

Introduction and Preface to the Conference

Natsumi ARATAME

To date, the Philippines has not been a popular destination to study English for the majority of Japanese people. Recently, however, an interesting development is taking place in English education in Japan: (1) studying English in the Philippines from Filipino teachers and (2) learning English on-line with native Filipino teachers based in the Philippines.

Since the Philippines was once part of the U.S. territory, English has been widely used as a medium of instruction at all levels of their education system. Therefore, studying English in the Philippines or learning English from Filipino teachers as an alternative to studying with an American or a British teacher is not unheard of. However, to many Japanese teachers and students of English alike, this is a new phenomenon.

Historically, it was in the early 2000s that Korean educators discovered the advantages of studying English in the Philippines over other English speaking countries: The costs were much lower, which enabled them to introduce intensive one-on-one English programmes. The reputation spread slowly but steadily, and after the 2010s, the number of Japanese students studying English in the Philippines started to increase. In response to this, the number of privately owned English schools in the Philippines run by Japanese managers also started to rise.

This development, however, was received with mixed feelings. On the positive side, some people welcomed the opportunity to learn English directly from “native speakers” at a much lower cost, but others, including native and Japanese English teachers still expressed concern over the grammatical accuracy, accents, and pronunciation of the Filipino teachers. This became the impetus for a group of researchers headed by Dr. Kazuo Sakai of Meiji University to initiate a research project to investigate the effectiveness of English lessons taught by Filipino teachers, both on-line and off-line.

This conference was initially planned as "The 111th Meeting on Higher Education for the Next Generation", a regular workshop conducted by Japanese researchers concerned with improving higher education in Japan with innovative teaching methods. Since many of the English language schools are located in Cebu, it was decided that the meeting be held in Cebu. We are grateful for the financial and logistical support extended by the Institute for Service Innovation Studies of Meiji University/Uchida Yoko Co., Ltd., Takushoku University and QQ English.

Initially planned as a meeting for Japanese researchers, the Philippine Association for Language Teaching (PALT) joined as a partner in view of the relevance to educators in the Philippines. The Japanese Society for Learning Analytics and The English Language Education Society of Japan followed suit. We are particularly grateful for the invaluable input received from Dr. Ma. Milagros Laurel, the president of PALT which helped to ensure the final programme became a true collaboration of Japanese and Filipino

English teachers concerned with the theory and practice of second language acquisition.

The aim of the conference was to be both academic and educational in nature. It was expected to add new insights to the theory of second language acquisition. It also tried to share with Japanese teachers how and why Filipinos had become native speakers of English as well as the characteristics of Filipino English compared with American or British English. The final program was organized to address the following five themes:

1. English in the Educational System: Language Policy in the Philippines and Japan
2. English in Business and Professional Usage
3. Variations of English – World Englishes: Japanese, Philippine, and American/British
4. English Language Teaching Trends and Approaches: Traditional and New Methods
5. Beyond ELT: Challenges, Techniques and Strategies

In total, there were 18 presentations including the keynote speech by Dr. Laurel. What we have adopted in this special issue is only a sample of these presentations. Many presentations were a research in progress and expected to be published in professional/academic journals in the future. An overall summary of the presentations can be found in the appendix.

Through this conference, we have gained further insight into English educational policies in the Philippines and Japan, the social settings in which English has been used in the Philippines, the characteristics of Filipino English, new teaching strategies and methods of evaluation and issues related to the technical development of English education in both countries.

Most importantly, we have learned that through their encounters with Filipino teachers, Japanese students are not only improving their English ability but are also being exposed to a diverse culture different to that of their own. The impact of cultural exposure is something that cannot be overlooked when assessing the effect of English education in the Philippines or English lessons from Filipino teachers.

Finally, with the primary goal of creating more effective teaching strategies, we hope that the professional collaboration between Japanese and Filipino teachers will continue in the future.

About the author

Natsumi ARATAME, PhD is a professor at Takushoku University and Head of the Department of International Studies, Faculty of International Studies, Takushoku University, Tokyo, Japan. His research interests include sociology, demography and area study with focus on the Philippines.

Email: naratame@ner.takushoku-u.ac.jp