



A Description of Intelligibility in Fossilized English Pronunciation of Mentor Teacher to Native English Speakers

Catherine Aredidon

Department of Teacher Education, UM Peñaplata College, Island Garden City of Samal, 8119 Philippines

Krishna Secretaria

Department of Teacher Education, UM Peñaplata College, Island Garden City of Samal, 8119 Philippines

Raymund Tuburan

Department of Teacher Education, UM Peñaplata College, Island Garden City of Samal, 8119 Philippines

Geoffrey Marfa

Department of Teacher Education, UM Peñaplata College, Island Garden City of Samal, 8119 Philippines

Jovenil Bacatan*

Department of Teacher Education, UM Peñaplata College, Island Garden City of Samal, 8119 Philippines

[*Corresponding author]

Abstract

This study focuses on describing the intelligibility of fossilized English pronunciation by elementary mentor teachers. The researchers used a corpus composed of English words commonly mispronounced by Filipinos. Using the qualitative descriptive method, the researchers described some fossilized English words (intelligible and unintelligible) pronounced by the three key informants, who are elementary teachers. All gathered data were validated by the respondents, who are native English speakers. It was found that 45 out of 50 words the mentor teachers mispronounced were considered fossilized, as each word was mispronounced at least three times. Though improperly mispronounced, the English words articulated by the mentor teachers are still understandable to Native English speakers. Additionally, the first and last sounds or phonemes of the word helped the native English speaker to understand the word even if mispronounced. Compared to the native pronunciation, the unintelligible and fossilized words have sound differences. These differences are misplacing the stress in multi-syllable words, changing phonemes from their original sound, vowel emphasis problems, and null representation of sound. Future researchers were recommended to broaden this study by adding the number of respondents and key informants from another native English-speaking country.

Keywords

Intelligibility, Fossilization, Pronunciation, Mentor teacher, Native English speakers

INTRODUCTION

Pronunciation is essential. It is the first thing people notice when one speaks English or any other language. One of the phenomena that some elementary teachers have been facing is their pronunciation skills. Fossilized pronunciation always hinders their ability to communicate effectively with their students, especially with native English speakers. Fossilized pronunciation refers to the problems of articulation that linger despite constant training and practice (Demirezen, 2010). Fossilized pronunciation errors have been fixed in speakers' language just as fossils of the ancient plant were preserved in a hardened state (Carnegie Mellon University, 2010). Improper pronunciation can make non-native English Speakers less fluent. It may result in unintelligibility among Native American English speakers, probably leading to misunderstanding. This implies that fluency is crucial in understanding and effective communication (Tan et al., 2021; Bazhouni, 2020; Nangima, 2020; Lin & Francis, 2014).

Zhang and Yin (2009) claimed that the pronunciation problem could be due to the difference between the place and the manner of articulation, as they focus on studying the pronunciation problems of English learners in China. Similar to the study conducted in the Philippines, which was done by Guinto (2014), the Sociolectal Approach was used to describe phonological features of the particular speech commonly used by Filipino speakers of English. The study showed that substitution, addition, and deletion of sound segments governed by experience in L1 (first language) resulted in the fossilization of pronunciation. These lapses among the participants of this study were then regarded as salient and defining features of a variety of written and spoken Filipino English.

Fossilization is a universal phenomenon that has attracted the attention of teachers and researchers alike. In this regard, this study aims to investigate a supposedly fossilized feature in elementary mentor teachers' pronunciation in the Island Garden City of Samal. It has been a common observation by students that only some teachers pay attention to English pronunciation. They think being understandable is enough, and everything else is optional. The latter's performance influences their students; it is necessary to consider that intervention in this phenomenon is vital. Filipinos are known to be English speakers, but learning and pronouncing the language correctly are two different things. In achieving the aim of this study, the researchers formulated the following questions, which are the following:

1. What are the fossilized English words pronounced by the mentor teachers?
2. What are the intelligible words uttered by the elementary mentor teachers?
3. What are the unintelligible fossilized English words pronounced by the elementary mentor teachers to the native English speakers?
4. What are the phonological differences between these unintelligible fossilized words and the pronunciation of native English speakers?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

In this study, the researchers utilized the qualitative descriptive method. The qualitative approach emphasizes the importance of looking at variables in the natural setting. This qualitative research focuses on fossilized word pronunciation phenomena, which few elementary mentor teachers committed. Creswell and Creswell (2017) stated that qualitative design is used to gather data through the natural setting sensitive to the people and places under study and the interpretation of the problem.

Moreover, the descriptive method aims to describe the phenomenon and characteristics of the problem. Both methods were used since the researchers described the fossilized English words and how they differ and affect the proper pronunciation of the mentor teacher. Through the data collected, the researchers analyzed qualitatively and descriptively. The researchers got the final and precise pieces of information.

Research Participants

The key informants of the study were the three teachers from different elementary schools in the Island Garden City of Samal. These mentor teachers already have eleven to fifteen years of active teaching service. As Merriam and Tisdell (2015) mentioned, there is no fixed number of key informants; researchers should aim for information saturation. Most scholars argue that saturation is the most crucial factor to consider when considering over sample decisions in qualitative research (Mason, 2015). This study employed purposive sampling to choose the key informants. A purposive strategy is adopted based on the assumption that certain individuals with specific perspectives and insights related to the study's aims and objectives should be included in the sample (Mason, 2017; Robinson, 2014; Trost, 1986).

Data Gathering Procedures

The researchers chose commonly mispronounced words from the article "100 English Words Commonly Mispronounced by Filipinos" Batongbakal (2018). However, the researchers had only chosen fifty widely mispronounced words. Afterward, the researchers proceeded to the research instrument validation, which contained fifty (50) commonly mispronounced English words by Filipinos. The researchers then prepared permission letters for the school director and the research coordinator. Furthermore, the researchers chose different elementary schools within the Samal District and Babak District of the Island Garden City of Samal and prepared letters for the school heads asking permission to conduct their study. The researchers used the technology in surveying since they used their smartphones to record the teachers' pronunciation as they went through the research instrument.

Right after recording the teachers' pronunciation, the researchers looked for American native English speakers who would be willing to rate the elementary mentor teachers' articulation of the fifty chosen words. Besides the researchers also prepared a waiver for the raters to sign as evidence of their participation and validation of the teachers' pronunciation. The researchers then analyzed the data gathered and were able to collect the results. Lastly, they prepared letters of confirmation for the key informants and for the native English speakers who rated the elementary mentor teachers' articulation and asked them to sign them as a piece of evidence.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers administered the informed consent to serve the interest of ethical standards in research. They clarified that this research study requested only those willing to present themselves to become our raters and key informants. The

researchers discussed the purpose of the research and why they were the chosen respondents with each of them. The researchers informed them that their personal information and backgrounds would not be disclosed in the said research. Moreover, the researchers prepared waivers for the elementary mentor teachers' key informants and requested them to sign them after conducting the study.

Besides, the researchers also prepared a waiver for the raters to sign as evidence of their participation and validation of the teachers' pronunciation. The researchers then analyzed the data gathered and were able to collect the results. Lastly, the researchers prepared letters of affirmation for the key informants and the raters and asked them to sign them as evidence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Fossilized Words Pronounced by Elementary Mentor Teachers

The study of Selinker (1972) further stated that Error reappearance refers to the repetition of the existence of inappropriate language structure. That is taught to continue to appear regularly, not only to learners with low proficiency. Learners learning another language for a long time may likely develop improper pronunciation, which is called language competence fossilization. Moreover, this study emphasizes the repetition of the incorrect pronunciation of words by mentor teachers as fossilized pronunciation, shown below.

The native speakers identified the words in the table as fossilized since the elementary mentor teachers improperly pronounced the words three times differently. Such words in the table above were identified as improperly pronounced since errors appeared as the respondents uttered each word three times. Wei (2008) stated that improper pronunciation pertains to the constant repetition of mistakes as a result of first-language interference. In this case, the three respondents congruently pronounced the words listed above thrice incorrectly. Moreover, native English speakers have commented that such pronunciation can be described as Filipino English. The vowel and other consonant sounds were not emphasized very well.

Table 1 The Fossilized Words Pronounced by the Elementary Mentor Teachers

Monosyllabic	Disyllabic	Multisyllabic
Says	Any	Affidavit
Sauce	Burial	Chocolate
Climb	Maniac	Comfortable
Debt	Species	Entrepreneur
Law	Suicide	Hippopotamus
Alms	Preface	Orator
	Worry	Condolence
	Orange	Advocacy
	Almond	Ingenuity
	Salmon	Indigent
	Journal	Cemetery
	Picture	Attorney
	Handsome	Category
	Idiot	Rendezvous
	Typhus	Jewelry
	Nuisance	Acoustic
	Busy	Utensils
	Confirm	Admirable
	Nuptial	
	Legumes	
	Theory	

The Intelligible Words Pronounced by the Elementary Mentor Teachers

Table 2 below contains the intelligible words pronounced by the elementary mentor teachers. Intelligible words are those words that were mispronounced by Second Language Learners but were acceptable to the native Speakers. This statement was supported by the study of Yates and Zielinski (2009), that intelligibility is a 'two-way process' between the speaker and the listener. A speaker cannot be understood because of their accent, which covers stress, silent sounds, and vowel sounds. Nikbaht (2010) further stated that if the accent is quite familiar to the native Speakers or listeners, even a strong emphasis can be easily perceived. There were also instances in which the listener or native speaker relied on the initial and final sounds of the words to understand what the second language learner meant. Based on the study of Grigos et al. (2015), when we hear a sound, it often leads us to expect another sound. Our brain automatically reacts as if we have listened to the second sound. We often anticipate the next sound and process it to what would logically be the correct pronunciation or the next word we hear.

For example, the word debt /det/ was pronounced by the mentor teacher as /dɛbt/, emphasizing the sound of the bilabial stop /b/. The word law /lɔ/ was declared /lɔw/ as the teacher emphasized the sound of labial glides /w/. Moreover, the word typhus /'taɪ.fəs/ has been incorrectly pronounced as /'taɪ.pəs/. The mentor teacher was not able to mark well the /ph/it just sounded like the Labiodental, Voiceless, and Fricative /f/.

Table 2 The Intelligible Words Pronounced by the Elementary Mentor Teachers

Monosyllabic	Disyllabic	Multisyllabic
Says	Any	Affidavit
Sauce	Burial	Chocolate
Climb	Maniac	Comfortable
Debt	Species	Entrepreneur
Law	Suicide	Hippopotamus
Alms	Preface	Orator
	Worry	Condolence
	Orange	Advocacy
	Almond	Ingenuity
	Salmon	Indigent
	Journal	Cemetery
	Picture	Attorney
	Handsome	Category
	Idiot	Rendezvous
	Typhus	Jewelry
	Nuisance	Acoustic
	Busy	Utensils
	Confirm	Admirable
	Nuptial	
	Legumes	
	Theory	

The Unintelligible Words Pronounced by the Elementary Mentor Teachers

The third table contains the unintelligible words to the native English speaker produced/pronounced by the mentor teachers. It contains the unintelligible words to the native speakers pronounced by the mentor teachers. The researchers identified the differences between these unintelligible words and native pronunciation. Additionally, the respondents pronounce the words differently from their correct pronunciation. These are *douche* / /du:ʃ/, becomes /dok/ (instead of sounding it as /ʃ/, it was replaced by /k/ sound) as it is affected by the variations of /k/ and /c/, *humongous* /hju:'mʌŋgəs/ pronounced as /hju:'mʌndʒəs/ (instead of sounding it as /ŋg/ it was replaced by /ndʒ/ sound), *tortoise* /'tɔ:rtəs / pronounced as /'tɔ:rtɔis/ (instead of looking it correctly the second syllable as /təs/ it was pronounced as /tois/, *heinous* /'hei.nəs/ Pronounced as /'hei.njəs/ (instead of saying it as /nəs/, it was replaced with /njəs/, and the respondent inserted it with glide sound /j/. Thus, these words pronounced by the respondents by producing incorrect phonemes sounded like different words to the native English speaker ears, and they concluded that these words were unintelligible.

Table 3 The Unintelligible Words Pronounced by the Elementary Mentor Teachers

Humongous
Broccoli
Douche
Heinous
Tortoise

The Phonological Differences of the Fossilized Pronunciation by Elementary Mentor Teachers Compared to Native English Speaker's Pronunciation

There were discrepancies in the pronunciation of Native Speakers and elementary mentor teachers as Second Language Learners. The researchers were able to categorize three main differences in the phonological representation of the words that had been studied. These are the differences in stress, variations in a vowel, and null phonological representation of sounds (silent letters). These are among the major factors that usually affect the pronunciation of second language learners.

The researchers compared and identified the acceptable and unacceptable mispronounced words with the difference of sound in the native pronunciation. According to the native speakers, most of the pronounced words by the elementary mentor teachers are understandable. The first syllable and last syllable in these words, according to them, were spoken. It gives them a clue about the words since the slight difference was the stress, especially on multisyllabic words. The Filipino language's basic principle states that words should be spoken according to their basic syllabication. It was further supported by Ortograpiyang Pambansa (2013), which stated that "kung ano ang pagkakasulat ay ganoon din ang pagkabigkas." (A word is supposed to be pronounced the way it is spelled/written). For example, the word "comfortable"/kʌmfɔrtəbəl/ becomes /kʌmfɔrtəbəl/, suicide /'su:ɪsaɪd/ becomes /swɪsaɪd/, and chocolate /'tʃɔklət/ becomes/'tʃakalɛt/. Some letters should have no phonological representation but be still being pronounced by the elementary mentor teachers, e.g., salmon /'sæmən/ becomes /salmən/, and almond /'ɑ:mənd/ becomes/'almənd/.

Differences in Stress

The longer the English word is, the higher the tendency to misplace the stress, which would also depend on its lexical category, e.g., "condolence" /kən.'dɒl.əns/ becomes /kəndɒu.ləns/, ingenuity /,ɪndʒə'nju:ə.ti/ becomes /m'dʒəu.ə.ti/, broccoli /'brɑ:kəl.i/ becomes /brɑ.'ka.li/, hippopotamus /,hɪp.ə'pɑ:təməs/ becomes /hɪp.ə.pa.'ta.mus/. Benrabah (1997)

stated that word stress (lexical stress), rhythm, and intonation are fundamental in communication and must be assigned the highest priority in Second Language Acquisition. He also added that stress is another factor that affects intelligibility.

Differences in Vowel Sounds

The researchers further found another difference in pronunciation, which is related to vowel sounds. There are vowel replacement problems like /ei/ sound on the first syllable of the word maniac becomes /a/ sound, rendezvous /'ran.dei.vu/ becomes /rɪn.'di.vu/. This observation was supported by Nunan and Carter (2001) and O'Connor et al. (2007), who stated that the errors in pronunciation of English language learners from different languages are not accidental. Hence, second language learners tend to substitute the sounds that they do not have in their native language, especially those sounds that are close to their manner of articulation.

Differences in Null Phonological Representation (Silent Sounds)

There was also fossilization because of the null sound representation. Such a mistake occurs when the Second Language Speaker tends to pronounce every sound in a particular word. For example, the English word "almond" was pronounced as /'ɑlmɒnd/ instead of /'ɑ:mənd/, the word "salmon" was pronounced as /sælmən/ instead of /'sæmən/ and the word "comfortable" /kʌmfɪt.əbəl/ becomes /kʌm.fɔr.ta.bəl/, which was supported by the Ortograpiyang Pambansa (2013) which stated that "kung ano ang pagkakasulat ay ganoon din ang pagkabigkas" (Words are supposed to be pronounced as the way they were spelled/written).

Legend: *The bold parts of the syllabication of each word are the stress marker*

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

After the researchers had conducted the study and analyzed the results, they came to this conclusion. The majority of the words in the corpus were commonly improperly pronounced by elementary mentor teachers. However, most mispronounced words are still intelligible to native English speakers. Secondly, there are some but only a few mispronounced words that are hardly unintelligible to native English speakers. Subsequently, three common factors affect the pronunciation of the elementary mentor teacher: improper stressing of words, wrong vowel selection, and null representation of sounds commonly known as silent sounds. In addition, the first and last sounds or phonemes of a word help the native English speaker to understand the word even if mispronounced.

Fossilization can be considered one of the frequent discrepancies in communication as it may affect the understandability of the words and even language as a whole. However, fossilization is considered a phonetic feature of L1 while learning L2, and this was identified as an inevitable phenomenon observable in Interlanguages. Moreover, in this study, we concluded that there could be acceptable and unacceptable words under fossilization based on our collection. Acceptable words are those words that are mispronounced but are still understandable by native English speakers by hearing the initial and last sound of the word. Unintelligible words are asserted to be difficult for native speakers to identify because some phonemes are changed as they are pronounced differently. Another remarkable feature of these unintelligible words produced by mentor teachers is the different stress locations, especially in disyllabic and multisyllabic words. Furthermore, the longer the words are, the more the tendency to misplace the stress. The researchers also concluded that there is a possibility that mentor teachers in schools who are teaching students in the formative years have been committing incorrect pronunciation of some English words.

Recommendations

Based on the data gathered, findings, and conclusions of this study, the researchers proposed the following: The school administrators should create programs for further pronunciation enhancement for the teachers to improve their pronunciation and teaching since teachers' pronunciation will influence the learners. Since pronunciation is vital in successful communication, teachers are recommended, especially in Grades 1-3, to undergo enhancement programs concentrating on English pronunciation, and these programs are considered essential for their enhancement. Lastly, future researchers are encouraged to broaden this study by adding the number of respondents and key informants from another native English-speaking country.

FUNDING INFORMATION

This research received no specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This research's overall success and completion would have been impossible without the divine guidance of our Almighty God. The authors also wish to thank the UM Peñaplata College Research and Publication Center, key informants, native English speakers, and school heads of the different elementary schools.

REFERENCES

1. Batongbakal, L.E. (2018, November 22). 100 English Words Commonly Mispronounced by Filipinos. Retrieved from <https://filipino.net/english-words-commonly-mispronounced-by-filipinos/>.
2. Bazhouni, M. (2020). The effect of Non-Native accents on English comprehension. *IOSR Journal of Research & Method in Education (IOSR-JRME)*, 10(1), 22–29. <https://doi.org/10.9790/7388-1001052229>
3. Benrabah, M. (1997). Word-stress-a source of unintelligibility in English. *IRAL: International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 35(3), 157.
4. Carnegie Mellon University. (2010, February 1). Understanding "Fossilized" Pronunciation: What to do when accent problems are hard to correct. Pittsburgh; Carnegie Mellon University: Student Academic Success Center.
5. Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.
6. Demirezen, M. (2010). The causes of the schwa phoneme as a fossilized pronunciation problem for Turks. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 2(2), 1567-1571.
7. Grigos, M. I., Moss, A., & Lu, Y. (2015). Oral articulatory control in childhood apraxia of speech. *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 58(4), 1103-1118.
8. Guinto, N. (2014). Segmental features of English modeled by selected professors in a state university in the Philippines: Implications in teaching English. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning*, 3(1), 67-80.
9. Lin, M., & Francis, A. L. (2014). The relationship between fluency, intelligibility, and acceptability of non-native spoken English. *The Journal of the Acoustical Society of America*, 135(4_Supplement), 2227-2227.
10. Mason, J. (2017). Qualitative researching.
11. Mason, M. (2010, August). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. In *Forum qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: qualitative social research* (Vol. 11, No. 3).
12. Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. John Wiley & Sons.
13. Nangimah, M. (2020). How Should We Counter Challenges in Teaching Pronunciation for EIL?. *Journal of English Teaching*, 6(1), 24-39.
14. Nunan, D., & Carter, R. (Eds.). (2001). *The Cambridge guide to teaching English to speakers of other languages*. Cambridge university press.
15. O'connor, R. E., White, A., & Swanson, H. L. (2007). Repeated reading versus continuous reading: Influences on reading fluency and comprehension. *Exceptional children*, 74(1), 31-46.
16. Ortograpiyang Pambansa. (2013). Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino.
17. Nikbakht, H. (2010). EFL Pronunciation Teaching: A Theoretical Review. *Journal of English Language Pedagogy and Practice*, 4(8), 146-174.
18. Robinson, O. C. (2014). Sampling in interview-based qualitative research: A theoretical and practical guide. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 11(1), 25-41.
19. Selinker, L. (1972). Interlanguage, *IRAL: International Review of Applied Linguistics*, 10. Connor, U (1996) *Contrastive Rhetorics, USA: CUP*.
20. Tan, K. H., Jospa, M. E. A. W., Mohd-Said, N. E., & Awang, M. M. (2021). Speak like a native English speaker or be judged: a scoping review. *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18(23), 12754.
21. Trost, J. E. (1986). Statistically nonrepresentative stratified sampling: A sampling technique for qualitative studies. *Qualitative sociology*, 9(1), 54-57
22. Wei, X. (2008). Implication of IL fossilization in second language acquisition. *English Language Teaching*, 1(1), 127-131.
23. Yates, L., & Zielinski, B. (2009). *Give it a go: Teaching pronunciation to adults*. Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP) Research Centre, Macquarie University.
24. Zhang, F., & Yin, P. (2009). A study of pronunciation problems of English learners in China. *Asian social science*, 5(6), 141-146.