



FORGET ME NOT: MILLENNIALS' USAGE AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE IBANAG LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the current status of the Ibanag language across different domains—home, community, work/school, and religion—and explored the attitudes, problems, threats, and challenges associated with its use. Sixty respondents participated, representing diverse age groups and educational backgrounds. Findings revealed that Ibanag remains strong within the home and among close community members, where it is “always” used, but its usage declines significantly in formal settings such as workplaces, schools, and religious gatherings, where it is only “sometimes” spoken. Respondents expressed pride and cultural attachment to the language, viewing it as a beautiful symbol of identity.

However, contextual switching to Tagalog and Ilocano is prevalent, especially in mixed-language environments. Identified problems include inconsistent formal usage, language mixing, declining youth proficiency, and the perception that Ibanag has limited practical value in professional contexts. Threats to its survival include the dominance of Tagalog and Ilocano, generational shifts, lack of institutional support, and reduced presence in religious practices. Challenges noted were reluctance to use Ibanag in public, increased media exposure to dominant languages, and limited opportunities for daily use. To address these issues, the study recommends developing community-based language workshops, launching media and technology campaigns, and implementing youth engagement initiatives.

Keywords: *Fishman Domains of Language use, Northern Isabela, Sociolinguistics, Ybanag*

1. Introduction

Among humans, language is what fundamentally makes communication possible. It is the prerogative of man that distinguishes him from animals. Its absence would render society greatly altered because it is the flesh and blood of human culture.

Language varies from one place to another, from one social group to another, and from one situation to another. It creates meaning that entirely depends on purpose and context. Nevertheless, language is continually changing/evolving in response to the rapid development of the society through the advent of technology that influences our language usage and perceptions of the world as well as our social values. Thus, language has its time and generation; how people use language inevitably changes over time. It can be perceived as an evolution which might include the decline of using a language's original form.

While the aforementioned is normal, the heavy decline of several languages around the world has become an area of concern for linguists. In the case of the Philippines, it is one



of the Asian countries rich in sociolinguistic diversity that tries to respond to the demands of globalization and involves transmission of culture through languages. The country consists of different ethnic languages spoken by Filipinos in different regions in the country. Nevertheless, this diversity is vulnerable as social progression has led Filipinos to become less-inclined in continuing to use of native tongues. According to Gallego et al. (2021), highly multilingual societies such as those in the Philippines are naturally prone to higher levels of language endangerment. Attrition is a challenge since speakers usually lose their native language when they become isolated from other speakers of said language or when a second language dominates the language practices in the community. In addition to attrition, stratification of languages due to language and power may also contribute to the decline of a language's utilization.

In the Northern part of Luzon, Ibanag is considered as a lingua franca. It is one of the 30 languages that have been widely used in the province even before the Spaniards came to Cagayan in the 16th century since in Isabela, the Ibanag people are considered as the original inhabitants of the province. There are over 41, 297 total number of households that speaks Ibanag as of Philippine Statistics Authority's census in 2010. The language on the other hand serves as the Ibanags' language prerogative, it is spoken in the provinces of Tumauni, Ilagan City, Echague, Gamu, Naguilian and Reina Mercedes.

However, due to the influx of variety of languages in a certain community, there have been some changes concerning the usage of the original use of a native language. Given the advancement of technology, millennials have paved their own way of transforming and facilitating language development. They tend to be more socially aware in their surroundings and to the community that they belong. Younger generations tend to use/follow language trends on their own terms. Many words have changed their meanings over the years, sometimes even evolving to mean the precise opposite of what they originally meant.

In the municipalities of Gamu, Naguilian and Reina Mercedes, Isabela, the declining use of Ibanag is most apparent among the younger generation, specifically the millennials. With this, the Ibanag language is said to be subject for language endangerment. For this reason, the researcher aims to determine the extent to which the Ibanag youth still utilize Ibanag language and if they are active transmitters of the language in different domains of the society in the places of Gamu, Naguilian, Reina Mercedes, Isabela. Hence, the endeavor of this research is to describe the usage of Ibanag language among the Ibanag millennials and to show the importance of using their native language in different domains of society such as domain in preserving their unique identity as an individual and as a community despite the rapid change of language and society of today's generation. Lastly, it will also investigate the millennials' attitudes towards the Ibanag language. Hence this study answered:

1. How often is Ibanag used in the following domains:

- b. Family/Home;
- c. Religion;
- d. Friendship/Peers;
- e. Community; and
- f. School/Work

2. What is the attitude of the respondents in the use of the Ibanag language?



2. Literature Review

Language is the foremost means of communication therefore it can embody not only the personality of its speakers but also their knowledge, culture and beliefs. According to (Banga & Suri, 2015), language transmits information, knowledge and ideas, emotions and social identity. Given this, language is vital for humanity's intellectual, emotional and social development as a whole.

Aside from the more practical functions, language is also considered as a vital aspect of identity. A survey by the Pew Research Center for an instance, found that a majority of countries consider their native languages as an essential marker of identity (Mitchell, 2020). On the same note, Zalmay (2017) also stipulated that language is a vehicle for history, tradition and customs. This is especially true for indigenous or regional languages which have direct links to cultural identity. As Vizuetta (2021) further stated, identity is embedded in language and is therefore an intrinsic aspect in the expression and transmission of culture and values.

Similarly, Parajuli (2021) considers language as an important factor that shapes cultural identity since it is used for interaction in various social contexts. When one generation transmit a language to another generation, the culture, values and traditions embedded in the language are also passed down ensuring that the identity of a particular group continues to live on through generations.

As of 2021, the World Atlas of Languages of the UNESCO (2021) has classified the Ibanag language to be potentially vulnerable in terms of endangerment. However, Eberhard et al. (2022) of the Summer Institute of Linguistics or SIL International, stipulated that Ibanag is currently used and sustained in different domains extending beyond the home and community. And while Coballes (2022) acknowledged the data from SIL International, he also put forth the reality that many Ibanag speakers in Cagayan and Isabela are nevertheless concerned since it has been observed that the language is not proactively transferred to the younger generations. With this, Coballes agrees to UNESCO's evaluation of Ibanag's vitality as 'threatened' as stipulated in their Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale for languages. According to said scale, Ibanag is "orally used by all generations but only some of the child-bearing generation are transmitting it to their children".

The aforementioned was further validated in the study of Tamayao (2019) which reported the dwindling utilization of the Ibanag language in Tuguegarao City, an area in Cagayan which was recognized to be predominantly Ibanag. In said study, it was also determined that there were various factors that brought about the diminishing use of the language, most, if not all, being non-linguistic in nature. In addition, it was also posited that without proper institutionalized, methodological, multidisciplinary and grassroots support, the gradual decline and loss of Ibanag would be inevitable.

As established in the vitality of a language is dependent on numerous factors but according to Falomir (2015), aside from the obvious cognitive, linguistic and pragmatic aspects, affective elements are also contributory especially among bilingual and multilingual children. Hence, language attitude is also considered in studying language use and language choice, specifically its role in both the growth and the decay of language.



The same scenario was also observed in African indigenous languages. In the work of Magwa (2015), it was discovered that English remains the most prestigious language in Zimbabwe while the indigenous languages have a relatively low status. Further inquiry revealed that this was the case since English was the primary medium of instruction in all levels of education and that it is perceived as a language that brings power and prestige. This was unfortunate since the country boasted of 16 indigenous languages which contributed to its sociolinguistic diversity. Also, the study found that the prestige of English therein is highly influenced by the colonial mentality of the country.

3. Methodology

The sequential explanatory mixed methods design is used to frame this study. The data were collected from three municipalities in the 2nd Congressional District of Isabela: Gamu, Naguilian and Reina Mercedes. These municipalities were specifically chosen to be the locale of this study as they are recognized as areas where Ibanag is widely spoken. This is further proven by the fact that when the Department of Education rolled out its MTB-MLE program, Gamu, Naguilian and Reina Mercedes were identified as the mother tongue to be used therein (Horario, 2012). Similarly, they were also recognized in Dita's (2010) study as municipalities where Ibanag is spoken at large.

The respondents of this study came from authentically Ibanag speakers. A total sample of 60 participants were randomly selected as per census records of each municipality with 20 participants coming from each respectively.

The main instruments used in the study is the questionnaire adapted from the study of Eustaquio and Tandoc (2023) titled "Language loyalty of the Ibanags: A basis for a project-based language solidarity extension program." To confirm the validity and accuracy of the respondents' responses, an interview guide was used (A priori code). These questions were validated by the researcher's adviser and the NCIP to ensure that the objectives of the study were really answered using the questions prepared.

Accordingly, the researcher had undergone to the Free and Prior Informed Consent (FPIC) pursuant to NCIP Administrative Order No.1, Series of 2012, otherwise known as the Indigenous Knowledge System and Practices (IKSPs) and Customary Laws (CLs) research and Documentation Guidelines of 2012. This is one of the programs of the NATIONAL COMMISSION ON INDIGENOUS PEOPLES (NCIP) to ensure that any documentation and or research about cultures, traditions, customs, practices, beliefs and other indigenous knowledge of the Indigenous Peoples must done/performed correctly and genuinely.

After the data were gathered, they were tabulated and tallied and were statistically treated using Statistical tools.

4. Results and Discussion

a. Use of Ibanag in Different Domains



Table 1. Ibanag in Home Domain

Indicators	Mean	Qualitative Description
1. I use Ibanag when talking to my father.	4.72	Always
2. I use Ibanag when talking to my mother.	4.77	Always
3. I use Ibanag when talking to my siblings.	4.63	Always
4. I use Ibanag when talking to my grandparents.	4.70	Always
5. I use Ibanag when talking to my other relatives.	4.57	Always
6. I use Ibanag at family meetings.	4.52	Always
Grand Mean	4.6516	Always

Table 1 presents the use of the Ibanag language in the home domain, with respondents indicating how frequently they speak Ibanag with different family members. The results show high mean scores across all indicators, with respondents reporting that they "always" use Ibanag when speaking to their father (4.72), mother (4.77), siblings (4.63), grandparents (4.70), and other relatives (4.57). Additionally, the use of Ibanag at family meetings is also rated as "always" with a mean score of 4.52. These consistently high scores reflect the central role of the Ibanag language in familial communication, indicating that it remains the primary language used within the home environment.

The grand mean of 4.6516 and the "Always" qualitative description across all indicators suggest that Ibanag is strongly maintained within the family setting. Despite external pressures from more dominant languages like Tagalog and Ilocano, this table highlights that Ibanag remains an essential part of daily communication among family members. The high frequency of Ibanag use in this intimate domain suggests that the language is still valued and preserved, particularly in close relationships and family gatherings. However, it remains to be seen whether this strong home-based usage can counteract the declining use of Ibanag in more public or formal settings.

Table 2. Ibanag in Community Domain

Indicators	Mean	Qualitative Description
1. I use Ibanag when talking to our neighbors.	4.67	Always
2. I use Ibanag when talking to my friends.	4.55	Always
3. I use Ibanag when talking to other people in our community.	4.38	Always
4. I use Ibanag when talking to our Barangay Officials.	4.32	Always
Grand Mean	4.48	Always

Table 2 illustrates the use of Ibanag in the community domain, with respondents reporting their language practices when interacting with different groups within their community. The table shows that respondents "always" use Ibanag when speaking with their neighbors (mean = 4.67) and friends (mean = 4.55). However, the use of Ibanag slightly decreases when communicating with other people in the community (mean = 4.38) and with

Barangay Officials (mean = 4.32), though it is still categorized as "always." The overall grand mean of 4.48 suggests that Ibanag remains a prevalent language in the community, though its usage is slightly less frequent in more formal interactions, such as with local officials.

The data reflects that Ibanag is still a widely used and valued language in the community, particularly in informal interactions with neighbors and friends. However, the slight decline in its use with other community members and Barangay Officials could indicate a shift towards other languages like Tagalog or Ilocano in more formal or broader social contexts. The grand mean of 4.48, categorized as "always," still demonstrates a strong attachment to Ibanag in communal settings, but the slightly lower scores in formal or larger community interactions might hint at the gradual encroachment of dominant languages in public life. This suggests that while Ibanag is robust in personal and familiar settings, its role in broader community functions may be diminishing.

Table 3. Ibanag in Work/School Domain

Indicators	Mean	Qualitative Description
1. I use Ibanag when talking to my classmates/workmates.	3.77	Often
2. I use Ibaang when talking to my teachers/boss.	3.47	Often
3. I use Ibanag when talking to my friends at school/work.	3.43	Often
4. I use Ibanag when giving instructions at school/work.	3.63	Often
5. I use Ibanag when discussing general topics (<i>weather, sports, politics, and media</i>) in school/work.	3.15	Sometimes
6. I use Ibanag when I write an SMS to my classmates/workmates.	3.22	Sometimes
Grand Mean	3.445	Sometimes

Table 3 highlights the use of Ibanag in the work and school domain, showing how frequently respondents speak Ibanag in various professional and educational contexts. The results indicate that respondents "often" use Ibanag when communicating with their classmates or workmates (mean = 3.77), when giving instructions at work or school (mean = 3.63), and when speaking with their teachers or bosses (mean = 3.47). However, the use of Ibanag decreases when discussing general topics like weather, sports, and media (mean = 3.15) and when writing SMS to classmates or workmates (mean = 3.22), both categorized as "sometimes." The overall grand mean of 3.445 suggests that, on average, Ibanag is used "sometimes" in work and school environments.

The grand mean of 3.445, categorized as "sometimes," indicates that while Ibanag is still present in work and school settings, its use is not as consistent as it is in more personal or familial domains. The higher mean scores for direct communication with classmates, workmates, and when giving instructions suggest that Ibanag is still used in face-to-face, task-oriented interactions. However, the lower scores for more casual conversations (like discussing general topics) and written communication (SMS) imply that Ibanag is being used less frequently in these contexts. This trend suggests that while Ibanag maintains relevance



in specific interpersonal interactions at work and school, its use is being overshadowed by more dominant languages, particularly in broader, less formal interactions and in written communication.

Table 4. Ibanag in Religion Domain

Indicators	Mean	Qualitative Description
1. I use Ibanag when I pray at home.	3.32	Sometimes
2. I use Ibanag when I pray at church/mosque.	3.27	Sometimes
3. I use Ibanag when I supplicate after praying.	3.35	Sometimes
4. I use Ibanag at religious meetings outside churches/mosques.	3.25	Sometimes
Grand Mean	3.2975	Sometimes

Table 4 presents the use of Ibanag in the religious domain, highlighting how frequently respondents use the language in different religious contexts. The results show that respondents "sometimes" use Ibanag when praying at home (mean = 3.32), praying at church or mosque (mean = 3.27), supplicating after prayer (mean = 3.35), and during religious meetings outside of formal religious spaces (mean = 3.25). The grand mean of 3.2975, also categorized as "sometimes," suggests that the use of Ibanag in religious practices is moderate but not consistent across all respondents or contexts.

The overall trend of "sometimes" using Ibanag in religious contexts reflects the gradual shift towards other languages, such as Tagalog or Ilocano, in religious practices. The moderate scores indicate that while some individuals still incorporate Ibanag into their prayers and religious gatherings, it is not the dominant language of worship or religious expression for many. The reliance on Ibanag appears to be context-dependent, possibly influenced by personal or community preferences. This suggests that as more formal religious institutions and gatherings favor widely spoken languages, Ibanag's role in spiritual life may be diminishing, confining its use to more personal and informal religious practices, such as at home.

2. Attitudes Towards Ibanag Language

Pride and Cultural Identity

Participants consistently express a deep sense of pride in the Ibanag language, which they see as integral to their personal and cultural identity. For many, speaking Ibanag is not just a practical means of communication but a way of connecting with their heritage. Maria Reyes, a respondent stated, "*Syempre Ibanag ako*," highlighting how being Ibanag is closely linked to speaking the language. Another respondent, Mark Santos, emphasized the pride in maintaining their cultural roots through language, stating, "*Ibanag kami, at yun ang kultura namin*". For them, the language serves as a living symbol of their collective history and community.

This sense of identity transcends generations, as respondents feel a responsibility to pass the language down to their children. Although Tagalog and Ilocano are becoming more



dominant, respondents still feel a duty to preserve Ibanag within their families, as Mark Santos mentioned, "*Natututo na po silang mag-ibanag*," when speaking about their children. The pride in being Ibanag is not merely passive; it is actively maintained through the continuous use of the language in family and community contexts, keeping their cultural identity alive (Fishman, 1991; Grenoble & Whaley, 2006; Hinton et al., 2018).

Comfort and Familiarity

For many respondents, Ibanag is the language they feel most comfortable using in intimate or familiar settings, such as at home or with friends. It represents a form of expression that feels natural and close to their hearts. Christine Garcia expressed this sentiment by stating, "*Dun ako comfort e sa Ibanag language*". This sense of ease is closely tied to their daily experiences growing up speaking Ibanag within their homes and communities. As a result, respondents find themselves reverting to Ibanag when they are with other Ibanag speakers, as it fosters a sense of belonging.

This comfort is also linked to the ability to express thoughts and emotions more clearly. Mark Santos noted, "*Naieexpress mo yung gusto mong sabihin*," indicating that using Ibanag allows for more nuanced and direct communication. Another respondent, Ian Ramos, mentioned that speaking Ibanag is second nature, especially when interacting with fellow Ibanag speakers, saying, "*Madali yung communication*". This deep-rooted familiarity with the language makes it a preferred choice in personal domains, reinforcing its role in maintaining familial and social bonds (Fishman, 1991; Grenoble & Whaley, 2006; Hinton et al., 2018).

Perception of Ibanag as a Beautiful Language

Many respondents see Ibanag as not only practical but also aesthetically pleasing. The beauty of the language is often tied to the fact that it is their mother tongue, with Maria Reyes stating, "*Maganda talaga ma'am kasi Ibanag kami e*". This appreciation stems from the language's role in their upbringing and cultural life, as it reflects their identity and the uniqueness of their community. The language's sounds, structure, and familiarity all contribute to its perceived beauty, which respondents value both emotionally and culturally (Anderson & Harrison, 2007; Rehg & Campbell, 2018; Romaine, 2013).

The aesthetic appreciation of Ibanag goes beyond mere functionality. For these speakers, Ibanag is a language of heritage, and its beauty lies in its connection to their ancestors and local traditions. Francis Gonzales highlighted this sentiment by saying, "*Syempre yun ang salita namin e*," emphasizing how the language is a reflection of their community's history. This pride in the beauty of the language drives many respondents to continue using it, despite external pressures to shift to more dominant languages like Tagalog or Ilocano.

Contextual Language Use

Despite their pride in Ibanag, many respondents acknowledge that their use of the language is context-dependent. In mixed-language environments, particularly in formal settings like schools, workplaces, and even some social interactions, respondents often switch to Tagalog or Ilocano. This switch is largely pragmatic, as Karl Villanueva explained, "*Kapag kausap mo ay hindi naman marunong mag-Ibanag, kailangan gumamit ng other*".



language". The necessity to communicate effectively in these settings often forces respondents to prioritize broader, more widely understood languages over Ibanag.

Even though Ibanag holds significant value in familial or community settings, the language is less dominant in professional or public domains (Fishman, 1991; Grenoble & Whaley, 2006; Hinton et al., 2018). Respondents pointed out that while they are proud of their language, they recognize the need to adapt to different social circumstances. Christine Garcia stated, "*Depende sa kausap*," when asked about when they use Ibanag, highlighting the practical considerations that guide their language choice. This pattern of switching languages based on context illustrates the balancing act that many Ibanag speakers must navigate between preserving their language and adapting to broader linguistic norms.

Belief in Ibanag's Role in Unifying the Community

For some respondents, Ibanag is more than just a means of communication—it is a binding force within the community. The language is seen as a unifying factor that helps maintain a collective identity among Ibanag speakers. Ian Ramos commented, "*Ibanag ang nagkakaintindihan kami*," suggesting that the language fosters mutual understanding and solidarity among members of the community. This belief in the unifying power of Ibanag reinforces its importance not just on an individual level but as a collective cultural asset.

This sense of unity extends beyond immediate family members and permeates wider social networks. Ian Ramos further noted that Ibanag plays a role in gatherings and local events, saying, "*Yun po ang usapan nila dito ma'am*," indicating that the language is central to communication during communal activities. For these respondents, Ibanag represents more than just words—it is a vehicle for community cohesion and cultural continuity (Eustaquio, 2019; Anderson & Harrison, 2007; Rehag & Campbell, 2018; Romaine, 2013). This belief strengthens the resolve of many speakers to keep using Ibanag in their interactions, despite the dominance of other languages in formal settings.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show that while Ibanag remains a strong presence within the home and community, its use is diminishing in more formal domains such as work, school, and religion. The generational language shift, where younger people are more exposed to and prefer using Tagalog and Ilocano, poses a significant threat to the sustainability of Ibanag. Additionally, the dominance of these languages in schools, media, and workplaces further marginalizes Ibanag in daily life, particularly in public and formal contexts. The lack of institutional support and the perceived limited utility of Ibanag in professional settings exacerbates the language's gradual decline, leaving it primarily confined to informal settings and personal interactions.

To counteract these trends, this study recommends a multifaceted approach to revitalize the Ibanag language. Programs such as community-based workshops, media and technology campaigns, and youth engagement initiatives can help to ensure that Ibanag continues to thrive across all domains. By creating modern and appealing platforms for Ibanag and encouraging its use among younger generations, these efforts will foster a stronger connection to the language, ensuring its relevance for future generations. These



initiatives can preserve not only the language itself but also the cultural identity it represents, helping to maintain a vital link between the Ibanag people and their heritage.

Hence, further research should explore the relationship between language vitality and community identity to understand how cultural pride influences language maintenance. Additionally, researchers should investigate the impact of intergenerational language transmission on the preservation of minority languages in multilingual contexts. They should also examine the role of institutional support, such as government policies and educational programs, in sustaining endangered languages over time.

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