
RESEARCH ARTICLE

To Be or Not To Be? A Question of Linguistic Resilience Among Young Speakers of Batak, a Critically Endangered Philippine Language

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the existence of resilience resource factors that may promote language maintenance in a Batak community whose language is critically endangered. Drawn from Chandler and Lalonde's (1998) concept of cultural resilience, Olsson et al.'s resilience resources model (2003), and Landweer's (2002) indicators of language use, interview and observation data from twenty-five children were collected and analyzed within ten months. Data were validated from interviews and focus-group discussions with parents, local leaders, and teachers in the community. Findings showed that: (1) the individual's developed language, strong identity with the Batak community and their self-efficacy, malleability, and flexibility are the resilience resources at the individual level; (2) cohesion and care within the family, strong use of Batak language at home and being a non-blaming family are the resilience resources at the family level; and (3) positive teacher influences in Batak language maintenance, being a non-punitive community and the consistent use of the Batak language within the community on a day to day interactions are the resilience resources at the community level. The enumerated are strong language resilience resource factors promoting language resilience among young Batak speakers.

KEYWORDS

Resilience, literacy, language maintenance, protective factors

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1. Introduction

The Batak language community is one of the five indigenous groups identified in Palawan and is considered the most economically underprivileged group. Headland (2003), listed Batak as one of the thirty-two Negrito languages in the Philippines that are endangered. Originally dark-skinned and short in stature, these people inhabited eight river valleys in the north of Palawan and Puerto Princesa City. Eder (1993), an American anthropologist, declared them a "disappearing tribe". As of 2010, the Batak population, according to National Statistics Authority (NSA), was 416 Batak, which included children of mixed marriages between a Batak and another ethnic group.

According to Warren (1964), most Batak are bilinguals, speaking both Batak and Tagbanua (another ethnic group), and some of the men, have acquired a limited knowledge of conversational Tagalog or Cuyonon. Like all other Philippine languages, Batak belongs to the Malayo-Polynesian (Austronesian) language family. A sociolinguistic survey conducted in 2011, identified the Batak adults as highly multilingual, speaking at least three languages (including Batak), while children who are seven years old and below were almost monolingual, speaking Batak as their first language with very little knowledge of Tagalog.

Of the eight valleys inhabited by the Batak, only three areas have the most concentration of "pure" Batak speakers, namely, Sitio Lipso in Barangay Maoyon, Sition Kalakwasan in Barangay Tanabag and Sitio Mangapin in Barangay Langogan, all northern parts of the City of Puerto Princesa. Such areas, however, especially Lipso and Mangapin are threatened with intermarriage and migration. With an estimated current population of about 500, the Batak language is considered critically endangered. In principle, a language has to have a minimum of 10,000 speakers to be considered safe. The Batak however, is dwindling, with only barely 5

percent of the standard number of speakers of a safe language community.

For many years until around 2011, the Batak have managed to live in relative isolation, with contacts with other speaking groups when they trade almaciga, wild boar or when they need to get supplies for the households. Except in Sitio Mangapin, no school was present in Sitio Kalakwasan and Lipso, and owing to poverty and distance from habitation, very few Batak send their children to public schools located in the barangay proper. As a matter of fact, most adult Batak claimed not to have reached grade 1 and they only learned to sign their names for transaction purposes. There was no supply of electricity and no water system. The households generally lived in extreme simplicity, surviving with only two major meals a day and no presence of television. The only person who had a cellphone was the local leader and there were only about two households with a motorcycle.

Gradually, many things have changed for the Batak, especially Kalakwasan, where the greatest number of Batak reside. In 2013, the Shell company-sponsored solar lighting facility for the Batak. It became operational in 2014. The solar bulbs, however, light the house for four hours only in the evening. In addition, the local government put up a water system for the people. Likewise, the men started acquiring motorcycles for the family to transport the harvested almaciga to the buyers and take members to satellite clinics when they are sick. It was also in 2013, when Heaven's Jewels, a missionary school was built in Kalakwasan to offer the children basic education and teach them the word of God. The school started with two volunteer missionary teachers and currently has five teachers handling multigrade classes.

The Batak household especially the adults, started acquiring cellphones for communication. Eventually, the male children who helped their fathers in their work acquired their own cellphones. There are about three televisions in the community watched by the households in the evening. Since solar energy comes from the sun and is never enough to last most of the evening, households contribute equally to purchasing gas for the community generator to light the whole area for four hours, especially on Fridays and Saturdays.

With threats of technology, a small number of speakers, intermarriage, and increased language contact, it is timely and relevant to examine the resilience resources present in the community from which young Batak speakers may draw their linguistic resilience.

2. Literature review

2.1 Issues Surrounding Resilience Studies

One important paper discussing linguistic resilience is the one written by Fitzgerald (2017) as a commentary on Mufwene's (2017) paper, specifically pointing out what is missing in the discussion on Language Endangerment and Loss (LES) is language revitalization. Fitzgerald strongly argues that any resilience study should involve/accommodate revitalization as an end goal, which Mufwene seems to have not emphasized. Fitzgerald adds that "language revitalization functions an adaptive capacity and serves as a protective factor as argued in research papers dwelling with traditional culture, language and related activities (Zimmerman et al. 1998).

Despite the nobility of the idea of language revitalization, the proponent of the present study observed that in many ways, the resilience framework espoused by both Mufwene or the modified version being advanced by Fitzgerald, may not fit the situation of the Batak in the Philippines, and may not even fit languages in third world countries experiencing the same situations. This belief is prompted by the following reasons:

Firstly, the languages which made use of the resilience framework were those minority languages from the North American context, the United States and Canada, and even those in Australia and New Zealand. Such languages, according to Mufwene (2017) suffered endangerment and loss caused by colonization and genocide. Colonization and genocide are really "adverse" and "traumatic" events which have long-term negative effects on the people and their language. In addition, such events took place a long time ago and form part of discussions to explain dead languages or those that are being reclaimed. It may, therefore, not fitting to presume that the challenges to resilience, and the protective factors present in those communities, are the same challenges and protective factors present in smaller language communities such as the Batak in the Philippines.

Secondly, none of the studies done previously seemed to involve languages in the current generation especially those smaller languages from developing countries such as the Philippines. Most of the studies conducted were either dead or on the brink of extinction. The fitness, therefore, of the framework to study resilience in endangered languages whose speakers are still very much alive, may not have been accommodated.

Thirdly, Resilience is defined (Janas, 2002) as "the ability to bounce back from adversity, frustration, a definition inspired by the field of psychology, which started the use of the resilience terminology. Although similar definitions are given in literature from different fields: (leadership) ...ability to maintain resilience in the face of prolonged contact with adversity (Ackerman & Maslin-

Ostrowski, 2002; Greene, 2002; Heifetz & Linsky, 2004, among others; (psychology) the capacity to face stressors without significant negative disruption in functioning (Perry, 2002); from human development, resiliency was defined as the ability to withstand or successfully cope with adversity (Werner and Smith, 2001) and social sciences defines resilience as the ability to recover from negative life experiences and become stronger while overcoming them. Most studies in linguistic resilience tend to adopt the resilience as defined by psychology, that is, resilience exhibited in the face of 'adversity' and 'positive adaptation'. This implies that for resilience to be demonstrated, both 'adversity' and 'positive adaptation' must be evident. (Fletcher & Sarkar, 2013, p. 8)

In their review and critique of the definitions and concepts of psychological resilience as adopted in the fields of business organizations, education, military, sports performance, and communities, Fletcher and Sarkar (2013), clearly pointed out the existence of the wide discrepancies in the way "resilience" is defined and conceptualized in those studies which contributed to the difficulties in conducting resilience research. One of the discrepancies according to them, is the use of adversity. Davis, Lueken, and Lemery-Chalfant (2009b, cited by Fletcher and Sarkar) argue that "for most of us, the adversities we encounter do not constitute major disasters, but rather modest disruptions that are embedded in our everyday lives" (p. 1638). Another criticism in the area of resilience research is the (negative) value-laden connotations associated with the term "adversity", which according to the authors, majority of work conducted defined "adversity" by associating negative circumstances with negative consequences, or using risk-related terminology, focusing on established, statistically significant predictors of maladjustment. Fletcher and Sarkar argue that even positive life events, not typically associated with a higher probability of undesirable outcomes- may be relevant in defining resilience. Another important observation is the varied reference of studies to "resilience" as a 'trait', 'process' or 'outcome'. It is suggested that researchers on resilience should be clear from the start whether the term resilience would refer to an individual or group trait, or a process, or an outcome.

Finally, an important yet often overlooked issue when examining positive adaptation is the socio-cultural contexts in which the individual operates (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Mahoney & Bergman. Likewise, Ungar (2008) and Ungar and Liebenberg, 2011) emphasized that resilience research has predominantly defined positive adaptation from a Western psychological discourse with an emphasis on individual and relational capacities such as academic success and healthy relationships. According to them, such notions fail to capture the 'cultural factors' that contextualize how certain populations define resilience and how the same is manifested in their practices.

The present study, therefore, is a response to the dearth of research for a resilience study of an indigenous community in the Philippines, whose speakers, although they have not undergone really "adverse" and "traumatic" events in their lives, encounter threats economically, socially and linguistically, yet "manifest competence despite exposure to significant stressors" (Rolf, 1999).

The study aims to identify evidence of cultural resilience among young Batak and the presence of challenges and protective factors contributing to building them as linguistically resilient speakers. Specifically, the study aimed to determine the following:

1. How do the young Batak speakers demonstrate native language resilience?
2. What resilience resources are present in the Batak community at the individual, family, and community level?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Theoretical Framework

The present study is a qualitative descriptive inquiry whose framework is drawn from Chandler and Lalonde's (1998) concept of cultural resilience. Originally termed as "cultural continuity, the two used the term as an attribute to refer to First Nations communities that initiated the preservation and rehabilitation of their cultural heritage. According to such communities, they provide their young people with a measure of cultural continuity, promote self-continuity and protect against suicide. The hypothesis was tested with data on First nation communities in British Columbia. Lalonde (2005) eventually replaced the term cultural continuity with cultural resilience.

In addition, the present study employed the Protective Model of Resilience to determine what protective factors are present in the community, external to the individuals, which contribute to building linguistic resilience among young speakers. According to Fleming and Ledogar (2008), there are resilience resources, adapted from Olsson et al. (2003) categorized under (1) Individual-level, (2) Family level, and (3) Community-level as shown below:

Resilience Resources at Individual, Family, and Social/Environment Levels⁺

Resources	Protective mechanism
<i>Individual level</i>	
Constitutional resilience	Positive temperament Robust neurobiology
Sociability	Responsiveness to others Prosocial attitudes Attachment to others
Intelligence	Academic achievement Planning and decision making
Communication skills	Developed language Advanced reading
Personal attributes	Tolerance for negative affect Self efficacy Self esteem Foundational sense of self Internal locus of control Sense of humour Hopefulness Strategies to deal with stress Enduring set of values Balanced perspective on experience Malleability and flexibility Fortitude, conviction, tenacity, and resolve
<i>Family level</i>	
Supportive families	Parental warmth, encouragement, assistance Cohesion and care within the family Close relationship with a caring adult Belief in the child Nonblaming Marital support Talent or hobby valued by others
Socioeconomic status	Material resources
<i>Community level</i>	
School experiences	Supportive peers Positive teacher influences Success (academic or other)
Supportive communities	Belief in the individual

Resources	Protective mechanism
Cultural resources**	Nonpunitive
	Provisions and resources to assist belief in the values of society
	Traditional activities
	Traditional spirituality
	Traditional languages
	Traditional healing

*Adapted from [Olsson et al. \(2003\)](#), pp. 5–6).

**Evidence for the influence of traditional activities and traditional spirituality on resilience is summarized in our “Resilience and Indigenous Spirituality,” pp. 47–64. For traditional languages see [Hallett, et al., 2007](#). For traditional healing see [Spicer, et al., 2007](#).

Finally, the present study adopted Landweer’s (2002) two of eight indicators of ethnolinguistic vitality namely: (1) Domains in which the language is used (more domains for the vernacular is better; (2) social outlook regarding and within the speech (higher internal identity, more support from the institution, and positive perception by outsiders are better. Such domains coincide with the resilience sources at the community level.

3.2 Participants and Setting

Sitio Kalakwasan in Barangay Tanabag is home to 31 Batak households, most of whom have two Batak parents. This Batak community is five to six kilometers away from the National highway and is at least an hour and a half walk from the national highway. On foot, one has to make ten river crossings to reach the Batak settlement although, during summer, the place may be accessible through large trucks.

There are three groups of informants in the study. The main subject consisted of twenty-five young men and women Batak from Kalakwasan whose ages ranged from 9 to 18 years old. The second group of data sources is the parents of the twenty-five children. To validate data from the children and yield data on family level support, interviews with parents were conducted individually. Later on, focus-group discussions were conducted with parents (divided into three groups of eight to nine parents each) to further validate data from children and individual parents and generate data on family level resilience resources. The third group of informants was the four teachers of Heaven's Eyes and the six local leaders in the community. Focus group discussions with teachers and local leaders and other members of the community were conducted to generate data on community level resilience resources.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection took place for twelve months between January to December 2019. The researcher conducted fieldwork during weekends at the bi-monthly interval, to ensure that no classes would be disturbed and parents would be available for interviews and focus group discussions. One child per household was selected to be a participant in the study. The purpose of the study was explained to the parents of the participants and informed consent from them was secured.

Likewise, the purpose of the study was thoroughly explained to the children, and assent in the Filipino language was signed by the children in the presence of their parents, attesting to their willingness to participate in the study. Both the informed consent and assent were written in the Filipino language. The consent of the community to conduct the study in Kalakwasan was given by the local leaders in writing. Interviews were conducted in Filipino and done individually. Permission to audio-record the interviews was sought from both parents and children. No picture was taken of the children during the interviews.

To validate data on language use, observation of children at play was done four times within the duration of the study. Observations conducted in the homes and while the children were at play were permitted by the local leaders and the owners of the homes. In addition, the researcher sought the permission of the parents to make house visits during weekends especially morning and afternoon to observe family conversations, still to validate the language/s used by children at home. Further, individual interviews were done with parents, and focus group discussions were done involving parents, teachers, and community leaders. Data yielded

were analyzed qualitatively following the frameworks used. In the interest of space, only the most glaring cultural factors found to be existent in the area and promoting linguistic resilience are discussed in the paper.

Questions on the background of the respondents included age, sex, grade level (for Batak participant), and parents' ethnicity and first language. Questions on reported language use (adapted from Quakenbush, 1989) explored the use of Batak, Tagbanua, Tagalog, and Cuyonon in five language domains: family, friends, school, religion, and neighbors. To determine the influence of gadgets, the language used by children when calling and texting friends was solicited.

Interviews and FGDs with informants revolved around the language used by children at home and in school, exposure to television and cell phones, and the role of parents, teachers, and local leaders in maximizing or minimizing resilience resources.

4. Results

The findings are discussed in this section, taking into consideration Olssons et al. cultural resilience framework with Landweer's (2002) indicators of language use: (1) domains in which the language is used and (2) frequency and type of codeswitching.

4.1 Resilience Resources -individual level

4.1.1 Developed language

Although by nature shy, the twenty-five Batak children accommodated the proponent and allowed themselves to be interviewed at least twice throughout the duration of data collection. The children generally could speak in understandable Tagalog with varying proficiency depending on their age. Older children are generally more proficient in Tagalog although all of them admitted that they speak better in the Batak language. Generally speaking, the Batak young speakers are bilingual, speaking Batak hand in hand with Tagalog.

4.1.2 Personal attribute -a foundational sense of self

Owing to time and space constraints, it would be quite impossible to identify the subjects' personal attributes. However, one important trait possessed by the children which were established in the course of the interviews was a strong foundational sense of self, that is, a strong ethnic identity. Of the 25 children, 88 percent exhibited a strong Batak identity. Although the 22 percent admitted they are Batak, they reported that outside of the community, they are embarrassed owing to the stigma ascribed to the community (e.g. poor and uneducated). Interviews regarding language preference when using cellphones indicated a preference to use the Batak language when texting and calling Batak relatives and friends while using Tagalog when messaging or calling non-Batak interactants. Seventy percent of the participants, (aged between thirteen to eighteen) admitted owning a cellphone and such is used in communicating with relative, friends, and classmates, even if their relatives are already Tagalog speakers,

To validate further the sense of identity, children were asked what they aspire to be when they grow up. About 60 percent maintained that they wanted to be a teacher, 20 percent wanted to be a nurse, 10 percent wanted to be a doctor and another 10 percent wanted to be a policeman. Out of the 25 children, 22 wanted to go back to the community and serve and only three shyly admitted wanting to go out of the community when they earn their degree and take their families with them. The latter are the same children who reported feeling embarrassed to be called Batak. This shows that children at a young age see the importance of their community and create in them the desire to be of service to their own people someday.

4.1.3 Self-efficacy, malleability and flexibility as a protective mechanism

The second personal attribute found in interviews with children was a combination of self-efficacy and malleability and flexibility which are evident in the manner in which the respondents have dealt with gadgets around them. According to the children, educational videos in the form of cartoons teaching values and faith in God are being shown by teachers on Saturdays, usually followed by lectures. Such videos are either given in English or dubbed in Tagalog.

Only the elder children ((between 13 to 18 years old), about 70 percent of the participants, admitted acquiring their own cellphone. According to them, they use Tagalog when calling or texting non-Batak friends, but use Batak language when communicating with relatives or Batak friends. The children also admitted having access to music and videos but none of these were pornographic. Interviews with parents validated this. According to parents they often inspect their children's phones to ensure that no pornographic materials will be watched by their children. The motivation for this move will be discussed later from the parents' data.

Responses from children as regards the use of cellphone saw a facilitating effect of cellphone use in promoting literacy among children.

(Student 4) *I find it easier to learn how to read and write messages when I got my cellphone.*

(Student 5) *I wanted to gain new friends who are non-Batak speakers and cellphone helped me do that.*

(Student 6) *When I'm calling or texting a relative, I use Batak but when a friend is a non-batak speaker, I use Tagalog.*

(Student 7) *Of course, I have to learn to read and write fast so I could read and type messages for my friends!*

The excitement of children to communicate with friends and relatives somehow facilitates literacy. This is also an observation of the teachers in Heavens' Eyes. According to the teachers, literacy is oftentimes a problem in far-flung areas where socio-economically underprivileged children do not find the motivation to learn to read and write. Acquiring a cellphone and being able to engage in social media are among the strongest goals of elementary learners to learn to read and write.

According to the Headteacher herself who has stayed in the Batak community for seven years, "Facebooking has become the strongest motivation of children for wanting to read and write". The children participants confirmed that their desire to own a cellphone and engage in social media has been their strongest motivation to read and write. According to seventy percent of the respondents, they would not have been able to read text messages and respond to them and chat with friends and relatives if they have not endeavored to become literate.

4.2 Resilience resources -Family Level

4.2.1 Use of the native language Batak as a protective mechanism

One important factor in determining language vitality is the language being used at home.

Responses showed that children in Kalakwasan acquired the Batak as the language at home it remains the language spoken with parents and siblings as they grow older. Data from home visits validated the responses 100 percent. The proponent found no instance at home where Batak is not used. Interviews with parents revealed that Batak is the first language acquired by their children at home.

About 70 percent of the children reported learning Tagalog from school when they speak with their teachers. The other 30 percent admitted gradually acquiring Tagalog from elder siblings during playtime. According to these children, they would playfully repeat words and expressions they hear from older siblings during playtime. When it is their turn to go to school, they eventually acquire full knowledge of Tagalog from teachers' lectures and conversations with them. Data from observations of these children at play yielded consistent use of Batak language throughout. Although it would be difficult to record data from play because of the number of interactants involved and the simultaneous contributions given at the same time, elders were helpful in determining the language used by the children. Children were not informed ahead of time that they would be observed. The researcher on those four occasions would just come in the middle of the game. Female children are generally fond of playing volleyball games. The participants were observed playing volleyball on two occasions which lasted about thirty to forty minutes each. It was observed that none of the participants uttered a single sentence in Tagalog during the play. Likewise, the young men were observed playing basketball with older males (siblings and parents) on two occasions. The researcher just appeared in the middle of the game and chose a conspicuous place to watch the players. Like the women, the men played the basketball game intensively and simultaneous utterances were given, mostly exclamations when the ball is taken away from them when they failed to shoot or fail to pass the ball to the playmate. Likewise, they give longer nervous utterances when seeking support from a playmate to pass the ball or to cover them as they shoot. Data from observation showed not a single utterance in Filipino was produced during the play.

Three of the teachers, according to the children can converse with them in the Batak during break time. One student says, (the student gave the response in Filipino and is translated in English here.

(Student 1) *Teacher would allow us to speak in Batak during recess. She doesn't reprimand us when we speak with classmates during class hours.*

(Student 2) *Teacher speaks with us during breaks in Batak and allows us to express ourselves in Batak when we forget the right term in Tagalog or when we cannot express ourselves in English.*

These are translations from the responses of older Batak children (14 to 16 years old) who are still in Grade 5. According to them, the teachers did not teach English while they were still in Kindergarten and Grade 1. English lessons were given when they were already in Grade 2. About 50 percent of the participants reported that they find English to be difficult, although they do not seem anxious about not being proficient in the language. When asked about the number of languages these children can speak, about 90 percent reported knowing Batak and Tagalog and only 10 percent admitted knowing very little English.

4.2.2 Cohesion and care within the family as a protective mechanism

Batak parents are generally not the demonstrative type, coming from a culture where hugging and kissing in public are considered taboo. Children, therefore, are not used to being hugged and kissed in public to demonstrate parental affection. Despite the conservative culture, cohesion and care as a protective mechanism for building resilience may be considered a strong quality of Batak families. For instance, it has been observed from the many years of ethnographic research in the area that mothers show their support by staying at home to cook meals and attend to their children's needs. For the few families who were already sending their children to elementary school, during the time when there was no school in the area, such mothers would stay in the habitation given by the government in the barrio then go home with their children to Kalakwasan during weekends.

Student 22: We do not allow our female children to go to the barangay proper by themselves unless accompanied by teachers. They are free to decide when they have their own family. The men are allowed when they are grown up and accompanied by friends or relatives. We only give limited freedom to female children.

4.2.3. Non-blaming family practice

The Batak is a non-blaming culture. This has been demonstrated quite repeatedly by parents as they relate to their children. It was observed during home visits that it is very rare that parents would reprimand their children for their shortcomings. Parents normally do not raise their voices to their children. During interviews with children, there was no instance that a child expressed any misgiving about their parents or their family or things they wished could have but never had. Life for them is normal and if there is anything the children wish for, it is to be able to get a college education.

The trait of being non-blaming is very characteristic of adults. It is customary among adults that when they feel they have offended somebody, they often would pay a visit to the aggrieved party and under the guise of requesting to drink coffee or chew betel nut with the house owner, the visitor would whisper their apology to the hearer and right there and then, a gap is settled. According to the parents and elders, it is not good to let a day pass without reconciling with the aggrieved friend, relative, or neighbor. So when an adult Batak announces that he wants to be in for a drink of coffee or a chew of betel nut, either they really mean it or they use this as priming to apologize to the owner of the house. No apologies are ever refused and once a gap has been settled, both parties involved no longer talk about the issue anymore.

One important occasion demonstrating this value was mentioned by the headteacher during the interview with her. There was an instance when a young man committed a moral transgression (whose detail this paper will no longer discuss in detail for ethical reasons). The elders conducted an investigation and learned that the man was influenced by the pornographic videos stored on his cellphone, which according to him were contained in the sim card bought from a vendor in the city. The elders were alarmed so they instructed the parents to check their children's phones to ensure that no similar event will take place. The youth concerned and parents dealt with the situation peacefully and since then, the neighbor and the rest of the community have been silent about what happened. The only reason why the headteacher offered the information to the researcher is to illustrate how important it is for the local leaders and the parents to safeguard their cultural beliefs. This happened about two years ago and since then, it became normal for parents to check their children's phones once in a while.

4.3 Resilience Resources -Community Level

Olsson (2003) identified three resilience resources at the community level such as (1) school experiences (i.e. positive teacher influences) (2) supportive communities (e.g. belief in the individual and nonpunitive) and (3) cultural resources (i.e. traditional activities, traditional spirituality, traditional languages, traditional healing). Data from interviews, FGDs, and observations showed that certain protective mechanisms serve as resilience sources at the community level.

4.3.1. School and Literacy Experiences

4.3.1.1 Positive teacher influences as a protective mechanism

English and Filipino used to be the media of instruction from elementary through college for many decades. However, with the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), a Basic Education Curriculum implemented in Philippine schools in 2012, the mother tongue became the language that is primarily used in subjects in Kindergarten until grade 3 to address the high functional illiteracy of Filipinos where language plays a significant factor. Classroom teachers, therefore, are expected to acquire the native language of the community.

Three of the teachers according to the children can converse with them in the Batak during break time. One student says, (the student gave the response in Filipino and is translated in English here).

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A younger Batak (10 years old) speaks about a new teacher who has been in the community for barely a year. (Student 24) *The teacher does not speak well Batak but she tries hard when she speaks to our parents (students' parents). It's funny sometimes, she would just stop midsentence, not knowing what to say next.*

According to the children, Tagalog is used most of the time even for subjects such as Math and Science. When the proponent gave the children informal language tests where they were asked to read individual English vocabulary and phrases, most of the children were able to read them and although about eight children (between 8 to 10 years old) have some difficulty translating the meanings in Filipino, a majority were able to give the right meanings for the words and expressions. This was done to see whether English was set aside purposively to prioritize teaching using Tagalog. It appeared that the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) is to some extent, being implemented in that missionary school. None of the lessons were really carried out in Batak language as the teachers, according to the students still have limited Batak but the use of Batak as a "fall back" language is highly encouraged in the area.

Based on the interviews with teachers, it can be derived that the Batak community members are satisfied with their existence. Firstly, all the school-aged children are sent to school to get primary education. Secondly, parents actively participate in school meetings and other activities which require their presence such as film viewings, feeding, and lectures. Interviews with parents and FGDs with elders validated data from children and teachers. Thirdly, the school serves also as the guardian of the people's culture by providing videos that are value-laden and constantly reminding parents to guide their children as they watch television shows during weekends. According to the local leaders, the Deped has been attempting to build schools inside the community in the past three years but the elders expressed their desire to retain Heaven's Eyes as delivering institution of basic education. The headteacher reported that their services are Deped accredited and their volunteer missionary teachers are mostly licensed, teachers. Perhaps, the strongest influence of the teachers and the school is creating a desire in the Batak children to dream for their future.

In a metaanalysis of 30 research articles dealing with language in education policy, Alcazaren and Rafanan (2017) found devaluation of one's first language and poor language policy as the main problem being faced in the educational systems of developing countries. The proponents suggest a strengthening of first language education (upholding the use of first language in teaching) which can take place only after having considered teacher training, availability of instructional materials, and stakeholders' involvement. In the case of the Batak, where teachers uphold the use of Batak by young speakers during breaktime and even during class hours when casually expressing themselves or are still struggling with Tagalog sentences, demonstrate the implementation of the Mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) in its real sense.

In an examination of how native and non-native Japanese teachers handling English courses perceive their own language backgrounds, Willey and Katz (2018) found that teachers' concern for attrition and maintenance of their English language abilities prompted them to use both English and Japanese in the classroom. Although non-Japanese teachers tend to use more English in their classrooms, they admitted that the Japanese language in the classroom "performs more of an "affective role than an instructional role, enabling the teachers to connect with their students through humor and shared cultural knowledge" (p.138).

Likewise, data from interviews with teachers in the Batak community, showed that despite the limited ability of the teachers to master the Batak language, their attempts at acquiring the language for conversational purposes and the freedom they give the learners in the use of Batak in expressing themselves in the classroom are important in building their students' confidence in their teachers, gaining the learners' affection and respect.

Children agreed during the interviews that it is really their teachers that made them realize how important the Batak language is to them and how important it is (the Batak language) to their identity as people.

4.3.2 Supportive Community

4.3.2.1 Nonpunitive culture

As mentioned earlier in this paper, the Batak is a non-blaming culture and, therefore, not punitive. This does not necessarily mean that they tolerate their children's shortcomings. A mother recounted during the interview that when her son acquired his cellphone, the latter no longer helped in the house chores. The mother did not beat her son nor reprimand her son but will just take away the cellphone and prevented the son from using it. Another parent, upon realizing that the son also became addicted to cellphone games, waited until the phone malfunctioned and did not buy a new one for the son. It was observed that there was no incidence of depression among the teenagers and no cases of runaway children. Despite the simplicity of life of the people and the lack of education by parents, the calm at which they face hardship and the peaceful approach by which they discipline their children are sources of resilience in linguistics.

One mother said: *"I am not embarrassed about being a Batak. The truth is I'm not pure Batak anymore because my mother is a Tagbanua. But what do I care? I'm whole, not half. I teach my children where they came from. I teach them to read and write because I have dreams for them. But at home after having taught them, we switch back to Batak. I always tell my children, be proud of who you are"*. The elders share the same thoughts during FGDs. According to them, whenever they get a chance to gather the children, they would inspire the children to strive to get an education but remind them also of the importance of giving back to parents and the community.

4.3.3. Cultural Resources

4.3.3.1. Traditional activities

Cultural resources have four protective mechanisms: (1) traditional activities, (2) traditional spirituality, (3) traditional languages, and (4) traditional healing. Evidently, with the existence of Christian churches in communities like the Batak, the people have gradually embraced Christian beliefs. Traditional rituals, therefore, which express beliefs in gods, may be practiced for the purpose of tourism. Elders and local leaders both admitted that when they get sick, they no longer look for the "Babalyan" or the faith healer, who performs religious rituals to achieve healing. Instead, the people go to the nearest satellite clinic to find healing. Along with the shift to Christianity is the demise of faith in traditional healing since these two are related to each other. It was observed that the elder who used to perform rituals for healing, who was then in his sixties, was no longer sought by people when they had ailments.

It was learned that the "Babalyan" did not train a younger generation to succeed him in healing, very obviously, for there is hardly any need for a faith healer in the current days. An observer who thinks that somebody should care to maintain the old practices for not doing so would mean the disappearance of the culture. It seems depressing to think about this but this fact reminds us only what culture is all about. It is not fixed. It evolves through time. What is good about the Batak community, is that they have retained some of their traditional practice (e.g. adaptation to hunger, use of herbs, cultural dances, traditional weddings), some of which have proven useful in the current generation and therefore have retained the language that carries the retained belief and practice.

Access to gadgets such as cellphones, televisions, and videos has added to the list of economic and social opportunities for the youth, which are a normal part of development. Like education, however, the influence of technologies could be both advantageous and detrimental at the same time. When the resilience resources at the family and community level, could no longer provide influence and inspiration to the youth to continually embrace the Batak culture and all it stands for, then the individual Batak might no longer find sufficient reasons to be proud of their ethnicity, their language, and their community. Although this does not happen overnight, rather gradually, one language shift has taken place, it would be difficult to reclaim the language.

Of the eight valleys originally, inhabited by the Batak, only three valleys have remained as the stronghold of the Batak culture and language. The other five have given in to intermarriage and migration, with the Batak speakers, outnumbered by non-Batak speakers such as Tagbanua and Cuyonon.

A closely-knit community like Kalakwasan is an ideal place to ensure language maintenance. It should be emphasized that the nexus, the community speaking the same native language, is a significant element in language maintenance. The interplay of the resilience resources at the individual, family, and community levels will eventually determine how resilient Batak speakers will be. Certainly, the key to language maintenance is the resilient young speakers of a language community.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Qualitative data from observations, individual interviews with children and parents, and focus group discussions point to resilient young Batak speakers who are a product of values imbibed from their own family, the school, and the community. The strong language identity, use of Batak language at home and in the neighborhood, the school and community support, and the cultural

values of being a non-blaming and non-punitive people, are factors promoting resilience among speakers despite the “stressors” experienced at the individual and community level. As long as these protective factors remain existent in the community, then the language will thrive despite threats of a small number of speakers and language contacts.

In the Philippines, the academe through classroom teachers and language educators have an important role to play in ensuring that literacy takes place among young speakers of minority languages, but this should not be at the expense of their native language. The influence of school in strengthening learners’ perception of their ethnic identity and in engaging parents and the community to work together to create a linguistically resilient community is one important goal of the Mother-Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Basic Education Curriculum should achieve. Data have shown the strong positive impact of Facebooking in creating the desire of children for literacy. The negative impacts, however, of uncontrolled and unsupervised use of gadgets and social media cannot be underestimated. Inculcating in our innocent young speakers the discipline and intelligence necessary to balance the impact of gadgets and social media in the learners’ life is another significant yet challenging feat for our educators.

The study was delimited in time and scope and the examination of the fitness of the cultural resilience framework to determine the linguistic resilience of a small language group is exploratory in nature. Future research may require longitudinal data collection involving inclusive samples to determine comprehensively the role of the cultural factors in establishing a resilient community and how a resilient community helps build resilient minority language speakers.

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