

## Language and Culture Interconnectedness: A Case Study Of a Chinese College Student Nurtured in the Cordilleras



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### Abstract

Culture and language are intricately intertwined in that one influenced the other as they developed, succeeded, interacted, and survived together in a long and unending process of human development. Anent this, the researcher conducted a case study on Christian, a Chinese college student in one of the universities in the Philippines whose family has migrated to the country, and he has been staying here since his kindergarten years. The data gathered through an unstructured interview were analyzed using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis technique. The analysis revealed that language acquisition of a second language was influenced by the individual's environment, parental and significant other's support, and age. Moreover, a language expression shapes one's mindset and mirrors one's culture.

**Keywords:** Language identity, Culture-language relationship, Ay-ayyew, Migrated, Critical

### Introduction

Universally, it is acclaimed that a particular community, tribe, region, or even the entire nation communicates primarily through a particular language. In contrast, culture is the culmination of a group of people's shared linguistic, geographic, and cultural experiences that may span an entire peninsula or continent. The similarities between the languages and cultures of different continents, such as Asia, Africa, and South America, are striking. Some contend that culture is a by-product of history, including its survival through numerous battles, numerous immigrations, several brutal explorations, and the ongoing development of language. The relationship between language and culture cannot be ignored because of the elaborate and close relevance between each other. Because of this significant relationship, one cannot be utilized without the other. Culture and language are intricately intertwined in that one influenced the other as they developed, succeeded, interacted, and survived together in a long and unending process of human development. Considering this, one of the most influ-

-tial American cultural experts stated, "...culture began when speech was extant, and from that point on, the enrichment of one meant the growth of the other" (Kroeber, 1923, p. 2). Language and culture are inseparable due to their complexity, evolution, and mutual influence. It is much more difficult if a language is obscure and its inhabitants are conservative, as is the case with the Japanese, whose culture heavily influences both their language and social norms.

Furthermore, language and culture can coexist in numerous ways, including through words, gestures, conduct, attitudes, discipline, labor, and history. While some languages do convey culture, other cultures conceal their language to an equal or greater degree. Some languages even reveal whether the cultures of their speakers are lethargic or diligent, emotional or composed, self-centered or altruistic, communal or individual. A Japanese author once remarked, "By examining a person's native tongue, it is simple to determine his or her passions." If not all,

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most languages in the globe reflect their respective cultures. There are numerous expressions in Japanese that refer to weather, seasons, and other aspects of nature. Although Mongolian has a rich animal vocabulary, French is superior for describing cuisine in detail (Ayumi, 2009, p.1).

### Research Questions

1. How did Christian describe his acquisition of the vocabulary ay-ayyew?
2. How did the vocabulary affect Christian's sociological mindset?
3. In what way does Christian integrate the social implicature of ay-ayyew in his Chinese culture?

### Methodology

#### Research Design

The qualitative research paradigm was chosen for this study due to its suitability for delineating epistemological issues pertinent to human experiences and its support for dialogic knowledge production that integrates facts and values (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). This paradigm allowed the researcher and informant to interact in a flexible and spontaneous manner to better comprehend a spontaneously occurring intriguing occurrence (Patton, 2002). The identification of patterns and relationships in qualitative data enabled the description, interpretation, and analysis of subjective meanings by utilizing the participant's emic perspective (Burns, 1999) and recording the subject's voice (Wolcott, (2000). In addition, they contain the researcher's admission of his own biases (Gale, 1990).

Case study methodology adheres to the post-positive philosophical tenet that social reality is constructed by its participants. A case is associated with a context, time, and location (Merriam, 1998), and may entail a person (Creswell, 1998). Case study research generates context-specific and relativistic data (Flyvbjerg, 2006). It aims to produce a reasonably exhaustive analysis and description of a "complex functioning object" (Stake 1995).

#### Context and Participant

The participant, Christian, a 21-college student at a private university in Baguio City, is a Chinese migrant from the mainland China when he was a

preschooler. He happened to be in the restaurant run by his parent, who became the researcher's friend when she arrived in Baguio City last February 2023. The researcher noticed that Christian conveniently speaks with the locals and heard him speaking some words foreign to the researcher, particularly the word ay-ayyew. Curious about the word, the researcher asked the Christian's parents about it, and she learned that is a local vocabulary, which means valuing something and it should not be wasted. This prompted the researcher to choose Christian as her informant in the language study that she is planning to take.

The researcher did not choose Christian according to the principles of random selection (Huberman & Miles, 2002) or the concept of objective sampling as a specific illustration of a larger problem, such as microscopic methodology (Yin, 1994). The criteria for case selection were Christian's inherent qualities and uniqueness (Abramson, 1992; Creswell, 1998; Flyvbjerg, 2006, as well as the informant's accessibility and subjective characteristics, such as his ideas, emotions, and desires (Broomley, 1986).

#### Data Collection Instruments

To construct the case study, Christian was interviewed on how acquiring ay-ayyew vocabulary affected his attitude and cultural orientation. In addition to Christian's voice, the narrative features "other personalities encountered in life, history, and society" (Moen, 2006). The approach lends the human significance of Christian's experience (Gudmundsdottir, 2001; Polkinghorne, 1988). Through a multi-voiced dialogic process that included description and contemplation, the narrator utilized Christian's story to help her make sense of the experience. This occurred at the center of multiple cycles of narrative formation, selection, and interpretation, employing "culturally positioned voices that ventriloquize through the solitary voice that an individual claims" (Moen, 2006).

#### Data Analysis and Interpretation

Using Fairclough's critical discourse analysis technique, the researcher analyzed Christian's narrative and the multilingual context (Freeland, 2003) in his story. The application of critical discourse to the interpretation of data advances the

study of the intricate relationships between language, discourse, and social action. It consists of three phases: descriptive (linguistic analysis of the text), interpretative (discourse practices), and explanatory (text-discourse practices).

During the descriptive phase, an inventory of linguistic elements based on grammatical resources for ideational, interpersonal, and textual meanings was used to analyze the narrative (Halliday, 1985). The list includes cohesive devices, thematic structure, transitivity patterns, the use of active and passive voice, nominalization, and lexicalization. The patterns generated by linguistic functions were associated with the contextual and intertextual conditions of text production. Because of this phase of interpretation, Christian's discursive goals-related discourses emerged.

## Results and Discussion

The interview with Christian began with a discussion of his upbringing in Baguio City and his integration with the city's natives, including their housekeepers, restaurant employees, and schoolmates. Christian's acquisition of the ay-ayyew vocabulary and how he uses and implements its meaning unconsciously in his daily activities finally became the focus of the conversation.

### Christian's acquisition of the ay-ayyew vocabulary

The lexicon ay-ayyew is a Kankanaey vocabulary. Kankanaey is just one of the many Cordilleran languages. This language became more accessible to Christian because their housekeepers and a majority of the employees in their restaurants are Kankanaeys or speakers of the language. They are the natives he first interacted with, especially his yaya during his growing years. As discussed in the earlier section of this paper, the researcher accidentally heard Christian using the vocabulary in her visit to their house. While the researcher was chatting with Christian's mother in their sala, the young man passed by playing with his dog as he was feeding it. Christian uttered in English, "Oh, ay-ayyew. You are wasting the food." Christian was referring to the dog.

After the researcher had gotten the consent of Christian (not the real name) for an interview

and they were able to get along with each other, the researcher asked him how he was able to acquire the vocabulary she heard last time and other vocabularies of the local. Christian shared,

First, my long years of stay in Baguio City is a great factor in why I was able to acquire their language. My parents told me that I have to learn also the language of the locals, especially so that when I grow up I will have my schooling here and I will be helping them in our restaurant. They told me that it would be an advantage if I learn their language.

This may be the reason why my parents employed locals as our housekeepers and my yaya when I was still in my growing years. The house helpers and my yaya are all Kankanaeys back then, so I typically hear them speaking their language. Little by little, they were teaching me some vocabulary. Then in my young mind, I often hear them say "Ay-ayyew!" when something was wasted. By then, I was imitating them (he laughed).

I remember in my grade school days, I was not able to fix properly my tumbler and it slipped. My drink spilled on the floor in the hallway. Luckily, she did not leave yet, so I got help immediately. She said lovingly, "Ayye, Christian, ay-ayyew payna (What a wastage?). You don't have a drink anymore. Be careful not to spoil to waste your food and things." (I saw some gloomy emotions crossed Christian's face as he remembered her yaya. He did not know where she was now because she resigned when Christian graduated in Grade 6).

The narrative of Christian advanced that language acquisition happened in one's interaction with people. His acquisition of the Kankanaey language was easier because this was the other language he was exposed to when he was growing aside from English and Tagalog in school. His parents were not strict in imposing English or Tagalog as their home language other than their Chinese language. Also, Christian shared that his yaya was instrumental in his acquisition of the Kankanaey lexicon, and tracing the years of the occurrence of this it happened during his grade school days, confirming that age is another essential element to language acquisition and learning.

From Christian's narrative in his acquisition of the ay-ayyew vocabulary, the researcher extracted these three encompassing sub-themes namely: environmental exposure's influence on language acquisition, parental and significant other's influence on language acquisition, and age-effect in language acquisition.

### **Environmental exposure's influence on language acquisition.**

Christian's environment played well in his acquisition and mastery of the ay-ayyew vocabulary and his capacity to understand the Kankanaey language. Christian got a favorable environment permissible for him to expand his horizons by learning other languages while maintaining his mother tongue, Chinese. Russel (2020) underscored the significance of the environment for language acquisition and learning. From a plethora of studies, it has concurred that the role played by the environment in language acquisition has been established, noting that a favorable one facilitates language acquisition and learning. Russel noted this when teachers and learners transitioned to an online learning environment wherein everyone was not prepared, which affected the quality of learning of a language.

Family circumstances may also influence bilingualism. Goriot et al. (2016) found that the more positive children's family language exposure, the better they performed in a multilingual classroom. Likewise, MacIntyre (2014) revealed that a non-threatening, friendly learning environment for language learning and acquisition plays an advantage over a restricted environment. Then Nightingale & Safont (2019) that the effect of a positive emotion-promoting environment facilitates active language learning and acquisition with longer effect until the secondary level. Similarly, Pfenninger (2017) report demonstrated for the classroom setting how the characteristics of the groups investigated have implications not only for theoretical discussions of the age factor but also for methodology.

In Getie (2020), who investigated the effects of teachers and peers in the English language learning of the Grade 10 students in Hong Kong, it was exemplified that a strict environ-

ment dominated by teachers is not welcoming to the learning process while the influence of the peers helped the learners cope. This finding further established the significance of the learning environment and other social factors in making learning conducive and more productive.

### **Parental and significant others' influence in language acquisition.**

In the narrative of Christian, his parents' openness further facilitated his acquisition of the language. He shared that his parents favorably encouraged him to learn the language of the locals while ensuring that he sustains their Chinese language, hence the significant influence of parents in the language acquisition of their children. Pu (2016) and Bai et al. (2019) affirmed the impact of parents in their children's language acquisition and development responsive to Pearson (2007), highlighting that the "quantity of input" as one of the factors parents can control the most.

Getie (2020) found that among the social factors that significantly impacted English language learning of Grade 10 learners in Hong Kong highlighted parents and native speakers of the language in their role of facilitating the learning processes.

### **Age-effect in language acquisition.**

Christian shared that his *yaya* was instrumental in his acquisition of the Kankanaey lexicon and tracing the years of the occurrence of this, it happened during his grade school days, confirming that age is another essential element to language acquisition and learning responsive to the critical period hypothesis of Noam Chomsky. According to Hartshorne and colleagues (2018), the critical period is the time during which a person's capacity for language acquisition declines. Children begin language acquisition with greater success between the ages of 10 and 12 than later. Pfenninger and Singleton (2018) opined that an earlier age of learning proved beneficial only for children raised as biliterate simultaneous bilinguals receiving substantial parental support, as opposed to monolinguals and non-biliterate bilinguals (simultaneous or sequential).

### **Christian's practice of ay-ayyew as a psychosocial mindset**

Christian was asked how the vocabulary ay-ayyew affected his psychosocial mindset. According to Boroditsky (2019) "Language plays a crucial role in the human experience, and the languages we speak have a profound effect on how we think, perceive the world, and conduct our lives." This premise has led the researcher to uncover this aspect in the experiences of Christian as he acquired the ay-ayyew vocabulary. Christian shared,

At first, the vocabulary was simply an expression. I even used it to tease our house helpers with it. Like when I saw them slipped with something, I uttered "Ay-ayyew." We laughed afterwards. Several times, I just utter the words even when it is not fit the situation, I just utter it, and then our house helpers would correct me if the situation I was using the word was not appropriate.

As it progressed, when my mom told our house helpers to feed the leftover food to the dogs and I know it can be kept for the next meal I would say, "Mom, ay-ayyew. We can still have that for lunch (dinner)." Then my mom smiles at me.

I do not know if it was part of my growing that made me conscious of the value of things and it was timely that I had acquired the word that it has been so natural of me to say it when I felt something is wasted or to be wasted. What I remembered was when I came to realize the meaning of the word ay-ayyew, which is on valuing things we have. That if we can still keep something and be useful in future occasions then we have to, I have been using the word also. In the second theme, Christian's use, and practice of ay-ayyew as a psychosocial mindset, three sub-themes were extracted to include ay-ayyew as an expression, ay-ayyew as a mental representation of a concept, and ay-ayyew as a cultural practice (economic).

### **Ay-ayyew as an expression.**

The deliberate use of Christian of the word ay-ayyew, whether as a blubber or a natural expression like any other expressions illustrates that the lexicon has become a part of his linguistic system. As part of his linguistic system, it has become naturally uttered. This natural utterance shows that a speaker has already owned

the vocabulary and it is part of his language faculties. According to Khojieva and Yokubova (2021) "the phrases describing certain features of the person in the speech activity of language owners realize the linguistic syntactic possibilities of the language among the nominative units expressing the concept of personality." Consequently, one's expression becomes a unit of thought in the process. Sarasvathy & Venkataraman (2020) describe that "the relation of words or expressions to other words or expressions constitutes, along with reference, the sphere of meaning" inasmuch that these expressions show the emotions of the speaker as they utter them in various situations (Ruan, et al. 2020). Then Good & Cysouw, (2013) concurred it is perfectly reasonable for laypeople and non-linguistic scholars to use names for languages without reflecting on the proper definition of the objects referred to by these names. Simply using an expression like what Christian did suffices as an informal communicative designation for a particular language or a language group.

### **Ay-ayyew as mental representation of a concept.**

Christian's constant use of the ay-ayyew vocabulary, consequently defined his mindset toward the value of the things he has. This scenario is evidence of the language's ability to influence a person's mindset. This is in consonance with Henry Sweet's lines "Language is the expression of ideas by means of speech-sounds combined into words. Words are combined into sentences, this combination answering to that of ideas into thoughts" Britannica (2019). Moreover, the use of the word by Christian and his interaction with this community as he followed how his yaya and their house helpers lived the concept of ay-ayyew further shaped his mental representation of the language as expressed in Rodin's and Chrystal's (2023) stance that 'language interacts with every aspect of human life in society, and it can be understood only if it is considered in relation to society.' Finally, the function of ay-ayyew as used by Christian, his yaya and their house helpers adhered to Widjajanti (2020) that a word symbolizes the ideas to be expressed to provide effective communication, prevent any



multiple meanings, provide the same interpretations, and distinguish the right nuances.

### **Ay-ayyew as a cultural practice (economic).**

During the interview, the researcher gained a deeper understanding of Christian's stories and concluded that ay-ayyew propelled cultural practice, particularly in economics and the social value of frugality. This assertion is supported by the study *Culture, language, and identity: Understanding prejudice* (n.d.), which states, "Language is intrinsic to the manifestation of culture." It serves a significant social function by conveying ideas, beliefs, and rituals and by fostering a sense of collective identification and cohesion. It is a means of transmitting and preserving culture, traditions, and shared values.

Light (n.d.) concluded that language is essential to cultural identity because this is universally true. As Christian's tale demonstrates, the ay-ayyew communicated their own reality; therefore, it is essential that people maintain their own language. Crysa (1997) asserts that humans ponder in language and engage in all cultural activities via language. If humanity lacked culture and language, it would be no different from other primates. Moreover, language and culture are inextricably linked, according to Bakhtin (1981). It serves the social function of transmitting the group's values, beliefs, and customs by fostering group identity sentiments.

### **Ay-ayyew and frugality among Chinese: Linking Christian's acquired vocabulary and his cultural tradition**

Chinese culture values thriftiness and frugality. Like many cultures in the world, this cultural value has passed a history of economic struggles before reaching the period where things become better. The history of the Chinese people has a share of this experience. Not only Filipinos and other races had been struggling in the past to make a good living, but Chinese, too. That is why the value of hard work is among the core values of the Chinese. Hence, being frugal is making sure that everything is spent for valuable reasons. It is not like celebrating today because you have the money, and tomorrow takes care of itself. He shared,

My parents may seem to pamper me with material things, but no. Part of my orientation in the family was to train myself to be dependable. I must learn hard work. We have house helpers, but they still instill in me that I have to learn how to do things on my own.

I told before that my parents got house helpers to orient us with the language of the community while assisting us. But at an early age, it was instilled to me that I must value work and the things that I have. When I have allowances, I learned to save from it.

When I was reflecting on my using of ay-ayyew lately, I was smiling that it can show our practice. It speaks of economic practice and economic tradition. I saw myself and my parents with that *yaya* of mine before. How my *yaya* would fix my notebooks and creased papers so I would be buying another. Her vigorous of saying to me, "Christian, ay-ayyew! Let us fix these papers for you to use" or "Christian, don't throw your leftover. I have it. Ay-ayyew."

Those words of my *yaya* resonate with her reminders and that of my parents that one has to value things and be intelligent in spending money because we do not know what tomorrow can bring us.

Christian's parents are businessmen who chose to migrate to Baguio City when the restaurant put up by their parents was working well. They could have stayed in China, but they have seen better opportunities in this part of the Philippines, so they decided to migrate. Nevertheless, the tradition they have grown up with, that is doing hard work to sustain one's good economic status. Christian's parents also pass this to him.

### **Conclusion**

The study shed light on the narratives of Christian in his growth with the ay-ayyew vocabulary. As a Chinese national, Christian managed to acquire the vocabulary and it became part of his linguistic mindset as one of his expressions acquired from the locals and eventually an expression of his Chinese culture of frugality. Considering this, the researcher concluded that language is indeed a distinct element of one's culture as it shapes one's mindset and cultural identity.

This study serves as an added source to the documentations of Chinese migrants in the Philippines how the Philippine culture and language influenced their mindset and were able to incorporate this language and culture to their Chinese culture. Furthermore, it adds to the body of literature in the studies of Kankanaey vocabularies as expressions of language and cultural identity.

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