

Morpho–Syntactic Translations: An Error Analysis

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Abstract. In a progressing world, English is hailed to be the language that connects people all over the globe. It is undeniable that English is used in many fields specially in education. Despite the wide use of English in the Philippines, several researches show that Filipino learners do not actually learn language skills specially morphology and syntax. In this regard, the researchers aimed to describe the morpho–syntactic translation errors and to describe the sources attributed to the translation errors. To analyze the translation errors, the researchers utilized the framework of Gass & Selinker (2008). Through the translation tests adapted from Langga & Alico (2020), the research revealed that the senior high school learners commit morphological errors such as inflection, adverb, verb tense, pluralization, infinitive, negation, articles, and demonstratives. Also, this study revealed that the participants committed syntactic errors such as subject–verb agreement and word order. Based on the errors, their sources were also analyzed. It was revealed that the source of errors can be attributed to both interlingual (transfer of morphological element, grammatical element, and lexico–semantic elements) and intralingual (addition, omission, ignorance of rule restriction, overgeneralization, and false analogy) interference. Based on the results, the researchers suggested that schools utilize translation as a means to remediate learners who are having difficulties in terms of morphology and syntax.

Keywords: Error analysis; Morphology; Source of errors; Syntax; Translation

1. Introduction

As of 2009, there are 6,909 distinct languages around the globe according to Ethnologue (Andersen, 2010). Because of this, there is a need for a common language to facilitate communication. Therefore, the purpose of English as a lingua franca comes in. According to Rao (2019), since English is a global language, most native and non–native speakers use it for communication. English language is widely used all over the world into almost all the fields specially in education. In the Philippines, the main goal of its Language Curriculum is to

produce students that are multi-literate and are communicatively competent. Therefore, Filipino learners must be knowledgeable about the structure of the language, have at least a good command, and be able to use the English language in different contexts. However, despite the emphasis in the use of the English language in the Philippines, several studies show that Filipino learners fail to apply the structure of English. According to Sumalinog (2018), students are struggling to retain and apply grammar principles and patterns, and several of their errors were ones that had already been covered in-depth in earlier grade levels. Moreover, Langga & Alico (2020) noted that despite government efforts to strengthen the education system by adopting the K-to-12 curriculum, large gaps in its effectiveness remain unfilled, including students' inadequately developed language skills.

In this case, the use of translation, although it is avoided in a communicative classroom, can help students in learning language skills. According to Bagheri and Fazel (2011), as cited by Al-Musawi (2014), translation assists students in acquiring writing and facilitating their comprehension. In relation to this study, Al-Musawi (2014) also pointed out that language learners most frequently use translation-related strategies to learn English vocabulary words, to read, and to write. Translation, therefore, can help, not just in aiding students, but also in identifying errors.

Wongranu's (2017) analysis revealed that the most problematic area in translation errors among the respondents are grammatical such as such as nouns, articles, and tenses. In this case, the proponent suggested that two to three class periods instead of one should be spent on these topics.

Cuc (2017) discovered that linguistic and translation errors account for the majority of the errors made by students. The students also demonstrated their limited abilities in appropriately building syntax and using English collocations.

Langga & Alico (2020) revealed that the participants, who learn Filipino and English, as a second language, lack familiarity and mastery of skills in both. Furthermore, the translation errors they committed were grammatical, lexical-semantic, pragmatic, and cultural. The most recurring errors among the errors committed was grammatical, specifically errors in pluralization, capitalization, word inflections, tenses, subject-verb agreement, demonstrative pronoun use, and fragments.

Bashir et al. (2021) studied morphological and syntactical errors that demonstrated Pakistani O' level students needed to be proficient in fundamental grammatical principles to perform well on their final CIE papers. The researchers suggested that they must practice more on rules of grammar especially related to nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, and prepositions.

Given these situations, the researchers aimed to describe the morpho-syntactic translation errors and to describe the sources attributed to the translation errors.

2. Methodology

This study employed sequential explanatory design, a type of a mixed-method design, by Creswell (2009). This research design was used because this study aimed to investigate the translation errors committed by ESL learners. This also sought to explain how the translation errors affect the learners' competency in morphology and syntax.

This research employed translation tests to obtain the results needed for the research. The translation test utilized was adapted from Langga & Alico's (2020) study. The outputs of the participants were evaluated using the framework of Gass & Selinker (2008) that involves a five-step procedure: collection of data, identification of errors, quantification of errors, analysis of source of errors, and remediation. Finally, the results were validated by two language experts.

2.1. Sampling Procedure

This study employed purposive sampling technique upon the selection of the participants in the study because it only focused on particular characteristics of the sample, and it is the best way of gaining answers of the research problem. The researchers generated qualifying criteria to provide justification of the selection of participants, and these were as follow: (1) Participants must be a local of Nueva Ecija; (2) Participants must have Tagalog as their L1 and English as their L2; and (3) Participants who belong to the top ten who committed errors during the translation pre-test.

2.2. Participants

The ten (10) participants of this study were taken from the population of 60 grade 11-HumSS students who had undergone pre-assessment. Grade 11 learners were the target participants of this study because they had already

tackled translation activities during their previous years. Moreover, the subjects offered in the HumSS curriculum are focused more on the aspect of writing.

2.2.1 Research Site

This research was conducted in Gregorio T. Crespo Memorial High School (GTCMHS). The school is located at Lopez Jaena Street, Entabulado, Cabiao, Nueva Ecija. It was established during the School Year 2016–2017 through the initiative of the Entablado Parents Association, DepEd–Cabiao and Cabiao Local Government Unit of Cabiao. The school began its first year of Senior High School implementation in 2019, offering Humanities and Social Science strand.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Quantification of Errors

Table 1. Frequency of Errors

Type of Error	Subcategories of Errors	Frequency	Percentage
Morphological	Inflection	5	5.95
	Adverb	1	1.19
	Verb Tense	15	17.86
	Pluralization	12	14.29
	Infinitive	3	3.57
	Negation	1	1.19
	Articles	4	4.76
	Demonstratives	2	2.38
	Sub-total	43	51.19%
Syntactic	Subject-Verb Agreement	3	3.57
	Word Order	39	45.24
	Sub-total	42	48.81%
Grand Total		84	100%

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of the morphological and syntactic errors committed by the participant. The research revealed that the participants committed 43 morphological errors (51.19%) and 42 syntactic errors (48.81%) that make up 84 errors in total. Analyses and explanations of samples from these categories are illustrated below.

3.1.1. Morphological errors

Inadequate morphological knowledge of the participant was revealed in their translation output. Morphological errors in translation happen when the translator commit errors in words and word formations relative to the source text. Based on the results, the participants commit errors in areas such as inflection, adverb, verb tense, pluralization, infinitive, negation, articles, and demonstratives

Inflection

Source Text	<i>“Ang unang pamamaraan ay maituturing na artipisyal na <u>pagkakambal</u>.”</i>
Participants	<i>“The first one procedure that considered to artificial to a <u>twins</u>.”</i> <i>“The first way that can be considered is a artificial <u>twin</u>.”</i>

The illustration above shows the errors of the participants in translating the word “*pagkakambal*.” The participants translated the word into “*twin*” and “*twins*” which are obviously incorrect instead of using the word “*twinning*”, which means “*the process of producing twins*.” Therefore, in this case, the participants failed to recognize the use of inflection in a word.

In the study of Alico & Langga (2020), the failure of applying inflection occurred in the translation of the word “*pag-clone*.” In Alico & Langga’s (2020) analysis, the word “*pag-clone*” a noun referring to the “act of cloning”. The participants’ inflection is likewise a noun, but it refers to the duplicated mammal rather than the act itself. This means that its inflection does not accurately represent the meaning of the ST. Moreover, it can be seen that a participant had an error in using the article “a”, in the phrase “*a artificial twin*” for it mistakenly preceded a word beginning with a vowel.

Adverb

Source Text	<i>“Ang proseso ay walang ipinagkaiba sa pagkabuo ng kambal na <u>natural na nagyayari</u> sa kaso ng identical twins.”</i>
Participant	<i>“The process is nothing distinguished in the formation of twins that <u>natural occurring</u> in the case of identical twins.”</i>

The participant in the illustration failed to transfer the English translation of the verb “*natural na nangyayari.*” The participant used “*natural occurring*” instead of simply using “*naturally occurs*” or “*naturally happens.*” The error happened when the participant failed to apply the structure of an adverb and the form of the verb preceded by an adverb. The same case happened in the analysis of translation errors of Syahrir & Hartina (2021) when a participant translated *dengan perlahan* (“*Indah membuka pintu dengan perlahan.*”) into “*with slow.*” In this study, errors of using adverb in a sentence was seen. It showed that the word “*dengan perlahan*” is translated without paying attention to the adverb rule. Syahrir (2021) emphasized that in Indonesian context, the word “*dengan*”, which is used in an adverbial phrase, is translated into “*with*” in English. However, this rule is not applied in the context of Indonesian language. The correct one must be “*slowly*”, an adverb of manner.

Verb Tense

Source Text	<i>“Ang mga tuklas na ito ang <u>nagbunsod</u> sa iba’t ibang modipikasyon at pagbabago sa teknolohiya ng komunikasyon.”</i>
Participant	<i>“This discovery <u>lead</u> to different modification and change in communication technology.”</i>

The participant failed to transfer the English translation of the verb “*nagbunsod*”. The participant used “*lead*”, a present tense, instead of using “*led*”. Therefore, the participant failed to take into consideration the past tense of the verb used. Moreover, under the umbrella of verb tenses, errors in using the present continuous tense was revealed.

Source Text	<i>“Kaya lamang <u>gumagamit ang tao...</u>”</i>
Participant	<i>“The reason why <u>people using...</u>”</i>

The sample above shows the participant’s inadequacy in using the present continuous tense. Instead of using “*...people are using...*” or “*people make us...*”, the participant mistakenly used “*people using*” and omitted the linking verb “*are*” to make the statement correct.

The translation analysis of Anjarani & Indahwati (2019) revealed that the use of past tense also occurs in Indonesian context. The participant in the study mistakenly translated “*Kita makan siang dan berfoto.*” into “*We have lunch and*

continue to take pictures.” The participant translated the sentence using *have lunch* and *continue to take pictures* instead of using *had lunch* and *continued to take pictures*. In Indonesian, according to Anjarani & Indahwati (2019), unlike in English, there are tenses and verbs do not change in past tense. This could be the reason why the translation of the participants had errors in terms of transforming a verb into its past form.

Pluralization

Source Text	“ <i>Batay sa kasalukuyang kaalaman, may <u>dalawang paraan ng pag-clone ng mga mammal.</u></i> ”
Participant	“ <i>According to current study, there are <u>two way</u> of cloning a mammal.</i> ”

The illustration above shows the error of the participant in terms of the pluralization of a word that comes after a plural number. It can be seen in the illustration that the participant used the phrase “*two way*” as a translation of the ST “*dalawang paraan.*” The participant failed to consider the plural form of the word “*way*” eventhough it is placed after the word “*two*”.

In Langga & Alico’s (2020) analysis, it showed that the participants had errors in pluralization. The source text clearly stated more than one entity. The determiner *mga* in Filipino indicates that the noun used is plural. The participants used *the cell* instead of simply using *cells*. In the Filipino language, the suffix *-s* or *-es* is not used to pluralize a noun. Instead, the word *ang* or *ang mga* is used to indicate that the noun is in singular form of in plural form.

Infinitive

Source Text	“ <i>Sa ganitong proseso, kinakailangan munang <u>maganap ang fertilisasyon na resulta ng unyon ng tamod at itlog.</u></i> ”
Participant	“ <i>As this type of process fertilization is needed <u>to happened</u> to get result of union of cells and egg cells.</i> ”

The example above shows the participant’s error in terms of the correct form of infinitive. In the output, the participant used the phrase “*to happened*” which deviates the correct for of infinitive. In the illustration, the format used is

“to + past form of verb”, instead of “to + base form of verb.” Therefore, the participant failed to recognize the format for infinitive and its use in a sentence.

In the analysis of translation error conducted by Akbar (2018), there was a failure in applying the correct format for infinitive. In the sentences “*We work to getting money.*” and “*Rika buys a book to reading.*”, the participants failed to apply the correct structure of infinitive (to + base form of the verb). According to Akbar (2018), the participants might have thought that verbs after the word *to* is in the *-ing* form. As a result, they mistakenly used *to getting* and *to reading*.

Negation

Source Text “*Ang proseso ay walang ipinagkaiba ...*”

Participant “*This process haven't difference ...*”

The example above shows the incorrect form of negation including its contracted form. In the sentence above, the participant used “haven’t difference” instead of using “*doesn't have*”, “*does not have*”, or simply “*no different*” as a translation of the phrase “*walang ipinagkaiba*.” The participant obviously had a limited knowledge about the usage and form of negative sentences as shown on the illustration. There are different ways in stating negation in any languages. In the study of Akan (2019), for example, the Arabic words like ‘ال /‘la/, ‘ما /‘ma/, and ‘لم /‘lam/, ‘لن /‘lan/ have equivalents in English as *no* and *not*.

Articles

Source Text “*...ang mga cell na bumubuo ng isang murang embrion...*”

Participant “*... the cells that creating an young embryo...*”

The example above shows the incorrect use of article “an”. Based on the rule of its usage, the article “an” is only used before a word that begins with a vowel or a vowel-like sound. However, the participant used “an” before the word “young.” This error reveals that the participant failed to distinguish the difference between the article in terms of usage. In the analysis of Björkegren (2018) on the committed errors by the Chinese students in writing composition, incorrect usage of indefinite article was found. The participant translated the statement “老师要求我写一份课程申请书。” into “*The teacher asked me to write a application for my class.*” In the English language, when a noun starts with a vowel or a

vowel-sound, the indefinite article “an” needs to be used. However, the illustration used “a” instead of “an” before the noun application.

Like in Filipino language, indefinite articles “a”, “an”, or some does not exist in Mandarin. in English as indefinite articles. To say a book, for example in Mandarin language, one should say one book.

Demonstrative pronouns

Source Text	<i>“Sa ganitong proseso,...”</i>
Participant	<i>“In these process,...”</i>

The example above shows the participant’s error in using the demonstrative pronoun “these.” The use of “this” and “these” depends on the number of nouns that is being referred to. In the case above, the phrase to be translated is “*ganitong proseso.*” This means that the subject is singular. However, the participant used “these” instead of “this.” This reveals that the participant failed to distinguish the usage of demonstrative pronouns in terms of its number.

In the study of Al Shehab (2013), the results revealed that learners also commit errors in using demonstratives. Al Shehab (2013) stated that Arabian students used “*that files*”, “*these student*”, and “*these file*”. It can be seen that the participants in the study did not use demonstratives correctly. Therefore, the incorrect translation of these words can be attributed to the lack of proficiency of the participants in the domain of using these words in their correct forms.

3.1.2. Syntactic errors

Translation errors also occur in syntax level. Syntactic errors mean participants’ inadequacy of the syntax and its form relative to the source text.

Subject-Verb Agreement

Source Text	<i>“...ang mga cell na bumubuo ng isang murang embryo ay...”</i>
Participant	<i>“... the cells that creating an young embryo is...”</i>

In Filipino language, verbs in Filipino do not necessarily agree with their subjects. Subject, regardless if it is singular or plural, takes the same verb form. On the other hand, English requires agreement in subject and verb. For a sentence and for a clause to be correct, the verb must agree in number with the

subject. It follows the fundamental rule: “Singular subject requires a singular verb, and a plural subject requires a plural verb.”

The illustration above shows the error of the participant in terms of subject and verb agreement. The fundamental rule in subject and verb agreement requires a singular verb for a singular subject. However, the participant used the verb “is”, a singular linking verb, with the word “cells”, a singular subject. Therefore, the participant failed to consider the rule in subject and verb agreement.

In the study of Langga and Alico (2020), it revealed that the participants also commit the same error. For instance, the phrase “...*nagsasagawa ng teknolohikal na interbensiyon ang mga siyentista...*” was translated “...*scientist conduct of technology that intervention...*”

The example, “*ang mga siyentista*” suggests that the subject is plural because of the determiner “mga”, which requires a plural verb. The error revealed that the participant did not consider the rule of subject–verb agreement because there is no such rule in the SL.

Word Order

Source text	“ <i>Ang proseso ay walang ipinagkaiba...</i> ”
Participant	“ <i>The process is nothing distinguished...</i> ”

The illustration above shows that the participant directly transferred each word to form its target text. As a result, there is an error in ordering words to form a sentence with a complete and a more comprehensible idea. This could be attributed to the L1 interference in terms of grammatical elements. In the sample, the participant translated the phrase word for word. Thus, this resulted to inaccurate arrangement of words in the sentence.

In the study of Cuc (2017), word order errors were also present in the translation of Vietnamese using English. In the participant’s output, the study revealed that the phrase “*một cô gái đẹp*” (“a beautiful girl”) was translated to “a girl beautiful”. Vietnamese, adjectives come after a noun. Because of the participant’s ignorance of the structure of the TL and word–by–word translation, words in the sentences were misordered.

3.2 Source of Errors

The errors committed by the participants can attributed to L1 interference and inadequacy of using the L2. Therefore, the source of the errors committed by the participants were intralingual and interlingual.

The results showed that the translation of the participants had errors in terms of transfer of morphological element, grammatical element, and lexico-semantic elements. Furthermore, the sources of errors can also be attributed to addition, omission, ignorance of rule restriction, overgeneralization, and false analogy.

4. Conclusions

This error analysis revealed that the ESL learners have difficulties when translating texts from Filipino to English, in terms of word inflection, adverbs, verb tenses, pluralization, infinitive, negation, articles, demonstratives, subject-verb agreement, word order, choice of word equivalent, misunderstanding the text, omission of verbs, and addition of unnecessary words. These amply demonstrate students' problems in establishing equivalence in their translations, which can be attributed to their limited command of their target language.

Based on then results, the researchers suggested that teachers may incorporate translation activities in their remedial classes to enhance the knowledge of the students in terms of morphology and syntax, and to cater the needs of the learners in various linguistic aspects of writing.

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