

# A Comparative Study of Tagalog and Mandarin Greetings

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**Abstract:** Greetings play an essential role in everyday conversational routines and are commonly used as a ritual form of politeness. They serve an important function in building and maintaining social relationships. Greetings often consist of brief conventionalized expressions that are not necessarily meant to be interpreted literally, but rather are used as a tool to demonstrate politeness or to enhance the hearer's positive face. This paper aimed to make a brief comparison between Tagalog and Mandarin greetings in terms of phonology, morphology and syntax, meanwhile, greetings as linguistic routines of politeness, similarities and differences of nonverbal greetings in the Philippines and China will be analyzed. It will be helpful for those who want to learn one of these two languages and also be useful for those who want to have a basic knowledge about Filipino and Chinese greeting culture.

**Keywords:** Tagalog, Mandarin, Greetings, Comparison.

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## 1. Introduction

Tagalog and Mandarin belong to different language families: Tagalog is from the Western-Malayo-Polynesian branch of the Austronesian language family tree (Schachter, 2008), while Mandarin is from Sino-Tibetan Family. Despite this rating and the lack of a common ancestor, the sound system of Tagalog may not appear so strange to the English speaker. It can be attributed to the fact that the Philippines experienced hundreds of years of colonization and occupation by speakers of Spanish and English, both of which are members of the Indo-European language family (Schachter, 2008). Additionally, globalization has ensured the continuing presence of English as a lingua franca in the Philippines and in Asia, providing native speakers of Tagalog constant contact with English. Tagalog, therefore, has an extensive inventory of borrowed words from Spanish and English, which has introduced certain sounds and patterns that would not be present in the language otherwise, such as Mandarin.

People around the world use different languages to interact with each other. Even if we cannot communicate fluently in any language, it will always be beneficial to know about some of the common greetings or phrases from that language. Greetings are important as well as frequent in everyday social interactions all over the world. Appropriate greeting behavior is crucial for the establishment and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. As a significant aspect of politeness phenomenon, greetings have been studied in disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, sociolinguistics and discourse analysis, yet there has been no systematic investigation of their use across Tagalog and Mandarin from phonology, morphology and syntax perspectives. Tagalog and Mandarin greetings not only help you understand basic phrases in Filipino and Chinese language, but also help you know something about these two cultures.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Tagalog

Tagalog is a member of the Central Philippine subgroup of

Philippine languages, forming part of the Western-Malayo-Polynesian set of Austronesian languages. It belongs in a subgroup with Bikol, Bisayan and Mansakan languages and was originally probably native to the eastern Visayas and northeast Mindanao in the Central Philippines (Zorc, 1993). By the time the Spanish arrived in the Philippines (1521), Tagalog speakers had migrated north into the southern part of the island of Luzon in the Philippines, with Tagalog becoming the major language spoken in Manila and surrounding provinces; it has in recent years spread as a second language over virtually the entire Philippine archipelago. Today, it is estimated that well over 90 percent of the 80 million total population of the Philippines is either a first- or second-language speaker of the language. Tagalog was selected in 1937 as the national language of the Philippines, and was established as such in the 1987 Constitution of the country. Under the name of Filipino, Tagalog is now taught in schools throughout the Philippines, and it is used as a lingua franca in many cities with mixed populations – as well as by its prominence in the mass media.

### 2.2. Mandarin

Mandarin is the major dialect of China both in terms of number of speakers (about 70% of the total population) and political importance. The term Mandarin is an English translation of *guān-huà* 'official language', i.e., the dialect spoken in Beijing. The Beijing dialect has been the standard for the official language of China for many centuries. Because of geographical and political considerations, the language came to be known by different names: in the People's Republic of China it is called *pǔtōnghuà* 'common speech', in Taiwan it is called *guóyǔ* 'national language', and in Singapore and Malaysia it is called *huáyǔ* 'Chinese language.' Although *pǔtōnghuà*, *guóyǔ* and *huáyǔ* are all technically based on the Beijing dialect, they differ from the dialect spoken in Beijing. They also differ from each other mostly in pronunciation and vocabulary.

### 2.3. Greetings

Greeting expressions reflect ritualized aspects of

conversational routines, and are typically interpreted as such. Ritualized language use is also called phatic communion (Malinowski, 1936), which serves an interactional purpose in communication rather than conveying information in a transactional manner. For instance, when a speaker utters the common greeting in English, "Hi, how are you?", s/he does not necessarily seek specific details about the hearer's state, but instead uses this ritual expression to negotiate the social relationship.

Oftentimes greetings are considered the first part of an interactional exchange between two or more people. Through a verbal or non-verbal greeting, the conversation partners can acknowledge each other's presence and begin a conversational exchange. A greeting statement often forms part of an adjacency pair, which consists of an initiation from the speaker and a response from the hearer, following an anticipated turn-taking routine.

Though greetings are a highly frequent universal phenomenon, they can vary significantly within and across languages, social groups, and even among the same individual in different circumstances. In this way, greeting behavior can be influenced by the relationship between the speakers, the social context at hand, as well as cultural differences that govern the politeness norms of the given community, among other factors.

## 2.4. Phonology

Phonology is the study of the patterns of sounds in a language and across languages. Put more formally, phonology is the study of the categorical organisation of speech sounds in languages; how speech sounds are organised in the mind and used to convey meaning. Phonology finds the systematic ways in which the forms differ and explains them. Phonology studies abstract mental entities, such as structures and processes. Phonology looks at what sounds/sound combinations are accepted and why. Different languages can use different phonemes, or different syllable structures (what sounds can go together to make sequences or words) and phonology identifies these differences.

## 2.5. Morphology

Morphology is the study of the internal structure of words and forms a core part of linguistic study today. The term morphology is Greek and is a makeup of morph- meaning 'shape, form', and -ology which means 'the study of something'. Morphology as a sub-discipline of linguistics was named for the first time in 1859 by the German linguist August Schleicher who used the term for the study of the form of words. Below is a step-by-step guide to drawing a morphology tree:

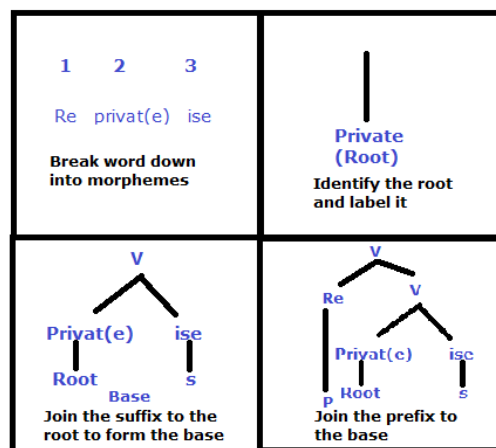


Figure 1. A step-by-step guide to drawing a morphology tree

## 2.6. Syntax

In linguistics, "syntax" refers to the rules that govern the ways in which words combine to form phrases, clauses, and sentences. The term "syntax" comes from the Greek, meaning "arrange together." The term is also used to mean the study of the syntactic properties of a language. In computer contexts, the term refers to the proper ordering of symbols and codes so that the computer can understand what instructions are telling it to do. Syntax is the proper order of words in a phrase or sentence. Syntax is a tool used in writing proper grammatical sentences. Native speakers of a language learn correct syntax without realizing it. The complexity of a writer's or speaker's sentences creates a formal or informal level of diction that is presented to its audience.

For native speakers, using correct syntax is something that comes naturally, as word order is learned as soon as an infant starts absorbing the language. Native speakers can tell something isn't said quite right because it "sounds weird,"

even if they can't detail the exact grammar rule that makes something sound "off" to the ear. "It is syntax that gives the words the power to relate to each other in a sequence...to carry meaning—of whatever kind—as well as glow individually in just the right place"(Burgess,1968).

## 3. Methodology

Qualitative research is used in analyzing data in the form of non numeric data. Internet research is used because all of the data and analysis are taken from Internet materials. The presented data are taken from google. This research takes 10 Tagalog and Mandarin greetings each to be analyzed from phonology, morphology and syntax perspectives.

The descriptive method is used to describe the presented data. It means that the first process is collecting the data of Tagalog and Mandarin greetings. The second process is to compare the phonology, morphology and syntax similarities and differences of Tagalog and Mandarin greetings. That is

what is meant by comparative analysis, which is intended to show the similarities and the differences of these two languages, and even two cultures.

## 4. Data Analysis

The 10 most common Tagalog and Mandarin greetings are presented in the table below.

**Table 1.** 10 most common Tagalog and Mandarin greetings

English	Tagalog	Mandarin
Hi	Musta-informal Kumusta-formal	嗨(Hāi ) 你好 (nǐ hǎo) 您好 (nín hǎo) 哈喽 (Hālóu)
Hello	Kumusta Kumusta po	喂 (Wéi)-used when answering the phone
How are you?	Kumusta ka? Kumusta ka po?	你好吗? (nǐ hǎo ma)
Good day	Magandang araw	日安(rì ān)
Good morning	Magandang umaga	早上好(zǎo shang hǎo) 早安(Zǎo ān) 早(Zǎo)
Good noon	Magandang tanghali	中午好(Zhōng wǔ hǎo) 午安(wǔ ān)
Good afternoon	Magandang hapon	下午好(Xià wǔ hǎo)
Good evening	Magandang gabi	晚上好(Wǎn shàng hǎo)
Good night	Magandang gabi	晚安(Wǎn ān)
Goodbye		再见(zài jiàn)
Bye-bye	Paalam	拜拜(bái bái)
Bye		拜(bái)

## 5. Results

### 5.1. A Comparison of Tagalog and Mandarin Greetings Phonology

From the data above, it is hard to find any phonology similarities between Tagalog and Mandarin greetings. Tagalog greetings phonology has been significantly affected by the incorporation into the language of many loanwords from Spanish. While Mandarin greetings phonology has been affected by some loanwords from English. For example, there are two forms of "How are you?", one is "Kumusta ka?", which is the most common use of this expression is when greeting a friend in the Philippines. The other is "Kumusta ka po?", a more respectable form. This is often used when greeting an elder person or someone you want to show your politeness or respect towards him or her. If you know a little Spanish then that word may seem familiar to you. That's because it comes from the Spanish sentence "¿Cómo está?" which also means "How are you?" Just like the English greeting "What's up?", "Kumusta ka?" or "Kumusta ka po?" is not necessarily a genuine inquiry into the other person's well-being, but just a greeting, which is used to maintain or even enhance the hearer's positive face. The Chinese version of "Hi" is "嗨(Hāi)", which own the similar pronunciation. "嗨(Hāi)", is an informal greeting used by young people in urban areas to greet friends and other people around their age. It's actually a loanword from English and is simply the Chinese form of the English greeting "Hi." You'll often hear young people greeting other young people this way in person. It's also common to see the written form of "嗨" as a greeting on popular social media platforms like WeChat. Besides "嗨(Hāi)", "哈喽 (Hālóu)", "拜拜(bái bái)"and "拜(bái)" are also

loanwords from English.

Another phonology difference between Tagalog and Mandarin greetings is that more than one syllable can be found in one Tagalog word, however, only one syllable can be found in one Chinese character's pinyin. Such as, "umaga" in Tagalog means "morning" which has three syllables in all, while Chinese "morning" is "早(Zǎo)", which only have one syllable.

The third phonology difference between Tagalog and Mandarin greetings is that there is no tone changes in Tagalog greetings while there is tone changes in Mandarin greetings. Standard Mandarin, or Putonghua, is most commonly said to have four tones, they are 阴平 (yīnpíng), 阳平 (yángpíng), 上声 (shàngshēng), 去声 (qùshēng). This number is sometimes given as five or even six depending on whether or not you count the neutral tone and the half-third/low-guttural tone. Neutral tone is weak and unstressed in the mid-flat range. When combined with other syllables, the third tone frequently undergoes major pronunciation changes. Due to this fact, some authors argue that in addition to the third tone, there exists another tone, called the half-third tone. This half-third tone is a low-guttural tone that falls slightly but does not come back up. When two consecutive third tones appear in a group, the first third tone changes to a second tone. This phenomenon happens frequently. The most famous example occurs in the Chinese greeting "你好 (nǐhǎo)", as third tone characters, both "你 (nǐ)" and "好 (hǎo)" are pronounced with a dipping third tone in isolation. Because of this tone change rule, "你好" is pronounced "nǐhǎo". However, the pinyin for "你好" is still written "nǐhǎo".

Tones in Mandarin are extremely important and shouldn't be ignored. The same character, using different tones, will express different meaning and have different communication effects. Take "嗨" as an example, if you use first tone or neutral tone to speak it, it is just a normal greeting that you greet with someone you are not so familiar or close. However, if you greet with someone you are eager to meet and you want to express your excitement and happiness, you could use a rising tone and lengthen the sound. If you have done something wrong or meet some troubles, you could use "嗨(Hài)" to express your low mood, while it will become a mood particle instead of a greeting.

## 5.2. A Comparison of Tagalog and Mandarin Greetings Morphology

From the perspective of morphology, there are both similarities and differences of Tagalog and Mandarin greetings. Both Tagalog and Mandarin uses different greetings, determined by the different times of day. Nearly all those greetings are composed of two parts. One part is the specific time of a day, and the other part is a word means "good". Such as, "Magandang araw" and "日安(ri ān)", both mean "Good day". In fact, "Magandang" and "安(ān)" mean "Good", while "araw" and "日(ri)" mean "day". The difference is Tagalog greetings in the different times of day are all consists of two words, while Mandarin greetings in the different times of day can be consists of one to three words. For example, "Magandang umaga" means "Good morning" in Tagalog, while in Chinese, there are three different expressions mean "Good morning", they are "早上好(zǎo shang hǎo)", "早安(Zǎo ān)", "早(Zǎo)". Though they all mean "good morning" as a greeting in the morning, there is a slight difference between them. "早(Zǎo)" means "morning," which is the simplest way to wish someone a good morning. "早上好(zǎo shang hǎo)" is the most common expression for Chinese people, while "早安(Zǎo ān)" is most used between couples or lovers, especially in novels or films.

## 5.3. A comparison of Tagalog and Mandarin greetings syntax

From the perspective of syntax, similarities and differences of Tagalog and Mandarin greetings can also be found. One similarity is both languages have respectful expressions. Such as, "Po" is a Tagalog article used in the middle or at the end of most sentences to show respect. Add this article when you're talking to elders or authorities. You can also use it when talking to anyone regardless of age, when you just want to sound as courteous as possible. Similar word can be found in Chinese greetings also, such as "您(nín)", which is the respectful expression of 你(nǐ). Although both "你好(nǐ hǎo)" and "您好(nín hǎo)" mean "hello", "您好(nín hǎo)" is much more respectful. And there are two main differences between "Po" and "您(nín)". First, "Po" is a Tagalog article which can be used in the middle or at the end of most sentences while "您(nín)" is a Chinese personal pronoun which can be used in the beginning of a sentence. Second, "Po" in Tagalog has no real meaning while "您(nín)" in Chinese means you.

Another syntax difference of Tagalog and Mandarin greetings is showed in the above data that adjectives precede nouns that indicate time in Tagalog greetings, such as

"Magandang araw", "Magandang umaga", "Magandang tanghali", "Magandang hapon" and "Magandang gabi", while adjectives follow nouns that indicate time in Mandarin greetings, such as "日安(ri ān)", "早上好(zǎo shang hǎo)", "中午好(Zhōng wǔ hǎo)", "晚上好(Wǎn shàng hǎo)" and so on.

## 6. Discussions

### 6.1. Greetings as Linguistic Routines of Politeness

Firth(1972:29-30) suggests that greetings should not be treated as spontaneous emotional reaction to the coming together of people. For the most part they are highly conventionalized and follow patterned routines. Espousing Firth's view, Laver (quoted in Qian, 1996) makes a further study of greetings in the linguistic patterns of conversation. He asserts that greetings as conversational routines are part of the linguistic repertoire of politeness. They are tools of polite behavior and their use is guided by a polite norm. Based upon his assumption, he employs Brown and Levinson's politeness theory to explain the function and use of greetings.

As Laver (quoted in Qian, 1996) comments, the central concept Brown and Levinson employ in their model is that of 'face' after Goffman (1967). As mentioned earlier, face refers to that emotional and social sense of self that everyone has and expects everyone else to recognize. They distinguish negative face (the want that one's action be unimpeded by others) and positive face (the want that one's wants be desirable to at least some others). If the strategic ends of speakers in conversational act are to be achieved, various politeness strategies must be used to maintain the participants' negative face or to enhance their positive face. In the process of greetings, such maintenance of enhancement of face has to be taken into consideration.

For instance, in Tagalog, greetings such as 'Kumusta(Hello)!', 'Kumusta ka(How are you)?' and "Ikinagagalak kong makilala ka/kayo(I am glad to meet you)." have to be used to maintain or even enhance the hearer's positive face, depending on the status of the participants and the social setting.

In Chinese, some greetings are frequently used for the sake of politeness in social interaction as well. For example, "Ni Hao(Hello)!" and "Zao Shang Hao(Good morning)!" as greeting expressions seem to be directed towards the hearer's positive face. The examples above illustrate some routine expressions used in social greetings. Both participants normally take each other's positive or negative face into consideration.

### 6.2. Similarities and Differences of Nonverbal Greetings in the Philippines and China

One similarity of nonverbal greetings in the Philippines and China is shaking people's hands. In both cultures it is generally best to shake hands with someone that you are meeting for the first time. This is usually a soft hand shake, not an overly firm one. Greeting someone you just met with a kiss on the cheek or a hug is not usually done. This is most often reserved for once you have developed a relationship.

Another nonverbal greeting is "mano" in the Philippines and "摸头(mō tóu)" in China. They have both similarity and slight difference. Filipino elders are often greeted by taking

their right hand and bringing it up to touch your forehead. This is called "mano." This is especially important to do with ones own family members and with those that are extremely elderly. If an elderly person holds out their hand in front of their body with the palm facing down, this may be a sign that they are expecting a "mano" greeting. This greeting is about you respecting your elders but it is also about the elder blessing you when they touch your forehead. Similar greeting in Chinese is called "摸头(mō tóu)", which owns the same meaning when Chinese elders touch your head instead of forehead. "摸头(mō tóu)" might between lovers in China, especially when a young man wants to express his love or comfort towards a young lady, he would touch her head slightly.

## 7. Conclusion

The results indicate that there are some similarities and differences in the phonology, morphology and syntax of Tagalog and Mandarin greetings. The similarities are that both Tagalog and Mandarin greetings phonology have been influenced by other countries. The difference is Tagalog greetings phonology has been influenced by Spanish, while Mandarin greetings phonology has been influenced by English. Another phonology difference between Tagalog and Mandarin greetings is that more than one syllable can be found in one Tagalog word, however, only one syllable can be found in one Chinese character's pinyin. The third phonology difference between Tagalog and Mandarin greetings is that there is no tone changes in Tagalog greetings while there is tone changes in Mandarin greetings. Tones in Mandarin are extremely important and shouldn't be ignored. The same character, using different tones, will express different meaning and have different communication effects. From the perspective of morphology, there are both similarities and differences of Tagalog and Mandarin greetings. Both Tagalog and Mandarin uses different greetings, determined by the different times of day. Nearly all those greetings are composed of two parts. One part is the specific time of a day, and the other part is a word means "good". The difference is Tagalog greetings in the different times of day are all consists of two words, while Mandarin greetings in the different times of day can be consists of one to three words. From the perspective of syntax, similarities and differences of Tagalog and Mandarin greetings can also be found. One similarity is both languages have respectful expressions. Such as, "Po" in Tagalog and "您(nín)"in Chinese. But there are two main differences between "Po" and "您(nín)". First, "Po" is a Tagalog article which can be used in the middle or at the end of most sentences while "您(nín)" is a Chinese personal pronoun which can be used in the beginning of a sentence. Second, "Po" in Tagalog has no real meaning while "您(nín)" in Chinese means you. Another syntax difference of Tagalog and Mandarin greetings is showed in the above data that adjectives precede nouns that indicate time in Tagalog greetings, while adjectives follow nouns that indicate time in Mandarin greetings. Meanwhile, there are similarities and differences of nonverbal greetings in the Philippines and China, such as, in both cultures it is generally best to shake

hands with someone that you are meeting for the first time, and the "mano" in the Philippines and "摸头(mō tóu)" in China, they have both similarity and slight difference. "Mano" in the Philippines is the elder blessing you when they touch your forehead, while "摸头(mō tóu)" in China owns the same meaning when Chinese elders touch your head instead of forehead. "摸头(mō tóu)" might between lovers as well in China, especially when a young man wants to express his love or comfort towards a young lady, he would touch her head slightly. Greetings are always one of the first things someone learns when studying a new language. They're the key to ensuring the people you talk to have a good impression of you right from the beginning. A proper greeting can really open up the gate to a fuller, desired conversation, and through greetings, one can have a glimpse of a new culture.

## 8. Limitations and Future Studies

Because the author has not any foundation in Tagalog and the research time is too short, the data gathered in this research is not so comprehensive and the research is not deep enough. In the future research, the author needs to further study Tagalog, and the comparative study of Tagalog and Mandarin should be more specific and in depth.

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