

# Taking Another Woman as My Mother: The State of Waray Language as Used by Today's Waray Children

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## **ABSTRACT**

The central question of this study is whether or not Waray schoolchildren ages 9 to 14 years old are shifting from their Waray mother language to Tagalog and English. The respondents, through a vocabulary test, were asked to give as many Waray equivalent words to each English term presented. The test focuses on words found in the home domain of the Warays. Purposive sampling technique is used. Respondents are divided into rural and urban respondents. Frequency distribution was utilized to tabulate and analyze the data.

The study found out an inverse relationship between the children's vocabulary competence in L2 and L3 (that is, Tagalog and English respectively, which are taught in school) and vocabulary competence in L1 (Waray). They tend to substitute Waray terms with English and Tagalog vocabularies and forget the Waray words. Distinction of Waray words from English and Tagalog words are blurring among the respondents. Children's negative or indifferent attitude towards the Waray language was also observed.

## **Keywords**

Waray, Waray language, endangered languages, language shift, language loss

## **INTRODUCTION**

The title of this paper originally comes from a *siday* or poem I have written entitled *Nagbalyo-balyo Ako hin Nanay* (I Took Another Woman as My Mother) [1]. (The lines in italics come from a traditional Waray song). Thus, I will begin this paper by reading the poem:

Ha balay/ An pulong nga nanay/An syahan ko nga nabaroan//*An iroy nga tuna matam-is pagpuy-an*//Pag-grade one ko/Mama ang turo/Ng mga classmates ko//*Bisan diin siplat puros kasangkayan*//Siring liwat ni Ma'am Sabel/Nga amon English teacher —/Mother//*Aanhi an hingpit nga ak kalipayan*//Yana,/Well.../I call her mommy//*Banyaga hira nanay, pati kabugtoan*

[At home/the word “nanay”/ is the first one I learned//*It is sweet to live in one's motherland*//During Grade One/ “mama” is what I learned/ from my classmates//*I have friends wherever I look*//Ma'am Sabel,/our English teacher, /also taught us “mother”// *This is where my entire happiness lies*//Now,/Well.../I call her “mommy.”//*Nanay and siblings are foreign to me.*]

This poem is my attempt—and I hope it has succeeded—in relating the continuous displacement of my language, Waray, through successive colonizations throughout history, from the Spaniards to the Tagalogs. In the process, the mother tongue has to be disowned in favor of another, thus, the phrase, “taking another woman as my mother.” Unfortunately, Waray is not the only casualty in this battle for linguistic rights, as one scholar says. It is reported that “ninety percent (90%) of the world's oral languages may be lost in the next one hundred years” [2]. Nettle and Romaine [3], on the other hand, gives a lower and dimmer estimate: “(M)ore than half of the languages... will be extinct by the end of the 21st century.”

Linguists may not agree on the actual figure, but one thing is sure—hundreds of languages and the cultures they house will be lost. A number of these languages will come from the Philippines. A question that haunts me is: Is Waray language one of them?

## **PURPOSE**

This paper aims to show how the Waray children of today's generation are shifting from their mother language to Tagalog and English. This assertion was based

on the assessment of their vocabulary competence in their own mother tongue.

## METHODOLOGY

A survey questionnaire was used to gather the data. The instrument focuses on words found in the home domain of the Warays. The test was divided into four sections, each representing a subdomain: living room, bedroom, dining place, and kitchen. The home domain is chosen because “anecdotal evidence suggested that the last domain to be lost in any potential language allegiance battle is that of the home” [4]. The respondents were given English words as stimuli and were asked to give their Waray word equivalent. Purposive sampling technique was utilized. Frequency distribution was used to tabulate and analyze the data. This paper is informed by Nettle’s [5] study on the symptoms of language loss and endangerment.

The researcher chose the Grade V pupils of Rizal Central Elementary school in Tacloban City and Barugo I Central School. Grade 5, according to psychologists, is the level considered at which the child has fully internalized the entire major rules of a natural language (L1) at the age of 10 [6]. But Thirumalai, et al. [7] argues that a child’s acquisition of L1 vocabulary is completed at the age between 7 and 9. The researcher, therefore, decided to take the 9 year-old pupils (that is, Grade 5) as respondents to accommodate these conflicting claims.

The researcher chose Rizal Central School in Tacloban City & Barugo I Central School as target population for the following reasons: 1) Children enrolled in this public schools mostly come from the lower middle social strata down to the lowest strata. Children of middle and upper social strata in Region 8 speak a kind of Waray that is significantly different from the traditional Waray language. “Traditional” here means the way the Waray language was spoken one hundred years ago. English and Tagalog are dominantly the language being used by the middle-upper social strata. It is, therefore, useless to include the upper social strata as a target population of this study. In Eastern Visayas, the researcher presumes that the Waray language is the language of the people who belong to the lower social strata. Therefore, in order to eliminate the class factors that obviously affect one’s language choice, the researcher conducted the study in urban and rural public schools where people of the lower social strata usually send their children to study.

The Spanish language has had a profound influence on Waray. Many of these Spanish words have been *adapted* and *indigenized* into the language. We will, therefore, treat words of Spanish origin as exceptions to what we call “*intruder words*.” That is, our primary concern here is on the state of Waray language and the degree of intrusion the English and Tagalog languages are having on Waray language at present.

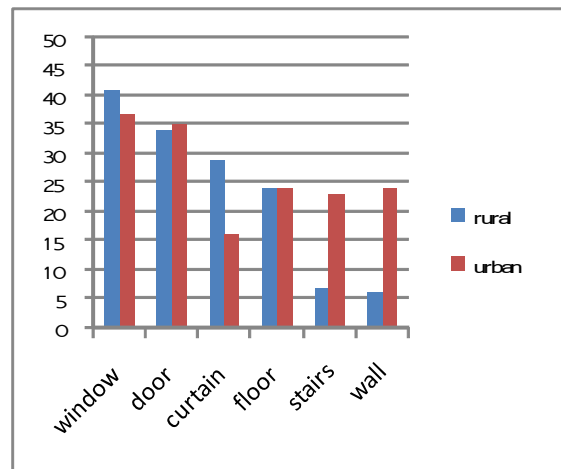
How are the words chosen? Since the respondents of this study are grade five pupils (9-14 years old), the researcher sees to it that the words included in the survey should be in the range of their experience. Thus, excluded, for example, is kinship terminology [e.g., “*ugangan*” (mother-in-law), “*bayaw*” (brother-in-law)]; names of livelihood (names of fishing methods and farming), etc. The researcher also tried to ensure that the “word-stimulus” be comprehensible enough in relation to the respondents’ age.

The three most substantial weaknesses in the methodology of this study are as follows: (1) The sample size is small: one hundred twelve (112) respondents consisting of 56 rural respondents (Barugo I Central School) and another 56 urban respondents (Rizal Central Elementary school in Tacloban City). (2) Only one aspect of linguistic discipline has been covered with this study—vocabulary. (3) The researcher is not trained in linguistics.

## ON ONE-WORD RESPONSE CATEGORY

As a general observation, consistently fewer rural respondents fall into the One-Word Response Category for any given word-stimulus in comparison with urban respondents.

**Figure 1. Number of respondents who were able to give one (1) Waray word per stimulus in the living room subdomain**



**Figure 2. Number of respondents who were able to give one (1) Waray word per stimulus in the bedroom subdomain**

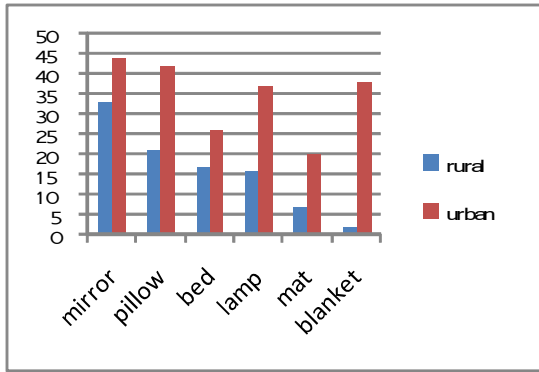


Figure 3. Number of respondents who were able to give one (1) Waray word per stimulus in the dining-place subdomain

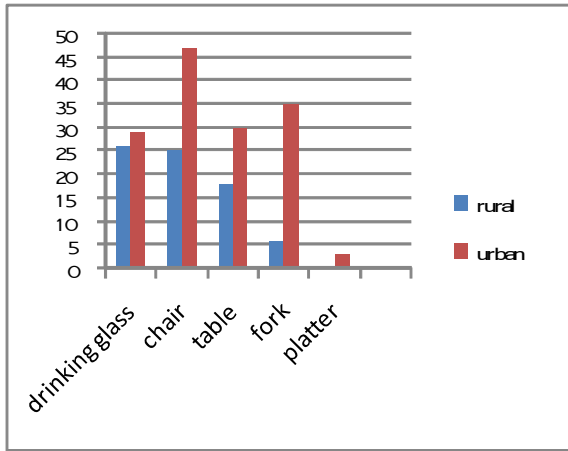
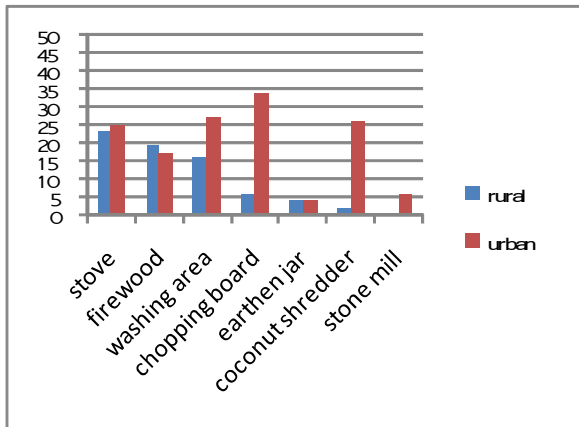


Figure 4. Number of respondents who were able to give one (1) Waray word per stimulus in the kitchen subdomain



This trend holds in all areas upon which participants are tested from the living room sub-domain through the kitchen subdomain. (See figures 1 to 4). Notice, for instance, that more than 40 rural respondents were able to provide Waray word equivalents for the English word “window” and nearly 35 for “door”. This could be

explained by the fact that these words referred to are still materially existent in each rural respondents’ household.

**ON TWO-WORD RESPONSE CATEGORY**

On the two-word response category both rural and urban respondents scored low on the four subdomains as shown on figures 5 to 8. However, urban children respondents scored higher compared with their rural counterpart. No higher than 20 respondents, both from rural and urban, were able to give two Waray words for each English term presented on the four subdomains.

Figure 5. Number of respondents who were able to give two (2) Waray words per stimulus in the living room subdomain

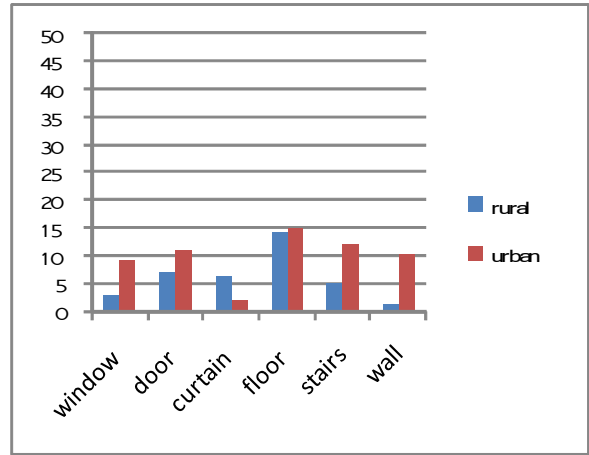


Figure 6. Number of respondents who were able to give two (2) Waray words per stimulus in the bedroom subdomain

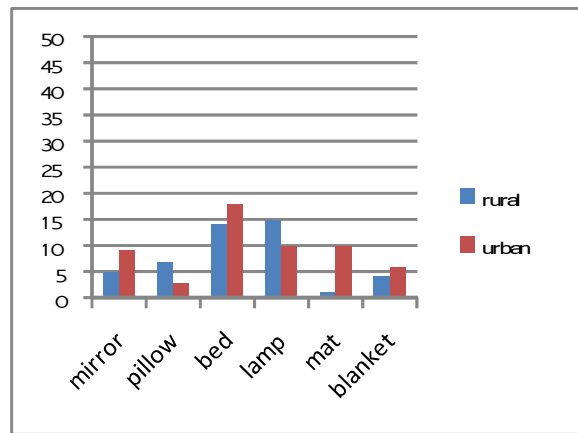
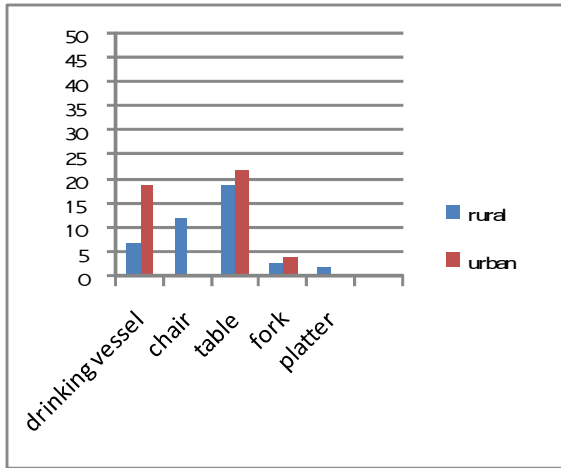
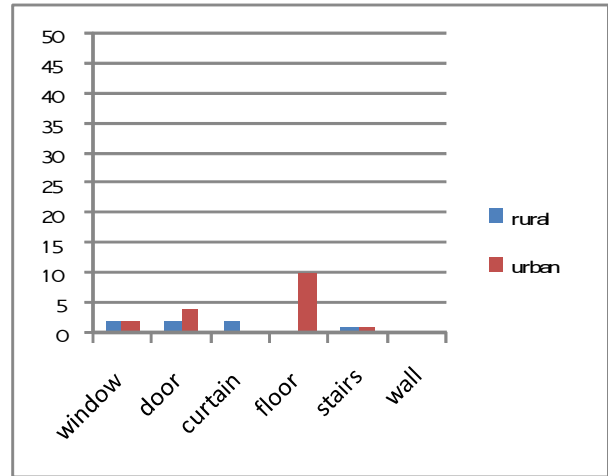


Figure 7. Number of respondents who were able to give two (2) Waray words per stimulus in the dining-place subdomain

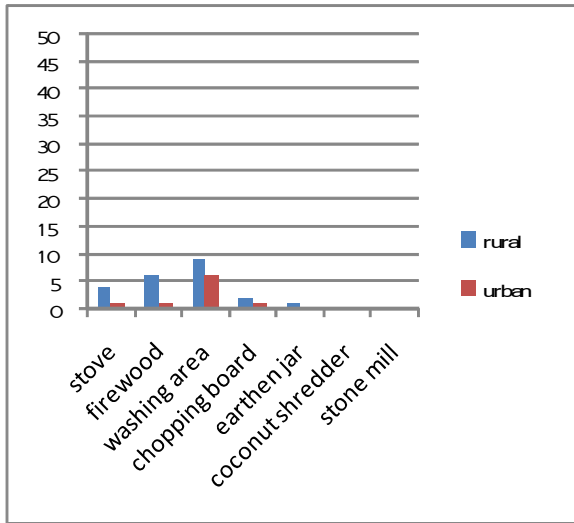


**Figure 8. Number of respondents who were able to give two (2) Waray word per stimulus in the kitchen subdomain**



On the other hand, rural respondents, despite their low number of who were able to give three Waray words for the given English terms, a few of them were able to consistently provide three Waray words in all the four subdomains albeit the very low score of this group.

These two-word response and three-word response categories are significant indicators of the vocabulary competence in Waray of each respondent. (See figures 9 to 12)

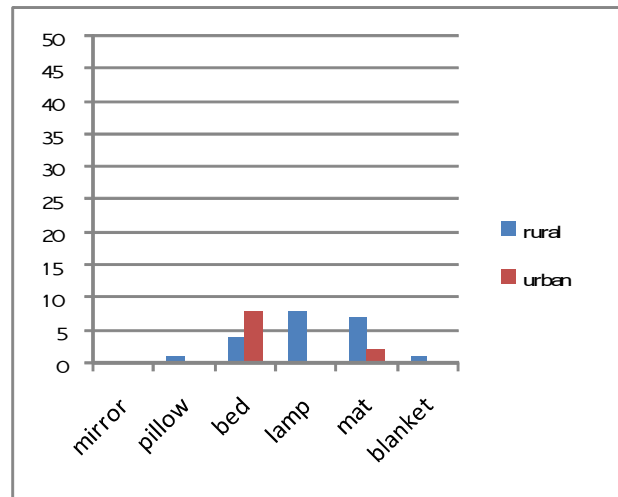


**ON THREE-WORD RESPONSE CATEGORY**

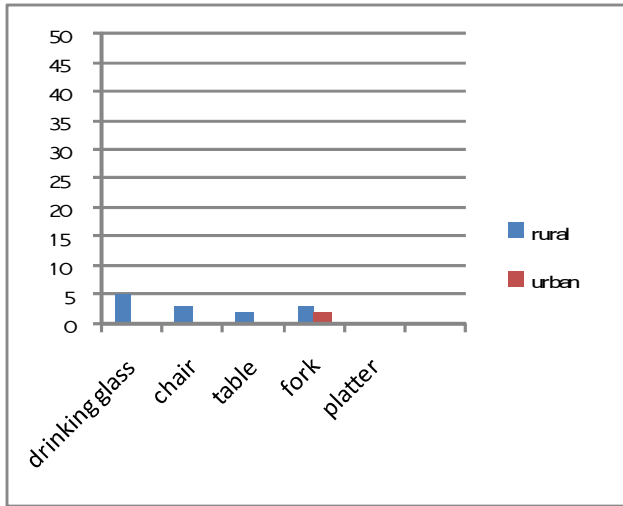
On the three-word response category both rural and urban respondents gave a very low and even no Waray word to each stimulus words on all four subdomains. In this category, it was noted that urban respondents scored lower than their rural counterpart. (See figures 9 to 12) Many urban respondents may be able to give three Waray words equivalent for the English term “floor,” “door,” and “bed,” compared with their rural counterpart but it must also be pointed out that majority of the urban respondents were not able to provide three Waray words to most of the English terms given. Urban respondents are able to provide only one to three Waray word equivalents.

**Figure 9. Number of respondents who were able to give three (3) Waray words per stimulus in the living room subdomain**

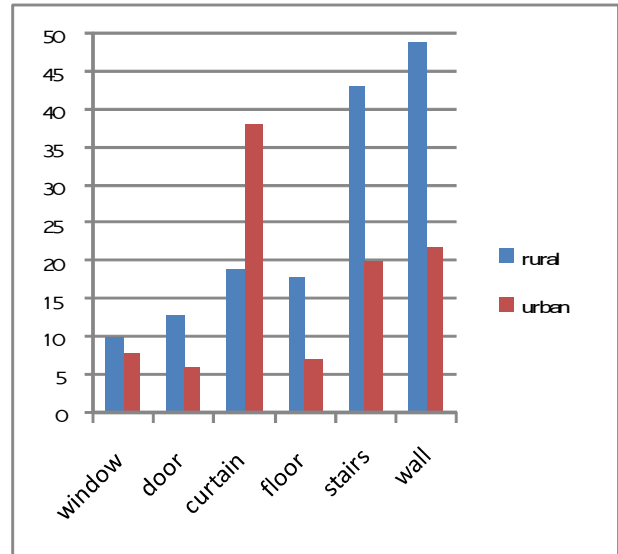
**Figure 10. Number of respondents who were able to give three (3) Waray words per stimulus in the bedroom subdomain**



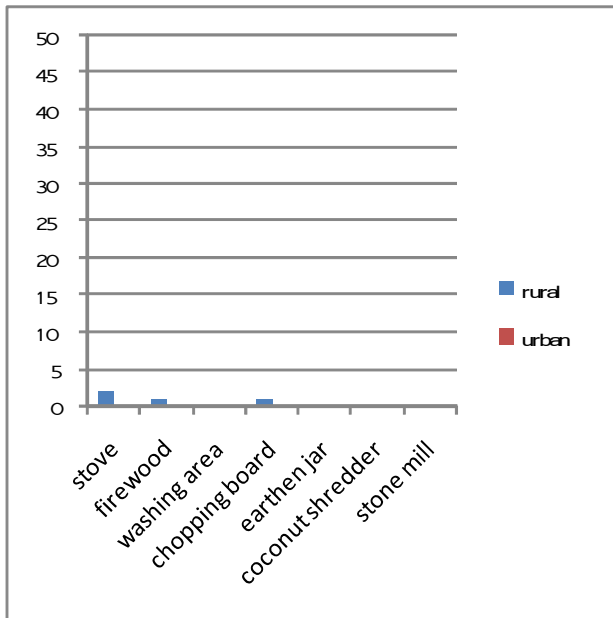
**Figure 11. Number of respondents who were able to give three (3) Waray words per stimulus in the dining-place subdomain**



**Figure 12. Number of respondents who were able to give three (3) Waray words per stimulus in the kitchen subdomain**



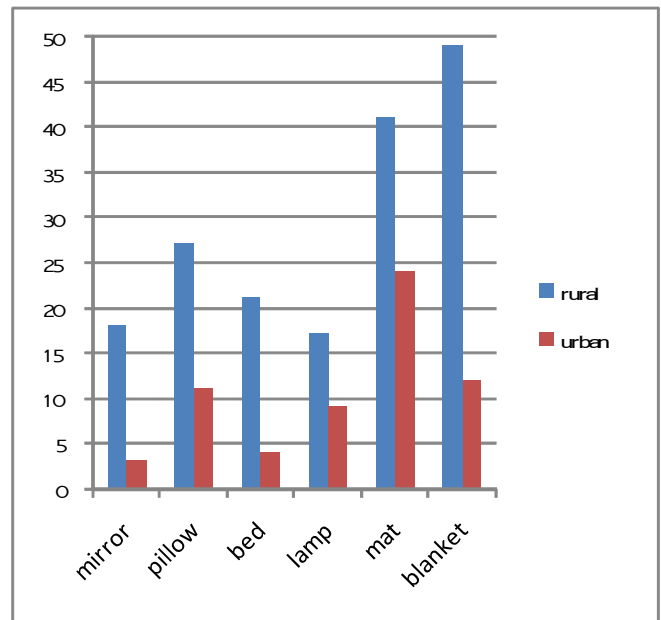
**Figure 14. Number of respondents who were able to give No (0) Waray word per stimulus in the bedroom subdomain**



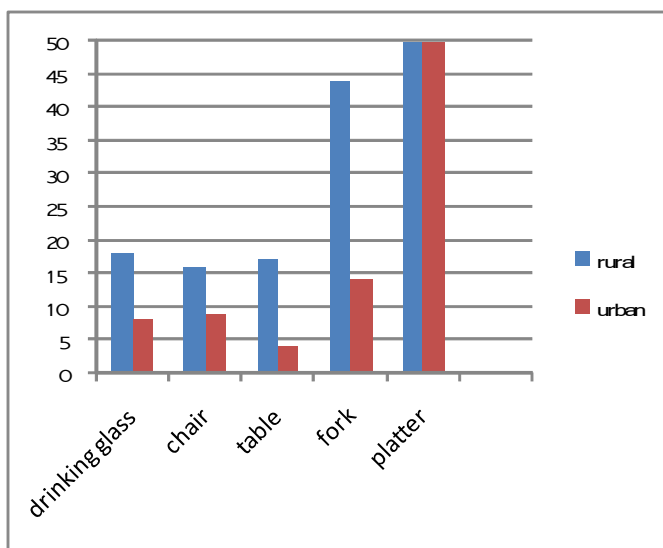
**ON NO RESPONSE CATEGORY**

With respect to the No Answer Category, a higher percentage of the rural respondents failed to provide the correct Waray term per given word-stimulus in the four subdomains. (See figures 13 to 16)

**Figure 13. Number of respondents who were able to give No (0) Waray word per stimulus in the living-room subdomain**



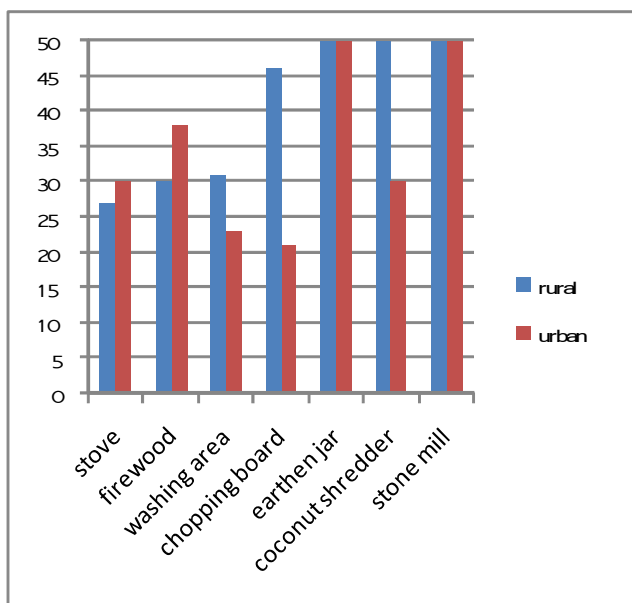
**Figure 15. Number of respondents who were able to give No (0) Waray word per stimulus in the dining-place subdomain**



What does this mean? We propose two interpretations to a ‘No Answer’ response:

1. It could mean that the respondents do not understand the stimulus word, which is English.
2. It could indicate that the respondents can no longer recall the equivalent Waray term per given word-stimulus.

**Figure 16. Number of respondents who were able to give No (0) Waray word per stimulus in the kitchen subdomain**



In the case of Interpretation Number One, it could mean that the stimuli (English words) have not yet entered into the vocabulary of the respondents, so they cannot understand the given word-stimuli though they may know the corresponding Waray equivalents. This could mean that more than one-half of the total respondents are lacking in English vocabulary.

This could be the reflection of the quality of English Language Education in the rural area. For instance, some respondents answered *lampaso* (coconut husk), *sundang* (dagger), or *lubi* (coconut) for “coconut shedder”, *platito* for “platter,” *jacket*, or *blangketa* for “blanket.”

Next, we consider Interpretation Number Two: that the respondents can no longer recall the equivalent Waray word. This second explanation cannot be true when one considers that since the very cultural materials or physical stimuli, in the form of verbal stimuli, still exist and are still part of their everyday rural life.

The problem with rural Waray children is that they have a grasp of Waray yet fail to give some terms in English. The problem with Waray Urban respondents, on the other hand, is that they know English. However, because of the low regard, if not the outright disregard, given to their mother tongue in the institutional context of our educational and legal systems, they tend to forget and not to know Waray words. This is consistent with the intruder-words that they give during the test.

#### INTRUDER-WORDS: LIVING-ROOM SUBDOMAIN

When the respondents were asked, “*Ano nga pulong o mga pulong ha Waray an iyo nanunumdoman kun nabati kamo hin pulong nga* “floor”? (What word or words in Waray come(s) into your mind when you hear the word “floor”)? Thirty-four (34) of the 56 rural respondents answered “*sahig*” or “*tiles*”, a Tagalog word and an English word respectively for “floor” while ten (10) out of the 56 urban respondents answered “plywood,” “*sahig*,” or “*tiles*” for the same word-stimulus. *Salog*, *bugha* and *papag* are the Waray terms for floor. Ten (10) of the 56 rural respondents answered “*dingding*,” which is Tagalog for the stimulus-word “wall” while one (1) out of 56 urban respondents answered “*poste*,” (post) “*bubong*” (roof) “*ding-ding*” for window. *Bong-bong*, *pader*, *muralya* are the Waray terms for wall. Thirty-five (35) out of 56 rural respondents and 32 out of 56 urban respondents answered “*kurtina*,” which is a derivative from the stimulus-word “curtain.” *Biray*, *pabyon*, *tabon*, *salipod* are the Waray terms for curtain. (See tables 1 & 2)

**Table 1. Number of respondents who recalled Tagalog or English words instead of Waray word [living-room sub domain (rural respondents)]**

word-stimuli	Intruder-words recalled	Number (f)
curtain	kurtina	35
floor	sahig; tiles	34
door	gate;daraan; pintuan	11
wall	ding-ding	10

window	jalousie	2
stairs		0

**Table 2. Number of respondents who recalled Tagalog or English words instead of Waray word [living-room subdomain (urban respondents)]**

word-stimuli	Intruder-words recalled	Number (f)
curtain	kurtina	32
floor	flywood; sahig; tiles	10
wall	poste; bubong;ding-ding	3
door	pinto; pintoan	2
window	door	1
stairs		0

Two (2) out of 56 rural respondents answered “*jalousie*” for the word-stimulus “window,” while among the urban respondents one (1) answered the same. *Tangboan*, *bintana* and *hurotaan* are the Waray words for window. Eleven out of 56 rural respondents answered, “gate,” “daraan,” or “pintoan” for the stimulus-word “door,” while two urban respondents answered the same. *Sada*, *dayonan* and *ganghaan* are Waray terms for door. None of the respondents gave an intruder-word on word-stimulus “stairs.” *Hagdan*, *hagdanan*, *sarak-an* are the Waray words for stairs.

#### **INTRUDER-WORDS: BEDROOM SUBDOMAIN**

Three (3) out of the 56 rural respondents and none among the 56 urban respondents answered “fluorescent” for the stimulus-word “lamp.”

**Table 3. Number of respondents who recalled Tagalog or English words instead of Waray word [bedroom subdomain (rural respondents)]**

word-stimuli	Intruder-words recalled	Number (f)
blanket	blanket; blangketa; jacket	10
lamp	fluorescent	3
mat		0

mirror		0
bed		0
pillow		0

**Table 4. Number of respondents who recalled Tagalog or English words instead of Waray word [bedroom subdomain (urban respondents)]**

word-stimuli	Intruder-words recalled	Number (f)
blanket	blanket; blangketa; jacket	9
bed	folding bed	1
pillow	throw-pillow	1
lamp		0
mat		0
mirror		0

*Suga*, *dukalwong*, *sulo*, and *lahingon* are the culturally specific terms in Waray for lamplight.

Ten (10) out of 56 rural respondents and nine (9) out of 56 urban respondents answered “blanket,” “blangketa,” and “jacket,” for the stimulus-word “blanket.” *Taklap*, *taplak*, and *tabon* are blanket in Waray. None (0) of the rural respondents and seventeen (17) out of 56 urban respondents answered “cabinet” for the stimulus-word “cabinet.” *Aparador* is used in Waray. “One (1) out of 56 respondents from both rural and urban respondents gave an answer of “folding-bed” for the word-stimulus “bed.” *Papag*, *katre* and *higdaan* are Waray words for “bed.” None (0) of the 56 rural respondents and one (1) out of 56 urban respondents answered, “throw-pillow” for the word-stimulus “pillow.” *Ulonan* is the Waray word for “pillow.” None among the rural and urban respondents gave an intruder word on word-stimuli such as “mat” and “mirror.” *Banig*, *hanig*, *hasnig* are Waray words for mat. *Salaming*, and *espiho* are Waray words for mirror.

#### **INTRUDER-WORDS: DINING PLACE SUBDOMAIN**

Ten (10) out of 56 rural respondents and two (2) out of 56 urban respondents answered “mesa” for the word-stimulus “table.” The Waray words for table are *lamisa*, *dulang* and *pangaraonan*. Four (4) out of 56 rural respondents gave an answer of “cup,” “one glass of water,” for the word-stimulus “drinking vessel.” None among the urban respondents gave an intruder-word on the same

word-stimulus. *Tinidor* and *pantusok* are the culturally specific word in Waray for fork. (See tables 5 & 6)

**Table 5. Number of respondents who recalled Tagalog or English words instead of Waray word [dining-room su domain (rural respondents)]**

word-stimuli	Intruder-words recalled	Number (f)
table	Mesa	10
chair	upoan; stool; silya	10
drinking glass	cup; one glass of water	4
platter		0
fork		0

*Bandehado* is Waray for platter. *Baso*, *irimnan* and *hungot* are the culturally specific terms in Waray for drinking glass or vessel. Ten (10) out of 56 rural respondents and one (1) out of 56 urban respondents responded with “upoan,” “stool,” “silya,” for the word-stimulus “chair.” *Lingkuran*, *bangkô*, and *taboriti* are variant words in Waray for chair. None among the rural and urban respondents responded with an intruder-word on word-stimuli “fork” and “platter.”

**Table 6. Number of respondents who recalled Tagalog or English words instead of Waray word [dining-room subdomain (urban respondents)]**

word-stimuli	Intruder-words recalled	Number (f)
table	mesa	2
chair	upoan	1
platter		0
drinking glass		0
fork		0

#### INTRUDER-WORDS: KITCHEN SUBDOMAIN

One (1) out of 56 rural respondents answered “kitchen” while three (3) out of 56 urban respondents responded with “washing machine” or “linisan” for the word-stimulus “washing-area.” *Panhugasan*, *banggera*, and *pantaw* are the words culturally specific to the Waray.

One (1) out of 56 rural respondents answered the Tagalog word “panggatong” for the word-stimulus “firewood” while three (3) out of 56 urban respondents gave the word “stove” for the mentioned word-stimulus. *Sungo*, *raha* and *tiak* are the Waray word for firewood. Fourteen (14) out of 56 rural respondents answered “gas range,” “stob,” “saingan,” and “Shellane” while three (3) out of 56 urban respondents answered “stob” (from the word-stimulus “stove”). *Abohan*, *gidangan*, *sug-ang* and *suron-aran* are the culturally specific words in Waray. One (1) each from the 56 rural and 56 urban respondents gave the word “jug” or “water jug” for the word-stimulus “earthen jar.” *Tadyaw*, *daba*, *tikô* and *bisô* are the terms culturally specific to Waray. None of the respondents (rural and urban) gave an intruder-word in any of the following word-stimuli: coconut shedder, chopping board, and stone mill. *Kaguran*, *panraspa* and *pankaros* are Waray words for coconut shedder. *Tadtaran*, *dat-olan*, and *tirosan* are the words for chopping board. *Gilingan*, *trapitsi* and *molinohan* are the Waray word for stone mill. (See tables 7 & 8)

Why did the rural children have higher numbers of respondents who gave intruder words (Tagalog or English words) compared with the urban respondents despite the fact that many of them relatively fared well compared with their urban counterpart in the three-word response categories?

The main explanation to this is that these children do not seem to know or care. They may not be ashamed of their language, but they do not have concern or loyalty to their own mother tongue. This is not surprising since their own mother language is not being taught in school. With their language invalidated by the institution, these children are having the impression that their own tongue is unimportant. Therefore, it must be replaced by another which is more functional in the real world of commerce, politics, and education. This linguistic displacement and replacement especially becomes more evident when their own mother tongue becomes a stigma, for instance, in how Tagalog telenovelas portray the Warays as maids or unkempt housewives ready for any juicy gossip.

**Table 7. Number of respondents who recalled Tagalog or English words instead of Waray word [kitchen sub domain (rural respondents)]**

word-stimuli	Intruder-words recalled	Number (f)
stove	Gas (gas range); stove; saingan; Shellane	14
earthen jar	jug	1
washing area	kitchen	1
firewood	panggatong	1



coconut shedder		0
chopping board		0
stonemill		0

**Table 8. Number of respondents who recalled Tagalog or English words instead of Waray word [kitchen sub domain (urban respondents)]**

word-stimuli	Intruder-words recalled	Number (f)
washing area	washingmachine; linisan	3
Firewood	stove	3
Stove	stove	3
earthen jar	water jug	1
coconut shedder		0
chopping board		0
Stonemill		0

“Their eventual replacement with English and *Tagalog* as the medium of literary production and news reportage in the local newspapers,” writes Sugbo, “etched in the minds of the citizens an attitude that their own ethnic mother tongues had become insignificant” [8, emphasis mine]. No wonder, these children are taking another woman, so to speak, as their mother.

Thus, it is not surprising that the researcher while gathering the data was asked by the respondents, pointing to the research instrument given to them, “*Sir, pwede mag-answer hin Ininglis?*” (Sir, may I answer in English?)

The population of Waray as a people is increasing, indeed, but this is no guarantee that there will be no language loss. The Waray language is no longer being passed on to the next generations due to parents’ preference for their children to learn English and Tagalog, making them “semi-speakers of the *Waray* language” [9, emphasis added]. Further, “a person having difficulties to find *the correct* words in a language rather changes over to a system, of which he has better control” [9, italics mine]. This is the stage of language displacement, according to Wohlgemuth, in which the speaker is “*reduced to insufficient competence*” with the language. The respondents’ “language skill is a deviation from the standards of ‘traditional’ *Waray* language” [10, emphasis added].

Also, it was observed that rural Waray children know Waray better than their urban counterparts as shown

on figures 5 to 8. However, their linguistic competence in English is very poor.

Now, to further describe this “deviation” taken by younger speakers of Waray from the standard traditional Waray language, let us see samples of how the urban and rural respondents construct a phrase or sentence in Waray.

### CODE SWITCHING

The following samples of the phraseology of respondents show resemblance to what Wohlgemuth [9] and Schmidt [10] had observed on the code switching of young speakers of the Dyrbal language. (See table 9 below)

**Figure 9. Samples of Phrase Construction of Urban and Rural Respondents**

Word-stimulus	Phrase/Sentence	Intruder-word/Origin
bed	Ginagamit para magpahinga	Magpahinga/Tagalog
platter	Binubutangan hin guti-ay nga <i>amount</i> hin kan-on	“amount”/English
table	Binubutangan hin <i>books</i>	“books”/English
fork	<i>Kaparis</i> hin kutsara	“kaparis”/Tagalog
stone mill	Bato na “mill”	“mill”/English

The presence of intruder-words as exemplified in the table above confirms that there is language loss occurring. “Language loss involves the mechanism of code switching” [11]. Because the Waray language is unintellectualized or that its use is limited to domains of “low-variety” conversation, its speakers have to disregard such language in order for them to be able to participate and cope with the information-based economy of the globalized world.

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The rural respondents scored relatively lower than their urban counterpart on the one-word response category. This trend is consistent up to the two-word response category. On the three-word response category, despite the fact that all of them scored very low in this category, rural respondents did give relatively more responses. Consistently enough, in the no-response category, majority of them are from rural respondents. In other words, urban Waray children are becoming bilingual. However, they tend to substitute Waray terms with English and Tagalog vocabularies as evidenced by their almost zero score on the three-word response category.

On the other hand, the big number of rural respondents falling into the no-response category, despite their relatively higher score in the three-word response category, could be viewed that most of the rural Waray respondents do not understand English. Since rural respondents did give relatively much response on the three-

word response category compared with the urban respondents, this could be mean that they relatively have higher vocabulary competence in Waray language but are very poor in English vocabulary competence.

If my method and analysis are correct, then it has been demonstrated, using a vocabulary test on the linguistic competence of the respondents on Waray vocabulary that these children are unconsciously shifting from their mother language to English and/or Tagalog in their vocabulary use. There is no quarrel on the fact that Waray children must learn English, Tagalog or any other languages. What is troubling is that, in the course of learning a more “national” or “global” language, the next generations of Waray speakers tend to prefer such language, thereby “taking another woman as their mother.”

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