



Filipino English Teachers Overseas: A Case Study of the Filipino English Teachers' Language Ideology

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Abstract: Various studies have presented the complexity of the impact of globalization in shaping the language ideologies of individuals. However, it seems that there is a dearth in the literature that seeks to examine the experience of the Filipino Non-native English-Speaking Teachers (NNESTs). This case study explores how their practice in teaching English abroad has shaped their language ideologies. Specifically, the study investigated the 18 Filipino NNESTs from Japan, Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia, and Canada. The findings of this study predicated on the assertions of Tupas and Salonga (2016) in their research about the Filipino call center agents where unequal Englishes is observed. However, based on the data gathered, this current study exposed that there is another facet of unequal Englishes existing among the Filipino NNESTs where they seem to be the inherent gate-keepers. Meaning, that their knowledge in the English language has led them to be hypercritical even among themselves and their capabilities as English teachers, which I believe is worse than the usual same-circle privileging posited by Tupas and Salonga (2016). Thus, showing how white privileging has already permeated the system even of the educated Filipino NNESTs, which may be too challenging to correct.

Key Words: World Englishes; Unequal Englishes; Sociolinguistics

1. INTRODUCTION

In response to the recognition of the power that the English language can bring to people who use it, the British Council projected that by 2020, two billion people would use or learn to use it (The British Council, 2013). That is because Bolton (2008) explained that "many Asian societies have moved away from labor-intensive mass production towards higher-level service industries" (p. 10); thus, there has been an increasing need for more proficient speakers of the English language (Bolton, 2008). Therefore,

from the power brought about by English among the formerly colonized nations, its advantages are also viewed advantageously from a non-colonial context; hence, making the world a "global village" where English is the universal language (Crystal, 2003). Cummins and Davidson (2007) explained that access to English could be associated with social stratification as well, but there are other factors aside from this, such as economic growth, aesthetics, and scholarship grants. This growing demand for learning English results in the need to hire English teachers



who can make the learners achieve competence in this language (Crystal, 2003).

1.1 Preference Towards the NESTs vs. NNESTs

It is interesting to note that there is a preference for the native English-Speaking teachers (NEST) in various countries where English is treated as a foreign language. According to Mahboob, Uhrig, Newman, and Hartford (2004), many employers consider a "candidate's nativeness" (p. 72) a requirement for English teachers. This was further supported in the study of Mahboob and Golden (2013) when the advertisements reflected the seven factors that schools, especially in Asia, were looking for English teachers: (1) nativeness, (2) race, (3) age, (4) qualifications, (5) gender, (6) nationality, and (7) teaching experience. This is despite the second statement released by TESOL International against discrimination of non-native English speaker teachers (NNEST) in the field of TESOL, Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages (Mahboob & Golden, 2013). Meanwhile, Selvi's (2010) study revealed that 60.5% "required native or native-like/near-native proficiency" (p. 165) with citizenship from inner-circle countries, "Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, United Kingdom, and [the] United States" (p. 166). Moreover, roughly around 40% required a TESOL degree, TEFL/TESL certificate, or a bachelor's degree in English or Education (p. 167).

However, Phillipson (2016) asserted that most NESTs are not "equipped linguistically, culturally, or pedagogically for their task[s]" (p. 81). This claim is the opposite of what Kirkpatrick (as cited in Phillipson, 2016) believes in when he said that "the most preferred teacher of English in today's world remains the native speaker" (p. 83).

This assertion was challenged by the Walkishaw and Oahn (2014) when the students from Japan and Vietnam viewed NESTs as models of pronunciations and good repositories of cultural knowledge, but are poor at explaining grammar. Meanwhile, they claimed that the NNESTs were

perceived as excellent teachers of grammar and are emphatic. This was supported by Ling and Braine (2007) when they discovered that NNESTs taught as effectively as the NESTs.

Albeit the diverging viewpoints about NESTs and NNESTs, there is undeniable that there is a growing market for NNESTs. Interestingly, there is a burgeoning inclination of hiring overseas NNESTs where English as at the second language status in the country where the overseas NNEST reside. Case in point are the Filipino English teachers who teach EFL in countries like Japan, China, Vietnam, Indonesia, and Korea.

1.2 The Filipino NNESTs

According to Tang (1997), the speech community of the educated Filipinos who speak English enjoy good "self-image" since they act as a model of the English language that is "internationally understood and accepted" (p. 578). Being part of the outer-circle Asian societies which are former colonies of Anglophone colonial powers like Hong Kong and Singapore, the Philippines has its 65% of the population that claimed to understand and to read English, 48% claimed to be able to write in English, and 32% to have spoken the language (Social Weather Station, as cited in Bolton, 2008). Furthermore, there is a *de jure* recognition of English" in the different sectors in the Philippine society, such as in the government, daily press, mass media, education, and law (Bolton, 2008, p. 4). Thus, displaying dominance over the local NNESTs of countries having EFL as the status of the English language being part of the expanding circles. Having a different orientation about the English language compared with other people from Asia, Filipinos, especially the English teachers or Filipino NNESTs may potentially impact upon their teaching because of their "cognitions (knowledge, beliefs, and understandings) about the specific language they teach" (Andrews, 2008 as cited in Sterzuk & Nelson, 2016).

Albeit the descending status of the country in terms of its quality of education (Mocon-Ciriaco, 2019) as reflected in the PISA results in reading, the



Philippines, being a formerly colonized country of the United States, is famed for its English-speaking population (Chang, 2011) as English a "co-official language" of various sectors such as government, law, and education (Bolton & Bautista, 2004). Likewise, English is a language used in "print media, movies, television, and creative writing" in the country (Chang, 2011, p. 193).

Consequently, Filipinos have become proficient in the English language compared with the other people in Asia who do not capitalize on the English language in any of the above-stated forms of media. This is the reason why Filipino NNESTs are being hired abroad, specifically among the neighboring countries of the Philippines. According to BBC News, the Philippines produces "budget English teachers" (McGeown, 2012, para. 1) and that these English teachers are being chosen over the NESTs because of their cheaper salaries compared with their native counterparts and their "clear American accent" manner of speaking (para. 6). Despite coming from the outer circle, it is intriguing that the Filipino NNESTs are being preferred over those teachers from the inner circle due to economic reasons. Arva and Medgyes (as cited in Frederiksen, 2014) explained that NNESTs like Filipino English teachers have the edge over the NESTs because of their strong foundation in the linguistic structure; meaning, they have a much technical understanding of the linguistic components of the English language.

In line with the previous studies concerning this topic, there have been studies about the advantages and disadvantages of the NESTs and the NNESTs and the preferences of the EFL students (Daftari & Tavit, 2017; Ling & Braine, 2007; Chu, 2014). However, it appears that there is a dearth in the literature in terms of the studies that endeavor to investigate how the Filipino English Speaker Teachers' (NNESTs) experience reflects the role of English in shaping their language ideologies in teaching EFL.

1.3 Research Questions

Based on the gap identified, this study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. How do Filipino NNESTs characterize the role of language in the teaching of EFL overseas?
2. How has their EFL teaching experience overseas shaped their language ideologies and identities as English teachers?

1.4 Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by the assertions of Tupas and Salonga (2016) in their study titled, "Unequal Englishes in the Philippines." In their paper, Tupas and Salonga (2016) argue that despite seemingly "celebration of Englishes" (p. 368) brought about by the pluralization of Englishes, there are still Englishes that are more acceptable and privilege than others. In a similar vein, this same concept is espoused even by those who belong to the outer circle. Hence, unequal Englishes has been witnessed not only between two different circles; but also, to those who belong to the same circle as well.

2. MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Participants

The participants of the current investigation are 18 Filipino NNESTs. Eleven of these graduated from the program, Bachelor in Secondary Education (BSE), Major in English, while the rest are from the programs BSE Library Science (1), BSEEd Special Education (2), BS Mass Communication (2), BA Fine Arts (1), and BS Tourism (1). They teach in different countries such as in Japan, Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia, and Canada. They have a mean of 2.43 years in teaching overseas while obtaining a mean of 9.11 in their overall-years of teaching experience. Likewise, the majority of the respondents are teaching in Japan under the Japanese Exchange Teaching (JET) Programme.

This study adopted the case study methodology of Sterzuk and Nelson (2016), where the



respondents are invited to attend an online interview, and using Facebook chat and video call, and I used follow-up questions to clarify some of the answers given by the respondents. After these, the answers were analyzed through thematic analysis.

3. KEY FINDINGS

The current study attempts to heed the call of Tupas and Salonga (2016) in understanding the impact of globalization in the aspect of ideologies about Englishes, which do not automatically lead to "freedom and liberation" (p. 378). Specifically, this case study attempts to explore how the Filipino NNESTs' experience shape their language ideologies. Results show the depth of the indexical relations that permeate in the fabric of the identity of these English teachers that albeit the intensive knowledge in the English language and their capacity to manipulate the language to their advantage; thus, despite having the capacity for "scale jumping" to manifest, they are sometimes are in the shackles of backward mindset about English.

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