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**Vernacular Language Origin and Students’ Accent Neutralization for Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) Employability**

Elma C. Sultan1

College of Arts and Sciences, Samar State University, Catbalogan City

**Abstract**

The study concentrated on Vernacular Language Origin and Students’ Accent Neutralization of the college fourth year students. It assessed the respondent’s locale profile and the vernacular language origin in terms of local dialect/s and domestic language/s used. It determined the significant relationship between vernacular language origin and accent neutralization of the respondents and the proposed activities to adopt in neutralizing students’ accent. It utilized the descriptive-correlational method of research determining the significant relationship between vernacular language origin and students’ accent neutralization. The researcher used: (1) questionnaire divided into three parts: the first part identified the students’ locale; the second part determined the respondents’ domestic language/s used while the third part identified their local language/s used, (2) validated accent neutralization tool, (3) statistical treatments in the analysis of data: percentage to determine the profile of the students; chi-square test for independence to determine the significant relationship between vernacular language origin and students’ accent neutralization. Findings of the study showed that vowel and diphthong sounds production, domestic and local languages in indigenous and native dialects are significantly related to accent neutralization. While slow reading speed has a higher possibility in affecting accent neutralization. These caused designing a 50 – hour short – term program for accent neutralization focusing incorrect vowel and diphthong sounds production and appropriate reading speed in preparation for the respondents’ search for BPO employment. This short – term program ran for 5 hours in a day for five days in a week.

**Keywords:** dialect, vernacular, indigenous native, language, accent neutralization, reading

speed, vowels, diphthongs, language origin

**I. INTRODUCTION**

As the global marketplace expands, a new branch of English learning related to ESL has become very intriguing. This field is often called Accent Neutralization or Accent Reduction. Everyone has an accent. Some accents can be fascinating and attractive. Yours may be more or less noticeable depending on where you came from and whether or not English is your first language. A strong accent, however, can interfere with the process of communication and make personal interaction difficult. Activities as simple as purchasing groceries, or as significant as closing a major business deal, can be complicated by the inability to communicate clearly.

154 Elma C. Sultan

There are three major components that make-up an accent: Sounds (consonants and vowels), Rhythm (stressed and unstressed words), and Intonation (the rise and fall of pitch in a sentence) (Corrigan, http://www.leaderinstitute.com/music-101-the-key-to-accent-reduction/). But first what is an accent in general sense? Accent is distinguishable differences in the way people of different nationalities, cultures and races pronounce the words of a particular language, e.g. English. According to Ashish Gupta (2011) CEO from a call centre training institute, is one that removes “regional biases”. Furthermore, Daniel Jones stresses that a neutral accent is important and safe that can’t offend anyone with it and diction devoid of mother tongue influence. It is one that doesn’t betray where you come from and comprehensible to everyone. In that, there’s no regional stereotype to obscure the meaning of the lines.

Accent is the rhythm of music of our speech. Acquiring another accent is like learning songs (Estorgue, 2013). When we try to learn a new song, we study both its lyrics and its melody. If we just study the lyrics (in this case, the grammar of the language we’re studying) and we just ignore the melody by using the melody of the song we are most familiar with (using the accent and pronunciation of our mother tongue), we sound different from what is expected. Each language and dialect has its rhythm that explains why we have different accents even if we all speak in English – our second language per se.

In fact, when students were asked “Why do people learn a second language?” these top five reasons among her students of English class came out, ‘to be competitive’, ‘I want to understand others’, ‘to enhance my communication skills’, ‘For me, to communicate well with others especially foreigners’, and ‘to be fluent in speaking English’. From the answers, we could say that the purposes of language teaching are far from straightforward (Kluwer, 2007). That the different goals include benefits for the learner’s mind such as manipulating language, for the learner’s future career and comprehension, self-development, a way-in to the mother tongue, a means of communicating with those who speak another language and building self-confidence. Being in the academe for more than eight years, varied students, teachers and administrators concerns are surfaced and solutions are undertaken to resolve them. Most of the time, it is undeniable for a classroom teacher to acknowledge problems and give necessary sometimes immediate solutions.

However, one of the common and obvious concerns in the classroom is the students’ language skills which oftentimes educators consider to be the foundation of students’ performance. English teacher considers pronunciation, rhythm of speech and reading speed an unresolved situation for years.

This has likewise been the situations the researcher observed in her teaching profession for almost a decade. Her college students even professionals who enrol in the short – term courses struggle to perform these three areas: pronunciation, the intonation and the reading speed. These areas of language are especially known to be the accent neutralization problems of the students. The researcher found that her students had a hard time neutralizing their accent during speech class from these major components that make up an accent: Sounds (consonants and vowels); Rhythm (stressed and unstressed); and Intonation (the rise and fall of pitch in a sentence). Thus, the researcher made a personal evaluation of why students have this so-called strong accent. It came out to be that she found out one factor affecting their accent: the languages used at home and in their locality. These might have a great deal in accent neutralization.

Therefore, the present study wants to show that students’ vernacular language origin plays an important role to their accent neutralization. She also hopes to prove that vernacular language origin affects students’ accent neutralization. With this study, she needs to prove that vernacular language origin does have a significant impact in students’ accent neutralization.

155 Elma C. Sultan

Additionally, this is something that drives the researcher to conduct this study for her to find out if there is a relationship between vernacular language origin and the accent neutralization of the students. She likewise desires to find out what degree of relationship this effect has on their accent neutralization.

**II. METHODOLOGY**

**A. Research Methods**

This study utilized the descriptive-correlational method of research. Such research design determined the significant relationship between vernacular language origin and students’ English language accent neutralization with the aim of the respondents’ employability in BPO market.

**B. Respondents of the Study**

The fourth year college students in the College of Arts and Sciences with an accent analysis assessment results from severe to moderate problem were the respondents of the study to realize the expected outputs and maximize assessment of their accent until fully neutralized.

**C. Sampling Non-Probability Based on the Purpose of the Researcher**

The study adopted a non-probability purposive sampling wherein the researcher identified the population of the fourth year college students by assessing the accuracy of intonation, speed in reading and level of accent neutralization. Subsequently, students who got a value of 0.0 (severe problem) to 0.50 (moderate problem) were classified as the respondents of the study.

**D. Research Instruments**

The researcher used a researcher-made questionnaire as a research instrument divided into three parts. Part one identifies the students’ locale. The second part determines the respondents’ domestic language/s used while part three of the questionnaire identifies the respondents’ local languages used. On the other hand, to analyse the accent of the respondents, the researcher employed the ALTA Den’s Accent Analysis Assessment Tool. The assessment tool is categorized into five: Pronunciation A – Sound Phonemes composed of forty-two (42) words with consonant sounds; Pronunciation B – Sound Phonemes composed of twenty-three words (23) with consonant clusters; Pronunciation C – Sound Phonemes composed of twenty (20) words with sixteen words with vowel sounds and four words with diphthong sounds; Category D – Rhythm of Speech is composed of three levels of intonation: statements, yes/no questions and tag questions; and Category E – measures the reading speed with the classifications as too fast, about right and too slow. Each category is valued as 1.48 (No Problem); 0.99 (Minor Problem); 0.50 (Moderate Problem); and 0.0 (Severe Problem) except for Reading Speed which is only valued ranging only from 1.48 – 0.50: 1.48 (About right), 0.99 (Too fast), 0.50 (Too slow). The scores are summed up and divided by the number of words in each category to get the total score while the total is taken from the total scores of each category divided by corresponding total categories.

**E. Validation of Instrument**

156 Elma C. Sultan

The validation of instrument was conducted among the selected first year college students of Christ the King College, Calbayog City. After a dry run, there were revisions as reflected in the analysis of the result. Inappropriate questions and items in the questionnaires were omitted, and considerable comment was incorporated.

**F. Data Gathering**

The researcher sent a letter of permission to the dean of the College of Arts and Sciences for the respondents of the study to field the questionnaire and conduct the pre- and post- assessment and discussion on accent neutralization. Upon the approval of the dean, the researcher sent a letter of request to the department’s clerk asking for the list of names of all first year college students. She also asked permission from the class advisers to pull out from their classes the identified respondents to answer the questionnaire. However, before the respondents answered the questionnaire, she explained the purpose of the conduct of the study and discussed to them the directions in the questionnaire. Each respondent answered the items in the questionnaire by checking the box that of the answer.

After retrieving the questionnaires, the researcher gathered and tallied the responses and submitted the data to the statistician for proper treatment.

On the next day and onwards until the assessment was through, the researcher conducted the accent analysis assessment. Every respondent underwent a one-on-one assessment on pronunciation with eighty-seven (87) words comprising the consonant, syllabic consonant, vowel and diphthong sounds where the respondent needed to read the words twice; fifteen sentences for intonation assessment where the respondent had to read five (5) declarative sentences, five (5) yes-no questions and five (5) tag question sentences with proper intonation; and a reading material with 230 words where the respondent read with average speed of 125 – 150 words minute. Each category in the English language accent neutralization assessment was measured and recorded through validated Accent Assessment Tool that served as rubric for the assessment.

After which, she tabulated the assessment results and submitted the data once again to the statistician for appropriate treatment.

Statistical treatments were used to find out the extent of the respondents’ accent neutralization problem and from these a speech program is designed for the students.

**G. Statistical Treatments**

The study utilized percentages to describe the profile of respondents, chi-square test to determine relationships between vernacular language origin and students’ accent neutralization.

**III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

After a closer examination, it was found out that majority of the respondents live within the locality with the highest frequency distribution of 52 out of 78 or 66.7 percent of the population. The data further showed that 65 out of 78 or 82 percent are using the English language. Most of the respondents use English language as their indigenous language domestically and locally; while a greater proportion of the respondents of 39 or 50 percent use both *waray-waray* language and some none *waray-waray* dialects. This implies that the respondents use different native languages in their perspective.

157 Elma C. Sultan

Table 1

Students’ Accent Neutralization Problem in Vowel and Diphthong Sounds

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Extent of Problem | Frequency | Percent |
| Minor Problem | 35 | 48.87 |
| Moderate Problem | 43 | 55.13 |
| Total | 78 | 100 |

The highest frequency of the Filipino dialect/s used is other regional languages other than *waray-waray* with a total frequency of 51 or 65.4 percent.

Considering the focus of the research study to identify respondents’ moderate problems in accent neutralization which are on consonant sounds, consonant clusters, vowels and diphthong sounds, intonation and reading speed, the data showed two apparent moderate problems: the vowel and diphthong sound production with a total number of frequency of 43 or 55.13 percent and the intonation patterns with a frequency of 42 or 53.9 percent.

This goes to demonstrate that vowel and diphthong sounds production which is one component of accent neutralization are significantly related to the vernacular language origin. It has a cluster obtained r- value of 0.27 and this r- value is significant based on the computed t- value of 2.44 with the critical value of 1.98 at df = 76 and level of significance set at 0.05 (two-tailed).

Table 2

Relationship Between Vernacular Language Origin and Accent

Neutralization Among Respondents

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Extent of Problem | df | Vernacular on Indigenous | | | Decision | Evaluation |
| r-value | Fisher’s tc | Critical Value |
| Consonant | 76 | 0.14 | 1.26 | 1.98 | Accept Ho | NS |
| Clusters | 76 | -0.01 | 0.09 | 1.98 | Accept Ho | NS |
| Vowel/Diphthongs | 76 | 0.27 | 2.44 | 1.98 | Reject Ho | S |
| Intonation | 76 | 0.12 | 1.05 | 1.98 | Accept Ho | NS |
| Reading | 76 | -0.06 | 0.52 | 1.98 | Accept Ho | NS |
| Vernacular Language Origin on Filipino | | | | | | |
| Consonant | 76 | 0.05 | 0.48 | 1.98 | Accept Ho | NS |
| Clusters | 76 | -0.01 | 0.09 | 1.98 | Accept Ho | NS |
| Diphthongs | 76 | 0.27 | 2.44 | 1.98 | Reject Ho | S |
| Intonation | 76 | 0.12 | 1.05 | 1.98 | Accept Ho | NS |
| Reading Speed | 76 | -0.13 | 1.14 | 1.98 | Accept Ho | NS |

Domestic and local languages used by the respondents are significantly related to accent neutralization. From among the three classifications of languages utilized in the study as indigenous, native and Filipino dialects, consistently both indigenous and native languages have a significant relationship to accent neutralization. In local-indigenous, the obtained r- value is 0.51. The computed r- values is significant based on the computed t- value of 5.17 with the critical value of 1.96 at df = 76, level of significance set at 0.05. While in local-native, the obtained r- value is 0.23. This r- value is significant based on the computed t- value which is 0.26. The critical value is 1.96 at df = 76, level of significance set at 0.05.

158 Elma C. Sultan

Similarly, in domestic-indigenous, the obtained r- value is 0.02 and the computed t- value is 0.17. Thus, the obtained t- value is greater than the critical t- value with the level of significance set at 0.05.

Table 3

Relationship Between Domestic and Indigenous Language to Accent Neutralization

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Domestic - Indigenous | df | Vernacular on Indigenous | | | Decision | Evaluation |
| r-value | Fisher’s tc | Critical Value |
| Local-Indigenous | 76 | 0.51 | 5.17 | 1.96 | Reject Ho | S |
| Local-Native | 76 | 0.23 | 2.06 | 1.96 | Reject Ho | S |
| Local-Filipino | 76 | -0.02 | 0.17 | 1.96 | Accept Ho | NS |

Table 4

Relationship Between Domestic and Native Language to Accent Neutralization

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Domestic - Indigenous | df | Vernacular on Indigenous | | | Decision | Evaluation |
| r-value | Fisher’s tc | Critical Value |
| Local-Indigenous | 76 | 0.02 | 0.17 | 1.96 | Reject Ho | S |
| Local-Native | 76 | 0.26 | 2.35 | 1.96 | Reject Ho | S |
| Local-Filipino | 76 | -0.15 | 1.32 | 1.96 | Accept Ho | NS |

Table 5

Relationship Between Domestic and Filipino Language to Accent Neutralization

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Domestic - Indigenous | df | Vernacular on Indigenous | | | Decision | Evaluation |
| r-value | Fisher’s tc | Critical Value |
| Local-Indigenous | 76 | 0.02 | 0.17 | 1.96 | Reject Ho | S |
| Local-Native | 76 | 0.26 | 2.35 | 1.96 | Reject Ho | S |
| Local-Filipino | 76 | -0.15 | 1.32 | 1.96 | Accept Ho | NS |

**IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Considering the results of the study, it is statistically evident that respondents’ vernacular languages used at home either in native – languages of regional origin (Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilokano, Hiligaynon, Waray-Waray, Kapampangan, Bikol, Albay, Pangasinan, Maranao, Maguindanao, Kinaray-a, Tausug, Boholano, others) and indigenous – languages of international origin (English, Spanish, Hokkein, Cantonese, Mandarin, Chavacano, Malayo-Polynesian, others) are significant to accent neutralization. This vernacular languages utilization transmits to vowel/diphthong sounds pronunciation which is similarly significant to neutralizing the accent. Furthermore, this concludes that the more the students are exposed to using English language (indigenous) at home, the greater the possibility their accent be neutral and the more the respondent is exposed to using Tagalog/Waray-Waray at home, the greater the probability he/she acquires strong accent.

An intense vowel/diphthong sounds production intervention must be given to language instruction in developing accent neutralization and its commitment to using English in language discussion among students. It will prepare them in the global workforce starting in the interview process qualifying them to getting a job.

159 Elma C. Sultan

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160 Elma C. Sultan

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