



## CHAPTER 8

# TEACHING ENGLISH INITIAL /S/ CONSONANT CLUSTERS PRONUNCIATION USING TONGUE TWISTERS: A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

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**ABSTRACT:** This study aims to evaluate the efficacy of tongue twisters in teaching initial English consonant clusters to Mexican Spanish-speaking learners. The research employs a mixed-methods approach to investigate how this phonological practice can improve learners' pronunciation and fluency in English. Data collection focuses on recordings of student oral production and a survey designed to gather learners' perceptions and experiences with the intervention. The treatment consists of a one-class session complemented by homework exercises that utilize tongue twisters targeting initial consonant clusters. Quantitative analysis of the recordings measures improvements in accuracy and articulation, while qualitative survey data provide insights into learner attitudes and challenges. The findings contribute to understanding the role of phonetic exercises in second language acquisition, particularly for Spanish speakers facing difficulties with English consonant combinations that do not occur in their native language. The study supports the integration of tongue twisters as a motivating and effective tool in the English pronunciation curriculum, highlighting its potential to enhance phonological awareness and learner confidence. Recommendations for teachers include incorporating similar phonological drills in classroom settings to target specific pronunciation issues among beginner and intermediate English learners. This research addresses a gap in pedagogical strategies for L2 phonetics and offers practical implications for English language teaching in Mexican contexts.

**KEYWORDS:** tongue twisters, consonant clusters, English language teaching, Spanish speakers

**RESUMEN:** Este estudio tiene como objetivo evaluar la eficacia de los trabalenguas en la enseñanza de los grupos consonánticos iniciales del inglés a estudiantes hispanohablantes mexicanos. La investigación utiliza un enfoque metodológico mixto para analizar cómo esta práctica fonológica puede mejorar la pronunciación y fluidez en inglés de los aprendices. La recolección de datos se basa en grabaciones de la producción oral de los estudiantes y una encuesta diseñada para conocer las percepciones y experiencias de los alumnos con la intervención. El tratamiento consta de una sesión en clase y ejercicios para tarea que emplean trabalenguas enfocados en grupos consonánticos iniciales. El análisis cuantitativo de las grabaciones mide mejoras en la precisión y articulación, mientras que los datos cualitativos de la encuesta aportan información sobre las actitudes y dificultades de los estudiantes. Los resultados contribuyen a comprender el papel de los ejercicios fonéticos en la adquisición de una segunda lengua, especialmente para hablantes de español que enfrentan desafíos con combinaciones consonánticas del inglés que no existen en su lengua materna. Este estudio respalda la integración de trabalenguas como una herramienta motivadora y eficaz en la enseñanza de la pronunciación inglesa, destacando su potencial para mejorar la conciencia fonológica y la confianza de los aprendices. Se recomienda a los docentes incluir ejercicios similares para atender problemas específicos de pronunciación en aprendices de niveles inicial e intermedio. La investigación aporta estrategias pedagógicas y aplicaciones prácticas en el contexto mexicano.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** Trabalenguas, grupos consonánticos, enseñanza del idioma inglés, hablantes de español

## INTRODUCTION

English is an important and global language present in the daily life of most people in Mexico. It is taught from primary up to higher educational levels in some cases, where the need to attain a certain level of language proficiency is required in some undergraduate degree programs. Despite its prevalence in education and daily life, there are aspects of the way it is taught that can be improved. Namely, pronunciation, which is a type of linguistic knowledge that is neglected. Because of this, common pronunciation problems among Spanish speakers are not solved. For example, adding an /ɛ/ sound to the beginning of consonant clusters starting with the /s/ phoneme. This research proposal aims to tackle this phonological problem by evaluating the efficacy of tongue twisters in the teaching of English initial consonant clusters to Mexican Spanish speakers.

The pronunciation of English is an element of student's linguistic knowledge that is often overlooked in the teaching of English as a foreign language (Afonso Funke, 2021). Its development is central to help students carry effective communicative

transactions. In addition, when students realized that they succeed in realizing intelligible and comprehensive speech, their motivation increases. Therefore, this research will zero in on the opinion students have on activities focused solely on practicing the pronunciation of words with initial consonant clusters starting with the /s/ phoneme using tongue twisters.

Findings on the literature suggest that Spanish speakers, specifically, struggle with the pronunciation of consonant clusters that start with /s/ that are not present in their native language. They tend to simplify them by adding the /e/ sound at the beginning of these words (Shemesh, 2018; Gómez-González & Sánchez-Roura, 2016). According to Moore (2020), this occurs because words in Spanish do not normally start with a consonant cluster. Therefore, sounds like /sp/, /st/, /sk/, /sl/, /sm/ do not exist in Spanish, and they will always have a vowel sound before. Further proving this point, Rauber and Baptista's study (2002) showed that Spanish speakers added the /e/ vowel from 12.67% to 63.50% of the time. For that reason, this paper focuses on these consonant clusters.

In addition to this, in a study performed by Calvo Benzies (2013) advanced Spanish speakers committed a total of 209 mistakes in the pronunciation of vowels. This shows that there is not enough emphasis on pronunciation, as difficulties persist even in experienced learners.

The objectives of this proposal are to identify the efficacy of tongue twisters in the teaching of English initial consonant clusters to Mexican Spanish speakers, to understand students' perspectives towards the usage of tongue twisters, and to improve the pronunciation of initial consonant clusters starting with the /s/ phoneme, finally, to analyze common mistakes among Mexican students living in Guadalajara participating in PAL with initial consonant clusters starting with the /s/ phoneme, and to analyze common mistakes among Mexican students living in Guadalajara participating in PAL with initial consonant clusters starting with the /s/ phoneme. To achieve the goals aforementioned, this paper will be guided by the following research questions. What are students' perspectives towards the usage of tongue twisters to improve the pronunciation of initial consonant clusters starting with the /s/ phoneme?, What are common mistakes among Mexican students living in Guadalajara participating in PAL with initial consonant clusters starting with the /s/ phoneme?, What is the effectiveness of tongue twisters to the teaching of phonetic accuracy of consonant clusters starting with the /s/ phoneme?

This research aims to discover whether the use of tongue twisters can help Mexican students overcome the pronunciation problems Spanish speakers face with consonant clusters starting with the /s/ phoneme. Moreover, their perspective on the activities would also be collected and analyzed. The results of this research could impact students by improving their speaking fluency, intelligibility, and confidence when using the language. Hopefully, this study could also inspire educators to use different strategies when teaching pronunciation in their classes.

Regarding what benefits could come out of this research, there is one which is of the utmost importance. Namely, to increase the students' phonological accuracy and the educators' awareness of pronunciation problems that could be solved with the incorporation of tongue twisters in the teaching practice. Of course, the main beneficiaries would be the students who would be the recipients of the pronunciation activities. On the other hand, the teachers can implement new strategies for teaching pronunciation and their students would see the benefits first-hand in their own production.

In this section, five different research findings on the teaching of pronunciation to Spanish speakers will be introduced. Some are experimental and others analyze previous papers. However, each of them deal with the pronunciation of English by Spanish speakers. Additionally, the last three focus specifically on consonant clusters.

Tapia, J. et al. (2017) conducted a research at the State University of Guayaquil in which the aim was to analyze and investigate the teaching English pronunciation to Spanish speakers. The study was focused on the qualitative analysis of observations. Results suggest that a few students showed signs of little interest based on their assumptions of English as a tough language. Also, they were motivated to understand English words and its pronunciation.

Additionally, Funke (2021), conducted a study in Spain to analyze recordings of online classes to find out the difficulties students had in the pronunciation of specific phonemes. Through this closer look at student speech, Funke concluded that there is a clear lack of focus on pronunciation coming from the teachers and the instructional material.

Moreover, Corralejo-Rodríguez (2017), carried out a research at an English course in Educación Secundaria Obligatoria (ESO). This study aims to design a methodology, adaptable and applicable to 1st of ESO students and other ESO and Bachillerato years and test the methodology as a tool for improving perception and production of teenage EFL learners acquisition of word final clusters /st/ / ft/ /tft/. Twenty students from a 1st ESO class participated in the study. Pre- and Post-tests were designed, and the results show a positive effect from employing the methodology between the students' pre and post test scores.

In addition to the above, Gómez-Martínez (2011) conducted an analysis of their experiences as a teacher in the University of Valladolid regarding student mispronunciations. Through his study, Gómez-Martínez found that, in everyday classes, students add an e before the pre-initial consonants to make words pronounceable according to the pronunciation rules of Spanish.

Furthermore, Rauber and Baptista's (2002) research applied in the University of Montoya and the Universidad de Federal de Santa Catarina focused on analyzing the production of initial /s/ clusters by Portuguese and Spanish EFL speakers. The subjects were nine Spanish speakers and ten Portuguese speakers. The data was acquired through the participants' reading of 180 sentences. One of the results was that Spanish speakers added the /e/ vowel from 12.67% to 63.50% of the time.

## OBJECTIVES

This research would attempt to achieve the following general and specific objectives:

**General objective:** To identify the efficacy of tongue twisters in the teaching of English initial consonant clusters to Mexican Spanish speakers

**Specific objective 1:** To understand students' perspectives towards the usage of tongue twisters to improve the pronunciation of initial consonant clusters starting with the /s/ phoneme.

**Specific objective 2:** To analyze common mistakes among Mexican students living in Guadalajara participating in PAL with initial consonant clusters starting with the /s/ phoneme.

**Specific objective 3:** To evaluate the effectiveness of tongue twisters to the teaching of phonetic accuracy of consonant clusters starting with the /s/ phoneme.

## HYPOTHESIS

If tongue twisters are used during the teaching of consonant clusters, students' pronunciation will improve, and they will have a positive perception of the activities and the learning of initial consonant clusters starting with /s/

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The decisions taken throughout the creation of this paper were guided by the following research questions:

1. What are students' perspectives towards the usage of tongue twisters to improve the pronunciation of initial consonant clusters starting with the /s/ phoneme?
2. What are common mistakes among Mexican students living in Guadalajara participating in PAL with initial consonant clusters starting with the /s/ phoneme?

3. What is the effectiveness of tongue twisters to the teaching of phonetic accuracy of consonant clusters starting with the /s/ phoneme?

## METHODOLOGY

This research would be carried out in Universidad de Guadalajara (UdeG). It is one of the largest public universities in Mexico with 339,508 students (Numeralia UdeG, 2025). The UdeG is comprised by a network of 19 campuses distributed in different regions of the city. These offer Bachelor's Degrees (B.A.), Master programs, and PhD programs. It also offers classes at highschool level. One of the campuses is called Centro Universitario de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades (CUCSH). This site has 12,486 students (Numeralia UdeG, 2025). It offers the undergraduate program in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (LIDILE in Spanish) is part of such site. This program has an average enrollment of 147 students who want to obtain a degree in teaching English (Numeralia UdeG, 2025). As part of school curriculum, in one of the class subjects, students at LIDILE are required to coordinate, observe, and teach extracurricular English classes from the third to the eight semester in a program that offers English classes to the school community and general public in a program called PAL (Spanish acronym for Programa Abierto en Lenguas Extranjeras). For this program, students are asked to do micro-teaching practices, a task in which LIDILE students are asked to get in groups of 4 students to teach basic general classes of English in PAL. This program has an academic offer of six levels, each with a duration of a one semester. The present study would be carried out in one of the previously mentioned groups.

In order to identify the effectiveness of the use of tongue twisters in the teaching of initial consonant clusters with the /s/ phoneme, an action research study was conducted following a mixed method for data collection and analysis. According to Bradbury (2015) an action research is a process that "brings together action and reflection, as well as theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern". Since one of the objectives of the study is to analyze students' opinion, a survey was elaborated with open-ended questions and a section of four rating scale options (see Appendix A). It would take place after the implementation and practice of tongue twisters to improve the pronunciation of initial consonant clusters with the /s/ phoneme. The results would be analyzed by comparing the answers of all the participants. This is to obtain a clear picture of their experience and performance.

For this study, the quantitative method would also be used to measure the students' outcome after the instrument. This would be done by asking students to provide an audio pronouncing the words with consonant clusters beginning with /s/ before and after the treatment. The audios can be later analyzed by doing a phonetic transcription and counting the mistakes. With this measure, it is possible to know if the students' pronunciation really improved after the tongue twisters.

The study follows a quasi-experimental design. The main reason for the usage of such design are the limitations of the context. The tested group would be the only available one, and comparing it to a control group would not be plausible. Therefore, this design would allow us to conduct the experiment despite the mentioned constraints. In short, using a quasi-experimental design is the most appropriate choice for this study.

The research also has a phenomenological aspect to it. In the aforementioned survey, the participants would be able to express their perspective and experiences. However, in the recordings, the only focus is performance. In other words, the survey would bring insights which the recordings cannot. Thus, they can complement the quantitative results.

In this last section, a rough outline of the treatment will be presented. The lesson is divided in 3 parts: pre-speaking, while-speaking, and post-speaking. In the first part, the consonant cluster pattern would be introduced. In the second part, two activities working with tongue twisters would be applied. In the third and last part, the students would continue working with the tongue twisters in a relay race; a competition in which members of a team take turns completing an action. An in-depth description of the lesson can be found in the appendix section (see Appendix B). After the class, the students would be given homework. They would be tasked with practicing new tongue twisters and, once they are finished, sending a recording in which they say them.

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## APPENDIX A

### Survey

Trabalenguas  
Encuesta para investigación.

¡Gracias por contestar!

Las actividades con trabalenguas son \_\_\_\_.

Muy divertidas  
 Divertidas  
 Poco divertidas  
 Nada divertidas

Las actividades con trabalenguas fueron \_\_\_\_ para mejorar mi pronunciación.

Muy útiles.  
 Útiles  
 Poco útiles  
 Nada útiles

Explica por qué.  
Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Las actividades con trabalenguas fueron \_\_\_\_.

Muy difíciles  
 Difíciles  
 Poco difíciles  
 Nada difíciles

Explica por qué.  
Your answer \_\_\_\_\_

Aprender pronunciación en inglés es \_\_\_\_.

Muy importante  
 Importante  
 Poco importante  
 Nada importante

## APPENDIX B

### Lesson Plan

LESSON PLAN				
<b>Date:</b> 03/04/2025	<b>Classroom:</b> H34	<b>Level:</b> 1	<b>Class time:</b> 50 minutes	<b>N° of ss:</b> 5
<b>Context:</b> Tongue twisters		<b>Function:</b> Pronunciation		
<b>Previous teaching point:</b> Verb of preference like in affirmative and negative with gerunds		<b>Teaching point:</b> Speaking		
<b>Framework:</b> Skill class				
<b>Language Item:</b> Consonant clusters starting with /s/: strange, students, speak, Spanish, splendid, schools, Stacy, Steven, stay, Spain, study, small, skinned, straight, stop		<b>Names:</b> Aolani Belegui Hernández Sánchez, Diego Noé Mendoza Chávez, Sergio Joel Barrera Ortega, Samantha Dean Sánchez Avilés		
<b>Aim:</b> By the end of the class, SS will be able to correctly pronounce words with initial consonant clusters starting with /s/				

Warm up			
<b>Time:</b> 8:00-8:10	<b>Teacher:</b> Diego Noe Mendoza Chavez.	<b>Skills:</b> All and any	<b>Interaction:</b> T-SS
<b>Material:</b> Flashcards.			
<b>Objective:</b> SS will recognize the /s/ + consonant pattern in the following words: strange, students, speak, Spanish, splendid, schools, Stacy, Steven, stay, Spain, study, small, skinned, straight, stop.			
Procedure			
<b>Lead-in:</b> "Do you know what tongue twister means?"			
<b>Steps:</b> 1. SS will be greeted. 2. SS will be asked. 3. SS will be presented the vocabulary with flashcards. 4. SS will be asked to analyze the flashcards. 5. SS will be asked "what do you notice?" 6. SS will answer the question. 7. SS will be asked to do choral repetition. 8. T will do error correction with the pronunciation.			
<b>Possible problems:</b> SS may not arrive on time.		<b>Possible solution:</b> T will take some minutes of the next stage.	
<b>Link:</b> "Do you know the tongue twister "camarón, caramelo"?"			

While-speaking task 1			
<b>Time:</b> 8:10-8:20	<b>Teacher:</b> Samantha Dean Sánchez Avilés	<b>Skills:</b> Speaking	<b>Interaction:</b> T-SS
<b>Material:</b> 6 pieces of cardboard of each word, adhesive tape			
<b>Objective:</b> SS will learn the correct pronunciation of words with initial consonant clusters starting with /s/			
<b>Procedure</b>			
<b>Lead-in:</b> "Yes, I do. It's so difficult for me."			
<b>Steps:</b>			
1. T will paste the words "Student School Spanish" on the whiteboard.			
2. SS will be asked to read them out loud.			
2.1. SS will be asked to do individual repetition.			
3. SS will be elicited to say more combinations.			
4. T will paste the combinations as SS say them.			
4.1. SS will be asked to read them out loud as they say.			
5. SS will be asked to read all the combinations in a row.			
5.1. Each SS will be asked to read them out loud individually.			
5.2. SS will be corrected if necessary.			
<b>Possible problems:</b>		<b>Possible solutions:</b>	
I SS might not be able to say another combination.		I T will give an example.	
<b>Link:</b> "Do you know a tongue twister in English?"			

While-speaking task 2			
<b>Time:</b> 8:20-8:35	<b>Teacher:</b> Sergio Joel Barrera Ortega	<b>Skills:</b> Speaking	<b>Interaction:</b> SS-SS
<b>Material:</b> Presentation, roulette, printed tongue twisters			
<b>Objective:</b> SS will learn the correct pronunciation of words with initial consonant clusters starting with /s/			
Procedure			
<b>Lead-in:</b> "Yes, I do."			
<b>Steps:</b>			
1. SS will be given instructions			
1.1. Listen to me			
1.2. Write what I say			
2. SS will listen and write the tongue twisters			
3. SS will be asked to read what they wrote			
4. SS will see a presentation with the tongue twisters			
5. SS will be given instructions			
5.1. Repeat after me			
6. SS will repeat all the tongue twisters using back-chaining			
7. SS will be given instructions			
7.1. Get in pairs			
7.2. Practice the tongue twisters			
7.3. You have 5 minutes			
8. SS will be given the printed tongue twisters			
9. ICQs			
9.1. Do you write or speak?			
9.2. How much time do you have?			
10. One teacher will monitor each group			
11. After 5 minutes have passed, SS will be asked to volunteer to say each tongue twister			

<b>Possible problems:</b> I SS might have problems pronouncing the words correctly I SS might not want to volunteer for step 7 I Only three SS might come I Only one SS might come	<b>Possible solutions:</b> I T will model the words by extending the /s/ I T will encourage them. I T will ask them to work together. I T will model and ask the student to say the tongue twister in different manners: sad, happy, whispering, shouting.
<b>Link:</b> "Do you like tongue twisters? Are they difficult for you?"	

Production			
<b>Time:</b> 8:35-8:50	<b>Teacher:</b> Aolani	<b>Skills:</b> speaking	<b>Interaction:</b> SS-SS
<b>Material:</b> Slide with instructions			
<b>Objective:</b> SS will pronounce the complete tongue twisters correctly.			
Procedure			
<b>Lead-in:</b> "I like them, but they are a bit difficult without practice"			
<b>Steps:</b> In teams, students must say a tongue twister correctly before passing it to the next teammate. The fastest team with clear pronunciation wins			
1. SS will see instructions on a slide: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1.1. Get in pairs</li> <li>1.2. Classmate 1 try to say tongue twister correctly</li> <li>1.3. If you do it right, pass it to classmate 2</li> <li>1.4. The team who says the 3 tongue twisters correct the fastest, WINS!!</li> </ol> *T will show an example with other T*			
2. T will check instructions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2.1. When can you pass the tongue twister?</li> <li>2.2. How you win?</li> </ol>			
3. T will have another T time one of the teams.			
4. The winners will be announced.			
<b>Wrap up</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. That was great, did you have fun?</li> <li>2. Do you like tongue twisters?</li> <li>3. What tongue twister was your favorite?</li> </ol>			
<b>Possible problems:</b> I SS may get stuck too much in the first tongue twisters. I Only two or three SS might come. I Only one SS might come.	<b>Possible solutions:</b> I If the impediment is just one repeated pronunciation mistake, T will correct the pronunciation to avoid fossilization. I T will have SS compete against each other. I T will change the activity: SS will be asked to record themselves and compare their recording with another one with proper pronunciation.		