

Living Through Their Accents: Perspectives and Attitudes Toward Philippine English among Basilectal Senior High School Students

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ABSTRACT

Linguistic insecurity and accent-based stigma persist as significant challenges for basilectal speakers of Philippine English in Philippine classrooms. Despite the growing recognition of Philippine English (PhE) as a legitimate localized variety, basilectal senior high school students who exhibit strong phonological influences from their native languages often navigate feelings of inadequacy, anxiety, and marginalization when using their natural variety of English in academic settings. This study explores the lived experiences, perspectives, and attitudes of basilectal Grade 11 senior high school students toward their Philippine English, particularly focusing on how they perceive their own accents, differences from "standard" forms, and the role of classroom practices in shaping their linguistic identity and confidence. The study used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach with eight purposively selected basilectal speakers from Felix Amante Senior High School. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and analyzed via thematic analysis. The study underscores that while basilectal features represent natural outcomes of language contact rather than deficiencies, dominant language ideologies in schools often privilege acrolectal or exonormative norms, affecting students' confidence and participation. These insights point to the need for more inclusive classroom practices that affirm Philippine English varieties and reduce accent-based stigma.

Keywords: Philippine English, World Englishes, Basilectal speakers, accent stigma, linguistic insecurity, language attitudes, linguistic identity, ESL classroom

INTRODUCTION

In the Philippines, English serves as an official language alongside Filipino, with millions proficient, often ranking the country highly in Asian English proficiency. This has given rise to Philippine English (PhE), a distinct variety featuring unique pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse influenced by local languages and culture. Pioneering efforts by linguists like Bautista (2004) have established PhE as a legitimate World English, yet debates persist among Filipino experts and educators about its status and acceptability. Despite its widespread everyday use, unconscious adoption in ESL classrooms frequently leads to misinterpretations of PhE features as errors in "standard" English (Sy-Tamco, 2022), highlighting a gap in understanding and acceptance.

The growing recognition of Philippine English (PhE) as a legitimate and institutionalized variety within the framework of World Englishes highlights the need for further study, particularly at the deeper level. Despite systematic instruction based on American standards, the English language inevitably underwent a process of localization. As Borlongan (2022) notes, grammatical and phonological deviations emerged early on, indicating that English was adapting to local linguistic realities rather than remaining a purely foreign entity. Philippine English has become an institutionalized variety and has developed particular features of pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse influenced by the native languages and culture of its Filipino speakers.

The widespread use of English has resulted in different varieties within PhE itself, ranging from the standard acrolect to, mesolect to the basilect, which is the variety most heavily influenced by local mother tongues. Tayao

(2004, 2008) explains that PhE has evolved distinct sound patterns shaped by the multilingual nature of Philippine society. These phonological features are most pronounced in basilectal speakers, whose pronunciation often carries strong traces of their native languages. Research confirms this phonological diversity through Berowa (2019), who found that speakers of different Philippine languages display distinct phonological features in English, while Haloc and Dita (2024) observed variations in vowels, consonants, and intonation among Ilocano speakers. Similarly, Urdas et al. (2018) identified vowel shifts among Filipino speakers, and Agbayani and Sy (2022) reported differences in how interdental fricatives ("th" sounds) are produced across social lects. These findings show that such variations are not mere errors but part of the natural development of PhE as a localized English variety.

Despite the linguistic legitimacy of these variations, the lived experience of basilectal speakers in academic settings is often with challenges. While PhE is accepted, a "standard" accent is still often privileged in schools. Quinto et al. (2024) emphasized that social attitudes toward local accents significantly influence learners' confidence and linguistic identity. This suggests that for many students, speaking English is not just a cognitive task but a phenomenological struggle of "living through" the judgment or insecurity attached to their accent. Abellana (2023) noted that Filipino high school learners face pronunciation challenges linked to exposure, while Fernandez and Lino (2022) highlighted that these regional segmental differences emerge early. For senior high school students, who are at a critical transition point toward higher education or the workforce, the pressure to conform to phonological standards can be intense.

Currently, most research on PhE focuses on grammar, vocabulary, or intelligibility (Tak et al., 2023), with limited qualitative studies exploring the specific experiences of basilectal speakers in secondary education. There is a gap in understanding how these students perceive, navigate, and experience their own distinct sound patterns. This is why the researchers came up with an investigation to explore the perspectives and attitudes of basilectal Philippine English speakers among senior high school students. By adopting a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, this research seeks to understand the perspectives and attitudes of basilectal Philippine English students.

This study aims to examine the perspectives and attitudes of the Senior High School students toward Philippine English as a legitimate localized variety with a particular focus on basilectal speakers. Specifically, it examined how basilectal students' experiences, perceptions of phonological and regional differences, and sociolinguistic factors influence their attitudes, acceptance, and confidence in using Philippine English.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What experiences have shaped basilectal students' attitudes toward their own Philippine English?
2. How do basilectal students perceive differences between their Philippine English and Standard English?
3. What are the perspectives and attitudes of the Senior High School students in Philippine English as a legitimate localized variety?
4. What emerging themes can be seen after examining the experiences, perceptions, and attitudes of basilectal senior high school students toward Philippine English in the context of classroom practices?

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research design, specifically hermeneutic phenomenology, was utilized in this study. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore the lived experiences, perspectives, and attitudes of basilectal senior high school students toward Philippine English as a legitimate localized variety of English. The study aimed to gather detailed narratives that allowed the researchers to interpret how students make meaning of their language use, linguistic identity, and classroom experiences. As a result, the study employed a hermeneutic phenomenological design that explored how basilectal students perceive and experience Philippine English within the educational setting.

The study involved eight (8) Grade 11 HUMSS students from Felix Amante Senior High School in San Pablo City, Laguna. These participants were purposively sampled to ensure that they met the predefined criteria of exhibiting strong and consistent basilectal features of Philippine English during classroom interactions. To identify suitable participants, the researchers conducted three classroom observation sessions focusing on the students' natural spoken English. This approach allowed the researchers to thoroughly examine the perspectives and lived experiences of students whose phonological features and language use were directly relevant to the study.

The study utilized semi-structured interviews to explore the participants' experiences and attitudes regarding Philippine English. The semi-structured interview guide consisted of open-ended and follow-up questions designed to elicit detailed responses about students' perceptions of their own English, their experiences in the classroom, and their views regarding the legitimacy of Philippine English. The interview questions developed for this study underwent expert validation by five specialists in Philippine English to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the objectives of the research.

Furthermore, the study was conducted after obtaining the necessary permissions and confirming the readiness of the participants. The researchers secured approval from the school administration and informed consent from the participants and their parents or guardians. Participants were informed about the objectives of the study, their involvement in the research process, and the confidentiality of all collected data and recordings. After obtaining consent, the researchers proceeded with participant screening through classroom observations and later conducted the interviews based on agreed schedules.

The one-on-one interviews were conducted through a face-to-face setup to encourage open and comfortable discussions among the participants. The researchers facilitated the interviews using the prepared researcher-made questionnaire while allowing participants the freedom to express their experiences and viewpoints. Follow-up questions were also used to deepen and clarify participants' responses. With the participants' permission, all interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and prepared for thematic analysis.

Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis was used to identify and examine recurring patterns and meanings within the participants' responses. The transcribed interviews were repeatedly reviewed to familiarize the researchers with the narratives and experiences shared by the participants. Significant statements and recurring ideas related to linguistic identity, confidence, classroom experiences, and perceptions of Philippine English were identified and coded. The codes were then grouped into categories and themes aligned with the study's research questions.

This thematic analysis within a hermeneutic phenomenological framework, the researchers interpreted how sociolinguistic experiences, classroom practices, and phonological differences shaped the participants' attitudes and perspectives toward Philippine English. The themes generated from the participants' narratives provided deeper insights into the experiences of basilectal students and contributed to a broader understanding of linguistic acceptance, identity, and the legitimacy of Philippine English in the classroom.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first theme, Linguistic Insecurity and Contextual Adaptation, emerged strongly as several students revealed significant self-perceived linguistic inadequacy. BES 6 reported struggling with grammar and limited vocabulary, often attempting only simple English expressions. BES 8 described difficulty in constructing sentences in English, while BES 2 admitted limited fluency. BES 3 added that speaking English felt uncomfortable and challenging. These accounts indicate that students evaluate their Philippine English through a deficit lens, focusing on gaps in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence construction rather than on communicative effectiveness. This internalized standard-language ideology leads to hesitation, simplification of ideas, and avoidance of complex expression, particularly in academic settings.

Under the same theme, language anxiety further reinforced avoidance behaviors. BES 3 expressed fear of being judged by others for poor English performance. BES 5 linked nervousness directly to awareness of personal limitations in English. BES 2 reported reduced confidence due to uncertainty about the correctness of responses.

Consequently, many students tended to remain silent or give only minimal answers to avoid mistakes, thereby limiting their practice opportunities.

Despite pervasive insecurity within this theme, students demonstrated functional and contextual adaptation. BES 2 noted using English primarily during recitations, English classes, and interactions with English teachers. BES 6 mentioned attempting English during English subjects, and BES 7 used it in reporting tasks and certain family interactions when required. BES 8 and BES 6 indicated a clear preference for Filipino or Tagalog in daily communication because it felt more comfortable and natural. At the same time, several students showed self-driven motivation. BES 1 explained that occasional use of English words helps sharpen comprehension and expands knowledge. BES 6 expressed determination to improve because being able to speak English properly is advantageous. BES 5 affirmed actively trying to speak English to train themselves, while BES 8 viewed mistakes as learning opportunities. These responses illustrate pragmatic code-switching and resilience alongside persistent insecurity.

The second theme, Evaluative and Affective Responses toward English Use, highlighted mixed feelings among the participants. On the positive side, BES 1 conveyed happiness and satisfaction at being able to use English even at a basic level. BES 4 reported feeling confident when able to produce correct English responses. However, dissatisfaction was more dominant. BES 2 expressed dissatisfaction with personal progress, noting that even in senior high school, English competence remained limited. BES 3 felt inadequate, particularly when unable to respond in continuous, fluent English.

Within this theme, social evaluation intensified affective responses. BES 2 felt judged when using English, while BES 4 observed that speaking English among friends sometimes turned into a subject of ridicule. Self-consciousness during performance appeared clearly when BES 2 described becoming nervous and overthinking whether responses were correct.

Nevertheless, a growing acceptance of Philippine English variation emerged under this theme. BES 8 considered their manner of speaking normal among Filipinos, with no inherent mistake in it. BES 5 and BES 7 described accents and variations as normal occurrences. BES 7 further linked such differences to one's place of birth and upbringing. These responses reflect a gradual shift toward viewing localized forms as legitimate and contextually appropriate rather than deficient.

The third theme, Linguistic Awareness and Development in Habitual Language Use, showed how repeated exposure fostered awareness of linguistic variation. BES 4 contrasted American English pronunciation with local practices, while BES 7 pointed out specific differences in word pronunciation. Multiple students (BES 1, BES 6, BES 8) described such variations as natural due to cultural and national differences and emphasized the need to accept them. Students linked their English to Filipino identity; BES 7 noted that certain speech patterns signal Filipino identity, and BES 2 explained that Filipinos naturally adapt English to their own patterns.

Under this theme, proficiency was viewed as developmental rather than fixed. Students positioned themselves as less proficient than teachers (BES 1, BES 2, BES 6) and described their own level as beginner or below average (BES 3, BES 7). They recognized improvement comes through practice and exposure. Contextual adaptation was evident in BES 8's view that people should speak the language in which they feel most comfortable. Resistance to rigid norms appeared when BES 2 asserted that their way of speaking English is not wrong, and BES 8 suggested that standards depend on the country or context one is in.

In summary, basilectal students' attitudes toward Philippine English are shaped by deep linguistic insecurity and anxiety that drive avoidance and self-monitoring under the theme of Linguistic Insecurity and Contextual Adaptation, balanced by mixed emotions and growing acceptance under Evaluative and Affective Responses toward English Use, alongside gradual awareness and contextual flexibility under Linguistic Awareness and Development in Habitual Language Use. Their responses reveal a dynamic tension between deficit perspectives rooted in standard-language ideologies and an evolving recognition of Philippine English as a functional, identity-linked, and legitimate variety. These patterns align with broader research on World Englishes, language anxiety, and the deconstruction of native-speakerism.

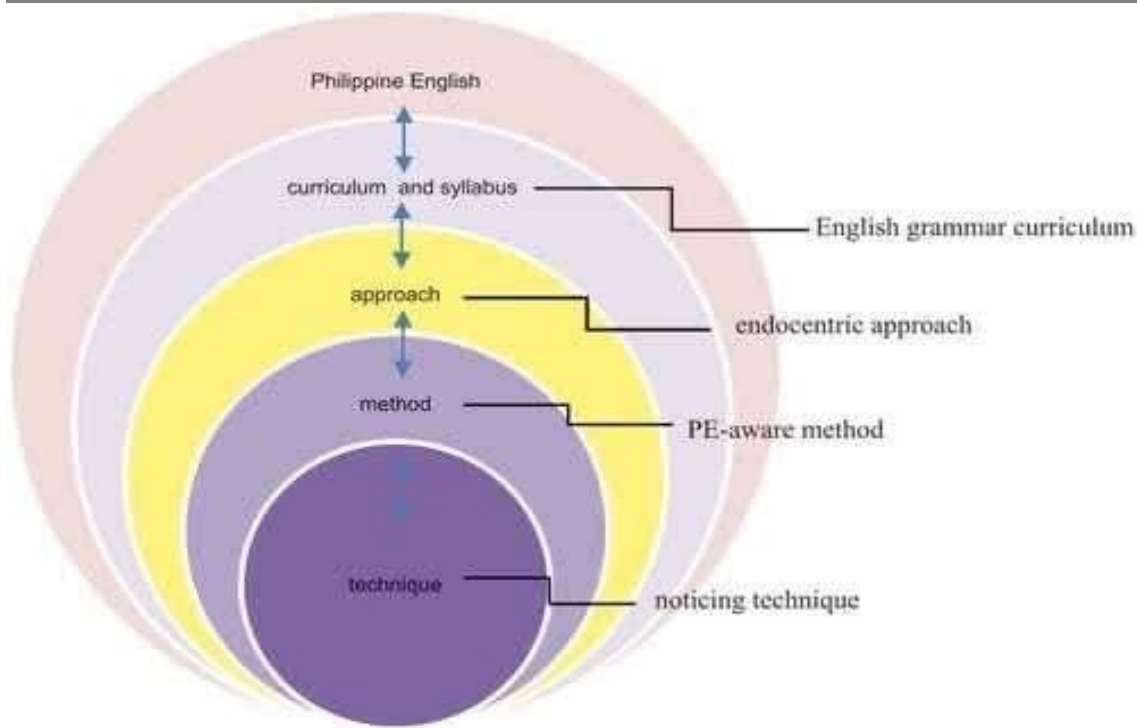


Figure 1. Philippine English Concentric Empowerment Framework (PECEF)

The findings presented show that basilectal Grade 11 students navigate significant linguistic insecurity, marked by struggles with grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence construction, alongside language anxiety, fear of judgment, and avoidance behaviors in formal settings, while also demonstrating pragmatic contextual adaptation, emerging acceptance of Philippine English variations as normal and identity-linked, and gradual linguistic awareness through habitual use. This dynamic interplay of deficit perspectives and growing ownership strongly supports the proposed concentric pedagogical framework, which places Philippine English at the core to affirm students' localized variety as legitimate rather than deficient. Anchored by an English grammar curriculum that integrates Philippine English features, the framework addresses students' self-perceived inadequacies and dissatisfaction by validating their existing repertoire and reducing the pressure of exonormative standards. It adopts an endocentric approach that counters social evaluation anxiety and hierarchical self-positioning by centering Filipino identity and cultural context, thereby fostering pride and confidence. At the methodological level, a PhE-aware method builds on students' natural noticing of linguistic variation by systematically exposing them to authentic Philippine English models and flexible language use strategies, supporting their contextual code-switching practices. Finally, the noticing technique at the innermost layer capitalizes on students' developmental mindset and self-driven motivation by guiding conscious attention to Philippine English features, transforming implicit awareness into explicit understanding, and promoting resilience and ownership. Overall, this layered framework directly responds to the tensions documented in the data by transforming linguistic insecurity into empowerment, anxiety into confidence, and self-criticism into affirmative, context-sensitive language development.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that basilectal senior high school students navigate their use of Philippine English through an ongoing interplay of linguistic insecurity, adaptability, and emerging acceptance shaped by institutional and social expectations. The findings reveal that students often experience self-doubt regarding grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency due to the dominance of Standard English norms, leading to anxiety, hesitation, and limited participation in classroom interactions. Despite these challenges, students demonstrate resilience by strategically code-switching between English and Filipino, prioritizing meaningful communication over grammatical perfection, and gradually recognizing Philippine English features as valid forms of expression. Their experiences reflect a continuous negotiation between external standards of "correct" English and their own linguistic identity, showing that they are active participants in shaping their language practices. The researchers therefore infer that while linguistic insecurity remains prevalent, the growing acceptance of Philippine English

highlights the importance of creating supportive and inclusive classroom environments that emphasize communicative competence, validate students' linguistic identities, and foster greater confidence and participation in English use.

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, several recommendations are proposed for different stakeholders. English teachers and classroom practitioners are encouraged to adopt more inclusive and affirming pedagogies that recognize Philippine English as a legitimate variety rather than a deficient form of English. They may lessen excessive emphasis on grammatical accuracy and pronunciation during speaking activities, avoid discouraging public corrections, and create supportive classrooms that discourage peer judgment and ridicule while integrating discussions on World Englishes and language variation to strengthen students' linguistic awareness and confidence. Basilectal senior high school students are likewise encouraged to sustain their motivation in using English and develop a healthier perception of Philippine English as a valid form of communication, understanding that effective communication is more important than rigid adherence to "standard" norms. This recognition may help reduce stigma and build greater confidence in English use. Meanwhile, future researchers are encouraged to explore the long-term effects of inclusive language pedagogies on students' confidence, participation, and academic performance, as well as investigate teachers' attitudes and practices toward Philippine English and examine intervention strategies that may reduce linguistic insecurity. Comparative studies between urban and rural contexts are also recommended to better understand how contextual factors influence the effectiveness of inclusive language pedagogies.

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