Mental Models on Philippine English in Online Spaces: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

For the majority of the elite and educated Filipinos, there is no doubt that Philippine English finds its home as an acceptable variety of English. However, the narrative changes once focus is decentralized and democratized to include other speakers of English in the country who do not belong to this exclusive social category. Using online comments to an online news article and to an online quote card about Philippine English, this study investigated the acceptability of Philippine English among the users of a social media space. Comments were gathered and then analyzed using the arrangement of propositions from the prompt (the online article and quote card) to the determination and thematic categorization of mental models deployed by commenters to interpret received information. The analysis revealed that within the online platform where various realizations of English are welcome, Philippine English remains contested. This paper encourages the inclusive education and information dissemination that focus on Philippine English across sociolectal groups to strengthen the knowledge, acceptance, and educational implementation of the principles and concepts related to Philippine English.

Keywords: acceptability; Philippine English; online space; mental models

INTRODUCTION

English is a Philippine language. It is no longer just a language conveniently nestled *in* the Philippines by its former English-speaking colonial master, but a language *of* the Philippines. English is owned, used, and continuously developed, consciously or otherwise, by a large number of Filipinos.

Kachru (1998, 1997) writes that there are two types of nativeness: *genetic* that is traced through the historical connections among languages in contact, and *functional* that is measured through the various domains languages are allowed to occupy (range) and "degree of social penetration" (depth) (Kachru, 1998, p. 92; 1997, p. 5) languages are able to infiltrate in discourse communities. In the Philippines, English may not be *genetically native* to its users, but it is undeniably *functionally native*. A quick survey of Philippine educational, political, and economic landscapes, even its justice system, reveals how well-entrenched the English language has become since its arrival ('transplantation' for Gonzalez, 2008) in the Philippine soil in the late 19th century.

What is unique and equally interesting about the English language is its ability to self-establish the legitimacy of its citizenship (*migration* as a form of *liberation* in Kachru, 1997) once it 'crosses borders.' Shamsuzzaman (2020) writes,

> English no longer remained English as it crossed borders. It became American, Asian, African, and Oceanian. Words spawned, while meaning altered and expanded.

Such perspectives articulated in the preceding paragraphs are true sans the politics of Philippine English (PhE from this point onwards). Such statements are acceptable for audiences

who mostly belong to the 'educated' groups of Filipinos and whose attitudes about PhE is often always considered in the scholarship of the dialect.

The definition of PhE that focuses on the perceptions of 'educated' Filipinos started with the seminal work of Llamzon (1969) and was adapted by the many succeeding scholars of PhE. However, PhE is not an exclusive property of the 'educated,' but rather a resource that exponentially develops in the realm of the less educated and 'uneducated.' Tupas (2004, p. 49) writes, "'Philippine English' signifies the cultural and sociolinguistic signs of the entire country" and not only confined to 'educated' Filipinos. Thus, perceptions about PhE should be decentralized from the 'educated' groups where it conveniently rests today and instead, mar to include various perceptions.

STUDIES ON THE ACCEPTABILITY OF ENGLISHES

The acceptability of the different varieties of English or Englishes in the world had been studied by many scholars (Nkansah, 2016; Wahid, 2016; Baumgardner, 1995). Nkansah (2016) found the ambivalence of over 400 educated respondents toward selected Ghanaian English lexes. Baumgardner (1995) reported the emergence of Pakistani norms (and thus, of Pakistani English or PE) from his surveys on the preferred model of English (BrE, AmE, and PE) and acceptability of selected PE lexes and grammar conducted among journalists, teachers, and university students from 1987 to 1992. In the Southeast Asian context, using a Grammaticality Judgment Test, Wahid (2016) found from among 103 Malaysian students that wide-range users of English (definition of 'range' adapted from Kachru, 1998) have higher tendencies to accept "nonstandard grammatical features" (p. 132) of English compared with students who were categorized as non-wide range users.

These studies show that investigations on the acceptability of different Englishes usually ask judgments from acrolect and mesolect variety speakers, and less, even none, from basilect variety speakers. This renders basilect variety speakers, often the less educated and uneducated, and users of nonstandard varieties voiceless in the discourse communities of World Englishes. This reality applies cohesively to studies written about the acceptability of PhE.

One of the earliest related works was Bautista's (2001) investigation of the general acceptability of PhE among 88 English language teachers from three universities in the Philippines. Bautista (2001) found that teachers have mixed attitudes toward PhE: while the teachers generally feel "very positive" toward PhE based on their responses to Likert scale items and to English varieties choices (AmE, BrE, and PhE), they showed reservation toward some "ungrammatical or unidiomatic expressions" that recur in the deployment of PhE, especially in the written expression.

Bernardo and Madrunio (2015) offer a framework toward a PhE-based endonormative model for teaching English grammar in the university level. Toward this goal, the researchers administered a Pedagogic Acceptability Test (PAT) to 125 ESL teachers in three large universities, and then to another 42 ESL teachers and 242 students from ten universities in Manila (see also Enrico & Bernardo, 2017), to determine the respondents' perceptions about the explicit integration of PhE in the tertiary-level language curriculum. The researcher-made PAT included 22 representative samples of PhE grammatical items put next to AmE counterparts that respondents needed to evaluate to reveal their judgment. The PAT revealed the acceptance of 16 of the 22 grammatical categories of PhE.

Torres and Alieto (2019) determined the extent to which some Philippine English grammatical and lexical items are acceptable among a total of 400 pre-service teachers enrolled in their final year in two state universities in the Philippines. To measure the acceptability of PhE, the researchers designed their own questionnaire that they called Grammatical and Lexical Items Acceptability Questionnaire (GLAC). The analysis of data revealed that the respondents "somehow accepted" some grammatical features of PhE.

Hernandez (2020) followed Martin's (2014) "circles within circles" framework and applied this to his analysis of the attitudes of ninety-five (95) graduate students of a Teacher Education Institution toward educated PhE. Hernandez (2020) found that there was general acceptance toward the pluricentric model in teaching English in the Philippines (PhE and AmE). Hernandez (2020) advocates for academic policymakers and teachers to consider the implementation of the pluricentric model in teaching English in the country.

However, not all studies that investigated the acceptability of PhE revealed positive results. In another study by Gustilo and Dimaculangan (2018), they revealed that Filipino English teachers from 15 higher-education institutions in the Philippines generally recorded "negative attitudes" toward 99 PhE lexical items taken from the 400,000-word corpus of early 21st century PhE written texts.

Martin (2014) argues that within Kachru's concentric circles of World Englishes, there is a more complex stratification of users of English. Using the Philippines as canvas for her "circles within circles" framework, Martin (2014) describes the "nuance[d] position" that must be taken about the acceptability of Philippine English. This nuancing can be imagined with the creation of another set of inner, outer, and expanding circles within the outer circle where the Philippines was assigned/belong to in Kachru's concentric circles model. The inner circle of PhE users are the "educated, elite Filipinos who have embraced the English language … and actively promote and protect it" (Martin, 2014, pp. 52, 57); the outer circle of PhE users "may be aware" of PhE but are either "powerless" or "ambivalent" toward its promotion (pp. 52, 57); and the expanding circle of PhE users still find access to the dialect a challenge for the many reasons that surround them: income level, education, cultural background, etc.

These circles somehow complement the lectal stratification, acro-, meso-, and basilect variety speakers of PhE (from the work of Llamzon, 1969), but this time with stronger sociolinguistic orientation. Acceptability, after all, is a sociolinguistic construct (Renandya, 2020), rather than densely linguistic observed in some of the previously presented studies on the acceptability of PhE.

These studies on the acceptability of (and even "negative attitudes" against) PhE somehow prove that PhE has indeed, to some extent, reached the age of maturity (Bolton, 2011, p. xi). However, it is important to qualify whose consciousness had reached maturity in terms of PhE. Is this maturity comprehensive enough to include everyone who needs and uses the dialect? Or does this maturity exclusively exist in the consciousness of the elite and educated? Martin (2010) explained that even among Filipino English language teachers, either acrolect and basilect variety speakers themselves, or inhabitants of the inner and outer circles of PhE, knowledge and performance of PhE does not automatically equate to acceptance. And for some ESL teachers, even the acceptance of PhE does not always equate to its implementation in the classroom. This can be observed in the attempts of teachers to "democratize" (Tupas, 2004, p. 47, 54) their ELT spaces while remaining faithful to the urges of the macrostructures that dictate their practices.

Tupas (2006) found this in his analysis of the essays submitted by seven Filipino teachers who were enrolled in the master's program in Language Studies Education in a Philippine university in 2003. While the teachers accept the political and cultural values of the Englishes that their students bring in their English classroom, they are still forced to teach standard varieties because of "structuring conditions" (Tupas, 2006, p.173), specifically "socio-economic, political and ideological conditions" (Tupas, 2006, p. 170) that leave many of them without a choice.

The preceding studies reveal the exclusive focus to the acrolect and some mesolect users of PhE: mostly the elite and educated, situated in the academe that includes agents such as ESL teachers and students, in the scholarship on the acceptability of PhE. This deems the wider mesolect and basilect variety speakers muted, if not totally voiceless, in the discourse communities of World Englishes. Ironically, in the Philippines, even without formal statistical presentation, it is without doubt that the number of mesolect and basilect variety speakers far outweighs the number of acrolect variety speakers. This makes the former sociolectal groups far influential in terms of their reach and ability to transfer codes and ideologies to other members of speech communities. This influence may be far greater compared to the limited time ESL teachers spend with their students compared with students' exposure to different speakers of Englishes beyond schools.

This study addresses Bautista's (2001) observation on the dearth of research on the acceptability of PhE "as a whole." While there had been several studies on the acceptability of some of the linguistic features of PhE, there is very little about the acceptability of PhE as a concept. However, the investigation in this project veers away from the lenses exclusively provided to the 'educated' and aims to "democratize" (Tupas, 2004, p. 47, 54) the study on the acceptability of PhE. This means bringing the investigation to a much wider social space that involves the 'nonstandard' and 'uneducated' uses of the dialect alongside its other sociolectal realizations. This project decentralizes the study of PhE from the academe and attempts to find out what (Filipino) commenters in social media posts about PhE say about PhE. Specifically, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What do (Filipino) commenters in the selected online spaces say about PhE? How do they evaluate PhE?
2. What mental models can be observed from the comments (of Filipinos) in the selected online posts about PhE?

The succeeding section supplies explanations about the framework that informed the analysis of the data, the data-gathering procedure implemented, and some limitations to the type of data chosen for this investigation.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

van Dijk (2000, para. 5-6) explains that "text and talk do not exist in isolation." Texts reveal people's cognitive acts: their "aims, beliefs, knowledge and opinions." These cognitive acts are manifestations of the *mental models* that contribute immensely to the process of discourse production (van Dijk, 2000). Simply put, mental models refer to concepts that exist in people's minds that help them interpret any life situation. Mental models operate via a complex organization of propositions that significantly influence the ability to reach a decision, including the acceptance

or rejection of an idea (i.e., acceptance of PhE). Mental models may be determined and investigated following van Dijk's (2000) description of cognitive analysis.

Cognitive analysis is defined by van Dijk (2000, para. 21) as the "analysis of those properties of discourse that are accounted for in terms of cognitive concepts, such as various types of mental representation." For instance, 'topic' is not always explicitly named in discourse (such as saying or writing, "the topic of this discourse …") but rather assigned by the speaker or writer and determined by the listener or reader based on their knowledge of the structures of discourse. Knowledge, explained by van Dijk (2000), is a cognitive category and not a linguistic category. In fact, many aspects of discourse are cognitive rather than linguistic: macro-propositions, coherence, presuppositions, relevance, implications, connotations, among others. Knowledge may be conceptual in nature (mobile phones are machines: term + genus), or shared (world knowledge) by a large group of language users (what mobile phones look like, their usual functions, etc.: term + characteristics, utility, etc.) (see van Dijk, 2000, para. 37).

Some of the tools to performing cognitive analysis, and thus revealing and allowing the investigation of people's mental models are the following:

1. *Coherence.* This refers to the ability of recipients of discourse to disambiguate particular pieces of knowledge based on their existing and/or developing mental models. This tool to cognitive analysis investigates the network of propositions (van Dijk, 2000) that is created based on the given information and then its relationship to the recipient's conceptual and world knowledge.
2. *Presuppositions.* This refers to the "set of meaning of conditions" (van Dijk, 2000, para. 33) necessary for a sentence to be accepted as true. These conditions refer to the implications (implicatures) that are created when particular linguistic units are deployed in sentences.
3. *Implications*. This refers to the set of conceptual and world knowledge shared by the speaker (writer or commenter in this study) and recipients of discourse (including myself as the analyst) implied in the given discourse. van Dijk (2000) himself acknowledges the extent of possible propositions that may be derived from shared knowledge, thus the need for discourse analysts to consider the relevance of implicated propositions to the context of the original proposition.
4. *Connotations*. This refers to the local (contextual, cultural) interpretation of general propositions.

Two examples of how these tools are employed in data analysis are presented in the succeeding section.

Cognitive analysis was employed in this study since it aids in the construal of the propositions created when people encode texts. These propositions reveal the mental models that people deploy to help them reach a decision whether to accept or reject (or interpret if enough contextual information is made available) an idea. The process of tracing the direction and meaning of propositions aids in the analysis of the intricacies of the workings of the human mind. For example, altering the elements of a set of propositions can encourage people to entertain alternative perspectives than what their mental models generally dictate (possibility for mind control).

In this study, cognitive analysis is used to trace the mental models deployed by the consumers of an online news article about PhE that lead them to articulate their acceptance or rejection of PhE.

RESEARCH DATA AND DATA-GATHERING PROCEDURE

Online comments to a news post (prompt) were the primary data used in this project. The prompts were gathered from the social media page of the news and current affairs programming division of a large Filipino media and entertainment group. The first prompt is a link to a news article "Philippine English is legitimate, says Oxford English Dictionary editor". The headline comes with a picture of four persons in their workstations facing their computer screens with their headsets on (presumably, Filipino call center agents at work). The second prompt is a quote card with the same headline presented earlier formatted in all capital letters in the middle of the picture and with a short caption underneath (within the quote card),

> Dr. Danica Salazar, world English editor for the Oxford English Dictionary, stressed that Philippine English is "not slang, not wrong, not carabao English, and any other derogatory word that's been used over the years.

> [Italics in the original] She said that just like British, American, Australian, and Singaporean variants, Philippine English plays an important role in the historical development of the language, which OED seeks to document.

The quote card comes with another caption in Filipino (this appears on the wall of the social media page and not within the quote card anymore), "*Dagdag pa ng eksperto, hindi hadlang ang pagiging multilingual ng mga Pilipino sa pagkatuto nito o pagiging proficient sa wikang Ingles*" [Added by the expert, the multilingual orientation of Filipinos is not a hindrance to their learning or becoming proficient in the English language]. The quote card likewise includes a picture of Filipinos in a gathering (a rally or a program) carrying and waiving miniature Philippine flags. Both posts were released on August 21, 2020.

When the online comments were gathered for analysis on October 23, 2020 (two months after the news and quote card were posted online), the news post records 542 comments and 1,800 shares, while the quote card reflects 581 comments and 1,700 shares. Because of the restrictions to the availability of social media posts, e.g., the settings of some owners of profiles that prevent other users from viewing their comments, only 222 comments to the article and 223 comments to the quote card are retrievable. Since only the main comments were analyzed in this study, these numbers were further reduced to 102 comments to the article and 102 comments to the quote card. The rest of the comments were replies to comments that were excluded in the analysis.

The comments were gathered with the "All comments" setting option selected (the other setting options are "Most relevant" and "Newest" that showed less entries compared with "All comments").

Data analysis underwent two preliminary stages. Stage 1 involved reading the available retrievable comments to determine if they contain enough evaluative qualities that may help determine the mental models (Filipino) commenters use to respond to the prompts. From this stage, some comments were *accepted* and many were *rejected*. Comments were accepted if they responded appropriately to the prompts, i.e., their comments contain direct or indirect evaluations of PhE. Many comments were rejected because they were not about PhE. However, from some of these rejected comments, mental models were still analyzed, especially if they are about language choices and other related ideologies. The analysis performed to these *rejected* comments appears in the succeeding section.

Yet, from the list of rejected comments, some were *totally rejected* because they were either not about PhE, not about language, or they do not show significant evaluative qualities to clearly trace the deployment of mental models to respond to the prompts. Specifically, here are the reasons for the decision to *totally reject* some comments:

1. comment does not offer enough contextual information;
2. comment does not offer any evaluation of PhE, such as
    2.1. evaluation of self and others' perceptions about and performance in English;
    2.2. anecdotal accounts of personal experiences with other speakers of English;
    2.3. comparison of Filipinos' performance of English in different industries (i.e., music industry, legal field) versus that of other cultures; and
    2.4. comparisons of the Filipino language with the English language (utility of the languages in the Philippines);
3. comment does not have any relationship with the main post or prompt, such as
    3.1. comments that contain strong political valuation (pro and anti-government);
    3.2. comments with political undertones;
    3.3. jokes and statements that do not have anything to do with the post; and
    3.4. comments about networking opportunities and solicitations for donations; and
4. comments that contain tags to other social media users (attempts to call the attention of another social media user).

After these layers of selection procedure were implemented, 65 comments to the news article and quote card were processed using van Dijk's (2000) cognitive analysis. This stage (stage 2) involved further categorizing the 65 comments into *accept, reject*, or *ambivalent to PhE* categories. Comments were further thematically categorized based on the similarities of mental models shown by the commenters. The mental models were determined based on the arrangement of propositions beginning from the prompt to the final proposition. Here are a couple of examples that show how the mental models were determined from the online comments:

> Sample 1 (First comment in the article prompt)
> *Comment:* "You mean the FILIPINISM? Sounds correct but grammatically wrong? Like, I need to XEROX this. Instead of I need to PHOTOCOPY this? [smiley emoji]
> *Analysis:*   Proposition 1 [Prompt] PhE is legitimate
>   Proposition 2: [Main response] PhE is Filipinism
>   Proposition 3: "Xerox" is Filipinism
>   Proposition 4: Filipinism is "grammatically wrong"
>   Proposition 5: *PhE is "grammatically wrong"*
>   Proposition 6: PhE is not legitimate

Sample 1 shows the arrangement of the propositions (cohesion) based on the commenter's conceptual knowledge of "Filipinism". From the network of propositions, the commenter implies the equivalence of Filipinism with PhE (proposition 2) connoted by the exemplar 'xerox' (proposition 3) and its variational difference with 'photocopy' ("Sounds correct but grammatically wrong"). The rejection of PhE (proposition 6) is presupposed by the implications revealed in propositions 4 and 5.

The final decision of the commenter to reject PhE comes from conceptual models of correctness in terms of what they believe to be the *right* (transposition of 'wrong') English grammar (the mental model).

While the above network of proposition is easy to interpret, the following is a more challenging case. At first, the commenter seems to affirm the legitimacy of PhE, however the investigation of the relationship among the propositions reveals otherwise.

> Sample 2 (First comment in the quote card prompt)
> *Comment:* "Uy! Filipinos can talk & speak english well ah! *Kya* [That is why] we r able to communicate wd some foreigners coming here. Even a *magtataho* [*taho* vendor; *taho* is silken tofu with tapioca pearls and sweet syrup] or *magbbalot* [*balut* vendor; *balut* is fertilized duck egg] can. *Khit pa* [Even] market vendor, streetsweeper. *Kaya.* [[They] can] *Kya* [So] don't under estimate d filipinos. We can speak english.
> Analysis: Proposition 1: [Prompt] English is legitimate
> Proposition 2.1: [Main response] Filipinos can communicate in English no matter their profession or source of income
> Proposition 2.2: PhE is an underestimation of Filipinos' ability to communicate in English
> Proposition 3: *PhE is not English*, therefore PhE is not legitimate

The commenter begins with the strong affirmation to the Filipinos' ability to "talk and speak" [sic] in English. However, what starts as a strong affirmation turns suggestive (implication) of the rejection of PhE given the meaning of the prompt. In fact, the mental model revealed by the network of propositions reveals a perception that rejects linguistic variation altogether. This may be brought by lack of exposure to the different dialects of Englishes, or purely by the insistence to the monolingual model.

The mental models grouped per theme for each subcategory (accept, ambivalent, or reject PhE) are presented in the succeeding section.

In terms of ethical practice, since the comments were gathered from a public social media page, it is assumed that commenters are aware of the limitations to their rights to privacy. Still, all the comments were anonymized, especially selected comments that were quoted and presented in the succeeding section for analysis. Likewise, sensitive information that may give clues to determine commenters' "race, ethnic origin, marital status, age, color, and religious, philosophical or political affiliations" (Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012) were muted from the analysis.

LIMITATIONS

Ensuring the veracity of perspectives and authenticity of social media accounts were the greatest limitations of the study. However, given the obvious perceived engagement of people, not only of Filipinos but almost everyone in the world today, to social media, even if there are fake accounts that posted comments to the selected prompts, there is still a large percentage among the online comments that are indisputably organic and authentic. This limitation is likewise the very reason for enclosing the word Filipinos in parentheses in the statement of the problem and in other sections of this paper: though a large portion of the comments appeared in Filipino, mixed Filipino and

English, English that contain features of PhE, and a few that were delivered in Philippine regional languages (Cebu Bisaya and Hiligaynon), there is no absolute assurance about the identity of the commenters.

Generally, in terms of demographics, a larger percentage of the users of the social media platform in the Philippines are women who are between 18 to 24 years old ("Facebook users in the Philippines"). However, this information is nearly impossible to ascertain in the context of the present study.

There were likewise some difficulties in verifying some meanings of posts as a lot of pragmatic elements are lost in written communication. Since no follow-up questions to the comments were conducted since this might either be unethical or might tamper with the authenticity of perspectives demonstrated in writing the comments, some statements that were found confusing were either *rejected* or *totally rejected*.

Finally, the analysis committed in this paper is limited to the observation of the deployment of mental models and does not include the analysis of actual use of language in the comments.

RESULTS

From the 65 comments that were accepted for analysis, only seven (7) contain evaluative qualities that totally accept PhE. A much larger share, 46 of 65 comments reject PhE, while the remaining 12 have more nuanced comments that reveal the commenters' ambivalent stances.

Among the comments that reject PhE, commenters (31 of 46) reveal mental models that treat *PhE as a form or source of humor*. This comes from (1) the exaggeration of phonological features of words and phrases such as in "pridzider" (trademark for the electric refrigerator Frigidaire), "juswa" (Joshua), "chens owel" (change oil), "dyabetis" (diabetes), "hamen ches" (ham and cheese), "jodorant" (deodorant), "Buenja" (Buendia, the former but still more popular name of Senator Gil J. Puyat Avenue in Pasay City, Metro Manila), "pried chicken" (fried), "pibti payb" (fifty-five), "Yunyun bank" (Union Bank) "orens" (orange) "silpon" (cellphone), "brikpas" (breakfast) and even words that gained traction because of the pandemic such as "fisheld" (face shield), and "pismas" (facemask) that were mentioned several times by different commenters; (2) deviations from the grammatical structures of English learned at school such as in "i told to you" and "I cannot marriage a woman who is not education, cause am a graduation"; (3) the general performance of English observed in comments such as, "*nag labasan na po mga* Major in English [laughing emoji] [English majors have come out/have started to participate in the comments thread of the prompt] and "So many English speaking here, nose bleed me...[headache emoticon]". There were also comments that use GIFs (graphic interchange format) and names of famous personalities such as Philippine Senator and well-known boxer Manny Pacquiao (GIF: Now you know!) and beauty pageant titleholder Janine Tugonon.

Other comments that reject PhE are scattered into the following mental models:

1. PhE is "grammatically wrong"
2. PhE objectifies rather than humanizes
3. the legitimacy of PhE is forced to Filipinos
4. features of PhE is not always acceptable; acceptance is a matter of taste
5. PhE is Taglish
6. PhE is not unique; Standard Filipino accent is similar to GAE and Californian accent

7. the PhE label is a form of bad judgment
8. PhE manifests illiteracy
9. PhE is not English
10. PhE is an underestimation of Filipinos' ability to speak using the English language
11. PhE is not an intelligent variety
12. PhE destroys Philippine culture
13. PhE makes Filipinos less nationalistic because it reduces affect toward own language(s)
14. PhE is not for everyone

Meanwhile, there are commenters that show ambivalence in their evaluation of PhE. Among these comments, several exhibited the acceptance to some linguistic features of PhE (lexes, syntax), but showed reservation for other features such as accent. For example,

> *I think the best way to define Philippine English should be via vocabulary and sentence construction, not really accent. The reason for this is because our standard in pronouncing words is the American pronunciation. Yes, we have an "accent", but if we pronounce the words "properly", it sounds like the American accent. Whereas we have English words that only Filipinos use, like "comfort room", "rubber shoes", "traffic" (heavy traffic), "go down" (alighting from a vehicle), etc.*

Some commenters started their statements with positive feedback for PhE, but later in the same statement, hinted that PhE is "wrong grammar." For example, here is a quoted comment to the prompt and its translation in English,

> *I agree ph english is legit. Ang dami english native wrong grammar din blth in writing and in oral. Lalo na ung mga kano na di nakapag aral. Pero di natin napapansin. Mas magalinv pa nga tau. Kasi tau perpectionist and english purist.*

> [I agree [that] Philippine English is legitimate. Many native speakers of English commit "wrong grammar" in both written and oral communication, especially the Americans who were not able [to go to school] to study. But we do not notice [them]. We are even better [than they are]. [This is] because we are perfectionist[s] and "English purist[s]."

There were comments that legitimated PhE by comparing it with other dialects of English worldwide, but similar with the quoted statement above, hinted that there is something wrong with PhE. For example,

> *Kng dito sa Ireland matutu ka din mag adjust. Kasi iba din ang pagbigkas. Halimbawa 8.. Eight yan.. Dito IT..PAG Australian kausap mo ayt Yan pagbigkas nila... Ang Letter H.. Dito Hets... Ang Z.. Dito zed... Etc... Kaya wag nalang tayu perfecto minsan. Kasi kahit dito mga irish maunawain sa pagbigkas at sa grammar... Marami din kasi European na Di marunong sa English.*

> [Here in Ireland, you need to learn to adjust. Because pronunciation is different. For example, '8,' that's 'eight,' here it's 'IT.' If you speak with an Australian, they pronounce that 'ayt.' The letter 'H,' here it's 'Hets;' 'Z', here it's 'zed,' etc. So, let's not [attempt to] be perfect sometimes. Because even here, Irish people are understanding [in facilitating other people's] in pronunciation and grammar. Many Europeans do not know how to use English.]

In terms of evaluative comments that accept PhE, mental models are scattered into the following,

1. PhE is a product of postmodernity
2. PhE is spoken with a different accent compared with other varieties of English but is comprehensible to foreigners
3. African varieties of English is as legitimate as PhE
4. PhE is informed by its speakers' first language
5. PhE should be acknowledged even outside the Philippines
6. PhE manifests Filipinos' ownership of English

Among the most common evidence to the legitimacy of PhE is its comparison with other varieties, usually the more popular dialects of English such as AmE, BrE, Australian English, Singaporean English, African English(es), and the lesser-known varieties such as Chinglish and Korean English.

One of the comments in this category received the third greatest number of reactions among the posts. It states,

> *Hopefully this is a step towards acknowledgement of Filipinos working/studying abroad. Many Filipinos still have to undergo multiple costly tests to prove their proficiency unlike other countries such as Singapore.* [36 reactions]

These 'like' and 'heart' reactions imply social media users' concurrence with the message of the posted comment.

GATEKEEPING ENGLISH

Many of the rejected comments can be categorized into the following major themes:

1. Evaluation of English users in the country without direct relationship to the performance of PhE
2. Disregard to the/no recognition of linguistic variation
3. Evaluation of specific features of English, i.e., pronunciation, use of pronouns, or other dimensions of English, i.e., translation, language change, though not precisely related to PhE
4. Self-evaluation of proficiency in English without any relationship to (or recognition of) PhE
5. Raised the social division espoused by English with no direct relationship to PhE

From among these major themes, the first recorded the greatest number of occurrences. These occurrences often lead to two mental models, (1) many Filipinos are gatekeepers of English and (2) English proficiency is not a measure of intelligence. With regard to gatekeeping practices, many comments pointed out how many Filipinos make fun of their fellow Filipinos when 'mistakes' are committed in the use of English. For example, one commenter stated the following,

> *2nd language na natin ang english, kaso kasi hindi natin madalas gamitin kya minsan nahihirapan magsalita ung iba, pero naiintindihan naman. May mga tao kc na Gramazi, hehe, magkamali lng gramar, feeling tatalino, dahil mas sanay sa pgsalita ng english, lol! E tagalog nga nawrowrong grammar pa ang marami eh! D nmn to writing contest, or wla naman editor sa pgsasalita. Not saying na di importante ang grammar. Try nila iacquire ang ibang language such as spanish, mandarin, japanese, etc. nang maging less judgmental sa pagsasalita ng iba sa*

english. Language fluency is a matter of usage, it doesn't define one's intelligence..let that sink in.

English is our second language, but we don't use [it] often that's why others find it difficult to speak [using English], but nonetheless [they] understand. There are people who are "Gramazi" [Grammar nazi], hehe, incorrect grammar, [they] feel intelligent, because [they] are more used to speaking using English, LOL! Even in Tagalog many commit "wrong grammar"! This is not a writing contest, or there is no editor in speaking. [I'm] not saying that grammar is not important. They should try acquiring other languages such as Spanish, Mandarin, Japanese, etc. so they will be less judgmental in other [people's] way of speaking English. Language fluency is a matter of usage, it doesn't define one's intelligence .. let that sink in.

Alternatively, another comment valued gatekeeping positively since this practice of many Filipinos forces others to strive to improve their communication skills in English.

Filipinos have the neutral accent when speaking in English, that's why we are easier to understand. We are very particular with grammar and sentence construction. Mas perfectionist pa kesa sa native English speakers. Kaya pag mali grammar mo... [More perfectionist compared with native English speakers. That's why if your grammar is wrong …] *expect bashers! [emoji] haha.. It helps us improve our com skills though. ...*

DISCUSSION

Comments that ridiculed Filipinos' tendency to pronounce English words using the reduced vowel and consonant inventories of PhE scored the highest in the data collected from the comments sections of the two online prompts. Some of these comments are punctuated with emojis (usually, laughing face emojis) that explicitly identify the intent of the posts, while others, for instance the GIF that showed Senator Pacquiao and the quoted statement, "Now you know!" though without any accompanying emoji, have recurring interpretations in the context (*connotations* for van Dijk, 2000) that allow similar construal (see Martin, 2014, p. 56).

Interestingly, Miss Universe 2012 1st runner up Janine Tugonon's name was mentioned several times (total of three times in both prompts). Tugonon's relationship to PhE is quite unclear. In the question-and-answer portion of Miss Universe 2012, judge Nigel Barker asked Tugonon if she thinks English should be a pre-requisite to winning the pageant since the Miss Universe winner shall be the pageant's ambassador to the world. Tugonon responded in her "mildly accented" (Rindels, 2012) English that, "Being Miss Universe is not just about knowing how to speak a specific language. It's being able to influence and inspire other people …" Tugonon's answer refused to categorically acknowledge the importance of English in the beauty pageant. To some extent, this indirectly empowered languages other than English. Perhaps, what makes Tugonon's English "funny" for some commenters is her accent. Tugonon's English accent follows the syllable-timing of Philippine languages (Llamzon, 1969) and not the stress-timed accent of other dialects of English. Many commenters who rejected and who are ambivalent to PhE stated that while other features of PhE are acceptable, accent is nonnegotiable. English accent must be "neutral" (this means standard AmE if clients are Americans, and standard BrE or RP if clients are British) for better chances of employment and/or regularization in the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) industry (from the comments) or must follow the standards of better-known English dialects to secure acceptance from, and to avoid marginalization by, other speakers of English (from the comments). This ambivalence to, or rejection of, PhE because of the accent of

its speakers has not yet appeared in studies of the acceptability of PhE conducted previously among educated Filipinos. The ambivalence of the educated class is often toward the promotion or educational implementation of PhE (Tupas, 2006; Martin 2014) or toward some of its lexical and grammatical features (Bautista, 2001; Hernandez, 2020).

On the other hand, the gatekeeping practices of many Filipinos, i.e., making fun of "grammatical errors" committed by other speakers, show that even in spaces beyond the academe, the notion of "standard of standards" of English (Bautista, 2000 in Tupas, 2004; 2006) persists no matter the sociolectal category of speakers. Corrections are only possible when there are standards at work, and still, for many Filipinos, the standards of AmE remain strong.

This argument is even clearer for the comments that uphold the legitimacy of PhE. Based on comparisons performed in the comments that show mental models that accept PhE, its legitimacy is *presupposed* by the legitimacy of the more well-known Englishes. PhE is PhE because there are other acceptable dialects of English and not because PhE can be independent of, or has reached independence from, other varieties of English. Clearly, the acceptability of PhE in the wider social spaces beyond the academe remains largely contested.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PHE EDUCATION

One interesting comment that was *rejected* because it lacks direct valuation of PhE addressed its concern to Oxford English Dictionary (OED). The comment states,

> *but do oxford know that some Filipinos don`t know that dictionaries always update their word collections ?* [sic]

OED publishes the words that it adds to its collection arranged per year and month in a section on its website (Home > Updates to the OED). The words OED adopted from the Filipino language had also been disseminated by local news bureaus through news reports and featured articles.

What makes this quoted comment interesting is that it shows the missing links toward the wider acceptability of PhE – more inclusive education and wider information dissemination about PhE. For instance, while Bernardo and Madrunio (2015) found that some ESL teachers have been implementing the pluricentric model in English teaching, other studies such as that of Hernandez (2020) only recently started to advocate for the same model of teaching English. This shows that efforts for the much wider dissemination of knowledge about PhE is still greatly needed because knowledge, acceptance, and educational implementation of PhE concepts and principles remain unequal in almost all domains in the country, as such among different social groups. This can be further observed in the results of studies that reveal the varying levels of acceptance of Filipino teachers and students toward PhE (see works cited previously: Torres & Alieto, 2019; Gustilo & Dimaculangan, 2018; Rosales & Bernardo, 2017). The uneven access to PhEs was also observed in the study of Canilao (2020) among multilingual public elementary schools in the Visayas and Mindanao regions.

The effort for wider PhE information dissemination should include not only the elite and educated (to further strengthen their knowledge about PhE, and then empower them to promote this knowledge to others), but should be more inclusive of other sociolectal groups, especially basilect variety speakers, or those who belong to the expanding circle of the outer circle of WE where the Philippines and Filipinos belong (Martin, 2014).

CONCLUSION

This study revealed traces of contestation on the acceptability of PhE is in social spaces beyond the academe. While PhE generally enjoys a comfortable position in the cognition of the educated and the elite, who are mostly acrolect and mesolect variety speakers, or those who belong to the inner circle of PhE, it remains ambiguous for the wider mesolect and basilect variety speakers, or among those who belong to the outer and expanding circles of PhE. The decentralization of the investigation on the acceptability of PhE committed in this study revealed the importance of having more extensive education about, advocacy for, and activism toward PhE across social spaces and discourse communities.

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