

Ethnolinguistic Vitality And Rootedness In Language And Identity Among Philippine Indigenous Communities

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Abstract: Ethnolinguistic vitality is the ability of a group to further preserve and maintain its existence in time without the threat of cultural assimilation. This article reviews the literature evaluating the ethnolinguistic vitality of indigenous communities in the Philippines in terms of rooting their language and identity. We focused on six (6) indigenous communities: the T'boli, the Mandaya, the Higaunon, the Talaandig, the Manobo, and the Subanon, as they were the ones that had been surveyed for ethnolinguistic vitality studies. We extracted the details of each community and categorized them into five (5) discussions: history, ethnolinguistic vitality, language, and identity, variables, standard model, and indigeneity. Only the Mandaya showed significant ethnolinguistic vitality, an observation supported by them also being the only group reported to have met the standard model. The T'boli managed to preserve their customs until discrimination against indigeneity and poor access to education and healthcare threatened assimilation. We found that dying ancestral oral traditions and an absence of written documents had been responsible for the Higaonon's fading linguistic distinctiveness and the Talaandig's language being neglected, respectively. We also found that the loss of speakers and outright rejection of the language and/or identity had, for the Manobo, come from a lack of institutional aid, failure of elders to teach the language, and, especially for the Subanon, prejudice. In conclusion, low vitality groups face cultural assimilation; indigenous peoples in the Philippines, in general, lack in the variables to maintain their ethnolinguistic vitality, and discrimination discourages indigenous people to identify as indigenous.

Index Terms: ethnolinguistic vitality, identity, indigeneity, indigenous communities, indigenous languages, language, language preservation

1 INTRODUCTION

The term Ethnolinguistic Vitality was first introduced back in 1977 from a research paper proposed by Giles et al. and has remained a topic of attention from this point onwards (Ehala, 2011). One reason for the increase of such interest was the adverse effects of globalization in the modern world (Yagmur & Ehala, 2011). For Yagmur and Ehala (2011), globalization has created an alarming number of traditional ethnolinguistic groups to experience vulnerability with the incursion of dominant languages and the birth of cultural assimilations. Additionally, through EV, one can identify the fundamental factors that can make up the vitality of ethnolinguistic groups (Yagmur, 2011). Ethnolinguistic Vitality (EV) is the ability of a group to preserve its existence by protecting its distinctive identity and language (Ehala, 2015). Ehala (2015) later mentions that the term involves the continuation of transmitting the intergenerational

language and cultural practices, social solidity, emotional connection, sustainable demography, and active organizations from a certain group to its future generations. Since ethnolinguistic vitality is associated with the presence or absence of language shift, it is undeniably a complex task (Karan, 2011). In Ehala's (2015) study under the standard model, groups that are high-vitality are utmost adept to secure their benefits inside its intergroup setting, whereas low-vitality groups are more prone to adjustment of their own culture to adapt with the others. Ehala (2011) argues that as the world's diversity developed over thousands of years, with the notion that the predecessor groups could no longer be traceable at this point, there is no doubt that most of the ethnic groups still exist today have sustained themselves for an extended period.

The Philippines is a rich country of diverse languages, but there remains a few unexplored Philippine Languages (PLs) (Tajolosa, 2012). Due to the lack of interest in Philippine Linguistics, the struggle between finding a good basis for a research study is a mainstream problem surfacing. Baluyos and Villanueva (2014) put forward the common dilemmas of reality; it speaks that the lesser-known the Philippine Language is, the more prone it is for cultural and linguistic assimilation. Since the mainstream language is more favorable for superiority, elevating the notion of a higher class of social and economic statuses, it makes the other less known languages devoid of use (Baker, 2017). Although there were interventions by the Philippine government in the past particularly in the national language that would be further developed and enriched based on existing Philippine and other languages as stated in the 1987 Philippine Constitution, Article XIV, Section 6, the difficult process of establishing a national language has led to the use of Tagalog in the guise of Filipino (Nares, 2020), and, as a result, other indigenous languages have been neglected and completely lost insight (Smolicz, 1984). For example, the very minimal studies and documentation about Talaandig and as formerly mentioned, the neglect of indigenous languages, maybe resulting in difficult or fewer interventions by the government and international

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organizations. However, local government units of different communities have their actions to maintain the preservation of the overall culture of the indigenous people. For instance, the local government of Ozamiz City highlights the people of the Subanon tribe in the course of the annual charter celebration of the city (Baluyos & Villanueva, 2014). The Subanens are availed of hospitalization benefits and employment priorities by decree. They are also integrated into both the political and social mainstream of society. Baluyos and Villanueva (2014) further state that regardless of the local government unit's actions, the Subanen respondents claimed that the support of the local or national government is on a very limited scale. The support has not attained their most pressing basic need for sustenance, for interventions to attenuate their plight, for strong advocacy to help preserve their native language, and for the freedom to speak their language without fear of being diminished as an inferior group of people. This particular situation implies that the Subanens believe that tangible programs to address their needs for cultural and language preservation are what they need but local and national authorities have yet to offer them these. The interventions done by their local government in maintaining the preservation of their overall culture have been inadequate. Objective ethnolinguistic vitality (OEV), as defined, is the vitality of an ethnolinguistic group that makes them behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations (Fransisco, 2018). The Philippines is inhabited by several indigenous groups of people (Baluyos & Villanueva, 2014). Most indigenous groups manifest proficiency in their language, but a number also exhibit linguistic inadequacy in their mother tongue. Language shift and language loss are evident in most communities: many are or have members that become incapable of speaking their mother tongue for reasons. The Philippines, due to its archipelagic nature, is linguistically diverse. Being the melting pot in Asia during the pre-colonial era, the Philippines, from its northernmost part until the southernmost part, has not only been traded with goods but was influenced as well with languages; and so, indigenous languages are on the verge of extinction. After a long run of these indigenous people striving to preserve their language, the Philippine government finally stepped up in 1997 where DepEd has envisioned strengthening the learner's knowledge of their mother tongue to be proficient in a second language (Nares, 2018). The government and non-government sectors, including educational institutions need to collaborate in strengthening their programs for the survival of indigenous people in the locality. National or local government units should provide sustainable programs geared to promoting cultural diversity and tribal language vitality. Schools in the communities can be tapped by teaching children their first languages through integration in the mother-tongue-based (MTB) program so that they will be given their rightful identity in society (Baluyos & Villanueva, 2014). For the past 30 years since the notion of ethnolinguistic vitality, researchers have argued about how much importance the preservation of language entity has exhibited. Ehala (2010) cites three theoretical concepts which involve the ability of the group to strengthen in dealing with the challenges that they may encounter along the way: sustainability, strength, and vitality. It is further explained that vitality may depend on the perception of the inside ethnic group comparing itself to the outside group. However, the comparative study of media, media use, and ethnolinguistic vitality in bilingual communities has focused on the relationship between media, identity, and language in situations where speakers of a

minority language are mixed into a majority population (Ezuka-Jeful, 2011). Numerous studies have been conducted abroad regarding ethnolinguistic vitality and how it supports the languages and identities of indigenous communities. However, not so much has been conducted on the 110 indigenous groups in the Philippines. Hence, this study seeks to reveal the gaps in ethnolinguistic vitality research in the Philippines by collecting as much information as available on the cultural and linguistic conditions of indigenous communities through an extended review of the literature. Generally, this extended literature review aims at synthesizing the researches evaluating the ethnolinguistic vitality of the indigenous communities in the Philippines in terms of establishing their language and identity. Specifically, it aims to determine the contribution of ethnolinguistic vitality to the overall language and identity of the Philippine indigenous peoples, identify the variables present to support the communities' ethnolinguistic vitality, analyze the standard model of ethnolinguistic vitality in the Philippine context, and ascertain the significance of ethnolinguistic vitality to the presence of Philippine indigenous peoples and existence, maintenance, and preservation of Philippine indigenous identity in the modern world, all based on the studies found. This extended literature review is composed of the Review of Literature and the Conclusion. In the Review of Literature, we will cover the relevant studies and literature on the brief histories of select Philippine indigenous communities and about the contribution of ethnolinguistic vitality to their overall language and identity, the variables supporting their ethnolinguistic vitality, the standard model of ethnolinguistic vitality in the context of these communities, and the role of indigeneity or legal identity in their ethnolinguistic vitality. In the Conclusion, we will summarize the findings of these researches, their limitations, and implications.

2 BRIEF HISTORY OF SELECT PHILIPPINE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

The Philippines is a culturally diverse archipelago that mostly uses ethnicity and/or language to label its identity (Hernani et al., 2021). Along with the numerous ethnic communities in the Philippines is the T'boli tribe. Also labeled as Tagabili or Tivoli, this indigenous community mostly lives near the lands of southwestern Mindanao, more particularly in South Cotabato (Talavera, 2013). Hernani et. al (2021) further note that amid the interference of the local neighboring communities, as well as the early colonialization of different races, the T'boli tribe still managed to preserve their culture and traditions for many years. Mindanao's Mandaya people live in Davao Oriental and Davao del Norte. Their name means "the first people upstream," derived from man ("first") and data ("upstream or upper portion of a river"). The Mandaya's deep belief developed a one-of-a-kind fusion of nature, spirits, and man. Undoubtedly, the Mandaya has one of the richest cultural heritage among ethnic groups. The first province in Mindanao, the old Caraga, has its capital in the town of Caraga in present-day Davao Oriental (Cacal, 2010). The Philippines has a wide variety of ethnic groups living across the land (Saranza, 2016). One, in particular, Higaonon, are the indigenous people living in the mountains, and are sometimes referred to as "people in the wilderness". Saranza (2016) has dissected the word "Higaonon" to its real meaning: "high" means "to live or reside," "gaon" means "mountain or highland," and "onon" means "people." Mostly living in the highlands of Mindanao, these indigenous people live way past the colonization of the

Spaniards back in the early 16th century (Paredes, 2019). Paredes (2019) further explains that among these pre-colonial groups, or in other words, the people who resisted the Spanish power, were the Lumad (indigenous people) and the Moros (people who converted to Islam before Christianity arrived in the Philippines). Thus, Mindanao became the home of many untouched ancestries that continued to thrive as the colonization assimilated the other parts of the country (Paredes, 2019). One of the seven Lumad groups in the province of Bukidnon is the Talaandig tribe and the members of the group are found in barangays and municipalities encompassing the historic domain of the Talaandig people, the mountain of Kitanglad (Arcilla et al., 2019). Others may likewise be found in Lantapan, Bangkud, Malaybalay, and Songco (Perez, 2013). Arcilla et al. (2019) add that the Talaandigs of Bukidnon are from the stock of aboriginal non-Negritoid people called the "Proto-Manobo" who settled among the mountain slopes of the region of Bukidnon in Mindanao and that they were additionally called "Bukidnons" signifying "mountain people", a general designation derived from the Cebuano word "bukid," which means mountain coined by the lowland settlers or Montesses by the Spaniards. Like other native people groups, the Talaandig are animists who love the spirits of the concealed world although embedded in their undocumented oral customs are vignettes scripturally strong legends (Lagunday et al., 2015). Originally, the Manobos, also known as "nitibo," or "natives," inhabit the land drained by the Agusan River. However, when Christian settlers from other Philippine islands and Visayan immigrants arrived, the previous population was driven into the mountainsides and slopes, and they are now more dominant and in possession of the flat areas in the Agusan Valley (Campos, 2014). The Philippines is home to 120-187 dialects of different indigenous groups of people and one of them is the Subanen/Subanon tribe. They are from the Zamboanga peninsula area, particularly living in the mountainous areas of Zamboanga del Sur and the areas of Misamis Occidental, located on the island of Mindanao (Pantao, 2021). The Subanon/Subanen language has over about 125,000 speakers found in the areas of Malayal, Lintangan, Siocon, Baliguian, Gutalac, Labason, R.T. Lim (traditionally known as Surabai), and Ipil. The name "Subanon" means "a person or people of the river." They are originally farmers who moved from one place to another to plant food and harvest them for their food in everyday living (Estioca, 2020).

3 THE CONTRIBUTION OF ETHNOLINGUISTIC VITALITY TO THE OVERALL LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY OF PHILIPPINE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Language needs preservation and giving and gaining knowledge about it. Maintaining and preserving the community's language is giving respect to the ancestors. Ethnolinguistic vitality determines the groups or community's capability to protect the existence of a language. Clément and Norton (2020) establish the relationship between social context, identity, and intergroup relations that refers to the overall influences and examine the vitality of ethnolinguistic vitality. The discussion also circulates the objective and subjective aspects of the group which then focuses on linguistic identification and motivation. Indigenous people are traditionally identified as descendants of a country or region's original inhabitants who were present before people of different ethnic or cultural backgrounds arrived and later

became dominant through settlement or occupation of some kind (Balilla et al., 2013). The Philippines has a large number of indigenous languages, with thirty of them already classified as endangered. Groups with poor vitality go through linguistic assimilation, while high-viability classes are more likely to keep their language. In certain language communication situations, however, a minority group can only turn to a collective strategy for survival if its members strongly identify with their culture. Even in multilingual environments, language and cultural repertoire are distinct (Smith et al., 2017). Among the indigenous communities selected for this review, only the Mandaya are found to be of high vitality. They were able to preserve strong bonds with their ethnic group and found a way for their new and traditional beliefs to coexist: they are very close to their families and Christianized Mandaya still retain some of the past beliefs creating a syncretic form of religion (Cacal, 2010). In terms of identity, the Higaonon Tribe is the least identified among all the ethnic groups living in the Philippines (Saranza, 2016). Threats of cultural assimilation have already created a mark on their endangered identity, most of which denotes the dying of their ancestral oral literature, which is the primary source of their language distinctiveness (Saranza, 2016). The Talaandig tribe is one of the indigenous groups in the Philippines that belong to the minority, and only a few studies have been conducted and existent; therefore, conducting studies about them would be onerous, especially when it comes to the aspect of their overall culture and ethnolinguistic vitality. This might lead to the demise of the community's general cultural knowledge being passed from generation to generation through written materials (Perez, 2019). Although there are existing studies from researchers like Perez (2019) and Arcilla et al. (2019) focusing on the community's courtship practices and their knowledge of good and evil, respectively, studies about the community's background in terms of ethnolinguistic vitality are difficult to find, and part of the reasons why is because of the Talaandig's written materials are very scanty and the neglect of indigenous languages made it even involuted. Within Manobo homes, Lumad language transmission is low. Furthermore, because this information transfer is based on the availability and disposition of Manobo elders and caretakers at home, it is inefficient. As Lumad parents are exhausted from work, they are unable to instruct their children at night. Young Manobo is known for their controlled nonchalance toward their language and culture. This is particularly noticeable among those who have left their community for further education or employment. When asked whether they are Manobo or not, Lumad children, for example, say that they are not. This is most likely a sign of a general distaste or inferiority of one's language and culture, although it could be something else entirely. As a result, this pessimistic mindset is likely to hasten the collapse of their own culture and language. The case of the Subanen language is fascinatingly similar. It used to be a language widely used by various areas of Zamboanga Peninsula namely the provinces of Zamboanga Sibugay, Zamboanga del Norte, and Zamboanga del Sur, and in Misamis Occidental of Northern Mindanao. The constant use of the first language is critical for its transmission. However, a number of those who know the language withhold themselves from speaking it even with their family members. Languages that are oftentimes used in private and familial contexts, as well as in public settings hold a greater chance of vitality (Barni & Bagna, 2010).

4 THE VARIABLES SUPPORTING THE ETHNOLINGUISTIC VITALITY OF PHILIPPINE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

As previously mentioned, almost all of the selected indigenous communities in the Philippines suffer from low ethnolinguistic vitality, except the Mandaya. Even then, as IPs, who generally live in remote and far-flung areas, they are precluded from enjoying access to essential services like education, health, livelihood opportunities, and political participation, which affect their ethnolinguistic vitality. The lack of such variables to support thus also drive away indigenous peoples to gross conditions of health, education, economic, and political deprivation as cited by the Philippine Judicial Academy (Cacal, 2010). In the case of the T'boli, Talavera (2013) adds that access to education, health benefits, etc. is still a point of struggle. For Manobos, the lack of support from government and academic institutions means a lack of opportunities for development (Nuñez, 2019). Variables such as educational support and interest are indeed vital to the ethnolinguistic vitality of indigenous people (Napil & San Jose, 2020). Over the years, many Subanen stopped using the language due to different factors such as discrimination and intermarriage which resulted in a small number of speakers (Pantao, 2021). For instance, intrinsic and extrinsic causes, such as language contact, parental apathy, mixed marriages, and tribal discrimination, affect the language vitality of the Subanen people. These people's linguistic vitality is dwindling as their culture, as well as the language they speak, is increasingly being dominated against by non-tribals. The non-tribal culture has affected the Subanen's way of life (Nares, 2018).

5 THE STANDARD MODEL OF ETHNOLINGUISTIC VITALITY IN THE PHILIPPINE CONTEXT

As stated in the standard model, the vitality of an ethnolinguistic group is what makes the group likely to behave as both active and distinctive collective entities in intergroup situations (Bourhis et al., 2015). As a result, ethnolinguistic minorities with little or no group vitality are likely to cease to exist as separate groups. On the contrary, linguistic groups that have high vitality are more likely to survive and thrive as collective entities in intergroup contexts. Ethnolinguistic vitality has been classified into two: objective vitality (OV) and subjective vitality (SV). OV is the strength of the group established by three groups of variables: demographic factors, institutional support factors, and status factors. They further state that demographic factors are those that relate to the scale of the group, birth rate, endogamy, exogamy patterns, immigration, emigration and geographical distribution of the members of the group, their proportion concerning a member of various out-groups, and their historical correlation to their populated territory. Institutional support factors contain formal and informal support factors. Formal support factors specify the extent to which the group members have obtained positions of power in business, industry, administration, education, mass media, culture, sports, and other fields. Informal support factors refer to a group's point wherein they have organized themselves as a pressure group in safeguarding their interests in social institutions such as education, culture, and administration. Status factors are the group's reputation, its socio-historic status, that is, respect with its historic achievements as its basis, and the prestige of its culture and language within a society, as well as internationally.

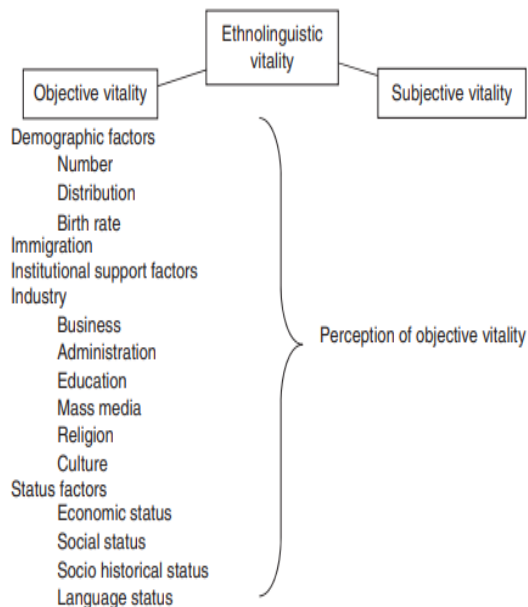


Fig. 1. The standard model of ethnolinguistic vitality. Source: Adapted from Bourhis, El-Geledi, & Sachdev (2015).

Applying this framework to the Philippine context, we could explain the high vitality status of the exception of indigenous groups such as Mandaya. In 2010, the Ancestral Domain Sustainable Development and Protection Plan (ADSDPP) of the Mandaya Community of Manay, Davao Oriental was crafted by the Mandaya Association of Taocanga Tribal Council (MATTCI). The goals for this plan are to implement sustainable development programs with the help of various agencies through the proper use of human and natural resources. It also aims to effectively manage the whole ancestral domain and its natural resources according to their indigenous knowledge systems and practices and traditions, ensure the recognition and protection of the rights of the people to the land, and to pursue development (Cacal, 2010). This concrete support from the administration contrasts with the rest of the indigenous groups like the Manobo whose language may soon lose speakers without institutional assistance from the local government, schools, and others (Nuñez, 2019). Although several institutions assist in areas such as schooling, government services, the environment, politics, and religion, socio-cultural support by the media and religious institutions has been discovered to have a lower level of funding (Fransisco, 2018). As evidenced by the above-mentioned details, for Philippine indigenous communities to meet the standard model of ethnolinguistic vitality, academic institutions and the government should make more visible projects to strengthen the culture of indigenous peoples and for them to be recognized not as primitives but as the gem of the land (Nuñez, 2019).

6 ETHNOLINGUISTIC VITALITY AND THE INDIGENEITY OR LEGAL IDENTITY OF PHILIPPINE INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Indigenous peoples have defined ways to assert their identity in the contemporary, globalized world. In relations between indigenous peoples, contemporary state actors, and often-

globalized non-governmental and commercial powers, contestation over rights, subsistence protection, and self-determination are main features (Kraljić & Stolz, 2010). Indigenous communities have adopted the concept of "identity", using it to express their cultural distinctiveness and freedom, validate claims to land and wealth, form strong alliances, and gain global recognition that is matched by a moral forcefulness to seek attention and redress from policymakers and national and foreign governance and law organs (Stilz, 2015). In the Philippines, the term "indigeneity" has different political connotations. Indigeneity is a term that is used to refer to ethnic minorities that are commonly recognized as not only culturally distinct but also racially distinct from the majority Filipino community, as established by the national Indigenous Peoples' Rights Act. Paredes (2019) explores the realistic consequences for Higaunons of state initiatives aimed at maintaining indigeneity and "tradition" among the Philippines' Indigenous Peoples, based primarily on ethnographic evidence from an ongoing field research project on Indigenous governance among the Higaunon Lumad people of Misamis Oriental province and the surrounding area. Higaunons have their definition of indigeneity, in which particular domains are linked to specific genealogical lines, with usage rights defined by descent from or marriage into these lines. This definition of indigeneity is distinguished from concerns of Higaunon-ness, since being Higaunon does not grant territorial privileges in and of itself (Paredes, 2019). Hernani et. al. (2021) argue that up to this day, negative connotations against the word "indigenous" are still relevant. Among the affected are the T'boli men and women who constantly feel the discriminatory remarks of people towards their community. Additionally, like the others, the typical effect of cultural assimilation can be found inside the group, with some of the customs originally intended for preservation is ultimately collapsing (Talavera, 2013).

7 CONCLUSION

The problem of globalization exposing an increasing number of indigenous ethnolinguistic communities to vulnerability with the intrusion of dominant languages and the creation of cultural assimilations has, over the years, attracted increasing interest in ethnolinguistic vitality research, hence this review, which has attempted to synthesize the researches that evaluate the ethnolinguistic vitality of indigenous communities in the Philippines and their relation to the rootedness of language and identity of their members. Among the selected indigenous communities, Mandaya is the only one considered to have high ethnolinguistic vitality for meeting the standard model, with their tribal council establishing sustainable programs with the assistance of various agencies recognizing and protecting their land rights, allowing them to effectively manage the entire ancestral domain and its natural resources according to indigenous knowledge systems, practices, and traditions. In terms of language's contribution to identity, the demise of ancestral oral literature, which served as a basis for the Higaunon's linguistic distinctiveness, has resulted in the deterioration of community members' rootedness of identity. Similarly, a scarcity of written sources in Talaandig has resulted in a disregard for language maintenance and preservation. The failure of elders and caregivers to teach their language, along with a lack of institutional aid, has resulted in low language transmission within the Manobo community, and, worse than the Higaunon situation, rejection, and scorn of

Manobo identity. The Subanen's preference for not using their original language, especially in private and familial circumstances, has resulted in a similar problem as the Manobo but is more of a result of discrimination against their community. This thread of discrimination continues with the T'boli, as the stigma surrounding indigeneity has resulted in members assimilating and abandoning the identification altogether. The findings prove that populations with low ethnolinguistic vitality experience linguistic and cultural assimilation, as in the case with the Higaunon and Subanen. Variables that sustain ethnolinguistic vitality, such as education, healthcare, economic possibilities, and political engagement, are lacking in most indigenous communities, failing to meet the standard model of ethnolinguistic vitality and hence low ethnolinguistic vitality. Finally, the negative connotation of indigeneity has led to discrimination against indigenous languages and identities, further undermining a community's ethnolinguistic vitality. The papers evaluated were accomplished in identifying major advancements and issues in indigenous people research, notably about ethnolinguistic vitality, its components, and its impact on language and identity. They also highlighted major issues in indigenous communities, such as a lack of access to basic services and prejudice. What these studies accomplished, however, is dwarfed by the details that have still to be discovered. The most crucial of them is that the indigenous communities chosen for study are all limited to Mindanao. Even some of these communities lack information in certain categories. More research on each indigenous tribe in the Philippines' three islands is unquestionably needed. Future research may concentrate on individual communities, with the standard model serving as the foundation for assessing each community's ethnolinguistic vitality. More research may be done on the role of tribal councils, government support, and land rights in the preservation of indigenous languages and identities. The implications of these studies underline the importance of indigeneity in inspiring indigenous peoples to fight for their languages, customs, and rights to ensure their survival in the modern world.

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