



Full Length Research Paper

# Inceptive study of prominent attribute of academic Philippine English among freshmen in the University of the Philippines

Adrian Kristine

Adamson University

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This study investigates the possibility of adding to the codified features of standard Philippine English. Its primary objective is to compare and contrast the lexical and syntactic features of Gonzalez and Bautista's (2000) Standard Philippine English with the innovative lexical and syntactic features of the Emerging Philippine Variety of English used by the University of the Philippines Baguio freshmen-participants in their written output. Kachru's World Englishes and Selinker's Interlanguage were used as theoretical frameworks for the analyses of the data in this study. This is an innovative approach to the conventional Error Analysis (EA) studies used to analyze similar data. The frequency count of lexical and syntactic features shows that syntactic features were more distinct than lexical features recurring from those already codified by Gonzalez and Bautista (2000). However, the more obvious issue brought about by this study is what variety should be taught in the academe when local features are likewise widely acceptable? How far should the re-thinking of English teaching at the university level go to produce graduates equipped with a genuine global lingua franca which is English?

**Keywords:** Language, Varieties and Variations, Language Teaching

## INTRODUCTION

English is one of the official languages of the Philippines. Most Filipinos display competence and proficiency in using the language in a variety of domains; specifically, in education, religion, government and business. The Philippine educational system today is a legacy of American colonialism. As early as pre-school, Filipino children are taught to speak and read in English. Most primary reading books train them first to read in English before Filipino (the national language) or in any other local language. This is done in order to prepare these children to meet the demands of most elementary and high schools which use English as a medium of instruction in most subject areas, specifically in Mathematics and Science. Hence, most school age children are functional in English even though they speak a different mother tongue in their homes.

However, over the decades that Filipinos have been using English and have gained a degree of proficiency in the language, the emergence Philippine English cannot simply be brushed off. In fact, this is impossible to dismiss. The contact of American English and

Philippine local languages, since the early 1900s, has contributed to the enrichment and development of English largely used in the Philippines today. Further, more and more young Filipinos today have English as their first language. However, this first language is learned from parents who are both non-native English speakers and in a context that is local. Hence, the variety learned is largely home grown, with lexicon understood and used in a uniquely Filipino context and syntax that closely resemble Philippine languages.

Although many language scholars would hesitate to label English as an 'international language', it has undeniably served the purpose of a global *lingua franca*. It is "the medium" for international or global understanding among peoples speaking a variety of native languages. English cannot claim to have the most number of speakers, with Chinese outnumbering English speakers about thrice; however, its privileged position as a global *lingua franca* remains unrivalled (Svartvik and Leech, 2006). Today, English no longer belongs to a specific group of people. It is a language whose varieties have evolved in countries

where it is widely spoken for a variety of internal as well as external purposes. According to Svartvik and Leech (2006), people want to learn English not because it is a beautiful language or that it is superior to any other mother tongue, but because it is a prerequisite for functioning well in a global community.

The nature of Philippine society and geography has led to dozens of languages and hundreds of dialects spoken all over the archipelago. This has resulted in most Filipinos being, at least, bilinguals or multilinguals. The interaction of local languages with English over the decades has undeniably given rise to the emergence of more innovative features of Philippine English (PE).

In most universities in the Philippines, courses are generally taught in English. Most reading materials either by local or foreign authors are generally written in English. Therefore, a college student cannot pass these courses without being functional, in the very least, or competent in English. In the University of the Philippines Baguio, instructors are given the academic freedom to teach courses (even specialized and major courses) in Filipino. The idea behind this is that exhibiting competence and proficiency in English is only secondary to the ideals of fully understanding the contents of the courses taken by students. Using only English in university classrooms also deprives some students who are not fully proficient in the medium of the knowledge which is their core goal. This has prompted local scholars to question whether the continued use of English truly serves the purpose of levelling the field of opportunities for students in terms of opening employment opportunities for them after graduation. In Tupas' paper which appeared in the anthology of similar works edited by Bautista and Bolton (2009), she proposes a critique of English-even the educated Philippine English- widely used in the country as being exclusive and divisive like its predecessor. Tupas (2009) argues that those who have access to educated, Standard Philippine English are those in the upper and middle class who can afford to and prioritize sending their children to expensive exclusive schools which use English as the primary and, often, sole medium of instruction. Thus, English, in this context, may be viewed as a class "stratifier".

### **Objectives of the study**

This study's major problem is to examine how the written English of freshmen of the University of the Philippines Baguio relates to the codified Philippine English (PE).

This study further describes and compares the lexical and syntactic characteristics of Standard Philippine English and the Emerging Philippine Variety of English exemplified in the written output of UPB Freshmen of academic year 2008-2009.

### **Framework**

The primary framework utilized in this study is Braj Kachru's World Englishes (WE). Braj Kachru introduced the *Three Circles Concept of World Englishes* (See the model in Jenkins, 2003). In his model, Kachru divided English speaking communities into three: (1.) Inner Circle composes of countries whose first language is English like U.S., Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand among others, (2.) Outer Circle composes of countries whose second language is English like India, Singapore and the Philippines and (3.) Expanding Circle composes of countries in which English is propelled by political and economic influence of English speaking countries, China, Indonesia and Thailand belong to this category (Kachru and Nelson, 2006). The concentric circles originally proposed by Kachru emphasize the range and depth in which English is used in the countries belonging to various circles. The more important aspect in this model is the blurring of distinctions previously held between NS and NNS and ESL vs. EFL. Kachru's model also emphasizes the fact that English is no longer monopolized by certain countries, specifically the U.S. and Great Britain, but has become a language for global communication. By the late 1990s, Kachru realized the need to re-conceptualize his original delineations; he "recently proposed that the 'inner circle' is now better conceived of as the group of highly proficient speakers of English – those who have 'functional nativeness' regardless of how they learned or use the language" (Graddol, 2006, p.110). That is to say, English is now being used by billions of people all over the world and the number is constantly increasing due to its demand.

### **Design of the Study**

The design of the study is basically descriptive-comparative, pointing out features of the currently investigated variety which resemble those already codified in the Standard Philippine English and highlighting innovative features peculiar to the emerging academic variety used by the participants. The present study jumps off from the features (lexical and syntactic) already documented largely from the works of Dr. Lourdes Bautista and Bro. Andrew Gonzalez (2000) in various aspects of government, commerce, education, mass media not only within a country but globally.

Although varieties of English are generally acceptable for a wide range of purposes, they are yet to reach a stage of standardization in most cases. WE, as a theory, is resistant to any form of standards or norms. Hence, varieties of English have only intelligibility, acceptability and interpretability as

“standards”. Intelligibility determines which lexical items or syntactic features that are innovative features of a variety may be conveniently considered as “standard” features when they are collectively understood by users of the said variety. This means that users of English from Outer Circle countries use the language in particular ways (different from native speakers of English). Although these particular innovative lexical uses and syntactic features deviate from standard English, people who belong to the same ESL community understand each other perfectly. Acceptability may be applied when innovative features appear to be used by various sectors of society such as media, academic institutions, commerce, various aspects of government and so forth. PE has yet to evolve into a language distinct from English. However, it cannot be denied that PE has developed enough distinguishing features to be brushed aside as non-standard usage of an Inner Circle English. Furthermore, Outer Circle countries like the Philippines which have obtained English from a colonial experience or a sustained close political and / or economic relations with Inner Circle countries continue to use their respective varieties of the language for general purposes within their countries and even for international communication.

## METHODOLOGY

The corpus data was gathered from UPB freshmen-participants (AY 2008-2009). One hundred freshmen from Communication Skills 1 (Communication Skills) and English 1 (Basic English) classes were randomly selected and asked to write a diagnostic essay using English. This was done in June 2008 (approximately during the third and fourth meetings of the said classes). The rationale for this was to ensure that their entry-level English proficiency would be gauged in the diagnostic essay. It was assumed, though doubtful because of the theories which present contrary evidence (Critical Period Hypothesis), that further language training in the respective classes might improve their use of English. The researcher carefully studied and isolated the lexical and syntactic features which deviate even from the standard features of Philippine English. Each essay from the participating students was carefully read by the researcher. Perceived lexical and syntactic deviations from standard English were duly marked and tabulated to arrive at deviant, yet innovative, features shared by the majority. Deviant features which appeared not to be shared by majority of the participants were treated merely as errors, thus, were not included in the features described in this study. Initially, these present themselves to be errors in the light of Standard

American English (SAE). Similar errors which appeared recurrently in the written output of the participants were presented as innovative features. One limitation of this method was that no native speaker contributed to the isolation of the innovative features.

## Profile of Participants

The demographic profile of the 100 participants shows that they are: (1.) predominantly female (80%), majority consider Filipino as their first language (77%), majority are bilingual or multilingual (87%) and, English is perceived by most of them (62%) as their second language.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The essays collected from the participants revealed that the following lexical and syntactic characteristics of Standard Philippine English remained evident: (1.) use of loan words from other languages, (2.) use of neologisms, (3.) use of “illiteracies” in SAE, (4.) use/adoption of Filipino lexicon, (5.) lack of tense unity, (6.) lack of subject-verb agreement, (7.) different use of prepositions, and, (8.) lack of pronoun-antecedent agreement. Examples from data collected:

1. But I **discovered** my true self when I'm already in fourth year high school. (Essay # 45A)
2. When I **attended** my first class, Comm. 1, I'm really nervous. (Essay #37)
3. I **treat** everyone that I **knew** as my friends. (Essay # 34)

Samples 1, 2 and 3 illustrate lack of tense unity within sentences. This was also prevalent in the entire compositions of the participants.

4. My **parents gives** us, my siblings enough freedom as we grow up. (Essay # 51)
5. **High school days was** over. (Essay #58)
6. ...without resorting **into** (to) any form of violence, harshness, or being rude. (Essay #53)

Sample sentences 4, 5 and 6 show lack of subject-verb agreement. This is a common challenge for Filipinos when using English. Lack of subject-verb agreement is a common error because in Filipino the verb form does not change regardless of the subject's number.

7. ...I'm always content(ed) **of** (with) what I have and what I do not have. (Essay # 54)
8. I write only when I am **on** (in) the mood...(Essay #56)
9. ...I (am) also (at) home in our university. (Essay #51)
10. ...they see me as a person who brags (about)

everything. (Essay #64)

11. ...now taking (up) an examination for a seaman.  
(Essay #66)

Samples sentences 7, 8, 9, 10 and 11 show the “innovative” use of English prepositions. With the menu of prepositions to choose from in English and their largely idiomatic uses, the participants’ output revealed that using prepositions remained a challenge. Common “errors” in preposition use consist of wrong choice of prepositions (as in samples 7 and 8), unnecessary use of prepositions (as in samples 9, 10 and 11), and lack of prepositions when they are called for in the sentence.

12. There are **things** that I don’t want to do just because I don’t want to do **it**.

(Essay #51)

13. ...I am one of those thousands **who took the exam that** passed. (Essay #8)

14. Now, **I’m** in college-a more challenging part of **our lives**. (Essay #58)

Sample sentences 12, 13 and 14 illustrate the lack of pronoun-antecedent agreement.

Furthermore, their essays revealed the following innovative lexical and syntactic features: (1.) increased use of fillers like **stuff/s, or anything/something/everything**, (2.) the continued use of the archaic term **betterment** to mean “improvement”, (3.) the misuse of the terms **say** and **tell** in its various tenses, (4.) the use of the slang ‘**cause** or ‘**coz** for “because” even for academic writing, (5.) direct translation of native/local phrases and statements into English, and, (6.) a marked redundancy (not necessarily for emphasis).

These features show that Philippine English continues to manifest more indigenous characteristics that typify Filipinos’ use of the language. Having established this through the validation of the continuous use of the features of PE previously documented in the studies of Bautista and Gonzales (in Kachru, Kachru and Nelson, 2006), it is imperative to recognize that the use of English among Filipinos should no longer be evaluated or assessed according to a native speaker model. In the context of English as a *Lingua Franca* (ELF), the concept of the native speaker has been radically redefined; Graddol (2006) proposes that anyone who has learned English alongside other local languages in a community that uses the language for a variety of domains may likewise be considered as a native speaker. (This re-conceptualization of the native speaker model into a “non-native native speaker” has concretized what was initially proposed in Gonzalez’ *When Does an Error Become a Feature of Philippine English?* (1983) which reads;

*In other words, with the attrition of native speakers as models in the educational system, we are confronted with the reality that even the best educated*

*Filipinos in English do not speak like Americans and do not use the*

*English language in quite the same way that the Americans (and the British) do* (Gonzalez, 1983, p.151).

This observation proves that the development and fossilization of formerly so-called “errors” may now be seen in a different light as innovations and indigenizations of American English. Gonzalez he attributes the observed features to the influence of mass media, specifically the idiolects of anchormen, newscasters, politicians and society elites frequently seen and heard on television. Furthermore, he points out that in highly urbanized areas, specifically in Metro Manila, children of more affluent families are raised as bilinguals speaking Filipino and English as their first languages. This shows that English is more than just a second language for Filipinos but, for many, a first language as well like Inner Circle speakers. Thus, the continuous development of PE and its growing corpus of innovative features which make it different from SAE may be attributed to the unique language profile of Filipino users of English.

Profile of the participants revealed that none of them was monolingual (which is only to be expected among Asians and other people from Outer and Expanding Circle countries). Most of them were competent and proficient in at least three languages (Filipino, English and one other local language). This multilingual nature of the participants in the study allowed them to shift effortlessly from one language to another depending on the demands of the communication context. However, the shift was often incomplete, which resulted in code mixing giving rise to the prolific use of *Taglish*, especially among younger generations. -(PE, however, is distinct from *Taglish*. It is predominantly recognizable as using the lexicon and syntax of English but, at the same time, manifesting features which are sometimes considered as “errors” but are “innovations” in the light of Kachru’s WE.) Further analysis of participants’ profile has led to the suspicion that most of these features continue to proliferate among bilinguals and multilinguals (a small number of participants claimed to be monolingual, L1 speakers of English, having been brought up abroad or spoke English as L1 in the Philippine context) rather than monolinguals. This emphasizes that variations from SAE may be attributed to the incomplete shifting among languages that users have in their repertoire. One dominant syntactic characteristic of PE is the direct translation from Filipino to English when participants were asked to write only in English. From the prevalence of this practice among the study’s participants, it can be proposed that one salient emerging feature of academic Philippine English may be the use of distinctly Philippine syntax in combination with English lexicon. Redundancy is also a marked feature of their use of English. The succeeding

samples were extracted from participants' essays illustrating direct translation and redundancy as innovative features in the participants' use of English.

Direct Translation Examples:

1. ...***I changed for the betterment of my life.*** (Essay # 1 Maybe roughly translated to Filipino ...*nagbago ako para sa ikagaganda ng aking buhay.*)
2. ...***I always knew to myself...***(Essay #55 can be translated to *alam ko sa sarili ko*)
3. I'm expecting that the University of the Philippines will enlighten me in the ***dark-and-full of hindrances world.*** (Essay #59 *ang mundo na madilim at puno ng balakid*)
4. ...***will not going to repent this.*** (Essay #59 *hindi ko ito pagsisisihan*)
5. ...others are ***contented in where they are.*** (Essay #60 *kuntento na kung nasan sila*)
6. ***Even when I first step on University of the Philippines-Baguio...***(Essay#63 *Saunang tapak/hakbang ko pa lamang sa UP Baguio...*)
7. A wise man thinks before he speaks...but I'm not, ***I'm not thinking what I'm saying.*** (Essay #66 *hindi ko iniisip ang sinasabi ko*)

From the examples above, italicized parts of the sentences show how the participants construct sentences in English directly from sentences originally constructed in Filipino. This is evidenced from the researcher's translation of the English sentence back to Filipino. In the English version, the sentences seemed awkward, in the very least, but in Filipino they appeared well constructed (especially those using metaphors or idioms in Filipino). The first example would better read in English as *I changed to improve my life* or the second one as simply *I always knew*. It is a common challenge for non-native speakers of English (even those who use it as L2) to "think" in English. Thus, this difference in "thinking" language and "writing" language produces the transfer of syntax from the "thinking" to the "writing" language.

Redundancy Examples:

1. I'd **rather prefer** to sleep or eat than going out anywhere. (Essay # 46)
2. ...because they are my **true best** friends. (Essay # 39)
3. But if the experience (d) **repeat again for the second time...**(Essay #14)
4. Tita still lives here, **her family, her husband and their son...**(Essay #3)
5. ...that **some other** people thought that I will faint but I'm not. (Essay #4)
6. **Yet, still** all of us need that in order to make ourselves feel important. (Essay #14)
7. I came from Olongapo City which is 6 to 7 hours **from here when you're going to travel** (Essay #59)

8. ...I do expect that **I'll be a better person than me now.** (Essay #69)
9. They also say that every individual is **unique from the other.**(Essay #60)
10. ...I'm **open on opening myself** as a friend to others.(Essay #70)
11. ...to make good decisions on things I have to **prior (itize) first.** (Essay #46).

The previous examples highlight the interference of the Filipino language when the participants write in English. This phenomenon may be supported by Selinker's Interlanguage Theory. 'Interlanguage' is a term coined by Selinker in 1972. It "refers to the separateness of a second language learner's system, a system that has structurally intermediate status between the native and target language" (Brown, 1994, p.203). A related concept called 'approximative system' coined by Nemser in 1971 also suggests that between the native language and the target language the language learner goes through a phase where a pseudo-language somewhere between the two is used and sometimes this is just as far as the language learner would be in relation to the target language being affected by other factors related to language learning. However, in the case of the features of PE described in this study, fossilization has already occurred. This implies that features that deviate from SAE and resemble features of Philippine languages have become permanent features of PE. For instance, in Filipino, repetition is a feature of the language which serves the purpose of emphasis, for modifying verb tenses or to make create degrees of comparison for adjectives used to describe objects, people and the like. Repetition may be likewise be used for emphasis in English but this was not the case in the examples just shown. In sample sentence 2, adjectives **true** and **best** were used together to describe the noun **friend**. To emphasize the idea, the phrase could have been better if it read **truest friends**. Sample sentence 3 has gone overboard in wanting to emphasize "repetition" by using 3 words in the same sentence that mean the same thing (repeat, again, second time). Sample sentence 9 uses the word **unique** and **than** together. The word **unique** already implies "incomparability".

These examples establish that resulting features arise too because of language contact. The interaction of Philippine languages in a local context for domains like media, education, politics/government, religion, and commerce allow free and fluid use of English alongside Philippine languages. The result is the proliferation of more innovative features incorporated into English used by Filipinos. When before the same may be seen as "errors" in usage among non-native speakers of English, this is hardly possible today in the light of the role of English as not only an Asian but as a Global *Lingua Franca*.

## CONCLUSIONS

Given the results of the present study, the implication would be the recognition of PE as a language distinct from SAE. Language contact, the multilingual profile of the participants (a quality shared by most Filipinos), incomplete or partial shifting between local languages and English have given rise to the continuous development and use of innovative features characteristic of and distinct to PE. These innovative features should no longer be seen as errors but as characteristics that distinguish PE from its other Asian counterparts; Singlish (Singaporean English), Hinglish (Indian English), Manglish (Malaysian English), Chinglish (Chinese English), Japanese English and the like. One important consideration though in the academe is how to evaluate the written output of students in English in the light of the WE framework. Where teachers formerly used SAE as a model or standard against which to evaluate and rate students' output, today this may no longer be possible or even fair. When input from teachers, media, as well as other public domains using English in the Philippine context make use of English but with PE features, students cannot be expected to use any variety other than PE, even within the classroom setting. Potentially revolutionary in effect, Kachru and other WE proponents agree that an endonormative (rather than exonormative or SAE as model and standard for Filipinos students, PE should be the standard) and polymodel (not using a native speaker, inner circle model rather Asian or PE) approach to teaching and evaluation may be applied. Further, the features of PE which become standardized over years of use are those that meet the criteria of acceptability, intelligibility and interpretability rather than conformity to a native speaker variety or SAE.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This conclusion potentially has a radical implication on education beginning with the revision of education curriculum as part of pre-service training of language teachers to the rethinking of how English should be taught to students in all levels. Active steps must be taken to expose students to the actual use of English varieties, in literature for example, beginning by including literatures written in non-native English.

This promotes familiarity with and tolerance of similar innovative features of English in other countries where it is widely used. After all,

*English is the lingua franca that Asians now share with one another and with the rest of the world. ..It has been thoroughly indigenized..the center of gravity of English as second language of lingua franca is manifestly Asian (especially in the South and East)* (Kachru and Nelson, 2006, p. 23).

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