

The Intelligibility of the Vietnamese Accented English

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Abstract

This study was purposely conducted to determine what linguistic features affect the intelligibility of the Vietnamese speakers. To do this, speech samples of exemplars of Vietnamese English were audio-taped and then listened to by representatives of the Kachruvian circles, who wrote down what they heard. The findings show that Vietnamese speakers have some difficulties producing English words properly, especially with final sounds, word-final consonant clusters, and words that have more than three syllables. The exemplars also find it difficult to deal with the stress time rhythm of English words with more than two syllables. The findings also imply that intelligibility is not much of a problem for Vietnamese exemplars, results of intelligibility scores of American and Filipino listeners show that less exposure of other speakers to another language does not follow that the latter would be completely unintelligible to the former. In addition, similarity in the general features of language between speakers of different nationalities does not guarantee mutual intelligibility between these people. From the findings, the paper discusses their implications for English language teaching in Vietnam.

Keywords: Intelligibility, Vietnamese accented English

1. Introduction

Language is a defining property of human social groups. It can create cohesion by marking group membership and by facilitating the sharing of activities and information. In the context of English as a global language, multiple groups with different backgrounds, cultures, languages are required to communicate in a common language. This speaking, which differs from mother tongues will drift apart through the accretion of small changes in vocabulary and pronunciation among speakers. These changes are caught unintelligibly by another social group who speaks the same language (Kachru, 1982), and English proficiency of speakers has been paid high priority in many education systems especially at non-native English

countries where English is not as a mother-tongue.

Historically, English has been spread out of Britain to different countries since sixteenth century. Nowadays, the world of English speakers are usually categorized in the three distinct groups: a native language, a second language, and a foreign language (Jenkins, 2003). The varieties of speakers make the linguistic diversity of English. This English varieties is defined and divided by Kachru (1982) into three concentric circles namely Inner circle or native users who use English by the mother-tongue and is the first language learnt of speakers, Outer circle or non-native in which English is learnt and largely used as a second language and official used beside mother tongue, and Expanding circle that English is learnt and used as a foreign language for different purposes with other English speakers, this group is categorized under non-native users as well.

English was transported to Vietnam since 1940s and used as a foreign language. It underwent explosive growth during the early 1990s because of its role and status in country development. Although it is considered to be a foreign language, the Vietnamese education system has adapted English as a means to carry out remarkable changes in all the aspects of the country. Today, in Vietnam, English is considered “as a national mission” (Phan, 2013, p. 162) in educating students who are expected to have language competency to engage in globalized world.

As a result of these changes, English began to be popular and was used not only in international dialogues but also commonly used at workplace. For this reason, the number of schools and centers specializing in English language training are booming, especially in big cities like Ha Noi and Ho Chi Minh; several policies and initiatives were set out by Vietnamese government with the aim “to renovate the teaching and learning of foreign languages with the national education system” (Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2008, Decision No 1400/QĐ-TTg). It is expected that by 2020, foreign language proficiency among Vietnamese will be increased and students will be effectively used English in communicating with other nationalities.

Even though Vietnamese government pays much effort in education to increase Vietnamese proficiency in using foreign languages, its reality still reveals several major challenges that exist at the level of the practice and implementation (Le, 2015). One of these challenges is that, for a long time up to now, students in Vietnamese schools have been taught more grammar and vocabulary than practice in conversation and dialogues to learn a new language. As explained by Nguyen, Warren, and Fehring (2015), lacking of available time in teaching, so the teachers cannot focus on teaching English communication for students. This methodology has resulted in limiting Vietnamese interactions between them and foreigners, especially when they visit or study in another country.

Unlike students from other Asian countries where English is used as a second or an official language, Vietnamese students face serious problems in communicating in English. One of these problems is pronunciation as many cannot pronounce an English sentence correctly, are not confident enough to communicate in the language (Trung Hieu, 2011). Their common difficulty in pronunciation is tense and lax vowels, consonant endings, stress and tones

(Nguyen, 2015). That is the reason why many Vietnamese can speak English but not many have intelligible English. Intelligibility is the single most imperative aspect of all communication (Munro, 2011, p.13). It determines the level of listener's understanding and the speaker's success in producing message with intended meanings. Effective communication depends not only on speaker's ability to deliver the message but also listener's ability to be familiar with the speaker's language and understand its meaning. There are many factors that affect individual's intelligibility such as individual sounds, word stress, word familiarity, or lexical stress (Field, 2003).

1.1 Speaker Factors

Intelligibility was defined by Brown (1989) "is a matter of a speaker being understood fully by a particular listener on a particular occasion, as much as of a speaker making himself understood" (as cited in Supatranut Singhanuwananon, 2016), or "the extent to which a speaker's message is actually understood by a listener" (Munro & Derwin, 1999, p. 289), or the extent to which the acoustic-phonetic content of the message is recognizable by a listener (Field, 2003). In learning language, teachers aim to teach their learners become intelligible ones to both native and non-native listeners. However, the intelligibility of non-native English speakers is affected by segmental such as consonant and vowel sounds, minimal pairs word, word stress, accentedness; and suprasegmental factors include pausing, rhythm, intonation, primary stress, connected speech and reduced speech (Hogan, 2012). Among these two, the segmentals makes crucial difference between native and non-native speakers due to their deviation from the sounds (Jenkins, 1998) and it tends to affect intelligibility of speakers (Luk, 2010). However, the findings of Hardman (2010) conducted on the intelligibility of Chinese graduate students to their Indian, Chinese, Korean, and American peers, the findings concluded the significant effects of a listener's word familiarity and L1 (native language) on intelligibility, especially when the L1 is shared with the talker, and the talker segmental accuracy is not considered as a significant predictor of intelligibility (p. 218).

Pronunciation is an important factor to determine intelligibility of the speakers even there is no clear specific aspects of pronunciation are the most crucial for intelligibility (Munro, Derwing, 1995), but it is the most noticeable. It is as an indicator of speaker's language background (Riney et al., 2005) but it is not the only issue causes in loss of intelligibility. Other factors such as vocabulary choice, grammar, fluency, listener internal factor, speaking choices, and the information presented through other channels all may contribute to a loss of understanding (Levis, 2010). Work by Phan (2012) on pronunciation errors suggested that EFL (English as a foreign language) and ESL (English as a second language) teachers need to focus on teaching prosodic proficiency in order to improve non-native speakers' comprehensibility and to reduce the negative effects of accentedness. The study also suggests training curriculum that includes sentence stress patterns in the learning activities, with the aim to improve sentence prosody, should be established to assist learners to function successfully in communicative situations between native speakers and non-native speakers.

Research by Derwing and Rossiter (2002) indicates that many non-native English speakers

may speak in a way that affects intelligibility. 100 speakers of English as a second language were surveyed and over half of them felt that pronunciation contributed to their communication problems. The pronunciation of non-native speakers with foreign accent affects listeners and speakers in both perception and production (Derwing, Munro, 2005). Improvement in speech intelligibility may therefore be an important goal for many speakers of English as a second language, however, to be able to improve speech intelligibility. One needs to understand the relationship between speech production (accent) and intelligibility.

To achieve successful communication, Derwing & Munro (2015) argue that the native English speakers interlocutor also will need to adjust themselves to the non-native English accent, and their interaction with non-native ones would be better by undergoing training process. According to Jenkins (1998) establishing the simplified, neutral, universal pronunciation variety, which is intelligible and acceptable to both native and non-native English users, is the possible solution for occurred problems in using international language (p. 120). In addition, the author also suggests that segmental, nuclear stress, and the effective use of articulatory setting need to be focused on teaching pronunciation to promote intelligibility.

Using intelligibility loosely to mean comprehensibility or the overall listener's degree of understanding of an utterance (Derwing & Munro, 2009), Dayag (2007) examined recorded speeches of five exemplars of Philippine English for intelligibility, focusing on two critical phonological features of mesolectal Philippine English, English such as substitution of interdental fricatives [θ] and [ð] to alveolar stops [t] and [d], and dropping of final sounds in consonant clusters. The said study has confirmed two phonological features mentioned, yet this somehow does not affect the intelligibility of speakers.

In another work done by Munro and Derwing (1999) considered intonation is more important for how easy relatively advanced speakers are to understand. Joan, et al. (2016) confirmed that intonation has an effect on intelligibility; poor intonation can cause misunderstanding or cannot be understood to listeners. On other hand, at both the word level and the sentence level, stress patterns are important for intelligibility because it conveys meaning of the speakers, the rise and fall of the voice in speaking need to include in teaching pronunciation, especially with a student who comes from different L1 backgrounds (Chela-Flores, 2001).

Speech rate is also considered as a key factor in terms of intelligibility, how fast a person speaks only seems to be a problem for learners when the speaker speaks excessively fast is excessively fast and has a strong accent. A reduced speech rate has facilitating effects on listener's comprehension of a heavily accent speaker, with the slow speech, listeners from both high and low proficiency group tend to be benefited from understanding (Matsuura et al, 2014). In fact, native speakers usually process speech easily and rapidly, and they have learned to attend to the natural phonetic variability presented in everyday speech, however, non-native speech processing is slower and they do not share the amount of language experience as native speakers have, so non-native listeners have to struggle to get understanding speakers, especially when speech is presented at different rates (Hanna & Joan, 2014).

Individual sounds also affect their intelligibility; errors in individual sounds may affect how far they are accurately understood (Munro & Derwing, 1999). Some other non-native speakers deliberately carry a strong foreign accent in their speech that makes their English becomes unrecognized or unfamiliar with others. The reason to explain for it is a combination of native and English sounds: that are difficult for speakers a variety of linguistic backgrounds to produce (Gilakjani, 2011). For example: the problem in pronouncing some particular sounds such as “v” with German speakers, or vowel sound like “bird”, “term” with Japanese... but the speakers commonly pronounces a perfectly acceptable version of the sound in another context (p. 75). However, the findings of Munro and Derwing (1995) in their study indicate that a strong foreign accent does not result in reduced intelligibility of speakers.

1.2 Listener Factors

The current research in listener factors can be described as investigating the effect of listener familiarity with other different variables. A particularly significant is listener’s prior experience with phonological representation of the target language. The more listeners store multiple representations of the phonemes, the more they are exposed to a certain production, the more intelligible they will be (Field, 2003, p. 36). This idea was clearly proven by the study of Matsuura et al (2014). They tested how familiar accent in English affects Japanese learners’ comprehension. The results show that even Canadian speakers and India speakers have the same speech rate, comprehension score was given higher to Canadian rather than India English speaker, and all 75 Japanese listeners rated higher comprehensibility for Canadian as well. The authors conclude that a fluent English speaker with an unfamiliar accent is more likely to be difficult to understand, in terms of both perceived and actual listening comprehension (p. 146). The rating perceived degree of accent differs from native and non-native English listeners, examined on 10 Americans (5 speakers and 5 listeners) and 21 Japanese (11 speakers and 10 listeners), Riney et al (2005) found that native speaker American listeners relied more on segmental (especially /r/ and /l/) while non-native speaker Japanese listeners relied more on intonation, fluency, and rate of speech.

Research on second language (L2) listening comprehension strongly supports the importance of a number of factors. One of several important factors is characteristics of listener that interfere their intelligibility which are listed as follow: working memory capacity, metacognitive strategies, and experience. Listener’s experience is indicated as prior exposure to the language, familiarity with and an ability to understand the non-native language’s phonology; vocabulary; and background knowledge about the topic, text, structure, schema, and culture; and anxiety (Bloomfield et al., 2010, p.1). The paralinguistic features such as the accent, noise, rate of delivery, pronunciation, and intonation significantly affect listener’s comprehension (Ardila, 2013) and their communicative competence.

The dialect background of the speakers and listeners is importantly considered in English phonological patterns. Hsueh Chu Chen (2011) investigated the intelligibility problems of Cantonese-accented English and Mandarin-accented English for listeners from different language backgrounds, and the result showed that the spoken texts intelligible are found in

both accents (at least 70%). Relatively speaking, the group of ESL (Filipino and Pakistani) and Cantonese performed worse than other groups. Listeners, except for the Cantonese, had a lower number correct for Cantonese-accented English than for Mandarin-accented English (which seemed a little easier to understand than Cantonese). The findings also revealed that the greatest phonological obstacles to mutual intelligibility appear to be deviant core sounds in combination with misplaced or misproduced nuclear stress, or both (p. 76). As a result, the accents of both groups were rated low by all the listeners in this study.

In the context of English as a global language in which the interaction is not only between native speakers and English as second language (ESL) speakers but also among non-native speakers themselves. There is a need to investigate how second language (L2) listeners can judge and successfully comprehend accented English produced by other second language (L2) speakers, particularly, how the specific linguistic background of the second language (L2) listener bears on their ability to understand and evaluate accented English from a speaker whose first language (L1) is related – or not - to their own language. It is for this reason that this study is being undertaken. Specifically, the study aims to answer the following questions: 1) How do the following linguistic features affect the Vietnamese speakers' intelligibility? a/ Pronunciation, b/ Stress pattern, and c/ Speech rate; 2) Which groups of listeners judge the sample Vietnamese speech as most intelligible? and 3) What pedagogical implication may be derived from the findings?

2. Research Methodology

The researcher borrowed the framework of Dayang (2007) in the design of the present study, which involved five phases, namely:

Step 1: Choosing the three exemplars of Vietnamese to be recorded and analyzed. Selection was based on the following criteria: (a) the exemplars must be at least 20 years old; (b) they had just arrived in the Philippines not more than three months and are enrolled at Asian Social Institute Manila; (c) they have TOEFL scores of 375-600; and (d) they must have born and raised in Vietnam, and willing to be recorded. Spontaneous speeches (monologues) of three candidate exemplars were recorded.

Step 2: Five topics were presented to each of exemplars and then each was asked to choose one topic that s/he interested to talk about. These suggested topics are reducing the effects of global crisis, the qualities of future partner in life, the names are worth emulating, the three important things to take from the burning house, and who would they like to be if they would be given a chance to live again. Then, each speaker had to deliver 5-10 minute spontaneous speech; (b) read a passage (see Appendix 1), and read ten sentences with words that are “problematic” to Vietnamese English users (see Appendix 2). All these speeches were audio-taped.

Step 3: Transcribing the speech samples of the three exemplars (see Appendix 3), and these were used to describe and analyze below because it reflects the nature of Vietnamese English speakers. Reading a passage and read ten sentences were meant to confirm the features of the English language which Vietnamese speakers find problematic.

Step 4: Selecting listeners. Using convenience sampling technique was utilized to select the listeners. Using her network relation with former professors and friends at Trinity University of Asia in Quezon city, Institute for Consecrated Life in Asia in Quezon City, Philippines Women University in Metro Manila, eight listeners were chosen based on Kachruvian Circles using the following criteria: (a) they must be at least 20 years old, and (b) they must be graduate students. Two Americans (Inner Circle), two Filipinos (Outer Circle), and two Vietnamese, two Chinese (Expanding Circle). These listeners have TOEFL scores of 375 – 600 who have not lived in Vietnam except the Vietnamese belonging to the Expanding Circle.

Step 5: Testing the intelligibility of the recorded speech samples by “write-down-what-you-hear” method (Atechi, 2004). The listeners were given schedule to listen to the tape recorded speeches of the three exemplars in a manner where no two listeners will be in one room at the same time. Every listener listened to the recorded speech on tape only once after the other and write down on paper what they heard. None of the listeners were informed about the nationality of the exemplars.

Based on the transcripts produced by the listeners, the researcher collected and analyzed the transcripts and obtained the intelligibility scores by checking the listeners’ transcripts against the researcher’s copy. Counting utterance, key words in listeners’ version (synonyms of the key words are accepted correct) were analyzed to explain the intelligibility success or failure of the exemplars. The percentage score of the three speakers’ utterances are computed as the number of correct utterances divides into the total number of actual utterances and then multiples by 100.

3. Results and Discussion

The length of speech samples and the number of utterances of each of the three speakers are presented by table 1, which on the transcript fully and faithfully produced by the researcher.

Table 1. Length of spontaneous speech samples (Researcher’s transcript)

Speaker	Number of words	Number of utterances
A	271	16
B	255	16
C	259	15
Total	785	46
Mean	261.66	15.33

As Table 1 shows, the speech sample recorded and analyzed are comparable to one another. The average length of the three samples was 261.66 words and the average number of utterances of the three speech samples was 15.33 utterances. Table 1 also reveals that given the same length of time, the three speakers have delivered nearly the same number of words

equivalent to the number of utterances.

3.1 Linguistic Features Affecting the Vietnamese Speakers' Utterance

3.1.1 Pronunciation

a) Omitted sound

Across comparison of the researcher's transcript and the listeners' transcript on the three speakers with an aid of the audio-tape, three speakers read a passage and the ten sentences containing the problematic features of Vietnamese English users. It is noticed that the three speakers omitted the following final sounds: /d/, /t/, /f/, /k/, /l/ and /s/ especially when the speaker's utterance is quite fast thus, the following final sounds were omitted as in the following examples: /d/ in guide, find, wind, friend and tide; /t/ in important, spirit, compassionate, replacement, trust and classmate; /l/ in call, whole, cool, social and sail; /f/ in life and /f/ was also read as /p/ so that "if" became /ip/; /k/ in like, think, and work, with speaker A "work" became "word"; /s/ in most of the time all three speakers dropped final /s/ sound.

The answer for such phenomenon of omitted final sounds in English like /d/, /l/, /f/, /k/ and /s/ is that these sounds never exist at the final position of the words and the /t/ sound is a silent sound in the speakers' first language.

Another feature of pronunciation that Vietnamese speakers find problematic is /-s/ and /-ed/ endings of verbs. Sometimes the /-s/, /-es/ ending of verbs sounds like /s/ (e.g. eat s), sometimes like /z/ (e.g. play s), and sometimes like /iz/ (e.g. wash es). They need to pay attention to the past tense regular verb endings for they sometimes sound like /d/ (e.g. played), sometimes like /id/ (e.g. wait ed), and sometimes like /t/ (e.g. wash ed).

Comparing the listeners' transcripts, most of the false utterances fall under the following phonology features: The speakers omitted the final sounds which never occur or are silent in Vietnamese language. The researcher noted that all eight listeners failed to listen to utterance number 5 correctly by writing down the sentence "and the second name is my spiritual guy" instead of "and the second name is my spiritual guide". In this case, the final sound /d/ was dropped. Most of the time, speaker A omitted the final /z/ sound, like "he give" instead of "he gives". But in this case, all the eight listeners correctly recognized this feature of Vietnamese English. This phenomenon of omitting the final sound /s/ was observed to have been the same for speaker B and C.

The final /l/ in most instances was dropped by the three speakers. For example, in utterance 14, speaker A read "when I find myself in the complete darkness, with my heart is fill with joy when I trust in him because I know that His answer is upcoming". The word "fill" was dropped, the final /l/ with this feature was the source of intelligibility failure. And there was the same observation found in the researcher's transcript with speaker B, saying that "I won't have any personal supplies so in this case, the blanket can help me find the comfort at the night time or encounter with cool.." here "cool" /ku:l/ becomes "coo" /ku:/

Another feature of omission was on the final sound /f/. Looking at the transcription of the two

listeners from Expanding Circle, the Chinese falsely recognized the final sound /f/ in “life” because the speaker omitted /f/ sound. The speaker thus read it as lie /lai/ instead of lif /laif/ but all other six listeners correctly recognized this particular feature of the Vietnamese English.

b) Difficulty in producing initial sounds /p/, /b/, /f/ and Consonant clusters

The sounds /p/, /b/, /f/ were extremely problematic to the Vietnamese speakers the reason is that, these sounds do not often occur as initial sounds in their mother-tongue variety, and it becomes a problem when they speak quickly. For instance, the researcher found that speaker A has a problem with the words such as *parents* and *problem* given /b/ at the initial position. It was also observed that the word *people* was unintelligible. It became /biyb/ because the /p/ was replaced by /b/ and the final consonant sound /l/ was omitted. Words beginning with the /f/ sound, such as *funny*, *famous* and *fame* in the speech samples were read with /p/ as the initial sound.

The features of non-cluster mother tongue contribute to the many difficulties for Vietnamese speakers in properly pronouncing English words with a wide range of final consonants, consonant clusters, and words with many syllables. The researcher found that the consonant clusters which seemed be the most challenging to the three Vietnamese speakers were /sts/, /ts/, /str/, and /tr/. The speakers had difficulty producing the sounds of consonant clusters like /st/ in trust, must; /pr/ in problem; /tr/ in retreat; /str/ as in spirit, spray, spume.

c) Pronunciation of long words

The study found that the Vietnamese speakers had difficulty pronouncing the words with more than three syllables. Carrying the tone feature of their native language, they found it hard to deal with the stress timed rhythm of English words having more than two syllables, because the word in the native language of the speaker has only one syllable. Such is considered to be the most significant problem in the phonetic features that Vietnamese need to pay attention. Admiration, encouragement, incomparable, liturgical, and replacement were found to be sources of interference in the speech current, thus causing unintelligibility.

3.1.2 Stress Patterns

Stress in English is different from lexical tone in several ways. That is the reason why Vietnamese have difficulty learning the stress patterns at both the word level and the sentence level, which are important features for intelligibility success or failure. With the utterance delivered by speaker A, all eight listeners falsely recognized the word “liturgical”. The speaker’s stress fell on the first syllable “liturgical” instead of stressing it on the second syllable “liturgical”. Likewise, there was only one Expanding Circle Vietnamese (ECV) out of eight listeners who could get the meaning out of the sentence uttered by speaker B: “It is not funny when I decide to take it”. With the key word “decide” the speaker put the stress on the first syllable, and so the word “decide” at this utterance in the transcript of the remaining 7 listeners sounded like one of the two words “design”, “desire”. Some of them could not even recognize this key word.

3.1.3 Speech Rate

In this study, findings revealed that the speech rate seemed to interfere with intelligibility. Speaker A and C delivered them so fast compared to the normal rate usually occurring in their speech causing less intelligibility. Such is the case of the following utterance of speaker A: “so in short they support me in different way”. There were only two listeners out of eight who could figure out the key word of this utterance. In fact, the two listeners from the Expanding Circle could completely catch up with the rate of the speaker. The same observation could also be noted with speaker C in utterance 12: “If before I’ve done so many mistakes in life, then, I will not do it the same”. It simply contains ordinary words but because the speaker delivered it very fast, the listener did not figure out all the key words to make the meaning. In contrast, speaker B delivered his talk with just the right rate and even though the speaker had a strong accent, he obtained the highest score in terms of intelligibility among all eight listeners. This finding seems to imply that accentedness is not a hindrance to intelligibility, rather, it is speech rate that determines whether a speaker will be understood or not. Intelligibility may be impeded if speakers speak fast. A more normal rate will encourage better understanding between people.

3.2 Listeners’ Judgment of the Sample Vietnamese Speech

The intelligibility scores of the 8 listeners for each of the three speakers are showed in Table 2.

Table 2. Intelligibility scores of the listeners across speakers

Speaker	Total number of actual utterance	Listener	Number of correct utterance	Percentage
A	16	IC1	12	75.00
		IC2	11	68.75
		OC1	12	75.00
		OC2	11	68.75
		ECC1	9	56.25
		ECC2	9	56.25
		ECV1	13	81.25
		ECV2	12	75.00
B	15	IC1	14	93.33
		IC2	12	80.00
		OC1	13	86.66
		OC2	13	86.66
		ECC1	11	73.33
		ECC2	13	86.66
		ECV1	15	100.00
		ECV2	14	93.33
C	15	IC1	13	86.66
		IC2	11	73.33
		OC1	14	93.33
		OC2	13	86.66
		ECC1	10	66.66
		ECC2	10	66.66
		ECV1	14	93.33
		ECV2	13	86.66

Legend: Inner Circle IC, Outer Circle OC, Expanding Circle Chinese ECC & Expanding Circle Vietnamese ECV.

Based on the individual scores of the listeners, the one from the Expanding Circle Vietnamese (ECV1) obtained perfect scores (100%) with this speaker. This is because, as indicated in the table 1, the B speaker has delivered the speech more normally and more slowly. There were two listeners from the Inner Circle and Outer Circle Vietnamese obtaining one utterance which was near the perfect score of 93.33%. One plausible explanation for these high intelligibility scores obtained by the eight listeners is perhaps the rate of speech of this particular speaker. In contrast, the listener at the Expanding Circle Chinese ECC obtained the

lowest score of intelligibility in comparison with the listeners from IC (American) and OC (Filipinos). In this case, all listeners from Expanding Circle Chinese (ECC) claimed that the three speakers talked so fast so they could not to catch up with the speaker.

A closer look at the data in table 2 reveals that there seems to be a disparity between scores obtained by listeners from the Expanding Circle Vietnamese and the Expanding Circle Chinese. For instance, with speaker A the first and second listener from the Expanding Circle Chinese obtained the same score of 56.25%, while the listeners, who came from Expanding Circle Vietnamese, obtained a score of intelligibility 81.25% by the EVC1 and a score of intelligibility 75% by the ECV2. On the one hand, those obtained scores of intelligibility by listeners from the Inner Circle and the Outer Circle were the same scores of 75% by the listeners IC1 and OC1, and 68.75% by the listener IC2 and OC2.

Table 3. Intelligibility percentage of the speakers across listeners

Type of listeners	Speaker A	Speaker B	Speaker C	Mean by Rows
IC1	75.00	93.33	86.66	85.00
IC2	68.75	80.00	73.33	74.03
OC1	75.00	86.66	93.33	85.00
OC2	68.75	86.66	86.66	80.69
ECC1	56.25	73.33	66.66	65.41
ECC2	56.25	86.66	66.66	69.86
ECV1	81.25	100.00	93.33	91.53
ECV2	75.00	93.33	86.66	85.00
Mean by columns	69.53	87.50	81.66	79.56

The table above indicates that speaker B was the most intelligible with the average score of 87.50% with eight listeners. Next is speaker C with an average intelligibility score of 81.66% with eight listeners. Speaker A had an average intelligibility score being the lowest 69.53% among eight listeners.

Looking at the mean in table 3 the listener (ECV1) from Expanding Circle Vietnamese obtained the highest score of intelligibility with all the three speakers' average of intelligibility score of 91.53%. Next to it was the group of the listeners obtaining an average score of 85% from Inner Circle (ICI) American, Outer Circle (OC1) Filipinos, and Expanding Circle (ECV2) Vietnamese.

The above data may be better appreciated by taking a look at table 4 which shows the mean intelligibility scores across listeners and listener types, the latter defined in terms of the three Kachruvian circles.

Table 4. Mean intelligibility scores across listeners

Type of Listener	Number	Mean Listener	per	Mean per listener type
Inner Circle	1	84.99		79.51
	2	74.02		
Outer Circle	1	84.99		82.84
	2	80.69		
Expanding Circle Chinese	1	65.41		67.63
	2	69.85		
Expanding Circle Vietnamese	1	91.52		88.26
	2	84.99		
Overall Mean				79.56

As can be seen from Table 4, the highest mean score was obtained by the Expanding Circle Vietnamese listeners (88.26%), followed closely by those from the Outer Circle Filipinos (82.84%). Inner Circle listeners came in third, with a score of 79.51% and the Expanding Circle Chinese was the lowest with the score 67.63%. The overall mean is roughly 79.56%.

Table 4 suggests that Vietnamese English, at least based on the limited data used in the present study, was 79.51% intelligible to Inner Circle American listeners, appropriately 83% intelligible to Outer Circle Filipinos listeners, reaching 67.63% intelligible to Expanding Circle Chinese listeners and more than 88% was intelligible to Expanding Circle Vietnamese listeners. Overall, however, it was 79.56% intelligible to all listeners in the present study.

3.3 Pedagogical Implication

Findings of this study reveal that the three features of speech such as the production of particular speech sounds, stress patterns of the speaker, and speech rate partially determine intelligibility success or failure. It is partially because each feature does not occur in isolation, rather they occur together. The degree of intelligibility depends therefore, on the totality of the speaker's attention to these features of language.

Of the four language skills, speaking is always seen as the most challenging among Vietnamese students especially if this involves speakers of other nationalities. One reason for this is the neglect of teaching pronunciation in Vietnam at schools in all levels. That is why linguistic features need to be taken into consideration to improve Vietnamese's English pronunciation. The findings show that teaching English should not focus solely on the pronunciation. Findings of previous research have shown that pronunciation teaching that is stress modification, production of the ideal speech sounds and acquiring the native accent does not guarantee success in real settings. Rather, it is putting the learners in a situation in where they will be encouraged to express themselves in the target language, with less

emphasis on grammar and pronunciation.

The Vietnamese educational system is known for its partiality toward native speakers of English, resulting in its tendency to hire Western teachers rather than Asians to teach English to Vietnamese learners. Perhaps, educators and curriculum designers would better review the system, consider the features affect intelligibility of Vietnamese English, its characteristic phonological features, design relevant curriculum that equips learners' ability to encounter with different varieties of English in future career rather than emphases on 'native'-like accent of Western teachers. It means English learners need to be prepared to deal with varying styles of pronunciation of different English dialects, so they can experience and enhance their language competency to the diversity of English.

This study does not rule out the important role of good pronunciation in intelligibility. What it does not encourage is its overemphasis in classrooms such that the more important goal which is the building of the confidence and acquisition of speaking skill has been taken for granted. This study believes that with the acquisition of the ability to communicate effectively not only within the community and building of ability to communicate interculturally are the highest goals a language classroom may possibly achieve.

With the advent of technology and integration, schools in Vietnam, therefore should reconsider their traditional ways of teaching language and its curriculum designs if the system would want to prepare its citizens, and contribute to the building of its people, and consequently, to the building of its country.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

Pronunciation of sounds, the stress patterns and the speech rate altogether determine intelligibility success and failure. Speech rate plays a greater deal in achieving intelligibility. That is the more normal or the slower the speech rate is, the greater chance of being intelligibility to other speakers. The findings also imply that intelligibility is not much of a problem for Vietnamese exemplars. However, results of intelligibility scores of American and Filipino listeners from the Inner and Outer Circle, show that less exposure of other speakers to another language does not follow that the latter would be completely unintelligible to the former. In addition, similarity in the general features of language between speakers of different nationalities such as Chinese and Vietnamese does not guarantee mutual intelligibility between these people. Rather, it is the overall familiarity of the person of another person's language that contributes to understanding between them.

The conclusion above renders at least three important implications on the manner of teaching Vietnamese learners. Firstly, the redirection of teaching language in Vietnamese schools from too much emphasis on grammar to a balanced teaching of communication and pronunciation in classroom. Secondly, pronunciation lessons should encourage the acquisition of features which are absent from the Vietnamese language, stress patterns of four to five – syllable words and a normal rate of speech. Thirdly, language teachers would be open-minded to the reality that they need to improve their skills to cope with the development and changes taking place around them. They should be adept enough to prepare their students for international

communication, especially equipping them with features which are absent in their first language early on would better prepare them for communication with other nationalities.

Drawing on the findings and conclusion, the researcher hereby recommends the following:

Intelligibility study is one interesting topic for research. Limitations in the number of samples, however, both in speakers and listeners did not allow much for greater generalizations and theory building in this study. It is recommended therefore that future research involve greater number of participants to ensure a more exhaustive interpretation of results

It is further suggested that future research on intelligibility involve gender and age variables and the possible effects of training in determining learners' improvement.

It is recommended that pedagogical implications of this research be given considerations in Vietnamese schools that cater to speakers of English as a foreign language in designing curricula and programs for learners.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. SEA FEVER

By: John Masefield

I must go down to the seas again, to the lonely sea and the sky
And all I ask is to tall ship and a star to steer her by;
And the wheel's kick and the wind's song and the white sail's shaking,
And a gray mist to the seas again, for the call of the running tide
Is a wild call and a clear call that may not be denied;
And all I ask is a windy day with the white clouds flying,
And I flung spray and the blown spume, and the sea gulls crying.
I must go down to the seas again, to the vagrant gypsy life,
To the gull's way and the whale's way, where the wind's like a whetted knife;
And all I ask is a merry yarn from a laughing fellow rover,
And quiet sleep and a sweet dream when the long trick's over.

Appendix 2. Ten Sentences Containing Words Those are “Problematic” to Vietnamese English Users

1. He appreciates opera
2. What kind of music do you like?
3. Do you like jazz?
4. Who do you think is the greatest composer of our time?
5. I am not familiar with the works of Mazart.
6. I am not familiar with the words of Bacharach.
7. I do not care much for rock music.
8. Did Nick write that health report?
9. My classmate answered my phone call
10. Tourists like to look at rural neighborhood.

Appendix 3. The Researcher's Transcription with Three Speakers

Speaker A

For me the first name is... my family, especially my parents (1), my father work hard to raise all of us... twelve, my mom witness of tender love of compassionate and kind heartedness (2), and other family members is... my brother and sister, they support me, give me good advice and pray for me (3). So in short they support me in different ways (4).

And the second name is my spiritual guide, he is gentleness (5), he... he carefully guide me in direct and indirect me... thuds methods (6). He gets to know my problem; he gives very good advice and guidance in big retreat in a long retreat or intimate talk (7). He can also raise me up from darkness by give my by... giving me hope but also gives me alone for the Holy Spirit to do His work (8) and I know how to trust in the word of Holy Spirit (9).

The third name is Jesus (10), I can tell you the spirit... a vary personal experience through prayer or liturgical celebration (11), He is the en... encouragement for me to continue my life of community for eternity, apostolic work and give well, so easy in the good synthesis (12). He is my ex-experience in life that very happens (13), when I find myself in the complete darkness, with my heart is fill with joy when I trust in him because I know that His answer is up coming (14), so for me my family is the further of life and then I time of trial God send me the spiritual guide and then in... my darkness I also have the big experience with Jesus (15), so they are three important... persons in my life (16).

Total 271 words 16 utterance

Speaker B

If I find myself in the burning house but I have only enough time to take three small things with me (1), the first thing I will take with me is my personal bag (2) that includes all my personal documents like passport, ID, birth certificate, degrees, etc (3)... because for me these documents are not easy to ask for the replacement (4). In addition, it is very important for me to travel as well as necessary for me in social... in my social life (5).

The second thing I will take is.. takes with me is a blanket (6). It is not funny when I deiced to take it (7) because imagine how come I get out the burning house while the fire is strong and hot (8). I will take the... blanket to cover myself as well as my documents so that I can find easier way and safer way to protect myself to get out without injury or harm (9). Furthermore, the house is already burned (10). I wont have any personal supplies so in this case, the blanket can help me find the comfort at the night time ore encounter with cool... whole weather or raining (11).

The third thing is, the third thing is my cellphone (12), it is the fastest way to contact to be able to inform to my friends and relatives (13) and it also is the most convenient way to ask for the assistance or help from those I need in this situation (14).

So in summary, three small things I will get are personal bag, blanket, and my cellphone (15).

Total 255 words 15 utterances.

Speaker C

If I will be given a chance to live gain, I would still prepare to be myself (1). I don't... I don't want to choose any famous and wealthy person just to be like them (2). If I will choose anybody else to become like them. How would I know that they are perfect (3)? That no one in this world is perfect (4)! Maybe, you had the admiration of that person because of his fame and power but still has human beings just like me or us (5). Who had weaknesses, mistakes and unholy (6).

I rather be myself, why? Because, each individual is unique. Everybody has it own talent, skills and knowledge (7). For no two individuals or on... on earth care exactly the same, each one is distinctly different (8). This also means that no two people will agree on everything (9). Indeed, all of us are imperfect, all have flaws and despite the best of intentions, weaknesses manifest themselves (10)

So, why I would be on other shoes? If I am contented of who I am? Perhaps, there will be changes to myself (11). If before I've done so many mistakes in life, then, I will not do it the same (12) I would rather be careful in everything I do and learned from my past mistakes to be myself is incomparable to anybody else (13) because God created me as a unique individuals. To accept oneself is "is" a same way you accept God as your creator (14). So, it is safe to be me, who I am, and no one will destroy me out of prejudice (15).

Total 259 words, 15 utterances

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