"Imported Labour, Imported English": Philippine English in the Australian context
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Abstract

Globalization and a skills shortage in Australia have seen an increase of skilled workers from the Philippines over the last decade. This in turn has facilitated, more than ever before, an increase in the opportunity for speakers of the two English varieties, Philippine English (PE) and Australian English (AE), to interact with each other in various sectors of Australian life. These new opportunities for closer and more frequent contacts between the two varieties have brought with them linguistic challenges, particularly for the Filipino skilled workers who have the onus to assimilate into the Australian workplace and community. These challenges are compounded by the fact that speakers of PE vary in their lectal range and proficiency level, due mainly to variations in educational background and socioeconomic status. However Filipino skilled workers coming to Australia for blue collar jobs are more than likely mesolectal speakers of English.

This study uses spoken conversation data from the International Corpus of English – Australian Component (ICE-AU), to analyse lexical items that are common in the Australian context, but used differently, if at all, in the Philippine context. Although the ICE sample texts are mostly from acrolectal speakers of English, their spontaneous conversation is of course colloquial, and the lexical resources used not very different from those of mesolectal speakers. They therefore show where possible misunderstandings of the Australian lexis could occur, and issues on which to focus for improved communication in the Australian workplace and in the community. Moreover, a critical discourse analysis on the 457 visa provisions, which is the type of visa most temporary skilled workers to Australia hold, will show the pragmatic challenges posed to Filipino workers. These data will be complemented by feedback obtained from recently arrived Filipino skilled workers – gathered during an interview as part of a larger research study on Filipino workers – on their language background, experiences, challenges, and aspirations. The linguistic expectations that they hold about the Australian workplace and how they differ from communication practices will be discussed, as well as the pedagogical and social challenges.

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