

Gerontological Variations on the Language Use and Attitudes of Southern Philippine Plurilingual Communities

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Abstract

This pioneering research explores the correlation of gerontological factors in sociolinguistics in the intergenerational language attitudes of Southern Philippine plurilingual communities on the Cebuano, Filipino, and English languages. Specifically, viewpoints of Cebuano speakers from the cities of Cebu and Davao in southern Philippines were investigated in this study. Utilizing mixed methods research, results found that the elder generation may prefer their children to learn the Cebuano language but this does not result in fruition as their beliefs in the English language prevent this from happening. Generation Z emphasized that the English and Filipino languages affected their fluency in the Cebuano language. They ended up speaking English for formal communication as the elder generation accentuated its role as an international language. While a majority of the respondents from both generations preferred the use of the Cebuano language for everyday communication, the actual count of their results deviated from the expected count that coincides with the null hypothesis. Consequently, this study confirms that gerontological variations affect the respondents' language attitudes on everyday communication. Lastly, no significant differences were in their views that English should be used for formal communication and the maintenance of Filipino as the Philippine national language.

1. Introduction

There is a clear lack of empirical intergenerational language use and attitudes studies in the international literature (Lapresta-Rey, Huguet, & Fernández-Costales, 2016) despite the long-established theory in communication accommodation that there is a link between people's ages and language studies (Harwood, 2007). This is also applicable in contemporary Philippine linguistics literature. Studies focusing on gerontological variations of Filipinos' language use and attitudes are saturated within their diasporic communities in English-speaking countries, particularly in Australia (Nical, 2000; Smolicz, Nical, & Secombe, 2000), New Zealand (Umali, 2016), and the United States of America (Axel, 2011). Existing Philippine-based sociolinguistic studies are mainly concerned with the views on the Filipino and English languages in educational settings (Vizconde, 2006; Borlongan, 2009; Durano, 2009; Cunanan, 2013; Besa, 2014; Sicam & Lucas, 2016) and general language perception surveys (Estipona, 2009; Pontillas & Parpa, 2017; Bernardo-Hinesley, 2018). As of this writing, there are no published works comparing the language use and attitudes between varying generations within the Philippines. As such, this remains to be an unexplored topic in Philippine sociolinguistics.

Owing to the established fact that there is a need to fill the gap in the academic literature on the said topic, the authors spearheaded this venture by looking into the intergenerational language use and attitudes of Filipino plurilingual speakers on the Cebuano, Filipino, and English languages. This study will first discuss the existing literature on the links between age and language studies and a concise history of Philippine language policies.

1.1 Correlating age and language studies

It was only in the 1980s that language and aging were first explored by applied linguistics researchers (Kemper & Anagnopoulos, 1989). Sociolinguists who first studied the links between age and language attitudes argued that gerontological variations could be the “bedrock of intergenerational problems in general and a contributor to psychological decline and physical ill-health among the elderly in particular” (Coupland, Coupland, Giles, & Henwood, 1988). As such, this topic extends beyond sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics as it may also include gerontology, public health, and other allied medical fields. From a linguistic viewpoint, including age as a variable in studying linguistic landscapes may trace language convergence and variation (p. 35). Pichler, Wagner, and Hesson (2018) noted that the elderly are often ignored by variationist sociolinguistics researchers, removing the opportunity for them to contribute to the repertoires of linguistic data that could be beneficial in understanding the “pathways of sociolinguistic development in later life.”

The socially-constructed thought that people perform less effectively when they age also affects the perceived communicative effectiveness of the elderly by other people which puts them in the communication predicament of aging. The mentioned term is defined as “the situation in which undesirable discrepancies occur between the actual communicative competence of an elderly person and the negative perception of [their] competence” (Ryan, Giles, Bartolucci, & Henwood, 1986). This perceived negative stereotype of the capability of the elderly to communicate has been empirically documented by Hummert (1990). In terms of age-based linguistic variation studies, Barbieri (2008) found that younger speakers of American English tend to use more slang words, cuss, personal pronouns, attitudinal adjectives, and stance adverbs. On the other hand, elders tend to be more formal. In Turkey, age has been found to be a significant social factor in language production as it has been also found that speakers from different generations speak differently, with the young using informal language and the middle-aged people speaking formally as they are expected in their workplaces (Demirci & Kleiner, 1998). In spite of the communicative differences between varying generations, the language development of children starts within their immediate environments, particularly with the smallest social unit which is within their families and homes.

1.2 Language Policies in the Philippines

The 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines lists the Filipino and English as the country’s official languages. Gonzalez (1994), however, noted that the linguistic situation in the archipelago is commonly multilingual. Local languages are spoken at the family and community levels. Filipino, as the national language, is considered to be symbolically uniting the Filipino people despite the linguistic and geographic variations. Meanwhile, English is the language used in education, business, law practice, science, and diplomacy. A variety of the English language emerged in the country as it had been continually spoken by the population for more than 120 years already. Gonzalez referred to this variety as Philippine English – a variation of the English language that is not a victim of linguistic imperialism, but a product of the interlocutors in the Philippines to suit their communicative needs (Bresnahan, 1979).

In his analysis of the language policies in the Philippines, Demeterio (2012) mentioned that the use of the English language in the country’s public space for more than a century started when the American colonial government enforced it to be the islands’ official language. Figure 1 shows the chronological map of language planning in the Philippines wherein it illustrates the continuous use of English in the Philippine linguistic community. On the other hand, the Filipino language was only formally part of the country’s bureaucratic institutions starting in in the 1930s. Since then, bilingual and multilingual language planning between the English and Filipino languages have been dominating in the past and present governments. Demeterio and Liwanag (2014) found out that Filipinos prefer the use of English in the business of the national and local governments, courts, civil service, education, entertainment, literature, and commerce. Regional languages, on the other hand, are secondary. Lastly, the Filipino language is least preferred.

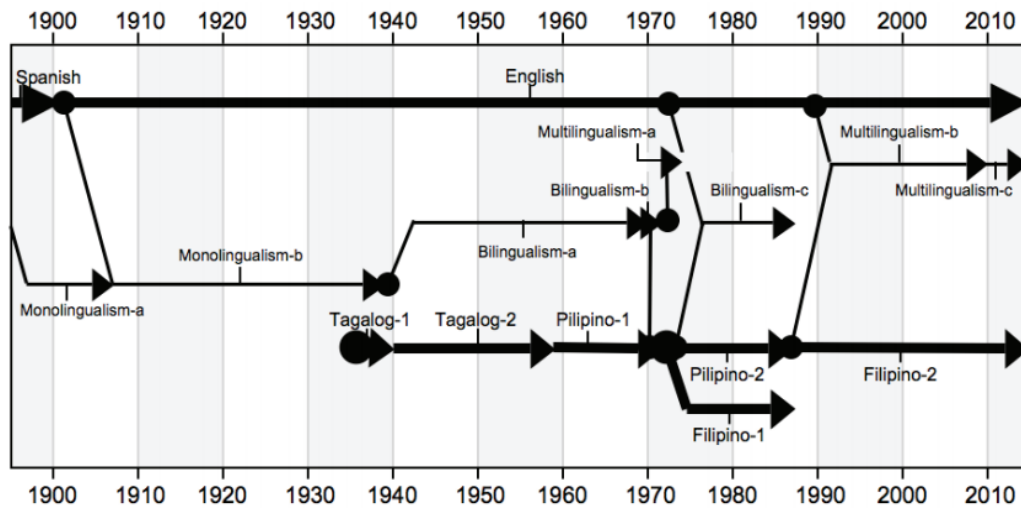


Fig. 1 An illustrative history of Philippine language planning (Demeterio & Liwanag, 2014)

2. Methodology

2.1 Research design

This pioneering study adopted mixed methods of research to comprehensively investigate and analyze the language use and attitudes of Cebuano plurilingual communities in the cities of Cebu and Davao in southern Philippines. By utilizing purposive sampling, the researcher was able to identify the respondents of the focus group discussion (FDG) and the survey questionnaires. Purposive sampling is used in studies wherein the researcher deem it necessary to decipher the general research questions and phenomena being explored in the project (Creswell, 2019). Data were collected in June to October 2018.

For the study's participants, the researcher focused on the generations X and Z. Those who come from the Generation X were born on the years 1965 to 1979 and those belonging to Generation Z were born in 1995 until 2012 (Berkup, 2014). In making sure that the study followed the ethical practices of research, respondents from the Generation Z only included those who were born from 1995 to 2000 as they were already of legal age to take part in the study. A total of 400 respondents took part in this research project with 200 coming from each generation. To ensure that the quality of data fulfills the standards of quantitative research, the researcher decided to have relative large population size, compared to common empirical linguistic studies, for this work to have a result that is truly representative to the use and attitudes of the Cebuano people (Fowler & Cosenza, 2009). In addition to the measures taken by the researcher above, they also utilized simple random sampling in the data gathering process to guarantee that the data will illustrate the overall viewpoints of the population probed. This sampling method makes certain that the participants are qualified to take part in the research process (Wilson, 2014). As for the qualitative aspect of this applied linguistic research, Dörnyei (2009) recommended that there should be at least four participants to take part in an FGD to expansively collect data. Four focus group discussions were done by the researcher on the respondents to exhaust their views on their language usage.

2.2 Research instruments

Three linguistic variables were assessed in this study: 1) language fluency; 2) language use; and 3) language attitudes. As the setting of the research took place in Cebuano-speaking communities in two cities of southern Philippines, the three languages investigated here are the English, Filipino, and Cebuano languages. Demographic variables such as the respondents' sex, birth year, education attainment, type of educational institution attended, and income bracket were initially found in the survey instrument. Those were followed by questions that empirically collected the respondents' language fluency, language use, and language attitudes through a five-point Likert scale. The researcher would like to note that the developed survey questionnaire and focus group interview guide both utilized the Cebuano language in the data collection.

For the FGD, the primary researcher recorded the discussions using the voice recorder application of his smartphone and laptop computer. The focus group started with the researcher thanking the participants for taking part in the study and everyone introduced themselves to each other. The respondents were allowed to

freely use any language they felt comfortable with, including the code-switching of all three languages investigated. The focus group interview guide remained consistent with the quantitative survey questionnaire as it had questions that explored the respondents' language fluency, language use, and language attitudes. After the discussions, the researcher thanked the participants and asked them if there were any linguistic issues they wanted to bring up to the body.

2.3 Data analysis

A t-test was done on the empirical data to identify if there were gerontological variations in the respondents' language fluency and use. The following statistical scales were utilized to interpret the numerical data: 4.50 – above meant Strongly Agree; 3.5 – 4.49 meant Agree; 2.50 – 3.49 meant Neutral; 1.50 – 2.45 meant Disagree; and, 1.00 – 1.49 meant Strongly Disagree. For the language attitudes part of the quantitative aspect of the study, a Chi-square test was applied by the researcher to assess if their language attitudes were either in accordance with the null or alternative hypothesis:

H₀: There are no gerontological variations in the language attitudes of Cebuano-speaking plurilingual Filipinos.

H₁: There are gerontological variations in the language attitudes of Cebuano-speaking plurilingual Filipinos.

The qualitative aspect of the study employed a relatively new data analysis method called rapid identification of themes from audio recordings (RITA) of Neal, Neal, Van Dyke, and Kornbluh (2015). This process preserves the spoken and non-spoken information that can only be gathered by listening to the actual discussion recordings. This data analysis method allows the researcher to quickly identify the themes of the discourses of the participants.

2.4 Ethical considerations

As mentioned above, this study collected demographic data from the respondents which include their sex, birth year, education attainment, type of educational institution attended, and income bracket. Due to this, the researcher made it optional for the participants to write their names on the survey questionnaire. Each questionnaire was instead stamped with code numbers from 1 to 400. To guarantee that the protocols of research ethics were practiced, the respondents were informed of their rights and an informed consent form was provided to them to be signed. The researcher made sure that the data collected will remain confidential and will not be shared with any individual, organization, or institution. The same was done with the FGD respondents and they were also informed that their voices were recorded.

All figures should be numbered with Arabic numerals (1, 2, 3...). Every figure should have a caption. All photographs, schemas, graphs, and diagrams are to be referred to as figures. Line drawings should be good-quality scans or true electronic output. Low-quality scans are not acceptable. Figures must be embedded into the text and not supplied separately. In MS Word input the figures must be properly coded. The preferred formats of figures are PNG, JPEG, GIF, etc. Lettering and symbols should be clearly defined either in the caption or in a legend provided as part of the figure. Figures should be placed at the top or bottom of a page wherever possible, as close as possible to the first reference to them in the paper. Please ensure that all the figures are of 300 DPI resolutions as this will facilitate good output.

The figure number and caption should be typed below the illustration in 10pt and left justified [Note: one-line captions of length less than the column width (or full typesetting width or oblong) centered]. The artwork has no text along the side of it in the main body of the text. However, if two images fit next to each other, these may be placed next to each other to save space. For example, see Fig. 1.

3. Results

3.1 Demographic profile of the respondents

As the researcher made certain that the respondents were qualified to take part in the study, their demographic profile were collected. Appendix A shows the demographic profile of the respondents. Of the 200 participants of Generation X, most were born in the year 1970 (n = 28), followed by those born in 1971 (n = 19). Their ages had a mean of 46.83. Most of them attended private educational institutions (n = 101) and were college graduates (n = 148). A great majority of the respondents were earning less than 250,000 Philippine pesos annually or approximately USD 5,100. All respondents from the younger generation took undergraduate education with a majority of them already graduated (n = 121). A majority (n = 113) also studied in private colleges or

universities. Comparable with the elder generation, 124 out of the 200 respondents from Generation Z were also earning less than 250,000 Philippine pesos.

3.2 Language fluency of the respondents

Table 1. Gerontological comparisons on language fluency

How fluent are you on the following languages?						
Languages Generations	Cebuano		Filipino		English	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Generation X	4.35	0.91	3.69	1.15	4.18	0.89
Generation Z	3.92	1.06	3.71	1.04	4.15	0.89
t-test	0.000022*		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>	

* $t < 0.05$ *ns* – not significant

In the intergenerational comparisons of language fluency as shown in Table 1, a significant difference was found in the fluency of both generations on Cebuano language. While both generations agree that they are fluent in the said language, the statistical analysis described that the younger generation rated themselves to be less fluent than Generation X. This difference will be emphasized in the latter sections wherein the elder generation mentioned the language that they use to their children and the experiences of the younger generation with their family language policies. No significant differences were found in the language fluency of the respondents in the Filipino and English languages wherein they both generally agree that they are fluent in the said languages.

3.2 Language use for everyday communication

Table 2. Gerontological comparisons on languages used for everyday communication

What languages do you use for everyday communication?						
Languages Generations	Cebuano		Filipino		English	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Generation X	4.48	0.92	2.88	1.45	3.33	1.26
Generation Z	4.24	1.08	3.01	1.32	3.26	1.09
t-test	0.02*		<i>ns</i>		<i>ns</i>	

* $t < 0.05$ *ns* – not significant

As for the intergenerational comparisons on everyday language use, Table 2 shows that both generations are neutral in their use of the Filipino and English languages. It is important to note that a significant difference, albeit minimal, was found in the everyday use of both generations of the Cebuano language wherein the elder generation stated that they prefer to use the said language more than Generation Z. The explanation for this phenomenon will be explained in the data triangulation at the latter part of this study.

3.3 Language used for formal communication

Table 3. Gerontological comparisons on languages used for formal communication

What languages do you use for everyday communication?						
Languages Generations	Cebuano		Filipino		English	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Generation X	3.67	1.33	2.91	1.55	3.84	1.25
Generation Z	2.93	1.25	2.81	1.24	4.2	0.91
t-test	0.000000016*		<i>ns</i>		0.001*	

* $t < 0.05$ *ns* – not significant

In the context of language use for formal communication, Table 3 shows that there is no significant difference in the use of the Filipino language as both generations mention that they are neutral on the said variable. Significant differences were found in the use of the Cebuano and English languages. It can be observed that the elder generation uses Cebuano more and English is primarily used by the younger generation.

3.3 Gerontological variations on language attitudes

This sub-section provides the data on the intergenerational language attitudes of the respondents from both generations X and Z. Notwithstanding the noticeable similarities in frequency results, a general significant difference was found in the statistical analysis of their language attitudes for everyday communication. Table 4 shows that the actual count of the respondents' viewpoints proves that there are intergenerational differences. Majority of the respondents (n = 263) prefer the Cebuano language to be used for everyday communication. It is also important to note that a significant number of participants from generation Z (n = 69) chose Filipino for this communicative situation. As such, this study confirms that generational differences affect the respondents' language attitudes on everyday communication.

Table 4. Gerontological language attitudes on everyday communication

What language do you prefer for everyday communication?		Generations		Total	
		Generation X	Generation Z		
Cebuano	Count	142	121	263	
	Expected Count	131.5	131.5	263	
Filipino	Count	35	69	104	
	Expected Count	52	52	104	
English	Count	23	10	33	
	Expected Count	16.5	16.5	33	
Total	Count	200	200	400	
	Expected Count	200	200	400	
				χ^2	0.000129*

$\chi^2 < 0.05$

For the participants' language attitudes on formal communication, the frequency of their answers does not substantially deviate from the expected count for statistical difference. Table 5 shows that both generations chose English as their preferred language for communicating with their supervisors, administrators, clients, and professors. As such, this study confirms the null hypothesis that there are no generational differences in the language attitudes of the respondents on formal communication.

Table 5. Gerontological language attitudes on formal communication

What language do you prefer for formal communication?		Generations		Total	
		Generation X	Generation Z		
Cebuano	Count	18	12	30	
	Expected Count	15	15	30	
Filipino	Count	19	22	41	
	Expected Count	20.5	20.5	41	
English	Count	163	166	329	
	Expected Count	164.5	164.5	329	
Total	Count	200	200	400	
	Expected Count	200	200	400	
				χ^2	0.485

$\chi^2 < 0.05$

Table 6 shows that the frequency of the participants' responses does not extensively stray from the expected count for statistical difference regarding their viewpoints on the Philippine national language. Looking at the overall figures, more than half of the respondents (n = 238) prefer to maintain Filipino as the country's national language. It can also be observed that a great minority of the participants (n = 110) prefer the Cebuano language to replace Filipino. Hence, this study confirms the null hypothesis that there are no generational differences in the attitudes of the respondents on the Philippine national language.

Table 6. Gerontological language attitudes on the Philippine national language

What language should be considered as the Philippine national language?		Generations		Total
		Generation X	Generation Z	
Cebuano	Count	64	46	110
	Expected Count	55	55	110
Filipino	Count	112	126	238
	Expected Count	119	119	238
English	Count	23	25	48
	Expected Count	24	24	48
Other Languages	Count	1	3	4
	Expected Count	2	2	4
Total	Count	200	200	400
	Expected Count	200	200	400
χ^2				0.183

$\chi^2 < 0.05$

4. Discussions

4.1 Gist of the quantitative data

In the gerontological comparison of quantitative data from the Cebuano plurilingual communities of Cebu and Davao, a significant difference was found in the fluency of both generations in the Cebuano language wherein the elder generation rated themselves to be more fluent. The said generation also uses the same language for everyday communication. Statistical variations were also found in the languages used for formal communication. Generation X primarily uses Cebuano while generation Z primarily uses English and then Filipino. As for their language attitudes on everyday communication, despite both generations having similar analogies that they prefer the Cebuano language, their frequencies digress from the expected statistical count that maintains the null hypothesis. As such, for the said context, this research substantiates the alternative hypothesis that there are generational differences in the language attitudes of the respondents on everyday communication. In contrast, the participants' viewpoints on formal communication and the Philippine national language reveal that they prefer to use the English language for the former and desire to maintain the Filipino language for the latter.

4.1 Gist of the qualitative data

Varying opinions were gathered from the respondents with regard to their viewpoints on the Cebuano language. Participants from both generations aspire that their language will develop along with their predominantly English-speaking society and that it will be applied to practice concepts that will be useful for the sensibilities of the younger generations. Respondents from Davao side of generation X expressed the same, but they also mentioned that there is a need for educational materials in their community to be localized in their context as those that were provided by the government were based in the context of Cebu City. It is a common discourse for the elder generation to consider English as an international language that their children can utilize if they eventually decide to work overseas. This is the primary motivation as to their advocacy to intensify teaching in the Philippine educational system. They also recognize the role of Filipino as the national language that unites the various ethnolinguistic groups of the country. They mentioned that even if they fluently speak the Cebuano language, when they talk with their fellow Visayans, such as the Warays and the Ilonggos, they use the Filipino language as it is evident for them that they have completely different languages. Most of the respondents from the elder generation prefer to maintain Filipino as the Philippine national language.

The younger generation emphasized that the strong influence of the English language in Cebu and the Filipino language in Davao affect their proficiency in the Cebuano language. As such, this is the primary reason that the researcher identified the preference of generation Z for maintaining Filipino as the national language, instead of the Cebuano language that dominates their communities. They also believe that there is no need for the Philippine educational system to intensify the teaching of the English language as it is already dominating the public linguistic sphere. While they recognize English as an international language, their generation criticized the implementation of 'English Only' policies in their schools wherein they were only required to speak English inside their institutions. They said that this policy fines students for speaking Philippine languages. Furthermore, they added that instead of encouraging the students to contribute to the discussions of their classes, many were forced to keep quiet as they were not confident enough in English as a spoken language. In

turn, their education is compromised simply by the enforcement of the English language. All respondents, meanwhile, stated that, at present, Filipino should be maintained as the Philippine national language for it connects the population who speak varying languages.

Conclusion

Upon the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data, it is discernable that both generations have varying viewpoints with regard to the Cebuano and English languages. Generation X may prefer their children to learn the Cebuano language but this does not result in fruition as their beliefs on the English language prevent this from happening. The data from this study proves that the elder generations' views on language affected the fluency of generation Z in the Cebuano language. Both generations have conflicting views on the English language as the younger ones prefer to lessen its teaching in their schools. There are no conflicting data when it comes to the Filipino language. Generation Z emphasized that the English and Filipino languages affected their fluency in the Cebuano language. As such, they prefer to speak the said languages in the context of everyday communication. They also ended up speaking English for formal communication as the elder generation accentuated its role as an international language. While a majority of the respondents from both generations preferred the use of the Cebuano language for everyday communication, the actual count of their results deviate from the expected count that coincides with the null hypothesis. Consequently, this study confirms that gerontological variations affect the respondents' language attitudes on everyday communication. Lastly, no significant differences were in their views that English should be used for formal communication and the maintenance of Filipino as the Philippine national language.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of the paper.

Author Contribution

The author confirms sole responsibility for the following: study conception and design, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, and manuscript preparation.

Appendix A: Demographic data of the respondents

Generation X Year of Birth (Age)	Frequency	Type of Educational Institution Last Attended	Frequency
1965 (53)	10	Public	99
1966 (52)	13	Private	101
1967 (51)	11	Educational Attainment	Frequency
1968 (50)	7	Elementary School Graduate	2
1969 (49)	15	High School Graduate	13
1970 (48)	28	Technical-Vocational Course	1
1971 (47)	19	College Undergraduate	32
1972 (46)	13	College Graduate	148
1973 (45)	12	Master's Degree	4
1974 (44)	9	Income Bracket (in Philippine Pesos)	Frequency
1975 (43)	14	0 - 250,000	124
1976 (42)	11	250,000 - 400,000	49
1977 (41)	7	400,000 - 800,000	21
1978 (40)	17	800,000 - 2,000,000	4
1979 (39)	14	More than 2,000,000	2
Mean of Age	46.83		
Generation Z Year of Birth (Age)	Frequency	Type of Educational Institution Last Attended	Frequency
1995 (23)	42	Public	87
1996 (22)	32	Private	113

1997 (21)	40	Educational Attainment	Frequency
1998 (20)	45	College Undergraduate	79
1999 (19)	41	College Graduate	121
Mean of Age	20.92	Income Bracket (in Philippine Pesos)	Frequency
		0 - 250,000	124
		250,000 - 400,000	42
		400,000 - 800,000	14
		800,000 - 2,000,000	13
		More than 2,000,000	7

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