

The Mother Tongue Proficiency of the Yogads

ERIC JOYCE DC. GRANDE



ABSTRACT

The Yogads are pre-colonial inhabitants of Echague, Isabela whose mother tongue is the Yogad language. The Ilocano migrations to Cagayan Valley and specifically to Echague, Isabela have resulted in the Yogads being outnumbered by the Ilocanos in an almost 2:1 ratio.

This study was conducted to assess if the Yogads are still proficient in their mother tongue. Thirty-one respondents, all residents of the Ugad region in Echague, participated in the mother tongue proficiency survey using a 10-point questionnaire.

Results show that despite the pervasiveness of Ilocano in Echague, the Yogads have remained steadfast in the use of their mother tongue. This finding has implications on the preservation of indigenous languages that may be threatened by extinction.

Background of the Study

The Yogads are the pre-colonial inhabitants of Echague in Isabela Province. They speak a language which is also called Yogad as recognized and classified by the Summer Institute of Linguistics. With the exodus of the Ilokano to Cagayan Valley since the 1900's or even earlier, they have been outnumbered. In 1995, the said municipality had a total population of 61,922; 32,470 (52.33%) is Ilokano, while 15,431 (24.87%) is Yogad.

Moreover, the Yogad people have been dubbed as "an ethnolinguistic group whose original culture is in danger of extinction" (Toquero, 2005:5). Others refer to them as a "lost tribe" (Macutay, 1989:1). They are also called a people who are almost not aware of their literature (Galot, 1988). It has been hypothesized that many Yogads have shifted to other languages. According to Philippine Daily Inquirer columnist Michael Tan (2003), in an article entitled From Adasen to Yogad, such is the case of other ethnolinguistic groups in the region (Cagayan Valley). Evident among the younger generations of the Ibanag, for instance, is the diminishing knowledge of their mother tongue because they now speak Tagalog, Ilokano, and English.

Hence, this paper explored the extent of the alleged extinction by assessing or surveying the mother tongue proficiency of the Yogad constituents of Ugad High School in Barangay Santo Domingo in Echague. Essentially, proficiency is "the degree to which a language can be used successfully in face-to-face interaction" (Quakenbush, 1989:19). It primarily includes listening and speaking skills, not necessarily reading and writing skills.

Significance of the Study

The political and pedagogical implications of language have once again jolted academicians and policymakers alike because of Executive Order 210, which mandates "the use of English as the primary medium of instruction in all schools starting in Grade 1" (Licuanan, 2007:14).

Despite its implementation in June 2007, many have registered their dissent.

Citing Sibayan and Gonzales (1988) and UNESCO (1950), Licuanan asserts that the teaching-learning process is more effective in the mother tongue. She therefore advocates "the use of the mother tongue not only to improve the quality of education but to also serve as a tool for learning and improving English" (2007:14). This is in line with harnessing the Filipinos' multilingual competence or ability to speak several languages.

However, the reality is "two out of the top ten languages in the Philippines, based on the number of speakers and percentage of the total population of the Philippines, are now dying" (Bas, 2007:2). These include Kapampangan and Pangasinan. Hence, it is but timely to look into other languages, especially ones that are spoken in relatively smaller communities with less than 20,000 speakers such as the Yogad language.

Review of Related Literature

Historical Background of Echague, Isabela

Archives reveal that in 1583, the vast province of Cagayan was a duly recognized political division. In 1839, it was divided into two provinces; Cagayan, in the north, and Nueva Vizcaya in the south. Consequently, Tuguegarao became the capital of Cagayan, while Nueva Vizcaya had Camarag, which, at present, is Echague. Eventually, in 1856, the province of Isabela was created. Ilagan became its capital, Cagayan has Tuguegara, Nueva Vizcaya has Bayombong. Echague, named after Governor General Rafael de Echague, used to be a capital town, which made it a historical landmark in the region.

At present, Echague is a first class municipality, with a total land area of 68,080 hectares, which are unevenly distributed in 64 barangays. It has also been an educational center because it hosts the main campus of the Isabela State University. Industrialization and urbanization have also been evident in the locality with the establishment of real estates, industrial firms, private schools, clinics,