



## Openings of telephone conversations in Philippine English

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### Abstract

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This study provides a corpus-based description of telephone-conversation openings in Philippine English. Data for the analysis of telephone conversations in Philippine English come from the Philippine component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-PH); to be more specific, this study makes use of the telephone calls documented in the dialogic, spoken texts in ICE-PH coded as S1A-091 to S1A-100. The analysis of a rather limited sample from ICE-PH – ten samples, to be specific – reveals interesting insights with regard to how similar or different openings in telephone conversations are in Philippine English with reference to American English. The sequences employed or afforded by Filipino speakers of English in telephone conversations appear to be rather tentatively established thus far. The openings documented in ICE-PH range from strict observants of Schegloff's (1972, 1979, 1986) four core opening sequences in American English to complete deviations from the purported patterns in the superstrate variety.

**Keywords:** Conversation analysis, Philippine English, telephone conversations

### 1. Preliminaries: The Study and Its Background

The end of the 1960s saw the publication of Llamzon's (1969) monograph entitled *Standard Filipino English* where he made the claim that a standard variety of English has become evident in the Philippines because of a sizeable number of native and near-native English speakers. The said monograph, which Bautista (2000) qualified as radical at the time, was expectedly criticized by scholars and linguists. Nevertheless, studies on Philippine English flourished: Alberca's in 1978, Gonzalez and Alberca's in 1978, and Gonzalez's in 1985 on Philippine English in the mass media; Bautista's in 1982 on the English of nursemaids, in 1997 on the lexicon of Philippine English, in 2000 on the status and grammar of Standard

Philippine English, and in 2001 (a, b) on attitudes toward Philippine English; Gonzalez's again in 1982 on errors turning into features; Gonzalez with Jambalos and Romero's in 2003 on Philippine English across generations; Bautista with Lising and Dayag's in 2004 on the compilation of a corpus of Philippine English – Philippine component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-PH); Tayao's in 2004 on the phonology of Philippine English; Borlongan's (2011) on the preparation of a grammar for Philippine English; and Collins, Borlongan, and Yao's (2014), among others, on the diachronic change in Philippine English. It is therefore not surprising that a foreign scholar even remarked that out of the Southeast Asian countries, the Philippines most likely produced the most comprehensive research on an indigenized English variety (Tay, 1991).

There are, however, not much studies done on discourse in Philippine English. In an entry on Southeast Asian Englishes in the *The Handbook of World Englishes* (Kachru, Kachru, & Nelson, 2006), Bautista and Gonzalez (2006) write that “the work is just starting” (p. 136). Philippine English has been commonly described as being monostylistic (Alberca, 1978; Bautista, 2011; Gonzalez, 1982, 1983, 1985, 1991; Gonzalez & Alberca, 1978; Nelson, 2005), but Elumba-Sanchez (1993) discovered that highly proficient speakers of Philippine English have full range of both communicative and rhetorical styles, shifting lects depending on their co-interlocutors, role relationships, and topics. Studies in the 2000s have mainly consisted of more sophisticated, contrastive analyses of discourse in Philippine English, as led by Dayag (1997, 2004a, 2004b) and his students and colleagues (Bautista & Rañosa-Madrurnio, 2004; Genuino, 2002; S. Gonzales, 2002; Rañosa-Madrurnio, 2003, 2004; Rojo-Laurilla, 2002), and comparisons of Philippine English with Tagalog, American English, and other Asian Englishes were made. Dayag (2004c) also has one study focusing on the evaluation of editorials written in Philippine English, which provided descriptions in terms of the editorials' global structure, lexico-grammatical markers, and semantic relations. More recently, Borlongan (2017) identified the moves found in dissertation acknowledgments written in Philippine English. More traditional analyses of discourse in Philippine English such as those within the framework of conversational analysis, interactional sociolinguistics, and speech act theory are rare, if not totally nonexistent.

It is in this context that this study provides a corpus-based description of telephone-conversation openings in Philippine English. The present work hopes to address the aforementioned gap in studies on Philippine English by subjecting the relevant texts in the ICE-PH to a conversation analysis.

To be more specific, this study makes use of the telephone calls documented in the dialogic, spoken texts in ICE-PH coded as S1A-091 to S1A-100. Bautista (2006) detailed how these telephone conversations were collected, noting the difficulty of collection. Thus, she tasked graduate students in a Corpus Linguistics class offered at De La Salle University, Manila in Term 1, School Year 2004-2005 to collect telephone conversations as a requirement for their class. As for the demographics of the interlocutors, nine were male and 11 were female. Seven dyads were made up of friends, and three dyads made up of students talking to their teachers.

## 2. Conversation Analysis, Telephone Conversations, and Openings

The development of conversation analysis as a subfield of discourse studies and as a methodology has progressed in close association with analyses of telephone conversations. Perhaps, this is because of the relative convenience in collecting (at least, in its technical aspect) this type of data. The choice of telephone conversations as data for conversation analysis is of two reasons: first, looking at its technical aspect, it is considered relatively easy to record, compared to face-to-face conversations; and second, amidst the convenience afforded by its collection, recordings of telephone conversations allow conversation analysts the same resources as the interlocutors involved, since they also are only connected through audio rather than using other conversation resources such as facial and hand gestures. Schegloff's (1967) groundbreaking dissertation focused on the first five minutes of telephone conversations as he looked at the sequencing of conversational openings.

He then characterized openings as interactionally compact and brief. To manage identification and recognition of one another, interlocutors involved in a conversation may utilize strategies or routines to negotiate interpersonal relationships (Gumperz, 1982; Schegloff, 1986), and these strategies and routines seem to be also evident in the openings of telephone conversations, as co-participants have resources available to them.

Openings in American English have been described by Schegloff (1972, 1979, 1986) as having an ordered set of four core opening sequences, and accomplishing these sequences are usually the focus of the first utterances in openings in American English: (1) the summons-answer sequence (the phone ring and the hello), (2) the identification-recognition sequence (speakers display their recognition of the other; for example, one speaker asks *Hello. John?* and the other responds *Yes, this is John. Who's this?*), (3) the exchange of greeting tokens (one speaker says *Hello* and the other responds *Hi*), and (4) the how-are-you sequence (one speaker asks *How are you?* and the other answers *I'm fine*). Schegloff (1986) adds, openings have a rather “perfunctory” character (p. 113). This means that interlocutors involved in a telephone conversation go through these routines in a rather automated manner when opening their conversations.

Also, according to Schegloff (1986), openings provide a position for the first topic. Once identification and recognition are achieved and a set of how-are-yous – if relevant – are exchanged, the speaker who made the call usually uses an anchor position to introduce the first topic or the reason for the call. This, however, is not the only possible position for the introduction of the first topic. In fact, there are other possibilities for the interlocutors to position the first topic. Routine openings therefore need to be understood as achievements going through possibilities for the preemptive first topic, rather than a “mechanical or automated playing out of pre-scripted routines” (p. 117).

In another paper, Schegloff (1979) looks at how interlocutors identify and display recognition of each other. He found that the one answering often does not self-identify explicitly by name; rather, they rely on the caller to recognize him or her by a sample of his or her voice. Schegloff provides this as one of his examples:

A: Hello  
C: Hi  
A: Hi

The first greeting *Hello*, Schegloff interprets, is an answer to the summons or the ringing of the telephone. The answerer's *Hi* greeting then is seen as a claim that the answerer has recognized the caller.

It bears pointing out that the analysis of telephone-conversation openings Schegloff (1967, 1972, 1979, 1986) has done originally looked primarily on American English data. This means that the patterns identified were based on a somewhat limited and homogenous group of users of a language, especially in the case with identification and recognition, and that this pattern may differ across languages and cultures – and language varieties, for that matter – from how Schegloff describes it. A case in point is Chinese. Following the model proposed by House (1982), Sun (2004) describes the interactional moves found in telephone conversations in Chinese. House (1982) initially proposed the notion of interactional moves in terms of functional units and sequential patterns. The moves identified by House (1982) in telephone-conversation openings include greeting, territorial breach apology, identification, questions-after-you, remarks, and topic introducers. Compared with the sequential model for opening sequences in telephone conversations proposed by Schegloff, House's (1982) taxonomy of interactional moves provides a broader framework that allows for an accurate descriptive account of the Chinese data and the interactional patterns observed, according to Sun (2004). Thus, House's (1982) model is modified and adapted for Chinese; the eight interactional moves that have been identified in the Chinese data are: (1) greeting, (2) addressing, (3) identification, (4) questions-after-you, (5) affirmation of reconnecting, (6) voice recognition comments, (7) disturbance check, and (8) prioritized communicative acts.

Looking at Spanish data, Coronel-Molina (1998) found that Hispanic conversational norms do indeed fall within Schegloff's (1972, 1979, 1986) canonical schema of universality, while, at the same time, exhibiting unique sequential variations. These variations may or may not be culture-specific, a point which can only be determined through further investigation, Coronel-Molina believes.

It must be noted that Chinese and Spanish are two languages and cultures that have significantly influenced Philippine languages and culture – at the very least, lexically, in terms of language (W.D.W. Gonzales, forthcoming). And it seems interesting to see where Philippine English will be leaning more closely – the Chinese patterns or Spanish and American patterns.

### 3. Openings of Telephone Conversations in Philippine English: An Overview

The analysis of a rather limited sample from ICE-PH – ten samples, to be specific – reveals interesting insights as regards how similar or different openings in telephone conversations are in Philippine English. The sequences employed and afforded by Filipino speakers of

English in telephone conversations appear to be rather tentatively established thus far. The openings documented in ICE-PH range from strict observants of Schegloff's (1972, 1979, 1986) four core opening sequences in American English to complete deviations from the purported patterns in the superstrate variety.

Of the ten samples of telephone conversations in ICE-PH, five closely followed the four core opening sequences earlier identified by Schegloff (1972, 1979, 1986). These five openings found in the Philippine data contained the summons-answer sequence, the identification-recognition sequence, the exchange of greeting tokens, and the how-are-you sequence; there are just samples in which some sequences were not reciprocated by the co-interlocutors. Some samples were noted that completely missed some of the sequences claimed by Schegloff to be present in his American English data.

Meanwhile, some samples were identified that clearly deviated from Schegloff's (1972, 1979, 1986) patterning of sequences. The other samples did not have any opening at all and went straight to their first topic, though some doubts as regards the completeness of the transcript could be present as one reads the entire text in question. Another sample has an unconventional opening sequence in that the caller started the conversation with a question that could be considered as a question begging for the first topic. Some samples would show that the how-are-you sequence immediately followed the summons-answer sequence; there is therefore a skip of two sequences, with reference to Schegloff's proposed norms in American English. One sample also opened with a *yes* uttered in a rising intonation, thereby replacing *hello* in the summons-answer sequence.

The following section discusses in detail the samples that conformed to the framework proposed by Schegloff (1972, 1979, 1986) on telephone-conversation openings. Another section discusses the samples that did not conform to the said framework. For purposes of referencing, the samples are referred to using the filenames assigned to them in the ICE-PH itself; filenames *S1A-091* to *S1A-100* all compose the telephone conversations found in ICE-PH.

#### **4. Samples Following Schegloff's Four Core Opening Sequences in American English Telephone Conversations**

As mentioned earlier, five out of the ten telephone conversations found in ICE-PH conform to the patterns proposed by Schegloff (1972, 1979, 1986). The four core opening sequences consist of the summons-answer sequence, the identification-recognition sequence, the exchange of greeting tokens, and the how-are-you sequence, and this is clearly seen in *S1A-093*:

A: Hello Sir  
B: Yes  
A: Yes

A: Uhm good afternoon Sir uhm  
B: Good afternoon  
A: So Sir how are you  
B: I 'm fine I 'm I 'm okay  
A: Uh that 's good uhm *ay* anyway before I forget  
B: Okay  
<ICE-PH:S1A-093#1-9>

In the extract above, the presence of all the supposed sequences of openings in telephone-conversation openings could be seen. The conversation opened with *Hello, Sir*, a simple example of the summons-answer sequence. Since, as early as this point in the conversation, there is already an attempt to identify who the speaker is in the other line, the answerer immediately identified himself as the *sir* being referred to by the caller. This sequence is now the identification-recognition sequence. The caller seems to expect his or her intended answerer to be the exact person to pick up the telephone, and so he directly addressed the person who answered the phone call as *sir*. There seems to be no possibility that the caller simply called the answerer *sir* because of voice judgments as there appears to be no hesitation at all, given that the transcript is faithful to the actual conversation and there are no missing parts in the actual recording, and that the answerer himself has expected that address and call from the caller. There is an immediate exchange of greetings, of good-afternoons: Having had verified the identity of the answerer, the caller immediately greeted the answerer 'good morning' to which the answerer immediately returned with a good-afternoon greeting, too. This is obviously the exchange of greeting tokens, and this exchange is now followed by a how-are-you sequence. The caller immediately asked the answerer how he is, which was also immediately responded to by the answerer. The answerer likewise asked the caller how s/he is, too. After the four core sequences, the anchoring to the first topic is then signaled by the utterance *Uh that 's good uhm <indig> ay </indig> anyway before I forget*.

It is also interesting how social-power relations come into play in the progression of even just the opening of the telephone conversation above. However, ICE-PH does not provide extra-corpus information, such as the relationship of the interlocutors with each other as well as the context of the conversation, but reading the text further reveals that the caller is a student and the answerer is a teacher; but the caller is not a student of the answerer, as further examined in the corpus, there is this exchange:

B: But you 've never been my student  
B: We 've never been... I 've never had the privilege of teaching you  
A: Uh yes Sir  
<ICE-PH:S1A-093#78-80>

It is not clear though how they are really related, but one can guess that the caller who is a student may perhaps have been acquainted with the answerer who is a teacher; but their friendly relationship still distinguishes social power they have in that the teacher is still a teacher and the student is just a student. Clearly, there is a play of power in the conversation, and even the progression of the conversation opening already reflects this play. There seems to be a struggle on the part of the caller to maintain the interest of the answerer in the conversation they are engaged in. This play of social power, however, must be interpreted more within the framework of interactional sociolinguistics.

This one now, SIA-091, simply skipped the exchange of greeting tokens but nevertheless followed the sequencing proposed by Schegloff (1972, 1979, 1986):

A: Uh hello  
B: Hello  
A: Hi  
A: Can I talk to Cherry  
B: Yeah this is Cherry speaking  
A: Oh Cherry this is Chris  
B: Oh Chris yes  
A: How are you  
B: Uh yes I 'm fine  
<ICE-PH:S1A-091#1-10>

Upon the pick up of the handset, the caller said *Hi* and looked for the person he is looking for. This sequence easily falls on the summons-answer sequence. Since the summons-answer sequence immediately asked for the person the caller is looking for, the answerer did not hesitate to identify herself – that she is the person the caller is looking for. In turn, the caller identified himself, too, after having affirmed Cherry on the other line: *Oh Cherry this is Chris*. Clearly, this is the sequence where the interlocutors identified and recognized each other. The exchange of greeting tokens is skipped, and one notices the sudden exchange of how-are-yous toward the end of the opening sequences.

Here is another example, S1A-094 now, of an opening in a telephone conversation in Philippine English that completely adheres to the American English norms proposed by Schegloff (1972, 1979, 1986) with one sequence skipped, the exchange of greeting tokens that is:

A: Hello  
B: Hello  
A: Dens  
B: Hi Lei

A: *Kamusta*  
B: How are you  
A: I 'm fine  
A: How about you  
<ICE-PH:S1A-094#1-8>

The telephone conversation from which the extract above comes from opened with the usual exchange of hellos upon the pick up of the handset. As can be seen, reciprocity in the summons-answer sequence of the above opening can be observed. The caller immediately recognized the intended answerer of his phone call, perhaps because of their familiarity with each other as they seem to be friends. The answerer affirmed his identity by simply verifying the identity of the caller. It is interesting to note that there was no direct affirmation of one's identity on the part of the answerer, but the answerer's identity was simply confirmed by throwing a question to verify the caller's identity. Notice that the answerer did ask a general question – *Who is in the other line?* – but rather simply asked if the answerer is Lei. This is another evidence that the interlocutors are intimates who could immediately guess who the other person is. The identification-recognition was simply followed by the how-are-you sequence. The deletion of the exchange of greeting token may be a sign of familiarity and intimacy, as can be seen by its absence in the last two samples given and its presence in the first sample given, which is relatively less intimate than the last two.

## 5. Samples Deviating from Schegloff's Four Core Opening Sequences in American English Telephone Conversations

The telephone conversations in ICE-PH that seem to deviate from Schegloff's (1972, 1979, 1986) framework are now discussed below. S1A-096 is of particular interest because there is no apparent opening at all. It seems that the caller, referring to the anchor position she may have, introduced the first topic right away, doing away with the entire opening sequence altogether:

A: So what do you plan to do I mean  
B: Tagaytay  
A: Are you guys still going  
B: Going where  
A: Tagaytay  
B: Yeah hell yeah  
<ICE-PH:S1A-096#1-6 >

However, in the very end of the transcript, a seeming exchange of greetings is visible:



A: Hi Pauline  
B: Hi Pauline  
<ICE-PH:S1A-096#362-363>

These utterances are rather strange because of its location in the entire conversation, though the utterances sound like a summons-answer sequence, which should be located earliest in the conversation and the exchange of *Hi Pauline* with each other – unless both speakers are named Pauline. There could be two explanations for this: The transcript may not be as accurate as it should have been in documenting the entire telephone conversation, or there may be an error in chronology in the transcript; but it appears more of the latter than of the former.

In S1A-099, a shift is seen from the sequencing that Schegloff (1972, 1979, 1986) offered. It started out with the summons-answer sequence and suddenly jumped to the how-are-you sequence. Also, the how-are-you sequence is not reciprocated and is one-sided. From here, a shift could be seen in the conversation leading to the how-are-you sequence in the form of the question *What are you doing?*, which, based on casual observation, appears to be a common question or a feature in telephone-conversation openings of Filipinos, regardless of the language they are using. S1A-099 is now reproduced below:

A: Yeah hello Jimmy  
B: How are you  
A: Hello  
A: What are you doing  
A: I 'm fine  
B: I 'm just sitting here doing nothing  
A: Uh-hmmmh uh-hmmmh  
B: Uh-hmmmh  
<ICE-PH:S1A-099#1-8>

The opening of a telephone conversation that is reproduced below is also interesting:

A: Yes  
B: Are you there  
A: Yes  
B: Oh how are you doing  
A: I 'm fine thank you  
A: How about you  
B: Uhm I 'm not not not really fine  
<ICE-PH:S1A-100#1-7>

There is an apparent deviation from the canonical summons-answer sequence in that, instead of saying *hello*, the caller said *yes* uttered in a rising intonation or perhaps asked the question *Yes?*, and the answerer asked if the caller is still in the other line. There seemed to be problems on clarity when the conversation above opened, which motivated the answerer to verify if there is the caller in the other line. From here, a sudden jump – yet again – to the *how-are-you* sequence. This time though, it is reciprocated and two-way. The reciprocity evident in the extract above may once again signal familiarity and intimacy between the interlocutors, and may have triggered the deletion of the rather formal sequences of identification-recognition and exchange of greeting tokens, similar to earlier examples that also did some skipping of sequences.

## 6. Discussion

The investigation of ten samples of telephone conversations found in ICE-PH provides some clues as to how this type of conversations opens in Philippine English. Half of the samples adhered to Schegloff's (1972, 1979, 1986) framework of four core opening sequences in American English, while the other half deviated from the American patterns. The strict observants of the model contained the *summons-answer sequence*, the *identification-recognition sequence*, the *exchange of greeting tokens*, and the *how-are-you sequence*, though some missed at most one of the sequences claimed by Schegloff (1972, 1979, 1986) to be present in the American English data.

The analyses indicate that familiarity and intimacy seem to direct how telephone conversations in Philippine English open and progress. Some sequences were deleted and skipped, perhaps because of their 'optional' status in more familiar and intimate conversations. Social power also seems to come into play with reference to who reciprocates who. These observations have much to say about openings of telephone conversations in Philippine English. As presented earlier, there is a seemingly closer correspondence with and adherence to patterns in American English and Spanish as opposed to Chinese, yet there are instances where speakers do not follow the American English and Spanish patterns. Is this once again a manifestation of the linguistic insecurity that has always been the descriptive words for discourse in Philippine English (Gonzalez, 1982), and therefore another evidence of the new English's stagnation in the nativization phase in Schneider's (2003, 2007) dynamic model, or is this a further progression in the model (Borlongan, 2016; W.D.W. Gonzales, 2017)?

This question may be initially difficult to answer with the current data at hand and may be overshadowed by issues and other questions in methodology like how natural the telephone conversations are in ICE-PH. Because of the difficulty in collecting natural telephone conversations, the informants of the corpus who were recorded for these text categories have been consciously tasked to converse in Philippine English, and hence the rather artificial sequencing in these conversations. Moreover, a larger corpus is demanded by these descriptive studies of discourse, perhaps corpora solely devoted for these kinds of analyses and not just a subcomponent of a rather generic corpora like ICE-PH. There might

also be a need to compare and contrast these emerging patterns in Philippine English with those patterns in substrate languages, so as to provide a more precise picture of what is going on in the new English as well as other related contact varieties (cf. W.D.W. Gonzales, 2016, forthcoming). Nevertheless, the current data still provide several valuable insights on the discourse features of Philippine English in general and telephone conversations in Philippine English in particular.

The adherence and close patterning to American English and Spanish would suggest that Philippine English is still linguistically conservative and ‘monostylistic,’ as has been raised several times previously (Gonzalez, 1982). However, the deviation from its colonial languages, which were presented earlier, seems to provide a relatively fresh perspective toward it as implications for its development, variation, and change have emerged. In response to Schneider (2003, 2007) who claims that Philippine English is at the stage of nativization, Borlongan (2016) proposes that Philippine English has already reached endonormative stabilization, and even so, differentiation (W.D.W. Gonzales, 2017). Event X, as Schneider would put it, has already taken place and that general acceptance of emerging local features of the variety is evident amidst the residual insecurity of the linguistically conservative (Borlongan, 2016). Despite the lingering preference for the American English and Spanish telephone-conversation opening patterns, the seemingly apparent deviation would still appear to contribute to the progression of Philippine English toward further along Schneider’s developmental model, as Borlongan and W.D.W. Gonzales have suggested.

Generalizing from a sample of ten conversations would appear difficult; nevertheless, these findings should be able to direct further studies of discourse in Philippine English. The findings should be relayed to the speakers themselves and should address why some sequences are missing, and why some are reciprocated and why some are not. The role of familiarity and intimacy, and social power has been frequently highlighted in the discussion above and should be considered as variables in future studies. It is interesting to examine how Philippine English, more specifically telephone-conversation openings in Philippine English, will progress in the coming decades.

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