

## *The Endangered Dialect of the Bugkalots*

Cynthia Grace T. Valdez, Quirino State University, Philippines

The Asian Conference on Education and International Development 2015  
Official Conference Proceedings

### **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to explore the use of Bugkalot native language and the factors that cause its usage and non-usage as perceived by the Bugkalots in a village of Quirino Province, Philippines. The research made use of the qualitative research approach. Case study was the strategy used to gather the needed information. Research participants were composed of the High School students whose parents are both Bugkalots, or one of the parents is a Bugkalot. Focused Group Discussions were also conducted among the elders to explore the causes of non-usage of the dialect. The findings of the study reveals that the research participants like their native dialect but they prefer to speak in Ilocano since Ilocano and Tagalog are the languages used in school. From the elders' point of view, the causes of its non-usage are: declining number of speakers, education, and migration. With these findings, the researcher compiled Bugkalot words and their meanings before it will be forgotten or eventually lost by the present generation.

**iafor**

The International Academic Forum

[www.iafor.org](http://www.iafor.org)

## **Introduction**

It is estimated that indigenous people number to about 350 million individuals (4% of humanity), representing over 5,000 languages and cultures in more than 70 countries all over the world (<http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php>). Out of the Philippines' population of 94.01 million, indigenous peoples are estimated to comprise some 10% or around 9.4 million (<http://www.iwgia.org/regions/asia/philippines>). According to the National Commission for Indigenous People, there are more than 110 Indigenous Cultural Communities inhabiting in twelve major ethno-linguistic regions.

Indigenous communities have kept their cultures alive by passing on their worldview, their knowledge and know-how, their arts, rituals and performances from one generation to the next. Preserving their cultural heritage has also included speaking and teaching their own languages, protecting their sacred and significant sites and objects. It has also included defending and holding onto their lands and territories, since these are fundamental for sustaining them as peoples and cultures (Kipuri, 2010 cited by Hernando 2013).

The Bugkalots are indigenous people of the province of Quirino, located in the Cagayan Valley Region of Northern Philippines. "Ilongot" or "Ilungot" comes from "I," a prefix denoting "people" and "gongot/longot" or forest, and means "people of the forest". A Spanish version is "Engotngot". For historians, anthropologists as well as ordinary people, both today and in the past, the word Ilongot is commonly preferred to any other name, in referring to these people in the mountains (Salgado, 1994 cited by Hernando 2013).

Today, the Ilongots prefer to be called Bugkalots, even in Quirino province, for in the course of history, colonizers attached to the term Ilongot the pejorative connotation of being savages and cruel head hunters (CCP Encyclopedia on Philippine Art, 1994). They are one of the many indigenous groups in the world that is struggling on the preservation of cultural heritage. Language is closely tied with our identity. The language we speak defines us in a major way. Our native language also binds us with others and creates a community of speakers. Something very valuable is lost whenever a language dies.

Quirino Province, which is comprised of only six municipalities and the youngest province in the region, serves as ancestral dwelling of two major tribes namely Bugkalot and Agta. Most of the Bugkalots are living in the municipality of Nagtipunan, Quirino where they are already awarded with a Certificate of Ancestral Domain Title.

Bugkalot culture is rich. However, only few young ones know the richness of their culture since it is not recorded and only few uses the native Bugkalot dialect in the village. Dialect and language at large binds a culture. Through the use of the native dialect, their identity is being transmitted from one generation to the next. It is language and dialect that carry the nature and character of who we are and how we relate with one another and to all things we experience in life.

Endangered dialect communities such as those found in Quirino Province also stand to lose valuable cultural practices, such as oral histories, traditional songs and poetry,

and other art forms that are tied to language. Philippine linguistics is at risk for losing half of the subject matter it studies. The study of linguistics, along with other academic disciplines, benefit from the information found in endangered dialects such as the Bugkalot .

Due to the influence of other socio-linguistic groups in the village, the Bugkalot dialect is seldom used. The non-usage of the dialect over time might lead to endangerment or worst, eventual death of the dialect.

The purpose of this case study is to explore the use of Bugkalot native language and the factors that cause its non-usage as perceived by the Bugkalots in Landingan, Nagtipunan, Quirino, Philippines. Specifically, this study sought to (1) document the attitudes towards the dialect; (2) capture the factors that lead to its usage and non-usage; (3) identify the measures or efforts done by the community to preserve the dialect; (3) make a booklet of Bugkalot words. This is needed because indigenous communities are rapidly changing due to acculturation, migration and globalization. There is a need to document their dialect or words since the knowledge informants are passing away and the dialect is gradually eroding.

## **Methodology**

The study used qualitative research design and the strategy used was case study. “Case study is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, of one or more individuals. Cases are bound by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time” (Creswell 2009). The approach used was descriptive because the method emphasizes on the “present status of a phenomenon, describes a current situation, determines the nature of prevailing conditions or practices and seeks accurate description of entities, objects, persons and processes” (Fox, 1989).

Other anthropological research strategies like field visits, interviews, and focus group discussions (FGD) were also used in this study since it sought to document the factors that cause the gradual dialect loss of the Bugkalots in the village. Before the actual field work, necessary protocol was made to the Tribal Chieftain, Mayor, local officials, elders of the community and the school principal.

The research was supported by Sikolohiyang Pilipino methods such as “pakapa-kapa” approach considering that the researcher is new to the research area and its people. The data collection was made through pagmamasid, pagtatanung-tanong, pagdalaw at pakikisangkot. Validation of the recorded words and their meanings was done through FGD. The participants of this study were selected through purposive and snowball sampling method. Students with parents who are both Bugkalot, and students with at least one parent who are Bugkalot were selected. The first participant was asked to recommend a student whom he/she knows meets the criteria.

Key informants for the focus group discussions were the Bugkalot parents and elders. A non-structured interview schedule was used for the student research participants and a discussion guide was used for the parents and elder participants. Lastly, the

study utilized content analysis of the qualitative responses and themes were developed.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The challenge of preserving the Bugkalot dialect is important to the Filipino nation, to the local community and to the Quirino State University because such dialect and cultural threats do not originate from within the indigenous communities themselves, but instead, they pertain to the external phenomena that stems from different factors. Thus, the solution should acquire the mode of a multi-sector initiatives and efforts.

A study pointed out that one of the most critical causal variables in language endangerment is the disruption of the intergenerational transmission process (Adegbija, 2001). It is essential to note that language does not exist without a speech community. Hence any form of changes in the language processes must really affect the indigenous peoples. There is important evidence that those regions and communities with higher incidences of language death refer to the regions and communities with corresponding higher rates of socioeconomic dependence. Hence, language preservation expert points to the direct connection between societal power relation and consequent language loss.

Crawford points out that, “after all, language death does not happen in privileged communities. It happens to the disposed and the disempowered; people who most need their cultural resources to survive” (Crawford, 2001). In a sense, the indigenous peoples refuse to identify with their basic heritage language when they believe that this identification is detrimental to the pursuit of a bright future for them. This pertains to an attitude that is then reproduced in the speech community. Its primary cause comes from factors encompassing political suppression, social discrimination, and economic exclusion. Crawford explains the loss of culture that comes with language death also results in decline in the sense of self-worth, which limits human potential to solve problems, encompassing poverty, family breakdown, school failure, and substance abuse (Crawford, 2001).

Cummins (2000) pointed to the transformative pedagogy that takes place in the context of an interaction between educators and students in which both are empowered. Given this set-up of intensive collaborative exchange, Cummins states that students are enabled to relate their personal and community experiences to the curriculum content. They also get to analyze the significant social issues relevant to their lives.

Cummins’ framework seems clearly justified because the conventional pedagogy has led to “historical patterns of underachievement among marginalized groups to the devaluation of identity that has typically been played out in the interaction between educators and students” (Cummins, 2000). The means for devaluation of identity has negative effects on the children and consequently for their parents and cultural communities, since the children are transformed into underachievers academically and by extension, into underachievers at both personal and social levels.

As Cummins states:

This devaluation of linguistic, cultural and academic identity reflected the pattern of coercive relations of power that characterized intergroup relations in the broader society. Under these conditions, students quickly became convinced that academic efforts were futile and many resisted further devaluation of their identities by mentally withdrawing from participation in the life of school (Cummins, 2000).

The withdrawal from the life of school also reflects as being a withdrawal from the participation in building the life of the community and the society. Transformative pedagogy is a key instrument to swiftly reverse the historical process of underachievement since affirmation of identity in the classroom is critical to the preservation of the Bugkalot language.

## **Results and discussions**

The main findings of this research are divided into three parts: dialect attitudes, perceptions on the causes of dialect loss, and the compilation of native words with their Tagalog counterparts.

### **Attitude toward the Bugkalot dialect**

To reflect the research participants' attitudes toward the dialect, two major questions were asked for both the students and parents: What dialect do you prefer more; and, "What dialect do you want your children to learn first?"

From the students' point of view, they like their native Bugkalot dialect but they prefer to speak Ilocano in school. The reasons that emerged are: (1) they can socialize better with their other classmates by communicating in Ilocano; (2) they can feel the essence of belongingness by speaking the dialect of the majority in the village; (3) it feels good to speak in Ilocano.

It is interesting to note that the participants do not feel any form of inferiority or discrimination when they like to speak in their own native dialect in school when they meet their fellow Bugkalot. In terms of frequency on speaking their dialect, they speak it when they want their Ilocano classmates not to comprehend what they are talking about and when they share secrets with their fellow Bugkalots. Ilocano students do not bully them when they speak; instead, they are interested to learn their dialect too. With this, they are not ashamed of their native Bugkalot dialect. But still, they admit that they have the notion and feeling that Ilocano is a better, more powerful and more influential dialect.

The students also admitted that when they will have their own children, they will teach them Ilocano first since it is easier and there are more speakers of this language than their native tongue. Acquiring fluency in dominant languages will help them and their children to find jobs and be successful. Present Bugkalot children also have a role in this process, and often it is the children who make the choice to stop learning their ancestral language and use the dominant language exclusively to improve their chances in getting better jobs.

From the parents' point of view, even if they prefer the Bugkalot dialect for themselves; they hardly use it at home. They believe it is in the best interest of the children if they learn Ilocano as first dialect. For them, the children should be taught the language used in school, and learning Bugkalot first may interfere with the learning of Ilocano or Tagalog. In the course of the interview, they said that they may still learn the native Bugkalot dialect when they grow older. In addition, some parents fear that speaking the native dialect at home will hamper the child's acquisition of the more economically valuable language such as Tagalog, English and Ilocano.

Drawing from the study of Adegbija (2001) one of the most critical causes in language endangerment is the disruption of the intergenerational transmission process. In this research, the intergenerational vertical transmission (parents to children) based from the findings, is already disrupted as parents prefer their children to learn Ilocano at an early age and speak the same language in order for their kids to be adjusted easily in school instruction and in terms of socialization with peers as well as with their teachers. Bugkalot is seldom spoken at home with adults and its proficiency and command has been stagnating, since the focus in school is Tagalog/ Ilocano, and English that keeps children away from consolidating Bugkalot competence with regard to grammatical structures and vocabulary, which is at best sporadically expanded. The continuous disruption of the transmission of Bugkalot language may eventually lead to its endangerment, or worst, death of the language.

### **Perceived causes of non-usage**

#### *Declining number of speakers*

During the focused group discussions with the adult participants, one of the themes identified was the declining number of speakers. Quoted from an elder, "*bassit kami a puro ditoyen, bassit kami nga agsasao iti Bugkalota agsasao kami laengen ti Bugkalot nu agkikita kami a panglakayen*". There are few pure Bugkalot in our place now, which resulted to lesser number of Bugkalot dialect speakers. The dialect is only spoken when we meet our fellow Bugkalot. Young Bugkalots speak Ilocano more than Bugkalot."

Another participant added, "*dagijay annak ku nga lallaki ket Ilocano ti asawa da, Ilocano metten ti usaren da nga sarita haan nga Bugkalot.. Ilocano ti sau dan ijay balbalay da. Agsao kami laengen ti Bugkalot nu agkikita kami.*" My sons married Ilocano women, and they speak Ilocano in their homes. They teach their children Ilocano. We only speak our native dialect when we meet.

The decline in the number of speakers is a result of intermarriage with another socio-linguistic group. This is one factor that contributes to the lesser use of the native dialect. Preference to speak Ilocano in their homes slowly erodes the use of Bugkalot dialect since children will be more fluent in the Ilocano dialect than the Bugkalot. This findings support Crawford's (1996) hypotheses of language loss where he said that, one of the causes of language loss is that there are growing number of parents who fail to teach the language to their children. In this case, Bugkalot children's knowledge and fluency on their native dialect will be affected as younger ones prefer to speak the dominant societal tongue in the village. This preference is influenced by the parents' choice that their children must learn Ilocano first.

Another reason why Bugkalot dialect is not taught: *“Narigat nga isao ti sarita mi, sabali. Adda iti pwersa na ken sabali a balikas mi. Nalaklaka nga adalen ken isao iti Ilokano ngem iti sao mi. Mas dominante iti Ilocano nga sao ngamen, pati nu aglako kami iti produkto mi, Ilocano iti sao mi”*.

Our dialect is different. It is difficult to learn and teach: the diction, intonation is very much different from that of Ilocano dialect. We prefer to use Ilocano when there are traders who go to our village; it is more prestigious and economically dominant. Traders, who go to the village, talk with the Bugkalots in Ilocano. It is the medium used and understood both by the traders and buy the products in the village.

Bugkalot speakers themselves see their dialect as tough as displayed in their facial expressions when asked why they do not teach the traders to speak the language. They admit that there is difficulty in teaching the proper intonation, pronunciation and diction of Bugkalot. These were their reasons why they prefer Ilocano.

Based from the participants’ statements, language assimilation has taken its toll. Bugkalots had assimilated the culture of the Ilocanos specially the married ones. It started with the language. In theory, the process of assimilation may be voluntary or may be forced upon a population. Speakers of some languages particularly regional or minority languages may decide to abandon them based on economic or utilitarian grounds, in favor of language regarded as having greater utility or prestige. Slowly this is happening in the village, from domains where the language was once secure-like the family, the school, and in daily economic activities like trading.

## **Education**

Education is viewed as a factor that causes the non-usage of the dialect. An elder said that educated Bugkalots prefer not to stay in their place. *“Nu addan adal da ket madi da kayat ditoy lugar min. Mapan da idiay ili ken jay Maddela”*. Educated Bugkalots prefer to stay in Nagtipunan proper or in Maddela rather than in the village for obvious reasons, that is, due to physical proximity to their work place and the school.

In general, the education and out-migration from the Bugkalot community to the mainstream society had certainly weakening effects on the participants’ perception toward the Bugkalot language. Because of the constant exposure with the non-Bugkalot speakers, the participants who may not have established strong ties with the in-group and their ancestral language have the tendency to identify more with the out-group.

### *Basic Efforts to Preserve the Bugkalot dialect -Transmission and Maintenance*

The process of transmission as well as the maintenance of the dialect in the village can be clearly explained and understood in the context of the basic organization of the extended family social structure. The extended Filipino family structure enables both vertical and horizontal intergenerational language transmission.

Vertical transmission is far more coextended and allows both vertical and horizontal intergenerational language transmission. Vertical transmission is seen to be more complicated compared to the unidirectional parent-to-children language transmission

as it includes the intergenerational language transmission from grandparents to grandchildren, from uncles and aunts to their corresponding nieces and nephews, from godparents to godchildren, and also from adult neighbors to youth and child neighbors.

The primordial role of the grandparents is quite important in the Filipino culture. The grandparents are still active in language transmission to their granddaughters and grandsons and grandnieces and grandnephews. This complex family social structure which is unique to the inherent Filipino culture also explains why the vertical intergenerational language transmission, such as the biological mother-to-child may pave the way for the continued and evolving use, maintenance, and preservation of the Bugkalot dialect.

The multidirectional dimension of language transmission operates in this way: language transmission and learning is generally a two-way process, and not a one-way only dynamics, particularly to the Bugkalot dialect transmission given the context of the Filipino extended family structure. The elders in the community can learn something about their own language and culture from the youngest family members. For example, during the vertical language transmission from parent to his toddler, the toddler is not a passive receptor. The toddler could say something, respond to, and even to ask something from the parents.

There are some factors that are quite instrumental for predicting the future of the Bugkalot dialect. In a rather bilingual environment, the future parent generation (the current primary school learners) displays another competence and proficiency as well as second language use that, by and large, exceed that of the dialect. The far-going expanded language exposure in Ilocano and English strongly affects their competence in developing and mastering specific Bugkalot dialect skills.

Coupled with strong formal and moral second language support, the chances of Bugkalot dialect to be transmitted in the future to another young generation diminish drastically over time. It is not likely that present-day children will help assimilate and reinforce their proficiency after leaving the formal education system.

Accordingly, the total language development observed and documented is quite threatening. The campaign for mastery in Ilocano, Tagalog, and English languages already has a negative impact on the position of Bugkalot dialect in the sense that the total number of Bugkalot speakers is decreasing. While these days inter-generational Bugkalot transmission still takes place, Ilocano and English competence building is stagnating or eroding as the result of the English imposition in formal education.

It can be inferred from the discussion that the current Philippine language policy and its implementation in formal education is of central relevance for the Bugkalot dialect's future. Hence, if this language policy were to stipulate that Bugkalot should be used in school in a sort of additive approach, the learners would certainly become better skilled speakers. This, in its turn, would enable them to use Bugkalot more widely.

The Philippine government at least officially recognized the language of indigenous peoples. This present policy still lacks a comprehensive edge, as it does not foresee

any particular role for the Bugkalot dialect in Philippine society. Nor does it hold out prospects of supporting follow-up steps in developing the local Bugkalot dialect to the perennial problem of lack of funding. School officials recognize the complex linguistic situation that they are faced with but are hesitant to offer a viable solution which is supposed to address the future of the Bugkalot dialect in this community. In sum, the emphasis on the usage of Ilocano, Tagalog, and English has a strong impact in education. To a large extent, this undue emphasis has been responsible for the consequent language shift and Bugkalot dialect endangerment in this community.

In support to the efforts of preserving the dialect and the UNESCO's urgent call to protect the indigenous dialects and languages of the world, a booklet of words with the title "MA LEBDU NU BUGKALOT" was made before it will be lost forever. This booklet contains Bugkalot words and the Ilocano counterpart.

### **Conclusion**

The Bugkalot student research participants like their native Bugkalot language but the preferred language is Ilocano due to socialization, easy comprehension, and the feeling of belongingness to the majority group. Parents prefer to teach their children Ilocano first since this is used in school. Teaching Bugkalot language first interferes with the learning of the mainstream language.

The perceived causes of non-usage of the language are: declining number of speakers, education, and out-migration from the village.

Basic efforts are done by elders in the village to preserve the dialect but younger generations seldom speak the dialect.

### **Recommendations**

The use of the Bugkalot dialect within the context of the domain of everyday life among adults and young populations can help in the efforts of the preservation of the dialect. This can be done through the direct transmission from parent to children. The adults can be encouraged to exercise preference to use the Bugkalot dialect as the primary medium of communication in routine and everyday conversation. This daily and regular practice will not constitute a vertical language transmission per se, but it represents a magnificent opportunity for language exposition and acquisition by children. Compulsory use of the dialect in rituals and celebrations can also prevent the eventual loss of the dialect. A Bugkalot Dictionary may help a lot both the old and young generation; and related studies are further recommended.

## References:

Creswell, J. (2009). *Research Design Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition. SAGE Publications, Inc.

Crawford, J. (1995). Endangered Native American languages: What is to be done and why? *The Bilingual Research Journal*, 19(1), 17-38.

Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power, and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Hernando, M.(2013). "*Say Ito Ma Tadek Mi*": The Traditional Rituals and Related Practices of the Bugkalots Based on Oral History. Quirino State University.

Kipuri, N. (2010). *State of the World's Indigenous Peoples*. UN Publication, New York.

Rosaldo, R. (1980). *Passion and Knowledge: Ilongot notions of self and social life*. Cambridge University Press.

Rumusod, M. (2009). *Cultural Symbols and Meanings of Headhunting among the Egongots*- Paper presentation. Nueva Vizcaya State University, Philippines.

<http://www.iwgia.org/regions/asia/philippines>

<http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php>