

RESEARCH NOTE

Community Pantry, ECQ, and Social Distancing: Linguistic Innovations in Philippine English During the Covid-19 Health Crisis

Rafael Ibe Santos

University of Asia and the Pacific, Pasig City, the Philippines
rafael.santos@uap.asia

Abstract

This paper is an attempt to chronicle some of the linguistic innovations in Philippine English (PhE) from the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020 all the way to the third quarter of 2022 and gather impressions about their origins, functions, surge in usage, and images conjured. Additionally, the study considered the implications of the modifications on the evolution of PhE, which is thought to be between phase 3 and 4 in Schneider's Dynamic Model of the Evolution of New Englishes. Of the changes in morphology, semantics, and syntax that were uncovered, the seven variations were mostly compound words, acronyms, and initialisms. Findings show that acronyms and initialisms represented formal language usage. Introduced by communities of practice within the government, the innovations served Covid-related communication needs such as labels for isolation terms and welfare assistance programs, made popular at the height of the pandemic between March and May 2020. A number of the neologisms projected images of war and militarism as well as poverty. The phrase *community pantry*, which was used widely between April and June 2021, became polysemous and localized to embody the *bayanihan* (community) spirit. This study concurs with earlier findings that the local variety appears to be experiencing endonormative stabilization.

Keywords: *Covid, initialisms, innovations, pandemic, Philippine English (PhE)*

1. Introduction

English as the lingua franca for international relations, business, and education is bound to change, owing to a combination of psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic factors that alter phonology, morphology, semantics, and syntax (Aitchison, 2004).^{*} Modifications like borrowing can also occur in both phonology and lexis of a language, and so can acronym and initialism—forms of abbreviation which use initials to form new lexicon (Hoffer, 2002). In the former, a mixture of initials is treated as a single word while in the latter, the letters are pronounced separately (Bloom, 2000). Other alterations in language include broadening, narrowing, and amelioration. If

^{*} I am grateful to Dr. Ariene M. Borlongan of Tokyo University of Foreign Studies for his recommendations regarding the inclusion of Schneider's (2003) Dynamic Model of the Evolution of New Englishes in the manuscript.

broadening embraces other potential uses for a word without discarding the original ones, narrowing restricts its usage (Koskela, 2011). As for amelioration, this phenomenon is a process of attaching a more pleasant meaning of a lexical item (Traught, 2017).

Another common linguistic alteration occurs in terms of meaning called semantic change, also known as shift in denotation (Banks, 2004). Denotation modifies existing expressions by offering a different usage and/or meanings. When the semantic shift is negative, it is called pejoration as seen in the sentence, “Don’t be salty! It’s just a game.” The traditional meaning of this adjective means something has too much salt in it. *Salty* is now synonymous to “bitter” or “angry” (Beukus, 2018). Used as early as the 1920s to describe individuals with rough personalities, it became part of the so-called “millennials speak”, “Globish”, “Netspeak” or “Netlish” (Bertacco, 2016; Crystal, 2006) only during the past few years. Consider another word that has become polysemous—*thirsty*—as used in the sentence, *I’m thirsty for some entertainment!* Originally meant parched or in need of a drink, its new sense is that of wanting something desperately, and in 2003 it was added in the Urban Dictionary to mean “graceless need for approval” (Chocano, 2017, para. 2). Its pejorative use was at its peak during the massive 2017 Diet Coke campaigns popularized by the tagline, “Be ambitious, not thirsty” (para. 6). *Salty* and *thirsty* are also related to a morphological process called conversion. The words *unlike* and *unfriend*, to cite a few more examples, have been converted as verbs.

The Internet—serving as a conduit and a major channel for other platforms, technologies, and applications—is the single most important external sociolinguistic factor that has caused a language maelstrom in the 21st century (McCrum, 2011). In fact, power institutions like technology creators have hailed netspeak-related variations as the “biggest revolution in communications since the advent of email” (Parles-vous “netspeak?”, n.d., p. 6). At the core of this language revolution is the argument that language is altered in order to be more responsive to the needs of its users, known as functional view of language change (Aitchison, 2004). To the so-called purists, however, “grammatical accuracy” is paramount and “idiosyncratic ... laws of good usage” is a matter of standard (p. 9).

From March 12, 2020 onwards, new Covid-related expressions permeated day-to-day interaction and media discourse. Noticeable were unique coinages and polysemous terms, providing some additions to both the Standard English (StE) and the local English variety. The official name of the Corona virus disease, an example of linguistic modification known as acronymism, was one of the first coinages introduced. In American English, pandemic-spurred phrases were encountered in formal and informal discourse and some examples include *herd immunity* (Caroll, 2020) and *community transmission*, a circulation of deadly diseases in a community despite lack of travel history or contact with infected people (Crisostomo, 2020; Katella, 2020). Other inventions are *asymptomatic*, *drive-thru testing*, *flattening the curb*, *incubation period*, *self-monitoring*, and *super-spreader*. These are referred to as coronacoinages and CORONASPEAK (*capitalization in the original*) (Thorn, 2020; Zimmer, 2020).

The Oxford English Dictionary (2021) observed a significant rise in the use of new Covid terms in British English at the height of the pandemic. Recorded were *face covering*, *isolation*, *stay-at-home*, *teleconsultation*, and *tracer*, among others. In Australia, such expressions as *self-isolating*, *key workers*, *Zoombombing* (hijacking of a video call), and *new normal* (Lawson, 2020) permeated the local English. Englishes in Southeast Asia also embraced new words such as *frontliner*, which was used much more frequently compared to inner circle English countries in this region (Kachru, 1985). Malaysian English created MCO, an initialism which stands for *movement control order*, the equivalent of cordon sanitaire (Shah et al., 2020). A paper on trending

Covid neologisms on Twitter listed such words as “quaranteens”, referring to the teenagers in a lockdown, and “coronnials”, babies who were born during the pandemic (Cahapay, 2020, p. 4). In East Asia, Hong Kong English absorbed several coinages including *doomscrolling*, a depressive feeling resulting from scrolling of Covid deaths and economic woes wrought by the pandemic; *covidiot*, a British slang referring to an individual who violates health regulations; and *zooming*, referring to work-from-home videoconferencing and homeschooling using Zoom (Ho, 2020). Singapore English introduced the compound word, *circuit breaker period*, a phrase akin to community quarantine or isolation (Government of Singapore, 2020). Indonesian English popularized the initialism PPKM Level 4 or Level 4 Community Restrictions, a quarantine measure (Baclig, 2021). According to Mervin Wenke, a key Google official, the Covid-19 situation “continues to bring an overwhelming amount of information” that must be processed “every day” (Malasig, 2020, para. 5).

Innovations in PhE have been reported in a number of studies (e.g., Bautista, 1997; Borlongan, 2009; Tadeo, 2012). Linguistic innovations are described as new or novel ways of usages “in a particular variety of English (whether old or new) and contextualized in the reality in which the speakers use the variety” (Borlongan, 2009, p. 4). In his study, Borlongan found the following language changes: (a) normal expansions (extension or adaptation of meaning; shift in parts of speech; preservation of items which have become lost or infrequent in other varieties), (b) coinages (e.g., analogical constructions), and (c) borrowings (e.g., from flora and fauna, food, national identity/culture, politics, life, etc.) (p. 11).

PhE has been evolving, and according to Bautista (2000), the local English variety had already been standardized. Borlongan (2009), echoes Bautista, saying that “having a wide range in its use, and penetrating different levels of Filipino society, English was already functionally-native to the Philippines” (p. 2). Almost a decade later, Borlongan (2016) went further to argue that PhE had “already been homogenized to a point that (initial) codification is now possible through dictionaries and reference grammars” (p. 7). Therefore, “it can be said that Philippine English is at the dawn of endonormative stabilization—phase 4 in Schneider’s (2003, 2007) dynamic model of the evolution of postcolonial Englishes (p. 7). This paper aims to gather impressions regarding the types of linguistic innovations in PhE, their origins, functions, and peak in terms of usage. Results could highlight the continuing evolution of the local English, which shows a trajectory from nativization to endonormative stabilization (Borlongan (2009, 2016, and 2023). Additionally, the study looks at the images and social values projected by some of the neologisms based on the critical discourse analysis dimensions of Fairclough (1995, 2012) to highlight the sociocultural elements associated with the modifications.

Research Questions

This paper is interested in uncovering some of the PhE coinages arising from the Covid-19 health crisis from March 2020 to October 2022. The specific research questions are:

1. What were some of the linguistic innovations in PhE during the Covid-19 period?
2. What are their origins, functions, and frequency of usage?
3. What are the innovations’ implications to the development of PhE?
4. What images and/or values are depicted by the alterations?

2. Methodology

In 1989, Romaine advanced the recommendation of the father of variationist linguistics, William Labov, regarding the need to examine the social location of the originators of language change to determine new linguistic phenomena (Schilling-Estes, 2003). Heeding both Romaine and Labov, this writer considered the social location of new PhE expressions as well as their innovators as the starting point of the study. Three stages of investigation were followed. The first phase involved culling a list of commonly used jargon in the local English register as spurred by Covid-19. The words were identified by perusing the front pages of three major newspapers (digital versions) namely, *The Philippine Daily Inquirer*, *The Philippine Star*, and *The Manila Bulletin*. Criteria for selection were the following: (a) prominence based on the frequency of uses in the News on the Web (NOW)-PH corpora, (b) novelty as indicated by the words' polysemous characteristics, and (c) uniqueness, suggesting some form of creativity or innovation. The words chosen for this study were also compared with the initial lists provided by Aguilar (2020a) and Becker (2020).

As part of the preliminary work, the expressions were searched through the NOW-PH corpora to finalize the list and provide a basis for observations. The NOW Corpus (n.d.) is a repository of 16.1 billion words of data emanating from online newspapers as well as magazines from 2010 to the present. According to its website, the corpora have grown by up to 200 million words per month, equivalent to two billion words per year. Unlike Google Trends, which provides only the list of searches made by Internet users, the NOW Corpus is “the only structured corpuse that shows ... what is actually happening in the language—virtually right up to the present time ... NOW is the most robust monitor corpus of English” (para. 2).

The third and last phase of this task was a look at the NOW-PH corpora to gather impressions regarding the peak of usage of the words and their decline in use. The origins of the inventions were then determined. The coinages were categorized according to the types of innovation and characterized based on their functions and images conjured. Implications of the innovations to the development of Philippine Standard English were explored. Finally, images, realities, and social values or worldviews depicted by certain words were presented.

3. Innovations in Philippine English as featured in this study

Selected PhE expressions, chosen for their frequency of use in the NOW-PH corpora and for being novel and unique are the following: *authorized person/s outside of residence, community pantry, covid adjustment measures program, enhanced community quarantine, frontliner/s, general community quarantine, locally stranded individual/s, lockdown, mobile palengke, modified enhanced community quarantine, permit/permission to leave premises, patients under investigation, patients under monitoring, personal protective equipment, physical distancing, returning overseas Filipinos, sanitize, social amelioration program, social distancing, and work from home (or work-from-home)*. Seven types of innovations were identified.

3.1 Compounding

As shown in Table 1, all of the PhE compound words, except for one, originated from the government agencies that include the Office of the President and the Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF), a committee led by the Department of Health (DOH) and which also includes the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), and Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) (Aquino, 2020). DSWD is tasked to handle welfare concerns and needs of the populace during a crisis while DOLE focuses

on employment/labor-related matters. DILG is responsible for the safety and protection of the people in collaboration with the armed forces.

Table 1

Origins of Covid-19 Compounding from 20 Selected Expressions

Agency	Number of Pre-selected Compounding Per Origin
DILG	2
DOH	2
DOLE	1
DSWD	1
IATF/Office of the President	3
Media	1
TOTAL	10

Ten of the listed compound words were devised and/or adapted by five agencies tasked to handle various pandemic programs and concerns while another one was introduced through the media. Meyerhoff (2003) refers to these groups as communities of practice (CofPs) which are characterized by a “shared repertoire” linguistic or otherwise, and which are engaged in “internal negotiations” (p. 397) for mutual benefit, that is, gaining the pleasure of the appointive president. The new expressions are *community pantry*, which was introduced by the media, *enhanced community quarantine* (ECQ), *general community quarantine* (GCQ), and *modified enhanced community quarantine* (MECQ) (Marquez, 2020a) courtesy of IATF. It was the government via the IATF, which was the main proponent of the lockdown and the health protocols. *Locally stranded individual/s* (LSIs) and *permit/permission to leave premises* (PLP) were coined by the DILG (Paculba, 2020). DOH was the source of *patients under investigation* (PUIs) and *patients under monitoring* (PUMs), which were later changed to “suspect”, “probable”, and “confirmed” (Gita-Carlos, 2020, para. 10). *Authorized person/s outside residence* (APOR) is traced to DILG while *COVID adjustment measures program* (CAMP), an assistance to workers who have been displaced by the pandemic, was invented by DOLE. *Social amelioration program* (SAP) was traced to DSWD since it functions to extend social services (“COVID-19 Financial Support”, 2020).

In terms of function, the neologisms can be grouped into three: measures to control the spread of the virus (e.g., enhanced community quarantine), labels for assistance programs (e.g., social amelioration program), and references to affected individuals (e.g., patients under investigation). The first category is a simplified and even euphemized version of the dreaded term *lockdown* with the adoption of new compound words (See section on Semantic Shifts). The second constellation provides distinctions among the dizzying number of assistance programs, helping beneficiaries distinguish which help is available at which agency (e.g., SAP from the welfare department and CAMP from the labor department). Law enforcers and local government units are identified with LSIs, PLP, and PDL, and DOH with PUIs and PUMs. This identification facilitated law enforcement and monitoring of affected sectors to ensure compliance with health protocols. Categorizing these creative neologisms made communication between government and the people

PHILIPPINE JOURNAL OF LINGUISTICS

efficient if not less problematic. *Community pantry* is a group in its own, a response by an individual and/or community organizations to hunger caused by the pandemic through the provisions of basic food items.

Community pantry soared in popularity from April 21, 2021 to June 2021, recording at least 742 uses. There was a single reference to the expression as of October 30, 2022. Social realities represented are government neglect, poverty, hunger, and unemployment. The term *community pantry* also depicted gender and community empowerment as well as resistance to those in power (Kusuma, 2021). *Enhanced community quarantine* soared in use from March 30 to April 13, 2020 but declined by April 27, 2020; this can be attributed to the fact that the strict stay-at-home orders were lifted days later. As such, frequency of use, as shown in NOW-PH corpora, went down. Expressions like “total lockdown”, “combat”, “fight”, “soldiers”, and “shoot violators” were associated with the new compound word, depicting images of war as well as confinement in a militaristic environment (Petty & Morales, 2020; Regencia, 2020).

Table 2

Sample Uses of New Compound Words

Coinage	Sample use
Community pantry	“THE Maginhawa community pantry ... became a blockbuster within a few days ...” (Valderama, 2021, para. 1)
Enhanced Community quarantine	“President ... Duterte has approved the proposal ... to place Metro Manila under enhanced community quarantine (ECQ)” (Aguilar, 2021, para. 1).
General community quarantine	“There’s a new buzzword in the Philippine response to the novel coronavirus: ‘general community quarantine’ or GCQ” (Ranada, 2020, para. 1)
Locally stranded individual/s	“Philippine Red Cross (PRC) Chairman and CEO Sen. Dick Gordon deployed a food truck to provide Hot Meals to 250 locally stranded individuals (LSI)” ReliefWeb, 2022, para. 1).
Permit/Permission to leave premises	“... Pasig will enforce the use of ‘Permit to Leave Premises’ (PLP) whenever residents need to go out of their homes to do essential activities ... until the enhanced community quarantine (ECQ) ends (Marquez, 2020b, para. 1).
Patient/s under investigation	“An individual is considered a [person under monitoring] PUM if he or she is asymptomatic but has travel history to areas with local transmission of coronavirus in the past 14 days ...” (Mallorca, 2020, para. 3)
Patient/s under monitoring	“... one is considered a [person under investigation] PUI if he or she presents symptoms of respiratory illnesses such as cough, colds, fever above 37.5 degrees Celsius ... (Mallorca, 2020, para. 4)
Authorized person/s outside of residence	“APOR ... means authorized persons outside of residence ...” (Gregorio, 2021, para. 3)

Coinage	Sample use
COVID adjustment measures program	“The ... DOLE ... will no longer accept online applications for the Covid-19 Adjustment Measures Program (CAMP) (Patinio, 2022, para. 1). 3
Social amelioration program	“The Social Amelioration Program grants a P5,000 to P8,000 monthly cash subsidy to low-income families for two months, depending on the area of residence” (Apostol & Go, 2020, para. 3).

3.2 Borrowing

Of the seven innovations, borrowing was the least observable morphological change from the sampled neologisms. A new coinage is the phrase *mobile palengke* (market) which was invented by local government units. A sample use reads, “To cut the number of people at Pasig Mega Market and at community markets, we launched Mobile Palengke” (Gotinga, 2020). Used interchangeably with *palengke-on-wheels*, it is an innovative blend of words to address the issue of physical/social distancing at wet markets. The term appeared in the NOW corpora 12 times beginning in March 2020 and its last mention was on October 7, 2020. In terms of social realities projected, the borrowing paints an idea of care and responsiveness in governance via the transport of goods and groceries to the villages and of continuing suffering in society.

3.3 Acronyms

Variations in the local English register encompassed lexical, semantic, and syntactic modifications, and these are acronyms and initialisms, as shown in Tables 3 and 4, respectively.

Table 3

Acronyms from the Compounding

Invented expression	Number of Words/Letters
APOR	4
CAMP	4
SAP	3

Acronyms such as APOR /eɪ-pɔr/, CAMP /kæmp/, SAP /sæp/ or /sap/, just like initialisms, were a natural result of the proliferation of compound coinages in PhE. In terms of origin, the coinages emanated first from government agencies, as stated previously, but eventually popularized by media. A sample use of CAMP reads, “[We] are eligible for ... the COVID Adjustment Measures Program (CAMP) of the Department of Labor and Employment” (PIA, 2020).

In terms of function, the acronyms were labels for departmental assistance programs and/or descriptive of certain pandemic regulations. Their use overshadowed the longer expressions for which they stood for originally, indicating that such ingenuity actually worked. Conversely, they became more popular than the complicated coinages themselves. This somehow reflects shortening, another variation which was not observed from the list of 20 words. *SAP* and *CAMP*

seemed to be a product of linguistic strategizing, almost tantamount to a marketing ploy designed to enhance the government's image amid the crisis (Beltran, 2020). This observation is consistent with Schilling-Estes (2003), who posits that language shifters engage in language innovations to reconstruct their identity. The helplessness, and to a certain extent, the dole-out mentality of many Filipinos is also projected.

APOR was used mostly in October 2020 with a total of 26 instances in NOW-PH corpora. Use of *SAP* spiked in April 2020 (more than 400 uses) while *CAMP* appeared in the corpora 26 times in November 2020, its highest recorded use. Looking at *APOR*, the initialism is associated with checkpoints and gun-toting law enforcers, based on linguistic collocation, creating an image of a police state (Caliwan, 2020) and conjures a discipline problem. The frequency of *SAP* represents the prevalence of poverty.

Initialisms. The Philippine media has the preponderance to popularize initialisms, apparently to avoid redundancy and for facility in communication (Caon, 2016). Accordingly, coinages like those that have been enumerated were replaced with initialisms in their subsequent uses in media reports. A sample use of PUIs reads, "There are, however, 11 patients under investigation (PUIs) in the country" (Patag, 2020).

Table 4

Initialisms from the Compounding

COVID-19 Initialisms	Number of Words
ECQ	3
GCQ	3
IATF	4
LSI/LSIs	3
MECQ	4
PLP	3

The quarantine words functioned as labels for the different levels of lockdown while the rest of the compound words represented the affected individuals. As previously stated, their invention facilitated identification of programs and affected sectors, making communication efficient. *LSI* saw a peak in use in July 2020 (15 tokens), *PLP* spiked from February to April 2020 with nearly 300 uses, and *PUMs* was popular between March and April 2020. Focusing on *PUMs/PUIs*, these terms further projected a military image of the government as reflected in the use of the term *investigation*. It highlights the reality of a massive pandemic task for government to undertake while also trivializing suffering.

4. Semantic and syntactic shifts

At least three more variations in PhE were observed from March 14 up to November 19, 2020, based on the 20 expressions, and these innovations are classified under semantic and syntactic shifts. These are semantic broadening, also known as expanding (words becoming more inclusive), semantic narrowing (words becoming restrictive in meaning), and pejoration (words acquiring a negative sense), whose examples are shown in Tables 5, 6, and 7, respectively.

4.1 Broadening

One instance of broadening occurred in the case of the phrase *social distancing*. First appearing in NOW-PH on March 14, 2013, it meant staying away from others “to avoid the negative stereotypes” (Gutierrez, 2017, para. 11). However, seven years later, specifically, on February 3, 2020, a new concept was acquired to mean a safe distance of at least one meter from another person (PIA, 2020; Boni, 2020). An example is the clause, “follow social distancing rules” (Business Mirror, 2020, para 4).

Table 5

Broadening of Covid Expressions

Existing Expression	Expanded Meaning
Social distancing	safe distance of one meter
Work from home	task done in one’s residence (noun modifier)
Frontliner/s	health workers and other essential workers such as security guards

References to *social distancing* skyrocketed between April and May 2020 with over 700 uses but declined to 91 tokens by November 19, 2020. A related phrase from the DOH, *physical distancing*, found its way into the local English variety on March 7, 2020. Equated with *social distancing*, the neologism also prescribed a one-meter distance between two people especially in the context of public transport (Caro, 2020; Manar, 2020). In terms of function, the two expressions gave the government some sense of control in abating the spread of the virus. A simple comparison shows preference for *social distancing* more than *physical distancing*, with 3,727 references for the former in contrast to 1,491 for the latter during the surge period. *Social distancing* spiked in use from April and May 2020 (average of 750 uses) but declined in the following months.

Similarly, the phrase *work from home*, besides being classified as a new compound, underwent further modification in terms of morphology (e.g., initialism: *WFH*), semantics (e.g., broadening), and syntax. Consisting of the noun/verb *work* and the prepositional phrase *from home*, it originally meant having a home-based job or a freelance work (Cheung, 2011). By April 12, 2020, it became polysemous, acquiring two new uses. Following a semantic shift, the word became a reference to a scheme wherein corporate employees perform regular tasks at home (Visco, 2020). This new sense is seen in this clause: *The work from home (WFH) arrangement that companies were forced to adopt*. In terms of grammar, the phrase was converted as a modifier as seen in the phrases, *work from home arrangements* and *WFH complications*, the latter also being an example of initialism. Both uses reached a spike between March and May 2020 and went down to mere 22 tokens by November 19, 2020. The word entails a widening of gap between the middle class/rich and the poor as seen in the expression, *(WFH) yet another gap widener ... during and in the aftermath of the ... pandemic crisis?* (Habito, 2020). As Habito suggests, the WFH system is anti-poor and favors only the middle class and the rich. For instance, the educated or those with white-collar jobs are able to earn a living remotely (e.g., teachers, office workers) whereas peasants, like street vendors, have to peddle their wares outside the confines of their homes, which means interaction with the buying public; thus, *WFH* does not apply.

The term *frontliner/s* acquired a new sense in PhE. Initially referring to anyone in the forefront (e.g., military personnel and medical workers), the term expanded beginning 2020 to

include all those engaged in critical services such as security, delivery, and food industries. Sources of the word have been the government, mostly IATF/Malacanang and media reports (BMPlus, 2020). An example reads, “bakers are part of the frontliner work force” (Cahiles-Magkilat, 2020). Images created by the word include war and rescue missions due to the associated words like *fight* and *rescue people*. It entails enormous sacrifices and heroism among workers, and neglect on the part of the government (Dino, 2020; Rappler, 2020). Sociocultural values include the collective spirit of *bayanihan* (community spirit). The OED (2020), reporting the use of *frontliner* at 49.59 % per million tokens in PhE and 20.85 % per million tokens in Malaysian English, declared the word as “chiefly Southeast Asian” (para. 12), reflecting not only the nativization of English in the Philippines (Bautista, 2000; Borlongan, 2009) but also the overwhelming acceptance of English in the archipelagic nation. In effect, OED recognized the term as part of the PhE lexicon.

Of all the 20 expressions, the most popular at the height of the pandemic was *social distancing*, recording more than 3,000 uses. This indicates not only the seriousness of the pandemic but the strict implementation of health protocols to curb the spread of the virus.

4.2 Narrowing

Narrowing occurred in the term *personal protective equipment* (PPE), which used to have a broader sense. From “equipment worn to minimize exposure to a variety of hazards” such as “gloves, foot and eye protection, protective hearing devices ... hard hats, respirators, and full body suits” (OSHA, 2004, p. 4), the term got “restricted to healthcare and emergency professionals” (Flood, 2020, para. 6; Gov.ph, 2020). A sample use reads, “The Paranaque City government received 500 sets of personal protective equipment (PPE) for use by its medical frontliners in the fight against COVID-19” (Fernando, 2021, para. 1).

Table 6

Words that Underwent Semantic Narrowing

Existing Expression	Narrowed Meaning
Personal protective equipment	Gear for protection for health workers
SAP	A form of economic assistance to affected workers due to Covid
Sanitize	Disinfecting one’s hands

The phrase, “the need for a continuous supply of personal protective equipment (PPEs) for the healthcare workers” (ABS-CBN, 2020) illustrates the change, making PPE a gear for pandemic hospital staff. *Sanitize* also narrowed in meaning. Denotatively, it means to clean or disinfect, and connotatively, to clean up a bad image or erase something (De Guzman, 2014), as shown in these examples: (a) “sanitize the sins of the Marcoses” (Lagman, 2022, para 7) and (b) “to sanitize the figures on the project” (Banal, 2013). The sense of the word was eventually reduced to the use of alcohol or other sanitizing agents, the narrowest being the disinfecting of one’s hands as seen in the clause, “we must either sanitize with alcohol or soap” (Alviar, 2020). Its use soared between March and June 2020 at a minimal average of 20 mentions. Lastly, *SAP*, a product of compounding and acronymism, was also modified. Originally a form of economic assistance to the ageing sector, persons with disabilities, and needy students and a fund for population control, it narrowed to mean assistance to families affected by Covid-19 (Boliver & Paunan, 2019). A sample use reads, “the government’s social amelioration program (SAP) for low-income families was not ‘perfect’”

(Aguilar, 2020b). Except for *SAP*, the words being analyzed here were not invented locally but have been existing in StE. Both *personal protective equipment* and *sanitize* conjure fear due to infection and death resulting from the virus as well as a sense of protection. *SAP* depicts poverty and dependence of a needy populace on the government.

4.3 Pejoration

Returning overseas Filipino, which is also categorized under compounding and initialism (i.e., *ROF*), became pejorative. From 2013 to 2019, the phrase had positive semantic implications being collocated mostly with the words *tourists* and *purchase of real estate properties*. Known as *balikbayan* in Filipino, the word has also been connected with prosperity. However, based on its uses from April 3 to September 7, 2020, it pejorated to mean displaced and stranded Filipino workers, according to Gonzales’s (2020) news report, and even Covid-positive overseas Filipino workers. Its use spiked between July and August 2020 (less than 50 instances).

Table 7

Expressions that Pejorated

Existing Expression	Narrowed Meaning
Returning overseas Filipinos	Displaced or stranded OFWs
Lockdown	Scary, extreme quarantine

Certain words broadened and pejorated as in the case of *lockdown*. First used in 1973 to confine inmates, the term was given a new sense, which entails restricting residents of a locale to prevent the spread of a disease, reflecting expansion (Merriam-Webster, 2020). However, with the negative reports associated with the Wuhan, China lockdown, the term acquired a negative connotation as it became associated with the expression “the world’s harshest” (Kyodo News, 2020, para. 3). In PhE, the phrases, “unprecedented lockdown” and “lockdown bore a lot mentally and psychologically” (Business Standard, 2020, para. 8-9), “Wuhan-style lockdown” (Hernandes, 2020, para. 8), and “total lockdown” (Esguerra, 2020, para. 1) were encountered. Then President Rodrigo Duterte even abhorred the word, saying “Ayaw natin diyan” (We don’t like that), and opted for the quarantine words such as *GCQ* and *ECQ*. Use of *lockdown* spiked between February and March 2020. Image projected is also a militarist regime, and realities represented are overwhelming fear, worry, and anxiety on both the government and the people.

5. Discussion

In this paper, 20 Covid-19 jargons—used because of the corona virus particularly at the height of the pandemic—were sampled for analysis. Their origins, functions, peak, and decline of usage were investigated. Also explored were the images and/or realities conjured by the new expressions. Morphological processes that have been observed are new coinages or compounding (a combination of pre-existing English lexical items), borrowing, acronyms, and initialisms. Semantic shifts include broadening, narrowing, and pejoration. The most prominent innovation in PhE is in the aspect of morphology such as combinations of existing English words, an innovation that triggered more linguistic modifications, namely, initialisms and acronyms. Since data used in this study were limited, results need further validation.

No two-word acronyms were observed, such as FM for face mask and SD for social distancing; rather, new coinages for at least three words such as *ECQ* and *SAP* were observed. Both acronyms and initialisms were formal in nature, understandably because they represent government programs and entities. Borrowing was the least common among the variations. Since this study is exploratory, it is possible that other coinages were simply missed. Certain terms introduced into the StE underwent semantic shifts: broadening, narrowing, and pejoration. A minor shift occurred in syntax such as in *work from home/WFH*.

Originators of new PhE innovations were CofPs (Meyerhoff, 2003) such as the departments of health, welfare, trade and industry, national defense (military), and the Office of the President/IATF. Wenger (1998, as cited in Meyerhoff, 2003) characterizes cofPs as having “the rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation ... specific tools, representations, and other artefacts, jargon and shortcuts to communication, [and] a shared discourse that reflects a certain perspective on the world”, among others (p. 399). The idea of “propagation” of linguistic jargon is crucial here since it indicates the proactive role of the innovators. Further, Wenger argues that CofP members formulate new vocabulary, utilizing them as tools and representations of what they do and who they are. In other words, speakers or agencies behind the novel expressions feel that language must be modified to serve their own purposes. Language, then, becomes a means to represent them and/or carry out their functions. The local English was modified to serve the communication needs of these CofPs and the public. Frequency of usage of the new expressions was at their peak at the initial onslaught of Covid-19, spanning between two to three months. Language variations for the past two years were instigated by those holding the reins of power (e.g., government agencies), then perpetuated by mass media.

In terms of realities and social values or worldviews, the expansion process, say, of *frontliner/s* reflects the collective characteristic of the Filipino culture such as of *pakikisama* (getting along with others) and *bayanihan* (working together) which promote community spirit and inclusivity. The images of war and militaristic/authoritarian governance were depicted, as well as hunger and poverty.

6. Contributions of innovations to Philippine English

The “linguistic expansion[s]” in the case of Philippine English represent the dynamic nature of the English language, particularly of the local variety, and the capacity of language users to harness it to meet communication needs (Barratt, 2014, pp. 99, 101). Along these lines, one significant contribution of this study is on PhE initialisms and acronyms. The new initialisms, for instance, have extended the original descriptions of these coinages as “new scientific discoveries, trade-names, names of organizations, new foundations or offices” (Marchand, 1969, as cited in Lundell, 2012, Abstract). They are no longer just confined in technical or scientific communications (Izura & Playfoot, 2012), further showing self-confidence in the English usage and language standards in the country. Usually representing of at least three existing terms, PhE Covid acronyms and initialisms are formal. They resemble simple phrases that are easy to recall such as *sap* and *camp* for the acronyms *SAP* and *CAMP*, respectively. The model for initialisms as found in this study is $w1+w2+w3$ = *new initialism* (e.g., $w1$ (*general*) $w2$ (*community*) $w3$ (*quarantine*)), while the models for acronyms are *consonant+vowel +consonant* (e.g., *SAP*); *C+V+C+C* (e.g., *CAMP*); and *V+C+V+C* (e.g., *APOR*). Based on the foregoing, it is safe to say that the linguistic modifications led to the expansion of PhE lexicon and enrichment of its grammar, as well as language shifts that have occurred in the Southern Hemisphere Englishes in the past, namely Australian English, New Zealand English, and South African English (Gramley & Patzold, 2002).

The coinages *enhanced community quarantine*, *general community quarantine*, *modified enhanced community quarantine*, *locally stranded individual/s*, *permit/permission to leave premises*, *authorized person/s outside residence*, *COVID adjustment measures program*, *social amelioration program*, and *returning overseas Filipinos* are locally invented. They are reflective of the continuing nativization and the movement toward phase 4 in Schneider's (2003) Dynamic Model of the Evolution of New Englishes of English in the Philippines. PhE also gave new or different senses to other existing English lexical items such as *frontliner/s*, *personal protective equipment*, and *sanitize*. As Borlongan (2016) previously noted, local English innovations are not "'idiosyncratic' compared to other Englishes" (p. 6), and this is true in the case of the new expressions. This development shows, in the words of Germino Abad, that indeed "English is ours, [and] we have colonized it" (Schneider, 2003, p. 233). And with the automatic, overwhelming acceptance of the language and the recent modifications introduced indicate a growing affinity to English. To amplify Abad, Filipinos not only own English; they have enhanced it and continued to develop it. This enhancement reflects a growing "linguistic self-confidence" (Schneider, 2003, p. 249) in addition to the many events that culminated in "creating our own [language] standards" (p. 250). Perhaps, Philippine English is not just at the "dawn of endonormative stabilization" (Borlongan, 2016, p. 7); it is possible that it has been experiencing endonormative stabilization.

7. Conclusion

This study attempted to gather impressions regarding the types of innovations in PhE during the Covid-19 health crisis, looked at their origins, functions, their implications on PhE, and images they conjured. There were seven types of linguistic innovations in PhE morphology, semantics, and syntax. Innovations were inevitable responses to communication needs wrought by the health emergency. It is safe to say that the linguistic modifications led to the expansion of PhE lexicon and enrichment of its grammar. Again, based on the impressions gathered from the linguistic innovations as spurred by the pandemic, PhE appears to be experiencing endonormative stabilization.

Future studies may consider focusing on compounding, initialisms, and acronyms to highlight contributions from other communities of speakers. Along these lines, a deeper investigation on borrowing (e.g., the blending of Filipino words or a combination of Tagalog and loaned expressions) can be a welcome addition to PhE.

References

- ABS-CBN. (2020, May 29). *ABS-CBN partners with WeCARE to bolster PPE drive for medical frontliners*. <https://www.abs-cbn.com/newsroom/news-releases/2020/5/29/abs-cbn-wecare-pantawid-pagibig-ppes-frontliner?lang=en>
- Aguilar, J. (2020a, July 10). *Coronavirus 101: Acronyms used in PH*. The Manila Times. <https://www.manilatimes.net/2020/07/10/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/coronavirus-101-acronyms-used-in-ph/739911/>
- Aguilar, K. (2020b, July 27). *Duterte admits social amelioration program 'not perfect'*. Inquirer.net. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1312739/duterte-admits-social-amelioration-program-not-perfect>