ARTIGO

CULTURAL PREJUDICE ON THE SPEAKING SKILL OF STUDENTS

(Prejuicio cultural sobre la habilidad de hablar de los estudiantes)

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ABSTRACT
Considering the vital role of language teachers in combatting cultural prejudice, this study explored the lived experiences of language teachers when cultural lenses affect their perception of students' speaking skills. With phenomenology as its research design, Senior High School language teachers were interviewed. Two themes emerged reflecting the cultural prejudices of language teachers in students' speaking skills – Fossilized Regional Defects and Low Communicative Delivery, and two cultural prejudice reduction strategies materialized – Maximize Profiling Strategies and Respecting Cultural Differences. This study concludes that reflecting on one's cultural prejudices can challenge us to examine our beliefs and change our teaching methods.
Keywords: Cultural Lenses. Prejudice Reduction. Multicultural Education.

INTRODUCTION

1. BACKGROUND

Language is a medium for social understanding; how we understand ourselves and communicate to minds other than our own (EDDY, 2006). Language acquisition can establish an understanding of diversities, cultural practices, and ideas with the ability to respond appropriately and flexibly in different contexts (DOUGHTY; LONG, 2003 as cited by EDDY, 2006; FOX; GREENBERG, 2006; VELASCO, 2015). Thus, language teachers must prepare for the realities of the profession and the demands of linguistic assessments catering to the macro skills; listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing (EDDY, 2006; SONG; DEL CASTILLO, 2015).

With culture being inseparable from language (BOURNOT-TRITES; BELLIVEAU; SPILIOTOPOULOS; SEROR, 2007), teachers are also responsible for resolving conflicts arising from cultural differences among students (D'ANGELO; DIXEY, 2001). Inevitably, however, teachers tend to view the world through individually constructed and socially imposed cultural lenses (EDDY, 2006; SONG; DEL CASTILLO, 2015). The impact of these lenses constitutes the first step toward successful and meaningful interaction, especially in a language class. Language teachers can profoundly affect students' views of their first languages and cultures, thereby affecting whether they pursue multilingual intercultural outcomes or subtractive assimilation (MACPHERSON et.al., 2004).

Effective teaching is often evaluated by sociocultural and linguistic perceptions rather than actual teaching experience, professional preparation, cross-cultural competence, content knowledge, and pedagogy (KIRKPATRICK, 2006 as cited by SONG; DEL CASTILLO, 2015). As emphasized by Ukpokodu (2009), for language teachers to facilitate successful multicultural language classes, they must be active and employ pedagogies that are empowering, humanizing, and liberating, yet

engaging and critical enough to ensure meaningful learning and challenge students' conservative and myopic beliefs and values.

On the contrary, some teaching-learning procedures offer scant treatment of clichéd situations, low-level drills of rote memorization, and cultural facts in isolation, yielding possible misinterpretations of different cultural groups (EDDY, 2006). This is most apparent in the experience of teachers in the speaking skills of students. The increasing usage of the English language at the global level has manifested an interest in many kinds of English language teaching and learning (MACEDO, 2001). With these new developments in English, come many difficulties associated with the multitude of the use of English.

Language is such a powerful communication tool, people tend to have extreme attitudes about how languages are spoken, and words are pronounced (EDDY, 2006; MACEDO, 2001; SONG; DEL CASTILLO, 2015). These feelings ultimately reflect attitudes toward the users of those languages. In some communities, accents can be viewed either positively or negatively. These attitudes can affect the choice of accent which teachers may choose to instruct students in the classroom versus accents to use during non-classroom situations (EDDY, 2006; MACEDO, 2001). Holmes (1992), as mentioned by Macedo (2001), suggests that intelligibility is also affected by attitudes. Some people find it easier to understand languages and dialects spoken by people they admire (MACEDO, 2001). For majority group members, people are more highly motivated and consequently more successful in acquiring a second language when they feel positive towards the people who use it (EDDY, 2006; MACEDO, 2001; SONG; DEL CASTILLO, 2015; MACPHERSON et al., 2004). Some of them even maximize others' positive perception of their language proficiency because of their political, economic, and social status to obtain better opportunities for education or occupation (SUGIMURA, 2015). As a result, attitudes toward language do have severe implications for people in language teaching, where speaking skills are essential.

These are evidence of prejudice being present in the language classroom. Prejudice is an "attitude of hostility, possibly including injury or damage, directed against an individual, a group, a race, or their supposed characteristics" (STUART, 2005, p. 65). There are different kinds of prejudices like racial or cultural, clothing, gender, and social class. Nonetheless, cultural prejudice seems prevalent in the observations of ESL teachers, as documented by Stuart (2005).

Courses in multicultural education and cultural awareness are plentiful, albeit falling short on issues of adaptability, risk-taking, and tolerance of ambiguity (EDDY, 2006). These are essential for communicating with people from another culture and engaging in situations the learner is likely to encounter in the culture. Materials for teacher preparation do not begin to explore candidate beliefs, attitudes, or understanding, thus reinforcing prejudice and an already myopic view (EDDY, 2006;

FOX; GREENBERG, 2006; SONG; DEL CASTILLO, 2015; MACPHERSON, et al., 2004). Teachers will be unable to create situations that explore cultural perspectives, beliefs, values, and practices if they have not engaged in this inquiry themselves (EDDY, 2006) because only when they have accurate knowledge and information and engage in critical thinking that they will be able to reverse prejudice in the language classroom (OBIEKEZIE, 2015).

According to Stuart (2005), D'Angelo and Dixey (2001), language teachers can cultivate positive attitudes and behaviors like respect, empathy, and kindness to surmount prejudice and intolerance through example because their attitude, actions, and language have the potential to convey a more vital message than any activity or curriculum. Nevertheless, Stuart (2005) pointed out a need for further detail on this matter.

Consequently, this study explored the lived experiences of language teachers when cultural lenses affect their perception of students' speaking skills and culled out techniques in reducing cultural prejudice from their experiences. Prejudice reduction primarily helps the learners to appreciate diversity and positively perceive differences among people (BANKS, 1994).

2. METHOD

2.1 Design

Phenomenology, in which the researchers investigated the structure and meaning a person or group attributes to phenomena and the nature and meaning of experiences relating to these phenomena (KATES, 1998; MAYKYUT; MOREHOUSE, 1994; YURDAKUL, 2001) was utilized. Data were examined by recursive readings, and tentative commonalities were documented. By grouping these, overarching themes and key ideas were identified.

2.2 Subject and Study Site

Key informants were twelve (12) English teachers from Saint Louis University - Laboratory Senior High School, Baguio City, Philippines. According to Kates (1998), eight to ten or more participants are appropriate for this type of research.

The key informants are the workmates of one of the researchers. They were selected by using convenient sampling, which relies on available subjects – close at hand or easily accessible (BERG, 2001). It is relatively common for college and university professors and basic education teachers to use their students and colleagues as subjects in their research projects, for it is an excellent means of

getting information since the researcher can easily retrieve and can easily follow-up data from the participants (BERG, 2001).

2.3 Instrumentation

A semi-structured written interview was utilized in gathering information. The researchers prepared the interview questions based on the use of a priori approach *(Appendix A)*, which investigated a prior theoretical understanding of the phenomenon under study (DE GUZMAN, 2013), and questions were organized or discussed during the interviews (KOCYIGIT, 2015).

2.4 Procedure

The interviews were conducted according to the available time of the key informants. Rechecking of data gathered by the interviewer was through following up the responses from the teachers.

2.5 Mode of Analysis

The written answers of key informants were read several times. Comparative analysis of their answers was made to find differences and commonalities. This was done through the construction of repertory grid.

In the repertory grid, cool and warm analyses *(Appendix B)* were applied in which cool analysis focused on culling significant statements and coming up with data categories, and warm analysis was the process of identifying the essence of the phenomenon (KATES, 1998).

From the analysis of responses of the interviewees, data categories were formulated and from which themes evolved. These themes were analyzed by looking at the data under each one and connecting them with common concepts and statements (KOCYIGIT, 2015).

2.6 Ethical Consideration

For the initial part, permission to conduct interviews was sought from the key informants. All key informants were informed about the aim and process of the study, their responsibilities, the position of the researcher, and their anonymity. The key informants were given the freedom not to answer a question if they refuse to do so. Symbols and numbers were used to represent them in the data analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

After careful analysis of the interview responses given by the key informants, two significant themes on the cultural prejudices on the speaking skill of students emerged. The two themes of cultural prejudices are Fossilized Regional Defects (FRD) and Low Communicative Delivery (LCD).

3.1 Cultural Prejudices on Speaking Skill

3.1.1 Fossilized Regional Defects

In a language class, accents and pronunciations are the first parameters looked into by the teacher as a part of his/her linguistic assessments. This leads to the notion that most language teachers associate the level of language learning with the communicative ability of their students (DINCER, 2017). Therefore, the speaking skill has become the main focus in recent years, with much research having been conducted into the nature of better education and success in mastering oral proficiency (DINCER, 2017).

Others often assess the way one speaks. Such evaluation can be based on either linguistic or social factors (SENEFONTE, 2016). Concerning social factors, it is evident that the higher the speaker's social status, the higher his/her language variety will be rated (SENEFONTE, 2016). Regarding linguistic factors, a speaker tends to be downgraded when his/her speech has significant problems concerning comprehensibility or intelligibility (SENEFONTE, 2016). Although a foreign accent and pronunciation evaluation can be based on linguistic or social patterns, the latter's influence is far more predominant. Therefore, language is used as a pretext for an evaluation, which is a social evaluation (SENEFONTE, 2016). That social evaluation is greatly affected by the speaker's cultural background (DINCER, 2017; MAKAROVA; MAKAROVA, 2014; SENEFONTE, 2016).

In a classroom, this is evident in how students express themselves. In the interview done with English teachers as key informants, they stated that regional accents are very apparent in their linguistic assessments. One can quickly identify the accent and pronunciation of students because of cultural influences. This is evident in their answers:

> **KI 1:** *"Students with regional defects have fossilized errors that are detrimental in oral communication tasks which may result in a low academic performance."*
>
> **KI 3:** *"I get distracted with the thought and focus more on the mispronunciation of Cordilleran students."*
>
> *"I get distracted with regional accents like Cordilleran and Ilocano accents."*

KI 4: *"What I notice from my students is they were affected by the accent of the place they came from when they speak specially the English language."*
"My student is from Surigao even when she speaks Tagalog or English she is always carrying their accent."

KI 8: *"Cordilleran students with fossilized twang brought about their distinct dialect tend to mispronounce certain vowels."*

Based on the experiences of some interviewed key informants, the common mistakes committed by the Cordilleran students, specifically the Kankana-eys and Ibalois, are their English vowels /e/, /i/, and /o/. Most Cordilleran students interchange the sounds of those vowels. Most of the time, the Ilocano students interchange vowel sounds /ə/ and /ɛ/. Ilocano students from Ilocos Norte are equipped to use vowel /ɛ/, thus applying it to most English words having different vowel sounds. Students from the Visayas, specifically from Surigao, usually speak with hard vowel sounds like how they pronounce the word *take*; instead of t/e/k, they say t/I/k.

This evaluation leads to cultural prejudice for some of the key informants. Responses from them show that although Cordilleran, Ilocano, and Visayan students are commonly seen with high regard in academics and co-curricular activities, their accents and pronunciations are rated low. In this case, this low evaluation is due to linguistic issues, given that having regional defects are less intelligible (BAUMAN, 2013 AS CITED BY SENEFONTE, 2016).

3.1.2 Low Communicative Delivery

According to Makarova and Makarova (2014), communicative interactions can be successful or can result in a complete failure depending on many factors: the availability of linguistic competence of the participants in the conversation, on cultural and communicative competence of the parties of the communication event, i.e., whether or not they have common linguistic and cultural background knowledge and what is the balance between the common and different in their processes of perception and symbolic systems. It can be said that the success of any communicative event rests on the three crucial issues: linguistic, communicative, and cultural competence of communicative interaction participants (DINCER, 2017; MAKAROVA; MAKAROVA, 2014; SENEFONTE, 2016).

Cultural background knowledge of communication participants is the foundation of any communication (MAKAROVA; MAKAROVA, 2014). From birth, every person belongs to multiple groups, and they shaped his/her cultural competence. In contrast, larger groups, usually called

cultures, substantially determine the cognitive and pragmatic basis of communicative activities in any community (MAKAROVA; MAKAROVA, 2014). In academic institutions, communicative activities like recitations, impromptu speaking, oration, etc. are assessments for knowing one student's progress as he/she learns a particular language. It is learning the language and the content of how the language is used to convey messages. This is most apparent in the quality of answers given by the students. As some of the interviewed key informants said:

KI 1: *"Students trained in provincial schools may manifest difficulties in expressing themselves. Active students are usually from the lowlands, while those quiet are mostly from the highlands. Those from highlands seem to be passive but can outdo their active counterparts from the lowlands."*

KI 3: *"I often call students whom I know have problems with their speaking ability especially the Cordilleran and Ilocano."*

KI 12: *"Sometimes, I tend to judge/assume that students who are active in the class have better speaking skills than those who tend to be passive."*

Based on the follow-up questions asked from the key informants, their prejudices are manifested from their observations that most students who graduated from city schools (e.g., Cordillerans from Baguio City, Ilocanos from Vigan City, Laoag City, San Fernando City) are more exposed to different idea-generating platforms like the use of social media applications, advanced media exposure and updated technology use than those from rural schools. Also, the participation of students in any speech acts is affected by their cognitive and pragmatic capacity for language use. Thus, the longer students' exposure to a specific language, the higher their communicative skill is (MAKAROVA; MAKAROVA, 2014; SENEFONTE, 2016).

The identified cultural prejudices by the key informants in students' speaking skills can be reduced through manifesting and practicing different ways or strategies addressed to what is expected from a language teacher. The following suggested strategies are based on the experiences and practices of the key informants. Two significant strategies emerged from the analyzed answers of the respondents – Maximize Profiling Strategies (MPS) and Respecting Cultural Differences (RCD).

1.1 Cultural Prejudice Reduction Strategies

3.1.3 Maximize Profiling Strategies

Teachers need to evaluate themselves by using self-awareness skills to interpret their feelings and attitudes about race. Self-reflection is often challenging and requires honesty by the individual

(D'ANGELO; DIXEY, 2001). Once teachers are conscious and aware of their prejudices, they can search for methods to change their views and prevent those prejudices from being communicated to their students (D'ANGELO; DIXEY, 2001). Like what the key informants suggested:

KI 4: *"What I do is when they recite/talk, I let them first use the language they are comfortable with, then let them speak in English, and as they go along I help them pronounce certain words they can't articulate well."*

KI 5: *"Introduction of basic blending rules."*

KI 7: *"In terms of group tasks, I make sure that there's intercultural exchange of ideas and heritage e.g. oral presentations on student's hometown."*

KI 8: *"For those with observable regional defect, I include them to do more speaking engagement/activities (e.g. speech choir).*

KI 9: *"I try to reduce the cultural prejudice through the repetition of the word/s."*

KI 12: *"I just try to disregard/ contain my judgment and come up with rubrics/ criteria to help me objectively evaluate their speaking skills."*

Teaching languages should focus not only upon linguistic aspects but also on cultural knowledge as a necessary aspect of communicative competence (MAKAROVA; MAKAROVA, 2014).

3.1.4 Respecting Cultural Differences

The goals of language teaching are not only communicative skills, but also "humanistically oriented cultural content" (BOURNOT-TRITES, et.al., 2007; MAKAROVA; MAKAROVA, 2014). Intercultural education and cultural sensitivity are important (BOURNOT-TRITES, et.al., 2007). This is apparent in the answers of the interviewed key informants:

KI 1: *"Professional trainings on differentiating learning will be a good move."*

KI 2: *"My advice to teachers who manifest cultural prejudices on the speaking skill of their students is to remember Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. Teachers should not contribute in increasing the affective filter of students."*
"Second language learners need motivation not demotivation."

KI 6: *"Respecting cultural differences."*

KI 11: "*Respecting ones' differences."*

KI 12: *"I just try to disregard/ contain my judgment and come up with rubrics/ criteria to help me objectively evaluate their speaking skills."*

Recent literature has focused on the importance of establishing effective communication in multicultural environments (MILHOUSE, 1996 as cited by ARIZAGA, et.al., 2005). Timm (1997), as mentioned by Arizaga, Bauman, Waldo, and Castellanos (2005), argued that effective communication is critical to diversity training and that combining cultural understanding and communication skills provides the framework for developing tolerance, acceptance, and respect.

4. CONCLUSION

Multicultural Education and cultural awareness courses are plentiful; however, they fall short on issues of adaptability, risk-taking and tolerance of ambiguity. With phenomenology as the design used for this study, cultural prejudices of teachers were culled out alongside their strategies in reducing them.

With culture at the heart of language learning, it is difficult, if not impossible, to separate language from culture for second language teachers (BOURNOT-TRITES et.al., 2007). Reflecting on one's cultural prejudices can challenge us to examine our beliefs and change our teaching methods to increase proper, if not accurate, linguistic assessment of all ethnic groups.

While this study has presented the cultural prejudices of teachers in the speaking skill of students and ways to reduce these cultural prejudices, further research is needed to explore other learning environments and other learning tasks. It has demonstrated two cultural prejudices on speaking, but additional research is needed to provide an empirical base for the findings.

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APPENDIX A

A PRIORI CODES

CONCEPT	DEFINITION	REFERENCE	A PRIORI CODES	INTERVIEW QUESTIONS
Cultural Prejudice	Prejudice is an **attitude** of hostility, possibly including injury or damage, directed **against an individual,** a group, a race, **or their supposed characteristics**.	(Stuart, 2005)	**Attitude against an individual or their supposed characteristics**	**Q1** In your classes, what are your cultural prejudices on the speaking skill of your students?
Prejudice Reduction	**Prejudice reduction emphasizes the importance of promoting the development of an understanding of the experiences of diverse populations** as well as an understanding of personally held values, beliefs, and biases	(Arizaga; Bauman; Castellanos; Waldo, 2005)	**prejudice reduction emphasizes the importance of promoting the development of an understanding of the experiences of diverse populations**	**Q2** How do you reduce your cultural prejudices on the speaking skill of your students?

APPENDIX B

COOL-WARM ANALYSIS

1. **What are your cultural prejudices on the speaking skill of students?**

THEME	WARM ANALYSIS	COOL ANALYSIS
Fossilized Regional Defects	-Regional defects -Fossilized errors -Cordilleran students with fossilized twang -Focus more on mispronunciation of Cordilleran students -Distracted with regional accent like Cordilleran and Ilocano accents -Mispronunciation of Cordilleran and Lowland students - Affected by the accent of the place they came from	-Students with **regional defects** have **fossilized errors.** -Cordilleran students with **fossilized twang** brought about their distinct dialect tend to mispronounce certain vowels. -I get distracted with the thought and **focus more on the mispronunciation** of Cordilleran students. -Distracted with **regional accent like Cordilleran and Ilocano accents**. -**Mispronunciation of my Cordilleran and lowland students.** -What I notice from my students is they were **affected by the accent of the place they came from** when they speak specially the English language. -My student is from **Surigao** even when she speaks Tagalog or English she is always **carrying their accent.**
Low Communicative Delivery	-Manifest difficulties in expressing themselves -Problems with their speaking ability -Active from lowlands, quiet from the highlands -From highlands seem to be passive - Active in the class have better speaking skills	-Students trained in provincial schools may **manifest difficulties in expressing themselves.** -I often call students whom I know have **problems with their speaking ability** especially the Cordilleran and Ilocano. -Sometimes, I tend to judge/assume that students who are **active in the class have better speaking skills** than those who tend to be passive. -Students who are **active** are usually from the **lowlands** while those **quiet** are mostly from **the highlands**. -Those from **highlands** seem to be **passive** but can outdo their **active** counterparts from the **lowlands**.

2. How do you reduce your cultural prejudices on the speaking skill of your students?

THEME	WARM ANALYSIS	COOL ANALYSIS
Maximize Profiling Strategies	-Basic blending rules -Introduction of mispronounced words. -Proper use of words. -Vary speaking activities -Intercultural exchange -To do more engagement activities -Aid with rubrics/criteria -Repetition of mispronounced words - Language they are comfortable with - Exposure to the English language.	-Introduction of **basic blending rules**. -Reading short pieces. -**Introduction** of some commonly **mispronounced words** for reading. -**Presenting the proper use of words** in different contexts. -Assessment of the speaking skills of students. -I **vary the activities** I give to the class. -In terms of group tasks, I make sure that there's **intercultural exchange** of ideas and heritage e.g. oral presentations on student's hometown. -For those with observable regional defect, I include them **to do more speaking engagement/activities** (e.g. speech choir). -Come up with **rubrics/criteria** to help me objectively evaluate their speaking skills. -I try to reduce the cultural prejudices through the **repetition of the word/s**. -I integrate those words in the discussion. -**Repetition of mispronounced words**. -What I do is when they recite/talk, I let them first use **the language they are comfortable with**, then let them speak in English and as they go along I help them pronounce certain words they can't articulate well. -Another is I give group activities where they can express themselves and for them to be **exposed to the English language.** **-**I acknowledge the mispronunciation and let the students **repeat the word in order to pronounce it properly**. -I reiterate the correct word and instruct students to **pronounce again the word**.
Respecting Cultural Differences	-Respect - Should not contribute in increasing the affective filter of students. - Learners need motivation not demotivation.	-**Respecting ones' differences**. -**Respecting cultural differences**. -My advice to teachers who manifest cultural prejudices on the speaking skill of their students is to remember Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. Teachers **should not**

	- Trainings on differentiating learning	**contribute in increasing the affective filter of students.** -Second language **learners need motivation not demotivation.** -Professional **trainings on differentiating learning** will be a good move.