

# Lexical Error as Common Interference in Students' Translations Using L2

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## ABSTRACT

Achieving proficiency in writing can only be achieved through successful dealing with content, audience, purpose, word choice, mechanics, syntax and grammar. Mastering any of these areas can be difficult and it takes years of practice and much hard work. The study aimed to analyze the lexico-mechanical elements in students' translations. The results showed that majority of the students committed error as a kind of interference than mistake. Of the two writing elements (lexical and mechanical) considered in the study, the students committed error mostly in lexical element than mechanical. The occurrence of lexical errors is caused by the inappropriateness of the words used in the content that gives meaning. Out of 40 students, 19 committed interference and eight were very much interfered. Interference is present in the students' translations since majority of the students use Cebuano as L1 which is different from L2 concerning the various lexical and mechanical elements. As a result, L1 interference is common in their written English. The study concludes that the difference in written discourse patterns which include the lexical and mechanical elements cause the interference in the composition of the students.

**Keywords** – Applied linguistics, contrastive rhetoric analysis, editorial, translations, descriptive research design, Philippines

## INTRODUCTION

Contrastive rhetoric analysis investigates the differences between pairs (or small sets) of languages against the background of similarities and with the purpose of providing input to applied discipline such as foreign language teaching and translation studies (Kaplan, 1966). Moreover, contrastive rhetoric is the study of how person's first language and culture influence his or her writing in a second language. Contrastive rhetoric has provided insights into students' problems with adjusting to English rhetoric by supplying information about the rhetoric used by other cultures, that is, non-English cultures.

There have been studies that conjectured on how learners are being considered proficient in learning a language which include the correct spelling of words and the choice of words in writing a composition to make it more efficient and comprehensive towards the readers. Extensive researches had also been done in the area of English language and its indicators as to how it has been acquired proficiently from the environment (Bhela, 1999; Asgari & Mustapha, 2011; Dich & Pedersen, 2013; Ebrahimi, 2015).

It is very important that English educators determine and improve students' proficiency and manageability in choosing words in writing a composition, and even in translating a composition to express their thoughts. Hence, texts are considered not merely as static products but as functional parts of dynamic cultural contexts (Connor 2002).

The appropriate choice of words and spelling in writing has been considered as part of the indicators to be proficient in writing. However, L1 has been interfering in the process of writing a composition as much as translating a composition. In fact, Dich and Pedersen (2013) assumed that the transparency of L1 orthography influences the amount of hesitation in spelling that is why learners of the target language commit mistakes. Moreover, Fender (2008) during his study in the spelling knowledge found out that Arab learners in English scored significantly lower in the spelling test because of the L1 interference. Muhammed and Ameen (2014) also stated that the idea that will be transferred from L1 to L2 in the translation process is a major problem of English as a foreign language to the learners. Consequently, Tabula and Salasac (2015) found out that L1 (Ilokano) personal pronouns are structurally independent and incorporated into other parts of speech as suffixes.

It has been observed that in Alubijid Comprehensive National High School, Philippines, many students have shown difficulty in writing a composition

particularly in spelling and using appropriate word choice. For instance, the Grade 10 students who served as participants of the study have performed poorly in English writing composition and textual translation. Generally, they tend to use direct translation of words in constructing a sentence. Such writing difficulty remains unaddressed and probably aggravates the situation if nothing is done to correct their mistakes.

## FRAMEWORK

The study was anchored on Contrastive Rhetoric Theory by Robert Kaplan, an American applied linguist who introduced his research in the 1960s. His research on Contrastive Rhetoric pioneered the attention to cultural and linguistic differences in the writing of ESL students. He stated that contrastive rhetoric is the study of how a person's L1 (first language) and culture influence his or her writing in L2 (second language).

Kaplan (1966) believed that languages are uniquely characterized by idiosyncratic rhetorical conventions influencing the process of writing composition and consequently, interfered with L2 writing. Throughout the years, contrastive rhetoric has investigated cultural differences in written discourse patterns or rhetorical conventions that include lexico-mechanical elements in writing composition that might negatively affect writing in L2 (Connor, 2002). Kaplan (1966) assumed that: 1) each language or culture has rhetorical conventions that are unique to itself; and 2) the rhetorical conventions of students' L1 interfere with their ESL writing. Furthermore, Kaplan's hypotheses have been supported by Ulla Connor who published a book about contrastive rhetoric in 2002. Kaplan's theory has showed its significance in this study based on the results of the students' translations that L1 revealed as interference in the L2 writing.

Kaplan's contrastive rhetoric maintains that language and writing are cultural phenomena and he asserted the linguistic and rhetorical conventions of the first language interfere with writing in the second language. Consequently, contrastive rhetoric is an area of research in second language acquisition that identifies problems in composition encountered by second language writers and by referring to the rhetorical strategies of the first language that includes the lexico-mechanical elements (Connor, 2002).

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of the study was to analyze the influence of L1 on translating a newspaper article using L2. Specifically, the study sought to determine the: 1) kind of interference that students make in the process of translating newspaper article; 2) level that the respondents' L1 interfere on using L2; 3) self-reported composition strategies that students commonly use during the process of writing the translation.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The study utilized descriptive research design. Forty students who were all native Cebuano speakers were invited to participate in the study and they were given an Assent Form to secure the confidentiality of their responses. Of this number, 12 are male, 28 are female. They were randomly chosen from the total population of 408 students from Grade 10.

### Research Setting

The study was conducted at Alubijid National Comprehensive High School, located in Alubijid, Misamis Oriental. It is one of the autonomous schools in Misamis Oriental. It admits 1,700 students from Grade 7 to Grade 10. This school is one of the select schools to pioneer the Senior High School in 2016. It offers three educational strands: General Academic Strand (GAS), Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM), and Technological Vocational (Tech Voc).

### Instrumentation

The study utilized three instruments: 1) contrastive rhetorical analysis grid, this is to identify and record the interference made by the respondents, 2) customized translation sheet, and 3) adapted survey questionnaire. The questionnaire has one part. It deals with the respondents' strategies in translating the Cebuano article to English. It was used to determine the students' self-reported strategies in translating the newspaper article. It was subjected to content and face validity with two experts from the fields of linguistics, language, and research. It was then pilot tested to five students to determine comprehensibility of the questionnaire.

### **Coding Reliability**

In-depth analysis was made by the inter-raters in identifying the interference in the students' translations with .80 reliability index.

### **Unit of Analysis**

The unit of analysis considered in the study is an editorial which was constructed in Cebuano. It was published in *Super Balita* on January 13, 2016. Editorials vary according to purpose; the purpose of the editorial used in the study is to persuade. It was selected as a specimen article for the students to translate to English.

### **Sampling Techniques**

The respondents of the study were determined utilizing the simple random sampling technique particularly lottery method. The sampling procedure considers the following steps: 1) identifying the total number of the students per section from the adviser's class list; 2) writing individual number in a small piece of paper and rolling it; 3) placing the rolled papers in a fish bowl where they can move freely in all directions; 4) shaking the container thoroughly before picking four rolled papers from each section; and 5) listing the numbers picked to determine the sampling frame of 40 students.

### **Data-Gathering Procedure**

A permission letter to conduct the study was sent to the schools division superintendent of Misamis Oriental. When the request was approved, a separate letter was sent to the principal of Alubijid National Comprehensive High School asking approval to conduct the study.

The adapted research instrument (survey questionnaire) was subjected to face and content validity obtaining a validity index of .80. It was then floated to the student-respondents.

The translation test was conducted on the following day. Each student was given the customized translation sheet and a clear photocopy of the Cebuano newspaper article. The main task requires the students to translate the Cebuano article to English. To facilitate easy and accurate contrastive rhetoric analysis, the study considered two important things: 1) two competent translators were invited to translate the Cebuano article to English. Their outputs were compared with the researcher's own translation to make an ideal translation which was as basis for checking and or analyzing the students' outputs; and 2) two competent inter-raters who are English language majors were invited to identify the interference

committed by the students. Their outputs were then compared with the output of the researcher to ascertain accuracy, consistency, and precision of the rating instrument, and to ensure equity and fairness of identifying interference, and to maintain the integrity of the analysis process. The translated articles were then analyzed using the Contrastive Rhetorical Analysis Grid.

A separate session with the students was conducted. The goal was to validate with the students the committed interference as either error or mistake. They were asked if they have another idea of the interference they committed and the researcher identifies the interference of either a mistake or an error. A scoring guide was then considered in determining the extent of L1 interference on L2.

A survey was then conducted in one of the noise-free classrooms of ANCHS in which convenience was assured. The student-respondents were given enough time to answer the questionnaires which were retrieved by the researcher. The results were then coded, tabulated, statistically processed and interpreted.

### Statistical Treatment

The collected data were managed and analyzed utilizing descriptive statistical technique. It includes mean, frequency and percentage distribution and standard deviation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Descriptive statistics on the kind of interference students make during translation (n = 40)

Measures	Kinds of Interference			
	Error		Mistake	
	Lexical	Mechanical	Lexical	Mechanical
Mean	14.00	2.13	1.55	2.51
Standard Error	1.02	0.43	0.27	0.39
Median	14	2	1	2
Mode	5	0	0	0
Standard Deviation	6.45	2.70	1.74	2.45
Range	27	15	6	9
Minimum	3	0	0	0
Maximum	30	15	6	9

Though L1 use in L2 classroom is seen to be facilitative, it is identified that L1 interference is one of the several sources of errors, learners make in learning the L2 (Owu-Ewie & Lomotey, 2016). Table 1 indicates that majority of the students committed error as a kind of interference than mistake in which lexical error is prevalent. Erkaya (2012) considered word choice as an error which caused more problems for the respondents in this study than other interferences and led to an incomprehensible output in writing.

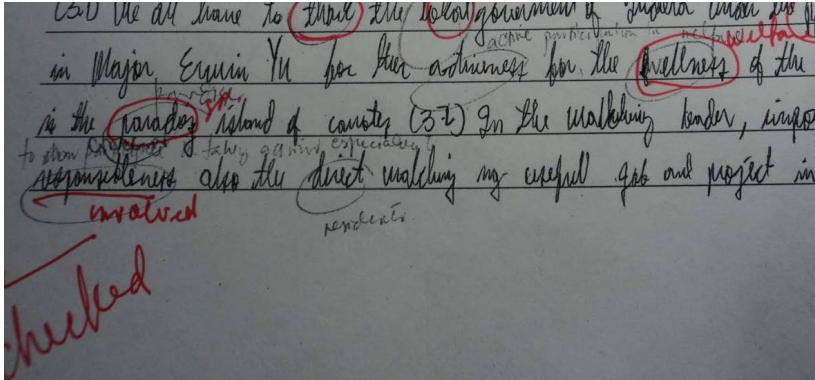


Figure 1. Student translation with lexical errors

Of the two writing elements (lexical and mechanical) considered in the study, the students committed error mostly in lexical element than mechanical. For instance, one student translated this statement: *Atong daygon ug pakpakan ang local na kagamhanan sa Tudela ubos sa pagpangulo ni Mayor Erwin Yu sa ilang aktibong pagpakabana alang sa kaayohan sa katawhan sa dapit... as*

We all have to **thank** the local government of Tudela **down** the **president** in Mayor Erwin Yu for their **activeness** for the **wellness** of the people...

As shown in the example, the students committed many lexical errors such as: thank, down, president, activeness and wellness than mechanical mistakes like president and thier. The occurrence of lexical errors is caused by the inappropriateness of the words used in the content that gives meaning. It is also noted in the example of Mahan (2013) that a dissonant phrase such as “As **late** as yesterday...” that is supposed to be “as **recently** as yesterday” clearly illustrates that the student has chosen only one wrong word but still it is adjudged wrong

because it distorts the intended meaning. Hence, the entire phrase comes out erroneous.

In the example statements, the respondents translated the sentence word for word that leads them to commit errors in the lexical element. The result shows that lexical error is the common interference in translating an article using L2.

Nevertheless, it has been noted in the study that a student's poor foundation of vocabulary in L2 may lead to lexical errors since L1 is strongly dominant in daily conversations. The participants of the study tended to substitute words that are synonymous, but inappropriate when used in a certain situation or context. For example,

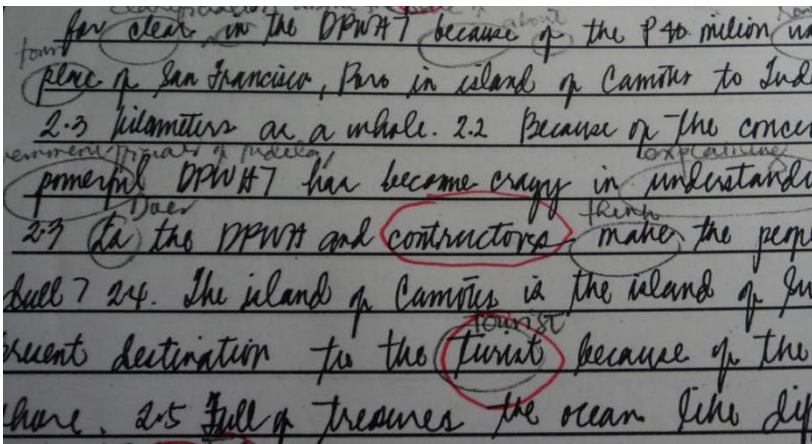


Figure 2. Translated sentences with lexical errors

The **government past** a resolution last December 16, 2015 **begging** for clear in the DPWH...” instead of “The **council passed** a resolution last December 16, 2015 **asking** for an explanation from the DPWH...”

In the given illustration, asking and begging are synonymous but they are used differently in certain context. Governor and council are both government officials, however, they assume different post in the government. Also, past and passed have the same final sound, but definitely they are different in meaning.

As noted in the study, the occurrence of L1 interference in writing using L2 has been an issue throughout the L2 learning process. It has been observed that the students committed errors and mistakes but the interference is more of errors. It is also noticeable that L1 interference on L2 makes the article difficult to understand.



Problem 2. Respondents' Level of Interference of L1 to L2

Level of Interference	Range of Errors	F	%
Very Much Interfered	20 and above	8	20.00
Interfered	11 to 19	19	47.50
Slightly Interfered	6 to 10	8	20.00
Not Interfered	5 and below	5	12.50
	Mean:	14.00	
	Sd:	6.45	
	Quali.Desc:	Interfered	

Table 2 exhibits the levels of interference caused by L1 in the L2 writing. The Cebuano newspaper article that was used as unit of analysis in the study is composed of three paragraphs and 10 sentences. These were translated by the students to L2. Nineteen out of 40 students have committed interference and eight were very much interfered. The data show that interference is present in the students' translations. These students used Cebuano as L1 which is different from L2 as regards structures which include the lexical and mechanical elements. Also, they are commonly exposed on L1 than L2 that leads them to commit errors. On the other hand, Castejon (2012) disclosed in his study that the influence of L1 on L2 has got to do with the use of gerunds; the errors occur because of the absence of cognitive approach. Another study which was made to the Persian students in writing English as L2 revealed that because of the different structural features required in certain genre of writing (i.e. narrative, journal, letter, etc.) Influenced the writing errors made in the L2 (Moqimipour & Shahrokhi, 2015).

As observed, the errors occurred because the students do not know the English equivalent of a certain Cebuano word used in the newspaper editorial. For instance, one student translated this paragraph:

“Ang konseho nipasar og resolusyon niadtong Disyembre 16, 2015 nganangayo og katin-awansa DPWH 7 bahin sa 40 milyunes nga dalan sa mga lungsod sa San Francisco, Poro sa isla sa Camotes ngadto sa Tudela nga moabotug 2.3 kilometros sa katibuk-an. Tungod sa pagpakabana sa usa ka local nga kagamhanan, and DPWH 7 nagkabuang na sa pagpasabut sa kontrobersiya.”

as:

*Student 1.*

“The governor is achieving and Resolusyon in the year of December 16, 2015 and to claim to the DPWH the divide for 40 millions a good road or highway to a Public in Francisco because in Camotes is a lot of island while Tudela have reach in 2.3 kilometers to al public. because of the activities for the one local and powerfull. The DPWH is hava ? craziest to understand the contribution.

*Student 2.*

“The congress and the resolution that approved on December 16, 2015 that want to know clearly to DPWH about the P40 milions for the street from the city of San Francisco. But on the Island of Camotes until to Tudela was 2.3 kilometers of all. the reason why give importance in one powerful organization. Because the DPWH not understand the contriburcy. They underestimate the DPWH and contractor in the people of Island. The island of Camotes is the island of Sugbo that we considered that most destination to the tourism because of the wonderful white sand. There’s a lot of different species in the seas of sugbo.”

*Student 3.*

“The council pass and the resolution on the last mont of December 16, 2015 that requires the clearness of DPWH 7 part of the P40 million of roads from the Municipality of San Francisco

instead of:

“The council passed a resolution last December 16, 2015 asking for explanation from the DPWH 7 about the 40 million pesos road project from San Francisco to Poro in the island of Camotes and Tudela reaching approximately 2.3 kilometers in its entirety. Because of one local government’s initiative to take action and to be involved about the issue, DPWH 7 is now in trouble in explaining the controversy”.

The example exposes an occurrence of both lexical and mechanical interference in the paragraph he has composed. The student’s translation contains numerous errors. The content words he used are inappropriate for a certain context because his L1 is predominant. Hemchua and Schmitt (2009) reported that 67% of the errors could be reasonably attribute to L1, however, they strongly affirmed that L1 was not a major factor in the lexical errors that the Thai learners made.

**Common Translation Strategies**

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics on the Respondents’ Composition Strategies Employed During Translation

Composition Strategies	mean	sd	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Usually	Always
1 sticks to the organization of ideas used in the newspaper article	3.08	1.14	12.50	7.50	55.00	10.00	15.00
2 uses the same tense based on the newspaper article	3.00	1.22	15.00	15.00	37.50	20.00	12.50
3 thinks of the correct spelling of English words during translation activity	4.03	0.97		5.00	30.00	22.50	42.50
4 changes the organization of ideas somewhat to fit the English language writing convention	3.40	0.90	2.50	10.00	42.50	35.00	10.00
5 attempts to find the best transitional devices (or connecting words) used to link the ideas	3.40	1.10	7.50	10.00	32.50	35.00	15.00
6 makes an effort to think how best to express the ideas in English	4.00	1.06		12.50	17.50	27.50	42.50
7 translates word for word for the newspaper article	2.75	1.10	17.50	15.00	50.00	10.00	7.50
8 have difficulty in finding translation equivalents in English for words in the newspaper article	3.20	0.97	5.00	12.50	50.00	22.50	10.00
9 uses simpler words and word structures in translating the newspaper article	3.75	0.98	2.50	7.50	25.00	42.50	22.50

10 uses a wide variety of vocabulary purposely to ensure complex grammatical structures	3.18	1.01	7.50	10.00	50.00	22.50	10.00
11 checks for subject-verb agreement when I translated the article in English	3.53	1.09	5.00	7.50	40.00	25.00	22.50
12 makes sure that the passive voice of the verb is used properly	3.38	1.10	5.00	15.00	35.00	27.50	17.50
13 skips words, phrases or sentences whenever I can hardly translate them	3.30	1.04	7.50	7.50	45.00	27.50	12.50

The result shows that student-respondents indicated as frequently used translation strategy is to think of the correct spelling of the English words in the translation process (mean= 4.03). As based on the statistical result in Table 1, the average mechanical error in spelling is only 2.13 compared with the lexical error which is 14. This shows that the respondents are conscious in spelling conventions to avoid spelling errors.

Another interesting result is that students always or usually try to make an effort to think how best to express their ideas in English that has mean percentage of 4. In line with the result, Ismail and Alsheikh (2012) also found out in their study that it is the most frequent strategy used by the students (69%) in the translated essay. However, the study revealed that the respondents are generally interfered in their translations which reach about 67%, although they have applied the same technique. Such interference is exemplified in the following paragraph as translated:

*Atong daygon ug pakapakan ang lokal nga kagamhanan sa Tudela ubos sa pagpangulo ni mayor Erwin Yu sa ilang aktibong pagpakaban alang sa kaayohan sa katawhan sa dapit ug mga dumuduong sa malaparaisong isla sa Camotes. Sa nakitang ehemplo, importante ang pagpakabana labi na ang yanong molupyo nga direktang nakakita ug nasayod sa pagtrabaho ang proyekto sa kagamhanan sa ilang dapit. Kon sakto ug mayo ang pagpatuman sa proyekto, ang mga residente usab sa dapit and kabeneplisyo niini.*

We hear and give around of applause the local power of Tudela under the presidency of mayor Erwin Yu in their active involvement for the good of the people near the arrival of the paradise like island of Camotes. In the seen examples, it is important the leadership especially the people of the powerful of the place. If it is correct and good the obedient of the project, the residence also in the place will benefit it.

As analyzed in the paragraph, both ideas are nearly analogous. This means that the student expressed most of the ideas from the original text. The translated paragraph of the student, however, shows the occurrence of interference in which lexical errors are mostly present. As revealed by Urdaneta (2011) in his study, the influence of L1 (Spanish) can definitely hinder the writing process in L2. In addition, four basic mistakes in student papers were found to be a direct influence from L1 to L2 writing that includes lexical component. Hence, the analyst observed that using a good technique in translation is not the basis of writing an effective, error free paragraph based on the statistics result in the study.

The result of the study showed scholastic implications to the teaching and learning of English Language in understanding the L1 background that will create interference in writing. Moreover, the study will help the L2 teachers in innovating teaching strategies based on the strategies made by the students in translation. However, the result should have been more meaningful if correlational research is also applied.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed that students seem to rely on their knowledge in L1 most of the time that makes interference occurred although they place conscious effort in the structures and word choice in the target language. This result is further established in the Contrastive Rhetoric Theory developed by Kaplan (1966) which presupposes that the person's L1 (first language) influence his or her writing in L2 (second language).

The study concludes that the difference in written discourse patterns which include the lexical and mechanical elements caused the interference in the composition of the students. In this study, the lexical error reveals an interesting factor in the translation process. The students committed errors when they were asked to translate a newspaper editorial in the second language in which L1 interference makes the article incomprehensible. The errors recorded were the word choice and the poor foundation of vocabulary in L2.

## TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

The analysis and results of the study show that the interference in the lexical and mechanical (spelling) element hampered the writing skills of the students. Consequently, the study proposes an English Language Program, specifically, in the Lexical and Mechanical elements in writing to meet students' difficulty in writing a composition.

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