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Phonological Varieties of Interdental Fricative Voiced and Voiceless 'TH' among Philippine English Lectal Speakers

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Abstract

Guided by the research works of Tayao (2004) and de Leon (2016), and the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) conventions of sounds, this study describes the phonological varieties of interdental fricative voiced and voiceless 'th' among the six lectal speakers. Six participants took part to embody the speakers from acrolect, mesolect, and basilect groups. With the use of a poem read by the participants and which was audio- taped for transcription purposes, the following research objectives were attained: 1) frequency of deviation of each speaker from the GAE to a new variety of pronouncing words in terms of voiced interdental fricatives and voiceless interdental fricatives; 2) lectal categories which conformed to the GAE pronunciation; and 3) the rate of speaking of each participant. Analysis exhibits that pronunciation of words with regard to both voiced and voiceless interdental fricatives, the basilectal speakers produced the greatest number of deviations, followed by acrolectals while mesolectals have the least. In other words, it is the mesolectal speakers who conformed and observed well the General American English (GAE) standard of pronunciation. However, as to their rates of speaking, the acrolectal speakers emerged to be the fastest.

Keywords

Philippine English, lectal speakers, interdental fricative voiced th, interdental fricative voiceless th, speaking rate

1. Introduction

The use of Philippine English (henceforth, PE) as a standard English language has sparked heated discussions over the years. PE, according to several linguists, is no longer an inferior version; instead, it is worthy of being acknowledged as a standard system. In fact, PE is used by Filipinos as a genuine nativized variation of English in different contexts such as bureaucracy, science and technology,

judiciary, higher education, the legislative, intellectual debate, etc. (Dayag, 2012). In 1993, McKaughan claimed that PE is an independent English variety with a self-regulating system. Also, according to Bautista (2000, p. 20), as reported by De Leon (2016), Philippine English is not English that is wrongly taught in a second language classroom nor a variety that violates the American English standards. Its peculiarity is not an error committed by those who are not native speakers of American English, but it is due to the first language influence. Its nativized structure makes it distinct from the Standard American English.

The crucial thing to note about the aforementioned is that PE along with other varieties has its own phonological features that are distinct in reality. This corroborates with the statement of Bolton and Bautista 2009 that PE has turned to be a World Englishes variety having a localized lexicon, discrete pronunciation, and even applied in creative writing in English by Filipino writers.

Schneider (2016) added that Philippine English (PE) differs from other World Englishes in terms of its characteristics, functions, and forms. These include Malaysian English, Thai English, and Singaporean English. While Filipino English speakers find its qualities new to them, they find its inclusion justified and necessary. As a result, these phonological elements and facets should continue to be studied.

Studies on PE phonology have increased and extended dramatically as a result of the past work of various Filipino experts. This research area has broadened its focus and investigated the inclusion of its other characteristics. Several studies relating to PE phonological analysis have been notable in recent years. To name a few, Tayao's (2004) research focused on summarizing the evolution of PE phonological research throughout the past three decades before her study. She also discussed the findings of a recent data-driven study on PE accents belonging to the three distinct types of speakers: the basilect, mesolect, and acrolect. The results provided a description of the distinct phonological traits shared by and among the speakers of each of the languages. Furthermore, the report suggested that future research should focus less on 'standard' Philippine pronunciation and more on offering descriptions of a wide range of dialects, which can be distinguished based on location and social group membership.

De Leon (2016), moreover, conducted a study on the intelligibility of PE to a variety of Southeast Asian listeners, taking into account the elements that influenced PE intelligibility. PE, according to the findings, is less than 50% comprehensible for EFL or English as a Foreign Language listeners, but PE is more than 60% intelligible for ESL or English as a Second Language listeners. Filipino listeners rated PE as quite understandable. Furthermore, PE has less than 50% rate of intelligibility, which is lower despite other research findings showing greater intelligibility rate. The results also demonstrated that, despite their low proficiency than acrolectal speakers, mesolect speakers have the highest intelligibility rate among PE speakers (acrolect, mesolect, and basilect). The used and speaking rate were other prevalent characteristics that improved PE's intelligibility. In terms of speaker considerations, intelligibility can also be enhanced or hindered by pronunciation, but it all depends on

the acceptability of the speaker's pronunciation, while listeners need consider aspects like accent and strategy familiarity.

Tuplano's (2011) efforts also resulted in the execution of another study about the phonological aspects of John Clements Inc. prehires. The researcher's attempt revealed solid evidence that the respondents exhibit numerous variations from Standard American English (GAE). Interdental variations were found to be very common, with substitution of voiced and voiceless /th/ by /t/ and /d/, replacement of vowel /u/ by /U/, conflation of long /i/ and short /I/, restructuring of /ae/ and confusion of initial aspirated /t/ with non-articulation initial plosive sounds /t/, restructuring of /ae/ to /a/, replacement. The presence of stress-timed and syllable-timed intonation combinations, as well as word stress misplacement in some words, further complicated things. As a result, the author proposes that the information gleaned from this study be used as one of the foundations for developing an English language program that is specifically tailored to contact center language requirements.

Flores (2016) investigated the phonological properties of basilectal Philippine English by replicating the data collection processes of Tayao (2004) and Llamzon (1997). Tupaz's (2004) task of performing PE studies in characterizing English of the educated (the mesolect and acrolect speakers) and language practices of the marginalized speakers (the basilect) in the Philippine setting led to the completion of this study (Llamzon, 1997; Tayao, 2004). Participants in the study were Basilect speakers from a certain region such as market vendors, janitors, nannies, and jeepney drivers, as well as Cebuano language speakers from Region 7. This was done with the goal of producing data that differed from earlier Luzon-only investigations. Furthermore, the study encouraged future studies to pursue PE phonology, with an emphasis on the spectrum of segmental and suprasegmental traits of Filipino basilectal speakers of Philippine English.

Nicanor's (2014) research is equally important to mention. His case study focused on the detection of English segmental elements as exhibited by three Filipino professors from a public university. The sociolectal technique was also employed to describe the respondents' phonological characteristics based on a study of the audio-recorded poem they read. The findings revealed that first language interference, as well as the fossilization of their pronunciation 'lapses,' influenced sound segment substitution, addition, and deletion. The Communicative Model should be strengthened by English language teachers to enable students to have more access to many varieties of English, particularly Philippine English. From these research trends, it appears that the spotlight is totally directed on studies of PE phonological features, however, delving into this topic in Metro Manila- centric remains underexplored in the country.

The study of Torres et al. (2021) also confirmed the disparity between Philippine English (PE) phonology and the GAE phonology. This was corroborated through their re- validation of the phonological description of Philippine English specifically in the production of vowel and consonant sounds by lectal speakers in the Luzon area. It was revealed that lesser deviation from the GAE phonology was marked in the mesolect speaker. It was also found out that the basilect speaker had the

highest phonemic substitution in both vowel and consonant sounds, which was then followed by the speaker representing the mesolect group, while the acrolect ranked as third. Thus, the findings attested the unique features of PE phonology.

In a different vein, the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), which is widely used around the world, provides a sort of standardization, essentially a standard description of all sounds in line with General American English (GAE). The combination of two English letters "th" is one of the sounds in the IPA. The way it articulates is fricative, and the place where it articulates is interdental. It can be voiceless (θ) or voiced (ð). On one hand, fricatives are created when the active articulator is close to, but not in contact with, the passive articulator. Close approximation means that as air escapes, it is forced via a tight route between the articulators, causing significant friction. Interdental, on the other hand, refers to the sound made by pressing the tip of the tongue against the rear of the upper teeth.

While these facts do provide thought-provoking insights about PE phonology, the purpose of this study was to show that an up-to-date analysis and explanation of voiced and voiceless interdental fricatives "th" amongst and within three lectal types of speakers is of significant interest. Furthermore, when someone else (for example, a non-native speaker) pronounces anything correctly or poorly, one can detect it. The IPA can be used to determine if the speaker/s applied the phonological rules correctly or not.

Therefore, the present researchers considered this issue to be the heart of phonological feature analysis in PE. The two research studies done by Tayao (2004) and de Leon (2016) both point to the variety of ways by which to analyze PE phonology. Hence, guided the present study.

1.1 Research Questions

Generally, this paper aimed to analyze the phonological features of the speakers in three lectal categories – acrolect, mesolect and basilect.

Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. How frequent did each speaker deviate from the GAE to a new variety of pronouncing words in terms of:
    a. voiced interdental fricatives; and
    b. voiceless interdental fricatives?
2. Which among the lectal categories of speakers conformed to the GAE pronunciation?
3. Which of the three lectal categories of speakers has the fastest rate of speaking?

1.2 Theoretical Framework

This research is based on Tayao's (2004) societal framework, which was also employed in de Leon's dissertation. In addition, this research is governed by the International Phonetic Association's (IPA) conventions and symbols for interdental fricative voiced (ð) and interdental fricative voiceless (θ) consonants. IPA provides a standard sound description in accordance with the General American English (GAE).

2. Methodology

This section presents the participants, design, instrument, data gathering procedure and data analysis of the study.

2.1 Research Participants

Shown in Table 1 is the demographic profile of the respondents. Six participants were chosen and were categorized using Tayao's (2004) classification of lectal speakers in the Philippines. Their category was based on their educational attainment and present occupation. Moreover, their ages ranges from 25- 30.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of the Participants

Lectal Category of the Respondents	Age	Gender	Educational Attainment	Occupation	Home Language	Spoken Language/s
Acrolect	25	Male	College Graduate	Call Center Agent	English	English/Filipino/ Spanish
	27	Female	College Graduate	Call Center Agent	English	English/ Filipino
Mesolect	30	Female	Master's Degree	Language Teacher	Filipino	Filipino/ English
	28	Male	College Graduate	Language Teacher	Filipino	English/ Filipino
Basilect	29	Male	High school Graduate	Janitorial	Filipino	Filipino
	28	Female	High school Graduate	Janitorial	Filipino	Filipino

There were two acrolectal respondents who participated in this study. One is a male and 25 years old, and one female who is 27 years old. Both are college graduates, presently working as call center agents in Metro Manila, and use English as their home language. Since Tayao (2004) characterized acrolect group as people who use English as home language and are compelled to work in fields where the dominant language used for communication is English, participants 1 and 2 were, therefore, categorized as **acrolectal** speakers.

Whereas, participant 3 is a female and 30 years of age, while participant 4 is a male and 28 years of age. Participant 3 is a master's degree holder while participant 4 holds a bachelor's degree. Both are currently employed as language teachers in one of the prestigious universities in Metro Manila. They speak Filipino and English, but consider Filipino as their first language. These participants are considered **mesolectal** speakers because according to Tayao (2004), the mesolect group is composed of professionals who utilize English in their line of work, but rarely use it in other domains.

Finally, participants 5 and 6 are male (29 years old) and female (28 years old), high school graduates and presently employed as janitors in a top university. They speak Filipino at home and use this language in their day-to-day communication. These participants are what Tayao (2004) has referred to as **basilectal** speakers because she described this category as group of non-professionals who never use English at home. If required to speak English in dealing with superiors and other job-related topics, this group's command of English is found to be influenced by their native language.

2.2 Research Design

The design employed in current study is descriptive- quantitative. In determining the occurrences of deviations from the GAE standard to a new variation of pronunciation demonstrated by the participants, frequency counts and percentage computations of the coded deviations were done. The researchers later did an analysis to identify the speaker who conformed to the GAE standard of pronunciation.

2.3 Research Instrument

The instrument utilized in this study was a poem entitled *Brush Up On Your English* from the *Manchester Guardian*. This poem is a six-stanza free verse with four lines in each stanza. The researchers' basis in the selection of this reading material is due to the fact that it contains words with voiced and voiceless ***th*** sounds. After scrutinizing carefully every word from each line of the poem, the researchers found 11 words with voiced ***th*** sound and seven (7) words with voiceless ***th*** sound. These words were marked to guide the researchers as they conduct the data gathering.

2.4 Data Collection

After preparing the instrument for data collection, the researchers immediately looked for target respondents who would qualify to the categories of the lectal groups. The researchers then were able to spot potential participants and asked if they are willing to sit down with the researchers and do the oral reading of the poetry. Upon convincing the participants, the researchers gave them instructions and informed them that the reading exercise will be audio-recorded for the purpose of phonetic transcription. The oral reading of the poem by each participant ran from one to two minutes only. After that, the researchers played the collected audio corpus and examined the reading speed. They also studied how those words in every line of the poem, particularly those with ***th*** sounds, were pronounced according to the General American English (GAE) standard.

2.5 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the IPA- GAE standard of pronunciation. Coded deviations of each of the three speakers were counted and percentages were also computed.

3. Results and Discussion

This section confers the results of the study and how they were analyzed and interpreted. The findings, analysis, and interpretations are organized according to the research's specific problems.

Table 2. Frequency of Deviation/s from the GAE to a New Variety of Pronouncing Words (Voiced 'th' Dental Fricative)

	Lectal Categories of Speakers	Number of Deviation/s	
		f	%
Acrolect			
	P1	1	9.09
	P2	1	9.09
Mesolect			
	P3	0	0.00
	P4	0	0.00
Basilect			
	P5	11	100.00
	P6	11	100.00

Legend: Total no. of words = **11**

Table 2 exhibits that from the six lectal categories of speakers, basilectal speakers produced the most frequent deviations of pronunciation with 11 (100%) each, followed by acrolectal speakers with one (1) or 9.09% each. The least was done by the mesolectal speakers having no deviation at all. It is clear, therefore, that mesolectal speaker as opposed with the acrolectal and basilectal speakers pronounced the words in conformity to the IPA- GAE standard. This contradicts the lectals' consonant inventory mentioned by Tayao (2004), in which acrolectal speakers are expected to fully conform to GAE pronunciation. In the case of mesolectal speakers, inventory affirms that they have a high incidence of variable occurrence of /th/ substituting interdental voiced /ð/ with /d/, however, this attribute did not exist in this study.

Table 3. Presentation of the Deviation/s and/or Conformity Done by the Speakers in the Voiced 'th' Interdental Fricative

Voiced *th*	GAE Phonetic Transcription	Philippine English Pronunciation Variety					
		Acrolect P1	Version P2	Mesolect P3	Version P4	Basilect P5	Version P6
Others	/ə ðərz/	/ə ðərz/	/ə ðərz/	/ə ðərz/	/ə ðərz/	/**a**d**I**rs/	/**a**d**I**rs/
That	/ ðæt/	/ ðæt/	/ ðæt/	/ ðæt/	/ ðæt/	/d**a**t/	/d**a**t/
They	/ ð**e**/	/ ð**e**/	/ ð**e**/	/ ð**e**/	/ ð**e**/	/d**e**/	/d**e**/
Mother	/mə ðər/	/mə ðər/	/mə ðər/	/mə ðər/	/mə ðər/	/m**a**dɛr/	/m**a**dɛr/
Bother	/ba ðər/	/ba ðər/	/ba ðər/	/ba ðər/	/ba ðər/	/b**a**dɛr/	/b**a**dɛr/
Brother	/brə ðər/	/brə ðər/	/brə ðər/	/brə ðər/	/brə ðər/	/br**a**dɛr/	/br**a**dɛr/

There	/ðɛr/	/ðɛr/	/ðɛr/	/ðɛr/	/ðɛr/	/dɛr/	/dɛr/
Then	/ðɛn/	/ðɛn/	/ðɛn/	/ðɛn/	/ðɛn/	/dɛn/	/dɛn/
there's	/ðɛrz/	/ðɛrz/	/ðɛrz/	/ðɛrz/	/ðɛrz/	/dɛrs/	/dɛrs/
These	/ðiz/	/ðiz/	/ðiz/	/ðɛrz/	/ðɛrz/	/d**I**z/	/d**I**z/
Them	/ðɛm/	/ðɛm/	/ðɛm/	/ðɛm/	/ðɛm/	/dɛm/	/dɛm/

Table 3 summarizes the list of words with interdental fricative voiced ***th*** extracted from the poetry and the corresponding pronunciation variety of each lectal representative. Each word is transcribed conforming to the General American English (GAE) International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) transcriptions.

The Philippine English (PE) pronunciation variety is represented by the six participants dubbed as **acrolect**, **mesolect** and **basilect**. The results of the oral reading exercise revealed that *basilectal speakers* have the highest number of deviation from the GAE pronunciation standard in the oral production of **voiced th** [**ð**] interdental fricative. Words such as **others** [ə ðərz], **that** [ðæt], **they** [**ðe**], **mother** [mə ðər], **bother** [ba ðər], **brother** [brə ðər], **there** [ðɛr], **then** [ðɛn], **there's** [ðɛrz], **these** [ðiz]**,** and **them** [ðɛm] were found to have variations in the basilectal versions. The word *others* is pronounced as *aders* [**a**d**I**rs], *that* is *dat* [d**a**t], *they* is *dey* [d**e**], *mother* is *mader* [m**a**dɛr], *bother* is *bader* [b**a**dɛr], *brother* is *brader* [br**a**dɛr], *there* is *der* [dɛr], *then* is *den* [dɛn], *theirs* is *ders* [dɛn], *these* is *dis* [d**I**z], and *them* is *dem* [dɛm]. As observed, the basilectal speakers have altered the production of **voiced th** [**ð**] sound by substituting it with the **d** consonant sound.

This case is supported by the findings of Tuplano (2011) in her study on "*Phonological Features of Philippine English: The case of prehires of John Clements Consultants, Inc.*" which exposed that basilect speakers have the larger tendency to commit errors that lead to the creation of another variety of sound. In her study, respondents' deviation pattern, both for voiced /ð/ and voiceless /θ/, can be indicated in the absence of these interdental sounds in one's native language (L1). Hung (2000) also explained that *basilectal speaker*'s mother tongue has a significant influence on the second language acquisition, which in this case is English.

In the case of the *acrolectal* and *mesolectal* speakers, the study reveals that the GAE interdental fricatives voiced and voiceless *th* obviously exist in their phonological repertoire based on their manner of articulation. The study of Tayao (2004) supports these findings and confirmed that the case of mesolect and acrolect groups exposes the interdental fricatives occurrences, with however, few variable manifestations in the mesolectal pronunciation.

Table 4. Frequency of Deviation/s from the GAE to a New Variety of Pronouncing Words (Voiceless 'th' Dental Fricative)

Lectal Categories of Speakers		Number of Deviation/s	
		f	%
Acrolect			
	P1	0	0.00
	P2	0	0.00
Mesolect			
	P3	0	0.00
	P4	0	0.00
Basilect			
	P5	7	100.00
	P6	7	100.00

Legend: Total no. of words = **7**

Table 5. Presentation of Deviation/s and/or Conformity Done by the Speakers in the Voiceless 'th' Interdental Fricative

Voiceless *th*	GAE Phonetic Transcription	Philippine English Pronunciation Variety					
		Acrolect Version		Mesolect Version		Acrolect Version	
		P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6
Thorough	/θəro/	/θəro/	/θəro/	/θəro/	/θəro/	/trukud/	/trukud/
Through	/θru/	/θru/	/θru/	/θru/	/θru/	/tru/	/tru/
Threat	/θrɛt/	/θrɛt/	/θrɛt/	/θrɛt/	/θrɛt/	/tr**e**t/	/tr**e**t/
Moth	/mɔθ/	/mɔθ/	/mɔθ/	/mɔθ/	/mɔθ/	/maut/	/maut/
Both	/boθ/	/boθ/	/boθ/	/boθ/	/boθ/	/but/	/but/
Broth	/brɔθ/	/brɔθ/	/brɔθ/	/brɔθ/	/brɔθ/	/brɔt/	/brɔt/
Thwart	/θwɔrt/	/θwɔrt/	/θwɔrt/	/θwɔrt/	/θwɔrt/	/twart/	/twart/

The above data reveal that there is also an absence of voiceless *th* in the basilectal pronunciation which is evident in the overall deviation from the GAE standards and the substitution of consonants **t** and **d**. Moreover, deviation is not only an issue in this case since the speakers distorted most of the words from the list. In addition, lack of exposure and familiarity to the words due to limited formal education caused him to overtly mispronounce the words. Acrolectal and mesolectal speakers, however, demonstrated that they have the ability to produce the voiceless th sound because of their perfect enunciations of the words.

In light of the findings in connection to the first research question, the researchers deduced that between and among the six lectal speakers, it was the mesolectal speaker who conformed and observed well the General American English (GAE) standard of pronunciation. It is evidently seen in the transcription of their pronunciation committing no deviations both in voiced and voiceless 'th' interdental fricatives.

Conversely, the acrolectal speakers deviated in only one of the total number of words with voiced 'th' interdental fricative. While, in the case of the basilectal speakers, the tend to pronounce the words with the influence of their home language (Filipino) exhibiting its syllable- timed feature and due to the absence of the sound 'th' in their native tongue.

Table 6. Rate of Speaking of the Lectal Speakers

	Lectal Categories of Speakers	**Rate of Speaking**
Acrolect		
	P1	1 min and 11 secs
	P2	1 min and 20 sec
Mesolect		
	P3	1 min and 26 secs
	P4	1 min and 34 secs
Basilect		
	P5	2 mins and 5 secs
	P6	1 min and 56 secs

Table 6 above displays that in terms of the rate of speaking; the result is not so surprising because the two acrolectal speakers (P1 and P2) recorded a rate of one minute and 11 seconds and one minute and 20 seconds, respectively, thus making them the first and second fastest among the six speakers. Mesolectal speakers landed third (P3) and fourth (P4) with a time of one minute and 26 seconds and one minute and 34 seconds, respectively, while the basilectal speakers noted two (2) minutes and five (5) seconds for P5 and one minute and 56 seconds for P6. This is due to the fact that acrolectal speakers are accustomed to speaking English because it is their native and home tongue.

4. Conclusion

The researchers' enthusiasm to provide evidence pushed them towards a deeper understanding and analysis of the data. Thus, the present study holds some implications.

The findings suggest that each speaker belonging in each of the three lectal categories has differences with regard to their way of pronunciation. Obviously, their manner of pronouncing the words, with voiced and voiceless 'th' interdental place of articulation and fricative manner of articulation,

respectively, from the given reading material has resulted to either following the GAE standard or not. Hence, the findings also reveal some interesting data. It should be noted that mesolectal speakers came out to be the most conforming to the GAE standard of pronunciation as opposed to the expectation that it should be the acrolectal speakers since English is primarily their home language.

The present study makes it clear that having English as one's home language is not a guarantee to sound like the native speakers. The lack of knowledge about the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is somehow a factor in the failure of the speakers to pronounce such words similar to the GAE norm. Moreover, it is also found out that the acrolect speakers appeared to be the fastest in terms of speaking rate.

Consequently, the phonological features of PE speakers coming from the acrolect, mesolect, and basilect groups, justly vary from one another. The researchers believe that findings of the study are suggestive rather than conclusive. They accept also the limitations of their paper considering the number of participants involved. They, therefore, recommend that an increase in the representatives in each of the three lectal categories should be considered for future researchers who would want to extend studies along this topic. Also, it is suggested that future research should look into the factors affecting the rate of speaking which was not as well investigated in this paper.

Overall, this study could serve as an eye- opener that in reality, phonology of PE is still a field to be further explored.

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