

A Study of Philippine Hokkien language

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Philippine Hokkien language is a variation of the Chinese Hokkien dialect of the Min Nan language as spoken by ethnic Chinese in the Philippines, who refer to their dialect as Lán-lâng-uē, or 'our people's language'. The first written records date back to 1575 when missionaries produced evangelizing materials, giving the dialect a documented history of 440 years. However, the ethnic Chinese in the Philippines did not gain recognition until 1973 with the promulgation of the New Nationality Law, which resolved their established status and recognized Philippine Hokkien as one of the country's minority languages.

This paper explores two dimensions of this dialect:

First, to understand the phonology of Philippine Hokkien, we conducted traditional linguistic and sociolinguistic research. We found that the phonology of Philippine Hokkien shows some differences with the phonology of the dialect of Jinjiang, its place of origin, but also that after contact with surrounding languages, its vocabulary has become its most distinguishing feature. A large-scale questionnaire survey was conducted to explore the current language situation of the Chinese population in the Philippines. It was noticed that functional language transfer has almost already emerged in the young generation, and language transfer has already been completed in the student community.

Second, to understand the troubles that Philippine Hokkien has faced through history and assess the feasibility of preserving the dialect, we first did a literature review to clarify the troubled past of the dialect, and we conducted an exploration from a language preservation perspective. I think that the position of Philippine Hokkien in the post-1973 situation must be redefined, and must be included in the Regulations for the Preservation of Special Languages Including First Languages, in order to replace the fragmented teaching model of Chinese community schools by the bilingual teaching model of public schools, for the purpose of effective preservation.

The ethnic Chinese of the Philippines have a high level of support for Philippine Hokkien, as they feel the dialect represents their identity, which is the very reason the dialect has been able to survive to date without any legal protection. However, incorporation into the education system would be a more appropriate way to pass on the legacy, and it would be instrumental in enhancing the vitality of Philippine Hokkien.

Keywords: Philippines · Lán-lâng-uē · Hokkien language · Sociolinguistics · Language preservation