

THE COMPREHENSIBILITY OF MODERNIZED VERSUS TRADITIONAL TAGALOG¹

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ABSTRACT

Experiments using Taylor's cloze procedure were conducted to compare the comprehensibility of modernized versus traditional Tagalog as these Tagalog styles have appeared in the daily newspaper *Taliba*. The scores of 400 agricultural high school students, 200 Tagalogs and 200 non-Tagalogs, were analyzed in a three-factor factorial analysis of variance in completely randomized design. Three hypotheses were tested: (1) Modernized Tagalog has higher comprehensibility than traditional Tagalog. (2) However, in the case of a familiar topic, the superiority in comprehensibility of modernized Tagalog over traditional Tagalog will be relatively little. (3) Modernized Tagalog will be more comprehensible to non-Tagalogs than Tagalogs.

Results failed to confirm any of the three hypotheses. However, the results should be considered for certain insights they shed on the future of Pilipino as the national language including its evolving modernized form. To the young Filipinos tested, the two styles of Tagalog did not make a significant difference in comprehensibility. Results also evidenced the validity of the cloze procedure for measuring the comprehensibility of Pilipino. The Tagalogs as a group consistently scored better than the non-Tagalogs in the tests which were on the native language of the former.

AROUND DECEMBER 1966, THE DAILY NEWSPAPER *Taliba* INSTITUTED the deliberate use of modernized Tagalog as language medium in place of the traditional Tagalog it heretofore used. Modernized Tagalog, among other characteristics, liberally incorporates into the basic Tagalog structure many borrowed words from Spanish and English. The borrowed words are written either by retaining their original spelling or by adapting them to the Tagalog orthography. Moreover, they are characteristically made to conform to Tagalog or Pilipino grammar as in the words "kumakampanya" for campaigning and "ni-rape" for raped.

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Ople (1968) named the combined Tagalog and English "Tagalish." For the other side of the coin, he called the "English inseminated with Tagalog" pioneered by *The Sun*, a new Manila tabloid, "Enggalog".

Gregorio (1967), then editor of the *Taliba*, said that the *Taliba's* innovation had been aimed to promote the newspaper's reach and impact as a medium for communicating with the masses. The *Taliba* Tagalog style, Gregorio said, reflected the everyday language of the people. It is familiar and functional to the readers and is the easiest language for them to understand. He called it the "spoken Pilipino" which "people use everywhere," in the stores, public markets, and in the streets.

In hearings later conducted by the Congress of the Philippines, it was revealed that the new Tagalog style attempted to convey written or printed information effectively to non-Tagalog speakers (*The Manila Times*, March 17, 1967). Executives of the Manila Times Publishing Company, publisher of the *Taliba*, believe that the addition of more non-Tagalog readers after the adoption of the new Tagalog style may have partly accounted for the dramatic increases in the *Taliba's* circulation since then. In December 1966, the average daily net paid circulation of the *Taliba* was 21,871. This climbed, in June 1967 or six months later, to 34,922. In December 1967, the circulation was 71,478. In December 1968, the circulation reached 111,268. (*The Manila Times* and Philippines Bureau of Audited Circulations).

Modernized Tagalog, as adopted by the *Taliba* and other mass media in the Philippines, such as radio and television, has elicited great interest among the present authors who are engaged in the communication of new ideas and practices in farming and homemaking to rural audiences. Specifically, this question has interested the authors: Is modernized Tagalog more comprehensible than traditional Tagalog?

To seek the answer to this question an experiment was conducted in the academic year 1967-68 by an undergraduate thesis student advised by the two senior authors (Gongon, 1968). The findings indicated no significant difference in comprehension between the two forms of Tagalog ($t = 0.73$, p greater than .05, with familiarity of topic and order of taking the tests randomized). However, in that study, the sample included Tagalogs only.

In April 1968, the experiment was repeated with non-Tagalogs as subjects. Data from the two samples—the Tagalog sample in the first study and the Ilocano sample in the second study—were integrated and subjected to statistical analysis different from the analysis used in the earlier study. The integrated study aimed to determine the relationship between Tagalog style, comprehensibility, and the dialect region of the users of the two forms of Tagalog.

Understanding or comprehending a language depends on the existence of meanings common to the source, such as a person speaking or writing, and

the receiver or receivers. However, meaning is not in words but in people (Berlo, 1960). Since meaning is personal, no two individuals can have exactly the same meanings. Meaning, moreover, is not fixed; it changes as the individual's experience changes. Thus, to illustrate, a foreign or borrowed word is foreign to a person only when he does not yet have a meaning for it. Once he gains a meaning for the word, it becomes as good as a native word for communicating.

Many Filipinos have been exposed to various languages as a result of the Philippines' historical development including more than 300 years under Spain and 50 years under the United States of America. English became the medium of instruction during the American period. After Philippine independence in 1946, English continued to be in use in the government, mass media and schools. Meanwhile, Tagalog or Pilipino, as the language began to be called in 1959, has been gaining ground in the elementary and high schools. This resulted principally from the efforts to propagate it as the national language of the Philippines. However, a form of Tagalog which is quite different from the traditional or "pure" Tagalog taught in the schools has evolved more and more especially in Manila and suburbs. This is modernized Tagalog, the lingua franca in the Greater Manila area.

These are the theoretical and socio-cultural backgrounds of the three hypotheses that guided the investigation reported in the present article. In this investigation, the authors combined the data obtained in the undergraduate thesis research of Gongon having Tagalogs as subjects and the data obtained in a second study having non-Tagalogs as subjects. The three hypotheses were as follows:

- H1: Modernized Tagalog has higher comprehensibility than traditional Tagalog.
- H2: However, in the case of a topic familiar to the readers or receivers, the superiority in comprehensibility of modernized Tagalog over traditional Tagalog will be relatively little.
- H3: Modernized Tagalog will have higher comprehensibility for non-Tagalogs than Tagalogs.

The prediction in the first hypothesis that modernized Tagalog is more comprehensible than traditional Tagalog has its rationale in the postulate that communication receivers understand better a language that more closely approximates their individual experiences. Because modern day Filipinos have been exposed to many borrowed words, it was expected that modernized Tagalog, which incorporates such words and expressions, would have higher comprehensibility to them than "pure" Tagalog. However, the case of a topic or content familiar to the receivers provides an exception. Receivers can comprehend better a topic which they already know (Taylor, 1956). Literatures on readability support Taylor's contention. Kearsley (1948) for example, asserted that *content*, format, organ-

ization, and style constitute the major determinants of the readability of written communication (*italics ours*). In the study of Gongon it was found that the familiar topic was significantly more comprehensible than the unfamiliar topic ($t=8.29$, p less than .05, with style of Tagalog and order of taking the tests randomized). Thus, the second hypothesis was forwarded.

The third hypothesis was suggested by the finding in the Gongon study of no significant difference in the comprehensibility of the two styles of Tagalog. Since in the Gongon study, the sample was made up of Tagalogs, the present authors desired to find out whether the difference in comprehensibility would be significant if non-Tagalog subjects were tested.

RESEARCH DESIGN

For the present integrated analysis, a three-factor factorial analysis of variance in completely randomized design was made. This statistical analysis afforded simultaneous tests of the three hypotheses.

The sample in the present study consisted of 200 Tagalogs and 200 non-Tagalogs (Ilocanos) or a total of 400 subjects. The subjects were third and fourth year agricultural high school students in four schools. The schools in the Tagalog-speaking provinces were the Quezon National Agricultural School in Pagbilao, Quezon, and the Baybay National Agricultural School in Siniloan, Laguna, where the first study was conducted. The schools in the non-Tagalog area were the Eastern Pangasinan Agricultural College in Sta. Maria, Pangasinan, and the Sta. Maria Agricultural College in Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur. Table 1 shows the distribution of the subjects by dialect region, school, and year level.

TABLE 1. DISTRIBUTION OF THE SUBJECTS²

	Tagalogs		Non-Tagalogs		Totals
	QNAS	BNAS	EPAC	SMAC	
Juniors	44	56	53	55	208
Seniors	44	56	41	51	192
Totals	88	112	94	106	400

To compare the comprehensibility of the two styles of Tagalog, comprehension tests were administered in the first and second schools

² Ten and 18 subjects in the Tagalog and non-Tagalog sub-samples respectively were discarded. These subjects were those who could not complete a group of four as required by the experimental design. In the non-Tagalog sub-sample, 100 subjects were likewise discarded after the total of 200 subjects needed to equalize the Tagalog sub-sample for the analysis of variance used had been reached. The 200 subjects were selected by stratified random sampling from the original number of 300 non-Tagalog students who took the tests.

mentioned on October 24 and 25, 1967, respectively. The tests were administered in the third and fourth schools mentioned on April 3 and 4, 1968, respectively.

Modernized and Traditional Tagalog

Traditional Tagalog was the Tagalog style used in the *Taliba* before December 1966 when the use of modernized Tagalog was adopted. Modernized Tagalog has since been used in the *Taliba*.

These two Tagalog styles were differentiated for experimental purposes as follows:

For the test materials, two news stories were selected from issues of the *Taliba*. One of the stories appeared in the issue of March 5, 1967 when the modernized style was already being followed. This story was handed to Mr. Gregorio, then the editor of the *Taliba*, with the request that it be rewritten "in the way you wrote your news stories before you adopted the new style." Actually, the story was rewritten by one of the *Taliba* newswriters.

The other story appeared in the November 18, 1966 issue. This story was similarly given to Mr. Gregorio for rewriting "the way you do it in the *Taliba* now."

A total of 115 borrowed words was counted in the March 5, 1967 news item. Rewritten, the number of borrowed words was pared down to 43 words. These two versions were considered as the modernized and traditional versions of this particular story.

The November 18, 1966 item had 22 borrowed words originally. Rewritten, the borrowed words increased to 64 words. These versions were considered as the traditional and modernized versions, respectively.

Familiarity of topic

The familiar topic was the November 18, 1966 story entitled "Masaganang Ani." It dealt with the rice variety IR8. This "miracle rice" had been already well publicized in the mass media and was expected to be familiar to many people, particularly to the intended test subjects who were agricultural students.

The unfamiliar topic was the March 7, 1967 news item. Entitled "Contra sa Sariling Administracion," the story dealt with "arrastre" or customs brokerage. The agriculture students were expected to be remotely conversant with this topic. Even members of the staff of the Department of Agricultural Communications who were asked about the topic "arrastre" were generally uncertain about what this word meant. The variable, familiarity of topic, thus pitted an agricultural against a non-agricultural topic.

Measurement of comprehensibility

Comprehensibility was measured by means of Taylor's Cloze Procedure (Taylor, 1953 and 1956). This technique has been devised for the measurement of readability as well as comprehension of materials in English. The instrument has also been successfully used on the Korean language. Samples of prose are mutilated by the deletion of words in the passages.

In the present study, every fifth word of the news items was deleted and replaced with a 1-inch line blank. The subjects were asked to guess and write the missing words in the blanks in the mimeographed tests. The total number of missing words that the subject guessed correctly constituted his cloze score per test. The number of words deleted in the four test versions were 90, 91, 96 and 98. The cloze scores were converted into standardized scores by dividing the number of correct answers in a particular test by the number of blanks in the test and multiplied by 100.

Order of taking the tests

Each subject took two tests. For purposes of experimental control, the subjects were divided into four groups to effect four ways or orders of taking the different tests (Table 2). This design provided control for the effects of practice and fatigue.

TABLE 2. ORDER OF TAKING THE TESTS

Group	O r d e r	
	First Test Taken	Second Test Taken
1	Mod : Fam	Trad : Unfam
2	Trad : Unfam	Mod : Fam
3	Mod : Unfam	Trad : Fam
4	Trad : Fam	Mod : Unfam

Practice or rehearsal in the first test may bias the results of the second test if a subject is compared on a single topic in both the modernized and traditional versions. Likewise tiredness or fatigue is expected to set in by the second test. For these reasons, the sequence of taking the tests was varied among the four groups of subjects.

The students were distributed into the four groups on the basis of the class register of the teacher in each section. This register was arranged alphabetically and grouped into boys and girls. The first boy in the list was assigned to Group 1, the second to Group 2, and so on; the fifth was assigned to Group 1, until the list of boys was used up. The girls were similarly distributed. An absent student was skipped and the next name was assigned to the group.

FINDINGS

The first hypothesis predicted that comprehension would be higher with modernized Tagalog than with traditional Tagalog. To test this hypothesis, the mean scores of the subjects in the modernized version of the tests were compared with their mean scores in the traditional version. In the analysis of variance summary below, this comparison is reflected in the main effect of Tagalog Style. The observed F value (1.22) was not statistically significant. The mean of the modernized Tagalog scores (34.7) was only slightly higher than the mean of the traditional Tagalog scores (33.9). Thus, the first hypothesis was not confirmed.

TABLE 3. ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE SUMMARY

Source of Variation	df	S.S.	M.S.	F	f	.99
Region of Subjects	1	5,245.018	5,245.018	56.63*		6.7
Tagalog Style	1	112.816	112.816	1.22		
Familiarity of Topic	1	3,749.664	3,749.664	40.48*		
Region x Style	1	175.046	175.046	1.89		
Region x Familiarity	1	187.320	187.320	2.02		
Style x Familiarity	1	14.749	14.749	0.16		
Region x Style x Familiarity	1	51.416	51.416	0.56		
Error	392					
Total	399					

N = 400, 50 subjects per cell

* Significant at .01 level.

The second hypothesis predicted that, in the case of a familiar topic, superiority in the comprehensibility of modernized Tagalog would be relatively little. This hypothesis concomitantly implies that, if the modernized version is compared with the traditional version of an *unfamiliar* topic, the modernized version would have much higher comprehensibility than the traditional.

In the analysis of variance summary, a significant interaction effect between Style x Familiarity would confirm the second hypothesis. The obtained F value, however, was very little (0.16). Moreover, the pattern of the mean scores was opposite that predicted; the mean comprehension score was lower in the modernized, unfamiliar version of the test (31.6) than in the traditional, unfamiliar version (32.6). The second hypothesis, therefore, was not confirmed.

The third hypothesis asserted that modernized Tagalog would be more comprehensible to non-Tagalogs than to Tagalogs. A significant interaction between Dialect Region of the Subjects x Tagalog Style would confirm this hypothesis. The observed interaction, however, was not statistically significant. The direction of the means, likewise, was not as predicted. The mean comprehension score of the non-Tagalogs in

the modernized version of the test was lower (31.8) than the mean score of the Tagalog subjects in the same version (37.7). Thus, the third hypothesis was also not confirmed.

DISCUSSION

Rather than merely "close the book" in the wake of the lack of confirmation of all the three hypotheses, the authors would like to remark on certain insights that emerged in the process of analyzing and interpreting the findings. It was noted that the experimental subjects consisted only of third and fourth year high school students. Could it be that the theorized value of modernized Tagalog, benefiting as it were, the general Tagalog-using population, are not applicable to these high school students? The sample we have studied may be a different breed of Filipinos, linguistically, compared with the users of modernized Tagalog. Having taken courses in traditional Tagalog in the schools, the new breed may not be as likely as their elders to have difficulty in comprehending unadulterated Tagalog. In sum, it is the traditional Tagalog that the students tested are familiar with.³

Furthermore, these students are also experiencing the wane of Spanish and English in the Philippines. This condition is echoed in the complaints frequently aired by teachers about the deterioration of English among the present day students. The students may no longer be as familiar with the Spanish and English words that have been strongly impressed on the awareness of older generations as a linguistic bridge. It is to be noted also that the subjects were from the provinces and not from the Manila area where the use of modernized Tagalog prevails.

These insights suggest future research on the functional use of modernized Tagalog. To whom is it functional? Modernized Tagalog, which is said to bridge the different cultures impinging on the language practice of Filipinos, may not be necessary after all for the present and future generations of young Filipinos having the characteristics of those belonging to the sample in the present study.

An implication of another finding in this study is of interest to researchers. The main effect of dialect region, i.e. Tagalog and non-Tagalog, was highly significant. The logic of this finding supports the validity of the cloze procedure for measuring the comprehensibility of

³ Compare these remarks with earlier statements made by Mr. Gonsalo del Rosario (del Rosario, 1967 in Aspillera, 1968) but which we came to know about only after we had written this report:

"The mixed style may perhaps be popular among a limited number of old people who had not been exposed to Pilipino grammar in school, who know more English or Spanish than their native language, and who either do not care or do not have the opportunity to study their national language. But these constitute a vanishing generation that will cease to influence public affairs in a few more decades. Their places in society will be taken over by a new breed that has received instruction in Pilipino and is familiar with the *balari* (grammar)."

Pilipino. In all the four different comparisons of the variables studied, the Tagalog group consistently had higher mean comprehension scores than the non-Tagalog group. In other words, it is logical that the native speakers of the language fared better than the non-native speakers in the tests which were on the former's language.

TABLE 4. AVERAGE (MEAN) STANDARDIZED CLOZE SCORES

		Modernized	Traditional
Tagalog	Familiar	40.9	43.3
	Unfamiliar	34.5	33.7
Non-Tagalog	Familiar	34.3	27.2
	Unfamiliar	29.2	31.6
N = 400, 50 subjects per cell			

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In summary, the results of this study should be considered for the insights they shed on the future of Pilipino, including the evolving modernized Pilipino style. The influence of modernized Pilipino may be expected to wane as the younger Filipinos schooled in traditional Tagalog take the center of the national stage. Finally, the results evidence the validity of the cloze procedure for measuring the comprehensibility of Pilipino.

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