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Enhancing Filipino Major Students' Translation Skills from Southern Leyte Bisaya to Filipino Through Poetry

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Abstract

This study investigates the translation capability of Filipino majors in rendering poems from Southern Leyte Bisaya into Filipino, addressing the challenges posed by the Philippines' linguistic diversity and the complex issues inherent in literary translation. Guided by Newmark's translation strategies, the research examines the students' performance before and after a targeted pedagogical intervention. Initial findings from the pretest reveal a predominant reliance on literal translation, often resulting in loss of nuance, cultural imagery, and poetic rhythm. Following the intervention, however, there is a marked increase in the use of idiomatic and transpositional strategies, reflecting a shift toward more culturally sensitive and contextually faithful translations. The study highlights the critical need for instructional materials that do not only teach translation theory but also promote hands-on application and cultural awareness. Such materials are envisioned to foster a deeper appreciation of regional literature, enabling students to engage more meaningfully with texts that embody the cultural and historical identity of Southern Leyte and similar regions. By cultivating these skills, students can contribute to a more inclusive and representative Philippine literary canon. Furthermore, this research underscores translation as an essential tool for cultural exchange and academic discourse, allowing regional voices to resonate within broader national and scholarly contexts. The proposed instructional framework offers an innovative contribution to the pedagogy of literary translation in Philippine higher education, addressing gaps in current methodologies. Ultimately, this study affirms that effective translation bridges not only languages but also the diverse cultural narratives that define the nation's literary heritage.

Keywords: *Literary Translation, Translation Skills, Filipino Language, Southern Leyte*

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Introduction

Region VIII, particularly the province of Southern Leyte, possesses a wealth of poetic compositions that embody its people's cultural identity, traditions, and aspirations. These poems, often composed in the local Bisaya dialect, serve as artistic and historical records of community values, indigenous wisdom, and collective memory. However, despite their rich literary and cultural significance, many of these works remain underrepresented in the national consciousness and largely absent from the mainstream Philippine Literature canon. The researcher argues that these works merit inclusion alongside other recognized regional literatures to ensure that the country's literary heritage reflects its true linguistic and cultural diversity.

The importance of regional literature in national literary appreciation is emphasized in the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order No. 59, s. 1996, which encourages the study of regional works as part of Philippine Literature courses. This aligns with Morga's (2019) call for the active development, preservation, and integration of regional literary outputs into Filipino Literature studies to promote cultural pride and reinforce the multiplicity of voices that define the Filipino identity. Similarly, Dela Cruz et al (2018) assert that poetry reflects artistic creativity and serves as a measure of regional socio-cultural progress, underscoring the urgency of preserving folk literary forms before they are lost to modernization and linguistic homogenization.

One of the most effective ways to preserve and promote regional literary heritage is through translation. Translation bridges the gap between languages, enabling communication between different cultural and linguistic communities (Bassnett, 2014; Catford, 1965). In the Philippine context, where more than 180 languages are spoken, translation plays a pivotal role in making regional works accessible to a national audience. This is especially vital in poetry, where meaning is conveyed through lexical content and rhythm, metaphor, and cultural allusion. As Newmark (1988) emphasizes, translation must preserve the original text's semantic meaning and stylistic nuances, which requires linguistic expertise, cultural sensitivity, and literary creativity.

Despite its importance, translation remains challenging, particularly in academic settings. There is currently no universally accepted standard methodology for teaching literary translation in Philippine higher education, creating difficulties for instructors seeking to develop students' skills. While some scholars (Larson, 1998; House, 2015) have proposed structured approaches such as emphasizing contextual analysis, target audience consideration, and comparative evaluation, these frameworks are seldom applied to regional Philippine literature. This gap leaves

students with limited exposure to culturally nuanced translation tasks, resulting in a tendency toward literal translation that often strips the source text of its poetic depth and cultural specificity.

Theoretical perspectives from scholars such as Nida (1964), who introduced the concepts of formal and dynamic equivalence, and Newmark (1988), who elaborated strategies such as transposition, modulation, and idiomatic translation, provide a strong foundation for developing effective pedagogical interventions. Additionally, Venuti's (2012) discussion on domestication and foreignization highlights the ethical dimensions of translation, whether to adapt a text for accessibility or retain its cultural distinctiveness (Caliboso et al, 2025), which is highly relevant when dealing with regional works.

In practice, students in literature and language programs often struggle with translating poetry due to the complexity of figurative language, symbolic imagery, and intricate sentence structures (Bassnett, 2014; Gentzler, 2001). These challenges are compounded when the source material contains culturally specific elements that do not have direct equivalents in the target language. Without proper guidance and structured exercises, students may over-rely on literal translation, which, while accurate in a denotative sense, fails to capture the artistry and cultural richness of the original work.

This study responds to these challenges by focusing on the translation skills of Filipino majors, specifically in rendering Southern Leyte Bisaya poems into Filipino. Applying Newmark's translation strategies, the research aims to document and evaluate the students' translation performance before and after a pedagogical intervention designed to encourage more idiomatic, transpositional, and culturally sensitive translations. The project will produce translations of four selected poems, which will be compiled as supplementary instructional materials for translation courses. By integrating these materials into the curriculum (De la Cruz et al, 2025), the research seeks to enrich educational programs, promote the Filipino language, and preserve the cultural heritage of Southern Leyte.

Ultimately, this study positions translation as both a pedagogical tool and a cultural bridge (Manera et al, 2025), connecting regional voices to the broader national and scholarly discourse and ensuring that the diverse narratives that define the Philippines are not only preserved but also celebrated in the country's evolving literary landscape.

Objectives of the Study

This study focuses on determining the Filipino major students' ability to translate using the Southern Leyte Bisaya poems.

Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the Filipino major's translation ability level regarding the translation process?
2. What is the difference between the students' ability to translate before and after the new method?
3. Is the students' enhanced performance attributable to the intervention?
4. What instructional material should be proposed to enhance the Filipino major's translation ability?

Methodology

This paper used a descriptive-evaluative research design that aimed to investigate the acceptability of translations of Southern Leyte Bisaya poems in terms of accuracy, clarity, naturalness, readability, and consistency. The study included quantitative and qualitative methods to analyze evaluators' feedback data. Pre-tests and post-tests of data gathering were conducted using four poems in Southern Leyte Bisaya: "*Babaye*" (anonymous), "*Patak sa Adlaw*" (Pedro Cadisem), "*Luyo sa Imong mga Lilo*" (anonymous), and "*Kanta sa Kinaiyahan*" (GB Carbonilla). Translation was done by using dictionaries as guides, with no translator apps used. Each translation session lasted an hour, after which interviews were conducted to raise potential difficulties during the translation process.

Students used Newmark's translation techniques: word-for-word, literal, semantic, free (contextual), idiomatic, and communicative. The analysis focused on gaining insight into the culture of Southern Leyteños. Four poems were gathered and entered into the 3Ns corpora project software for managing linguistic data. This study only utilized selected Southern Leyte poems for analysis. Twelve third-year major students from the Southern Leyte State University-Tomas Oppus Campus participated in the 2023-2024 academic year study. The population was ten female and two male participants.

A pre- and post-test data gathering on students translating the poems first, with and without Newmark's translation strategies, dictionaries, and subsequent translation evaluation, was conducted based on correctness by literature experts. The study adhered to ethical standards, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, equity, and voluntary participation. Transcriptions were carefully reviewed to maintain the original meaning of the poems.

Findings

This study aimed to evaluate the translation abilities of Filipino majors using Newmark's translation strategies, comparing their performance before and after an intervention. The pre-test results revealed that students predominantly employed literal translation, using it 322 out of 408 lines. Free translation was used 90 times, cultural translation appeared 34 times, and borrowing was noted 54 times. Idiomatic translation, the least used strategy, appeared 24 times.

Based on the pre-test results, the Filipino majors' translation ability level predominantly leaned towards using literal translation, which was employed 322 times out of 408 lines. This indicates that before the intervention, the students relied heavily on direct word-for-word translation, suggesting a basic level of understanding in the translation process, with limited use of more nuanced strategies like idiomatic or cultural translation.

Post-test results showed a significant shift in the students' translation strategies. Literal translation decreased to 250 instances, indicating a more varied use of translation methods. Transposition, not observed in the pre-test, was used 30 times in the post-test. Free translation was reduced to 50 times, and cultural translation dropped to 20 times. Borrowing remained constant at 54 instances. Notably, idiomatic translation increased substantially to 50 times, suggesting a deeper understanding of nuanced language expressions after the intervention.

The difference in the students' translation ability before and after the new method is marked by a decrease in literal translation and a greater diversity in translation strategies. In the post-test, literal translation usage dropped from 322 to 250 instances, and there was a notable increase in more advanced strategies. For example, idiomatic translation increased from 24 to 50 times, and transposition, which was not used in the pre-test, appeared 30 times in the post-test. This shift suggests that the new method improved the students' translation skills, enabling them to employ a broader range of strategies, enhancing their overall translation ability.

These findings demonstrate an improvement in the students' ability to diversify their translation methods, indicating that the intervention enhanced their translation skills. The increased use of idiomatic and transposition strategies reflects a move toward more sophisticated translation techniques, which are crucial for capturing the essence of the source language in the target language.

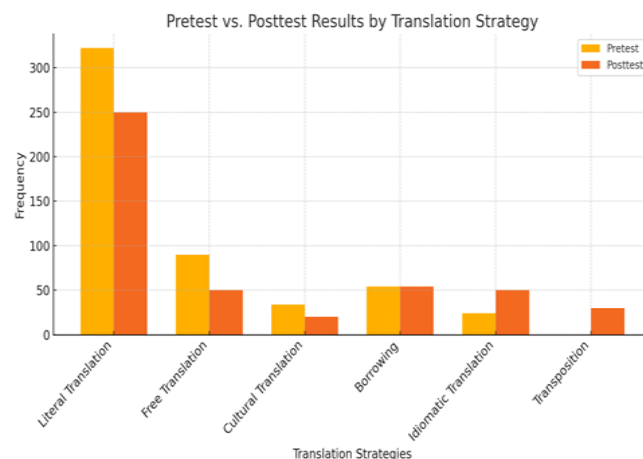
Table of Findings

Table 1 illustrates the translation strategy, pre-test, and post-test

Translation Strategy	Pre-test (Times Used)	Post-Test (Times Used)
Literal Translation	322	250
Free Translation	90	50
Cultural Translation	34	20
Borrowing	54	54
Idiomatic Translation	24	50
Transposition	0	30

This table clearly illustrates the changes in the students' use of translation strategies before and after the intervention, highlighting the shifts towards more varied and complex translation techniques.

Figure 1: The graphical representation of pre-test and post-test



Proposed Instructional Materials Development

Objective. The proposed instructional materials aim to improve the translation abilities of Filipino majors by focusing on diverse translation strategies, particularly those that were less frequently used or needed improvement in the post-test results.

Components of Instructional Materials

Idiomatic Expressions Practice

This component provides a range of exercises and authentic texts designed to train students to recognize idiomatic expressions within the Southern Leyte Bisaya source texts and render them naturally into Filipino. These activities will present the idioms in varied literary contexts and include contextual clues, usage examples, and

opportunities for students to create their own idiomatic equivalents. Emphasis will be placed on ensuring that translations preserve both the literal meaning and the stylistic or emotional effect of the original.

Cultural Nuances Exploration

This section focuses on developing students' sensitivity to cultural references embedded in source materials, such as local customs, historical allusions, religious imagery, and region-specific metaphors. Guided activities will encourage students to research these references, discuss their significance, and determine the most effective strategies for conveying them accurately in Filipino. Supplementary materials, including cultural glossaries and annotated examples, will help bridge knowledge gaps and foster cultural empathy.

Advanced Translation Methods

Under this component, two specific strategies will be developed:

Transposition: Exercises will train students to rearrange sentence structures to match Filipino's natural syntax and rhythm while maintaining the integrity of meaning.

Modulation: Activities will guide students in altering perspectives, points of view, or levels of abstraction in the target language to convey nuances that may be lost in direct translation, especially in poetry and figurative passages.

Contrastive Analysis

Through side-by-side comparisons of literal, idiomatic, and culturally adapted translations, students will learn to evaluate which method best fits a given text. This analytical approach will sharpen their decision-making skills by making them aware of the strengths and limitations of each translation style.

Feedback and Reflection

Each module will include spaces for reflective journaling and structured peer and instructor feedback. Reflection prompts will encourage students to assess their translation choices, identify areas for improvement, and internalize lessons learned, thus reinforcing a cycle of continuous skill development.

Table 2. Pre-test vs. Post-test Results and Focus Areas for Instructional Material

Translation Strategy	Pre-test Usage	Post-test Usage	Focus on Instructional Materials
Literal Translation	322	250	Reduce reliance, encourage strategic variety
Free Translation	90	50	Emphasize context-based translation
Cultural Translation	34	20	Develop cultural sensitivity and accuracy
Borrowing	54	54	Maintain as needed, emphasize correct usage
Idiomatic Translation	24	50	Increase focus on idiomatic usage
Transposition	0	30	Introduce and practice transposition

Explanation of the Table:

Literal Translation. The noticeable reduction in the use of literal translation in the post-intervention stage signifies a positive development in students' translation competence. This decline reflects their growing awareness of alternative strategies that better capture the source text's intended meaning and stylistic qualities. However, the persistence of this method as a default approach for many students suggests that old habits and the comfort of word-for-word rendering remain influential. To address this, instructional materials should include scaffolded exercises that gradually move students away from literal translation. For instance, activities that require interpreting figurative language, reconstructing culturally bound expressions, or rephrasing for

tone and rhythm can challenge them to prioritize meaning and context over direct lexical equivalence.

Free Translation and Cultural Translation. The decline in free translation and cultural translation strategies in the post-test results may indicate that while students learned to avoid excessive liberties, they also struggled to balance faithfulness and cultural adaptation effectively. This points to the need for targeted learning activities emphasizing contextual interpretation, cultural symbolism, and audience awareness. Exercises such as comparing multiple translations, annotating cultural references, or reimagining poems for different cultural contexts could enhance their interpretive flexibility and sensitivity to source and target cultures.

Idiomatic Translation and Transposition. The substantial improvement in these strategies demonstrates the effectiveness of the intervention in promoting more sophisticated translation techniques. By adopting idiomatic expressions and restructuring sentences to fit the target language's natural flow, students showed greater mastery in preserving meaning while enhancing readability. However, they require sustained exposure to increasingly complex texts, collaborative translation workshops, and reflective practice sessions to consolidate these gains. This will ensure that the skills acquired extend beyond the controlled environment of the classroom and become embedded in their long-term translation repertoire.

Discussions

The results and findings indicate a marked improvement in the translation abilities of Filipino majors following the pedagogical intervention. In the pre-test, students predominantly relied on literal translation, with 322 recorded instances. This figure decreased to 250 in the post-test, signifying a noticeable shift from the rigid, word-for-word approach toward more contextually appropriate translations. As Newmark (1988) emphasizes, literal translation often serves as a beginner's default strategy but can result in semantic and pragmatic distortions if applied without consideration of context. The observed decline aligns with the assertion of Hatim and Munday (2019) that effective translators gradually move from literalism toward adaptive strategies that preserve meaning, tone, and communicative intent.

Free translation occurrences also dropped significantly, from 90 to 50, suggesting that students became more adept at balancing accuracy with naturalness. While free translation allows for greater flexibility, Bassnett (2014) warns that excessive freedom can compromise fidelity to the source text. The decline, therefore, may represent a conscious move toward more formal and text-sensitive renderings, as

students internalized the importance of maintaining both semantic precision and stylistic integrity.

Similarly, cultural translation instances were reduced from 34 to 20, indicating increased discernment in preserving culturally bound elements. Venuti (2017) argues that cultural translation demands linguistic competence and cultural sensitivity, ensuring that the translation bridges rather than erases cultural contexts. The selective use observed in the post-test aligns with foreignization and domestication strategies, where translators deliberately decide whether to retain cultural markers or adapt them for the target audience.

Interestingly, borrowing, the direct adoption of words from the source language when no equivalent exists, remained constant at 54 instances. This stability suggests that borrowing is used not as a default but as a targeted solution to lexical gaps, consistent with Toury's (1995) descriptive translation studies, which highlight borrowing as a legitimate and necessary strategy in certain semantic domains, particularly for technical, institutional, or culturally unique terms.

One of the most notable shifts was the increase in idiomatic translation, which rose from 24 to 50 occurrences. This improvement demonstrates the students' enhanced ability to translate figurative language, an essential skill for producing natural, reader-friendly, and culturally resonant translations. As Baker (2018) notes, idiomatic translation reflects linguistic fluency and deep engagement with the target culture's expressive norms. Such an increase indicates students' growing proficiency in avoiding awkward literal renderings of idioms and crafting equivalent expressions that carry the same pragmatic force.

The post-test also revealed an increase in transposition, with 30 instances recorded. Transposition, the change in grammatical category or syntactic structure without altering meaning, is regarded by Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) as a hallmark of advanced translation competence. Its greater frequency in the post-test implies that students developed the syntactic agility necessary to adapt structures to improve the target language's clarity and naturalness.

Overall, the data suggest that the teaching materials and instructional strategies successfully broadened the students' repertoire of translation techniques. The shift from mechanical, literal translations toward more nuanced, culturally sensitive, and idiomatically rich renderings aligns with the principles of functional equivalence (Nida, 2003), where the emphasis is placed on the receptor's response rather than mere structural correspondence. This progression underscores the role of explicit translation pedagogy, as supported by Kiraly (2000), who argues that guided practice, awareness-

raising activities, and reflective translation exercises can foster both linguistic skill and intercultural competence.

These findings have significant implications for translator education, particularly in the Philippine context, where bilingual or multilingual environments require nuanced strategies for bridging linguistic and cultural divides. The measurable shifts in strategy use point to the effectiveness of targeted interventions in cultivating translators who are not only linguistically competent but also culturally and pragmatically aware, a key competency in both academic and professional translation settings.

Conclusions

It can be deduced that the intervention significantly enhanced the translation capabilities of Filipino majors, shifting the reliance from literal translation to advanced strategies such as idiomatic translation and transposition. The improvement by targeted instructional materials thus attests to the tools' effectiveness in developing the students' ability to translate complex texts. The consistent borrowing usage reflects that the approach would be balanced whenever direct equivalents do not exist; the increased utilization of idiomatic translation shows further understanding of how to produce naturally and culturally suitable translations.

Recommendations

Such findings recommend more comprehensive instructional material emphasizing practical application for various translation strategies. Exercises should be on idiomatic expressions, cultural nuances, and more advanced techniques such as transposition and modulation. Adding real-world translation tasks and peer reviews can make the learning more contextualized and collaborative for students. This way, the improvement can be sustained as Filipino majors learn to produce accurate, culturally sensitive translations in different contexts.

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