Filipino or Tagalog

Filipino or Tagalog? Is there really a difference? Sometimes, we just shrug this question off. It's easy to say these two don't have a difference since native speakers of these languages will not be strangers when they talk. They will understand each other completely.

But **technical translations** demand more literal transfers. Consequently whether to [**use Filipino or Tagalog becomes a conscious question.**](https://www.english-to-tagalog.com/TagalogorFilipino.html)

**The following are not rules but options:**

When source words are without exact equivalents in Tagalog, here is where Filipino becomes useful. In a sense, one often resorts to using Filipino when "pure Tagalog" expressions can't be found. A translation therefore cannot be purely Filipino or Tagalog, *because there is yet no clear line that distinguishes one from the other.*

Tagalog is not a dialect but a major language in the Philippines. Within the Tagalog region, there are many dialects such as the variations found in Nueva Ecija, Bulacan, Mindoro, Palawan, Quezon, Rizal and Batangas provinces. Ninety percent of native Tagalog speakers are born and bred and grew up in these provinces.

Filipino is based on Tagalog. Without Tagalog, I doubt if there will ever be a clear identification of the Filipino language. On second thought, maybe, Filipino will be based on Cebuano, or Ilocano, or Hiligaynon, or Bicolano which are also major languages. Some Cebuanos are sometimes jealous because majority of the so-called Filipino words and expressions are actually Tagalog. But in Davao, Cebuano is mixed liberally with Tagalog, and this probably accounts for the difference between Cebuano and the so-called Cebuano-Davao.

***Filipino or Tagalog?* Some Suggested Differences**

**for the Translation of Technical Documents**

"Filipino" incorporates more words and borrowings from other major Philippine languages including Visayan, Ilocano, Bicolano, Ilongo, Waray, Kapampangan, Pangasinense, Maranao, and also from languages outside the Philippines. But remember that "Tagalog" has borrowed words and expressions from Spanish, English,  Chinese, Malay and others. As an accepted practice, what has already been borrowed and in use widely in the Tagalog region for a long time can be safely categorized as Tagalog, but new borrowings and word-mixes can be identified as Filipino. The origin of these Filipino or Tagalog words can't always be determined, but academicians, writers, and other word-crafters,  invent new words in order to accommodate the fast pace of world events, pop culture and new media. Most expressions, need to be "Filipinized" using [**Filipino rules of spelling.**](https://www.english-to-tagalog.com/Filipino-spelling.html)

1. *Filipino is more Tag-lish friendly,* that is, it prefers to use more hyphenated Tagalog-English combinations or [**code shifting**](https://www.english-to-tagalog.com/Taglish.html) since Filipino citizens will combine English and Tagalog most of the time anyway. Some say that this is because many Filipinos are not fluent both in English and Tagalog. Majority in the upper and middle class Philippine society use more Tag-lish than those who belong to the lower-income groups community.
2. *Filipino will sway more towards transliteration* - that is just spelling the source words according to the Filipino way of saying it (example: discussion in Tagalog is - *pag-uusap, pagtatalakayan, pagbabalitaktakan*, but Filipino will simply use *diskusyon* changing C to K). In a "strictly" Tagalog translation, transliteration should be done only when there is absolutely no exact equivalent and if the nuance of the word combinations demands it.
3. *Filipino alphabet has the letters****C F V X****and****CH****,* which explains the variations in spelling when one compares translations of Filipino and Tagalog
4. *Filipino may lean comfortably toward using the original spellings of the source words.*(Example - "address" - Since everybody understands "address" anyway, Filipino will not hesitate to use it as it is, although many will say it should be spelled *adres* - a transliteration. There is a Tagalog word for address, however, that is, *tirahan*, an idiomatic and  perfectly understood word to mean address - as in *pangalan at tirahan*. So are you going to use Filipino (adres) or Tagalog (tirahan) for this term? Better specify

**Filipino and Manila Tagalog**

Most Tagalog native speakers (even with their dialect variations) can translate into Filipino if they know these differences, but I strongly believe that there is a lesser number of Filipino language speakers (Tagalogs, Ilocanos, Bicolanos, Cebuanos, Warays, Kapampangans etc.) who can translate fluently into "strictly" pure Tagalog. (Some will ask, "Is there such a thing as pure Tagalog?")

Filipino is heard mostly in Manila where Filipinos of different Philippine ethnic origins and languages merge. In Manila, foreigners who are armed with their knowledge of pure (?) Tagalog will eventually lose their acquired fluency in this language since more people will prefer to speak to them in English or Taglish anyway (even if they are Germans, or Italians, or Japanese or Koreans).

Or when a tourist travels around the non-Tagalog provinces and speaks in her learned Tagalog, those she talks to will probably respond to her in a mixture of their local language and some Filipino. Everybody in the Philippines who goes to public or private school is mandated to learn Filipino; that is, whatever his or her ethnic origin. This mandate naturally yields combinations of inter-regional expressions brought about by language adjustments. The resulting Filipino or Tagalog expressions further enrich the language and make it even more useful around the country.

Whether to [**translate into Filipino or Tagalog**](https://www.english-to-tagalog.com/translate-into-Filipino.html) becomes an issue only when there's a strict demand to use one or the other.

# English to Tagalog Problems and Solutions

English to Tagalog problems in translation carefully consider the linguistic category, whether it is semantic, syntactic or pragmatic, when deciding on an interpretation or equivalent.

What is a semantic problem?

A semantic problem is when you search for exact equivalents or interpretations of words or phrases. Matching vocabulary is fun and exciting when translations are available but what happens in translation is mostly approximations. When a word or phrase do not have an exact equivalent in Tagalog or in English, the solution is to search for that terminal meaning in an expression which will have the same cultural register. Meaning of words (codes, symbols, language) aren't simply always what they appear to be - they need to be interpreted according to their immediate context, displaced context, or transferred context. But even after understanding the exact context, and after exhausting the cultural implications, the terminal meaning may still be inaccessible.

Common Conversation

Question: Ano sa palagay mo?

("What do you think?")

Answer: Ikaw....

("Up you you," or "You do the thinking yourself", or "You decide.")

The semantic solutions given here are literal as long as the word "You" (Ikaw) is present. But what is lost in the English to Tagalog problem solution is the performance aspect of the expression, or the emotive aspect of the speech act. This one is actually a pragmatic problem and well, it is difficult to solve.

Common Conversation

Question: Paano ka na?

("So what will happen to you?")

Answer: Bahala na....

("Fate will Decide" or "It's up to Fate")

Both English to Tagalog equivalents above are lame approximations. Again, all the emotive aspects are lost. Clearly, when it comes to semantic problems, you may find equivalents but those won't always be enough to put the exact meaning across.

Common Conversation

Question: Bakit mo ginawa yon?

("Why did you do that?")

Answer: Wala lang...

("Nothing", or "It doesn't matter" or "Who cares?")

Clearly, every implication in "Wala lang" is completely lost in translation. Again, the pragmatic aspect must be considered in searching for an equivalent here. The semantic field of "wala lang" is completely not apparent and thus, a semantic solution is not enough. Notes and references may become necessary to explain some decisions.

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| First, find the exact equivalent. If absent, the nearest exact equivalent. If still absent, the borrowed equivalent. If still absent, the cultural equivalent. And so on. This is routine and standard operations. Translation is always challenging because no transfer is ever simple. Always in translation, solving [**English to Tagalog problems**](https://www.english-to-tagalog.com/Philippine-Language.html) is the rule rather than the exception. |

Taglish, A Perspective

***Taglish is when Tagalog dominates and Engalog, when English dominates.***

**Manila Tagalog**

Most Manilenos rarely speak pure Tagalog in Manila.One, because, Manila is a convergence of cultures, and two, because the new media forms, gaming culture, MTV, etc. introduce new words that young people inevitably adapt and assimilate in their written and oral expressions.

For quick communication, **Taglish may be the easiest and fastest mode of expression.** People read billboards, brand labels and packaging literature - in English - as part of their everyday experience. A lot of information from the internet makes everybody tune in to English. Codes on the streets and in public places aren't Tagalog at all: "U-Turn, PedXing, Exit, Open, Channel, Mall, Text, Clerk, Credit Card." Translators can invent equivalents to words such as computer, internet, and email but it will take time before their inventions register in the culture, if they register at all. Retention, borrowing and transliteration are ways to blend in a global environment.

**Everyday Code Switching**

In their everyday conversation, **Tagalogs easily switch to Taglish, or sometimes, to pure English**. But in writing and translation, certain rules apply, and careless code switching result in "bastardization" of both languages. As in other languages, there are levels of usage. Many will probably frown at purists, but at least, most of them rein the use of the language to maintain a certain tone and style.

***If there is King's English, Standard English, Colloquial English and Slang, in Tagalog, there is also Formal, Informal, Conversational, Street Tagalog, and Tagalog of the sub-cultures, such as "gay or showbiz lingo," "cono," etc. These maintain their distinct idiomatic expressions. Idiomatic here means the most natural use of the language within a culture or sub-culture.***

Mr. Almario notes that propagators of Taglish have the following against the use of proper Tagalog and Filipino:

* They think lowly of the language or does not appreciate the true nature of the language.
* They say that knowledge transferred via the English language will never be understood unless told in modernized (read: English-ized?) Filipino.
* They believe that only English brings about new knowledge.
* They highly suspect knowledge and insight expressed in Filipino.

All of the above simply discriminate against the use of the Filipino language. The national artist further argues that coddling Taglish is:

**A manifestation of the colonial mind among the elite and educated in Filipino society.**

Coddlers use it as guise to undermine efforts at cultivating and spreading one national language based on the native tongue.

Definitely, the language in the slums and in many middle class households lean more towards Filipino. Taglish is used only in as far as this has already become part of the general vocabulary.

Curiously, non-native speakers of Tagalog or Filipino from other Philippine regions have stock knowledge of "deeper" Tagalog because they learned Filipino from textbooks. These books used the classic literatures of the Tagalog region such as *Florante at Laura* and *Ibong Adarna*. They use and appreciate what they have been taught.

**A discrimination against Filipino.**

Some elitists often say that Filipino or Tagalog is hard to pronounce and relatively longer, and that they end up misunderstood if they use it. Their premise seems to be that English vocabulary is always monosyllabic, easy to read and pronounce. Print media and the academic institutions are often guilty of a subtle endorsement of this view. Eventually, the greater population who are repeatedly told that they need English in order to survive, and are unable to cope, feels diminished.

**An answer to an argument that Filipino or Tagalog is inadequate.**

Admittedly in translation, finding exact equivalents is a problem, but this is true of all languages all over the world. Even English will lack exact equivalents for some German terms where it branched from.

However, all cultures will have a cultural equivalent even for the most difficult vocabulary.For example, Filipino or Tagalog will have "masakit ang tiyan" for all types of disorder in the abdomen. Diagnosis will name the pain, and in translation, the medical term may be used (sometimes inside a parenthesis after the Tagalog nearest idiomatic equivalent). Spelling of the medical term is better retained because there is no point in transliterating.

Exact equivalents do exist yet proponents of Taglish won't use them.  One example cited by Almario is the word "Disability" which is “kapansanan” in Tagalog (exact equivalent), and not “depekto” (defect). Defect is "pinsala," (exact equivalent), which is not applicable at all times in medical context. If "disability" will be translated "depekto" - (transliteration of defect), then it is wrong.

In other words, if the propagator of Taglish doesn't know the exact equivalents, he concludes that our language vocabulary is not comprehensive. He frowns at the exact equivalents out of sheer discrimination against what he calls "pure and deep" Tagalog or Filipino.

**Taglish Translation**

* Taglish is highly suspect in Translation. Clients must say if they prefer the translation to be in Taglish. Supposedly, target users are used to it and would not understand Tagalog or Filipino in pure form.

In a Taglish translation translators have the option to retain the English spellings or to transliterate, but they should be consistent. Sometimes transliteration adversely affects the target user's fluency in English. Spelling is often a first casualty.

Filipinos spell a word as they pronounce it, and once a transliteration registers, it will be difficult to reverse the effect. In a parallel example, constantly texting "hous" for "house" makes a cashier automatically encode "hous" in an official receipt. Of course the cashier has to be told that this is the wrong spelling.

* An indiscriminate use of Taglish is a sign of laziness. Automatically shifting to English or simply retaining English without exhausting the Filipino or Tagalog equivalents tell something about the translator's professional ethic.

Translators can't be apathetic about culture and cultural registers. We propagate a certain language standard as we carefully use Tagalog and other Filipino languages. In a sense, we have a mandate to guard against a complete deterioration of our native tongue. Otherwise, we will be instrumental in worsening this nation's cultural dementia.

* A Taglish translation is still in English. This makes a translator ask, "Why translate at all?" The more serious casualty is the Filipino culture itself. Since it highly favors English it fails to project our unique culture, and this is how a language begins a slow painful death.