
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Are Mandarin Chinese Speakers Prepared for Philippine English? Insights from PhD Students in Manila

Shen Li¹, Dong Zhao², Ying Huang³, Dongqiang Han⁴✉

¹Graduate School, University of Santo Tomas, Manila, Philippines

²⁴School of Foreign Languages, Shandong University of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Jinan, China

³School of Foreign Languages, Qilu Normal University, Jinan, China

Corresponding Author: Dongqiang Han, **E-mail:** han_sdutcm@126.com

ABSTRACT

The study explores how Mandarin Chinese PhD students in Manila perceive Philippine English and how they adapt to it through the World Englishes and Communication Accommodation Theory frameworks. Data were gathered for the project using a mixed-methods approach, completed through questionnaires (n=30) and interviews (n=9). Findings reveal a positive perception of legitimacy of Philippine English, highlighting its functional role in communication. Pronunciation challenges were found to be a major obstacle to intelligibility which mirrored an enduring conflict between English variants and Inner Circle standards. Participants employed adaptive strategies, such as simplifying grammar and selectively using localized vocabulary. These strategies fit well with the main focus of Communication Accommodation Theory, that is, to achieve linguistic convergence to mutual understanding. The results highlight the dual role of Philippine English as both a challenge and an enabler, and the relevance of adaptation to multilingual environments. Implications derive from integrating Philippine English into curriculum, as well as developing cross cultural communication skills.

KEYWORDS

Philippine English, Mandarin Chinese PhD Students, World Englishes, Communication Accommodation Theory, Language Adaptation Strategies, Cross-Cultural Communication

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1. Introduction

Increased use of English as an international language has resulted in variation and indigenization across diverse cultural and social contexts and developed into what is referred to as World English. As English is widely used across the globe, areas in Asia such as the Philippines, Malaysia and China have evolved into variants of English with their distinctive cultural and linguistic features (Porrás-Piorac, 2019; Berowa & Dita, 2021). The linguistic phenomenon was thoroughly theorized by Kachru (1985) in his Three Circle Model, in which English-speaking regions can be categorized as Inner Circle, Outer Circle and Expanding Circle. In the inner circle, English is utilized as a native language, in the outer circle as an institutionalized language, and in the expanding circle as a foreign language. Within this framework, Philippine English is acknowledged as a legitimate variety of English that develops from the local communicative purposes and rich multilingual and cultural context (Momongan et al., 2023).

1.1 Research Significance

Since English remains a lingua franca in a wide range of contexts, it is critical to explore how speakers from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds, such as Chinese PhD students in Manila, perceive and adapt to the variants of English, such as Philippine English. The significance of the research can be evaluated from both pedagogical and sociolinguistic perspectives.

In regard to pedagogical significance, insights from the Chinese PhD students in Manila can enhance the teaching methodologies in English in the Philippines and stimulate the development of courses tailored to Chinese students. Philippine English as a legitimate variety of English in the outer circle, has its distinct phonological, syntactic and lexical characteristics (Bolton, 2012). These distinctions may place great difficulties to students who are used to another variety or other varieties of English. Several studies have indicated that Chinese students were faced with challenges in English-speaking setting. Huang and Klinger (2006) delineated the Chinese Graduate Students' difficulties in understanding lectures at North American Universities due to their professors' fast speaking speed, idiomatic expressions and unfamiliar accents. Amoah and Yeboah (2021) described English speaking challenges faced by Chinese EFL due to linguistic and psychological factors. Similarly, Chinese PhD students in Manila may also face linguistic challenges in Philippine English contexts where the localized accent and indigenized expressions may have an impact on students' academic confidence and performance as well as their daily communication.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the research will contribute to the framework of World English by strengthening the legitimacy of Philippine English as a variety of English in Mandarin-Chinese community. Philippine English was affirmed as a legitimate variety of English due to its widespread utilization in crucial domains, including education, law and technology (Dayag, 2012). Despite the fact that Philippine English has been increasingly recognized as a variant of English based on General American English, some people may deny its legitimacy (Goncalves, 2022). Paz (2022) argued that Philippine English was widely accepted by elite Filipinos, while the wider sociolect groups contested the legitimacy. The dilemma calls for more inclusive education and awareness to promote the broader acceptance of Philippine English both at home and on the international scale. Filipinos' ambivalent attitudes towards Philippine English may also exist in other cultural and social groups, such as Chinese learners of English. Li (2016) suggested that China English was perceived by Chinese students as inferior to Native English, like American English and British English. Chinese students' low recognition of Chinese English as a variety of English and preference for native-like accents hinders their acceptance of other varieties of English, including Philippine English. Therefore, the research calls for the recognition and respect of Philippine English as a legitimate variety of English among Mandarin Chinese speakers, justifying the linguistic identities of speakers in the Outer Circle and fostering the integration of Philippine English into Mandarin speakers in academic and social contexts.

1.2 Literature Review

The theories that underpin this research are World English and Communication Accommodation Theory. World English refers to the various forms of English used across the globe and emphasized its function as a global lingua franca and its adaptation to diverse cultural and linguistic contexts. While Communication Theory focuses on the dynamic process of communication adjustment in intercultural interactions. Communication Accommodation Theory examines how speakers adapt their linguistic and behavioral patterns to minimize social distance (convergence) or maintain cultural identity (divergence). The following sections elaborate on the two theories and related literature.

1.2.1 World English

The concept of World English developed from the global spread and localization of English, driven by historical, social, economic and cultural factors. Kachru transitioned the view of regarding English as a monolithic entity to a pluricentric view where English varies in forms due to the functional and formal interactions with a wide range of languages (Mesthrie, 2003). The Kachru's Three Circles Model is fundamental in this field. The Inner Circle includes countries like the US and the UK, whose first language is English. Outer Circle consists of countries like the Philippines and India where English serves as the official and second language. Finally, the Expanding Circle is composed of countries like China and Japan, where English is perceived as a foreign language (Bolton, 2012).

Philippine English, as a variety of English, falls within the Outer Circle of World English and has distinctive lexical, phonological, and syntactic features, setting it apart from other World Englishes. The lexical resources of Philippine English are innovative and adapted, featuring its integration of Filipino languages and localized meanings. Words, such as "trapo" (traditional politician) and "pasalubong" (travel gift) indicate core borrowings and cultural borrowings respectively. The rich lexical repertoire demonstrates the creativity and identity of Filipinos. Innovations like portmanteaus, e.g., "telebabad" (long phone call), and Spanish-derived terms, e.g., "tocino" (cured meat), further highlights its distinctiveness (Lising, 2021).

The phonological features of Philippine English can be viewed from segmental and supersegmental aspects. The differences between Philippine English and the Inner Circle norms arise from phonemic gaps in Filipino languages. For example, the substitution of /f/ and /v/ with /p/ and /b/, as well as /θ/ and /ð/ with /t/ and /d/, is prevalent. This results in pronunciations like "parmer" for "farmer" or "tink" for "think" (Berowa & Dita, 2021). Moreover, such substitutions can at times, even serve to improve the intelligibility of the communication with others in monolingual or multilingual situations (Momongan et al., 2023).

At the supersegmental level, stress placement and intonation patterns in Philippine English showcase different characteristics. Research suggested stress on pronouns and rising-falling intonation in declarative sentences were often affected by tonal patterns in Filipino languages. Despite the uniqueness of these traits, it did not hinder the intelligibility in communication but Philippine English was tailored for effective communication in different contexts (Berowa & Dita, 2021; Palmera-Blanco, 2022). The complex interaction between segmental and suprasegmental features demonstrate that Philippine English is a highly nativized English variety, emerging from a multilingual and multicultural background.

The unique syntactic traits of Philippine English are influenced by the structural patterns of the local languages. Subject-verb agreement in Philippine English can embody the shadow of Filipino language grammar. For example, singular subjects may be compounded with plural verbs, or vice versa, due to the optional nature of verb inflection in the local languages (Maxilom & Delfin, 2011). Article use, like omission or overuse of "a" and "the" is another example that reflects the void of equivalent articles in many local languages (Bautista, 1996, as cited in Maxilom & Delfin, 2011). Furthermore, the word order may deviate from the Inner Circle norms due to the literal translation from Filipino language. For instance, the subject-initial structure usually corresponds to the syntactic preferences of the local language tradition (Lising, 2021). These syntactic features mirrors the linguistic creativity of Philippine English and its adaptability to meet the Filipinos' communicative needs.

In summary, the lexical, phonological, and syntactic aspects of Philippine English reveal the processes of the nativization of the English language. Borrowed terms and phonological adaptations and syntactic loans from Philippine languages clearly showcases its linguistic-instrumental, cultural orientation (Lising, 2021; Maxilom & Delfin, 2011). Therefore, Philippine English finds its legitimacy in World Englishes variety and reflects its versatility and survival in sociocultural globalization.

1.2.2 Communication Accommodation Theory

Communication Accommodation Theory provides a generalized theoretical framework for exploring significant aspects of linguistic behavior and social adjustment that have to be scrutinized in multiple contexts, such as cross-cultural communication (Gallois et al., 2005). Communication Accommodation Theory perspective focuses on the ongoing negotiated state of identity in multicultural communication processes as people converge to reduce social distance or diverge in many occasions to preserve their cultural heritage (Zhang & Giles, 2017). For example, convergent methods are employed by teachers within the Malaysian classroom to fill the linguistic gap and offer inclusion for ESL learners as students often diverge slightly to maintain parts of their social identity (Kashinathan & Aziz, 2021). Similarly, in intercultural contexts speakers adjust their accents, words and further nonverbal behavior which meet the anticipated speech habits of others to increase interaction effectiveness (Chen et al., 2024). Communication Accommodation Theory can be particularly important for overseas students who are adapting to a new school system. For instance, Chinese graduate students in Malaysia seem to follow convergent strategies is adherence to local linguistic usage that aids them with adaptation in both academic and non-academic spheres. However, they also maintain divergence by keeping their culture-grounded linguistic traces, showing both processes of assimilation and the retention of identity (Chen et al., 2024). Communication Accommodation Theory has a dual role as individuals strategies the balance of inclusion into a cross-cultural context and maintaining of self identity.

In addition, studies show Communication Accommodation Theory also includes nonverbal adjustments. Although gestures such as body language and eye contact differ from culture to culture, they are key components of intergroup relations. For instance, foreign language learners experience difficulty in decoding the cultural meanings of gestures. The demands call for adaptive strategies to fit behaviors into cultural norms (Chen et al., 2024; Zhang, 2024).

Communication Accommodation Theory can also be applied in a multilingual and multicultural country such as the Philippines. Multilingualism and multilingual use of first language in the Philippines leads to the effort of the Philippine English speakers to match the level of understanding with the international audience while on the other hand they also exhibit some of the phonological elements which signify their local loyalty. Such practices demonstrate the way Communication Accommodation Theory offers a view of the relationship between global and local language usage (Tonio, 2019).

With the expansion of globalization, Communication Accommodation Theory poses significant consequences for intercultural education and all forms of business correspondence. Communication Accommodation Theory enlarges our understanding of interpersonal processes and provides a useful orientation on how communication can be optimized in social, educational, and professional contexts (Giles et al., 2023; Kashinathan & Aziz, 2021). It underscores the importance of flexibility and adaptability in communication, ensuring that interactions are inclusive and contextually appropriate.

Communication Accommodation Theory examines how individuals adapt their linguistic and nonverbal behaviors to negotiate identity and social distance in cross-cultural interactions. It highlights convergence for the sake of inclusion and divergence to protect or preserve local or cultural identity, which sheds light on concepts of linguistic accommodation in a multilingual setting

such as the Philippines. The impact of Communication Accommodation Theory extends to educational, professional, and intercultural contexts, which adds to the extent of the theory's ability to analyze how inclusion can be achieved with the preservation of identity (Giles et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2024).

1.3 Research Gap

Although a number of advancements have been made concerning specific regional types of English under the optics of World English and Communication Accommodation Theory, certain deficiencies exist in the literature, especially in light of Philippine English and Chinese Mandarin learners who try to adjust.

First, most of the studies investigate language differentiation in terms of generic Inner Circle Englishes such as American or British Englishes with little consideration of how learners approach Outer Circle English such as Philippine English. Although Philippine English has received formal verification for its recognition as a World English, its acceptance by the Outer Circle speakers remains a relatively uncharted area.

Second, Filipino students' attitudes or beliefs towards Philippine English as well as opinions and judgments concerning its legitimacy and the comprehension of its features, have been investigated almost exclusively from the binocular-alternative angle of Filipino subjects or from the world discourse. However, the experience of international learners which includes Mandarin Chinese PhD students in Manila is still limited. This affords these learners the opportunity to share their experiences about how localized English varieties are received cross culturally, and even in academic settings.

Third, as the Communication Accommodation Theory based studies has identified specific language adaptation behaviors in some contexts, most of these studies emphasize macro-level perspective on intercultural as in multinational organizations or in general cultures. Currently, it is unclear how Communication Accommodation Theory can be used in particular educational contexts, like how Mandarin Chinese students in the Philippines adjust their spoken language according to Philippine English in educational and social contexts.

Lastly, although prior studies investigated linguistic difficulties that Chinese learners encountered in Inner Circle English milieu, no previous research has yet examined contextualization difficulties in learning a heavily nativized Outer Circle English such as Philippine English. Such difficulties can be phonological, lexical, and syntactic differences and their effects on the learners' achievements and wellbeing, self-esteem, and social interactions.

It is important for these areas to be developed in order to contribute towards the discussion on World Englishes, sociolinguistic authority and the applicability of Communication Accommodation Theory in ethnoclassically diverse learning environments. To fill these gaps, this study will focus on the perception, the difficulty, and coping strategies of Mandarin Chinese PhD students in Manila.

1.4 Research Questions

To address the identified research gaps, this study is guided by the following questions:

1. How do Mandarin Chinese PhD students in Manila perceive the legitimacy and intelligibility of Philippine English as a distinct English variety?
2. What specific linguistic features of Philippine English do Mandarin Chinese PhD students find challenging, and how do these challenges influence their adaptation strategies in academic and social communication?

2. Method

This section discusses the research design and process employed to investigate the Mandarin Chinese-speaking PhD students' perceptions and adaptive use of Philippine English or English.

2.1 Research Design

The study employed an exploratory mixed-methods design to examine participants' perception of Philippine English and their adaptive strategies. Quantitative questionnaires indicated trends and qualitative interviews offered themes.

2.2 Participants

The quantitative phase involved 30 Mandarin speaking PhD students learning in Manila. The questionnaires were conducted online using both Wenjuanxing and WeChat platforms to reach out to students from St. Paul University Philippines (SPUP), University of Santo Tomas (UST), and Lyceum of the Philippines University (LPU), etc. Female respondents comprised 86.67% and males 13.33%; 70% of respondents had learned English for over nine years. Their perceived English skill level was from novice to advanced.

In the implementation of the quantitative phase, nine participants were purposively selected from SPUP, UST and LPU. Participants came from diverse disciplines such as education, business, and management. These universities were selected for their research orientation and various institutions could ensure that diverse views on Philippine English were obtained.

2.3 Data Collection Instruments

This study employed a bilingual questionnaire (Chinese & English) to examine participants' demographics, their perceptions of Philippine English, and language adaptation strategies. The clarity and theoretical alignment of this study were validated by Linguistic teachers and they also offered some suggestions for improvement.

Structured interviews were conducted via Tencent Meeting. The interviews included four open-ended questions to explore perceptions of Philippine English, linguistic challenges, adaptation strategies, and cultural integration. In order to clarify the perceptions, the interviews were conducted in Mandarin. The recorded interviews were transcribed in WPS software, and translated into English using Chatgpt. The translated transcripts were validated by a linguistic teacher.

2.4 Procedure

This section describes the major procedures of the research, including pilot testing, data collection, and adherence to ethical considerations.

2.4.1 Pilot Testing

Before distributing the questionnaire, the researcher pre-tested the questionnaire and achieved a Cronbach's Alpha score of 0.765. The result indicated acceptable reliability.

2.4.2 Data Collection

Questionnaires were employed to collect Quantitative data via Wenjunxing and Wechat platforms and structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data. For clarification, follow-up questions were asked in occasional cases.

2.4.3 Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed of the study's purpose, provided informed consent, and assured confidentiality. Names and identifiers were anonymized, and data were securely stored for academic purposes only.

2.5 Data Analysis

This section outlines the quantitative analysis method and qualitative analysis method.

2.5.1 Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data collected through questionnaires were analyzed using mean scores and weighted scoring. The questionnaire used Likert scale and it was a 5 item scale where 1 means strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 neutral, 4 agree and 5 strongly agree. Weighted scores were obtained from the mean of all the assessments for the specific factors, thus showing scores ranging from 1.00 to 5.00. To ensure a systematic interpretation of these scores, the following ranges were established: where 1.00 to 1.80 represented very low perception or very low adaptation; 1.81 to 2.60 represented low perception or low adaptation; 2.61 to 3.40 represented moderate perception or moderate adaptation; 3.41 to 4.20 represented high perception or high adaptation; 4.21 to 5.00 represented very high perception or very high adaptation.

The questionnaire was prepared in the form of positive and negative statements. In the case of positive statements, the higher scores represented the more positive perception or higher level of adaptation. For instance in the statement "I can easily understand Philippine English accents," such a response attracts high perception and high adaptation with a high score. On the other hand, negative statements were those whose higher score indicated either a problem or poor adaptation. For instance, in the statement "The pronunciation differences in Philippine English make communication challenging," a high score would indicate greater difficulty and lower adaptation.

2.5.2 Qualitative Analysis

Transcripts of interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify codes that included pronunciation difficulties, issues of legitimacy, and adaptive strategies. The translations were reviewed by a linguistic teacher to maintain the context relevancy.

3. Results

In this section, the results of both the quantitative and qualitative data were presented.

3.1 Perceptions of Philippine English

Table 1 summarizes participants' responses to statements related to their perceptions of Philippine English.

Table 1

Perceptions of Philippine English

Perceptions of Philippine English	SA 5	A 4	N 3	D 2	SD 1	Mean	Statement Polarity	Interpret ation
9. The English spoken by my Filipino teachers and classmates is easy to understand.	5	36	42	8	2	3.10	Positive Statement	Moderate Perception, Moderate Adaptation.
10. The accent and pronunciation differences in Philippine English make it challenging for me to communicate effectively.	15	76	24	0	0	3.83	Negative Statement	Negative Perception, Low Adaptation.
11. The vocabulary used in Philippine English is significantly different from the English I learned in China.	15	36	45	4	1	3.36	Negative Statement	Moderate Perception, Moderate Adaptation.
12. I believe that Philippine English is a legitimate variety of English, just like American or British English.	10	60	30	4	0	3.46	Positive Statement	High Perception, High adaptation.
13. Exposure to Philippine English has helped me understand the local culture better.	10	88	18	0	0	3.86	Positive Statement	High perception, High adaptation.

According to Table 1, the participants' perceptions of Philippine English reveal both recognition of its legitimacy and challenges in its usage. The mean score of 3.46 for the legitimacy of Philippine English as a variety of English suggests a positive perception. This finding aligns with Kachru's (1985) Three Circle Model, which positions Philippine English in the Outer Circle, acknowledging its role as a legitimate variety of English within multilingual contexts. Interviewee No. 1 affirmed this by stating, "Although there are some subtle differences, their grammar structures are correct, and their expressions are also appropriate. The differences exist, but they do not affect the legitimacy of Philippine English". Similarly, Interviewee No. 8 commented, "I think Philippine English is quite good, and I believe it's the same as American and British English. I just consider it a variant of British English". These views highlight an acceptance of Philippine English's legitimacy while acknowledging its distinctiveness.

Participants perceived the intelligibility of English of their Filipino teachers and classmates as moderately intelligible, with a mean score of 3.10. This means that, while participants found communication broadly easy, some degree of difficulty was likely still present.

Pronunciation differences emerged as a significant challenge, reflected by a high mean score of 3.83. This difficulty aligns with Berowa and Dita's (2021) observations on the phonological features of Philippine English, including substitutions of /f/ with /p/ or /v/ with /b/, which can hinder comprehension for non-native speakers. Interviewee No. 5 noted, "It's mainly their pronunciation. Additionally, sometimes the meaning they convey differs from how we understand it in Chinese". Similarly, Interviewee No. 7 remarked, "Their pronunciation is influenced by their local way of speaking, and sometimes it's not very clear". These findings support Jenkins' (2000) argument that phonological clarity is critical for effective cross-cultural communication.

Vocabulary differences posed moderate challenges, as indicated by a mean score of 3.36. Participants highlighted occasional unfamiliarity with localized terms, consistent with Lising's (2021) analysis of Philippine English's lexical innovations, such as borrowings from Filipino and Spanish.

Despite these challenges, exposure to Philippine English facilitated cultural integration, with a high mean score of 3.86, reflecting positive perceptions. This finding aligns with Dayag's (2012) assertion that Philippine English acts as a cultural bridge, promoting cross-cultural understanding. Interviewee No. 6 remarked, "If you use some Philippine English in daily life, locals will immediately perceive you as friendly, warm, and integrated into their culture". Additionally, Interviewee No. 1 noted that Philippine English

"helped me understand some local customs and integrate into the local culture to a certain extent". These insights underscore the dual role of Philippine English as both a communicative tool and a medium for cultural adaptation.

Participants employed various strategies to adapt to Philippine English, particularly in academic and social settings. The mean score of 3.70 for adapting speaking styles reflects the widespread use of strategies such as simplifying grammar and vocabulary. This aligns with Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory, which highlights convergence as a strategy to enhance mutual understanding in intercultural communication. Interviewee No. 2 explained, "I simplify my grammar and use keywords to make sure my meaning is clear". However, phonological adaptation, such as mimicking local accents, proved more challenging, as indicated by a lower mean score of 3.33. Interviewee No. 7 expressed, "Sometimes I rephrase my sentences, or directly use translation software to communicate", suggesting that participants may rely on alternative strategies to bridge communication gaps.

In summary, the quantitative and qualitative data indicate that Philippine English functions both as a challenge and an enabler to Mandarin speaking PhD students residing in Manila. While pronunciation and vocabulary differences present obstacles, the cultural insights gained through exposure to Philippine English underscore its value as a legitimate and functional variety of English.

3.2 Language Adaptation Strategies

Table 2 highlights the strategies participants employed to adapt to Philippine English in academic and social contexts.

Table 2

Language Adaptation Strategies

Language Adaptation Strategies	SA 5	A 4	N 3	D 2	SD 1	Mean	Statement Polarity	Interpret ation
14. I actively use expressions or vocabulary specific to Philippine English to better integrate and communicate effectively.	15	68	21	6	0	3.36	Positive Statement	Moderate Perception, moderate adaptation.
15. I intentionally mimic the local accent and intonation patterns of Philippine English when communicating.	10	40	42	8	0	3.33	Negative Statement	Moderate Perception, Moderate Adaptation.
16. I adapt my speaking style when communicating with Filipino teachers or classmates to ensure better mutual understanding.	10	76	21	4	0	3.70	Positive Statement	High Perception, High Adaptation.
17. I think using Philippine English helps me better understand Filipino culture and communicate effectively in the Philippines.	20	68	21	4	0	3.76	Positive Statement	High Perception, High Adaptation.
18. I think exposure to multiple varieties of English (e.g., American, British, Philippine English) makes me a better English user.	25	68	15	6	0	3.80	Positive Statement	High Perception, High Adaptation.

The data from Table 2 illustrate participants' efforts to adapt their language use in response to the academic and social demands of the Philippines. The highest-rated item, "Exposure to multiple varieties of English (e.g., American, British, Philippine English) makes me a better English user" (mean score 3.80), reflects participants' recognition of the benefits of linguistic diversity. This aligns with Jenkins' (2000) assertion that exposure to World Englishes enhances communicative competence. While no direct interview quotes explicitly supported this view, participants often mentioned encountering and adapting to multiple English varieties, which indirectly supports their acknowledgment of this benefit.

Adapting speaking styles to ensure better communication received a mean score of 3.70, indicating a high level of acceptance of this strategy. This is consistent with Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory, which emphasizes the importance of convergence in intercultural communication. One participant shared, "I use simpler sentences to make sure they understand me"

(Interviewee No. 2). This highlights a conscious effort to adjust communication strategies for mutual understanding, reflecting Communication Accommodation Theory's principles in practice.

Mimicking local accents and intonation patterns received a lower mean score (3.33), suggesting that participants found this strategy more challenging or less essential. One participant stated, "Since you don't know the Philippine-style pronunciation, just use British or American pronunciation. As long as your pronunciation is standard, they will understand you." (Interviewee No. 4). This finding aligns with Berowa and Dita's (2021) observation that phonological adaptation can be particularly difficult for speakers of tonal languages like Mandarin.

The use of Philippine English-specific expressions and vocabulary received a moderate mean score of 3.36, suggesting that participants engage with localized linguistic features selectively rather than universally. However, some interview responses reveal a more active and pragmatic engagement with such expressions. Interviewee No. 2 noted, "When interacting with people here, whether it's for better communication, building relationships, or facilitating business cooperation, imitating their pronunciation makes you seem closer to them. This helps not just in business situations, like renting a house, but also in daily life". This nuanced perspective highlights the situational and relational motivations behind adopting local linguistic features, even if this behavior is not reflected consistently across all participants.

This selective engagement aligns with Lising's (2021) observation that integrating localized vocabulary often depends on contextual familiarity and necessity. It suggests that while participants may not universally adopt local expressions, they recognize their utility in specific contexts that require social or professional rapport. The moderate mean score, therefore, reflects the diversity of participants' adaptation strategies rather than a lack of willingness to engage with localized features.

Finally, participants highly valued the cultural insights gained through the use of Philippine English, as reflected by the mean score of 3.76. One participant remarked, "If I can use Philippine English well, I can communicate effectively with local people. I could ask about locations for Filipino food or learn about local delicacies, which makes such exchanges more convenient." (Interviewee No. 8). This finding supports Kachru's (1985) emphasis on the role of Outer Circle Englishes in fostering cross-cultural understanding and integration.

In summary, participants' language adaptation strategies consisted of a rich repertoire of behaviors that testified the participants' ability to meet academic and social requirements of the Philippines. Phonological accommodation, including accent imitation, presented major difficulties related to language and cultural differences, whereas more practical and readily used measures included modulation of speech and the use of localized terms and phrases. The data reveals that participants understand the pragmatic value of particular features in specific contexts while also using the language selectively. These results add to the existing literature in the area of Communication Accommodation Theory and World Englishes by emphasizing the importance of flexibility and context-based strategies in enhancing the quality of communication and engaging in cross cultural interactions in multilingual settings.

3.3 Analysis of Interview Themes

Table 3 presents the key themes identified through the thematic analysis of interview transcripts, supported by representative quotes from participants.

Table 3

Interview Themes and Representative Quotes

Theme	Supporting Quotes
Challenges in Understanding Pronunciation	"Their grammar and writing are basically fine, but the main issue is pronunciation. " (Interviewee No. 4) "It's mainly their pronunciation." (Interviewee No. 5) Their pronunciation is influenced by the local way of speaking, and sometimes it's not very clear." (Interviewee No. 7)
Legitimacy of Philippine English Despite Differences	"I think in their country, it should be considered legitimate. Although there are some subtle differences, their grammar structures are correct, and their expressions are also appropriate. The differences exist, but they do not affect the legitimacy of Philippine English." (Interviewee No. 1) "I think it's real English, but it's somewhat different from American and British English." (Interviewee No. 3)

Theme	Supporting Quotes
Benefits of Using Philippine English for Adaptation and Integration	"I think Philippine English is quite good, and I believe it's the same as American and British English. I just consider it a variant of British English, and it can still serve as a tool for communication." (Interviewee No. 8)
	"Secondly, it has helped me understand some local customs and integrate into the local culture to a certain extent. This is also a part of cross-cultural exchange." (Interviewee No. 1)
	"This helps not just in business situations, like renting a house, but also in daily life. Mimicking their English makes things much easier." (Interviewee No. 2)
Adapting Communication Style: Simplifying Vocabulary, Grammar, and Intonation	"Philippine English is helpful for our life here. If you use some Philippine English in daily life, locals will immediately perceive you as friendly, warm, and integrated into their culture." (Interviewee No. 6)
	"I tried using complete sentences and more complex expressions before, but they often found it difficult to understand. So now, I stick to using key words to convey my message and make the communication smoother." (Interviewee No. 2)
	"Because my English is not very good, I use short sentences to communicate with teachers, or just a few key words to express my ideas." (Interviewee No. 8)
	"I need to adjust my intonation to make it easier for them to understand." (Interviewee No. 9)

The analysis revealed several recurring themes related to participants' experiences with Philippine English. Key challenges included difficulties with pronunciation and vocabulary differences, while participants also reflected on the legitimacy of Philippine English and its role in fostering cultural integration. Additionally, the data highlighted various communication strategies employed by participants, such as simplifying grammar and adjusting intonation to enhance mutual understanding. The following sections provide a detailed discussion of each theme.

3.3.1 Challenges in Understanding Pronunciation

Participants frequently identified pronunciation as the primary challenge when engaging with Philippine English. Interviewee No. 4 stated, "Their grammar and writing are basically fine, but the main issue is pronunciation," while Interviewee No. 7 added, "Their pronunciation is influenced by the local way of speaking, and sometimes it's not very clear". This challenge is consistent with questionnaire findings (Table 1, Q10), where pronunciation difficulties received relatively high mean scores (3.83), indicating moderate-to-high perceived difficulty.

From a theoretical perspective, this finding supports Jenkins' (2000) *Lingua Franca Core*, which argues that phonological clarity is a critical factor in cross-cultural communication. Similarly, Berowa and Dita (2021) note that phonological features of Philippine English, such as vowel shifts and consonant substitutions, can impede comprehension for non-local speakers. These insights highlight the importance of targeted pronunciation support for Mandarin-speaking learners adapting to outer-circle varieties of English.

3.3.2 Legitimacy of Philippine English Despite Differences

The legitimacy of Philippine English was widely accepted among interviewees, albeit with nuanced perspectives. Interviewee No. 1 remarked, "In their country, it should be considered legitimate... the differences exist, but they do not affect the legitimacy of Philippine English," while Interviewee No. 3 stated, "I think it's real English, but it's somewhat different from American and British English". This aligns with the questionnaire findings (Table 1, Q12), where the mean score of 3.46 indicates a positive perception of Philippine English's legitimacy.

This acceptance reflects Kachru's (1985) framework, which recognizes localized varieties of English as legitimate adaptations to specific cultural and functional contexts. However, as Paz (2022) argues, the acceptance of these varieties often depends on the domain of use. Interviewee perspectives similarly highlighted this stratification, suggesting that perceptions of legitimacy are shaped by comparisons with inner-circle norms and the situational contexts in which Philippine English is used.

3.3.3 Benefits of Using Philippine English for Adaptation and Integration

Many participants highlighted the role of Philippine English in facilitating cultural integration. Interviewee No. 6 observed, "If you use some Philippine English in daily life, locals will immediately perceive you as friendly, warm, and integrated into their culture," while Interviewee No. 1 added, "It has helped me understand some local customs and integrate into the local culture to a certain extent". These views align with the high mean score in Table 1, Q13 (mean = 3.86), reflecting the perceived cultural value of Philippine English.

This finding supports Dayag's (2012) argument that outer-circle English varieties serve as cultural bridges, fostering cross-cultural understanding. Additionally, participants noted the pragmatic benefits of using Philippine English in everyday scenarios, such as building social relationships or navigating professional interactions. For example, Interviewee No. 2 remarked, "This helps not just in business situations, like renting a house, but also in daily life".

3.3.4 Adapting Communication Style: Simplifying Vocabulary, Grammar, and Intonation

Participants frequently described adapting their communication styles to overcome language barriers. Interviewee No. 2 explained, "I stick to using key words to convey my message and make the communication smoother," while Interviewee No. 8 shared, "Because my English is not very good, I use short sentences to communicate with teachers". This corresponds with Table 2, Q16, where adapting speaking styles received a relatively high score (mean = 3.70), indicating widespread adoption of this strategy.

These behaviors reflect Giles' (1973) Communication Accommodation Theory, which emphasizes convergence as a strategy to enhance mutual intelligibility in intercultural communication. Simplifying grammar and vocabulary, as highlighted by participants, illustrates a practical application of Communication Accommodation Theory in overcoming linguistic and cultural gaps.

In summary, the interview themes provide valuable qualitative insights that complement the quantitative questionnaire data. Pronunciation remains a significant barrier, as indicated by both participant feedback and questionnaire scores. However, participants broadly accept the legitimacy of Philippine English and recognize its utility for cultural adaptation and integration. By simplifying their communication styles and selectively adopting localized features, participants demonstrate a pragmatic and proactive approach to linguistic adaptation. These findings contribute to the theoretical discourse on World Englishes and Communication Accommodation Theory, emphasizing the interplay between linguistic strategies and cultural integration in multilingual settings.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This section critically examines the findings of the study in relation to the research questions, theoretical frameworks, and prior literature. It begins by addressing the research questions, evaluating how the results align with or challenge theories such as World Englishes and Communication Accommodation Theory. Subsequently, it explores theoretical and practical implications, offering actionable insights for researchers, educators, and institutions. The section concludes with an acknowledgment of the study's limitations and proposes directions for future research.

4.1 Answers to the Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do Mandarin Chinese PhD students in Manila perceive the legitimacy and intelligibility of Philippine English as a distinct English variety?

Participants demonstrated a generally positive perception of Philippine English's legitimacy, with a mean score of 3.46 (Table 1). This reflects their acknowledgment of Philippine English's functional role in communication, particularly within its localized cultural and social contexts. As Interviewee No. 1 remarked, "In their country, it should be considered legitimate... the differences exist, but they do not affect the legitimacy of Philippine English". Such views align with Kachru's (1985) World Englishes framework, which recognizes Outer Circle varieties like Philippine English as legitimate adaptations to specific cultural and functional contexts.

However, intelligibility emerged as a more significant concern. Pronunciation challenges, indicated by a mean score of 3.83 (Table 1), were frequently cited as a primary barrier. Interviewee No. 4 noted, "Their grammar and writing are basically fine, but the main issue is pronunciation," while Interviewee No. 7 observed, "Their pronunciation is influenced by the local way of speaking, and sometimes it's not very clear". These findings resonate with Jenkins' (2000) *Lingua Franca Core*, which emphasizes the critical role of phonological clarity in cross-cultural communication. The participants' perceptions reflect ongoing tensions between localized English varieties and globally dominant Inner Circle norms, highlighting the dual challenges of functional recognition and practical intelligibility.

Research Question 2: What specific linguistic features of Philippine English do Mandarin Chinese PhD students find challenging, and how do these challenges influence their adaptation strategies in academic and social communication?

Participants identified pronunciation, vocabulary, and localized expressions as key linguistic challenges in navigating Philippine English. Pronunciation issues were particularly salient, as noted by Interviewee No. 4: "Since you don't know the Philippine-style pronunciation, just use British or American pronunciation. As long as your pronunciation is standard, they will understand you". This pragmatic approach underscores the limited phonological convergence among participants, aligning with Berowa and Dita's (2021) observation that tonal language speakers often struggle with adapting to stress-based systems like Philippine English.

Vocabulary and expressions also presented moderate challenges. The mean score of 3.36 (Table 2) for adopting localized vocabulary reflects selective engagement, as participants were cautious about using terms they found unfamiliar. Interviewee No. 4 explained, "I only use local words when I'm sure they are appropriate in the situation". Despite these challenges, participants recognized the value of incorporating localized expressions to facilitate social integration. Interviewee No. 6 observed, "Using Philippine English phrases helps me connect better with locals and makes them feel I respect their culture". These findings support Lising's (2021) argument that lexical adaptation depends on cultural familiarity and situational necessity. In terms of adaptation strategies, participants demonstrated a strong preference for simplifying grammar and vocabulary, as reflected by a mean score of 3.70 (Table 2). This aligns with Giles' Communication Accommodation Theory, which highlights linguistic convergence as a means of enhancing mutual understanding. Interviewee No. 2 shared, "I adjust my sentence structure and use simpler words to ensure my message is understood". These adaptive behaviors reflect a proactive approach to overcoming linguistic barriers while balancing the need for clarity and cultural appropriateness in both academic and social communication.

4.2 Implications

This section discusses the implications of the study findings from both theoretical and practical perspectives.

4.2.1 Theoretical Implications

This study provides further support for the functional validity of Philippine English within the World English frameworks while highlighting the two-fold pedagogical and socio-cultural role of the variety. However, it also shows the conflict between English as a regional language and English as an international language especially in academic environment. These findings help extend the discussion on localized varieties by bringing into the analysis the views of the Expanding Circle learners, and how perceptions are shaped by cultural and linguistic contexts.

The findings support the use of Communication Accommodation Theory in explaining adaptive approaches especially in multilingual and multicultural contexts. As far as linguistic accommodation strategies are concerned, linguistic simplification was used broadly including lexical and grammatical simplification, whereas, phonological accommodation was hardly used and limited. This provides further support for the need to further improve the Communication Accommodation Theory approach by taking into account social, linguistic factors, including power relations and perceived risks of using non-native accents.

4.2.2 Practical Implications

The integration of Philippine English into English language curricula could help to overcome the learners' difficulties and, thus, increase the subject's credibility. Those training programs and exposure to the authentic materials of Philippine English may help learners to achieve mutual comprehensibility and cultural understanding.

Universities could provide students with additional training in intercultural communication, including the specifics of verbal and non-verbal communication and the use of appropriate vocabulary and phrases. The peer-mentoring programs that involve local and international students may also be expanded to include language and cultural exchange out of class.

Thus, intercultural sensitivity can be developed by using institutional means to promote dialogue and cooperation, as well as linguistic accommodation and cultural reintegration.

4.3 Limitations

The study has a relatively small sample size, with 30 participants completing questionnaires and 9 participating in interviews. Furthermore, use of self-assessment can be problematic, as the participants can provide inflated or deflated results regarding their adaptation success. Lack of consideration of other linguistic groups limits the findings to Mandarin speaking learners, thus future studies may consider including other linguistic groups in order to obtain a wider view.

4.4 Conclusion

This research provides an understanding of Philippine English as both an opportunity and a problem for Mandarin-speaking PhD students. On the one hand, phonetic and lexical dissimilarities are mentioned as obstacles; on the other hand, the learners use strategies like simplification and selective lexicality to manage communication and ensure their integration. Thus, the study adds to the theoretical discussions of World Englishes and Communication Accommodation Theory pointing out the versatility of the language in multilingual environments.

The findings of this study have implications for education and culture to support international students. Future research should expand to diverse learner populations and examine the long-term effects of exposure to localized English varieties, offering deeper insights into linguistic and cultural adaptation.

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