

The Phrasal-Prepositional Verbs in Philippine English: A Corpus-based Analysis

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Abstract

The study determines the most common forms of phrasal-prepositional verbs (PPVs) in Philippine English using the ICE-PHI and describes their syntactic and semantic features, following Quirk et al.'s (1985) framework. Thirty nine out of the forty-eight words from the list of Quirk et al. (1985) and Biber et al. (1999) were found in the corpus using AntConc 3.4. Results show that *come up with*, *get out of*, *look forward to*, *come out with*, *hold on to*, and *catch up with* are the most frequently used PPVs by Filipinos. These PPVs occur in active voice. They are intransitive verbs and are also inseparable. Findings further reveal that the meanings of the PPVs are the same as the single-word verb meanings provided by the online dictionaries of phrasal verbs, and those single-word verb meanings can replace the PPVs. Hence, they are idiomatic. The study implies that Filipinos use minimal number of PPVs. They appear to be conservative in their choice of PPV structure, but generally show proficiency in using PPVs in their utterances.

1 Introduction

Multi-word verbs (henceforth MWVs) are word combinations often used by native speakers in conversation because of their colloquial tone (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999). To distinguish MWVs from other complex verb forms, Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, and Svartvik (1985) classified MWVs into phrasal verb, prepositional verb, and phrasal-prepositional verbs. A phrasal verb consists of a verb and a particle and is either intransitive or transitive. An intransitive phrasal verb functions like a predication adjunct inseparable from its lexical verb (e.g. *The plane has now taken off.*)

while a transitive phrasal verb requires a direct object (e.g. *Victoria will set up the equipment.*). Moreover, a prepositional verb has a lexical verb and a preposition with which it is semantically and/or syntactically associated (e.g. *Look at the billboards.*). And finally, a phrasal-prepositional verb (henceforth PPV) takes a verb, an adverb, and a preposition, with two main structural patterns: verb+ particle + preposition +NP (e.g. *Jason had to keep away from salty snacks.*) and verb + NP + particle + preposition + NP (e.g. *They fobbed her off with a cheap perfume.*). According to Quirk et al. (1985), “many of them have idiomatic metaphorical meanings which are difficult or impossible to paraphrase” (p. 1179).

Interestingly, corpora-based studies have made it relatively easier to determine the typical behavior of the MWV expressions in both spoken and written discourse (Gardner & Davies, 2007; Ryoo, 2013; Biber et al., 1999). More so, a shift of approach on phrasal verbs, from the traditional to the cognitive, has greatly helped non-native speakers in understanding how productive the particles are (Cubillo, 2002; Kiativutikul and Phoocharoensil, 2014; Garcia-Vega, 2011). For instance, the particle *up* can have five meaning extensions ranging from literal to figurative ones (Rosca and Baicchi, 2016). Lindner (1981 in Lu Zhi and Sun Juan, 2015) clarified that “all the items of phrasal verbs sharing the same particles, literal or metaphoric, are correlated with one image schema, influencing the whole meaning of phrasal verbs” (p. 3). Understandably, the entire phrase, not its individual units, provides the primary meaning (Sinclair, 2008 in Garnier & Schmitt, 2015).

Second language and foreign language learners nonetheless find MWVs ambiguous because of their notoriously difficult nature. Most of these MWVs do not have the equivalent expressions in the native language or they are non-existent at all in the mother tongue (Bensal, 2012). Viewed relevant in learning a second or foreign language to attain fluency, most students memorize the list of MWVs in their textbook. But according to Lu Zhi and Sun Juan (2015), learning about the multiple senses of MWVs can actually be systematic.

As a major category of MWVs, PPVs have not been extensively studied (Biber et al., 1999). To date, corpus-based studies on PPVs utilizing ICE-Philippines have yet to be reported. It is therefore the aim of this study to fill this gap and offer significant contributions to the existing literature in Philippine English. This study attempts to determine the most common forms of PPVs in Philippine English and describe their syntactic and semantic features.

2 Methodology

The data used for this study were drawn from the Philippine component of the International Corpus of English (ICE). Following the ICE standards as outlined by Nelson (1996), these four components included spoken and written texts in the form of public and private dialogue, scripted and unscripted monologue, student writing, letters, academic papers, popular papers, reportage, and instructional materials among others.

The PPVs were taken from the list presented in *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (Quirk et al., 1985, pp. 1179) and *Longman Spoken and Written English Corpus* (Biber et al., 1999, pp. 426-427). The PPVs are *break in on, catch up on, catch up with, check up on, come down with, cut down on, do away with, face up to, get away with, get down to, keep away from, keep up with, look down on, look forward to, look out for, look up to, put up with, run away with, stand up for, turn out for, get out of, come out of, get back to, go up to, get on with, get away with, get off at, get off with, go out for, get away from, go over to, hold on to, turn away from, turn back to, come in for, get back into, go along with, hand over to, keep up with,*

look out for, come out with, bring up in, come up with, give in to, come down to, end up with, go on to, and move on to. These 48 PPVs were searched in ICE-PHI using AntConc 3.4. The top five most frequent PPVs were considered for syntactic and semantic analysis.

For syntactic features, each of the five PPVs was analyzed in terms of type (I or II), transitivity and intransitivity, separability and inseparability, and voice. For semantic features, the meanings of the PPVs were determined based on the binary contrasts – idiomatic and non-idiomatic (Quirk et al., 1985). The online version of Oxford Dictionaries, MacMillan Dictionary, and Cambridge Dictionary of phrasal verbs were consulted for the single-word verb meanings of the PPVs.

3 Results

3.1 The Most Common Forms of Phrasal-Prepositional Verbs in Philippine English

Out of the 48 PPVs that were searched, 39 PPVs in the present, present participle, past, and past participle forms were found in the corpus, and they appeared more frequently in the spoken registers. Table 1 presents the most frequent PPVs in Philippine English. These are *come up with, get out of, look forward to, come out with, hold on to, and catch up with.* The last two PPVs share the fifth position, having the same number of instances.

In contrast, the least used PPVs in Philippine English are *check up on, look away from, look down on, run away with, go up to, catch up on, go out for, face up to, get down to, keep up with, and come down with,* occurring with only one hit each.

Phrasal-Prepositional Verbs	frequency		Total
	Spoken	Written	
come up with	49	24	73
get out of	29	15	44
look forward to	20	23	43
come out with	20	2	22
hold on to	8	4	12
catch up with	2	10	12

Table 1. Most common forms of PPVs

3.2 Syntactic Features of Phrasal-Prepositional Verbs

Occurring generally in the medial position (1 & 2) and rarely in the final position (3), *come up with* typically followed the type 1 pattern. With the absence of a direct object (henceforth DO) after the verb, this PPV is thus considered intransitive and inseparable, as illustrated in the sentences that follow:

- (1) Okay so what he did was he grouped the workers into smaller groups asked them to come up with what they thought was a reasonable quota reasonable working hours. <ICE-PHI:S1B-006#17:1:A>
- (2) Although maybe your organization Math Circle may come up with an arrangement with Computer Services Center wherein maybe they can come up with uh simple mainframe <.> fami <./.> <.> familiariza <./.> familiarization seminars okay for you people somewhere in your third or fourth year okay. <ICE-PHI:S2A-049#115:1:A>
- (3) Then and then you integrate it with the visuals and I want to see you know I wanna hear my voice and then I wanna see what kind of visuals you come up with. <ICE-PHI:S1A-085#147:1:A>

Come up with appears in most of the sentences after the infinitival *to* in (1), forming an infinitival phrase and suggesting a purpose. Other usage is evident after the modals *can* and *may* in (2), and the personal pronoun *you* in (3). While most of the sentences with *come up with* take a complex noun phrase (henceforth NP) (2, 3), there is also a rare instance that *come up with* appears with a noun clause (1). The NP and the noun clause following the MWVs are therefore recognized as the object(s) of the PPVs and not as objects of the preposition *with*. Another pattern becomes evident in (3), where the PPV did not take an object.

In the case of *get out of*, both type 1 and type 2 syntactical patterns are observed; that means, it can be used as either intransitive in (4) or transitive in (5 & 6). Examples are provided below:

- (4) Get out of that bed because we need it for somebody who's really sick okay <ICE-PHI:S2A-032#74:1:A>
- (5) In a loyalty check conducted today the President is said to still be confident of having the support to get him out of the impeachment process <ICE-PHI:S2B-004#114:1:C>
- (6) President Estrada's decision to get the government out of gambling appears to have been made without the necessary legal study. <ICE-PHI:S2B-003#56:1:A>

In the absence of the subject, *get out of* takes the initial position in (4) while in (5), it appears in the medial position after the infinitival *to*, thereby forming the infinitival phrase to modify *support*. The verb *get* and the particles *out of* are inseparable in (4) as the role of the verb is intransitive. In contrast, in (5), the verb and the particles are separable because of the presence of the pronoun *him* that takes the action of the verb *get*, giving a transitive role to the verb mentioned. The pronoun *him* understandably shares a central role in the expression as it becomes the DO. PPV as a lexical unit may appear discontinuous because of the pronoun *him*, being the DO, but it must be emphasized that *him* effectively intervenes between the elements *get* and *out of*, which in this case is a single semantic unit. Notably, *him* must intervene; it is then obligatory as a pronoun that its placement must be after the verb and not after the preposition. If the sentence is structured in this manner *... *President is said to still be confident of having the support to get out of him the impeachment process*, there is obviously no syntactic relationship between the PPV and the pronoun, and the pronoun and the object. The NP *the impeachment process* is also acceptable since it behaves syntactically as a prepositional object and shows less tendency to passivize.

In (6), the expression *get the government out of* becomes part of the infinitival phrase that is a postmodifier to the main subject *decision*. This falls also under the type 2 pattern because the NP *the government* serves as its DO. Of the 44 times it appeared in the data, *get out of* generally collocates with a noun or a NP in (7) and occasionally with a pronoun in (8) or an adverb in (9).

(7) A new hegemon or a rogue nation may rise to challenge the predominance of the United States and *get out of* its sphere of influence. <ICE-PHI:S2B-035#57:1:A>

(8) What do you *get out of* it <&> inaudible answer </&>. <ICE-PHI:S1B-005#128:1:A>

(9) I wanna </[> </{> get out of here as fast as I can. <ICE-PHI:S1A-018#158:1:B>

Apparently used as active voice, *look forward to* is seen more popularly in the written than in spoken discourse. It generally appears in the medial position, acting as the main verb in (10) and forming the infinitival phrase in (11).

(10) He 's been *looking forward to* this all year round. <ICE-PHI:W1B-008#31:1>

(11) There's something to *look forward to*. <ICE-PHI:S2A-038#37:1:A>

Moreover, it follows the type 1 pattern as it will be cumbersome to insert a NP or a pronoun in the expression (**I look something forward to; *I look the party forward to; *I look her forward to.*). The verb and the particles are inseparable as the verb has an intransitive role and implies a syntactic function with other elements. It usually takes a prepositional object as exemplified in (10) with pronoun *this*. In (11), *look forward to* does not take a prepositional object and thus shows divergence from what is typical in the corpus.

The PPV *come out with* is intransitive, and it restricts the movement of the elements as it can make the expression troublesome. In (12), *come out with* occurs as part of the infinitival phrase that serves as the complement to the verb *planning*.

(12) Philippine P.E.N. is planning to *come out with* an anthology of works by members published in the 1990s. <ICE-PHI:W1B-016#145:8>

Moreover, *hold on to* follows the type 1 pattern (13 & 14) that suggests the intransitivity of the verb. The particles cannot be disjoined from its verb as they always must be written right next to the verb, so an attempt to put NP in between the elements may result in grammar error. Examples of these are shown below:

(13) Reach forward as far as you can just forward and *hold on to* your toes. <ICE-PHI:S2A-052#94:2:B>

(14) The illegitimate daughter, Maria Rosa, would later turn out to be the single reason why her mother *held on to* life and sanity. <ICE-PHI:W2E-006#6:1>

In (13), *hold on to* is written after the conjunction *and* as part of the compound verb of a simple sentence while in (14), it is positioned as part of the relative clause. In both instances, the prepositional object is evident.

Finally, *catch up with* in the past form functions as the main verb of the independent clause in a complex sentence in (15). It also shows that an attempt to cut the string of words into single units may invite questions in terms of its acceptability. The pronoun *us* follows the PPV, which takes the role of the prepositional object as shown below:

(15) The work bug *caught up with* us as we saw a McDonald 's store with a new burger that they launched. <ICE-PHI:W1B-011#133:2>

3.3 Semantic Features of Phrasal-Prepositional Verbs

The word *come* is defined by the online Oxford English Dictionary as *to move or travel towards or into a place thought of as near or familiar to the speaker*. It also means *to arrive/occur/happen/take place*. Linking the verb to its preposition, the particle *up* commonly appears with a motion verb like *come* to suggest direction or movement. It is considered the most productive because it can be used together with different classes of verbs but still retains its directionality. The preposition *with* means *accompanied by or having/possessing something*. When the three elements are combined, *come up with* becomes a PPV, which means *to produce/create/devise/think up*. For instance, if in (16 & 17) as shown below, *come up with* is replaced by a single-word verb *produce* and the thought remains the same, then the phrase possesses an idiomatic meaning.

(16) And hopefully with a very sincere effort with the President and with the support of both

houses of Congress to come up with (**produce**) an amnesty program for the rebels. <ICE-PHI:S2A-001#117:1:B>

- (17) Pardo directed the GETB and Trade Undersecretary Nelly Villafuerte to review the system and come up with (**produce**) the recommendations on the issue. </p> <ICE-PHI:W2C-006#98:5

Interestingly, in (16 & 17) the word *produce(d)* fits the intention of the speakers and does not give room for the listener/ reader to doubt about the kind of message being conveyed. The utterances use the appropriate PPV to make sense and to intensify its semantic content by emphasizing the object of the PPV. Remarkably in (17), the PPV provides the successive action, but the writer could have opted to use a single-word verb as the proposition suggests a level of formality because of the topic discussed. It may be inferred then that the writer chose the “less formal” expression to build a better writer-reader relationship.

Get out of means to *evade/avoid/escape/cut* in Oxford Dictionaries. In MacMillan Dictionary, this PPV has the following meanings: *get out of something means to avoid doing something; get something out of something means to get pleasure or benefit from something; get out of something is to take off clothes so that one can put on more comfortable clothes; get something out of someone is to persuade someone or give information or money; and get out of here means to tell someone to leave*. The multiple meanings generated from the expression would necessitate different scenarios to make their usage appropriate and acceptable. Examples are given below:

- (18) Now it is a sad fact though that students get out of (**leave**) the university with having the barest knowledge of polymers. <ICE-PHI:S2A-035#14:1:A>
- (19) Then get out of it (**leave/cut**), of that relationship. <ICE-PHI:S1A 7#76:1:B>
- (20) Let 's say for example you get six out of ten sixty percent. <ICE-PHI:S1B-020#2:1:A>

* Let 's say for example you **leave** six ten sixty percent.

- (21) In a loyalty check conducted today the President is said to still be confident of having the support to get him out of the impeachment process. <ICE-PHI:S2B-004#114:1:C>

*In a loyalty check conducted today the President is said to still be confident of having the support to **leave him** the impeachment process.

- (22) The second type are the dishonest cab drivers because they are tampering the cab meter just to get enough out of you. <ICE-PHI:W1A-012#98:5>

*The second type are the dishonest cab drivers because they are tampering the cab meter just to **benefit** from you.

In (18), the speaker gives his/her observation about the students who get out of the university but still lack knowledge of polymers. The PPV is replaced by *leave*, and the sentence still makes sense, giving a hint that it is a verbal idiom. In (19), the speaker gives an order to *get out of* the relationship, which presupposes that the listener is in a relationship that is no longer healthy or beneficial to him/her. The single verb *leave* or *cut* is deemed appropriate to replace the PPV as it provides the same intended meaning. In (20), the attempt to replace the PPV with *leave* brings semantic constraint. The expression *get six out of ten* indicates transparency and should be taken in its literal sense.

In (21), the PPV has a direct object *him* referring to the President, properly positioned after the verb and effectively intervenes between the verb and the particle. To test whether the expression is idiomatic or non-idiomatic, PPV can again be tried to be substituted by a single verb. In this case, however, the intent to replace *get him out of* with *leave him* should not be pursued since doing so may create ambiguity in making meaning. Its semantic content probably entails a closer examination of its context. Further, *get enough out of you* as an expression in (22) can be taken in its literal sense since there is no single-word verb that can be used to

capture what must be conveyed. Replacement can only be made possible by considering a prepositional verb in *benefit from*, which violates the single-word verb rule but still makes the expression a verbal idiom. However, what comes after the verb is an adjective, which cannot function as a DO. Syntactically, the expression is acceptable as it has become popular in informal spoken discourse, but it cannot be labeled as DO because only the noun or pronoun can perform the role. Hence, the construction of the expression is atypical.

MacMillan Dictionary notes the meaning of *look forward to* as *to feel happy and excited about something that is going to happen*. In another online dictionary, it means *to await eagerly*. This PPV is found to be more popular in the written than in spoken discourse. Its meaning is reflected in the way it is used in the succeeding sentences:

(23) I *look forward to* (**await (eagerly)/ feel happy and excited about**) working with you and contributing to research in the area of linguistics where my interest lies. <ICE-PHI:W1B-024#89:5>

In (23), *look forward to* is used at the end of a formal letter to express that the writer is hopeful that something will happen. These samples provide evidence that Filipinos are aware of its idiomatic status and in fact practice its correct usage. Labeling a PPV like this as informal and colloquial can already be challenged since its use extends to formal letters.

Further, *come out with* means *to say something suddenly and unexpectedly* in Cambridge Dictionary. The use of *come out with* in (24) seems to be redundant since the word *statement* comes after the PPV. The speaker may have opted to say “*will give a statement...*” rather than “*come out with the statement*” to make the message clear. In (25), *come out with* is incorrectly used, causing the change of meaning when the standard meaning (dictionary) is applied. *Produce/introduce/launch* can give better meaning sense.

(24) But uh I feel and I believe that uh the group uh of uh the the this corporation that wanted to get the franchise will *come out with* (**say /**

declare) the statement that there was no pay off. <ICE-PHI:S1B-034#131:1:D>

(25) Because if ever they *come out with* (**say / declare**) a big proposal they might be assured of a business that would yield profit to the company that they are working for. <ICE-PHI:S1A-089#104:1:B>

Cambridge Dictionary states that *hold on to* means *to keep something you have*. This PPV can be replaced in (26 & 27) by the word *keep* and can still retain its meaning. The change of PPV to a single-word verb in (26) makes *keep* become parallel with *seek* in the second clause. In (27), the insertion of *keep* in the place of *hold on to* makes the meaning more transparent as it becomes formal. In both instances, the word *keep* was able to give the same meaning in a clear and concise manner and thereby considered idiomatic.

(26) There was no job he would *hold on to* (**keep**), no other job he would seek. <ICE-PHI:W2F-009#117:1>

(27) You know what I call imperial Manila want to *hold on to* (**keep**) those powers and to that money as if their dear lives depended on it. <ICE-PHI:S2A-028#98:1:A>

(28) *Hold on to* your toe. <ICE-PHI:S2A-052#172:2:B>

**Keep* your toe.

In contrast, the PPV in (28) if it is to be replaced with a one-word standard meaning from the dictionary, the sentence will accommodate *keep* and will result in **keep your toe*. Syntactically, it follows the correct order, but semantically, the sentence may sound cumbersome since *your toe* is a body part, which a person does not normally lose. Because the verb *hold* can act as transitive or intransitive, the meaning of the combination should be taken separately. In this particular instance, *hold on to* is non-idiomatic because the individual meanings of the components in the sentence are apparent (Quirk et al., 1985).

The final PPV is *catch up with*, which in MacMillan Dictionary means *to affect, apprehend, influence, etc.* In (29), *affected* can replace the PPV and still make the sentence sound meaningful, thereby proving the idiomatic characteristic of the PPV.

(29) I wasn't able to continue with the last part of this paragraph because time caught up with (**affected**) me. <ICE-PHI:W1B-001#18:1>

Another distinct finding is the overuse of PPV in one sentence. In (30 & 31), *come up with* was repeatedly used. In (30) where *come up with* was mentioned three times, there is an assumption that the speaker is an instructor who requires a class project, and the repetition occurs because he wants to emphasize that there can be variety (e.g. lamp, wall decoration, electrical project). In (31), the speaker tries to suggest an arrangement or a mainframe in which he/she used the expression twice.

(30) They have to come up with a lamp or they may have to come up with a wall decoration or they should come up with an electrical project anything that has something to do with reports and this may be the application of all the things that they learned in <mention> Technical Writing </mention> <ICE-PHI:S1A-089#78:1:A>

(31) Although maybe your organization Math Circle may come up with an arrangement with Computer Services Center wherein maybe they can come up with uh simple mainframe <.> fami <./> <.> familiariza <./> familiarization seminars okay for you people somewhere in your third or fourth year okay. <ICE-PHI:S2A-049#115:1:A>

4 Discussion

Based on the results, Filipinos show minimal usage of PPVs, although this is quite expected. Biber et al. (1999) pointed out that the occurrences of PPVs are common in conversation and fiction, but rare when compared to phrasal verbs and prepositional verbs. It clearly implies that Filipinos, as non-native speakers, are conservative in using PPVs in their utterances. As it has become the

convention, English as a subject is taught as a formal language where proper usage of words and expressions are emphasized. Furthermore, many Filipino students who are not required by social contexts to speak in English will tend to have a lesser fluency in English. Another possible explanation is the fact that MWVs do not exist in Tagalog or Filipino, the mother tongue. Speakers' difficulties may arise from their tendency to translate an expression or find an equivalent in order for them to keep up with the conversation (Bensal, 2012). And in truth, the complexity of constructing PPVs can also be contributing to the infrequent use of PPVs.

The PPVs in the present study typically occur in the active voice. Bensal (2012) noted that active voice is more preferred than the passive voice, for it allows the speaker to express himself/herself in a more direct and emphatic manner. Moreover, the PPVs are hardly passivized as their construction can be awkward and barely acceptable. For example, *His own version has been come up with; *Your toes are held on to.

Except for *get out of*, PPVs fall under Type 1 with intransitive role and behave like all other intransitive phrasal verbs. Because they only have one semantic role, DO is not necessary in the expression since it can create discontinuity in the expected order of elements. Additionally, Filipinos conveniently use PPVs that are typically inseparable, and as such, they do not show any movement of particles.

According to Quirk et al. (1985), "the semantic unity of phrasal verbs can often be manifested in single-word verb" (p. 1162). The six PPVs are proven to have an idiomatic status. Their meanings are not predictable, and the fact that there could be many verb and particle combinations that can occur during substitution, the meaning assigned to a particular verb or to a particle does not remain constant (as in the case of *come up with* and *come out with*). Each PPV has only one meaning sense upon examining the sentence and comparing the meaning of the PPV and the meaning taken from the online dictionary.

The misuse of PPV (in *come up with* and *come out with*) in a few utterances may have only occurred

due to confusion in the use of particle. Nonetheless, it does not seem to be problematic, and it cannot be considered errors as the number may be insignificant in the first place. However, repetition (*come up with*) makes the utterance uninteresting to listen to. According to Dixon (1991), “it is infelicitous to repeat the same word several times in a sentence” (p. 91). This may have been avoided if only the speakers were able to clarify their semantic motivation in using such expressions in one sentence.

5 Conclusion

The study aimed to determine the most common forms of PPVs and describe the syntactic and semantic features of the most frequent PPVs. The six most common PPVs found in the corpus were mostly used in the present tense. Although there were 39 PPVs out of 48 PPVs in the corpus, these occurrences can still be considered low compared to the volume of existing PPVs in the English language. The study suggests that Filipinos, being second language learners, are conservative in using PPVs. The few instances of PPVs in both the spoken and written discourse may stem from the assumption that they just rely on the PPVs they previously know. Syntactically, the lack of variation in the expression indicates that they show the tendency to adopt only one structure, which may also have something to do with unfamiliarity with other expressions, complexity of structure, or limited vocabulary. However, it is significant to point out that, generally, knowledge and proficiency in the use of PPVs are evident, suggesting that the speakers are confident in using the PPVs they know in spoken and written discourse.

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