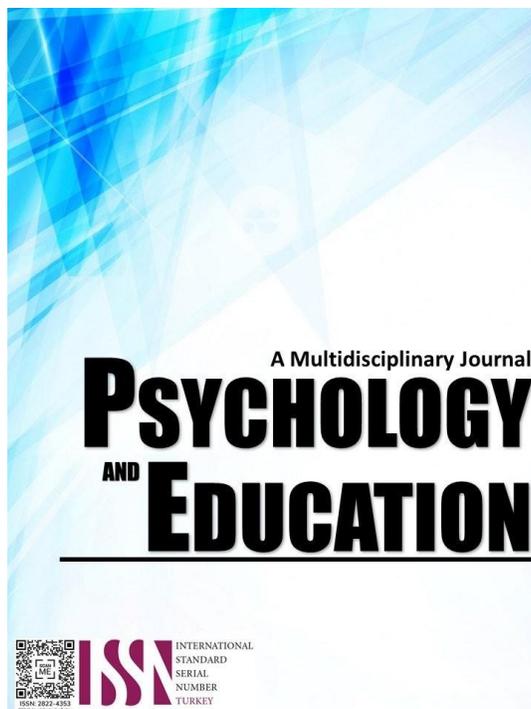


HOW VERNACULAR LANGUAGE INFLUENCE THE GRADE VI PUPILS' ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION: A CASE STUDY



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How Vernacular Language Influence the Grade VI Pupils' English Pronunciation: A Case Study

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Abstract

This study aimed to determine the first language of the respondents and how it affects the Pronunciation Skills of Grade VI-A Pupils. Further, it determined if there existed a significant relationship between the first language of the concerned pupils and their pronunciation skills. The result of this study provided basic information for the educational planner and school administrators in the formulation of educational policies and programs that will address the needs and problems on MTB-MLE of the poor but deserving pupils as it was implemented in the year 2012. The respondents of this study were fifty-three (53) Grade six Pupils who belonged to section A class. The instrument used in this study is a researchers-made pronunciation skill test. After the permission to conduct the instrument was sought from the principals of the schools, the test was administered. The 3 raters rated the pronunciation skills of the concerned pupils by using the scoring rubric. The results were tallied and tabulated for further analysis. The researchers found out that most of the pupils were Tausug speakers. Further, the respondents obtained satisfactory on the level of pronunciation skills on stress and intonation. Researchers concluded that the pupils could pronounce some of the words and sentences according to correct stress and intonation and that, the first language of the pupils don't affect their skill on pronunciation. Pupils should be provided with drills and exercises particularly on stress and intonation to further improve and enhance their levels of pronunciation skills to obtain very satisfactory or excellent level.

Keywords: *english pronunciation, first language, mother tongue, vernacular language*

Introduction

As part of Department of Education's K+12 Basic Education Program, DepEd Order No. 16 or the Mother Tongue-Based Multi-Lingual Education (MTB-MLE) was implemented last June 2012. The program stems from the findings of several international studies showing that the First Language during a child's early years results in easier learning of a Second Language.

A first language (also native language, mother tongue, articular language, or L1) is the language a person has learned from birth or that a person speaks the best. For Brown (2000), a second language learner meets some difficulties in pronunciation, because his/her first language (L1) affects his/her second language (L2) especially in adulthood, and this effect is a result of L1 transfer. Thus, it is a significant source of making errors for second language learners.

In the province of Tawi-Tawi, there are second language learners since the areas are densely populated by natives who speak several dialects. The province has eleven municipalities: Bongao, Languyan, Mapun, Panglima Sugala, Sapa-Sapa, Sibutu, Simunul, Sitangkai, South Ubian, Tandubas, and Turtle Islands.

The dialect spoken by the natives of these municipalities includes Sinama, as the most widely spoken dialect, followed by Tausug and Bisaya. The second language learners go through a gradual systematic developmental process in the target language, as such, these pupils are subject to commit errors in the pronunciation of English words. Sinama, Tausug and Bisaya have distinct phonetic features that may influence English pronunciation through the following: In terms of stress patterns, Sinama, Tausug and Bisaya tend to have a syllable-timed rhythm, meaning that each syllable tends to be given equal emphasis in speech. This differs from English, which is a stress-timed language, where certain syllables are stressed more heavily while in the intonation, Sinama speakers might struggle with using appropriate pitch to signal questions, emphasis, or emotional tone in English and Tausug speakers may unintentionally use inappropriate intonation, making it difficult for them to convey nuanced meaning.

Pronunciation is the way in which a sound, word, or language is articulated, especially in conforming to an accepted standard. Proper way of pronouncing English words will lead to determining the correct spelling and meaning of the word. Thus, correct pronunciation of the English words is essential. (Encarta Encyclopedia)

As observed by many English teachers, pupils in elementary, apart from learning the English language inside the classroom; they also tend to mispronounce some words. The cause of these pupils to have difficulties in developing their pronunciation skills is the early exposure and influence by their native tongue. For the Grade VI pupils in Bongao, Sinama, Tausug, and Bisaya languages can uniquely influence their English pronunciation, particularly in stress and intonation patterns. Understanding the specific phonological features of each of these languages is crucial for educators to design effective language teaching strategies that help these students overcome challenges in English pronunciation. By focusing on stress patterns, intonation exercises, and phonological differences, teachers can help these students improve their English fluency and confidence.

It is with this reason that the researchers wanted to determine if first language affect the pronunciation skills specifically on stress and intonation patterns of the Grade VI Pupils of Tubig Mampallam Central School and Salamat Elementary School. This study can support provincial governments and educational authorities in making language policy decisions. By advocating for a balanced approach to

teaching both local languages and English, these policies can help preserve linguistic diversity.

Research Questions

This study aimed to determine if the Tausug, Sinama, or Bisaya dialects affect the pronunciation skills of the Gr. VI-A Pupils of Tubig Mampallam Central School and Salamat Elementary School S.Y. 2023-2024. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the native language/dialect spoken by the Grade VI-A Pupils of the concerned school?
2. What are the levels of pronunciation skills of the Grade VI-A Pupils of the concerned schools measured by a Likert scale in terms of stress and intonation pattern?
3. Is there a significant direct relationship between the first language of the concerned pupils and their pronunciation skills in terms of stress and intonation pattern?
4. Is there a significant difference on the pronunciation skills of the concerned pupils by demographic location of the schools?

Literature Review

Derwing and Munro (2015) highlight that L1 interference significantly impacts second language (L2) pronunciation, particularly in the early stages of acquisition. They argue that learners often carry over the phonetic rules from their L1, such as incorrect vowel sounds or stress patterns, which can cause mispronunciations in L2. This interference is especially noticeable among younger learners, including Grade 6 students, as their phonetic awareness is still developing, and their L1 has a strong influence on their L2 production

Gilakjani (2012) emphasizes the role of phonetic awareness in overcoming L1 interference. He argues that L2 learners must be trained to identify and produce sounds that do not exist in their L1. This is especially relevant for Grade 6 learners who are at a crucial stage where explicit phonetic instruction can significantly improve their pronunciation. Techniques such as oral drills, as suggested by Sewell (2016), help in addressing these L1-related pronunciation challenges. These drills allow learners to repeat difficult sounds and improve muscle memory for more accurate production.

Agudo (2014) discusses the sociolinguistic aspect of pronunciation, noting that learners' perceptions of their L1's influence on their L2 pronunciation affect their motivation to change their accent. Grade 6 students, who are still developing their identities, may resist modifying their pronunciation if they view their L1 accent as a key part of their identity. This can make it harder for them to adopt new pronunciation patterns in English, especially when they are surrounded by peers who share the same L1 pronunciation patterns.

Pourhosein (2012) points out that L1 influences not only segmental features like consonants and vowels but also suprasegmental features such as stress, rhythm, and intonation. This is particularly relevant for Grade 6 learners, as these features are crucial for achieving intelligibility in L2. When learners from languages with different stress patterns, such as Mandarin or Spanish, try to speak English, their L1's stress-timed or syllable-timed rhythm patterns may interfere with their ability to speak English in a native-like manner.

He added that the studies on functions of language revealed some major observations on how it affects social relations and ethnic identity, how variations (the dialects) have interjected out of the factor of geography and advancing the idea that linguistic diversity is influenced in part by cultural diversity. Moreover, communication is the relevant function of which language plays in all societies, although human communication is not limited to spoken language. Language is of overriding importance because it is the primary vehicle through which culture is shared and transmitted. It is even being known as one way of defining humankind. Some attempts to explain the diversity of language have focus on the possible interaction between language and other aspects of culture. In the one hand, if it can be shown that a culture may affect the structure and content of its language.

The previous works on Second Language Acquisition (SLA) specially those concerning English pronunciation problems; all agreed that the errors committed by speakers of other languages are something systematic rather than random. Arabic speakers according to their language background, face some difficulties in their English pronunciation. These difficulties lead to mispronunciation. (O'Connor, 2003)

The role of age in L2 pronunciation is crucial, as younger learners, like those in Grade 6, generally have a higher capacity to acquire native-like pronunciation (Burns, 2003). However, motivation plays a significant role in overcoming L1 interference. According to Howlader (2010), learners who are motivated to acquire L2 pronunciation skills, often through exposure to media or by recognizing the communicative value of clear pronunciation, are more likely to succeed in overcoming the challenges posed by their L1.

Kang (2010) addresses the concept of mutual intelligibility, which suggests that the primary goal of pronunciation instruction should not necessarily be to eliminate accents but to ensure that the learner's speech is intelligible to others. For Grade 6 learners, this perspective can be motivating as it emphasizes the functional purpose of pronunciation rather than the pursuit of native-like accent perfection.

Tohidian and Tohidian (2009) explore how L1 transfer affects the acquisition of L2 pronunciation, particularly how specific features of the L1 can create predictable pronunciation errors in L2. For Grade 6 learners, errors like mispronouncing certain consonants or vowels due to the influence of their native language's phonetic system are common. These errors can be mitigated through targeted

phonetic training.

In the study of Custodio (2000) entitled “An Assessment of the Pronunciation Skills of the First Year High School students of MSU TCTO Science High School”, she concluded that the assessment of the mentioned school was quite satisfactory because the students were able to pronounce the vowel sounds tested. However, she added that they still need to be enhanced to further develop their ability in pronouncing vowel sounds especially in /a/ sound.

Ladja (March 2002) in her study “Pronunciation Skills of Science High School Fourth year Students”, she recommended that the students should be exposed to a speech laboratory to undergo intensive practices and drills in pronunciation in the vowel system.

Malon and Macua (2003), also recommended that pupils of MSU Laboratory Elementary School needed to be enhanced in pronunciation skills to improve the speaking ability in English sounds. Effective and reliable drills and exercises must be kept out to reach the outstanding level of performance in pronunciation.

In the study conducted by Aharajul and Hynson (2010) entitled “An Assessment of the Pronunciation Skills”, they stressed that English teachers who handle oral communication subjects should have an adequate and sufficient training and background in English phonology. The exposure of students to model teachers of oral communication is a great deal.

Bicasan and Dawaie (2005) concluded that the students of Sanga-Sanga National High School and Pagasinan National High School needed more enhancement exercises in stress and intonation, more support from administrator for sufficient educational facilities.

In the study of Abdulkadil and Ullang (2011) entitled “Pronunciation Skills of the BSEd English Students of the College of Education”, concluded further that the BSEd English Students of the College of Education have very satisfactory pronunciation skills in all the vowel and consonant sounds tested. Whereas, both male and female respondents’ performance do not vary which means they have almost similar exposure on oral communication skills. Furthermore, the BSEd English students at the College of Education are well taught in pronouncing the cited consonant and vowel sounds.

The MTB-MLE approach, which uses Tausug or Sinama as the initial language of instruction, can help young learners develop strong foundational language skills. However, when English is introduced, students may struggle with certain English sounds that are not present in their native languages. For example, they might find it difficult to pronounce the "th" sound in "think" or the "v" sound in "van." This was supported by the study of Thomas & Collier (2022) where they looked at the effectiveness of multilingual education programs for students in minority language communities, showing that students who begin learning in their native language tend to develop better literacy skills and perform better in second languages over time. On the other hand, it also identifies that pronunciation can be a barrier to full English proficiency for these students.

Methodology

Participants

The participants of this study were the fifty-three (53) Grade VI-A Pupils of Tubig Mampallam Central School and Salamat Elementary School who are enrolled officially during the S.Y. 2023-2024. Tubig Mampallam Central School and Salamat Elementary School. Tubig Mampallam Central School is located at Tubig Mampallam, Bongao, Tawi-Tawi while Salamat Elementary School is located at Salamat Street, Poblacion, Bongao, Tawi-Tawi. Both schools are under the supervision of the Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education (MBHTE). The researchers selected the Grade VI pupils for they are at the stage where their basic language skills in both their mother tongue and English are becoming more established.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a researcher-made pronunciation skill test composed of 40 items: 20 items for stresses and 20 items for intonation patterns. In stresses, there are 7 items for two-syllabic words; 7 items for three-syllabic words; and 6 items for four-syllabic words. In intonation patterns, there are 5 items for declarative; 5 items for interrogative; 5 items for imperative; and 5 for exclamatory. To determine the face validity of the test, it was presented to the 3 panel members with expertise who have been handling oral communication subjects.

Procedure

To conduct the study for pilot testing, the researchers requested the permission from the principals and the advisers of the concerned schools. As the permission was granted, the researchers proceeded to the respective classrooms. Ten (10) pupils were the respondents in the pilot testing. The instrument was subjected to Cronbach alpha for the reliability and underwent content panel validity.

After the instrument was item analyzed, the researchers proceeded with the final testing. With same procedure, upon permission from the principal and teachers concern, the pupils read orally the researchers made pronunciation skill test, and their voices were recorded in a silent room using voice recorder application from a cellular phone. Using the scoring rubric, the same raters for the instrument also rated the pronunciation skills of the concerned respondents. These three raters were college professors handling English courses and are considered experts in Phonology. The results were tallied and tabulated for further analysis.



Ethical Considerations

This research study followed ethical guidelines. This study considered ethical issues into account including, information confidentiality and informing the consent from the respondents concerned. To build trust between the researcher and the respondents, researchers informed the respondents prior to the conduct of the study and had them signed the respondents’ consent letter.

Results and Discussion

The following tables present the analyses and interpretation of the data gathered on the first language affecting pronunciation skills of Grade VI-A pupils of Salamat Elementary School and Tubig Mampallam Central School.

Table 1. *First Language of Grade VI-A Pupils of Salamat Elementary School and Tubig Mampallam Central School*

First Language	Salamat Elementary School		Tubig Mampallam Central School		Total	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Tausug	18	58.1	11	50.0	29	54.7
Sinama	10	32.3	5	22.7	15	28.3
Bisaya	3	9.7	5	22.7	8	15.1
Other (Chavacano)	0	0	1	4.5	1	1.9
Total	31	100	22	100	53	100

Table 1 shows the First Language of Grade VI-A Pupils of Salamat Elementary School and Tubig Mampallam Central School. It further shows that out of the 31 pupils of Salamat Elementary School, 18 are Tausug speaking yielding 58.1% of the total population, 10 pupils are Sinama speaking yielding 32.3%, and 3 are Bisayan speaking having a percentage of 9.7%, with a total of 100%

It also presents that 11 pupils of Tubig Mampallam Central School are Tausug speaking, yielding 50% of the total population, 5 pupils are Sinama speaking, yielding 22.7%, 5 pupils are Bisayan speaking, also yielding 22.7% of the population, and 1 pupil is of Chavacano, yielding 4.5% of the population.

In totality, both schools yielded a frequency of 29 Tausug speaking pupils which has a percentage of 54.7%, 15 pupils are Sinama speaking having a percentage of 28.3%, 8 pupils are Bisayan speaking, 15.1%, and 1 Chavacano speaking pupil with percentage of 1.9%, with a total population of 100%. Moreover, the total frequency of Salamat Elementary School and Tubig Mampallam Central School is 53.

Table 2. *Levels of Pronunciation Skills of Grade VI-A Pupils by Variable and School*

Variable	Salamat Elementary School		Tubig Mampallam Central School		Overall	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
Stress	3.46	Satisfactory	3.29	Satisfactory	3.38	Satisfactory
Intonation	3.38	Satisfactory	3.39	Satisfactory	3.39	Satisfactory
Overall	3.42	Satisfactory	3.34	Satisfactory	3.38	Satisfactory

Legend: 4.50-5.00 – Outstanding, 3.50-4.49 – Very Satisfactory, 2.50-3.49 – Satisfactory, 1.50-2.49 – Fair, 0.00-1.49 – Poor

Table 2 shows the Levels of Pronunciation Skills of Grade VI-A Pupils by Variable and School. It further shows that the pupils of Salamat Elementary School have a mean score of 3.46 in stress and 3.38 in intonation. Both variables are interpreted as satisfactory. In the mean average, it also demonstrated a satisfactory level as evidence by 3.42 rating.

It also shows that the pupils of Tubig Mampallam Central School have a mean score of 3.29 in stress and 3.39 in intonation. Both also interpreted as satisfactory, and the mean average is 3.34, interpreted as satisfactory.

Furthermore, Salamat Elementary School and Tubig Mampallam Central School manifested satisfactory level of pronunciation skills in stress with mean average of 3.38 which is interpreted as satisfactory. Both schools also manifested satisfactory level of pronunciation skills in intonation with mean average of 3.39 which is interpreted as satisfactory. Thus, the overall mean average is 3.38, likewise interpreted as satisfactory.

Table 3. *Test on Significant Relationship between First Language and Pronunciation Skills of Grade VI-A Pupils of Salamat Elementary School*

Variables	r values	p-values	Remarks
First Language And Stress	-0.292	0.112	No significant relationship
First Language And Intonation	-0.048	0.798	No significant relationship

*0.05 level of significance

Based on the data presented in Table 3, there is no significant relationship between first language and stress and the intonation of Grade VI-A Pupils of Salamat Elementary School. As shown by the computed r-values of -0.292 and -0.048 with associated p-values of 0.112 and 0.798 respectively are higher that of 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table 4 presents the Test on Significant Relationship between First Language and Pronunciation Skills of Grade VI-A Pupils of Tubig Mampallam Central School. It also shows that “there is no significant relationship between first language and stress and intonation of

Grade VI-A pupils of Tubig Mampallam Central School”, having pearson r values 0.217 and 0.023 with associated p-values 0.332 and 0.918 respectively. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Table 4. *Test on Significant Relationship between First Language and Pronunciation Skills of Grade VI-A Pupils of Tubig Mampallam Central School*

Variables	r values	p-values	Remarks
First Language And Stress	0.217	0.332	No significant relationship
First Language And Intonation	0.023	0.918	No significant relationship

Table 5 shows the Test of Significant Relationship between First Language and Pronunciation Skills of Grade VI-A Pupils of Salamat Elementary School and Tubig Mampallam Central School. To have a clear presentation, tables 3 and 4 were combined, forming table 5. In here, the first language and stress of Grade VI-A pupils of Salamat Elementary School and Tubig Mampallam Central School were compared. As well as the first language and intonation of both schools mentioned.

Table 5. *Test on Significant Relationship between First Language and Pronunciation Skills of Grade VI-A Pupils of Salamat Elementary School and Tubig Mampallam Central School*

Variables	r values	p-values	Remarks
First Language And Stress	-0.085	0.547	No significant relationship
First Language And Intonation	-0.002	0.990	No significant relationship

Table 6 presents the Test on Significant Difference on the Pronunciation Skills of Grade VI-A Pupils by School. The associated p-value of 0.157 of the computed t-value of 1.438 is greater than 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis that states “there is no significant difference on the performance on stress of Grade VI-A pupils between Salamat Elementary School and Tubig Mampallam Central School” is accepted. It also shows the associated p-value of 0.894 of the computed t-value of -0.134 is greater than 0.05 level of significance. Therefore, the null hypothesis that states “there is no significant difference on the performance on intonation of Grade VI-A pupils between Salamat Elementary School and Tubig Mampallam Central School” is accepted.

Table 6. *Test on Significant Difference on the Pronunciation Skills of Grade VI-A Pupils by School*

Variable	t-value	p-value	Remarks
Stress	1.438	0.157	Not significant
Intonation	-0.134	0.894	Not significant

Conclusions

On the basis of the findings and conclusion of this study, the following are the recommendations:

The Grade VI-A pupils must be taught thoroughly on stress and intonation and must be given drills and practice exercises on stress and intonation to improve and enhance their pronunciation skills from their satisfactory level to excellent.

The teachers at these concerned schools as well as other school should undergo content strategies of teaching English.

The parents should encourage their children by giving them reading materials at home in order to enhance their pronunciation skills, particularly on stress and intonation.

The administrators of these schools must provide adequate and up-to-date learning materials for the pupils.

Based on the findings that the level of pronunciation skills on stress and intonation is satisfactory, it is concluded that the pupils can pronounce some of the words and sentences according to correct stress and intonation and that, the first language of the pupils don't affect so much their skill on pronunciation. Yet, pupils should be provided with drills and exercises particularly on stress and intonation to further improve and enhance to excellent level in pronunciation skills.

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