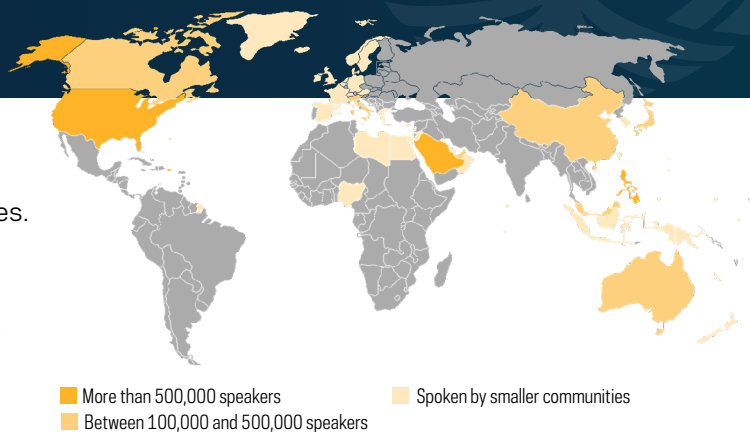# TAGALOG *at a Glance*

A Comparative Linguistic Analysis for Classroom Teachers

HELPFUL INFORMATION

▶ **Over 24 million people** around the world speak Tagalog and it is the sixth most-spoken language in the United States.

▶ It is the **common language** of the Philippines.

▶ The phrase **"kapwa tao"** is often used among Filipinos. This translates into English as **"shared togetherness"** and is an important cultural value.

■ More than 500,000 speakers
■ Between 100,000 and 500,000 speakers
■ Spoken by smaller communities

COMPARISONS AND COMMON DIFFICULTIES BETWEEN TAGALOG AND ENGLISH

PRONUNCIATION

Although the letters c, f, j, x, and z are included in the Tagalog alphabet, the sounds these consonants make in English are often difficult for Tagalog speakers. This is because most consonant sounds in Tagalog are combined with a vowel sound. For example, in American English the alphabet is pronounced, "a," "b," "c," "d," etc. In Tagalog, these letters are pronounced "ah," "ba," "ka," "da," etc.
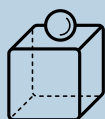
SOUND SUBSTITUTION

There is often great confusion among speakers of Tagalog between the sounds of the English letters b/v, t/d, and s/z.

VERBS

In English, we often create subject-verb agreement by changing the suffix of a verb. For example "I run" versus "He runs." In Tagalog, verbs do not change based on the subject. Instead, affixes (prefixes, infixes, and suffixes) are added to indicate tense and focus (voice).

PREPOSITIONS

In general, Filipino languages, such as Tagalog, have far fewer prepositions than English. The main preposition in Tagalog is "sa," which is roughly translated as "on" and is used in a wide variety of contexts. In contrast, English has over 100 different prepositions.

Resources:
- Demystifying the Morphosyntactic Features of the Tagalog and English Languages (Raymunde 2023)
- Filipino – Tagalog Speech and Language Development (Bilinguistics)

EXAMPLES AND TEACHING STRATEGIES

LINGUISTIC ELEMENT	EXAMPLES	TEACHING STRATEGIES
PRONUNCIATION	Most **consonant sounds** in Tagalog are combined with a vowel sound. Tagalog speakers often add an "ah" after sounds. For example, "a," "b," "c," "d" becomes "ah," "ba," "ka," "da."	These mispronunciations often cause spelling and reading errors. Provide ample opportunities to practice difficult sounds in **low pressure situations**. Celebrate students' accents as a sign of **bravery**!
SOUND SUBSTITUTION	A native Tagalog speaker might struggle to **spell the word** "movies" because they might read it using the **Tagalog sounds** "moo-bees." Similarly, distinguishing "price" from "prize" might be difficult due to similarities in their pronunciation.	When teaching spelling patterns, be sure to **highlight sounds** that might cause confusion.
VERBS	In English, **subject-verb agreement** is often indicated by the verb's ending. For example, "I run" versus "She runs." In Tagalog, verbs remain the same regardless of the subject. For example: • Tumakbo ako (I ran) • Tumakbo siya (He/She ran) • Tumakbo sila (They ran) In all cases, "tumakbo" (ran) does not change based on the subject.	Explicitly teach and model how changing suffixes impacts **subject-verb agreement** using **sentence frames.**
PREPOSITIONS	**"Sa"** is one of the most commonly used prepositions in Tagalog. It can **express various relationships**, such as indicating movement towards a destination or location ("Pumunta ako sa tindahan" – "I went to the store."). Additionally, "sa" can be used to specify the time an event occurs or the recipient of an action.	Make a **list of prepositions** in English and explicitly teach them to your students using gestures and visuals.

PONDER AND DISCUSS

▶ What percentage of your students speak Tagalog? Do these families speak any other Filipino languages at home?

▶ How can you integrate these languages into your classroom?

▶ What countries of origin are represented in your classroom?

▶ What do you know about these countries? How can you learn more about them as a class?

▶ What Filipino traditions and do your students celebrate? How can you integrate these celebreations into your school year?

▶ What do you know about these countries? How can you learn more about them as a class?