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Intergenerational Transmission of Hanunuo Heritage Language

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Abstract

This case study explored the reasons, approaches, and challenges encountered in the intergenerational transmission of the Hanunuo heritage language. The study was conducted from April to June 2019 at Emok and Canabang, Magsaysay, Occidental Mindoro, Philippines. A total of 17 Hanunuo Mangyan selected through purposive sampling participated in the study. It was found that cultural heritage, strong adherence to language, strong identification with the group, residence in the speech community, and ease of communication were the reasons for heritage language maintenance. The oral approach is used in the intergenerational transmission of the Hanunuo heritage language. The challenges encountered include no proper documentation, non-Hanunuo teacher, school curriculum, technology, inter-marriages, and orthography is not taught by elders. Nevertheless, the Hanunuo Mangyan maintains their heritage language to facilitate communication. They have high orality in their language, and the challenges encountered were attributed to personal and societal factors.

Keywords

intergenerational, heritage language, language transmission, reasons for transmission, approaches, and problems encountered

1. Introduction

Language plays a significant role in everyday life. It is not just restrained as a tool for communicating one's thoughts and ideas to others but has become an instrument for building friendships, cultural ties, and economic relationships. Language and culture are intertwined. Without language, culture cannot be acquired entirely, nor can it be effectively expressed and transmitted. Without culture, language cannot exist. However, with the advent of technology and increasing globalization, language and cultural features from different communities tend to get closer, change, absorb, merge, and replace one another.

The languages of the ethnic groups will inevitably be modified as well. Such significant changes create an avenue for preserving any language that is gradually shifting, endangered, and facing extinction (Casanova, 2015).

Research indicates that 46% of the world's 7,000 language communities are in danger of experiencing a complete break in language transmission by this century (Rouvier, 2017). According to the UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages (2003), the maintenance, promotion, or abandonment of non-dominant languages may be dictated by the dominant linguistic culture, be it regional or national. The linguistic policies may inspire linguistic minorities to mobilize their populations towards maintaining their languages or may force them to abandon them. These linguistic attitudes can be a powerful force for promoting and losing their languages.

Casanova (2014) mentioned that the micro-social arena of the family as the agent of spontaneous intergeneration language transmission and the macro-social arena of group settlement in a 'territory 'are among the factors that determine language shift and maintenance. The absolute demographic strength means little if its members are widely dispersed, providing few social settings for using its language outside the family. And if a language ceases to be transmitted domestically, the bedrock of its continuing tradition is undermined. Micro and macro-social factors of the surrounding community that interact in the families influence their language. Family and concentrated minority—residence areas are domains and territories of language. A stated by

Many of the world's languages are moribund because the parent failed to teach those languages to the next generation. Instead, parents push their children to learn prestige languages, which they perceive as economically and educationally advantageous to their children (Grimes, 2000). This phenomenon could lead to the possible occurrence of language endangerment since there is no intergenerational transmission of the mother tongue.

Fishman considers Stages 6 to 4 in the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) as the intergenerational transmission stages. It involves the home, family, neighborhood, and community domains. These domains provide the occasion for mother-tongue transmission and initial, non-formal literacy (Lomboy, 2009). Gordon (2005) explains that moribund languages are shown to depart with the decrease in the number of speakers in phases determined by their ages. Finally, at the most critical phase, the language dies with the death of the few older speakers who have not transmitted their language to the succeeding generation.

Fishman's (1989) language function and Giles' Speech Accommodation theory theoretically supported the scenario above. Fishman's (1989) concept about language function in a community, "who speaks what language to whom and when," describes that most bilinguals do not use their languages with everyone in the speech community. Among the members of an intra-group multilingual society, several language varieties constitute their speech repertoire, and speakers could choose among the available codes and sub-codes as they face a variety of interlocutors. Only one of the language varieties will be chosen by a particular class with interlocutors on particular occasions to discuss a particular topic.

According to Fishman (1989), there were specific institutional context, called domains, in which one language variety is more likely to be appropriate than another. A domain is a combination of factors believed to influence speakers' choice of code (language, dialect, or style). Such factors might include participants (in conversation), topic, or location (Casanova, 2014). Language choice could be explained by Giles' Accommodation Theory, whereby participants in a given conversation adjust their accent, dialect, or other language characteristics according to the other participant/s. Giles stresses that accommodation can take one of two primary forms: convergence, when speakers modify their accent or dialect, etc. to make them resemble more closely those of the people they are speaking to; and less usually, divergence, when, to signal social distance or disapproval, speakers make their language more unlike that of their interlocutors. Accommodation usually takes place during face-to-face interaction (Casanova, 2014).

In the study done by Casanova in 2014 among the Hanunuo, one of the Mangyan tribes, an indigenous people found on the island of Mindoro, the Philippines, it was found that the intergenerational transmission of the Hanunuo heritage language is intact, widespread, and on ongoing. This scenario shows that the Hanunuo heritage language speakers could maintain their language, even under pressure. Thus, their success stories must be examined in-depth by scrutinizing their situations and language contexts. In this premise, the study of intergenerational transmission of the Hanunuo heritage language is conceptualized. Specifically, it attempted to:

(1.) Identify the reasons for maintaining the Hanunuo heritage language. (2.) Ascertain the approaches used in the intergenerational transmission of the Hanunuo heritage language. (3.) determine the challenges encountered in the intergenerational transmission of the Hanunuo heritage language.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

A case study design was used to determine the reasons, approaches, and challenges encountered in the intergenerational transmission of the Hanunuo heritage language.

2.2 Time and Place of the Study

This study was conducted from April to June 2019 at the selected Hanunuo Community in Emok and Canabang, Magsaysay, Occidental Mindoro, Philippines. This Hanunuo speech community was selected because it is accessible and near the non-Hanunuo (*damuong*) communities. Furthermore, this community was chosen for safety reasons.

2.3 Respondents and Sampling Technique

A total of 17 Hanunuo Mangyan chosen through purposive sampling participated in the study. The following were the criteria used in selecting the participants for the study: Hanunuo is their mother tongue, parents are both Hanunuo or born with at least one Hanunuo speaking parent, and a permanent resident of the speech community for at least five years. Respondents' age groupings: 13-22 years old, 23-32

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years old, 33-42 years old, and 43 years old and above. The age groupings were based on the interview done with the *gurangons* (Casanova, 2014).

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

A self-made questionnaire was the main instrument used in gathering data for the study. It consisted of the respondent's profile, language acquisition and use, and language transmission. It was shown to experts (three colleagues), three Hanunuo students, and two Hanunuo parents for content validity. Before collecting data, a permit from the office of the National Commission on Indigenous People (NCIP) and the free prior and informed consent (FPIC) of the participants were sought. Triangulation such as participant observation focused grouped discussion, and interviews were employed to gather data for the study. The data collected were coded to find frequencies of the themes out of the raw qualitative data.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Reasons for Maintaining the Hanunuo Heritage Language

Language maintenance refers to the situation where the speech community continues to use its traditional language in the face of a host condition that might foster a shift to another language (Sofiana, 2013).

Based on the interview and focused group discussion, there are five important reasons for maintaining the Hanunuo heritage language: it facilitates communication, strong identification with the group, cultural heritage, and residence in the speech community. The respondents agreed that they are maintaining the language because it facilitates communication. According to the respondents: *"I am using my mother tongue because I can easily communicate my thoughts, feelings, and ideas to the members of my family; I feel "at home" or very comfortable in using it; I know my language well*; *To avoid disputes since we share the same language; I could easily get the trust and confidence of the people in my community."*

Strong identification with the group is the second reason they maintain the language. As shown in the following excerpts: *"If you are a true Hanunuo, you have to speak the language; It is part of our identity as Hanunuo; We have to use it so that people will know that we belong to the Hanunuo tribe. I am proud of my identity as Hanunuo, and I have to use my heritage language."* Ethnic identity can be a fundamental reason for language maintenance when language users believe that the use of their language is an essential part of ethnic identity. It is then an essential means of self-identification, as a sense of identity is bound with the spoken language (Ulfa, 2017).

Hanunuo as cultural heritage is the third reason they have to maintain it. According to them: *"This is the only legacy of my ancestors and parents*; *This is the language transmitted to me by my relatives; It's their legacy as Hanunuo, so they have to use it and transfer it to the next generation; If I do not use it, I will not leave any legacy to the members of my family; This is the only inheritance I received from my parents, and I am duty-bound to protect and use it; My parents always emphasized that we have to keep on using it, even if we are already educated and have a different status in life because it's one of our priceless inheritance."* Therefore, maintaining the individuals' sense of cultural heritage is a strong argument for

language maintenance. Culture as every aspect of life is an inclusive notion of the various elements of everyday life, for example, food, religion, and sport. The most crucial relationship between language and culture gets to the heart of what is lost when you lose a language is that most of the culture is in the language and is expressed in the language (Ulfa, 2017).

Strong adherence to language was also noted in the responses given by the elders: *You have to love your language because you are Hanunuo; You have to show your concern; if you will not do it, it's like betraying your community; therefore, you should always use it, wherever you go, and there's a chance to use it.* The statements above were also exemplified in the use of technology by the younger generations of Hanunuo. According to the three participants: *"When I am texting, I still use Hanunuo; We have Facebook accounts, and we chat with our fellow Hanunuo using our mother tongue, so, even if they are or we are outside our community, we are still using our language."*

The last reason they maintain their heritage language is that they reside in the Hanunuo community. They have to use their language in their community because everybody uses their mother tongue. *"You're an outsider if you will not use it; You will be out of place; You are arrogant and don't have a sense of brotherhood."* The participants' responses implied that they are duty-bound to use their language if they are in the community. Decker (2013) states that large ethnic communities are essential for families who wish to maintain their heritage language because they possess resources and opportunities for learning and preserving the heritage language. Sofiana (2013) also supported the participants' responses that a language can be maintained and preserved if families from a minority group live near each other and see each other frequently. Their interactions will help to maintain the language.

3.2 Approaches Used in the Intergenerational Transmission of Hanunuo Heritage Language

The continuity of dialects and languages across time results from the ability of children to replicate the form of the older generation's language faithfully, in all of its structural detail (Labov, 2007). According to the study participants, they transmit their heritage language orally from one generation to another. This implies that the speech community members have a high level of sustained orality in the heritage language; thus, most use an oral approach in language transmission. *"Most of the time, transmission is oral. Only a few elders know how to write; My father taught me orally; I grew up with that practice, and my parents transferred orally; That's the transmission approach (oral) we get used to. My grandparents and parents used the same approach in transmitting our mother tongue."* The current findings of the study validated the results of the study done by Casanova (2014) that the intergenerational transmission of Hanunuo is intact, widespread, and ongoing. The older generation of Hanunuo (43 years old above) actively passes their language to the youngest generation (12 years old and below) through *ambahan* (lyric poem), *urukay* (song), *suyot* (short story), *paratigmon* (riddle) during *paglalayis* (courtship) and performance of different rituals. Aside from oral transmission of the language, written transmission using the *surat Mangyan* (Mangyan script) is also done but to the slightest extent. The findings also coincided with the statement of Norman (2018) that some might argue that, without writing, the same beliefs could

not have prevailed over such a long period. Still, in reality, oral traditions are far more faithfully passed on than the written word.

3.3 Challenges Encountered in the Intergenerational Transmission of Hanunuo Heritage Language

Six challenges were identified in the intergenerational transmission of the Hanunuo heritage language. First, orthography is not taught by elders.

The participants shared that the elders no longer teach orthography (*surat Mangyan*). Thus, the overall approach to language transmission in the community is oral. Though their elders and some parents know orthography, they no longer share it with the younger generation. *"It is difficult to teach, especially if they are not interested. I don't teach them how to write because, in school, students use a different alphabet, it's not helpful in their studies; I didn't teach my children because I am busy, and the nature of my work with my Christian employer demands much of my time. Teaching my children to write is time-consuming. It entails patience and much practice; If I teach them, where will they use it?"* The said responses implied that the elders no longer teach orthography because they do not see its benefits when their children go to school, and there is a limited domain that supports orthography. It is assumed language itself has utility value, which is variable. The actual and the perceived utility value of languages in contact situations is a valid predictor of language shift and maintenance (Coulmas, 2005).

Hanunuo Mangyans acknowledge the importance of education. In support of this aspiration, the indigenous peoples (IPs) are allowed to pursue formal education as stated in the Education Act of 1982, Indigenous Peoples Republic Act (RA 8371), and Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd). However, getting a good education is still wanting for most Mangyans due to the lack of school buildings, inadequate facilities, lack of books, and competent teachers, which are still some of the significant problems encountered (Lumbo, De Claro, & Casanova, 2009). The presence of non-Hanunuo teachers in their school community posed a significant challenge to maintaining their heritage language. Due to the difference in the mother tongue, teachers opted to use Filipino as a medium for communication and instruction. According to the Hanunuo parents: *"If their teacher is "damuong," they are imposing to their students to use their language; Teachers will not easily adapt to the language used in the community; Our children got confused because they find it difficult to understand the language used by their teacher; the language used by teacher creates a barrier in communication."* Educators should learn about students' backgrounds and cultures to help them succeed in linguistic and academic learning. Cultural differences can present difficulties in the classroom. By respecting home languages and cultures, teachers can help learners feel at ease in their classrooms. A solid understanding of the interconnectedness of language and culture is fundamental for teachers (Becker, 2013).

Technology is considered another challenge in the intergenerational transmission of the heritage language. Some participants, especially the older generation, considered it a challenge, while the younger generation did not see it as a potential threat to language transmission. Older generations were a little bit reserved when it comes to using technology. According to them: *"technology like cellphone, TV, radio, and other modern means of communication and transportation could easily influence their children to*

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use other languages; *they will be exposed to other cultures who are using languages different from ours*; *if they will use a cellphone and watch TV they can also acquire other languages; Our language will no longer be pure."* On the other hand, younger generations are curious about using new technology in their everyday activities. At first, it is hard for them, but they have to adopt it because when they go out of their community, it is a necessity. According to the younger participants: *"It is easier to communicate with our friends and family members who have means and access to technology. We still use Hanunuo when communicating with them using our cellphone, Facebook, messenger, and other social media. In this way, we can still transmit our heritage language in different media. Our elders (gurangon) were afraid because they thought we would completely forget to use Hanunuo.* The younger generation of Hanunuo also admitted that there are several instances that they also used other languages, especially when talking with non-Hanunuo, and technology helped them acquire other languages. The following excerpts showed their reasons: w*e cannot avoid using Tagalog or English because we must blend in with the damuongs (non-Hanunuo). We have to learn other languages so that we will not be branded as stupid or ignorant; I am happy that there are TV, radio, and cellphone because we can also learn other languages even if we are not in school. If other Hanunuo does not use technology wisely, it will contribute to the non-use of our language".* Abdelhadi (2017) supports the participant's explanations that the availability of the media in minority languages helps maintain their stability in terms of the number of speakers. It gives them the status and prestige to be used publicly, somewhat being restricted to private domains.

No proper documentation also hinders language transmission. Language documentation is concerned with the methods, tools, and theoretical underpinnings for compiling a representative and lasting multipurpose record of a natural language or one of its varieties (Bisang, Hock, & Winter, 2006). The oral approach is employed in the transmission, creating problems documenting their heritage language. As observed, the community does not have a written repository of their language and culture. Plenty of researchers visited their community, but unfortunately, no written accounts were left by the researchers to them. In the interview conducted majority of the respondents mentioned that: *"Not all of us have books or related references regarding our language, there are only a few who have it; In my case, we have a book at home about "ambahan" written in Hanunuo (Surat Mangyan), it was given to my father as a souvenir when he is working with a missionary; None, we do not know how to write (Surat Mangyan) so, there are no written materials available".* The statements above imply that concerted efforts must be made to document the heritage language properly. Documentation of endangered languages can provide critical linguistic resources to efforts to support endangered language (re)learning in community and institutional contexts. Further, the act of documentation can impact language attitudes and heighten awareness of language endangerment within communities and in the broader society (Rouvier, 2017).

The Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) Program is DepEd's response to the right of indigenous peoples (IP) to primary education. It is responsive to their context, respects their identities, and promotes the value of their indigenous knowledge, skills, and other aspects of their cultural heritage (DepEd, 2016).

Although it was already implemented, still the Hanunuo participants complained that the school curriculum also impedes language transmission. As stated in the excerpts of their response: *"Even though there is a policy on the use of mother tongue until primary, the non-Hanunuo teachers used Filipino; some of the activities and lessons in school do not support the maintenance of their language; They are exposed to the ways and practices of the "damuongs"; the curriculum is not for the indigenous people because it does not support indigenous knowledge and practices; Books and other instructional materials were not available and are not using Hanunuo language."* The participants' responses imply their strong wishes for heritage language to be introduced, discussed, and taught at schools. Educators should help children be positive towards speaking and learning heritage language by showing interest in their heritage and encouraging them to speak their heritage language (Becker, 2013). Further, the school's language policy is not conducive to maintaining the heritage language. According to Schiffman (2005), language policy has to do with decisions (rules, regulations, guidelines) about the status, use, domains, and territories of language(s) and the rights of speakers of the languages in question.

Intermarriage is the last reason identified among the challenges encountered in maintaining the Hanunuo heritage language. According to Abdelhadi (2017), marriage to a majority group member is the quickest way of ensuring the shift to the majority group language. Exogamy, or inter-ethnic marriages, contributes to the loss of the community languages, a process during which the language with the higher status and prestige becomes the preferred language for daily communication. As explained by the participants: *"It became a problem when a Hanunuo marries a non-Hanunuo because there is a chance that the heritage language will be lost, if not, it will be mixed with other languages; There's a tendency that the children will be confused and they will only learn the prestigious language; Hanunuo will not be pure; They will always use the other language."* The statements and experiences of the participants coincide with the explanation of Ulfa (2017). The children in an intermarriage family may learn the language of either their mothers or their fathers or even sometimes both, but which language will dominate may depend on which language has the most prestige where they live. In intermarriage, one possible outcome is bilingualism for the children and sometimes for one or both parents.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study was conducted to determine the reasons, approaches, and challenges encountered in the intergenerational transmission of the Hanunuo heritage language. Based on the previous results and discussion, it can be concluded that the Hanunuo Mangyan continue to maintain their heritage language to facilitate communication. Therefore, the Oral approach is used in the intergenerational transmission of the Hanunuo heritage language. The challenges encountered in the intergenerational transmission of the Hanunuo heritage language were attributed to personal and societal factors. In the light of the previous results and conclusions, the following recommendations were drawn: Conduct seminars on values orientation and cultural awareness to strengthen the Hanunuo speakers' knowledge of their language and orthography. The older generation and the young and educated Hanunuo may be involved in documenting

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and codifying their language by coming up with Hanunuo dictionaries, grammar books, writing, and pronunciation guides. The Hanunuo and non-Hanunuo teachers may design teaching strategies and lessons appropriate for the Hanunuo learners. Conduct a community-based language development (CBLD) program for Hanunuo heritage language for further study.

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