

Linguistic mapping of Bago language: The case of selected upland speech communities in Ilocos Sur, Philippines

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Abstract

Linguistic mapping is an important research endeavor to profile different speech communities. Interestingly, review of literature indicates that dearth of studies on this area is evident. With this gap, this study aimed to document the profile of Bago language in three different upland Municipalities in Ilocos Sur, Philippines. Interviews and document reviews revealed that the Bago tribe members come from various areas in the low-land municipalities of Ilocos Sur and the mountainous areas of the Cordillera Administrative Regions especially in Mt. Province, Abra, and Benguet. Additionally, they speak Ilokano, Kankanaey, English, and Filipino. The Bago language is being used as auxiliary language in education. It is also being used in socio-cultural affairs of the members. It is also being used on social media. Meanwhile, the language possesses linguistic features that share the characteristics with their neighboring speech communities. The use of min- as prefix and vowel sound [a] are evident in their daily conversation. In such contexts, their language is safe and flourishing amidst technological advancements and societal changes.

Keywords: culture, identity, Indigenous Peoples, language diaspora, linguistics

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1. Introduction

Language users, learners, and everyone involved in language education should all have an understanding of the connection between language and culture. Understanding the varied perspectives on the relationship between language and culture can be helpful for both language teachers and language learners in general. It can shed light on the variety of viewpoints expressed regarding language use. Understanding how one's language impacts other people can have a significant impact on the direction and motivation of language study as well as interpersonal interactions. It can also provide valuable insights and support for curriculum development, program planning, and language instruction for all language users.

In addition, the interconnection of language and culture is complicated because it might be challenging to comprehend people's thought processes during communication. Language is more than just the understanding of particular sounds, words, and sentences; it is also the knowledge of norms and principles as well as the methods in which things can be said and done using these elements (Wardhaugh, 2002). Although he made no mention of culture in general, it appears that he defined language with context in mind because our speech acts are inextricably linked to the environments in which they are done. Furthermore, Thanasoulas (2001) argued that language cannot exist independently of culture, which is the collection of customs and beliefs passed down via social interactions and which shapes the way our lives are lived. It functions as a kind of guide to social reality and a key to a society's cultural past (Salzmann, 1998). Every person, every family, every community, and every country must respect language as a means of expressing culture. Language, according to Fishman (1996), is a people's intellect, spirit, and soul. These languages need to be safeguarded, preserved, promoted, and used. In order to guarantee a language's survival, efforts must be maintained.

Meanwhile, Wardhaugh (2002) underscored that culture is defined by the members' obligations to participate. Accordingly, the culture of a society is comprised of all the knowledge and beliefs that its people require in order to function in any capacity that they choose for themselves and to do it in a way that is acceptable to them. Hantrais (1989) also emphasized that culture is the set of values and customs that shape a society's way of life and that are expressed through a specific language. Speaking the language of the people can help one have a deeper understanding of their culture and way of life. One group of people with a rich language and culture is the Bagos of Ilocos Sur, Philippines.

Moreover, the Ilokanos of the lowlands and other indigenous cultural groupings of the Cordillera Region intermarried, giving rise to the Bago group. They are located between the Pangasinan, La Union, and Ilocos Province borders and the mountain ranges of Ilocos. Based on oral accounts of their ancestors without era estimates or dates, the Bagos who are first called "Igorots" have their customary laws, ancestral domains, indigenous property concepts and relations already existing long before the inclusion of foreign colonials. They are indigenous people who inhabited the borders of Cordillera and Ilocos Region believed to be 200-300 B.C., and those who traced their ancestry from the old Mountain Province (those Bago Tribe who migrated to the old Mountain Province and those who went back to the lowlands) with their distinct Bago Tribe language, culture and tradition.

Moreover, the language and culture of the Bagos are preserved despite the influence of lowland brothers. The discussions of the Bago language are not simply academic exercises but as means of passing on this social heritage to the younger generation. It is to note that language is considered as an abstraction from behavior and may be observed from the people. It should be borne in mind that language is unique to man in various societies. It manifests one's cultural practices, beliefs and status.

Despite constituting a very significant stream of Philippine culture, there is a dearth of critical studies on Bago language. In fact, recent studies focused on the cultural practices among the Bago and Tinguian tribes (e.g. Alviento & Alviento, 2016; Cawili & Bakidan, 2016). Studies also on the culture and language of the mentioned tribal community are limited especially those that are published in different research journals.

Above all, the dearth of studies on the language of the Bagos in Ilocos Sur interests the researchers considering the significant contributions and role that the language plays in their culture. Hence, this study was conceptualized to describe the profile of the ethnolinguistic group and the linguistic characteristics of the Bago language. This study could be seen the light of preservation and promotion of the Bago language since this language would continuously serve as a reminder about the rich culture of the target tribal communities. This would also serve as an avenue for the tribes to realize and nurture their ancestors' legacies that are inscribed in their language. Hopefully, the preservation of these legacies would also serve as a challenge for them to continue speaking, practicing and preserving these legacies. Finally, this study aimed to conduct linguistic mapping on selected upland speech communities in Ilocos Sur. Specifically, it sought answers to the following: 1) What is profile of the ethnolinguistic group in terms of migration patterns, location, language, and usage of the language? 2) What are the linguistic characteristics of the Bago language?

2. Methodology

Research Design - This study employed basic descriptive qualitative and linguistic analysis as its research designs. The goal of qualitative descriptive study is a comprehensive summarization, in everyday terms, of specific events experienced by individuals or groups of individuals, and it tends to draw from naturalistic inquiry (Lambert & Lambert, 2012). In this study, the profile of the Bagos in terms of migration patterns, location, language, and usage of the language as they are lived was described. Meanwhile, linguistic analysis is the scientific analysis of a language sample, it involves at least one of the five main branches of linguistics (phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics) (Lapham, 2023). It is used to understand the content of the text (Jothilakshimi & Gudivada, 2016) which in this study is the transcribed conversations of the participants. In such context, the study found the designs suitable for the study.

Selection and Study Site - This study was conducted in three selected municipalities in the upland municipalities of Ilocos Sur, Philippines. The participants of the study are members of the Bago tribe who were chosen based on their willingness to participate in the study and their ability to speak the language. They are aged 20 to 45 years old. Equally, the study involved 20 males and 20 females from the said age bracket. They are residents in the locale of study who manifested interest and willingness to participate in the study. All of them know how to use social media and messenger which allowed the conduct of follow up interviews to supplement or substantiate the gathered data. Information from the internet posted vlogs, research, magazine, and newspaper articles were considered secondary sources of data.

Research Instrument and Procedure - In gathering the data, interview protocol was used. This contains questions which focused on profile of the Bagos in terms of migration patterns, location, language, and usage of the language. In gathering the data, the researcher secured permission first to conduct the study from barangay officials and leaders who endorsed them to willing participants. After that, the researchers oriented them on the nature of the study. With the approval and consent of the participants, the interviews were held either online or face-to-face given the availability, convenience, and preferences of the participants. The interviews were audio recorded to fully document the sharing of the participants. Then, the researchers retrieved the recorded conversations of selected participants. After all the data were gathered, the recordings were transcribed. Finally, the data were analyzed in which member checking procedures were conducted simultaneously.

Analysis of Data - The transcribed recordings were analyzed through thematic analysis and structural analysis. In thematic analysis, the data were categorized and sorted to arrive at themes that encapsulated the verbalizations of the participants. In other words, open coding and thematic analyses were applied to sort, extract, link, and

present data and categorization (Francisco, 2022). In performing the thematic analysis, the researchers followed the six steps discussed by Braun & Clarke (2006): become familiar with the data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review themes, define themes, and write-up. Structural analysis is the process of breaking down words into their constituent elements to determine the meaning of unknown words (Cuesta College, 2024). In structural analysis, the language used in the recorded conversations were analyzed in terms of phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics; however, this study only focused on the phonology, morphology, and syntax of the Bago language.

3. Result and Discussion

Profile of the Ethnolinguistic Group - Migration Patterns. From the sharing of the respondents, it is believed that group of bands of people from the old Mountain Provinces or from the low lands migrated to the hilly places of present-day Ilocos Sur. As a result of intermarriage, the speech communities have with them Ilokanos, Tagalogs, Kankanaeys, Tinguians, Pangasinan, and other tribes of Igorots from Cordillera Administrative Region. Clearly, the Bagos intermarry with the people living in neighboring areas, and their offspring became also Bago adding numbers to their tribe; thus, leading to the idea that the Bago is a product of intermarriages.

Undeniably, intermarriage can facilitate greater cultural integration and understanding. The blending of languages and cultures can lead to new ways of communication and expression, enriching the cultural fabric of the family and broader society. Children from intermarried couples often grow up in multilingual environments, which can lead to them learning and using multiple languages fluently. Multilingualism promotes intellectual flexibility and creativity (Okal, 2014). Likewise, children who grow up in a supportive environment and speak more than one language from a young age are more perceptive and cognitively versatile than those who only speak one language (King, 2007). Hence, it provides cognitive benefits, such as improved problem-solving skills and greater cultural awareness.

Language and Location. In terms of language, the Bagos in three selected speech communities are multilingual. They can speak Ilokano, as their lingua franca, Filipino, English, and Kankanaey. Notably, the language of the Bagos is a mixture of northern Kankanaey with an infusion of lowland dialects. They speak a language similar to the Tinguians, Kankanaey, and Ibalois; yet, the majority of them have distinctive tone when speaking Ilokano. Interestingly, some of the participants mentioned that their language is called Itneg.

Usage of Language. The Bago language which participants called as Itneg is being used in various occasions. In terms of education, the tribe's language is used as auxiliary language. This means that it is used to explain lessons with English or Filipino as the medium of instruction. This is also the primary language being used by learners to express their ideas when speaking Filipino or English is not strictly implemented. Notably, Cummins (2000) highlighted that learners are able to connect the curriculum information to their personal and communal experiences because of this intense collaborative interaction setup. They also have the opportunity to examine important societal issues that affect them personally.

With the use of Bago language in school context, the study underscores the vital role of first language or mother tongue in the teaching and learning process. In fact, Benson (2005) emphasized the advantages of teaching in the mother tongue language in schools. He emphasized that using it increased female enrollment, enhanced parental participation, decreased sexual exploitation by teachers, improved learning, and attracted more girls to become teachers. Khan (2016) reported benefits such as increased children's sense of classroom belonging and receptiveness, as well as improved affective, psychomotor, and cognitive performance. Similarly, Sario *et al.* (2014) discovered that using one's mother tongue in the classroom increased students' levels of activity, participation, and interaction, as well as their sense of class membership and receptivity.

Furthermore, Vela's (2015) study revealed that teaching in the mother tongue resulted in improved science performance, implying that the learners' everyday language is an active mode of education. Walter (2011) also proposed that the effects of mother tongue instruction are significant and measurable both in the short and long

term through more global measures such as access to higher education and more advanced career opportunities, with the greatest benefits going to those with average ability and potential.

Meanwhile, it is used as the language of trade. One can hear the members speak Itneg at the market, government offices, public places, social gatherings like weddings and baptism, family affairs, rituals, church worships, wake and burial of the dead. Notably, the language is being spoken alongside the Ilokano language. Clearly, in performing their roles as members of society and participants in socio-cultural activities, their languages remain as one of the primary forces and media that allow them to be effective and active participants in their communities and in any communicative event (Azarias, 2022).

Furthermore, their language is also being used in different social media like Facebook and TikTok. The use of the language is evident in status, my day, and other similar posts. With their posts, comments are constructed by using either Ilokano or Itneg; some use Filipino or English. Clearly, the languages being used by the participants continuously adapt to the trends and development in the society; technological advancement and emergence of social media and other online platforms have made the Ilokano, English, and Filipino responsive, resilient, dynamic, and adaptive (Azarias, 2022).

Finally, in Sustainable Use Model (SUM) through the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) of Lewis and Simons (2016), the language of the Bago members is under Level 3 (Trade) and Level 4 (Education). Notably, the languages ranked between 1 to 6 are deemed as safe languages which means that they are not in danger of becoming extinct in the current generation in the said place. Hence, this calls for continuous use of their language for cultural preservation and promotion.

Linguistic Characteristics of the Bago Language - The Bago tribe members speak a language similar to Tinguians, Kankanaey, and Ibalois, as was previously indicated; nonetheless, the majority of them speak Ilokano with a unique inflection. Ilokano words are also inserted in their sentences when they speak. Their intonation is similar to those Itneg speaking communities in Gregorio del Pilar, Cervantes, and Quirino, Ilocos Sur. To illustrate the said observations, below are some examples.

“*Sinoy napasamak*(What happened?)” P1

In this example, napasamak is also being used among Ilokano speaking communities in the province. At the moment uttering the language, the speaker had a rising intonation when uttering napasamak which amplified his concern about what happened to someone he knows. In that sentence and other sentences, the sound of [a] pervades like in the sentence below.

“*Ay Amboy intayo minlaba* (Amboy, let us go and wash the/our clothes).” P7

In the sentence, we can see the pervading sound of [a] in ‘Amboy’, ‘intayo’, and ‘minlaba’. In the word minlaba, min serves as the prefix while laba is the root word. Interestingly, the use of min- as a prefix is mostly used by the members like in the word minlako (to buy) and minkali (to dig).

Some expressions were also noted. One is *ayaket* or *yow’* that is being said when one is dismayed/disappointed or amazed. Also, one can hear them utter *kasos* and *aye’* when they are also dismayed or disappointed. They also say *ni’-in’*, this is said when one happens to commit a mistake.

Evidently, the usual parts of a sentence which are the subject and the predicate are also present in the utterances of the members. The vowel sound [a] is evident in their phonetic inventory in which the [æ] is absent just like in Ilokano and Filipino languages. They use most of the time *min-* as prefix. They have distinct intonation and diction of the members create a melodic effect when they speak. Nonetheless, the Bago language, Itneg as mentioned the participants, possess linguistic features or characteristics that are unique and reflective of the identity of the speech communities.

Notably, the mentioned linguistic features reflect the cultural norms, values, and practices of the speech community. Also, these linguistic features are also important elements of identifying discourse structure (Crossley, 2020). Understanding these characteristics helps you appreciate cultural nuances and avoid cultural insensitivity. Understanding the linguistic aspects of a new language aids social integration, allowing for more meaningful interactions and engagement in the community. As a result, understanding a language's linguistic characteristics is critical for efficient communication, cultural comprehension, educational advancement, and a variety of professional disciplines. It does not only improve personal and professional experiences, but also helps to promote society cohesion and technical growth.

4. Conclusion

This study documented the profile of three selected speech communities in the upland municipalities of Ilocos Sur. The linguistic characteristics of Bago language were also described. In the light of the findings of the study, Bago language is safe and is widely used by the members of the speech communities in different communicative events. The language also possesses linguistic characteristics that share commonalities with the other neighboring upland municipalities; however, their language shows their identity.

Interestingly, Bago language is used as an auxiliary language. As auxiliary language, it is used to explain lessons with English or Filipino as the medium of instruction. This accentuates the vital role and potential of the language in delivering quality and excellent education to learners. Clearly, schools should maximize it by exploring its positive impact to learners' learning and to the success of the teaching and learning process. Last, instructional materials and local literatures or materials that were written using the language may be used in teaching especially in teaching reading and language skills to learners.

Furthermore, Bago language is deeply tied to cultural identity. With this in mind, education that includes this language helps them maintain and appreciate their cultural heritage, which can enhance their sense of belonging and self-esteem. When teachers use the mother tongue, it can build stronger relationships between learners and teachers, as communication is clearer and more effective. Using the first or native language of learners alongside additional languages ensures balanced development across all languages, preventing one language from dominating and allowing students to maintain proficiency in their native language. Nonetheless, incorporating the mother tongue in education validates learners' backgrounds and experiences, fostering a positive self-image and promoting cultural diversity in the classroom.

Notably, the study has various limitations. First, the study involved only small number of participants. Second, the researchers have limited immersion in the communities. Hence, future studies should involve larger population and immersion in the speech communities should be longer; one may focus only on one speech community to fully document the language and their culture.

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