

Status of Manobo Language in Katipunan, Bayugan

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Abstract: This study analyzes the status of Manobo language in Katipunan, Bayugan City, Agusan del Sur, Philippines. Specifically, it focuses on their case history, and linguistic extinction threats and their causes.

Research method is qualitative descriptive observation. Key informants in the first phase are Manobo elders; children and non-lumad spouses (second phase).

Based on the case history of the Katipunan Manobo, the following are the findings of the study: threats to linguistic extinction are neighbourhood, intermarriage, religion, education, career opportunities, lack of language development opportunities, and speakers' linguistic-cultural attitudes.

It is concluded that Manobo is gradually becoming out of use due to acculturation with Cebuano Visayan.

Recommendations. Local government units (LGUs) may develop a livelihood program for Manobos. Elders may require parents to transmit Manobo language to children by using this language at home. LGUs, non-government organizations and other educational leaders may establish lumad school of living traditions akin to Muslim 'madrasah' (meaning, school among Muslim Filipinos).

Keywords: Manobo language and culture, language change, linguistic threats, case history, acculturation

INTRODUCTION

Manobo of Agusan del Sur is one group of cultural minorities in Mindanao which resisted Spanish colonization through isolation. Other groups include the Bagobo, B'laan, Tagbanwa, Tagabili, Mangyan, Higaonon and Isneg.

Manobo language may be stable at present but it may become endangered and even extinct. Research indicates that half of the world's languages are already in a state of endangerment. In fact, Brenzinger, M., et.al.(2003), experts from UNESCO Ad Hoc Expert Group mentions that "at least 50 percent of the world's more than 6000 languages are losing

speakers. They estimate that 90 percent of the languages may be replaced by dominant languages by the end of the twenty-first century.

Findings in Anonby, S. and S. (2008) show that Xokleng speakers in Santa Catalina, Brazil, have a positive attitude towards their own language. Porras' (2012) study titled "Attitudes, Motivations, and Strategies among Indigenous Students' Second Language Learning" also looks at the attitudes of speakers towards their own language. The present study relates to Anonby's and Porras' work because it aims to find out whether Manobo speakers both young and old still have a positive attitude toward their own language and whether or not both groups still use their language in different domains of speech.

Mendoza's (1978) survey among the residents of Surigao del Sur reveals a disturbing reality that Surigaonon in Surigao del Sur, Philippines, as a minority language is not anymore used mostly in speaking, writing, and reading in the various domains mentioned. Quakenbush's (1989:8-10) survey of Agutaynen, Palawan, Philippines reveals that younger Agutaynens do not much use their language anymore. Instead, they use Tagalog language already. Likewise, this Manobo inquiry looks into this same approach using a participant observation technique to find out whether Manobo language is used most or least frequently in speaking, writing, and reading. This present inquiry also attempts to find out the language use and attitudes of Katipunan *Manobo* especially the younger speakers.

Loque's (2008) study of the "Historical and Cultural Significance of Selected Festivals of Agusan del Sur: A Kaliyagan ta Nu Festival Manual" and Sanchez's (2009) study titled "Indigenous Games of the Manobos in Agusan del Sur" both reveal the importance of arts, music, games, music and dances in the preservation of Manobo language and culture. This present inquiry supports both studies above because any effort at preserving the Manobo cultural history with its hidden wealth and beauty would involve cultivation and preservation of their local language as well.

Hence, like any other speech community, Katipunan *Manobo* is confronted with many external and internal factors that shape the future of their language and culture. Inter-marriage, religion, movement of people, and others are the external; conflicting attitudes and perceptions of these village people (the elders and the young) are the internal factors.

With these observations, it may be assumed that the *Manobo* language of this speech community in Katipunan, Bayugan City, Agusan del Sur, is slowly becoming out of use.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study descriptively analyzes the status of the *Manobo* language in Katipunan, Bayugan City as basis for a proposed pedagogic grammar. Specifically, it focuses on the: (1)

case history of the *Manobo* speech community; and (2) threats leading to linguistic extinction and their causes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study argues that the *Manobo* language is gradually becoming out of use due to acculturation with *Cebuano Visayan*.

This research is supported by applied linguistic theories as: Variability of Language by Corder (1973) and Anthropological Perspective of Language Change of Ottenheimer (2008) <http://grammar.about.com/od/il/g/Language-Change.htm>.

In the first supporting theory, Corder (1973) introduces three dimensions of variability in language use, namely, relative social status of speaker and hearer, medium and role-related variability. In *relative social status of speaker and hearer*, a language used by a teacher to a pupil is different from that used by a pupil to a classmate, or a judge speaking to a counsel or to a prisoner. This status-related dimension is called *style*.

The *Manobo* may have problems with maintaining their language. Most probably, these three dimensions of variability of language: style, medium, and role are some of the factors. For instance, *Manobo* children go to school or play with their non-*Manobo* peers while their fathers work in their farms. This means that as time spent between parents and children decreases, language transmission also decreases.

The second supporting theory, Anthropological Perspective of Language Change by Ottenheimer (2008) states that factors influencing the rate at which language changes include the attitudes of the speakers towards borrowing and change. When most members of a speech community value novelty, for example, their language will change more quickly. When most members of a speech community value stability, then their language will change more slowly.

All the empirical evidence gathered to date indicates that children do not preserve the dialect characteristics of their parents, but rather those of the peer group which dominates their preadolescent years.

Similarly, this theory of language change by Ottenheimer (2008) is evident among the *Manobo* speech communities. Initial survey reveals that *Manobo* phonology or sound-letter system is more difficult than that of the *Cebuano-Visayan*. For this reason, *Manobo* children would do well to pronounce some of their *lumad* (native) words the *Cebuano-Visayan* way.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Materials (*Key Informants*)

The key informants are grouped based on the statement of the problem, specifically the following: (1) case history of the Manobo speech community, and (2) threats leading to linguistic extinction and their causes.

Seven key informants of the case history of the Manobo speech community are pure blooded Manobo *lumad*, have resided in the village for thirty to forty years, and are familiar with the language and cultural history of the village.. They are the following: Datu Unlad (55, male); Elder Jesus (57, male); Manong Junior (55,male); Manong Puko(59, male); Elder Pulon (60, male); Nang Maring (53, female); and Nang Lita (45, female).

Ten informants of the threats leading to linguistic extinction are either mixed Manobo, pure blooded Manobo, or Cebuano Visayan. *Tibor (10, male), and Jake (8, male),* are the children informants. *Edjie (13, male), Marvin (17, male), Ralf (15, male),Tiu (15, male), Jomar (16, male), and Lyn (25,female)* are the young adults informants. *Nang Lydia (42, female), and Nang Clara (40, female)* are Cebuano-Visayan spouses. Both are wives of *lumad* Manobo. Children are in their elementary grades, young adults are either high school or college students. Housewives are high school level/graduates.

Method Used

As a qualitative research, it uses observation as the data collection method. Observation is the selection, recording of behaviors and observing the linguistic area of Katipunan *Manobo* in their natural setting (<http://www.qualitativeresearch.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/466/996L>.)

Collecting verbal data consists of informal and formal part. The informal part consists of free conversation) for eliciting vernacular or local use, and a formal part (consisting of a *Manobo* reading passage) to elicit various degrees of formal or standard language use.

A *Manobo* interpreter, preferably the eldest or chieftain, helps in collecting and interpreting these verbal data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section descriptively discusses the results based on the problems of the study.

Case History of the Manobo Speech Community

The *Manobo* belong to the original stock of proto-Philippine or proto-Austronesian people who came from South China thousands of years ago, earlier than the Ifugao and other terrace-building peoples of the northern Luzon. (de Leon, http://litera1no4.tripod.com/manobo_frame.html).

Katipunan *Manobo* is one of the four *Manobo* communities in Bayugan City. Calaitan, San Juan and Pinagalaan are the other three. The *lumad* arrive here long before the *Cebuano-*

Visayan and other settlers came. As early as 1900's, these settlers come to form small community units which are mostly primitive farmers and hunters which subsist on wild animals and plants for food.

"Niadtong una pa, siguro human sa giyera, mga Manobo ra jud ang namuyo diri. Ang among mga katigulangan gikan sa nagkalain-laing dapit sa Agusan Sur."(*In the old days, probably, immediately after the war, the early inhabitants are natives. Our ancestors came from all over Agusan del Sur.*) Manong Pukô confesses in *Cebuano-Visayan*.

'Katipunan' is both a Cebuano-Visayan and *lumad* (native) term which means 'a gathering/coming together', Manong Puko confesses. Villagers build their huts on a linear fashion along 'Maatoy' river and on the foot of mountains or hills. Under a village chief and a *baylan* (a village priest or priestess), they render obedience and practice their village rituals. Mostly patriarchal, boys usually go with their fathers and learn how to hunt, plant or harvest while girls are left at home with their mothers to attend to the chores.

As one moves closer to the river, one overhears two boys talking (below). *"Magdow ikoo't niyog ugeygon ta"*. (*How good it is to eat young coconut*), Tibor, 10, suggests. *"Uy! Uli na ta, gitugnaw naku"*. (*Come, let's go home instead because I'm already cold*), Jake, 8, answers.

In the nearby house, Mang Jesus displays a *tabey* (battle spear) and a *kaesag* (shield) in his living room. He proudly narrates that these war and ritual implements have been handed down from his forefathers. He adds that these are not used already these days.

Later, he goes out to ask his young nephew, Ralf, *"Andii kow gabii?"* (*Where were you yesterday?*) *"Diya't kuy tu bubungan migayas."* (*There, at the hill clearing the area*), the nephew replies. *"Nokoy tu kayuag tu iyon awing?"* (*How wide is your clearing already?*) Mang Jesus insists. *"Mgu upat un nu gantang"*. (*About four ganta uncle*), Ralf quickly replies.

Although, the elders insist that they still manage to maintain their traditional life ways, they yield that many changes have taken place since the *Cebuano Visayan* arrived. As the latter grow in number to cultivate their new-found land, they become prominent and influential in the community.

Manobo elders transfer their language to their children orally. Gradually, this language transfer declines. In fact, only very few younger *Manobo* could perform their songs, chants, and rituals. Datu Catalino 'Maatoy' Unlad, village chief, observes that sometimes, when a *Manobo* parent talks to their children, they (children) would reply in *Cebuano Visayan*.

Difficulty in pronouncing mid central vowel /ə/ and open mid, near front vowel /ɛ/ among younger Manobo

The *Manobo* passage below is prepared by Datu Catalino ‘Maatoy’ Unlad. As a point of reference, he reads them twice. In turn, five (5) *lumad* elementary (grades 4 to 6) and three (3) high school *lumad* also read the passages.

Passage A:

Utû, kona ka ug yangan; so ug kasakpanan katuudan so ma damye tu kibe.

(Boy, do not delay; or else the rain would catch you because there are heavy clouds already).

Passage B:

Madane on ug sayup tu aedow, no sekona ug padeyo kad gadud.

(Almost the sun would set, and you are going to leave). (From a *Manobo* love song, ‘*Kadukiluman*’, meaning twilight)

It turns out that these young *Manobo* readers do not pronounce the third and fourth *Manobo* vowel sounds such as, the mid central vowel / Θ / and open mid, near front vowel / \mathcal{E} / correctly. They pronounce vowels in ‘*ug, tu, on, gadud*’ similar to that of the third *Cebuano* vowel /u/. Likewise, they pronounce the underlined vowel in ‘*damye, kibe, madane, aedow, and padeyo*’ like the *Cebuano-Visayan* vowel /i/. Four of these readers are pure *Manobo* while the other four, are half *Manobo*- half *Cebuano-Visayan*.

Datu Unlad and the elders confirm this phenomenon - younger *Manobo* do not speak or pronounce some of their native words correctly anymore. These are the mid central vowel / Θ / and open mid, near front vowel / \mathcal{E} /, for instance (*to mgo, agutoy*), and (*bawe, kemag, kebi, babe, and aedow*) for / Θ / and / \mathcal{E} / respectively.

Observably, *Manobo* phonology is more complex than their *Cebuano-Visayan* counterpart. Hence, the emerging linguistic change.

Threats Leading to Linguistic Extinction and Their Causes:

Manobo children, young adults and non-*Manobo* spouses identify the following as the threats leading to linguistic extinction and their causes: neighbourhood, education, mass media and technology, intermarriage, religion, career opportunities, lack of language development opportunities, and language and cultural attitudes of speakers, and difficulty in pronouncing mid central vowel / Θ / and open mid, near front vowel / \mathcal{E} / among younger *Manobo*.

It is revealed that in most of the speech domains such as home, street, church, school, entertainment, political and social gatherings, and the farms, the use of *Manobo* language is gradually declining especially among the younger *Manobo*.

The Neighbourhood

Immediate neighbourhood is dominated by the *Cebuano-Visayan* -- the streets, the basketball court, the sari-sari stores, the river, the farms or the barangay hall. Usually, the adult *lumad* are obliged to use *Visayan-Cebuano* as they daily interact with non-*lumad* to be clearly understood. The frequent interaction between *lumad* and non-*lumad* using *Cebuano-Visayan* would gradually cause the *lumad* children to pick up the language of the latter.

Ryan, a *Cebuano-Visayan*, and a research staff, illustrates this language shift when he approaches a group of *lumad* washing clothes. “*Kanindot ug kabugnaw sa tubig no?*” (*How beautiful and cold is the water, right?*) he asks. “*Mao jud sir, maong ganahan mi manglaba diri kay bugnaw kaayu diri*” (*You’re right sir. That’s why we like to wash our clothes here*), Tita, a middle-aged *lumad* quickly replies in *Cebuano-Visayan*.

In fact, the *lumad* will only use their language in the presence of *Cebuano-Visayan* when they are only requested to. Still, this study reveals that some *lumad* would use *Cebuano Visayan* even as they interact among themselves.

This observation is supported by Ottenheimer’s (2008) perspective of language change. Among others, it says that change takes place as speaker learns an alternate form, during the time that the two forms exist in contact with his competence, and when one of the forms become obsolete.

Education

There is only one complete elementary school in the village. The secondary school is located in the neighbouring barangay. Although some *lumad* children/pupils use *Manobo* sparingly among themselves in school, most of the time, they use *Cebuano-Visayan* because this is the lingua franca of the majority. The teachers, the school administrator, *Cebuano-Visayan* pupils, and the staff speak *Cebuano-Visayan*.

Goyong, Doki, Simon, and Isko (*lumad* elementary graders) use *Cebuano- Visayan* while playing at the school grounds. When asked if they use *Manobo* during school days, they answer in chorus, “*panagsa ra*” (*sometimes*). When asked also if they are *lumad*, they sheepishly answer, “*Oo*” (*yes*).

By the time *lumad* children go to secondary or tertiary levels, a more difficult scenario would take place because, “there simply are lesser *Manobo* speakers in the schools away from the village; instances for speaking their language have become less frequent”, Lyn, a *lumad* college graduate, confesses in *Cebuano-Visayan*.

Mass Media and Technology

Television has become a foster parent to most *lumad* children. Constant exposure to mass media (TV, radio, online games or even cell phones) keeps *Manobo* children away from their own language. Also, many *Manobo* children already use cell phones and other gadgets. Every day, they would learn more popular songs and (soap opera) stories than their own *Manobo* lore. They could memorize names of celebrities more than their own family tree.

“*Nganong ganahan man ka ug cell phone, dong?*” (Boy, why do you like to use cell phone?). “*Ganahan lang. Daghan music, ug maka text text pud ta!*” (I just like it. I could play music and could text my friends, too!) replies Edjie quickly in *Cebuano Visayan*. “*Manobo imu gamit pag text?*” (Do you use *Manobo* in texting?) “*Dili, Binisaya, kay daghan ko classmate Bisaya sa haiskul*” (I use *Visayan* because my classmates are *Cebuano Visayan*), he continues.

Observably, most *Manobo* households have at least one television set and a CD player. *Lumad* elders and younger *Manobo* alike are also into video karaoke during their leisure time singing songs in English, Filipino or *Cebuano-Visayan*.

Intermarriage

Survey reveals that sixty per cent (60%) of Katipunan *Manobo* families is composed of mixed marriages. Manong Junior narrates that although he is a *lumad*, he is married in a Christian ceremony because this is what the parents of his *Cebuano-Visayan* bride want. Today, he and all his family members are practicing Christians. Most of his older children marry *Cebuano-Visayan* (Christians) too.

Most housewives are non-*lumad*. They are either *Cebuano*, *Waray*, *Surigaonon* or *Mindanao-Visayan*. In most cases, they stay at home and, consequently, use *Cebuano-Visayan* with their children.

When asked whether he speaks or understands *lumad*, Edjie, a mestizo, responds in *Cebuano-Visayan*, “*dili ko ka estorya kaayo ug dili pud kasabut sa Minanubo labina kung paspason ni Papa ug sulti*” (I don’t speak nor understand *Manobo* anymore especially if Father speaks it fast).

Religion

Most *lumad* are Christian converts - Catholics and Pentecostal. They use *Cebuano-Visayan*, *Filipino* or *English* songs during their church services. Bible readings, services and sermons are in *Cebuano Visayan*.

“*Duna ba mo’y biblia nga Minanubo?*” (Do you have a bible in *Manobo*?) “*Nia ko’y Minanubo nga biblia pero wala namu gamita sa pagsimba*” (I have a bible in *Manobo* but I don’t use this during the service), Datu Unlad, who is also a lay minister, answers in *Cebuano-*

Visayan. “*Lisud masabtan kay mas daghan man sakup sa simbahan nga Bisaya.*” (It would be difficult to use *Manobo* version. There are fewer *Manobo* members in the church”, he asserts.

Career Opportunities

“*Unsang kursuha imung gikuha, Marvin?*” (What did you take up Marvin?) “*BS Agriculture*”, he replies. “*Mobalik ka dinhi paghuman nimug eskwela?*” (Do you plan to go back here?) “*Gamay ra man opportunities dinhi; basin adtu ko sa lungsod*”. (I think there are lesser opportunities here, so I plan to work at the *Poblacion*), Marvin, a *lumad* college student shyly answers.

Based on this, it can be deduced that this community is not exempt from a diaspora phenomenon due to economic factors. Once they get a stable job, younger *lumad* would marry and settle in the urban areas. Parents of these *lumad* reveal that their children hardly use *Manobo* away from their home village especially if their spouses are non-*lumad*.

Lack of Language Development Opportunities

Except for the only public elementary school in the heart of the barangay, respondents comment that there are no other avenues where *lumad* children could learn the fundamental three R’s (reading, writing, arithmetic). Obviously, this transfer of knowledge is done using Filipino, English and *Cebuano-Visayan* using textbooks written in either English or Filipino. Teachers, too, are *Cebuano-Visayan*.

Recently, transmission of *lumad* language minimally occurs within *Manobo* households. All the more, this knowledge transfer is not efficient because it is dependent on the availability and disposition of *Manobo* elders and caregivers at home. *Lumad* parents are tired already from work, hence, could not teach their children at night.

Also, Mang Polon said that *lumad* gatherings have become less frequent because most celebrations are sponsored by the local government-which is not obliged to patronize *lumad* language during its activities. Eventually, these *lumad* gatherings have gradually given way to discos, basketball league, patron saint fiestas, ‘araw ng barangay’, and others.

Hence, like the Hasselbring (2000) study, without institutional support such as the local government, schools and others, *Katipunan Manobo* language may be losing speakers soon.

Language and Cultural Attitudes of Speakers

The negative reinforcement these young *Manobo* receive from their own environment, their newly acquired concept of independence and mass media/technology, their search for socio-economic independence and their socio-political struggle encourage this *Manobo* speech community to use language/s other than their own.

Young *Manobo* generally manifest attitudes of subdued nonchalance about their language and culture. This is mostly observable among those who have gone out of their village for higher education or work.

For instance, when asked whether they are *Manobo* or not, *lumad* children respond that they are not *Manobo*. This, probably, is a manifestation of a general feeling of dislike or inferiority of one's language and culture, or maybe something else. Hence, probably, this negative attitude may accelerate the decline of their (*Manobo*) own culture and language.

Similar to Potter et.al.(2003) study in Papua, New Guinea, Katipunan *Manobo* have low vitality because language use and attitudes are low.

Katipunan *Manobo* may gradually lose its speakers because of low self esteem of the young *Manobo* toward their own language and culture. While the elders try to retain their own language and culture, observably, the young do not have the same zeal.

In one hand, *lumad* have retained some of their traditional ways as the pictures reveal, like: houses with elevated floors and made of indigenous materials, traditional spear and shield, betel nut chewing, manual stone corn mill, chieftain's folk literature and songs, barefoot, and *Manobo* language use especially among the elders.

On the other hand, traces of *Cebuano-Visayan* influences are obvious, too. These are: adoption of *Cebuano-Visayan* language, modern clothing, houses, intermarriage, education, religion, and career opportunities.

CONCLUSION

The *Manobo* language is gradually becoming out of use due to acculturation with *Cebuano-Visayan*.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following are recommended:

Livelihood Programs. Local government units, non-government organizations, and other stakeholders may develop a sustainable livelihood program suited to *Manobos'* socio-cultural practices and needs by establishing linkages with private individuals, local industries and corporations for sustainable job opportunities such as basketry, mat making, and others.

Lumad Language Use. *Manobo* council of elders may require *lumad* parents to transmit *Manobo* to their children and use *Manobo* at home, in schools, on the streets, in the work places, or anywhere regardless of who they interact with.

Lumad School of Living Traditions. LGUs, NGOs, and other educational leaders may develop a system similar to *madrrasah* among Muslim Filipinos. Pure *lumad* or especially trained mentors may serve as teachers of these schools. They (local teachers) may use indigenous materials as scaffolds to learning. *Manobo* language may be used in teaching Maths, Sciences or other subjects. Incorporating Department of Education curriculum, these *lumad* schools may contextualize the Mother Tongue Based- Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) and K to 12 program of the DepEd so that graduates of these *lumad* schools qualify to any regular secondary public or private schools anywhere in the country.

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