



Intelligible and Comprehensible Approaches in Teaching Pronunciation in the First Years of Studying English in the Philippines

Correspondence: Mark Anthony Reyes Aguion Bulacan State University, Philippines.
<markaguion@gmail.com>

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Abstract

Filipinos are good speakers of English. Filipinos can communicate fluently and be understood by many foreigners. Even though Filipinos are known to have a sweet spot in speaking English, still, many foreigners fail to understand lots of their spoken words and are too accented to speak due to the influence of their native language. The researcher finds it an issue and would like to think of the best approach to fit the teaching of pronunciation in the Philippine education system. This paper synthesizes the idea of promoting the teaching of comprehensibility and intelligibility in L2 pronunciation. This paper elaborates on the need to press these approaches in an English classroom. The collected information presented in this paper has been generalized to two: the nativeness approach in teaching L2 pronunciation and the intelligibility principles. The analysis concludes that applying the intelligibility teaching approach as a pedagogy for L2 learners' pronunciation classes. In addition, this paper likes to specify the needs of executing this approach to the first years of education in the Philippines. Since the first years of learning hold the foundation years that can powerfully and significantly affect the students' learning attitude, it is essential to pinpoint that this approach is more suited for them. Thus, this paper recommends that the said approach is beneficial to promoting the students' pronunciation. Lastly, the researcher would like to exhort future researchers to make learning materials promoting the comprehensibility and intelligibility approach in teaching pronunciation.

Keywords: nativeness approach, intelligibility, comprehensibility

1. Introduction

Indeed, the Philippines is an English-speaking country. According to MBBS Abroad Study Consultancy, the Philippines is ranked as the third-largest English speaker globally. More than 95% of Filipinos speak English, making the English language recognized as an official language. In a blog by Look Upgrade (2019), considering that English is taught at a very early age is one of the many reasons why Filipinos can speak English fluently. Filipinos are widely exposed to the English language everywhere: advertisements, road signs, instructions on the sachets and cartons of any products, and many more. Mariñas (2021) concluded three reasons why Filipinos are appraised as among the top English-users in the business field: Business Destination for the investors worldwide, English-instruction Education for universities and schools, and the Filipinos' extensive cognizance of the Western culture. Undoubtedly, the Philippines is one of the acknowledged good English speakers globally. In fact, many international students who want to learn the English language go to the Philippines to study English rather than go to native English countries. Jang (2018) studied why South Korean students choose to go to the Philippines to learn English. This paper has discovered that the Philippines is a competitive English learning space in the ELT industry since it can offer a suitable emotionally and pedagogically comprehensive learning environment. Thus, undoubtedly, the Philippines' use of the English language marks a good image in the globe, an ample proof that Philippine English is a legitimate English variant language (Oxford English Dictionary, as cited in Kurt, 2021).

2. Filipino English Accent and Asian English Accents

Filipinos, usually, when speaking English, have a very distinct accent. Though unique, the Filipino accent is loved by many, especially the ESL students. Kurt (2021) lists four reasons why ESL students go for Filipino English accent rather than the English accents: (a) easily comprehensible, (b) closely sounds like American English accent, (c) the "Sexiest accent in Asia" and "21st Sexiest accent in the world," (d) the most picked-choice accent by BPO corporations from countries whose native language is English. Consequently, the BPO and the ESL industries in the Philippines hold a good reputation globally. However, though the Philippines is an English-speaking nation, it cannot hide the fact that it is not a native English country. A blog posted in what Michael likes blogspot (2013) stated why people from the Philippines could not become better English speakers. Accordingly, Filipinos have a strong Filipino accent, lousy grammar knowledge, and Filipino negative views on speaking English. Though not intended for mockery, this blog opens a mentality that Filipinos still have room for betterment in English speaking. Orelus (2020) posits that this world highly values the standard accent resulting in accent discrimination. When going to foreign countries, Filipinos are being easily recognized because of their distinct accent. Jo Koy, a very famous comedian, even makes jokes about the Filipinos, and other Asians, to tell easily apart from other nationalities. In a YouTube video uploaded by "Netflix is A Joke" titled "Jo Koy Reveals How to Tell Asians Apart | Netflix Is a Joke," Asians have funny accents, making them evidence that they are Asians. Though the content of the video was funny, the fact that the accents are being subjected to mockery is not good. Some foreigners even make fun of them for having such a thick English-speaking accent – being labeled weird, that causes being bullied. Ro (2021), in an article by BBC, Asians, Africans, and Middle Easterners' English speaking are subjected to linguistic racism. Moreover, it has been found that many people who have experienced being ostracized and abashed due to their language appear to acquire an inferiority complex (Canagarajah, 2019, as cited in Ro, 2021). The researcher finds this alarming; thus, a pedagogical implication to be recommended might help to address this issue.

3. Intelligible and Comprehensible Pronunciation

Accent, as defined by Merriam Webster, is either a singular person or a distinct group of people's unique way of speaking a language's tone and inflection. Each race, even a small group of people in tribes, speaks differently. Derwing (2018) believed that instead of thinking of accent as a natural problem, regarding it as a normal phenomenon is much better. Kolesnikova, Liubimova, Muromtseva and Muromtsev



(2021) have concluded that encouraging intelligibility-based pronunciation instruction becomes the primary basis for checking the second-language speakers of English's speaking performance in the academic field. It would open people's minds to accept that not having a native-English accent cannot hinder them from being more likely to engage in international academic events such as international conferences. Levis (2020) defined the Intelligibility principle as more suitable than Nativeness Principle regarding the pronunciation teaching approach. Accordingly, the intelligibility principle is highly regarded for some reasons: (1) it can cover the broader concerns in language teaching, (2) teaching goals are effectively addressed, (3) it is the most appropriate way to deal with all the contexts about learning a second language pronunciation, and (4) it can open us the reality of the various ways of pronunciations and its social consequences. O'Brien et al. (2019) collected that the traditional way to learn pronunciation has been long inappropriate because many studies have proven that students who learn a language do not need to become a native-like style in phonetics and phonology comprehensibility and intelligibility matter. Particularly, Saito and Plonsky (2019) have scrutinized seventy-seven (77) studies published from 1982 to 2017 about the teaching of L2 pronunciation. Accordingly, Saito and Plonsky have concluded that since teaching L2 pronunciation covers an extensive scope, future researchers should focus on which construct it covers time frame, effectivity, and analysis. Though they have mentioned comprehensibility as a specific example on the long run time frame, the researcher made it an aspiration to go on investigating the comprehensibility approach of pronunciation teaching.

Munro and Derwing (1999, as cited in Isaacs and Trofimovich, 2012) defined comprehensibility as how listeners perceive and understand a speech based on how it can easily be understood. Thus, focusing on comprehensibility as a goal for the instruction in an L2 pronunciation should be considered. Prioritizing the L2 learners' comprehensibility as the primary instruction in the classroom can open to more acceptance of other English variants. Accent discrimination, hence, if not being eliminated, at least, can be mitigated. Gordon and Darcy (2016) studied how comprehensible speech among L2 learners can be achieved. The mentioned study has discovered that through explicit instruction, both the suprasegmental and segmental spoken features can be incorporated in speaking/communication classes exponentially, bringing a more standard comprehensible pronunciation to the learners. This revelation pedagogically implies that even without exposing the L2 learners to a particularly intensive and long-time pronunciation training, these L2 learners can effectively be instructed in honing their pronunciation skills in a localized context classroom and a short duration.

Therefore, the researcher is open to either developing a material that promotes pronunciation learning by intelligibility and comprehensibility approach or investigating more profound the use of intelligibility-used instruction or comprehensibility-used instruction as a pedagogical approach in language learning.

4. English Education in the Philippines

English education in the Philippines has been envied by many countries. For instance, in Japan, only since 2020 when the teaching of English as a formal course starting from the Grade 5 elementary students (International Trade Administration, 2020). Many have thought that that was one of the main reasons Japan cannot speak the English language fluently. However, in the Philippines, the Basic Education Curriculum (BEC), which only has ten (10) basic years of education (the implemented curriculum in the Philippines before the current mandated curriculum), even though considered an outdated style since the Philippines was the only country in Asia following this short period of primary education learning, had included the English language education as a formal subject in elementary years. After the BEC, there has been a switch of the new curriculum, including the twelve (12) years of basic education, the K-12. But still, the English subject is among the five core subjects being learned by the students. Hence, even before the new curriculum in the Philippines has been implemented, the learning of the English subject in the Philippines has been a long-running situation, which many people think is one of the biggest reasons Filipinos can speak English well.

However, Barrot (2021) concluded that the reform in the English curriculum under the K-12 faces many challenges and issues if viewed to the demands of 21st-century learning. Barrot (2021) summarized three problems that the English curriculum in the Philippines is experiencing: mismatching attributions of the new curriculum to the 21st century's essential principles in language learning, the confusing roles of the teachers and the learners, and the teaching-learning process, and the limited time being spent for English exposure to the students. Stated in the first reason mentioned, innovations in language learning must be implemented and executed, and only then the 21st-century language teaching principles are achieved. Since this paper seeks to synthesize the possible application of intelligibility and comprehensibility on L2 pronunciation teaching, this paper wants to find a solution to contribute to this concern.

The researcher believes that recommending these approaches in the L2 pronunciation teaching in the Philippines is a good start. The researcher has observed that many, if not some, Filipino speakers of English are still incomprehensible and unintelligible when speaking. It has brought a big concern to the researcher since it is an important matter. The Philippines' new curriculum follows a spiral progression of learning the English subject. Learners from grade 1 to grade 3 learn introductory exposition and familiarity English language only. It is a good foundation for them to have a strong background in the English language. Then, grade 4 to grade 6 students develop their intermediate learning of the language. These years are the pivot of learning, and backing up a good foundation can be an excellent way to sustain the learning. Thus, this paper wants to start the application of intelligibility and comprehensibility teaching of L2 pronunciation in these levels. Making materials suited for the target competencies and the innovative instruction from the intelligibility and comprehensibility approaches integrated with the 21st-century learning principles. Pedagogically, the same applies to how it can be delivered to the classroom.

5. Conclusion

Innovation to teaching a language not only varies to a single country but also varies and applies to all. This world is vastly changing, so does everything about it, and everything about it must cope and integrate. Only then real change for the betterment is achieved. Indeed, learning pedagogies and published and unpublished pieces of knowledge are still in their early form, and many are still yet to be uncovered and enhanced. One step to achieving it is this paper claim that hopefully can contribute to the already existing knowledge on teaching and learning process, particularly the language learning and perhaps, acquisition. This paper fully concludes that there is a need to switch from the thinking of nativeness superiority to modern and more widely-accepted ones – the intelligibility and comprehensibility ideologies. Pedagogically, based on the collated information from different papers, studies, blogs, and other references, comprehensibility, and intelligibility approach on language teaching, specifically the pronunciation teaching and learning, are the trends, and not just to follow the modernity, but to improve the apparent loopholes of the current approaches and techniques. As dynamic as it is, language lives to its image of being demanding and evolving. Thus, learning and teaching must also go along with the changes. Crafting materials and pedagogically implementing the suggested approaches are needed to be in consideration to go along with the needs of innovation and upgrade the topical teaching methodologies.

This paper only focuses on the Philippines since the researcher has been observing the pressing matter on the locale. This paper is limited, but the researcher is hoping that future evidence and investigation will be conducted to further and deeply support the aims being intended in this paper.

Bio-note

Mr. Mark Anthony Reyes Aguion is an online ESL teacher of an online company called “Native Camp” where he teaches mostly Japanese students. He is currently taking his masters in English Language Education at Bulacan State University Graduate School Malolos, Bulacan Philippines. His research interests are TESOL and applied linguistics.

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