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PHONOLOGICAL PROBLEMS IN MAKING ENGLISH-MANIPURI DICTIONARY

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Phonological Problems in Making English-Manipuri Dictionary for Manipuri Speakers

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***Abstract:** The Manipuris, by virtue of their schooling and educational systems are bilinguals. They use two languages in different situations depending upon the context. Most of them learn English/second language straight from their school stage and they could be called school made bilinguals. Even then, errors in English learning are sustained due to the interference from the learner's mother tongue. The importance of a good bilingual dictionary as an aid to over-come the gravitational pull of the mother tongue cannot be exaggerated. In fact, the lexicographical art in Manipur is in its primal stages. Manipuri dictionaries, which can match the high standards of bilingual dictionaries available in developed languages, are still a long way off. English-Manipuri dictionaries have mostly been compiled and edited by non-English speaking people as well as un-trained lexicographers. Unfortunately, trained compilers are of very limited numbers in Manipur. Therefore, the qualitative values of English-Manipuri dictionary are very poor. The problems in making a bilingual dictionary broadly comprise– a) Phonological, b) Grammatical, and c) Semantic. In this paper, the phonological problems confronted in making English to Manipuri Dictionary for Manipuri speaker will be discussed vividly.*

0. Introduction:

In all existing English-Manipuri Dictionaries, the pronunciation of the English entry words are transcribed in Manipuri with Bengali script, which creates many problems to the user (Manipuri speaker) as Bengali has a distinct character of its own. As a matter of fact, Manipuri has a traditional writing system with indigenous alphabets called 'Meetei/Meitei Mayek' (Manipuri script). With the advent of Hinduism (early 18th century) the Bengali alphabet has been adopted in lieu of the traditional one in education etc. According to different scholars the number of script for Manipuri is varied. Grierson, (1973) has mentioned 35 alphabets in his well-known book 'Linguistic Survey of India'

(Vol. III Part III) while some Meitei scholars are of the opinion that it is 27 in number (Singh, L. Sarbajit, 2002). However, in 1980 the Government of Manipur has recognized the purposed 27 one. Despite the traditional/indigenous writing system the Bengali alphabet is being continued for all practical purposes. In 1992, the Government of India has also included the Manipuri language in the 8th Schedule of Indian Constitution as '*Manipuri written in Bengali script*'. It can be mentioned that Meitei script for written Manipuri (Meiteiron) is in the implementation stage. The Government of Manipur have replaced the Bengali script with Meitei script from Class I to III and also assured that Bengali script would be completely replaced in a phase-wise manner (Singh, L. Sarbajit, 2002).

Information about the pronunciation becomes a primary need for a dictionary as the dictionary making has been increased by new attitude towards speech. "The printed word is no longer the only means of mass communication; the spoken word has become as important in the age of radio, telephone, phonograph, television, tape recorder, video-tape recorder, cinema, and telstar." (Al-Kasimi, 1983). Every lexicographer has provided the pronunciation of headword at least and the transcriptions used in the dictionaries are based on purpose of the dictionary especially in bilingual dictionary. However, the application of transcription is the most important task for dictionary makers. "Transcriptions can be used only in relating the written form to a spoken one. So, the lexicographer has great responsibility in this respect, as unreliable information may lead to wrong performance." As pronunciation is to be included in a bilingual dictionary, it is necessary to choose an appropriate type of transcription. Again Piotrowski pointed out: "when selecting the appropriate transcription, lexicographers must consider their position between two attitudes—usage of a transcription widely known on an international scale, and keeping to the traditional one used in their country. International transcription makes it easier for the user to use other dictionaries (monolingual one, for example), while following traditional is reassuring for the user and relates the dictionary to other books published in his or her country." (Piotrowski, 1987). Berkov puts a case clearly: lexicographers in their choice of the system of transcription are restricted only by the convenience of the user (ibid). The purpose of this study is to discuss the phonological problems confronted in making English to Manipuri Dictionary for Manipuri speaker. In

section 2 of the paper, we discuss briefly about the Manipuri sounds. Section 3 says about the Manipuri sounds and Bengali script. In the section 4, brief information about English and Manipuri Sounds is given. Section 5 deals with pronunciation in existing English-Manipuri dictionaries. Section 6 concludes by giving some suggestions.

1. Manipuri Sounds:

The inventory phonemes of Manipuri varies from author to author of Manipuri grammars, for instance, (Thoudam, 1980), (Chelliah, 1994), (Bhat, 1997), (Singh, Ch, 2000), (Singh, I. 2002), etc. It is clear that there are some disagreements among the linguists regarding the number of Manipuri phonemes. It is observed that the affricate sounds are not included by the above authors except by (Chelliah, 1994) and the symbols used are based on old IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) or some other systems. Accordingly some controversies have been encountered, as the transcription no longer corresponds to any of those found in major dictionaries. The modern dictionaries have adopted the new IPA symbols. At least a movement towards the using of a standard transcription for Manipuri sound is highly essential. However, it can be resolved to a more relevant one that Manipuri has 38 phonemes in all— 24 consonants, 12 vowels (6 monophthongs and 6 diphthongs), and 2 tones.

1.1.1 Consonant Phonemes of Manipuri:

	Bilabial		Alveolar		Palatal		Velar		Glottal
	V.less	V.ed	V.less	V.ed	V.less	V.ed	V.less	V.ed	V.less
Plosive: Unaspirated	p	b	t	d	c	ɟ	k	g	
Aspirated	p ^h	b ^h	t ^h	d ^h		ɟ ^h	k ^h	g ^h	
Nasals		m		n				ŋ	
Fricative					s				h
Approximant		w		ɹ		j			
Lateral Approximant				l					

Figure 1. Chart of consonant phonemes of Manipuri

1.1.2. Distribution of Manipuri consonants sounds (word level):

Phonemes	Initial	Medial	Final
p	+	+	+
p ^h	+	+	-
b	+	+	-
b ^h	+	+	-
t	+	+	+
t ^h	+	+	-
d	+	+	-
d ^h	+	+	-
c	+	+	-
ɟ	+	+	-
ɟ ^h	+	-	-
k	+	+	+
k ^h	+	+	-
g	+	+	-
g ^h	+	-	-
m	+	+	+
n	+	+	+
ɲ	+	+	+
s	+	+	+
h	+	+	-
w	+	+	-
ɭ	+	+	+
j	+	+	-
l	+	+	+

Figure 2. Chart of distribution of consonant phonemes of Manipuri

Exotic phonemes: /b, b^h, d, d^h, g, g^h, ɟ, ɟ^h, ɭ/ can occur initially only in the loan words. However, /ɟ/ can occur initially in indigenous word, for example /ɟə.goi/ “dance”. It is possible that the very word may be derived from * /cə.koi/, which is found in *Sekmai* dialect of Manipuri. The phonemes /ɭ/ and /s/ cannot occur in the final position in indigenous Manipuri words.

1.2. Vowels Phonemes of Manipuri:

1.2.1. Monophthongs of Manipuri:

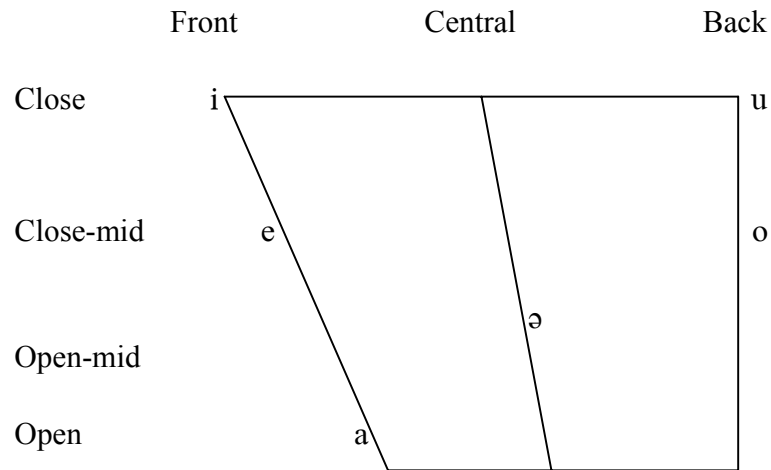


Figure 3. Chart of Monophthongs of Manipuri

1.2.2. Diphthongs of Manipuri:

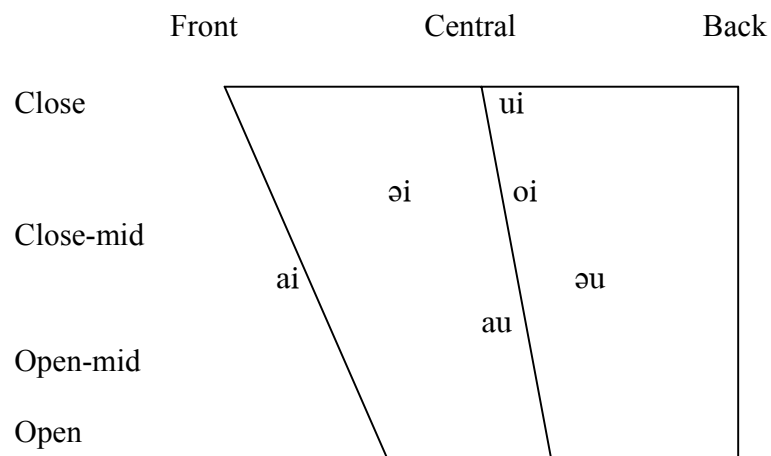


Figure 4. Chart of diphthongs of Manipuri

1.2.3. Distribution of Manipuri vowel phonemes (word level):

Phonemes	Initial	Medial	Final
i	+	+	+
e	+	+	+
ə	+	+	+
a	+	+	+
o	+	+	+
u	+	+	+
əi	+	+	+
oi	+	+	+
ui	+	+	+
ai	+	+	+
au	-	+	+
əu	+	+	+

Figure 5. Chart of distribution of consonant phonemes of Manipuri

1.2.4. Tones of Manipuri:

Level: unmarked

Falling: / ˈ /

2. Bengali Script and Manipuri Sounds:

The Manipuri speakers always have a tendency to use all the symbols of Bengali/Assamese script in normal orthography. The present Bengali script written using Manipuri spelling is 55 symbols against actual 38 phonemes (including two tones) of Manipuri. The symbols more than 38 are being used unconsciously or very sparingly. It is of course in English, for example, an alphabet represents more than one sound. In case of Manipuri with Bengali script, mapping of extra alphabets to a fix number of sounds produced originally is very contradictory as well as purposeless. Eventually, the extra alphabets make obscure performance to the users. However some symbols are very useful to indicate the tonal variations in writing Manipuri, for instance, ই /i/ against ঐ /i/, উ /u/ against ঊ /u/, etc. The symbols in Bengali script cannot handle all the tone vowels (monophthongs and diphthongs) of Manipuri, for instance, আ /a/, ঐ /əi/, etc. Some

consonants are being used for marking of tonal variations, for instance, ঁ /ɲ/ for level in syllable final against উ /u/ and য় /j/ for falling against ই /i/ on the other hand ই /i/ is used for level against ঐ /i/ elsewhere. In fact, marking of tone in consonant is not acceptable linguistically and using of either ঐ or য় against ই creates inconsistency in writing Manipuri. Conjoint symbols of Bengali written using Manipuri makes a great confusion to pronounce a Manipuri word, as there are distinct consonant clusters which are familiar with Manipuri speakers by nature, for instance, উত্তা /ʊt̪a/ “early”, চমপ্রা /t̪əm.pra/ “lemon”, here in the former the phonemes /n/ and /t/ are not to be clustered in actual Manipuri pronunciation however orthographically it is expressed as clustered sounds. The insertion of “akar” † /a/ for released consonants in the final position of a word creates ambiguity with the consonants followed by /a/, for instance, উনা /u.nə/ “by wood” and না /na/ “ear”. M. S. Ningomba discusses regarding this matter in a paper “Manipurida akar” (Ningomba, 1971). The words borrowed from Indo-Aryan languages like—Bengali, Sanskrit, etc. are putting on as original one. English and many other languages are also facing such problem in their spelling system and is becoming a big question of inconsistency. The Spelling Committee Government of Manipur framed the first office spelling regulation rule in 1925. After a long gap of 44years, in 1969 the government devised another spelling regulation rule for Manipuri spelling with some modification to the former. Though there is a conventionalized order of the authority, the Manipuri spelling with Bengali is becoming independent day by day. “The various daily papers and books including the text one published in the language have been found in using variant spelling systems. Besides those who are learning postgraduate in language and literature have come across different spelling system as different teachers have taught them. Consequently, while they again become teachers in different institution they started teaching the spelling system differently. Likewise spelling problem is disseminated just like an epidemic” (Singh, N, 1998). The consonants and vowels of Bengali letters (used

in present Manipuri orthography) and the Manipuri phonemes and their corresponding Bengali alphabets are given below (Fig. 6-10):

2.1. Bengali Consonant Symbols Written Using Manipuri:

ক খ গ ঘ ঙ চ ছ জ ঝ ঞ ট ঠ ড ঢ ণ ত থ দ ধ ন প ফ ব ভ ম য র ল ঝ শ ষ স হ
ক্ষ ড় ঢ় য় ং ঃ ৎ ণ

Figure 6.

2.2. Bengali Vowel Symbols Written Using Manipuri:

অ আ ই ঈ উ ঊ ঋ ৳ এ ঐ ও অং অঃ

Figure 7.

2.3. Manipuri phonemes and their corresponding Bengali Letters:

2.3.1. Consonants:

	Manipuri Phonemes	Bengali Letters
01	p	প
02	p ^h	ফ
03	b	ব
04	b ^h	ভ
05*	t	ত, ট and ং
06*	t ^h	থ and ঠ
07*	d	দ and ড
08*	d ^h	ধ and ঢ
09	c	চ
10*	j	জ and য
11	j ^h	ঝ
12	k	ক
13	k ^h	খ
14	g	গ
15	g ^h	ঘ
16	m	ম
17*	n	ন, ণ and ঞ
18*	ɳ	ঙ and ং
19*	s	স, ছ, শ and ষ
20	h	হ
21	w	ৱ
22*	ɽ	র, ড় and ঢ়
23	j	য়
24	l	ল

Figure 8.

2.3.2. Monophthongs:

	Manipuri Phonemes	Bengali Letters
01*	i	ই and ঐ
02.	e	এ
03	a	আ
04	ə	অ
05	o	ও
06*	u	উ and ঊ

Figure 9.

2.3.3. Diphthongs:

	Manipuri Phonemes	Bengali Letters
01**	ai	—
02	əi	ঐ
03**	oi	—
04**	ui	—
05**	au	—
06	əu	ঔ

Figure 10.

The above analysis reveals that more than one character of Bengali alphabet represent some Manipuri phonemes (*marks). However, some diphthongs of Manipuri have no equivalent in Bengali script (**marks). Therefore, it creates many problems while giving the pronunciation of English head entries in English to Manipuri dictionary for Manipuri speakers, as the Manipuri speaker cannot pronounce the extra alphabets in Bengali.

3. English and Manipuri Sounds:

English has 22 vowels (14 monophthongs + 8 diphthongs) (Hornby, 2000) however Manipuri has only 12 vowels (6 monophthongs + 6 diphthongs) (Singh, Ch, 2000). The English vowels like /i:, I, æ, a:, ɒ, ɔ:, ʊ, u:, ʌ, ɜ:/ create some serious problems. These absent vowels are substituted by the near vowel sounds of Manipuri that are in stock. Such vowels are troublesome both at the production as well as perception

levels. The vowel sounds common to English and Manipuri like /i, e, a, u, ə, / (/a/ in first member of English diphthongs /aɪ/ and /aʊ/) have seemed to pose no problem in production.

Both languages have 24 consonants each, however the types of consonants are different. According to the place of articulation: English has 6 Plosives, 2 Affricates, 9 Fricatives, 3 Nasals, and 4 Approximants but Manipuri has 15 Plosives, 0 Affricate, 2 Fricatives, 3 Nasals, and 4 Approximants. According to the place of articulation: English has 3 Bilabial, 2 Labio-dental, 2 Dentals, 6 Alveolars, 1 Post-alveolar, 4 Palatato-alveolars, 1 Palatal, 4 Velars, and 1 Glottal but Manipuri has 5 Bilabials, 0 Labio-dental, 0 Dental, 7 Alveolars, 0 Post-alveolar, 0 Palatato-alveolar, 4 Palatals, 6 Velars, and 1 Glottal. Due to this difference, Manipuri speakers will face difficulty in pronouncing some of the English consonant sounds that are not present in Manipuri. While the English consonant sounds that are almost similar with Manipuri consonants, can be pronounce without much labour.

English has considerably more number of clusters than Manipuri. Moreover, in English, clusters can occur either in the initial (as many as three members) or the final (as many as four members) position of a syllable. In Manipuri, clusters can occur only in the initial position of a syllable with two member consonants. There are few words with initial consonant clusters, all having the approximant /j/ or /w/ as second member. In the word medial, the second members are either approximant /w/ or /ɹ/. Even though, word medial clusters are persisting in Manipuri that are always in the initial position of a syllable. The medially occurring English clusters in words will not be studied here, since the question of cluster remains within the syllabic boundary. For example, the cluster [tr] and [ks] in the words – contract [kən.'trækt], contrast [kən.'tra:st], expert ['eks.pɜ:t], extrinsic [eks.'trin.sik], etc. occur in a syllable. It means that it is not possible phonologically in English for a series of clusters to be articulated within a syllable. It is the fact that many of the English linguists have absolutely neglected the medial clusters in their studies (Crystal, 1985:52), (O'Connor, 1980:64-77), and (Cruttenden, 1994:218-221).

All final clusters of English are difficult to pronounce for Manipuri speakers since Manipuri has no final clusters at all. For such final clusters a Manipuri speakers has a tendency to reduce a consonant clusters by a single consonant, with which he is able to pronounce.

Most English words are bound to pronounce with an appropriate stress and stress contrast affect the lexical meaning of words. Unlike in English, Manipuri has weak stress. Manipuri speakers do not pay much attention in pronouncing the English words with stress. One reason may be due to the importance of tone in the language rather than stress.

The phonology of English has been extensively analyzed and described by many eminent linguists. Manipuri language has yet to be studied from the point of view of modern linguistics. However, some work has started for a systematic study of the language. For English phonemes, “Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary of Current English” (OALD) (6th edition, 2000) is taken as a reference.

4. Pronunciation in Existing English-Manipuri Dictionaries:

For any English-Manipuri dictionaries, the pronunciation of the English entry words has been transcribed in Bengali script. Three major English- Manipuri Dictionaries- The Anglo-Manipuri Dictionary (AMD), Friends’ English to Manipuri Dictionary (FEMD) and Students’ Anglo-Manipuri Dictionary (SAMD) have been chosen for the purpose. The pronunciations of English headwords containing all the English phonemes which are extracted from above three English-Manipuri dictionaries are given below:

English phonemes	Head entries	OALD	AMD	FEMD	SAMD
i	happy	'hæpi	হ্যোপ্ ^৬ -পি	হ্যাপি	'হ্যোপি
i:	see	si:	সী	সী	সী
ɪ	sit	sɪt	সিট্	সীট্	সিট্
e	ten	ten	টেন্	টেন্	টেন্
æ	cat	kæt	কোট্	ক্যাট্	কোট্
a:	father	'fa:ðə(r)	ফা ^৬ -দর	ফাদর	'ফাড(র)
ɒ	hot	hɒt	হোট্	হোট্	হোট্
ɔ:	saw	sɔ:	সো	সো	সোও
ʊ	put	put	পুট্	পুট্	পুট্
u	actual	'æktʃuəl	এক্ট্ ^৬ -ইউ-অল্	অ্যাকচুয়াল্	'একচুঅল্
u:	too	tu:	টু	টু	টু
ʌ	cup	kʌp	কপ্	কপ্	কপ্
ɜ:	bird	bɜ:d	বর্ড্	বার্ড্	বঅর্ড্
ə	about	ə'baʊt	এ-বাইউট্ ^৬	অ্যাবাইউট্	অ'বাইউট্
eɪ	say	seɪ	সেই	সে	সেই
əʊ	go	gəʊ	গো	গো	গউ
aɪ	five	faɪv	ফাইব্	ফাইভ্	ফাইব্
aʊ	now	naʊ	নাইউ	নাইউ	নাইউ
ɔɪ	boy	bɔɪ	বোয়্	বোয়্	বোওই
ɪə	near	niə(r)	নীয়র্	নীয়ার	নিঅ(র্)
eə	hair	heə(r)	হেঅর্	হের্	হেঅ(র্)
ʊə	pure	pjʊə(r)	প্যূর্	পিউর্	প্যুঅ(র্)

Figure 11.

English phonemes	Head entries	OALD	AMD	FEMD	SAMD
p	pen	pen	পেন্	পেন্	পেন্
b	bad	bæd	বোড্	ব্যাড্	বোড্
t	tea	ti:	টী	টী	টী
d	did	dɪd	ডিড্	ডিড্	ডিড্
k	cat	kæt	কোট্	ক্যাট্	কোট্
g	good	ɡʊd	গুড্	গুড্	গুড্
tʃ	chain	tʃeɪn	চেন্	চেন্	চেইন্
dʒ	jam	dʒæm	জোম্	জ্যাম্	জোম্
m	man	mæn	মোন্	ম্যান্	মোন্
n	no	nəʊ	নো	নো	নউ
ŋ	sing	sɪŋ	সিঙ্	সিং	সিং
r	red	red	রেড্	রেড্	রেড্
f	fall	fɔ:l	ফোল্	ফোল্	ফোওল্
v	van	væn	বোন্	ব্যান্	বোন্
θ	thin	θɪn	থিন্	থিন্	থিন্
ð	this	ðɪs	দিস্	দিস্	ধিস্
s	so	səʊ	সো	সো	সোউ
z	zoo	zu:	জু	জু	জু
ʃ	shoe	ʃu:	শু	শু	শু
ʒ	vision	'vɪʒn	বিব ^৬ -অন্	বিব ^৬ ন্	'বিব ^৬ ন্
h	hat	hæt	হোট্	হ্যাট্	হোট্
w	wet	wet	রেট্	রেট্	রেট্
j	yes	jes	য়েস্	য়েস্	য়েস্
l	leg	leg	লেগ্	লেগ্	লেগ্

Figure 12.

English stress	Head entries	OALD	AMD	FEMD	SAMD
'	vision	¹ vɪʒn	বিঝা ^৬ -অন্	বিঝন্	'বিঝন্
,	hallucination	həˌluːsɪˈneɪʃn	হোল্-লু-সিন্-এই ^৬ -শন্	হ্যালুসিনেইশন্	হলুসি'নেইশন্

Figure 13.

From the above figures 11, 12 and 13, it is apparent that the English-Manipuri dictionary compilers have adopted some specific systems of their own for giving pronunciation of English headwords by using Bengali script and some other diacritic marks for stress marks (superscript of ⁶ in AMD and normal mark in SAMD for primary stress). The secondary stresses to English words are not seen.

5. Conclusion:

The adoption of scientific transcription (International Phonetic Alphabet) at beginner's level has its limitations although it is customary in bilingual dictionaries to indicate pronunciation. It is true that beginners very often do not even try to master the scientific transcription, because they think it too complicated and useless. Instead they construct their own notation of pronunciation, based on values of the letters of their alphabet, a notation that is almost wrong. It seems that it would be advisable for phoneticians to work out a notation based on letter values of respective languages, which would be consistent and more adequate. However, "... it might be useful to provide the scientific transcription beside it" (Piotrowski, 1987). In the light of this statement we can observe that many English-Manipuri dictionary compilers have provided the pronunciation of English headwords in different ways in Bengali script, for instance, cat (কোটে) here, English vowel phoneme /æ/ in /kæt/ is replaced by '৳ ৳' are to be pronounced as /e/ and /j/ respectively. Again in another dictionary it is given as (কাটে) '৳' /j/ and '৳' /a/ are combined to substitute the phoneme /æ/ phonologically as transcribed in the dictionaries (কোটে) and (কাটে) can be manifested as /kjet/ and /kjat/ respectively. As a result the pronunciation is being diverted from near equivalent sound. It is suggested that

the lexicographer has to choose the nearest possible equivalent (sound or symbol of Manipuri) to the English sound, for instance, /i/ and /ɪ/ can be substituted by 'ই' and 'ঐ' for /i/. For different places of articulation we can employ diacritic marks. As the sounds of these languages are distinct from one another the dictionary makers may use the nearest or closest letter of the target language since the dictionary is planned for the target language speakers. However, the extra letters in the orthography, which are absent in the language, should be avoided, for instance, Manipuri has only one sound /s/ for 'স, ছ, শ and ষ'. Illustration of sounds of both languages, say how to articulate in the simplest way should be given. Extra care for absent sounds is indispensable, for instance, English vowels like /i:, ɪ, æ, a:, ɒ, ɔ:, ʊ, u:, ʌ, ɜ:/, Fricatives /f, v, θ, ð, z, ʃ, ʒ/, etc. Special indication of English like stress mark should be included. The findings of the contrastive study phonologically of the two languages are also very important to display in the front matter of the dictionary. For advanced level employing of IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) that is used in English monolingual dictionaries is suggested.

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