

The Pragmatics of *Okay* in English Language Teaching by Phone

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Abstract

This paper aims to explore the pragmatics of discourse *okay* in distance learning. English lessons by telephone of six Filipino English teachers, three male and three female, were transcribed and analyzed. The overall results are consistent with Borlongan's (2008) paper, indicating that the main function of *okay* is to give a simple acknowledgment, as it occurred a little over 60% of *okay* in the corpus. It is therefore perhaps safe to say that in line with Borlongan's claim, Filipino speakers of English tend to use *okay* as a form of acknowledgment. There is a significant difference between the second most frequent function, the third turn receipt marker, and the most frequent function, as the former occurred only a little over 25% in the data. Third turn receipt markers were found to be followed by requests for information (25%), signifying that instructors gave follow up questions and elicited more information from the students. Significant transitions was found to be the least frequent function, possibly because the structure of the 30-minute lesson is only divided into three and some teachers did not follow this guide. Significant transitions were mainly followed by discourse markers (26%), perhaps to mark a smooth shift from one topic to another. The instructor's sex was clearly not a factor in the use of *okay* in this study, contradicting Swacker's (1975, in Schlee, 2008) claim and consistent with Schlee's (2008) study.

Keywords: Pragmatics, English distance learning,

Introduction

Linguists have seen how the semantics and pragmatics of English have evolved. This primarily stems from the use of certain words and expressions by speakers of a variety of English. Since then, distinct uses of words and expressions have been attributed not only to the speakers/users' discourse community, but also to the

concentric circle (B. Kachru, 1985, in Y. Kachru, 1995) where they belong.

It was almost three decades ago when scholars started paying attention to the functions of *okay*. This linguistic structure is primarily categorized as a structural marker, expressing discourse and conversational structure by signaling transitions from one information phase to another (Schleef, 2008).

Okay seems to be one of the most frequently explored structural markers. It is analyzed both in British and American English, in relation to conversation closings (Schegloff and Sacks 1973; Button 1987, 1990, in Schleef, 2008), in University lectures (Levin and Gray 1983), and in face-to-face and computer mediated decision-making (Condon 1986), just to name a few.

Okay performs functions at many levels of discourse. It can either signify approval, acceptance, and confirmation by the speaker (Condon, 1986) at the ideational level. In this function it is frequently categorized as a third turn receipt by a current speaker (Beach 1993, in Condon, 2001). *Okay* and *alright* are also frequently discussed due to their function as backchannel signals (Heisler 1996, in Schleef, 2008).

In 2001, Condon revisited the functions of discourse *okay* in face-to-face and computer-mediated decision-making. The prediction was that for face-to-face interactions, the most frequent function that will follow *okay* is *orientation*; however, *elaborates-repeats* turned out to be the most frequent one. The second most frequent function is *orientations* and *discourse markers*. She also concluded that in computer-mediated interactions, the mean utterance length for *orientations*, *suggestions*, and *agreements* are lesser compared to *explicit management strategies*.

In a more recent study, Schleef (2008) examined whether there is a correlational link between structural markers such as *okay*, *alright*, *right*, and *now* and the academic division, age, and sex of the American University lecturer. After analyzing 24 lectures from both the Humanities and Natural Sciences, the researchers argue that it is not gender that plays a major role in the variations in the use of structural markers in the academic setting; but rather, it is differences in preferred teaching styles and content in lectures across different academic divisions. Structural markers *alright* and *okay* were used more in Natural Sciences than in Humanities lectures. This was attributed to the fact that they belong to the hard and soft disciplines

respectively. Moreover, the activities performed in the lectures were also considered. Natural Sciences lectures used the blackboard frequently and information was delivered with variation--on boards, handouts, overheads; thus causing more pauses and more transitions. Age played a minor role, as younger lecturers used *okay* and *alright* more often, although no significant differences were found in the study.

In the Philippine context, it was Borlongan (2008) who paid attention to the use of *okay* in Philippine English (PE). Adapting Condon's (2001) framework, he looked at the most frequent function of *okay* in the corpus of both spoken and written texts. Results revealed that more than 85% of *okay* in ICE-PHI was used as a marker of acknowledgment. The second most frequent function of *okay* is when it is used as a significant transition in the discourse, accounting for only a little over five percent of the total occurrences of *okay*. Both functions, agreement with suggestion and third turn receipt marker, only occurred in spoken texts.

The findings of Condon (2001) support the assumption that *okay* can be associated with expected transitions in decision-making. We have to recognize, however, that functions of utterances that succeed *okay* may depend on the interaction. It is therefore an objective of the present paper to explore the pragmatics of discourse *okay* in distance learning. It also seeks to extend the findings of Borlongan (2008) and identify what changes the context of academic discourse will bring to the results. Specifically, the research aims at providing answers to the following questions:

1. What function of *okay* will occur the most in the corpus?
2. Will gender be a factor in the use of *okay*? If yes, which gender group will use *okay* in the discourse more often and what function will be used the most?
3. What is the most common function of the utterance that follows *okay*?

Given that face-to-face (FtF) interaction is impossible for the participants in this study, miscommunication may most likely occur because repair is either impossible or delayed. Moreover, communicative language teaching is used in this setting; students are encouraged to speak, lessening teacher talk time. Therefore,

acknowledgment will perhaps occur the most, similar to Borlongan's (2008) findings.

One reason why gender may be a factor in this study is because men tend to use more structural markers because they speak more and control the conversation (Swacker, 1975, in Schleef, 2008); whereas women focus more into facilitating conversation (Coates, 1993). The question is whether this extends to distance learning discourse.

Significant transitions will most likely be followed by discourse markers (so, well, etc.) due to the fact that the latter marks transition points in the conversation. Third-turn receipt will perhaps be succeeded by an elaboration or repetition given that in a typical lesson, teachers tend to expound on or repeat the answers of their students. The final hypothesis is based on Borlongan's (2008) assumption that Filipino speakers of English are inclined to use *okay* as a form of acknowledgment.

The present study hopes to contribute both theoretically and pedagogically. Theoretically, the paper intends to flesh out the functions of *okay* in Philippine English, specifically in distance English language teaching. In addition, it also hopes to fill in the gap in the analysis of *okay* in PE that has focused solely on the functions of the said focal word and not on the functions of utterances that succeed them.

From a practical point of view, the paper suggests implications of the findings to English language teaching and how the functions that will be presented be beneficial to English language learning.

Methodology

This case study revolves around the analysis and description of discourse *okay* in distance learning. The data for this research are drawn from transcribed lectures of Filipino English teachers from a company that specializes in providing English lessons by telephone. Lessons of six teachers – three male and three female – were recorded then transcribed by the researcher herself. The teachers' ages range from 24-36 years old. Age, however, is not a variable that was considered in the study.

Given that classes are done by phone, participants do not see each other, for web cameras are not utilized. Students can schedule

30, 45, 60, or 90-minute lessons; but for the purposes of this study, only 30 minute-lessons were chosen. The ideal structure is: (a) 5 minutes for warm-up (i.e. discussion of the student's week/end, the weather); (b) 20-22 minutes for the lesson proper, and; (c) 3-5 minutes for the summary, giving of feedback, and explanation of the homework. The company adheres to communicative language teaching; instructors are advised to lessen teacher talk time and let students improve their fluency. Accuracy is also targeted, especially if the learner requests that he be corrected. During students' diagnostic or first lesson, their correction preferences are noted whether they want to be corrected after the mistake, after the thought, or right before the lesson ends. Regardless of what they choose, teachers also send an e-mail or a lesson report which includes the highlights of the lesson, the students' weaknesses and grammar and pronunciation notes. Clients of the company are adult professionals from European corporations/companies, namely, France, Italy, Germany, Austria, Russia, and Spain.

Only lessons that completed or exceeded the full 30 minutes were transcribed. Encoding was stopped at the 30th minute for those classes that exceeded the ideal duration. In analyzing the functions of *okay* and the utterance that follows it, utterances were divided into utterance units, defined by Condon (2001) as "single clauses with all complements and adjuncts, including sentential complements and subordinate clauses" (p.501) Discourse markers and other interjections such as *mhmm* and *anyway* were treated as separate utterances.

The analytical framework of the present study was drawn from Condon's (2001) revisit of the function of *okay* in discourse. The present study modified the functions of utterances that follow *okay* which Borlongan (2008) and Condon (2001) used in his paper. Initially, the functions are *agreement with suggestion*, *disagreement with suggestion*, *complies with request*, *request for action*, *discourse markers*, *elaborates/repeats*, and *acknowledgement only*. However, other types of functions that have emerged from the data have been identified. These are: *correction* and *praise/greeting*, and *explicit management*.

On the functions of okay:

1. Significant transitions in the discourse - signals a significant transition across "[... significant structural]

boundary as a default or expected one" (Condon, 2001, p.496):

(1) –S: Sorry *** my colleagues are noisy I had to shut the door.

–T: I understand. Okay (1) so welcome back, as I mentioned earlier this is our second lesson together...

2. Third turn receipt marker – indicates adequacy of a response to an interview question and serves as a preparation for the next question" (Beach, 1995, in Condon, 2001)

(2) - T: So I think our teaching point here is about uh the past, you know the simple past tense, ok?

- S: Yes.

- T: So ok, uhm can you tell me about ah (3) a job interview that you had in the past?

3. Acknowledgement – signals the hearer's acknowledgement of previous utterances and to repetitions or completions of a partner's previous utterance.

(3) – T: The, I need to hear that sound. The.

–S: The.

–T: Okay.

On the functions of utterances that follow okay:

1. Acknowledges Only: Implies that *okay* was used to simply acknowledge what was previously stated by the student (Borlongan, 2008). Given this function, it may encourage the co-interlocutor to continue what s/he is saying, as in (4):

(4) –S: Cuba is very beautiful, the weather was perfect and the hotel that we booked was nice too.

– T: Mhmm. **Okay.**

–S: People were very nice

–T: **Okay.**

2. Correction: Utterances that explicitly state that what students have said are incorrect or those that contain the correct answer. This function was not considered in Borlongan (2008) and Condon's (2001) research simply because of the nature of the conversations that they analyzed.

(5) –S: tree

–T: Okay. It's not tree. I need to hear th TH sound because if you simply say tree, that would be in the forest...

3. Complies with Request: Utterances that are produced because students asked them to, as in (6):

(6) –T: Different with a T at the end.

–S: Differend?

–T: No no. Different.

–S: Sorry I didn't catch, can you spell for me?

–T: **Okay**. D-I-F-F-R-E-. Sorry D-I-F-F-E-R-E-N-T.

4. Discourse Markers: Forms like *well*, *so*, *now*, *let's see*, and *alright* that transition from one information phase to another and "could not be interpreted as functioning in other ways" as well (Condon, 2001, p. 503). For instance, the utterance could not be seen as a correction, or an elaboration/repetition.

(7) –T: We So that's it for today.

–S: Okay ***.

–T: **Okay** so our next lesson will be next Tuesday.

5. Elaborates/Repeats: Utterances that explicate either explicate a rule, define word, or repeat something that was previously said by the student:

(8) –S: They suggested him to go hiking.

–T: **Okay**, yes, suggested.

6. Explicit management: A means by which teachers guide students to what the have to do, like giving instructions, and those that are related to managing time:

(9) –T: **Okay**. Uh I think that's the only time we have for small talk.

7. Praise/Greeting: Shows that teachers commend or admire their students for something they had said or done. It also expresses a polite word or phrase as a sign of welcome or recognition. Just like the function correction, this was also not examined in Condon's (2001) research.

(10) –T: **Okay**, that's it for now enjoy your Monday.

8. Request for Action: Utterances that triggers students to do something:

(11) –T: Uhum very good **okay**. So please use spearhead in your own sentence.

9. Request for Information: Queries that are directed to students and that should be answered based on what they have experienced or what they know.

(12) – T: So **okay**, uhm can you tell me about ah (3) a job interview that you had in the past?

10. Request for Validation: Questions that are directed to students as well, to check or prove the accuracy of what teachers know or are thinking about.

(13) – T: Oh **okay**, so it's similar?

Results

This section presents the findings of the study relating to the functions of *okay* in language teaching by phone. Table 1 shows data on the most evident function of *okay*.

Table 1

Functions of Okay in English Language Teaching by Phone

Function of OKAY	Frequency	Percentage
Significant Transitions	43	11.35%
Third turn Receipt	101	26.65%
Acknowledgment	235	62.01%
TOTAL	380	100%

As shown above, the acknowledgment function is obviously the most frequent function of *okay* in English language teaching, occurring 235 times out of almost 400 occurrences of the focal word in the data. Extract (15) is an example:

(14) –T: Is everything ok now?

–S: Yes yes *** I'm sorry it's an emergency, my boss called me-

–T: **Okay-**

-S: And he asked me if I could bring the contracts

-T: Uhuh.

This accounted for a little over 60% of *okay* in the corpus, confirming Borlongan's (2008) claim that Filipino speakers of English have a strong propensity to use *okay* as a marker of simple acknowledgment.

The second most frequent function is when it is used as a third turn receipt marker, as in (15):

(15): -T: Mmm well are you trying to compare two things?

-S: Uhm (2) yes.

-T: **Okay** so instead of much, what word should you use to compare? Chance? Your chance and let's say my chance?

There is, however, a considerable difference between this function and the most frequent function; the former occurred only a little over 25% in the data. This seems to be inconsistent with Borlongan's (2008) findings because after the acknowledgment function, significant transition in the discourse was presented to be the most frequent function of *okay*. He, however, investigated *okay* in telephone conversations in ICE-PHI, which is quite a broad category.

The least occurring function in the corpus is significant transitions in the discourse, as it occurred only 43 times out of the total occurrences. That accounts for only a little over 10% of the functions in the data. (16) exemplifies this function:

(16) -S: Because the client just arrived

-T: Mhm I see.

-S: So I'm really sorry for the late.

-T: I understand. **Okay** (1) so welcome back, as I mentioned earlier this is our second lesson together...

This study also explored whether the instructor's sex will be a factor in the use of *okay*. Table 2 indicates that although female teachers used *okay* more frequently than their counterparts, they both used *okay* at about the same extent. This does not confirm claims in literature that men would inevitably use more structural markers (Swacker, 1975, in Schleef, 2008) due to their competitiveness and

dominance during discussions (Coates, 1993). One possible reason is that both men and women teachers have the same role, which is to facilitate the lesson, elicit responses, and explain unclear points. Moreover, there is no need for them to be aggressive in this regard. This goes to show that, perhaps, gender differences may be a significant variable if we take into account the kind of talk (e.g. teacher vs. student talk), the learning environment (face-to-face vs. computer-mediated interaction), and the activity (e.g. graded discussion vs. regular classroom discussion) of both teachers and students.

Out of the 380 occurrences of *okay*, 3 of them were coded as “*mmkay*”, as in (17) and (18), produced by a male and female teacher respectively:

(17) - S: Yes I know what means safety.

- T: **Mmkay** so a safe neighborhood, a quiet neighborhood.

Alright?

(18) -S: Okay. Movies or films can be categorized by joon-re-

-T: Genre.

- S: Genre

- T: Mhmm.

- S: Number one, action films.

- T: Mmkay.

Table 2

Teachers' Sex and Use of Okay

Function of OKAY	Frequency	Percentage
Male	161	42.22%
Female	219	57.78%
TOTAL	380	100%

Two of these occurrences were from a male teacher and the other one from a female instructor. This goes to show that speakers also use varied forms of the token word.

Let us now look at the most common function of the utterance that follows *okay*. We shall discuss functions of utterances that follow a significant transaction in the discourse, a third turn receipt marker, and an acknowledgment by referring to Tables 3, 4, and 5 respectively.

As can be seen in Table 3, significant transitions in language teaching done over the phone are mostly followed by discourse markers. This is somehow expected especially because transitions are more effective when discourse markers are used. Instructors that did not use transitions-discourse marker pair did not follow the standard lesson format that is endorsed by the company. These can be described as conversational lessons, meaning they started with the warm-up, and then used the topic at hand as the objective of the lesson (i.e. the teacher asks the student about her vacation for the warm-up, but then proceeds to talking about the said topic for the whole lesson).

On the other hand, there are some lessons that adhere to the lesson format, transitioning from small talk to the lesson proper, as in (19):

- (19) -T: Okay so. What I just did is I just put it under uhm. Sorry the *site* the correction for "each purchasing manager of each countries are coming" I put it there (1.5) with the notes. Okay?
- S: Uhuh
- T: So they are coming one after the other or they're coming one after another.
- S: I understand.
- T: Good. **Okay** anyway so today *** we are going to continue with the document uhm actually the article on the 28 finalists compete for the new 7 new wonders of nature.

In the extract above, the instructor was correcting a mistake made by the learner after talking about her meetings. After the student verifies her understanding of the correction given, the teacher goes on to the lesson proper.

Table 3

Functions of an Utterance that follows a Significant Transition in the Discourse

Function	Percentage
Correction	11.63%
Discourse Marker	25.58%
Elaborates/ Repeats	18.6%
Explicit Management	18.6%
Praise/ Greeting	4.65%
Request for Action	11.63%
Requests Information	9.3%

An interesting function of *okay* in giving English lessons by phone is when it is used as a third turn receipt marker. A 30-minute discussion can be short due to explanations, narratives, and so on. Therefore, teachers have to control students once they begin to talk about unrelated topics. This is where the third-turn receipt marker *okay* comes in. Table 4 reveals what kind of utterance commonly succeeds the said function.

Since third turn receipt markers allow for a smooth end of a topic to the next, *requests information* was found to be the most common function that follows them. To illustrate this clearly, let us look at extract (20):

(20) -T: Mhmm so there's movement detection, When there's movement it turns on, is that?

- S: Yes

- T: Okay, does it works as well? The motion sensor? It's called a motion sensor.

Evidently, once the student affirmed that what they were talking about was movement detection, the teacher said *okay* and immediately followed this up with a different but related question

about the condition of the motion sensors. In extract (21), we can see that there are more turns for each interlocutor:

- (21) - T: (laughs) what what happened to you Rosanna?
 - S: Well from what I remember, we had a lesson 2 months ago?
 - T: Yes that's right, mhmm.
 - S: But then after that I had many many things to do in the office.
 - T: Mhmm.
 - S: And then my husband and I we finally had the chance to travel after our wedding
 - T: Okay.
 - S: And now we are back (.) unfortunately
 - T: Mhmm okay.
 - S: We went in Cuba for 1 month and there the sun is out, very very nice.
 - T: I see **okay**. So did you did you say that you just uh (1) you just got back from your honeymoon?

Table 4

Functions of an Utterance that follows a Third Turn Receipt Marker

Function	Percentage
Correction	11.88%
Discourse Marker	14.85%
Elaborates/ Repeats	16.83%
Explicit Management	9.9%
Praise/ Greeting	8.91%
Request for Action	1.98%
Requests Information	24.75%
Requests Validation	10.89%

After a series of turn takings, and the teacher acknowledging what the student is saying, the former used the third turn receipt marker *okay* to perhaps stop the student from continuing her narrative and to elicit the word *honeymoon*.

Finally, we will focus on the most frequent function of *okay*, which is acknowledgment. Table 5 reveals that teachers use *okay* to simply acknowledge that they understood what the learners were talking about.

This, as mentioned earlier, is imperative in distance learning by phone because it adds up to the teachers' attentiveness and commitment to what students are saying, as in (22):

- (22): -T: So okay, uhm can you tell me about ah (3) a job interview that you had in the past?
 -S: Okay let me remember (2) yes, for my first job at *** I was interviewed by a man
 -T: Mhmm
 -S: From the HR department
 -T: **Okay.**
 -S: He was very nice but I was very much nerv- nervous.
 -T: Mhmm.
 -S: He asked me about school and if I have worked for another company.
 -T: Mhmm.
 -S: I told him that I studied uh (2) pharmacy?
 -T: **Okay.**

Table 5
Functions of an Utterance that Follows an Acknowledgment

Function	Percentage
Acknowledges Only	51.06%
Correction	3.83%
Complies with Request	0.43%
Discourse Marker	5.11%
Elaborates/ Repeats	16.6%
Explicit Management	0.43%
Praise/ Greeting	8.51%
Request for Action	2.98%
Requests Information	7.23%
Requests Validation	3.83%

In the extract above, we can notice how *okay* and *mhmm* are used interchangeably to acknowledge understanding of what the student is narrating about a past job interview. This kind of acknowledgment seems to be prevalent in English language teaching by phone as well.

If we exclude acknowledges only, the second most frequent function would be *elaborates/repeats*. This is the most frequent function that follows *okay* and *so* in decision-making (Condon, 2001). Here is an example of how the acknowledgment-elaborates/repeats pair is used:

- (23) -S: Can you tell me how we make bubble baths?
 - T: (laughs) **Okay**, well usually you can have it if you have a tub, a bathtub or if you have a Jacuzzi....
- (24) -S: Okay so we can't say travels, how do we say then?
 -T: **Okay**, so in this case if you want to talk about more than 1, so instead of travels, you can say trips. Ok?

Examples (25) and (26) provide us with ways in which instructors acknowledge the students' question before explaining a certain term and elaborating on a specific rule. The next two examples show how instructors acknowledged then repeated what the learners had just said:

(25) - T: Okay. Uhm you said, "you sent me an mail"

- S: So I must to say, "an e-mail"

-T: **Okay** (.) an e-mail or A mail. A mail.

(26) - S: The New 7 Wonders Foundation spearheads the New 7 Wonders of Nature campaign. (5) Uhm to lead.

- T: Okay **A-repeats** to lead. Very good. So. Can you please use spearhead in your own sentence.

In these two extracts, teachers seem to have acknowledged that the student produced a grammatically correct utterance or selected an accurate answer by saying *okay*. This moreover, is succeeded by a repetition, perhaps to emphasize and/or make the students remember the construction or the answer.

Table 6

Functions of Utterances that Follow okay per Gender

Function	Significant Transitions	Third turn receipt	Acknowledgment	
Males	Discourse Markers - 40%	Elaborates/ Repeats - 19.51%	Acknowledges Only - 63.46%	Elaborates/ Repeats - 12.5%
Females	Elaborates/ Repeats - 21.43%	Requests Information - 32.73%	Acknowledges Only - 41.22%	Elaborates/ Repeats - 19.85%

If we look at Table 6, we can see that for both male and female teachers, the majority of the occurrences of *okay* that functions as an acknowledgment is not followed by any utterances. Nevertheless, the second most frequent function that succeeds an acknowledgment for both genders is an elaboration or repetition. The differences between males and females can be seen when we look at the functions of

utterances that follow significant transitions and third turn receipt markers. For the former, males made use of discourse markers the most, whereas females preferred to elaborate/repeat. With regard to the latter, males opted to elaborate/repeat, and females tended to request information.

Conclusion

This study looked at the use of Filipino English teacher's *okay* in distance learning. The overall results are consistent with Borlongan's (2008) paper, indicating that the main function of *okay* is to give a simple acknowledgment, as it occurred a little over 60% of *okay* in the corpus. It is therefore perhaps safe to say that in line with Borlongan's claim, Filipino speakers of English tend to use *okay* as a form of acknowledgment. In the context that was studied, it is maybe due to the lesson setting where face-to-face interaction is lacking, compelling teachers to acknowledge as much as they can. There is a significant difference between the second most frequent function, the third turn receipt marker, and the most frequent function, as the former occurred only a little over 25% in the data. Third turn receipt markers were found to be followed by requests for information (25%), signifying that instructors gave follow up questions and elicited more information from the students. Significant transitions was found to be the least frequent function, possibly because the structure of the 30-minute lesson is only divided into three and some teachers did not follow this guide. Another possible reason is that teachers tried not to veer away from the topic that they were discussing in order to have a coherent lesson. As predicted, significant transitions were mainly followed by discourse markers (26%), perhaps to mark a smooth shift from one topic to another.

The instructor's sex was clearly not a factor in the use of *okay* in this study, contradicting Swacker's (1975, in Schlee, 2008) claim and consistent with Schlee's (2008) study. Female teachers may have used the token word more frequently, but no considerable difference was found. Perhaps, gender differences may depend on the kind of talk (e.g. teacher vs. student talk), learning environment (face-to-face vs. computer-mediated interaction), and activity (e.g. graded discussion vs. regular classroom discussion).

Given the findings of the present study, a reductive paraphrase of *okay* can then be presented in this context:

(a) *Okay* functioning as a significant transition in the discourse=

X and Y are talking about something
sometimes X:

starts to talk about something else

starts to talk about something that Y does not know

does not want to stop talking

because of this, Y says *okay* to talk about another thing

(b) *Okay* functioning as a third turn receipt marker=

Y asks something to X

X starts to talk and sometimes for a long time

Because of this, Y says this and asks X another thing or talks about what X talked about

(c) *Okay* functioning as a simple form of acknowledgment=

X is talking about something

Y says *okay* to make X feel that Y hears X

because of this, X keeps talking about that something

In conclusion, this article provides us a better understanding of the use of linguistic features like *okay*, not only in face-to-face interactions and telephone conversations in general, but also in distance learning. Their functions do not seem to be affected mainly by gender, but perhaps by the structure of lessons and the tasks performed. Moreover, we can observe how *okay* was used by teachers to introduce a new topic and signal a transition, give a correction, and elaborate and repeat what was said to emphasize a point. In this study, we can also see how the focal word signaled not only a greeting and a praise, but also questions to verify and elicit more information from their students to increase student talk time. These functions are, without a doubt, vital in English language learning.

Further research will be needed to explore the functions of Filipino teachers' *okay* in other learning milieus and also compare them with the findings of this study. Variables that can be looked into are the subject matter or academic division of the lecturer, gender,

gestures, kind of interaction and activity. Moreover, results of the present paper can be compared with the use of American teachers' *okay* in distance learning.

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Appendix A Sample Analysis

(M) teacher

LEGEND: ***-name of student/teacher

T: Yes good morning this is *** from (name of company) how are you doing?

S: Hi good morning I'm okay.

T: Yes, good morning *** it's a Friday today. And how's your Friday?

S: Well, it's very quiet. Many colleagues of me are in vacation.

T: Oh really? Okay. **Acknowledges only**

S: Yes yes it's perfect because I feel very very sleepy-

T: -Mhmm

S: I want to go back to vacation and you know, rest on the beach, sun bath and so on?

T: (Lauhgs)

S: I think I have 4 hours sleep only.

T: Really? Why didn't you get enough sleep last night?

S: Well I could not sleep as I am thinking of so many things...

T: Mhmm

S: My wife and I you know we try not to sleep so (2) deep.

T: Is it because you've been working to hard? Or is it insomnia that you weren't able to sleep?

S: No no no. Not that. Well because in our house (.) me and my wife, we just put a camera-

T: -Mhmm

S;and we started this project one month ago

T: Mhmm

S: It is very useful for us.

T: Is it like a webcam? Yeah?

S: No it is like uhm (2) I haven't the word. (2) it helps you see your home even when you are in the office. You understand?

T: Ah yes it's like a security camera. You can see your home from your office? Right?

S: Yes!

T: Ok- **Acknowledges only**

S: and we try and try to make put it there

T: Mhmm

S: but it's not easy for us we are not professionals

T: Mhmm (.) So (.) so in in other words, it was difficult for you to install, right?

S: Mmm yes yes/

T: So were you able to install the security camera? Were you able to successfully install them?

S: Uhm sorry could you repeat please?

T: Were you were you able to install the camera? To to make it work?

S: At first no but yes yes after one month voila.

T: Alright. Good good alright, so ah I suppose that time was well spent uh trying to set it up and have it set up huh?

S: Yes oh yes.

T: So how many days in total did it take you to set up your webcam? How many days in total did it take you to set up your security camera?

S: More than one month I suppose because it has to work with a computer.

T: (laughs). Is it a windows computer you're using?

S: Yes windows 7

T: (L) So how did you finally make it work? What was the problem? What did you discover?

S: I'm sorry I didn't catch can you repeat please?

T: What (1) what did you discover that fixed the solution? What (.5) what was the problem? Why wasn't it working?

S: Oh. (3)

T: Was it the sof-the hardware driver?

S: I think it's the software.

T: Mhmm

S: Because when something move in the house I get an email.

T: Alright.

S: It is very sensi-sensible. Sensitive.

T: Mhmm so there's movement detection, When there's movement it turns on, is that?

S: Yes

T: Okay. **3rd turn-request info** Does it works as well? The motion sensor? It's called a motion sensor.

S: Oh so that's the name.

T: Yeah.

S: Yes it works alright.

T: -Mhmm

S: It will send you an email when it feels someone walking or running or moving-

T: -Mhmm

S: We receive each minute an email! It's crazy.

T: (Laughs) each minute you receive an email?

S: Yes!

T: I-its not because you have a pet at home that likes to run around, that's why you have an email every minute do you? Do you have a pet at home or (.) something that moves around that's why the motion sensor sends you an email every minute? (Laughs)

S: (Laughs) No we haven't a pet like a dog. No no.

T: (Laughs) alright something must be moving around your house right? (Laughs)

About the author

Clarisse Anne P. Ilustre is currently finishing her PhD in Applied Linguistics at De La Salle University, Manila, Philippines. She has been teaching at goFLUENT, Philippines, a Swiss-owned company which specializes in English distance learning. Her research interests concern pragmatics, contrastive rhetoric, computer-mediated discourse analysis, and bilingualism.