

Lexical Attrition Across Generations in a Minority Language

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Abstract

This study examined lexical attrition in Southern Sinama, one of the minority languages spoken in the Philippines. A mixed-methods research design was employed to identify the extent of lexeme loss and the underlying factors contributing to this phenomenon. Thematic analysis was used to categorize these contributing factors. A total of 28 native speakers participated in the study, evenly distributed across four distinct generations. The materials utilized included a 417-word list translated by the participants to assess the rate of lexical attrition, as well as an interview guide designed to explore the factors associated with this attrition. The results revealed that the oldest generation (61 years and above) demonstrated strong vocabulary retention, with an attrition rate of only 1.54%, mainly due to age-related memory decline. In contrast, the middle-aged groups (31-45 and 46-60 years) showed moderate to notable attrition rates (4.66% and 2.64%, respectively), driven primarily by language shifts resulting from changes in social environments. The youngest generation (18-30 years) exhibited the highest attrition rate at 8.56%, influenced by globalization, technological advancements, and shifting social and familial dynamics. Critically, the study highlighted an increasing attrition rate with each younger generation, stressing a significant trend of language loss over consecutive generations. This trend emphasizes a concerning decline in linguistic heritage, potentially leading to the eventual extinction of Southern Sinama. As younger generations drift further from their linguistic roots, the loss of unique knowledge and identity associated with this language poses a significant threat to community cohesion and diversity. If these patterns continue, the future of Southern Sinama appears uncertain, illustrating the urgent need for revitalization efforts to preserve the language for future generations.

Keywords: intergenerational communication, lexical attrition, minority language, Southern Sinama.

1. Introduction

In an increasingly globalized world, the dynamics of language use are shifting in profound ways, presenting both opportunities and challenges. As communities interact and blend, the complex relationship between language and identity becomes even more pronounced. Understanding the mechanisms behind language change is

essential for recognizing its impact on the identity and continuity of communities. As asserted, language is a multifaceted entity that is a foundation of social interaction and cultural identity (Mooney & Evans, 2018; Noels et al., 2020; Parajuli, 2021). It enables effective communication and embodies a community's rich history, traditions, and unique knowledge (Fenuku, 2024; Mills, 2020). The evolution of language is a continuous process that mirrors the vibrancy of society, adapting to the changing landscape of human experiences and values (Markov et al., 2023; Strongman, 2017). As languages evolve with time and societal shifts, their usage undergoes subtle transformations. This is evident when archaic vocabulary fades, introducing novel terms that reflect modern realities (Corballis, 2017; Crystal, 2018). Consequently, the gap between older and younger generations may widen, pointing out the critical importance of preserving linguistic heritage.

When the vocabulary of a language fades, it is referred to as lexical attrition. Lexical attrition refers to the gradual loss of words from a language or the decline in the frequency of use of certain words over time (Schmid, 2007). This phenomenon can affect both native and non-native speakers of a language and is common among bilingual or multilingual individuals (Gallo et al., 2021; Schmid & Köpke, 2009). This process can occur for various reasons, such as disuse, lack of practice, or exposure to a different language or linguistic environment (Opitz, 2011; Schmid, 2011). When someone is exposed to and primarily uses one language over another, especially in specific contexts or domains, the less frequently used language may experience lexical attrition. This can lead to difficulties recalling specific words, expressions, or terms in less-practiced language (Schmidtke, 2014).

While languages exhibit varying degrees of susceptibility to lexical attrition, it is unlikely that any language remains entirely immune to change and evolution over time (Corballis, 2017). This is particularly true for minority languages like Southern Sinama, which are especially vulnerable to such processes. Consequently, this study investigates lexical attrition in Southern Sinama, aiming to quantify the extent of lexeme loss and explore the factors underlying this lexical decline. The Southern Sinama language (ISO 639-3: SSB) is part of the Malayo-Polynesian branch of the Austronesian language family and serves as the primary language of the Southern Sama people in the island province of Tawi-Tawi, located in the Sulu Archipelago of the southern Philippines. It belongs to a classification of Sama languages characterized by mutual intelligibility, including Central Sama, Jama Mapun, and Yakan (Grimes, 2003). Approximately 260,000 people speak Southern Sinama (Rajik & Tarusan, 2023).

According to the Ethnologue's Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS), Southern Sinama is a developing language (Eberhard et al., 2021). This classification indicates that while there is some literature in standardized forms, it is not yet well-established, widespread, or sustainable. The existing literature is fragmentary and limited, contributing to a lack of prestige for the language. Its use in national and provincial offices, as well as in educational institutions, is often deemed unsuitable. Consequently, the Sama people frequently communicate in the dominant languages, such as Sinug and Filipino, particularly when interacting with other tribes,

such as the Tausug and Cebuano, and even among themselves. This linguistic shift is influenced by the political dominance of the Tausug in the province. Many Sama people are proficient in Sinug, whereas only a few Tausug can speak Sinama. Some Tausug resist learning Sinama despite living in the Sama community for extended periods.

While previous studies have examined language attrition across various contexts and languages (Gil, 2024; Kasparian et al., 2018; Khasanah et al., 2024; Zambrano, 2018), there remains a notable gap in focused research on the specific patterns of lexical attrition within Southern Sinama. Investigating lexical attrition in this language—especially considering its status as a minority language in the Philippines—can provide valuable insights into broader issues, including language shift and the efficacy of revitalization efforts aimed at its speakers. By addressing this gap and conducting a targeted study on intergenerational lexical attrition in Southern Sinama, this research seeks to fill a significant gap in language attrition studies. Understanding the distinct patterns and underlying factors of lexical loss in the language is vital for the language itself and the broader discourse on the preservation of minority languages globally. Furthermore, the findings of this study could have practical implications for language preservation strategies by stressing how lexical attrition across generations affects language continuity. Understanding this dynamic is essential for more effective revitalization programs that are context-specific and responsive to community needs. Thus, the study contributes to the academic field of language attrition and underscores the importance of maintaining linguistic diversity in an increasingly globalized world.

2. Method

Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design to understand the phenomenon of lexical attrition within the Southern Sinama community. This design analyzed the extent of lexical loss and the underlying factors contributing to this decline. The quantitative approach involved systematically counting and comparing the number of lexical items lost across different generational cohorts. This method provided empirical data illustrating the patterns and degree of lexical attrition, enabling a clear assessment of how the phenomenon varied across age groups. In contrast, the qualitative component utilized Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to gather in-depth insights from participants regarding their perceptions of the causes of lexical attrition. FGDs enabled a rich exploration of individual experiences and perspectives on factors that they believed contributed to the attrition of their native vocabulary.

Participants

A purposive sampling approach was employed to select 28 participants for the study, deemed appropriate for ensuring a targeted and relevant participant pool. This sampling technique allows researchers to choose individuals who meet specific criteria (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024; Robinson, 2014; Tongco, 2007). This study's

criteria included native speakers of the language who have been exposed to other languages through various means, such as their environment, social media, education, employment, or mobility. Participants were equally drawn from distinct age groups – specifically 18-30 years, 31-45 years, 46-60 years, and 61 years and older – ensuring that the study comprised a wide range of generational perspectives (Lindgren & Bohnacker, 2022; Miralpeix, 2007; Páez, 2009). This approach ensures that the study captured the diversity in language use, exposure, and attitudes that facilitated the collection of richer and more in-depth insights into the underlying factors contributing to lexical attrition.

The final participant group included individuals from various educational backgrounds and occupations – ranging from those with primary education to higher education degrees and including out-of-school youth, students, small business owners, migrant workers, government and non-government employees, and senior citizens. This demographic diversity was essential for obtaining a broad spectrum of language experiences and perspectives (Garimella et al., 2023; Stevens, 1992).

Materials

The materials used in this study included a word list sourced from the Language Department of the Mindanao State University in Tawi-Tawi, along with an interview guide adapted and modified from Cagampang et al. (2020). The word list comprised 417 lexemes selected based on their relevance to everyday communication and cultural significance within the Southern Sinama community. The choice of these lexemes was guided by the need to represent a wide range of semantic domains, ensuring that the list encompassed categories such as animals, food, objects, colors, action verbs, state verbs, descriptive words, adverbs, pronouns, numbers, prepositions, conjunctions, and functional words. This diverse selection aimed to portray the essential vocabulary utilized in daily interactions, thus providing a holistic understanding of the lexical items most vulnerable to attrition in the community. Conversely, the interview guide was designed to elicit information from participants regarding the reasons behind the attrition of specific words from their vocabulary (see appendix).

These materials underwent content and face validity assessments by three native-speaking language experts of Southern Sinama. The experts evaluated both instruments for clarity and relevance to the social and cultural context of Southern Sinama speakers, ensuring that the word list accurately reflects the community's vocabulary. Their feedback was then instrumental in refining and enhancing the materials.

Data Collection

The data collection process commenced with interviews with all 28 participants to administer the word list assessment, which involved translation to evaluate vocabulary attrition. A criterion was established to determine lexeme loss, that is recall of specific words. The presence or absence of these lexemes in participants' vocabulary was assessed during interviews. When participants encountered words that could not

be directly translated, the interviewer provided descriptions and explanations to aid in recalling the correct translations. If participants could not produce accurate translations, the interviewer allowed them additional time to reflect. For instance, after completing the initial translation of the word list, the interviewer revisited any words that participants struggled with. If participants could not provide the correct translation at this stage, those words were counted as instances of lexeme loss. The words correctly translated by the participants were validated by the same three language experts who validated the materials used in data collection. Translations that received invalidation from the three experts were also counted as instances of lexeme loss.

Once all participants had completed the translation of the word list, they were divided equally into their respective age groups. Following this, each group participated in a series of focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted consecutively, audio-recorded, and supplemented with diary notes. Each member was allowed to respond to the primary and probing questions during the discussions. After initial responses, follow-up questions were posed to facilitate a more profound exploration of the topics, allowing all participants to share their insights and thoughts.

Data Analysis

The data collected from both the word translation task and the FGDs were analyzed using a mixed-methods approach, integrating quantitative and qualitative techniques. For the assessment of lexical attrition based on the word list, means and percentages were calculated to summarize the frequency of incorrect translations by participants, providing a clear picture of attrition rates. On the other hand, the qualitative data from the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis, which facilitates a thorough exploration of participants' perspectives on lexical attrition. The analysis began with open coding, during which key themes and patterns related to the underlying factors influencing attrition were identified. Following this initial coding, the themes were grouped into broader categories encompassing the social and linguistic dynamics affecting language attrition.

Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted with a solid commitment to ethical principles to ensure all participants' privacy, respect, and rights. Written informed consent was obtained before data collection began. The researcher adhered to ethical standards and maintained integrity in all aspects of the research. Participants were allowed to access summaries of research findings, fostering transparency and trust.

3. Results and Discussion

The results are presented according to the primary objectives of this study. First, it reports the average and percentage of lexical attrition within the Southern Sinama language across the four distinct generational groups. Second, it discusses the factors influencing lexical attrition as reported by the participants. Finally, the findings on attrition rates are integrated with the identified influences on lexical attrition.

3.1. Lexical attrition within the Southern Sinama language across the four distinct generational groups

Table 1 - Average lexical attrition within Southern Sinama by generation

Age Range	Mean	Attrition Percentage
61 and above	410.57	1.54%
46-60	406	2.64%
31-45	397.57	4.66%
18-30	381.29	8.56%

Across the different age groups examined in this study, distinctive patterns of lexical attrition within the Southern Sinama language were observed. Participants aged 61 and above displayed significant vocabulary retention, with a minor loss observed (1.54%). This suggests that older individuals have a stronger connection to their native language, attributed to lifelong use. Older adults have typically had a more extended period of exposure to and use of their native language throughout their lives. This extended duration allows for stronger neural connections related to language processing in the brain (Caucheteux & King, 2022). Frequent engagement with their linguistic community keeps the vocabulary and grammatical structures active in their daily lives (Bastardas-Boada, 2017; Pine & Turin, 2017).

In contrast, the group aged 46 to 60 and 31 to 45 showed a moderate decline in translated words and lexical attrition rate, indicating some vocabulary loss but not as severe as observed in the younger age group. This suggests a decline in language use during mid-adulthood, likely attributed to mobility and migration, which increases exposure to and influence from dominant languages. Mid-adults are often immersed in environments where their native language may be less prevalent, especially in work and urban settings emphasizing dominant languages (Kashoki, 2018). This lack of exposure diminishes opportunities for practice and interaction in their native language, leading to increased reliance on the dominant language for communication. As a result, mid-adult speakers may experience cognitive disconnection from their heritage language, resulting in vocabulary attrition and a weakened linguistic identity.

Lastly, the youngest age group, 18 to 30, demonstrated the lowest number of translated words and the highest attrition rate (8.56%) among all age groups. Previous research has shown that younger speakers often show higher rates of language attrition compared to their elders, primarily due to various sociolinguistic dynamics at play, such as globalization and increased use of dominant languages such as English in education and media (Ahn et al., 2017; Bylund, 2009; Schmid & Dusseldorp, 2010; Schmid et al., 2004). This increased exposure can lead to a preference for these languages over their native language, resulting in diminished proficiency and vocabulary retention as they prioritize communication in the more socially and economically advantageous language. Additionally, this shift can be driven by societal pressures to assimilate or integrate into a dominant culture, resulting in a weaker connection to their linguistic heritage (Bakun et al., 2023). The combination of

these factors contributes to the progressive language loss observed in younger generations, highlighting the importance of promoting the use and value of native languages to preserve linguistic identity and diversity.

3.2. Factors influencing lexical attrition

Table 2 - Factors influencing lexical attrition across age groups

Age Range	Contributing Factor	Quote
61 and above	Age-related memory decline	<i>Takunan ku translation sa' maha ta entom ku.</i> "I know the translation of the words but just can't seem to recall it."
46-60 and 31-45 years old	Language shift due to change in social environment	<i>Mahang du aku mag-Sinama, handa ku aa Suk, officemates ku, although niya' du sab bangsa Sama sa' maha ru sab mag Sinama ma office or misan kami kami ru magbissara.</i> "I seldom speak Sama, my spouse is Tausug, and although my officemates are Sama as well, they also do not speak Sinama in the workplace even in our ordinary conversations."
18-30 years old	Globalization and technological advancement	<i>Llow-llow takale ku ma vlogs banan Korean words like Mukbang. So, mitu na siga ma vocabulary ku.</i> "Every day, I hear Korean words like mukbang in vlogs, so it seems like it has also become a part of my vocabulary."
	Social	<i>Niya' waktu bang kami mag-Sinama, nionan kami luwaan.</i> "Sometimes when we speak in Sinama, we are called <i>luwaan</i> 'spat out' or 'outcast'."
	Familial	<i>Mag-Sinug na sidja kami maka banan anak ku ma luma'.</i> <i>Maha makahati ina' siga mag Sinama.</i> "My children and I speak Sinug in the house because their mother cannot understand Sinama."

Age-related memory decline

Primarily, age-related memory decline influences lexical attrition among participants aged 61 years and older. Participants within this age bracket frequently attributed their difficulty in providing word translations to their age, expressing frustration over their inability to recall the words when prompted. They often described experiences akin to the tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon, feeling they knew a word but struggling to retrieve it when necessary.

Scientifically, the influence of age-related memory decline on lexical attrition in older participants is the natural changes in the brain as individuals age (Goral, 2004). As people age, specific brain structures involved in memory processes, such as the hippocampus and prefrontal cortex, may undergo structural and functional changes, impacting memory storage and retrieval (Anderson & Craik, 2000; Pudas et al., 2018; Robertson, 2002). These age-related changes can lead to difficulties accessing stored

vocabulary, contributing to lexical attrition. On the other hand, the tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon experienced by older participants may be attributed to age-related declines in retrieval mechanisms. Older adults may encounter difficulty accessing and retrieving specific words due to slower processing speed and reduced cognitive flexibility (Ciolek & Lee, 2019). This phenomenon can be frustrating for individuals who know the word but struggle to bring it to conscious awareness, highlighting the complex interaction between memory, cognition, and aging processes in the context of lexical attrition.

Concerning age-related memory decline, the participants highlighted the frequency of use of the words they struggled to recall. Notably, they observed that the terms causing them difficulty were ones they utilized less frequently in their daily conversations, indicating a link between memory decline and diminished exposure to specific vocabulary. The participants' experiences highlighted how reduced usage of specific vocabulary could exacerbate the challenges of retaining and recalling words as individuals age.

Language Shift

Language shift—a process whereby individuals gradually adopt another language, often the dominant one within their society—significantly contributed to lexical attrition among participants aged 31 to 60. The participants in these age groups experienced decreased exposure to and usage of their native language due to changes in their social environment initiated by factors like migration, employment, mobility, and interracial marriage. This decreased exposure and usage has resulted in the eventual erosion of particular words over time, leading to lexical attrition.

Changes in a social environment due to migration significantly impacted lexical attrition among individuals aged 31 - 45 and 46 - 60. Three participants from these age brackets, who used to work in Malaysia and Saudi Arabia, highlighted how the reduced use of their native language post-migration was a common challenge. Adapting to a new linguistic environment where a different dominant language prevailed led to a gradual decline in their use of their mother tongue, resulting in the loss of some vocabulary over time. They also emphasized how the decreased exposure to their native language limited their language practice and reinforcement opportunities. Furthermore, they shared instances where the pressure to conform and prioritize the dominant language, particularly for integration and career advancement, contributed to language replacement. These shared experiences underscored the adverse impact of migration-induced social environment changes on proficiency in the native language, ultimately leading to lexical attrition, as recounted by the participants in the focus group discussion.

On the other hand, five participants agreed on how employment-induced changes in the social environment could also contribute to lexical attrition. One of them recounted how the prolonged exposure to the workplace language resulted in reduced use of their native language outside of working hours, affecting their vocabulary retention and fluency. She vividly described instances where the demands of her job

prioritized fluency in the workplace language, leading to a potential neglect of her native language and hastening the erosion of her vocabulary. Another participant shared how workplace policies mandating a specific language for communications limited opportunities to use and practice his native language, further exacerbating the process of lexical attrition.

The shared experiences of two other participants unveiled another factor contributing to lexical attrition: changes in the social environment due to mobility. As they reflected on their stories, they elucidated how frequent relocations or travels presented them with a myriad of linguistic environments, interrupting their regular interactions with speakers of their native language. The limited language practice over time due to decreased native language use, vividly recounted by the participants, translated into a decline in vocabulary retention and language skills. They shared personal anecdotes illustrating how adapting to new linguistic contexts during mobility often prompted a prioritization of other languages over their native language, diminishing proficiency and hastening the process of lexical attrition.

Furthermore, drawing from the experiences and insights shared by another participant, which resonated with the majority due to their observances within their social circles, it became apparent that changes in the social environment resulting from interracial marriage, particularly in cases where the spouse's language holds dominance, play a significant role in shaping lexical attrition. He highlighted how the establishment of a common language for communication within interracial marriages often marginalized the importance of practicing each partner's native language. The shift towards a shared language, as emphasized by the participant, resulted in reduced utilization of individual native languages, potentially weakening language reinforcement and proficiency over time. Focusing on the spouse's dominant language in their community as a defining factor, he poignantly described how the emphasis on a shared language within the marital context contributed to the gradual erosion of language skills, ultimately playing a pivotal role in the progression of lexical attrition.

The interplay of migration, employment dynamics, mobility, and interracial marriage collectively contributes to lexical attrition among Southern Sinama speakers. This phenomenon aligns with Schmid's (2021) assertion that immersing oneself in a second language (L2) environment can significantly weaken lexical access to the native language (L1). As individuals navigate their daily lives in L2-dominant contexts—whether through work or social interactions—they often prioritize using their workplace language over their native tongue, gradually eroding their vocabulary and fluency in Southern Sinama. This immersion not only limits opportunities for practicing and reinforcing the native language but also creates an environment where the cognitive pathways to accessing L1 become less robust, increasing challenges for speakers to retrieve words and expressions in their native language over time.

Globalization and Technological Advancement

The impact of globalization and technological advancements on lexical attrition among Southern Sinama speakers in the 18-30 age bracket has emerged as a prominent

theme in language loss discourse. Global connectivity, facilitated by online platforms, exposes individuals to various linguistic influences and expressions worldwide. This exposure leads to a fascinating fusion of language styles, where foreign terms and linguistic structures are seamlessly integrated into everyday discourse, reflecting a dynamic evolution shaped by digital interactions. Specifically, globalization contributes to language loss by creating an environment where speakers are increasingly surrounded by and influenced by dominant global languages, often at the expense of their native tongue. For instance, the adoption of loanwords from various languages – such as Bahasa Melayu (e.g., *nasi goreng* for fried rice instead of *kinakan sininga*), Korean (e.g., *Mukbang* for eating large quantities of food instead of *mangan*), and English (e.g., *anti*, borrowed from the term for "aunt" instead of *babu*) – illustrates how broader cultural interactions can dilute the native lexicon. This trend shifts language usage patterns and influences preferences as speakers increasingly gravitate toward these borrowed terms.

The transformative effect of integrating loanwords reshapes language dynamics, gradually diminishing the use of traditional native terms and potentially impairing the retention of the original lexicon over time. Participants in the focus group discussions emphasized that this assimilation of foreign vocabulary undermines the distinctiveness of the Southern Sinama language. They expressed growing concern that the prevalence of borrowed terms – like "doctor" for *anambar* or "silver" for *pilak* – erodes lexical diversity and cultural identity. As younger speakers prefer loanwords over native vocabulary, the richness of the language diminishes, accelerating its attrition.

Moreover, technological advancements amplify these trends by providing platforms for rapidly disseminating foreign linguistic influences and fostering environments where dominant languages often overshadow minority languages. Social media, online communication, and digital entertainment frequently prioritize mainstream languages, further entrenching the dominance of foreign terms and expressions. As a result, younger speakers might feel less inclined to engage with their native language, perceiving it as less relevant or prestigious in a globalized context.

Despite these challenges, potential mitigating factors have emerged that could help slow the trend of lexical attrition in Southern Sinama. Community initiatives designed to preserve the language are crucial in this endeavor. Language workshops, cultural events, and promoting bilingual education are effective strategies to enhance engagement with Southern Sinama. By fostering greater awareness and pride in their linguistic heritage, these initiatives can substantially counterbalance the pressures exerted by globalization and technological influences. Encouraging younger generations to retain their native language while embracing borrowed terms paves the way for a dynamic linguistic practice that values innovation and tradition. Ultimately, communities need to harness these efforts to safeguard their linguistic identity against the forces of language loss driven by global trends.

Social Factors

Social factors, particularly attitudes and behaviors towards language, were observed as significant contributors to the phenomenon of lexical attrition in the context of Southern Sinama speakers. Participants shared how negative perceptions towards their native language or considering it less prestigious than dominant languages like Sinug or Filipino impacted their language practices. The narratives highlighted how societal norms, influencing the predominant use of a different language in daily interactions, marginalized the native language. As noted by participants, this shift towards more prevalent languages led to a decline in regular native language usage, potentially resulting in word loss.

Within the Tausug-dominated community, participants recounted experiences of discrimination related to their native language use. For instance, one participant was labeled as *luwaan*, meaning "spat out" or "outcast," for speaking Sinama amongst Tausug individuals. This anecdote supports Bakun et al.'s (2023) findings that Sama individuals speaking their language were derogatorily referred to as *aho' aho'* (literally translated as "yes" but meant offensive by the Tausug), reflecting how the stigma around minority language usage can breed feelings of marginalization and undervaluation. Participants' internalization of negative perceptions towards their native language emerged as a central factor contributing to diminished language proficiency and usage over time.

Familial

The FGD unraveled a profound understanding of the impact of familial dynamics on lexical attrition in bilingual households where one parent speaks a minority language while the other exclusively uses a dominant language. One participant articulated how the dominance of the Sinug language within his family environment fostered a linguistic imbalance, where the Sinama language received lesser emphasis or importance in day-to-day interactions. With this, children are naturally inclined towards using the dominant language more frequently, influenced by the prevailing linguistic patterns observed and practiced within the family context. As time progressed, this linguistic imbalance and reduced exposure to the minority language catalyzed language retention and proficiency decline among children. Gradually, children began to lose vocabulary, grammatical structures, and cultural nuances associated with the minority language as they leaned towards predominantly using the dominant language in their interactions within the familial setting.

In addition, participants agreed about the profound implications of familial language dynamics on lexical attrition within the context where parents strongly prefer English and Filipino languages over the Sinama. They detailed how this preference led to heightened exposure to English and Filipino, resulting in limited exposure to and proficiency in the Sinama language among children, thereby contributing significantly to lexical attrition of the Sinama language. Additionally, they expressed how the fervor for English and Filipino languages inadvertently marginalized the importance of the Sinama language within the family setting. Influenced by their parents' strong preference for English and Filipino, children began to perceive the Sinama language

as less crucial or integral to their daily communication needs. This perception shift led to a gradual decline in language usage and proficiency in Sinama as children increasingly prioritized English and Filipino in their linguistic interactions.

3.3. Integration of attrition rates and the identified influences on lexical attrition

Participants aged 61 and above reported experiencing age-related memory decline, which contributed to difficulties in word retrieval despite their strong connection to their language. These recall challenges often manifested as instances of the tip-of-the-tongue phenomenon, suggesting that while older adults retain vocabulary well, they may struggle to access it. The low rate of lexical attrition observed in this group aligns with qualitative insights that highlight their long-term exposure to and consistent use of the Southern Sinama language. Although older adults may encounter memory decline, their extensive life experience and frequent engagement with their linguistic community enable significant vocabulary retention. Qualitative data emphasized that cognitive mechanisms influence these recall challenges more than actual vocabulary loss, as reflected in the low attrition rates.

In contrast, the middle-aged groups (ages 31 to 45 and 46 to 60) experienced moderate lexical attrition, significantly impacted by language shift due to changes in their social environments. Participants reported reduced exposure to their native language resulting from migration, employment, and social mobility, contributing to lexical erosion. The quantitative findings of moderate attrition rates can be explained by the qualitative insights regarding lifestyle changes that diminish native language usage. As individuals in these age brackets prioritized dominant languages in new social contexts, decreased exposure directly results in vocabulary loss. Experiences such as adapting to dominant workplace languages and reduced use of their native language post-migration further illustrated the risks of attrition driven by shifts in language practices related to social changes.

For younger participants (ages 18 to 30), factors like globalization, technological advancement, and social attitudes play a crucial role in their language use. This group described how increased exposure to global languages through digital platforms led to a reliance on borrowed terms, thereby diminishing the use of native vocabulary. Additionally, negative perceptions of their native language contributed to decreased interest and usage, resulting in the highest rate of lexical attrition quantitatively observed among the age group. This quantitative finding aligns with qualitative factors, indicating that social pressures and technological influences promote a preference for dominant languages. The pervasive impact of globalization and the integration of foreign vocabulary dilute the use of the native language, underscoring how rapid social changes contribute to language loss. Furthermore, participants expressed frustration at societal stigmas, emphasizing the psychological dimensions of this attrition. This suggests that younger generations may feel increasingly disconnected from their linguistic heritage, which correlates with higher attrition rates.

Overall, the qualitative reasons for lexical attrition elucidate the mechanisms behind the quantitative declines observed across different age groups. For older adults, cognitive factors primarily influence their ability to recall vocabulary rather than actual retention, highlighting a complex relationship between language use and memory. Middle-aged individuals face moderate vocabulary loss that correlates with lifestyle changes driven by migration and employment. In contrast, younger individuals exhibit significant vocabulary attrition influenced by modern sociocultural dynamics and adverse perceptions of their native language. This underscores the need for interventions to preserve linguistic heritage across all age groups.

4. Conclusions

This study investigated the lexical attrition within Southern Sinama, one of the minority languages in the Philippines, and the factors influencing this lexical attrition. The findings revealed a clear trajectory of lexeme loss influenced by age, social, and external factors. The oldest group showcased remarkable vocabulary retention, with a meager attrition rate, predominantly attributable to age-related memory decline. Meanwhile, the middle-aged groups exhibit moderate to notable attrition rates, influenced primarily by a shift in language use due to evolving social environments. The most striking decline is observed in the youngest cohort. This accelerated lexical loss can be primarily ascribed to the pervasive impacts of globalization and technological advancements, coupled with shifting social dynamics and familial influences. Alarming, the attrition rate increases with decreasing age, underscoring a troubling trend of language loss across successive generations. These findings resonate with the work of Cagampang et al. (2020), who similarly identified rising attrition rates among younger generations in their study of lexical attrition in Isamal, another minority language in the Philippines. In light of these findings, future research should explore the effectiveness of existing language revitalization programs, assessing their impact on increasing vocabulary retention and usage among younger generations. Additionally, studies examining lexical attrition in other minority languages could provide valuable comparative insights, helping to identify common challenges and successful strategies across different linguistic communities. These avenues for further investigation will enhance the understanding of language attrition and contribute to more effective preservation and revitalization efforts in the face of ongoing linguistic and cultural shifts.

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6. Appendix

Interview Questions for Focus Group Discussion (FGD)

(The interview was done in Sinama)

Main Question: - *Why did you have difficulty translating the words?*
(Refer to the words that were not able to be translated by the respondents)

Probing Question: - *Is this the first time you have heard these words?*
(Refer to the words that were not able to be translated by the respondents)

If no,

- *What could be the reasons why you do not know these words?*
- *Can you share any personal experiences that have influenced your vocabulary loss?*

Follow-up Questions:

- *How do factors (community or social circle, work, school, family, religion, language attitudes including stigma and prestige, social media, television, entertainment, business, relocation, age, and peer influence) affect your language use?*
- *Please provide personal experiences that illustrate this impact.*