CLDcorner

Tagalog and English: A Contrastive Discussion

Part 2: Comparisons of Tagalog and English Syntax and Morphology

By: Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Task Force Members

The Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Corner was created in an effort to provide information and respond to questions on cultural and linguistic diversity. Questions are answered by members of the TSHA task force on Cultural and Linguistic Diversity. Members for the 2011-2012 year include **Ellen Stubbe Kester**, PhD, CCC-SLP (co-chair); **Margarita Limon-Ordonez**, MS, CCC-SLP (co-chair); **Lynette Austin**, PhD, CCC-SLP; **M. Ruth Fernandez**, PhD, CCC-SLP; **Barbara Fernandes**, MS, CCC-SLP; **Rachel Aghara**, PhD, CCC-SLP; **Lisa Carver**, MA, CCC-SLP; **Tracey Gray**, MA, CCC-SLP; **Scott Prath**, MA, CCC-SLP; **Stacy Thomas**, BS, and **Sarah Panjwani**, BA.

Submit your questions to Ellen Kester at ellen.kester@bilinguistics.com. Look for responses from the CLD Task Force on TSHA's website and in the *Communicologist*.

The Cultural and Linguistic Diversity (CLD) Task Force is now offering half- and full-day trainings for school districts, Education Service Centers, university programs, and other agencies on assessment and intervention with CLD populations. For information, contact Ellen Kester at ellen.kester@bilinguistics.com.

Part 1 of this contrastive discussion on English and Tagalog was featured in the CLD Corner in the October 2011 issue of the *Communicologist*. This CLD Corner delves into Part 2 of the discussion, which focuses on a comparison of the syntax and morphology of English and Tagalog.

There are significant differences in the linguistic features of Tagalog and English. The differences can be found in the basic sentence structure of each language and in word inflections used to change meaning. Tables 2 through 4 provide examples of these differences. The first language difference considered in this writing is seen in the sentence and the use of articles in noun-phrase structure. In Tagalog, the sentence structure includes a predicate and a topic, while, in English, the typical structure consists of a subject and a predicate. Differences are also seen in the use of definite and indefinite articles. In Tagalog, the same articles are used interchangeably to indicate definite or indefinite nouns. Whether a Tagalog article is definite or not is derived from the linguistic and situational context. In English, the article itself provides that information. Table 2 presents samples of basic sentences and the use of articles in each language.

Table 2: Syntax and Use of Articles

	Tagalog	English	Expected Difficulties
Sentence Structure:			
Predicate position in basic sentence	**Predicate + Topic**	**Subject + Predicate**	
	Artiast ang babae. (artist) (the woman)	The woman is an artist.	subject verb complements
	Maganda ang babae. (beautiful) (the woman)	The woman is beautiful.	adjective complements
	Yumaman ang babae. (got rich) (the woman)	The woman got rich.	elaborated verb phrases
Articles:	**ang, ng**	**a, the, an**	
Meaning definite or indefinite	**ang** kendi **ng** kendi **ng** mansanans	a candy, the candy the candy, a candy an apple, the apple	use of definite vs. indefinite articles

Both languages have some flexibility in word order, as in "The man gave the woman the book," and "The man gave the book to the woman." Similarly, in Tagalog, "Nagbigay ng libro sa babae an lalaki" and "Nagbigay ng libro ang lalaki sa babae" also show that flexibility within phrase. For Tagalog, however, the predicate remains in the initial position of the sentence structure. For Tagalog speakers, learning to begin with the subject (topic) and using articles within predicate phrases may cause difficulty. Tagalog verb constructions are also appreciably different from those typical for English.

Table 3: Verbs, Adverbs, and Inflections

	Tagalog	English	Expected Difficulties
Verbs:	**mag, nag, na**	**will, has, had, ed**	
Contemplated Reduplicating the first syllable of the root and prefixing **mag**- to the base	**Maglu**luto ng pagkain ang nanay bukas.	Mother will cook some food tomorrow. [future]	Will
Completed Add **nag** to the root word, add **nag** + **na** for the present and past perfect	**Nag**luto ng pagkain ang nanay. (completed form) **Nag**luto **na** ng pagkain ang nanay. **Nag**luto **na** ng pagkain ang nanay. (noong dumating ako)	Mother cooked some food. [past tense] Mother has cooked some food. [present perfect] Mother had cooked some food. (when I arrived) [past perfect]	Morphological marker –ed has + -ed had +ed-
Not completed but begun Formed by prefixing *nag*- to the verb root and reduplicating its first syllable	**Naglu**luto ng pagkain ang nanay. **Naglu**luto (na) ng pagkain ang nanay. **Naglu**luto ng pagkain ang nanay.	Mother cooks some food every day. Mother is cooking some food. [present progressive] Mother was cooking some food. [past progressive]	Adding -s for third person singular verb is + ing was + ing

Grammar: Related materials pages, n.d. In Tagalog, the emphasis of the verb is placed on whether the action is contemplated, initiated, or completed rather than on time, past, present, and future, as in English. Tagalog uses the prefix "mag" and a reduplicated syllable "lu" to mark the thought of performing the action "to cook," which is "luto," e.g. "She will cook." The "nag" and "na" are used to mark aspects of the simple past tense and the perfect aspect for completed actions such as in "cooked." Tagalog uses the prefix "nag" and replicated syllable forms for actions begun but not completed. These linguistic differences may create difficulties in acquiring the adverbs and verb morphology that mark time in English.

Table 4: Possessive, Prepositions, and Pluralization

	Tagalog	English	Expected Difficulties
Possessive:	**Ng**	**'s**	
Ng form precedes that which is possessing	Lapis **ng** bata. (pencil) (*belongs* child)	This is the child's pencil.	Possessive /s/
Preposition:	**sa, kina**	**at, in, on**	
Used as locative adverb form for unmarked noun – **sa**	Sumulat siya **sa** mesa.	Writes at the table. Writes on the table.	Prepositions "at," "in," and "on"
Used as locative adverb form for personal pronoun – **kina +**	Diyanitor siya **kina** Ben.	He is a janitor at Ben's place.	Use of "at"
Used as locative adverb form for plural pronoun – **sa**	May trabaho siya **sa** kanila.	Has a job at their place.	Use of "at"
Pluralization:	**mga**	**s, es**	
mga adds a plural meaning to the noun that follow it	**Mga** librong para **sa** bata. (books) (for the child)	These books are for the child.	Plural markers "s" and "es"

Schachter & Otanes, 1972

The marking of prepositions, plurals, and possessives in Tagalog and English is also dissimilar. The marking of possession and pluralization in Tagalog entails the insertion of the words "ng" and "mga" rather than the affixing of "s" or "es" to root words as is done in English. This Tagalog convention of marking plurals and possessions with separate words may reduce a Tagalog-English speaker's facility in applying the English forms. The semantic differences of the Tagalog prepositions "sa" and "kina" as equivalents for "in," "at," and "on" in English can influence the use of prepositions in either language. The fact that in Tagalog "sa" and "kina" are applied differently based on whether the word precedes an unmarked noun, a second-person personal pronoun, or a plural form can also create an influence in applying the conventional English forms. This information can serve to distinguish differences from disorders, i.e. errors in language performance attributed to second-language learning from true errors that provide evidence of a disorder.

This article is dedicated to increasing the understanding of the language features of Tagalog speakers of English. Differences and disorders are distinguished based on detailed language histories that include patterns of L1 and L2 input, opportunities and requirements of use, and an analysis of errors. Although Tagalog is similar to English in that both combine root words with affixes to create different meanings, the languages are dissimilar in sentence structure, verb inflection, and gender marking (Battle, 2002). The use of replicated sections of the root word is seen in Tagalog and not in English. Tagalog-English speakers or English speakers who have a high degree of contact with users of Tagalog could have typical English responses that resemble speech and language disorders. Continued investigation into the Tagalog language is needed to inform intervention. Additionally, this article is aimed at introducing features of Tagalog to readers and serving as a starting point for intervention and elective accent modification programs. Special thanks to Tagalog language consultant **Sherree Medalla** and research assistant **Yolanda Cantu**. ★

References (Part 1: Tagalog and English Phonology, Part 2: Comparisons of Tagalog and English Syntax and Morphology)

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