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Cross-Linguistic Transfer in Tagalog-Iloko Bilingual Learning: A Morphosemantic Analysis of Cognates in Nueva Ecija

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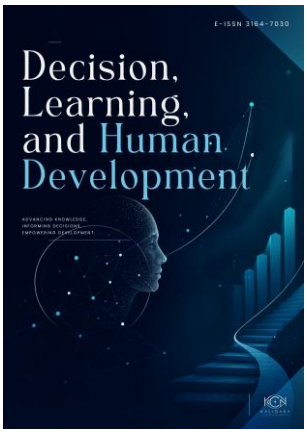
ABSTRACT

Cross-linguistic similarity can provide useful lexical cues in bilingual learning, yet form overlap can also create confusion when meanings diverge. This study examines how morphosemantic relationships between Tagalog and Iloko cognates relate to cross-linguistic facilitation and interference in a multilingual educational context in Nueva Ecija, Philippines. A descriptive-qualitative design involved 32 participants (16 students and 16 Filipino-language teachers) from two universities. Data were generated through four focus-group discussions, informant interviews, and archival research; teacher participants additionally supported linguistic analysis and sentence construction. Cognates were examined for word structure, semantic correspondence, lexical and syntactic distribution, and reported effects on first- and second-language use. The dataset showed more cognates with similar meanings than cognates with dissimilar meanings, while the pattern for frequently observed affixes was reversed; systematic phonological and morphological correspondences were also identified. Participants most frequently described false or polysemous cognates as sources of confusion, but they also reported that familiar cognates supported second-language learning by connecting new forms with prior lexical knowledge; this perceived contribution was stronger for second-language learning than for first-language communication. The findings position morphosemantic similarity as both a learning resource and a potential interference mechanism, extending a descriptive Philippine-language analysis toward cross-linguistic lexical learning and bilingual cognition.

IMPACT STATEMENT

The study shows why structurally similar words across Tagalog and Iloko should not be treated only as linguistic curiosities. In multilingual classrooms, reliable form-meaning correspondences may be used as explicit lexical bridges, while false or polysemous cognates require contrastive attention to prevent misinterpretation. For language educators in Philippine multilingual settings, the evidence supports instruction that develops metalinguistic awareness of recurring sound, affix, and meaning patterns while distinguishing participant-reported facilitation from experimentally measured learning effects. This framing also provides a basis for future developmental and experimental studies of bilingual vocabulary learning.

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1. Introduction

Bilingual lexical learning is shaped by continuous interaction between languages rather than by two fully independent lexical systems. Contemporary accounts of cross-linguistic influence propose that lexical representations from more than one language may become co-activated, creating widespread facilitation when form and meaning converge and context-dependent interference when they compete [1]. This perspective is particularly useful for cognates because cross-language form overlap provides an observable route through which prior lexical knowledge can support, bias, or complicate the processing of a related language.

Recent empirical work strengthens this learning-oriented interpretation. Experimental evidence shows that prior bilingual experience can facilitate novel-word learning through cognate-like overlap while form-meaning mismatch may produce a different balance of facilitation and interference [2]. Developmental research further indicates that cognateness can accelerate bilingual lexical acquisition [3], and that productive vocabulary is sensitive not only to specific cognate similarity but also to broader language distance [4]. These findings move the study of cognates beyond descriptive comparison toward mechanisms of lexical learning and development.

Morphological and morphosemantic knowledge are also relevant to learning because word structure provides cues for organizing and extending lexical representations. Morphological awareness contributes to early word reading in bilingual children [5], cross-linguistic phonological and morphosemantic skills can transfer into literacy development [6], and morphological knowledge and awareness are associated with second-language vocabulary knowledge [7]. Work on vocabulary acquisition likewise shows that previously learned languages and cognitive resources such as working memory can interact with lexical learning [8]. Together, these studies suggest that recurring form-meaning patterns may become metalinguistic resources rather than remaining purely structural features of a language.

The same overlap can, however, generate ambiguity. Corpus evidence on false cognates documents lexical ambiguity in second-language production [9], production studies show that cognates may simultaneously yield facilitation and cross-language interference [10], and multilingual lexical research emphasizes co-activation and cross-linguistic similarity as central mechanisms in additional-language learning [11]. It is therefore analytically important to distinguish true or meaning-convergent pairs from form-similar pairs whose meanings diverge.

This learning perspective is especially relevant in educational contexts where multilingual experience is routine. Recent work by Aridan and colleagues emphasizes that language-learning outcomes and teacher readiness are embedded in pedagogical, technological, and affective contexts across Asian settings [12], while their study of personalized AI-supported Arabic listening illustrates how language learning can be interpreted through learner experience and instructional design rather than through linguistic form alone [13]. In the Philippine context, Villarama and colleagues similarly show that second-language learning practices are shaped by pedagogical environments, including technology-mediated interaction [14] and reflective-emotional language experiences [15]. These studies are not direct cognate investigations, but they underscore the educational-contextual orientation needed to connect linguistic evidence with learning and development.

The Philippine linguistic setting provides a particularly rich context for this analysis. Philippine languages are situated within the Austronesian tradition, with Tagalog and Iloko among the country's major indigenous languages. Earlier Philippine scholarship has examined comparative language patterns, grammar, language planning, and ethnolinguistic relationships [16]–[22]. The descriptive tradition also draws on ethnographic methods [23], ethnolinguistic group documentation [24], Filipino grammar [25], surveys of Philippine language groups [26], linguistic atlases [27], Iloko literacy and grammar resources [28], Tagalog grammar [29], language-planning histories [30], and regional-language literature [31].

Within this tradition, regional studies have documented Iloko and Northern Luzon language and culture [32], Tagalog-Ilokano cognates with identical, related, and different meanings [33], shared linguistic elements across Philippine languages [34], Iloko lexical relations [35], multilingual education [36], and ethnolinguistic language-culture relationships [37]. Cross-linguistic typology provides a broader account of how contact and structural interaction may shape grammars [38]. The present study builds on this Philippine comparative foundation by examining its implications for bilingual lexical learning.

1.1. Research problem and gap

Earlier descriptive work on Tagalog and Iloko cognates in Nueva Ecija documented sound correspondences, affixation, meaning, parts of speech, sentence use, and participant experiences. An important implication of these observations, however, has received less attention: participants explicitly reported that familiar cognates helped them learn another language, whereas false or multiple-meaning cognates created confusion. These reports connect linguistic structure with learning, cognition, and contextual experience, creating a basis for a more explicit account of cross-linguistic lexical transfer.

Much of the Philippine cognate literature predates contemporary models of bilingual lexical co-activation. Classic second-language and cognate studies already addressed lexical relations, vocabulary testing, morphological mismatch, cognate identification, and facilitation [39]–[43], whereas recent research provides a sharper facilitation-interference framework [1]–[11]. The unresolved problem is therefore not whether Tagalog and Iloko share form-related words, but how those relationships can be interpreted, without overstating causal evidence, as potential resources and constraints in bilingual lexical learning within a multilingual educational context.

To address this gap, the analysis brings morphosemantic patterns together with participant reports of perceived learning and communication. Because the study did not experimentally manipulate cognate status or measure reaction times, memory, or learning gains, the terms facilitation and interference are used as interpretive labels for participant-reported support and confusion, not as experimentally estimated causal effects.

1.2. Research objectives and questions

The study aims to explain how morphosemantic relationships between Tagalog and Iloko cognates can illuminate cross-linguistic transfer in bilingual learning and communication. Three research questions guide the analysis: (1) What morphosemantic correspondences characterize meaning-convergent and meaning-divergent Tagalog-Iloko lexical pairs? (2) How do Tagalog-Iloko bilingual speakers describe the facilitative and interfering roles of cognates in second-language learning and communication? and (3) How do these morphosemantic patterns and participant experiences illuminate cross-linguistic lexical transfer in a multilingual educational context?

2. Literature review

2.1. Morphosemantic relations and cross-linguistic influence

Cross-linguistic influence at the lexical level reflects interaction among form, meaning, context, and prior language experience. The contemporary bilingual-lexicon literature describes facilitation as highly common but interference as dependent on factors such as language context, direction, and modality [1]. This distinction is critical for the present study: a Tagalog-Iloko pair that shares both recognizable form and meaning may supply a useful retrieval or learning cue, whereas a similar-looking pair with divergent meanings may compete with an existing mapping. The relationship is therefore not reducible to a binary linguistic classification; it is a potential learning mechanism whose consequences depend on context and the learner's language history.

Novel-word research provides direct experimental evidence for this mechanism. Xue et al. found that bilingual experience supported the learning of cognate-like novel forms and that the balance between facilitation and interference differed across previously learned languages [2]. Developmental work shows that cognate status can influence the trajectory of bilingual word acquisition [3], while work with simultaneous bilingual children indicates that phonological similarity and language distance jointly shape productive vocabulary [4]. These studies support a conservative inference for the present qualitative dataset: reported ease with familiar cognates is theoretically consistent with cross-language co-activation, but the present study does not estimate the size of a cognate effect.

Morphology offers another route for cross-linguistic transfer. Bilingual children can draw on morphological awareness during word reading [5], and the contribution of phonological and morphosemantic skills to literacy differs across bilingual language backgrounds [6]. Among second-language learners, morphological knowledge and awareness are separable yet related contributors to vocabulary knowledge [7]. This literature makes the Tagalog-Iloko affix observations educationally relevant: repeated correspondences such as Tagalog mag- and Iloko ag- or Tagalog ma- and Iloko na- may be noticed as patterns that help learners form hypotheses about unfamiliar lexical items. Such a hypothesis requires experimental testing, but the pattern itself provides a plausible metalinguistic cue.

In this study, the term cognate is used in the applied contrastive sense common in the cited Philippine literature, including form-similar lexical pairs classified by semantic similarity or difference. This operational usage does not claim that every listed pair is an etymological cognate inherited from a single proto-form. That distinction matters because some similarities may reflect borrowing, contact, parallel adaptation, or other historical processes. The term is therefore used consistently within this applied contrastive scope.

2.2. Cognate facilitation, lexical interference, and multilingual learning

False or meaning-divergent cognates make visible the limits of positive transfer. Sampedro Mella shows that false cognates may introduce ambiguity in second-language production [9], while Muylle et al. report that cognates can show both processing advantages and language-interference patterns depending on level and modality [10]. Otwinowska similarly links multilingual lexical acquisition to language co-activation and cross-linguistic similarity [11]. From this perspective, confusion reported by Tagalog-Iloko speakers is not incidental noise; it is a theoretically meaningful signal that familiar form can activate an inappropriate meaning and require contextual disambiguation.

Earlier literature is also compatible with this interpretation. Carroll's work represents an earlier second-language research foundation [39], Elgort examined how L1 definitions and cognate status affect vocabulary testing [40], Janke and Kolokonte addressed false cognates and morphological mismatch [41], Potapova examined methods of cognate identification [42], and Rosselli et al. reported cognate facilitation in bilingual naming [43]. In the Philippine setting, studies of deceptive or false cognates across Cebuano, Maranao, Pilipino, Tagalog, Iloko, Pangasinan, Kapampangan, Hiligaynon, and Visayan varieties document a longstanding regional concern with misleading cross-language similarity [44]–[48].

The educational implication is not to assume that every shared form makes learning easier. Rather, learners may benefit from explicit comparison that distinguishes stable form-meaning correspondences from misleading similarity. This stance aligns with contemporary language-learning research in Asia and the Philippines that emphasizes contextualized pedagogy, learner experience, reflective practice, and the conditions under which learning resources are used [12]–[15]. Figure 1 summarizes the analytical pathway adopted in this article.

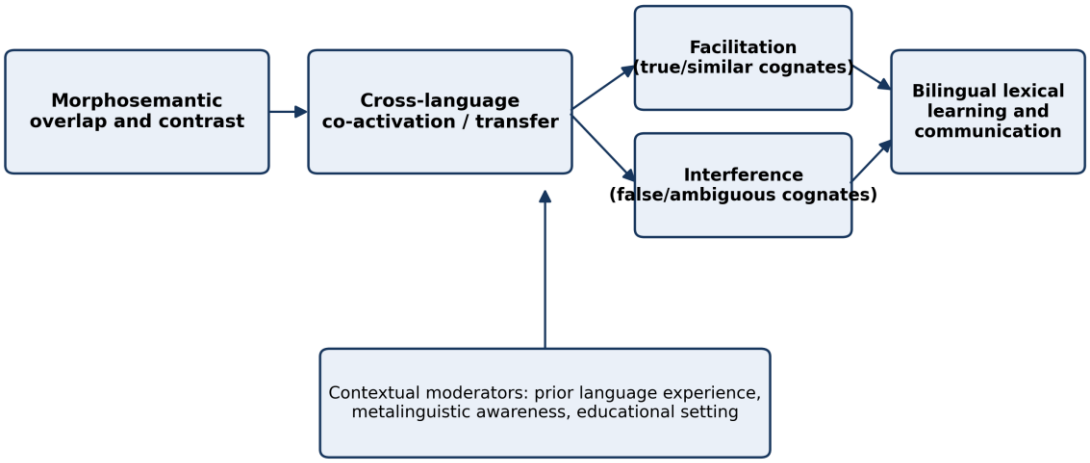


Figure 1. Conceptual framework linking morphosemantic relationships with cross-linguistic transfer in bilingual learning.

3. Methods

3.1. Research design

The study employed a descriptive-qualitative design. This design was used to describe the structural relationships among Tagalog and Iloko cognates, their semantic functions, and speakers' use of the lexical pairs during the period of investigation. The analysis distinguishes two linked analytical layers: (a) linguistic description of word form, meaning, distribution, and morphophonemic patterning; and (b) qualitative interpretation of participant reports concerning communication and second-language learning. The study is therefore exploratory and interpretive rather than experimental.

Data were triangulated across focus-group discussions (FGDs), informant interviews, and archival research. This combination is consistent with a qualitative strategy in which multiple forms of evidence are

used to clarify language use and participant interpretation [23]. The archival component also allows the contemporary participant evidence to be compared with previously documented Philippine cognate and language materials [16], [33]–[38].

3.2. Data universe and analytical units

A total of 32 participants were reported: 16 students and 16 teachers specializing in Filipino. Participants were native speakers of either Iloko or Tagalog and were drawn from Central Luzon State University and Wesleyan University Philippines in Nueva Ecija. Four FGD groups and four discussion sessions were conducted, separating teacher and student groups across the two institutions. The interview documentation reports eight Iloko and eight Tagalog speakers from each institution, with equal teacher-student representation within those language groups. The Results section, however, describes the 16 students as nine native Iloko speakers and seven native Tagalog speakers. Because no participant-level roster is available to resolve this discrepancy, both statements are reported transparently, and no subgroup inference is based on the contested 8/8 versus 9/7 student-language breakdown.

Students and teachers served as informants, while the Filipino-language teachers also participated in linguistic analysis and sentence construction because they were considered to have greater metalinguistic knowledge of Filipino grammar and Iloko. The analytical units were lexical pairs treated as cognates in this study, their affixes and sound correspondences, example sentences produced or validated by native speakers, and interview/FGD statements about communication and language learning.

Table 1. Data sources, participants, materials, and analytical roles.

Source / sample / material	Coverage	Role in this study
Participants	N = 32: 16 students and 16 Filipino-language teachers; Tagalog/Iloko native speakers; two Nueva Ecija universities	Primary interview and FGD evidence about lexical use, meaning, communication, and learning
Teacher analytical subset	16 Filipino-language teachers	Linguistic analysis and construction/validation of example sentences
Focus-group discussions	Four groups and four sessions	Collaborative analysis of word structure, meaning, lexical/syntactic distribution, and sentence use
Informant interviews	Central Luzon State University and Wesleyan University Philippines	Clarification of cognate use and perceived influence on L1 communication and L2 learning
Archival sources	Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino materials, Consuelo J. Paz compilation, Luis Ballesteros collection, and Hambingan ng mga Wika sa Pilipinas	Historical and comparative lexical evidence used alongside participant data

3.3. Operational definitions / Variables

The study is qualitative, so the terms below function as analytical constructs rather than measured variables with numerical scales. They are defined conservatively so that the learning-oriented interpretation remains within the limits of the available evidence.

Table 2. Operational definitions of the principal analytical constructs.

Construct	Operational definition in this study	Interpretive role
Meaning-convergent / “true” cognate	A cross-language lexical pair classified in the study as having recognizable structural similarity and similar meaning	Potential source of positive cross-linguistic cueing or perceived facilitation
Meaning-divergent / “false” cognate	A form-similar lexical pair whose meanings differ across Tagalog and Iloko	Potential source of lexical competition, confusion, or misinterpretation
Morphosemantic correspondence	Relationship between word structure/morphology and meaning across the two language forms	Primary linguistic evidence used to interpret transfer
Cognate facilitation	Participant-reported ease, support, confidence, or use of prior lexical knowledge associated with familiar cross-language forms	Qualitative learning interpretation; not an experimentally estimated effect
Lexical interference	Participant-reported confusion or need for elaboration when similar forms activate divergent or multiple meanings	Qualitative interpretation of potential negative transfer

Construct	Operational definition in this study	Interpretive role
Cross-linguistic transfer	Use of prior language knowledge as a resource or source of competition during use or learning of another language	Integrative concept linking linguistic patterns and participant experience

3.4. Data collection and extraction

Data collection occurred over a three-month period from January to March; the available study records do not specify the year. Four FGDs were conducted with teacher and student groups from the two universities. Participants supplied definitions, syntactic-semantic interpretations, and examples of how the selected lexical items were used in sentences. Informant interviews were also conducted to clarify lexical meanings and to elicit participants' views of how cognates influenced first-language communication and second-language acquisition.

Archival research complemented the participant data. In addition to cognates supplied by informants, the researcher consulted collections from the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino, a compilation of Philippine cognates associated with Consuelo J. Paz, Luis Ballesteros's Tagalog-Ilokano cognate collection, and Hambingan ng mga Wika sa Pilipinas. These sources were used to expand and check the lexical material considered in FGDs and interviews; they were not treated as a statistical population.

Two principal instruments were reported. The FGD guide covered (a) word structure and morphological features, (b) semantics or meaning, and (c) syntactic and lexical distribution, including parts of speech and sentence functionality. The interview guide elicited information about perceived effects of cognates on first-language use and second-language acquisition and provided follow-up clarification for evidence obtained from the FGD and archival procedures.

3.5. Data analysis

Analysis proceeded from form to meaning and use. The researcher first examined the pronunciation of lexical items produced by informants, then interpreted semantic relationships through participant-provided sentence contexts, and finally classified lexical distribution according to parts of speech. Morphological analysis focused on affixation and morphophonemic patterns, including recurrent prefix, infix, suffix, reduplication, elision, and sound-alternation relationships. These observations were organized according to whether they provide evidence of systematic cross-language correspondence or meaning divergence.

Participant statements about language use were examined thematically under learning-oriented categories derived from the reported findings: confusion, facilitative linkage to prior knowledge, confidence in first-language expression, need for contextual elaboration, and the perceived stronger contribution of cognates to second-language learning than to first-language communication. These themes are interpreted in relation to contemporary cross-linguistic influence research [1]–[11] only after the empirical results are presented.

3.6. Validation, reliability, and uncertainty

The study documentation indicates that the FGD and interview instruments were reviewed by linguistics professionals for clarity, appropriateness, and relevance to the research objectives and were pilot-tested before use. Trustworthiness was further supported through methodological triangulation across interviews, FGDs, and archival sources, as well as by involving Filipino-language teachers in linguistic analysis and sentence construction. Follow-up questions were used to check the accuracy of recorded information.

No inter-rater reliability coefficient, coded transcript matrix, item-level cognate frequency table, or raw corpus is available in the study documentation. Accordingly, no numerical reliability estimates or cognate-category counts are inferred. Statements such as "more" or "most common" are used only where they were explicitly reported. This limitation is treated as uncertainty in the evidence rather than converted into unsupported statistics.

3.7. Ethical considerations

The study documentation reports that informed consent was available during the FGDs and that the researcher attended to the conduciveness of the setting and rapport with participants. No formal institutional ethics review body or approval number is identified. Accordingly, no formal approval identifier is reported. The analysis also avoids identifying individual participants and reports evidence at group level.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1. Participant and analytical context

All 32 participants contributed to the study as informants: half were students and half were teachers specializing in Filipino. The Results data indicate that 20 participants (62.5%) were male. The researcher purposively selected participants with Tagalog or Iloko as a first language to prioritize depth of linguistic competence. Participants were also kept within a relatively close age range to reduce generational vocabulary variation, although exact ages are not provided. Only the teacher participants were involved in the formal linguistic analysis and construction of sentences.

The participant composition supplied two complementary forms of evidence. Student and teacher informants provided natural-language judgments and experiences of lexical use, while teacher analysts contributed explicit grammatical and metalinguistic interpretation. Because participant-level linkage between each lexical judgment and demographic characteristic is unavailable, the results are presented as qualitative group-level patterns rather than as subgroup comparisons.

4.1.2. Morphophonological and morphological correspondences

The linguistic analysis identified recurrent phonological correspondences in the lexical pairs. Examples include Tagalog kabayo and Iloko kaballo, Tagalog alagaw and Iloko allagaw, and Tagalog tatlo and Iloko tallo as examples of consonantal adaptation. It also reports alternations involving [b] and [v], [i] and [e], [r] and [d], [l] and [r], and free interchange between [o] and [u]. Specific examples include Tagalog bitayin and Iloko bitayen for [i]/[e] alternation and Tagalog araw and Iloko aldaw for [r]/[d] correspondence. The study associates some of these patterns with historical Spanish influence and internal language development; this explanation is treated as contextual rather than as experimentally tested causation.

A further pattern concerned items ending in the [ong] sequence, illustrated by Tagalog bayong and Iloko bay-ong. The analysis also reports a tendency for Tagalog forms containing [h] to lose that sound in Iloko when immediately followed by a vowel. Across the dataset, free phoneme alternation was described as the most common morphophonemic change. These observations indicate that cross-language resemblance may involve regular sound mappings rather than exact surface identity.

Affixation produced a second set of systematic correspondences. The Tagalog noun kasal was contrasted with the perfective verb kinasal through the infix -in-. The Iloko prefix ag- was related to Tagalog mag- in forms such as agmamani and magmamani, and Tagalog ma- was related to Iloko na-. The verbal infix -um- was described as functioning similarly in both languages, illustrated by lumagto in Iloko and tumalon in Tagalog. For nominal formations, Tagalog -an was compared with Iloko ka-...-an, as in sagingan and kasagingan. Agent or profession formation contrasted Tagalog mang- plus reduplication with Iloko taga- or tagi-, illustrated by mambibilad and taga-bilag. In adjectives, Tagalog kay- was compared with Iloko agkaka- (kaygaganda / agkakapintas), while Tagalog mala- was compared with Iloko agat- (malabulaklak / agatsabong).

The reported findings indicate that cognates with similar meanings outnumbered those with dissimilar meanings; the affix patterns showed the opposite trend. Because item-level counts are unavailable, these findings are presented as qualitative comparative statements rather than converted into percentages. Table 3 consolidates the explicit examples documented in the study.

Table 3. Reported Tagalog-Iloko morphophonological and morphological patterns.

Phenomenon	Tagalog form / pattern	Iloko form / pattern	Interpretation
Consonantal correspondence	kabayo	kaballo	Related lexical forms with consonantal adaptation
Consonant length / correspondence	alagaw	allagaw	Related form with consonantal difference
Consonant correspondence	tatlo	tallo	Related form with consonantal difference
Vowel alternation	bitayin	bitayen	[i]/[e] substitution
Consonant alternation	araw	aldaw	[r]/[d] correspondence
Boundary / segment pattern	bayong	bay-ong	Reported pattern in forms ending with [ong]
Verbal derivation	kasal → kinasal	—	Tagalog infix -in- changes noun to perfective verb in the cited example

Phenomenon	Tagalog form / pattern	Iloko form / pattern	Interpretation
Verbal prefix correspondence	magmamani (mag-)	agmamani (ag-)	Systematic prefix correspondence reported in the study
Attributive prefix correspondence	ma-	na-	Systematic morphological correspondence
Verbal infix function	tumalon (-um-)	lumagto (-um-)	Similar reported function of -um-
Nominal formation	sagingan (-an)	kasagingan (ka-...-an)	Different morphological packaging for related nominal function
Agent/profession formation	mambibilad (mang- + reduplication)	taga-bilag (taga-/tagi-)	Typological contrast in agent nominalization
Adjectival morphology	kaygaganda (kay-)	agkakapintas (agkaka-)	Reported adjectival correspondence
Adjectival comparison	malabulaklak (mala-)	agatsabong (agat-)	Reported adjectival correspondence

4.1.3. Participant-reported facilitation and interference in language use

The learning-related results were consistent across participant accounts. Confusion was the most commonly reported difficulty, particularly when a familiar-looking word had a different or multiple meaning. Participants indicated that elaboration in communication was sometimes necessary to prevent misinterpretation. This pattern is the clearest qualitative evidence of potential lexical interference in the dataset: formal familiarity may trigger an expectation that is not semantically appropriate in the immediate context.

At the same time, participants described cognates as useful for second-language acquisition because existing knowledge of a familiar word could serve as a foundation for learning a related form. Informants also reported greater confidence when communicating in their first language with cognates they already knew. Yet they consistently characterized cognates as more influential for second-language learning than for first-language communication: in the first language they paid less conscious attention to cognates, whereas in learning another language they more deliberately used prior lexical knowledge as a basis for interpretation and acquisition.

These findings do not provide experimental learning gains, response times, or accuracy estimates. They nevertheless show that the same cross-language similarity can be experienced in two directions: as a bridge to prior knowledge and as a source of confusion. Table 4 presents the participant-reported themes in a form aligned with the study's learning framework.

Table 4. Participant-reported cognate experiences in learning and communication.

Reported theme	Reported evidence	Learning-oriented interpretation
Confusion	Confusion was described as the most common response to problematic cognate use	Potential interference when form similarity activates a divergent meaning
Support for second-language acquisition	Participants said cognates highlighted connections with languages they already knew	Prior lexical knowledge may provide cross-language cues for new learning
Confidence in first-language communication	Several informants felt more confident using familiar cognates	Familiar lexical forms may support communicative accessibility
Need for elaboration	Participants emphasized explanation when a cognate had multiple meanings	Contextual disambiguation may be required to suppress an inappropriate mapping
Stronger perceived role in L2 than L1	Informants reported using cognate knowledge more during second-language learning than routine first-language communication	Cross-linguistic similarity becomes more salient when learners actively map unfamiliar forms to prior knowledge

4.1.4. Contextual and grammatical observations

Several broader linguistic and sociocultural observations provide additional context for the findings. Tagalog and Iloko were described as differing substantially in the context and use of nominal and non-nominal parts of speech. The study also described a tendency for Ilocano speakers to shorten expressions,

including attaching pronouns to content words ending in a vowel. It reported that the phoneme /ɤ/ may substitute for "o" and "e" and treated proficiency in that pronunciation as characteristic of Ilocano speech. In addition, the study described many loanwords as having become integrated into Iloko and associated this pattern with Ilocano migration.

The interpretation linked the presence and distribution of cognates to foreign influence, livelihood, religion, and migration, and noted that many Iloko affixes begin with a vowel in connection with natural elision. These contextual explanations were not independently measured by the study and should therefore be read as historically informed interpretations rather than causal findings. Their relevance to the present framework is that lexical learning occurs within language-contact histories and community practices, not in an abstract decontextualized system.

4.2. Discussion

4.2.1. Morphosemantic regularity as a resource for cross-linguistic learning

A central contribution of this study is to connect systematic Tagalog-Iloko form-meaning relationships with the contemporary concept of cross-linguistic transfer. The documented consonant, vowel, and affix correspondences show that learners encounter recurring patterns rather than only isolated similar words. When a learner recognizes a stable mapping such as mag-/ag- or a recurrent sound correspondence, prior knowledge can become a hypothesis-generating resource for interpreting new forms. This interpretation is compatible with research showing extensive facilitation in bilingual lexical processing [1], advantages for cognate-like forms in novel-word learning [2], and developmental benefits of cognateness in lexical acquisition [3], [4].

The morphology findings are especially important for DLHD's learning-and-cognition orientation. Morphological awareness is associated with word reading and cross-language transfer in bilingual learners [5], [6], and morphological knowledge is related to second-language vocabulary knowledge [7]. The present study does not measure morphological awareness directly, but its teacher-supported identification of affix correspondences demonstrates the kind of pattern knowledge that could be transformed into explicit metalinguistic instruction. A follow-up study could test whether teaching these correspondences improves vocabulary inference, retention, or reading among Tagalog-Iloko bilingual learners.

The participant reports provide a complementary experiential layer. Informants stated that cognate knowledge served as a foundation when learning a second language and was more salient in L2 learning than in routine L1 communication. That asymmetry is theoretically plausible: when a form is unfamiliar, learners have greater incentive to search their prior linguistic repertoire for recognizable structure and meaning. Experimental work on bilingual vocabulary acquisition similarly shows that previously learned languages can influence subsequent lexical learning [2], [8], [11]. The present evidence should nevertheless remain framed as perceived transfer, because no learning outcome was experimentally compared across cognate categories.

4.2.2. False cognates, ambiguity, and pedagogical implications

The most common participant-reported difficulty was confusion, particularly when a familiar form carried a different or multiple meaning. This result aligns with corpus evidence that false cognates can produce lexical ambiguity in an L2 [9] and with production evidence showing that cognate status may yield both facilitation and interference [10]. The pattern also connects the study with the older Philippine literature on deceptive cognates [44]–[48]. Form overlap therefore should not be taught as an unconditional shortcut. Its pedagogical value depends on whether learners also notice semantic divergence and contextual constraints.

A practical implication is a two-column instructional strategy: educators can explicitly highlight reliable Tagalog-Iloko correspondences as transfer cues while contrasting false or polysemous pairs that require semantic inhibition and contextual elaboration. The goal is not rote memorization of cognate lists but development of metalinguistic awareness: learners should be able to ask which parts of a familiar form transfer, which meanings do not, and what sentence context disambiguates the intended interpretation. This is consistent with contemporary work emphasizing morphology and lexical knowledge in language development [5]–[7].

The educational context also matters. Aridan et al. show that learning readiness varies with pedagogical, technological, and affective conditions across language-teacher populations [12], while their work on personalized listening learning illustrates the importance of aligning language-learning tools with specific learner processes [13]. In the Philippine context, Villarama et al. demonstrate that language

engagement is shaped by the instructional environment, both in technology-mediated classrooms [14] and in reflective practices that connect language and emotion [15]. Together with the present findings, these studies support an ecological view: cross-linguistic cues are most useful when teachers make them visible, meaningful, and contextually safe for learners rather than assuming that similarity automatically yields learning.

Table 5. Synthesis of evidence, implications, and cautious claims.

Evidence domain	What the study supports	What should not be claimed
Morphophonological correspondence	Recurring Tagalog-Iloko sound patterns are present in the reported examples	The study does not establish historical causation for every sound change
Morphological correspondence	Affix patterns differ systematically in several reported examples	The study does not quantify productivity across the full lexicon
Meaning-convergent cognates	Participants and linguistic analysis identify many similar-form/similar-meaning items	No experimental cognate advantage or effect size was measured
Meaning-divergent cognates	Participants reported confusion and need for elaboration	No clinical or cognitive deficit is inferred
Second-language learning	Participants perceived cognates as more useful in L2 learning than in L1 communication	The study does not demonstrate causal improvement in L2 proficiency
Educational application	Contrastive attention to form, meaning, and context is defensible as a pedagogical implication	The effectiveness of a cognate-based intervention remains to be tested

4.2.3. Methodological implications, limitations, and future research

The study has several limitations, all of which constrain generalization. First, participants were limited to teachers and students. A broader participant pool could reveal different patterns of lexical knowledge and contact. Second, the study was geographically concentrated in Nueva Ecija, where isoglosses and dialectal boundaries may shape linguistic individuality. Third, syntactic and pragmatic dimensions were not systematically analyzed. Fourth, participants may have held biases toward their native languages during FGDs, and group discussion can amplify socially shared interpretations.

Additional limitations arise from incomplete documentation. Exact participant ages, item-level frequency tables for true and false cognates, an accessible coded transcript matrix, and an inter-rater agreement statistic are unavailable. The documentation also contains a minor inconsistency between the recruitment description, which implies an 8/8 student language allocation, and the Results section, which reports nine Iloko and seven Tagalog student speakers. These limitations do not invalidate the overall qualitative patterns, but they prevent precise subgroup or frequency-based inference.

Future work should therefore move from descriptive transfer hypotheses to direct tests. Experimental studies could compare reaction time, accuracy, vocabulary retention, or learning rate across meaning-convergent, meaning-divergent, and non-cognate items while controlling phonological and morphological overlap. Longitudinal classroom studies could examine whether explicit contrastive instruction strengthens metalinguistic awareness and vocabulary learning. Broader sampling across Philippine regions would clarify how migration, language contact, and isogloss boundaries moderate transfer. Finally, syntactic and pragmatic analyses could establish whether the form-meaning patterns observed at the lexical level extend to sentence-level bilingual processing.

5. Conclusion

The Tagalog-Iloko evidence in this study shows that cognates are more than a descriptive inventory of similar words. The dataset contains systematic phonological and morphological correspondences, reports more meaning-convergent than meaning-divergent cognates, and documents a contrasting pattern in the affixes examined. Participants described the same cross-language similarity as both useful and potentially misleading: familiar cognates connected new lexical forms with prior knowledge and were perceived as especially helpful in second-language learning, whereas false or multiple-meaning forms generated confusion and required elaboration. These findings position morphosemantic similarity as a contextual learning resource whose value depends on semantic accuracy, prior language experience, and metalinguistic attention. By linking the linguistic observations to cross-linguistic transfer, the article contributes a Philippine multilingual perspective to research on bilingual lexical learning. The evidence supports pedagogical attention to systematic correspondences and false-cognate contrasts, while experimental and longitudinal research remains necessary to establish causal learning effects.

Ethics approval statement

No formal institutional ethics-review body or approval number is identified in the available study documentation. Accordingly, the article does not report an approval number. The study reports group-level findings and does not identify individual participants.

Author contribution statement

ACB: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Formal analysis, Validation, Writing - original draft, Writing - review & editing. The author accepts responsibility for the integrity of the work.

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Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

AI-assisted technologies disclosure

During the preparation and editorial refinement of this work, ChatGPT (OpenAI) was used to support manuscript organization, language clarity, scope alignment, and bibliographic verification. The tool was not used to generate or alter participant data. The author reviewed and edited the resulting text and takes full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, source verification, interpretation, and integrity of the article.

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Data availability statement

The available study documentation identifies no public-repository deposit for the qualitative materials and linguistic examples underlying the study. Reasonable requests for access should be directed to the corresponding author and remain subject to participant confidentiality and applicable institutional requirements.

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