

# An ELF-based Syllabus for Teaching English Pronunciation to Native Bengali Speakers (NBS)

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## ABSTRACT

As a flexible and effective communication system for Non-Native Speakers of English (NNS), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is a frequently mentioned concept in the current literature on ELT. This study investigates if the problems encountered in the teaching of English pronunciation to Non-Native English Speakers (NNS) can be alleviated in Bangladesh through the ELF approach. In particular, it develops a simple and easy to teach/learn pronunciation teaching model specifically designed for Native Bengali Speakers (NBS). Furthermore, this study offers a prototype syllabus for English as a Lingua Franca for Bengalis (ELFB) based on the Bengali Lingua Franca Core Model (BLFC) adapted from LFC model of Jenkins.

**Keywords:** English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), Non-Native English Speakers (NNS), English pronunciation, intelligibility

## Introduction

The topic English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) was of little interest to ELT researchers and teachers as recently as in 1995 (Walker, 2010; Kirkpatrick, 2010). Today, about two decades later, the situation is quite different with ELF which is now a ‘hot’ topic for research (see Firth, 1996; Jenkins, 2000, 2002, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Seidlhofer, 2001, 2004, 2005; House, 2003; Pickering, 2006; Kirkpatrick, 2008, 2010, 2012; Walker, 2010). ELF has both supporters and critics (Walker, 2010). However, we believe that non-native speakers (NNS) would benefit from an understanding of ELF and ELF-based teaching practices in ELT.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to raise awareness of ELF. Currently, English pronunciation following Received Pronunciation (RP) or General American (GA) standards, are still commonly taught to NNS. These standards have two types of features: segmental and supra-segmental which are difficult to teach and learn (Roach, 1991). In her *Lingua Franca Core (LFC)* model, Jenkins (2000) did not include some of the complex features from these two categories. The aim of this current study was to investigate if one could take advantage of Jenkins' LFC model, and develop an easy English Pronunciation model and syllabus specifically targeted to Native Bengali Speakers (NBS) and use it for teaching and learning intelligible English Pronunciation in Bangladeshi schools.

### Understanding ELF

Table 1 shows how past and present experts defined ELF since the mid-90s.

**Table 1.** Definitions of ELF by past and present researchers

|                           |  |
|---------------------------|--|
| Firth (1996, p. 240)      | This is the naturally-occurring talk-in-interaction produced by non-Native speakers of English, where English is used as a <i>Lingua Franca</i> – a ‘contact language’ between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication.   |
| Seidlhofer (2001, p. 146) | It is an additional acquired language system that serves as a means of communication between speakers of different first languages, or a language by means of which the members of different speech communities can communicate with each other but which is not the native language of either – a language which has no native speaker. |
| Cook (2003, p. 29)        | In ELF, speakers speak a new variety of English which depends neither on childhood acquisition nor on cultural identity, and is often used in communication in which no native speaker is involved.  |
| House (2003, p. 559)      | It is a repertoire of different communicative instruments, an individual has at his/her disposal, a language of communication.   |
| Pickering (2006, p. 2)    | ELF is talk comprising expanding circle speakers – listeners, also described as non-native speakers  |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | (NNSs), competent L2 speakers, or, in Jenkins' (2000) terms, non-bilingual English speakers (NBESs) for whom proficiency may range from nearly bilingual English speakers (BESs) to beginners who are non-bilingual English speakers.   |
| Jenkins (2008, p. 5)                             | ELF is a way of referring to communication in English between speakers who have different first languages.  |
| Hulmbayer, Bohringer, & Seidlhofer (2008, p. 27) | ELF is defined <i>functionally</i> by its intercultural communication rather than <i>formally</i> by its reference to native-speaker norms. The crucial point is that speakers of whatever L1 can appropriate ELF for their own purposes without over-deference to native-speaker norms.  |
| Kirkpatrick (2008, p. 28)                        | Lingua Franca is to be seen more as a <i>functional</i> term rather than a <i>linguistic</i> one... the English used by speakers is likely to be characterized by variation and variety.  |
| Walker (2010, p. 7)                              | ELF represents a community of users of English. The members of this community are predominantly non-native speakers. Native speakers are not excluded, but if they wish to join the ELF community, they can only do this by respecting ELF norms. What native speakers cannot do in ELF is impose their particular set of native-speaker norms. |

The above definitions suggest that ELF is a community language (Walker, 2010). Where members of the community, who are mainly Non-Native English Speakers from different countries, do not speak a common language (Firth, 1996; Seidlhofer, 2001; Jenkins, 2008) create a new variety of English (Cook, 2003; Pickering, 2006) for communication (Firth, 1996, 2003; Seidlhofer, 2001; House, 2003) within that community. They use ELF as a contact language (Firth, 1996).

### **ELF is like offering and having tea**

Communicating in ELF with somebody can be compared to offering someone a beverage like *tea*. It can be served in a fine bone china or English Willow tea set. It can also be served in mugs with or without handles of different sizes and shapes, or in disposable cups or glasses. In Middle Eastern countries tea is served in glasses, half filled with sugar. The glass size varies from one country to another. In a roadside tea stall in Bangladesh one may be served tea in small tin cans, which previously contained condensed milk. In this case the circular lid, which is still stuck to the can at one end, serves as a

convenient handle. In India, when the train stops at different stations, tea vendors serve tea to passengers in disposable clay pots. The pot size starts with small in the east, gradually getting larger as one travels west.

The way tea is prepared also varies. There are practices of formal tea ceremonies among the upper class in China and Japan. The formal English style of preparation involves putting loose tea leaves in a tea-pot and then adding boiled water to it, covering the pot with a tea-cosy, and brewing it for five minutes. The English tea is served with milk and sugar. There are also different varieties and blends of this great beverage. Spices like ginger, cardamom, cloves, saffron, and cinnamon may be added to it. It can be prepared in different ways and served in different utensils and still called tea.

The same is the case with ELF. It has no fixed norms and standards; there are no boundaries, no ownership. It is an array of English sounds and words strung together and uttered by someone to communicate a message. Importantly, like tea, ELF is for *sharing* between people. Kasper and Kellerman (1997) maintain that “ELF is for extroverts”.

## Methodology

Our findings are based on the following: (a) the experience of the two authors in teaching ELT and TESOL to undergraduate and post graduate students from the following countries: Afghanistan, Australia, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Cambodia, Chile, China, Colombia, Japan, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Korea, UK, USA, Vietnam, Iraq, and Australia; (b) Analysis of the audio data available in VOICE<sup>1</sup> (Vienna-Oxford International Corpus of English) and ACE<sup>ii</sup> (Asian Corpus of English); and (c) Analysis of the following three assumptions.

**Assumption 1:** *Natives of one country are familiar with the English pronunciation of different regions within their own country*

In Bangladesh, people from different regions speak different dialects of the Bengali language using different regional allophones. As they all study English throughout their primary and secondary education, when anyone speaks English, irrespective of their regional background, other English speakers of Bangladesh generally have no difficulty in comprehending them. Native English Speakers (NS) may classify many of their pronunciations as

‘incorrect’ (e.g. if an NBS pronounces the word “zoo” as [dʒo]<sup>iii</sup>) (Rahman, 2016). However, such ‘mis-pronunciations’ do not compromise intelligibility among people in the same country. In this regard, the case of Singapore is relevant. Singapore has three recognized versions of English (Kirkpatrick, 2010, p. 47; Walker, 2010, p. 11): ‘Standard’ English, Standard Singapore English, and Singlish. A Singaporean who primarily speaks Standard English because of his educational background and job requirements still understands the other two versions of Singapore English with ease, although people from outside Singapore might not necessarily enjoy similar ease of comprehension.

**Assumption 2.** *People from one country find the English pronunciation of their neighboring countries intelligible and acceptable*

People from the Indian subcontinent generally understand the English pronunciations of the people of their neighboring countries because of many commonalities. For instance, they may use the strong forms of the consonant sounds /d/ and /t/, which comedians like Peter Sellers mimics. Among the current TV serials, *The Simpsons* and *The Big Bang Theory* have Indian characters in them as their directors like to highlight such non-native English pronunciation in the name of entertainment. It is note that many NS viewers who watch these two popular TV programs have no difficulty in understanding such ELF speech. If they did, there would be complaints, and the Indian characters would be replaced by alternative characters, and the series would not have such long runs.

To give another example, a person from Punjab in Pakistan may pronounce the word ‘school’ as [səku:lə] while speaking in English with a Bengali. The latter, instead of pointing out that this is a non-standard English pronunciation, will simply accept it. With reference to our above tea metaphor, it is like accepting whatever version of tea that a person has been offered by his/her host (which may be different to what he/she is used to having at home). Similar examples can be found in other regions of Asia. The best examples are the two Asian regional economic groups ASEAN (Kirkpatrick, 2010) and SAARC where English is used successfully as the language for communication by people of different countries having different pronunciations without any perceived difficulties or challenges.

**Assumption 3.** *People who read/write and speak English can and do communicate with speakers of other countries in English*

Anecdotal evidence from annual ELT, TESOL and other international conferences supports this assumption. English speakers from many countries attend these conferences, present papers, and communicate with each other in question and answer sessions. Presenters are understood by all participants as they intermix during breaks and, when two persons do not speak the same L1, they speak English (L2), each using their own varieties of pronunciation.

After agreeing with and accepting these three assumptions, NBS English learners can use *English as a Lingua Franca in Bangladesh* (ELFB). With such mindsets people will be ready to accept each other's tea or English, prepared according to individual customs. They can enjoy the tea or an ELFB conversation without smirking at someone's pronunciation.

## **Discussion**

Jenkins (2009), one of the pioneers of ELF, with a view to simplifying the teaching of English for Non-Native Speakers (NNS) of English, carried out extensive empirical research on interactions between NNS. She found that majority (almost 60%) of the breakdowns in communication in English were due to pronunciation problems (Jenkins, 2000, p. 88), rather than grammar, vocabulary, and other causes. In this paper, pronunciation in EFL communication, the primary cause of communication breakdowns in NNS conversations, has been examined.

### ***Intelligibility of ELF pronunciation***

In ELT literature, the term *intelligibility* has been discussed extensively (e.g. Seidlhofer, 2000; Walker, 2001; Field, 2005; Cruz, 2007; Kirkpatrick, 2012; Munro & Derwing, 1995; Munro, 2008; Pickering, 2006; Rajadurai, 2007). Cruz (2007) compared the definitions of *intelligibility* proposed by scholars during the period 1950 to 2003. Numerous definitions, spanning over 53 years, confirm that "there is as yet no broad agreement on a definition of the term 'intelligibility'; it can mean different things to different people" (Jenkins, 2000, p. 20). However, Field (2005, p. 401) "restricts the term *intelligibility* to features of the speech signal and uses it to refer to the extent to which the acoustic-phonetic content of the message is recognizable by a listener".

To understand *intelligibility* in relation to ELF, if may use the *tea* analogy once again. *Intelligibility* is connected with the *recognition* of the

beverage tea, by a tea drinker when it is served by a host. When someone offers another person tea or someone orders tea from a tea stall or restaurant and the tea arrives, the person for whom the tea has been prepared recognizes that what (s)he is served is tea and not anything else. It may be served in a different form to what (s)he is used to—very light, medium or dark, strong, with or without sugar, or spices, but (s)he still recognizes that it is indeed tea. The *intelligibility* of ELF pronunciation can be conceptualized similarly. The server, in this case the speaker, serves the listener with a string of sounds, forming words and sentences, which the latter recognizes as English, even though (s)he or another person would not necessarily have used or spoken those same words or sentences in a similar manner to communicate the same idea. The listener, after hearing them, if (s)he does not fully understand, may ask the speaker for clarification. This is like a tea drinker asking for a little more milk, sugar, or water to make it closer to his/her taste (for more discussion on *intelligibility* see Cruz, 2003, p. 56).

### ***Acceptability of ELF pronunciation***

Again, we can use the *tea* analogy to explain *acceptability* of ELF pronunciation. For example, the tea that will be *acceptable* to the Queen of England will be different from the tea that will be acceptable to a three-year-old child; or the tea that people will accept from a mobile tea vendor while on the move. Thus, *acceptability* is more like the *degree of familiarity* of the receiver with a particular item and the environment. However, *acceptability* is not constant, it changes over time. An item becomes more acceptable to someone when (s)he is exposed to it for a long period of time or gets familiar with a new environment. This applies both to tea and ELF pronunciation. For example, a new learner of English, including an NS learner will initially have difficulty in accepting the current RP pronunciation of words like ‘walk’, ‘rough’, ‘women’, ‘psalm’, ‘cello’, ‘gnome’, ‘beautiful’, ‘xylophone’, ‘hour’, ‘mnemonic’, and ‘tsar’. However, after formal introduction and more exposure to these words (s)he will learn to accept these non-phonetic pronunciations.

### ***Jenkins’ Lingua Franca Core (LFC) model***

Jenkins (2000) identified four areas for her Lingua Franca Core (LFC) model, which non-native English learners must be taught in their pronunciation learning programs. These are: (a) individual consonant sounds (LFC1), (b) clusters (LFC2), (c) vowels (LFC3), and (d) nuclear stress placement (LFC4). LFC is significantly simpler than the standard RP English

pronunciation and hence a training based on this can be less daunting, both for teachers and learners. In the following sections, the four areas of LFC (LFC1, LFC2, LFC3, LFC4) are presented and an attempt is made to fine-tune them, by simplifying them further to develop a Bangladeshi Lingua Franca Core (BLFC) model and an ELF pronunciation teaching syllabus for Bangladesh. We believe that learners should first be introduced to the *Human Musical Instrument* while teaching ELF pronunciation and this may be included in the BLFC, as explained in the next section.

### ***The Human Musical Instrument***

Humans make speech sounds with the help of their very versatile and powerful musical instrument, the Vocal Musical System (Lessac, 1967). It is known that a musician first has to get familiar with the different parts of his/her musical instrument that (s)he plays and learn about their functions before being able to play or perform. Similarly, vocalists, singers or speakers, who want to make beautiful sounds with their vocal musical instrument, need to know each part or articulator that is used for generating different types of speech sounds, which should sound like music to a listener's ears. While learning to use this instrument for speaking, users need to also get familiar with the concepts of *voiced* and *unvoiced* sounds as these are two primary categories of English consonant sounds.

The advantage of including all this in the Bangladeshi Lingua Franca Core (BLFC) model is that most English learners in Bangladesh who have gone through secondary school are familiar with this device, although they refer to it by a different name—*The Human Vocal System*. Therefore, it is worth spending some time to teach and demonstrate the functions of the different parts of this musical device to pronunciation learners. In addition, from our personal experiences in teaching English pronunciation, we have observed that learners find more interest when the teaching of pronunciation is made somewhat like the teaching of music. If the learning of English songs is encouraged, for example, learners will, automatically and unknowingly, use the supra-segmental features of English speech, such as the primary and secondary stresses on words, connected speech, rhythm, and tonality. They may be able to learn these features without going through any rigorous drilling, which is commonplace practice in Bangladeshi classrooms and often tends to be boring. Later, when speaking English, it is likely that they will use these features. Incidentally, supra-segmental features are not included in



Jenkins' Lingua Franca Core (LFC). In the following section, we discuss the four areas of Jenkins' LFC model.

### *LFC1: The consonants*

Jenkins (2000) suggested that all English consonants (24 in RP) should be included in LFC except /θ/ and /ð/. As these two phonemes are not present in many languages and are difficult to articulate. She proposed replacing them by alternative sounds present in a speaker's native language. She also makes some suggestions regarding the pronunciation of /p/, /t/, /k/ and /l/, /r/ so that they are intelligible when used in English speech. For ease of understanding, teaching, and learning, we propose that the consonant phonemes be grouped as follows (it can also be used while developing a syllabus for teaching pronunciation for NBS).

- (a) The fricative consonant sounds
- (b) English consonants which need to be replaced by L1 sounds
- (c) Other consonants

In LFC1, NBS face three pronunciation problems as described below.

*Problem 1: The fricative consonant sounds.* NBS cannot always pronounce all the English fricative consonant sounds /s, f, v, z, ʒ, θ, ð/ correctly. While pronouncing English words which contain any of these consonant sounds, they often use a Bengali sound instead, which they perceive to be the same as the English sound (Rahman, A., 2016). This is a major cause of unintelligibility of English speech of NBS. Therefore, learners should first be taught the concept of *fricatives*, i.e., how two articulators or parts of the musical instrument are brought close together, without touching each other, so that there is a gap between them through which air can be forced out to produce the required sound. We suggest that the two English phonemes, /θ/ and /ð/, should be replaced by [t<sup>h</sup>] and [d], respectively as when English words are pronounced with these two alternative sounds they are still intelligible (Jenkins, 2009a). The authors have noticed that NS also substitute [θ] and [ð] with these alternative sounds. For example, we have heard NS pronounce words like “think” as [t<sup>h</sup>ɪŋk] instead of /θɪŋk/ and “this” as [dɪs], instead of /ðɪs/.

*Problem 2: English consonants replaced by other sounds.* In some Asian languages, when an English consonant phoneme is not present, speakers use another similar sounding English consonant phoneme or an entirely different

L1 phoneme, which they consider to be similar to the original English phoneme (see Table 2).

**Table 2.** English sound replacements by speakers of English in different Asian countries

| Sound replacement | Example                  | Country/Region    | Reference   |
|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|---|
| /p/ → [b]         | “park” → [ba:rk]         | Arab              | Arabic does not have unvoiced bilabial stop /p/ (Alfehaid, 2015; Hassan, 2014)      |
| /dʒ/ → [g]        | “Jamal” → [gəma:l]       | Arab              | Arabic does not have affricates (Alfehaid, 2015)                                    |
| /tʃ/ → [k]        | “chain” → [keɪn]         | Arab              | Alfehaid, 2015  |
| /ð/ → [z]         | “this” → [zɪs]           | Egyptian          | Alfehaid, 2015  |
| /θ/ → [s]         | “thing” → [θɪŋ]          | Egyptian          | Alfehaid, 2015,   |
| /θ/ → [f]         | “three” → [fri:]         | Hong Kong         | Deterding et al., 2008  |
| /l/ → [n]         | “lest” → [nest]          | Hong Kong         | Deterding et al., 2008  |
| /r/ → [l]         | “rice” → [laɪs]          | Japanese & Korean | Essays, UK (2018)   |
| /w/ → [null]      | “wool” → [vʊl]           | Bangladeshi       | Many Bangladeshis cannot pronounce the /w/ phoneme (Rahman, A. 2016, p. 4)          |
| /dʒ/ → [z]        | “digital” → [ˈdɪz.ɪ.təl] | Bangladeshi       | Many Bangladeshis interchange /dʒ/ & /z/ (Rahman, A. 2016, p. 59; Rahman, M. p. 10) |
| /z/ → [dʒ]        | “zoo” → [dʒu:]           | [dʒu:]            | As above  |

*Problem 3: Other consonants.* In the Bangladeshi Lingua Franca Core (BLFC) model, we suggest that the consonant phonemes /l, r, p, t, k/ should be included with simplified pronunciation as described below.

(a) /l/: One sound should be used. The dark [ɫ] is difficult to conceive and learn, and not necessary. For example, [mɪɫk]. It is not necessary to use the dark [ɫ] for pronouncing such words. The simple /l/ should suffice as words pronounced with the simple /l/ are easily comprehensible.

(b) /r/: One sound should be used. It is not necessary to include the different forms of /r/ i.e., the alveolar tap [ɾ], the alveolar continuant [ɹ], the retroflex [ɻ], the uvular [ʀ] and the fricative [ʁ]. It is very difficult to learn all these different forms and use them at the right times and places. Some examples (from Ogden, 2009) are listed below.

(i) the alveolar tap [ɾ] - [θɾi:] for the word ‘three’ Scottish.

(ii) uvular [ʀ] - [ʀɛd] for the word ‘red’ in RP.

(iii) the retroflex [ɻ] [ɻˈɛd] for the word ‘red’ in GA

(iv) the fricative [ʁ] - [ʁɛd] for the word ‘red’ in Northumbrian accent.

These different allophonic sounds of /r/ are used in certain regional accents and need not be learned for ELF pronunciation.

(c) For /p/, /t/, /k/ phonemes, the [p], [t] and [k] sounds may be used, including at word initial positions followed by a vowel. Examples: With aspiration the pronunciations of the words ‘pet’, ‘tap’, and ‘cat’ are supposed to be /p<sup>h</sup>et/, /t<sup>h</sup>æp/ and /k<sup>h</sup>æt/ respectively. The aspirated versions of these sounds, as suggested in LFC, may not be made mandatory as some Asian languages, including Bengali, have breathy versions of these three stops. For instance, in Bangladesh, ‘van’ is quite often pronounced with the breathy aspirated stop and the /v/ takes the [bh] sound. Pronouncing the word ‘van’ as [bhæn] would make it unintelligible.

#### *LFC2: consonant clusters*

*Problem 4.* Some Asians cannot pronounce consonant clusters because these are not present in their L1. Walker (2010, p. 33) identified the following two strategies which are often used by people for pronouncing consonant clusters.

i. Insertion of a short [i] or [e] like vowel before or between the two consonants.

ii. Deletion of one of the consonants in the cluster.

*Example i:* Pronouncing the word ‘school’ as [ɪsku:l] in Bangladesh and as [səku:lə] in Punjab. They are *still* intelligible.

*Example ii:* Deletion of some medial consonants is done even by NSs. For example, ‘postmen’ is pronounced as [pəʊsmen] or ‘next week’ as [nekswi:k] (Walker, 2010, p. 33).

However, deleting the first phoneme like the /t/ in the word ‘train’, which would sound as [reɪn] would result in loss of intelligibility. Further examples (Jenkins, 2000, p. 142) include the Japanese pronunciation of the word ‘product’ as [pəʊdʌktə] and as [pʊdʌk] in Taiwan. The first is considered intelligible but the second is not. Another strategy used in Bangladesh for pronouncing words with medial clusters is to interchange the two consonant phonemes in the cluster. For example, the word ‘signal’ is pronounced as [sɪŋəl] and ‘ask’ becomes [ɑ:ks]. Such pronunciations are acceptable within the country and should generally be intelligible to English speakers of other Asian countries as well.

Therefore, from the above discussion, it can be concluded that in BLFC some phonemes in English words may be modified or deleted in word medial and word final clusters. However, deletion of consonant phonemes in a word-initial cluster must not be permitted for the sake of intelligibility. For example, words like “school” and “brain” should not be pronounced as [ku:l] or [reɪn] by deleting the /s/ and /t/ sounds respectively.

### *LFC3: Vowels*

Jenkins (2000) mentioned two features of English vowels: (a) *vowel quality* i.e., how a vowel is to sound or articulated; and (b) *vowel quantity* i.e., how long a vowel is to be sounded in a particular English word: short, medium or long.

*Problem 5: Vowel quality.* Most scholars (e.g. Jenkins, 2000; Jenner, 1989; Walker, 2010; Kirkpatrick, 2012) agree that different speakers use different vowel allophones when they pronounce the same English word. They may even replace the intended (RP) vowel phoneme by another phoneme. Scholars agree that as long as this replacement is consistent, it is acceptable. This means that non-Native English Speakers (NNS), including NBS, should not be penalized for such articulation of vowels. According to Jenner (1989, p. 3):

Native accents show such enormous differences in vowel quality that it cannot be claimed that these are vital for mutual intelligibility. Nor can it be claimed that there is a minimum set of vowel shapes that must be acquired by the foreign learner, since different native varieties do not make all the oppositions or any other standard variety.

Jenkins (2000) does not include *vowel quality* as part of her LFC, which means that speakers can use any variation in vowel quality in pronouncing a certain vowel as long as they are consistent.

*Problem 6: Vowel quantity.* Scholars are not so tolerant about the (mis)use of *vowel quantity* when, for instance, NNS replace a short vowel phoneme by a long vowel phoneme or vice versa. Jenkins (2009), Kirkpatrick (2010), Walker (2010), and other scholars give examples of NNS who cannot differentiate between short, medium, and long vowels and pronounce words like ‘ship’ as [ʃi:p]. While this is a deviation from the RP, the authors would like to point out that there are NS who also make such interchanges in *vowel quantity*. For instance, there are differences in *vowel quantity* between RP English and Scottish English pronunciations (both NS pronunciations). A Scotsman may shorten his vowels almost as if they are non-existent, pronouncing the word ‘girl’ something like [grl]. On the other hand, Americans like to lengthen their vowels. One can find examples of irregular vowel quantity in the Cambridge online dictionary (Jones et al., 2006) of GA pronunciation recordings. For instance, Americans pronounce ‘hot’ as [hɑ:t] and ‘caught’ as [kɑ:t], which sound like the words ‘heart’ and ‘kart’ respectively to those not familiar with American pronunciation. More examples can be found in Jenkins (2002), Walker (2010), and Kirkpatrick (2010).

We believe that such “national (mis)pronunciations”, not meeting the RP standard, should not matter as long as everyone within a country finds them *both* intelligible and acceptable. Here, it is worth quoting Bamgbose (1989, p. 11) who stated: “I would be more worried if Nigerian English is not intelligible within Nigeria as compared to other countries”. Therefore, we exclude *vowel quantity* from the BLFC. From the above discussions on vowel quality and vowel quantity, it may be concluded that there is no need to teach NBS English learners new vowel sounds like *schwa* and other reduced vowel phonemes. NBS may use whatever similar vowel sounds they may have in their respective regional repertoire, as long as they are intelligible and used consistently.

#### *LFC4: Nuclear stress placement*

*Problem 7.* Nuclear stress placement is part of the supra-segmental features of English pronunciation, which is a difficult concept (Kirkpatrick 2010) for NNS and takes a lot of time and effort to learn and master. It can be thought to be the syllable within a word in a group of words in an English sentence, where the speaker should put stress to make his/her speech meaningful. This phenomenon is also called “tone units”, “thought groups” and word groups (Walker, 2010, p. 36). According to Jenkins (2000), stress in the wrong place may lead to miscommunication; hence, she includes it in LFC. As this feature of English pronunciation may be automatically incorporated into one’s speech if learners learn to sing English songs, we suggest that teaching of this feature should be kept for the second stage of English as a Lingua Franca for Bangladeshis (ELFB) pronunciation teaching/learning, and only if found necessary.

### **Results**

#### ***The BLFC model and a proposed syllabus for ELFB pronunciation***

Based on the above analysis of LFC and discussion of the different types of English pronunciation problems faced by Bangladeshi English learners, we have included four components in the Bangladeshi Lingua Franca Core (BLFC) model, which are slightly different from Jenkins’ LFC. These components are discussed below.

(a) *The human musical instrument.* We all have a very versatile musical instrument gifted to us at birth. It is the vocal organ, which we can employ to make any type of sounds, as made by string, wind and percussion instruments. One needs to get familiar with all the parts (articulators) of this instrument and learn which articulators are to be used and how for making a certain speech sound. We have used this technique with teachers and students in rural Bangladesh and observed that this is a more effective method than the “repeat after me” method to teach the pronunciation of any language.

(b) *Different types of consonant sounds.* It is necessary to become familiar with *all* the 24 English consonant sounds. As we discussed under the section ‘Problem 1: The fricative consonant sounds’, the Bengali language has only two fricative consonants: /s/ and /ʃ/; however, it does not have the English

fricative sounds /f, v, z, ʒ, θ, ð/. NBS English learners will be taking a big step forward by learning to pronounce the English fricative sounds /s, f, v, z, ʒ/. Achieving this will make them highly intelligible. We have decided not to include the two fricatives /θ, ð/, as Jenkins (2009a) stated that it was not necessary to pronounce the two English fricatives /θ, ð/ the way they are pronounced in RP. They may be pronounced the way NBS pronounce these two difficult fricatives.

(c) *Consonant clusters.* NBS should learn to pronounce all English consonant clusters appearing at word-initial (‘**brain**’), word medial (‘**windy**’), and word terminal (‘**slept**’) positions without any insertions and deletions as shown under the section ‘Problem 4’.

(d) *Nuclear stress.* While components (b) and (c) of BLFC will help NBS learn the segmental features of English pronunciation, we propose teaching the supra-segmental features of English pronunciation using English songs and poetry (Rahman, M., 2016) with the help of our Human Musical Instrument, i.e., component (a). We have used this approach successfully to teach English Pronunciation to teachers and students of rural schools in Bangladesh in English Boot Camps<sup>iv</sup>.

The prototype BLFC syllabus is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Sample syllabus outline for BLFC

| <b>Id</b> | <b>Syllabus Item</b>  | <b>Objective</b>  |
|-----------|---|---|
| 0         | The human musical instrument  | Familiarize learners with the Human Vocal Sound making instrument |
| 1         | Consonant sounds  |   |
| 1.1       | The fricatives (voiced and unvoiced)<br>/s/, /ʃ/, /f/, /v/, /z/, /ʒ/  | Address Problem 1   |
| 1.2       | English consonants which are replaced by similar sounds from the L1 or from English—to address Problem 2                            | Address Problem 2   |
| 1.3       | Consonants /l/, /r/, one form only Problem 3  | Address Problem 2   |
| 2         | Consonant clusters: non-deletion of the first consonant in word initial clusters and no vowel insertion at word initial position    | Address Problem 4   |
| 3         | Nuclear stress: to be taught through songs. May be left for the second stage after learners have mastered items 0 to 2. (Problem 7) | Address Problem 7   |

## Conclusion

In this article we explained what ELF is, what it is not, when, why, and how it is to be used and by whom. We analyzed seven problems that NBS face when teaching/learning English pronunciation, with both consonants and vowels. To make the task of teaching/learning the English consonant sounds easy, we categorized them into three groups: (a) the fricative consonants, (b) consonants replaced by other local sounds, and (c) other difficult consonants like /l, r, p, t, k/. We discussed how to handle English consonant clusters to maintain speech intelligibility. For vowel quality, we decided that we would not be doing anything ‘wrong’ as long as we pronounced different vowel sounds consistently. Similarly, as different NS pronounce the same English word with different vowel quantity, we decided to exclude this from our BLFC syllabus. Based on the discussion, we constructed our prototype BLFC syllabus. It is to note that we have used this syllabus for teaching English pronunciation to secondary school teachers and students in different regions of rural Bangladesh and found them to be effective. From these trainings some were selected as trainers of trainers (TOT) who are now training others in their respective regions.

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<sup>i</sup><https://www.univie.ac.at/voice/>

<sup>ii</sup><http://corpus.eduhk.hk/ace/>

<sup>iii</sup> In the examples, we have used the following conventions for denoting words, phonemes (pronunciation in IPA), and allophones (surface sound). The x in “x”, stands for a word, the y in /y/, represents the IPA pronunciation of the word “x” and [z] is the surface sound of /y/. For example, the three forms of the word, cat, is written as “cat”, /kæt/ and [k<sup>h</sup>æt] respectively.

<sup>iv</sup><https://www.facebook.com/groups/795074387368450/>