

FIRST LANGUAGE AND SECOND LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY: A CASE OF BISAYA LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT: *This study purported to determine the L1 and L2 proficiency of the respondents and to determine if a significant relationship can be drawn between proficiencies in the two languages. The study employed a descriptive-quantitative-correlational design using respondents' ratings for the two subjects. The 113 respondents are third graders, nearly half are males and more than half are females with age means of 8.56 and 8.63 respectively. The analysis of the data showed that the respondents' level of proficiency in the L1 and L2 are relatively similar and both characterized as 'approaching proficiency'. Moreover, the data exposed a strong positive significant correlation between the respondents L1 and L2 proficiencies.*

Keywords: Bisaya, Mother Tongue, L1, L2, English

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Researchers [1, 2, 3] maintained that proficiency in the second language (L2) is predicted by proficiency in the first language (L1). This means that L1 serves as a linguistic foundation for the learning of other languages. Moreover, it implies that learners who have a solid foundation in their L1 could easily learn and could smoothly acquire proficiency in L2 which is English in most contexts. This contention is in consonance with the developed theory by others [4], known as the *Interdependence Hypothesis*, which claimed that L2 competence is dependent on L1 proficiency. Some [5], explained that failure to develop children's proficiency in the L1 compromises linguistic proficiency in additional languages children are learning. Therefore, rightful language choice, as regards the medium of instruction, could determine academic success [6] and English language learning.

It could be inferred along this line that the call for the use of mother tongues (MTs) is not to move away from gaining proficiency in the English language instead of a means towards it. In the year 1953, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) made the call for the use of MTs in the early years of education. The organization's plea is predicated on the notion that language is a salient concern in education and that educating learners in the language they understand best is a mark of good practice [7].

The investigations elsewhere [8], with 1080 pre-service teachers revealed that the respondents held positive beliefs towards MTs and were found to be willing to teach using mother tongue (MT) as a medium of instruction and MT as a subject. In a similar vein, authors in [9] reported willingness of respondents who are also pre-service teachers to teach in a local language (Chavacano) as a substitute of the English language in being the language of instruction. This suggests that MT education is gaining increasing support in the Philippines. However, limited studies were conducted to document the successful implementation of MT use in education, especially in the context of the Philippine which is a linguistically diverse country. Some of the few investigations include that of [6]

which reported promising results, regarding the benefit of MT use, as students proficient in their L1 were found to be excelling in mathematics when it was taught in the MT and not in English.

Another study that accounted for the use of a native language (Waray – a local language in the Philippines) in teaching mathematics in the Philippines soil is that of [10] which found that the use of native language results better performance in mathematics as compared to the use of a foreign language. The two cited studies documented positive results in the use of L1 in mathematics learning. On the account of L1 use impacting English proficiency, a dearth in the literature exists. Accounting this need, this study is conducted with the primary objective of drawing a significant relationship between L1 proficiency and English proficiency which is the identified L2 of the current study. In addition, this study is in the context of Bisaya speakers – an ethnic group in the country.

1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This present study aimed to determine the L1 and L2 proficiencies of the respondents. Also, this purported to determine whether a significant relationship could be drawn between the determining variables. Specifically, the study intended to answer the following question:

1. What is the L1 (Bisaya) proficiency of the respondents?
2. What is the L2 (English) proficiency of the respondents?
3. Is there a significant relationship between the respondents' L1 and L2?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. RESEARCH DESIGN

This current investigation employs descriptive-quantitative-correlational design. (11) explained that descriptive research involves the collection of data with the end purpose of testing a hypothesis or answer a question. As this study intended to identify the level of proficiency of the respondents in L1 and L2 as well as to determine if a significant relationship can be drawn between the two, the design is deemed fit to use.

2.2. PARTICIPANTS OF THE STUDY

The sample size of the study is comprised of a total of 113 third graders. Forty-nine or 43.4% are males with a mean age of 8.56 (SD-0.746) and Sixty four or 56.6% are females with a mean age of 0.863 (SD-0.816).

2.3 SOURCE OF DATA

The present empirical investigation used secondary data. Students’ average grades for three grading periods for the subjects Mother Tongue (Bisaya) and English were utilized. By the time when the study was conducted, only the grades for three grading periods were available for analysis.

2.4 PROCEDURE

Request to access students' data (grades in Mother's tongue and in English) was first sent to the school principal. Upon approval of the letter, the investigator met with the class advisers. Discussion of the nature of the study and the data needed for analysis was provided to the class advisers. A date was set for the meet up for the adviser to provide the data to the researcher.

2.5 METHOD OF ANALYSIS

Data analysis was done through the employment of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. To give interpretation to the respondents ‘average grades in the subjects Mother Tongue and English, the study adopts the description of proficiency of the Department of Education (DepEd) found in (12) : 74% and below – beginning level (B) , 75% - 79% - developing level (D), 80% - 84% - approaching proficiency (AP), 85% - 89% - proficient (P), and 90 and above – advanced (A).

To determine the respondents’ L1 and L2 proficiencies, descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) were used.

In addition, to determine the significant correlation between the respondents’ L1 and L2 proficiencies, Pearson Product Moment Coefficient was employed.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 RESPONDENTS’ L1 (BISAYA) PROFICIENCY

To determine the respondents' L1 proficiency, the respondents' grades in the subject Mother Tongue for three grading periods were first computed for average. Afterward, the average grade was descriptively analyzed. Moreover, the grade range of the respondents’ in the subject Mother Tongue is 75-94. Table 1 shows the mean value (M) and standard deviation (SD).

Table 1. Respondents’ Proficiency in Mother Tongue

Variable	M	SD
Proficiency in the Mother Tongue	81.6	4.580

Table 1 exposes the respondents’ proficiency in the mother tongue. The analysis of the data revealed that the respondents mean score of 81.6 (SD- 4.580) suggests that the respondents’ proficiency in the Mother Tongue is described as ‘*approaching proficiency*’ or AP. Moreover, the standard deviation (4.580) implies that the scores of the respondents are largely dispersed. This result suggests that unlike the respondents in the study of [6] who were found to be ‘*advanced*’ in their level of proficiency in the MT (*Chavacano*) , the respondents of this study are yet to reach the same level. It is interesting to note that the respondents in

both studies are third graders. This implies the respondents may have been exposed to limited opportunities that would allow the use and practice of their L1. One seen reason is the limited resources available for the teaching of the MT due to the hasty implementation of the program (13). The successful implementation of the language-in-education policy, to an extent, depends on the presence of resource materials such as books.

3.2 RESPONDENTS’ L2 (ENGLISH) PROFICIENCY

To determine the respondents’ L2 proficiency, the respondents’ grades in the subject English for three grading periods were first averaged. Afterwards, the average grade was descriptively analyzed. Moreover, the grade range of the respondents’ in the subject English is 75-93. Table 2 shows the mean value (M) and standard deviation (SD).

Table 2. Respondents’ proficiency in English

Variable	M	SD
Proficiency in English	81.28	4.128

Table 2 shows the respondents’ proficiency in the English language. The data (M-81.28, SD-4.128) revealed that the respondents’ proficiency, on average, is described as ‘*approaching proficiency*’. This suggests that the respondents have a similar level of proficiency in the two languages. This implies that the respondents should be provided with practice in L2 to further enhance their English proficiency.

3.3. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN L1 AND L2 PROFICIENCIES

The data were first tested for normality using the Shapiro-Wilk Test. It was revealed that p-value of 0.300 is greater than alpha = 0.05 suggesting that the data is normally distributed; hence, the utilization of a parametric statistical tool is appropriate. The inferential statistics known as Pearson Product Moment Coefficient also known as Pearson *r* was employed to determine significant relationships between variables. Table 3 presents the *p*-value, *r*-value, and interpretation.

Table 3: Correlation between Bisaya and English Proficiencies

Variables	<i>p</i> -value	<i>r</i> -value	Interpr.
L1 (Bisaya) Proficiency and L2 (English) Proficiency	0.000*	0.922	Significant

Note: Significant at alpha = 0.05

As it can be gleaned from Table 3, the analysis of the data revealed that there is a significant relationship between the respondents L1 (Bisaya) proficiency and L2 (English) proficiency as provided by the p-value (0.000 < alpha = 0.05). Moreover, the relationship is described as very high and positive (*r*-value = 0.922). This means that respondents with low first language proficiency are very same ones with low second language proficiency. Conversely, the respondents with a high level of proficiency in their L1 are the ones with a high level of proficiency in L2. This finding corroborates with previous research claims that L1 proficiency predicts L2 proficiency (1, 2, 3). Moreover, this implies that in order for learners to gain high proficiency in L2 and in other languages learners’ L1 proficiency must first be established. This result is supportive of (4)

Interdependence Theory. Therefore, the use and teaching of MT brought about by the latest shift prompted by the K-12 law is not a move away from gaining English proficiency, but, as provided by the data, a move towards attaining it.

4. CONCLUSION

This investigation was set to determine the L1 and L2 proficiency of the respondents. Likewise, it intended to determine the significant relationship between the respondents' L1 and L2 proficiencies. Based on the findings, the following conclusions are made:

One striking finding was the respondents were relative to a similar level of proficiency in both languages, L1 (Bisaya) and L2 (English). In both languages, the respondents are yet to develop a high level of proficiency. Therefore, there is a need to continuously develop students' proficiency through activities that would lead to allowing students to utilize the languages.

The most astounding is that L1 proficiency of the respondents significantly correlates with their L2 proficiency. This is a promising result for many reasons. One is that the said result provides empirical support to claims that L1 proficiency significantly correlates with L2 proficiency. Although many research works have accounted and documented the same result but none, if not limited, has been realized in the case of a local language in the Philippines such as the Bisaya. Pessimists deny the plausibility of MT in the Philippines due to the absence of empirical support contextualized in the country. This study is one with those that tend to fill this gap. Second is that this study documents a result that could be used to battle the ideology that L1 learning adversely affects L2 proficiency. This negative belief towards MT learning serves as a threat to the successful implementation of the MTB-MLE in the country. However, this documentation of the benefit and importance of founding the L1 proficiency of learners does not only provide support to the latest language-in-education policy but also affords evidence debunking unfounded belief about MT learning among young learners.

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