Philippine English Proficiency of the K12 students: Basis for the improvement of the English Curriculum

Lemuel R. Fontillas, PhD
Bataan Peninsula
State University
lhemf@yahoo.com

Sherrilyn B. Quintos, EdD
Bataan Peninsula
State University
sbquintos@bpsu.edu.ph

Cynthia M. Ronquillo, MAEd.
Bataan Peninsula
State University
cmronquillo@bpsu.edu.ph

Abstract

This study attempted to assess the Philippine English proficiency of the students who took the K to12 curriculum. The study dealt with the speaking and comprehension skills of the students. The main aim of the study is to show the need to have proficiency in using the Philippine variety of English. The researchers interviewed students who were 18 to 19 years of age, male or female, and were enrolled for the first time in any of the programs offered by BPSU on the Main Campus. The recorded material exhibited each respondent's English comprehension and speaking skills; anonymity and privacy were observed. Recorded conversations were lexically transcribed hence forming a 336,828-word corpus. The analysis was done using 1) relevance of the answer, 2) eloquence, 3) grammatical content and 4) time of response. The study found that students can speak the language but use the Philippine English variety (Bautista, 2000a). Hence, we recommend that ELT teachers should have the acceptance of Philippine English. This can be done by having different awareness campaigns for the academic community. A curriculum modification for both the tertiary level and DepEd can be done to realign the use of Philippine English.

1 Introduction

In 2018, a new curriculum for the tertiary level was released by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). The said curriculum was said to be more focused on the major subjects of the program. Many minor subjects such as Maths, Sciences, and languages were removed from the old curriculum and transferred to the Senior High School level. Language courses, particularly English, are not exempted from this. Specific courses such as Speech and Oral Communication, Writing in the Discipline, Study and Thinking Skills, Oral Diagnostic English and Communication Arts 1 & 2 were removed from the tertiary level. They were transferred to the new basic education program. These courses are avenues where our own variety of English can be introduced to students. As these courses were transferred to basic education, it is now the responsibility of the teachers to establish learning in the Philippine variety of English. This is despite the Philippine English (PE) paradigm still facing opposition from traditional teachers, or some teachers haven't entirely accepted the idea of having a Philippine variety of English at all Some teachers have the idea of having PE but are not confident enough to teach them to students. As the issue of having this variety is being taught in schools, it is evident that it already exists among Filipinos (Gonzalez, 1997). Teachers may have been teaching it unknowingly but lacking knowledge that they are dealing with PE already.

This study attempted to assess the Philippine English proficiency of the students who took the K to12 curriculum. The study dealt with the speaking and comprehension skills of the students. The main aim of the study is to show the need for proficiency in using the Philippine variety of English. Specifically, the study answered the following questions:

1. How is Philippine English displayed in the answers of the students in terms of their;
 1.1 relevance of the answer;
 1.2) eloquence;
 1.3) grammatical content; and
 1.4) time of response?
 2. What is the implication of the developed skills of the students to language teaching?

2 Review of Literature

The language learning process of the Department of Education (DepEd) is anchored to a belief that

for effective language acquisition and learning to take place, language teachers must be guided by the six (6) language teaching principles. These are Spiral Progression, Interaction, Integration, Learner-Centeredness, Contextualization, and Construction. These principles are applied in the classroom in which skills, grammatical items, structures, and various types of texts are taught, revised, and revisited at increasing levels of difficulty and sophistication. DepEd believes that this will allow students to progress from the foundational level to higher levels of language use. This may seem effective, but the National Achievement Test (NAT) 2018 showed declining scores and skills mismatch since 2013. This problem in the language education sector showed that despite continuous teaching of language skills, no mastery was taught to the student. The basic education ends at grade 12 then college is next. In College, where education is of a higher form, mastery of skills is enhanced but if mastery is underdeveloped what then will be enhanced?

In the United States, Carhill, Suárez-Orozco & Páez (2017) conducted a study to increase understanding of factors that account for academic English language proficiency in a sample of 274 adolescent first-generation immigrant students from China, the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Central America, and Mexico. Previous research has shown the importance of English language proficiency in predicting academic achievement measured by GPA and achievement tests. Their study described the academic English language proficiency of immigrant youth after, on average, 7 years in the United States and models factors that contributing to the variation. Findings show that although differences in individual student characteristics partially explain variation in English language proficiency, the schools that immigrant youth attended are also important. Students' time spent speaking English in informal social situations is predictive of English language proficiency. These findings demonstrate that social context factors directly affect language learning among adolescent immigrant youth and suggest a crucial role for school and peer interventions.

On the other hand, Pereda et al. (2013) pioneered a study about the influence of more than one language in second language acquisition through corpus analysis. Their study aimed to determine the possible interferences between a language and a target language. It was reported that the proposed project is innovative in that the conclusions are based on the Error Analysis of a large corpus

and that the results were very useful for SFL teachers and learners in Flanders. At the same time, it fills an existing gap in SFL books and the topic of change-of-state verbs. It is argued that while the research clearly shows that many factors other than English proficiency are important to academic success, there may be for each institution, or even for each program within an institution, a minimum level below which lack of sufficient proficiency in English contributes significantly to lack of academic success. Such a level can be determined by each institution individually, but until it is determined, several steps can be taken to establish reasonable English language proficiency requirements.

Going back to the Philippines, where various English languages were born, Borlongan (2017) pointed out that in 1925, the educational survey board noticed that Filipinos spoke differently from Americans. Further contrastive reports (Raqueño, 1940, 1957) also pointed out the distinctive way of how Filipinos use English. Gonzalez (1997, 2008) said that when Filipino teachers began teaching fellow Filipinos English, which was around the 1920s, Philippine English was born, but it was only towards the end of the 1960s when a linguist, Teodoro Llamzon, called attention to an emerging variety of English in the Philippines.

Still, according to Borlongan (2017), through a publication of Llamzon in 1969, Philippine English had received much attention from Filipino linguists. It became an object of inquiry and was proven by some of the reviews in linguistic research in the Philippines done by Dayag and Dita (2012). Indeed, research on Philippine English had been remarked as the most likely comprehensive research among other indigenized Southeast Asian English (Tay 1991). Bautista (2000a) thus defined Philippine English: "Philippine English is not English that falls short of the norms of Standard American English; it is not badly learned English as a second language; its distinctive features are not errors committed by users who have not mastered the American standard. Instead, it is a nativized variety of English that has features that differentiate it from Standard American English because of the influence of the first language (specifically in pronunciation but occasionally in grammar), because of the different cultures in which the language is embedded (expressed in the lexicon and discourse conventions), and because of a restructuring of some grammar rules (manifested in the grammar)".

3 Methodology and Materials

3.1 Respondents of the Study

This descriptive qualitative study randomly selected first-year students from Bataan Peninsula State University (BPSU) Main Campus for the English Proficiency assessment. The university accepts an average of 2000 first-year students every semester, thus with a margin of error of 5% and a confidence level of 95%, a required sample size of 238 (students) is considered as respondents in this study. Respondents were 18 to 19 years of age upon the conduct of the interview of the teachers involved in the study, male or female, and were enrolled for the first time in any of the programs offered by BPSU on the Main Campus.

3.2 Corpus Building Process

The researchers of the study first discussed how to conduct the interview. To ensure the consistency and reliability of the data, the team had to select qualified respondents. The individual data recording took place in an area with less noise and fewer chances of interruption. The name and identities of the respondents were not asked to ensure anonymity and privacy. Participants were asked to answer a set of questions verbally. The answers of each respondent to the questions were audio-recorded; thus, it was just the interviewee's voice that was taped. Recordings were then transcribed for analysis. The respondents answered the following questions in English for at least four (4) minutes each: 1) Tell something about your experience in learning the English language. 2) How did you learn to use the English language? 3) Narrate unforgettable lessons your former English teachers taught you. 4) What are the topics in English that you have difficulty in mastering? Why do you think so? 5) What are you doing to make these difficulties ease?

3.3 Description of the Corpus

The recorded material exhibited the English comprehension and speaking skills of each respondent. All recorded conversations were lexically transcribed, forming a 336,828-word corpus for the study. The analysis was done using 1) relevance of the answer, 2) eloquence, 3) grammatical content, and 4) time of response. Based on the categories given, results were concluded. A speaking and comprehension rubric used in grading similar activities in purposive communication

was used. The rubrics were prescribed in the region during the seminar on handling Purposive Communication; hence, these were validated prior to prescription.

3.4 Corpus Management

Data were given codes to the mp3 files produced to ensure the organization and confidentiality of the respondents' answers. Alphanumeric codes were assigned such as S01 for Student 01, S02 for Student 02, and so on. The codes were the filenames of the mp3s and were used for the title of the transcribed material for analysis. The mp3s and the softcopy of the transcription were saved in a cloud application, Dropbox. The folder was password-protected to ensure the security of the files. A list of names of the respondents with their corresponding codes was also stored in the protected folder to secure the identity of the respondents as well. Only the researchers have complete access to the cloud folder.

4 Discussion of Results and Findings

4.1 Relevance of the Answer

Using the Comprehension Rubric, out of the 238 respondents, there were 185 students given a score of 5 for comprehension. This is 77.7% of the entire population. While 43 scored 4 and the remaining 10 scored 3 and 2. This minor number of respondents simply gave appropriate answers to questions, thus, expressed logically relevant statements. This shows that students can comprehend the interviewer's questions but have difficulty expressing their thoughts/ideas using the English language. To give a score of five (5) from the rubric means that the answer is given a full mark.

Score	Frequency	Percentage
5	185	77.7%
4	43	18.06%
3	7	2.9%
2	3	1.3%
	238	100%

Table 1. Score of Respondents

The description suggests that the initial post or

answer is organized around a clear point of view or idea with adequate supporting detail. According to Gonzales (1982), Filipinos typically have mastery of the formal style or classroom English. Gonzales also concluded that there are minimal differences in the formal and informal written discourses. Loan words, nicknames, and contractions as often used in an informal style, and code-switching to the vernacular is generally prevalent in informal discourses. Respondents were bilingual speakers, and the corpus also revealed that Tagalog words appeared 781 times and a total of 1,426 wordy sentences, meaning the respondents knew what to say but they were gasping for the right equivalent word in the second language. De Boni (2006) explained that logical relevance could be based on and observed using measured simplification, a form of constraint relaxation, and considering flexibility and directness of statements in a sliding scale of aptness. This then shows that the respondents, despite their previous difficulties in learning the English language, are already familiar with it.

4.2 Eloquence

Table 2 refers to the respondents' coherence in answering the questions, while table 3 refers to their level of fluency and pronunciation of words. Using the speaking rubric, it was found out that 137 students out of the 238 respondents were coherent in their speaking. This is 57.56% of the population. According to the rubric, a 2.5 score means that a student correctly understands the questions and that responses are clear. Seventy eight (78) students or 32.77% got a score of 2, meaning that a student makes few mistakes understanding the questions, and responses are mostly clear.

Score	Frequency	Percentage
2.5	137	57.56
2	78	32.77
1.5	23	9.66
	238	100%

Table 2. Score of Respondents for Coherence

Lastly, 23 students, or 9.66%, got a 1.5 score, meaning that a student makes significant mistakes in understanding the questions, and responses are somewhat clear. The indicated scores show that majority of the respondents are coherent with their answers to the questions. This is consistent with the result in table 1 on the relevance of the student's answers, which says 77.7% of the respondents scored 5

4.3 Fluency

In table 3, 125 or 52.5% of the respondents got a score of 2.5 which means students speak fluidly with few to no breaks. While 100 students, or 42.01%, got a score of 2, meaning students speak mostly fluidly with semi-frequent short or a few long breaks. Only 13 or 5.46% of the respondents got a score of 1.5, meaning these students speak somewhat fluidly with frequent short and long pauses, as seen from these numbers. It averages 40-60% of the respondents are eloquent in English.

Score	Frequency	Percentage
2.5	125	52.5
2	100	42.01
1.5	13	5.46
	238	100%

Table 3. Score of Respondents for Fluency

The respondents were considered to be members of Gen Z; thus, there are influences on how they speak through the different media (both social and electronic) around them. It is also evident that their pronunciation of the words is unique in terms of sound.

It is similar to the tone of their speaking Filipino, their first language. This is proof of what Teodoro Llamson (1969) noted in his monograph, the distinction between Filipino and the American variety in producing vowel sounds, stress, and syllables. His study was expanded by Gonzales and Alberca (1978), who noted the distinctive features of Philippine English phonology as: absence of vowel reduction rule and possible spelling pronunciation, absence of schwa

sound, the substitution of voiceless fricatives for voiced fricative, absence of aspiration of initial voiceless stops, simplification of consonant clusters, and different stress patterns in individual words, among others.

4.4 Grammatical Content

Type of Error	Frequency
Determiner use	2,993
Wordy sentences	1,426
Wrong or missing prepositions	1,152
Faulty subject-verb agreement	837
Tagalog words	781
Incorrect nouns	746
Confused word usage	582
Incorrect verb forms	508
Wrong pronoun use	354
Commonly confused words	263
Improper formatting	183
Misuse of modifiers	58
Misuse of modal verbs	44
Misuse of quantifiers	35
Mixed English dialects	16
Conjunction use	2
TOTAL	9,980

Table 4. Transcript Analysis of Errors

Table 4 reports a significant number of transcript errors associated with grammatical content, namely: determiner use (2,993), wrong or missing prepositions (1,426), Faulty subject-verb agreement (837), incorrect nouns (746), confusing word usage (582), incorrect verb forms (508), wrong pronoun use (354), improper formatting (183), misuse of modifiers (58), misuse of modal verbs (44), misuse of quantifiers (35), and con-junction use (2). All of these fall under intralingual interferences, which was defined by Erdogan (2005) as the errors resulting from the learners' view about the target language because of their lack of experience with it. These are the errors not related to the native language structure but caused by learners' limited target language information. These intralingual interferences manifested through the students' responses unveiled that there had been only partial learning of the target language. A corpus was formed out of the 238 respondents, having 336,828 words. The table below shows an error deviation of 9,980 words committed by the students. This proves what Gonzales and Alberca (1978) mentioned on the distinct variation in word order, article usage, noun subcategorization, as well as some errors in pronoun-antecedent agreement, tense-aspect usage, and subject-verb agreement. Bautista (2000a) noted similar findings in subject-verb agreement, articles, prepositions, mass and count nouns, word order, and comparative constructions. Instead of errors, Bautista adopted D'Souza's recommendation of categorizing variants that were rule-governed, widespread, and used by competent users as distinct features of Philippine English.

4.5 Time of response

Using the comprehension rubric, table 5 shows that 178 out of the 238, 74.78% of the total respondents, got a score of 5, and 60, 25.21%, scored 3. None got a score of zero since all have answers to all the questions. 74.78% answered immediately, while 25.21% of the respondents needed seconds to think for answers and probably got conscious of the recorder. Responding to questions is a normal reaction.

Score	Frequency	Percentage
5	178	74.78
3	60	25.21
	238	100%

Table 5. Score of Respondents

for Time of Response

The respondents know they are being interviewed and their answers are being recorded. However, their reaction to react quickly is an innate action coming from consciousness, but looking at what and how they answer the question still shows the evidence of having a variety of English uniquely embedded in them. The earlier variables discussed above show them.

5 Summary and Conclusion

Grammatical errors were committed by the respondents, as displayed in the data. As Bautista (2000) mentioned, common errors may be a nativized variety of English with different features from Standard American English. Thus, this only highlighted that the respondents in their age and level of English performance need to be guided to make a variety of English more intelligible without compromising the comprehensibility of the language. Language is a growing entity, and its changes are manifestations of it being alive. Thus, putting a stop to these changes and saying which is appropriate or not only hinders the growth, which leads to killing a language. Meanings are user and dependent. The English language is not exempted from this claim, just like any other language, it is a tool for expressing the thoughts, ideas, feeling, or simply the message the user wants to convey.

The respondents' so-called "grammatical errors" may not necessarily mean errors, as discussed above, but features of a language. These features then distinguish a particular variety giving birth to a language. These errors are most of the time related to how the respondents make use of their first language. On the other hand, errors not related to the native language structure are caused by the learners' limited information about the target language. These intralingual interferences manifested through the students' responses unveiled that there had been only partial learning of the target language. Thus, reinforcement is needed.

The analysis also revealed that there is also a need for coherence, fluency, and pronunciation of the respondents. Despite being members of Gen Z and being influenced by how they speak by the different media (both social and electronic) around them, there is still room for them to be proficient in using Philippine variety way of speaking. This can be proven when the students can comprehend the interviewer's questions but have difficulty expressing their thoughts/ideas using the English language. This proof strengthens the claim that the first language very much influences the English variety. Philippine English is evident in how the respondents/students performed in the study. Philippine English being a highly intelligible and acceptable language is dynamically expanding, and its rules and conventions in grammar, style, and usage is flexible and eclectic. Because of these characteristics, Philippine English is continually evolving, benefitting from a multi-dimensional effort of propagation through education, media, and literature.

6 Recommendations

The data that was gathered came from students enrolled before the pandemic. These students were a product of the K-12 curriculum thus, it is possible to have a new set of data coming from the HYFLEX setup with a new set of students and their answers to the same set of questions. Data from them to the new one can be compared to see if the improvements are already met in implementing the curriculum. Another area that can be investigated is that the learning modality at present is different thus, it would be beneficial to know for curriculum makers if learning can be adjusted for the betterment of the learners.

Based on the discussion above, it is also recommended that curriculum makers revisit the new General Education Curriculum for the tertiary level and the Senior High School curriculum by incorporating Philippine English as the variety to be taught can help students be proficient in using the variety. Aside from incorporating Philippine English in Purposive Communication and English Skills Enhancement at the College level, an additional course such as "Philippine English" will help enhance the evolving Philippine language learning. We cannot get away with proficiency. In the first place the study was conducted in an academic setting. The researchers themselves are academicians, who are responsible for making the students proficient in the field, in this case, in the English language macro skills field. Errors were identified as far as the other varieties are concerned, but there is a must that students be proficient in using Philippine English (PE). After all, PE is not a substandard variety of English. Curriculum makers can plan on making the curriculum more effective using the PE variety instead of other varieties. Teachers, on the other hand, can execute the learning to their students if they

are also properly oriented with the World/ Philippine English paradigm. Kirkpatrick (2007) talks about how some scholars have recommended using a native speaker variety as a norm, with the local variety as a model. This being said, it is the heart of having a local variety such as Philippine English, where American English is the native speaker variety. In this way, learners will not be discouraged from using whatever variety they speak. It can be seen already in the present study that learners can talk about the language in the local variety. Imposing the local variety as part of the curriculum can produce Standard Philippine English.

Despite the awareness of the ELT teachers on the use of PE, acceptance of the topic is needed for other educators who do not advocate the use of this variety. For the new educators, symposiums, seminars, and awareness campaigns are suggested to be done. World Englishes varieties exist and being chauvinistic about a particular variety does not help make English language teaching more effective.

Relatively, more studies on using Philippine English in the academic setting are highly encouraged. This will further establish the emerging body of literature on the Filipino's own variety of English.

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