English sounds that they cannot pronounce or confuse with other sounds. But alas, I have no poetic skills and hence could not write such poems. But then I was lucky because I had a neighbour, a friend of over 50 years, Mushfiqur Rahman, who often wrote poems on different topics and occasions, and circulated them to his friends. I approached him and explained to

him what I wanted. After initial hesitation he agreed and wrote the poems in this booklet in record time. I could not expect anything better.

I plan to use these poems in my future English Pronunciation teaching programs. I am confident that Bangali learners of English who learn and recite these poems will notice marked improvement in their English Pronunciation which all will admire. So Mushfiqur Rahman deserves a big “thank you” from all English teachers and learners in Bangladesh and other places where these poems will be recited and learned.

Amin Rahman
Dhaka, December 2016

Preface

As a native Bengali speaker (NBS), I have always been intrigued by the many idiosyncrasies of English pronunciation. What makes it challenging for a non-native speaker is the absence of unique rules. For example, the words 'rough' and 'dough' have similar spelling but have markedly different pronunciations. To add an extra layer of complexity, there are several sounds associated with English vowels and consonants that are not captured by the Bengali alphabet. Those 'alien' sounds, do not come naturally to the Bengali speaking tongue. To make things worse, incorrect pronunciations morph into incorrigible habits over time that can't be rectified without a conscious effort. An innovative but simple approach to learning correct English pronunciation is required that circumvents IPA, a theoretical but impractical tool for most Bengalis. Amin Rahman's English Pronunciation Dictionary that transliterates English words with BPA, a collection of selected letters of the Bengali alphabet and a handful of imported symbols, is a ground-breaking contribution that fills a void.

As an applied linguist, Amin Rahman found his passion in teaching English to children and adults from disadvantaged backgrounds. The English Pronunciation Dictionary is the culmination of more than a decade's work. He has blended together his practical teaching experience and his theoretical knowledge in linguistics. Furthermore, as an accomplished musician, he has an intimate understanding of the vocalization process. Putting together these distinct qualities have resulted in an extra-ordinary contribution – the Pronunciation Dictionary has the potential to play a very significant role in enabling Bengalis to speak intelligible English.

I have known Amin Rahman since our university days. As a close friend and neighbour, we have often bantered over the vagaries of English pronunciation. Words starting with 'Z' have

been particularly challenging. Against this backdrop, I had composed a poem "All about G, J & Z" that I circulated amongst friends. It was meant to be a humorous exercise, but to my surprise Amin Rahman included this poem as compulsory reading for his students. Now, at his request, I composed a set of limericks to highlight unique challenges posed by certain letters or combination of letters. The reason to adopt limerick as a medium was deliberate. A limerick is a nonsensical verse of 5 lines with rhyming pattern AABBA. Writing a few verses does not make me a poet and a limerick was an easy way out that allowed me to focus on pronunciation issues without the need to write anything poetically profound. It has been a great privilege for me to watch Amin Rahman's work unfold and reach fruition. To be able to make a modest contribution makes it even more worthwhile.

Mushfiqur Rahman
Melbourne, Australia, 2016

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Vagaries of V & W

(1)

English pronunciations are swarming in vice
One has to practice, much more than twice
 But anyone can master
 Only if they persevere
Through repetitions one becomes very wise

(2)

People wonder what makes Jamal so vain
Perhaps pride simply overflows in his vein
 Exams he fails
 Followed by wails
And for a little while his vanity is on the wane

(3)

The little rascals made the teacher weary
Teasing, taunting and vaunting with wild glee
 Some would scrawl
 Others would brawl
Making her raise her voice, sounding very angry

(4)

When you vault and win everyone says wow
Though deep beneath, jealousy makes them vow
 To stand in your way
 Like you are a bird of prey
They whine and vent, taking you down somehow

Intricacies of P & F

(1)

There was once a vagabond in Feni
Poor Fellow didn't even have a penny
 Stones that kids would pelt
 Would hit him that he sadly felt
So he vanished dressed up as a granny

(2)

A little boy was sitting on a fence
Happily twirling his solitary pence
 He saw a bird appear
 That made him fear
About an appalling consequence

(3)

Miss Marple was so proud of her furniture
That she had them strewn with flower
 Her little pet did a pee
 What a playful perfidy
Poor lady had to put the prankster in a freezer

(4)

Peter said to his pal, lets play water polo
Promptly replied Paul, let us then follow
 The rules of the pool
 Without acting like a fool
Or else coach's pill will be hard to swallow

Hush & rush to See a Snake

(1)

The teacher shouted to Hamish to hush
Poor little fellow shut up with a sad blush
 He felt so much shame
 Swore never to do the same
But he wasn't coming back to class in a rush

(2)

A snake swooped on a Swiss store with a hiss
Shocked shoppers dreading a deathly kiss
 How shambolic and shocking
 To see such stealing and snatching
A senseless end to what once was sheer bliss

(3)

Sasha had a sweetheart called Shane
Sadly she was seldom sober and sane
 At times very sly
 But never too shy
It was a union that simply could not sustain

(4)

An Aussie from Tassie had so many sheep to shear
He would shriek with sneer, slashing with a spear
 With a lash he could thrash
 Smoothly shooing any backlash
Sharp as a shark, he could be showy and severe

Measure treasure but not pleasure

(1)

A hearty meal is a source of pleasure
That only a fool will ever try to measure
 Watching on a television
 Either a vision or an illusion
Will never equal a gastronomical treasure

(2)

I opened the doors of my garage
To discover a wanton act of sabotage
 As if it was a nuclear fusion
 Causing utter confusion
The whole thing seemed like a mirage

(3)

The town of Montage was terrorized by the triage
Their leaders moved about with armed entourage
 So savage was their rage
 They left a trail of carnage
Punishing any informant suspected of espionage

(4)

Something was concealed by a hotel concierge
Which was hidden with an elaborate camouflage
 Creating an aura of illusion
 In order to cause delusion
That turned out to be nothing but a useless collage

Pat your bat but don't bet your pet

(1)

There was once a beautiful wombat
That loved its lush green habitat
 At the time of sunset
 It sounded like a clarinet
And other animals followed like a copycat

(2)

Sam suddenly put a bet on his pet
That it could run faster than a jet
 But it was really very fat
 And was slower than a rat
No wonder, this was the onset of a debt

(3)

The town bully used a bat for combat
Neither a democrat, nor a diplomat
 Police would always regret
 He escaped their dragnet
Thus he could live like an aristocrat

(4)

The quartet had a stunning brunette
A coquette set in an exquisite statuette
 Refusing to chitchat
 Like a spoiled brat
She got an epithet that she wanted to forget

T & D

(1)

My old bed will bend before you can comprehend
Therefore never lend even though it's the trend
 Time to spend a dime
 It's more than time
It's not something I can anymore pretend to defend

(2)

Humpty Dumpty swept away by a big tide
Tied together they had a roller coaster ride
 Tossing and treading
 Darting and diving
They landed on a dune by the seaside

(3)

Banking terms like debit and credit
Makes me run away like a rabbit
 A cheque that is postpaid
 Is as good as unpaid
A tad daunting before an audit

(4)

Delta was devoted to her daughter
Tilda was a dainty little toddler
 Mum told a tall tale
 With hardly any detail
Making delicate Missy burst like tinder

V & B

(1)

Vivian lived like a brave old bimbo
Fabian was more like a vintage Rambo
 Viv loved to blithely banter
 While Fab played with a visitor
Vaunting their vanity with a jumbo Volvo

(2)

Boys discovered a very big vessel with a vent
Which offered a clear view if backs were bent
 Of a boozier who alas was a vicar
 A sight so vicious and vulgar
To view the reverend basking in a village event

(3)

Marrying a stranger can turn out to be venal
Even if everything is organized for the bridal
 Never marry a virtuous Virgo
 Who brims with boisterous bravo
Love should be neither banal nor vocational

(4)

Vikings like to vilify before they begin to vanquish
A band of bandits blitzing all including the British
 It is a good idea to divest
 Anything precious and best
Before being vetted of a blemish and made to vanish

O & U

(1)

It's romantic to sit by the sandy seashore
As long as you make sure to be never a bore
 Don't feel insecure
 Indulge in pedicure
While there is a downpour of a mature folklore

(2)

A sophomore swore to bore into a store
Keen to score, he tore through the door
 New boot on his foot
 With a matching suit
To ensure none will consider him a crude anymore

(3)

In a corner of the field covered by snow
There sat all alone a lonesome crow
 Playing with a ball
 Not letting it fall
Wouldn't it be fair to call it an awesome show

(4)

There was once a marauding horde
Insisting they be given food and board
 People were so poor
 They shut their door
To put away all anyone could hoard

All About G, J and Z

All these rhymes are written in earnest ZEST
See how different G, J and Z are with JEST
Sounds can be tricky unless we practice and digest
It just needs training, that's what linguists suggest

Like a magician's abracadabra
One can transform a ZEBRA into a JEBRA
A graceful tall animal by the name of GIRAFFE
So often it is insulted being called a ZIRAFFE

US president ZACHARY Taylor also known as ZACK
While John Kennedy was affectionately called JACK
TARZAN roamed the forests with girlfriend JANE
Using ZODIAC signs they JAUNTED through rain

Life is a collection of many big ZOOS
Mispronounce at your peril as JEWS
Like a ZEALOT who may not be JEALOUS
But he is always, by definition, ZEALOUS

Once I lived in a country called BraZil
Where I met a pretty maiden called Jill
Our friendship was full of fun and Zeal
Alas, a relationship which didn't congeal

Heartbroken, I travelled to Zimbabwe
Which, sadly, is now ruled by a Zombie
So fled to Zambia along a road so ZIGZAG
Not much fun, no JIG, just one painful JAG

People from ZAIRE are not necessarily ZANY
And the JAPANESE are anything but JOLLY
Southern Africa once was ruled by the ZULU
Where indigenous faith healers practiced JU-JU

You can ZOOM into your preferred ZONES
But no one can JOOM, not even a JONES
If you have gone this far, you are one big hero
You know your Z from J, a ZERO is not a JERO