

TAGALOG AND ENGLISH: A CONTRASTIVE DISCUSSION

Part I: Tagalog and English Phonology

BY: CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY TASK FORCE MEMBERS

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Filipinos have attained some level of Tagalog proficiency. Sometime after the reformed 1965 U.S. Immigration Act was passed, an estimated 1,465,800 Filipino people immigrated to the U.S. (Ciana, n.d.). Like many immigrants to the U.S., they arrived anticipating the start of their new lives. The U.S. Census Bureau (Shin H.B. & Kominski, R.A., 2010) released a summary of information for the year 2007. This summary indicates that there are 1.5 million homes in the U.S. in which families speak the Tagalog language. This number represents a substantial increase in the number of U.S. families speaking Tagalog compared to nearly a half-million reported for 1980. Of the family members 5 years and older who speak Tagalog in their U.S. homes, 71.7% report speaking English very well or well, while 0.6% report not speaking English at all. In the United States, speakers of Tagalog-influenced English present salient characteristics in their English productions that speech-language clinicians and researchers should distinguish as representing a language difference rather than indicating a speech or language disorder. This purpose of this paper is two-fold: First, to provide a set of comparisons of phonological, syntactic, and morphologic features of Tagalog and English and to illustrate the features of English that typical speakers of Tagalog could have difficulty acquiring; and second, to provide this information and references that can be used by speech-language pathologists to distinguish differences from disorders. The cross-linguistic comparison are presented to begin what is expected to be an ongoing discussion of Tagalog English-speaking individuals in both clinical practice and research.

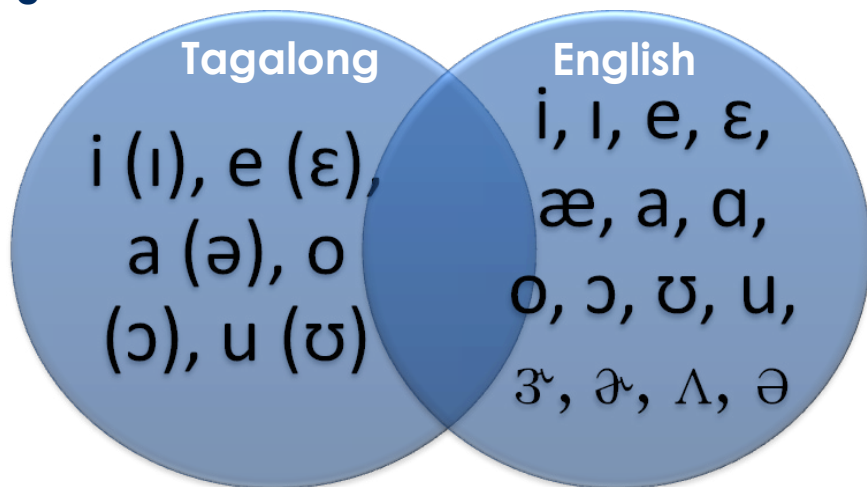
This two-part article is dedicated to increasing the understanding of the language features of Tagalog speakers of English. Differences and disorders are distinguished based on detailed language histories that include patterns of L1 and L2 input, opportunities and requirements of use, and an

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Speech-language pathologists who are unfamiliar with the similarities and differences of English and Tagalog can mistakenly interpret language influences as evidence of a communication disorder or delay. It is for that reason that Tagalog and English are being contrasted in this issue. Tagalog is one of the 154 languages and dialects spoken in the Philippines (Tagalog, Philippine Languages and Dialects, n.d.), a country located in the Pacific Ocean between the United States and Asia. A standard Filipino language, Tagalog has been influenced by contact with other languages, including English and Spanish. It is the primary language of approximately 25% of the people of the Philippines (Battle, 2007), and because it is considered a national language, all

analysis of errors. **Part 2: Comparisons of Tagalog and English Syntax and Morphology will appear in the December 2011 issue of the *Communicologist*.**

Figure 1: Vowels



Five Tagalog vowels and their allophones (shown in parentheses) are compared to 14 English vowels. Shared vowels are noted in the overlapping portion of the Venn diagram (Schachter & Otones, 1972).

below present a comparison of Tagalog and English vowels and consonants that can assist in making these determinations.

Schachter and Otones (1972) describe Tagalog as having the vowels /i, e, a, o, u/ and indicate that the sounds /ɪ, ɛ, ə, ɔ, ʊ/ can be used as allophones of these respective vowels. The vowels /i, e, a, o, u/ shared by the languages are expected to promote the intelligible production of standard English words. However, the allophonic variations and the sounds used in English alone have the potential to reduce intelligibility of English for Tagalog speakers. This can occur because the allophonic sounds are separate vowels in the English language that can change meaning, for example, in the words “ship” and “sheep.” The reduction of intelligible speech can also occur because of unfamiliar oral motor production patterns found in the English-only vowels. The difficulty described above represents a typical process of English-language learning and not evidence of a speech disorder. Such second-language learning aspects of language acquisition may be addressed as appropriate in the contexts of bilingual education program or English-as-a-second-language programs, in the response to intervention processes or as elective services (such as elective ac-

The shared consonants are highlighted in a rose color, while the unshared or varied forms are listed under the E column for English and T for Tagalog (Schachter & Otones, 1972).

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Errors in vowel and consonant sound production can be evidence of a communication disorder. Careful examination of the vowels and consonants used in a first language (L1) provides a basis to evaluate the production of standard English sounds. Clinicians can make judgments about whether sound errors are true errors or typical productions influenced by first language (L1). Figure 1 and Table 1

Table 1: Consonants

Place Manner	Labial		Labiodental		Dental		Alveolar		Palatal		Velar		Glottal		
	T	E	T	E	T	E	T	E	T	E	T	E	T	E	
Stop Voiceless	p	p			t	t					k	k	ʔ	ʔ	
Stop Voiced	b	b			d	d					g	g			
Nasal (V)	m	m			n			n			ŋ	ŋ			
Fricative (VL)			f	f		θ	s	s		ʃ				h	h
Fricative (V)				v		ð		z		ʒ					
Affricate (VL)							tʃ			tʃ					
Affricate (V)										dʒ					
Lateral (V)							l	l							
Tap Trill (V)							r			r r					
Glide (V)		w, m								j	j	w			

Schachter & Otones, 1972

cent modification programs) provided outside the purview of special education or services for speech impairment. Tagalog and English share stop sounds primarily but have significant differences in nasals, fricatives, and affricates. Table 1 below presents information about place, manner, and voicing for Tagalog and English consonants.

Schachter and Otones (1972) describe Tagalog as having both a shared set of consonants and sets that are unique to the language. Fifty-two percent (14 of 27) of the total consonants used in English are also used in Tagalog. The shared consonants include the stops /p, b, t, d, k, g, ʔ/, nasals /m, n/, fricatives /f, s, h/, the lateral /l/, and /j/ glide. The consonants /tʃ, n, w, r/ are represented in both languages; however, they are produced in different places. For example, the sound /tʃ/ is produced at the alveolar for Tagalog and at the palate for English, and the consonant /n/ is produced at the alveolar ridge in English and dentally in Tagalog. The greatest differences between Tagalog and English are found in the voiceless fricatives /θ, ð/, the voiced fricatives /v, ð, z, ʒ/ and the voiced affricate /dʒ/. This set of sounds may prove difficult for Tagalog speakers of English to hear and produce and has the potential to diminish speech intelligibility in English communication. Once again, these errors are not considered evidence of a communication disorder and may be addressed as appropriate in programs such as bilingual education, ESL, or accent modification programs (outside of special education or the speech-impaired category of school services).

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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 responses English 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**. ★

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(Part 1: Tagalog and English Phonology,

Part 2: Comparisons of Tagalog and English Syntax and Morphology)

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