



Developing a Language Maintenance Program for the Hanunoo Mangyan Language: Strategies in Sustaining Heritage

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Abstract

The Hanunoo Mangyan language, one of the indigenous languages spoken in Oriental Mindoro, is facing a challenge of losing its orthography or writing system. The young generation of these communities is no longer familiar with this writing system and no longer sees its relevance. Given this, the study, which is a part of a language documentation research project on Hanunoo Mangyan, aims to craft a language maintenance program for the preservation of the orthography. The proposed program is based on existing language maintenance initiatives done in countries with strong indigenous people's education programs.

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Key words: language maintenance, language documentation, language death

INTRODUCTION

The Hanunoo Mangyan language faces challenges, as it is classified as a developing language with a decreasing number of speakers. The importance of studying this language lies in the urgency of preserving not only its unique orthography but also the cultural heritage and tradition of the Mangyan people. With only about 13,000 speakers as of 2000, the Hanunoo language is at risk of attrition, loss or even extinction and efforts to document and revitalize it are crucial to prevent the disappearance of this rich linguistic and cultural resource

A specific pressing concern in the preservation of Hanunoo Mangyan culture is the significant decline in the use of Surat Mangyan, the traditional writing system of the Hanunoo Mangyan people. Surat Mangyan is a unique script, deeply embedded in the cultural and historical identity of the Mangyan community.

The decline of Surat Mangyan is not just a loss of a written language; it embodies a bigger issue of cultural identity disconnection. Without active efforts to document and revitalize both the Hanunoo language and its traditional orthography, there is a real danger that the Mangyan people will lose an essential part of their cultural heritage and historical identity.

This study, therefore, is not only focused on preserving the Hanunoo language itself but also on protecting Surat Mangyan as an integral feature of

the Mangyan people's heritage. Through language documentation, the promotion of cultural practices tied to the orthography, and the engagement of younger generations in revitalization efforts, this research seeks to foster a deeper understanding of the significance of the writing system and support its preservation.

CURRENT STATUS OF THE HANUNOO MANGYAN LANGUAGE

Lucas et al., 2019 found that the Hanunoo Mangyans present a predominantly positive attitude toward their language, grounded in a deep sense of cultural pride and ethnic identity. This pride is reflected in their unwavering commitment to protecting their linguistic heritage, which they view as critical to their cultural identity. Their study suggests that the Hanunoo Mangyan language is still extensively spoken in the community, largely due to the geographic remoteness of the Hanunoo Mangyans in Sitios Umabang and Bailan.

Nevertheless, while the oral use of the Hanunoo language remains robust, there are notable concerns regarding the Surat Mangyan writing system. Their study showed that many young people of the community are unacquainted with this writing system. Regardless of the historical richness of the Surat Mangyan script, which has been used to chronicle the everyday life and customary practices, the younger generation is growingly detached from it. This disassociation can be ascribed to a lack of formal education and exposure to the writing system, as young generations have not been taught to read and write in Surat Mangyan as their elders were.

While older members of the community exhibit profound knowledge of both oral and written forms of their language, younger generations encountered difficulty with the script. This generational gap endangers the future of the writing system, which could become nothing more than a cultural artifact if not actively preserved and promoted. The study validates the concerns raised by Quakenbush (2007), who argued that literacy plays a vital role in the preservation of language. Thus, the intergenerational transmission of the Hanunoo language, particularly the Surat Mangyan script, is imperative for its survival.

CRAFTING A LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE PROGRAM FOR THE HANUNOO MANGYAN

Figure 2 Concept Map for Proposed Hanunoo Mangyan Language Maintenance Program




The preservation and revitalization of the Hanunoo Mangyan language require a comprehensive approach that actively involves the community, integrates the language into education, and ensures its continued transmission across generations. Language is a core element of cultural identity, and this program aims to develop a sustainable framework for its maintenance through community involvement, educational integration, and strategic documentation.

Community engagement is key element to the success of this effort. Workshops, cultural events, and language learning centers or hubs will raise awareness and encourage active engagement in language preservation. Early childhood education programs will ensure young children are immersed and exposed in Hanunoo Mangyan language from a young age, developing bilingualism even multilingualism and cultural pride. In formal education, the integration of Hanunoo into school curricula, along with teacher training and the development of culturally relevant resources, will help establish the language as an academic subject.

Language documentation is another vital component, focusing on preserving Hanunoo’s grammar, vocabulary, and oral traditions while developing digital resources for wider access. Intergenerational transmission through mentoring and storytelling will strengthen the bond between generations and ensure the language is passed down. Government support and policy advocacy will provide the necessary resources for the program’s sustainability.

Ongoing research and evaluation will track the program’s impact, allowing for adjustments and improvements. Through these concerted efforts, the Hanunoo Mangyan Language Maintenance Program will ensure that the Hanunoo language thrives for future generations.

This proposed language maintenance program for Hanunoo Mangyan is informed by successful models from countries like Canada, Hawaii (US), New Zealand, and Australia, which have robust indigenous people’s education programs. This



program holds potential for adaptation in the preservation of other indigenous languages in the Philippines.

1. Community Engagement and Awareness

Community engagement is at the heart of the Hanunoo Mangyan language revitalization program. Engaging the Hanunoo Mangyan community in preserving their language requires creating a supportive environment where all community members understand and appreciate the cultural significance of their linguistic heritage.

Workshops and seminars are an effective way to educate both younger and older generations about the importance of preserving the Hanunoo language. Drawing from global best practices, such as the Cook Islands Māori initiatives (Glasgow, 2010), these educational programs could focus on the interrelationship between language and cultural identity, community cohesion, and empowerment. This shared knowledge exchange not only promotes learning but also strengthens the intergenerational transmission of language, a strategy successfully implemented in the Cree language programs in Northern Quebec (McAlpine & Herodier, 1994).

Furthermore, cultural events and festivals can serve as powerful activities for community engagement and language preservation. These events, featuring traditional songs, dances, and performances in the Hanunoo Mangyan language, provide an opportunity for people—especially the youth—to witness and experience the language in action, deepening their association to their cultural roots. Drawing from examples like the Papahāna Kaiapuni Hawaiian immersion program (Yamauchi et al., 1998), such cultural events can promote an immersive environment where language learning becomes an enjoyable and natural part of everyday life.

A community language learning and resource center (or School of Living Traditions-SOLT) is another important initiative that can play a crucial role in the revitalization process. This concept has been successfully implemented in many indigenous communities, such as the Te Kohanga Reo program in New Zealand (Stiles, 1997), where community-based centers provide as hubs for language learning, cultural workshops, and other social

activities. These spaces can serve as archives for learning resources, such as storybooks, songs, and multimedia materials that exhibit the grammar, vocabulary, and cultural nuances of the language.


2. Early Childhood Education

The early introduction of language and culture is crucial to the preservation of the Hanunoo Mangyan language and to ensuring its transmission to future generations. Integrating Hanunoo Mangyan language into early childhood education initiatives will not only promote bilingualism but also help cultivate a strong sense of cultural identity.

As Sarkar and Lavouie (2014) found that bilingual education plays a crucial role in bridging the gap between cultural heritage and contemporary societal demands. In the case of the Hanunoo Mangyan, incorporating Hanunoo alongside widely spoken languages like Filipino and English will provide children with the linguistic tools to cope both in their cultural and social environments. Early exposure to the Hanunoo Mangyan language will help ensure that children become well versed with basic vocabulary, simple phrases, songs, and traditional stories. This conforms to the findings of Fishman (1991), who stressed that early language exposure is a crucial factor in reversing language shift and ensuring the sustained survival of endangered languages.

Teachers and caregivers are essential in advancing bilingualism and biculturalism in young children, especially in indigenous communities. According to Aikman (1999), the advancement of indigenous community educators is an important factor in the success of language revitalization programs. For the Hanunoo Mangyan, it is important that local teachers are not only fluent in the language but are also equipped with culturally responsive teaching methodologies.

To assist in these educational initiatives, age-appropriate learning resources should be developed in Hanunoo Mangyan. Research has shown that children learn best when educational materials are interesting, interactive, and relevant to their lives. For example, the PFMB model of intercultural education in Peru shows the importance of culturally relevant materials that reflect the community's values and worldview (Aikman, 1999). In the Hanunoo Mangyan context, simple



storybooks, picture books, poems (urikai), and songs (ambahan) in Hanunoo Mangyan can be used to teach vocabulary, basic phrases, and traditional stories. These materials should incorporate cultural themes reflecting their heritage. Such resources would not only support language acquisition but also help children build a strong connection between the language and their cultural heritage.

3. Formal Education

As Mangyan communities face increasing pressures from urbanization and the dominance of national languages like Filipino and English, it is critical that educational structures actively support and incorporate Hanunoo Mangyan into both formal education and everyday life. This process must involve community, teachers, and students alike to ensure that the language continues to thrive in the face of external societal pressures.

a. Bilingual Education Programs

In this program, Hanunoo would be taught as a first language (the mother tongue). This encourages students to actively use Hanunoo in their daily lives. As Gomashie (2023) found in the case of Nahuatl in Mexico, the successful integration of an indigenous language into formal education is largely shaped by community attitudes and the learning environment. By developing a space where Hanunoo Mangyan is a valued language within the school system, students are more likely to embrace it, both at home and in other social settings.

Furthermore, bilingual language education promotes intergenerational language transmission and supports the idea that fluency in Hanunoo Mangyan does not come at the expense of proficiency in Filipino or English. It is an important resource, one that offers cognitive benefits and a sense of cultural and pride for young learners.

b. Hanunoo Language Curriculum

To support the enduring success of bilingual education, it is crucial to develop a Hanunoo language curriculum that is both structured and culturally relevant. The curriculum should provide a comprehensive and systematic framework for teaching the Hanunoo language, subsuming language skills (speaking, reading, and writing), cultural knowledge, and historical setting.


Drawing on Sarkar & Lavouie (2014) and their research on indigenous language revitalization, the curriculum should go beyond basic rudiments of language and should also include cultural aspects like traditions, folklore, customs, and local biodiversity. This ensures that students relate with their linguistic heritage on a deep, personal level. Incorporating cultural education with language learning not only strengthens language retention but also promotes intergenerational knowledge transmission.

c. Teacher Training in Language and Culture

The success of any bilingual language education program is fundamentally connected to the qualifications and training of the teachers who implement it. As Gustafson (2014) highlights in the context of indigenous bilingual language education, teacher training is one of the important factors that determines the effectiveness and potency of language revitalization programs. For Hanunoo Mangyan, specialized teacher training programs must be created to equip educators with both the linguistic and cultural knowledge crucial in teaching the language effectively.

Teacher training should feature the development of culturally responsive teaching strategies, ensuring that educators understand the significance of Hanunoo Mangyan as more than just a language, but as a fundamental element of identity and heritage. Educators should be trained not only in language pedagogy but also in the incorporation of Hanunoo Mangyan oral traditions, such as storytelling, songs, and rituals, into their daily lessons.

In line with Aikman's (1999) findings on intercultural education, teacher training for Hanunoo Mangyan language education should underscore the need for community collaboration. Teachers must be regarded as integral to the community's continuing efforts to sustain their language and culture, and should collaborate closely with community elders and leaders and cultural to ensure the curriculum remains rooted in the larger social realities.



d. Promotion of Bilingualism and Formal Education Integration

Promotion of bilingualism is a core aspect in successful educational programs for indigenous languages. As King (2001) and Sichra (2006) observe, indigenous communities often confront difficulties in implementing bilingual education programs due to political, sociocultural, and logistical challenges. In the case of Hanunoo Mangyan language, strengthening the current indigenous educational system that promotes not only bilingualism but also multilingualism, is crucial to conquering these challenges. Educational institutions should focus on the functional and practical use of Hanunoo Mangyan language in the classroom while concurrently promoting proficiency in the national languages, such as Filipino and English.

This can be achieved through language immersion efforts, where learners interact in Hanunoo Mangyan for specific content subjects or during certain times of the school day. Such programs create a balanced environment where students become comfortable and confident using both Hanunoo Mangyan and Filipino (or English) in their academic and social lives.

e. Use of Digital Platforms for Language Learning

Expanding digital initiatives explored in the context of Hawaiian language revitalization (Warschauer, 1998), the Hanunoo Mangyan community can capitalize on modern technological innovations to further incorporate their language into formal education. Digital platforms, such as language-learning apps, online courses, and multimedia content, present versatile and stimulating methods for students to utilize the Hanunoo Mangyan language beyond the traditional classroom setting. These platforms can assist virtual language immersion, offer interactive lessons, and provide opportunities for students to practice Hanunoo Mangyan in both formal and informal contexts.

As observed by Kaplan (1995), the use of digital media in language education can intensify the cultural significance of a language while addressing some of the logistical challenges to learning it in rural or remote areas. When incorporated with

traditional educational methods, digital platforms offer an innovative solution to the concerns of language teaching, making Hanunoo Mangyan language more accessible to students.

4. Language Documentation and Revitalization


The language revitalization initiatives which have succeeded in other indigenous communities, highlights the importance of comprehensive language documentation, early education, community engagement, and the development of culturally relevant educational resources. By consolidating these elements, the Hanunoo Mangyan community can establish a robust and sustainable framework to revitalize their language and ensure its transmission to future generations.

a. Continuous Documentation of Grammar, Vocabulary, and Oral Traditions

Research into the grammar, syntax, and vocabulary of Hanunoo Mangyan is critical for understanding the structure of the language and developing authentic learning resources. As observed in Cree language programs in Northern Quebec (McAlpine & Herodier, 1994), language documentation constitutes the groundwork for developing educational materials that ensure the accurate transmission of the language's complexities. The importance of grammar guides, dictionaries, and learning resources is highlighted by Yamauchi et al. (1998), who show how the development of such resources is of equal importance in revitalizing the Hawaiian language. For the Hanunoo Mangyan language, continuous documentation of oral traditions such as, songs, poems, and traditional knowledge encapsulate the cultural values, and beliefs of the Hanunoo Mangyan people, which provide learners with a rich, deeply immersive connection to the language. The Cook Islands Māori language program (Glasgow, 2010) for instance, successfully incorporates traditional cultural narratives into the curriculum, a practice that should be replicated in the Hanunoo Mangyan language efforts.

b. Developing Digital Resources

Incorporating digital platforms into language revitalization is critical in reaching broader audiences beyond the local community. The



Hawaiian language revival efforts (Warschauer, 1998) exhibit the potential of digital technologies to support indigenous language learning through digital platforms. In a similar manner, the Hanunoo Mangyan language can benefit from the development of digital resources such as language learning apps that are interactive and engaging. These tools can help learners at all levels of proficiency to develop their language skills, from basic vocabulary to advanced grammar, and can be designed to be used on demand by making language learning more accessible to Hanunoo Mangyan communities and beyond.

Creating interactive resources that teach vocabulary and pronunciation for example, will offer learners a fun and stimulating way to practice Hanunoo Mangyan. As observed by Kaplan (1995), digital learning resources can also be used to embody the cultural practices and traditions rooted in the language, offering an integrative learning experience that incorporates cultural identity with language learning.

5. Intergenerational Transmission

Intergenerational language transmission is vital for the survival of any language, particularly for endangered languages like Hanunoo Mangyan. Several various factors—such as parental involvement, community support, and formal educational interventions—have a transformative impact on the success of intergenerational transmission.

Informed by global models of indigenous language revitalization (e.g., Forrest, 2018; McCarty & Nicolas, 2014), we can utilize these insights to the Hanunoo Mangyan context to improve intergenerational language transmission, particularly through the active participation of elders, community-targeted programs, and family-oriented learning activities.

a. Encouraging Community Elders to Share Knowledge

Elders are not only the custodian of the language but also of the cultural practices and oral traditions that go with it. Hanunoo Mangyan community elders, with their profound knowledge of the language and culture, play a crucial role in the transmission of both linguistic and cultural

knowledge. As Forrest (2018) and De Houwer (2007) pointed out, the successful transmission of indigenous languages is grounded in family and community support, and elders are a crucial asset in this process.

This approach has been effectively utilized in Cook Islands Māori programs (Glasgow, 2010), where elders and other proficient speakers are actively engaged in mentoring younger generations. These initiatives help ensure that cultural practices—like oral storytelling, traditional songs, and rituals—are passed down together with the language itself.


In the case of Hanunoo Mangyan, elders can be motivated to take on active roles in educational programs, contributing to the creation of oral history archives or repositories, cultural festivals, and language revitalization materials. These initiatives would elevate the elders' status within the community and impel the younger generation to see them as both cultural and linguistic role models, fortifying their commitment to language preservation.

b. Family Language Learning Activities

Family-centered programs are a vital aspect of intergenerational transmission. As De Houwer (2007) and Fishman (1991) observe, the home environment is crucial for language learning, especially for minority languages. In the context of Hanunoo Mangyan, family engagement can be cultivated through language learning activities that encourage the use of Hanunoo Mangyan in their daily life.

Examples of such initiative include arts and crafts projects that incorporate the use of Hanunoo vocabulary and expressions. These activities may have had merit the process of language learning more engaging and enjoyable, promoting a sense of collective identity and cultural pride within families.

These activities also offer a one-of-a kind opportunity to link younger generations with traditional knowledge, enabling them to use Hanunoo Mangyan in contexts that are meaningful and relevant to their daily lives. This approach conforms to the research on Hawaiian language initiatives (Yamauchi et al., 1998), where the use of language in practical contexts has proven effective in supporting language proficiency. In Hanunoo



Mangyan communities, these family-based activities would help promote a language-rich environment within the home, increasing both fluency and cultural engagement.

c. Expanding the Role of Community-Based Programs

Apart from formal school-centered programs, community-focused programs are important for ensuring the long-term survival of Hanunoo Mangyan. As presented in the Cook Islands Māori revitalization initiatives (Crocombe & Crocombe, 2003), engaging the community in language learning activities—such as language enrichment programs, family and community workshops, and elders' storytelling sessions—help to build an environment where the language is actively utilized and valued.

Hanunoo Mangyan language transmission could be bolstered through community-based language immersion programs that center on cultural practices, as well as formal educational programs. Community members, including elders, parents, and teachers, can work together to develop learning materials, share knowledge, and institute language standards within their communities.

6. Government Support and Policy

The revitalization of the Hanunoo Mangyan language requires more than just local level efforts; it requires active government support and policy advocacy to ensure that language preservation efforts are self-sustaining, comprehensively supported, and integrated into national road maps.

a. Advocating for Language Preservation Policies

One of the most crucial steps in ensuring the success of language revitalization is promoting policies that officially acknowledge and safeguard indigenous languages. As emphasized in various case studies, including the indigenous language Institute's efforts in Arizona and New Mexico (Linn et al., 2002), successful language revitalization often begins with the awareness of the language's importance at a national policy level. In the case of the Hanunoo Mangyan language, espousing for government policies that explicitly acknowledge Hanunoo Mangyan language as an essential

component of the Philippines' linguistic and cultural heritage is imperative.

National and local governments should develop language policies that earmark funding for revitalization projects and language advocacy programs. As observed in the Northern Territory's bilingual education programs (Nicholls, 2005), inadequate state resources can lead to the discontinuation of language programs, which amplifies language loss.

b. Securing Funding for Language Initiatives


Securing adequate funding is crucial to the success of language revitalization projects. This can be achieved through a combination of government grant funding, international cooperation, and private sector collaboration. As seen in Dementi et al. (1999), the Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) secured funding from the Administration for Native Americans to support the revitalization of Athabascan languages. This financial support allowed them to create language programs, train teachers, and provide adequate funding to revitalize the language in the community.

For the Hanunoo Mangyan language, a comparable method can be adopted, advocating for state funding to develop educational materials, teacher training programs, and language immersion programs. Collaborations with international organizations like UNESCO or private foundations could also help obtain funding to create digital language learning resources like mobile apps, and interactive media to make the language more readily available to a wider audience.

c. Encouraging the Use of Hanunoo in the Public Sphere

To enhance the integration of Hanunoo Mangyan language into everyday life, government policies should support its utilization in the public spaces.

These initiatives would promote the greater use and acceptance of Hanunoo Manyan in everyday social interactions and to promote among younger generations an understanding of the language as a vibrant and vital part of their identity.



7. Research and Evaluation

To ensure the effectiveness and long term sustainability of the language maintenance program, the revitalization of the Hanunoo Mangyan language and its unique Surat Mangyan writing system demands ongoing, rigorous research and assessment to ensure the program's effectiveness and long-term success.

a. Effectiveness Assessment

To monitor the progress and impact of language revitalization and maintenance efforts, regular evaluations should be conducted to assess language proficiency and usage. As Fishman (1991) and De Houwer (2007) posit that the evaluation of language programs must encompass both language proficiency and socio-cultural factors that influence language maintenance.

Through ongoing data collection, valuable insights can be gained regarding the effectiveness of different teaching methods and language learning resources, which may help determine what strategies are most successful in promoting language revitalization.

b. Monitoring Language Use in the Community and Schools

Ongoing monitoring of the Hanunoo language's use within various social contexts (including home, schools, and community settings) is a critical component of evaluating language maintenance. As Forrest (2018) and Cataldi (2001) observe, language transmission is most successful when it is used regularly in daily life. Observing the patterns of Hanunoo Mangyan language across different contexts Hanunoo Mangyan will provide insights on its vitality.

Data collected through these methods will enable the identification of barriers to language use, such as lack of proficiency in Surat Mangyan or limited opportunities for conversing in Hanunoo Mangyan outside the home.

c. On Going Research on Language Vitality

To achieve a comprehensive and sustained understanding of language revitalization, longitudinal research should be conducted to monitor the long-term impact of the Hanunoo Mangyan language maintenance program. Sukhram & Hsu (2012) found that sustained, long-term involvement in language programs result in improved outcomes for language retention.


Ongoing research and evaluation are essential to the success of the Hanunoo Mangyan language revitalization program. Through effective assessments, constant monitoring language use, and program alignment based on research findings, the program can adapt to challenges and strengthen language transmission across generations. As exemplified by global examples of indigenous language maintenance (Linn et al., 2002; Angelo & Poetsch, 2019), continuous research and community-driven assessments can help ensure that language efforts are both sustainable and effective in preserving the Hanunoo language for future generations.

CONCLUSION

In essence, the interrelationships among Community Engagement, Early Childhood Education, Formal Education, Language Documentation, Government Support, and Research and Evaluation create a dynamic, interconnected framework for language maintenance. Each variable supports and enhances each other, ensuring that the Hanunoo Mangyan language is preserved but also revitalized, maintained and transmitted to future generations. This multi-dimensional approach as a whole ensures that our indigenous languages remain a living, evolving part of our cultural identity as a nation.

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