



Subject-verb Concord of Nouns with Latin Plural Endings in Philippine English

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the subject-verb (SV) concord of nouns with Latin plural endings in Philippine English. Despite the seemingly straightforward nature of SV agreement, it poses challenges for first-language (L1) and second-language (L2) English learners. Data from the GloWbe and NOW corpora were analyzed to identify the nouns' SV concord frequency patterns in Philippine, American, and British English. The findings show that the nouns can be categorized into three groups based on agreement patterns. Some, like "agenda," favor a singular interpretation, while others, such as "criteria," are treated as plural. A third group demonstrates ambivalent agreement. These findings emphasize the tension and confusion between the notional and grammatical agreement. By analyzing agreement patterns, this study sheds light on learning complexities and language acquisition and education, and encourages a normative rule evaluation surrounding subject-verb concord. This also highlights the importance of

	<p>recognizing and understanding usage variations in usage as vital language learning components.</p> <p>Keywords: Philippine English, nouns, SV concord, American English, British English</p>
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Introduction

English subject-verb (SV) concord or agreement is a linguistic device that signals structure in a language (Keeney & Wolfe, 1972). Because of its important role in structuring sentences, it needs to be mastered by a child acquiring English as either a first (L1) or second (L2) language. SV concord is a challenging and complex area of grammar (Hudson, 1999), as evidenced by the difficulties experienced by learners at different instructional levels (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2008) and from various linguistic backgrounds, including both L1 and L2 English speakers. Notional and grammatical agreement, which refers to whether subject-verb agreement is determined by the perceived number of the subject's referent or by the conventional linguistic number of the subject, also presents a significant obstacle for learners (Quirk et al., 1985). The issue of notional and grammatical agreement has been explored by researchers such as Humphreys and Bock (2005), especially its impact on how SV concord is enacted in sentences. Due to the possible impact of the tension arising from notional and grammatical agreement, this study investigated one area where this difficulty might prominently manifest itself: the agreement patterns of nouns with Latin plural endings.

There is a tendency to treat nouns with Latin plural endings whose number agreement is equivocal as either singular or plural (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Quirk et al., 1985). This uncertainty results in possible confusion on whether to treat them as singular or plural for the purposes of subject-verb concord, and this might impact the meaning of sentences that English speakers produce. For example, confusion might arise if a speaker uses “phenomena” instead of “phenomenon” when referring to only one event. This confusion is aggravated if it occurs in environments where linguistic precision is especially important. According to Huddleston and Pullum (2002), the following are nouns with Latin plural endings with historical singular forms that demonstrate ambivalence in subject-verb concord:

Table 1*Nouns with Latin Plural Endings*

Nouns with Equivocal Number	Historical Singular Forms
algae	alga
media	medium
bacteria	bacterium
phenomena	phenomenon
criteria	criterion
data	datum
insignia	insigne

Huddleston and Pullum explained that the historical singular forms of these nouns were much more infrequent than their plural counterparts. This has led people to think the plural forms are singular and unrelated to their historical singular counterparts. This is especially true for nouns used in highly specialized environments such as *alga*, *bacterium*, and *insigne*. So widespread was this confusion that a reanalysis had occurred regarding *agenda* and *candelaria*, according to Huddleston and Pullum. The infrequent use of these nouns and the tension between notional and grammatical agreement understandably lead to divided usage and pedagogical problems for English learners.

Aside from clarifying the SV concord behavior of these nouns with Latin plural endings is essential, the second objective of this study was to use these patterns to compare Philippine English (PhE) with American English (AmE) and British English (BrE). Specifically, the data might establish if there were unique concord patterns that could be considered possible features of PhE, especially because the usage rules for nouns with Latin plural endings are divided. Investigating this topic will provide clues on whether PhE still follows the agreement tendencies of its parent variety or has already developed a standard distinct and independent from those of AmE and BrE. This can then contribute to the spirited discussion on the stage where PhE is in its evolution as a post-colonial English (PCE) (Schneider, 2007), whether it is still at the nativization stage (Collins, 2016; Hundt, 2006; Schneider, 2003), at the endonormative stabilization stage (Borlongan, 2016), or in the initial phases of the differentiation stage (Dita, 2025; Gonzales, 2017; Gonzales & Dita, 2018). From a pedagogical perspective, investigating SV concord rules is important because of the critical role they play in structuring sentences and, therefore, in meaning expression and avoidance of communicative ambiguity, as argued above.

Literature Review

Kachru's (1985) three-circle model and Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model are important theoretical frameworks in World Englishes. Kachru's model, which described the diffusion of English globally, categorizes countries into inner, outer, and expanding circles based on the types of spread, acquisition, and functional domains of English across countries. Inner-circle countries, such as the UK and the USA, are norm-providing and are the traditional bases of the English language and the areas where the language is the primary language. Outer-circle countries, like India and the Philippines, have institutionalized English (Jenkins, 2015) and are norm-developing. In outer-circle territories, English is one of the languages in the linguistic repertoires of speakers and has acquired an important status. Expanding circle countries, where English is a foreign language, are norm-dependent on inner-circle varieties. They are without experience of colonization by inner circle countries (Kachru, 1985) and where English does not possess any official status (Jenkins, 2015). Kachru's three concentric circles model has been used to argue that different Englishes exist across the globe and to demonstrate that the owners of the language are not the British or the Americans but actually those who use it (Kachru, 1997).

Schneider's Dynamic Model, meanwhile, details the evolutionary stages of Postcolonial Englishes (PCEs), such as PhE, through 1) foundation, 2) exonormative stabilization, 3) nativization, 4) endonormative stabilization, and 5) differentiation. Each stage involves shifts in sociopolitical background, identity construction, sociolinguistic conditions, and structural changes in grammar, pronunciation, and lexicon. The model highlights the dynamic process of linguistic adaptation and development, illustrating how PCEs evolve from adopting external norms to developing their unique linguistic identity over time.

To describe each stage, four (4) constitutive parameters were used: 1) extralinguistic or sociopolitical background; 2) identity construction; 3) sociolinguistic conditions, including contact settings and use of specific varieties, and norm orientations and attitudes; and 4) structural changes to grammar, pronunciation, and lexicon (Schneider, 2007). Schneider (2007) provided a detailed description of each of these stages. At the foundation stage, contact between colonizers and the native population transpires. This can be characterized by occupation, loss/sharing of territory by the indigenous population, and trade between the two groups. Cross-dialectal contact and limited local language exposure also happen. The linguistic developments that characterize this stage are borrowing and pidginization, especially in trade colonies. Exonormative stabilization, meanwhile, is

characterized by a stable colonial status and the establishment of English as a code for use in various domains, such as law, administration, and higher education. Further factors are also acceptance of the norm of the mother variety and the spread of elite bilingualism. Lexical borrowing and pidginization/creolization can also be observed in the language. Once the conquered state attains political independence, weakening ties transpire, although there is still widespread and regular contact between the two groups. Within the indigenous population, a division emerges between those who accept innovations in their language and those who wish to maintain exonormative norms. In the language, there are heavy lexical borrowings, phonological innovations, nativization of structure, lexical innovations and productivity, and code mixing, which is an identity signal. Endonormative stabilization is achieved post-independence or after what Schneider (2007) calls “Event X” (p. 49). At this stage, there is now widespread acceptance of local norms and acceptance of this local variety, although there are still remnants of conservative hostility toward it. There is also flourishing literary creativity in the new variety. Linguistically, there is stabilization and codification of the new variety in dictionaries and grammars. Finally, differentiation is characterized by internal sociopolitical differentiation and the birth of a new dialect. This new dialect has group-specific varieties that function as either L1 or L2.

PhE is one of the most essential PCEs, considering the breadth and depth of research on it (Schneider, 2023). PhE demonstrates unique features and qualities that attest to its uniqueness as a PCE (Schneider, 2023). One distinguishing property of PhE is its American provenance, unlike practically all other PCEs, which have BrE as their parent variety. “[O]n a global scale, it [PhE] is the only major variety with this character and target” (Schneider, 2023, p. xxv). In addition, PhE is already on its way to endonormative stabilization (Borlongan, 2011b), although other authors would have a different assessment of PCEs status, as will be demonstrated later. Despite being a young PCE, PhE spread quickly and effectively compared to the other varieties. Filipinos have a high English proficiency rate, despite the country’s efforts to establish Filipino as the national language, a rare policy among former colonies. It likewise operates in an environment replete with code-mixing (e.g., blending English with local languages) and is seen as both a social equalizer and divider (Thompson, 2003). Finally, PhE is exported to other parts of the globe due to overseas Filipino workers (Schneider, 2023).

According to Gonzalez (1991), early studies on the grammar of PhE can be divided into three major eras. The first era was characterized by studies that focused on what was wrong with the English used in the Philippines, most notably in grammar and pronunciation. This era was called the error analysis era. The beginning of the second era was marked by the publication

of Teodoro Llamzon's "Standard Filipino English" in 1969. This era was marked by research efforts positing Filipino English's standardization through descriptions of its grammar, lexicon, and phonology. The next phase of the early studies on PhE grammar was the publication of Gonzalez (1991), which refined and further fleshed out its features. Bautista (2000a) predicted that the next stage for studies on PhE grammar would involve the codification of its features using quantitative approaches with large corpora, which is the direction that this discussion will now take.

The literature on subject-verb concord and verb usage in PhE has focused on various areas. Early studies by Bautista (2000b) highlighted frequent errors in subject-verb agreement due to factors like notional agreement, special nouns, and intervening prepositional phrases. Collins (2011) and Hundt (2006), meanwhile, provided further insights into agreement patterns and showed closer ties to AmE and adherence to external norms. A recent analysis by Hernandez (2023) suggests, on the other hand, innovative features in verb agreement with intervening prepositional phrases, meeting criteria for systematic and rule-governed changes.

Aside from SV concord and verb usage, studies on the PhE verb system have delved into its morphosyntax and semantics. For instance, Borlongan (2011a, 2011b) explored aspects like tense usage, voice, and modality and found similarities with AmE and unique patterns in PhE. Schneider (2004), meanwhile, examined modals and noted trends that reflected both conservatism and innovation. Diachronic studies by Collins (2016) and Borlongan and Dita (2015) tracked changes to PhE's grammar over decades, revealing shifts toward endonormativity while still showing signs of exonormative influence. Additionally, Dita et al. (2023) and Dita (2025) have put together various grammatical descriptions of PhE. Collectively, these studies underscore the dynamic and evolving nature of PhE verb usage, reflecting both adherence to and divergence from external norms.

The current study positions itself in this distinct line of study of PhE. Previous investigations, such as Bautista (2000b), Collins (2011), Hundt (2006), and Hernandez (2023) have focused on either factors that impact SV concord or agreement patterns of PhE compared to other varieties of English. This study contributes to this area of PhE grammatical descriptions by exploring the subject-concord patterns of nouns with Latin plural endings that exhibited ambivalent agreement, a noun category that has not been previously explored. The choice of these nouns with Latin plural endings is strategic because the study surmises that their ambivalent agreement tendencies would demonstrate how PhE was positioned against AmE and BrE, i.e., if the former's patterns showed similarities and differences from the native varieties that could contribute to the clarification of the status of the

Philippine variety of English. By comparing PhE patterns with those in AmE, one can ascertain whether PhE follows its American parent in this aspect or has already begun to assert its independence. This will signal evidence of PhE's status based on Schneider's (2007) Dynamic Model. Specifically, it can inform discussions on whether PhE is at the nativization stage (Collins, 2016; Hundt, 2006; Schneider, 2003), endonormative stabilization stage (Borlongan, 2016), or already at the differentiation stage (Gonzales, 2017; Gonzales & Dita, 2018). Related to this, since the study uses corpora for its data source, the study demonstrates the usefulness of large language bodies in documenting the features and development not just of native speaker Englishes but also PCEs, just as Bautista (2000a) predicted.

Additionally, the findings of this study will help guide language teachers in teaching this critical grammatical phenomenon. Although recent pedagogical approaches have emphasized the ability to use the target language in meaningful exchanges, especially in the communicative approach to language teaching (Richards, 2006), mastery of (morpho)syntactic forms is still needed for the development the competence to communicate meaningfully and appropriately in various contexts (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 2008). Hence, the study may provide a more nuanced view of these rules, especially views informed by variational and genre-based differences.

For the purposes of this study, the list of nouns with Latin plural endings that exhibited ambivalent agreement was taken from Huddleston and Pullum (2002), which is considered one of the most comprehensive grammar books of English. These were: 1) algae, 2) media, 3) bacteria, 4) phenomena, 5) criteria, 6) data, and 7) insignia. Three additional nouns were included based on observations of their prevalence in PhE and agreement pattern equivocation: 8) agenda, 9) memoranda, 10) honoraria. By using Huddleston and Pullum's list and the researchers' observations, the study ensured that it would be able to cover a good number of such nouns in English. The agreement patterns of these nouns were analyzed with the primary verbs in English (Quirk et al., 1985) to achieve the study's aims.

Methodology

Data Sources

This study used two corpora: the GloWbe corpus, with 1.9 billion words comprising 60% informal blogs and 40% web-based materials like newspapers (Davies & Fuchs, 2015), and the NOW corpus, designed for balanced genre representation and accurate World Englishes identification. The GloWbe corpus consisted of two million web pages, maintaining a ratio of 60% informal blogs to 40% formal materials (e.g., newspapers, magazines,

etc.), ensuring representation from 20 varieties. The NOW corpus, meanwhile, is a continually updated collection of texts that includes 20.3 billion words (Davies, 2019) (at the time of the research). It is created by aggregating newspaper and magazine articles from 20 English-speaking countries via Google News. Daily, thousands of articles are gathered, cleaned, tagged, and stored in a relational database, with duplicates removed. The corpus focuses on a variety of topics such as current events, technology, and entertainment. Its extensive and dynamic nature allows researchers to study linguistic changes in English more effectively than with other corpora.

The list of primary verbs utilized in English was sourced from Quirk et al. (1985). According to them, the three primary verbs in English are *be*, *do*, and *have*, which could function as both the main verb and auxiliary verb in a verb phrase, in contrast to lexical verbs, which only serve as the main verb in a verb phrase, and modals, which serve only as auxiliary verbs in verb phrases. This flexibility in being able to function either as an auxiliary element or as a main verb, which allows the primary verbs to encode subject-verb concord, was the reason for the decision to focus on these three verbs.

Data Analysis

To search for the data needed for this investigation, the string *noun verbs* was utilized following the method used by Morallo (2022). For example, to look for the pattern of *algae* with the present forms *do* and *does*, the noun was searched in combination with each of these, yielding the strings *algae do* and *algae does* which were used in searching the GloWbE and NOW corpora. The corpora generated the raw frequency and words per million (WPM) data for each string. Since primary verbs carry subject-verb concord regardless of whether they serve as main verbs or as auxiliary elements, the data collected included primary verbs functioning both as main verbs and as auxiliary components within verb phrases. The chart display feature of the corpora was used to show the data for PhE, AmE, and BrE. Considering that the searches involved fairly esoteric nouns, the frequency numbers might be small, so a check of the keywords in context (KWIC) was performed to ensure that the results were relevant to the study. After each session, the WPM and frequency data were gathered and listed in an Excel spreadsheet. The WPM data for each noun with singular and plural verbs in the three varieties were compared to identify patterns in the corpora. These general subject-verb concord patterns were then noted and analyzed to yield information on the tendencies per variety and the behavior of PhE vis-à-vis AmE and BrE.

Results and Discussion

This investigation aimed to analyze the subject-concord patterns of nouns with Latin plural endings in PhE, AmE, and BrE with English primary verbs (Quirk et al., 1985). Based on the general data, *agenda* and *media*, and, to some extent, *data* and *algae*, demonstrated reclassification by speakers of these varieties as singular nouns. *Bacteria*, *phenomena*, and *criteria* exhibited the strongest plural interpretation among the scrutinized nouns. There was limited data to determine the subject-verb concord tendency of *insignia*, *memoranda*, and *honoraria*, resulting in their exclusion from further discussion in the paper. The general tendencies of these nouns in the two corpora across varieties can be represented on a continuum, with *agenda* exhibiting the strongest singular preference tendency and *bacteria* showing the strongest plural tendency.

Figure 1

General Subject-Verb Concord Tendencies of Nouns with Latin Plural Ending



Here are some extracts from the Philippines from the NOW corpus that exemplify the nouns' general tendencies:

- (1) I am not the only one who is still unclear on what President Marcos really wants to achieve in his presidency. The 8-point socio-economic **agenda is** universal to suffice. PH (23-07-04)
- (2) The **bacteria were** identified as " Streptomyces sp. A1-08, " the DOST said. PH (21-08-04)

A more granular discussion of the subject-verb concord tendencies of the nouns across each variety in the two corpora follows, from nouns that indicate a strong singular preference, which the paper called, "reclassified nouns," to nouns adhering to the prescriptivist subject-verb agreement rule.

Reclassified Nouns

Of the ten nouns investigated, *agenda* and *media* demonstrated the strongest singular treatment tendency. This observation held across varieties and primary verbs, as shown in the tables below. This led to their description in this paper as “reclassified nouns.”

Table 2*Agreement Patterns for the Noun Agenda*

Words	Corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbE)						NOW (News on the Web) Corpus					
	Frequency			Words Per Million (WPM)			Frequency			Words Per Million (WPM)		
	Ph E	A m E	Br E	Ph E	Am E	Br E	Ph E	Am E	Br E	Ph E	Am E	Br E
Agenda (are)	4	62	64	0.09	0.16	0.17	120	633	167	0.23	0.09	0.07
Agenda (is)	31	805	638	0.72	2.08	1.65	650	6180	1934	1.27	0.86	0.76
Agenda (were)	0	13	15	0	0.03	0.04	34	181	58	0.07	0.03	0.02
Agenda (was)	18	159	163	0.42	0.41	0.42	170	1543	590	0.33	0.21	0.23
Agenda (do)	0	8	1	0	0.02	0	0	21	3	0	0	0
Agenda (does)	0	25	10	0	0.06	0.03	8	204	44	0.02	0.03	0.02
Agenda (have)	1	10	13	0.02	0.03	0.03	19	210	55	0.04	0.03	0.02
Agenda (has)	11	137	112	0.25	0.35	0.29	63	1339	484	0.12	0.19	0.19

Table 3*Agreement Patterns for the Noun Media*

	Corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbE)						NOW (News on the Web) Corpus					
	Frequency			Words Per Million (WPM)			Frequency			Words Per Million (WPM)		
Words	Ph E	Am E	Br E	Ph E	Am E	Br E	Ph E	Am E	BrE	Ph E	Am E	Br E
Media (are)	48	10 03	10 93	1.11	2.59	2.8 2	684	864 5	299 8	1.3 4	1.2	1.1 8
Media (is)	19 0	39 61	29 12	4.39	10.2 4	7.5 1	269 8	271 23	836 4	5.2 7	3.77	5.8 5
Media (were)	26	23 2	29 9	0.6	0.6	0.7 7	432	351 5	168 7	0.8 4	0.49	0.6 6
Media (was)	34	53 8	41 7	0.79	1.39	1.0 8	623	780 7	265 8	1.2 2	1.09	1.0 5
Media (do)	11	14 8	17 1	0.25	0.38	0.4 4	45	753	295	0.0 9	0.1	0.1 2
Media (does)	11	37 2	15 8	0.25	0.96	0.4 1	97	278 7	990	0.1 9	0.39	0.3 9
Media (have)	43	67 3	82 8	0.99	1.74	2.1 4	812	892 4	349 5	1.5 9	1.24	1.3 8
Media (has)	11 2	16 05	13 11	2.59	4.15	3.3 8	129 1	191 99	589 3	2.5 2	2.67	2.3 2

Tables 2 and 3 show that across varieties, the preference of English speakers was to treat *agenda* and *media* as singular nouns, demonstrated by the use of *is*, *was*, *does*, and *has*. This was observed in both GloWbE and NOW corpora. In *agenda*'s case, PhE, AmE, and BrE speakers in the GloWbE and the NOW corpora preferred to pair it with *is*, *was*, *does*, and *has* as opposed to pairing them with the verbs' "plural" counterparts. One observation needs to be highlighted before explaining these tendencies. Although PhE generally adhered to the concord patterns of AmE and BrE for these three nouns, PhE

usage for *agenda do/does*, at least in the GloWbE corpus, did not yield any items. Meanwhile, PhE was divided over the usage *media do/does* based on the wpm data, indicating a PhE pattern distinct from the two older varieties. (See sample lines below.)

Based on the presented GloWbE and NOW data, *media* and *agenda* might have already been reclassified as singular nouns. This conclusion for *media* and *insignia* supports and extends the findings of Morallo (2022), who suggested these two nouns may have already been reclassified by AmE based on the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) data. This study shows that this singular interpretation drift has also transpired in PhE and AmE. The shift in the nouns' treatment as singular can be due to the grammatical and notional agreement tension (Humphreys & Bock, 2005). English users may have reclassified these nouns as singular, termed 'singular override' (Morallo, 2022), the opposite of 'plural override' (Huddleston & Pullum, 2022), due to the absence of plural morphological markings and despite their plural notion. Below are sample lines from the three varieties in the two corpora for the three nouns.

GloWbE Corpus

- (1) Their **agenda is** to suppress and dominate, to rip out the heart of ingenuity and productivity and different ways of doing things, because it is a threat. (Philippines: General)
- (2) The **media has** been the main source for obtaining current affairs and other issues in the society. (Philippines: General)
- (3) If USA **media doesn't** cover it then it must not be news worthy. (United States: General)
- (4) Even the **media don't** know how to call the woman. (Philippines: General)
- (5) The **media doesn't** help either as people constantly see advertisement after advertisement of beautiful women and handsome men advertising products that are made to enhance ones physical appearance. (Philippines: General)

NOW Corpus

- (6) The standing committee is scheduled to meet from August 8 to August 11, and its **agenda does** not include any items relating to Hong Kong. PH (20-07-31)
- (7) Remember, please, that 35 years ago, **media was** under the total control, if not directly operated by, the government. PH (20-12-16)
- (8) As the news **media do** their daily report on Covid counts, the congested hospitals, and our perilously overburdened health system... PH (21-04-30)
- (9) And if media doesn't get the message and get it pretty soon, bad news won't even sell anymore. PH (17-01-16)

Ambivalent Nouns

The two nouns that demonstrated ambivalence in their subject-verb concord in the two corpora were *algae* and *data*. *Data* was closer to the singular preference end of the continuum, while *algae* was in the middle. The frequency and wpm data for *data* and *algae* are presented in Tables 4 and 5, respectively.

Table 4

Agreement Patterns for the Noun Data

Corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbE)							NOW (News on the Web) Corpus					
Frequency			Words Per Million (WPM)				Frequency			Words Per Million (WPM)		
Words	Ph E	Am E	Br E	Ph E	Am E	Br E	Ph E	Am E	Br E	Ph E	A m E	Br E
Data (are)	10 0	183 9	12 92	2.3 1	4.75 3	3.3 3	582	278 29	27 91	1.1 4	3.8 7	1.1
Data (is)	19 0	430 4	40 83	4.3 9	11.1 3	10. 53	186 4	664 29	35 74 0	3.6 4	9.2 3	14. 06
Data (were)	30	869	87 0	0.6 9	2.25	2.2 4	265	187 15	10 24	0.5 2	2.6	0.4

Data (was)	30	831	80 1	0.6 9	2.15	2.0 7	589	180 01	56 45	1.1 5	2.5	2.2 2
Data (do)	4	195	10 0	0.0 9	0.5	0.2 6	56	165 9	22 7	0.1 1	0.2 3	0.0 9
Data (does)	4	251	15 6	0.0 9	0.65	0.4	101	571 1	10 10	0.2	0.7 9	0.4
Data (have)	6	247	23 4	0.1 4	0.64	0.6	119	398 9	70 1	0.2 3	0.5 5	0.2 8
Data (has)	16	472	51 2	0.3 7	1.22	1.3 2	886	975 4	45 20	1.7 3	1.3 6	1.7 8

As shown in Table 4, there was a preference to use *is* with *data* across PhE, AmE and BrE, suggesting a tendency to treat the noun as singular, at least in the present tense. However, usage became more divided in the past form of *be*: AmE preferred *were* in both corpora while usage was more divided in BrE, which used *were* more in GloWbE and *was* in NOW. Usage was also divided in PhE, especially in GloWbE. Meanwhile, both AmE and BrE preferred *does* to *do* in both corpora. In this string, PhE was divided in usage in GloWbE and inclined to *does* in NOW. The same pattern held for *have/has*, with the older varieties and PhE preferring the “singular” verb form in both corpora.

Table 5

Agreement Patterns for the Noun Algae

Words	Corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbE)						NOW (News on the Web) Corpus					
	Frequency			Words Per Million (WPM)			Frequency			Words Per Million (WPM)		
	Ph E	A m E	Br E	Ph E	A m E	Br E	Ph E	Am E	Br E	Ph E	Am E	BrE
Algae (are)	1	43	13	0.02	0.1 1	0.03	14	367	71	0.03	0.05	0.03
Algae (is)	2	25	16	0.05	0.0 6	0.04	12	459	161	0.02	0.06	0.06
Algae (were)	0	4	3	0	0.0 1	0.01	2	77	16	0	0.01	0.01

Algae (was)	0	5	6	0	0.0 1	0.02	5	111	27	0.01	0.02	0.01
Algae (do)	0	2	1	0	0.0 1	0	0	16	2	0	0	0
Algae (does)	0	3	0	0	0.0 1	0	0	22	7	0	0	0
Algae (have)	1	9	3	0.02	0.0 2	0.01	1	140	22	0	0.02	0.01
Algae (has)	1	5	4	0.02	0.0 1	0.01	7	151	52	0.01	0.02	0.02

Algae demonstrated more agreement pattern ambivalence in both corpora. For *is/are*, different patterns emerged in the two corpora. AmE preferred the “plural” verb in GloWbE, while PhE and BrE exhibited an inclination for *is*. In NOW, PhE uses *are* more while the two native speaker varieties employed *is* more frequently. BrE, PhE, and AmE preferred to use *was* in both corpora. No data were found in the two corpora for *does/do*. Finally, for *has/have*, AmE utilized *have* more in GloWbE, while PhE and BrE were inclined to use *has*.

Based on the data, although there was still some ambivalence in the usage of *data*, evidence of a drift toward singular noun interpretation was seen, as shown by the varieties’ proclivity for *is*, *does*, *has*, and, to some extent, *was*. Despite its drift with other varieties, PhE demonstrated a stronger ambivalence based on the corpus data gathered. Usage was divided between *were* and *was* and *has* and *have* in GloWbE. AmE showed some remnants of conservatism in treating *data* as either plural or singular, whereas BrE moved toward singular noun reclassification. The data pointed to the possible position of PhE as between these two varieties, in the case of *data*. In *algae*, more divided usage was observed across varieties and corpora. The varieties were divided over using either *are* or *is* and *have* or *has*. A more definite preference could be observed for *was* over *were*. However, the data for *do/does* were too low to make concrete observations.

In view of the data gathered, there was evidence to categorize *data* and *algae* as prototypical examples of nouns with Latin plural endings and ambivalent subject-verb agreement patterns. Although there was an indication of a singular treatment drift, the totality of the evidence gathered showed that speakers of the three varieties might still be ambivalent over their usage of these two nouns. This finding was similar to Morallo’s (2022) result for *data*. However, the current study’s results did not support Morallo’s classification of *algae* as a noun with a strong tendency to follow prescription. Here are some sample lines from the corpora demonstrating these nouns’ ambivalent agreement patterns:

GloWbE Corpus

- (10) Preclinical **data have** also demonstrated that oral administration of ALKS 37 have a greater effect on intestinal motility... (Philippines: Blog)
- (11) Since Chinese **data have** been weakening marginally all year and European economic data has been showing a more decisive similar trend, more oil price weakness is likely in a seasonally slow fourth quarter. (United States: General)
- (12) Other government **data has** also shown the United States on track to have ethnic minorities as its " majority " population rather than whites. (Philippines: General)
- (13) So far the **data has** not supported this idea, but as a presenter in this area of concern it is important that I keep up to date on this area of study. (United States: General)

NOW Corpus

- (14) These **algae are** then consumed by shellfish. Red tide occurs when algae increase in number due to warmer sea temperatures. PH (19-11-30)
- (15) **Algae are** a large group of organisms that thrive in warm, damp, and shady environments. GB (23-05-13)
- (16) A study conducted by the Philippine Nuclear Research Institute revealed that the proliferating **algae was** largely caused by man-made pollution. PH (15-07-02)
- (17) It comes just days after the Causeway Coast and Glens Council said the **algae was** spotted in counties Antrim and Londonderry. GB (23-07-09)

Prescriptively-oriented Nouns

Three nouns demonstrated a prescriptive pattern in subject-verb concord. Of these, *bacteria* exhibited the strongest preference for prescriptivism, followed by *phenomena* and *criteria*.

Table 6

Agreement Patterns for the Noun Criteria

Corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbE)							NOW (News on the Web) Corpus										
Words	Frequency			Words Per Million (WPM)			Frequency			Words Per Million (WPM)							
	P h E	A m E	Br E	Ph E	A m E	Br E	Ph E	Am E	Br E	Ph E	Am E	Br E					
Criteria (are)	26	26	1	37	1	1	0.6	7	0.96	117	236	108	1	8	0.23	0.33	0.43
Criteria (is)	13	17	2	3	3	3	0.3	4	0.45	77	126	5	552	0.15	0.18	0.22	
Criteria (were)	6	12	8	17	8	8	0.14	3	0.46	44	170	3	261	0.09	0.24	0.1	
Criteria (was)	3	37	37	40	0.07	0.1	0.1	13	529	213	0.03	0.07	0.08				
Criteria (do)	5	25	40	0.12	6	0.1	10	92	32	0.02	0.01	0.01					
Criteria (does)	0	8	10	0	2	0.03	0	48	20	0	0.01	0.01					
Criteria (have)	8	32	68	0.18	8	0.18	27	411	170	0.05	0.06	0.07					
Criteria (has)	1	15	31	0.02	4	0.08	11	160	98	0.02	0.02	0.04					

Table 7*Agreement Patterns for the Noun Phenomena*

Corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbE)	NOW (News on the Web) Corpus
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Words	Frequency			Words Per Million (WPM)			Frequency			Words Per Million (WPM)		
	P h E	A m E	Br E	Ph E	A m E	Br E	Ph E	Am E	Br E	Ph E	Am E	Br E
Pheno mena (are)	14	17 5	12 0	0.32	0.4 5	0.31	28	677	148	0.05	0.09	0.06
Pheno mena (is)	5	83	79	0.12	0.2 1	0.2	14	733	86	0.03	0.1	0.03
Pheno mena (were)	5	23	22	0.12	0.0 6	0.06	3	140	48	0.01	0.02	0.02
Pheno mena (was)	0	11	16	0	0.0 3	0.04	2	54	15	0	0.01	0.01
Pheno mena (do)	3	13	3	0.07	0.0 3	0.01	1	26	4	0	0	0
Pheno mena (does)	0	6	4	0	0.0 2	0.01	1	8	4	0	0	0
Pheno mena (have)	2	37	25	0.05	0.1	0.06	11	242	52	0.02	0.03	0.02
Pheno mena (has)	1	14	10	0.02	0.0 4	0.03	7	81	20	0.01	0.01	0.01

Table 8

Agreement Patterns for the Noun Bacteria

Corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbE)	NOW (News on the Web) Corpus
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Words	Frequency			Words Per Million (WPM)			Frequency			Words Per Million (WPM)			
	P h E	A m E	Br E	Ph E	Am E	Br E	Ph E	Am E	Br E	Ph E	Am E	Br E	
Bacter ia (are)		18 4	19 5		0.6 0.48	0.5		267 58	5	588	0.11	0.37	0.23
Bacter ia (is)	8	95	54	0.18	0.25	4	42	3	349	0.08	0.17	0.14	
Bacter ia (were)	0	62	32	0	0.16	8	15	6	179	0.03	0.19	0.07	
Bacter ia (was)	0	23	15	0	0.06	4	15	587	155	0.03	0.08	0.06	
Bacter ia (do)	1	30	17	0.02	0.08	4	7	263	40	0.01	0.04	0.02	
Bacter ia (does)	0	5	4	0	0.01	1	1	65	15	0	0.01	0.01	
Bacter ia (have)	6	53	57	0.14	0.14	5	19	880	152	0.04	0.12	0.06	
Bacter ia (has)	0	15	19	0	0.04	5	9	522	117	0.02	0.07	0.05	

Table 6 presents the frequency and wpm data for *criteria* in both the GloWbE and NOW corpora across the varieties. Based on the GloWbE data, there was an inclination to use the “plural” verbs *are*, *were*, *do*, and *have* with the noun *criteria*. The same pattern could be observed in the NOW data, although American and British English exhibited ambivalence in the use of *does/do* based on the wpm data. However, if we look at the raw frequency, the two older varieties preferred *do* in journalistic texts, but the preference level was insufficient to move the wpm data for *do*.

The wpm and frequency data for *phenomena*, meanwhile, are listed in Table 7. The general preference for *phenomena* was to be treated as plural, except for *do/does*. In GloWbE, BrE was ambivalent between *do* and *does*. BrE

and PhE were also ambivalent about this in the NOW corpus. Generally, *phenomena* exhibited a strong plural propensity, but this partiality was not as strong as that found in *bacteria* due to a lack of data for some noun-verb combinations.

Finally, Table 8 shows the data for *criteria*. The wpm and frequency data indicate that *bacteria* was treated as plural across varieties and verbs. *Bacteria* demonstrated the strongest plural tendency as shown by the use of “plural” verbs with it across the three varieties and in the two corpora. The strength of this predisposition pointed to the possibility that this noun’s particulate notion was clear to English speakers and that it had not been reclassified as a singular noun.

Based on the available evidence, it can be inferred that *bacteria*, *phenomena*, and *criteria* are still plural in the minds of language speakers and have not been reclassified as singular nouns. This generally holds, especially for *bacteria* and *phenomena*, across verbs and corpora. These findings are similar to Morallo’s (2022) findings on *bacteria*, *phenomena*, and *criteria*, which were also found by the study to exhibit a strong prescriptive tendency. According to Huddleston and Pullum (2002), *criteria* and *phenomena* generally buck the emerging acceptance of treating these traditionally plural nouns as singular. Examples from the corpora are as follows:

GloWbE Corpus

- (18) In freezing, bacterial action on the food is stopped. **Bacteria are** completely inactive if frozen. (Philippines: General)
- (19) **Bacteria is** killed at when cooked at 150 degrees for 10 minutes. (United States: General)

NOW Corpus

- (20) The **criteria have** been weighted, with percentage scores totalling 100%. GB (19-12-16)
- (21) The qualifying **criteria hasn't** been fully confirmed yet, but the principle is that they will be chosen based on results over previous years. PH (20-03-18)

Conclusions and Recommendations

Before presenting this study’s conclusions, it must be emphasized that these determinations must be taken with an eye on data limitations for some noun-verb strings, as shown in the preceding section. Hence, the strength of these conclusions must be considered in view of these possible limiting

factors. This investigation uncovered three patterns in the nouns' subject-verb concord. Two nouns, *agenda* and *media*, demonstrated the strongest singular treatment bent. An ambivalent agreement could be observed in *data* and *algae*, with the former demonstrating a slightly stronger singular preference, while the latter's usage was more divided. Due to this ambivalence, these two were characterized as prototypical nouns with Latin plural markings and ambivalent subject-verb concord, the second group of nouns. The third group of nouns was prescriptively oriented because of the predisposition to treat them as plural. These nouns, in order of plural interpretation tendency, were *bacteria*, *phenomena*, and *criteria*. This finding provides qualified support to the observation that *criteria* and *phenomena* buck a singular interpretation (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002) of these nouns. Further, these observations were mostly congruent with Morallo's (2022) findings because this earlier study classified these nouns with ambivalent agreements into the same categories.

There are three possible factors that can influence subject-verb concord (Quirk et al., 1985). Of these three, there were indications that two, notional and grammatical agreement, might have influenced the observed patterns in the data. Due to the Latin plural endings of the investigated nouns, their plurality is notional and not reflected morphologically. This lack of morphological plural marking can be a source of confusion, thus leading to divergent usage among language speakers (Humphreys & Bock, 2005). This is because richer morphology has been shown to reduce notional effects during agreement production (Mingazova et al., 2014). Simply put, clearer morphology provides speakers with clues on the number of nouns, which neutralizes any confusion that might arise from the notions that these nouns carry. Since speakers cannot split the stem from the plural inflections in these nouns (Gardelle, 2016), English speakers may interpret these traditionally plural nouns as singular, leading to singular override (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). As Humphreys and Bock (2005) stated, "the implementation of verb number agreement is influenced not only by the grammatical number properties of subject nouns but also by the number properties of the mental referents of subject noun-phrases" (p. 694). However, not all nouns exhibited this characteristic, as a group of nouns exhibited a plural interpretation preference. A possible explanation for this, which may need further investigation in the future, is traceable to the nature of the texts in the corpora. Since a good portion of the two corpora is composed of formal texts, their formal nature might have led speakers to more conservatively treat some nouns and to more strictly adhere to traditional SV concord. With respect to the status of PhE based on the agreement patterns of the nouns with the three primary verbs in English, the Philippine variety generally adhered to the general concord patterns observed in AmE and BrE for nouns

that may have already been reclassified (*agenda* and *media*). However, there were no data on *agenda do/does* in GloWbE for PhE and divided usage for *media do/does*. Additionally, there is evidence that signals unique usage patterns in PhE elsewhere in the data. For example, for *data*, PhE was similar to AmE and BrE in the predilection to use *is* and treat it as singular. However, PhE exhibited divided usage in the past forms of *be* and *do/does*, with *does* preferred by AmE and BrE. This suggests that PhE might be behind the two native varieties when it comes to reclassifying *data* as a singular noun in tandem with these verbs. PhE could be placed between AmE and BrE, with the former showing more conservatism in treating *data* as plural, whereas the latter was more definite in its movement toward reclassifying it as a singular noun when used with the past forms of *be* and *do/does*. For *algae*, PhE demonstrated more ambivalence in agreement patterns, as usage was divided between *has* and *have*. Finally, for nouns with Latin plural endings treated as plural, PhE generally hewed closely to the tendencies of AmE and BrE. However, there were still indications of the possible unique features of PhE. For instance, there was a slight prescriptive tendency in PhE in the case of *criteria*, while it follows AmE and BrE for agreement patterns regarding *phenomena* and *bacteria*. Although PhE follows subject-concord patterns when using these nouns with Latin plural endings to a large extent, we have seen that there were combinations that PhE did not use (e.g., *agenda does/do* in GloWbE) or exhibited greater ambivalence about compared to its two inner circle counterparts (e.g., divided usage for *data were* and *data do/does*). Overall, the data painted a picture of PhE sharing some characteristics with native speaker varieties and exhibiting its own unique features.

Since PhE has an American origin, it could reasonably be predicted to follow AmE patterns. However, this was only partly true as PhE data showed both similarities and differences with its parent variety. These overlaps and differences between PhE and AmE are expected in the PCE's evolution as a separate dialect of English because PhE is already somewhere along the nativization (Collins, 2016; Hundt, 2006; Schneider, 2003), endonormative stabilization (Borlongan, 2016), and differentiation stages (Gonzales, 2017; Gonzales & Dita, 2018). This convergence and divergence between the parent and the child varieties support Collins and Borlongan's (2017) observation that, despite signs of endonormativity, PhE is yet to gain full independence. This suggests that PhE might still be at the endonormative stabilization stage in the Dynamic Model (Schneider, 2007), as Borlongan (2016) asserts. However, the unique patterns observed in the data could be seen as a clear evidence indicating its drift toward differentiation, making the PhE a variety in a possible transition from endonormative stabilization to differentiation, in line with the analysis of Dita (2025).

This study's findings have several implications for language teachers and researchers. First, language teachers should refrain from providing sweeping generalizations about subject-verb concord "rules" to their students and should instead inform their students that concord patterns can differ depending on genre, text, and context of language use. For example, language samples from various varieties demonstrating different agreement patterns can be presented to students during their consciousness-raising activity to help them realize these variety-based SV concord tendencies. Samples from various genres can likewise be used by teachers. Second, materials development should consider these tendencies as language teaching materials play a crucial and influential role in the classroom. Through corpus-informed data, language teaching can be guided to follow case law in grammar, where general usage determines the standard language (McEnery et al., 1997). Additionally, echoing Jitpraneechai (2019) and Timyam (2024) in raising students' awareness of the use of English. Finally, further research on PhE features, particularly diachronic work on these, as suggested by Borlongan (2013), should continue. This will allow us to see the development of PhE as a PCE variety and ascertain its stage in the Dynamic Model.

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