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Inconsistencies in the Orthographic Nativization of English Loanwords in Cebuano Textbooks

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Abstract

This study examines how English loanwords are orthographically nativized in Cebuano Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) textbooks and how these forms affect spelling instruction. The research aimed to: (1) identify the orthographic strategies used in adapting English loanwords into Cebuano, (2) determine spelling inconsistencies in these nativized forms, and (3) reveal the challenges teachers and learners encounter when teaching and learning spelling. A descriptive qualitative design was employed, using Grade I–III Cebuano MTB-MLE textbooks as the corpus. Lexical analysis was conducted to document orthographic strategies, and interviews with seven elementary teachers provided insights on instructional difficulties. Seven key orthographic

strategies were observed, namely, *vowel insertion*, *deletion*, *phoneme substitution*, *spelling indigenization*, *affixation*, *syllabic restructuring*, and *reduplication*. However, despite clear phoneme–grapheme correspondence, multiple spelling variants (e.g., *estik/istik*, *awto/awtu*) revealed a lack of standardization, leading to learner confusion, difficulty distinguishing English from Cebuano spellings, and teacher challenges. It is concluded that Cebuano functionally integrates English loanwords but inconsistent nativized spellings hinder literacy development and complicate instruction. It is recommended that standardized orthographic guidelines and targeted teacher training be done to ensure consistent spelling and effective MTB-MLE implementation.

Keywords: Loanword Nativization, English Loanwords, Orthographic Strategies, MTB-MLE, Spelling

Introduction

Language plays a crucial role in education, particularly in mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE), which was institutionalized in the Philippines through DepEd Order No. 74, s. 2009, titled *Institutionalizing Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MLE)*. The order specifies that during the first three years of primary school, children must be taught in their mother tongue while also learning Filipino and English (Official Gazette, 2023) ^[10]. In the context of Cebuano, MTB-MLE textbooks often incorporate English loanwords that are orthographically nativized to fit the phonological and spelling conventions of the language.

Cebuano, a major language in the Philippines, employs a largely phonetic orthography based on the Latin alphabet. The standard Cebuano alphabet consists of 20 letters: A, B, D, E, G, H, I, K, L, M, N, Ñ, O, P, R, S, T, U, W, and Y, while letters such as C, F, J, Q, V, X, and Z appear primarily in foreign loanwords (Caroro, Paredes, & Lumasag, 2020). This phonetic approach ensures that words are spelled as they are pronounced, which facilitates literacy and comprehension among speakers. Also, vowel and consonant phonemes combine to create various syllable structures and word shapes, including (V), (CV), (VC), (CVC), (CCV), and (CCVC). Additionally, the (VCC) structure is commonly found in borrowed words (Rubrico, 2015). However, inconsistencies in the spelling of these nativized words have been observed, which can lead to confusion among learners and complicate teaching practices.

This study is significant because it reveals the orthographic practices and challenges in Cebuano MTB-MLE textbooks. By identifying patterns of nativization and inconsistencies, the research offers practical implications for textbook developers, educators, and curriculum planners that learning materials support accurate spelling and comprehension. Moreover, understanding these challenges can suggest strategies to better support learners in navigating the intersection of their mother tongue and English.

Previous research investigated the complexities of integrating English loanwords into native languages. Lestari and Prasetyo

(2023) ^[9] noted that orthographic inconsistencies in multilingual classrooms can hinder effective teaching and learning, while Alibali *et al.* (2022) ^[1] revealed that teachers' proficiency and preparedness directly affect learners' literacy outcomes. Studies by Sieras (2020) and Genon-Sieras (2020) analyzed Cebuano Visayan news texts, identifying orthographic inaccuracies and inconsistencies that may influence learners' spelling. Research on spelling errors in multilingual contexts, including Bahr (2012), Coronado (2024) ^[4], Muhassin (2020), and Naruemon (2012), revealed that phonological, orthographic, and morphological patterns contribute to learner difficulties across languages. Finally, Escarda, Veloso, and Veloso (2024) explored the practical challenges learners face in MTB-MLE implementation, which highlights the importance of effective instructional strategies. Gomez and Tan (2023) ^[7] also argued that the absence of parental reinforcement intensifies learning difficulties.

While previous studies have explored spelling errors, orthographic inconsistencies, and multilingual literacy challenges, few have specifically examined the orthographic nativization of English loanwords in Cebuano MTB-MLE textbooks and how these inconsistencies affect both teaching and learning. The present study aims to examine the orthographic nativization of English loanwords in Cebuano textbooks by addressing the following questions: (1) What orthographic strategies are employed in adapting English loanwords into Cebuano? (2) Are there spelling inconsistencies with the orthographically nativized English words in Cebuano, and if so, what spelling inconsistencies are observed? (3) What challenges do users encounter in the teaching and learning of spelling with regards to the use of nativized English loanwords in Cebuano? The study seeks to provide an analysis of orthographic practices and challenges for an effective literacy instruction using Cebuano MTB-MLE textbooks.

Materials and Methods

This study used a descriptive qualitative design with the Cebuano MTB-MLE textbooks in Grade I – Grade III from public schools as the source of corpus as nativized English lexemes are evident in the materials. Further, lexical analysis was employed in analyzing the orthographic strategies of the nativized English lexemes in Cebuano.

Results and Discussion

1. What orthographic strategies are employed in adapting English loanwords into Cebuano?

Seven orthographic strategies were observed that include *vowel insertion*, *deletion*, *phoneme substitution*, *spelling indigenization*, *affixation*, *syllabic structuring*, and *reduplication*. First, vowel insertion includes three positions, namely, initial, medial, and final. Vowel insertion in the initial position can be observed in the borrowed English words that start with *sp*, *st*, and *sk*. For instance, the English words *special* and *spiral* were nativized as *espesyal* and *espayral*. Also, *stick* and *straw* were nativized as *estik* and *estro*. Likewise, *score* was nativized as *eskor*. Moreover, vowel insertion in the medial position was observed in the English lexemes having the morpheme *-tion*. Cebuano orthography requires the insertion of a vowel within the CC cluster specifically to CC sound clusters (Pitogo, 2022) ^[12], hence the nativized forms *inpeksiyon* and *konstraksiyon* from originally being *infection* and *construction*. With this

process, an additional syllable is formed, and this insertion is found consistent among nativized loanwords when the letter preceding *s* is a consonant. Furthermore, vowel insertion in the final position was observed in borrowed words *texture*, *metaphor*, and *structure*, which have become *tekstura*, *metapora*, and *estraktura*, respectively. This nativization process reveals that Cebuano adds phonemes to some borrowed English lexemes whose sounds end with the retroflex /r/.

Second, deletion was observed in borrowed English words that end with *t*, such as *compost*, *interest*, and *checklist*, which have turned *kompos*, *interes*, and *tseklis*. This outcome shows that *t* is deemed an excess letter in Cebuano orthography particularly when preceded by *s*.

Third, phoneme substitution was prevalent in the nativized forms, such as *z* → *s*, *f* → *p*, and *v* → *b*. For instance, the English words *stanza* and *zero* were adapted as *estansa* and *sero*. The borrowed words *focus* and *professional* were also nativized as *pokus* and *propesyunal*. Then the words *level* and *driver* were nativized as *lebel* and *drayber*. These results reflect that Cebuano orthography avoids the use of letters that have fricative sounds like /z/, /f/, and /v/.

Fourth, syllabic structuring was also noticed through vowel insertion and dropping of final consonant just as in the case of the words *circle* and *truck*, nativized as *sirkul* and *trak*, respectively. Also, the loanword *interview* has become *interbiyo*, and *check* has become *tsek*. This nativization reveals that English borrowed words are reshaped at the syllable level to fit to Cebuano's preferred CV or CVC structure.

Fifth, spelling indigenization also occurred. The borrowed English word *teacher* has become *titser*, and *checklist* has become *tseklis*. Also, English spellings with the sound /dʒ/ just as in the words *journal* (initial), *magic* (medial) and *stage* (final) were orthographically nativized as *dyurnal*, *madyik*, and *esteyds*, respectively. Loanwords such as *classmate* and *recite* were also adapted as *klasmeyt* and *resayt*. This adaptation process further proves that Cebuano language is phonemic, meaning, words are spelled as pronounced (Pesirla, 2019) ^[11].

Sixth, affixation was observed in nativized lexemes with verb conjugations. For the progressive aspect, examples include *nagdrowing* (drawing), *nagkolor* (coloring), and *nagrambol* (rumbling). For the completed past, examples include *gi-tsek* (checked) and *gi-aksiyon* (acted). For the imperative mood, nativized lexemes include *kolori* (color), *sirkuli* (circle), and *tseki* (check). English verbs in Cebuano are modified with Cebuano affixes to convey time, aspect, or command.

Lastly, reduplication was also noticed with the borrowed lexeme *auto* (short for automobile) and *truck*, adapted as *awtu-awtu* and *trak-trak* in Cebuano. However, in the nativized form, a semantic shift happened. Instead of referring to a full-scale vehicle, the definition is narrowed to mean a toy car for *awtu-awtu* and a toy truck for *trak-trak*. This result shows that Cebuano reduplication of English loanwords also convey smallness or play.

The present findings on the orthographic strategies employed in the nativization of English loanwords in Cebuano align with the findings of Talde and Lovitos (2023) ^[13] who documented several phonological processes such as three insertion positions that also directly shape the orthographic forms of indigenized English lexemes. Similarly, Pesirla (2019) ^[11] underscored Cebuano's strict

phoneme–grapheme correspondence and highlighted how orthographic adaptation often coincides with semantic shifts in loanwords.

2. Are there spelling inconsistencies with the orthographically nativized English words in Cebuano? If so, what spelling inconsistencies were observed?

Amidst the observable orthographical nativization patterns of English loanwords in Cebuano, a few inconsistencies were observed. Table 1 presents the spelling inconsistencies among the nativized English loanwords.

Table 1: Orthographical Inconsistencies among Nativized English Lexemes

English Loanwords	Nativized Spelling 1	Nativized Spelling 2
<i>stick</i>	<i>estik</i>	<i>istik</i>
<i>station</i>	<i>estasyon</i>	<i>istasyon</i>
<i>score</i>	<i>eskor</i>	<i>iskor</i>
<i>auto (short for automobile)</i>	<i>awto</i>	<i>awtu</i>
<i>circle</i>	<i>sirkol</i>	<i>sirkul</i>
<i>dialogue</i>	<i>diyologo</i>	<i>deyologo</i>
<i>chemical</i>	<i>kemikal</i>	<i>kemika</i>

One prominent observation involves the initial vowel insertion of the nativization of the English lexemes *stick*, *station*, and *score*. *Stick* is nativized as *estik* in MTB-MLE textbook, but is nativized as *istik* in MAPEH (Music, Arts, Physical Exercise, and Health) textbook. Similarly, *station* becomes *estasyon* in MAPEH, but the Araling Panlipunan (Social Studies) textbook records it as *istasyon*. Another inconsistency is in the loanword *score*, which has been nativized as *eskor* in MTB-MLE textbook, but is *iskor* in MAPEH. These observations emphasize that there are two competing nativized spelling variants that alternate between e-insertion and i-insertion.

Another inconsistency was also observed between o and u for the English lexeme *auto*. The Araling Panlipunan (Social Studies) adapts it as *awto*, while the Math subject writes it as *awtu*. A similar case is also true with *circle*, nativized as *sirkol* in Math, but *sirkul* in Araling Panlipunan. The lexeme *dialogue* likewise shows variation, appearing as *diyologo* in the MTB-MLE textbook but as *deyologo* in Araling Panlipunan. Even scientific terms are not exempt: *chemical* is adapted as both *kemikal* and *kemika*.

These nativized orthographic variations illustrate a lack of standardized orthographic rules for borrowed English lexemes in Cebuano, especially in educational materials. This inconsistency parallels Deiparine's (2025) [6] observations that Cebuano learners resolve unfamiliar English sounds through vowel insertion and phoneme substitution, which reveals how oral interference extends into written forms. This outcome points to potential challenges for learners in reconciling spelling variations across different subjects.

Additionally, the English lexeme *classmate* is also nativized as *klasmeyt*, although both the original and the nativized spelling variants are alternately used. The same is true to the other nativized lexemes, such as *kompyuter* (*computer*), *okay* (*okey*), *tren* (*train*), *doktor* (*doctor*), *berbo* (*verb*), *komiks* (*comics*), *nars* (*nurse*), *helikopter* (*helicopter*), *radio* (*radio*), *customer* (*customer*), and *neyutral* (*neutral*). These alternate spellings suggest that there is an orthographic negotiation between retaining the prestige spelling and

adopting nativized spellings. Echavez (2016) found that the presence of loanwords even in Cebuano textbooks are prevalent because English terms are clearer compared to Cebuano counterparts. However, these inconsistencies still highlight the urgent need for standardized spelling conventions in Cebuano textbooks especially on nativized lexemes to ensure accurate and consistent language instruction.

3. What challenges do users encounter in the teaching and learning of spelling with regards to the use of nativized English loanwords in Cebuano?

From the interview data collected from seven teachers handling the lower grades in public elementary schools, three major themes emerged: learners' difficulties in identifying original and derived spellings, learners' confusion with spelling, and teachers' struggles in teaching spelling. These themes are discussed in the following sections.

Theme 1: Learners' Difficulties in Identifying Original and Derived Spellings

Teachers consistently observed that learners struggle to differentiate between original English spellings and Cebuano-influenced forms. Participant 1 noted, "*The problem is much observed on the spelling. For example, to spell a word with /ka/, they still have to ask whether what I mean is in Bisaya or English.*" Similarly, Participant 3 remarked, "*My learners are so poor with spelling. When we move to other subjects like English and Filipino, they struggle because of their much exposure to the mother tongue.*" These observations suggest that learners must constantly negotiate between two orthographic systems, which can hinder their overall literacy development. Participant 4 further emphasized the consequences of inconsistent spellings, stating, "*It would have been better to have pure Bisaya to avoid confusion.*" These accounts highlight that learners' difficulties extend beyond memorization, which reflect the cognitive challenge of reconciling multiple spelling conventions. This result conforms that of Coronado (2024) [4] and Canoy *et al.* (2023) [3] where common spelling errors among learners was due to the impact of first language interference on English spelling proficiency.

Theme 2: Learners' Confusion with Spelling

Learners' confusion was observed as they transition to higher grades where English dominates instruction. Participant 2 explained, "*It (nativized spelling) helps, but when it comes to spelling, especially when they proceed to higher grades with the Bisaya spelling in their minds, it becomes a struggle for them. It confuses the learners because there is no more Bisaya in the higher grades but a quick transition to English.*" This concern was echoed by Participant 1: "*The problem is, when these lower graders reach higher grades, they struggle with spelling and reading. It becomes hard for them.*" Teachers also noted that parents observe these difficulties, with Participant 7 commenting, "*Some would say, their child has become poor in spelling.*" The instructional burden on teachers is further highlighted by Participant 6: "*This mother tongue subject only adds burden to us teachers. It's not an easy subject. It needs more time and effort. There is a problem with spelling and reading skills.*" Participant 2 added, "*They tend to get*

confused with spelling. And they have a hard time reading in Bisaya. They're better with English." These statements indicate that learners' confusion arises from both orthographic inconsistencies and insufficient scaffolding during critical transitions in language instruction. This outcome is consistent to the findings of Anfone *et al.* (2024)^[2] where both teachers and learners struggle when transitioning medium of instruction from mother tongue to English. Imtiaz *et al.* (2023)^[8] also found that a major cause of spelling errors among ESL learners is the interference of the mother tongue, the same with the findings of Xue (2023)^[14] where a negative transfer from the teaching of mother tongue affects English spelling of learners. This implies that learners' native language significantly influences English proficiency, which is deemed of greater significance to be studied by teachers.

Theme 3: Teachers' Struggles in Teaching Spelling

Teachers themselves face significant challenges in delivering effective spelling instruction. Participant 4 observed, *"I am aware that these words have English origins. Only that I have some issues with the spelling particularly with the use of 'i' and 'e.' So, I tend to analyze first before spelling the word out."* Participant 5 reflected on their own confidence: *"Even, I, myself feels I am getting dumb already because my knowledge in English has not been exercised anymore."* Compounding these challenges is the lack of parental reinforcement, as Participant 6 noted, *"Parents are even negative with it. Some would say, their child has become poor in spelling. So, generally, there is no positive reinforcement coming from them, and we, teachers, tend to get swayed because we don't even understand the system, too."* Some teachers also adopt adaptive strategies to mitigate these challenges, such as Participant 1, who explained, *"Sometimes, I place the equivalent English word or spelling on the side for them to differentiate the Bisaya from English,"* and Participant 3, who shared, *"Some words in the textbooks are too deep, too unfamiliar. Also, the spelling is not uniform."* These accounts highlight that teacher preparedness, orthographic clarity, and parental involvement are critical for effective spelling instruction (Lestari & Prasetyo, 2023)^[9]. Consistent with the findings of Alibali *et al.* (2022)^[1] and Gomez and Tan (2023)^[7], teachers frequently encounter challenges in spelling instruction due to orthographic inconsistencies, limited English proficiency, and weak parental support, which can hinder learners' spelling development. This situation calls for the need for adaptive strategies to ensure more effective multilingual literacy instruction.

Conclusion

The study revealed that the adaptation of English loanwords into Cebuano is governed by certain orthographic strategies that highlight the language's phonemic and syllable-based nature. It was also verified that in the nativization of English loanwords, spelling inconsistencies exist. Also, teachers viewed English as more valuable than Cebuano, seeing Cebuano instruction as an obstacle to mastering English – a prestige language.

With these results of the study, it is concluded that Cebuano nativizes English loanwords that fit its orthographic features. It is also concluded that multiple nativization practices coexist, and that the presence of alternate spellings highlights negotiation between retaining English forms or

adopting Cebuano phonemic conventions. Spelling variability also calls for an established Cebuano orthography especially that spelling inconsistencies of nativized loanwords are already evident even in educational materials. Teachers' negativity with the MTB-MLE curriculum also signifies that they still misunderstand the purpose of the implementation.

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