

Phonological Problems among Indigenous Students in Oral Communication Skills using English Language

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Abstract

In the teaching profession, one of the most important skills needed for a successful teacher is the good command of English particularly in speaking skill. If a teacher commits mistakes in the pronunciation of the English Language across disciplines, learners would also perceive wrong meaning and interpretation on the content of the lesson. In fact, good pronunciation should be one of the first things that should be learned in English. Thus, teachers across curriculum must have the pedagogical knowledge on phonology and speech articulation sounds in English Language. This study aimed to determine and analyze the obstacles encountered by the indigenous students in learning the correct pronunciation of the English Language. The participants of this study were the maranao, subanin and Higaonon students of the College of Education, MSU-IIT during second semester 2014-2015. The total number of participants were 25 indigenous students. The research method used was purely qualitative design using the individual and group interviews, observation through listening of their informal conversation using English Language. Video was used during the conduct of the data gathering procedure. Then, it was analyzed through categorizing the themes and coding for the concepts leading to the final content analysis. Based from the results, indigenous students have difficulty in pronunciation due to their lack of phonological awareness that caused their problem in speech articulation sounds. According to the findings, indigenous students' speech articulation sounds were affected with their native language or mother tongue because of the different accents, poor foundation of speech sounds in English Language during their early childhood education, parents pedagogical knowledge on English sounds and their ecosystem at home particularly the places prone to conflict in Mindanao. Hence, based from the findings of this study, speech improvement in English Language intervention is needed to be integrated in the teacher education curriculum.

Keywords: Articulation, English Language, Phonological Speech Sounds

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Introduction/Problem

In the teaching and learning process, language is the basic tool in communication. That is why, teachers must have phonological knowledge about linguistic competence. In fact, one of the most important components of a culture is its language. With language, people not only expeditiously communicate; they also express their values, beliefs, and world views. When a language becomes extinct, a part of the cultural patrimony of humanity is lost (Barfield, S. C., & Uzarski, J. 2009). For linguists, this also means the loss of an opportunity for a better understanding of the manifestation of the human faculty of language. So, the curriculum in the teacher education program must preserve the cultures of language through English language as medium of instruction in teaching that caters to the needs of diverse learners. According to Barfield et al. (2009), the preservation of cultures through English language teaching and provide practical teaching ideas in which English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers can integrate indigenous artifacts and cultural components into their classes.

Moreover, in the teacher education curriculum, comprehension to the content of the lessons is very important. That is the reason why teachers should speak distinctly and pronounce the words properly so that the students will be able to fully understand the lessons. Indeed, teachers particularly who belong to indigenous group need more practice in producing the correct sounds of English language due to their mother tongue or native language which affects in speaking using English as the second language. Thus, there is a need to integrate the meaning or semantic in language to be the core of teaching particularly in preparation for ASEAN integration. Certain aspects of meaning in language must be discussed, including propositional, illocutionary, & social meaning. Propositional meaning should be the central focus of language teaching & semantic content of language curricula should be based on analysis of texts or discourse characteristic of learners' goals (Kennedy, 1979).

In addition, in the teaching and learning process through using English language, knowledge of culture is also be emphasized to have culturally responsive pedagogy. This is supported from the idea of Xue-wei & Ying-jun (2006), stated that it's obvious that the teaching situation and teaching methods used in English Language Teaching (ELT) needs to be changed to involve culture instead of language knowledge only. To further explain the importance of culture teaching, teachers need to know to what extent cultural background knowledge influences language learning and teaching, and how teachers can take advantage of that influence. To account for the roles culture plays in language learning and teaching, it is necessary to demonstrate the functions it may perform in the components of language learning and teaching, such as listening, speaking, reading, and translating.

As a matter of fact, in the teacher education program, pre-service education students must have good command of English particularly those who belong to indigenous group so that when they practice their teaching profession in the Department of Education both public

and private, their students or pupils will be able to understand the lessons. According to Gilakjani (2012) learners with good English pronunciation are likely to be understood even if they make errors in other areas, whereas learners with bad pronunciation will not be understood, even if their grammar is perfect. Gilakani added “we judge people by the way they speak, and so learners with poor pronunciation may be judged as incompetent, uneducated or lacking in knowledge. Yet many learners find pronunciation one of the most difficult aspects of English to acquire, and need explicit help from the teacher. Therefore, some sort of pronunciation instruction in class is necessary”. From the ideas of Gilakjani, it is clearly stated how important is the use of English language and the involvement of cultures in the classroom instruction. This is also very important in preparing the culturally responsive curriculum design for teacher education for K+12 curriculum teachers and ASEAN integration.

In like manner, Fangzhi (1998) said that English pronunciation is being unduly neglected or even ignored in some colleges and universities. Its role and necessity are not yet generally realized, and English phonetic courses are usually left to chance or given no place in the teaching or learning. Fangzhi (1998) stated: ‘advanced students find that they can improve all aspects of their proficiency in English except their pronunciation, and mistakes which have been repeated for years are impossible to eradicate. The long-term solution to this problem, would suggest, is to have a compulsory phonetic course because an active command of pronunciation will help promote the entire learning process.

Consequently, these literature reviews prompted the researcher to come up with this action research entitled “Phonological Problems among Indigenous Students in Oral Communication Skills using English Language”. This study aimed to analyse the problems encountered by the pre-service indigenous students in the college of education, regarding their English language pronunciation which is very important in their teaching profession. More specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the phonological problems encountered by the maranao, subanen and higaonon pre-service education students in oral communication using English as the second language?
2. What are the causes or factors of their phonological problems in English language?
3. How do their speech articulation sounds affected by their mother tongue and child rearing practices?
4. What implications, suggestions and recommendations can be drawn based from the findings of the study?

Literature Review

According to El-Halees (1986), the results of an error and contrastive analysis study of the performance of 203 students in Jordanian secondary schools suggest that the English pronunciation teaching-learning situation is the outcome of a number of interrelated factors,

chief among which are: Negative transfer from Arabic sound system into English sound system, inherent difficulty in English sound system, strategies the learners use in learning English as a foreign language, socio-emotional factors, methodological factors and psychological factors. The way in which students are taught standard Arabic affects their learning English pronunciation, especially insofar as rhythm is concerned. A plan has been suggested for improving the learning-teaching situation of English pronunciation in Jordan centred around giving advanced training in English phonetics to teachers of English.

Furthermore, Taylor (1991) said that now that English is a means of global communication, what should be the aim of pronunciation teaching? The tacit assumption has always been that we should aim to make learners “intelligible”. But to whom should they be intelligible? In an era of global communication where a substantial and ever-increasing proportion of English transactions take place between non-native speakers, it becomes very difficult to specify precise targets. Most of the work done to date has assumed that intelligibility means intelligibility to a native speaker. This in turn assumes that there is a role for a native-speaker model of pronunciation.

Accordingly, Jenkins (2002), the Lingua Franca core approach, is suggested, to be able to promote both intelligibility and regional appropriateness among EIL interlocutors, as well as being more teachable, than either of the two most commonly adopted classroom models,

Moreover, Derwing & Munro (2005) stated that empirical studies are essential to improving our understanding of the relationship between accent and pronunciation teaching. Teachers are often left to rely on their own intuitions with little direction. Although some instructors can successfully assist their students under these conditions, many others are reluctant to teach pronunciation.

In addition, Burgess & Spencer (2000) stressed that the relationship between two fields: (1) teaching and learning pronunciation in a second or foreign language; and (2) the study of pronunciation-teaching and of phonology in the training and education of language teachers are very important. It reports research conducted to inform the design of an initial teacher-training course. It argues for a strongly integrated approach to the relationship between the two fields, but for different priorities in those fields.

In preparation for ASEAN integration, the findings of the study of Hu (2010) is very useful as far as globalization is concern. Hu strongly stressed out that in response to an escalating demand for English proficiency brought about by the rapid economic, social, and cultural development in China, there has been a massive drive to expand and improve English language teaching (ELT) since the mid-1980s. Tremendous efforts and resources have been expended on upgrading the various components of ELT, including curriculums, syllabi, textbooks, tests, and teachers' professional competence. The economically and socio-culturally developed regions differ notably from the less developed ones in the development of ELT. Hence, there is a challenge for the teacher education curriculum in the Philippines to

come up with integration of English language and culture in the pedagogy of the professional education subjects.

Another research results discussing the importance of English language is the study of Honna & Takeshita (2004), describing Japan's most recent attempts to improve English teaching and learning at all levels of the education system both for students and teachers as well as for the public in general. Based on policy recommendations by several advisory committees, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has developed a five-year strategic plan to cultivate 'Japanese with English Abilities'. One important issue is whether or not English should be introduced in public elementary classrooms as a subject. Various districts, nationwide, have implemented this primary English program with the government's approval.

Moreover, Wallace (2002) argues for teaching a particular kind of English that she calls "global literate English" notion of global literate English. Robertson's (1995) also argues that when the global English is glocalized through critical pedagogy, English can work as a language of opportunity for Koreans. A critical understanding of the complex relationship between ELT and colonialism and a reconceptualization of the ownership of English in Korea will have implications for ELT practices in other countries. This means that here in the Philippines, teacher education curriculum must also integrate language culture in the professional education subjects through classroom discussion.

Moreover, in order to realize the culturally responsive pedagogy across curriculum in the teacher education program, indigenous communities must also be included in the content of the curriculum design. This is supported from the results of the study of UNESCO (2009) emphasizing that the "the loss of their specialized knowledge of nature is a grave concern for many indigenous communities throughout the world. Education, as it is understood in a Western context, occupies a pivotal role in this process, highlighted by many as both a major cause of the decline of indigenous knowledge, and also as a potential remedy for its demise. Commendable efforts are being made to better align educational curricula with indigenous realities and to incorporate local knowledge and language content into school curricula, but the interrelationship and balance between these two different ways of learning remain delicate. This implies that in the Philippines, the curriculum design of the teacher education program must also have content integration about indigenous realities to incorporate local knowledge and English language content.

Certainly, not only content language culture integration, but also oral communication skill. In "Speaking," Willem "Pim" Levelt, Director of the Max-Planck-Instituter Psycholinguistic, accomplishes the formidable task of covering the entire process of speech production, from constraints on conversational appropriateness to articulation and self-monitoring of speech. "Speaking" is unique in its balanced coverage of all major aspects of the production of speech, in the completeness of its treatment of the entire speech process, and in its strategy of

exemplifying rather than formalizing theoretical issues. Level provides a theoretically coherent picture of the speaker as information processor. He proposes a modular organization of relatively autonomous processors for message generation, grammatical encoding, phonological encoding, and articulation. For each processor, he distinguishes carefully between its operations and its input and output representation. The chapters are arranged so that the reader acquires more knowledge of semantics, syntax, lexical structure, and phonology as it becomes necessary in order to understand processing. Throughout the book, Levelt acknowledges the purposes served by the speaker's information processing--particularly in the sections on discourse processing, requesting, referring, monitoring, and self-repair. (PsycINFO Database Record (c) 2005 APA, all rights reserved).

Furthermore, for the phonological awareness, Gussenhoven & Jacobs (2005) assuming no previous knowledge of phonology or linguistic theory, the authors introduce the basic concepts and build on these progressively, discussing the main theories and illustrating key points with carefully chosen examples. It covers a wide range of phenomena, including speech production, segmental contrasts, tone, quantity, prosodic structure, metrical relations, and intonation, as well as such key theories as feature geometry and Optimality Theory.

Design/Procedure

The participants of this study were the maranao, subanin and Higaonon students of the College of Education, MSU-IIT during second semester 2014-2015. The total number of participants were 25 indigenous students. The research method used was purely qualitative design using the individual depth and group interviews, observation through listening of their informal conversation using English Language. Video was used during the conduct of the data gathering procedure. Then, it was analyzed through categorizing the themes and coding for the concepts leading to the final content analysis. Content and rhetorical analysis has been used for the inferential analysis of the oral conversational interview.

Findings

1. What are the phonological problems encountered by the maranao, subanen and higaonon pre-service education students in oral communication using English as the second language?

Answers from the participants:

- They cannot correctly pronounce the vowel and consonant sounds due to lack of knowledge
- They lack phonological awareness

- They have difficulty in producing the correct sounds of English language due to their speech mechanism
- They lack knowledge on the functions of their speech organs
- Their intonation is more on accented
- They forgot to analyse the symbols of IPA sounds
- They did not experience speech improvement laboratory in English pronunciation
- They were not expose to social interaction using English language

2. What are the causes or factors of their phonological problems in English language?

- Demonstrate difficulty in acquiring a phonological system; involving organizing the patterns of sounds in the brain and the output, not necessarily in the motor production of the sounds like Articulation errors
 - general immaturity or learning disability
 - recurrent middle ear infections which affect the child's ability to hear differences among similar sounds
 - low motivation on the part of the child, because the family understands the child anyway, or does not expect the child to speak more clearly
 - poor control of the lip, tongue and palate muscles used for speech.

Analysis

Based from the results, indigenous students have difficulty in pronunciation due to their lack of phonological awareness that caused their problem in speech articulation sounds. According to the findings, indigenous students' speech articulation sounds were affected with their native language or mother tongue because of the different accents, poor foundation of speech sounds in English Language during their early childhood education, parents pedagogical knowledge on English sounds and their ecosystem at home particularly the places prone to conflict in Mindanao. Hence, based from the findings of this study, speech improvement in English Language intervention is needed to be integrated in the teacher education curriculum.

Recommendation

Based from the results of the study, the following suggestions and recommendations are being formulated:

1. Speech Language Therapy through intervention program is needed for the diverse students in the teacher education curriculum.
2. Culturally responsive pedagogy with the emphasis of the English language correct articulation be included in the curriculum

3. Propose speech improvement enhancement program for the parents of the indigenous students. This will be done through extension program of the Department of Professional Education

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