

Languages at Home: The Case of Bi-/Multilingualism in Pangasinan

Francisco C. Rosario, Jr.
University of the Philippines Baguio

Abstract

Language contacts have brought different changes in the world. These contacts have affected the linguistic environments of many societies that competition among languages is inevitable. The experience of Pangasinan, which is considered one of the major languages in the Philippines and is being used by more than 1.5 million of Pangasinenses in the province of Pangasinan, is no exception. Other languages being used in the province are English, Filipino and Ilocano. This research considered that parents play an important role in the transmission of languages to the younger generation. It used survey questionnaires to gather data from 34 parents. The survey focused on the home language preferences of the parents in Pangasinan and the reasons for their preferences. Also, this showed the respondents' frequency of exposure to media and different discourses and explained the possible influence of these to their preferences and their perceptions towards the language/s that they use at home. Lastly, this research explored the possible reactions of the Pangasinenses towards the new Department of Education (DepEd) order, which is the mother tongue-based Multilingual Education (MLE). In general, this research provided insights on the status of Pangasinan language as it faces the threats of English – the language of globalization, the Filipino – the national language in the Philippines and Ilocano – the emerging language threat to Pangasinan.

Keywords: Pangasinan language, language contact, bi-/multilingualism

The Language Situation in Pangasinan

Pangasinan, which is located in the northwestern region of Luzon, is one of the provinces in the Philippines with the largest number of population. According to the 2007 Census of Population, there is a total population of 2,645,395 in the province (<http://www.census.gov.ph/data/census2007/index.html>).

The languages spoken in the province are Pangasinan, Ilocano, Filipino and English. Pangasinan and Ilocano both belong to the Austronesian languages family. Pangasinan is used primarily in the province while Ilocano is used in the northwestern provinces of Luzon like Ilocos Norte, Ilocos Sur, La Union and Abra. Ilocano speakers spread to nearby provinces like Pangasinan due to migration. The popularity of Filipino and English in the province is attributed mainly to their status as the country's official languages.

In the 2000 Census of Population and Housing of the National Statistics Office, 47.60% of the population classify themselves as Pangasinense, 44.25% as Ilocano, 3.79% as Tagalog,

1.96% as Bolinao, and the remaining 2.41% belong to other linguistic groups living in the province (<http://www.census.gov.ph/data/census2007/index.html>).

Based on the NSO data, we see large number of Ilocanos in the province. In the history of Pangasinan, it was during the 19th century when large number of Ilocanos started to migrate in the province. There were already established towns in Pangasinan then, and the rice fields were very productive. Because of the available opportunities in the province, the migrants increased in number and eventually gained political power in the province (Anderson & Anderson, 2007). Ilocano, then, became one of widely spoken languages in Pangasinan.

English language was one of the official languages in the Philippines during the American occupation. On the other hand, as part of the country's desire to establish its national identity, Filipino (originally, Pilipino) was designated by the government as the national language. The government started its efforts to popularize Filipino along with English through the educational system where both languages are designated as the official medium of instruction. The use of these languages in the local media took part not only to their popularization but also to their status as the prestige languages in the country.

At present, there are still a large number of Pangasinan speakers. There are approximately more than 1.5 million of Pangasinan speakers in the province. This may be large enough to maintain the use of the language but not a guarantee that Pangasinan will be free from different language threats.

Languages in Contact and Conflict

Bi-/multilingualism is a widespread linguistic phenomenon. In a simple statement, Li Wei (2007) said bi-/multilingualism happens because different linguistic groups have contact to other groups. However, language contacts are not just simple linguistic events because linguistic environments in many societies can be seriously affected by these linguistic phenomena.

Preferences and beliefs attached to languages may be influenced by these changes in the linguistic environment. According to John Edwards (1994), language contacts may also lead to conflicts. Because of the influx of different languages in a particular linguistic community, domination and competition happen among languages. Hence, we have existing dichotomies like international and local languages, the dominant and the dominated ones.

These issues on domination and competition among languages created more serious problems especially in language policies. The designation of national and official languages and the pervasive use of these languages in the local media highlighted the differences among languages giving advantage to the “superior” language and its speakers. The limited use of the local languages in the educational system has created the idea that knowledge in the local languages is more of a disability and education can only be achieved through the official languages (Martí et. al., 2005).

If language contacts affect language policy making in the macro-level, more so to the micro-level. It is important to take note of the effects of these language issues to the decisions that parents make for their children. Furthermore, it is necessary to look at the home language preference and on how situations at home can affect the country’s language policies.

From BEP to MLE

In July 2009, the Department of Education signed the DepEd Order No. 74 known as “Institutionalizing Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MLE).” This policy is the replacement of the Bilingual Education Policy (BEP) which was first implemented in 1974. In the BEP, Filipino and English are the official medium of instruction along with the vernacular language in the community as the auxiliary medium. This was aimed to develop the language skills of the learners in both Filipino and English.

The new DepEd (2009) directive believes in the “superiority of the use of the learner’s mother tongue or first language in improving learning outcomes...” as proven by different empirical studies like the Lingua Franca Project and Lubuagan First Language Component. Quoting from the Department of Education (2009) memorandum, these studies assert that,

- a) First, learners learn to read more quickly when in their first language (L1);
- b) Second, pupils who have learned to read and write in their first language learn to speak, read, and write in a second language (L2) and third language (L3) more quickly than those who are taught in a second or third language first; and
- c) Third, in terms of cognitive development and its effects in other academic areas, pupils taught to read and write in their first language acquire such competencies more quickly.

Also, the new policy gives opportunity to individuals to regain their right to learn in their first languages which was not enjoyed for so many years because of the dominance of English and Filipino in schools.

Scope and Limitation

There are four cities and 44 municipalities in Pangasinan. In this study, the researcher focused on San Carlos City which is located in central Pangasinan. San Carlos has the largest number of population in the province and Pangasinan language is widely spoken in the city.

This research used survey questionnaires to gather data on the preferred home language/s and language in different situations and the reasons for their preference. There were 34 parents who participated in the survey. The research also provided insights on the reactions of the parents to the recently-signed directive from the Department of Education, which is the mother tongue-based multilingual education.

The Home Language Preference

As mentioned earlier, Pangasinan is a multilingual province because languages, namely Ilocano, Tagalog/Filipino, Bolinao and English are being used and spoken. It is not so surprising then to have bi-/multilingual set-up at home.

As reflected in the Table 1, the use of Pangasinan, Filipino and English is preferred by most parents.

Table 1: Home Language Preference of the Parents

Home Language Preference	N = 34
Pangasinan-Filipino-English	18
Filipino	4
Filipino-English	4
Pangasinan-Filipino	3
Pangasinan-Ilocano-Filipino-English	3
Pangasinan	1
Pangasinan-English	1

However, among these languages, we see that Filipino is the most preferred language in bilingual or multilingual environment. Though most of the respondents' first language is Pangasinan, Filipino dominates the preferred home language.

This can be explained by various reasons. As stated in the Table 2, either of the respondent or the partner is non-native speaker of Pangasinan. In interethnic marriage, there is a possibility for the non-native speaker to adopt the language spoken in the community.

Table 2: Language/s Used by the Parents

Respondents' First Language	
Pangasinan	26
Tagalog/Filipino	5
Ilocano	2
Ilonggo	1
Partner's Language/s	
Pangasinan	28
Tagalog/Filipino	7
Ilocano	1
Bisaya	1
Waray	1
Ilonggo	1

This case of interethnic marriage may contribute to the dominance of Filipino being the most preferred home language. The couple has higher tendency to use a language that is understood by both, and in most cases, Filipino is the most convenient choice.

We may also look at the reasons expressed by the respondents to explain this case. Based on the gathered data in the survey, the main factor considered by the respondents for the home language is its usefulness in communication.

Pangasinan is the language in the province however skills in the vernacular language is not enough to help their children in communicating with non-native speakers of Pangasinan. As compared to Pangasinan, Filipino is more functional because this can be the common or "neutral" language that can be used in different situations for communication.

This can also be validated by the preferred language in different situations. The respondents think that Filipino is the most useful language in majority of the given situations. English can also be very useful in several situations however in most cases, the use of English in Pangasinan may not be as necessary as that of Filipino or even Pangasinan.

The researcher also tried to look at the educational background of the respondents as one possible reason that may explain the dominance of Filipino. It is assumed that respondents who were able to reach in college may have leaning towards the use of Filipino and English since these are the prestige languages, and mostly, these languages are accessed through education. In the survey, there are 29 respondents who are college graduates or at least were able to go to college, and 5 respondents went to high school.

Contrary to the assumption, educational background does not affect the home language preference of the respondents. The survey indicates that the preference of the respondents both high school and college group is towards the use of Filipino. This may indicate something about the language behavior of the respondents but it is hard to conclude with the small number of respondents.

The Frequency of Exposure to Different Discourses

In this part of the survey, the respondents were tasked to rate the frequency of their exposure to different discourses. Home language preference can be affected by the exposure of the parents to different discourses like media texts (television and radio programs, newspapers and magazines) and other available printed materials. One's language preference is influenced by the available discourses in the environment because of the need to understand these texts.

Based on the respondents' frequency of exposure to television programs, most of the respondents are exposed to Filipino and English and very minimal in Pangasinan and Ilocano. Though ABS-CBN and GMA have their own regional networks and have been broadcasting local programs like TV Patrol North Central Luzon, Gandang Umaga Kapamilya and Mag-TV na, Atin 'to (ABS-CBN Channel 32) and Balitang Amianan and Primera Balita (GMA Channel 10), these programs still have heavy use of Filipino.

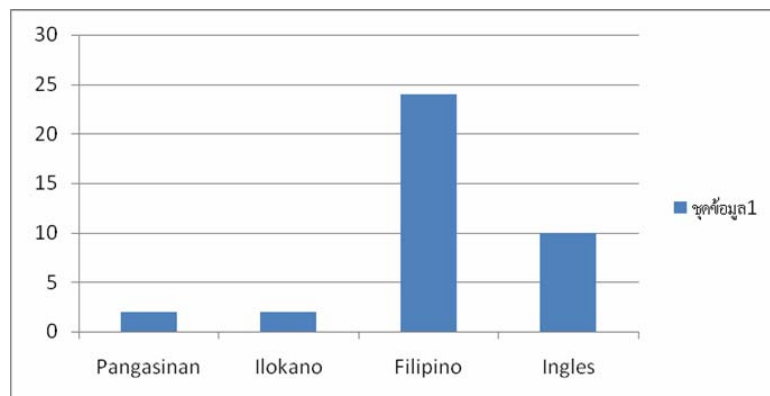


Figure 1: Exposure to Television Programs

The survey result on the frequency of exposure to radio programs is the same as the TV programs. FM radio stations play music in various genre which primarily are in Filipino and English. Songs in Ilokano and Pangasinan are not available in the FM stations, and these languages are rarely being used by the disc jockeys.

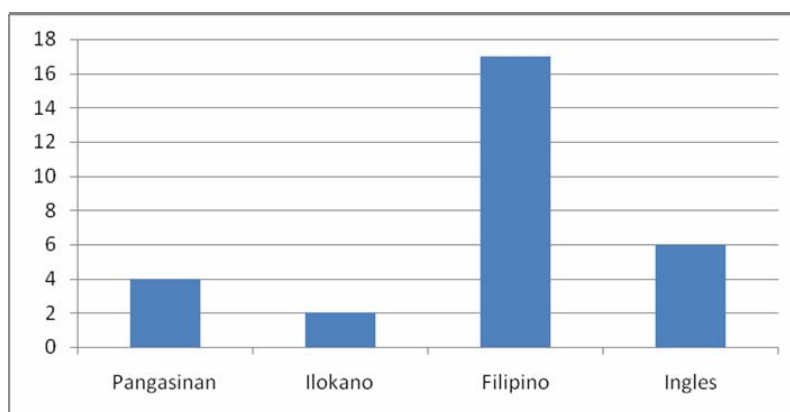


Figure 2: Exposure to Radio Programs

Nowadays, local AM radio programs have heavy use of Filipino language as compared to past decades when Pangasinan was the primary medium in the local AM radio programs. In a phone interview with Eddie Sumera and Dexter Dupagan, both anchormen and reporters of DZWN Bombo Radyo Dagupan last 18 September 2009, Filipino is the language often used by

most radio reporters and anchormen. Pangasinan was used before but then it is quite impossible nowadays for the sole use of Pangasinan because some of the radio reporters speak Ilocano. Filipino became the preferred language because it is the language that is common to the anchormen and reporters.

They also added that this is the trend among the existing local radio stations in the Pangasinan namely, DWCM Aksyon Radyo, DWPR Power Radio, DZRD Sunshine Radio and DZMQ Radyo ng Bayan.

The exposure of the respondents to different printed discourses is almost the same as shown in the previous data. The respondents have the highest frequency of exposure to newspapers in Filipino and followed by English. National newspapers use English for broadsheets and Filipino for tabloids. Local newspapers, namely *Pangasinan Today*, *Sunday Punch*, *The Gazette* and *Northern Journal*, release their issues in English. *Pangasinan Star* uses English and provides one column for Pangasinan.

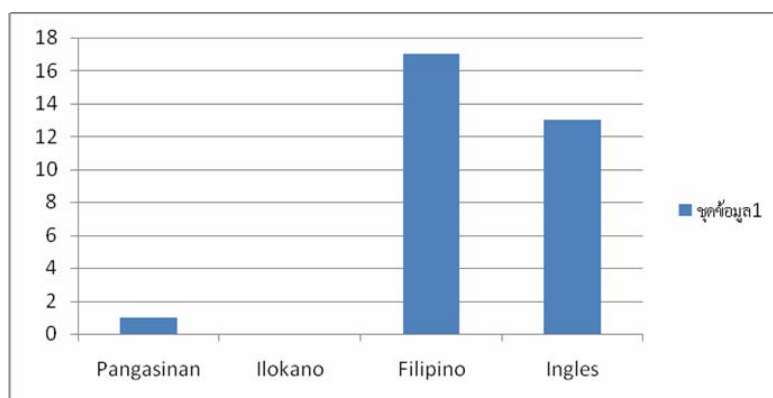


Figure 1.3: Exposure to Written Texts

It is noteworthy that aside from the usual announcements that are seen in the city and town plazas, the Bible is just one of the available written texts known to the respondents.

Pangasinan Language in Education

In this part of the survey, the respondents were tasked to rate their level of agreement or disagreement to particular statements. These statements are related to the use and non-use of Pangasinan as the primary medium of instruction in the schools.

The results show that respondents “agree” with the use of Pangasinan as the primary medium while the other set of statements (non-use of Pangasinan) got higher level of agreement from the respondents. This response is not really surprising at all considering the survey results shown earlier in this report. The respondents expressing agreement with the use of Pangasinan is already a favorable response knowing that prestige languages are being used and spoken in the region.

On the other hand, the results (indicating higher level of agreement with the non-use of Pangasinan) may be attributed to the desire of the parents for their children to learn a language other than their first language. In fact, during the first phase of data gathering, one parent commented that teaching Pangasinan in the schools is not necessary since this language can be learned at home or in the community. The parent also added that teaching a language like Pangasinan is not practical anymore since better opportunities await someone who can speak languages like English and Filipino.

Though the parents obviously have leaning towards the use of languages other than Pangasinan, based on what we see here, it will still be very easy for the parents to accept the new policy having their considerably favorable response towards the use of Pangasinan in education.

MLE Issues

The new language policy is DepEd’s way of recognizing the importance and use of the vernacular languages especially in education. The implementation of the BEP in the country has given primary focus on the teaching of Filipino and English, and somehow “displaced” the vernacular languages by designating them as the auxiliary medium of instruction.

As already noted, the primary objective of MLE is to use the learner’s first language as the primary medium of instruction. However, the implementation of the new policy is not simple at it may seem. The DepEd may have pleased the different ethno-linguistic groups in the country by signing the new policy; however challenges and several issues have yet to be faced.

The different communities in the Philippines, like San Carlos, are mostly multilingual if not bilingual. The bi-/multilingual nature of most linguistic communities in the country is just one issue that the DepEd has to look into. How the schools would address the needs of the learners using and speaking languages different from the community or region seem to be a problem. Also relating to this is the production and funding of educational materials which is

considered one of the major problems in Philippine education even before MLE. This is a problem particularly of the teachers who are the ones responsible for the proper implementation of the policy. Several problems in the system of education such as lack of teachers, incompetent teaching skills and not-so conducive learning environments should also be taken into consideration if the government, particularly the DepEd, is serious with their objectives in implementing this policy.

Conclusion

The case of Pangasinan particularly in San Carlos is an example of what happens to a local language when pitted against “superior” languages. As stated in this research report, the parents indicated that Filipino is the most preferred language at home and in different situations. This does not discount the fact that Pangasinan is still widely being used in the province and English in more specific situations. The influence of Ilocano in San Carlos is not as strong as its presence in other Pangasinan cities and municipalities where Ilocano is widely being used along with Pangasinan.

There are different factors mentioned that may have contributed to the wide usage of Filipino in the area. Because of the pervasive use of Filipino in the local media and its status as one of the official medium of instruction, it has become very easy for Pangasinenses especially the younger generation to learn the language.

In addition, Filipinos, especially in the provinces, are aware of its status as prestige language. This language has to be learned because education is accessible in Filipino. Local jobs require knowledge in Filipino language. It is for these reasons that for some local residents, teaching their children a local language like Pangasinan has become impractical.

Indeed, in multilingual communities like San Carlos in Pangasinan, competition among languages is an inevitable case. Even worse, the Philippine national language has become the main language threat to Pangasinan. Others may consider it advantageous to the status of Filipino for its popularization and propagation; however, it cannot be denied that this has also become detrimental to the status of local languages like Pangasinan.

We have always thought that English being the hegemonic language threatens and endangers a number of languages. However, as we see in this research report, it is not English

versus Pangasinan, but Filipino against the vernacular. This may not just be the case in Pangasinan, but also in other local languages in the Philippines.

The new DepEd directive which is the mother tongue-based Multilingual Education (MLE) is something long overdue. The idea that education is better in the first language of the learner has been proven several decades ago.

The major shift in the language policy can also be considered as the government's contribution in helping protect the threatened languages in the country. However, aside from the government's effort, it is also necessary that the individuals or the language speakers themselves do their part in the preservation of their own languages and culture. Quoting Edwards (1994):

Languages do, then, have a span of existence which is granted by human society and culture rather than by natural laws... they [linguists] do recognize that the fortunes of languages are inexorably bound up with those of their users. Perhaps, we might consider languages as inorganic parasites on human hosts (pp. 8-9).

It is a known fact that there are various factors that may contribute to the decline of many languages. It is in this case that the language speakers themselves need to take their part to maintain the use of their languages, and parents play the key role to the transmission and continued use of their languages.

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