

Preserving the Ancestral Language: A Case Study of the Tagbanua Language in Irawan

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In the age of globalization, an important issue for some of the small ethnic communities of Palawan is whether or not they can preserve their ancestral language. The Tagbanua of Irawan is the ethnic group living closest to the city of Puerto Princesa. Irawan is a city barangay, approximately ten kilometers away from the city proper. There are two sites in Irawan inhabited by the Tagbanua, namely Sitio Iratag and Sitio Taga-ud. Both are accessible by motorcycle or strong jeep. This paper investigates the factors reinforcing the desire of the members of the tribe to perpetuate their language, their own perception of that language, the social forces inducing some members of the community not to learn or speak the language, and its chances of survival.

The constant changes taking place in the city, migration, stereotyping, mainstreaming of tribal members through intermarriage, education, work, the desire to enjoy city life, and other reasons which may not be of their own choice, such as forced relocations, are considered deciding factors on the fate of the language.

To collect the necessary data, the interviewer conducted personal interviews with tribal members within a two month period. Four major groups of respondents were considered respondents of the study. The first group consists of Tagbanua residents of Iratag. The second group, the residents of Taga-ud, are at present facing a socio-cultural crisis: they are being asked by the city government to give up their ancestral domain for the good of the greater majority, as Taga-ud is in the watershed supplying the city's water. But relocation would place the natives' ancestral homes, their means of livelihood, their heritage, and even their chances of language preservation at risk. The third group is composed of Tagbanua elementary school students in the area, and is further divided between three different schools. The fourth group of respondents is composed of Tagbanuas who have lived in Irawan barangay proper for one year or more. The medium used in all interviews was Filipino, the respondents being fluent speakers of the national language. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed.