

Language Vitality Case of Higaonon Language in Rogongon, Iligan City

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ABSTRACT

In a globalized world today, the Indigenous Peoples' languages have been impacted by the avalanche of socio-politico-economic factors which result to language instability. One of the IP languages in Mindanao, Philippines is the Higaonon language which is threatened with various social impacts. This study investigated the vitality of the Higaonon language using the EGIDS by Lewis & Simons (2010) as a tool and interviewed key informants. Qualitative method and descriptive analysis were used. Given the gap on the unmatched finding of ethnologue about the language domains and the DepEd policy in supporting the IP language, the researchers immersed themselves in a select area where Higaonon is used. Using the EGIDS, it was revealed that the Higaonon language is at Level 6b, threatened and vulnerable. However, some responses from informants indicated that the Higaonon language is vehicular somehow showing that is used in wider communication, education, and trade. On the other hand, it is shifting due to various factors that affect language progress. Important ideas from the narratives of the key informants are: mostly domestic use of the language, speakers' discrimination due to the use of the language, inferiority of one's ethnic identity, and motivation on sustaining the language use even outside the Philippines. Due to this, local policies and programs are enumerated to facilitate the survival and sustainability of the Higaonon language. The findings might be limited due to immersion into one area, therefore further investigations in various periphery areas where Higaonon is used are recommended.

Key words: Higaonon, Language vitality, EGIDS, Intergenerational transmission, MTB-MLE

INTRODUCTION

The Higaonon language is one of the indigenous languages in Mindanao coded as [mba]. It is a primary language used by ethnic community members and not known yet to be taught in schools. It has an estimated ten thousand to one million users. The language vitality is stable which means, though it is not sustained by formal institutions, the language is used in the community and at home, adults and children alike (Ethnologue, 2024).

On the other hand, the report shown is in contrast to the effort of the Department of the Department of Education (DepEd) towards the idea of culturally responsive education for the indigenous people through the Department Order No. 62, s. 2011, which created the policy framework to contextualize the education or culture-based education, and it signifies a mismatch of the outcome of the said institution. The effort was boosted during the enactment of Republic Act No. 10533 or known as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 that opened the way to introduce the mother tongue based-multilingual education (MTB-MLE) through the Department Order No. 32, s. 2015 as guide for schools with IP learners in contextualizing their programs. In the case of Higaonon as an identified indigenous cultural community, it was not originally part of the nineteen local languages to be first taught, however in the rise of the need to use the language, materials to teach the Higaonon language emerged as evident in the available but very few learning resource. The latest one is the simple guide for Higaonon Orthography published in 2017 (SIL, 2024).

With this, two competing notions are at par: the language status report by institution and the perception of locals of the government's efforts in sustaining their language. Hence, ethnolinguistic vitality study on the language is desired especially in a particular area where this language is being used.

The framework operates in the dissection of language vitality is the ethnolinguistic vitality theory (EVT) introduced by Giles et al. (1977). This assesses the sociocultural features that have an influence in the strength of the language or its vitality in the context of multilingual setting. This describes the social behavior of a group when in contact with other ethnolinguistic group which distinctly exhibits the so-called ethnolinguistic identity. Hence, this is being separates them with others as collective individuals with the same language and/or culture. Moreover, vitality of ethnolinguistic group determines the inclusion of demographic features, institutional representations, and status (Lindell et al., 2023). To evaluate how strong the language is in contact within the given sphere of multilingual rumble, looking into these features of ethnolinguistic vitality brings thorough assessment of the language being studied and significantly updates its vitality status.

Ethnolinguistic vitality is also a way of finding the ability of the ethnic group to maintain and protect its existence as time goes and remain as a group with distinctive identity and language. It can also be a way of transmitting the group's language and cultural practices, sustainability of demography and institutions, social integrity as a group, and social cohesion onto the coming generation (Ehala, 2015). In simple flow, this is intergenerational activity that is extant to ensure the continuity of generations and its ethnolinguistic identity. It is hegemonizing itself within society, but not necessarily influences other ethnolinguistic groups.

EVT requires a tough and demanding time to study a target group due to the features mentioned while employing both quantitative and qualitative steps in revealing the actual status of the group's language. This is true when imagining studying the Higaonon tribe as whole considering its dispersion geographically and majority is residing in the far flung areas of different provinces where they can be found. Hence, the study seeks to delimit its parameter to Rogongon in Iligan City. This was chosen because of its historical claim that the roots of the majority of the Higaonon migrants originated in this area accounted by a native speaker and cultural worker of the tribe. Moreover, in order to achieve the objective of the study to specifically assess the language of the tribe, the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) of Lewis and Simons (2010) is used to further discuss the language status rather than collectively involving the whole areas of EVT.

In the EGIDS, thirteen levels with labels are identified to assess the language vitality and its proneness to endangerment. The target is not only to identify one level of the language, however, by basing from the narratives of the native speakers about how they know about their own language. Given also the EGIDS decision tree as diagrammed by Lewis and Simons, the interpretation must be based on the key questions therein as guide. Apparently, this is also a way of trying to address the weakness side of the concept of boxing into one level of the language being investigated because it does not conform to common ways of quantifying responses statistically compared to other instruments. However, EGIDS remains the widely used instrument when dealing with language vitality and can help in establishing the ethnolinguistic vitality status of a particular group. Meanwhile, it reexamines the language vitality by studying one of the peripheries of Higaonon domicile and how strong or vulnerable the language is in the multilingual context considering the recency of access in the locale.

To conduct the reexamination and find the two competing notions mentioned here, this paper identified specific inquiries to look for the language vitality of the Higaonon people.

1. What is the status of the Higaonon Language in Rogongon in terms of:

- a. Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS)
 - b. Personal narratives of the local
2. What local policies and programs can be implemented in the community to preserve the Higaonon Language?

RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

The global crisis of language endangerment has been a focal point of linguistic research for decades. Krauss (1992) initially highlighted the alarming rate of language extinction, predicting that only 10% of the world's languages were safe from extinction. Simons and Lewis (2012) revisited this issue using the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) and data from Ethnologue. They observed regional disparities, with language extinction rates exceeding 70% in countries like Australia, Canada, and the United States, compared to less than 10% in sub-Saharan Africa. Simons and Lewis suggested that colonization types—settlement and exploitation—as well as modern urbanization, play significant roles in language endangerment. For instance, Ferrer et al. (2023) explores the decreasing number of the speakers of Pangasinan, it is the eighth spoken language of the Philippines. They explore the effects of language vitality. It highlights the language history of the Philippines, policies, and the benefits that globalization can give for revitalization. It was also mentioned in this study how educators and stakeholders address language endangerment. Their findings underscore the complexity of language preservation, shaped by historical, social, political, and environmental factors.

Studies on indigenous languages reveal their critical role in cultural identity and heritage. Reid (2018) notes that the Philippines' 175 indigenous languages face varying degrees of endangerment, with at least 30 languages at risk. In the study of Villanueva & Baluyos (2014) affirmed that the Philippines is home to numerous indigenous people. However, the exposure of the non-tribal settlers has exposed the tribe to the external influences that lead to varying levels of fluency in their native language. While some members are fluent in the majority language, some face challenges in maintaining their Subanen language. The findings from this study determined that the extent of Subanen ancestry, rather than geographic location, significantly impacts language retention. That factor such as language contact, lack of parental involvement, intermarriage, and discrimination have contributed to the decline of language use.

The Subanen language, for example, faces declining vitality due to language contact, mixed marriages, and parental apathy (Villanueva & Baluyos, 2014). Similarly, the Dumagat communities in Aurora, Bulacan, and Quezon provinces face challenges such as social stigma, migration, and exogamy, leading to reduced use of their native language (Mabuan, 2021). Despite these challenges, there remains a strong community desire to preserve indigenous languages, emphasizing the need for institutional support and cultural pride. Another threat to language proliferation is linguistic imperialism and cultural erosion. The prioritization of English and Filipino in education and governance has contributed to linguistic imperialism, overshadowing smaller indigenous languages (McFarland, 1994). This phenomenon is exacerbated by parental preferences for dominant languages, social stigma against indigenous languages, and globalization.

Language loss leads to the erosion of cultural traditions, historical knowledge, and community identity (Villanueva & Baluyos, 2014). Luza (2023) affirmed that the development of the identity and concept of indigenous peoples is anchored on the internal and external experiences of the community. Those that refer to social norms, standards, and policies that affect the assertion of the Indigenous peoples in the country are external factors. In contrast, those that refer to the lens or perspective of Indigenous peoples based on their organic culture and indigenous narratives are internal factors. The Republic Act No. 8371

also known as the Indigenous Peoples' Right Act of 1997 (IPRA 1997) and other government policies are part of the external factors, while the internal basis for understanding the concept of "indigenous" includes community assertions and indigenous cultures. These two factors must be mediated to understand the notion of Indigenous Peoples. In addition, Dumas (2022) stated that Indigenous Peoples Rights are focused on three main areas: ancestral territory, self-determination, and the right to culture and identity and this can often be presented as collective demands. However, these perspectives neglect the evolving realities within the indigenous territories. Though these collective demands are valid, there is evidence that the community does not benefit equally, and, in some cases, it worsened their economic status. In some of the communities, the implementation of these rights led to environmental damage. These findings highlight the urgent need for inclusive policies that value all languages equally.

The linguistic setup of Higaonon across the multilingual forces reiterate the need to check into the stability of the language through the ethnolinguistic vitality theory to project its survival rate or status in the current situation given the observable decline among speakers on using the language. Resisting the language change and losing its identity along the way, the EVT is the stance for the monitoring of the language survival (Bonifacio et al., 2022). Jamallullail and Nordin (2023) stress that the survival of language is salvaging the group cultural identity and avoiding itself from extinction. Strength and sustainability are two factors to consider in the language survival. The attempt to preserve the language is the sustainability factor and the population serves as the strength, in one way, define the ability to survive. Moreover, Mufwene (2017) argued that linguists should theorize about language vitality more adequately than has been the case. He emphasized that since the early 1990s, language endangerment and loss (LEL) concerns have been raised, and language advocacy was delayed far behind linguists' current investment in theoretical developments about language vitality. The article of Obligar (2024) highlighted the key factors to the loss of linguistic identity of Indigenous people, such as the influence of English as a global lingua franca, multilingual influence of media, and limited government-support programs. This is a crucial part of communication that enables people to convey their thoughts, which helps us express our feelings and ideas.

Language death vis-à-vis language shift is a phenomenon where first language speakers are losing its nativity in their own language and use the second language as their preference for communication at home or outside and this is due to linguicide (Zuckermann, 2012) and glottophagy (Calvet, 2006). Lindell et al. (2023) explained the heterogeneity view in a negative way because of political and social trust which stereotypes the outgroup people. This can bring the limitations of rights of the minority group and favor the dominant. Cacay et al. (2023) examines how Higaonon youth preserved their native language amidst the evolution of social and cultural influences. Higaonon plays an important role in preserving the language and the indigenous culture, protecting the stories of the community and their traditions as well. The participants expressed their pride in protecting their language and gaining a deeper understanding and strong appreciation of their cultural heritage. In the study of Bonifacio et al. (2022) on the EV of Philippine Indigenous Groups, they mentioned that Higaonon is not vitally stable (dying) due to lack of ancestral oral traditions and documents which fade its linguistic distinctiveness. The ethnic group is vulnerable to changes and cultural assimilation. Hence, this calls for a revitalization project to salvage it. Abad and Abad (2022) implied that language with probable shift in the process is necessarily be prevented with revitalization activities or projects that uplift the status of language particularly the intragroup appreciation of their own ethnolinguistic identity. Practices such as documenting songs and teaching it to the new generation is essential. This is because the only way to reinstall the losing identity is the exposure of the various literary forms and performances, language usage, and using

materials that are readily available at school. According to Araya (2021), while there is a high vitality rate of a language use in the intragroup and observable in the communication process, the support of implementing policies that strengthen the language is a key to secure the literacy and proficiency among the native speakers. It is relevant when the policy is implemented and recognized in the educational system.

The Philippines provides a unique case study in language policy and planning (LPP), shaped by colonial history and modern-day globalization. Cobarrubias (1983) identified four ideologies guiding LPP: linguistic assimilation, vernacularization, linguistic pluralism, and internationalization. Historically, Spanish and later English dominated as colonial languages, sidelining indigenous languages (Smolicz, 1984). Post-independence policies aimed to promote Filipino as a unifying language, but the dominance of English in education and commerce has marginalized local languages. Programs like Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) were introduced to promote vernacularization, but challenges such as limited resources and societal biases persist (Reid, 2018). The coexistence of these ideologies reflects deeper struggles over identity, inclusion, and power. In the research on utilizing educational technology for the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous Languages and Culture, Bustillo et al. (2024) investigated how drawing upon in-depth interviews and thematic analysis frame identity, encourages resilience against assimilation pressures, and promotes cultural sovereignty. The findings of this study emphasized the crucial function of language and cultural revitalization in affirming community cohesion, delivering ancestral awareness, and defying cultural extinction.

Furthermore, to institute an independent study of language revitalization, more categorical investigation, research, and theorization are necessary. A community-based approach is best to the intervention program in language maintenance and revitalization and inspires parents to practice speaking their heritage language at home to preserve their language. Also, a detailed objective and list of activities of the program must be made to guarantee the preservation of the language (Alejan et al., 2021).

The findings of these studies collectively emphasize the need for adaptive and inclusive language policies. Strengthening indigenous language education, promoting community participation, and addressing societal biases are essential steps. Additionally, the Philippines' experience offers valuable lessons for other multilingual nations navigating similar challenges.

In summary, the reviewed literature and studies reveal the multifaceted challenges of language endangerment and the urgent need for proactive measures to preserve linguistic diversity. The interplay of historical, social, and political factors underscores the complexity of this global issue, while the Philippine context provides a microcosm of the broader struggle to balance national unity, global competitiveness, and cultural preservation.

METHODOLOGY

The research is qualitative and used the descriptive analysis to present and digest the data gathered of how Higaonon Language is vitally sustained or gradually shifting in the process amidst the influence of various linguistic surges. The study locale is the Brgy. Rogongon, Iligan City. It is considerably a big territorial area of the Higaonon group together with Meranaw. The road to the area was among the recent constructed by the local government, wherefore there can be an easy access to the center. The key informants were Higaonon native, living and born in Rogongon. The age range is between 20-70. There were diverse informants to meet the perception of different generations of the particular group. Most of them are bilingual, if not multilingual. The selection was random through referrals. A biracial Higaonon is not selected to ensure minimal influence within the language climate at

home of the speaker. To protect the privacy and identity of the informants, their names and other demographic descriptions that can possibly harm them were not asked.

The researchers used primarily the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) by Lewis and Simons (2010) to briefly summarize the language status vitality. The lower level means the vitality is high or stable while the high level signifies low vitality rate or death of the language. The guide-based on the decision tree of identifying the level of the language is partially followed because the intervention made by the researchers was to possibly answer more than one level to accommodate the key informants’ responses based on their experience and observation as native speakers. Hence, asking all the EGIDS descriptions was done even if it is obviously some descriptions do not apply to their case (e.g. Higaonon as an international language). Lewis and Simons (2010) added that some levels are already identified, most especially the case of level 0 which can count in the fingers the numbers of international languages (e.g. English, Japanese, Chinese, Bahasa Indonesia). Interviews were conducted using the instrument while additional questions in clarifying some answers and narratives were done. The collection of data was possibly with the help of the community leader and wanted to increase awareness of the situation of her fellows.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Knowing the status of language and the preservation efforts of the native speakers and external individuals can entail a high vitality rate of Higaonon Language, at the same manner promoting the indigenous culture. Ethnic sense of pride in their identity comes from the preservation and realization of the importance of the culture and tribal standards (Cacay & Taja-on, 2023). This section presents the data and the results obtained from the interview of the locals.

Higaonon Language Status using EGIDS

The refined version of GIDS into Expanded GIDS is not identical as the latter becomes more eminent in the suggestions and comments of the users to improve the usage in looking into the language vitality status. They also included the language vitality and endangerment (LVE) scale of UNESCO as a feature and merging the GIDS and LVE (Lewis & Simons, 2012). Notwithstanding, following the guide questions intended for the usage of EGIDS was employed, however based on how the interview went rather than staying on the idea that the language is put in one level the possibility of having a multiple response in the scale was entertained. The following table shows the EGIDS and this can be divided into five key statements (or in the original version, key questions) to cast a decision on the status. The two levels at the bottom can only use the key statement 1, the top four levels must answer the key statements 1 and 2, and the other levels key statements 1, 3, 4 (or 5 depending on the answer).

Table 1. EGIDS on Higaonon Language

Level	Label	Description	UNESCO
0	International	The language is widely used between nations in trade, knowledge exchange, and international policy.	Safe
1	National	The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government at the nationwide level.	Safe
2	Provincial	The language is used in education, work, mass media, and government within official administrative subdivisions of a nation	Safe
3	Wider Communication	The language is widely used in work and mass media without official status to transcend language differences across a region.	Safe

4	Educational	The language is in vigorous oral use and this is reinforced by sustainable transmission of literacy in the language in formal education.	Safe
5	Developing	The language is vigorous and is being used in written form in parts of the community though literacy is not yet sustainable.	Safe
6a	Vigorous	The language is used orally by all generations and the situation is sustainable.	Safe
6b	Threatened	The language is still used orally within all generations but there is a significant threat to sustainability because at least one of the conditions for sustainable oral use is lacking.	Vulnerable
7	Shifting	The child-bearing generation can use the language among themselves but they do not normally transmit it to their children.	Definitely endangered
8a	Moribund	The only remaining active speakers of the language are members of the grandparent generation	Severely endangered
8b	Nearly extinct	The only remaining speakers of the language are elderly and have little opportunity to use the language.	Critically endangered
9	Dormant	There are no fully proficient speakers, but some symbolic use remains as a reminder of heritage identity for an ethnic community.	Extinct
10	Extinct	No one retains a sense of ethnic identity associated with the language, even for symbolic purposes.	Extinct

Note: *0-highest vitality status, 10-no language vitality/ dead language

Key statement 1: Current Identity function of Higaonon

There are four identified possible answers to this statement, either historical (level 10), heritage (level 9), home (levels 4-8) or vehicular (levels 0-3). Higaonon can fall into both home and vehicular per se. The language is home when it is used daily in oral communication. In an interview to key informants, the Higaonon is used at home daily among the family members. Parents are using Higaonon when talking to their children. Mapping this into EGIDS, this can be on level 4 or 5. In Rogongon, it is on the level 5 because it is not formally learned in school except in the mother tongue class. Compared to the other provinces, there is a high usage of Higaonon at school. Meanwhile, a language is vehicular when it serves as lingua franca and used by second language learners in communication. It is believed that Higaonon has a wider communication within the area even though it is not evidently used in mass media regularly.

Key statement 2: Level of Official use of Higaonon

As it is mentioned in the preceding key statement, Higaonon is said to be vehicular in respect to the response of the key informants. It is in level 3 because the language is not yet officially recognized but it becomes a tool for intergroup communication. The reason why the language can also be considered into level 3 because of two reasons: first, this is used by community in trade, and second, the Meranaw in Rogongon learned the Higaonon and they can use it for communication; if not to understand the utterance of the native speaker. Eventually, this happened due to social contact and established a good relationship between the two ethnolinguistic groups. They shared common territory without inflicting one another. They see themselves as brothers rather than different groups, hence the Higaonon is used by

the counterpart language. However, there is no certain knowledge if the new immigrant group whose language is Cebuano-Iliganon can use the Higaonon to communicate with them.

Key statement 3: Higaonon Parents Transmitting the Language to their Children

Key informants believed that many Higaonon families teach their children the language and use it. Indeed yes, it is used somehow. In response, the family tries to teach their children by using the language when communicating because it is the main avenue to best learn the Higaonon. They are more convenient and expressive in communication. Even outside home, the younger generation use it to converse with their fellow Higaonon. The intragroup communication and development of language is being facilitated with this dynamic among the speakers. However, there is a need to investigate also on the prevalence of the factors why some minority language speakers feel ashamed of their heritage particularly in using the language which signifies they belong to a particular minority group and received discriminatory remarks. This is commonly observable among the younger generation which can be a factor to avoid language shift in the process.

Key statement 4: Higaonon Speakers Literacy Status

When the key informants informed the researcher about the literacy status, it was found that it is 'incipient' status. This states the introduction of the Higaonon Language informally in the community wherein there are only few literate populations in acquiring the language skills. This refers to the four macro skills of the language (listening, writing, reading, and speaking). Aside from school where the basic language learning is introduced through the mother tongue based, they created a school of tradition where they can gather the younger generation to learn the culture. However, this initiative is highly revitalizing the traditions and cultural activities and it was not mentioned to have special classes on the basic language that corresponds to improving the literacy of the new generation. Moreover, it is not also reported that they have many available resources for the written text of their language that can facilitate language learning.

Key statement 5: Youngest Generation of Higaonon as Proficient Speakers

The generations that are mostly speaking or using the Higaonon language are the parents and older. It can also be said that new generations are using the language, the children. Based on the key informants' conviction, the parents are not strict in requiring their children to fully use the language and majority are bilingual or multilingual, the shift is starting within the generation. It was also previously tackled the discrimination of being minority group speakers or the indigenous speakers because of the connotation associated to native speakers as ignorant, illiterate or even worst uncivilized. This remark has pulling down the confidence and trust of the heritage speakers to have pride of their own tongue. Hence, the language can be labeled as 'shifting' and 'threatened'.

Decision on the Vitality of Higaonon Language: Level 6b, threatened (Label) and vulnerable (UNESCO)

The dark grey shade in the EGIDS reveals the standing of the Higaonon status in Rogongon. It is threatened due to low transmission of the child-bearing generation to their children. Some responses fall under lower levels which signifies safer status with lighter shades can be noticed such as 3 (wider communication, safe), 4 (educational, safe), 5 (developing or trade, safe), and even higher than the declared level which is level 7 (shifting, definitely endangered) due to evidences provided by the key informants and greatly adds weight to the consideration of the status investigated. This also has an advantage of arguing and creating an intervention of employing all the descriptions, wherefore the probability that

different descriptions can be found in the community and how the language is treated by both the heritage and non-heritage speakers (referring to the Meranaw). Given this, the 'stable' claim and reported in ethnologue can be reassessed in the field where significant populations of Higaonons are. It might be that the report is concentrated in a particular area. Another finding is the usage of Higaonon in the educational system, in Rogongon the Higaonon is not fully employed even though there are available materials because the professional Higaonon as teachers use second language when communicating to younger Higaonon.

The EVT states the two main aspects of language survival factors: the sustainability and strength (Jamallullail & Nordin, 2023; Ehala, 2015). Higaonon speakers of Rogongon try to maintain their language amidst the influence of the external groups. Since multilingual in context, the Higaonon thrive and instill their heritage in the capacity they can give their understanding of the importance of intergenerational transmission and language climate (Lindell et al., 2023). While the number of speakers is necessary in order to comply with language strength, the possible decrease of usage due to preference of second language influence and the social pressure have subjected them, the new generation and some child-bearing generation, to fall in the bait of social hegemony. Special attention is noticed to the younger generation to easily cast aside their native language (Cacay & Taja-on, 2023). Mobility also takes part of the threat in language vitality (Araya, 2021; Cummins, 2000). What worse is the forceful displacement that affects their cultural and linguistic identity since their homelands are meaningful to them that signify their ethnic characteristics (Dumas, 2022). This is the shift due to needs arising (Abad & Abad, 2022). Sustainability requires a transmission of knowledge and the language itself. The help of social institutions, particularly the education sector uplifts the educational status of Higaonon that somehow saves the language from death. Locals in Rogongon have recognized the school of living traditions as a means of teaching the younger Higaonons of what they have to keep as their identity manifests from their tangible and intangible heritage. Albeit the effort and testament of the key informants, the Higaonon language is undeniably threatened and vulnerable of the intrusion of dominant language (Bonifacio et al., 2022; Alejan et al., 2021; Obligar, 2024) because of language competition (Mufwene, 2017), marginalization, globalization and language policies (Bustillo et al., 2024). Moreover, Pantao (2021) identified factors that can affect the vitality of a language such as language contact, mixed marriages, apathy to teach the language, and discrimination. In Mabuan (2021), these factors can be classified as social factors, institutional factors, and linguistic factors.

To safeguard the threats in language vitality and turns into demise, language recovery plan is essential (Ferrer & Brangan, 2022) and as a way of revitalization or language maintenance (Alejan et al., 2021). Plan including particularly the update of Higaonon Grammar (Munger, 1986) directs the continuity of language use and can be learned by the next generation and even the interested outsiders to know Higaonon. The last orthography related to grammar is in 2017. Language planning and policy (LPP) must be decolonized since the current LPP in the country favors Filipino and English which detrimental to positioning the indigenous languages survival (Zeng & Li, 2023). Hence, clarity of LPP in the Philippines to protect and preserve the indigenous languages like the Higaonon is desired (Nares, n.d.). The advent of educational technology can become a tool for the access of language related activities that can be primarily used in schools (Bustillo et al., 2024). In protecting their lands, since the relationship between homeland and their language are very relative, recognition of IPRA of 1997 or RA 8371 gives them more power to sustain their community's culture (Asian Development Bank, 2019, Luza, 2023).

Narratives of the Higaonon Speakers on their Language

The native speakers are the best people to describe their own mother tongue. They are people who are impacted with social pressures and marginalizations that bring ethnolinguistic effects on its stability. The narratives accumulated aside from the use of EGIDS are given space to specify their experiences as speakers.

The traditional therapist said that the Higaonon language is used at home only when their fellow adult Higaonon communicates with each other and when kids are playing with their peers, not when they are out of town because they are ashamed of their language. After all, they resemble the “Badjao” people who are another ethnolinguistic group that receives heavy discrimination in the society. This means that the Higaonon people are inferior in their language. In the study of Bonifacio et al. (2022) on the EV of Philippine Indigenous Groups, they mentioned that Higaonon is not vitally stable (dying) due to lack of ancestral oral traditions and documents which fade its linguistic distinctiveness. The ethnic group is vulnerable to changes and cultural assimilation.

Another traditional healer narrated that when her family abroad tends to talk with each other over the phone they use the Higaonon language. When they miss each other, they tend to use the Higaonon language. This means that to retain the language, the user of the language should patronize it. This is a corollary to the study by Cacay et al. (2023) examine how Higaonon youth preserve their native language amidst the evolution of social and cultural influences. Using descriptive explanatory design, the researchers investigated the views of the six Higaonon students (five males and one female) on learning their native language. The data gathered through surveys and semi-structured interviews reveal that Higaonon plays an important role in preserving the language and the Indigenous culture, protecting the stories of the community and their traditions as well. The participants expressed their pride in protecting their language and gaining a deeper understanding and strong appreciation of their cultural heritage.

Another study that supports this claim is the study of Jamallullail and Nordin (2023), the survival of the language is salvaging the group's cultural identity and avoiding itself from extinction. Strength and sustainability are two factors to consider in language survival. The attempt to preserve the language is the sustainability factor, and the population serves as the strength that defines the ability to survive.

The traditional therapist always advises her family members to use the Higaonon language even if they are outside, in school, or at the market but most of the young family members do not use it since they are reserved to use the language; This means that to retain the language, the user of the language should use it. This is supported by Bonifacio et al. (2022) presented in their study that ethnolinguistic vitality refers to a group's ability to preserve its cultural and linguistic identity against assimilation. In this article, he examined the six Philippine indigenous groups such as T'boli, Mandaya, Higaonon, Talaandig, Manobo, and Subanen regarding their language and identity preservation. Among the indigenous group, only the Mandaya showed strong language vitality that meets the standard criteria while others did not, they are facing challenges like declining traditions, absence of documentation, language loss, and discrimination and this may leave them at a greater risk of assimilation.

Research on indigenous languages, such as those by Villanueva and Baluyos (2014) and Mabuan (2021), highlights the precarious state of linguistic diversity in the Philippines. The Subanen and Dumagat communities exemplify the struggles of maintaining linguistic vitality amidst external pressures like social stigma and internal factors such as parental neglect. These studies underscore the importance of community involvement and institutional backing in language preservation.

Local Policies and Programs in Preserving Higaonon Language

Reid (2018) points the promotion of mother tongue is a key towards appreciation of vernacularization. With the current challenges faced by Higaonon as IP and to enrich the promotion of mother tongue to the community itself, certain local policies and programs are aimed to reflect the results in EGIDS and narratives.

Local Policies

1. Integration of Higaonon Language in Local Schools.

Develop and formalize an Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) curriculum that incorporates the Higaonon language as part of the action of the Department of Education to language maintenance and protecting the language strength and sustainability. It can ensure that Higaonon is taught or used as a medium of instruction, particularly in early grades even if the eradication of MTB-MLE in the lower levels is implemented.

2. Official Recognition and Support

To use the language is to retain it alive. The political influence of the local government in establishing different language policies particularly in an ethnolinguistic community adhere to ethnic empowerment and lifting their own language. In order to advocate for official recognition of the Higaonon language as a vital cultural heritage and a medium for local governance and community events, this must be used in the communication among members and freely expressed in the offices where the majority of speakers of this group exists. For instance, create local ordinances that mandate the use of Higaonon in public signage, official documents, and radio communication where applicable.

3. Cultural Preservation Ordinances

Some unwritten local policies in the community are desired to be written to legalize it and gain recognition from the authority. Hence, reenforcing policies that protect and promote Higaonon cultural practices, including oral traditions, songs, and rituals that use the native language are relevantly enacted.

4. Anti-Discrimination and Awareness Policies

Native speakers of Higaonon are vulnerable to social pressures and prejudices. They are belittled and marginalized in mainstream society, to avoid this for them, they are trying to socialize and assimilate their culture and language to adapt to what the society deems acceptable and norms. Enact policies that prohibit discrimination based on the use of indigenous languages and promote cultural pride and respect for the Higaonon identity are necessary.

Local Programs

1. Higaonon Language Documentation and Resource Development

Records on the language are found to be crucial in salvaging the culture as well because language carries culture. Languages with several records are accessed by individuals who are native speakers as well as non-native speakers who have interest in studying and learning the language. In the case of Higaonon as a big language based on their geographical occupation, this language is supposed to have an established document that can be a resource for understanding the language and culture. To do this, collaboration with linguists and cultural workers to document the Higaonon language comprehensively, including vocabulary, grammar, and oral literature. This leads to developing teaching materials such as dictionaries, storybooks, and orthography guides.

2. Community Language Revitalization Workshops

As the school of living traditions is available in the Higaonon community, it can be easy for the advocates to continually progress the language by revitalizing it to avoid the threats and shifts that have been found in the study. In line with this, to conduct language

revitalization workshops that encourage intergenerational transmission of the language by engaging elders to teach traditional language use to the younger generation is yearned for.

3. Cultural and Language Festivals

Similar to the common activities in urban or mainstream society, cultural and language festivals are showcased. Hence, organizing annual festivals celebrating Higaonon culture and language, showcasing traditional songs, dances, and storytelling are invigorating these as something to be appreciated and kept for.

4. Higaonon Language Media Programs

As media is prevalent in communication and entertainment, language media programs are also good shows to educate and at the same time entertain people. Noting the quiz bees in television, for instance the Bahasa Indonesia, non-native speakers are the target of teaching the foreign learners to learn it. This is the same equation applied to Higaonon but it must be started with the native speakers as it is developing within the intragroup. Some possible tactics are to establish community radio programs, podcasts, or local TV shows in Higaonon to increase visibility and usage of the language in media.

5. Partnership with Local and National Institutions

Institutional support is a foundation to language sustainability in the society. Language thrives fueled by the enough support of the institutions. There can be two ways where this can be begun, local to national or vice versa. Partners can be with the Department of Education, Commission on Higher Education, and NGOs to fund and support language preservation projects. Language organizations are sought to work with as such Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), Commission on Filipino Language and other language organizations to create resources for the Higaonon language.

6. Language Immersion Programs

The best learning that individuals can experience is through immersion. Introduce immersion programs where participants, especially the youth, live with Higaonon-speaking families to learn the language in its natural context.

To preserve the Higaonon language, several local policies and programs can be initiated. First, integrating the Higaonon language into the formal education system through culturally responsive and contextualized teaching can strengthen its use among the younger generation. This can be supported by aligning with the Department of Education's (DepEd) contextualization. Local schools in areas with Higaonon learners should be encouraged to develop and utilize teaching materials in the Higaonon language, such as textbooks, storybooks, and other learning resources. Capacity-building programs for teachers, focusing on the Higaonon language and culture, can also ensure effective implementation of such initiatives. Second, community-driven language documentation projects can be established, including the creation of dictionaries, grammar guides, and orthographies, as well as the recording of oral traditions, songs, and folk stories. These efforts can safeguard the language and its cultural heritage for future generations. Third, community-based initiatives like cultural festivals, language workshops, and intergenerational storytelling sessions can encourage the active use of Higaonon in both formal and informal settings. Such activities can also boost the ethnic pride of speakers and reinforce the importance of the language within the community. Fourth, local government units (LGUs) can partner with indigenous leaders to develop policies promoting the inclusion of Higaonon in public signage, government services, and official events to elevate its visibility and use. Finally, advocacy campaigns that challenge stereotypes and promote respect for the Higaonon language and culture can address the social stigma and discrimination sometimes faced by indigenous speakers. These combined efforts will not only revitalize the Higaonon language but also ensure its sustainability amidst the multilingual forces in the region.

CONCLUSION

Studying the language vitality of an indigenous language ensures to monitor the vigor, ability to sustain, and strength of usage. This can map the status and update the records reported by the institutions, e.g. ethnologue. It also reveals the effect of the efforts made by the government on how far the language policies have gone in the grassroots. The study also exposed the influence of social pressures e.g. social cohesion, language integrity, marginalization, political play e.g. vague policies, insufficient language policy, land rights, and, economic status e.g. livelihood, trade market. As mentioned, problems in the previous studies decades ago are still prevailing as problems in the current community of Higaonon regarding their language. Modernity and technology are the main causes why the new generation is hooked on dominant culture and language over choosing their own language. Meanwhile, limitations are seen in the study and further investigations using the EGIDS or other instruments on language vitality are necessary to come up with valid and more generalized findings. It is recommended that a study such as this is applied in the periphery areas or similar areas where multicultural settings are observed to see how the Higaonon language behaves.

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