

## CHARACTERIZING PHILIPPINE ENGLISH PHONOLOGY IN READ AND SPONTANEOUS SPEECH STYLES

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### ABSTRACT

This paper aims to describe the phonological features of Philippine English (PE) in different speech styles. As argued, English has multiplicity of norms depending on the context of use, and that the occurrence of different speech forms in a variety of speech styles is a sociolinguistic reality. Thus, this study is an attempt to illustrate the segmental (*vowels* and *consonants*) and suprasegmental features (*stress* and *intonation*) of PE in read and spontaneous situations to offer a better understanding on the plurilithic, as opposed to monolithic, characteristic of the English language. To illustrate the reading style of the participants, they were tasked to read aloud word and sentence lists as well as passage *Wolf*. For the spontaneous discourse, speakers performed a monologue and provided answers to a speaking task which “similarly opened with the same questions” (Deterding et al., 2008, p. 4). It was found that, generally, the vowel features of PE are similar in different speech styles although /i/ and /u/ are excluded in the spontaneous speech. Likewise, the consonants in various speaking styles are almost the same, however, the voiceless fricative /θ/ is a feature in the read speech but it is inconsistently realized as dental stop /t/ in spontaneous speaking situations. Moreover, PE is characterized by penultimate stress and rising intonation for all types of questions in both read and spontaneous speech styles. Based on the results, it appears that there are particular forms that are more convenient for speakers to use in a certain speech style. As English is homogenously used for communication, it has different forms depending on the context of use.

**Key words:** Philippine English, Phonology, Speech Styles, Read Speech, Spontaneous Speech

### INTRODUCTION

The vigorous spread of English language has been clearly evident in the Asian continent over the last decades (Schneider, 2011). The immense importance of English is reflected on how it is used both in the intranational and international communicative interactions (Honna, 2008). Many of these Asian countries were conquered by powerful countries like the

UK and USA in the past which were able to leave linguistic and cultural imprints (Kachru, 1998). Since the majority of the people from these contexts have embraced the colonial imprints, they have become a part of the multilingual and multicultural legacies that enriched the traditional English by molding, reshaping, acculturating and redesigning it. This resulted in “a liberated

English which contains vitality, innovation, linguistic mix, and cultural identity” (Kachru, 1998, p. 106). The rise of these new diversifications and varieties has displayed nativized distinctive characteristics in terms of their phonological features that are different from the traditional English varieties (Sharma, 2008) since speakers come from plurilithic societies who have diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Pennycook, 2009) just like in the Philippines.

Despite the fact that there exist a number of Philippine languages, English has enjoyed strong presence and popularity in the country as used by Filipinos in various communicative contexts and domains. English has been regarded highly for functional and practical purposes particularly for career advancement as it becomes an important factor in hiring, retention and promotion in any organization (Berowa, 2016a; Berowa, 2016b; Berowa, 2017; Berowa, 2018; Berowa, & David, 2018). In communicative situations which involve speakers of different Philippine languages, English is usually used to bridge the cultural, religious and linguistic gaps. Given the multilingual setting outside of Metro Manila, the continued usage of

English along with local languages paved the way for a variety called the Philippine English.

Philippine English (PE) refers to the kind of English as spoken by educated Filipinos (Llamzon, 1969; Bautista, 2000). This variety originated from American English although Filipinos seldom submit to its conventional norm in all situations (Tayao, 2004). Since varieties are primarily associated with speech (Crystal, 2003), the distinctive phonological features of PE have been extensively documented since 1969 which were primarily based on the production of the educated Filipinos, and on the accent spectrum or continuum belongingness of the speakers. In all these studies, speakers were coming from the metropolitan linguistic environment.

Thus, this study aims to fill-in the gaps from previous studies on PE phonology by including speakers from different geographical backgrounds in various speech styles. It attempts to establish the patterns of speech performance in read and spontaneous speech styles, a factor in Philippine English phonology which has not been fully explored, and to provide valuable perspectives as to the learning and teaching of pronunciation in the Philippines.

## **REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

The earliest investigation to illustrate the standard accent of PE was carried out by Llamzon in 1969. His speech samples were taken from a college professor, a college senior, a college sophomore, and a janitor. He asserted that “educated individuals are the representatives and judges of acceptable speech in a language community” (p. 15). The ground breaking study of Llamzon inspired a number of researchers to explore further the features of PE phonology although the focus was still on the educated individuals like Gonzalez and Alberca (1978) who obtained their data from the people in mass media.

In more recent investigations, the focus has shifted to the *lectal* range which follows Bickerton’s model of creole continuum in 1975 (Mesthrie, 2001) like Llamzon (1997), Tayao (2004) and Regala-Flores (2014) who described the spoken English of Filipinos in *sociolectal* lens. Using this approach, speakers are grouped as an *acrolect*, who approximate the General American English (GAE) formal style production as represented by educated and well-known media personalities; a *mesolect*, who use English in their line of work but sometimes or seldom use it in other domains except when discussing job related topics like people from the government, academe and the mass media; and a *basilect*, whose

“speaker’s ethnic tongue forms the substratum, and more substitutions are made than in the *mesolect* for the *acrolectal* phonemes” (Llamzon, 1997, 47) as exemplified by non-professionals speakers, such as janitors, who have limited command of English. According to Tayao (2004), what differentiates *lectal* varieties of English is the frequency of use among speakers of Philippine English in different domains and their choice of language in different activities such as reading and writing. The *lectal* English approach was perfectly summarized by Gonzales (2017) who said that, “the more English input and output an individual receives, and the higher the person’s preference for the English language in daily activities, the more *acrolectal* his or her English are in the *lectal* continuum” (87).

Although previous studies have provided comprehensive description of PE phonology, it appears that they utilized a metro-centric approach since they were conducted in the country’s capital. Additionally, given that English language has multiple identities depending on the contexts of use, it is implied that there are also plural speech forms that would emerge in a variety of speech styles. English may be homogenous in form as it is used as a medium of communication, but it appears to be pluralistic in terms of function depending

on the linguistic situations in which the occurrence of different features is an obvious consequence. It is in this context that this study was conducted in order to establish the patterns of the Filipinos' speech performance from various linguistic and geographical backgrounds across speech styles in order to illustrate features confined to each style, a factor in Philippine English

## METHODS

This study employed a descriptive-qualitative research design in order to describe the English segmental and suprasegmental production of Filipinos who were speakers of the 13 major language in the country. A total of 26 speakers took part on this research in which 19 were females and 8 were males whose age ranged from 22 to 47 years old. This study made use of read materials and spontaneous verbal tasks in order to elicit the needed data. Since recording and documentation were required, sound recorder and camera were also utilized during the data collection. To illustrate the phonological features of the participants in reading style, they were asked to perform read aloud word and sentence lists, as well as the passage *Wolf*. To illustrate the spontaneous speech style of the subjects, they were asked to perform a speaking task in the form of *monologue*, and

phonology which has not been fully explored. Thus, this study is an attempt to fill-in the gaps from previous studies and particularly to answer the call made by Tayao (2004) on the need to describe the English phonology in the Philippines of speakers from different geographical backgrounds in various speech styles.

to provide answers to questions in relation to the passage they read.

For the read speech, all target sounds were analyzed through narrow transcription using the IPA symbol. After transcribing, the counting of the occurrence of features followed. As regards word stress features in the read speech style, stress placement was analyzed based on the most prominent syllable in words, and the prominence of pronouns through careful listening. Additionally, sentence stress was investigated based on the way in which the most important words were made more prominent in the whole sentence or utterance. Moreover, the intonation patterns were examined through careful listening. The stress and intonation features which emerged were then tallied.

On the other hand, the data from spontaneous speech were first transcribed

using ordinary transcription. After that, the researcher looked into words which contained the target sounds to illustrate the segmental level. Upon the identification of the words, the target sounds were then transcribed using the IPA method. The features which emerged were then counted.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Vowels

Generally, vowel features in read and spontaneous speech styles of the participants are similar as both contexts were characterized by reduced vowels such as /ɪ/, /ʊ/ and /ə/. However, the number of features found in the vowel inventory of the participants in their English production vary depending on the speech situation that they found themselves in. Based on the analysis, vowel system in read speech includes the following: a.) front vowels /i/, /ɪ/, /e/, /ɛ/; b.) central vowel /a/; back vowels /ɔ/, /o/, and /ʊ/; and the unstressed schwa /ə/ sounds. When compared, it was revealed that a smaller number of vowels were found in spontaneous speech which include only the following sounds: a.) front vowels /ɪ/, /e/, /ɛ/; b.) central vowel /a/; back vowels /ɔ/, /o/ and /ʊ/; and the unstressed schwa /ə/. In this case, the exclusion of high-front tense vowel /u/ in spontaneous speech, which is a feature

As regards suprasegmental features, the combined speech samples from all spontaneous tasks were the bases to illustrate stress placement features. With reference to intonation patterns, they were made possible through careful listening.

in read speech, further contributed to simpler vowel system of PE.

Moreover, the vowel /i/ is a feature in the read speech style of the participants, while it is inconsistently realized as /ɪ/ in their spontaneous performance. It is possible that when speakers are faced with spontaneous verbal activities using the English language that requires them to focus more on content rather than on form, their sound production tend to be inconsistent. Thus, it appears that in the spontaneous speech, the distinction between long and short vowels does not really matter as they are probably considered by the speakers to be just the same.

### 2. Consonants

Based on the results, the consonantal inventory in different speech situations have almost similar features. In both read and spontaneous speaking situations, the following sounds are found: *stops* /p/, /t/, /k/,

/b/, /d/ and /g/; affricates /tʃ/ and /dʒ/; fricatives /f/, /v/, /s/, /z/, /h/, and /ʃ/; nasals /n/, /m/ and /ŋ/; glides /w/ and /j/; and liquids /l/ and /r/. However, the difference rests in the voiceless fricative /θ/ as it is a feature in read speech but it is inconsistently realized as dental stop /t/ in the spontaneous speech.

It is argued that voiceless fricative /θ/ in the English language, along with /ð/, is inherently difficult to produce. Moreover, it is claimed that speakers of new Englishes tend to use /t/ for /θ/ which is actually acceptable and does not affect intelligibility. In fact, the use of /t/ enhances intelligibility in informal domain of English language use (Lewis & Deterding, 2018). In addition, it seems that speakers use the sound available in their first languages when they are faced with a more complicated English production tasks that require them to provide contents on their speech (Berowa & Regala-Flores, 2020; Berowa & Dita, 2021).

In general, the segmental features of consonants in read and spontaneous speeches are different from the results presented in the study of Gonzalez and Alberca (1978) in which all speech styles have similar sound features. As the use of the English language is appropriated based on domains and situations (Kachru, 2005), the same must be true in terms of the pronunciation patterns. Hence, differences

in the consonantal features found in read and spontaneous speeches can be attributed to the first languages of the speakers, and possibly, with the speakers' desire to enhance intelligibility.

The findings further strengthen the notion that, although English serves a homogenous function, that is, for communication, its distinctive characteristics are actually reflected in localized sociocultural and interactional contexts (Kachru, 1996). As such, it appears that the differing sound features in various speech situations could be a means of appropriating the language production to further enhance mutual intelligibility.

### 3. Stress

The data obtained suggest that speakers find the penultimate stress to be more natural and more convenient position both in read and spontaneous speech situations as previously reported by Gonzalez and Alberca (1978) who used the idea of *syllable timed* in contrast to *stress timed* characteristic of AmE and BrE to explain this stress placement phenomenon in PE. It appears that the penultimate syllable is the default stress position in multi-syllabic words among Filipino speakers of the English language. This probably reflects the influence of the speakers' mother tongue

since stress placement in the Philippine languages is usually found in the penultimate syllable, that is, the second to the last syllable especially in multisyllabic words (Jubilado, 2016).

In terms of pronoun stress, it appears that pronouns such as *he, his, him, himself, they, them, and their* were often stressed particularly when placed in the subject position both in read and spontaneous tasks. Such a tendency to provide prominence on pronouns is said to be apparent in Southeast Asian varieties of English (Deterding & Kirkpatrick, 2006) with emphasis in the SgE variety (Deterding & Hvitfeldt, 1998). In the context of this investigation, a number of stressed pronouns were found but such a linguistic phenomenon did not qualify as feature of PE based on their frequency of occurrence. The incidence of stressed pronouns could be the means of the speakers to emphasize a point as to who is the subject, or object, of the sentence.

Moreover, the use of heavy end-stress is displayed by some speakers of the major Philippine languages who served as participants of this study both in read and spontaneous speech styles. As observed, heavy-end stress emerged as feature of some sets of speakers although it cannot be considered as a phonological feature in PE. However, the researcher believes that its rate

of occurrence in the read speech of the participants appears to be a developing feature in PE variety that needs further investigation. According to Kirkpatrick (2010), the use of heavy-end stress appears as a feature in the ASEAN ELF which has the communicative function of signaling the end of an utterance. This is especially true when accompanied by a falling tone (Deterding & Kirkpatrick, 2006). Such function is different from the speakers of the inner circle variety in which heavy-end stress indicates new information (Levi, 2005, as cited in Kirkpatrick, 2010). In the present paper, heavy-end stress in read style is likely to signal the end of the sentence.

The emphasis placed on the pronouns in the utterances of the participants was also reported by Deterding et al. (2008) who consider this as an unexpected phenomenon. It is worth repeating that many Asian languages are allowing null subjects (Kirkpatrick, 2010), that is, a subject pronoun can be omitted (Deterding & Kirkpatrick, 2006). In this sense, if the pronoun is retained, it means that it is important thus, stressed. Based on the production of the participants, it is possible that speakers tend to stress some pronouns because they feel that they are important and it was their way to emphasize a point.

In the analysis of the speech samples obtained from the spontaneous speaking tasks, most of the utterances of the speakers were characterized by a falling mark. However, instances of heavy-end stress were also demonstrated by the participants during the self-introduction task particularly in the final word of the participants' utterances. It was observed that heavy-end stress usually emerged when speakers were providing their summary of the passage, and when they were talking about lesson/s that one can learn from the passage.

The tendency of the speakers to provide prominence on the final words in their utterance seems to communicate the importance of the word that could be the very core of their thoughts or arguments. Another reason that the researcher could think of is that, it served as an indication of the end of the utterance. This heavy-end stress phenomenon is also found in the study of Deterding et al. (2008) which made use of interview data. They found that the main stress still falls at the end of the sentence even if there is an emphatic word which is expected to become the focus of information. Although Deterding and Kirkpatrick (2006) argued that heavy-end stress is a feature in Southeast Asian varieties of English, the present paper does not consider it as a feature but it could be

considered as a developing feature in PE phonology.

Based on these results as regards stress placement features in read and spontaneous speech, the second syllable stress position is highly favored in the read situation while in spontaneous speech tasks, established stress positions are greatly maintained. This consistency in the spontaneous context may have something to do with the familiarity of the speakers on words they used in their verbal tasks. The researcher thinks that in the spontaneous language performances, participants used familiar and simple terms which do not encourage different stress patterns. It is also possible that, since participants are assumed to be more relaxed in the conduct of the spontaneous speech, stress positions are greatly maintained. On the other hand, inconsistencies on the stress patterns in the read speech may have something to do with the extent of anxiety during their sound production, and the degree of unfamiliarity in the words produced.

However, similarity in both speech contexts is found on preference toward penultimate stress in multi-syllabic words. Such stress placement is very evident especially on words which end with a suffix *-tion* like *adminis'tration*, *accredi'tation* and *sociali'zation*. This confirms previous



findings that PE is characterized by penultimate stress which is a trend in read and spontaneous speech situations.

#### 4. Intonations

The results illustrate that the majority of the speakers exhibit the rising-falling intonation in the reading aloud of sentence which is the universal linguistic feature for declarative sentences (Gonzalez & Alberca, 1978). Such a pattern is similar to GAE variety which prefers down-to-fade-out intonation at the end of the statements. However, it is also interesting to note that some speakers of the major Philippine languages exhibit the final rising intonation, also termed as sustained high pitch, which is a seemingly British way in ending sentences.

The findings, therefore, reveal some inconsistencies in the intonation patterns of the participants in their production of declarative sentences although speakers exhibit the rising-falling intonation feature. Such a preference must be influenced by the basic intonation patterns they learned in their English classes and in the situation that the speakers found themselves in, that is, reading the list of sentences. Reading is basically impersonal and ‘does not encourage much deviation from the usual mid-high-low intonation contour’ (Gonzalez & Alberca, 1978, 47). This may explain that

many speakers were able to preserve the rising-falling intonation for statements in read speech.

However, such an intonation contour is not a feature of PE in the controlled context of this study as also manifested in Tayao’s (2004) *lectal* varieties of English. Based on the recorded samples obtained, the great majority followed the final rising intonation pattern in the following utterances. But there were instances in which some speakers used falling intonation in their utterances although their occurrences were insignificant in number.

By and large, the speakers of this present investigation follow the rising intonation in asking questions which could be answered by a *yes* or *no*. Similar results were presented by Gonzalez and Alberca (1978) among mass media personalities and by Tayao (2004) in all *lectal* groups, and Regala-Flores (2014) among speakers of the *basilectal* English variety. Thus, final rising intonation for *yes/no* questions is a feature of PE in this study in read speech situation. It appears that final rising intonation pattern was somewhat inconsistent when the question is quite long but consistency was observed in a much shorter informative question. But regardless of these irregularities, it is clear that speakers tend to use the final rising intonation for both *yes/no*

and *wh* questions which is an intonation feature of PE in read speech of this study. This observation was also pointed out in the previous investigations of PE phonology (Gonzalez & Alberca, 1978; Tayao, 2004; Jubilado, 2016).

One possible reason for similar intonation pattern in realizing all types of questions could be the speakers' overgeneralization of the English rules. It must be emphasized that Filipinos in general learn the English language through reading and written textbooks inside the classrooms (Gonzalez & Alberca, 1978) where linguistic rules are of utmost importance. And normally, English learners are taught to use rising intonation to signify a question. Such basic rule might have been generalized by the speakers of this study in which, regardless of the question, it must have a final sustained high pitch.

Additionally, Jubilado (2016) explains that intonation pattern when asking any type of question is the same in Philippine languages, that is, the use of rising contour. Thus, the influence of mother tongue could also be an important factor in the intonation patterns displayed by the participants. In the end, rising intonation for informative questions is a feature of PE in the read context of this study.

During the spontaneous speaking tasks, participants in general were very comfortable in talking about their current position and how they understood the passage and the learnings that one can get from it. Thus, it seems that when participants are somewhat comfortable in talking or in expressing themselves using the English language, they tend to display the rising-falling final intonation contour when making statements. Such intonation pattern is a feature of PE in spontaneous speech of the participants. Furthermore, the researcher notes that insignificant instances of rising intonation emerged in the utterances of the speakers. Most words which received sustained high pitch at the end of the utterance appears to emphasize a point on the part of the speakers. It was observed that they tend to produce the final rising intonation to highlight an idea. Thus, the infrequent use of rising intonation served to emphasize a point.

These examples sustain the assertion of Gonzalez and Alberca (1978) and Tayao (2004) that Filipino speakers of the English language exhibit the rising intonation feature in realizing the *wh* questions. This situation could be attributed to the mother tongue of the speakers since Philippine languages do not distinguish intonation patterns when asking, or they

possibly overgeneralized the rules in the English language in articulating questions. Based on the results presented, Jubilado (2016) must be right when he said that “speakers of Philippine English have no discursive distinction in the intonation between yes-no questions and questions that require factual declarative answers” (p. 92). It is very apparent that rising intonation for

all types of questions is a feature of PE in the spontaneous context of this investigation.

Therefore, the intonation patterns in various speaking situations differ as final rising-falling intonation is a feature in spontaneous speech but not in read situation. However, both styles exhibit the use of rising intonation feature for all types of questions.

## CONCLUSION

The features of PE phonology is influenced by the speech situation. In a context which requires the speakers to focus on form, Filipinos tend to demonstrate the phonological features comparable with those found in the conventions of the inner circle variety. On the other hand, in a more naturalistic and uninhibited speech production, the speech forms available in the first language tend to be reflected.

Thus, the emergence of features seems to be dependent on the kind of speech situation that a speaker is faced with. It appears that there are particular forms that are more convenient for speakers to use in a certain speech style. As English is homogeneously used for communication, especially for intercultural interaction in the international arena, it has different forms depending on the context of use. Therefore,

it can be argued that features vary in accordance with the style of speech.

In the last analysis, this paper implies that new English varieties which are situated in highly diverse contexts are influenced by various factors. With this, speakers from different backgrounds have multiple possibilities of phonological productions. Thus, one should realize that variation is the norm as the English language now comes in various forms, shapes and sizes as it has been localized and indigenized to fulfill both local and international functions. In the words of Kachru and Nelson (2006), “people take English as they find it and use it as they will” (p. 34). Since English varieties in different linguistic areas are shaped by the local languages (Kachru & Nelson, 2006), speakers from around the world have range of accents depending on the speech context.

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