| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Intelligibility of Select World Englishes and the Factors Affecting It: The Case of High School ESL Learners

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| **ABSTRACT**

With the significant upsurge of English language speakers in the world, it is easier to anticipate the chances of both native and non-native speakers communicating with each other. As a consequence, the question of the intelligibility of the different English varieties has become a significant area to be studied. Normally, most studies utilized participants who have an extensive background in the language, such as English majors, teachers, or natives of the English language, to investigate the intelligibility of World Englishes. However, in the Philippine setting, students across all grade levels also use English as their second official language. Stemming from the aforementioned, this paper projects to establish the research space by employing ESL senior high school students of Southern Mindanao to determine the intelligibility of American, Philippine, and Chinese Englishes and the factors that affect the intelligibility of these varieties. With a mixed method research design, the study found that Philippine English was relatively the most intelligible variety to the students. Moreover, the study further revealed that accent familiarity, pronunciation, speech rate, and linguistic environment are the factors that influence intelligibility. The findings of the study suggest that English language users should be keen on the factors that affect intelligibility to increase their awareness of the different varieties of English. It is also suggested that teachers should adopt a variety that is most beneficial for the users to achieve better intelligibility.

1. Introduction

Doubtlessly, a great number of speakers all over the world utilize English as a common code for understanding. Its massive influence has become a middle-ground language for different speakers with distinct language idiosyncrasies and socio-cultural backgrounds. Karoń (2011) stipulates that the number of non-native speakers (NNSs) currently using English has almost threefold outnumbered the number of its native speakers (NSs). This is due to the fact that more countries have recognized the presence of English, which made it one of their official languages, and more countries are accepting its emergence. As a result, many countries have developed their own variety of English in terms of its phonetic, lexical, grammatical, and semantic aspects.

Since there exist different varieties of English, it is important that diverse speakers of the language maintain being intelligible to their interlocutors. Smith and Nelson (1985) define intelligibility simply as "word or utterance recognition." According to Munro (2011), effective communication is difficult to achieve if intelligibility is absent since this is the single most important aspect of all communication. This concept is a much-touted topic, especially in pronunciation teaching and World Englishes. The question "who is intelligible to whom" has raised a plethora of studies that aim to identify the intelligibility of different English varieties.

Normally, intelligibility studies of local varieties of the language are measured by NSs. This is primarily because of the notion that local language learners should adhere to the standards of NSs in order to be intelligible. Quirk (1990) and Van den Doel (2006) assert that English as an international language should remain a monolith and that international intelligibility is better realized if there is a single standard to be abided by learners of the language.

On the other hand, there is an increasing number of studies where NNSs evaluate the intelligibility of both native and non-native speakers of English. This is principal because some researchers (e.g., Kachru, 1985; Jenkins, 2000; Munro, 2011) argue that English as an international language should be treated as "a heterogeneous language with multiple norms and diverse grammar" (Crystal, 2003) and that standard of the native speakers should not be the sole reference for establishing intelligibility, but instead, it should be a shared responsibility of all speakers of the language to be intelligible.

However, most of the studies stipulated above-utilized speakers with an extensive educational background in English, such as English majors or teachers of the English language, to examine the intelligibility of World Englishes. Nevertheless, it should be noted that those with significant educational backgrounds in English are not the only users of the language. There are also speakers that have no extensive training but regard English as their second language.

Grounding on the stated research gap, this research is geared toward identifying how intelligible are American English, Philippine English, and Chinese English to the Grade 12 ESL students in a private school. This aims to contribute to the thinly investigated perspective of English language users in Southern Mindanao of the Philippines regarding intelligibility. Furthermore, this paper also attempts to identify the factors that affect the intelligibility of World Englishes derived from the perspective of the participants.

As this paper intends to diagnose the intelligibility of World Englishes, the following questions need to be crystalized: (1) how intelligible are American English, Philippine English, and Chinese English to ESL students? and (2) what are the factors that influence the (un)intelligibleness of the language?

2. Literature Review
2.1 World Englishes
Utilizing English as a world language has bred evident benefits to an increasingly globalized world. Rao (2015) raised that it is inevitable for people from all parts of the world to learn English since it propagated as the major and dominant language of international diplomacy, business and commerce, science and technology, travel agency, and education. Not only has it become the medium of instruction that fosters the spread of its emergence, but it has also become a means of communication across the world. In consequence, many countries have developed their own variety of English in terms of its phonetic, lexical, grammatical, and semantic aspects. With this, it seems that World Englishes has evolved as better means of communication where people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds can now communicate with each other (Jung, 2010).

Although there are varying constructs of the term, Bolton (2004) defines World Englishes (WE) using one of his interpretations of the term as "an 'umbrella label' covering all varieties of English worldwide and the different approaches used to describe and analyze them." The history of its formulation was formally introduced in the year 1978 when two seminal conferences were conducted in the USA. The first conference was organized by Larry E. Smith at the Culture Learning Institute of the East-West Center in Honolulu, Hawaii, and the second conference was organized by Braj Kachru together with the Linguistic Institute of the Linguistic Society of America, hosted by the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in USA (Kachru, 2013). These conferences became trailblazers in providing a realistic framework for studying the English language in a global context and other related concepts, specifically its acceptability and intelligibility.

The primary purpose of the formulation of WE is to recognize the spread of English in many regions of the world, then developed by many non-native speaking countries as their own variety of English. Historically, English first developed in the colonies of English-speaking countries (Kirkpatrick, 2010). Colonized countries such as the Philippines, India, Singapore, and others later institutionalized English making it one of their official languages. In the modern days, the English language has also reached countries that participate in an increasingly globalized world. These varieties of English have continued to develop as they are necessarily used in a lot of global transactions. To illustrate the spread and development of English all over the world, Kachru (1985) introduced the Three Concentric Circles.

2.2 Kachru's Three Concentric Circles
The most influential and discussed model to explain the spread of English until this recent time by most studies (e.g., Jindapitak & Teo, 2013; Natiladdanon & Thanavisuth, 2014; and Lee & Jun 2016) is Kachru's (1985) Three Concentric Circles. Kachru (1992) defined the three concentric circles as "the types of spread, the patterns of acquisition, and the functional allocation of English in diverse cultural contexts." This model classifies and groups three different categories of English varieties. These are Inner Circle, Outer Circle, and Expanding Circle. Each circle has its own characteristics.

The Inner Circle represents English as a linguistic base of all Englishes spoken in different regions and is primarily used as a mother tongue or English as a Native Language (ENL). Countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and some of the Caribbean and Australasian territories belong in this circle. These are the countries where the use of the English language originated.

The Expanding Circle, on the other hand, represents countries where English is regarded as a Second Language (ESL) which means that it is one of the country's official languages together with their mother or native language (Jindapitak & Teo, 2013). India, Malaysia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Nigeria are some of the countries that are in this circle. Bamgbose (2001) and Kachru (1992) labeled the English variety of these countries as 'new Englishes', 'nativized Englishes', 'institutionalized Englishes', or 'indigenized Englishes'.

Finally, the Expanding Circle classifies countries where English has no major historical influence or is not institutionalized but rather solely recognizes the benefits of utilizing English in business, higher education, media, science and technology, and among English-mediated domains (Lee & Jun 2016). China, Russia, Japan, Indonesia, Korea, Egypt, and most of Europe belong to this group.

2.3 Issues on World Englishes

Because of the concept of World Englishes, the landscape of English as a native-centered language has been radicalized into a more diverse language. In consequence, this shift of perspective created varying issues in terms of standardization, pedagogy, and others. Many sociolinguistic researchers embrace the notion that English, in this context, is not solely owned by native speakers. Kachru argues that it is time to legitimize the variety of English that other countries have developed based on what is useful to them. Cystal (2003) further supports this when he emphasizes that English should not be regarded as a homogeneous language but rather a heterogeneous language with varying linguistic idiosyncrasies.

However, Quirks (1990), one of the strong critics of World Englishes, believes that Standard English Norms such as Received Pronunciation (RP) or General American (GA) should be used in non-native settings to gain international intelligibility. Quirk's concern regarding this concept is the idea that continuing to utilize a non-native variety of English in teaching non-native speakers has detrimental impacts on the intelligibility of the English user. Prator (1968) provides a foundation for the concern of Quirks (1990), stating that he does not see how a local model or variety of English can serve as a model for English language learners.

But the concern of Quirks (1990) was answered by Jenkins (2000) when she argued that NN teachers have the upper hand in teaching the language to NN learners because they have the personal knowledge of the "route" that the learners are taking in terms of learning the language. This is particularly relevant, especially if the NN teacher and NN learners have the same L1. In fact, multiple studies (e.g., Smith & Rafiqzad,1979; Matsuura, 2007; and Orikasa, 2016) have proved that NNSs can be more intelligible than NSs.

2.4 The Concept of Intelligibility

Surveying studies that gave definitions of intelligibility would suggest that there is no universally accepted definition of the term. Intelligibility is often confused with acceptability, comprehensibility, accentedness, and interpretability. Smith and Nelson (1985) state that because intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interpretability are the most commonly confused terms used, they established a distinction between the three terms:

> a) Intelligibility. word/utterance recognition; a word/utterance is considered to be unintelligible when the listener is unable to make it out and, thus, to repeat it.
>
> b) Comprehensibility. word/utterance meaning (locutionary force); word/utterance is said to be incomprehensible when the listener can repeat it (i.e., recognizes it) but is unable to understand its meaning in the context in which it appears.
>
> c) Interpretability. meaning behind word/utterance (illocutionary force); a word/utterance is said to be uninterpretable when the listener recognizes it but is unable to understand the speaker's intentions behind it (i.e., what the speaker is trying to say).
> (Smith & Nelson, 1985, pp. 334-336).

Smith (1992), as cited by Rajadurai (2007), further proceeds in saying that these three terms also need to be ranked according to the degree of their importance in communication, with intelligibility being the last and interpretability being the first. Although Jenkins (2000) regards the definition given by Smith and Nelson (1985), she rejects the ranking of Smith (1992), for she declares that intelligibility is a prerequisite (although not an assurance) for successful and effective communication. This is because of the notion that a listener must first be able to recognize the utterance of the speaker before the listener can comprehend and interpret the message at his/her end.

Nonetheless, this paper utilizes the definition of Smith and Nelson (1985) as the mechanism to identify the intelligibility level of World Englishes. This definition is perhaps one of the most applied definitions of intelligibility as several researchers (Deterding & Kirkpatrick, 2006; Sewell, 2010; and Nazari, 2014) also utilize their definition.

2.5 Previous Studies on Intelligibility of World Englishes
In the early and important study of Smith & Rafiqzad (1979), 1,300 respondents from 11 different countries evaluated the intelligibility level of 9 various native and non-native speakers. The result of the study reveals that non-native varieties of English can be more intelligible than native varieties and that native speakers are not always the best assessors of intelligibility. Additionally, they insinuate that familiarity with different varieties can increase intelligibility.

The same result prospered in the study of Matsuura (2007), where 106 Japanese students evaluated the intelligibility of 2 native speakers of American English and 2 speakers of Hong Kong English using a dictation task. He reported that it was easier for Japanese students to understand the utterance of Hong Kong English speakers than of those native speakers of American English. He further revealed that perceived competence in terms of American English and Hong Kong English was the most important variable in measuring the intelligibility level of a speaker. It was concluded that exposing students to a wide variety of English helps to improve intelligibility. The same claim is forwarded by Nelson (2011) that when users of the English language are exposed to different varieties, higher intelligibility persists.

Orikasa (2016) carried out a study where 37 Japanese speakers of English examined the intelligibility of 8 undergraduate and graduate students from Inner Circle and Expanding Circle countries. The researcher chose one male (M) and one female (F) exemplar from each country, namely the US, China, Korea, and Vietnam. Employing a mixed method research design, the result revealed that China F got the highest intelligibility, followed by USA M. On the contrary, Vietnam M got the second lowest intelligibility mean, and USA F got the lowest intelligibility score. Following the study of Smith & Rafiqzad (1979) and Matsuura (2007), the study also proves that native speakers are always the most intelligible. Orikasa (2016) primarily ascribed the findings to the speech rate of the speakers.

In the Philippine setting, Dayag (2007) tested the intelligibility of PhE to various listeners from three Kachruvian circles. There were 5 mesolectal speakers of PhE and 2 listeners from each concentric circle. The researcher recorded the 5–10-minute spontaneous speeches of the speakers to serve as speech samples to be examined by the listeners. It was found that PhE was 79.96% intelligible to inner circle listeners, 74.88% to outer circle listeners, and 54.99% to expanding circle listeners. He attributed the findings of his study to speech rate and exposure to different English varieties.

More recently, in the study of Dita & De Leon (2017), twenty EFL students from seven countries identified the intelligibility and comprehensibility of PhE with the use of cloze and comprehension tests. The findings of their study confirmed the result of Dayag (2007), where PhE is least intelligible to expanding circle. Speech rate, speaker's syllable-timed rhythm, and familiarity with pronunciation were the factors that appeared influential to the intelligibility of PhE. Furthermore, the study revealed one of the explanations why the listeners manifested low scores in intelligibility is because of the semantically anomalous words used in the cloze test. Thus, it is assumed in the study that the linguistic context of the text or its linguistic environment is assumed to affect intelligibility.

Chen (2011) determined the intelligibility level of Chinese English in different dialects in which one is Mandarin speaker, and the other is Cantonese speaker. There were 29 listeners in the study, specifically, 2 British English speakers and 3 American English speakers for the Native Speaker Group, 9 Tagalog speakers and 1 Pakistani speaker for the ESL group, and 2 Japanese speakers, 2 Korean speakers, 5 Cantonese speakers, and 5 Mandarin speakers for EFL group. The listeners were instructed to transcribe the utterances of both the Mandarin and Cantonese speakers. The result showed that the ESL group (Tagalog and Pakistani speakers) performed the lowest in both dialects of Chinese English. The study also revealed that one of the causes of unintelligibility is the complete mispronunciation of the words, as one of the speakers did not have explicit formal instruction in IPA, thus resulting in a lack of letter-sound correspondence. With regard to this, Jenkins (2003) asserts that proper pronunciation of vowel and consonant sounds is a crucial factor for intelligibility. However, Dita (2013) had a different finding in which she stated that pronunciation does not seem to play a significant role in the intelligibility of utterances.

Finally, the study of Hong (2017) explored the intelligibility of Hindi and Chinese-accented English by forty-two (42) native Korean students and twelve (12) native speakers of the English language. With the use of audio-recorded speeches of the speakers taken from a corpus of ELF-Speech Accent Archive (Weinberger, 2013), the findings of the study show that for both Korean learners and native speakers of English, the Chinese-accented English was significantly less intelligible than the Hindi-accented English. Moreover, the error analysis of the study presented that accent familiarity is closely related to intelligibility, which is further proven by other studies (Adedeji, 2014; Nazari & Younus, 2021).

3. Research Methodology
3.1 Research Design
This recent study employed a mixed method research design. This research design was used for the collection, presentation, and organization of data that identified the relationship among all the variables. The quantitative research design was applied to describe how (un)intelligible the three selected English varieties while qualitative research design following thematic analysis was utilized to investigate and expose the factors that affect intelligibility.

3.2 Locale of the Study
This study was conducted in Philippine Engineering and Agro-Industrial College, Inc. – one of the private educational institutions in Marawi City, Philippines. The rationale for selecting this locale is to elicit insights from ESL students in Southern Mindanao of the Philippines in relation to the intelligibility of World Englishes. After all, educational institutions in the Philippines generally use English as a medium for instruction.

3.3 Respondents of the Study
Three (3) representative speakers of the different English varieties based on Kachru's (1985) Three Concentric Circles were selected from the corpus of ELF – Speech Accent Archive (Weinberger, 2013). For the inner circle, American English (AmE) was used. The speaker is a 25-year-old male who has been living in New York City his entire life. He does not speak any language other than American English. For the outer circle, Philippine English (PhE) was used. The speaker is a 24-year-old female from Gingoog City, Philippines. Her native language is Bisaya and her second languages are Filipino and English – both official languages in the Philippines. Lastly, for the outer circle, Chinese English (ChE) was used. The speaker is a 27-year-old female from Beijing, China. She had 1.2 years of English learning experience, and her native language is Mandarin. The selection of these varieties is primarily hinged on their close relation to the Philippines.

On the other hand, the listeners in this study are the one (1) blocked section of Grade 12 Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM) students of Philippine Engineering and Agro-Industrial College, Inc. enrolled in the Academic Year 2021-2022. The section comprises exactly twenty-six (26) students. Their first language is Meranaw, which signifies that English and Filipino are their second languages – both official languages in the Philippines. This paper used a convenient sampling procedure to arrive at the selection of the listeners.

More than 90% of all subjects of the listeners in the entire two years in senior high school are written and taught in the English language, which can be inferred that they have spent significant time learning using the English language. More than that, their experiences of using the language are furthered by the fact that English is taught to them in their elementary and junior high school years. As users of the language, it is essential to identify which variety of English is comfortable for them to develop their level of enthusiasm in learning the language and increase their communicative competence.

3.4 Instrumentation
3.4.1 Cloze Test
To evaluate the intelligibility of the three English varieties employed in this study, a cloze test was used. This way of assessment follows multiple studies such as those of Becker & Kluge (2014), Hong (2017), and Dita & De Leon (2017). There were fifteen (15) words removed from the manuscript that has exactly sixty-nine (69) words read by the speakers of this study (see Appendix A). The removal of words was based on Jenkins' (2000) Lingua Franca Core (LFC). Its core goal is to attain mutual understanding in communication regardless of the English variety. LFC simply suggests that there are certain pronunciations (mostly highlighting vowels and downplaying consonants and prosody) in native English models that are unnecessary to perfect just to accomplish better intelligibility.

3.4.2 Audio-Recorded Oral Stimulus
The audio-recorded oral stimuli of the speakers were retrieved from the corpus of ELF – Speech Accent Archive (Weinberger, 2013). The speakers read a manuscript and recorded their speeches in an mp3 format. Each of the recorded files was more or less twenty seconds in length.

3.4.3 Semi-Structured Questionnaire

This tool was utilized to spot the significant factors that influence the intelligibility of different English varieties. This was administered subsequently after the participants listened to the audio-recorded oral stimulus and answered the cloze test. The questionnaire is adapted from Dita & De Leon's (2017) interview questions. However, the researcher made alterations and included those questions that only pertain to intelligibility.

3.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The Englishes that were tested in this paper were American English (AmE) for the inner circle, Philippine English (PhE) for the outer circle, and Chinese English (ChE) for expanding circle. The twenty-six (26) listeners were randomly grouped into three and were assigned to different Englishes. Ten participants (Group A) were assigned to listen to the audio recording of the AmE speaker, eight listeners (Group B) were instructed to listen to the audio recording of the PhE speaker, and another eight listeners (Group C) for the ChE speaker.

The assigned participants were instructed to listen simultaneously to their assigned English variety. The audio recorded file was played three times. In the first play, the participants listened to the whole recording without doing anything to give participants a general understanding of the test. In the second play, participants were instructed to write down the word/utterance that they understood from the oral stimulus. Finally, the audio recorded file was played once again for the third time to only refresh the participants for the interview. Subsequently, an interview using a semi-structured questionnaire was administered to 5 randomly selected listeners from each group to identify which factors influence the intelligibility of different English varieties.

3.6 Data Analysis Procedure

The intelligibility of the variety corresponds to the percentage of correct words. The data collected from the respondents were analyzed using simple percentage computation to show the intelligibility of the variety. This method of analysis follows several studies, such as Dita & De Leon (2017) and Dayag (2007). Afterward, the researcher employed thematic analysis to establish explanations of the relationship of the result and to exhaustively explicate the factors that influence intelligibility.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Intelligibility of Select World Englishes to ESL Students

Inner Circle Group (American English)			
Listener	Correct Answers	Percentage	Average Percentage
A1	11	73%	
A2	3	20%	
A3	10	67%	
A4	5	33%	
A5	5	33%	44%
A6	6	40%	
A7	9	60%	
A8	8	53%	
A9	7	47%	
A10	7	47%	

Table 4.1.1 Intelligibility of American English

Table 4.1.1 shows that American English (AmE) only obtained a 44% average from the listeners. This is relatively lower compared to Philippine English, with a 52.50% average (see Table 4.2), which suggests that the respondents do not entirely find AmE intelligible. The same result manifested in the study of Orikasa (2016), where she emphasized an American speaker was below 40% intelligible to non-native listeners. Furthermore, this outcome provides additional evidence for the claim that native speakers are not always the most intelligible (Smith & Rafiqzad, 1979; Matsuura, 2007). This result shines a light on altering the English language teaching in the Philippines in which teachers of the language do not necessarily have to abide by the native English paradigm when teaching the language, especially when it comes to pronunciation. As Dayag (2007) puts it, "the traditional approach that privileges the native speaker must give way to a broader, more realistic approach that recognizes the reality that uses and roles of English vary from one speech community to another." In this case, it can be assumed that modeling English language teaching from a native exemplar may be less pragmatic and helpful. This does not only validate the legitimacy of PhE (since PhE, in this

study, has the highest intelligibility average) to become the model in English language teaching but the other non-native varieties as well.

Outer Circle Group (Philippine English)			
Listener	Correct Answers	Percentage	Average Percentage
B1	5	33%	
B2	9	60%	
B3	10	67%	
B4	14	93%	52.50%
B5	7	47%	
B6	6	40%	
B7	9	60%	
B8	3	20%	

Table 4.1.2 Intelligibility of Philippine English

As can be seen from table 4.1.2, Philippine English (PhE) got a 52.50% average from the listeners. Considering the listeners of this recent study as representative of the outer circle, this result is in contrast with the study of Dayag (2007), where PhE was roughly 75% intelligible to outer circle listeners. It should be noted, however, that, in this study, PhE got the highest average compared to AmE with 44% average (see Table 4.1) and ChE with 29.12% average (see Table 4.3). This may be rooted in the phenomenon that the listeners have the same linguistic background as the speaker, although not necessarily their L1 but most probably in some aspects such as pronunciation, rhythm, and accent. This is supported by Smith's (1992) findings that when listeners and speakers of the language have the same linguistic background, the intelligibility level is high.

Expanding Circle Group (Chinese English)			
Listener	Correct Answers	Percentage	Average Percentage
C1	3	20%	
C2	2	13%	
C3	7	47%	
C4	4	27%	29.12%
C5	5	33%	
C6	1	6%	
C7	7	47%	
C8	6	40%	

Table 4.1.3 Intelligibility of Chinese English

As shown in table 4.1.3, Chinese English (ChE) only got a 29.12% average from the respondents, which is the lowest among the three speakers. This corroborates the study of Chen (2011), where Filipino ESL respondents performed the lowest in terms of identifying the intelligibility of Chinese-accented English. Furthermore, this result is also congruent to the study of Hong (2017), where Chinese English consistently got a lower intelligibility average over Indian English as judged by both Korean and native listeners. The result of this study may primarily be attributed to the pronunciation of the speaker (see theme 2). For example, the ChE speaker pronounced the word "snack" as [snɛk], which may have confused the listeners as the manuscript also has the word "snake." Another is the word "plastic," which was completely gibberish, and the word "scoop" was pronounced as [sput]. This suggests that pronunciation may play a crucial role in intelligibility.

4.2 Factors Affecting (Un) intelligibleness of English Variety
4.2.1 Accent Familiarity
Accent familiarity was pointed out by the interviewed respondents stating that they were not fairly oriented with the accents of the speakers. Almost all of them said that because they were not familiar with the accents of the speakers, they did not easily understand the entirety of their speeches. The excerpts below are the translated samples of the respondents' answers pertaining to the question, "How did you find the recording?":

Listener A4: *"I cannot catch up with the accent of the speaker, sir."*

Listener A8: *"I am not so familiar with the accent of the speaker...because his accent is different from our accent, so I was having a hard time understanding some of the English words he said."*

Listener A9: *"I got confused with the speech, sir, because they have different accents... it is different from our accent."*

Listener B8: *"When I heard about the recording, the accent was kind of new to me because I usually listen to the American language. Maybe because I watch too many American movies and shows since I was in [junior] high school... and I got used to their accent."*

To further support the relationship of accent familiarity to intelligibility, it is interesting to note the observation from listener B8, who got the lowest score in PhE, that he is more familiar with the American accent even though he is an ESL learner in the Philippines. This can be principally attributed to his rigid exposure to American media, thus supporting his low intelligibility score in Philippine English. This result is parallel to the studies done by Adedeji (2014) and Nazari & Younus (2021), where they highlighted the high correlation between accent familiarity and intelligibility. This result simply implies that learners of the language should be exposed to the different varieties of English to attain better intelligibility, as Nelson (2011) claims that exposure to the speech of a particular variety of English language increases its intelligibility.

4.2.2 Pronunciation
The pronunciation of the speakers, according to the respondents, has contributed to their ability to recognize the speakers' speech. This is foremost apparent in the ChE group, where all interviewed listeners said that they could not understand the speaker because of her pronunciation. The excerpts below are the translated samples of the respondents' answers about the pronunciation of the speaker:

Listener C1: *"It was difficult, sir. It was difficult to understand the speaker. There are words sir that was pronounced by the speaker differently. For example, the word "snake." She pronounced it as [snɛk]."*

Listener C8: *"Her pronunciation was different, sir. That is why I was not able to complete the test.*

Following the responses of the listeners, it can be deduced that pronunciation is a potential factor that can affect intelligibility. This supports Jenkins (2003), who claims that variation in pronunciation could lead to misunderstanding and contrasts with Dita (2013), who points out that pronunciation does not influence intelligibility. However, the English language learning experience of the ChE speaker should be taken into consideration as the speaker has the shortest time of learning the language and hence has a higher propensity for pronunciation errors.

4.2.3 Speech Rate
In this area, the interviewed respondents gave different answers based on the group or circle they were in. For AmE, the respondents unanimously answered that the speaker's speech rate was too fast, causing their inability to finish some of the blanks in the test. For PhE, respondents answered that the speaker was relatively moderate in speaking. However, for ChE, the respondents were distracted by the junctures of the speaker. The excerpts below are the translated samples of the respondents' answers pertaining to the rate of speech of the speakers:

Listener A4: *"I cannot catch up with the test... when he is speaking... he is speaking fast while I was catching up with the statement, I cannot write it down because... when I am writing the first word, he is already on other words."*

Listener B2: *"For me, sir, it is just in between normal and fast... I do not have a problem with the speaker.*

Listener B4: *"Just average, sir. I can follow the speaker. The problem... only the pronunciation."*

Listener C8: *"The speaker was not fast, sir, but I got distracted because she was complicated. She kept on repeating the words... she has so many pauses, sir."*

This satisfies a wide range of studies where the rate of speech affects the intelligibility of the speaker. For example, Dayag (2007) asserts in the result of his study that speaking rate does affect the understanding of a speaker's speech. Another is the study of Orikasa (2016), in which she indicated that two (2) of the least intelligible speakers were the fastest speakers in her study; thus, she concluded that the rate of speech affects intelligibility. This certain suprasegmental aspect implies that interlocutors should be cognizant of their phasing during the communication process to achieve better understanding.

4.2.4 Linguistic Environment
According to the answers of the respondents, it takes more than listening to recognize the utterance of the speaker. The respondents used the linguistic context to answer the blanks of the cloze test. For example, listener B4, who got the near-perfect

score, said that because some words were pronounced by the speaker differently, she went back to the cloze test instead to make sense of what she heard.

> **Listener B4:** *"There are certain words that I cannot understand properly but... I prefer to look at the test... there are certain words that I cannot understand through listening... I just make sense of the hint and meaning of the text."*

An example of her work is shown below:

Example: Six <u>spoons</u> of <u>fresh</u> snow <u>peas</u> [peace].

Listener B4 emphasized that she heard "peace" the first time she listened to the speaker. But when she went back to the cloze test, the word did not make sense with the context of the sentence. In consequence, she used the linguistic environment to answer "peas" instead of "peace." This phenomenon is consistent with the result of Dita & De Leon (2017), who highlighted that linguistic context affects the intelligibility of the listeners.

5. Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations
This study explored the intelligibility of World Englishes by ESL Senior High School students of a private institution in Marawi City, Philippines. This also unearthed the factors that influence the intelligibility of a variety. Despite the limitations of this paper, the results generated from this study provided some valuable insights. Foremost and perhaps the most interesting outcome is that Philippine English was the most intelligible variety among the three varieties examined. This is contrary to the general view that native varieties are always the most intelligible. On the factors that affect intelligibility, it was found that accent familiarity is a great factor for better intelligibility; thus, exposure to the different varieties of English can facilitate a better understanding of communication. Moreover, this research showed that pronunciation could also influence intelligibility. It can be inferred from this that pronunciation may confuse the listeners, therefore, inhibiting them from recognizing the speeches of the speakers. However, while pronunciation is a potential reason for decreased intelligibility, speech rate appears to be more striking than pronunciation. The findings disclosed that intelligibility is inversely proportional to speech rate, meaning that the faster the interlocutor speaks, the lower the intelligibility gets. This insinuates that phasing in speech is important. Finally, it was also revealed in this recent paper that listeners were able to identify the utterance of the speakers because of linguistic context. It can be generalized from this result that being able to identify the linguistic environment of a speech can increase intelligibility.

With all the aforementioned findings, the pedagogical implication is that insisting on modelling a native variety of English in teaching the language is unnecessary. Teachers are encouraged to take the route of utilizing a model that is useful and practical to the learners. This then stipulates that English language teachers should introduce to the learners the different varieties of English in order for them to be aware of their unique features, especially their phonological aspects. This is pragmatically relevant considering that there is an increasing number of foreign students studying the English language in the Philippines rather than in the country of native English speakers. Moreover, this paper also insinuates that establishing better intelligibility extends further than the segmental of a variety. Hence, elements such as speech rate, accent, and linguistic environment also need to be considered.

Further studies related to this paper are encouraged to test more varieties in each concentric circle, expand the number of speakers and listeners, and measure the influence of the educational background of both participants on the intelligibility process. Researchers are also recommended to employ spontaneous speeches from the speakers rather than predefined speeches to mock organic communication. Finally, other factors such as word stress, intonation, and speech rhythm may also have a significant effect on intelligibility that need exploration.

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Appendix A: Cloze Test
Cloze Test
Instruction: Fill in the blanks with the correct words you heard from the oral stimulus.

Please call Stella. Ask (_____) to bring these (_____) with her from the (_____): Six (_____) of (_____) snow (_____), (_____) (_____) slabs of blue (_____), and maybe a snack for her brother (_____). We also need a small (_____) (_____) and a big toy frog for the kids. She can (_____) these things into (_____) red bags, and we will go (_____) her Wednesday at the train station.

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Please call Stella. Ask her to bring these things with her from the store: Six spoons of fresh snow peas, five thick slabs of blue cheese, and maybe a snack for her brother Bob. We also need a small plastic snake and a big toy frog for the kids. She can scoop these things into three red bags, and we will go meet her Wednesday at the train station.

Appendix B: Semi-Structed Questionnaire
Adopted from: Dita & De Leon (2017) "The Intelligibility and Comprehensibility of Philippine English to EFL"

How do you find the recording? Was it fast or slow?

How do you find the pronunciation of the speaker? Was it easy to understand? Why or why not?

Are you familiar with the words used?

Were you able to answer the all the items in the cloze test?

If you did answer all the items, what are the reasons that made you answer these items?

If did not answer all the items, what are the reasons of your difficulty in answering the   test?