# How Multilingual Filipinos Learn Spanish as a Foreign Language: Some Crosslinguistic Considerations

**ANNA SIBAYAN-SARMIENTO, Ph.D.**
University of the Philippines Diliman
aisibayan@up.edu.ph

**ABSTRACT**

The inclusion of foreign language units in the Philippine high school curriculum calls for an urgent examination of how we multilingual Filipinos learn the not-so-foreign Spanish as a foreign language (FL). Filipinos have been learning Spanish since the 1950s, yet little is still known about the learning of a language that is not exactly foreign to us. The present study, which considers adolescent learners who not only speak the country's two official languages but other languages as well, aims to shed light on how multilingual Filipinos learn Spanish as FL by examining how language similarity affects FL learning as evidenced by productions of crosslinguistic influence (CLI) in speech. Monologic and classroom interaction data were gathered from four groups of participants of different proficiency levels. Results were very interesting: English, Filipino, and Romance languages contributed to the majority of CLI production in terms of vocabulary, where English and Filipino were mostly manifested in content words, while Romance languages in function words. For grammar and syntax, English was dominant, while for pronunciation, it was both Filipino and English. Influence from other Philippine languages was scarce, if at all. In light of these findings, this paper concludes with insights on current FL teaching practices. [1]

**KEYWORDS**

Spanish as a foreign language, foreign language learning, adult language acquisition, language contact, crosslinguistic influence

## Introduction

Philippine languages are fruits of centuries of language contact, an incarnation of Spanish legacy that begs to be considered by stakeholders involved in the foreign language enterprise. The inclusion of foreign language units in the Philippine high school curriculum through the Special Program in Foreign Language (SPFL) of the Department of Education (DepEd) calls for an urgent examination of how we multilingual Filipinos learn the not-so-foreign Spanish as a foreign language (FL). In 2009 when the DepEd first launched the SPFL, it was exclusive to the teaching of Spanish. Now on its eighth year, the Spanish program of the SPFL continues to be preferred, as it is, to date, the most widely subscribed among the five languages offered.[2]

Although Spanish was made official language of the Philippines in the late 1600s, it was not widespread enough to gain lingua franca status. It was the language of the elite minority, the language of religion, education, trade, and politics. In the 1900s, when the Americans occupied the country, English eventually replaced Spanish as the language of prestige. The linguistic takeover became definite when the predominantly Spanish-speaking communities of Manila, Intramuros, and Ermita were bombed and destroyed in the Second World War (Rodríguez-Ponga). From 1952 to 1957, Spanish was reduced to being a mandatory subject in university, limited to those taking up Law, Commerce, Liberal Arts, Diplomacy, and Education (RA No. 709). In 1986, Spanish was made optional (RA No. 1881 a.k.a. "Cuenco Law"), and, as a final blow, was removed from the list of official languages alongside Filipino and English in the 1987 Constitution.

However, not many Filipinos are aware that the Spanish language has endured and permeates our daily lives. Even when we think we do not speak it, we do: when we talk about the months of the year, the days of the week, the hours in a day. It is ubiquitous: it is in the *kamiseta* we wear, the *pan de sal* we eat, the *baso* we drink from, the *kotse* we drive, the *gobyerno* we put up with, and the *Diyos* we pray to. When we talk about *trabaho* and *eskwela*, when we say noble things like *palabra de honor* and less noble things like *kesehoda*, when we think of once-a-year events like *Pasko* or the day-to-day *siesta*, there is no escaping Spanish.

The decline in the importance of the Spanish language was not a gradual one: in a span of 40 short years it went from revered to reviled: along with the decline of the prestige of all things Spanish was the decline of the Spanish language (Rodao 104). However, despite its apparent dwindling in use and relevance, it was resilient to societal changes and remained in educational institutions, the persistent presence of which reflects our relationship with it. However, whether we considered it as the language of the motherland or of the colonizer (Argüelles), we first and foremost deemed it a language of the world (Rodao 98). We still do, as we did then.

The implementation of the SPFL is an apparently forward-thinking move by the DepEd, as one of its thrusts is to "prepare students for meaningful interaction in a linguistically and culturally diverse global workplace." (DepEd, "DepEd Enhances Foreign Language Skills"). It is an attempt at coping with the rapid blurring of borders, which we have witnessed in the recent years. While our neighboring countries hasten to gain proficiency in the English language, we step up by taking on the learning of Japanese (Nihongo), Chinese (Mandarin), Korean (in 2019), French, German, and Spanish, as we have already made English our own. However, the prevalent traditional education style in the country, which is largely authoritarian, is reflected in how DepEd views both students and curriculum design, as attested by the top-down process it adopted in creating the SPFL curriculum.

Hence, in this paper, I consider the Filipino multilingual student as the point of departure of foreign language pedagogy, focusing on the effects of his or her existing linguistic knowledge on the FL learning process, specifically on how the languages we Filipinos speak (i.e. Filipino, English, and other Philippine languages) affect the learning of Spanish as FL.

**Foreign Language Learning**

More often than not, linguistic terms are used interchangeably in common speech. In fact, these continue to be contested and negotiated in the field. One perspective is that first language (L1) is also considered mother tongue (c.f. Pattanyak), and second language (L2) may serve as an umbrella term for all languages learned after the first (e.g. Kramsch and Whiteside). However, one's mother tongue need not necessarily be the first acquired by the child, and not all languages learned after the first qualify as L2. A language is considered as L2 when learned in a context where the language is spoken, such as English for Koreans who have come to study in Manila, or Kapampangan for some children in Pampanga whose whose mother tongue is either Filipino or English (c.f. De Guzman, "Kapampangan a dying language"). For other Filipino children whose mother tongue is another Philippine language, Filipino and English are considered L2.

In contrast, a FL is learned in a context where the language is not spoken and hence can only be learned in a formal classroom setting, which is the case of the participants of this study who are Filipino adolescents learning Spanish in a Philippine university. The stark difference in the learning context has serious repercussions in language pedagogy, which makes it disconcerting to find that the DepEd continues to consider English as a FL, despite the existence of the Philippine English variety, as implied on their website: "The SPFL is open to Grades 7 to 12 students who have demonstrated competence in English—based on learners' National Achievement Test (NAT) results—and are capable of learning *another* foreign language" (emphasis mine). Spanish, however, which can be considered not too foreign due to its assimilation into Philippine languages and cultures, explored in *More Hispanic Than We Admit* (Mojares et. al) remains a FL, as it does not exist in Philippine society as a separate linguistic system. It is worth stressing that understanding how L2 differs from FL determines how educators

approach the teaching of each language—from defining learning objectives, to designing courses and their corresponding assessments.

Despite the difference in learning environment, studies on both L2 acquisition and FL learning are primarily concerned with how, through limited exposure to the target language, learners create a new language system (Gass and Selinker 1). This learner language is popularly referred to as Interlanguage (IL). The IL changes as constantly as the learner validates and invalidates the linguistic hypotheses he makes of the Target Language (TL) (Selinker). Therefore, as he strives to make his IL as similar to the TL as possible, he discovers comparable elements that exist between the TL and the languages he knows, such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

## Crosslinguistic Similarity

Crosslinguistic similarity is one of the first recognized constraints on transfer between previously learned languages and the TL (e.g. Kellerman) and is one of the most widely recognized factors in affecting CLI (e.g. Odlin; Ellis; Ringbom; Jarvis and Pavlenko). The literature has identified two forms of crosslinguistic similiarity: objective and subjective, where objective similarity refers to the formal kinship between linguistic systems as established by linguists, while subjective similarity is the resemblance between linguistic systems as perceived by the language learner. Since "learners are normally oriented toward looking for similarities—not differences—between what they already know and what they are currently learning" (Jarvis and Pavlenko 179), this distinction is important. The perception of similarities may either be conscious or unconscious, assumed or observed. Depending on the language level, some similarities are more susceptible to being assumed, like word meanings and culture, even between two completely unrelated languages, while some similarities are more likely to be perceived, like grammar and vocabulary, since they remain dissimilar until observed otherwise by the learner (Jarvis and Pavlenko 180).

Aside from a language learner's predilection for finding similarities, the fact that his perceived similarity evolves as his proficiency develops, makes subjective similarity a more significant factor of transfer than objective similarity (Ellis 178). Subjective similarity, hence, appears to be more influential since it presents more justifications for transfer; however, as objective similarity remains constant, it is equally important as it provides impartial contextualization for observations of CLI phenomena (Odlin 27).

## Crosslinguistic Influence

As illustrated by the examples earlier, where Filipino words like *kamiseta* and *pan de sal* transparently manifest their Spanish etymology, crosslinguistic influence (CLI) is most evident in vocabulary. Although CLI "is not equally visible in all areas of language use" (Jarvis and Pavlenko 61), evidence has proven that it does occur in all linguistic levels, even in grammar and sentence structure (e.g. Dulay and Burt). Its manifestations are dependent on many factors, "such as language universals, typological distance between the source and recipient languages, the user's level of proficiency in both languages," etc. (Jarvis and Pavlenko 61-62). In this present paper we focus on the factor of typological distance between the source and target languages, otherwise plainly called *crosslinguistic similarity*, and how it affects FL learning as evidenced by productions of crosslinguistic influence (CLI) in speech.

The existence of comparable elements across languages, such as pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and culture, encourages not only comparison, but transfer as well. *Transfer*, in the past two decades, has been called CLI or "the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired (Odlin 27)" to avoid the unilateral direction that the term *transfer* often implies (Kellerman and Sharwood-Smith). Although in this study only samples of negative transfer are analyzed, it does not claim that CLI is limited to such. Negative transfer clearly displays CLI as it is more pronounced than positive transfer. Hence, in this study, deviations from the target form,

henceforth errors, occurring in pronunciation (on the phonetic-phonological level), in grammar and sentence structure (on the morphosyntactic level), and in vocabulary (on the lexical-semantic level) are considered manifestations of CLI, which will help us understand how previously learned languages affect the learning of a new one.

Corder's seminal work (1967) differentiates errors from mistakes and slips, where he defines "error" as a deviation that appears in oral production of a L2 or FL learner due to his ignorance of the correct linguistic rule. On the other hand, he refers to "mistake" and "slip" as infrequent errors that the learner commits due to either a lapse or carelessness. However, this dichotomy has been criticized, as a large number of researchers recognize that "errors and mistakes are not only challenging to distinguish, but they are not always easily defined" (Botley 83). This paper, which concerns itself with CLI as manifested by all phonetic-phonological, morphosyntactic, and lexical-semantic deviations from the target form, adopts the term "error" for brevity, without considering Corder's distinctions.

Findings of studies on the acquisition of Spanish as FL in Filipino learners are consistent, although such studies are few and far between and are generally limited to theses and dissertations. Some are focused on rate of error production vis-à-vis level of proficiency in the TL (e.g. Morta; Sibayan), while others focused on describing the IL by considering errors (e.g. Sánchez; Ozoa) and self-repairs (e.g. Sibayan and Rosado; Sibayan), while others still focused on a particular grammar feature, such as prepositions (e.g. Madamba), or on vocabulary (e.g. Nogra and Rodriguez).

On the level of pronunciation Filipino learners were found to make the least number of errors according to Sánchez, and Sibayan, whose qualititative analyses led them to claim that the learners' knowledge of Filipino and English phonology resulted more in positive transfer than negative transfer. Although there are two main categories identified in phonology, namely segmental (i.e. voicing and aspiration of vowels and consonants) and suprasegmental (i.e. intonation, stress, and rhythm) (Jarvis and Pavlenko 62), the observations of said studies were limited to the production of consonants, vowels, and syllables. Confusion in vowel pairs /o/ and /u/ as well as /e/ and /i/ were found albeit rarely (Sibayan and Rosado). Equally rare was the relaxation in the pronunciation of consonants, such as the aspiration of the *j* /x/ in *cajón* and the reduced vibration of the *r* /r/ in *dinero* (Sánchez). Lastly, stressing the incorrect syllable tended to occur in Spanish words that have cognates in either Filipino or English. Sibayan and Rosado note that errors in pronunciation on the part of the students did not elicit much clarification on the part of the teacher, as they hardly ever caused communication breakdown compared to errors in grammar or in vocabulary. In sum, CLI on the phonetic-phonological level is noticeable among Filipino learners, but not significant enough to be a matter of concern.

On the level of grammar and syntax Filipino learners were found to make the most number of errors according to separate studies by Morta, Sibayan, and Sibayan and Rosado. However, there is a significant decline in its production as the IL of the Filipino learners progress. The literature has found CLI in both bound morphemes, like the possessive *'s* and the past tense *-ed* (e.g. Selinker and Lakshamanan; De Angelis and Selinker) and free morphemes, like articles and prepositions (e.g. Jarvis and Odlin 2000), contrary to the outdated belief that transfer only happens in free grammar particles (e.g. Weinreich). Bound morpheme CLI can be found in the example of *"yo estado en mis abuelos\* casa"*, where *abuelo's casa* is evidently a transfer from the English possessive grandfather's house (Morta 141). In the case of the free morpheme, the English function of the gerund as a noun is easily transferred to Spanish, as seen in the example *"El socorrista nos dijo que nadando\* ahí es prohibido"* where *nadando* (swimming) should have been expressed in the infinitive *nadar*, since in Spanish it is the infinitive and not the gerund that has a nominal function (Morta 141). Categorization of grammar errors in this study, however, are parts of speech, following that of the previous studies on Filipinos to facilitate comparability. It has been consistently found that among the most frequently occurring are determiners (e.g. *el, la, los, las*), verbs (e.g. subject-verb agreement, adequacy of tense or mood), and prepositions (e.g. *a, en, de*). In sum, CLI on the morphosyntactic level appears to be mostly influenced by English.

On the level of vocabulary Filipino learners were found to make a considerable number of errors according to separate studies by Morta, Sánchez, and Sibayan. An interesting study is that

of Nogra and Rodriguez who hypothesized that having Cebuano as mother tongue puts the learner at an advantage, since Cebuano has in its vocabulary thousands of words that are Spanish in origin (c.f. Quilis). To find out if Cebuano-English-Filipino multilinguals are indeed at an advantage, they observed the oral production of five adult informants, focusing on their preferred source language in borrowings and coinages as compensatory strategies in overcoming lexical deficiency. Results proved otherwise as the informants heavily code-switched to borrow from English; invented words were equally split between Cebuano and Filipino. In these studies, English appears to continue to be the source language for CLI in lexicon. CLI in lexicon is defined as "the influence of word knowledge in one language on a person's knowledge or use of words in another language" (Jarvis and Pavlenko 72). This definition hence implies code-switching in its various foms as basis of lexical CLI (c.f. Hammarberg), whether intentional (e.g. borrowings) or non-intentional (e.g. false cognates), and whether phonologically or morphologically adapted (e.g. coinages) or not. CLI in lexicon is categorized into two: formal and semantic, where formal is the transfer of form, and semantic is the transfer of meaning (Jarvis and Pavlenko 72). Formal lexical transfers are observed in false cognates (e.g. English *embarrassed* and Spanish *embarazada*), borrowings, and coinages (e.g. invention of the verb *\*printar* based on the English infinitive *to print* (Sibayan)). On the other hand, semantic lexical transfers are observed in improper use of the target word (e.g. English *paper* and Spanish *papel* (Sánchez) where the English extends its meaning to the intangible, such as reports, while the Spanish counterpart does not) and in calques (e.g. *\*cortar su amistad* (Sánchez) from the English, *cut off a relationship*). False cognates, borrowings, coinages, improper use of target word, and calques are the categories used to analyze errors in this study.

**Method**

The present study, which contributes to the dearth of research on the acquisition of Spanish as FL by Filipinos, is a pseudolongitudinal study of their Spanish IL whose objective is to shed light on how crosslinguistic similarity between their mother tongues and the TL Spanish affects the process of the learning of Spanish as FL, by focusing on the negative CLI, i.e. errors, in their speech.

Participants of the study were four groups of students learning Spanish in the University of the Philippines (UP) Diliman who possess basic, low intermediate, high intermediate, and advanced levels of proficiency. They were recorded in the second semester of the academic year 2014-2015, in their own classroom contexts and individually to build two complementing oral corpora for the analysis of their speech, to facilitate observation of CLI phenomena in different modes of oral production. For the classroom interaction data, a total of 50 students were recorded. From the 50 participants, five were randomly chosen from each proficiency group. To gather monologic data, elicitation procedures from the research project Developing Literacy in Different Contexts and Different Languages (Berman and Verhoeven) was adopted. Having a more contained set of subjects for monologic data facilitated the analysis of the effect of previously learned languages on the acquisition of Spanish, as the quantity of students and variety of linguistic combinations in the classroom interaction data would make observation difficult. Subjects were mostly female (3:2) and were aged 17 to 29.

All 40 hours of recorded classroom sessions and 40 monologic texts were transcribed according to the transcription conventions of the CHAT Program (Codes for the Human Analysis of Transcripts) of the CHILDES Project (Child Language Date Exchange System) (MacWhinney). These were then codified and tagged as deemed fit for the objectives of the study, for its later analysis through the CLAN (Computerized Language Analysis) programs. Errors were categorized according to their formal linguistic levels and sub-levels (i.e. pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary).

The subjects were taken from one institution, not simply to control for variability, but more importantly because, to date, there are no other students in the Philippines learning the Spanish language as a university degree. Their studying of the language for four consecutive years makes them the ideal subjects for a longitudinal analysis of the development of the Spanish IL of Filipinos. They were screened using the Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q) to ensure their having a comparable linguistic profile. They must not have studied Spanish elsewhere and must

not have travelled to any Spanish-speaking country. Subjects must likewise be Filipino natives who are highly proficient in both Filipino and English. Knowledge in another Philippine language was optional. All participants were specializing in Spanish, however some were concurrently learning other European languages, such as French, Italian, and German. The LEAP-Q served as an assessment tool of their proficiency in the various languages that they knew as they had to arrange them in order of dominance, date of acquisition, language preference in different communication tasks, exposure to each language, among others. Majority indicated Filipino as their most dominant language, followed by English, stating that they have learned both at school starting from their primary years.

**Results and Discussion**

To determine how crosslinguistic similarity of previously learned languages affect the configuration of the IL as manifested by errors Multiple Regression Models were applied, which demonstrated that crosslinguistic similiarity is a reliable predictor of error production.[3] No information from the participants was elicited on *objective similarity* among their known languages since the resemblance is factual and established by linguists. Hence we can state that among the known languages, French and Italian have the highest objective similarity to Spanish, for being Romance languages themselves. Their kinship may be established through grammar, syntax, and vocabulary. English is next for having Germanic roots, whose relationship to Romance languages can be established through their Indo-European ancestor. Aside from factual syntactic similarities, English is likewise formally related to Spanish due to vocabulary inherited from French. Filipino and other Philippine languages come last as they belong to the Austronesian language family tree and are only formally related to Spanish on the level of vocabulary. With regards *subjective similarity*, the participants were asked to rank their known languages according to how similar to Spanish they perceive them to be. Based on the descriptive analyses, French and Italian came first, Filipino second, English third, and other Philippine languages last. However, it is interesting to note that French, Italian, and Filipino are not significantly different at 0.10 level of significance. Hence all three are statistically tied in first place.

Most errors were intralingual in nature (c.f. Ellis), meaning it was the unique linguistic features of Spanish that caused majority of the error production. However, those which were caused by interference were largely due to English influence, a result that is consistent with previous studies on Filipino learners of Spanish FL presented earlier in this paper. At this point it is worth remembering that the students indicated Filipino, together with other European languages, as more similar to Spanish than English, and that existing literature maintains that subjective similarity is a better predictor of CLI. This finding hence contests the commonly held belief that it is subjective similarity and not objective similarity that provokes transfer (Jarvis and Pavlenko).

A more qualitative approach was done to illustrate how CLI affects the IL of the Filipino subjects from the different proficiency groups. In the sections that follow, the three most occurring error subtypes found across the groups are presented and discussed.

**On the phonetic-phonological level**

Errors found at the level of pronunciation were statistically negligible, but it is nevertheless interesting to see how previously learned languages affect this aspect of speech. For all four proficiency groups, pronunciation errors appeared similar.

*Vowels*

Mispronunciation of vowels was largely due to interference of either Filipino or English. Consistent with findings from previous studies, instances of confusion between the phonemes like /e/ and /i/ were registered in utterances such as *\*discubrir* [dis ku 'βrir] instead of *descubrir* [des ku 'βrir] and *\*enforme* [eM 'for me] instead of *informe* [iM 'for me], which, for both instances, may be alluded to Filipino influence. There was likewise a diphthongization of vowel sounds, where /au/ is produced as /o/, /eu/ as /u/, as in *\*sudónimo* [su 'ðo ni mo] instead of *seudónimo* [sew 'ðo ni mo], and *\*queótica*

[ke ʻo ti ka] instead of *caótica* [ka ʻo ti ka], which reflect an evident influence of the English *pseudonym* [ˈsudəˌnɪm] and *chaotic* [keɪˈɑtɪk].

### Consonants

Most mispronunciations of consonants illustrate an apparent economization of effort, visible in examples like *\*uniporme* [u ni ʻpor me] for *uniforme* [u ni ʻfor me], *\*solushonar* [so lu ʃo ʻnar] for *solucionar* [so lu θjo ʻnar], *\*cueschón* [kwes ʻ tʃon] for *cuestión* [kwes ʻtjon], which is also evidence of influence from Filipino and English. However, the existence of cognates in other Romance languages has likewise caused negative CLI, as evidenced by utterances like *\*coza* [ˈko za] for *cosa* [ˈko sa], and *\*acceptado* [ak θep ʻta ðo] for *aceptado* [a θep ʻta ðo], influenced by Italian and French, respectively. There were some intralingual mispronunciations registered as well, such as the overgeneralization of the [θ] and /ʎ/ sounds, as in *\*converzación* [kom ber θa ʻθjon] instead of *conversación* [kom ber sa ʻθjon] and *\*abueya* [a ˈβwe ʎa] instead of *abuela* [a ˈβwe la].

### Syllable

Mispronunciations on the syllable were, like in the case of vowels, largely due to Filipino and English interference, and manifested by incorrect placement of stress, such as *\*proHIbido* [pro ʻxi βi ðo] from the English *prohibited* or an addition or omission of a syllable, such as *\*stricto* [s ʻtrik to] instead of estricto [es ʻtrik to], from the Filipino *istrikto*. The surfacing of Filipino and English as the two most influential languages in errors of interference confirms claims made by Hammarberg and Hammarberg that the mother tongue will always be a constraint in the phonological acquisition of a new language.

Results are hence consistent with those of previous studies, likewise illustrating reasons for which Filipinos produce not too many errors on the phonetic-phonological level. Apart from the similarity in the phonological systems of Spanish and Filipino (Sibayan and Rosado), the knowledge of English likewise positively contributes to the acquisition of Spanish (Sánchez).

## On the morphosyntactic level

The three most occurring morphosyntactic error subcategories revealed by the descriptive analysis results were determiners, verbs, and prepositions. It is worth noting that these were likewise the top three most frequent grammatical error subtypes identified in previous studies, albeit not in the same order.

### Determiners

Errors on determiners were mostly intralingual in nature, as these were due to a linguistic feature that is not present in any of the subjects' known languages and hence unique to Spanish: the agreement of articles, demonstrative adjectives, possessive adjectives, etc. with the grammatical gender and number of the nouns they modify. Errors were often "binary" in nature, meaning either only the gender or the number of the determiner did not agree with the noun, as in *\*una examen*, where the feminine singular indefinite article *una* does not agree with the masculine singular noun *examen*, or as in *\*nuestras vida* where the feminine plural possessive adjective *nuestras* does not agree with the feminine singular noun *vida*. These "binary" errors, however, were predominantly due to gender disagreement.

Another interesting result is the varying production trends across the four proficiency groups, where low proficiency learners (Group 1) produced statistically more errors than the other groups. However, though the more proficient learners (Groups 2, 3, and 4) produced fewer errors, their errors were more varied. Equally worth noting is the fact that omission and confusion between definite and indefinite articles are characteristic errors of beginners, and that omission and confusion are limited to definite and indefinite articles. Meaning, subjects appeared to understand the function of other determiners. Another characteristic of beginners is the production of "non-binary" errors, such as *\*muchos verdura* where the determiner disagrees with the noun not only in terms of gender but number as well. This is indicative that the task of monitoring determiner use is more demanding for lower

proficiency learners. Increased proficiency in the language frees up more attention resources, as higher proficiency learners are more capable of monitoring at least one linguistic feature, either gender or number (Kormos 333). However, binary errors of gender appear to persist even in higher proficiency groups.

There were also determiner errors due to transfer, mostly visible in the unnecessary use of articles, like in *mi vida como \*un estudiante.* As the indefinite article is not required in Spanish when stating one's profession, this utterance is clearly an evidence of the English transfer *my life as a student*.

### *Verbs*

Errors on verbs were second most frequently committed, a finding that is comparable to previous studies. Under this subcategory, all features related to the verb were considered: person, number, aspect, voice, mood, and tense. In comparison to determiners, which only have two grammatical features (gender and number) with two ramifications each (masculine-feminine, singular-plural), verbs offer a disconcerting array of options. There are perfect and imperfect aspects; active and passive voices; indicative, subjunctive, imperative, and conditional moods; past, present, future tenses, etc. Moreover, there are six endings to make the verb agree with its subject for each of these aforementioned verb features. Having presented the complexity of verbs it might be assumed that a language learner may make more errors on verbs than on determiners. However, the fact that verb errors occur less frequently does not suggest that they are more manageable than determiners; determiners, by nature, are used much more frequently than verbs.

Similar to the first subcategory, low proficiency learners (Group 1) produced statistically more errors on verbs than the other groups, and the more proficient learners (Groups 2, 3, and 4) produced fewer but more diverse errors. And similar to the first subcategory, omission and the use of the infinitive in lieu of an adequately conjugated verb appear to be characteristic errors of less proficient learners. An interesting error that seems to persist even in highly proficient learners is the interchanging of the first and third persons both in the singular and the plural, like *\*hace* instead of *hacen, \*tendré* instead of *tendrá,* and *\*desarrolló* instead of *desarrollaron,* which may be due to the fact that majority of their utterances involve the self (first person) or the other (third person). To communicate with peers, which is their only opportunity to conjugate in the second person, students often choose to speak in the language they are most comfortable in, i.e. either Filipino or English.

In terms of voice, Group 1 limited their utterances to the active voice; errors on the passive voice can only be observed in Groups 2, 3, and 4. English appeared to be the principal source of CLI for such cases, as evidenced by their predilection for the *pasiva perifrástica* over the *pasiva refleja*. An example is *estaba cortada* (pasiva perifrástica) and *se cortó* (pasiva refleja). Though both are translatable into the English "was cut," students opt for the more syntactically familiar, albeit the latter being more widely used in Spanish. Similarly, errors related to mood only began to appear in Group 2, with a predilection for the indicative over the subjunctive. With regard to tense, errors in Group 1 were generally limited to the present, while Groups 2, 3, and 4 expanded to the past and future tenses. Lastly, with regards aspect, participants who were concurrently learning French had a striking preference for the imperfect and perfect tenses over the preterite, evidently reflecting transfer from French grammar. This observation confirms Odlin's claim that even imperfectly acquired languages directly contribute to CLI. In general, however, participants used the perfect and the preterite interchangeably, without giving their distinct functions much thought.

Majority of conjugation errors are limited to one feature of the verb: either on agreement, or voice, or mood, or tense. There were instances when two features were implicated in the error, like agreement and time, as in the example *dijo* instead of *he dicho,* or of agreement and mood, as in *dejamos* instead of *dejadnos*. However, these were quite uncommon. The fact that there are no verb errors involving all six features of the verb and the fact that majority of the errors only affected one feature, demonstrate the efforts that the subjects make in monitoring their speech, the maximum limits of their

IL and the limits of their attentional resources. We can therefore conclude that verb errors were mostly intralingual in nature, except for a few errors of transfer in which English was the source for CLI.

### Prepositions

The third most frequently occuring grammar subtype was prepositions, an expected result in any non-native speaker production as it has been proven a linguistic feature most difficult to master (Muñoz) and identified to be a classic source of confusion for any student of Spanish as FL (Fernández). Among the many prepositions, *en* and *a* were the most widely used incorrectly, another finding consistent with that of Morta, and Sibayan and Rosado, which seemed to function as default prepositions (c.f. Madamba). While *en* was widely used in place of *de*, the preposition *a* was widely used to replace *de* and *en*.

On the one hand, English may be the cause for the use of *en* in lieu of *de* in the following cases: *el presidente \*en la clase* and *las personas \*en esta edad, actuar \*en una manera diferente* and *graduar \*en tiempo,* as their direct translations into English *the president in the class, persons in this age, act in a different manner, and graduate on time* are grammatically acceptable. On the other hand, Filipino may be the cause for the use of *en* in lieu of *a,* a preposition that certain verbs of movement require, as in *vuelvo \*en casa* or *llegar \*en otro sitio,* since the Filipino preposition *sa* covers both Spanish prepositions *en* and *a.*

With regard to the use of *a* in lieu of *de*, majority of such errors are due to English influence, like in *fácil \*a resolver* and *la oportunidad \*a realizar mi sueño*, which are direct translations of *easy to resolve* and *opportunity to realize my dream.* Some, however, appear to be more intralingual in nature, as in the apparent overgeneralization of the use of *a* in the following cases: *estaban burlando \*a él, recibí \*un patada \*a mi mandíbula,* where *de* and *en* should have been used, respectively. Students might be unaware that some verbs are collocated with prepositions, very much like a buy-one, take-one deal.

Despite the decline in error rate in higher proficiency groups, omissions and redundancies in preposition use persisted. Curiously, those frequently omitted prepositions were also the same ones unnecessarily used, which were *a* and *de.* Omissions of *a* and *de* are mostly intralingual errors, as these appeared in Spanish expressions that required them, like *jugamos \*0 fútbol, necesitamos entender \*0 sus padres, yo quiero \*0 mis amigos, después \*0 mi trabajo* and *antes \*0 la muerte.* Conversely, the unnecessary use of *a* is more of a transfer from previously known languages, like in *\*a la fuera* and in *es difícil \*a tratar*, which are correct in the French *c'est à l'extérieur,* and in the English *difficult to deal with.* Likewise, the overuse of *de* appears to be intralingual, an overgeneralization of the function of *de,* like in the extension of *se trata de* in the incorrect utterance *es sobre \*de*, and the modifying function of *de* for nouns taking an adjectival role, like in c*asa de papel* or *casos de este tipo*, extended in the utterance *casos \*de así.*

To conclude, errors in prepositions may either be intralingual or caused by CLI. In the case of the latter, both Filipino and English function as source languages, though English appears to be more dominant between the two.

## On the lexical-semantic level

The three most occurring lexical-semantic error subcategories revealed by the descriptive analysis results were borrowings, improper use of target word, and coinages.

### Borrowings

Borrowings cannot be technically classified as errors as they are a compensatory strategy for lexical deficiency. However, borrowings, specifically unintentional borrowings, have been considered deviations from TL norms. As this study is solely concerned about the evidence of lexical CLI, this distinction is a non-issue. Borrowing was the preferred compensatory strategy for lexical deficiency across all proficiency groups (c.f. Nogra and Rodriguez), especially the low proficiency learners (Group 1) who registered statistically more borrowings in comparison to the other proficiency groups.

All words that do not form part of the Spanish vocabulary and were not phonetically modified to approximate the TL were considered borrowings, regardless of intentionality. According to descriptive analyses, content words, such as nouns and adjectives, were most susceptible to being borrowed. Curiously, while lower proficiency groups tended to borrow from both Filipino and English, higher proficiency groups tended to borrow mainly from English. Examples of Filipino borrowings from Groups 1 and 2 are the following: *aspetos (aspectos), seryoso (serio), eksena (escena), pitaka (cartera), and jabar (manchas de hoyo),* while examples of English borrowings from the same proficiency groups are the following: *rebel (rebelde), special (especial),* and *bully (mandón).* The assortment of borrowed words informs us of some, albeit very little, metalinguistic awareness in low proficiency learners. The choice of Filipino borrowings may possibly due to awareness of etymology or awareness in phonology, or both, that may feed their linguistic intuition and help them select Filipino words that "sound Spanish". However, the choice of English borrowings is disappointing, as *rebel*, for example, could have been produced correctly had the student chosen the Filipino *rebelde* instead, evidence of his ignorance of Spanish vocabulary that already exists in his linguistic repertoire as a cognate. It is interesting to note that the dominance of English is unanticipated, especially since all respondents from the higher proficiency groups indicated Filipino as their most dominant language in the LEAP-Q.

A borrowing worth highlighting is *pitaka,* which serves as evidence of developing metalinguistic awareness, but also informs lack of knowledge of Spanish words integrated into the Philippine languages during the colonial rule, but that have now fallen into disuse in the source country or may have taken on a different meaning in the adoptive culture. The Spanish *petaca* could have been widely used in the 19th century before *cartera* became more mainstream. This example represents the use of other Spanish lexical units that are no longer used in Spain, such as *kandila/candela* and *tsinelas/chinelas.*

Another borrowing worth discussing is *bully*, a clearly deliberate use of English to fill a language gap. As these subjects only use *bully* even when speaking in Filipino, they are limited to the word in its English form. Another intentional borrowing was *jabar*, a very colloquial Filipino word for pit stains, whose equivalent in Spanish is unkown. Both examples reflect the important place that code-switching occupies in daily life in Metro Manila and perhaps one of the functions of code-switching in daily speech, which is to take advantage of all available linguistic resources to articulate our thoughts with precision.

It has been previously mentioned that even imperfectly acquired languages may have an effect on the learning of a new one (Odlin), a claim that our data can corroborate. Borrowings were not solely from Filipino and English but from French and Italian as well. However, these were more visible in function words and appear to be slips, more than anything else. From French there were *qui (que), cette (este/esta), des (de los),* and *après (después),* while from Italian there were *ma (mas)* and *però (pero).*

### Improper use of target word

Improper use of target words was the second most frequently occurring subtype that deviates from the TL norm, where Groups 1 and 2 produced significantly more improper lexicon use than Groups 3 and 4. Like borrowings, the improper use of target words was more observable in content words, however, unlike borrowings, the principal cause of this phenomenon was the TL itself, since most of the errors were intralingual, a result of the confusion between words that share either a similar form or meaning,

Subjects across all proficiency groups seemed confused with the different parts of speech, not knowing when to use the noun and when to use the adjective like in *verdades* (truths) for *verdaderas* (true), *delincuentes* (delinquent) for *delincuencias* (delinquencies). Despite the similarities in form, Spanish nouns and adjectives consistently follow a very limited set of terminations, as Spanish formation of words is quite systematic and predictable. Had the subjects been more aware of nominalization and adjectivalization in Spanish, this confusion would not take place.

Improper use likewise manifested in words belonging to the same part of speech, like in *estresado* (stressed) for *estresante* (stressful), *deber* (a must) for *deberes* (homework), *también* (also, too) for *tampoco*

(neither), *ser* (to be, generally expressing more permanent states) for *estar* (to be, generally expressing more temporary states) and vice versa, *saber* (to know something) for *conocer* (to know someone), *tener* (to possess) for *haber* (to exist, to have [done something]), and *mirar* (to look) for *ver* (to see).

Lastly, subjects appear to prefer the transitive verbs over the pronominal ones even when the context demands the latter, as in *hacer* (to do) for *hacerse* (to become), *quedar* (to fit, to be left over) for *quedarse* (to stay), *terminar* (to end) for *parar* (to stop), and *comportar* (to involve) for *comportarse* (to behave), which may all be alluded to the ignorance of the value of the reflexive pronoun.

### *Coinages*

Like borrowings, coinages cannot be technically classified as errors as they are a compensatory strategy for lexical deficiency. However, coinages are also non-standard productions. Coinages were the third most occurring subcategory, although its total number of occurrences is not statistically significant according to the descriptive analysis. Similar to borrowings and improper use of target word, coinages were mainly of content words. There were some evidence of English CLI: *\*fisicalmente* (fisicamente), *\*estamina* (resistencia), and some intralingual: *\*rompado* (roto). The low occurrence of coinages may be due to the students' preference for borrowing, which is a more efficient compensatory strategy, especially since English is spoken and understood, even by the native Spanish-speaking professors.

### Conclusion

In this paper we examined how crosslinguistic similarity of previously learned languages of Filipino multilinguals affect the learning of Spanish as FL through the consideration of negative CLI in the phonetic-phonological, morphosyntactic, and lexical-semantic levels. It is an attempt to contribute to the paucity of knowledge in FL learning in Filipinos and to inform FL programs in the country of the existing linguistic knowledge that must be taken into consideration when teaching Spanish as FL to Filipinos.

Subjects were Filipino students learning Spanish language as a university degree. Complementing oral data were gathered: one of classroom interaction and another of monologic production. For the classroom interaction data five class sessions of four different proficiency groups were recorded. For the gathering of monologic data, a total of 20 participants from the four proficiency groups were chosen at random. Elicitation procedures from an international project on literacy development were adopted. All oral data was transcribed and tagged according to the conventions of a transcription program. Two types of crosslinguistic similarity were considered: objective and subjective. Only subjective similarity was needed to be elicited from the subjects as objective similarity is factual and established by linguists. They ranked Filipino, French, and Italian as closest to Spanish, followed by English, and lastly by other Philippine languages. This distinction was made as current literature suggests that it is perceived similarity of the language learners, and not formal similarity among languages that plays a more significant role in CLI. Results proved otherwise: English and not Filipino appeared to be a stronger predictor of CLI in Spanish. As the students claimed to perceive Filipino as more similar to Spanish than English, the predominance of the latter was unexpected. This comes with a caveat, however, as this could have been brought about by other factors that are outside the scope of this study. Nevertheless, this finding may serve as a validation and justification of the English proficiency prerequisite for students wishing to take part in the SPFL.

Results likewise showed that previously learned languages, regardless their proficiency, affect the learning of a new language, albeit in varying degrees. On the level of pronunciation, evidence of Filipino and English CLI were observed, though the knowledge of both contributed to positive transfer more than negative, as phonetic-phonological errors were scarce. On the level of grammar and syntax, English had the most influence in the production of errors. Lastly, on the level of vocabulary, English and Filipino manifested the most in content words, and Romance languages in function words. For all linguistic levels it can be said that the languages that cause negative transfer are also the ones that facilitate positive transfer. What is crucial is the development of metalinguistic awareness in Filipino

learners so they themselves capitalize on the linguistic knowledge that they already possess and use it to advance in the learning of a FL.

Despite its limitations we believe that this research offers relevant findings on the role that crosslinguistic similarity plays in the acquisition of Spanish as FL, which can be further explored not only in terms of negative transfer but also in terms of positive transfer. Also, in this study we pointed out how similar languages appear to both facilitate and hinder the acquisition of a new language, which can be examined in greater detail. Lastly, findings can be applied in the creation of didactic materials and evaluation tools, which could be the beginning of FL pedagogy that departs from the learner, bottom-up approach that will challenge the prevalent top-down approach.

## NOTES

1    This article is partly based on my doctoral dissertation.

2    As of February 20, 2017, "there are 10,526 SPFL students nationwide—3,531 students of which are in Spanish language classes, 3,020 in Japanese classes, 2,280 in Chinese classes, 1,112 in French classes, and 583 in German classes." (DepEd)

3    In my dissertation, Multiple Regression Models were used to examine not only the effect of the variable of crosslinguistic similarity on rate of error production, but the variable of language proficiency as well.

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**ANNA MARIE SIBAYAN-SARMIENTO, PHD** is Assistant Professor of Spanish at the Department of European Languages, University of the Philippines, Diliman, where she completed her bachelor's degree. She holds an MA in Teaching Spanish as a Foreign Language and a PhD in Didactics of Language and Literature from the University of Barcelona, and is currently teaching undergraduate and graduate courses. Her research interests include adult language acquisition, interlanguage, and linguistic phenomena in the classroom, such as translanguaging and self-repairs.