RESEARCH NOTE

Dialectal Semantic Comparison between Davao and Cebu Varieties of Binisaya: Toward a Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis

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A B S T R A C T

This study investigates semantic comparison between Davao and Cebu varieties of Binisaya focusing on the potential L1-L2 interference. There were 25 synonymous words from both varieties designed for a classroom writing task. Findings revealed that 68% of the lexical items exhibit semantic alignment, leading to the assumption of cross-dialectical intelligibility due to shared Austronesian roots. However, 32% of entries demonstrate semantic mismatches, which reflected Lado's Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, that linguistic differences between native and target language pose learning challenges. These mismatches are not arbitrary but culturally and regionally situated. The study concludes that semantic variation within the two varieties can lead to misinterpretation and communicative friction if not addressed pedagogically. By applying this contrastive approach, educators can better diagnose learner difficulties and design culturally responsive instruction that accounts regional vocabulary.

Keywords: *Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, Cebu variety, Davao variety, Philippine Dialects, Semantic Comparison*

Binisaya is not a single language but a family of closely related dialects forming a linguistic continuum across the Visayas and parts of Mindanao (Zorc, 1977). Within this continuum, the Cebuano branch stands out as one of the most widely spoken, encompassing varieties commonly labeled as Cebuano or Sinugboanon. However, Endriga (2011) defined Cebuano in two meanings: it applies to the people and language of the Province of Cebu; it applies to all speakers of vernaculars mutually intelligible with the vernaculars of Cebu, regardless of origin or location, as to the language they speak. The term "Cebuano," to narrow things down, is also the majority language and lingua franca in almost all of Mindanao except in the provinces of Sultan Kudarat, South Cotabato, and Lanao del Sur (Endriga, 2011). However, many speakers in Mindanao simply call their language Binisaya. Rubrico (2012), as cited by Cooke (2023), supported that Cebuano, referred to as Bisaya or Binisaya by the people of Davao, is the language most people speak. According to Ethnologue, Cebuano is used as a language of instruction in education and is considered institutionally supported, meaning it is sustained by institutions beyond the home and community (Eberhard et al., 2025). These claims are not a case of confusion but rather a matter of convenience and context. After all, "Cebuano-Binisaya" can also refer to one of the Cebu varieties, characterized by numerous dialects exhibiting distinct phonological, morphological, and lexical features (Abucay, 2025). In this context, "Binisaya" refers to the language as a whole, distinguishing its specific varieties such as the Davao and Cebu Binisaya.

Despite sharing a common linguistic root, the Cebu and Davao varieties of Binisaya differ in subtle but meaningful ways semantically. These differences do not make the languages mutually unintelligible, but they do shape how people communicate, especially in formal settings like schools. A word that feels familiar to a student from Davao Oriental might sound strange or mean something entirely different to someone from Cebu. This assumption was clarified in this study. It was hypothesized that language transfer, according to Lado's Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, is predictable. Learners tend to transfer linguistic patterns from their first language, which in this study is the Davao variety (L1), to the second language, Cebu variety (L2). This is to say that if the structures are similar, learning is easier; if they differ, errors are more likely to occur. Further, these errors stem not only from structural differences but from semantic, phonological, and syntactic contrasts as sources of interference (Lado, 1957).

In this study, the researcher attempted to experiment among students on whether lexical items selected by the researcher would show semantic differences after a classroom-based writing task. The students in San Isidro Campus, Davao Oriental, where the study was administered, showed a tendency to misunderstand a few of the words from the Cebu variety, which can feel distant from their everyday speech. The study employed purposive sampling, selecting 45 officially enrolled third-year BEED students who were present during the designated writing activity. Students who were absent, enrolled in other year levels, or belonged to

different class sections were excluded in this study. Each student was tasked to compose sentences using both the Davao and Cebu varieties. The Cebu variety was administered first, followed by the Davao variety, ensuring a structured sequence in eliciting responses.

From the collected data, a set of representative sentences were selected for analysis. These responses were then examined through semantic comparison, highlighting differences in meaning and usage between the two Binisaya varieties.
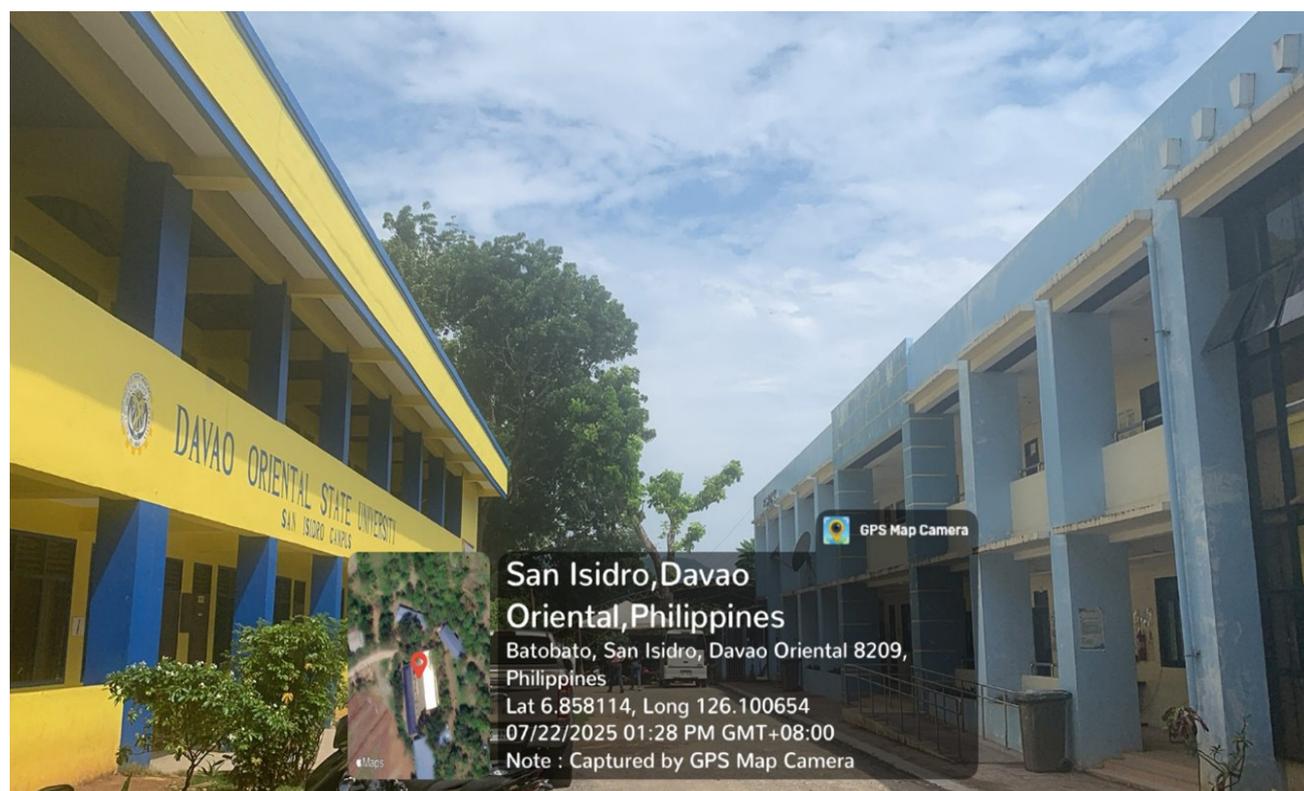

Figure 1. The location of the study.

Table 1. Sets of synonymous words with the Davao variety as L1 and Cebu variety as L2.

Davao (L1)	Cebu (L2)	English meaning
1. *Tanga*	1. *Danghag*	Careless (adj.); Heedless (adj.)
2. *Kuripot*	2. *Tihik*	Stingy (adj.); Tightfisted (adj.)
3. *Dakdak*	3. *Dakin-as*	Thud (v); Skid (v); Slide (v); slip (v)
4. *Shortpan*	4. *Purol*	Shorts (n.); Short pants (n.); Trunk (n.)
5. *Tagam*	5. *Mirisi*	Serve someone right (idiom.); *Etymology*: *spanish*: *merece*: *to deserve*
6. *Antipara*	6. *Anteyohos*	Glasses (n.); Goggles (n.); Sunglasses (n.)
7. *Mali*	7. *Sayop*	False (adj.); Wrong (adj.); Defect (n.); Error (n.); Fault (n.); Flaw (n.); Mistake (n.)
8. *Halok*	8. *Hawok*	Kiss (n.); Kiss (v.)
9. *Gunit*	9. *Hawid*	Clutch (v.); Grasp (v.); Hold (v.); Hold on (v.); Wield (v.)
10. *Balas*	10. *Bas*	Sand (n.)
11. *Pantalon*	11. *Karsones*	Pants (n.); Trouser (n.)
12. *Pambalay*	12. *Uran*	Work-shirt (n.); Workwear (n.)
13. *Gikalintura*	13. *Hilanat*	Fever (n.)
14. *Payat*	14. *Niwang*	Thin (adj.)
15. *Amigas*	15. *Hulmigas*	Ant (n.)
16. *Gupit*	16. *Tupi*	Haircut (n.); Trim (v.)
17. *Kasayang*	17. *Anugon*	What a pity (interj.)
18. *Tugtog*	18. *Tukar*	Music (n.); Play (v.); Relapse (v.)
19. *Malipayon*	19. *Alegre*	Lively (adj.)
20. *Katulgon*	20. *Gaduka*	Drowsy (adj.)
21. *Buntis*	21. *Mabdos*	Pregnant (adj.)
22. *Salog*	22. *Sawog*	Floor (n.)
23. *Damang*	23. *Kaka*	Spider (n.)
24. *Gilabay*	24. *Gibuno*	Threw (v.)
25. *Lapok*	25. *Pisak*	Mire (n.)

Table 1 provides 25 Davao variety (L1) and Cebu variety (L2) lexical pairs and their English translations. The pairs, although semantically equivalent, have minor differences in sense and usage expressing local linguistic differences. *Source: English to Binisaya—Cebuano Dictionary and Thesaurus* (Binisaya.com, 2025).

Table 2. Dialectal semantic comparison.

Student	Davao variety	Davao sample sentence	Cebuano variety	Cebuano sample sentence	Semantic comparison
1	Tanga	**Tanga** kaayo siya kay iyang gisunog sa plantsa iyang sanina.	Danghag	Nasamad siya sa kutsilyo kay danghag man.	Matched
2	Kuripot	**Kuripot** kaayo si mama, di manghatag sinsilyo.	Tihik	Kanus-a man ka mo**tihik** anang imong baba.	Mismatched
3	Nadakdak	Sa sige niya'g ambak, **nadakdak** iyang lubot.	Nadakin-as	Naligo sa ulan ang akong manghuod, grabeng kiat niini maong **nadakin-as** siya.	Matched
4	Shortpan	Bag-o ang **shortpan** ni Jason tungod kay giregalohan siya sa iyang amahan.	Purol	Luag kaayo ang **purol** ni Diboy kay wala gartiri sa iyang inahan.	Matched
5	Tagam	Nakakaon og **tagam** si Berto kay tungod sa iyang kapalahubog na bangga siya sa poste.	Mirisi	Gipa barangay ni Diday si Joy kay nanglibak kini maong **mirisi** niya.	Matched
6	Antipara	Nganong nag **antipara** si Ana na gabii man ron?	Anteyohos	Si Gani ni halap na iyang mata kinahanglan na niya ug **anteyohos**.	Matched
7	Mali	**Mali** si France Kate sa number 2 na question.	Sayop	Ang sayop ni Daniel kay nagbinuang siya.	Matched
8	Mohalok	Hilig ko **mohalok** sa aping sa akong mama og papa.	Mohawok	Permi mohawok si mama sa akong aping.	Matched
9	Gunit	Ako ang nag **gunit** sa kwarta sa akong manghud.	Hawid	Ako ang nag **hawid** sa susi sa among balay maong wala nakasulod ang akong manghod.	Matched
10	Baras	Napuling ko sa **baras** huyopa sa gud akong mata.	Bas	Usahay musakay kog **bas** kung walay jeep.	Mismatched
11	Pantalon	Dako kay Jana Lei ang iyang **pantalon** na gisoot tungod kay hinirman ra niya kini.	Karsones	Mas ganahan si Salda og Apple kaysa sa **karsones**.	Mismatched
12	Pambalay	Akong mama kay hilig kaayo mangukay ug **pambalay**.	Uran	Inig uli ni Ebyang gikan sa eskwela, mag ilis dayun siya ug **uran** aron dili mahugaw ang iyang bag-ong sinina.	Matched
13	Gikalintura	**Gikalintura** ang mga tao tungod sa COVID-19.	Hilanat	Gi **hilanat** si papa kay nanghagbas gihapon bisag ulan.	Matched
14	Payat	Ning **payat** si Ayen kay nag gym.	Niwang	Si May Ann wa pa nasakit, **niwang** na daan.	Matched
15	Amigas	Nagbalay ang **amigas** sa ilalom sa yuta.	Hulmigas	Napaakan ug **hulmigas** si Bidong.	Matched
16	Gupit	Nigwapo siya'g samot tungod sa iyahang **gupit**.	Patupi	Alimuot na kaayo iyang nawng kay taas na kaayo iyahang buhok wala na kini **patupi**.	Matched
17	Kasayang	**Kasayang** sa ilong ni May Ann kay iya mang gipausab.	Anugon	Na**anugon** si Anielex kay hapit na mamatay.	Mismatched
18	Tugtog	Kusog kaayo ang **tugtog** sa among silingan, sayo pa kaayo sa kabuntagon.	Tukar	Ni**tukar** ang kamaldita sa akong pag-umangkon kay wala gihatagan ug pagkaon.	Matched
19	Malipayon	Gisugat nga **malipayon** ni May Ann iyang bana human kini mipauli sa ilang panimalay.	Alegre	Gi-**alegre** nalang sa kauban ni Stepsis ang manok nga napildi sa sabong.	Mismatched
20	Katulgon	**Katulgon** kaayo ko samtang maghimo sa akong proyekto.	Gaduka	Samtang nagtudlo ang maestra ni Pipoy **gaduka** siya nga naminaw niini.	Matched
21	Buntis	**Buntis** si Karen maong di sya bulagan sa iyang uyab.	Mabdos	Nag **mabdos** si Jea maong gipamalay-an sa iyang uyab.	Matched
22	Salog	Nag sige na lang sila og panlimpyo sa **salog** kay moabot daw ilang bisita.	Sawog	Daghan kaayo og **sawog** ang halo-halo sa among lugar, mao daghan pod ang mopalit.	Mismatched
23	Damang	Daghan kaayug **damang** ang akong manghud.	Kaka	Kada buntag sigeg **kaka** ang akong mama.	Mismatched
24	Gilabay	Iyang **gilabay** ang tanan sanina sa iyang bana.	Gibuno	**Gibuno** ra sa among manok ang manok sa among silingan.	Matched
25	Lapok	Puros **lapok** ang dalan sa among lugar.	Pisak	**Pisak** ang nabati ni Jane kay wala na sila sa iyang hinigugma.	Mismatched

The results of this study reveal that 68% or 17 out of 25 lexical items from the Cebu variety, demonstrated semantic alignment in terms of shared meaning and pragmatic equivalence. Philippine languages, such as Tagalog, Cebuano, and Bikolano, share common Austronesian ancestor, which often result in semantic overlap across dialects.This shared vocabulary contributes to cross-dialectal intelligibility, especially in basic and commonly used expressions (Escudero, 2023). However, 32% or 8 out of 25 entries, revealed semantic mismatches. This suggests the potential influence of L1-L2 interference, as proposed by Lado's Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (1957). Within Cebuano varieties, mismatches such as *kuripot* vs. *tihik, baras* vs. *bas,* and *pantalon* vs. *karsones* illustrate semantic interference. Lado (1957) argues that the main difficulties in learning a target language (TL) arise when its structures differ from those of the native language (NL). In this case, although both varieties belong to the Binisaya language group, their semantic fields diverge enough to cause confusion. For instance, *kuripot* in the Davao variety denotes stinginess, while *tihik* in the Cebu variety refers to being reserved or quiet—leading to misinterpretation if assumed to be interchangeable. Similarly, *baras* and *bas* share phonological resemblance but are semantically unrelated, posing a risk of false equivalence.

This study hypothesizes that lexical meaning in Cebu varieties is not merely linguistic but also culturally and regionally situated. Semantic mismatches emerged from responses such as *kasayang* vs. *anugon, malipayaon* vs. *alegre, salog* vs. *sawog, damang* vs. *kaka,* and *lapok* vs. *pisak,* even when surface forms appeared similar or familiar. Lado (1957) posits that linguistic similarities facilitate learning, while differences pose challenges. This implies that elements, whether vocabulary or structure, that are similar will be simpler in terms of form and meaning transfer, whereas those that differ will be more difficult to acquire. These semantic mismatches are not random errors but reflections of cultural and linguistic divergence. As Maxilom (2008) notes, cultural influences significantly shape language use and meaning. Inocian et al. (2020) further emphasize that Cebuano lexical meaning is shaped by geographic, historical, and cultural factors.

On the other hand, in societies where multiple dialects coexist, there have been issues and concerns among linguists, educationalists, and researchers in choosing the variety to be used as a language of instruction (Yiakoumetti, 2007). In fact, Tegegne (2015) stated, that there has been a mismatch between the varieties used at schools and those used at home. The mismatch between home dialects and school instruction often leads to linguistic alienation, reduced engagement, and equitable learning outcomes. However, Heslop (2024) suggests that incorporating students' native variety into learning fosters clearer insights and positively influences their confidence, engagement, and learning experience. Likewise, learning is claimed to be better and more successful when conducted in the variety of students (Cheshire, 2005). Recognizing dialectical variation in educational context can help bridge the gap between students' linguistic realities and academic expectation while embracing cultural and linguistic diversity.

CONCLUSION

The goal of this semantic comparison is to explain the differences between L1 (Davao variety) and L2 (Cebu variety) lexica in order to accurately diagnose students' potential difficulties in learning the L2. By analyzing semantic variations, educators may gain a deeper understanding of how regionally situated meanings can lead to misinterpretation or communicative friction. Lexical pairs such as *kuripot* in Davao varietyand *tihik* in the Cebu variety illustrate how surface level similarity can mask actual meaning. While it is established that students' semantic interpretations are shaped by their cultural backgrounds, the failure to acknowledge

and address these influences may result in persistent semantic mismatches within classroom settings.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

The author solely wrote the manuscript.

DECLARATION

Informed consent statement

This research was approved by the university.

Conflict of interest

The author declared no conflic t of interest.

AI Desclosure

The authors declare that no Artificial Intelligence (AI) or AI-assisted technologies were used in the preparatin of this manuscript.

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