Semantic Feature of Philippine English: A Qualitative Analysis

CHARLIE A. DAYON
http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6553-2743
charliedayon2@gmail.com
Agusan del Sur State College of Agriculture and Technology
Agusan del Sur, Philippines

Grammar Test: 91/100
Originality: 95/100
Gunning Fog Index: 12.41
Flesch Reading Ease: 43.81

❧

ABSTRACT

The study described the semantic feature of Philippine English in the Davao region. Using qualitative analysis of multiple sources of data from student composition, print media, billboard ads, virtual communication, and office communication, I discovered that the semantic feature of Philippine English in Davao was influenced by language user's social status, regional origin, and context. In the corpora of Student Composition, Billboard Ads, and Office Communication, the social status of users in reference to the extent of their exposure to English language in the school setting and local community influenced their choice and use of words or expressions. Meanwhile, in some samples from Print Media and Billboard Ads, the regional origin of users in reference to the adoption of local terms by local users determined their use of local expressions or terms for practical reason. Lastly, in Office Communication and Virtual Communication samples, the meaning of user's words or expression was drawn from the context. The implications of the findings to the acquisition

and learning of the English language were two-fold. First, the exposure of the users to English language in school or local community was deficient. Second, they used some local terms or words for easy understanding.

Keywords: *Language education, Philippine English, semantics, qualitative analysis, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

Philippine English was originated in the US intervention 1898, and toward the end of the Philippine-American war, the American teachers known as "Thomasites" arrived and were dispersed throughout the islands. Since the Thomasites used English language as their medium of instruction and communication, the Filipino locals had acculturated the language (Gonzales, 2009). Meaning, they had eventually incorporated some English idioms into their local language.

When the native Filipino teachers who were trained by Thomasites were given the privilege in teaching the succeeding generation of Filipino students, the indigenization of

the English language in **lexis and syntax** started. According to Bolton and Butler (2008), the Philippine English has developed into a variety of English because of the processes it has gone through over the century in the Philippine. The mutation is evident in the lexicon of the Philippine English. Bautista (1997) described the lexicon of the Philippine English infrequent or lost in other varieties.

In view of this, I intended to conduct a qualitative analysis of the Philippine English in Davao to describe the semantic feature of multiple sources of written corpora found in the city. I intently limited my study to semantic feature of the Philippine English for practicality. But, I hope that the implications of my study to education practice would be significant to English teachers.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In this study, I intended to primarily describe the semantic feature of Philippines English in the Davao region. Specifically, I aimed to achieve the following objectives:

1. To analyze the semantics of words or phrases as seen in student composition, print media, billboard ads, virtual communication, and office communication;

2. To describe the semantic feature of Philippine English as evidently discovered in multiple sources of data; and,

3. To draw out implications of the findings to education practice.

Theoretical Lens

Bautista' theory (2000) states that Philippine English is not English that falls short of the norms of Standard American English. It is not badly-learned English as a second language either, for its distinctive features are not errors committed by users who have not mastered the American standard. It is rather a nativized variety of English that has features which differentiates it from Standard American English because of the influence of the Filipinos' first language or mother tongue, their different culture in which the language is embedded, and the restricting of grammar rules.

To classify a Philippine English as a variety, Bautista adopted Platt, Weber, and Ho's (1984) criteria. The first criterion is that the English variety has developed through the educational system. Meaning, English has been taught as a subject and used in many cases as a medium of instruction. The second criterion is that it has developed in an area where a native variety of English is not the language spoken by most of the population. The third criterion is that it is used for a range of functions among those who speak or write it in the region where it is used in letter writing, in the writing of literature, in parliament, in communication between friends and in the family. The last criterion is that it has become 'localized' or 'nativized' by adopting some language features of its own such as, sounds, intonation patterns, sentence structure, words, expressions.

Citing D'Souza (1992), Bautista adds that these New Englishes are the result of colonization, are institutionalized, have range and depth, are nativized and stable, have developed through educational system in bilingual contexts, and are creative. According to her, range means a wide range of uses and an extended register and style range; depth is about time of penetration at all levels of society; creative refers to the use of language in creative writing.

METHODOLOGY

Qualitative structural analysis was used in this study in conformity with the guidelines of Mills (2003) as cited by Yin (2009). I analyzed the semantic feature of corpora in Davao with focus on how the meaning of words or phrases were expressed. To ascertain the trustworthiness or credibility of the study, I applied important procedures. First, I used data from multiple sources, such as student composition, print media, billboard ads, virtual communication, and office communication. I analyzed the meaning of words or phrases and confirmed

them with other sources.

Second, I did use an audit trail. I provided matrices after discussing the data for referential accuracy. With these matrices, the readers would have easy access to data. They would also have enough chance to double check on the accuracy of data being cited in the discussion.

Third, I drew implications from samples to education practice so that teachers of the English language in an academe would take an initiative of suggesting to the school administration the implementation of a SPEAK in ENGLISH policy. Besides, they would think, plan, and use doable strategies to encourage, inspire, and motivate their learners to use English as their medium of communication in English classes or in school campus.

As researcher, I played the role of analyst. I analyze the collected data from multiple sources of written texts, confirmed or disconfirmed the occurrence or recurrence of peculiar semantics with other sources.

During the data collection and analysis, ethics was considered. Since the information or data were obtained from multiple sources of corpora, I blackened the author's name to ensure confidentiality of his or her given information and to protect his or her honor and prestige. And, to prove that the information came from reliable sources, one sample of each genre in text or picture forms was appended. Moreover, in the analysis of the data where the opinion of authorities was cited in support to or contradiction against my personal insights, I properly acknowledged the authors or editors (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

RESULTS

In this section, the semantic feature is introduced before presenting the analysis of data in matrices. So, I start with the description of Finegan (2008) on linguistic meaning. According to him, linguistic meaning includes referential and sense meanings. In referential meaning, the meaning of an expression has a reference to an actual person, object, abstract notion, event, or state, while sense meaning considers an expression with 'sense.'

On the other hand, Finegan describes social meaning. He writes that social meaning conveys information about the social nature of the language user or of the context. This entails user's social status, ethnicity, regional origin, and context of the expression.

Social Status
The social status constitutes some factors that influence user's meaning or thought in an expression. One of these factors is the user's exposure to English language in the school setting and local community. Since the acquisition

of the English language is dependent on the impact of school system or local community where he/she studies or stays respectively, his/her choice of words or expression speaks for itself.

In Student Composition, for example, the word 'locking' which is used by the language user in the sentence is anomalous, because he/she is supposed to mean 'lacking' as construed in the following matrix:

GENRE	TEXTS	DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT
Student Composition	xxx I felt <u>locking</u> because me and my proponent Marvin did not well prepared because both of us are very busy…" (GTCD Education Student, Reflection on Title Proposal Defense)	Social Status

This ambiguity in meaning is brought about by the user's social status. His/her exposure to English language in the school setting is apparently deficient so much that he/she commits an error in using the word correctly.

Similarly, this performance error is evident in other instances found in the same genre. The meaning of the word 'descent' in the text shown in the matrix below is ambiguous too because of the user's incorrect use of the word 'descent' in the context of the succeeding page:

GENRE	TEXTS	DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT
Student Composition	"my mother's name is xxx she works as an office clerk of a descent company." (UIC Student, My Autobiography)	Social Status

Instead of using the word 'decent' as it is appropriate to his/her thought embedded in the context, the user uses 'descent.' Again, this semantic ambiguity is influenced by the user's social status in reference to his/her exposure to English language in the school setting.

The same phenomenon is found in the following matrix wherein the user commits an error in the verb form which results in semantic ambiguity:

GENRE	TEXTS	DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT
Student Composition	"Try your best until you success." (BSEd-Eng, "Building Up Self-Confidence")	Social Status

In this text, the user uses the noun word 'success' as a verb. Such performance errors obviously indicate user's respective social status in connection with his/

her deficiency in linguistic knowledge of the English language during his/her educational training in the school setting.

Other corpora confirm how social status of language user affects the meaning of his/her expression in written texts. In the corpora of Billboard Ads and Office Communication, the language user's thought or meaning of his/her expression is vague or confusing because of syntactic errors. In the Billboard Ads, for instance, the user vaguely uses the locative expressions 'to this way left side and right side' in giving directions. As a result, his/her thought is semantically unclear.

GENRE	TEXTS	DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT
Billboard Ads	"…IF YOU WET BODY WITH DRESS AND SHORT TO THIS WAY LEFT SIDE AND RIGHT SIDE GO TO BATH ROOM"	Social Status

This problem on semanticity usually arises from user's acquisitional deficiency of the English language. Since the manner he/she expresses his/her thought is very vernacular, it could be possible that he/she has more dominant exposure to local language in the community than to English language.

In the corpus of Office Communication, the user's thought is obscure because of syntactic error as shown in the following matrix:

GENRE	TEXTS	DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT
Office Communication	"The Scholarship Committee of the College of Nursing had deliberated on the aspect of your scholarship and came up with the decision that…" (DMS Scholarship Committee Chair, June 5, 2010)	Social Status

This apparently shows that the user of this text has deficient linguistic knowledge which he/she should have developed in the school setting.

Meanwhile, in the corpus of Virtual Communication, the influence of social status to the semanticity of users' expressions is highly prominent too. But, the social factor that influences the semanticity of an expression is in reference to the range of functions of an English variety in communication between or among those who speak the same local language and use English because it is felt to be more appropriate for certain purposes.

For instance, in Virtual Communication shown in the matrix below, the user uses the American idiom 'my hands were full.' He/she apparently feels using such an idiom appropriate in the context, for he/she knows who his/her receiver is. He/

she also knows that his/her receiver understands what he/she wants to convey:

GENRE	TEXTS	DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT
Virtual Communication	"my hands were full these past few days as I have to finish the president's message and report for the stockholders meeting…" (idf_idf_idf@yahoo.com, November 27, 2008 1:09 PM)	Social Status

On the other hand, his/her use of American idiom also indicates the depth of his/her exposure to English language in school. Hence, his/her thought is semantically comprehensible.

Similarly, in the following matrix, the user's use of the expression 'can book' is felt to be appropriate as she intends to communicate with her students. She knows that her students can understand what she wants to drive home when she uses such an expression as they are educated students who know English and use it as a lingua franca in communication. So, in this instance, the user's thought in her expression/statement is obviously clear.

GENRE	TEXTS	DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT
Virtual Communication	"prepare a powerpoint presentation and email it to me two days b4 your presentations so i can book our learning center."(cathyroble@yahoo.com, May 5, 2010 9:35 AM) (hormone_harry05@yahoo.com, October 6, 2011 2:37 PM)	Social Status

Regional Origin

Another factor that affects the meaning of a word or a sentence is the user's regional origin which has a reference to adoption or borrowing of local words or expressions for functional or practical purposes.

In the corpus of Print Media, the meaning of expressions which are presented in the matrix is ambiguous and incomprehensible for non-Davaoenos because the users employ local words or expressions intended for local people of Davao region where these words originate:

GENRE	TEXTS	DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT
Print Media	a. "The actual land adventure started as we rode the "habal-habal" (single motor ready for passengers), setting on a 90 degree-road, my first time ever. ("Re-Discovering Talicud Island" by Pamela Gay Bangad-Perales in Mindanao Times, May 06, 2012)	Regional Origin
	b. "In our home barangay, now and then, we would hear a sound at night, especially during moonless nights, supposedly from a witch or wakwak." ("So It Seems," Opinion, The Mindanao Daily Mirror, April 24, 2012)	Regional Origin
	c. "A drunk driver lies on the floor in pain after his motorcycle collided with a payong-payong tricycle in Tagum City." (Mindanao Times, April 27, 2012)	Regional Origin

On the other hand, the use of borrowed terms or expressions from the local language in Davao City is confirmed in the corpus of Billboard Ads. The user's adoption of localized terms such as 'panit', 'unod', 'Balbacua', and expressions like, ''ang sabaw! and 'higop na!' as shown in the matrix on the succeeding page indicate that they are incorporated in the English language for the practical reason that is, for easy understanding of their clients as shown in the matrix below:

GENRE	TEXTS	DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT
Billboard	a. "We Serve PANIT – P20.00, UNOD – P25.00 BALBACUA WOW! ANG SABAW! HIGOP NA!	Regional Origin
	b. "FOR SALE DUMOY FRESH Water GALON P2"	Regional Origin

Context

Context is another factor that affects the semanticity of a word or an expression of language users. If an expression, for instance, appears incomprehensible because of a word used by user, the meaning can be deciphered because of some clues surrounding it.

In the corpus of Virtual Communication, for instance, thought of the language user is muddled because of choppy sentences as shown in the matrix below. However, due to user's explanation which serves as a clue, the fragmented group of words 'Took me several days to do this' is consequently comprehended.

GENRE	TEXTS	DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT
Virtual Communication	"Here's my powerpoint presentation I was'nt able to share with you. Malas, walang LCD projector. <u>Took me several days to do this</u>. Hope you find it useful." (geof_girado@yahoo.com., March 27, 2010 4:06:09 AM)	Context

Other instances affecting the meaning of the user's expression are found in the corpus of Office Communication as shown in the following matrix:

GENRE	TEXTS	DESCRIPTION OF DEVELOPMENT
Office Communication	a. "xxx because it did not <u>pass</u> through me and that you did not even give me a chance to comment on it." (CASBE Dean– DDC, May 24, 2007)	Context
	b. "All employees are expected to have qualified to the position xxx." (DDC Director, November 27, 2006)	Context

In the first instance, the user's meaning of the expression 'did not pass though' is made clear because of the use of explanation 'that you did not even give me a chance to comment on it.' Also, in the second instance, the meaning of the user's word 'position' is immediately understood to be referring to 'ranking' because of the word 'qualified' preceding the said word. So, all these instances explain that in the context the meaning of user's words or expressions is conveyed.

DISCUSSION

The samples clustered for the analysis of semantic feature show how the meaning of words or expressions is affected or influenced by the social status of language user, the regional origin of words or expressions, and clues in the context. In the corpora of Student Composition, Billboard Ads, and Office Communication, for instance, the semanticity of user's expressions is affected by his/her social status in reference to how depth his/her exposure to the English language in the school setting and local community.

On the other hand, in the corpus of Virtual Communication, the thought or meaning of user's expressions is influenced by his/her social status in reference to the range of functions of a variety of English which he/she uses for communication with his/her friend or those people who speak either different native languages

or similar local language (e.g., 'prepare a powerpoint presentation and email it to me two days b4 your presentations so i can *book* our learning center' and *'my hands were full* these past few days as I have to finish the president's message and report for the stockholders meeting…').

Meanwhile, in the corpora of Print Media and Billboard Ads, the semantic feature of the samples is developed by regional origin that is in reference to the adoption of local terms by language users (e.g., 'The actual land adventure started as we rode the '*habal-habal'*; 'In our home barangay, now and then, we would hear a sound at night, especially during moonless nights, supposedly from a witch or *wakwak*'; 'A drunk driver lies on the floor in pain after his motorcycle collided with a *payong-payong* tricycle in Tagum City'; 'We Serve *PANIT* – P20.00, *UNOD* – P25.00 BALBACUA WOW! ANG SABAW! HIGOP NA!,' and 'FOR SALE *DUMOY* FRESH Water GALON P2').

Finally, in the corpora of Virtual Communication and Office Communication, the meaning of user's words or expressions is drawn from the context (e.g., "Here's my powerpoint presentation I wasn't able to share with you. Malas, walang LCD projector. *Took me several days to do this*. Hope you find it useful," "xxx because it did not *pass through* me and that you did not even give me a chance to comment on it," and "All employees are expected to have qualified to the *position* xxx").

The findings of this study have significant implications to educational practice. On the bases that the semantic feature of corpora is prominently influenced by social status, regional origin, and context, it suggests that during the stage of acquisition or learning of the English language in school, the learners or language users vary in learning experiences. There are those who have dominant exposure to good models of English language, so they can clearly express their thought in writing. On the other hand, there are also those who have less exposure to English language, so they ambiguously express themselves in writing. Bautista points these circumstances to the dominant influence of local language to the learners or language users as well as to the educational system which they have gone through.

LITERATURE CITED

Bautista, M. L. S. (2000). *Defining standard Philippine English: Its status and grammatical features*. De La Salle University Press. Retrieved on March 8, 2018 from https://bit.ly/2W9QMCj

Bolton, K., & Butler, S. (2008). Lexicography and the description of Philippine English vocabulary. *Philippine English: Linguistic and literary perspectives*,

175-200. Retrieved on March 7, 2018 from https://bit.ly/2Z1ooUP

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2017). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications. Retrieved on July 8, 2018 from https://bit.ly/2ENyq4e

Denzin, N. K. (1994). Introduction: Entering the field of qualitative research. *Handbook of qualitative research*. Retrieved on August 8, 2018 from https://bit.ly/2KnoJgy

Finegan, E. (2014). *Language: Its structure and use*. Cengage Learning. Retrieved on July 8, 2018 from https://bit.ly/2HTgreR

Glesne, C., & Peshkin, A. (1992). Being there: Developing understanding through participant observation. *Becoming Qualitative Researchers: An Introduction. White Plains, NY: Longman*, 39-61. Retrieved on March 7, 2018 from https://bit.ly/2EPRz5x

Gonzalez, A. (2008). A favorable climate and soil: A transplanted language and literature. *Philippine English: Linguistic and literary perspectives*, 13-27. Retrieved on July 8, 2018 from https://bit.ly/2W4UjBW