An investigation of Filipino ESL learners' language stereotypes toward Philippine lectal speakers using a Matched Guise Test

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Abstract

With the widespread use of English all over the world, more language varieties have been observed and documented (Smith & Nelson, 2006) yielding to differing preferences, perceptions, and attitudes toward varieties and subvarieties. While some varieties have homogenizing effects where speakers make the language their own, others who seek to follow the prescribed sound may want to neutralize the accent of other speakers, especially in highly stratified societies where interlocutors attach different attitudes toward language varieties. Although these effects may be seen in most social interactions, more evidence are needed to determine if people's attitude toward different lectal groups influence ESL (English as a second language) learners. Attitudes toward a language can be partly captured in stereotypes. Thus, language stereotypes about different lectal groups further warrant investigation as these may have consequences on how students learn their second language. This study explores the language stereotypes attached by Filipino ESL learners to different Philippine lectal groups through the use of a Matched Guise Test (MGT) and follow-up interviews. The study shows that the language stereotype and the lectal group in which the speaker belongs have a significant relationship. This means that specific language stereotypes are strongly associated with different lectal groups. Social status, which is often attached to accent, has somehow skewed the ESL learners' perceptions based on the three lectal varieties (i.e., basilect, mesolect, and acrolect) of English spoken in the Philippines. These language stereotypes largely influence those students who still consider the acrolect variety as the prescribed accent in evaluating other lectal speakers of English.

Keywords: ESL learners, language stereotypes, lectal speakers, speaker evaluation

1. Introduction

The increasing awareness on English as a global language has motivated countries to modify their respective language policies. Some postcolonial countries have accommodated English in education, governance, and popular culture even if English is not their first language. With the widespread use of English, more varieties have been observed and documented (Smith & Nelson, 2006) yielding to differing preferences, perceptions, and attitudes toward varieties and subvarieties. These varieties were captured by Gonzales (2017) when he reevaluated

Philippine English (PE) and outlined related studies to highlight substrate-influenced English varieties, socially influenced varieties, mixed varieties, and regional Englishes.

Categorized under socially influenced varieties are acrolectal, mesolectal, and basilectal. Llamzon (1997) who first used this lectal framework noted the deviation of the Filipino accent from American English. The amount of linguistic input speakers receive forms the basis for determining what English they are inclined to use. As such, acrolectal speakers use an approximation of the General American English (GAE) formal style, while mesolectal speakers significantly deviate from the acrolectal variety. Basilectal speakers are those who bring their ethnic accent and evidently deviate from mesolectal and acrolectal phonemes (Tayao, 2004). This stratification of accents was earlier explored by Kachru (1982) through concentric circles where American English (AmE) and British English (BrE) are found in the inner circle; while Philippine English (PE), along with other second language varieties, are found in the outer circle. This means that the more input and output in English speakers receive, along with their higher preference to use the English language in daily activities, the more acrolectal their English is (Gonzales, 2017).

Martin (2014) also applied the Kachruvian circles to describe the three lectal groups previously mentioned and took into consideration geography and social-group membership. Tayao (2004) also included linguistic background as one feature to describe the lectal system. Despite these PE studies focusing on phonology, little attention has been given to explore the sociolinguistic factors that mark variation among PE.

It is important to note that the distinguishing characteristics of one lectal group from another may have homogenizing effects on speakers, especially in highly stratified societies where interlocutors attach different evaluations to different language varieties. These effects are evident within sociocultural communities and in the field of English language teaching where students, in particular, are somehow expected to master AmE. More often, when students fail to meet the 'standards' of AmE, they are negatively evaluated. This level of conservatism was noted in Borlongan's (2016) study, which revealed that English language teachers in the Philippines would try to fix 'broken' English, especially of those who speak English with a strong regional accent. Canagarajah (2012) and Jenkins (2007) highlight the need for communicative competence and intelligibility more than the achievement of acrolectal pronunciation, but given the prestige often accorded to AmE, most Filipinos find it hard to 'own' PE as part of their identity (Borlongan, 2016). This assumption affirms Mahboob and Cruz's (2013) claim that local languages in the Philippines will always be on the margins even in educational setting. Thus, an investigation of what keeps some Filipinos from claiming ownership of a local variety of English that they speak should be pursued.

Apart from the abovementioned challenges linked to the acceptability of PE as a variety of English, there has been a call for acceptance of other varieties, which need to be reflected in pedagogy. Gonzales (2017) observes the lack of acceptance of a local variety of English in the country. This lack of recognition has somehow influenced the movement of PE toward the differentiation stage in Schneider's (2003) dynamic model. Schneider (2003) avers that PE is still restricted by language policies of the country. However, Borlongan (2016) argues that PE is nearing stage 4 or endonormative stabilization because it is gaining acceptance in private universities and is ready for codification. Thus, before PE becomes recognized and mainstreamed, stereotypes attached to non-acrolectal varieties need to be

neutralized. One way of achieving this is to recognize the fluidity of any language.

It is important to undertake investigations that include less-known varieties, such as regional varieties of PE, so that idiolectal bias may be avoided, if not, at least be lessened. Another important part of these studies should include social factors, which partly form the basis for the variation of local Englishes, for such variables are seldom considered in phonology studies. Thus, this paper deals with a quanti-qualitative inquiry that investigates the relationship between accent and language stereotypes in English, and the different factors that contribute in forming these stereotypes such as identity of L2 speakers or learners' perspectives on English. This present study seeks to offer insights into the complexity of language stereotypes and its relationship to accent, and to share views on pronunciation instruction in the ESL classroom.

A speaker may be evaluated based on social dominance, integration (acculturation) pattern, enclosure (shared social facilities), cohesion (intragroup contact), size, convergence (extent of similarity to the target language), and intended length of residence (Schumann, 1978). When visual cues are not available, listeners tend to rely on acoustic-phonetic information (e.g., region of origin and language background, including whether the interlocutor is a native or nonnative speaker of the language), for speaker evaluation is often saliently realized through a speaker's dialect or accent (Bent et al., 2016). The subjective ratings of accent strength were discovered to have an impact on speaker prestige variables—perceived intelligence and education of the speaker (Groendelaers et al., 2015). The main concern here is how linguistic varieties influence perception and representation.

Studies on language attitudes have expanded to include the role of accent in one's perception. Although voice may not be enough to evaluate a speaker, the study of Giles and Powesland (1975) showed that social consensus can be observed in terms of ESL learners' language stereotypes toward lectal speakers by assigning stereotypical traits to voices. Giles and Billings (2004) highlight that a particular speaking style "triggers certain social categorizations that will lead to a set of group-related trait inferences" (p. 189). This type of study was initiated by Lambert et al. (1960) who introduced the Matched Guise Test (MGT). In their study about inter-ethnic language attitudes in Montreal, they used the MGT to elicit attitudes from different language users. The elicitation presupposes that speech style (including accent) triggers certain social categorizations where trait inferences are based. This means that by simply hearing a voice, listeners are predisposed to infer a speaker's personality attributes. The said study yielded the following results: (1) out of the 14 traits in the Discourse Completion Task (DCT), the English-Canadian speakers of their own ethnic group judged their language favorably, while the French-Canadian favored other languages than their own. The DCT contains a situational prompt to elicit responses from participants given a specific context.

Honey (1998) claims that variation of speech can influence pronunciation differences, which may depend on one's region, social group, and situation. Although there is an increasing acceptance of phonological differences based on varieties of English, it can be assumed that some people still adhere to pronunciation standards closer to the native-like accent with accompanying value judgments. Recent empirical studies have examined a range of speaking situations and communities showing positive attitudes toward the RP-like (Received Pronunciation) variety or the assumed British English pronunciation (Cheung

& Sung, 2016). One of the major reasons cited accounted for the prominence of English in education. The instrumental value of English was cited as one of the reasons why ESL learners would like to learn it (Chen & Cao, 2013; Lai, 2009; McKenzie, 2010; Sicam & Lucas, 2016; Siregar, 2010; Tamimi Sa'd & Modirkhamemne, 2015). McCrocklin and Link (2016) also found that the RP-like accent is an advantage in terms of communication skills, which gives ESL learners pride and excitement.

Furthermore, learners' language attitudes may influence their second language learning. Most studies on language attitudes and speaker evaluation investigated L2 learners (Lai, 2009; Lambert, 1990; Sicam & Lucas, 2016). Lambert (1990) highlighted that cultural background would often influence students' attitude toward second language learning and their desire to learn the language. Thus, students' attitude influence their perception on successful language learning (Cummins, 1993). Because students from different academic strands have varied motivations for learning the second language, these motivations may affect their perception and the way they maintain their first language (Döpke et al., 1991).

Apart from the aforementioned social factors that affect speakers' preference toward their local accent, socialization could be one of the major reasons why speakers would prefer the local accent over the target-language accent. One possible social variable is gender, which may affect a speaker's perception (Flaherty, 2009). Similarly, gender was also assumed to influence perceived competence and linguistic behavior (Nelson et al., 2016). As such, this variable needs to be considered, for there may be differences as to how males or females perceive characteristics of speakers.

Another social variable is speaker's exposure to native speakers. Second language speakers are assumed to have very limited interactions, if not negative experiences, with first language speakers, thus making them unaccustomed and uncomfortable to the accent. In her study, Piller (2002) investigated 27 highly proficient speakers of German that could pass for a native speaker in certain contexts. She particularly pointed to a participant who tried to maintain her L2 accent to avoid assumptions about her German identity, which could trigger negative evaluation toward her. On the other hand, McCrocklin and Link (2016) found out through a mixed-methods study that while speakers try to achieve a native-like accent, they do not find this as a threat to their identity. Other motivations for preferring the local accent are related to the similarity of phonemic features of both the local and the target languages (Leiken et al., 2009), authenticity and comprehensibility of the accent (Tevar, 2014), fluency (Pinget et al., 2014), language awareness (Honey, 1998; McGowan, 2015), and ethnocentrism (Neulip & Speten-Hansen, 2013).

Leiken et al. (2009) presupposes that when a target language has similar phonemic features as their native language, interlocutors understand it better and therefore evaluate it more positively. Pinget et al. (2014) correlated L2 speech fluency and accent, and found that the speech rated as less fluent was evaluated as more accented at the same time. Language awareness also improves sociophonetic perceptions (McGowan, 2015). Although there is an increasing acceptance of different phonological variations, people still uphold pronunciation standards closer to the native accent with accompanying value judgments (Honey, 1998). Neulip and Speten-Hansen (2013) also believe that as ethnocentrism increases, the less likely will an interlocutor evaluate a language positively.

There is, however, uncertainty in terms of speakers' accent preferences because despite their reasons for choosing to maintain the local accent, they are not afraid to lose it and acquire a new accent because they cannot see the clear connection of one's accent to one's identity (McCrocklin & Link, 2016). This assumption is contrary to the claims of Goodwin (2010) where accent is connected to personal identity and can represent identification with or membership in a particular group. Although students aspire for a native-like accent, they can be satisfied with near-native-like accent speakers as teachers. Buckingham (2015) studied the preference of Omani students in terms of native-speaker model and found that Arabs, South Asians, and Filipinos were generally accepted to teach English, except those who have a very 'strong' accent.

In the Philippines where 187 languages are spoken at the time of this study, the possibility of inter-speaker and intra-speaker phonological variations is very high. Llamzon (1997) and Tayao (2004) described these variations in lectal categories as acrolect, mesolect, and basilect. Acrolectal speakers sound very similar to native-like proficiency. Mesolectal, on the other hand, slightly depart from the acrolect style because the local accent somehow neutralizes the native-like accent. Basilectal speakers are those whose regional accents are very much evident when they speak English. Gonzales (2017) also recently reaffirmed the idea of lectal system as one of the subcategories of social Englishes within PE along with occupation-based Englishes such as *Yaya* English (nanny English) and Bargirl English (spoken by female employees in red-light district bars in Clark and Subic areas). This categorization may resemble very close characteristics as other subvarieties (such as the basilectal), which can be attributed to fractal recursivity (Irvine & Gal, 2000) where basilectal PE can still be further reclassified as upper or lower depending on urban upper basilectal and provincial upper basilectal. It should be noted that social factors contribute greatly to this further expansion of subvarieties (Martin, 2014). Despite the little differences noted between and among subvarieties, Gonzales (2017) further argued that these differences still deserve linguistic attention as other known varieties.

In the Philippine context, recent investigations on language stereotypes associated with accent have centered on language attitudes. Castro and Roh (2013) found that Korean learners perceived the accent of Filipino ESL teachers as nonstandard. Sicam and Lucas (2016) found that positive attitudes were associated with English and Filipino. These positive attitudes, however, do not automatically translate to acceptance. Siregar (2010) argued that varieties of English still have to go through a long process to be accepted. If these varieties still sound 'unnatural' even to a nonnative speaker's ears, then speakers of these varieties will most likely be evaluated distinctively from their native counterparts. Language choices affect an interlocutor's impressions. Thus, speakers constantly negotiate for these impressions to improve or be maintained over the course of the interaction.

Although a number of studies have focused on language attitudes in the Philippines, limited studies, however, have been undertaken to explore accent stereotypes of Filipinos across lectal groups. Furthermore, it is important to consider ESL learners' background that may influence their perceived language stereotypes and to explore possible perceptions that may hinder one from accepting a local variety of English. This paper aims to answer the following questions:

1. What language stereotypes do ESL learners associate with acrolect, mesolect, and basilect speakers?
2. Is there a significant relationship between the ESL learner's language stereotypes and the speakers' lectal group?

2.   Method

2.1   Research Design

The study employed a quantitative-qualitative research design in investigating accent stereotypes and attitudes of Filipino ESL learners in a private institution in Manila, the Philippines. Data were collected through the Matched Guise Test (MGT) developed by Lai (2007), which was modified to examine the attitudes and stereotypes toward a speaker's accent using the three lectal groups proposed by Llamzon (1997). In view of the need for triangulation, follow-up interviews were conducted to supplement the results of the MGT. The interview questions were derived from the study of Lai (2009). The frequency and mean of the responses were determined, and ANOVA was used to ascertain the significant relationship between the ESL learner's language stereotypes and the speakers' lectal group.

2.2   Participants

A total of 120 ESL learners from a private institution in Manila, the Philippines were considered in the study. Two classes out of six were randomly selected from each academic strand. The first group was consisted of 60 students (29 females, 31 males), while the second had 60 students (52 males, eight females). Their ages ranged from 15 to 18 years old, with a mean of 16.5. All respondents had gone through at least ten years of formal English instruction in their elementary and junior high schools. Despite the unavailability of data as regards their proficiency test results, the amount of exposure to English of these students reflect their level of proficiency in the English language.

Because the research instrument requires students to read through the scenarios, proficiency may somehow affect their responses. Although the respondents did not take any standardized English proficiency test, their admission to the university required them to take an entrance test where they were supposed to obtain at least an average to intermediate language-proficiency level. Also, the personal information part (see Appendix A) they filled out before they completed the DCT asked them to indicate the number of years they have been learning English. Likewise, English is taught as a second language in the Philippines; in fact, it is one of the official languages used in commerce, trade, government transactions, and education. It is likewise important to note that proficiency level was not considered as a variable in the present study. Although there are notions where pragmatic competence is said to be influenced by language proficiency, very little is proven of its influence on pragmatic transfer (Felix-Brasdefer, 2006; Kasper & Rose, 2002).

The personal information part includes details about the respondents' age, sex, educational attainment, language used at home, years of stay in the Philippines, and years of

learning English. Given that the participants had no problems with their English proficiency, the MGT was written in English only. To support and clarify the findings from the MGT, 15 participants were individually interviewed.

2.3   Research Setting

Data were collected from a private learning institution in Manila, the Philippines. For convenience, the participants were chosen from this school because the medium of instruction in their major subjects is English and that they are expected to manifest improvement in all their language skills to be promoted to Grade 12. The data-elicitation activity was done using the audio facilities in the classrooms. Initially, a technical test was run to ensure the smooth conduct of the said activity.

2.4   Research Instrument

The language stereotypes of ESL learners were collected through a modified Matched Guise Test (MGT) adapted from Lai (2007) (see Appendix A). The modifications on language labels (i.e., 'English' to 'Acrolect') were done to suit the needs of the present study. The questionnaire was subjected to Cronbach reliability test. The participants of the study were asked to evaluate the audio-recorded speaker's traits after hearing her read a passage in different accents, namely acrolect, mesolect, and basilect. The students were not aware that the same person did the recording, and they were led to believe that the speakers were different people. Because one of the objectives of this study is to assess the effect of accent on the ESL learners' perceptions, the audio-recordings used English in varied accents based on the description of Llamzon (1997). An inter-rater listened to the recordings to verify if the accents conform to the phonological features set by Llamzon (1997) for each Filipino lectal speaker. To ensure that the chosen topic would not affect the participants' perceptions, the text "Useful Insects" was lifted from Solorzano and Schmidt's (1996) paper, which was also used by Scales et al. (2006) in their study about language learner's perception toward accent. Since the same language (i.e., English) was used during the recordings, it was assumed that any difference in the ratings on the voices would be a reflection of the respondents' attitudes toward the different accents. The speaker in the MGT is a Filipino woman who speaks Cebuano as her first language, and English and Filipino as her additional languages.

The use of the MGT has limitations as clarified by its proponents. Gardner and Lambert (1972) were uncertain whether the stereotypes that surfaced from their data really reflected the beliefs of respondents. They also pointed out that since the questionnaire already listed the qualities, the respondents may have been forced to reveal stereotypes, which would not exactly capture their preconceived beliefs. Despite these shortcomings, Solis (2002) explains that an indirect method of collecting language stereotypes requires a greater degree of introspection, which accounts for less rational, less conditioned, and sincere responses. Gardner and Lambert (1972) also suggested the use of audio-recorded stimulus materials to elicit multistylistic evaluation and the triangulation of the MGT with follow-up interviews to substantiate the results or findings.

In the present study, the MGT consists of 13 qualities or attributes: friendly, sincere,

approachable, considerate, trustworthy, intelligent, competent, industrious, educated, wealthy, trendy, arrogant, and aggressive. The rating is based on a four-point scale: 4 = the voice matches very well with the given trait, 3 = the voice matches quite well with the given trait, 2 = the voice does not match well with the given trait, and 1 = the voice does not match at all with the given trait. The 13 traits were derived by Lai (2007) from the studies of Lyczak et al. (1976), Pierson et al. (1980), and Gibbons (1987). From these traits, only two are negative. Despite the danger of a biased evaluation, results could still show negative feelings toward any accent by rating it low on specific positive traits. For example, if a respondent rated 4 on 'sincere' and 1 on 'considerate' for the basilect speaker, this would mean that the speaker is 'very sincere' but not at all 'considerate.' The means on the different traits were calculated and compared.

After conducting the DCT, individual interviews were conducted among 15 participants to verify and substantiate some of the answers in the MGT. The interview questions (see Appendix B) were also derived from the study of Lai (2007) and were slightly modified to fit the context of the present study.

2.5   Data-collection Procedure

Permissions from the principal and class advisers of the participants were secured before the data collection was conducted. The objectives of the study were also thoroughly explained to all parties (i.e., principal, students, and class advisers) involved. To ensure consistency in the test administration, the researcher prepared standard instructions to all classes and administered the test herself. Before the instructions were given, it was made clear to all the students that their participation was voluntary and that their responses would not affect their grades.

Before answering the MGT, the participants filled out the personal information section. In the DCT, a sample item was given with a sample answer to guide the participants. Also, this example was explained by the researcher before the actual test. Before the test, the participants were asked to read through the traits indicated in the MGT. The differences among the three lectal groups were also explained to them. Afterward, the recording was played twice per speaker in between 30 second gaps to give the students more time to write their answers on the MGT questionnaire.

An initial data cleaning was done to assure validity. Out of 135 returned questionnaires, only 120 were considered for analysis. Fifteen problematic questionnaires were excluded because either most of the items were left blank or the answers were all the same from the first to the last item. The entries from the MGT and the questionnaire were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

2.6   Data Analysis

Thirteen traits were listed in the MGT adapted from Lai (2007). These traits were categorized into four: solidarity, competence, personal attractiveness, and aggressiveness. As mentioned earlier, the data were encoded as nominal values in SPSS. The codes used to represent gender, academic strand, and speaker's evaluation are presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Coding scheme used in SPSS

Variable	1	2	3	4
Gender	Male	Female		
Academic Strand	Strand 1	Strand 2		
Speaker's Evaluation	The voice matches very well with the given trait.	The voice matches quite well with the given trait.	The voice does not match well with the given trait.	The voice does not match at all with the given trait.

To measure the significant relationship between the ESL learner's language stereotypes and the speakers' lectal group, one-way ANOVA was used where the differences were only deemed significant if the *p*-value or significance value was lower than 0.05. With the help of a reliable statistician and educational researcher, the frequency counts of the responses, as well as cross tabulations and correlations, were computed using the SPSS software.

To validate and qualify the results from the quantitative data, 15 one-on-one interviews were facilitated by the researcher using a standard questionnaire. The interviews were transcribed and recorded for analysis. To illustrate the extracts from the said interview, the interviewer was represented as "I," while the participants were randomly assigned with numbers to maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

3.   Results and Discussion

3.1   Language Stereotypes of ESL Students Toward the Lectal Speakers

Table 2 presents the consistent patterns revealed in all categories. The acrolect speaker was consistently rated higher than the other two speakers in 'solidarity,' 'competence,' 'personal attractiveness,' and 'aggressiveness.'

Table 2
Language stereotypes of ESL students toward the lectal speakers

Solidarity		Acrolect	Mesolect	Basilect
	Trait	**Mean**		
	Friendly	2.84↑	2.29↓	2.43
	Sincere	2.88↑	1.83↓	2.00
	Approachable	2.83↑	1.94↓	1.95
	Considerate	2.84↑	2.00	1.96↓
	Trustworthy	2.85↑	1.84↓	1.85
Mean		2.85↑	198↓	2.04

Competence		Acrolect	Mesolect	Basilect
	Trait	**Mean**		
	Intelligent	3.18↑	2.04	1.81↓
	Competent	2.51↑	1.76	1.75↓
	Industrious	2.71↑	2.00↓	2.03
	Educated	3.38↑	2.13	1.84↓
Mean		2.95↑	1.98	1.86↓

Personal Attractiveness		Acrolect	Mesolect	Basilect
	Trait	**Mean**		
	Wealthy	2.69↑	1.76	1.62↓
	Trendy	2.40↑	1.68	1.46↓
Mean		2.55↑	1.72	1.54↓

Aggressiveness		Acrolect	Mesolect	Basilect
	Trait	**Mean**		
	Arrogant	1.93↑	1.93	1.75↓
	Aggressive	1.93↑	1.74↓	1.84
Mean		1.93↑	1.84	1.80↓

↑group with the higher mean;↓group with the lower mean

In terms of solidarity, the results are contrary to those revealed in previous studies on learners' perception toward accent. The findings in Scales et al.'s (2006) and McCrocklin and Link's (2016) studies highlighted the importance of language identity and communication

goals over accent to explain why the respondents would rather use the mother-tongue accent (mesolect and basilect) than the target-language accent (acrolect). However, Tamimi Sa'd and Modirkhamene's (2015) study revealed EFL learners' tendency to rate 'solidarity' higher toward the acrolect speaker as a marker of acculturation into the target culture. In the present study, it can be assumed that since all the participants were post-millenials, who would tend to adapt a more 'westernized' culture through their exposure to technology and social media, it is not surprising why they would feel 'closer' to the native-like accent.

In their study, McCrocklin and Link (2016) highlighted socialization as the primary reason why the mother-tongue accent was preferred. Similarly, most of the respondents in the present study seldom speak English when they communicate. This could possibly explain why, despite listening to mesolect and basilect speakers, 'solidarity' was not rated high. Goodwin (2010) presupposes that the language used signifies one's cultural identity. Therefore, the language, more than the accent, affects one's identification with his or her culture as represented by the language. A majority of the interviewees claimed that the acrolect was the accent they liked the most although they did not mention that they could closely identify themselves with the said accent. Most responses confirmed that despite their preference to acquire the acrolect accent, they would still want to retain their mother-tongue accent because they thought such would identify them as Filipinos:

> I: If you had a choice, would you give up your native accent?

> S1:   *No, because it is still our native tongue. Although I prefer the acrolect accent, it does not mean that I do not appreciate the basilect and mesolect accents.*

> S2:   *No. It's my pride. It signifies where I come from.*

> S3:   *No, I grew up with this accent. I would not replace this for an American accent.*

Among the speakers, the acrolect was viewed by the respondents as the most competent. This finding runs parallel with those in previous studies (McCrocklin & Link, 2016; Scales et al., 2006; Tamimi Sa'd & Modirkhamene, 2015), which consistently rated the native-like accent higher in traits related to 'competence.' The acrolect accent is assumed to manifest competence in speaking the language, and since it is also believed to be the 'standard form,' it offers speakers more opportunities to improve learning, adapt to globalization, and get better jobs in the future. Because the acrolect accent is closer to RP, Honey (1998) emphasized that the use of RP confers special prestige on its speakers and offers several opportunities for employment, education, and the like.

The interview findings revealed a strong preference for the acrolect accent because of its instrumental value and prestige. The most common reasons offered were closely related to its utility and practicality.

I: Which of the three accents would you rank first?

S7:   *Acrolect, it is important in my future career.*

S8:   *Acrolect, foreigners would like to talk to you the most. They like the sound of your speaking. It is nice to listen.*

S11:   *Acrolect, it sounds good. The pronunciation is correct unlike mesolect and basilect. You seem intelligent.*

Similarly, the acrolect speaker was rated significantly higher in traits under 'personal attractiveness,' whereas the basilect speaker was rated the lowest in this category. Honey (1998) associated RP with members of the upper class in the same way it was described by Llamzon (1997) as he gave examples of speakers who would most likely fall under this category. Llamzon (1997) implied social status as he used examples from those working in blue-collared jobs (e.g., security guards, janitors) who belong to the basilect category.

Despite the positive perceptions toward it, the acrolect accent was likewise accorded specific negative traits such as 'arrogance' and 'aggressiveness.' These traits affirm the relative social distance of acrolect speakers to their listeners as they are perceived to be more 'attractive' and 'competent' than the other lectal speakers. Apart from social distance, dominance was highlighted as a negative attribute associated with the acrolect variety. In addition, the highest ratings assigned to the acrolect variety in terms of 'personal attractiveness' and 'aggressiveness' would imply power. However, the basilect speaker was rated the lowest, which would mean that regional accent is weakly associated with both in-group solidarity and power. This is not surprising, however, because the respondents are mostly Manila residents. The basilect speaker, however, speaks Cebuano, which is far from the mother-tongue accent of most respondents. This also accounts for the difficulty in comprehending the basilect speaker, which may have affected the rating because the ESL learners are not familiar with the phonemic and phonetic contours of Cebuano. The same findings were explained in the studies conducted by Tevar (2014), Pinget et al. (2014), and McGowan (2015).

Some responses of the interviewees pointed out the heavy accent of the basilect speaker, which made it difficult for them to understand her.

I: If you were to rank the three accents, which would you rank last?

S10:   *Basilect, he sounds like he's not fluent in English. It is also difficult to listen to him.*

S11:   *It is difficult to understand the words.*

3.2   Relationship Between the ESL Learner's Language Stereotypes and the Speakers' Lectal Group

To determine whether the evaluations of the three lectal speakers were significantly different, one-way ANOVA was used. The significance value (p) smaller than 0.05 is considered significant.

As shown in Table 3, the ANOVA results are highly statistically significant in two traits, i.e., 'competence' and 'solidarity,' since almost all of the significance values (p) are smaller than 0.05. The only exception is found in the categories 'personal attractiveness' and 'aggressiveness' and the trait 'solidarity' assigned to the acrolect speaker.

Table 3
Comparison among the lectal speakers

	Acrolect		Mesolect		Basilect	
	p-value*	Conclusion	*p*-value*	Conclusion	*p*-value*	Conclusion
1. Solidarity	.992	Not Significant	.000	Significant	.000	Significant
2. Competence	.000	Significant	.000	Significant	.048	Significant
3. Personal Attractiveness	.007	Significant	.453	Not Significant	.075	Not Significant
4. Aggressiveness	1.00	Not Significant	.074	Not Significant	.394	Not Significant

*p-value is significant at 0.05.

Although the acrolect speaker obtained the highest frequency in 'solidarity,' it is, however, insignificant when compared to the mesolect and the basilect speakers. This shows that 'solidarity' and 'aggressiveness' are not closely associated with the acrolect speaker who is most often positively evaluated with respect to 'competence' and 'personal attractiveness.' This implies that the American-English accent is considered a stronger symbol, which signifies wealth, trendiness, and competence. The insignificant differences in 'solidarity' associated with the acrolect speaker support previous findings that regional accent (i.e., mesolect and basilect) is most likely linked to solidarity (Lai, 2007). Although this finding is contradictory to the results found in Table 2, this shows that although there were some who may have assimilated themselves to the American culture, there were still an equal number of respondents who identified or felt more closely with the mother-tongue accent resembled by the basilect and the mesolect speakers.

The results for the mesolect and the basilect speakers were consistent in terms of the number and type of traits that were statistically significant. It can be deduced, however, that qualities such as 'personal attractiveness' and 'aggressiveness' are difficult to measure through one's accent. Such may have accounted for the insignificant differences in the results for both speakers. This explanation, however, does not reflect that of the acrolect speaker because the RP-like accent is closely associated to prestige.

3.3   Validity of the Findings

Although Edwards (1994) questions the validity of the MGT in assessing attitudes by simply listening to speakers, patterns often emerge from the data in the present study, which somehow validate that perceptions may characterize attitudes regarding particular groups of speakers.

The results of the study are valid for these reasons: The speaker is a university English language instructor who speaks fluent Cebuano and Filipino as her native languages. Despite such, she obtained consistently low ratings from the respondents when she used the mesolect and the basilect accents. Although she read the same English passage for each of the portrayed accents, different evaluations were elicited from the respondents. This observation suggests that other than the language, the accent likewise contributes to the perceptions of the ESL learners toward the speakers.

The findings were further substantiated through follow-up individual interviews with the same group of students. In line with the results of the MGT, the respondents highlighted qualities related to 'competence' more than any other categories; thus, 'competence' traits were consistently considered significant across the lectal speakers.

4.   Conclusion

The results of the present study suggest that different accents may influence Filipino ESL learners' language stereotypes. First, in all traits, the acrolect variety was consistently rated higher than the two other lectal accents. This finding supports the claim of Scales et al. (2006), Tamimi Sa'd and Modirkhmanene (2015), and McCrocklin and Link (2016) in their respective studies, which revealed the superior status of the RP, an accent which closely resembles the acrolect variety. The mesolect and the basilect varieties, however, were considered inferior because the respondents believed that these accents would not be very helpful in their hopes for upward mobility. Second, the differences in the evaluation of the ESL learners toward the acrolect variety would show the social factors involved in choosing the two other varieties. A majority of the ESL learners agreed that for solidarity and identity purposes, they would prefer the use of either the mesolect or the basilect accents. Third, as revealed in the interview data, one of the main factors that contributed to the students' evaluation of the lectal accents was the clarity of the speakers' message. They would tend to evaluate positively those speakers who were found to be easier to comprehend.

4.1   Implications of the Present Study for Language Teaching

This study revealed the language stereotypes of Filipino ESL learners toward acrolect, mesolect, and basilect speakers. Although the respondents were aware that they did not have the native-like accent, they, however, seemed to be contented with their mesolect accents. This finding would show that despite not sounding native-like, they understood the social context from which these speakers come from. Such can serve as a good motivation for teachers to make their students realize that English can be spoken with a Filipino accent. In reality, it would be difficult for educators to push for unrealistic goals in terms of pronunciation at the expense of

other linguistic aspects. Codifying and standardizing Philippine English and incorporating it in teaching materials may provide institutional support for students to recognize and accept the phonological characteristics of the local variety of English. Through the Mother-Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) approach, increased language awareness may be expected from students, which might eventually change how they view mesolect and basilect speakers. Using the results of this study, teachers may also reinforce the importance of accommodation in communicating with speakers who have different accents. It is impossible to speak a language in a uniform accent; therefore, teaching the skill of adjusting speech styles (e.g., accent) in relation to the speech of interlocutors would be practical in developing negotiation and intercultural-communication abilities among Filipino students.

With Philippine English known to be in the developing stage (Gonzales, 2017), the mesolect variety could therefore be considered in updating phonological standards taught in Philippine schools. Because the mesolect variety is found in mid-continuum, it is a lot easier to appropriate its phonological contours. However, given that the lectal system implies socioeconomic and political divisions, the acceptance of the mesolect variety can be challenging to achieve. As revealed in the present study, the ESL students did not consider mesolect as the standard variety even though this accent is often used by celebrities, government officials, academics, and media practitioners in the local context (Gonzales, 2017). Since the study only considered students who speak the mesolect variety, it would be a worthy endeavor, too, to explore the language stereotypes of students with basilect and acrolect accents in order to verify if familiarity with the accent and sense of identity play a crucial role in their evaluation.

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Appendix A
The Matched Guise Test (MGT)

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Class Number: _____   Section: _____   Age: _____   Sex: (____) Male (_____) Female

Place of Birth: _____   Language(s) Spoken at Home: _____

No. of Years Spent Learning English: _____ Years of Stay in the Philippines: _____

RESPONSES

Listen to the three speakers, and decide how well they match with the following personality traits. Put a check in the box that corresponds to your choice.

4 = the voice matches very well with the given trait

3 = the voice matches quite well with the given trait

2 = the voice does not match well with the given trait

1 = the voice does not match at all with the given trait

	TRAITS	ACROLECT				MESOLECT				BASILECT			
		4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1	4	3	2	1
1	Friendly												
2	Intelligent												
3	Educated												
4	Arrogant												
5	Competent												
6	Industrious												
7	Sincere												
8	Aggressive												
9	Approachable												
10	Considerate												
11	Trustworthy												
12	Wealthy												
13	Trendy												

Appendix B
Interview questions

1. Which of the three accents do you like the most?
    a. Why do you like this accent the most?
    b. Why did you rank this accent 2ⁿᵈ or 3ʳᵈ?
    c. Do you think L1 accent is still important?
    d. Speaking in the L1 accent may be less understandable, especially to foreigners. Why do you insist that you speak this way?
    e. Mesolect/basilect – Is it because you're a Filipino that's why you prefer this accent?
2. Which accent do you think is easier to acquire?
3. Which accent do you want to acquire?
4. Which accent makes you feel more superior?
    a. Why do you feel superior?
5. How would you classify your own accent?
    a. Why do you speak with this accent? (Is it because you encounter this accent more often?)
6. Is it weird for a Filipino to speak with an acrolect accent?
7. Do you like your accent? Why or why not?
8. Which accent do you find comfortable using?
    a. But didn't you say you prefer the acrolect accent more?
    b. Mesolect - What if you go out to the world?
9. If you had a choice, would you give up your native accent?
10. As a Filipino, shouldn't we be more appreciative of the mesolect or the basilect accents?

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