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I KNOW [pɪlɪpino] BUT I SAY [fɪlɪpino]:  
AN INVESTIGATION INTO FILIPINO  
FOREGIN DOMESTIC HELPERS' INFLUENCE  
ON HONG KONG CHINESE'S  
L2 ENGLISH PHONOLOGY ACQUISITION

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ABSTRACT

As a response to a preliminary study (Leung 2010) of five HK learners of English which found that those who had grown up hearing Filipino-accented English showed no trace of this accent in their production, this study probes further to look for more subtle signs of exposure to Filipino English. Data were collected from 10 speakers aged 2½ to 25 who were divided into three groups. Both Groups A and B were initially exposed to Filipino-accented English input at home, and Group A continued to receive such input. Group C had not received any Filipino-accented English input at home. Findings from two perception tasks targeting English words with /p/, /t/, /k/, /f/, and /v/ onsets spoken in a Filipino accent showed that speakers with exposure to Filipino-accented English could better perceive these words than those who had none. A decline from Group A to C was found in their ability to recognise target phonemes, indicating that quantity and/or recency of input play a role. These results raise the issue of incipient/passive-bilingualism (Diebold 1964; Romaine 1995) and call for more detailed study of attitude, accommodation and identity with respect to the acquisition of a given second language variety.

KEYWORDS: Input; L2 perception; Filipino English; variety; Hong Kong Chinese.

## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

How much do we really know about input in the second language acquisition of phonology? Given the possibility of not only internal but external factors im-

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments on an earlier version of this paper. Also, I would like to thank the organising committee of New Sounds 2010 for offering the platform for valuable intellectual exchanges regarding L2 sounds and phonology without which this paper would not have been possible.

pacting on the acquisition outcome, one can expect the end state be highly variable (Piske and Young-Scholten 2009). The literature tells us that native-like attainment is far from a guarantee; learners with near native competence coexist with speakers whose accents are markedly foreign even after prolonged residence in the target language country. While researchers have discussed the effect of foreign-accented input on second language phonology (e.g. Young-Scholten 1994, 1995) and other language contact phenomenon such as koineization and dialect levelling (e.g. Kerswill and Williams 2002, 2005), little research has been carried out on learners' choice when several varieties of the same language exist (see Rys 2007).

In Hong Kong, children are exposed to both Cantonese and English, but studies of bilingual/young second language learners (e.g. Matthews and Yip 2009) focus on the mental representation of two languages rather than on input factors. With respect to English, input may be an important factor where children's first exposure is from Filipino housekeepers as parents are often away for work in the daytime. These Filipino foreign domestic helpers (FDHs) are sometimes regarded as auxiliary English teachers for young Hong Kong learners (Constable 1997; 2007; McArthur 2002; Poon 2006). We therefore expect children's acquisition of features characteristic of Filipino English: unaspirated plosives, /p/, /t/, /k/, and the use of [p], and [b] for /f/, /v/ (Bautista 2000; Tayao 2008). Notwithstanding such circumstances, many children appear not to have grown up "acquiring" a Filipino accent.

In spite of the intriguing nature of this phenomenon, such seeming dissociation between input and acquisition outcome has not been studied thoroughly and systematically in L2 phonology (Leung 2009a, b). Crebo (2003) has even gone so far to state that the study of Filipino FDHs' influence on Hong Kong Chinese learners is virtually non-existent. This paper is an effort to address this phenomenon from a speech perception perspective. It will first summarise a study that looks at this apparent dissociation from a production point of view (Leung 2010). Building on that, the paper will proceed to report on the actual study that pertains to subjects' ability to perceive English words with /p/, /t/, /k/, /f/, /v/ onsets pronounced in a Filipino accent. This will then be followed by a section of discussion. Lastly, some relevant issues will be pointed out in the concluding section.

## **2. Exploratory study**

In an exploratory study that taps into the purported dissociation between input and linguistic outcome in the context of Hong Kong (HK), Leung (2010) finds

that speakers who grew up receiving Filipino-accented English input do not produce English speech with such an accent. The study focuses on Hong Kong-Chinese English speakers' pronunciation of labio-dental fricatives /f/ and /v/, which are realised as [p] and [b] in Filipino English (Bautista 2000; Tayao 2008).<sup>2,3</sup> Furthermore, the study also examines the production of /p/, /t/, /k/ which are often not aspirated in the English of Filipino speakers (ibid.). The stated labio-dental fricatives and plosives are chosen because they are instantiated differently in Filipino- and Hong Kong- accented English (see Table 1; also Bautisa 2000; Leung 2010; Tayao 2008 for phonological features of Filipino English; Bolton and Kwok 1990; Deterding et al. 2008; Hung 2000; Leung 2010; Luke and Richards 1982; Setter 2008; Sewell 2009 for phonological features of HK English).

Table 1. Relevant comparable contrasts between Filipino and Hong Kong English.

	Filipino English	Hong Kong English
#_ (/p/, /t/, /k/)	Not aspirated	Aspirated
/f/, /v/	/f/ realised as [p], /v/ as [b]	/f/ realised as [f], /v/ as [v]/ [w]

Through two separate tasks, it is revealed that the pronunciation of five subjects (three with Filipino-accented English input, two Hong Kong controls without such input), aged from 12 to 23 at the time of data collection, differ from the female Filipinos (55 and 52 of age), who were the actual domestic helpers of the three subjects in the experimental group. In a paragraph reading task, marked differences were observed with regard to both the aspiration of /p/, /t/, /k/ (aspi-

<sup>2</sup> It has to be pointed out that the /f/, /v/ which are rendered as [p]-, [b]-like sounds are acoustically different from the [p], [b] of /p/, /b/. That is to say, the Filipino [p] and [b] originated from /f/, /v/, and /p/, /b/ are not identical, such that words like *fan*, *pan* may sound similar but they are not homophones. An anonymous reviewer pointed out the value of a detailed discussion of the acoustic properties of the respective sounds in question, a remark to which I fully concur. However, due to the length limitation such discussion has to be set aside as the focus of this paper does not lie on the acoustic detail of individual segments.

<sup>3</sup> One reviewer pointed out the possibility of variation among Filipino speakers of English, i.e. not all Filipino English speakers sound the same. This is in fact a valid concern, and this is the reason why scholars such as Tayao (2008) have adopted a lectal continuum approach (basilect, mesolect, acrolect) to describe Filipino English phonology. However, features chosen for the study are believed to be common among Filipino-FDH according to three Filipino informants who work in Hong Kong as FDH.

ration of subjects and HK controls: 100% vs Filipino Group: 17%) and the rendering of /f/, /v/ as [f] and [v] (subjects and HK controls: 100% vs Filipino Group: 50%). These findings are reinforced by data from a second task, a spontaneous speech production task set up in the format of a semi-structured interview. The relevant sounds analysed from the recordings of the subjects displayed no Filipino trace/influence. It has to be pointed out that even though the amount of English input the participant in the experimental group obtained from the Filipino helper decreased as s/he grew older, the Filipino nevertheless remained a constant source of English input for these subjects, hence the results obtained are somewhat unexpected. The amount of input participants obtained from various sources is listed in Table 2; subjects in the HK control group would have obtained input only from the institutional means (the right most column in the table). The results reported in Leung's study accord with the anecdotal observation of the dissociation conundrum between input and acquisition in Hong Kong.

Table 2. Amount of English input informants (experimental group) obtained from the two main sources.

Period	Source of input	
	Filipino domestic helpers	Institutional means
Pre-school	7–9 hours / day	rare
Kindergarten	6 hours / day	4 hours / week
Primary school	4–6 hours / day	4.5–6 hours / week
Secondary school	~ 3–5 hours / day	4.5–26 hours / week (depending on EMI/CMI) <sup>4</sup>
Tertiary education	< 3 hours / day	4–6 hours / week

### 3. The present study

#### 3.1. Speech perception

The study of speech production by Leung (2010) seems to indicate that learners are not influenced by the Filipino-accented input to which they are constantly ex-

<sup>4</sup> EMI and CMI stand for “English as a medium of instruction” and “Chinese as a medium of instruction” respectively. In an EMI school all academic subjects are taught in English apart from Chinese and Chinese history, while all academic subjects apart from English are taught in Chinese in a CMI school.

posed from an early age. This seems to be at odds with a range of L2 phonology findings (Moyer 2009; Young-Scholten 1994). One might hence be led to thinking that learners did not acquire this variety, therefore, challenging the role that input plays in (second) language acquisition (cf. Piske and Young-Scholten 2009; Young-Scholten 1994, 1995). However, for one to claim that these learners did not acquire this particular variety of English, one has to show that they shunned this accent or to demonstrate their insensitivity towards it. This is because learners could be bi-dialectal and possess passive knowledge of this variety even though the spoken form is not adopted. That is to say, these speakers could have built up implicit knowledge (perception) of this type of English through ongoing exposure (Wode 1994, 1995, 1997), but nonetheless failed to display it in production. In the light of that, this follow-up study focusing on speech perception was conducted.

Against the backdrop of Leung (2010), the study intended to find out whether subjects who grew up with Filipino-accented English input could perceive this variety despite not actively producing it.

The study involved two tasks to allow cross-validation of the results. In the first task, ten subjects were asked to listen to stimuli of English words with /p/, /t/, /k/, /f/, and /v/ onsets pronounced with a Filipino accent and write them down. In the second task, participants were asked to pick the picture corresponding to the word they heard.

It was found that speakers who were exposed to Filipino-accented English performed better than subjects who were not exposed to such input. This result poses a challenge to the tentative non-acquisition claim made by Leung (2010) on the basis of production data.

### 3.2. Subjects

Subjects of this study ranged from 2½ to 25 years of age. Five of the ten subjects (subjects AL, CH, NH, TC, BN, see Table 3) had also participated in Leung's (2010) speech production study. Their data are crucial to analysing the possibility of implicit acquisition of the Filipino-accented variety, as it was already shown by Leung that these people did not show traces of Filipino-accent in their production of English (cf. Section 2).

Informants were divided into three groups. Group A consisted of speakers who had been and still were being exposed to Filipino-accented English input, while group B were speakers who had been exposed to this variety previously but no longer do. Finally, group C were speakers who had not received any Filipino accented English input. All subjects reported conversing with their parents

in Cantonese (their L1) except JA who used a mixed code of Cantonese and English with her parents. On the other hand, all subjects communicated with their FDHs in English. Thus, the amount of input various participants obtained largely resembles details shown in Table 2 above. Speakers' profiles are very diverse; they cover a wide-spectrum of variations in age, level of education and years of exposure to English (see Table 3).

Table 3. Subjects' profile.

Groups	Subjects	Age	Length of English instruction <sup>1</sup>	Level of education	Length of exposure to Filipino-accented English
A	AL	23	12 years	Tertiary (undergrad)	23 years (from birth)
	CH	18	12 years	Tertiary (hi-diploma)	18 years (from birth)
	NH	12	6 years	Secondary (1st year)	12 years (from birth)
	JA	4;5	1 year	Kindergarten (2nd year)	4 years and 5 months (from birth)
	KY	3;2	2 months	Kindergarten (1st year)	3 years and 2 months (from birth)
	KL	2;7	0 years	Pre-school	2 years and 7 months (from birth)
B	AW	24	12 years	Tertiary (undergrad)	10 years (from birth–10)
	TC	16	9 years	Secondary (4th year)	3 years (ages 7–10)
C	KK	25	12 years	Tertiary (postgrad)	N/A
	BN	24	12 years	Tertiary (postgrad)	N/A

### 3.3. The tasks

All recordings for the tasks in this study were recorded by a 55-year-old female Filipino English speaker whose production resembled the prototypical Filipino accent attested in the literature (Bautista 2000; Tayao 2008). Painstaking effort was put into the preparation of the recordings. At the beginning, the reader was very conscious about the whole process even though she knew she was not the target of this study. She admitted paying constant attention to the words that begin with letters <f> and <v> since she was aware of the confounding nature of these sounds with [p], and [b] in Filipino English. She also thought seeing the spelling of the words affected her pronunciation to a certain degree (for the influence of orthography in pronunciation and acquisition, please refer to Bassetti

2009; and Young-Scholten 2002). However, it is believed that the final version chosen for the study adequately represents Filipino-accented English.

### 3.3.1. Task 1 (word spelling task) and Task 2 (picture choosing task)

Both tasks involved a word-listening procedure where informants identified the 15 words played to them. In addition, 5 fillers were included to divert participants' attention. Subjects' ability to identify words played is considered to be an indication of his/her knowledge of the word/sound and vice versa. The first task required subjects to take dictation of the word they heard on a sheet of paper. In the second task, subjects were asked to select the picture representing the words they heard from the images given. The option of "don't know" was available when they could not identify the word. Similarly, they could provide a word in the second task when they thought the word they heard was not among the pictures provided, even though in actuality pictures of all the words played were available.

Words chosen were mainly vocabularies that are related to the daily life of children, such as *foot*, *van*, *pen*, *ten* and *king*. Also, the words represented a number of different phonological environments. For instance, vowels of different heights were included following the onset /f/. Similarly, both front and back vowels were included. Examples include, *fish* where /ɪ/ is [+ high], [+ front]; *foot* where /ʊ/ is [+ high], [-front].<sup>5</sup> This was to ensure the perception results obtained were not going to be affected by the quality of the following vowel. Furthermore, subjects were tested for their knowledge of the words in the given pictures before the tasks begin. Words that the subject did not know were excluded lest the analysis was obscured. A training phase was also included; subjects were asked to listen to a few words other than the targets and practise writing them down and choosing them from the pictures. The actual experiment did not start until informants were familiar with the procedure.

## 3.4. Results

### 3.4.1. Task 1 – word spelling task

The youngest subjects (subjects JA, KY, KL) encountered difficulties in spelling the words since they were still in the process of acquiring literacy in English,

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<sup>5</sup> A list of the words included can be found in the Appendix.



therefore, their results are not reported here. In total, 15 words with the various onsets /f/, /v/, /p/, /t/, /k/ were played to the subjects (the fillers were not taken in for analysis). The words were chosen at random from the pre-selected list of words which mostly meet the criteria stated in Section 3.3.1 (cf. Appendix).

The results show a cline of varying capabilities in recognising the sounds. Subjects in group A have the highest sensitivity towards the different sounds, with group B being slightly less competent in identifying the words, and group C being the worst among the three groups. Group A is able to identify the words beginning with /p/, /t/, /k/ 86% of the time, /f/, /v/ 94% of the time.<sup>6,7</sup> Group B is able to recognise words with /p/, /t/, /k/ onsets correctly 75% of the time, and 43% of the /f/, /v/. Group C identifies 20% of the words starting with /p/, /t/, /k/, and 27% of the words with /f/, /v/ are correctly spotted. Table 4 gives a detailed account for the individual performance of each subject in the group.

Table 4. Subjects' performance in Task 1.

Groups	Subjects	Plosive onsets (response/ no. of tokens)				Labio-dental fricative onsets		
		p [p <sup>h</sup> /p <sup>h</sup> ]	t [t <sup>h</sup> /t <sup>h</sup> ]	k [k <sup>h</sup> /k <sup>h</sup> ]	total	f as [f]	v as [v]	total
A	AL	3/3	4/4	3/3	10/10	3/3	2/2	5/5
	CH	3/3	1/3	3/3	7/9	3/3	3/3	6/6
	NH	3/3	1/3	3/3	7/9	2/3	3/3	5/6
B	AW	1/3	2/2	2/2	5/7	2/6	1/2	3/8
	TC	3/3	2/3	2/3	7/9	1/3	2/3	3/6
C	KK	1/4	0/2	0/2	1/8	1/5	1/2	2/7
	BN	0/2	0/3	2/2	2/7	1/6	1/2	2/8

#### 3.4.2. Task 2 – picture choosing task

Words containing /p/, /t/, /k/, /f/, /v/ onsets were played. In line with the previous task, a general decline in sensitivity towards the target sound is observed with group A being the best and group C the worst. Group A has chosen the pictures accurately for words with /p/, /t/, /k/ onsets 89% of the time, while /f/, /v/

<sup>6</sup> Since the spelling of words is not a matter of concern, hence whenever the participant was able to write down the relevant onset, it was counted as an incidence of “correct identification”.

<sup>7</sup> All numbers are rounded to the closest digit unless otherwise stated.

are correct 63% of the time. It has to be pointed out that the data obtained from subject KY was removed from the analysis since he was found to have certain learning disabilities. Group B has selected the correct pictures that represent the words with /p/, /t/, /k/ onsets approximately 47% of the time, while the accuracy rate for /f/ and /v/ is 50%. Lastly, group C has picked 24% of the correct images corresponding to words with /p/, /t/, /k/ onsets, and 46% for /f/, /v/ onsets. Table 5 lists the detail of the subjects' responses.

Table 5: Subjects' performance in Task 2.

Groups Subjects	Plosive onsets (response/ no. of tokens)				Labio-dental fricative onsets			
	p [p <sup>h</sup> /p <sup>h</sup> ]	t [t <sup>h</sup> /t <sup>h</sup> ]	k [k <sup>h</sup> /k <sup>h</sup> ]	total	f as [f]	v as [v]	total	
A	AL	3/3	3/3	3/3	9/9	2/3	3/3	5/6
	CH	2/3	3/3	2/2	7/8	2/4	0/1	2/5
	NH	3/3	3/3	2/2	8/8	1/4	0/1	1/5
	JA	2/4	3/3	2/2	7/9	4/5	1/1	5/6
	KY	1/5	1/4	1/2	3/11	1/3	1/1	2/4
	KL	3/4	4/4	1/2	8/10	3/4	1/1	4/5
B	AW	2/3	2/4	1/2	5/9	4/5	1/1	5/6
	TC	0/2	1/1	1/3	2/6	0/4	1/2	1/6
C	KK	1/4	0/3	1/1	2/8	1/5	2/2	3/7
	BN	0/3	0/4	2/2	2/9	1/4	2/2	3/6

#### 4. Discussion

A cline of decreasing ability to pick the appropriate words can be observed in both tasks (Table 6 and 7).

These results can be taken as an indication of different awareness towards the sounds that represent /p/, /t/, /k/, /f/, /v/ onsets among groups. The remarkable ability to identify Filipino /p/, /t/, /k/ is actually a very good indicator of knowledge of the Filipino variety, since non-aspiration is found to be one of the major barriers for intelligibility (Jenkins 2000). Therefore, the competence in these sounds (the non-aspirated /p/, /t/, /k/) is a reliable pointer telling us that subjects have in fact established these sounds in their phonology. However, one might wonder why subjects in Group C did not score zero percent despite not having received any Filipino-accented English input. Given that Filipino

Table 6. Correction identification of words with the following sounds in Task 1

Groups	/p/, /t/, /k/	/f/, /v/
A	86%	94%
B	75%	43%
C	20%	27%

Table 7. Correction identification of words with the following sounds in Task 2

Groups	/p/, /t/, /k/	/f/, /v/
A	89%	63%
B	47%	50%
C	24%	46%

foreign-domestic helpers constitute approximately 1.5 % of Hong Kong's population (Visa and Policies 2007), group C's performance could possibly be due to subjects' occasional exposure to this variety of English from the ambient environment.

It is interesting to note that the ability of some subjects in choosing the correct words dropped from Task 1 to Task 2. This is perhaps a manifestation of task effects, reminding us of the importance of triangulating; subjects might have relied on the options they had from the images presented to them in the second task. Conversely, in Task 1 they had to count on their own competence of the sounds and write down the words presented to them, this perhaps prompted them to write down what they actually heard without being affected by any external stimuli.

In all, results obtained from this study indicate that exposure to Filipino accented English at some point in the subjects' life is essential to their ability in recognising such sounds. In other words, this linguistic system is established in their grammar even though this variety is not observed in production.

## 5. Conclusion and future direction

On the face of it, Leung's study (2010) seems to be going against the traditional belief of language acquisition that one would logically acquire the variety s/he is exposed to. The non-production of Filipino accent by the informants is apparently saying that they had somehow avoided acquiring the Filipino variety regardless of the continuous input they received, in some cases prior to starting school and being exposed to another variety of English. However, such a conclusion drawn without considering speakers' ability to perceive the variety is dubious or haphazard at best. It is possible that the subjects have acquired im-

plicit knowledge of the variety even though it does not surface in their production. This indeed is exactly what is found in the perception study reported in this paper. Subjects show a decline in sensitivity towards Filipino accented English speech sounds according to their exposure profile of this variety. Ongoing exposure to such input leads to better ability in perceiving the sounds. Synthesising the results of Leung's (2010) study as well as the ones reported here reminds us of the importance to include a wide-array of testing methods (in this case by looking at both production and perception) so that conclusions drawn are more empirically sound. This echoes the point made by Tench (1996) who calls for circumspection in the design of methodologies in L2 phonology studies. In fact, Gut (2009) has expressed the need to re-balance the study design of L2 phonology which currently favours studies that involve production tasks. Investigating both production and perception data allow us to reveal a more comprehensive profile of one's phonological competence that could not be achieved otherwise.

Although the results of the current study should be viewed with caution due to the small sample size included, they do in turn opened up a new research question, namely: "What has impeded subjects' production of Filipino accent in their English speech?" Drawing on insights from related findings of acquisition studies in migration settings (e.g. the so-called Ethan experience, where children filtered out their parents' accented input and acquired the community variety (Chambers 2002, 2005) and multi-dialectal exposure due to inter-clan marriages (Stanford 2008)), we could infer that sociolinguistic factors may be at work leading to the non-adoption of Filipino accent in speakers' English speech production (see Bayley 2005; Schumann 1978; Spolsky 1989). Yet, initial findings obtained through a verbal-guise experiment suggested a more complex picture than straightforward accommodation. Results showed that speakers expressed neutral attitudes towards Filipino English but negative ones towards Hong Kong English. This points to the need for further investigation into factors such as attitude and identity with respect to the acquisition of a given second language variety. It will also be interesting to find out when such divergence from Filipino-accented speech occurs if the children orientate to that at all (see Kerswill 1996; Kerswill and Williams 2000 for details of shift of linguistic orientation). These issues will be addressed in a forthcoming study (Leung, in preparation) that aims to investigate L2 phonology acquisition in the presence of Filipino FDHs by young learners in their third grade of kindergarten (4–6 years old) as well as early teenagers who are in their first year of secondary studies (12–14 years old). Through eliciting production data via a carrier-phrase reading task, and a guided speech production task, and perception data through a picture choosing task and a sound discrimination task, as well as attitudinal data towards different

types of accented English by the verbal-guise technique and focus groups, his study hopes to find out the interplay between social factors and the acquisition of English as a second language by Hong Kong Chinese where different varieties are present.

All in all, the present study has tapped into an interesting area of research pertaining to second language acquisition where multiple varieties are present. This phenomenon is not only unique to Hong Kong but many East-Asian and African countries where FDHs are hired to take care of children while employers are away for work during the day. Thus, further investigation into this area will add an interesting layer to our understanding of L2 phonology and SLA.

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## APPENDIX

Words included in the task:

F: Feet, fin, fish, foot, food, fork, fan.

V: Van, vegetables.

P: Pizza, pool, park, police, pumpkin, pan.

T: Tea, ten, taxi, two, table, toilet, tie.

K: Key, king, cat.

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