Sociolinguistic Profiles of Multilingualism: Implications for Isabela State University Language Policy

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ABSTRACT

This study developed a structured framework for language policy at Isabela State University (ISU) to enhance communication and promote bilingualism among its stakeholders. Key participants included university administrators, faculty, staff, and students. Utilizing surveys and participant observation, the research assessed language usage patterns across various contexts, such as personal communication, family interactions, social media activity, and workplace routines. Findings reveal Filipino and Ilocano as the most widely used languages among ISU's community, with English serving a significant but more institutional role, particularly among faculty and staff. Language preferences shift depending on context — for example, Filipino and Ilocano are dominant in informal and emotional situations, while English is preferred for formal communication and written correspondence. Exposure to both Filipino and Ilocano is high due to their status as first languages among most participants. The study also explored attitudes toward first and second language maintenance, finding both faculty and students value bilingualism and are reluctant to prioritize a second language at the cost of their native tongue. Teachers generally show even stronger support for promoting both languages. These attitudes underscore a shared belief in the benefits of sustaining bilingual proficiency within ISU. The call is for a campus-wide language policy that not only systematizes communication but also strengthens cultural identity and educational competence. Recommendations include adopting or adapting language policies by campus location, forming student organizations to preserve local languages and culture, and extending research to local government contexts to support community-wide language promotion and preservation.

Keywords: Bilingualism, language attitude, language policy, language use

I. INTRODUCTION

Language policy pertains to rules or laws that set the usage, status, and rights of a language. It may be viewed as an ensemble of activities that are anchored on language practices, language beliefs, and language ideologies governing various fields (Zhang et al., 2023). The pivotal role of language for society has made language policies an essential element in promoting equity in access to resources and opportunities across socio-economic groups, especially in multilingual setups.

As such, linguistic diversity in the school environment is a significant point for both the Department of Education and the Commission on Higher Education in the Philippines, especially with the adoption of a multilingual education policy in 2012. To note, the goal of language policies in the functional level is to respond to the needs of societies for linguistic functions as an expression of social behavior, and to integrate unfamiliar terminologies or entire languages for survival. This is conventionally achieved through innovation and adaptation (Moummou & Fathi, 2023). For schools, language policy is used to frame the medium of instruction, as well as frame guidelines for managing language teaching and learning. In addition, a school language policy is also crucial for preserving identity and cultural diversity through language use (Abuateyh, 2023).

In higher education, a primary concern revolves around the dominance of English within the academe. This has been the case in Europe, where the international mobility of students is fostered through the promotion of English. Concurrent to this, there also persists the concern of local language displacement (Torres-Purroy & Mas-Alcolea, 2022). This pattern has also been observed in Philippine universities. For example, in the University of the Philippines, English is specified as the medium of instruction, and Filipino is used and developed simultaneously (University of the Philippines, 2020). Likewise, De La Salle University's Language Policy specifies their compliance with the country's bilingual policy; however, internal practices reflect English as a preference for common academic functions (Tabajunda, 2018). These indicate a policy-practice discrepancy as there is a gap between official language policies and the actual language practices. Also, there is a perceived displacement of local languages, which may impact their vitality and status within the community.

This type of discrepancy highlights the need for academic institutions to develop precise and clearly defined language policies that will ensure alignment between mandates and actual practice. This need is underscored further by Bernard Spolsky's theoretical framework. For Spolsky (2021), a language policy is not just a formal document of language use; it is a complex interaction of language practice (what people do), language belief (what people think they should do), and language management (the effort to change practices or beliefs of others). As shown in the examples from European and Philippine academic contexts, misalignment among the 3 components of Spolsky's model results in a gap in the implementation of the policy and ambiguity in language use and language prioritization within the academic community. In contrast, a robust and well-formulated school language policy not only minimizes ambiguity, but it also ensures that stakeholders align their beliefs about the value of local languages without sacrificing competitiveness in a lingua franca. Thus, local language resources should be actively sustained and protected while keeping up with the global academic demands of internationalization.

The Isabela State University is one of the first state universities in Region 2. Founded in 1926, it has expanded to Angadanan, Cabagan, Cauayan City, the City of Ilagan, Jones, Roxas, San Mateo, and San Mariano. Also, it is one of the country's HEIs with the greatest number of accredited programs by the Association of Accredited

Chartered Colleges and Universities of the Philippines. While the university continues to expand its horizons by regularly updating its administrative and instructional practices to cater to the trends of globalization and internationalization, policies on language remain vague and unspecified.

According to the National Statistics Office's 2010 Census of Population and Housing, there are approximately 37 languages that are generally spoken in the province of Isabela. The following are the most spoken languages at home, according to the list provided: Ilocano, Ibanag, Tagalog, Yogad, Parananum, Gaddang, Itawis, Calinga, Kankanaey, Pangasinan/Panggalato, and Bisaya/Binisaya. Given the wide variety of languages spoken in Isabela, it is necessary to ascertain the status of language use and language attitudes of Isabelinos to use these views as the basis for developing a language policy.

The significance of language policies in education has already been emphasized in much of the literature; hence, the researcher thinks that the Isabela State University, with its mission and vision for providing quality education, should develop its language policy. This will not only systematize language use in the university but also aid in the school's individual development policy and multicultural awareness.

Language planning constitutes a careful consideration of certain factors that impact language use and the language attitudes of the language policy's stakeholders. As such, this inquiry was framed by Spolsky's (2004) framework and analyzed the language beliefs and practices of the Isabelinos. This was triangulated with data from pertinent documents and surveys with university stakeholders. Since language use status is evaluated along with attitude, the study transcends descriptive reporting towards serving as a basis for language management. Given this, it may serve as a guide for the university system in bridging institutional policy to the community's linguistic reality: contributing to the discussions on language planning in higher education.

II. METHODS

The study utilized a mixed-methods design, particularly a convergent design, which simultaneously collected both quantitative and qualitative data, merged the data, and used the results to understand a research problem (Creswell, 2002).

Participants of the study included the stakeholders of the Isabela State University, specifically students, administrative officials, faculty, and staff. Student participants were composed of respondents from the 9 campuses of Isabela State University- Angadanan, Cabagan, Cauayan City, the City of Ilagan, Jones, Palanan, Roxas, San Mateo, and San Mariano. 312 student-respondents who are *bona fide* students of ISU and currently enrolled during the 2nd semester 2021-2022 and are residents of Isabela took part in the survey, where 215 were male, and 97 were female; 305 of whom belong to the 16-25 age bracket, while 7 are ages 26-35. They are speakers of at least two local languages to gather relevant data for the study, where 238 live in the rural area of the province, while 74 live in the urban area. 185 declared Ilocano as their first language, 84 for Tagalog, 32 for Ybanag, 3 for Gaddang, 2 for Filipino, and 1 each for Yogad, Ifugao, Itawes, Paranan, Waray, and Maranao. Purposive convenience sampling was used to extract the student

respondents accordingly. As for the ISU administration and employees, 9 Directors for Academic and Related Affairs were chosen as participants due to their familiarity with the different policies in their respective campuses, total enumeration was used in the selection of this set of participants; 62 faculty and staff members who speak at least two local languages were tapped for the study, to collect further data regarding local languages in the province. 38 were male, and 23 were female, where 9 belonged to the 16-25 age bracket, 17 with ages 26-35, 28 with ages 36-45, and 7 with ages 46-55. In terms of their educational attainment, 22 are college graduates (no post-graduate degrees), 19 have master's degrees, and 20 have doctoral degrees. 26 live in rural areas, while 35 live in urban areas, where 38 of them speak Ilocano as their first language, 12 speak Tagalog, 5 speak Filipino, 3 speak Ybanag, and 1 each for Yogad, Gaddang, and Itneg. Purposive convenience sampling was employed to elicit appropriate responses from this set of respondents.

A survey questionnaire was used to investigate the target language use and language attitude of students, teachers, and staff. Separate sets of questionnaires were provided to students and faculty members, and staff, with each consisting of items about their profile, language use in different contexts, and language attitude. To systematically evaluate this, a 4-point Likert Scale was used. The language use items were adapted from Dayag (2012), whereas the language attitude items were adapted from Sicam and Lucas (2016). In addition, a semi-structured interview guide was used to put focus on existing language mandates, language awareness promotion, and possible contributions to a potential university language policy.

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze quantitative data. In particular, language status and language attitude were determined through computation of frequency, percentage distribution, and mean. On the other hand, the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach was used to explore participants' lived experiences. The IPA was guided by Cresswell's recommended steps for thematic analysis of the participants' statements in the interview.

Throughout the study, several ethical considerations were incorporated. Before data collection, official permission to conduct the study and to schedule data-gathering was obtained from the ISU Vice President for Academic Affairs and Campus Executive Officers. The Google form survey questionnaires sent to the participants contained a preliminary section that provided extensive details on the study title, rationale, and objectives, nature and limitations of participation, potential risks and benefits, and measures for confidentiality. Participants confirmed their willingness to participate by selecting the "Yes" option in the form as well.

Confidentiality and data privacy were also ensured. The provision of names was optional. Information collected was only made accessible to the researcher, research adviser, and data consultant. Electronic data was kept safe in a password-protected folder in an external hard drive. It was scheduled for deletion after 5 years for privacy protection. Qualitative interviews, which were conducted via Google Meet, and these were recorded to ensure accuracy for coding and analysis. This was also done with the participants' consent.

III. RESULTS

A. Status of Language in the University

Analysis of quantitative evidence reveals that Filipino, Ilocano, and English occupy the highest functional domains. Filipino was identified as the primary lingua franca for social and affective practices, especially in terms of general interaction (Faculty M=3.75; Students M=3.49), and emotional expression, particularly, love (M=3.50). Meanwhile, Ilocano was identified as an intergenerational cornerstone (Lachica & Albert, 2024) as its use was most dominant in communication with grandparents (Faculty M=3.30) and parents (Students M=3.14)

The function of English was primarily instrumental, as results indicated its peak use in office communication (M=3.92) and academic writing (M=3.40). Minimal use of English was noted in intimate or personal communication, further highlighting the diglossic pattern for the language. Notably, regional languages like Paranan, Gaddang, and Itawes garnered consistently low results in all language use domains, signifying a lack of formal management for regional languages (Hossain, 2025).

B. Language Attitude in the University

Results show that there is a general positive attitude towards bilingualism, with both teachers and students expressing strong favorability for maintaining proficiency in the first and second languages. A higher degree of commitment was found among teachers, with a mean score of 4.45 compared to the 3.25 of the students. Both groups demonstrated agreement that L2 is important for modernization and academic success (Dillera-Prejoles et al., 2025; Magno et al., 2024) while they view L1 more as a vehicle for emotional expression. This was most apparent for the teachers who scored a mean of 3.33 or Strongly Agree in said category. In light of these preferences, it was noted that there was no linguistic exclusion expressed by both groups.

Ultimately, L2 was found to be valued for its benefits for career and the academe, and L1 was valued for its cultural and integrative benefits. As such, there is an expressed inclination for fluency in both languages.

C. Status and Prestige of Languages in the University

Interviews with academic affairs directors of the campuses revealed 10 themes about language status and prestige in the university: mandated languages and local dialects; language as a communication tool; cultivating socio-culturally significant interrelations; fostering effective communication; language policy needs; language resource use; language programs and activities; language support; language policy and VMGO; and language policy inclusions.

1. Mandated Language and Local Dialects

Among the given languages, English and Filipino were dominantly mentioned as they are declared as the medium of instruction. As AP5 remarked, "For instruction, of course, we make use of the medium of instruction, which are English and Filipino." AP1 mentioned, "The common language used in our campus are English and Filipino." Local dialects were also spoken, with Ilocano as the most used and Yogad and Gaddang as the least spoken.

Article XIV Section 7 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution states that for purposes of communication and instruction, the official languages of the Philippines are Filipino and, until otherwise provided by law, English. The regional languages are the auxiliary official languages in the regions and shall serve as auxiliary media of instruction therein. Moreover, CHED Memorandum Order No. 59, Series of 1996, which is in line with the Bilingual Education Policy enunciated in DECS Order No. 52, Series of 1987, likewise justifies the theme that emerged. The prevalence of Ilocano as the language the students and teachers first spoke, used at home, and best understood can all be accounted for by the fact that Ilocano is the *lingua franca* in the Region and is one of the major languages in the Philippines (Temporal, 2018).

2. Language as a Communication Tool

The participant discussed language as a communication tool in light of Halliday's (1975) language functions. The most dominant function mentioned was the informative/representational function, which encompasses the conveyance of observations, thoughts, emotions, needs, and ideas. As AP5 said, "By using the language that we are comfortable with, we are able to express our feelings well…" This signifies that the main use of language in the university is information transmission. Secondary language functions, likewise mentioned, included personal, interactional, and regulatory. Based on these, it is indicated that language is used in the university as a tool for sharing experiences, expressing disposition, and disseminating information.

3. Cultivating Socio-Culturally Significant Interrelations

Wardaugh and Fuller (2021) describe language as both an individual and societal phenomenon, signifying that the utilization of familiar languages creates an effective communication channel that promotes understanding and harmonious relations. According to one participant, "…with the use of these languages which are very familiar to our students and employees, it facilitates and fosters an effective channel of communication and understanding, and also it facilitates harmonious working relationships within the organization among the students and the employees themselves."

This statement reflects principles from sociolinguistics and politeness theory, which indicate that routinized and conventional speech make up most of everyday interpersonal exchange. This maintains social relations and supports public image aside from simple information provision (Weirich, 2021).

4. Fostering Effective Communication

The discussion for the theme "fostering effective communication" revolved around the promotion of understanding, reinforcement of cognitive skills, and enabling self-expression in an organization through language use.

Of these, the most dominant aspect was mutual understanding, as participants agreed that language mastery and fluency enable "better understanding and make communication more effective". According to AP1, for example, "Mastery and fluency in using a language common to most members of the organization leads to better understanding and makes communication more effective." Other aspects mentioned included client connection, clarity of instructions, accurate information dissemination, and efficient development of organizational functions. For reinforcement of cognitive skills, participants discussed the upholding of academic value, creativity enhancement, learning, facilitation of overall language development, supporting student comprehension, and speaking ability improvement. Participants also talked about the importance of language for self-expression, specifically in communicating feelings and thoughts freely and confidently, in code-switching, and in using the most convenient language possible.

Ultimately, the theme highlights the significance of promoting effective internal communication among stakeholders in the university, as this allows the harmonious sharing of ideas and emotions, which in turn builds work efficiency and good relations (Limani et al., 2024).

5. Language Policy Need

Data analysis for the theme centered on existing mandates and the perceived absence of localized guidelines to comply with these mandates. Participants indicated that the Commission on Higher Education has implied specific language use for curricular offerings, in compliance with Executive Order No. 210, Series of 2003, which specifies English as the main medium of instruction and the maintenance of Filipino for specific courses. As AP1 mentioned, "Specific language as a medium of instruction and communication is implied in the different CMOs of the curricular offering of the campus."

While the participants spoke of general compliance with these, their responses also revealed a gap in the enforcement of an explicit and contextualized language policy for the university. As such, it was signified that "there are no specific mandates or guidelines being used in the campus regarding language use and language learning." As AP1 said, "There are no specific mandates or guidelines being used by the campus regarding language use and language learning."

6. Language Resource Use

In the emergence of this theme, the participants discussed the available materials in the institution. These included printed materials such as traditional library resources and media, as well as multimedia resources. In addition, several campuses also have speech laboratories which students can use to enhance their English language

competencies. AP8 stated, "What we have in our campus to have language students to be more competent in the English language is we purchased speech laboratory equipment for English classes, and this is open for our students to use in their classes."

Despite the provisions, the participants still emphasized the lack of universal access. As one participant noted, "*[resources] are not required by the curriculum".* This indicates a discrepancy that not all students in the university have access to similar language learning resources and opportunities. Such inadequacies have a negative impact on language learning in general. As stipulated by Oswal et al. (2025), the lack of resources in HEIs lessens the opportunities of students to receive better training and inclusive education.

7. Language Programs and Activities

The discussion around the theme highlighted the initiatives made and gaps in comprehensive policy and implementation. For the programs, the participants mentioned seminars, trainings, and workshops that provided opportunities for skill improvement; outreach programs that supported community needs; and scholarship opportunities for professional development. As for the gaps, however, a key issue identified was the lack of a language program that catered to faculty and staff. Only informal initiatives by language teachers and students were conducted. According to AP8, "We did not have any seminars on language as we focus on other things like mental health. There are a lot of seminars, but when it comes to language, it is not common here. These are just initiated by language teachers and students. This is one thing that should be strengthened and enhanced."

All in all, the participants' statements indicate the significance of a robust language program for the university. As the Cambridge International Education Teaching and Learning Team (2022) stipulated, language learning is best promoted by creating language awareness. All the clusters identified under the theme of language programs and activities contribute towards the development of language awareness; hence, their significance to the planning and designing of a language policy for the university.

8. Language Support

The theme of language support emerged from discussions about campus support and linkage support. Participants' discourse revealed that campus support made use of internal resources for research awareness that promoted English proficiency. This included outreach programs that offered free classes: "…There are outreach and extension program which allow the faculty members to gain valuable classroom teaching experience while addressing the dire need for free English language classes." Linkages are also made with other SUCs, LGUs, national organizations, and international bodies. From the participants' viewpoint, internal and external support are essential in maintaining and enhancing language programs. Collaboration, after all, not only improves program quality, resource efficiency, and goal alignment; it also helps maintain and enhance programs that cater to language-related initiatives (Gutierrez et al., 2024).

9. Language Policy and VMGO

For this theme, the participants shared unanimous views of how a formal language policy can aid the university in achieving its goals. For instance, a participant stated: "A well-designed, implemented, monitored, and evaluated language policy will contribute to the attainment of VMGO because its faculty, staff, students, and graduates will become competent and diverse individuals ready to work and collaborate in the global environment."

Others put focus on an LP's impact on providing guidelines: that the adoption of a language policy provides parameters, boundaries, and best practices needed to strengthen the organization and its stakeholders. There was also an emphasis on ensuring the translation of the VMGO into local languages and on inculcating culture, identity, and values through the LP. This was regarded as the university's realization of glocalization as reflected in its VMGO and core values. Glocalization is prioritized by HEIs due to its potential in creating globally competitive but locally relevant education while simultaneously addressing issues of inequality and cultural homogenization in curriculum design, institutional norms, and student outcomes (Ghosh, 2022).

10. Language Policy Inclusions

The participants also gave key recommendations that led to theme language policy inclusions. Most dominant of these are the creation of language centers, the regular policy reviews to ensure continuous meetings of campus needs, and faculty and staff consultation.

For the creation of language centers, participants also suggested the identification of specific languages to focus on, the strengthening of English skills, and the provision of training opportunities. One participant also said, "The University may consider the creation/establishment of a Language Center in the University. The center shall be manned by qualified personnel to work on the crafting, implementation, evaluation, and monitoring of Language Policy." Notably, the university had already begun with a proposal for a Center for Ybanag Studies as one way of promoting local dialects.

The revision of the policy to continuously match campus needs was also a focal point among the participants. The formalization and updating of policies to connect trends and to contextualize to the needs would only enhance their effectiveness for the university. Consulting with faculty members and staff was also emphasized as one way of ensuring the relevance and effectiveness of the LP to the university stakeholders.

IV. DISCUSSION

In light of the aforementioned findings, a Language Policy Framework is proposed for the Isabela State University as a stakeholder-driven policy informed by quantitative data on university language status and attitude from students, teachers, and staff, as well as quantitative data on the prestige of languages in the university. The framework was also formulated with its main principles anchored in Spolsky's Language Policy, which posits that language policy consists of three interrelated but independently described elements: language ecology, language ideology, and management planning.

Language ecology pertains to the linguistic practices that can be discerned through behavior and choice. These are observable in the language use in a community as well as the number of people who use said language; in the conventions of language use in schools, communities, and in homes; as well as in the communicative value of languages in the school setting and in the community setting.

Language ideology, meanwhile, is the beliefs that people hold regarding the relation of certain languages to their identity as a people, and towards aiding them in navigating the world in the context of globalization. It also includes the people's belief about language pluralism, specifically language choice as a human right.

The last component is management planning, which was defined by Spolsky (2007) as the explicit efforts of a group to modify their beliefs and practices regarding how they use languages. The concept of management planning was elaborated upon by Kaplan and Baldauf (1997), who discussed it under the term language planning. It is defined as the formulation of ideas, laws, and regulations, as well as the changes they make to existing rules, beliefs, and practices that are geared towards a planned change or intervention in the language use in a group or community. Accordingly, the language planning goals framework was also posited as consisting of status, planning, corpus planning, and acquisition planning.

Status planning is the process of allocating the prestige and functions of languages within a community. For instance, it might involve the assigning of official and regional languages or even elevating a certain dialect to a more prestigious category. Corpus planning, on the other hand, is technically defined as a prescriptive intervention that develops resources to standardize a language for a specific kind of discourse or purpose. Acquisition planning, meanwhile, involves the teaching and learning of languages. But aside from that, it may also take the form of preserving, promoting, and revitalizing language.

While said components of the framework consist of numerous sub-components, the emerging themes from the qualitative data analysis narrow down the focus of said components to what applies to the context of Isabela State University. They are as follows: language origin, degree of standardization, juridical status, and vitality for status planning; language standardization for corpus planning; and curriculum inclusion, language utilization in materials, linkages with stakeholders, and language teacher training for acquisition planning.

The inclusion of said elements is expounded on in the language policy for ISU (Appendix A). Based on the premise of the findings in crafting a language policy, the language policy may be adopted by Isabela State University with the end means of bringing about change to address their current language situation and enhance their competencies to become research experts in their respective field. The university may also consider modifying or enhancing the language policy herein, in order to be more appropriate in each campus' setting/location. Since ISU campuses are situated in different parts of Isabela, language use varies as well, especially in the use of their L1.

V. LIMITATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The study's scope was confined to the Isabela State University, a single university system. As such, the findings on language use and attitudes are highly contextualized to this institution and may not be generalizable to other HEIs in the Philippines or in other multilingual/bilingual contexts. Apart from these, the focus of the study was also on existing resources pertinent to current language use patterns more than on the exploration of hypothetical language needs that may go beyond the university's scope of operations.

Nonetheless, the findings present significant implications for institutional policy, in the sense that it presents an empirically-based roadmap for the university towards the standardization and institutionalization of a language policy. In addition, the bottom-up approach to language planning that was used in the study adheres to the actual beliefs and practices of the stakeholders, signifying that higher engagement with the proposed policy may be achieved. Lastly, the study validates the utility of Spolsky's framework in a regional context. This signifies how language ecology is connected to the roles assigned to languages within a community.

Given these, the study therefore provides a basis for the development of a language policy framework that balances global and local linguistic realities. The framework bridges the gap between the stakeholders' language realities and institutional mandates. By anchoring policy in data, the study can ensure that the linguistic future of the university will be inclusive and strategic at the same time.

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