

# A Corpus-Linguistic Analysis of Phrasal Verbs in Philippine English

Dandie C. Somoson <sup>1,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Master of Arts in Education Major in English Language Teaching, Philippine Science High School, Central Mindanao Campus, Philippine*

*\*Corresponding author. Email: dandie.somoson@gmail.com*

## ABSTRACT

This study aimed at identifying the most commonly used phrasal verbs (PVs) of Philippine English, analyzing their grammatical patterns and semantic features, and designing sample activities for teaching PVs. This corpus-based research used the mixed method research design specifically the exploratory-qualitative paradigm. In analyzing the grammatical patterns of the most commonly used phrasal verbs, the summary of the grammatical patterns of PVs illustrated by Quirk et al. (1985) was used as a reference. In classifying the semantic features of the commonly used PVs, the three categories - the free, non-idiomatic, the semi-idiomatic, and the highly-idiomatic construction demarcated by Quirk et al (1985) were used as a reference for tagging and information. Findings revealed that the five most commonly used PVs of Philippine English were talk about, talk to, think of, think about, and come to which were more common in spoken texts. Although their grammatical patterns were generally in accordance with the major varieties of English, there also appeared unique patterns that may be distinct to Philippine English. Moreover, the semantic features of these five PVs were generally free, non-idiomatic construction which means that majority of the PVs only have literal meanings. Furthermore, the designed set of sample activities for teaching phrasal verbs was rated Very Satisfactory.

**Keywords:** corpus linguistics, philippine english, antconc, phrasal verbs, grammatical patterns, semantic features

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Recently, there has been a growing interest in the use of corpus linguistics in investigating language phenomenon especially on grammar. Having collected the authentic use of language among people and placed it electronically in a corpus, linguists find corpus-based analysis as an effective and most practical approach in examining and describing how a specific language is actually used. Phrasal verb (PV), a lexical point that raises so many issues with its syntactic and semantic features is a potential language focus to be investigated using a corpus-based analysis. Analyzing phrasal verb from the corpus could yield an objective description of how people use and vary the use of this certain lexical category.

The use of phrasal verbs in spoken and written English has always been a pervasive linguistic problem among Filipino learners and even professionals (Malicse, 2005). Hence, many researchers are motivated to explore more about PVs and investigate how people actually use them in the context. In fact, there have been many studies about phrasal verbs using the corpus-based analysis (Liu, 2011; Yasuda, 2010; Gardner & Davies, 2007; Liao and Fukuya, 2004). Using different corpora, these studies on

PVs investigated specifically on the combination of phrasal verbs, the most frequently used phrasal verbs, and the learners' avoidance of use of PVs respectively.

Although there have been several studies about phrasal verbs on those aspects, little research has been undertaken to identify the grammatical patterns and semantic features of English phrasal verbs. Kiativutikul and Phoocharoensel (2014) focused their studies specifically on the three PVs namely, carry out, point out, and find out on their grammatical patterns and collocations, but the corpus they used was the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). In the present study, the researcher aims to investigate the grammatical patterns and semantic features of the most commonly used phrasal verbs in Philippine English using the International Corpus of English in the Philippines (ICE-PHI). Moreover, there have been many studies on grammar using the ICE-PHI (Dita, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012; Borlongan, 2010, 2011, 2012; Gustilo, 2011), but only one study, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, has been undertaken concerning on the phrasal verbs of Philippine English.

However, this single study, the study of Schneider (2004) was a cross-lingual study that investigated the use

of phrasal verbs in four recent sub-corpora of International Corpus of English from India, Singapore, the Philippines, and East Africa and compared these corpora with the British English ICE corpus. Moreover, as World Englishers has started to create a space in language research, the findings of this study may say something more about the grammatical features of Philippine English. Should there be variations in the grammatical patterns and semantic features of phrasal verbs used by Filipinos, this study may then well serve as another indication that Philippine English is indeed on its way into reaching the endonormative stabilization (Borlongan 2011c) which means stabilization of new English variety (Schneider 2003). However, the researcher asserts that these supposed variations should still go through further investigation as regards their standardization that is not covered in the present study.

The study specifically aims to provide answers to the following questions:

- a. What are the most common phrasal verbs in the Philippine component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-PHI)?
- b. What are the grammatical patterns of these most common phrasal verbs?
- c. What are the semantic features of these most common phrasal verbs?
- d. What sample activities can be designed to teach phrasal verbs in Philippine English?

## 2. METHOD

This study used the mixed method research design specifically the exploratory-qualitative paradigm. It involved exploration on the grammatical patterns and the semantic features of the target phrasal verbs. This also considered using the qualitative non-observational method as a corpus was used in the investigation of PVs.

The research corpus used in the study is the International Corpus of English or the ICE-PHI. The software used to generate data from the corpus was the Antconc specifically using the concordance tool. Antconc is “a freeware, multi-platform, multi-purpose corpus analysis toolkit, designed for specific use in the classroom. AntConc includes a powerful concordance, word and keyword frequency generators, tools for cluster and lexical bundle analysis, and a word distribution plot” (Anthony, 2008).

In the identification of the most commonly used phrasal verbs, first, the 269 English phrasal verbs identified by Malicse (2005) as the most commonly used PVs by Filipino professionals were taken to be individually searched in the corpus of Philippine English across all text types. All the forms of PVs that include their plural and singular form, their past tense, and their

past and present participle form like talk about, talks about, talked about, and talking about were included to get the total number of frequency counts of a certain PV. The frequency count of each PV was then noted, and the PVs that got the highest number of hits were taken to subject to further analysis.

In order to find out which specific text types the most commonly used PVs do commonly appear, whether in spoken or written and what particular text type in spoken and written, each of the PVs was again keyed in, but the data used were each of the specific text categories. All these texts categories were downloaded to the software one at a time.

In analyzing the grammatical patterns of the top five phrasal verbs, the patterns illustrated by Quirk et al. and the British-American Lexicon 9th edition (2015) of Hornby et al. were used as the main reference for the specific grammatical patterns of PVs. In identifying the semantic features of the most commonly used phrasal verbs of Philippine English, the three categories under the semantic features demarcated by Quirk et al (1985) were used as bases for the analysis. In the making of supplemental activities for teaching phrasal verbs, the instructional development procedures were only until the development phase as suggested by the members of the thesis committee.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 3.1 Most Commonly Used Phrasal Verbs in ICE-PHI

Table 1 shows the most commonly used phrasal verbs of Philippine English as reflected in the number of hits across all text types. It also shows the corresponding percentage that each PV gets in relation to its total number of hits among the most commonly used PVs.

As can be seen, talk about obtains the highest percentage of the number of hits, which is almost half of all the combined number of hits of the commonly used PVs. Close to almost having the same percentage of the number of hits are talk to and think of whose difference is only a matter of 0.10%. Comes next is think about with a percentage a little more than one-eighth of the grand total percentage of the frequency of occurrence. The PV, come to comes last whose frequency of occurrence is closest to one-eighth of the 100%.

It can also be gleaned from the table that between written and spoken texts, these phrasal verbs are more commonly used in the latter as it is 65% higher than the former. Although the division of two text types is not equal, having 200 corpus folders for the written text while 300 corpus folders for the spoken text, it cannot still suffice to maintain that there may be equal number of hits between the two text categories should the two be

equal in number of folders. In fact, spoken texts comprised about 82% of the total hits while the written texts consisted of only about 17%.

**Table 1 Summary of the Most Frequently Used Phrasal Verbs in ICE – PHI**

PVs	Written	Spoken	Total	%
	Text	Text	No. Hits	of
1. talk about	48	377	425	43.06
2. talk to	18	133	151	15.30
3. think of	44	106	150	15.20
4. think about	11	122	133	13.48
5. come to	15	78	128	12.97
<b>Total</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>816</b>	<b>987</b>	<b>100</b>

Considering the difference in figures, it can be ascertained that despite greater number of folders in the spoken texts, it is still valid to claim that phrasal verbs are more preponderant in the spoken language. This may be the case since these lexical items are non-academic and are commonly used in informal context such as in conversation. In fact, Biber, Conrad, and Leech (2002) had the same result when they looked into the frequency of occurrence of phrasal verbs from the Longman Spoken and Written English (LSWE) corpus across all registers. They claimed that one reason why phrasal verbs are more common in spoken is that most PVs are colloquial in tone.

### **3.2 Grammatical Patterns of Phrasal Verbs in ICE-PHI**

For the PV, TALK ABOUT, it has been found out that it has eight grammatical patterns, and the pattern, “talk about + somebody/something” is the most commonly used in ICE-PHI whose number of hits is equivalent to a little more than three-fourths of the total frequency of all the grammatical patterns of the said PV. This grammatical pattern of talk about is the only pattern that is illustrated in the British-American Lexicon which means that the use of talk about in ICE-PHI generally conforms to the major varieties of English.

For the PV, TALK TO, the grammatical pattern “talk/talks/talked/be talking to + sb” is the most commonly used in ICE-PHI obtaining a percentage more than three-fourths of the total number of frequencies of occurrence. Its second grammatical pattern, the “talk/talks/talked/be talking to + sb+about sb/sth” with a percentage only close to 10 is too way behind than the first. These two grammatical patterns of talk to are the only ones illustrated in the British-American Lexicon, but their use in ICE-PHI comprises a total of 138 tokens out of 151 in the concordance which means that more

than 90% of the grammatical patterns of talk to in ICE-PHI are in accordance with the major varieties of English.

The PV, THINK OF displays nine grammatical patterns; the first three of which are illustrated in the British-American Lexicon which constitute 87.32% of the 100% total percentage. Hence, the use of think of in ICE-PHI in as far as its grammatical patterns are concerned is generally in conformity with the major varieties of English. The remaining six patterns get a total token of 19 which is equivalent to 12.68%.

Five grammatical patterns of THINK ABOUT appeared in the software. Out of these five patterns, two are illustrated in British-American Lexicon, and one of which, the think/thinks/thought/ be thinking about + sb/sth bears the greatest number of tokens comprising more than 80% of the total number of frequencies of occurrence. But the second pattern, the think/thinks/thought/be thinking about + doing something does not commonly appear in the ICE-PHI as it occurs only four times from the corpus data.

COME TO has six grammatical patterns in the corpus data of Philippine English, and these patterns are all the same patterns illustrated in the British-American Lexicon. Hence, there may be no pattern of come to that is distinct in Philippine English. However, there is one pattern, the come/comes/came/be coming to + sth + with sb which is illustrated in the reference consulted that is not used in ICE-PHI. Among the six illustrated grammatical patterns, the one most commonly used is the come/comes/came/be coming to +somewhere with just a little more than a half number of concordance hits from the overall total number of hits, followed by the come/comes/came/be coming to + sth whose number of hits is way less than a quarter.

Considering the findings revealed in every phrasal verb with respect to its grammatical patterns, it can be concluded that while most of the major patterns from this study are in accordance with the major varieties of English – the British and American Englishers, some grammatical patterns are not illustrated in the said reference. This result is parallel to that of Kiativutikul and Phoocharoensil (2014) when they analyzed the grammatical patterns of carry out, find out, and point out from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA). They found out that not all of the possible grammatical patterns of the said PVs are illustrated in the British-American Lexicon (OALD 8th edition 2010).

The researcher then claims that the grammatical patterns of the most commonly used PVs of Philippine English in ICE-PHI not illustrated in the British-American Lexicon are patterns that may be distinct to Filipino users of English. This means that even phrasal verbs of Philippine English have grammatical characteristics that may only be their own. As the case may be, these patterns not illustrated in the consulted

reference may support Borlongan (2012) claim that Filipinos “no longer speak and write in a language of the Americans (nor the British) but in a language that is incontestably” theirs.

This implies therefore that in teaching the forms of phrasal verbs specifically their grammatical patterns, language teachers may also consider including the patterns that are unique in Philippine English. In order to do this, they may include in their planning and preparation for instruction a corpus-based data that would provide them authentic language examples (Kiativutikul and Phoocharoensil,2014).

### 3.3 Semantic Features of Phrasal Verbs in ICE-PHI

Table 2 shows the summary of the semantic features of the most commonly used phrasal verbs in ICE-PHI. As can be gleaned, the most commonly used phrasal verbs of Philippine English are generally free, non-idiomatic construction gaining almost a hundred percent of the total number of frequencies of occurrence; a negligible percentage belongs to PVs with highly-idiomatic construction and none at all falls under the semi-idiomatic construction.

This result speaks so much of what Durrant and Schmitt (2009) claimed that non-native learners of English also use phraseological units in a broad sense that are frequent in English, but they do not use those less frequent ones. By this, in the case of second language learners of English, one of the phraseological units that are referred to by Durrant and Schmitt as used frequently in English are those PVs that have literal meanings such as the most commonly used phrasal verbs in ICE-PHI since there is generally no problem in their usage, and thus they are frequently utilized.

Kamarudin (2013) stressed that literal PVs are very frequently transparent in meaning, as both elements in the PV combination retain their regular meanings, and, thus, are less difficult to understand. On the other hand, the ones referred to as less frequent ones in English include PVs that have aspectual and idiomatic meanings. In fact, they also appear very low in the corpus of Philippine English which means Filipinos hardly use them.

The dearth of use of PVs with aspectual and idiomatic meanings is also in conjunction to the claim among linguists about phrasal verbs that PVs, considering the complexities of their semantic features especially their aspectual and idiomatic meanings are difficult to use among second language learners of English who include the Filipinos (Side, 1990; Liao & Fukuya, 2004; Malicse 2005; Liu, 2011). Hence, Filipinos may have avoided using these aspectual and highly idiomatic PVs as they, based on the finding of this research, hardly occur in the corpus. This claim is supported by Schneider (2004) when he made mention in his paper that included phrasal

verbs of Philippine English when he did a cross-lingual study on PVs, that the Filipinos tend to have a heavier reservation and hesitation towards using phrasal verbs.

**Table 2 Summary of the Semantic Features of Phrasal Verbs and their Frequency of Occurrence**

PVs	Semantic Features			Total
	Non-idiomatic	Semi-idiomatic	Highly-idiomatic	
<i>Talk about</i>	219	0	5	224
<i>Talks about</i>	14	0	0	14
<i>Talked about</i>	38	0	0	38
<i>Talking about</i>	149	0	8	157
<i>Talk to</i>	60	0	0	60
<i>Talks to</i>	9	0	0	9
<i>Talked to</i>	37	0	0	37
<i>Talking to</i>	45	0	0	45
<i>Think of</i>	90	0	0	90
<i>Thinks of</i>	2	0	0	2
<i>Thought of</i>	22	0	0	22
<i>Thinking of</i>	36	0	0	36
<i>Think about</i>	99	0	0	99
<i>Thinks about</i>	1	0	0	1
<i>Thought about</i>	7	0	0	7
<i>Thinking about</i>	25	0	0	25
<i>Come to</i>	47	0	1	48
<i>Comes to</i>	15	0	1	16
<i>Came to</i>	39	0	1	40
<i>Coming to</i>	21	0	0	21
<b>Total</b>	<b>975</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>991</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>98.39</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1.61</b>	<b>100</b>

Another interesting result that is yielded by this study is that possibly the meanings of some phrasal verbs may have not all been illustrated in a lexical reference or if not, some phrasal verbs especially PVs of other Englishers apart from the native speakers, may have just distinct meanings that set them apart from the rest of the Englishers, or it could be both. To note, Zarafi (2013), although he argued that the use of lexical reference like the Oxford to explore phrasal verbs is a valid instrument because they provide much more meanings of PVs compared to other sources, he made no claim at all that this kind of lexical reference has all the meanings of phrasal verbs.

In the case of Philippine English, the PVs, think about and come to may stand as an evidence to speak of these phenomena concerning PVs although the number of their frequency of occurrence is too limited, and thus is negligible. But to further buttress this claim, it may serve just well and right to cite what Zarafi and Makundan (2015) argued that not all meanings of phrasal verbs are common to all language registers. This statement is indicative to the notion that PVs’ meaning may vary from one context to another. In fact, Trebits (2009) made

mention in her study on the most frequent phrasal verbs in European Union documents (EU) that some PVs have multiple meanings depending on the context. And as revealed in the present study, indeed there are those meanings of PVs that are not in accordance with the British-American Lexicon (2015) and which may only be used in the Philippine context, and thus, may add even more to the distinct characteristics of verb system of Philippine English (Borlongan 2012).

This implies that using a corpus as basis or ground to teach the target language provides more contextual approaches, and hence is all the more effective. Moreover, a corpus is a valuable teaching and learning resource for both teachers and students who need access to explicit lexicogrammatically structures in relation to use. With corpus-based analysis, language teachers are given insights on the grammatical variations that may be distinct to specific English like the Philippine English, and thus they may avoid wrong markings in their students' written outputs.

### **3.4 On the Designed Sample Activities for Teaching Phrasal Verbs**

The result of the evaluation tool made by the researcher and validated by the adviser and which was used by the two language experts, revealed that generally the designed material for teaching phrasal verbs is Very Satisfactory. The validators gave most of the features a score of five indicating that the features are satisfied very adequately. In fact, one expert gave only one score of four and the other two had only two scores of four among the 21 features being evaluated.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

Based on the results and findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn: (1) Since only five PVs are commonly used by Filipinos as they appear in the ICE-PHI based on the list of 269 PVs of Malicse (2005); therefore, there is indeed a limited use of PVs in Philippine English. (2) Philippine English has phrasal verbs whose grammatical features conform to the major varieties of English although these PVs also have distinct grammatical features. (3) The phrasal verbs with free, non-idiomatic meanings are generally the most commonly used in ICE-PHI; therefore, the use of phrasal verbs with semi-idiomatic and highly-idiomatic meanings is not evident within the Philippine English domain. (4) Sample learning activities for instructional purposes can be designed based on the result of the corpus-based analysis.

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