When Pedagogical Acceptability Judgments of ESL Teachers and ESL Learners Differ

Enrico F. Rosales, Ph.D.
La Consolacion University Philippines
Valenzuela St., Capitol View Park Subd., Bulihan
City of Malolos, 3000 Bulacan, Philippines
efr64@yahoo.com
+639155901313

Alejandro S. Bernardo, Ph.D.
University of Sto. Tomas
Espana, Manila Philippines
Bernardo_andrew@yahoo.com
+639228613420

When Pedagogical Acceptability Judgments of ESL Teachers and ESL Learners Differ

Enrico F. Rosales, Ph.D. and Alejandro S. Bernardo, Ph.D.

Abstract

The study of World Englishes had expanded the confines of sociolinguistic study to exploring different pedagogical dimensions of normalizing local linguistic caveats to be a fully-distinct variant of the English language. For instance, the study of Philippine English has opened the possibilities for the features of local English to be acceptable even within formal, academic contexts. The present study takes a closer look at the concept of pedagogical acceptability and its prevalence in college English classrooms in the Philippines. A pedagogical acceptability test was administered to a group of teachers (n=42) and a group of students (n=242). The test contains 38 items constructed within acceptable Philippine English conventions, which the respondents would rate on a six-point Likert scale as to its acceptability. The results show a slight disparity in the acceptability of some items, which turns out to be more significant than other items that were otherwise accepted. The pedagogical implications of this difference are also discussed towards the end of the paper.

Key Words: Philippine English, pedagogical acceptability, World Englishes, sociolinguistics

1.   Introduction

This paper presents the results of a small segment of our larger study which focuses on the design of a Philippine English-based pedagogical model for teaching English grammar. Philippine English (PhE henceforth) is the educated variety of English used in the Philippines (cf. Bautista, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c; Gonzalez, 1983; Llamzon, 1969) which is a long-time English as a Second Language (ESL) territory.

This article narrates the pedagogical acceptabilty decisions of English teachers and ESL learners in the Philppines. Studies on the beliefs about, attitudes toward and opinions on PhE have been done (cf. Bautista, 2001a, 2000b, 2000c), but we surmise than none has so far looked into the difference between the teachers' and the students' extent of acceptance of the PhE idiosyncratic grammatical features. Hence, this study looks into the disparity between the pedagogical acceptability decisions of Filipino ESL teachers and students.

2.   The Survey We Conducted

In this paper, a pedagogical acceptability test was designed and administered to investigate college English teachers and learners' judgment toward the PhE-based grammar model. Types of questions varied, e.g., close-ended questions and multiple-choice items. Our pedagogical acceptability test, therefore, is a researcher-made instrument that assesses how tolerable or unobjectionable PhE grammatical variants are as a standard in teaching English grammar in formal classroom setting. Put in another way, it is a tool that assesses the suitability of an endonormative model within a context of use specific to the needs of the English language learners in the country.

The first part of the instrument asks for the respondents' personal information. The second part contains 38 pairs of statements and requires the participants to rate each pair in which one component is written in American English (AmE) while the other is written in PhE using a six-point Likert scale. The respondents were requested to circle the number that represents how much they accept each statement as a model sentence in teaching and learning a specific rule of the English grammar. (Legend: 1 = "totally unacceptable"; 2= "unacceptable" 3= "somewhat unacceptable"; 4="somewhat acceptable"; 5="moderately acceptable"; 6 = "highly acceptable"). For example:

No.	Statement	Pedagogical Acceptability
1a	No parking on **both** sides.	1---2---3---4---5--⑥
1b	No parking on **either** side.	1---②---3---4---5--6

The last section of the instrument asks the participants to choose a particular model in teaching English grammar and their reasons for selecting the model they prefer.

The development of the pedagogical acceptability test followed the conventional survey methodology. Adapting Benson and Clark's (1982) and Bratt's (2009) frameworks for survey design, this study subdivided the method of pedagogical acceptability test development into four phases: Phase 1 – mapping out of initial item pool; Phase 2 - expert review; Phase 3 - pilot test; and Phase 4 - administration.

3.   Our Respondents

A total of 42 English instructors and 242 students from 10 colleges/universities in the Philippine capital, Manila, participated in the study. The 42 teachers requested to participate in the pedagogical acceptability test must first fulfill three compulsory conditions: (1) they are full-time English teachers in their respective institutions, (2) they do not teach any other disciplines, and (3) their L1 is Filipino. On the other hand, the 242 students enrolled in grammar course or any of its equivalent must meet three compulsory requirements: (1)

bilingual/multilingual, but their L1 is Filipino, (2) non-English majors, and (3) are 16-18 years old.

The profile of the teacher-respondents shows that out of 42, 26.2% are males while 73.8% are females. Further, these teachers handle General Education English courses, such as basic communications skills, reading, writing, and oral communication. In addition, a majority (40.48%) have been teaching English to Filipino students for five or less than five years, and a considerably large percentage (23.81%) have been in the teaching profession for 16 to 20 years. Only 16.67% and 11.90% have been part of the ELT industry for 6 to 10 and 21-25 years, respectively. Further, 64.3% have master's degrees, 31% have bachelor's degrees, and only 4.8% have earned their doctoral degrees. It must be noted that a large fraction (78.6%) is categorized as instructors and relatively few have earned higher academic ranks or statuses.

As regards the profile of the 242 student-respondents, 28.51% are males while 71. 49% are females. Because the student respondents are freshmen enrolled in General Education English courses, more than half of the population (57.85%) are 17 years old and only 27. 69% are 16 years of age. Only a small percentage is 18 years old and above. These students are returnees and the so-called *irregular students* who either failed or did not take basic English courses in the specified academic year.

The data also show that the student-participants come from various degree programs, like creative arts (18.60%), banking and finance (.82%), hotel and restaurant management and tourism (40.29%), and prelaw courses (40.29%), such as economics, philosophy, and political science. Finally, a large percentage (95.04%) has no experience studying abroad.

Concerning self-assessed proficiency in English, the numbers present that there is a preponderance of student-respondents who rated themselves *average* in terms of speaking (74.79%), listening (64.05%), reading (60.33%), and writing (69.01%). The mean scores (2.24 for listening; 2.33 for reading; 2.12 for writing; 2.09 for speaking) suggest that college students could hardly rate themselves *excellent* in the use of English whether in written or in spoken form.

4.   Disparity between the Pedagogical Acceptability Decisions of   Students and Teachers

Table shows that there is a significant difference with respect to the students and teachers' levels of pedagogical acceptability of PhE grammatical variants. Stated more clearly, the mean and *p*-values (*p*-values below 0.05) indicate that a PhE grammatical variant may be, for example, 'somewhat acceptable' to teachers but 'moderately acceptable' to students or vice versa.

In Table 1, a number of acceptable PhE grammatical variants are 'somewhat acceptable' to teachers but 'moderately acceptable' to students:
   a)   *result **to***
   b)   *based **from***
   c)   *in search **for***

d)   *with **regards** to*
e)   the use of *wherein* instead of *in which*
f)   the use of simple past for past perfective as in "They **left** before their children entered college."
g)   the use of the plural pronoun *their* as a substitute for the indefinite pronoun *everyone*

In the case of *Ø majority*, however, both groups of respondents rated it 'moderately acceptable,' but the computed values imply that the students' and teachers' acceptability of this PhE grammatical variant differ in intensity, i.e., teachers pedagogically accept it more favorably.

Table 1
Difference between the Students' and Teachers' Levels of Acceptability of PhE Grammatical Variants

Items	Teachers		Students		Mean Difference	t	df	p-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD				
result **to**	4.45	1.485	4.97	1.257	-0.523	-2.416	279	.016
based **from**	3.67	1.803	4.69	1.362	-1.028	-4.284	282	.000
in search **for**	4.17	1.480	4.79	1.185	-0.623	-3.023	282	.003
with **regards** to	3.83	1.820	4.75	1.343	-0.917	-3.852	280	.000
This practice is still being done in several universities in the US **wherein**	3.98	1.585	4.89	1.079	-0.916	-4.697	281	.000
that **Ø** majority of	5.19	1.042	4.69	1.389	0.498	2.214	281	.028
the punctuations have role to play*	3.05	1.464	3.68	1.327	-0.634	-2.815	282	.005
I **have seen** him yesterday *	2.69	1.585	3.89	1.475	-1.198	-4.806	282	.000
They **left** before their children entered college.	3.52	1.864	4.61	1.442	-1.086	-4.298	281	.000
mass which **would** be held*	3.17	1.681	3.71	1.516	-0.540	-2.096	282	.037
The teaching of critical thinking... **have** further*	2.38	1.696	3.81	1.728	-1.431	-4.963	279	.000

as far as the use of...*are* concerned*	2.50	1.798	3.83	1.831	-1.333	-4.365	280	.000
I including my sisters *are* not*	3.43	2.062	4.54	1.730	-1.113	-3.733	280	.000
There *exists* basic roadblocks*	3.02	1.893	4.13	1.689	-1.110	-3.856	280	.000
Everyone implored the Almighty for *their*	3.67	2.044	4.69	1.646	-1.025	-3.584	280	.000
Regular verbs are considered weak verbs because *it* forms *its**	2.40	1.683	3.75	1.764	-1.346	-4.594	281	.000
me and my siblings*	2.81	1.685	4.25	1.784	-1.444	-4.878	281	.000

The same table also shows that teachers and students have contrasting decisions in relation to the pedagogical acceptability of the following PhE grammatical variants:

   a) the use of *the* for a nonspecific reference is 'somewhat unacceptable' to teachers but 'somewhat acceptable' to students;
   b) the use of the present perfective for simple past as in "*I **have seen** him yesterday."* is 'somewhat unacceptable' to teachers but 'somewhat acceptable' to students; and
   c) the use of the modal *would* where *will* is needed is 'somewhat unacceptable' to teachers but 'somewhat acceptable' to students.

Furthermore, verbs that disagree with their subjects in terms of number received contradictory judgments from the two groups of respondents. The use of *have* in the sentence below is regarded 'unacceptable' by the teachers but adjudged 'somewhat acceptable' by the students.

> *The teaching of critical thinking in the minds of philosophers such as Ennis Paul and McPeck and psychologists Sternberg and Fernstein **have** further identified the components of this educational phenomenon.*

Similarly, the use of the plural linking verb *are* in the expression "as *far as the use of these phrases **are** concerned*" is deemed 'somewhat unacceptable' by the teacher-respondents but believed to be 'somewhat acceptable' by the student- informants, and in the statement "*I including my sisters **are**...*" the use of *are* is regarded 'somewhat unacceptable' by the teachers but considered 'moderately acceptable' by the students.

In addition, the nonstandard use of *are* in sentences such as *"I including my sisters **are** not going to attend the party."* also received opposing judgments from the two groups of respondents. The teachers look at it as 'somewhat unacceptable' while the students regard it 'moderately acceptable. Finally, the table also suggests that the singular pronoun *it* may be

used for plural antecedents based on the students' judgment but not based on the teachers' and that using *me* instead of *I* in statements such as *"Me and my siblings will attend a party."* is 'somewhat unacceptable' to teachers but 'somewhat acceptable' to college learners.

5.   Our Take on the Issue

These figures suggest that in some cases, teachers' and students' pedagogical judgments are conflicting, while in some situations, they are complementary. The contradiction may be a result of the teachers' strict adherence to the exogenous norm (AmE) despite their awareness of the existence of PhE and the students' exposure to the local variety in situations, such as classroom interaction and in printed media, e.g., textbooks and newspapers. It is possible that the PhE grammatical variants acceptable to students are those that they use or encounter within or outside the ESL classrooms, which English teachers could hardly tolerate at the moment because they regard them as serious deviations from the norm. This stance of the teachers may be attributed to the principle of invariability which Bautista seems to imply in her study in 2003. It appears that even after a decade, there are grammatical rules that remain inviolable.

The unacceptance of other distinctive PhE grammatical features may also be a result of firm adherence to "linguistic conservatism" (Trask, 2000; Chambers, 2009). Simply put, there are language users who are relatively conservative and resistant to change. They seem to keep a conservative linguistic form, such as a word or a structure or a rule, which remains closer to a standard form from which it evolved. The passing of time, however, has brought about positive changes with respect to pedagogical acceptability decisions. For instance, the prepositional phrases *result to* and *based from* seem to have received more intense acceptance from English teachers and learners contrary to what Bautista found years ago.

The difference in judgment needs to be pedagogically resolved. The PhE grammatical variants listed in the preceding section have been found acceptable either by the teachers surveyed or the students asked to participate or by both groups. Not giving a room for the use of PhE grammatical variants that teachers hardly accept or recognize such as "I, including my sisters, **are**.." may be pedagogically unjust on the part of the students because these learners look at these structure as appropriate and tolerable. It is, however, imperative to examine the specific communicative context in which students would like to use these structures without any form of restriction. It must be noted that a limitation of the pedagogical acceptability test conducted is that it barely examined if the language learners and teachers would accept the PhE grammatical features in writing and/or speaking and in formal and/or informal situations.

On the other hand, not considering what teachers uphold to be correct and appropriate may undermine their authority being the "linguistic models" in the classroom. It is, therefore, sound to consider features that are acceptable to both teachers and students and to allow them to find the middle ground. As a simple illustration, when students are asked to write a composition where the use of *result to* is inevitable, the students should be allowed to use

result to (if that is their preference) as long as it is acceptable to the teachers as well. In the present study, both groups deem *result to* pedagogically acceptable; hence, there is no reason for teachers to strictly impose *result in* anymore even if they regard it as *the* standard (or even if the students are hardly aware that it is *the* standard). Anyway, both of them reckon *result to* as acceptable; thus, there seems to be no grounds for conflicts.

Worthy of mention is another central issue that surfaced in the present study - that teachers and students could hardly rate a number of items subjected to a pedagogical acceptability test "highly acceptable." It seems reasonable to suppose that the student and the teacher judges would give lower ratings to PhE grammatical features, for they may regard these items questionable, incorrect, nonstandard, or deviant. However, it is surprising to note that even Standard American English structures, such as *with regard, assured us, I and my siblings are...* and *result in* barely received the highest acceptability grades from both groups of respondents.

On the part of the students, their qualms may be a result of their uncertainty of how grammar rules apply. When a few students were asked why they could not rate a specific item "highly acceptable," the typical response was that they were unconfident of what is really correct and what is not. In some instances, students aired that it is not because they dislike rules – it is that they are unacquainted with the rules, and what is more, they do not particularly care about them either.

Furthermore, it is also possible that the students' uncertainty is a consequence of the mismatch between what they hear from other local and educated speakers of English and what the conventions and their teachers promote. For instance, the popular PhE variant *fill **up*** was hardly rated highly acceptable probably because students are taught that *fill out* should be used instead. In the case of Standard American English (SAE) *a majority*, they could hardly rate it highly acceptable and adjudged its PhE counterpart *Ø majority* more favorably because more and more Filipinos use the latter. Perhaps, this situation of incompatibility between *the ideal* and *the real* causes students to incompletely trust grammatical variants - whether SAE or PhE – as unquestionably acceptable.

The students' inability to decipher *the* standard form may also be another consequence of imperfect learning, a linguistic phenomenon in which language learners, in spite of the amount of education they received and no matter how fluent they are, are likewise prone to mistakes that arise from inadequate learning. As adult speakers of the language, college students are expected to possess the requisite amount of education, and they can be reckoned to have a more or less proficient command of the English language. The range of proficiency, however, differs as a result of a confluence of factors, such as academic training, social interaction, and exposure to various forms of media. A good number of English teachers also hardly regarded several SAE features highly pedagogically acceptable. It might sound inappropriate to posit that their uncertainty is caused by their unawareness of the rules and how the grammar of the English language works. As English teachers who have acquired the necessary degrees and teaching experiences, they are supposed to have a much higher level of proficiency in the language they teach; more so, they are more cognizant of the rules that

govern the English language. It is possible that the teachers' uncertainty is caused by self-doubt, i.e., they are overly concerned about deciphering what is highly acceptable from their own point of view vis-à-vis the perspective of others. They become unsure, and this raises self-doubt which causes them to pass poor judgment.

References:

Bautista, M.L.S. (2000a). Studies of Philippine English in the Philippines. *Philippine Journal of Linguistics 31*(1), 39-65.

Bautista, M.L.S. (2000b). *Defining standard Philippine English: Its status and grammatical features.* Manila: De la Salle University Press.

Bautista, M.L.S. (2000c). The grammatical features of educated Philippine English. In M.L. Bautista, T. LLamson, & B. Sibayan (Eds.), *Parangal cang Brother Andrew: Festschrift for Andrew Gonzalez on his sixtieth birthday* (pp. 146-158). Manila: Linguistic Society of the Phiilppines.

Bautista, M.L.S. (2001a). Studies of Philippine English: Implications for English language teaching in the Philippines. *Journal of Southeast Asian Education 2*(2), 271-295.

Bautista, M.L.S. (2001b) Attitudes of English language faculty in three leading Philippine universities towards Philippine English. *Asian Englishes 4*(1), 4-32.

Bautista, M.L.S. (2001c) Attitudes of selected Luzon University students and faculty towards Philippine English. In M. L. G. Tayao et al. (Eds.), *Rosario E. Maminta in focus: Selected writings in applied linguistic*s (pp. 263-273). Quezon City: Philippine Association for Language Teaching.

Bautista, M.L.S. (2003). The new Englishes and the teaching of grammar. In J.E. James (Ed.), *Grammar in the language classroom: Changing approaches and practices* (pp. 62-90). Anthology Series 43. Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.

Benson, J. & Clark, F. (1982). A guide for instrument development and validation. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy 36*(12), 789-800.

Bratt, S.E. (2009). Development of an instrument to assess pedagogical utility in e-learning systems. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Simon Fraser University.

Chambers, J.K. (2009). Education and the enforcement of standard English. In Y. Kawaguchi, M. Minegishi and J. Durand. *Corpus Analysis and Variation in Linguistics.* Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Gonzalez, A. (1983). When does an error become a feature of Philippine English? In R. Noss (Ed.), *Varieties of English in Southeast Asia. Anthology Series no. 11.* Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre, 150-72.

Llamzon, T. (1969). *Standard Filipino English.* Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press.

Trask, R.L. (2000). *The Dictionary of Historical and Comparative Linguistics.* London: Routledge.