

Pronunciation of the English Letter ‘S’ by Bangladeshi EFL/ESL Learners: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

This paper aims to investigate into how the multi-phonemic English consonant letter ‘s’ is pronounced by the Bangladeshi EFL/ESL learners. For this purpose, language samples were collected from 40 EFL/ESL learners who are currently studying English as a compulsory subject at different schools, and colleges located in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh. The findings show that the English consonant letter ‘s’ poses considerable pronunciation difficulties for the Bangladeshi EFL / ESL learners. On the basis of the findings, this paper offers some recommendations for the EFL/ESL teachers and learners so that they can improve the quality of the pronunciation of this English letter.

1. Introduction

The English spelling system poses a lot of troubles and confusions for non-native EFL learners when they are to pronounce English words because many English letters do not have any specific corresponding relationship to English sounds or English phonemes (Kenworthy 97). Some letters in English have more than one phonemic representation in different contexts. Sometimes consonant letters are not pronounced at all, rather kept silent. In such linguistic contexts, they have zero phonemic value. Again, double consonant letters in English are not pronounced double; rather they have a single phonemic realization. Furthermore, consonant digraphs in which two different consonant letters are clustered together also pose a significant challenge for any EFL/ESL learners. Likewise, English vowel letters do not have a one to one relationship with English vowel phonemes because there are only five vowel letters which represent twenty vowel sounds (Kelly 123). The same vowel letter can have different phonemic values depending on the contexts. For example, the letter ‘a’ can represent English /æ / in *act* and /ɑ:/ in *hard*. Moreover, vowel digraphs (two vowel letters put together) also cause much pronunciation difficulty for any *EFL/ESL* learners as their pronunciation can be notoriously difficult (Kenworthy 109).

Many consonant letters in English have their corresponding sounds or phonemes. Any EFL or ESL learners can easily guess what sounds these letters represent and how they are pronounced. For example, English letters p, b, n, m, d, f, v, h, k, l, v, and r, etc. have their corresponding phonemic counterparts / p/, /b/, /n/, /m/, /d/, /f/, /v/, /h/, /k/, /l/, /v/, and /r/. In such cases where there is a corresponding relationship between letters and sounds, the learners are usually able to pick up the right kind of sounds the letters represent.

However, the English letters c, g, s, t, and x often confuse the EFL / ESL learners because these letters do not have any specific corresponding English phonemes, rather they have multiple phonemic representations (Kelly 149). English letter ‘c’ has three phonemic values, that is, ‘c’ can be pronounced differently as three different phonemes /k/, /s/, and /ʃ/ as in the words *cat* /kæt/, *city* /siti/, and *precious* /preʃəs/ respectively.

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Again, English letter 'g' has also three phonemic variations, that is, 'g' has three different phonemic representations, namely, /g/, /dʒ/ and /ʒ/ as in the words *god* /gɒd/, *gym* /dʒɪm/, and *prestige* /preʃtɪʒ/ respectively.

Like 'g' and 'c', the letter 's' can have multiple phonemic values such as /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, and /ʒ/ as in the words *pots* /pɒts/, *bans* /bænz/, *tension* /tenʃən/, and *measure* /meʒə/ respectively.

Similarly, English letter 't' also has different phonemic values, that is, 't' can be pronounced as three different phonemes /t/, /tʃ/, and /ʃ/ as in the words *cut* /kʌt/, *culture* /kʌltʃə/, and *pollution* /pɒlu:ʃən/ respectively.

Again, the fact that in some cases consonant letters are not pronounced also causes a great problem for EFL/ESL learners. Most often, it is seen that learners are trying hard to pronounce the letters rather than keeping them silent. English letters b, p, d, c, k, l, n, s, t, h, r, etc. can be sometimes silent in a few particular cases. For example, 'b' in *doubt* and *debt*; 'p' in *pneumonia*, and *psycho*; 'd' in *judge*, and *nudge*; 'h' in *hour*, and *heir*; 'l' in *talk*, *stalk*; and 'r' in *here* and *heir*, etc.

At the alphabetic level, English vowel sounds are represented by the five letters a, i, o, e, and u. However, at the phonemic level, English has so many vowel phonemes: five long vowels (i:, ɑ:, ɔ:, u:, and ɜ:), seven short vowels (ɪ, e, æ, ʊ, ʌ, ʊ, and ə), and eight diphthongs (eɪ, aɪ, ɔɪ, əʊ, aʊ, ɪə, eə and ʊə) (Roach 2-12). At the alphabetical level or in spelling, the five vowel letters represent all these 20 English vowel phonemes. Consequently, one single vowel letter can represent more or multiple vowel phonemes. This phenomenon of English spelling and English sounds often create much confusion and difficulty for any EFL/ESL learners.

English letter 'a' can have many phonemic variations. This 'a' can be pronounced /eɪ/, /æ/, and /ə/ as in the words *take* /teɪk/, *pact* /pækt/, *about* /əbaʊt/. For the EFL/ESL learners, these multi-phonemic variations of a single vowel letter poses a huge dilemma regarding which phonemic value/s they will apply when they come across any words having the letter 'a'. Again, the letter 'u' is sometimes pronounced as /ʌ/, sometimes /ʊ/ and sometimes as /u:/ with a preceding /j/ as in the words *cut* /kʌt/, *put* /pʊt/, and *mute* /mjʊ:t/ respectively. Similarly, English vowel letter 'o' also poses a lot of confusions for the EFL learners as this vowel letter can represent multiple English vowel sounds like /ʊ/, /əʊ/, /u:/, and /ʌ/ as in the words *pot* /pʊt/, *hope* /həʊp/, *move* /mu:v/ and *love* /lʌv/ respectively. .

In such cases, any EFL/ESL learners feel confused as to which phonemic value/s to apply to pronounce such letters.

2. Theoretical Analysis

The 's' is the 19th letter of English alphabet. In English, this letter is used frequently in different linguistic contexts. It is used in all positions in English words. It is used in the word initial, medial and final positions. It is also used as a plural form marker, as a third person singular verb form marker and also in the possessive forms. But this letter is not pronounced in the same way in all such contexts.

On the other hand, English phoneme /s/ is a consonant sound. This sound has different phonemic characteristics. According to the manner of articulation, it is a fricative sound. When this consonant sound is produced, there occurs some kind of friction noise (Roach 6-7).The articulators come closer to each other but do not constitute any complete closure

and the air is not held back inside the mouth. Rather a narrow passage is formed and the air is released through this small passage with a hissing sound or a friction noise. That is why, this is called a fricative sound. On the other hand, on the basis of the place of articulation, this sound is called an alveolar consonant as the tip of the tongue moves towards the alveolar region and forms a narrow passage for the air to be released with a hissing sound (Jones 103).

So, the English letter 's' and the English phoneme /s/ are linguistically related to each other but not the same. In English, the letter 's' is used in spelling or at the alphabetical level. For pronunciation, it is the phoneme /s/. However, the letter 's' represents multiple phonemes. It represents English phonemes /s/, /z/, /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ sounds depending on different linguistic situations (Kelly 148).

In most cases the letter 's' is phonemically realized as /s/ as in the words *sun*, *skin*, *gas*, *goose*, *toss*. However it is pronounced as /z/ when it occurs between two vowel letters (Kelly 148). For example, *present* /prezənt/, *preside* /prɪzaɪd/, *reside* /rɪzaɪd/, and *lose* /lu:z/.

This letter is also pronounced as /z/ when it occurs after a voiced consonant as in the words *dogs* /dɒgz/, *hands* /hændz/, forms /fɔ:mz/, and nouns /nɑ:onz/ (Kelly 148). Furthermore, when 's' occurs at the end of a verb as a third person singular form marker after a voiced consonant or a vowel, it is realized as /z/ as in the words *harms* /hɑ:mz/, *kills* /kɪlz/, *loves* /lʌvz/, *leaves* /li:vz/, and *goes* /gəʊz/ (Kelly 148).

The letter 's' can also represent English /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ sounds. When 's' occurs between a consonant and a following vowel 'i', it is pronounced as /ʃ/ as in the words *tension* /tenʃən/, *mansion* /mæʃən/, and *pension* /penʃən/ (Kelly 148). In word initial position, in some particular words, 's' is realized as /ʃ/ as in *sugar* /ʃʊgə/, and *sure* /ʃɜ:/. And between vowels in some few cases, 's' is also pronounced as /ʒ/ as in *leisure* /leɪʒə/, *measure* /meɪʒə/, *vision* /vi:ʒən/, etc.

3. Objective of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate into how the multi-phonemic English consonant letter 's' is pronounced by Bangladeshi EFL/ESL learners. Specifically the study is designed to find out whether Bangladeshi EFL/ESL learners encounter any problems when they pronounce the multi-phonemic English consonant letter 's'.

3. Methodology

3.1. Study Area

The study was conducted at some educational institutions in Dhaka city.

3.2. Study Population

This study was conducted on a total of 40 (forty) EFL / ESL learners from 5 schools, and 5 colleges. From each of these institutions, four learners were selected through convenient sampling.

3.3. Data Collection

3.3.1. Word List for Collecting Empirical Data

As the study involves pronunciation of English sounds, a list of 30 English words were developed. In this word list, the letter 's' occur 30 times in different linguistic conditions. The table below shows the distribution of the letter 's' in different linguistic contexts:

SL	Words	Contexts	Phonemic Value
1	sun, sat, sum	Initial position	/s/
2	sure, surefire, sugar	Initial position	/ʃ/
3	speed, strong, sky,	Initial position before consonants	/s/
4	preside, prison, reside	Medial position between vowels	/z/
5	tension, mansion, pension	Medial position between consonant and vowel letter 'i'	/ʃ/
6	cats, kicks, cops	Final position after voiceless sounds as plural marker	/s/
7	bags, kids, dogs	Final position after voiced sounds as plural marker	/z/
8	takes, hopes, cuts	Final position after voiceless sounds as tense marker	/s/
9	runs, rubs, leads	Final position after voiced sounds as tense marker	/z/
10	islet, isle, debris	As silent consonant	zero

Table 1: Distribution of the Letter 's' in Different Linguistic Contexts

3.3.2. Data Collection Method/Tool

For collecting the empirical data in this study, the participants were asked to pronounce the 30 words aloud and their pronunciation was recorded by the sound recorder of Samsung M 10 mobile set.

3.4. Data Analysis

After collecting data from these learners, the recorded pronunciation of these words was transcribed with IPA. Then the transcribed pronunciation was compared with that of Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. Incorrect pronunciations of this letter 's' were identified through contrastive analysis.

4. Findings and Discussion

The empirical data collected from the respondents show that the pronunciation of the multi-phonemic English consonant letter 's' causes considerable problems for the Bangladeshi EFL/ESL learners. Most of the pronunciations of the letter 's' were incorrect. The findings are described below in detail:

4.1. The 's' in the Initial Position as /s/

In the word initial position, the letter 's' in *sun, sat and sum* has the phonemic value /s/, a voiceless alveolar fricative and each of these 's' letters was pronounced 40 times by the 40 learners. In 97.5 % (117 out of 120) cases the 's' in these words was pronounced correctly like a voiceless alveolar fricative /s/. Only 2.5% (3 out of 120) pronunciations were found to be incorrect as it was pronounced like a palato-alveolar fricative /ʃ/. The table below shows the pronunciation of the letter 's' in the word initial position having the phonemic value /s/:

SL	Letter 's' in	Phonemic value	Pronounced /s/ correctly	Pronounced /s/ incorrectly as /ʃ/	Pronounced /s/ incorrectly as /z/
1	sun	/s/	38	2	0
2	sat		40	0	0
3	sum		39	1	0
Total			117	3	0
Percentage			97.5%	2.5%	0%

Table 2: 'S' in the Initial Position [Source: Field Data]

4.2. The 's' in the Initial Position as /ʃ/

In the word initial position, the letter 's' in *sure*, *surefire* and *sugar* has the phonemic value /ʃ/, a palato-alveolar fricative and in each case 's' was pronounced 40 times by the 40 learners. In 56.67 % (68 out of 120) pronunciations, the 's' in these words was pronounced incorrectly like a voiceless alveolar fricative /s/. Only 43.33 % (52 out of 120) pronunciations were found to be correct as it was pronounced like a palato-alveolar fricative /ʃ/. The table below shows the pronunciation of the letter 's' in the words having the phonemic value /ʃ/:

SL	Letter 's' in	Phonemic value	Pronounced /ʃ/ correctly	Pronounced /ʃ/ incorrectly as /s/	Pronounced /ʃ/ incorrectly as /z/
1	sure	/ʃ/	36	4	0
2	surefire		4	36	0
3	sugar		12	28	0
Total			52	68	0
Percentage			43.33 %	56.67 %	0%

Table 3: 'S' in the Initial Position [Source: Field Data]

4.3. The 's' in the Medial Position between Vowels

In the word initial position, the letter 's' in the words *preside*, *prison* and *reside* has the phonemic value /z/, an alveolar voiced fricative and in each case 's' was pronounced 40 times by the 40 learners. In 53.33 % (64 out of 120) cases the 's' in these words was pronounced incorrectly like an alveolar voiceless fricative /s/. Besides, in 2.5 % (3 out of 120) cases the 's' in these words was pronounced incorrectly like a palato-alveolar voiceless fricative /ʃ/. On the other hand, 44.17 % (53 out of 120) pronunciations were found to be correct as it was pronounced like an alveolar voiced fricative /z/. The table below shows the pronunciation of the letter 's' in the word medial position having the phonemic value /z/:

SL	Letter 's' in	Phonemic value	Pronounced /z/ incorrectly as /s/	Pronounced /z/ incorrectly /ʃ/	Pronounced /z/ correctly
1	preside,	/z/	34	2	4
2	prison		3	0	37
3	reside		27	1	12
Total			64	3	53
Percentage			53.33 %	2.5%	44.17 %

Table 4: 'S' in the Medial Position between Vowels [Source: Field Data]

4.4. The 's' in the Initial Position before Consonants

In the word initial position, the letter 's' in *speed*, *strong*, and *sky*, has the phonemic value /s/, an alveolar voiceless fricative and in each case 's' was pronounced 40 times by the 40 learners. In 40 % (48 out of 120) cases the 's' in *speed*, *strong*, and *sky*, was pronounced incorrectly as /ɪs/. Besides, in 6.67 % (8 out of 120) cases the 's' in these words was pronounced incorrectly /es/. On the other hand, 53.33 % (64 out of 120) pronunciations were found to be correct as it was pronounced like an alveolar voiceless fricative /s/. The table below shows the pronunciation of the letter 's' in the word initial position before consonants having the phonemic value /s/:

SL	Letter 's' in	Phonemic value	Pronounced /s/ correctly	Pronounced /s/ incorrectly as /ts/	Pronounced /s/ incorrectly /es/
1	speed	/s/	24	13	3
2	strong		21	15	4
3	sky		19	20	1
Total			64	48	8
Percentage			53.33 %	40 %	6.67 %

Table 5: 'S' in the Initial Position before Consonants [Source: Field Data]

4.5. The 's' between Consonants and the Vowel /i/

Between a consonant and a following 'i', the letter 's' in the words *tension*, *mansion*, and *pension* has the phonemic value /ʃ/, a palato-alveolar voiceless fricative and in each case 's' was pronounced 40 times by the 40 learners. In 91.66 % (110 out of 120) cases the 's' in these words, was pronounced correctly like a palato- alveolar voiceless fricative /ʃ/. Only 8.34 % (10 out of 120) pronunciations were found to be incorrect as it was pronounced like an alveolar voiceless fricative /s/. The table below shows the pronunciation of the letter 's' in the word initial position before consonants having the phonemic value /ʃ/:

SL	Letter 's' in	Phonemic value	Pronounced /ʃ/ incorrectly as /s/	Pronounced /ʃ/ correctly	Pronounced /ʃ/ incorrectly as /z/
1	tension,	/ʃ/	3	37	0
2	mansion		5	35	0
3	pension		2	38	0
Total			10	110	0
Percentage			8.34 %	91.66 %	0%

Table 6: 'S' between Consonants and the Vowel /i/ [Source: Field Data]

4.6. The 's' after Voiceless Sounds as Plural Marker

After voiceless consonants in the word final position as plural markers, the letter 's' in the words *cats*, *kicks*, and *cops* has the phonemic value /s/, a alveolar voiceless fricative and in each case 's' was pronounced 40 times by the 40 learners. In 97.5 % (117 out of 120) cases the 's' in these words was pronounced correctly like a palato- alveolar voiceless fricative /s/. Only 2.5 % (3 out of 120) pronunciations were found to be incorrect as it was pronounced like a alveolar voiced fricative /z/. The table below shows the pronunciation of the letter 's' in the word final position after voiceless consonants as plural form markers having the phonemic value /s/:

SL	Letter 's' in	Phonemic value	Pronounced /s/ correctly	Pronounced /s/ incorrectly as /ʃ/	Pronounced /s/ Incorrectly as /z/
1	cats	/s/	38	2	0
2	kicks		40	0	0
3	cops		39	1	0
Total			117	3	0
Percentage			97.5 %	2.5 %	0%

Table 7: 'S' after Voiceless Consonants as Plural Marker [Source: Field Data]

4.7. The 's' after Voiceless Consonants as Tense Marker

After voiceless consonants in the word final position as plural markers, the letter 's' in the words 'takes', 'hopes' and 'cuts' has the phonemic value /s/, an alveolar voiceless fricative and in each case 's' was pronounced 40 times by the 40 learners. In 95.83 % (115 out of 120) cases the 's' in these words was pronounced correctly like a palato-alveolar voiceless fricative /s/. Only 4.17 % (5 out of 120) pronunciations were found to be incorrect as it was pronounced like an alveolar voiced fricative /z/. The table below shows the pronunciation of the letter 's' in the word final position before consonants having the phonemic value /s/:

SL	Letter 's' in	Phonemic value	Pronounced /s/ correctly	Pronounced /s/ incorrectly as /z/	Pronounced /s/ incorrectly /z/
1	takes	/s/	37	0	3
2	hopes		38	0	2
3	cuts		40	0	0
Total			115	0	5
Percentage			95.83 %	0 %	4.17 %

Table 8: 'S' in the Final Position after Voiceless Consonants as Tense Marker [Source: Field Data]

4.8. The 's' after Voiced Consonants as Tense Marker

After voiced consonants in the word final position as third person singular verb marker, the letter 's' in the words *runs*, *rubs* and *leads* has the phonemic value /z/, an alveolar voiced fricative and in each case 's' was pronounced 40 times by the 40 learners. In 90.83 % (109 out of 120) cases the 's' in the words was pronounced incorrectly like an alveolar voiceless fricative /s/. Only 9.17 % (11 out of 120) pronunciations were found to be correct as it was pronounced like an alveolar voiced fricative /z/. The table below shows the pronunciation of the letter 's' in the word initial position before consonants having the phonemic value /z/:

SL	Letter 's' in	Phonemic value	Pronounced /z/ incorrectly as /s/	Pronounced /z/ incorrectly as /f/	Pronounced /z/ correctly
1	runs,	/z/	34	0	6
2	rubs		36	0	4
3	leads		39	0	1
Total			109	0	11
Percentage			90.83 %	0 %	9.17 %

Table 9: 'S' after Voiceless Consonants as Tense Marker [Source: Field Data]

4.9. The 's' after Voiced Consonants as Plural Marker

After voiced consonants in the word final position as third person singular verb marker, the letter 's' in the words *bags*, *kids* and *dogs* has the phonemic value /z/, an alveolar voiced fricative and in each case 's' was pronounced 40 times by the 40 learners. In 86.66 % (104 out of 120) cases the 's' in these words was pronounced incorrectly like an alveolar voiceless fricative /s/. Only 13.34 % (16 out of 120) pronunciations were found to be correct as it was pronounced like an alveolar voiced fricative /z/. The table below shows the pronunciation of the letter 's' in the word final position after voiced consonants as a plural marker having the phonemic value /z/:

SL	Letter ‘s’ in	Phonemic value	Pronounced /z/ incorrectly /s/	Pronounced /z/ incorrectly /ʒ/	Pronounced /z/ correctly
1	bags	/z/	37	0	3
2	kids		36	0	4
3	dogs		31	0	9
Total			104	0	16
Percentage			86.66 %	0%	13.34%

Table 10: ‘S’ after Voiced Consonants as Plural Marker [Source: Field Data]

4.10. The ‘s’ as Silent Consonant

As silent consonants, the letter ‘s’ occurring in the words *islet*, *isle*, and *debris* has the zero phonemic value, that is, the ‘s’ in these words is not pronounced rather kept silent. In 89.17 % (107 out of 120) cases the ‘s’ in the words was not left out, rather pronounced, like an alveolar voiceless fricative /s/ and /z/. Only in 10.83 % (13 out of 120) pronunciations the ‘s’ was kept silent. The table below shows the pronunciation of the letter ‘s’ in the words having zero phonemic realization:

SL	Letter ‘s’ in	Phonemic value	Pronounced /s/ incorrectly	Pronounced /ʒ/incorrectly	Pronounced /z/ incorrectly	Not Pronounced
1	islet	zero	15	0	21	4
2	isle		18	0	17	5
3	debris		29	0	7	4
Total			62	0	45	13
Percentage			51.66%	0%	37.5%	10.84 %

Table 11: ‘S’ Having Zero Phonemic Realization [Source: Field Data]

4.11. Pronunciation of the Letter ‘s’ in the Study in Different Linguistics Contexts

This letter occurred 30 times in 10 different linguistic contexts and was pronounced 1200 (30x40) times by the 40 respondents. Out of these 1200 pronunciations, 658 (54.84%) were correct while 542 (45.14%) were found to be pronounced incorrectly when matched with the pronunciation of Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary. The table below shows the overall pronunciation of the letter ‘s’ by the EFL/ESL learners who participated in the study:

SL	Words	Contexts	Phonemic Value	Correct		Incorrect	
				Nos.	(%)	Nos.	(%)
1	sun, sat, sum	Initial position	/s/	117	97.5	3	2.5
2	sure, surefire, sugar	Initial position	/ʃ/	52	43.33	68	56.67
3	speed, strong, sky,	Initial position before consonants	/s/	64	53.33	56	46.67
4	preside, prison, reside	Medial position between vowels	/z/	53	44.17	67	55.83
5	tension, mansion, pension	Medial position between consonant and vowel letter ‘i’	/ʃ/	110	91.66	10	8.34
6	cats, kicks, cops	Final position after voiceless sounds as plural marker	/s/	117	97.5	3	2.5

7	bags, kids , dogs	Final position after voiced sounds as plural marker	/z/	16	13.34	104	86.66
8	takes, hopes, cuts	Final position after voiceless sounds as tense marker	/s/	115	95.83	5	4.17
9	runs, rubs , leads	Final position after voiced sounds as tense marker	/z/	11	9.17	109	90.83
10	islet, isle, debris	As silent consonant	zero	13	10.83	107	89.17
Total				668	55.67%	532	44.33%

Table 12: Overall Pronunciation of the Letter 's' in the Study

5. Discussion and Analysis of the Findings

From the findings of the study, it is seen that the letter 's' creates considerable pronunciation problems for the Bangladeshi EFL/ESL learners as this letter has multiple phonemic variations in different linguistic contexts. When this letter represents its corresponding sound /s/, it does not pose any difficulties for the learners but when it represents a different sound like /z/ and /ʃ/, or a zero phonemic value, they usually mispronounce it as /s/. Most of the incorrect pronunciations of this letter occurred where it has the phonemic value /z/ (52.63%) while 14.66% incorrect responses occurred where it has the phonemic value /ʃ/. Again 20.11 % pronunciations were mispronounced where this letter has the zero phonemic realization. On the other hand, only 12.60 % incorrect responses occurred where it has its corresponding sound /s/. The following table summarizes the incorrect responses of the learners who participated in the study:

SL	Phonemic Values	Incorrect Responses	Percentage (%)
1	/s/	67	12.60
2	/z/	280	52.63
3	/ʃ/	78	14.66
4	zero	107	20.11

Table 13: Incorrect Responses in the Study [Field Data]

6. Importance of the Study

English has become an international language across this globe for different socio-cultural, geo-political, educational, economic, trade-commerce-sports related reasons. And for these reasons, communicative competence in English is very significant. To maintain, effective communication in today's global village, the citizens of this global village need to be prepared with better communication skill at the national and international level. As a partner of global development, Bangladeshis also need to be ready with a good command in English for communication both at the local as well as global level. At the national boundary, we need to communicate with the foreigners from different parts of the world who come here everyday for numerous purposes. We need to talk to many native as well as non-native English speakers. For this, we need better communication skills in English. Again, when we travel to different English speaking countries, we need to make us intelligible to the people of those countries.

So, the study explores one of the areas of pronunciation where our EFL/ESL learners face difficulties and feel confused regarding which way to go. The findings of the study can help our future generations to prepare themselves with intelligible pronunciation skill by which they can communicate successfully at the national as well as international arena.

7. Recommendations and Conclusion

The findings show that the multi-phonemic English consonant letter ‘s’ poses huge difficulties for the EFL/ ESL learners of Bangladesh. The learners feel confused when they come across this consonant letter which has many different phonemic values. In this study, the learners committed about 542 pronunciation errors because they were misled and confused by the English spelling / letter- sound complexities. On the basis of the findings of this study, some suggestions are recommended both for English teachers as well as the EFL/ESL learners to ensure their correct pronunciation. The tips can be very useful to the teachers who teach English in their class:

a. Recommendations for the EFL/ESL teachers

- They should explain the differences between English letters and English sounds.
- They should explain the differences between English and Bengali sound patterns
- They should clarify which English letters represent what English sounds in particular linguistic contexts.
- They should explain the differences between English voiced and voiceless sounds.
- They should develop practice materials on English spelling and sound systems.
- They should make their learners aware of the fact that a consonant letter can be pronounced differently in different linguistic situations.
- They should expose their learners to native English conversation.
- They should arrange listening activities in the class.

b. Recommendations for the EFL/ESL learners:

- They should have motivation for learning English pronunciation.
- They should never feel sad or depressed if they mispronounce any sound.
- They should learn that a letter is not a phonetic sound.
- They should know that a letter can be pronounced differently in different position. For example, in this study, the letter ‘s’ can have at least three phonemic variations or values such as /s/, /z/, /ʃ/ and sometimes it has no phonemic value, that is, remain silent.
- They should listen to native English conversation, songs, news, music, etc.
- They should watch English movies, dramas, etc.
- They should practice speaking among themselves, and with their teachers and friends.

Thus, it is expected that the learners will learn about how English letters and English sounds are related to each other and will be able to pronounce this multi-phonemic consonant letter properly.

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Appendix

a. The List of the Words Used in the Study

sun	sugar	islet	bags	ruhs	takes	preside	speed	tension	cats
sat	sure	isle	dogs	runs	hopes	prison	sky	pension	kicks
sum	surefire	debris	kids	leads	cuts	reside	strong	mansion	cops