



English Language Acquisition and Usage among Asian ESL speakers: An Intercultural Dialogue

Corresponding Author : DR. ERWIN L. PURCIA erwinpurcia@yahoo.com
Principal, Basic Education Department and Dean, School of Graduate Studies
Dr. Carlos S. Lanting College Philippines

Article Received 30-08-2020, Accepted 26-09-2020 , Published 30-09-2020

ABSTRACT

Teaching English to speakers of other languages remained one of the perennial concerns of many countries not just in Asia but even in other places where English is reckoned as an instructional language. This study aimed to arrive at an in-depth understanding of the acquisition and usage of ESL in various Asian countries. Involving Key Research Informants (KRIs) from three different nations vid. Philippines, South Korea and Bali, Indonesia, the researcher has phenomenologically delved into the veracity of acquisition and usage of the language among these countries and deciphered on their shared practices. Thematically analyzed via axial coding, results revealed that both Korean and Balinese English language learners share similar acquisition and usage practices. English to them is a privilege and only those who can afford to enroll in an English crash course program can have the nitty-gritty of the language unless otherwise, they pursue baccalaureate degrees which only the affluent ones could afford. Further, English is taught in both countries based on the principles of structural linguistics whereby the use of such a language is strictly governed by rules of grammatical categories which eventually hamper them to speak it freely. Thus, for them spoken or oral communication becomes an issue. In the Philippines, however, Filipinos are dubbed fluent with the language as this has been part of their curriculum and is taught by functionalism where learners are given the freedom to speak whatever they have in mind so long that feedback mechanism is established. By then, they do not have the inhibitions to use the language because for them, it comes out naturally.

Keywords: Intercultural dialogue, ESL acquisition and usage, Phenomenology

INTRODUCTION

Learning English as a second or foreign language (L2) is not an easy task. According to Brown (1987), to master the English language, learners must be adequately exposed to the four basic skills namely:

listening, speaking, reading and writing. However, language teaching in this country currently focuses on the teaching and learning of the five language skills including viewing. While the standard of English among Filipino children continuously

declines despite learning English for several years, Filipino students remained deficient especially in their writing and speaking skills. They still commit inconsistencies in almost all aspects of language usage.

In the Philippines, English language has been considered the most influential spoken language in both educational and commercial facets of society. In fact, any school encourages the use of English in all forms of exchanging thoughts and ideas with which they can be understood by many. As an indispensable form of spoken and written communication and as a global language, English plays a pivotal role among people who seek for greener pasture and would take lucrative positions abroad. Moreover, English as a second language serves as the portal to susceptibly open greater opportunities among Filipinos who opt to create names in their chosen fields of expertise.

More than one billion people worldwide are learning English as a second or foreign language, and the number is growing. The difference between the two groups amounts to speakers of English as a foreign language using English occasionally for business or pleasure, while English as a second language speakers use English on a daily basis. The total number of English speakers has grown from one quarter to one third of the global population (Crystal, 2008). With the colossally increasing number of people speaking the language, it is an irony and paradox that other countries in some parts of Asia remain deprived of the use of the English language.

In Indonesia, the English curriculum is genre-based, which is an incredibly strange way to teach a foreign language. Rather than getting through the basics, and very simple grammar, students are thrown into the deep end and given advanced

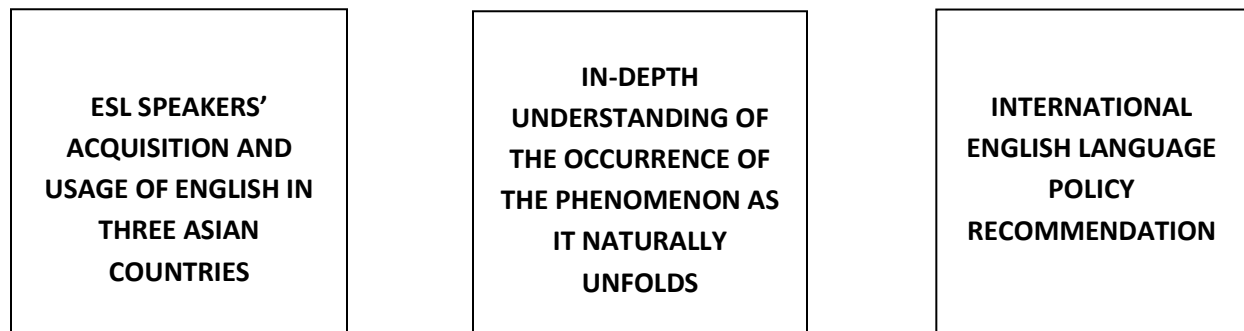
passages to read and decipher. Narrative text, analytical exposition, hortatory text – these are just three types of texts that students with practically zero vocabulary and grammar skills are expected to understand. English teachers in the country even just teach English just to ensure that students pass the National Exam, based on the government curriculum. Hence, as it is very well recorded in their history, the official status of English in the country has been "the first foreign language" and the political stance of Indonesia's government is quite firm: "English is not and will never be a social language nor the second official language in Indonesia" (Sadtono, 1997:7). Meaning, regardless of the extent of benefits that English creates among Indonesians, still the language will never become an official second language of the country.

In South Korea on the other hand, Korean students usually write down what the teacher says and answer questions in an exercise book containing written English questions. After school they typically go to a hagwon to upgrade their English scores for the university entrance exam. Most high school students focus only on learning easy technical skills, and their English is quite poor. The problems of Korean English education are severe. First, their classes are too grammar-oriented. Korean English teachers focus on grammar because of their generally poor speaking ability. As a result, English class in public school is often boring. Learning is passive, not active (Kim, 2010). In the Philippines, however, Filipinos are dubbed fluent with the language as this has been part of their curriculum and is taught by functionalism where learners are given the freedom to speak whatever they have in mind so long that feedback mechanism is established.

Consistent with the premises above, it is with this very reason that the researcher was instigated to conduct an in-depth analysis of the context of acquisition and usage of ESL across the three countries of Indonesia specifically in Bali, South Korea and the Philippines. Through establishing an intercultural dialogue with locals from the countries, the researcher created a prismatic view on how the ESL acquisition and usage are manifested in said countries. As such naturally occurring phenomena emanate with the corresponding issues of teaching English in other parts of world emerge, it is just but essential to capture a conforming panorama on the teaching of English to speakers of other languages.

Framework of the Study

The study aimed at creating an in-depth understanding of the acquisition and usage of ESL on three Asian countries namely Bali, Indonesia, South Korea and the Philippines as basis for International Language Policy Recommendation. The study utilized a phenomenological process of inquiry as it captures the exactitude of the occurrence of the phenomenon as it naturally unfolds (Giorgi, 2012).



This further ensued the framework below.



Figure 1. Framework of the Study

Objectives of the Study

This study was a naturalistic inquiry which identified the practices of ESL acquisition and usage on three Asian countries namely Bali, Indonesia, South Korea and the Philippines.

Specifically, it tried to achieve the following:

1. Identify the status of teaching of English in the cited countries.
2. Determine the acquisition and usage of English among three (3) Asian countries
3. Recommend an International English Language Policy that would be beneficial to speakers of the English language.

Methodology

This study utilized a phenomenological research method with five (5) locals identified as the Key Research Informants (KRIs) in three (3) research domains of Bali, Indonesia and South Korea. Phenomenology as a method of qualitative research can be defined as the direct investigation and description of phenomena as consciously experienced by people living those experiences. Phenomenological research is typically conducted using in-depth interviews of small samples of participants (Giorgi, 2012). Identifying the Key Research Informants through convenient sampling, the researcher subjected each KRI and gathered the data through a series of individual interviews and focus group discussions. Five (5) Balinese and South Koreans across ages were interviewed and were set to a focus group discussion separately from both domains. The study

was conducted by the researcher in his route to both places during his stay in these countries for research presentations. Extending his stay in such places made him gather the naturally occurring phenomenon especially on the series of interviews done among locals of the places. The said series of interviews among KRIs for both places lasted for ten (10) days thereby gathering richer data for thematic analysis.

After the data gathering procedure, the most recurrent responses of all KRIs were subjected to thematic analysis through categorizing the most common themes from their pieces of information given. The researcher then coded each common response and assigned themes for their recurrence based on the objectives of this intelligible exploration.

Results and Discussion

After thematically analyzing the most recurrent responses of the KRIs of the study, results of the investigation revealed that the teaching and learning of the English language in the identified countries varied in various social and educational contexts.

On the Status of Teaching English in the Identified Countries

Teaching English in Bali, Indonesia according to the KRIs is similar to a roller-coaster ride. English teaching in the country is exercised only for the purpose of passing the National Exam so they could land their own desired jobs. In Bali specifically, people in the marginal line can never learn English unless they will enroll themselves in an English crash course program and at least learn the basics of the language. Of all the kinds of people in Bali, only the rich ones could learn English unless if you are sent to a university

as a government-funded scholar. Because they still abide by the caste system as most of them are Hindus, only the rich ones or the Brahmins and/or Kshatriyas are given the privilege to learn English as they could afford to enroll in such programs. Further, English as a subject is not part of their curriculum in Bali. They are not taught of the language in earlier grades instead teachers indoctrinate their traditional language for religious and traditional yet formal ceremonies “Kawi.” This traditional language is even used in their daily conversations although they also use the Indonesian Bahasa as their national language. Since they are deprived of such opportunity, most of them just enter a married life so they could have someone to help them live their lives.

Further, teaching of English in Bali just like in South Korea even if you enter college is a struggle. Aside from the difficulties of the word usage, phonology, phonetics and morphology since they have a different twang of their tongue, teachers do not teach the basics of the English language they focus on deeper and more complex language and literature concepts that students could hardly understand. Teachers carry out English language lessons in a structuralist perspective as they concentrate more on the structure of the English language creating activities and exercises on several work books sacrificing the functions of the language. They intensify structuralism as a principle of teaching English to speakers of other languages. Therefore, students create a negative notion that using English requires mastery of its structures, hence, would find difficulties, reluctances, and hesitations to either write or speak the language itself. English for me is governed by rules without

you mastering such rules will leave you deficient of its usage...

In South Korea, university students would likely experience language lapses and grammatical inconsistencies because teaching of the English language in such domain could arduously be absorbed. This can be rooted from the teaching styles, linguistic differences, and phonological struggles Korean language learners experience with native English speakers teaching the language. Reasons of which are, native speakers speak English with utmost spontaneity, nasally-produced sounds, and usage of slang or colloquial words and expressions that create culture load among Korean English language learners which would likely result to language communication breakdown.

Meanwhile, teaching of the English language in the Philippines has created a dynamic pattern redirecting structural or prescriptive language teaching to functional or descriptive language pedagogy. In the country, English is embedded and framed as part of the curriculum starting from grade school to tertiary level. Besides, the Philippine standards for English language teaching abides by the principle of functional linguistics of Michael Halliday (1985). *Functional* signifies the proposition that language evolved under pressure of the functions that the language system must serve. It is in this context where students are given the opportunity to speak whatever they have in mind, express their thoughts and ideas, create their own understanding of several social, economic, political, and natural phenomena. Thereby underscoring the importance of the systemic functions of language. Teachers therefore are challenged to establish a

separate feedback mechanism where students utterances are revisited for the purpose of mechanical and/lexical corrections.

On the Acquisition and Usage of ESL

In effect, since people from Bali, Indonesia and South Korea do not have the constant exposure to the English language, they could hardly speak and write it. In fact, even if they know a little of English, most of them still end up working within the marginal line. Once they get to finish an English crash course program and improve their English communication skills, they can now venture and land at least a better job as hotel receptionist or restaurant crew. Hence, most Balinese people earn a living through working in one full-time job and two or more part-time jobs. Others would engage in this situation because they want to support their studies, finish college and hopefully secure their future with a stable job. This is primarily the reason why English language learning sets as the only difference between poverty and affluence. Yet, not all of them are given the opportunity to learn and master the craft.

Conclusion

Teaching English to both countries of Bali, Indonesia and South Korea is a privilege and only those who can afford to enroll in an English crash course program can have the nitty-gritty of the language unless otherwise, they pursue baccalaureate degrees which only the affluent ones could afford. Further, English is taught in both countries based on the principles of structural linguistics whereby the use of such a language is strictly governed by rules

of grammatical categories which eventually hamper them to speak it freely. Thus, for them spoken or oral communication becomes an issue. In the Philippines, however, Filipinos are dubbed fluent with the language as this has been part of their curriculum and is taught by functionalism where learners are given the freedom to speak whatever they have in mind so long that feedback mechanism is established. By then, they do not have the inhibitions to use the language because for them, it comes out naturally.

Acknowledgment

The researcher is indebted to no less than the most ebullient support shared by the administration of Dr. Carlos S. Lanting College for this research presentation opportunity. To God be all the glory.

Literature Cited

- Brown, C. (1987). The interrelation between speech perception and phonological acquisition from infant to adult. Great Britain: Blackwell Publishers Limited. *European Journal of Social Sciences – Volume 8, Number 3.*
- Crystal, D. (2008). Teaching English in a global context, Retrieved on February 23, 2018, accessed from <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20050716/teaching-english-in-a-global-context.html>.
- Halliday, M. (2004). Introduction: How Big is a Language? On the Power of Language. In *The Language of Science: Volume 5 in the Collected Works of*

M.A.K. Edited by J.J.Webster. London and New York: Continuum. p. xi.

Giorgi, A. (2012). The descriptive phenomenological psychological method. *Journal of Phenomenological psychology*, 43(1), 3-12.

Kim, Min-gyu (2010). Korea`s English education problems and a solution,

Retrieve on March 10, 2018, accessed from
<http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20070214000031>.

Sadtono, E. (1997). ELT Development in Indonesia: A Smorgasbord. In *The Development of TEFL in Indonesia*, ed. E. Sadtono, 1-19. Malang: Penerbit IKIP Malang.