

Mother Tongue Interference in English Pronunciation Among Grade 10 Special Program in the Arts Students: A Phonetic Analysis

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Abstract. Pronunciation is crucial for effective communication, as it helps deliver a message clearly. It involves learning phonetics to produce sounds appropriate for a specific word. Guided by the Contrastive Analysis theory of Robert Lado and the Interlanguage Theory of Larry Selinker, this study aimed to identify the level of proficiency in Bisaya and English pronunciation, as well as the interference from the mother tongue on English pronunciation. A quantitative, causal-comparative design was employed among 50 SPA students. Pronunciation tests adapted from Wilhelmi (2024) in English and validated Bisaya pronunciation with topographical terms were administered to the students and evaluated by language teachers to check their correctness. The results indicated that students were advanced in pronouncing Bisaya, while beginners were advanced in pronouncing English words. The students have difficulty pronouncing English words, which is attributed to interference from their mother tongue. The familiar sounds from Bisaya phonetics that interfered with pronouncing English words were vowel monophthongs /ɑ:/, /ɪ/, /u:/, /ʊ/, /e/, consonant /b/, and diphthong /aɪ/. In contrast, the English sounds that the students mistakenly uttered included vowel sounds /ə/, /e/, /ʌ/, /i:/, and /æ/, as well as consonants /v /v/v/v/, /f/, and /z/. Lastly, there is a significant difference between the mother tongue and English pronunciation scores.

Keywords: Bisaya pronunciation; English pronunciation; Grade 10 SPA students; Mother tongue interference; Phonetic analysis

1.0 Introduction

In learning a language, a learner will undergo a complex process that requires the proper production of sounds to deliver words and messages clearly. A learner's mother tongue frequently affects how they pronounce words in their second language. Additionally, many bilingual students struggle to pronounce the second language correctly due to the influence of sounds from their first language (Hayeesa-i, 2023). Likewise, a study found that learners in China often make mistakes because their native language interferes with the pronunciation of English words (Xue, 2023). Additionally, a study conducted in Indonesia concluded that one of the factors contributing to the mispronunciation of English words is the interference of the mother tongue and the influence of one's own accent. This creates errors in speaking the English language (Anggrarini et al., 2023).

Correspondingly, a study showed that participants from different languages, including Arabic (Saudi), Spanish (Mexican), Turkish, and Filipino, faced challenges in English pronunciation due to their native languages. Bisaya

speakers often struggle to pronounce words with phonemes such as /e/, /ɪ/, /æ/, and /eɪ/. The mentioned phonemes were mispronounced by Filipino learners with a Cebuano mother tongue when reading English words. For instance, the words *artistic* with phonetic transcription of /ɑ:r'tistik/ and *cake* with phonetic transcription of /keik/ were pronounced as /ɑ:r'testi:k/ and /ki:k/ (Taefi, 2024). Moreover, it was stated that one of the significant reasons why mispronunciation occurs is interference from the native language when speaking a second language (Irene et al., 2023).

In Davao City, it was concluded that the everyday usage of the first language affects the students' pronunciation in English (Gorgonio, 2024). Similarly, a study found that mispronunciations can be a cause of differences in English phonemes compared to the mother tongue (Abendan, 2023). In connection to this, first language interference has a significant effect on students' English pronunciation skills (Ajan et al., 2020). Currently, numerous studies have been conducted on the challenges in pronouncing English words due to the interference of their L1 (Kurniawan et al., 2024); however, there are fewer studies analyzing Bisaya phonology as an interference to English pronunciation. For these reasons, this study would fill the gap by determining and analyzing specific phonetic patterns of mother tongue interference in English pronunciation, thereby providing empirical-based insights for the development of pedagogical interventions to improve learners' pronunciation skills.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study used a quantitative paired (within-subjects) design to identify the level of pronunciation in Bisaya and English. This method was appropriate because it distinguishes between two pronunciation scores without manipulating any variables. Notably, it aimed to investigate whether a mother tongue influenced English pronunciation. The researcher then compared the Bisaya and English pronunciations to determine possible mother-tongue interference.

2.2 Participants and Sampling Procedure

The participants in this study were the Grade 10 SPA students enrolled at Matanao National High School during the 2024-2025 school year. The complete enumeration technique was used to select the participants. Therefore, all Bisaya learners were included, while others were excluded. Out of 79 students, only 50 met the criteria and participated in the study. This method ensured full representation of the target group; however, the external validity is limited, as the results may not apply to students in other grade levels.

2.3 Research Instrument

The data of this study were collected through the results of pronunciation tests. The English pronunciation test was adapted from Wilhelmi (2024), while the researcher prepared the Cebuano pronunciation test, which underwent validation by language teachers to verify the correctness of the participants' utterances. Two test sheets were given to the teachers hired by the researcher. Bisaya and English pronunciations were tested using separate test sheets for each language. First, the level of Bisaya pronunciation was identified through topographical terms, in which ten words were selected. Second, a pronunciation test in the English language consisted of ten words. These pronunciation tests were rated 1 point each, equivalent to 10 points per language. The pronunciation of the participants was recorded through a recording device to identify mother tongue interference.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

The data for this study were collected using a recording device to gather participants' pronunciation of both languages, Bisaya and English, one at a time. To pronounce words, they are given a set of words in Bisaya and English to read out loud. It was conducted within three days face-to-face.

2.5 Data Analysis Procedure

Lastly, in interpreting the data, the researcher used statistical tools. Mean and frequency counts were used to determine the students' pronunciation in both languages. A paired-samples t-test was used to examine the significant difference between Bisaya and English, with normality of the data checked using the Shapiro-Wilk test. Effect sizes (Cohen's d) and 95% confidence intervals were reported to show the precision of the differences.

2.6 Ethical Consideration

The researcher ensures that the appropriate ethical considerations are met by ensuring that participants' participation is voluntary and obtained with informed consent. Students were also assured that they would not face any risks, such as physical, emotional, or psychological. Confidentiality of the result was carefully considered.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Level of Bisaya Pronunciation

Table 1 presents the accurate pronunciation results in Bisaya of the participants. The level of utterance of students in Bisaya was an aspect that reflected their skills in pronouncing words using their mother tongue. It was graded by a mother-tongue teacher in Cebuano by examining the sounds produced in each letter from the words given and pronounced by the students.

Table 1. *Accuracy of Pronunciation in Bisaya*

Word	Number of Students with Accurate Pronunciation	Number of Students with Mispronunciation	Frequency (100 %)
Busay	50	0	100%
Baranggay	50	0	100%
Lalawigan	50	0	100%
Bulkan	50	0	100%
Baybayon	48	2	96%
Rehiyon	48	2	96%
Tubod	47	3	94%
Pyapi	47	3	94%
Uma	46	4	92%
Suba	36	14	72%

As shown in the table above, the Bisaya words uttered by the students have corresponding numbers indicating the accuracy of pronunciation among students and the number of students who mispronounced the given words. The words that all students enunciate accurately in the list of Bisaya words were /'bu. Say/, /baran'gay/, /lala'wigan/, and /bul'kan/ with the percentage of one hundred.

Contrastingly, the word with the lowest rate of accurate pronunciation was /'su.ba/, in which the sound /u:/ was uttered as /o/, which fourteen students out of fifty participants mispronounced, having the lowest percentage of seventy. The vowel monophthong /o/ was produced by the student instead of /u :/ Because both are rounded, also called front vowels, as explained in the study by Deiparine (2025). In fact, Toci (2020) stated that even those in advanced stages can produce incorrect sounds unintentionally and still require mastery training.

Table 2. *Level of Bisaya Pronunciation*

Rate	Value	Description
Highest Score	100	Advanced
Lowest Score	80	Approaching Proficiency
Mean Score	95.2	Advanced

Likewise, Table 2 shows that the participants' level of pronunciation in Bisaya has a mean of 95.2. This indicates that the students produced words accurately, with only a few words mispronounced. This means that the students' skills in pronouncing the Bisaya words were described as advanced based on the results from the pronunciation test administered by the researcher and checked by the mother tongue teacher. The highest score was 100, which means students can pronounce words precisely. This score was recognized as the perfect score, converted from the scores of ten, with 100 as the maximum equivalent. The lowest score was 80, which means students had some pronunciation errors.

This proves that Bisaya words are pronounced according to how it is written or spelled out. According to Momongan et al. (2023), Filipino students often utter a word based on its spelling. The participants efficiently produced the words because the sounds in Bisaya were familiar to them. This suggests that the pronunciation of Cebuano is not challenging to learn and use for effective communication. Moreover, Bahian et al. (2024) explained that there are interchangeable vowel sounds in the Bisaya language, but despite this, the meaning of the words remains the same. This showed that it is not challenging to produce Bisaya vowel sounds.

3.2 Level of English Pronunciation

Table 3 presents the accurate pronunciation results in English. The pronunciation results of the students reflected their pronunciation skills in the second language. It was graded by an expert in the English language, who examined the sound of each letter produced by the participants when pronouncing English words.

Table 3. *Accuracy of Pronunciation in English*

Word	Number of Students with Accurate Pronunciation	Number of Students with Mispronunciation	Frequency (100 %)
Ask	40	10	80%
Wednesday	35	15	70%
Stomach	33	17	66%
February	28	22	56%
Jewelry	23	27	46%
Bury	17	33	34%
Mischievous	10	40	20%
Library	10	40	20%
Salmon	9	41	18%
Subtle	8	42	16%

Table 3 shows the word that most students pronounced accurately, which is *ask* with a phonetic transcription of /æsk/. It showed that 40 out of 50, or 80% of the students, were correct. In contrast, the word with the lowest rate of correct pronunciation was "*subtle*", with 16% accuracy, having the phonetic transcription/ 'sʌtəl/. There were 42 out of 50 students who mispronounced it, such as /'sa:btel/, /'su:btel/, /'sʌbtel/, or /'sa:btə/.

In addition, Mukhrizal et al. (2021) revealed in their study that silent consonants, including the /b/ sound, were often mispronounced by learners due to the absence of sound in the first language. The word "*subtle*" is one of the difficult English words that many learners find challenging to pronounce. It poses a challenge for learners that often leads to struggles with pronouncing English words. Therefore, it affects their understanding and communication, as noted by Adi et al. (2025). This is also because there is a vowel that differs in pronunciation from its spelling, and a silent word is present in the word. Thus, sounds that were mostly mispronounced were /ə/, /ʌ/, and the silent /b/.

Table 4. *Level of English Pronunciation*

Rate	Value	Description
Highest Score	80	Approaching Proficiency
Lowest Score	10	Beginner
Mean	41.2	Beginner

As shown in Table 4, the participants' level of English pronunciation has a mean of 41.2. The results show that many students have mispronounced English words, and more than half have scored 50 or below. The highest score was 80, which indicates that the student has some pronunciation errors. This means that there were two mistakes made in pronouncing the words. In addition, the lowest score was ten. This score indicates that the participant correctly pronounced only one word.

Moreover, Faisal (2023) explained in her article that pronunciation in English has many reasons why it is difficult, such as silent letters that cause confusion and word spelling complexities. For example, the /d/ sound is not visible in the word *Wednesday* or the /h/ in the word *ghost*. The vowels also have many sounds in just one letter, and they cover the entire range of mouth position with short and long vowels, which makes it sensitive to pronounce. Hence, vowel sounds cause pronunciation problems due to their complexity, where mispronunciations are inevitable and continue to be an obstacle (Mariani et al., 2025). Thus, it was revealed that achieving perfect English pronunciation was difficult, especially if it was not the student's first language. Mispronunciation is recommended for interventions, especially for students who are not native English speakers, because even teachers experience pronunciation problems. This was supported by the discussion of Nangimah (2020).

3.3 Significance Difference Between Bisaya and English Pronunciation

Table 5 presents the significant difference between Bisaya and English pronunciation scores through the T-test. The T-test was employed with the aid of SPSS software.

Table 5. *T-test Between Bisaya and English Pronunciation Scores*

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	p-value	f-value	Decision on Ho	Interpretation
Bisaya	English	0.00	18.455	Reject Ho	Significant

The table above illustrates the significant difference between the mother tongue, which is Cebuano (Bisaya), and the English pronunciation used by the participants. The results from the SPSS software indicate that the p-value is 0.00 and the f-value is 18.455, suggesting a significant difference between the two groups, and the null hypothesis is rejected. This also explains that the scores of the participants' pronunciation in Bisaya are higher than their English pronunciation, because students rely on familiar sound patterns in Bisaya when uttering English words – a case of first language (L1) transfer.

The familiar sound that was mispronounced was the vowel sounds in both languages. The /u:/ or /ʊ/ sounds in Bisaya and /ə/, /e/, and /ʌ/ in English. These errors indicate L1 transfer, as Bisaya has fewer vowel contrasts than English. Likewise, some mistakes may also result from orthographic influence, where spellings may lead learners to mispronounce words. Similarly, the study by Farhansyah et al. (2024) found numerous discrepancies when students produced words with vowel sounds. Correspondingly, Riswanto (2022) also found that students have difficulty pronouncing English words because their mother tongue interferes with the pronunciation of sounds that do not exist in their L1.

3.4 Mother Tongue Interference on English Pronunciation

Table 6 presents the detailed analysis of the participants' pronunciation of the given English words. These pronunciations were analyzed through transcribing the participants' voices into phonetic transcriptions and then comparing them to the standard English pronunciation. The table displays the words and transcriptions, the sounds, classifications, interference, and the frequency of each mispronounced vowel monophthongs, diphthongs, and consonant sounds.

As shown in Table 6 above, the word with the most frequency is *salmon*, which is pronounced as /sæmən/, where English /ə/ and /æ/ are substituted with sounds /ʊ/ and /ɑ:/. This shows that L1 transfer is due to the absence of /ə/ and /æ/ in the Bisaya vowel system, which typically contains only five vowels (/a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, /u/). However, this finding may apply particularly to the Grade 10 SPA cohort and does not generally apply to all Bisaya-speaking learners.

Moreover, Noviyenty and Putri (2021) explained that English pronunciation, including vowels, is difficult for students to pronounce due to the interference of their first language. In contrast, the least word with interference is *ask*, which is pronounced as /æsk/ with seven counts of interference from the mother tongue /ɑ:/. There is still an interference from their mother tongue, even in small English words, which explains that students tend to use sounds they are familiar with or apply the same patterns from their mother tongue. It was suggested by Chiluisa et al. (2024) that addressing students' phonological problems is crucial to contributing to their overall competence in communicating in English.

In addition, interference occurs when a speaker is bilingual. According to Rahayu's study (2021), being bilingual can lead to interference with sounds in a second language. Irene et al. (2023) claimed that the interference of the mother tongue can affect language learners' speaking skills. Thus, learners may face difficulties learning English pronunciation due to language transfer, also known as the interference of the first language on the second language (Perkins & Zhang, 2022).

Table 6. Mother Tongue Interference on English Pronunciation

Word/Pronunciation	Sound	Classification	Interference	Frequency
Mischievous /ˈmɪs ˈtʃi vəs/	/ə/	Vowel Monophthongs	o - ul <u>o</u> d u: - <u>u</u> lo	19 9
Jewelry /ˈdʒu:əlri:/	/v/ /u:/	Vowel Monophthongs	b - <u>b</u> awal e - <u>e</u> lephant i - <u>i</u> tik ɑ: - <u>a</u> d <u>l</u> aw ə - <u>a</u> bout o - <u>p</u> it <u>o</u>	8 11 7 5 5 2
February /ˈfeb jə ri:/ /ˈfebru:eri:/	/ə/ /e/ /f/	Vowel Monophthongs	ɑ: - <u>a</u> gi i - <u>i</u> sda p - <u>p</u> alit	18 7 6
Library /ˈlaɪ breri:/	/e/ /aɪ/ /i:/	Vowel Monophthongs/Diphthongs	ɑ: - <u>a</u> nino i - <u>i</u> mpas i - <u>i</u> nday	28 5 2
Salmon /sæmən/	/ə/ /æ/	Vowel Monophthongs	o - it <u>l</u> og ɑ: - <u>a</u> ngkol	18 21
Subtle /ˈsʌtəl/	/ʌ/ /ə/ /ʌ/	Vowel Monophthong/Diphthong	ɑ: - h <u>a</u> gok aɪ - a <u>w</u> ay o - i <u>l</u> ong	25 4 1
Ask /æsk/	/æ/	Vowel Monophthongs	ɑ: - <u>a</u> mping	7
Wednesday /ˈwenz dei/	/z/ /e/	Consonant/Vowel Monophthong	s - s <u>a</u> ging i - <u>i</u> nday	14 3
Bury /ˈberi:/	/e/ /i:/ /e/	Vowel Monophthongs	ju: - <u>y</u> uta u: - <u>u</u> law i - <u>i</u> mpyo o - r <u>e</u> lo ɑ: - <u>a</u> lom	12 7 7 3 2
Stomach /ˈstʌmək/	/ʌ/ /ə/	Vowel Monophthongs	o - w <u>a</u> lo u: - a <u>k</u> o ɑ: - l <u>a</u> in ɑ: - <u>a</u> pil	12 2 2 6

4.0 Conclusion

This study examines the mother tongue interference of Bisaya on students' English pronunciation. It was revealed that learners substituted familiar Bisaya sounds as /u:/, /o/, /e/, /ɑ:/, and /ɪ/ for unfamiliar English vowels /ə/, /ʌ/, /æ/, and consonants /v/, /f/, and /z/, often influenced by the spellings in English. To address this, the researcher emphasizes the need for targeted minimal pair training sessions focusing on problematic vowels, rater calibration sessions to ensure consistent assessment on pronunciation, and teacher professional development on phonetic awareness. International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) - based instruction supported by technology or a pronunciation program can also be considered. However, since this study was limited to a small Grade 10 SPA cohort and restricted to specific word lists, its results can be interpreted cautiously. Future researchers may consider including larger samples to validate and expand the understanding of mother tongue interference in English pronunciation.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

Author 1: conceptualization, data gathering, data analysis

Author 2: conceptualization, data analysis, editor

Author 3: data analysis, editor

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The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest throughout the process and publication of this research.

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