

## **Ethnolinguistic Vitality of the Subanen Communities in Ozamiz City, Philippines**

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### **Abstract**

The Philippines is inhabited by a number of indigenous groups of people. Thriving in Zamboanga Peninsula is the Subanen tribe which possesses a distinct language and culture. Coexistence with non-tribal settlers in the area exposes the Subanens to the influences of the majority group. Tribal members manifest proficiency in the majority language, but a number exhibit linguistic inadequacy in their mother tongue. This study aimed to conduct an actual test and an assessment of the ethnolinguistic vitality of the Subanen respondents from the tribal communities in Ozamiz City, Misamis Occidental. Researcher-made instruments were utilized to carry out the assessment. Results revealed the average vitality of the Subanen language in the city. Geographical location of the tribal community is not a predictor of the vitality of the indigenous language, but the extent of Subanen blood that the tribesmen have. Intrinsic and extrinsic factors such as language contact, parental apathy, mixed marriages, and tribal discrimination are contributory factors affecting the language vitality. The findings of this study may help propel the contemporary Subanens to take more decisive steps in revitalizing their first language for cultural preservation and tribal identity.

**Keywords:** culture, discrimination, indigenous, language, tribesmen

## Introduction

Language is considered as a repository of identity, history and human knowledge (Sussex, 2002). It also holds traditional wisdom (Krauss, 1996). However, maintaining a first language has become a problem when the use of another language is predominant in different speaking occasions and various communicative settings (Fishman, 1991). People tend to use the language of the majority group that may eventually lead to cultural and language assimilation (Allard & Landry, 1992; Tran, 2010). The mainstream language takes the superior stance, being perceived to elevate the social and economic status of the speakers, thus making the minority languages devoid of use (Baker, 2011). Consequently, speakers of the minority languages decrease in number (Saarikivi & Marten, 2012).

Language contact endangering a number of minority languages proves a worldwide phenomenon (Sussex, 2002; Obiero, 2010). The language of the outgroup is given more value and preference as people abandon their mother tongue in favor of the other, whether individually or collectively (Hall et al., 2011). For instance, Navajo people (American Indian) adopt the use of English in their tribal and judiciary meetings and those who attend formal education raise their children using English only (Fishman, 2001). Similarly, many children refrain from the use of their first languages as they submit to the English-only policy in schools (Krauss, 1996). Bilingual speakers of endangered languages prefer to read materials written in the majority language, and when they write they use it better than their mother tongue (Fishman, 2001).

The attitude of the speakers toward their indigenous languages influences significantly the language vitality (Belikov, 1994; Sachdev, 1998). When speakers view their heritage language negatively, the attitude hampers its transmission (Velázquez, 2013; Lee, 2014). Thus, ideological issues with respect to group identity are vital factors which determine the survival or extinction of minority languages (Ehala & Niglas, 2006). No language is superior or inferior to the others; all languages are equally complex, expressive, and complete as Rowe and Levine (2011) assert. Two or more languages are equal sources of pride and strength of the speakers (Coupland, 2012).

However, Fishman (2001) stresses that it is only the belief and acceptance of one's language as distinct that one continues to thrive amidst a multicultural environment. Similarly, the attitude of the mainstream society toward the minority groups affects the language maintenance patterns and ethnolinguistic vitality perceptions of the ethnic minority (Yamur, 2004).

In the Philippines, specifically in Zamboanga Peninsula, the Subanens coexist with non-indigenous settlers. Interactions with non-tribal people, therefore, become inevitable. In Ozamiz City, the majority group is called the "Bisaya," and the Subanens in the city, whether living in a remote, rural barangays or urban areas, are in regular contact with this majority group. With the eventual passing of years, a number of Subanens manifest a spontaneous and frequent use of the Bisayan dialect even when communicating with their fellow tribesmen. Others exhibit better linguistic skills when using the dialect than when using their mother tongue - the Subanen language. Romaine (2007) asserts that it is political, geographical, and economic factors which support the maintenance of linguistic and cultural diversity. Thus, realistic assessments need to be conducted to determine the status of a language in a community with respect to the speaking skills of its speakers (Krauss, 1996).

In the light of the observations aforecited, this study sought to determine the ethnolinguistic vitality of the Subanens in Ozamiz City. The variables included in this study were the respondents' status, demography, and institutional support. The status of the Subanens includes their social, economic, and educational conditions. Demography accounts the migration and mixed marriages in the tribal communities. Institutional support points out the political recognition and integration of the tribesmen, as well as the economic and educational assistance extended by the government to the indigenous communities. The findings of this study may help propel the contemporary Subanens to take more decisive steps in revitalizing their first language for cultural preservation and tribal identity.

## **Materials and Methods**

This study was conducted in nine Subanen communities located in the different barangays in Ozamiz City, Philippines. The research

areas were barangays Aguada, Malaubang, Bongbong, Kinuman Sur, Guimad, Trigos, Gala, Guingona, and Sitio Tipan in Stimson Abordo.

This study used the survey type of research using quantitative and qualitative designs. Researcher-made instruments were utilized based on the insights gained from the previous studies on ethnolinguistic vitality (Shaaban & Ghaith, 2002; Mufwene, 2004). The first instrument required interviews in determining the variables for ethnolinguistic vitality as to the status, demography, and institutional support. The second instrument was an observation checklist used in assessing the respondents' linguistic competence of the Subanen language.

The actual assessment catered to four linguistic skills that include understanding, speaking, reading, and writing. Understanding is a test which required the respondents to give the meaning of the Subanen words, phrases, and statements spoken by the research assistants. Speaking is the test which required the respondents to speak the Subanen equivalents of the 'Bisayan' set of words, phrases, and sentences listed. Reading is the test part which required the respondents to read the set of Subanen words, phrases, and sentences in Subanen-like manner. Writing is the test which required the respondents to write in Subanen expression the 'Bisayan' set of words, phrases, and sentences given. The respondents who had limited or no formal education readily admitted inability to respond to the writing test notwithstanding their knowledge of the expected answers.

Three Subanen research assistants acted as co-raters in determining the correctness of the respondents' performances. Each area for language test contained three words, three phrases, and three sentences deemed answerable using a basic knowledge of the Subanen language. Nine was the highest score that the respondents could obtain for each skill tested. The research instruments used had undergone the validation process before they were administered to the actual respondents of the study.

Subanen household heads were identified as respondents using a convenient sampling. A total of 180 Subanens participated in the study, 20 respondents from each barangay, and one per household. The researchers secured a prior informed consent from the Subanen tribal chieftain of Ozamiz City and members of the tribal council headed by the respective 'Gukums'/'Timuays' or the 'Bae' in the areas. The

consent of the respondents was also obtained after the researchers discussed with them the scope of the study, the anonymity, and confidentiality of their responses, as well as their right to refuse participation.

The performance of each respondent was rated based on the following scale: 0-1 (very poor/very weak vitality), 2-3 (poor/weak vitality), 4-5 (satisfactory/average vitality), 6-7 (very satisfactory/strong vitality), 8-9 (excellent/very strong vitality). The weighted mean and standard deviation were used in determining the respondents' performance in all linguistic skills tested. One-way ANOVA was used for determining the significant difference in the respondents' performance as to geographical location and blood lineage.

## **Results and Discussion**

The linguistic tests showed that among the respondents in barangays situated in the city proper, the Subanens in Malaubang have a weak vitality based on the poor performance in all linguistic skills assessed (Table 1). For the upper barangays such as Trigos, Guimad, and Kinuman Sur, the respondents in Guimad exhibited a similarly poor performance and so with the respondents in Guingona, a hinterland barangay like Stimson Abordo and Gala. The findings showed that the Subanen language is very strong in Gala while weak in Malaubang, Guimad, and Guingona. Results also showed that the pure Subanens had the highest performance in the four skills tested compared to those with less Subanen lineage. The finding implies that the degree of the Subanen blood poses a difference in the tribesmen's linguistic competence in the tribal language. The result may be attributed to the frequency of exposure to the Subanen language in the various domains of communication.

A recurrent remark from many respondents on their failure to achieve proficiency in their native tongue is the unfavorable attitude of the non-tribal people around them. Although the undue indifference toward the Subanens is no longer profound, the tribesmen still carry with them the scar of overt degradation and ridicule that their predecessors experienced. As a consequence, minority language speakers who are accorded with low regard eventually adopt a prestigious language if it would mean a higher social status and a better attitude toward them

**Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of the respondents' skills on the Subanen language by place of residence and blood lineage.**

Residence	Understanding		Speaking		Reading		Writing		Overall	
	Mean Scores	SD	Mean Scores	SD	Mean Scores	SD	Mean Scores	SD	Mean Scores	SD
Aguada	8	2.00	7	3.01	8	1.84	6	3.97	7	0.52
Malaubang	2	3.66	2	3.30	2	3.55	1	3.18	2	0.73
Bongbong	7	3.38	6	3.86	7	3.59	7	3.49	7	0.76
Kinuman Sur	5	3.79	4	3.45	5	2.78	2	3.14	4	0.57
Guimad	5	4.23	2	2.41	3	1.57	1	1.57	2	0.55
Trigos	7	2.20	6	2.41	7	2.54	7	1.57	6	0.46
Gala	9	0.60	9	1.79	9	2.01	8	2.02	9	0.36
Guingona	3	3.53	2	3.08	2	3.50	2	2.81	2	0.65
Tipan	6	3.92	5	4.04	3	4.17	2	3.69	4	0.69
<b>Blood Lineage (%)</b>										
25%	2	2.22	1	1.56	3	3.36	1	1.50	2	1.78
50%	4	3.94	4	3.75	5	3.94	3	3.57	4	3.53
75%	3	3.63	2	2.49	2	3.94	1	2.75	2	2.85
100%	8	2.47	7	3.08	6	3.70	6	4.03	7	2.81

Scale: Excellent/Very Strong Vitality (8-9); Very Satisfactory/Strong Vitality (6-7); Satisfactory/Average Vitality (4-5); Poor/Weak Vitality (2-3); Very Poor/Very Weak Vitality (0-1)

by the majority group (Grenoble & Whaley, 1998). Those who succumbed into undesirable experiences like being punished in school for speaking their language have blinded themselves about the endangerment of their language (Krauss, 1996). Even academic institutions can serve as an avenue for language prejudice wherein bilingual minority language speakers are viewed as inferior (McCarty, 2003). Consequently, superiority of another language and culture has blurred the existence of the long been marginalized minority group (Sissel & Sheared, 2001). The stigma resulting from demeaning remarks about being Subanens left an indelible mark which forced these indigenous people to become incognito as a tribe if only to protect themselves from the pain of undeserved humiliation.

The findings showed that writing was the skill least performed by the respondents. This academic inadequacy could be attributed to the low educational background of the respondents. Few had never gone to school. A number earned the primary education, but only a handful finished elementary. Some had entered high school, and only a small number obtained a college education. This low educational accomplishment might have contributed to the low performance of the respondents in writing the words, phrases, and sentences in their tribal language. Their limited formal education could have affected their writing of the distinctive features of their tribal language in addition to the weak transmission of the intended meanings, translations, and expression of ideas. While speech may be more important than writing, it is an agreed notion that the latter is an artifact; writing is a cultural achievement (Coulmas, 1989). Writing reveals so much about people and the world around them (Barnes & Duncan, 2013).

The overall performance reveals a satisfactory or average ethnolinguistic vitality of the respondents (Table 2). The finding implies that the Subanen language is at the crossroad to vitality and extinction. The performance of the respondents reflects the general status of the Subanen language in Ozamiz City indicating the inadequacy of exposure and use of the tribal language by the younger generation which may result in language loss or permanent language shift by the present tribal members and the subsequent generations.

**Table 2. Mean and standard deviation of the respondents' skills on their Subanen language.**

Linguistic skills	Mean scores	Standard deviation
Understanding	6	3.81
Speaking	5	3.88
Reading	5	3.99
Writing	4	4.00
<b>Overall</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>3.52</b>

Scale: Excellent (8-9); Very Satisfactory (6-7); Satisfactory (4-5); Poor (2-3); Very Poor (0-1)

The performance of the respondents on the linguistic tests disclosed that geographical locations of the tribal communities do not determine the vitality of the Subanen language (Table 3). Whether the Subanens live in a remote, rural areas or at the city proper, their linguistic competence in their mother tongue is not influenced by where they reside. However, the extent of the Subanen blood poses a significant contribution to their skills in the tribal language.

**Table 3. One-way ANOVA of the language skills of Subanens when grouped by residence and blood lineage.**

Linguistic skills	F value (P value)	
	Residence	Blood lineage
Understanding	0.34 (0.713)	38.89 (0.000)**
Speaking	2.45 (0.089)	35.78 (0.000)**
Reading	0.87 (0.423)	8.15 (0.000)**
Writing	1.93 (0.148)	14.62 (0.000)**

\*\* means highly significant at .05 level

The Subanens self-assessed the usage of the mother tongue and admitted that they infrequently use it in schools, church, workplace, neighborhood, or even at home (Table 4). Many respondents including those proficient in their Subanen language also admitted the infrequent use of the mother tongue even during tribal gatherings. The respondents revealed that the Bisayan language is predominantly used. This admission implies that the vitality of the Subanen language may have eroded over time since the adults do not adhere to the constant use of

their language in their daily interactions, nor do they teach the children the first language. According to Barni and Bagna (2010), languages that are often used in private and familial contexts, as well as in public settings hold a greater chance of vitality. Evans (1996) stipulates that ethnolinguistic vitality reflects the transmission efforts that originate in the family domain of speakers and that clinging to a perceived prejudice of the society would lead to language loss if not language shift.

**Table 4. Self-assessment of the respondents in the language domains.**

Language Domains	Frequency	Percentage
Home	98	54.44
Tribal Meetings	105	58.33
Neighborhood	101	56.11
Church	73	40.55
School	71	39.44
Workplace/Farm	98	54.44

(n=180)

The interviews revealed the major factors negatively affecting the vitality of the Subanen language in the tribal communities in Ozamiz City. The factors include (1) language contact, specifically between the Subanen language and the Bisayan dialect, (2) mixed marriages between a Subanen and a “Bisaya”, (3) apathy of Subanen parents to teach the language to their children, and (4) discrimination against the Subanen tribe.

Mufwene (2004) asserts that learning other languages is a necessity for minority cultures to live. However, it is imperative that minority people keep their linguistic ethnic identity amidst coexistence with the majority group (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 1982). Language contact may have a negative impact on ethnolinguistic vitality as Allard and Landry (1992) stipulated. Although grammar of a language is maintained, people can change the lexicon and phonology of their language as they gain knowledge and skill of the other languages (Heine & Kuteva, 2005). This claim may mean that when other sources of vocabulary and linguistic elements are present, it is very likely that competency and frequency in the use of the first language decline. Some respondents admitted that their knowledge of the Subanen language is

confined to basic greetings and terms, the level of knowledge that is inadequate for spontaneous and native-like proficiency. This linguistic inadequacy resulted in the feeling of inferiority by the non-proficient or less proficient speakers when compared to the linguistically adept speakers. Nevertheless, Barni and Bagna (2010) and Evans (1996) state that the vitality of a language is largely dependent on the determination and positive regard of the speakers toward their language. According to Fishman (1991), the need to reverse language shift must be done primarily by the minorities themselves. In this study, the Subanen respondents were interested and determined to regain their language even under the tutelage of informal classes intended for the purpose. This positive manifestation is suggestive of language revitalization although the process may neither be fast nor easy.

Based on the interviews and tests conducted, the respondents with parents who are both Subanens are better in the tribal language compared to those born in mixed marriages. Marriage with a non-Subanen can then be a reason for the infrequent use of the language leading to language loss or language shift. The interviews revealed that there are Bisayan spouses who are unfavorable of their Subanen husbands or wives using the tribal language in the family domain. The former may not approve of the learning of the Subanen language by their children. Thus, Subanen spouses often opt to use the Bisayan dialect to facilitate communication in the family and to avoid conflict in the household. This condition puts the children at a disadvantage because they learn an adoptive language from the non-tribal parent while losing hold of the native language of the Subanen parent. As a result, many Subanen children have grown to maturity without being given the chance to decide whether or not to learn the Subanen language alongside learning the Bisayan language.

Parental apathy emerged as another factor for the inability of the present Subanen generation to speak the tribal language. Although a number are still conversant with the Subanen language, many had or have chosen not to transmit it to their children since speaking the language often caused the bullying of children in school and even in the surrounding community. Thus, the parents did not see the value of the language for the young ones to inherit; they deemed it as a source of discrimination and indifference. Parents thought it practical to inhibit

themselves from exposing their children to the language which other people viewed as inferior and insignificant. Hence, it is not necessarily the unwillingness of the children to acquire or learn the tribal language which caused their inability to speak it, but their parents chose not to teach them.

The respondents claimed that the Subanens in the early times suffered from an extreme form of discrimination, stripping them off of their pride and dignity as tribal people. They were subjected to mockery not because they inhabited the far-flung mountainous areas, but simply because they are Subanens. The stigma attached to being a Subanen had prompted a number of them to conceal their tribal identity. They were skeptical about using their mother tongue especially when non-tribal people like the “Bisaya” were present. This avoidance of the use of one’s first language indicates a rejection of a speaker’s identity and culture (Kramsch, 1998) and learning a second language that results in the loss of the speaker’s linguistic identity exemplifies a subtractive bilingualism (Gaudet & Clement, 2005). Group identity is not a natural fact, but a cultural perception (Kramsch, 1998).

Amidst the unfavorable experiences the tribesmen once had, and contrary to the general performance of the respondents in the linguistic test conducted, they unanimously claimed that they are proud of their mother tongue and preserving it is paramount. They claimed that their language is a mark of their tribal identity – a legacy from their early Subanen forebears as well as a repository and carrier of their Subanen culture. This conviction of the contemporary Subanens signifies that their outlook toward their native language as their tribal identity has never waned through generations. The only barrier is in deciding whether or not to preserve the language by speaking it amidst all negative connotations by non-tribal people. Contrary to preceding generations’ views, ethnic groups have to decide for themselves whether to maintain their native tongue or to let it erode (Giles & Johnson, 2009; Hornberger & King, 1996).

### *Status*

The socioeconomic status and activities of the speakers may influence the vitality of languages (Mufwene, 2004). Similarly, Saarikivi and Marten (2012) reported that changes in the ways of life of the minority cultures like in livelihood practices have implication on the language vitality. Table 5 shows the socioeconomic profile of the respondents. The findings of this study showed that a greater percentage of the Subanen respondents belong to 46 – 55 years old age bracket. The majority of the respondents were women. Most Subanens rely on farming as the primary means of income. The harvests they obtain from tilling the land for planting corn and vegetables are intended to sustain the daily needs of their respective families. Some also raise backyard and farm animals such as pigs and chickens, cows, and carabaos. Other respondents render farm labor and services; others resort to other means of living like carpentry, motorcycle driving, fishing, and the like to supplement household income. Except for a handful, the data showed that the majority earn an estimated income of ₱1,000.00 – ₱ 3,000.00 per month, others even lower than ₱1,000.00.

The findings also revealed that most respondents attained education at the elementary level only. This low academic attainment explains why some respondents who are conversant of the Subanen language are incapable of reading and writing. This inadequacy or even a lack of education presumably impedes the respective tribal communities from improving their socioeconomic status. According to Anastasia and Teklemariam (2011), the socio-cultural and economic factors affect formal education. Chernichovsky (1985) reported that schooling was conceived as a burden on the family due to the expenditures associated with education and the loss of child's contribution to household production and income. Edwards (1992) emphasized that the economic condition may not be sufficient to ensure language maintenance, but it can be a necessary element. Appel and Muysken (2005) stated that when groups of minority language speakers have a relatively low economic status, there is a strong tendency to shift toward the majority language. However, indigenous people lack access to higher education and the availability of job and work opportunities (Wotherspoon, 2012; Dockery, 2009). In this regard, the economic condition of the Subanen tribal communities needs a close attention and

evaluation especially that it affects educational attainment and it influences language vitality.

**Table 5. Respondents’ socioeconomic profile.**

Profile	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Age (years)	20 - 25	3	1.7
	26 - 35	36	20.0
	36 - 45	44	24.5
	46 - 55	51	28.3
	56 - 65	33	18.3
	66 years old or above	13	7.2
Gender	Men	60	33.3
	Female	120	66.7
Subanen Lineage (%)	100	92	51.1
	75	16	8.9
	50	42	23.3
	25 or below	30	16.7
Educational Attainment	College	14	7.8
	High School	49	27.2
	Elementary	105	58.3
	Unschool ed	12	6.7
Estimated Monthly Income (₱)	6,001.00 – above	25	13.9
	3,001.00 – 6,000.00	37	20.5
	1,000.00 – 3,000.00	106	58.9
	Below 1,000.00	12	6.7
Sources of Income/Subsidy	Farming	117	65.0
	Employment	12	6.7
	4 Ps	43	23.9
	Others	8	4.4

(n = 180)

**Demography**

The Subanens are a minority group in Ozamiz City. Eighteen of the 51 barangays of the city have tribal communities. Their origins were traceable to the migration of Subanens from various origins in the Zamboanga Peninsula. The Subanens in Ozamiz City are a mixture of a number of the 24 subgroups of the tribe. This explains the variation in lexis and phonology and the complexity and uniqueness of the language

of each subgroup. Majority of the respondents identified themselves as belonging to the “Salugnon” subgroup which is the majority of the Subanen tribal communities in the city. The term “Salugnon” originated in Salug Valley in Zamboanga del Sur – the place where the early Subanens were said to have first established a tribal settlement (Imbing, 2002).

The study utilized the data from nine barangays selected according to geographic location. Aguada, Bongbong, and Malaubang were the barangays that represented the tribal communities within the city proper. Kinuman Sur, Guimad, and Trigos represented the tribal communities outside the city proper. Guingona, Gala, and Sitio Tipan in Stimson Abordo represented the hinterland tribal communities in the city. The Subanens in the different barangays live among the “Bisaya” people, except in Sitio Tipan (hinterland) where they live in a separate cluster among themselves. It was surprising to find that a number of Subanens in this barangay do not speak Subanen among themselves despite the distance separating them from the “Bisaya” inhabitants.

In other barangays, the findings showed that while the Subanens can speak and understand the Subanen language, they prefer to communicate using the Bisayan dialect because it is simpler and easier to use since everybody has adopted the dialect as their medium of communication. In Barangay Gala, there is a very strong vitality of the Subanen language. The greater number of the members of the tribal community exhibited a high proficiency in the Subanen language as the respondents claimed the frequent use of their language during their monthly tribal meetings and in their day-to-day interactions. The linguistic competence of the majority makes the other tribal members develop the desire to be linguistically proficient with the encouragement of those using the language in their daily interactions. The tribal groups in the barangays within the city (Aguada and Bongbong) are proficient to very proficient speakers of the Subanen language. This skill was shown during the interview sessions where the respondents communicated with their fellow Subanens in their native tongue.

Interviews revealed that the tribal communities in all barangays except in Aguada convene once a month for a tribal meeting. However, when they were asked if they speak in Subanen during the session, the majority of the respondents said that they speak in Bisayan for greater

understandability and participation since there are those who are not conversant in Subanen. Even the proficient speakers of the native language use the Bisayan dialect to avoid suspicion and misunderstanding by people around and their non-Subanen speaking members. Baker (2011) claims that individual tends to switch to a language one believes as preferable or acceptable to the other. In the case of the Subanens, this inhibition results in the reduction of the number of proficient speakers of the language. Garcia (2003) stressed that ethnic languages need to be used in family and friendship domains for transgenerational transmission to occur leading to linguistic viability. Inadequate exposure to and use of the mother tongue while constant exposure to and use of the other language affect the authenticity of the native language spoken (Maher, 1991). Thus, the Subanens need to be conscious and cautious of the changes occurring in their language if they are to ensure distinctness of their tribal language.

### ***Institutional Support***

The local government of Ozamiz City recognizes the Subanens through highlighting them during the annual charter celebration of the city. The Subanens can avail of hospitalization benefits and employment priorities as mandated by law. The Subanens have also become integrated into the political and social mainstream of society. Nevertheless, the Subanen respondents claimed that the support of the local or national government is on a very limited scale. The support has not met their most pressing basic need for sustenance, for interventions alleviating their plight, for a strong advocacy for the preservation of their native language, and for the freedom to speak their language without fear of being ostracized as an inferior group of people. The situation implies that the Subanens believe that local and national authorities have yet to offer them with more tangible programs to address their needs for cultural and language preservation.

The interviews disclosed that the local government units are too focused on presenting them in the community as authentic cultural dancers, wearing native costumes which they have no say in their altered versions. Also, no government programs have been instituted to improve their economic conditions in a sustainable manner. While a number of them avail of the conditional cash transfer from “Pantawid Pamilyang

Pilipino Program” or 4Ps launched by the Aquino administration (Fernandez & Olfindo, 2011), a greater number are unable to do so despite the equally struggling condition on a daily basis. This situation compounds their belief that they are still the underprivileged, underserved segment of society as indicated by the generally low economic condition of the Subanen respondents.

In the case of the tribal communities in Ozamiz City, only selected barangays receive informal education through the Alternative Learning System wherein the Subanen language is taught. Moreover, the program lasts for a limited period only and it may end although the language learners have not mastered yet the target language. According to Fishman (2001), education in school can be an effective means to revitalize threatened languages. Cantoni (2007) also emphasized that academic institutions can take a significant role in reviving the endangered languages.

Pietikainen (2008) asserts the idea of preserving languages by reversing language shift through utilization of print media and radio and television broadcasts using the minority languages. Children may also be placed in immersion programs for them to learn to speak the language of the community (Krauss, 1996). These language programs promote an increased sense of heritage and identity, but the success of programs may also depend on home and community initiative and involvement (Stiles, 1997). Thus, realistic goals have to be set for programs designed at responding to the needs of endangered languages (Krauss, 1996; McCarty, 2003). The study of Hornberger and King (1996) cited the efforts of language advocates in revitalizing Quechua language in the Andean republics with the observed shift of its speakers to Spanish language. Thus, revitalizing the Subanen language in Ozamiz City before the point of extinction can be made possible through innovative and lasting endeavors.

This study did not include all tribal communities in Ozamiz City. Only one parent from each of the selected Subanen household served as one of the respondents. Subanen children’s actual knowledge and competence of the Subanen language were not included in the assessment.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The deeply-rooted low esteem of the Subanens caused by the stigma associated to the tribe resulted in the deliberate attempt to conceal tribal identity by neither speaking their first language nor teaching it to the succeeding generations. As a consequence, even the pure-blooded Subanens living in the hinterlands become inept in the supposed first language of the tribe. The Subanens have adopted the Bisayan dialect among them even in their family domain, and this preferential use poses a threat to the survival of the Subanen language in Ozamiz City. Despite consciousness of the significance of the Subanen language as a mark of tribal identity, the conditions of language shift and language loss are evident in some members of the tribe; many are or have become incapable of speaking their mother tongue. Nevertheless, the contemporary Subanens are bent on recovering their first language as they have regained pride in their ethnic identity and cultural uniqueness.

The government and non-government sectors, including educational institutions need to collaborate in strengthening their programs for the survival of indigenous people in the locality. National or local government units should provide sustainable programs geared to promoting cultural diversity and tribal language vitality. Schools in the communities can be tapped by teaching children their first languages through integration in the mother-tongue based (MTB) program so that they will be given their rightful identity in society. Tribesmen who are proficient speakers of the Subanen language may be utilized as mentors in the teaching of the indigenous language. With the concerted effort of the tribal communities, the non-tribal society, and the appropriate government and non-government institutions for language and cultural preservation, Subanens and other indigenous groups in the country may become assured of inheriting the precious linguistic legacy from their predecessors.

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