PlayPhrase.Me: A Multimedia Corpus for Foreign Language Education

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Abstract

Technological advancements have not only introduced new tools for language education but also tailored apps and resources for specific language skills. These include mobile apps (e.g., *Drops: Language Learning Games* for vocabulary), websites (e.g., *SpanishDict* for Spanish dictionary and grammar), and reference tools (e.g., *Grammarly* for writing assistance). One such resource is PlayPhrase.me, an online and mobile tool serving as a database of movie clips for language practice, particularly vocabulary. Despite the relative attention that similar tools (e.g., *YouGlish* and *Voscreen*) have received, only two studies have been conducted about the PlayPhrase.me website. Accordingly, there is a need for a review that outlines its general characteristics and pedagogical affordances. To this end, this review evaluated the website and revealed considerable potential for vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation learning. Citing the possible pitfalls, such as short video durations, lack of filtering, and absence of evaluative and competitive means, the researcher offered recommendations for improvement. The review concludes with the researcher's reflections as a teacher and urges further research to validate the findings.

Keywords: data-driven learning, language education, movie clips, phrases, vocabulary

Introduction

Vocabulary is a salient language learning component (Shi & Tsai, 2024). It is also linked with other language skills, including grammar (Choi & Zhang, 2021), listening (Milton & Masrai, 2021), reading (Lawrence et al., 2022), pronunciation (Jones, 2018), speaking (Uchihara & Clenton, 2023), and writing (Lavigne et al., 2022). Language learners must know a word's form (e.g., spoken, written, and word parts), meaning (e.g., form/meaning, concepts/referents, and associations), and use

(e.g., collocations, constraints on use, and grammatical functions) (Nation, 2022). However, building a sufficient vocabulary is a central challenge for language learners (Nation, 2022). Previous research in diverse linguistic contexts reported difficulties in vocabulary learning, including English (Teng et al., 2024), French (French & Beaulieu, 2020; Tskhovrebova et al., 2022), German (Röthlisberger et al., 2023), Italian (Nicolaidou et al., 2023), and Spanish (Tocaimaza-Hatch & Santo, 2023).

However, recent computer and mobile technologies have allowed for more targeted interventions in language learning (Burston & Giannakou, 2022), including vocabulary (Lin & Lin, 2019). A plethora of research on vocabulary learning apps (e.g., Babbel, Busuu, Duolingo, Memrise, and Rosetta Stone) has documented valuable insights into their pedagogical affordances (Shortt et al., 2023). Another way technology has impacted language learning (e.g., vocabulary gains) has been corpora, enhanced by computational corpus linguistics (Monaghan & Rowland, 2017). Corpora consist of a "large, principled collection of naturally occurring language stored electronically" (Reppen, 2010, p. 23). Researchers have endorsed using corpora for vocabulary learning and teaching (Ma & Mei, 2021). Even vocabulary lists for general (e.g., the General Vocabulary List) and academic/specific (e.g., the Academic Vocabulary List) purposes have been devised using corpora (Brezina & Gablasova, 2015).

Advancing technologies have also led to the emergence of multimodal corpora, such as YouGlish (https://youglish.com/), serving as a video pronunciation dictionary (Topal, 2023) and Voscreen (https://www.voscreen.com/) for language (e.g., listening, vocabulary, and pronunciation) practice (Nushi & Momeni, 2022). Unlike traditional corpora such as the Corpus of Contemporary American English (https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/) and the Oxford English Corpus (https://www.sketchengine.eu/oxford-english-corpus/), which can mainly be used by researchers and lexicographers, online resources like YouGlish and Voscreen serve as multimodal corpora for researchers, learners, and teachers. Previous research revealed several benefits of the two multimodal corpora for language learning and teaching (Sardegna & Jarosz, 2022; Topal, 2023; Yücetürk & Bergil, 2021).

One such multimedia corpus is PlayPhrase.me (https://www.playphrase.me/) (see Appendix) – an online resource that has received scant attention. It allows users to search for words or phrases included in movies and TV series. In language learning methodology, the significance of vocabulary and word combinations (e.g., collocations) is reflected through Lewis's (1993) lexical approach. The centrality of lexis, the de-prioritization of grammar, and the salience of contextual and meaningful input are among the tenets of this approach (Pemberton, 2024). In this sense, PlayPhrase.me might have great potential to assist language learners and teachers with authentic vocabulary use in context. However, only two studies included this website in their research. For instance, Veiga Norlander (2022) investigated the effectiveness of Playphrase.me and revealed advantages for receptive vocabulary knowledge. Similarly, Ahmad (2023) compared Playphrase.me with SKELL (Sketch Engine for language learning) in perceiving phrasal verbs and idioms among adult English learners. Hence, there is a need for a descriptive-evaluative study that will bridge the research gap.

Considering these arguments, the current review aims to evaluate the PlayPhrase.me website using Topal's (2022) framework comprising a general description, technical features, pedagogical affordances, and a conclusion. Accordingly, the website in focus will first be described. The website's technical features and potential pedagogical affordances will then be outlined. The review will end with a conclusion and recommendations for future research.

General Description

Established by Evgeny Potapenko in 2014, PlayPhrase.me is an online database of clips from movies and TV shows. Users can access this resource at https://www.playphrase.me/. The tool has been

available as a mobile app through the Apple App Store (https://apps.apple.com/tr/app/playphraseme/id6443976432) since 2022. The website allows users to watch five video clips without registration/login. All that language learners or entertainment enthusiasts have to do is go to the website, which will automatically begin playing videos, including random phrases (see Figure 1).

The website allows users to search for words or phrases in English (10,174,281 words/phrases), French (1,622,862 words/phrases), Spanish (1,205,422 words/phrases), Japanese (846,822 words/phrases), Italian (673,989 words/phrases), and German (288,277 words/phrases). Users can also access the tool on YouTube and Facebook by clicking on the two tabs at the top right of the website. Those wishing for full video access must register or subscribe using the Patreon webpage (https://www.patreon.com/playphraseme). Since an individual entrepreneur developed this tool, it operates on a subscription-based system whereby users sponsor the developer by donating USD $5 + VAT a month or USD $4.20 per month if paid annually.

As indicated in Figure 2, captions are provided with the searched phrases highlighted. Users can select the target language for the translation to be presented under captions. The large icons for "play," "forward," and "backward" enable users to move between the videos. Users can also view the most common database phrases and their favorites on the right-hand side. By entering the query item (e.g., "*que je suis à*") into the search box, users can embark on a cinematic journey wherein they enjoy viewing engaging video clips, including target phrases. The tool also allows users to search specific grammar structures in English. By clicking the "GR" button, users can type a sentence in a particular grammatical tense (e.g., modal verb structures) (see Figure 3). A subsidiary website (https://www.whatpoliticssay.com/) powered by PlayPhrase.me is also available to users interested in phrases or statements by U.S. politicians.

At the bottom on the right, the user can cancel playing the videos by clicking the cross icon, save them by pressing the star sign, or enlarge the screen with the frame icon. The number of videos for each searched item is also available in the bottom right corner. The three dots allow users to access keyboard shortcuts and settings. Users can customize the frequency of showing subtitles (always, when video paused, never show), translate directions (more than 50 languages), the viewing of phrase translations
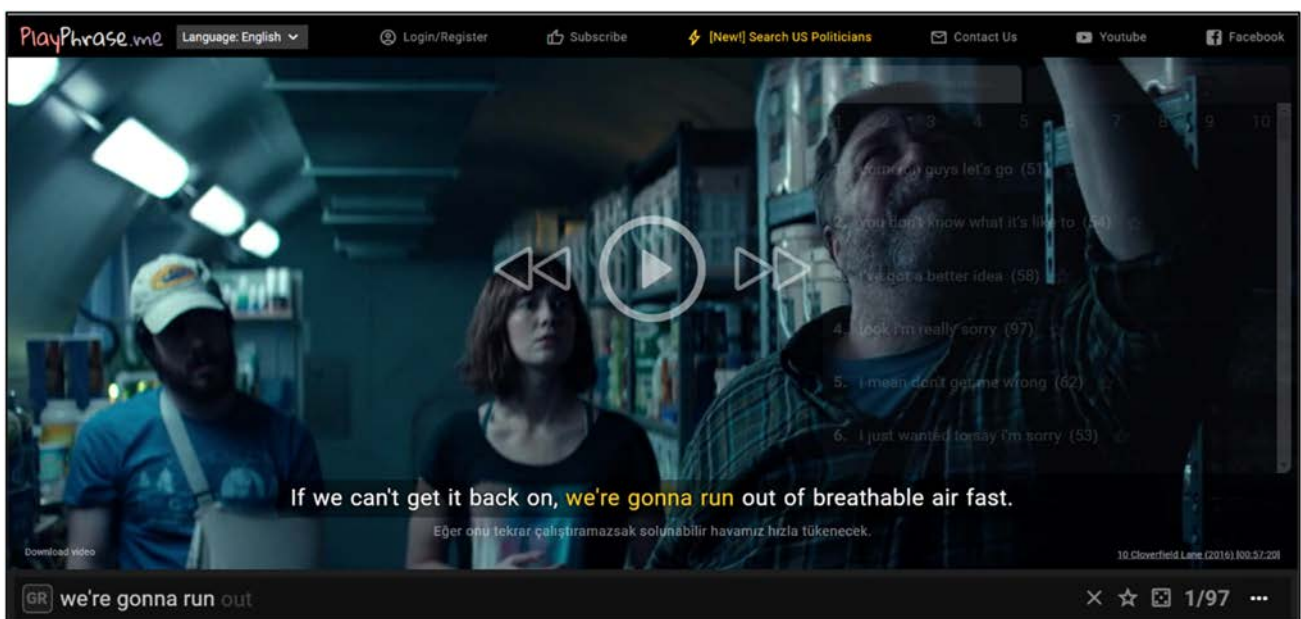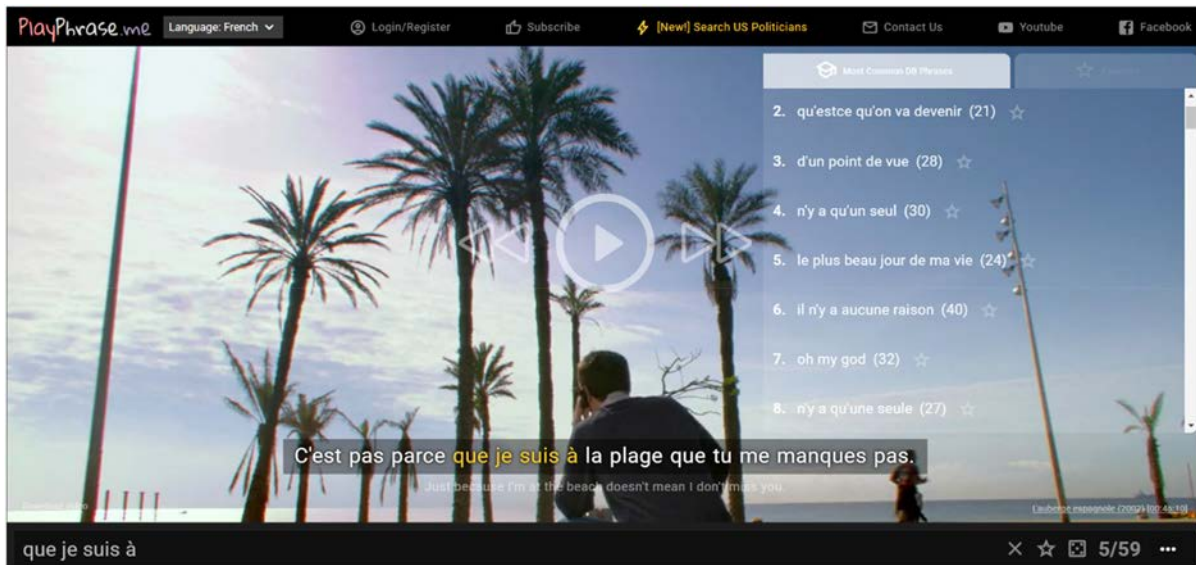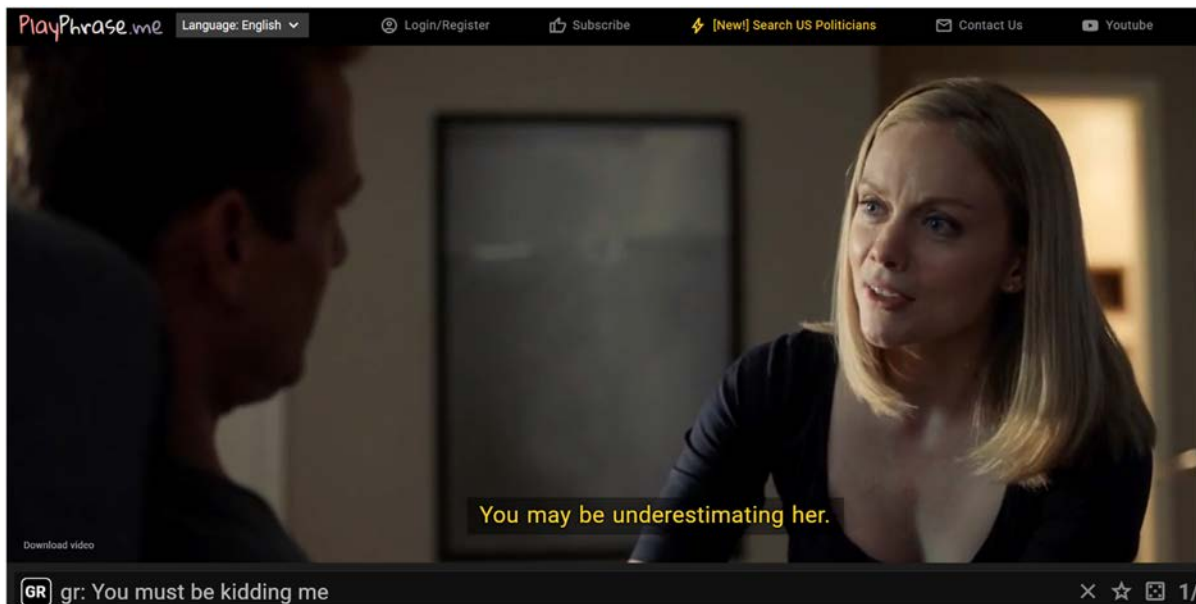

Figure 1 *The Main Screen.*

Figure 2 *The Main Features.*

Figure 3 *The Grammar Search.*

(always, when video paused, never show), and the timing of common phrases (when video paused or never show). Additionally, the information (movie title, release year, and the video's exact running time) about the played video clip can be accessed at the bottom right page. Furthermore, the website allows users to download videos by clicking "download video" at the bottom left.

Technical Features

User Interface and Navigation

PlayPhrase.me's user-friendly interface allows for easy navigation on the website. The website is not overloaded with multiple tabs or buttons that could be complicated for users. A simple search bar and

playback features enable users to watch and listen to videos without manual intervention. However, users might also play, resume, or skip between clips. The results are presented sequentially, focusing on the specific phrase. Nevertheless, the pop-up frame (including common and favorite phrases) that appears when moving the mouse might be distracting since it emerges on the right side of the screen, which can block a whole video view.

Search and Filtering

The search experience is easy with a simple search bar under the website. Despite the above-average functioning with phrasal queries, searching for specific grammar structures may not result in the intended or desired outcomes. Entering the grammar forms (e.g., have been or may be doing) either does not start the search or yield promising results. Therefore, it requires an update on search and filtering since the website would definitely benefit from a systematic filtering feature.

Database and Content Quality

Although the website stands out with its extensive video content, which varies from 288,277 German to 10,174,281 English phrases, the quality of videos needs improvement. The short video durations and automatic looping of videos might also be annoying for viewers. Currently, the website's database supports six languages, each with a different number of phrases.

Technical Compatibility

PlayPhrase.me is fully compatible with desktops, tablets, and smartphones via web browsers. The tool's mobile version is accessible only to Apple users through the App Store. There is no dark or light mode, which might be visually unappealing to users with optical sensitivities. However, several other features, from subtitling to translations, are customizable through the settings. The contact information is not explicitly available on the website. However, users can click "contact us," which automatically directs them to the email page.

Despite the website's simplicity, further updates are required, especially for advanced search options and filtering. Users might also benefit from enhanced video (aural and visual) quality and additional features in settings. An extension to the database might also expose users to manifold phrases.

Pedagogical Fit

Data-Driven Learning

One way to benefit from PlayPhrase.me is via its potential to serve as a data-driven learning (DDL) tool. Johns (1991) defines DDL as "the attempt to cut out the middleman as far as possible and to give the learner direct access to the data" (p. 30) that "help [students] to become better language learners outside the classroom" (Johns, 1991, p. 31). This approach treats naturally-occurring language input as data and learners as researchers. In this sense, it applies more to advanced language users. Similarly, language teachers might exploit this tool and create small corpora to teach vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar (Crosthwaite & Steeples, 2024; Hirschi & Kang, 2024). Given the scarcity of learner-appropriate, authentic pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary materials (Couper, 2021; Purwaningrum & Yusuf, 2020; Rehman & Perveen, 2021), PlayPhrase.me might act as a multimodal corpus for these language skills. Previous research also revealed the effectiveness of DDL to master language skills (Hirschi & Kang, 2024).

Building Vocabulary

Through repeated exposure to contextualized use of phrases and word combinations, language learners might construct a good vocabulary base. Similar claims were made regarding the impact of repeated exposure on lexical gains (Mister et al., 2023). Given the positive contributions of contextualization and multimodality on recall and retention (Nami & Asadnia, 2024; Zhou & Wang, 2024), autonomous language learners might leverage this website. Also, language teachers might create small corpora comprising target vocabulary (e.g., unit vocabulary, colloquial expressions, and idioms) and integrate them into their lesson plans. Previous studies supported our claim that learner- and teacher-generated corpora and content might contribute to positive learning outcomes, including vocabulary gains (Lambert et al., 2023; Lo, 2023).

Pronunciation Perception

Exposure to language input through multimedia content benefits language learning (Zhang & Zou, 2022). Given the significance of intelligible pronunciation for effective communication (Demir & Kartal, 2022), language learners might utilize PlayPhrase.me to perceive how individual words or expressions are pronounced in connected speech. As the pronunciation of words in isolation differs from those in connected speech (Guskaroska et al., 2024), learners might familiarize themselves with the perceptional pronunciation of lexical items in context. In addition, since the website allows for video downloads and incorporation, teachers might generate a video pronunciation corpus for them in their lesson plans. Since vocabulary knowledge encapsulates form, meaning, and use (Nation, 2022), presenting word pronunciations before reading or listening tasks might be conducive to learning. Viewing clips from movies and TV shows also means exposure to various accents, suggesting the ease of accent familiarity for speech comprehensibility (Miao, 2023).

Multilingual Support

The availability of video clips in English, French, Spanish, Japanese, Italian, and German implies their broad utility for diverse language learners. In parallel with the Council of Europe's plurilingual and pluricultural competences (Coste et al., 2009), immersing in multimodal content (i.e., movies and TV shows) of diverse genres will also indirectly expose learners to authentic input in six target languages and their cultures because movies are cultural artifacts and contain cultural information (Berger & Packard, 2022). However, short video durations on the PlayPhrase.me website might hamper adequate cultural exposure.

User Experience and Limitations

Despite its great potential as a multimodal corpus, the PlayPhrase.me website has several pedagogical and technical limitations. Pedagogically, brief excerpts from movies and TV shows might hinder complete contextual understanding. However, repeated exposure to the same grammatical or lexical structures might yield positive outcomes, which must be corroborated in prospective experimental studies. Also, a lack of customization on linguistic (e.g., grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, and language proficiency levels) and cinematic (e.g., filtering movie genres) searches might result in demotivation and ineffective attempts for language learning gains. Additionally, a lack of assessment means and a competitive learning environment could lead to insufficient website use among learners.

Technically, the limited video view (five for each query) might be discouraging for language learners. However, a monthly payment of USD $5 for a subscription might be considered a payable sum to be granted full access. Also, mediocre audiovisual quality might be a technical constraint, warranting

further attention toward more high-resolution videos. In addition, a more viable option for contacting the developer would benefit website users and contribute considerably to the website's credibility. Lastly, the automatic looping of videos might also reveal visually inappropriate (e.g., nude) scenes from movies and TV shows.

Conclusion

Adopting Topal's (2022) framework, the present review assessed the pedagogical utility of the Play-Phrase.me website. The results indicated considerable potential for data-driven learning, vocabulary growth, perceptual aspects of pronunciation, exposure to diverse accents, and plurilingual and pluricultural support. In contrast, several drawbacks were also cited: short video durations, a lack of linguistic-cinematic customization, limited viewing frequency, visually inappropriate scenes, and the need for high-resolution videos and various contact options. It is imperative to note that this website would be more appropriate for advanced or autonomous language learners since it lacks a filter for language proficiency levels. However, it would address more to language teachers in terms of corpus compilation and course integration. Overall, the review reiterates the under-researched educational opportunities of PlayPhrase.me. Therefore, studies with different designs (qualitative, quantitative, and mixed) are needed to substantiate the review's findings.

Teacher's Reflection

One of the website's key strengths is its prospective utilization as a multimodal corpus for lexical and grammatical structures, from collocations and colloquial expressions, to tenses and modal verbs. However, the pedagogical and technical limitations I mentioned earlier also existed in my teaching experience. I primarily benefited from the website in introducing and practicing word pronunciations. I must also report student engagement and interest in the website. I further generated small corpora for vocabulary and pronunciation since the website allowed me to download videos with captions.

Nevertheless, the monthly USD $5 payment restricted me from integrating the website into my lessons. I must also reiterate the inconvenience that short video durations created. As a teacher-researcher, I believe integrating manifold assessment options might significantly benefit skills development.

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Appendix

The Product at a Glance

Title	PlayPhrase.Me: Site for Cinema Archeologists
Developer	Evgeny Potapenko
Website	https://www.playphrase.me/ www.youtube.com/@PlayPhraseMe https://www.facebook.com/playphrase/
Product type	Multimedia corpus for phrases
Supported languages	English, French, Spanish, Japanese, Italian, and German
Desktop operating systems	Windows, macOS, Linux (through browsers such as Chrome, Firefox, Safari, etc.)
Mobile operating systems	Requires iOS 15.1 or later; Requires macOS 12.0 or later and a Mac with Apple M1 chip or later.
Registration	Not applicable
Hardware requirements	Desktop computer or mobile device and a stable internet connection
Price	Mobile App: Free Website: Free (up to five videos + requires registration and subscription of $3.5/month on Patreon for full access)