

# Exploring How Spanish Borrowings Shape Filipino Vocabulary: An Analysis of Morphological Adaptations and Contextual Communication

TOLEDO, Crisanto D.<sup>(1)</sup>

<sup>(1)</sup>  0009-0005-9181-7538; Doctor of Arts, Cebu Normal University, Cebu City, Cebu, Philippines, toledoc@cnu.edu.ph.

The content expressed in this article is the sole responsibility of its authors.

## ABSTRACT

This study investigated the impact of Spanish loanwords on the Filipino lexicon through morphological adaptation and contextual communication. The study employed qualitative descriptive design in analysing the written and oral responses of seventy fourth-year nursing students enrolled in Basic Spanish for the second semester of AY 2022–2023. The data were obtained from questionnaires, classroom activities and interactions in Spanish. Booij's Construction Morphology Theory was used to incorporate borrowed words as form-meaning units to the Filipino linguistic structure. Responses were coded in the categories of direct borrowing, phonological adaptation, orthographic change, sound deletion, sound addition, affixation, and semantic alteration. The findings show that Spanish loanwords are often employed in Filipino expressions of directions, occupations, descriptions, places, household items, time, occasions, and in daily conversation. These words are systematically adapted to Filipino sound patterns, spelling conventions, affixations and cultural usage (e.g., banco to bangko, cine to sinehan, tienda to tindahan, cocinero to kusinero). In addition, their connotation and context for interpretation and use influence common communication. The study reflects the historical and linguistic relationship of Filipino and Spanish language. It shows that lexical borrowing enriches and expands Filipino vocabulary and fosters cultural and linguistic continuity. The importance of these findings is their contribution to the teaching, preservation, and analysis of the Filipino vocabulary in a bilingual setting for educators and linguists.

## RESUMO

O empréstimo de palavras filipinas de outras línguas, como o espanhol, melhora a qualidade e a amplitude do vocabulário. Consequentemente, esta pesquisa visa examinar e analisar os empréstimos espanhóis incorporados ao filipino e as regras que regem esses empréstimos. Foi empregado um método de pesquisa qualitativa com um delineamento descritivo-qualitativo. Um questionário contendo atividades e interações em sala de aula usando o espanhol foi utilizado para coletar as respostas. O estudo foi ancorado na Teoria da Morfologia das Construções de Geert Booij. Dados de setenta (70) estudantes de enfermagem foram meticulosamente analisados, revelando que os morfemas emprestados do espanhol são: a) amplamente utilizados em discussões sobre interação, terminologia, locais e instruções; b) emprestados por meio de empréstimo direto, adaptação fonética, exclusão e adição de sons e afixação; c) a adaptação de palavras emprestadas segue contextos socioculturais, interpretações e aspectos práticos; e d) alguns empréstimos sofrem mudanças no léxico e no significado dentro do contexto filipino devido à adaptação. O estudo confirmou uma relação profunda entre as línguas filipina e espanhola por meio de palavras emprestadas, resultando em um vocabulário mais amplo e desenvolvimento na gramática e estrutura do filipino.

## ARTICLE INFORMATION

### Article process:

Submitted: 09/24/2025

Approved: 05/08/2026

Published: 06/18/2026



### Keywords:

Spanish borrowings,  
Filipino vocabulary,  
morphological adaptation,  
loanwords, Construction  
Morphology, language  
contact

### Palavras - chave:

Espanhol, Empréstimo,  
Língua Filipina, Estrutura,  
Lexões

## **Introduction**

The national language of the Philippines is known for its ability to incorporate the lexical units of various languages associated with the country. In the course of its development, Filipino has borrowed words from Malay, Sanskrit, Chinese, Arabic, and more recently from Spanish and English. These loanwords are a testament to the history of cultural interactions in the Philippines and the language's ongoing evolution, expanding the vocabulary and enriching its meaning.

Language borrowing enriches not only the vocabulary but also the communicative context. It shows Filipinos' affinity to different cultures and the dynamic evolution of Filipino as a creative language. The Spanish language has been a major influence in borrowed lexicons, with over five thousand loanwords that are used extensively in the communities (Almario, 2010). Spanish has a great influence on the speech system of the native language, since many everyday Filipino words are of Spanish origin. Strategies for teaching should use Spanish as a second language to enhance the Filipino language skills according to Harish (2013).

Despite the massive borrowing, Filipino is not yet fully standardized. A language is first standardized by an accepted writing system (Santiago, 2001, p.116). There is still no thorough exploration and research on the structural use of Filipino in society. This indicates a crucial gap in the understanding of vocabulary development and the adaptation of Spanish loanwords. Moreover, if Spanish is similar in translation and pronunciation to Filipino (Tyler & Friederici, 2013), then the processes and forms of the loanwords are worthy of a thorough study.

This gap has prompted this present study to analyze the Spanish loanwords that have been incorporated into Filipino and the rules that govern their adaptation.

## **Related Studies**

According to Omil (2009, p. 6), there are some aspects that should be considered in choosing words to be used in borrowing. They are: 1. The appropriateness of the word. 2. The certainty in the meaning of the word. 3. The prestige of the word. This means that the words used are consistent with the idea of the language being translated or used. Napoleon (2017, p. xii) also noted that the corresponding lexicon in Filipino should be utilized if available, and native words may provide more context. But these adaptations of borrowed words into Filipino are often overlooked. Borrowing offers opportunities for vocabulary expansion and use of language in broader contexts (Yip, 2015). It allows students to articulate their thoughts and ideas in a more extended manner. It assists in developing richer and more varied linguistic expressions.

Smith (2016) mentioned that the process of borrowing is an important factor in the evolution of languages around the world. The use of words from other languages, such as Spanish, can broaden and enrich the vocabulary of the borrowing language. In the same way, Gonzales (2015) states that the borrowing of words signifies more words and concepts in a language that brings about better understanding and more exact expression of ideas. Yip, Smith, Gonzales, and Brown also contend that borrowing aids communication and enhances culture by introducing words and ideas from other languages into the native lexicon.

From the point of view of grammar and language structure of words, Fernandez (2016) states that they need to be classified according to usage and lexical meaning in order to help formulate clear sentences and convey the intended messages. Nouns and adjectives refer to features of a person, thing, or concept (Smith, 2014). Adverbs provide meaning and define relations between words (García, 2016). These studies collectively show that knowledge of parts of speech is important in the effective integration of borrowed words in the Filipino language.

There are also difficulties in borrowing words from Spanish. Dela Cruz (2010) states that understanding context is important to avoid incompatibility in sentences. Espino (2013) stressed the need for caution in order to avoid misinterpretation, and Dalisay (2015) reminded that Filipino has native equivalents that can be used in place of borrowed words. As Ramos (2010) has shown, borrowing does increase vocabulary and understanding, but not every word keeps its original meaning or use. Hence, it needs critical study and careful analysis so that it is applied correctly.

In general, the cited studies and related literature offer a strong foundation for this paper. They underscore the importance of borrowing in enlarging vocabulary, improving communication and helping in the assimilation of Spanish loanwords in Filipino and point out the challenges and elements to be taken into account for a successful adaptation.

## **Methodology of Study**

### ***Research Design***

The study was a qualitative descriptive design to obtain a rich understanding of the phenomenon. The design intended to expand the details, the contexts and the language experiences of the Spanish loanwords in Filipino. The data were collected using questionnaires, classroom activities and Spanish interactions where the participants were asked to provide written and oral responses to questions on topics such as asking questions, giving directions, professions, describing persons or objects, parts of the home, tools and workplaces, time, occasions and the use of Spanish verbs.

### ***Participants***

Participants were fourth-year nursing students taking Basic Spanish in the second semester of academic year 2022–2023. They were chosen because their course exposure had given them sufficient familiarity with Spanish vocabulary, classroom activities, and Spanish-based communication tasks. The study only included students who gave informed consent and completed all required activities.

### ***Instruments***

The data collection instruments used were a structured questionnaire, classroom-based activities and guided Spanish language interactions. The prompts were constructed to elicit examples of Spanish-derived words in the Filipino usage. Respondents were asked to reply in Filipino using common words in daily conversation.

### ***Data Gathering Procedures***

The researcher obtained formal permission from the college office before data collection. Consent forms explaining the purpose of the study entitled “Spanish and Filipino: A Bilingual Glossary” were provided to participants. All students participated on a voluntary basis and could withdraw at any time without penalty. Data were gathered from classroom activities and Spanish-based interactions.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

The study was conducted after obtaining ethical approval. Confidentiality and privacy were assured; the names of participants and the institution were not revealed. Responses were recorded with codes or markers only and were for academic and research purposes only.

### ***Coding Process***

Responses were coded with participant numbers for confidentiality. Identified words were classified according to processes of borrowings: direct borrowing, phonological adaptation, orthographic change, sound deletion, sound addition, affixation and semantic change.

### ***Method of Linguistic Analysis***

Every Filipino word was compared with its Spanish source. Changes in sound, spelling, meaning, affixation and contextual usage were examined. This study used the Booij’s Construction Morphology Theory that considers borrowed words as form-meaning units that are integrated in the Filipino linguistic structure.

## **Appendix**

### ***Questionnaire / Prompts***

**Instruction:** Answer in Filipino. Use words normally used in daily communication.

1. ¿Cómo preguntas para ir al banco, al mercado, a la iglesia, al cine o a la estación?  
*How do you ask how to go to the bank, market, church, cinema, or station?*
2. Escribe tres frases con profesiones como doctor, maestro, carpintero, secretaria o cocinero.  
*Write three sentences with professions such as doctor, teacher, carpenter, secretary, or cook.*
3. Describe a una persona usando palabras filipinas que vienen del español.  
*Describe a person using Filipino words that come from Spanish.*
4. Describe partes de la casa, herramientas o lugares de trabajo.  
*Describe parts of the house, tools, or workplaces.*
5. Haz un diálogo corto sobre la hora, los días, las ocasiones o las actividades diarias.  
*Make a short dialogue about time, days, occasions, or daily activities.*
6. Escribe palabras filipinas que crees que vienen del español. Pon su significado y úsalas en frases.  
*Write Filipino words that you think come from Spanish. Give their meaning and use them in sentences.*
7. Explica cómo cambió la escritura o la pronunciación de una palabra del español al filipino.  
*Explain how the spelling or pronunciation of a word changed from Spanish to Filipino.*
8. Haz un diálogo corto usando palabras del español que se usan en filipino.  
*Make a short dialogue using Spanish words used in Filipino.*

#### 4. Data Interpretation

This section will present a thorough analysis of the data collected from the research conducted.

Table 1 shows Spanish-derived expressions used to give directions and identify locations. Many of the words, such as 'banco', 'calle', 'cine', 'dirección', 'estación', 'mercado' and 'playa', are used mostly as nouns, while other words, such as 'derecho', are used as directional expressions and 'puede' is used as a verb or modal auxiliary. This diversity shows that borrowing affects more than just nouns but other lexical categories, too, and this shows the flexibility of Spanish loanwords in Filipino.

The table below shows the Spanish loanwords and the rules governing their use.

**Table 1:**  
Words Used for Asking Directions

Spanish	Filipino	Meaning	Rules of Borrowing
banco	bangko	A bank; an entity established as a joint-stock company.	Letter <b>-g added, c → k</b>
calle	kalye	Public road in an area.	ll → ly

cine	sinehan	Place where people watch films for entertainment.	c → s, suffix - <b>han added</b>
derecho	diretso	Going to a point without deviating; straight, right.	ch → ts
dirección	direksyon	Destination or address.	c → k / c → s, i → y
estación	estasyon	Place where vehicles commonly stop.	c → s, i → y
iglesia	iglesia	Christian church or ecclesiastical government.	Direct borrowing
mercado	merkado	Public place where goods are sold or bought.	c → k
playa	aplaya	Flat sandy beach area.	Suffix - <b>added</b> <b>-a</b>
puede	pwede	Ability or capacity to do something.	<b>u → w</b>
rotonda	rotonda	Circular area or plaza.	Direct borrowing
tienda	tindahan	Establishment where food or drinks are sold.	<b>-e removed</b> , suffix <b>-han</b> <b>added</b>
tren	tren	Vehicle formed by linked cars pulled by a locomotive.	Direct borrowing

Booij's Construction Morphology Theory explains that borrowed words are form-meaning units that are systematically adapted to the phonological, orthographic, morphological, and semantic norms of Filipino. The data patterns reveal several different adaptation processes:

**Phonological and orthographic adaptation:** The Spanish 'c' becomes 'k' when uttered /k/ (banco → bangko, mercado → merkado) and 's' when uttered /s/ (cine → sinehan). Likewise, 'll' becomes 'ly' (calle > kalye), and accented sequences like '-ción' are rendered as '-syon' (estación > estasyon).

**Sound Substitution:** Some consonant clusters are replaced to comply with Filipino phonotactics. For example, ch → ts in derecho → diretso, preserving phonetic similarity while conforming to native articulation patterns.

**Vowel-Glide Adaptation:** Spanish vowel sequences are adapted into Filipino vowel-glide combinations. For example, puede → pwede (pue → pwe). This is a naturalised pronunciation.

**Morphological Adaptation:** Borrowed bases get fused with Filipino affixes to create contextually relevant words. 'Cine' → 'cinehan' and 'tienda' → 'tindahan' take the locative suffix '-han', producing words that refer to specific places or functions in Filipino.

What these patterns show is that Spanish loanwords are not simply copied but Filipinized in a systematic fashion. Phonetic equivalence, orthographic adjustment, affixation and semantic

integration work together in reshaping foreign forms. This strengthens the Filipino linguistic structures while preserving intelligibility and functional meaning.

The words collected and listed in Table 2 are terms that describe various professions.

**Table 2: Terms for Professions**

<b>Spanish</b>	<b>Filipino</b>	<b>Meaning</b>	<b>Rules of Borrowing</b>
abogada	abogada	Person legally authorized to defend clients' rights in court.	Direct borrowing
bombero	bombero	Person responsible for extinguishing fires and assisting in emergencies.	Direct borrowing
carpintero	karpintero	Carpenter or woodworker who makes or repairs wooden objects.	c → k
cocinero	kusinero	Professional dedicated to food preparation.	c → k, o → u, c → s
doctor	doktor	Person with a medical or academic degree.	c → k
ingeniero	inhenyero	Engineer; professional in the field of engineering.	g → h, i → y
jardinero	hardinero	Person who takes care of and cultivates a garden.	j → h
maestra	maestra	Teacher in the early educational cycle.	Direct borrowing
mecánico	mekaniko	Person focused on vehicle engine management or repair.	c → k
ministro	ministro	Head of a department or messenger of teachings.	Direct borrowing
músico	musiko	Musician or member of a band.	c → k
presidente	presidente	Leader or head of an organization; head of state in a republic.	Direct borrowing
profesor	propesor	Person dedicated to teaching.	f → p
secretaria	sekretarya	Person responsible for office documentation, letters, and records.	c → k, i → y
abogada	abogada	Person legally authorized to defend clients' rights in court.	Direct borrowing

The Spanish-derived words for occupations and the incorporation of occupational vocabulary into Filipino are shown in Table 2. The data show that many professional terms were borrowed because they refer to social roles, jobs, and institutional positions which are frequently used in everyday communication.

There are a number of **direct borrowings**, such as *abogada*, *bombero*, *maestra*, *ministro*, and *presidente*. These terms have been left in their original form and meaning, indicating that some Spanish words were readily accepted into Filipino with little modification.

Other words show **phonological** and **orthographical adaptation**. The Spanish letter 'c' is pronounced as /k/ and is replaced with '**k**'. Examples are *carpintero* → *karpintero*, *doctor* → *doktor*, *mecánico* → *mekaniko*, and *músico* → *musiko*. For *cocinero* → *kusinero*, the form adapts to the familiar Filipino word *kusina*, showing both sound adaptation and semantic connection.

The data also show **sound substitution**, such as *jardinero* → *hardinero* and *ingeniero* → *inhenyero*, where Spanish sounds are substituted with sounds more natural in Filipino. In '*profesor*' → '*propesor*', 'f' is pronounced as '**p**', according to common Filipino pronunciation tendencies.

As shown in Table 2, Spanish professional terms are adapted via spelling change, sound substitution and retention of meaning (Table 2). Adaptation of Spanish professional terms These patterns suggest that borrowing is a systematic process of Filipinization.

## Conclusion

The study shows that Spanish loanwords have penetrated into the Filipino vocabulary, especially in terms of directions, professions, descriptions, locations, items, time, and day-to-day communication. Filipino incorporates foreign words through direct borrowing, phonetic equivalence, phonetic modification, affixation, and alteration in spelling and meaning. The results indicate that the Spanish lexicon is not simply translated into Filipino; rather, it is restructured to fit into Filipino phonetics, syntax and cultural usage. This is a strong confirmation of the historical and linguistic link between Filipino and Spanish. The study contributes to the understanding of linguistic contact, borrowing, and development of Filipino as a dynamic language. The results may help teachers in explaining the formation of words, pronunciation, and cultural influences when teaching Filipino and Spanish.

The research shows that the Spanish loanwords have been incorporated into the Filipino vocabulary, especially in the fields of directions, professions, descriptions, places, household items, time expressions and daily conversation. Direct borrowing, phonetic equivalence, sound modification, affixation and changes in spelling and meaning are the ways in which borrowed words are adapted. The analysis shows that the Spanish words are not just translated but systematically restructured to fit the Filipino phonology, orthography, morphology, and contextual usage. These data support the historical and linguistic relationship between Filipino and Spanish and show the systematic processes involved in the

adaptation of lexical items. The results give insights on how Filipino speakers incorporate foreign lexical items, which may help language teachers to explain word formation, pronunciation patterns and contextual usage when teaching Filipino and Spanish vocabulary.

### **Recommendations**

Employ a larger and more diverse group of participants from different courses, geographical areas, and linguistic backgrounds.

Compare Filipino loanwords with those from other Philippine languages like Waray, Cebuano, and Hiligaynon.

Examine the use of Spanish borrowings in actual spoken conversation.

Analyze the use of Spanish-derived words in written documents.

Investigate the presence of Spanish loanwords in academic and professional environments.

### **REFERENCES**

- Abstracts: Bilingual education & bilingualism. (2007). *Language Teaching*, 40, 360–363.
- Albalá, P. (2003). Hispanic words of Indo-American origin in the Philippines. *Philippine Studies*, 51(1), 125–146.
- Almario, V. (2010). Ang wika ni Almario. In *Sa piling sinig: Talumpati, sanaysay, tula, atbp.* Anvil Publishing.
- Al-Shaboul, Y. (2011). The influence of Spanish on the morphology and syntax of Jordanian Arabic. *Journal of Language and Literature*, 2(2), 21–36.
- Aronoff, M. (1994). *Morphology by itself: Stems and inflectional classes.* University of Chicago Press.
- Baklanova, E. (2017). Types of borrowings in Tagalog/Filipino. *Kritika Kultura*, 28, 35–54. <https://doi.org/10.13185/1656-152x.2109>
- Baklanova, E., & Bellamy, K. (2023). Spanish suffixes in Tagalog: The case of common nouns. In M. Klamer & F. R. Moro (Eds.), *Traces of contact in the lexicon: Austronesian and Papuan studies* (pp. 307–347). Brill. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004529458\\_010](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004529458_010)
- Bauer, L., & Huddleston, R. (2002). Lexical word formation. In R. E. Asher (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of language and linguistics.* Cambridge University Press.
- Booij, G. (2010). *Construction morphology.* Oxford University Press.
- Calderón, J. F. (2016). Ang Filipino at ang pagtuturo ng mga salitang Espanyol: Mga hamon at oportunidad. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 37(6), 583–596.
- Castillo, M. B. (2012). Ang pagbuo ng mga glossary ng mga salitang Espanyol sa Filipino. *Philippine Journal of Linguistics*, 43(1), 35–44.

- Chomsky, N. (1993). A minimalist program for linguistic theory. In K. Hale & S. J. Keyser (Eds.), *The view from Building 20: Essays in linguistics in honor of Sylvain Bromberger* (pp. 1–52). MIT Press.
- Crystal, D. (2008). *A dictionary of linguistics and phonetics* (6th ed.). Blackwell.
- Haugen, E. (1950). The analysis of linguistic borrowing. *Language*, 26(2), 210–231.
- Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino. (2014). *Ortograpiyang pambansa*. Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino.
- Rubino, C. R. G., & Llenado, M. G. T. (2002). *Tagalog-English, English-Tagalog dictionary*. Hippocrene Books.
- Schachter, P., & Otones, F. T. (1972). *Tagalog reference grammar*. University of California Press.
- Thomason, S. G., & Kaufman, T. (1988). *Language contact, creolization, and genetic linguistics*. University of California Press.