

A COMPARATIVE STUDY: PREDICTING INTERFERENCE
AND FACILITATION FOR TAGALOG SPEAKERS IN
LEARNING ENGLISH NOUN-HEAD MODIFICATION PATTERNS

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The descriptive-comparative studies of two given languages make it possible to locate points of similarity and difference between these two languages, and to predict more precisely the interference and facilitation the speakers will encounter in learning the new language.

The purpose of this study was threefold: (1) to compare a part of English syntax with an equivalent part of Tagalog syntax; (2) to predict the points of interference and facilitation that will arise at this syntactical level for Tagalog speakers learning English and classify them on different levels of ease and difficulty; (3) to prepare sample testing materials based on the predicted points of interference and facilitation and to administer these tests to a sampling of Tagalog speakers to verify the predictions made.

Since the complete comparison of two languages is a task of great magnitude, this study was limited to some of the major noun-head modification structural patterns. The procedures for comparison set up by Robert Lado in his book, *Linguistics Across Cultures* (Ann Arbor 1957) were followed.

In the comparative analysis, the similarities and differences of English and Tagalog were assumed to be a function of three linguistic factors: *form*, *meaning*, and *distribution*. Form refers to the shape of the elements in isolated forms as well as in sequences, to the order of the elements, to stress, and to function words in relation to the other elements in the construction. Meaning refers to the grammatical meaning, that is, the modifier in its relation to the head. Distribution refers to the occurrence of the construction in the larger structural patterns of the language; this was restricted to subject function.

A one-to-one comparison will often make it immediately apparent why certain interferences occur. Generally a language system set against a more complex one yields a greater amount of interference than facilitation. Those structures with all features similar will be easy to learn because they will be trans-

ferred and may function satisfactorily in the foreign language. There is maximum facilitation and minimum interference. Those structures that are different will be difficult because when transferred they will not function satisfactorily in the foreign language. In this case, there is maximum interference and minimum facilitation. However, if in the NL (native language) structures there are some features that will resemble the FL (foreign language), then there is facilitation and those features that are different cause the interference. With new structures, that is without parallel in the NL, there is no transfer nor facilitation; there will be difficulty encountered since the learner has to form new habits of recognizing and producing the new patterns.

The predicted language learning problems were then classified under two types, *reception* and *production* after the comparison. Some patterns were assumed to be easier to recognize than to produce. Then these predicted problems were assigned to different levels of ease and difficulty arranged in ascending order from A to D. To verify the predictions made a special exploratory test was constructed and administered to three hundred Tagalog students in the Philippines. For the reception type, English patterns serve as the stimuli and the students give the Tagalog equivalent, and for the production type, Tagalog patterns serve as the stimuli. For both types we use normal utterances in sentence forms. It is a paper and pencil type of test.

The test results confirmed the predictions made. The proportions of wrong answers increased from Level A through Level D. The differences were statistically significant.

Application of the methodology.

Examples: *Adjective-Noun.*

Pattern Type I.

English A N

beautiful girl

beautiful girls

Tagalog A η N

N η A

maganda η dalaga

dalaga η maganda

magaganda η dalaga

dalaga η magaganda

maḡa dalaga η magaganda

maḡa magaganda η dalaga

maḡa maganda η dalaga

Form:

English. The adjective precedes the noun head (*N*). In many cases the adjective is a derived form, with a noun or verb as stem plus a suffix.

Tagalog. There is a similar construction but there is a particle *η* or *na*¹ which connects the modifier and the head referred to as *N*. These two elements can occur in any order with the *η* or *na* between them. The modifier may be determined by the context. The adjective often occurs in derived form, too.

There is number concordance between the modifier and the *N*: when the head is plural, the adjective must also be plural. However, this change is restricted to the descriptive adjective that denotes quality. The root is reduplicated and in some instances a plural marker *maηa* is preposited to the modifier and the head.

e.g. *maηa maganda η dalaga*
maηa magaganda η dalaga
magaganda η dalaga

Meaning:

English. "When the modifier of a Class 1 word (noun) is a Class 3 word (adjective) the meaning of the modification structure is that of 'quality' to a substance."² However, Fries describes three situations in which special features of the adjective or noun signal meanings other than "quality."

Tagalog. In the sequence *A η N* or *A na N* the modifier restricts the *N*. This pattern is limited to single-word adjectives.

Comparison:

The main differences of the Tagalog pattern from the English are: presence of the conjunctive particle *η ~ na*; order of the modifier and the head is not fixed; reduplication of the modifier or presence of *maηa* when the head is in the plural form.

Problems:

Predictions.

a. *Reception:* The singular pattern is easier for the Tagalog learner to recognize. The interference lies in the order of the modifier and its head. He must therefore learn that in the

¹*η* is used after a vowel, *n* or glottal stop, and *na* after another consonant.

²Charles C. Fries, *The Structure of English*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1952. p. 221.

English pattern the modifier usually precedes the *N* and there is no particle to connect the modifier and the head. There is more interference in the recognition of the plural pattern because Tagalog has five forms against one form in English. Only the pattern that corresponds to the English pattern causes facilitation and the other forms cause the interference, hence must be controlled. There is relearning involved here.

b. *Production*: For the singular pattern, the Tagalog learner has two patterns so he has to learn to use just that which corresponds to the English form. The derived forms of English will cause much interference because Tagalog uses the prefix *ma-* for most modifiers that indicate quality. First, the learner will have to learn the many different suffixes. Secondly, he will have to learn the different meanings signalled by these suffixes.

For the plural pattern, Tagalog has five forms to equate the one plural form in English. The learner has to learn to control the alternate patterns not needed and make the proper selection of the NL pattern that could be equated to the FL pattern. There will be much relearning involved here. These patterns (singular and plural) are classified in Level C for production whereas for reception in Level B for they are easier to recognize than to produce.

Findings:

a. *Reception*: The singular pattern was easier to recognize than the plural pattern. There were two hundred cases out of three hundred who failed to recognize the plural inflection of the head.

b. *Production*: The singular pattern was easy to produce. For the plural pattern, two hundred and fifty students failed to produce the *-s* inflection of the *N*.

Pattern Type II.

English A A N

big black dog

Tagalog A η A η N

A η N η A

malaki η itim na aso

malaki η aso η itim

Form:

English. Two adjectives before the noun both modifying it. Word order is usually fixed.³

³Some stylistic variation is permitted so that there may sometimes be a change of order on the two adjectives serving as modifiers but both still precede the *N*.

Tagalog. Two adjectives before the noun both modifying it. The order of the modifiers in pre-position to the *N* is not fixed.

Meaning:

English. Quality of substance.

Tagalog. Quality of substance.

Problems:

Predictions.

a. *Reception:* There should be no difficulty for the Tagalog learner in recognizing this English pattern since the meaning is similar and the form involving position (or word order) will be supplied for him. This is therefore an easy pattern for the Tagalog learner. Facilitation occurs in the similarity of meaning and the form with the modifiers preceding the *N*. The interference will be caused by those patterns having the *N* between the modifier or preceding them. Since word order is supplied, the English patterns will be easier to recognize than to produce. This is assigned to Level B.

b. *Production:* The difference in word order will cause much interference so this is a difficult pattern to produce and we assign it to Level C. Since Tagalog permits any order of the modifiers in relation to the *N* while English permits only one, the Tagalog will tend to produce patterns like *black big dog*, *black dog big*, *dog black big*, *big dog*, *black dog*.

Findings:

a. *Reception:* There was a tendency to omit one of the adjectives

e.g. instead of *malaki η puti η aso* 'big white dog'

the common answers were:

(a) *malaki η aso* 'big dog'

(b) *puti η aso* 'white dog'

(c) *aso η malaki* 'big dog'.

b. *Production:* This pattern A A *N* is more difficult to produce than to recognize.

e.g. instead of *old red dress*

the common answers were:

(a) *old dress red*

(b) *old dress that is red*⁴

(c) *old dress of red*

(d) *old dress with color red.*

⁴In the answers (b), (c), and (d) the meaning of the pattern is understood but the form is wrong, hence interference lies in this part.

*Pattern Type III.**English*A-er *N* bigger houseA-est *N* biggest housemore A *N* more beautiful
housemost A *N* most beautiful
house*Tagalog*pinaka-A *N*pinakamalaki η bahay
'biggest house'

}	<i>lalo</i> <i>mas</i> <i>labis</i> <i>higit</i>	A <i>kaysa N</i>
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e.g.

Si Lita ay *lalo* η marunon
kaysa kay Fe.'Lita is more intelligent
than Fe'*Form:**English.* The English construction has two forms.

- a. adjective with *-er* or *-est* inflection occurs before *N*
- b. *more* and *most* occur in intensifier slot⁵ before A *N*.

Tagalog. The Tagalog construction has also two forms but cannot be directly equated with the English forms.

- a. adjectival stem with the prefix *pinaka-* occurs either before or after the *N*.
- b. *lalo*, *mas*, *labis*, *higit*, occur in the intensifier slot before A *N*.

*Meaning:**English.* The *-er* and *more* constructions indicate 'to a greater extent or degree.'The *-est* and *most* constructions indicate 'to the greatest extent or degree.'*Tagalog.* The *pinaka-* and the *mas*, *lalo*, *higit*, *labis*, occur

⁵The *more* intensifier occurring before a plural *N*, ambiguity may arise due to the fact that *more* indicates plurality as well as intensity. However, the presence of a pause distinguishes the two patterns involved.

e.g.

- more/beautiful houses (plurality)
 more beautiful/houses (intensity)

with the derived adjectives which is the *ma-* class denoting quality 'to the greatest extent or degree.'

Problems:

Predictions.

a. *Reception:* The Tagalog learner will have to learn to respond to the inflected forms *-er* and *-est* as they are new. Since the meaning is familiar, facilitation occurs. They are difficult patterns and so we assign them to Level C.

For the English patterns with *more* and *most*, a different kind of problem is involved. In Tagalog the intensifier indicating 'to the greatest extent or degree' is *pinaka-*, a bound morpheme, in contrast to English *most* which is a free morpheme.

<i>English</i>	<i>Tagalog</i>
most A N	pinaka-A N
most beautiful house	pinakamalaki η bahay
	'most big house'
	biggest house

These patterns are easier to recognize than the inflected forms so we assign them to Level B.

b. *Production:* Here the Tagalog learner will have to learn to produce the inflected forms and the intensifiers especially the form indicating 'to the greatest extent or degree.' The learner has only one pattern in his NL, (*pinaka-A N*) which he will tend to equate with the English forms (*A-est N*; *most A N*). He, therefore, produces such forms as **most big house* or **beautifullest house*.⁶ There is facilitation since the meaning is familiar but more interference occurs here than on the reception level especially on the inflected forms which are new to the learner. This is assigned to Level D.

Findings:

a. *Reception.* The pattern (*most A N*) was easier to recognize than (*more A N*).

Instead of *anj pinakamaganda η regalo* 'the most beautiful gift'

the common answers were:

- (a) *anj pinakamaganda* 'the most beautiful'
- (b) *anj maganda* 'the beautiful'
- (c) *anj maganda η regalo* 'the beautiful gift.'

Instead of *mas mahirap na leksyon* 'more difficult lesson'

⁶The symbol * indicates a non-English pattern.

- (a) mahirap na leksyon 'difficult lesson'
- (b) pinakamahirap na leksyon 'most difficult lesson'
- (c) mahirap 'difficult'
- (d) mas mahirap 'more difficult.'

b. *Production.*

Instead of *most beautiful house*

- (a) beautifulest house
- (b) beautiful house
- (c) most beautiful
- (d) very beautiful house
- (e) most house.

Instead of *cleaner seat*

the common answers were:

- (a) clean seat
- (b) seat clean
- (c) seat more clean
- (d) seat more cleaner
- (e) seat that is more clean
- (f) seat cleaner
- (g) most clean seat.

The common difficulties of the Tagalog speakers as revealed in their responses are word order, the *-er* or *-est* suffix, tendency to overmark, failure to include the *N*. These are caused by the differences between the Tagalog patterns and the English patterns.

The conclusions and implications made as a result of this study are: (1) there is an effect of previously learned language habits upon foreign language learning; similar elements were found easy and different ones difficult; (2) a comparison of the students' native language and the language to be learned furnishes a basis for better description of the language learning problems involved, preparation of teaching materials, and constructions of tests for diagnostic and evaluation purposes; (3) it is not only possible to predict areas of interference as well as facilitation between the two languages but also to rank them into different levels of ease and difficulty; (4) empirical evidence is helpful in verifying predicted language learning problems and also in unravelling other problems involved; (5) teachers with a knowledge of such problems can be expected to guide their students better. They will understand the cause of an error and be better able to prepare corrective drills; (6) the learning burden can be graded according to difficulty instead of arranging the lesson series in a purely logical sequence.