

The Meranaw Lexical Variants and its Implication to the Standardization of Meranaw Orthography

| Sharifa Khalid Masorong, PhD |

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47175/rielsj.v1i2.260>

English Department,
Mindanao State University,
Marawi City, Philippines

Sharifa.masorong@msumain.edu.ph

ABSTRACT

The language of the humankind is linked to the creation of meaning and expressions of human behaviors and emotions. Language is said to manipulate and persuade people's perception of 'reality' (Holmes, 2013). The reality—social and linguistic landscapes— that people construct is affected by the linguistic choices members of the community make.

This research investigated the possibility of a Meranaw uniform orthography in terms of the word spelling and symbols by examining the varieties of the language in terms of its lexicons. Understanding varieties can unlock answers questions regarding variety's causes and its contribution to the development of the language in terms of orthography—which can actually help Meranaw writers extend studies on other components of the language. These factors contributed to the direction of this paper as it attempted to investigate the sprouting of the varieties and its lexical changes. The findings of the study revealed that even though there were Meranaw lexical variants, it does not hinder the communication to be effective. The paper also showed that Meranaw lexical variants are mutually intelligible among the surveyed Meranaw communities. Mutual intelligibility suggests that language is convention--- meaning that even if there are varieties, the Meranaw language itself serve as a unifying link in keeping a society intact. The Meranaw language brings together one culture and its usage is a means to express community's style in an effort to create a social reality. This reality allows them to express their thoughts and ideas through their language.

KEYWORDS

culture; Meranaw; orthography; language; language standardization; language studies; linguistics;

INTRODUCTION

The language of the humankind is linked to the creation of meaning and expressions of human behaviors and emotions. Language is said to manipulate and persuade people's perception of 'reality' (Holmes, 2013). The reality—social and linguistic landscapes— that people construct is affected by the linguistic choices members of the community make. According to Doda (2006), culture is both 'individual' referred to as people's self expression and 'public' referred to as open to the world. Based on the definitions of both concepts, the relationship of language and culture is interchangeable. The society's reality is made up of the intertwining of individual's recognition of himself and of the world expressed by his language use and culture.

As language exists in a community, it changes and branches out depending on different factors. This branching out is eventually referred to as 'language varieties.' Language variation is a language phenomenon that can be attributed to language and time and defined

by most linguists refers as varieties of the same language that are used by the same culture. How a culture converses and how they understand an item or word might be different even if they are using the same language. The spread of different studies on language variation has set the foundation of this paper.

Language arises as people make choices based on their cultures. According to Baker (2019), our language and the traditions that go with it demonstrate the interrelatedness of the influence of cultures locally, regionally and globally. In this research, the Meranaw culture, specifically its language, is studied. The Meranaws are the known dwellers of Lanao del Sur in Mindanao. They have become known recently because of the war that ensued between the military government and the Maute Brothers (who were eventually linked to the ISIS) in the capital of the province, Marawi City. Historically, the Meranaws are considered to hold the record as the largest Moro ethnic group. They are considered inland group before the colonizers came (<http://www.everyculture.com/East-Southeast-Asia/Maranao.html>). The Meranaws are known for their strong sense of clanship but also known with their use of their language. Their language has unique features that may sound differently for outside listeners. Furthermore, the Meranaw language is also a less explored language just like most of the languages in Mindanao but understanding its uniqueness and its possible varieties gives great information to the people's perception of the culture.

The Meranaw language is dominantly used in Lanao del Sur but there are very limited sources that demonstrate its written version. Many researchers have groped in the dark in deciding what letters or symbols represent certain sounds and pronunciation. There were few attempts at understanding its phonology and meanings, but few are properly documented. Due to the lack of sources, many did not expand on their research regarding its other unique features. This can possibly be factored on the idea that there seems to be less studies on Meranaw orthography. That is also one of the bases in understanding the factors of Meranaw varieties, to possibly create a standardized Meranaw orthography. The motivation of this paper is to have a uniform orthography in terms of the words spelling and symbols by examining the varieties of Meranaws in terms of its lexicons. Exploring and investigating the Meranaw language varieties can unlock answers to many questions regarding a variety's causes as well as its contribution to the development of the language in terms of orthography—which can actually help Meranaw writers extend studies on other components or elements of the language. These factors contributed to the direction of this paper as it attempts to investigate the sprouting of the language varieties and lexical changes specifically those of the Meranaws.

For Labov (1969) and other linguists, it is natural for a language to have a variety. Labov assumptions include the idea that varieties are determined by social factors while others associate language variety with the grammars and lexicons of a language. Language usage changes as generation evolves but its changes can be developed really fast or slow. The common language varieties can be brought about by many factors like changes in pronunciations of a borrowed word, an invention of a new word, word drifts, or even the structure of sentence. Due to the reports that the Meranaw language (the focus of the paper) has varieties in the Lanao area, this paper traced and studied the different factors that trigger such varieties.

RESEARCH METHODS

With the objectives and nature of this research paper, a qualitative-descriptive approach was used which involved field research for sociolinguistic survey and interview.

The lexical variants of the Meranaw language in Lanao del Sur provinces --Taraka and LumbaBayabao to represent areas in District 1 and Pualas, Lumbatan and Balabagan to

represent areas in District 2, were studied and analyzed in terms of lexicon and meaning through the use of different field methods with the support of linguistic theories on the variation and language changes. This paper also aimed to understand these variants by identifying the factors that led to such change and variations. Once collected and analyzed, the researcher discussed and verified the possible contributions of these variants to the production of a standardized Meranaw orthography.

Entry Protocol for the Conduct of the Field Study

The researcher requested a contact person, who is a native of the community, for each municipality to accompany the research team for the conduct of the survey and interviews. The contact person was requested to set up a date with some of the community members who were willing to help the researcher for the data gathering. Most of the respondents were informed in advance of the rationale of the study and the schedule of the interview and survey. There were also respondents who were requested on the day of the scheduled survey and interviews but were briefed by the research team about the flow of the field work. For those who were not in the planned area, the contact persons guided and accompanied the research team in transferring from one household to another.

Locale of the Study

Lanao del Sur is said to have an interesting background. Just like some Muslim places in Mindanao, Lanao resisted basically most of the colonizers and this could explain the strong and brave personalities of the dwellers of the said area. The province consists of 39 municipalities and is the homeland of Meranaws. The Meranaws are known as the “people of the lake”, named after Ranao, which refers to Lake Lanao, mainly because they depend their livelihood in Lake Lanao, which is considered the second largest and is the deepest lake in the Philippines. During Commonwealth government, the unified Lanao was divided into two: the Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte. Because of the division, Lanao del Sur retained its record with having many native Meranaws while Lanao del Norte is now populated with different cultures of different languages. Lanao del Sur has 31 municipalities all in all and were divided into first and second districts. Marawi City is considered the province’s capital. The recently ended five-to-six month war in the capital had devastated many houses and claimed many lives. Ironically, the Meranaws became known to other parts of the country because of the conflict.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research is done to identify the different Meranaw lexical variety as well as tracing the factors that led to such language trend. The essential purpose of the study is to see how varieties and factors of the variation contribute to the current Meranaw orthography.

This study particularly addressed the queries on the existing Meranaw lexical variants in the selected municipalities of 1st District and 2nd district of Lanao del Sur in terms of vocabulary (lexicons) and the different factors that gave rise to such variants. This study also discussed the implications of the Meranaw lexical variants in the development of the Meranaw orthography. The data that were gathered and analyzed in this research were based on the survey answered by respondents. The survey was done to gather the Meranaw lexical varieties by using a modified Samarin list which contains 226 words. The researcher modified the list by adding words that are commonly used in a Meranaw community. The survey results were also used as a basis to identify the Meranaw orthography. In order to validate and get more data, interviews were done as well in the selected municipalities in

both District 1 and District 2, Lanao del Sur. The interviews were also used to trace the common reasons for the rise of Meranaw lexical varieties.

After all the data and information were gathered and categorized, analysis and validation were applied for the interpretations' accurateness. Moreover, the researcher used the qualitative- descriptive approach and utilized inductive data analysis in finding the results.

The study's results showed that lexical variants are also present in the Meranaw language. Although based on the findings, the varieties appear less; it is still an interesting feature for a Meranaw community is often seen as homogenous. The Meranaw lexical variants found prove that Meranaw is not a homogenous language and meaning- making are created out of a social reality constructed by the community. The finding that the Meranaw lexical variants are mutually intelligible among the Meranaw communities suggests that indeed language is convention. It shows that the Meranaw language brings together one culture and its usage is a means to express community's style in an effort to create a social reality. This reality allows them to express their thoughts and ideas through their language. The Meranaw lexical varieties are manifestations of the people's making meaning of the words they use and their means of adapting to the society they live in. The variants demonstrate a 'heterogeneous' nature of the language in social meaning. The result illustrates that the Meranaw language, just like all languages, have internal variations that are yet to be revealed depending on certain degrees and factors.

Contrary to some linguists and variationists, the Meranaw lexical variants naturally occur because of different factors that can be BOTH viewed as synchronic and diachronic at the same time. Based on the findings, Meranaw lexical variants can be factored on geography. The findings showed that Meranaws in Balabagan have more lexical variants compared to Lumbatan, Pualas, Lumbabayabao and Taraka because it is nearer to places which people's languages are not Meranaw. The sprouting of lexical variants are also traced back to history—the embracing of Islam in Meranaw communities. Some factors also include social contact and modernization. The findings showcase that the reason why most Meranaws are easily identified when speaking is because they take pride in using their language anywhere. As they say, loud and proud.

Moreover, the orthographists should know that most Meranaw words are using vowels that do not have the same representations in sound and in writing as that of the English vowels. As of the time of research, there is no standardized orthography yet but based on findings, the Meranaw language is made up of 18 letters only with 14 consonants and 5 vowels. One unique feature is that most of their vowels are used (in sound) like that of a regular English vowel sounds.

CONCLUSION

The investigation revealed that there are Meranaw lexical variants as used by Meranaws in Taraka, Lumbabayabao, Lumbatan, Pualas and Balabagan respectively. These Meranaw lexical variants that were found are just a little over half of the word list provided, 114 of 226 words to be exact, indicating that theirs is one speech community and that even though there were Meranaw lexical variants, it does not hinder the communication to be effective. Moreover, the results also showed that the variants are mutually intelligible among the surveyed Meranaw communities. This proves that Meranaw language is a unifying link that keep Meranaw communities intact and one.

The results also demonstrate that the common factors for the rise of Meranaw lexical variants can be traced back to geography, especially for the Meranaws in Balabagan, language choice, influence of media and religion. Just like in the Meranaw lexicons, there are also few variants in the orthography of Meranaws and how they write the words that they

use in speech. As investigated in the findings, there are only 14 consonants used in Meranaw orthography and as follows: Bb, Dd, Gg, Kk, Ll, Mm, Nn, NGng, Pp, Rr, Ss, Tt, Ww and Yy and there are 5 vowels: Aa, Ee, Ii, Oo and Uu. It is important to note that Ee is used for the /ə/, /U/ for /ə/ and Oo for /U/ as well.

REFERENCES

A. Books

- Barker, C. (2012). *Cultural studies: theory and practice*. 4th Ed. London: Sage Publications.
- Bonvillia, N. (2000). *Language, culture and communication*. 3rd Ed. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc.
- Brown, D. (1994). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Regents.
- _____(2010). *The Cambridge encyclopedia of language*. Third ed. David Crystal. Cambridge University Press, Edinburgh.
- Chambers, J.K. (2009). *Sociolinguistics theory*. revised ed. Wiley Blackwell: UK.
- Chambers, J. and Trudgill, P. (1997) *Dialectology*. 2nd edition. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Cobley, P. (2001). *The routeledge companion to semiotics and linguistics*. London: Taylor and Francis Group.
- Ehri, L., & Wilce, L. (1980). The influence of orthography on readers' conceptualization of the phonemic structure of words. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 1(4), 371-385.
- Eckert, P. (2008). Variation and the indexical field. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 12: 453-476.
- Eckert, P. and John R. (2002). *Style and sociolinguistic variation*. Cambridge: University Press.
- _____(2006). *Encyclopedia of anthropology series: linguistic anthropology*. Edited by Darshna Tyagi. New Delhi: ANmol Publication.
- Halliday, M. (2007). *Language and society*. London: Continuum.
- Holmes, Janet. (1992). *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. London: Longman.
- Labov, W. (1966). *The social stratification of English in New York City*. Washington: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Majul, C. (1973). *Muslims in the Philippines*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press.
- Richard, H. (1996). *Sociolinguistics*. 2nd ed. (Cambridge Textbooks in Linguistics.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Romaine, S. (1994). *Language in society: an introduction to sociolinguistics*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press.
- Trudgill, P. (1992) *Introducing language and society*. London: Penguin.
- Wardhaugh, R. (2006). *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. 5th edition. Australia: Blackwell publishing.

B. Journals/ Theses/ Dissertations

- Adiong, A. (2016). *Istrukturang sintaktik ng wikang Meranaw: Isang pagsusuri*. Thesis. Mindanao State University.
- Al-wer, E & Herin, B. (2010). *The lifecycle of Qaf in Jordan*. Thesis. University of Essex.
- Ammour, N. (2012). *A Sociolinguistic Investigation of Language Variation in the Speech Community of Nedroma*. Dissertation. University of Tlemcen, Nigeria.
- Aro, Mikko. (2004). *Learning to read: the effect of orthography*. Thesis. University of Jyväskylä.

- Baker, W. (2019). Language, culture and identity in Asia. The linguistic journal. Special Edition.
- Bassiouney, R. (2006). Language variation and gender in Egypt: evidence from talkshows. Georgetown University, Washington DC.
- Brewer, J. (2008). Phonetic reflexes of orthographic characteristics in lexical Representation. Dissertation. University of Arizona.
- Bichani, S. (2015). A Study of Language Use, Language Attitudes and Identities in Two Arabic Speaking Communities in the UK. Thesis. Department of English Language and Linguistics.
- Borbely, A. (2000). The process and factors of language shift and maintenance: A sociolinguistics research in the Romanian minority community in Hungary. Czech Republic: Research Support Schee.
- Botha, W. (2011). Dimensions in variationist sociolinguistics: A Sociolinguistic investigation of language variation in Macau. Thesis. University of South Africa.
- Cahill, M. and Karan, E. (2008). Factors in designing effective orthographies for unwritten languages. SIL Electronic Working Papers. 2008-001.
- Cornel-Molina, S. Definitions and Critical Literature Review of Language Attitude, Language Choice and Language Shift: Samples of Language Attitude Surveys. Indiana University, Bloomington, 1-64.
- Cornips, L. (1994). Variationist Sociolinguistics: syntax. Dissertation. University of Amsterdam, Netherlands.
- Hauptseminar, R. (2014). Language and Society. English linguistics. Campus Essen. 2014. Vol. Vi and VII, SS2014.
- Holyk, S. (2014) Language variation and grammar change. English Philology Department, Institute of Foreign Philology. Uzhhorod National University.
- Ihemere, K. (2003). An integrated approach to the study of language attitudes and change in Nigeria: The case of the Ikwerre of Port Harcourt City. University of Newcastle: Tyne, United Kingdom.
- Liao, S. (2010). Identity, Ideology, and Language Variation: A Sociolinguistic Study of Mandarin in Central Taiwan. Dissertation. University of California.
- Maba, S. (2016). Ang mga panlaping makangalan ng Meranaw. Thesis. Mindanao State University.
- Palmer, LF. (2004). Acquisition of English orthography by EL students and its relationship to their reading performance. Dissertation. Appalachian State University.
- Xuan, J. (2011). A study of diglossia: a survey of difference English varieties used by Utar English language course students. Thesis. Universiti Tunku.

C. On-line Sources

- Almonte-Acosta, S. A.. (2008). Ethnic Identity: The Case of Filipino-Japanese Children in Japan. *Asia-Pacific Social Science Review*, 8(2). Retrieved from <http://www.ejournals.ph/form/cite.php?id=5895>
- Bara, Hannbal. (2015). The history of the Muslim in the Philippines. Available: retrieved From <http://ncca.gov.ph/subcommissions/subcommission-on-cultural-communities-and-traditional-arts-sccta/central-cultural-communities/the-history-of-the-muslim-in-the-philippines/April 30>
- Castro, M and Roh, T. (2013). The effect of language attitudes on learner preferences: A Study on South Koreans' perceptions of the Philippine English Accent. University of the Philippines Diliman. Retrieved from <http://blog.nus.edu.sg/eltwo/?p=3508> Volume 5

Language variation and change. Linguistic society of America. Available: retrieved from <http://www.linguisticsociety.org/resource/language-variation-and-change>

Mu'in, F. (2008). Varieties of language. retrieved October 18, 2008
<https://pbingfkipunlam.wordpress.com/2008/10/18/varieties-of-language/>

Roque, LS and Meyer, Antje. Why the need for ortho. Retrieved from:
<http://www.mpi.nl/qa/questions-and-answers/why-do-we-need-orthography>