

SOCIOLINGUISTIC SURVEY OF AYTA MAG-ANTSI LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an analysis of the sociolinguistic situation of an ethnolinguistic group in Bamban, Tarlac, Philippines known as Ayta Mag-Antsi. The investigation determined the languages spoken by the children and elderly at home and in the community. The findings revealed that this ethnolinguistic group is multilingual, and the three dominant languages are Ayta Mag-Antsi, Kapampangan, and Filipino. This implies that parents may face a challenging decision of monitoring and controlling the use of what they seem a more important language to be learned by the child. The task of raising a multilingual child is a huge undertaking considering the hegemony of Kapampangan in their communities. It is promising though that the children may still learn and speak the Ayta Mag-Antsi language as the elderly speak the said language at home.

KEYWORDS: sociolinguistic survey, heritage language, Ayta Mag-Antsi

INTRODUCTION

Language is a system of communication used distinctly by humans, that without it, it is scarcely impossible to define human life. The simple, yet complicated act of interpersonal communication is a distinguishable characteristic of humans that made them extremely at par with other species. The most basic function of language is to be able to express a concept, a thought, or a content. Language is particularly useful to convey information be it factual or not, considering the realm of social media influences in the life of humanity. However, language function can be viewed more than the expression of concepts or facts mediated by several channels. What makes humans more connected and more distinct among other species is how they use language to make a statement about one's identity, about the relationship of the parties involved in the communication process, and how humans promote and maintain social contacts to be included in a larger community. Thorn borrow (2004) boldly claimed that it is through the use of language that one could establish his/her identity and of how one shapes other people's view of himself/herself.

Human beings have an innate capacity to learn a language quite readily. The capacity for acquiring a language has several social reasons. There might probably be no instance for normal children not to acquire a native language. It is phenomenal to note that young children at such a young age have an ability to learn the seemingly complex rules of spoken and sign languages in a noticeably short period of time. Adequate exposure to the language may mean proficiency in it, and the more exposure to the

language, there is a greater possibility that the child may have greater command of the language. However, humans also have the capacity to lose a language if it is not used or if a speaker feels no use of it. Gonzalez and Maez (1995) found that the younger the children, the more vulnerable they are to communal forces that lead them to abandon their first language. Wong Fillmore (2000) contended that it may be disadvantageous to children and their families if children do not learn to speak a native language that is often the only language in which the parents can effectively communicate. The socialization process starts at home; therefore, parents have the responsibility to fulfill their roles as the most important instrument in establishing effective communication at home, this role may in turn be applied by the children in dealing with outside home domain. Although it is highly observable that the language at home may not necessarily be the dominant language of a wider community, and children need to learn that in order to respond to the many challenges of the social world. This is the case of an ethnolinguistic group from Bamban, Tarlac. This paper then is an exploration of sociolinguistic facts of languages heard, learned, and used by an ethnolinguistic group, specifically of Ayta Mag-Antsi speakers in Sitios San Martin, Buok, and Santa Rosa in Bamban Tarlac, Philippines. Moreover, this paper also explored the reasons why parents had to teach their native language to their children at home as well as the reason why they allow their children to use this language. This further investigates the strategies of the parents in informally teaching language at home.

Literature Review

The review of related literature and studies presented here focused on the language/s used and heard at home, language/s the children learned in their formative years, language/s children used at home, language/s the mother used to their children in conversing at home, language/s used by the elderly at home, and the reasons why parents allow their children to speak in their native language or other languages as well as their strategies in teaching their children the language they speak.

It is evident that parents may consciously or unconsciously shift from one language to another in conversing to their children. Ijalba (2014) studied the shift of children's home language use to the English language. It focused on the effectiveness of a parent-implemented language and literacy intervention in the home language. The study conducted randomly assigned twenty-four mother-child dyads as part of the intervention or comparison group. The Intervention group included 9 boys and 3 girls (age M = 43 months, SD 1.95). The Waiting-control group included 8 boys and 4 girls (age M = 42 months, SD 2.64). It showed that mothers from the intervention group developed a skill in stimulating language literacy through routine activities at home, aside from playing and reading. They were able to innovate a way to make their children's home language to be valued.

Orathai Chureson (2013) made a research about the impact of English as a global language on Filipino language practices and examined the perceptions of Filipinos towards the language modification as impacted by English. Since this is qualitative research, Chureson used semi-structured interviews, spot observations, and observations of Filipino media. The participants were cultured Filipinos who speak both English and Tagalog in the age range 15 to 60 years old. The findings showed that (1) Filipinos

localized English to a large extent, (2) influence of colonialism and language policy in the past, self-perception and the positive attitude of people toward those who spoke Taglish, and heavy influence of local media and globalization are the contributors to the phenomenon, (3) and all participants were conscious of the trend that Filipino was losing its uniqueness as an individual language.

On the other hand, Montrul (2005) focused on the linguistic knowledge of adult second language (L2) Learners, who learned the L2 after puberty, with the potentially 'eroded' first language (L1) grammars of adult early bilinguals who were exposed to the target language since birth and learned the other language simultaneously, or early in childhood. This study is concerned with the L1 loss with the concept of bilingualism which happens when the foundation or language system of the first language is weak when the second language started to become more influential because of the external influences. Since the study was meant to determine the degree and patterns of grammatical variation in proficiency level of L2 and unaccusativity—a universal semantic-syntactic distinction between two classes of intransitive verbs, the findings showed the phenomenon of unaccusativity is an ideal testing ground to examine how syntax and semantics are differentially affected in L2 acquisition and incomplete acquisition.

As Schrauff researched on the Western context, Nicoladis and Grobais (2002) conducted a study concerning the acquisition of English and the loss of Chinese by a child adopted from China into an English-speaking family in Canada at the age of 17 months. Videotapes were gathered, and productive vocabulary and comprehension vocabulary were analyzed. Overall, the researchers found out that the child's language acquisition was founded on already established social and communicative processes. The previous exposure to Chinese may have allowed her to learn about language use in general, thus facilitating her rapid acquisition of English.

In the study conducted by Raquel Anderson (1999), the impact of first language loss on grammar in a bilingual child. Anderson followed a young bilingual Puerto Rican Spanish-English speaking child named Victoria for two years, started from four years and seven months old until six years and five months old. Since the purpose of the research is to provide preliminary data on L1 Language loss in a Spanish-English speaking child, attention was given to the grammatical aspects of Spanish, as previous research has identified a language's morphology and syntax as being vulnerable to language loss contact situations. As the child interacts with the familiar adult, Spanish language samples were collected and analyzed for evidence of grammatical errors and reduction in morphosyntactic complexity. Communicative strategies used by the child were also assessed by Anderson. The background of the study discussed the bilingualism and how misconceptions of bilingualism may turn to language loss of the minority language as the second language, particularly English, became dominant in the community or country. The study also mentioned the four main patterns of the L1 loss. The result was based on the utterance length complexity, error production analysis, code-switching patterns, use of Spanish word types, and use of general phrases and linguistic fillers. The findings showed that language loss affects the utterance complexity of the bilingual child and how grammatical

form is used. However, the subject of the study was competent enough based on the strategies used yet first language productive skills were reduced.

James Crawford (1996) conducted a research that dealt with the seven hypotheses on language loss causes and cures and this paper is adapted from a speech given on May 4, 1995, at the Second Symposium on Stabilizing indigenous languages. First, the language shift is very difficult to impose from without. This research claimed that the language can be murdered as it provided an example of how Colombian was killed by California settlers and the assimilation of the speakers into other cultures. Therefore, external forces were involved. Second, language shift is determined primarily by internal changes within language communities. It was also known as dislocation. People were responsible for their attitudes and choices as they reflected on what will happen to their spoken language. Some of the aspects involved here were demographic factors, economic forces, mass media, and social identifiers. The third hypothesis, if language choices reflect social and cultural values, language shift reflects a change in these values. One could be a factor of another and vice-versa. These hypotheses implied that cultural values and traditional influences might encourage language maintenance. Individualism, pragmatism, and materialism were the aspects involved.

2. METHOD

This paper analysed the sociolinguistic situation of languages heard, learned, and used by Ayta Mag-Antsi speakers in Sitios San Martin, Buok, and Santa Rosa in Bamban Tarlac, Philippines. A semi-structured interview was conducted. After which, a focus group discussion (FGD) was also conducted.

2.2. Subjects and Study Site

The study was conducted among the Ayta Mag-Antsi ethnolinguistic group living at Sitio San Martin and Sitio Buok of Barangay Sto. Niño, and San Vicente, Bamban, Tarlac. The said ethnolinguistic group is a community that speak several languages (i.e., Kapampangan and Filipino) aside from their heritage language – Mag-Antsi. This study revealed that there are other languages being spoken in the community (i.e., Ilokano, Bisaya, Zambal, and Ilonggo).

2.3 Instrumentation/Data Measures

The researcher used sociolinguistic survey questionnaire that determines the following: (1) languages frequently heard at home, e.g. language(s) used in conversation, media, music, and any other forms of literature; (2) language(s) learned by the child as he/she grows ; (3) language(s) frequently used by the child at home; (4) language(s) frequently used by the mother or caretaker to the child; and (5) language(s) used by the elderly at home. The focus group interview determined the following: (1) the reasons why parents allow their children to learn the language they use; (2) the purpose of teaching native language to children at home; and (3) the strategies employed by the parents to focus more on teaching and learning the language(s) at home.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

Both in-person interviews and FGD were conducted among the parents of an ethnolinguistic group in three sitios located in Bambang, Tarlac: Sitios San Martin, Buok and Sta Rosa. Although there were limitations in terms of the number of parents who were willing to be interviewed during the site visitation because of several factors such as most of the parents were working in the field, the researcher was able to interview 15 parents from Sitio San Martin, ten from Santa Rosa, and eight from Sitio Buok. The interview and FGD were conducted from September 2019 to February of 2020.

2.5 Ethical Consideration

Prior to the actual survey and interview, the researcher conducted several consultations with the community leaders of the three sitios (San Martin, Santa Rosa, and Buok). The research participants were requested to sign the informed consent signifying their willingness to be part of the study.

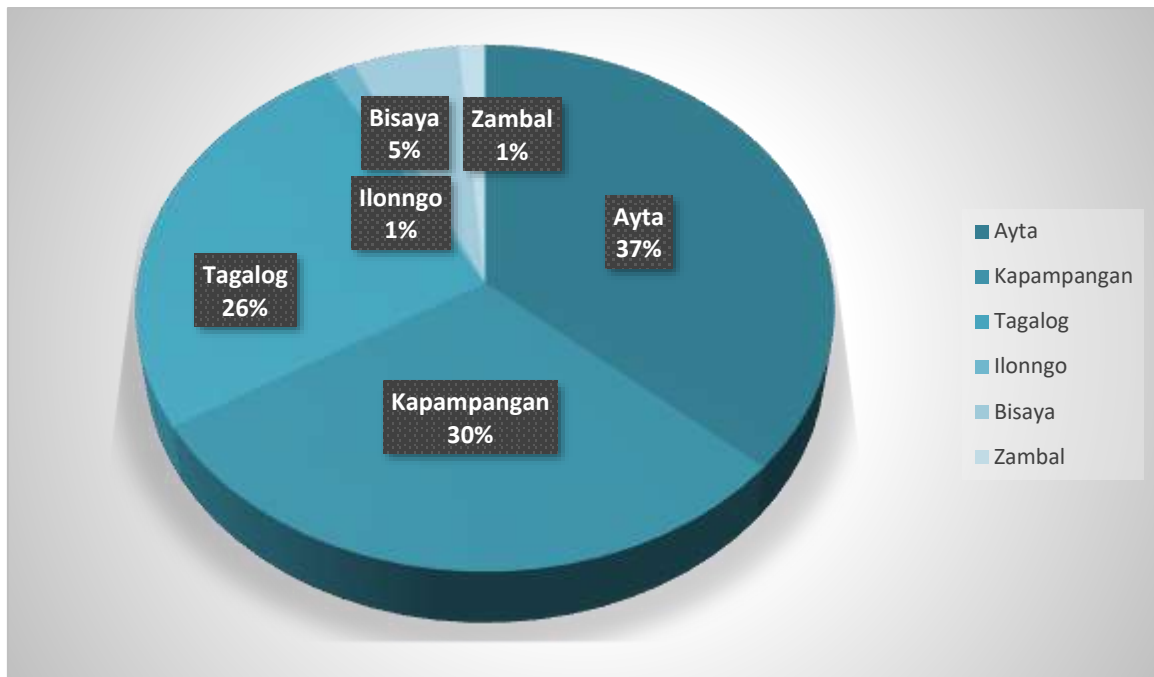
2.6 Data Explication/ Mode of Analysis

The sociolinguistic survey was administered among the members of the ethnolinguistic group of Ayta Mag-Anchi, after which, a focus group discussion was conducted. The survey was tallied and percentage was calculated to determine the following: : (1) languages frequently heard at home, e.g. language(s) used in conversation, media, music, and any other forms of literature; (2) language(s) learned by the child as he/she grows ; (3) language(s) frequently used by the child at home; (4) language(s) frequently used by the parents to the child; and (5) language(s) used by the elderly at home. A thematic analysis was used to determine the most recurring reasons of the purpose of teaching native language to children at home and the strategies employed by the parents to focus more on teaching and learning the language(s) at home.

3. Findings and Discussion

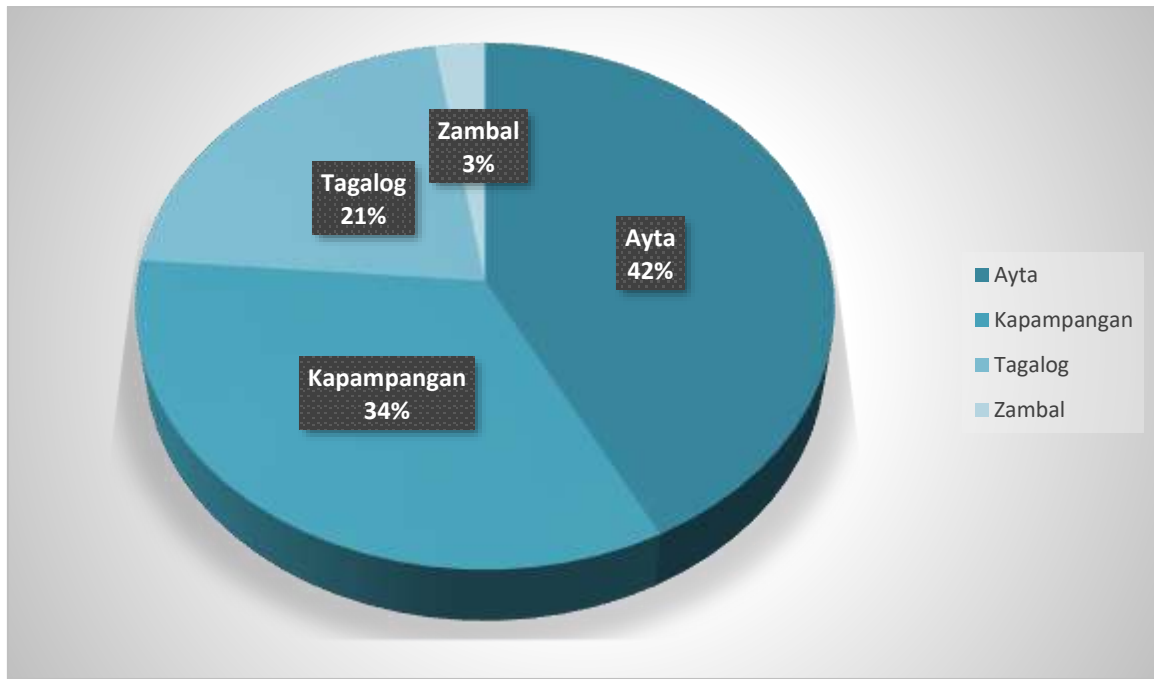
The following are the findings revealed in this study:

3.1. Languages frequently heard at home, e.g. language(s) used in conversation, media, music, and any other forms of literature



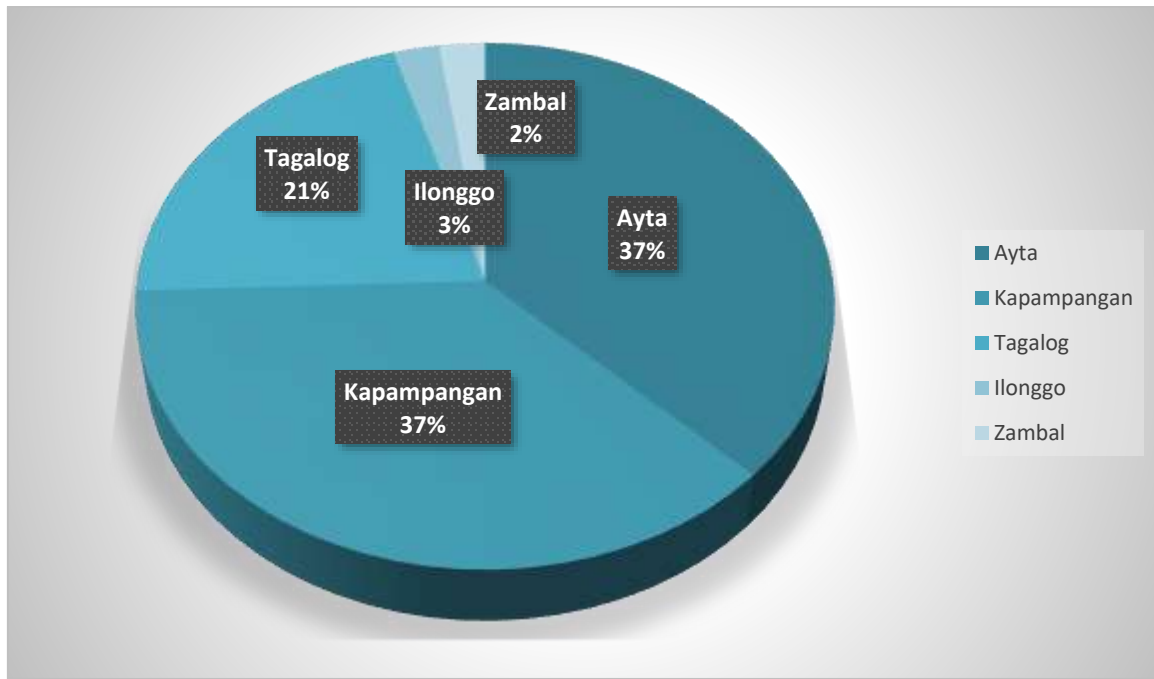
This pie chart reveals that there are six languages frequently heard by the children at home. The languages frequently heard by the children are Ayta Mag-Anchi (37%) and Kapampangan (30%). Noticeably, Tagalog occupy more than half of the pie chart. This finding implies that at home, there seem to be an almost equal distribution of Ayta Mag-Anchi language, Kapampangan, and Tagalog with regard to languages heard at home. This phenomenon is also observed by Brown, Hammond, and Onikama (1997). They affirmed that being exposed to two languages at home may not have consequences at all. Research suggests that children may need to know multiple languages, because these languages are important for travel, employment, speaking with members of one’s extended family, maintaining a connection to family culture and history, and making friends from different backgrounds (Kluger, 2013).

3.2. Language(s) learned by the child as he/she grows



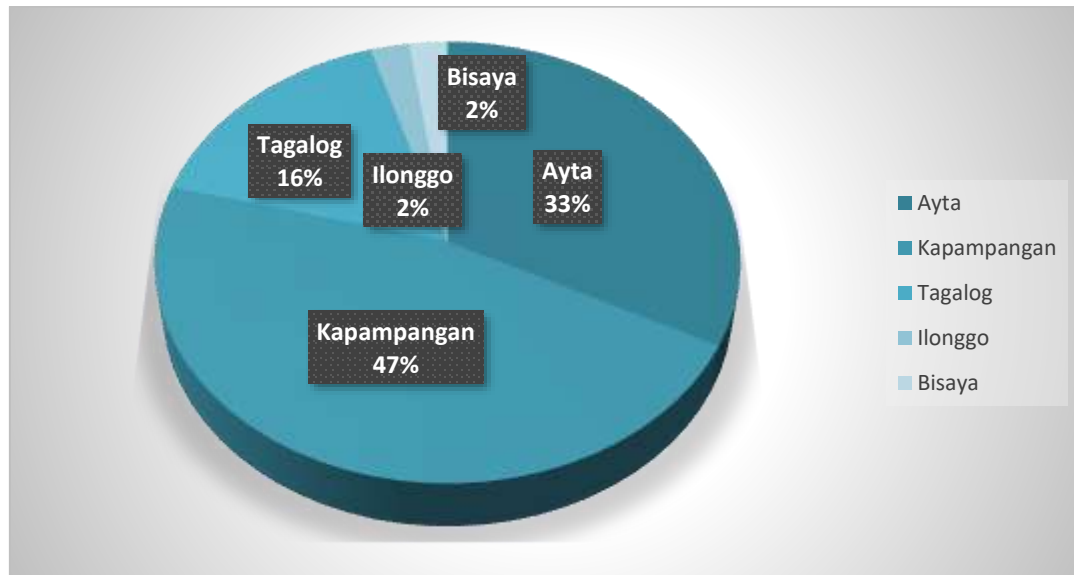
This pie chart reveals three languages dominating the languages learned by the child as he/she grows: Ayta Mag-Anchi (42%), Kapampangan (34%), and Tagalog (21%). This finding reveals that children in Sitios San Martin, Santa Rosa, and Burog are exposed with multiple languages, and this poses several advantages. Goodrich (2018) listed several benefits of being a multilingual; this includes a better innate understanding of how language works, a more efficient and better developed executive control system in the brain – the part of the brain that controls the ability to switch attention and exercise working memory, and improvements in learning abilities.

3.3. Language(s) frequently used by the child at home



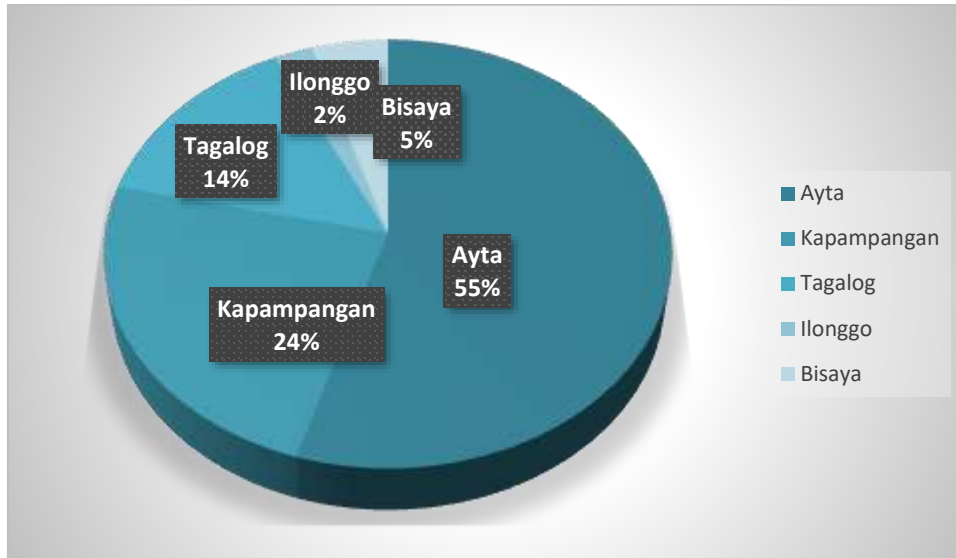
This pie chart reveals that in terms of language(s) frequently used by the child at home, there is an equal percentage of use between Ayta Mag-Anchi and Kapampangan languages. Tagalog also surfaced as a language frequently used by the child at home. This result implies that children in this ethnolinguistic group speak several languages. It is evident that parents of these children converse with them using multiple languages as revealed by this finding. Moreover, learning two or more languages may enhance chances for social interaction, for economic progress as the child grows, and for increasing intercultural understanding. This kind of language learning may also yield positive effects to cognitive and language development of the child. In a study conducted by the National Assessment of Educational Progress from 2003-2015, the study revealed that there is improvement in terms of the reading and mathematics performance of multilingual learners. In a multilingual environment, children may also have higher awareness in terms of cultural sensitivity. When a parent exposes the child to several languages in narrating stories, songs, historical and geographical concepts through understanding and communicating in more than one language, the child’s understanding of the world deepens.

3.4. Language(s) frequently used by the parents to the child



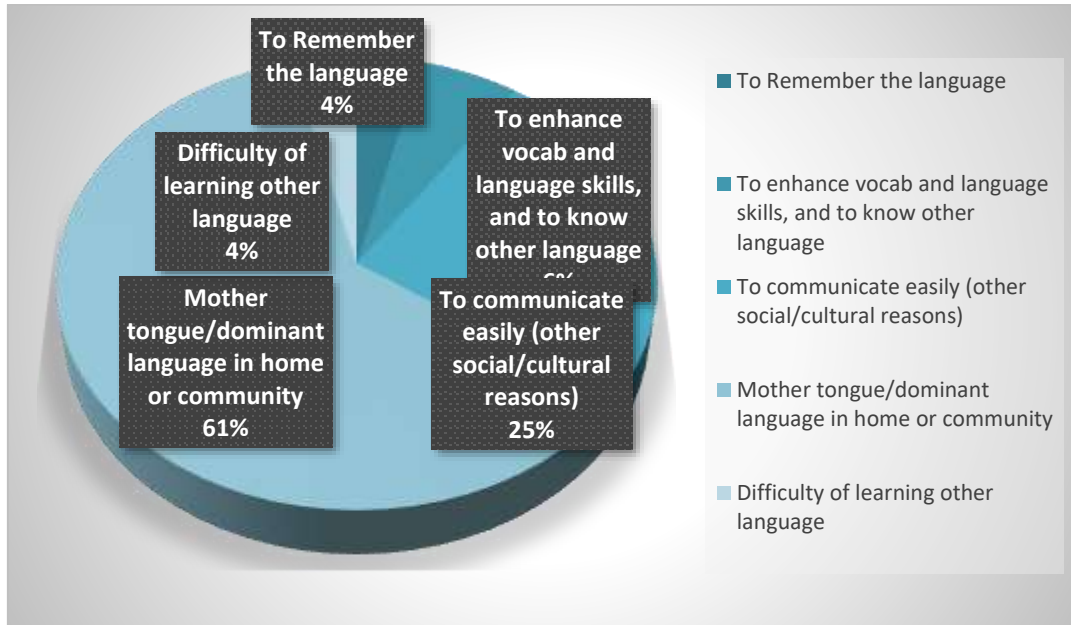
This pie chart shows that 47% of the respondents use Kapampangan as the language most often used in conversing with the children at home. 33% of the respondents use Ayta Mag-Anchi; 16%, Tagalog, and 2% of the respondents use Ilonggo and Bisaya. This finding reveals that this ethnolinguistic community is a multilingual community. The role of mothers, in particular, is emphasized when they transmit heritage language skills, particularly spoken oral skills (Chumak-Horbatsch 2008; Kondo 1998). The language used by the parents is highly influential to the linguistic development of the child. Schwarts and Verschil (2013) viewed family as a key prerequisite for maintaining and preserving languages. The use of any language at home is by far the decision of the parents, and this decision is highly influenced by the social utility, power, and value of a language in each society. These influences are highly evident in this ethnolinguistic community, Kapampangan, being the language of commerce in the three sitios as it is the language the respondents use in communicating outside their environment. Taking an important look at the role of parents in enhancing the linguistic ability of the child, the Social Policy Report presented by the Society for Research in Child Development (SRCD, 2013), parents who talk at length with their children regarding past experiences have children who excel in narrating. Moreover, the report also emphasized the importance of positive tone in conversing with the child. Maternal speech is important in the children's accumulation of vocabulary.

3.5. Language(s) used by the elderly at home



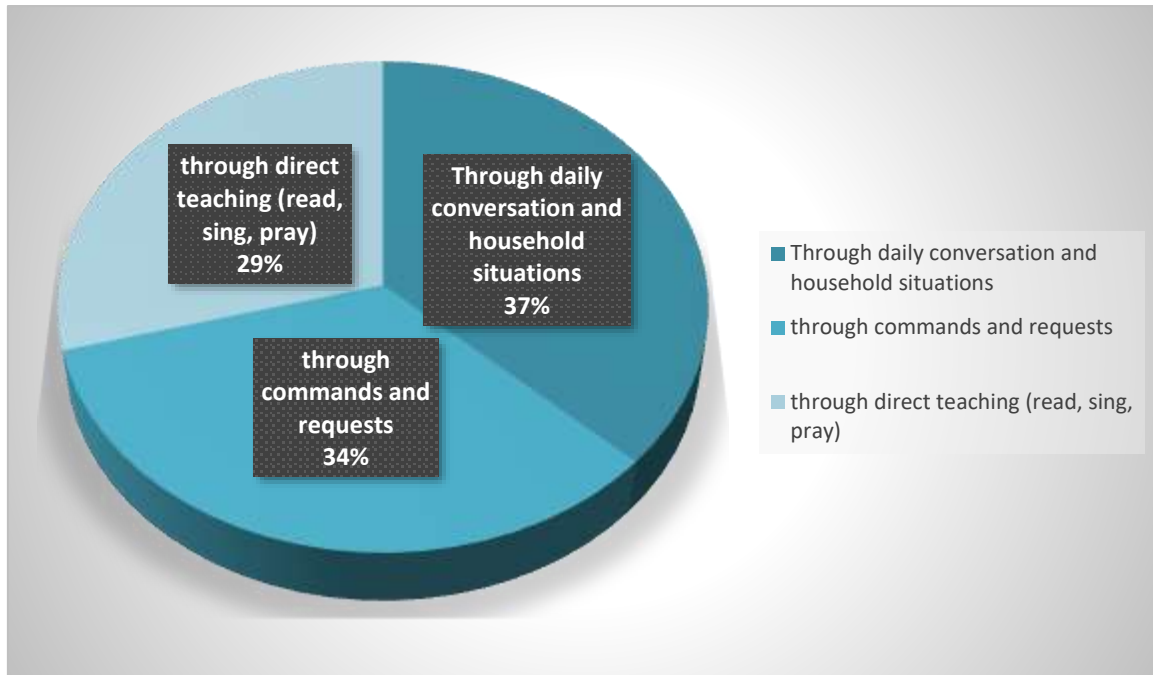
The pie chart presents the percentage of the respondents’ answer in terms of the language(s) used by the elderly at home. 55% of the respondents answered Ayta Mag-Anchi, 24% Kapampangan, 14% Tagalog, 5% Bisaya and 2% Ilonggo. This result implies that as for the elderly, their use of their heritage language (i.e., Ayta Mag-Anchi) is still evident. With this small community in Santa Rosa, San Martin, and Buok, the influence of elderly seems to be higher than that of the peers outside of the context of home. Realizing the need to preserve the heritage language, which is the Ayta Mag-anchi in this ethnolinguistic group, one can see a bright future in terms of the transmission of the language, since more than half of the respondents still use their heritage language at home. Children’s exposure to the heritage language is highly encouraged at home although the elderly as well as the parents should realize their role in providing emotional support, structure, organization, and encouraging emotional environment at home since this will provide implications for the development of language and literacy skills in younger children (Roberts, et al., 2005). Importantly, the family is seen to be an enabling agent that shapes children’s language and literacy development (Snow et al., 1991).

3.6. Reasons of teaching heritage language to children at home



This pie chart reveals the reasons the respondents teach their native language (i.e. Ayta Mag-Antchi) to their children. 61% said that they teach their native language to the children at home because it is the mother tongue or the dominant language in the home or in the community. This result implies that Ayta Mag-Anchi language is very evident in the community. 25% of the respondents said that they teach Ayta Mag-Anchi language to communicate easily with their children. 6% of the respondents said that they teach Ayta Mag-Anchi to enhance the vocabulary and language skills of the children. 4% answered that they have difficulty learning other language and another 4% said that they teach Mag-Anchi so that their children will remember their language. Since the respondents felt the need to teach their heritage language to their children shed light to preserving and maintaining their heritage language. The study of Yan (2003) found that the reasons why parents teach their heritage language is (1) to maintain cultural and religious religious heritage; (2) to strengthen family ties and moral values; and (3) to keep connections to their own cultural and language This finding is deemed important to the preservation of the heritage language because the maintenance of children’s heritage language is not merely beneficial but is essential to their psychological, cognitive, linguistic, social and academic achievement (Vallance, 2015). Moreover, this heritage language maintenance may yield to higher cognitive flexibility including an improved ability to deal with abstract concepts (Lee & Oxelson, 2006).

3.7. Strategies employed by the parents to focus more on teaching and learning the language(s) at home



The pie chart presents the strategies employed by the parents to focus more on teaching and learning the language(s) at home. 37% of the respondents said that they teach the language through daily conversation and household situations. 34% through commands and requests, and 29% through direct teaching, such as reading, singing, and praying using their heritage language. These strategies are deemed important because maintaining the heritage language is primarily considered to be influenced by the activities at home. Han (2003) found that children whose parents imparted pride about the heritage language had maintained the use of heritage language at home. This implies that the more the parents feel a sense of pride to their language and culture, there is greater possibility of maintaining the heritage language. However, Krashen (1998) noted that while asserting the significance of maintaining heritage language, some parents do not essentially act upon their belief by assiduously monitoring the heritage language use at home. In the context of the Ayta Mag-antsi speakers, this should further be investigated.

4. CONCLUSION

Findings from this study highlight that the Ayta Mag-Antsi ethnolinguistic group speak not only their heritage language (Ayta Mag-antsi) at home and in the community; the other languages that surfaced based on the findings of this paper are predominantly Kapampangan and Filipino (Tagalog). These three languages are frequently used in conversation among the parents and peers of the children in the community. Although the elders at home speak Ayta Mag-Antsi language, it seems to be a great

challenge to maintain the heritage language because of the influences of the other two languages (Kapampangan and Tagalog) in the community, most especially the use of Kapampangan as it is the language of commerce outside their environment. Parental influences are seen to be a driving force for the children to maintain the heritage language because of the nature of the way of life of this ethnolinguistic group where parents are highly respected and obeyed. These parental influences are considered not simplistic because of the fact that there are inter-marriages that were observed. This implies that parents may face a challenging decision of monitoring and probably controlling the use of what they seem a more important language to be learned by the child. The task of raising a multilingual child is a great undertaking considering the hegemony of Kapampangan in their communities. It is promising though that the children may still learn and speak the Ayta Mag-Antsi language because of the findings that the elderly speak the said language at home; this does not only foster transmission of language but more importantly, it establishes family togetherness and transfer of culture and values in the next generation of speakers.

Although the elderly speak their heritage language at home, this paper also sheds light to the fact that the next generation of the speakers of Ayta Mag-Antsi may have greater possibilities of being multilingual speakers as the community now becomes greatly involved in the activities within and outside their environment. Having said this, there is a pressing need to the community elders and Aytas themselves to transfer their heritage language to the next generation of speakers.

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