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Quo Vadis Zamboanga Chavacano? Some Issues on Language Change and Language Loss

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Introduction

Philippine Creole Spanish (PSC) also known as Chavacano is the native language of over 200,000 (Gonzalez, 1985) people in Zamboanga City and Basilan Island in the Southern Philippines. It is also the lingua franca of these two places. Whinnom (1956), identified five (5) varieties of Chavacano which he called Spanish Contact Vernaculars. These are Ternateño Ermitaño, Caviteño, Zamboangueño, and Davaoeño. The other term, Philippine Creole Spanish was used by Frake and Molony (1971, 1974: cited in Riego de Dios, 1986). The term Chavacano was first used to refer to the variety spoken in Zamboanga, a term which Whinnom said was a pejorative one, a Spanish word for *lenguaje de trapos*. The term, however, later generalized to include all the dialects of Philippine Creole Spanish. It was a language heavy with Spanish lexicon but with a grammar patterned after that of the Philippine languages.

Writing in 1956, Whinnom predicted the eventual death of Chavacano saying that it was on the verge of extinction having had at that time (according to him) only 1,300 speakers. He gave Zamboanga Chavacano a grim prognosis: it had only thirty more years to live. At that time, Ermita Chavacano and Ternateño had

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long since ceased to be the lingúa franca of Ermita and Ternate in Cavite. True, there were still speakers of the language but it had given into the inroads of Tagalog or Caviteño.

Almost half a century has gone by and although Zamboanga Chavacano continues to be the lingua franca of Zamboanga and Basilan Island, the fear of many Zamboangueños that Chavacano has changed so much today that it may eventually go the way of the Ermitaño and Davaoeño is a persistent, nagging thought. Thus the question is posed, "Quo vadis Chavacano?" The objective of this paper is to provoke language experts and even dillettantes of languages studies to answer this question on the basis of sound linguistic and sociolinguistic principles.

The Historical Perspective

According to the Jesuit historial n. Francisco Combes (1667), when the Spaniards first arrived in Zamboanga in 1596, the inhabitants of the peninsula were the "subanos" the native highlanders who lived in the interior of what is now Zamboanga del Norte and Sur; and the "lutaos" who lived near the sea along the Zamboanga coastline. He was probably referring to the Sama living in the coastal areas and the Badjaw who made Zamboanga one of their mooring places, thus the word "sambuan' from which the name Zamboanga was taken.

During the 17th century, frequent attacks and slave-raiding sorties by the dreaded Sama Balangingi led to the building of the Spanish military base (now known as Fort Pilar) in 1635. The construction work force was composed mainly of some Spanish speaking Mexican soldiers, Tagalog and Caviteño troops, and masons from different places including Iloilo, Cebu, Dapitan, and neighboring towns of Zamboanga del Sur. By an accident of history, this conglomeration of languages gave birth to a pidgin language created in response to a need to communicate.

The pidgin could have died by the time the construction of the fort stopped; however, the intermarriages between the soldiers and the native women created a more or less permanent community living near the fort and forming the first speech community of pidgin Spanish. The children of these pidgin speakers became the first generation speakers of a now creolized language, Chavacano. When the Spanish troops returned in 1719 to resume works on the fort, twenty five Visayan families were resettled in the rural areas (Bautista, 1992) enriching the language

further with Visayan terms. Zamboanga became a garrison town with soldiers of diverse origins: Spaniards, Mexican, Molluccans, Visayans, Tagalogs, and Caviteños. Chavacano, a fascinating blend of Spanish and Philippines languages became the proud language of Zamboangueños.

For many years until the early period of Martial Law in the 1970s, migrants or visitors coming to the Zamboanga had to learn Chavacano otherwise they would not be able to get around. But with the establishment of the Southern Command (SouthCom) and the influx of soldiers from the Tagalog speaking areas and the Visayas, the burning of Jolo in 1974 and the evacuation of the Joloanons to Zamboanga somewhat changed the language situation in Zamboanga. Moreover, at about the same period the Zamboanga Barter Trade was started, resulting in the confluence of trade from Sandakan and Sabah in Borneo, and Singapore. The tourists, both local and foreign, came in droves. Zamboangueño oldtimers began noticing discernible language shifts and code-switching. Visayan and Tagalog terms began to "corrupt" the language, a valid reason to say that the language was "deteriorating". This growing alarm expressed over the local media prompted Congresswoman Ma. Clara Lobregat to initiate efforts towards the preservation of Chavacano. The local government encouraged the use of Chavacano in some sections of local newspapers, local television newscasts, radio programs and in cultural activities such as the revival of old Chavacano songs and Chavacano song composition contests (Akil, 1997).

Is Chavacano really being corrupted? Is it facing extinction? Perhaps, the phenomenon can best be explained and the questions answered after first exploring some principles of language change. But first, let us go into the birth of pidgins and creoles.

Pidgins and Creoles

Holmes (1988; cited in Wardhaugh, 1992) defines a pidgins as "a reduced language that results from extended contact between groups of people with no language in common; it evolves when they need some means of verbal communication, perhaps for trade, but no group learns the native language of any other group for social reasons that may include lack of trust or of close contact."

Wardhaugh (1992) explains that pidginization probably requires a situation that involves at least three languages, one of which is 'dominant' over the others. When three or more languages are involved and one is dominant, the speakers of

the two or more that are inferior appear to play a critical role in the development of the pidgin. They must not only speak to those who are in the dominant position, but they must also speak to each other. To do this, they must simplify the dominant language in certain ways. A pidgin, therefore, arises from the simplification of a language when that language comes to dominate groups of speakers separated from each other by language differences. In time, this language becomes the lingua franca of that group of people who cannot speak the corresponding standard languages that are used between such people and the speakers of the standard varieties. A common view of a pidginized variety of a language is that it is some kind of 'bad', 'corrupted', 'inferior' language (i.e., bamboo English, corrupted Spanish, etc.). The speakers themselves are also regarding to be deficient in some way, culturally, socially and even cognitively. Most linguists (Wardhaugh, 1992), however, find this attitude untenable recognizing that these pidgins do have their own special rules and are highly functional in the lives of those who use them.

A creole, on the other hand, often defined as a pidgin that has become the first language of a new generation of speakers, is a 'normal' language in almost every sense. Nevertheless, creole speakers often feel that they speak something less than 'normal languages' because of the way they and others view the language they speak compared with the standard or H language.

The actual processes involved in pidginization and creolization illustrates how diametrically opposed they are.

	Pidginization	**Creolization**
•	involves some kind of simplification e.g. reduction in morphology/syntax	involves expansion of morphology and syntax
•	tolerance of considerable phonological variation	regularization of phonology
•	reduction in the number of functions for which the pidgin is used	deliberate increase in the number of functions of language use
•	extensive borrowing of words from Local mother-tongues	development of a rational and stable system for increasing vocabulary

Linguistic Characteristics of Pidgins and Creoles

Hancock (1977; cited in Wardaugh, 1992) lists 127 pidgins and creoles, the majority of which are distributed mainly, though not exclusively, in the equatorial belt around the world, usually in places with direct or easy access to the oceans. These languages also tend to be located along trade routes, including trade in slaves, and associated with dark skins. In addition, membership for their speakers is usually in the Third World community of nations. Hancock does not include Zamboanga Chavacano but Keith Whinnom has extensive discussion of Philippine Spanish contact vernaculars in his book. Hancock observes that of the one hundred-plus attested living pidgins and creoles, the majority are apparently based on one or other of the European languages.

The linguistic characteristics of Pidgins and Creoles are summarized by Wardaugh as follows:

1. Each Pidgin or Creole is a well-organized linguistic system and must be treated as such.

2. The sounds of a Pidgin or Creole are likely to be fewer and less complicated in their possible arrangements than those of the corresponding standard language. For example Tok Pisin does not contrast between *it* and *eat; pin* and *fin, sip, ship,* and *chip.* They distinguish a ship from a sheep by calling the first a *sip* and the second a *sip-sip*.

3. There is almost a complete lack of inflection in nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives. Nouns are not marked for number and gender, and verbs lack tense markers.

4. Syntactically, sentences are likely to be uncomplicated in clausal structure. Instead, much use is made of particles as tense or negation markers. In the process of creolization, development of embedded clauses can occur.

5. The vocabulary is similar to that of the standard language but with phonological and morphological simplification. Example from Tok Pisin: talk (talk), talk-talk (chatter), pis (peace), pis-pis (urinate).

Beyond Creole

Not every pidgin eventually becomes a creole. In fact very few do. Most pidgins are lingua francas, existing to meet special local needs. If a pidgin is no longer needed, it dies out. Creolization occurs only when a pidgin for some reason becomes the variety of language that children must use in a situation which use of a 'full' language is effectively denied them (Wardaugh, 1992). They creolize the pidgin. What happens then to the creole? Does it evolve into a full fledged langauge? What happense after creolization?

Let us look at the case of Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea. This pidgin has been observed to have made compulsary most of its grammatical structures such as time and number; a word-formation component has been developed; devices for structuring discourse are now present; and there are opportunities for stylistic differentiation. As far as functions are concerned, it is now used in many entirely new domains, e.g. government, religion, agriculture, and aviation; it is employed in a variety of media; and it is supplanting the vernaculars and even English in many areas. Tok Pisin is quickly developing into a full fledged language.

A diametrically different case but with the same result is Bahasa Indonesia, a 'full' language created from a creole and made obligatory in the domains of government, education, religion, and business. It has to be standardized and taught to speakers of the other Malay languages which formed the bases of the language. Similarly situated is Afrikaans which has already been standardized. In both cases, there was a strong unifying 'national' consciousness among potential speakers. Hall (1972; cited in Wardaugh, 1992), says that 'one important factor for the change of status of a pidgin or a creole is 'political', meaning to say, pressure effectively exerted by or on behalf of the population which uses it for its recognition," He adds that the 'correlation between political factors and status achievement, for pidgins and creoles, is so close that we may expect to see such other languages rise to the status of standards only where the areas where they are spoken gain political independence or autonomy, and use the local tongue as a symbol of nationality."

Recent intensive study of pidgins and creoles has revealed how quickly such languages can and do change. Pidginization can occur almost 'overnight' Relexification also seems to be a rapid process. Creolization takes no more than a generation or two. And even language death can come quickly.

What can happen after creolization? Bell (1976, cited in Wardaugh, 1992), points out that various things can happen to a creole. It can reach a quite stable

relationship with the language or languages in the community, as in the current relationship between Haitian Creole and French. It may for one reason or another be extinguished by the standard language: for example, Dutch West Indies Dutch has virtually extinguished Neggerhollands. A creole may in some cases become a standard language: cases in point are, Afrikaans, Swahili, Bahasa Indonesia, and Maltese. Finally, a post-creole continuum may emerge with the standard language at its top and the bottom varieties probably not mutually intelligible with the standard (Jamaica and Guyana). Another scenario would be a diglossic situation where two or more distinct codes show clear functional separation.

The Case for Zamboanga Chavacano

The language experiences cited above for some of the world's pidgins and creoles show that there are some commonalities for creole stability or standardization:

- A pride in the language
- Political pressure geared towards language maintenance
- Expansion of the domains of language use
- Standardization of its grammar structure

Some studies on language variation of Chavacano have been conducted. Tabaquero (1994) compared the Chavacano spoken by the old and the young using Constantino's 100 Test Sentences and found out that although the difference in syntax and morphology is negligible, lexical variation is significant particularly in the pronoun system. The young speakers are now using Visayan pronouns like *ka* or *ikaw* instead of *tu* or *usted.* Akil (1997) studied language variation between rural and urban Chavacano speakers. Her study reports that rural speakers tend to retain the old forms of Chavacano while the urban speakers borrow heavily from English, Tagalog and Visayan. The same observation is made in the case of the pronouns with the addition of other borrowings in the locative and genitive cases, to wit: *con ikaw,* instead of *contigo* or *con usted; de ikaw* instead of *de tuyo* or *de usted.* Lehman (1962) says that some items of the vocabulary are better maintained than others: the lower numerals, pronouns, items referring to the parts of the body, to natural objects-animals, plants, heavenly bodies, and so on. These items are referred to as the basic core vocabulary. If the Chavacano pronouns are being change, what implications can be made?

As to standardization, Chavacano has never reached that phase because during the Spanish times, the language of prestige or H language was Spanish. No self-respecting Zamboangueño writer would use Chavacano for his/her literary work. It has to be Spanish. In fact, all newspapers were then published in Spanish, Even when the American came, the local papers continued to be published in Spanish until the Americans themselves put up their own newspaper which even then has to be bilingual; English and Spanish (Danao and Puno, 1985).

When in 1920. English was required to be the medium of instruction and the official language of government, English became the standard of H language in Zamboanga. The literary tradition also shifted to English. Proof of this is the rich crop of Palanca winners in English among Zamboangueño writers. At present the H language continues to be English. Filipino is now generalized because it is a required subject in school but a variety of Tagalog seems to have taken root in the domain of trade and commerce. This variety is jestingly called "Tagalog de Barter," the code one uses when shopping in the Barter Trade Center. Visayan is now more acceptable in many informal domains when before, it used to be looked down upon as the language of the "indays" and the "dongs", then a generic term for house servants. Chavacano remains as the language of all the other informal domains with code shifting to English, Tagalog or Visayan when preferred.

Direct observation as well as informal interviews made by me in several of my visits to Zamboanga have substantiated the nagging fear of many Zamboangaueños: that Chavacano may soon face extinction. Chavacano are fiercely proud of their language but the inroads made by English, Tagalog and Visayans have resulted in relexification, language shifting and borrowing. So, the question is asked once again. Quo vadis Zamboanga Chavacano?

Is Chavacano a dying language?

The proposition that Chavacano is a dying language is probably triggered by Zamboangueños themselves who have observed how the younger generation of speakers, who are also probably influenced by the influx of other regional languages like Cebuano and Tagalog, have "corrupted" the language. The other opinion expressed by Keith Whinnom in 1956 was based on his assessment of Caviteño and Ternateño Chavacano, varieties in Luzon which were at the time of his writing undergoing major language change and loss. Whinnom, in fact, pre-

dicted that Zamboanga Chavacano, just like Caviteño and Ternateño, is "doomed to extinction". The basis for his prediction was that Chavacano did not seem to have a "clear standard"; that is, when compared with Spanish, it was "grammarless" (Whinnom, 1956:77). This "grammarlessness" made the language unstable and will ultimately lead it to its end. Even the idea of writing a Chavacano grammar was for Whinnom, "absurb" (Valles-Akil, 1998).

Lojean Valles-Akil, a Zamboanga Chavacano scholar who is herself a Cebuano speaker but who now speaks flawless Chavacano, asserts that Whinnom's contentions can be refuted and are, in fact, seriously lacking in sociolinguistic principles. Two of Whinnom's premises that Valles-Akil refutes are that Chavacano has no clear standard and that it is undergoing the process of decay.

To the first premise, Valess-Akil says that Whinnom may have made such sweeping statements because earlier notions about creole languages has been generally unfavorable. Creole language, having less complicated grammatical systems and more limited lexicon, were then considered as "inferior", a 'debased' version of the parent languages" (Edwards, 1979:42). In other words, the creole language system is gauged according to the standard of their parent-languages' own systems, i.e., either that of the superstratum language (in this case the master-colonizer language, Spanish) or that of the substratum language (the slave-colonizee's indigenous languages). The creole language is not based on the creole's own standard as "it embarks upon as independent career" as a new language (Bloomfield, 1965:474, cited by Valles-Akil). Thus, according to Valles-Akil, when Whinnom studied Chavacano based on the standards of the Spanish grammar system, it was certainly easy for him to conclude that the language was "grammarless".

Valles-Akil cites recent research advances on creole languages (Rodman, 1978; Edwards, 1979; Fasold, 1993) which offer new insights into the nature and development of pidgins and creoles. For example, it is argued that when a pidgin reaches the stage of creolization, i.e., when it has become the first language (L1) of a group of pidgin (trade language) speakers, and when its grammar system becomes more complex and its lexicon expanded. Otherwise, Valles-Akil says, it would not be able to meet a wide range of communicative needs of its users.

This argument in favor of Chavacano finds support in Fasold (1993:183) who claims that as the creole continues to meet the interactive needs of its speakers, its grammatical machinery and lexicon are expanded and become stabilize. Furthermore, according to Fromkin and Rodman (1978:4), creole languages are "as complete in every way as other languages."

Frake (1971) and Molony (1973, 1974) conducted studies on Chavacano and came to the conclusion that it is indeed a creole language and has attained the status of a full-fledged language. To argue therefore that Chavacano is dying because it is grammarless is a sociolinguistic *fauxpas*.

As to the second premise propounded by Whinnom that Zamboanga Chavacano is undergoing the process of decay, Valles-Akil argues that this is not so too. She traces this popular notion from the Chavacano speakers themselves who often refer to their own generation's variety as "pure" and the new one as "corrupt" (no longer standard). To the former, the "standard" Chavacano is the one that has remained uncontaminated by non-Spanish influences. Any change in this aspect is preceived to be a sign of language decay. Of course, any true blueblooded Chavacano speaker of the older generation could not stand to her new words borrowed from Cebuano, for example, that have started to creep into the Chavacano personal pronoun system such as, **con ikaw** instead of **contigo** and **de ikaw** instead of **de tuyo** or **de uste.** Thus, they claim that the language is becoming corrupted or undergoing decay and may well become a dead language.

From the point of view of sociolinguistics, however, a decaying language is one that is starting to lose its capacity to meet all the communicative needs of its speakers. It is argued that language decay is by no means brought about by linguistic change. Halliday et at. (1964:103), for instance, assert that linguistic change is not a process of degeneration and decay. It is, rather, a sign of language dynamism. To say otherwise, is "simply nonsense".

Cleator (1961:230, cited by Valles-Akil) points out the role of change in the development of a language. According to him, a language is "a living thing, and in the normal course of its growth and development, words alter their meaning, or fall into disuse, to be replaced by other expressions, either newly coined or borrowed from some alien tongue".

Furthermore, according to Valles-Akil, Halliday et al. (1964:101) are of the opinion that although creoles undergo change brought about by extreme linguistic borrowing, such a phenomenon, however, does not in any way make less effective than any other language. Thus, the presence of heavy borrowings in Chavacano sould not be considered detrimental to the language. On the contrary, it should be seen as a contributory factor in its growth as a language.

Lexical borrowing can come from many other languages in contact and in the course of time added to the creole repertoire. To prove her point, Valles-Akil says that just as Chinese **pancit** has become the Tagalog **pansit**, there is no

doubt that the Ilonggo **baliscad,** the Taosug **malandug,** and the Cebuano **gayod** have now become the Chavacano **baliscat, malanduk, and gayot.** Therefore, she proposes that the argument that Chavacano is a dying language or one that is undergoing decay is easily refuted by sociolinguistic research.

A more important question that needs to be addressed, though, is this: To what extent has Chavacano changed such that people are oftentimes of the impression that it is a dying language?

Let us take a look at the Chavacano basic (core) vocabulary. Linguists say that between the core and cultural vocabulary of a language, it is the former that is less resistant to change. A study conducted by Valles-Akil in 1998 which aimed to find out how much of Spanish has been retained in the Chavacano core vocabulary, the following findings are reported:

1. Out of forty-four (44) lexical items for body parts, only seven (7) are borrowings from Philippine languages. All the rest are still in Spanish, e.g. mano, cabeza, barriga, dedo, pescueso, corazon, pies, etc. The borrowed lexical items are:

   Atay – liver
   Tuhud – knee
   Sa'gang – jawbone
   batiis – lower leg
   buli – buttocks
   tangcugu – nape
   kalamingking – small finger

   Valles-Akil included subaco (armpit) but it is a Spanish word. I excluded it from her list.

2. Out of the 28 kinship terms gathered, only three (3) are borrowings. All the rest are still in Spanish. The borrowings are:

   nana – mother
   tata – father
   anak – offspring

Lolo and lola, which may seem at first glance to be Philippine language borrowings are actually of Spanish provenance, being diminutives of abuelo (grandfather) and abuela (grandmother). Valles-Akil included these in her data. The correction here is mine.

3. The same pattern is observed in the lexical items gathered for flora and fauna, action words, and abstract ideas (part of the cultural vocabulary).

Factors contributing to language death

Another aspect of this issue that Valles-Akil considers worth discussing are the conditions or factors that contribute to the death of a language. First of all, she asks, what do language experts say is a dead langauge? Using Antilla's (1972:23) definition of dead language as one which has no speakers, i.e. no longer spoken in any form, she suggests that we look into the statistics on Chavacano speakers today.

As of 1956, Beyer's report (cited in Whinnom, 1956) lists 18,000 Caviteño speakers, 12,000 Ermitaño, and only 1,300 Zamboanga Chavacano. As of 1985, Gonzalez reports a total number of 200,000 native Chavacano speakers. If the number of Caviteño and Ermitaño speakers has drastically gone down since 1956. There is no doubt, according to Valles-Akil that the larger percentage of the 200,000 is comprised of Zamboanga Chavacano speakers. The figures therefore indicate an increase, rather than a decrease in the number of speakers.

Finally, another way of determining the "fate" of a language, i.e. whether it is going to die or to live, is its status in the speech community. The question to be asked, says Valles-Akil is: Is it the language spoken by the dominant group or by the minority goup?

According Bloomfield (1965:462), many kinds of pressure drive the speaker of the minority/lower language to use the majority/upper language. Ridicule and serious disadvantages, for instance, punish imperfections. He adds that when one uses the lower language to his fellows, "he may go as far as to take pride in garnishing it with borrowings from the dominant speech".

In Zamboanga, there is no doubt that Chavacano is the upper language. Taking herself as example, Valles-Akil recounts that being a migrant and a Cebuano speaker from Dipolog, Zamboanga del Norte, she learned to speak Chavacano fluently because of the pressure exerted by her peers. For instance, when she was still learning the language, errors like "Tiene yo anda" (I'm going somewhere) were immediately corrected to "Tiene yo donde anda", followed by a remark like "Bisaya man ka, Day". Moreover, she informs me that non-Zamboangueños who

have learned the language usually speak it even among themselves instead of their native tongues.

Speculations as to whether Tagalog or Cebuano is fast gaining ground as the upper language remain as speculations for as long as the data do not support them. At this point the arguments raised by Valles-Akil in support of Chavacano's linguistic vitality may be summarized as follows:

- Chavacano has a clear standard; its own particular grammatical system
- The change that people claim as occurring in Chavacano is not a case of language deterioration but of dynamic development
- The increase in the number of speakers is proof of its vitality
- Chavacano remains as the upper language in Zamboanga.

Therefore, to the question "Quo vadis, Chavacano?", Valles-Akil's response is: Chavacano is here to say. I could not but agree with her.

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