

Innovations in a stigmatized language: The case of *wh*-fronting production and acceptability in Philippine Hybrid Hokkien

Wilkinson Daniel Wong Gonzales
University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

The metropolitan Manila variety of Philippine Hybrid Hokkien (PHH) is an oral mixed language that has lexical and structural features sourcing from Hokkien, Tagalog, and English. This language is generally used by Manila Chinese Filipinos (CFs), although the youth prefer to use Tagalog and English instead due to historical Filipinization policies. This, along with community-wide perceptions of it as a substandard, broken variety, suggests endangerment. Despite this, minimal scholarly attention has been paid to PHH. The current work we have so far, however, suggests systematicity and conventionalization of features (Gonzales 2018; Gonzales & Starr 2019). For instance, Gonzales (2018) found that CFs only import Tagalog prefixes into PHH while English affixes are only borrowed to achieve a comical effect. While morpho-phonological evidence of systematicity and conventionalization exist, syntactic ones do not. This paper addresses this gap and complements existing work by investigating questions in PHH, particularly matrix *wh*-questions. It aims to examine how CFs form and judge *wh*-questions. It also hopes to explore the structural and social conditions on which new forms are used and judged.

Based on production and acceptability judgment data of 72 Manila Chinese Filipino participants (ranging from ages 21 to 89) collected in 2019 as well as source language comparisons, I show that PHH questions have features that distinguish it from the ‘standard’ Philippine Hokkien (PH). For instance, PHH *shāngá* ‘who’ can be fronted (1) or non-fronted (2). This contrasts PH *sīāngá* that can only be non-fronted (2). However, I argue that this fronting feature is not default or transferred ‘wholesale’ into PHH. There are cases where fronting is more acceptable and can be observed more frequently. Corpus and experiment results show that fronting is more likely to be used ($\beta = 2.3034$, SE = 0.2943, $p < 0.0001$) and accepted (scale-rating experiment: $\beta = 0.21794$, SE = 0.10023, $p < 0.05$) when the *wh*-word is *kàna* ‘why’. It also tends to be used ($\beta = 3.0749$, SE = 1.6596, $p < 0.1$) more in argument *wh*-questions by speakers that are more proficient in English/Tagalog. Results also indicate the presence of innovative constructions that are not found in any of the source languages (e.g. *how* fronting) and reveal a tight association between this innovative form and the youth ($\beta = 2.6381$, SE = 0.7585, $p < 0.0001$). However, despite robust use, results show that most speakers tend to stigmatize these constructions ($\beta = 0.21794$, SE = 0.10023, $p < 0.05$), and that this stigmatization can be conditioned by proficiency in English and Tagalog.

The selective use of fronting and age-graded variation in question production suggest the emergence of a systematic (conditioned) and innovative syntactic feature. I also argue that both the use and acceptability of *wh*-fronting can be partially attributed to Tagalog and English influence. In the case of production, proficiency and exposure to both Tagalog and English (fronting languages, 3) seems to have encouraged the use of general fronting in PHH (except in the case of *why* questions, where I argue that the high-scope interpretation of *why* seems to trump the language contact account). In the case of acceptability, proficiency of the same languages seems to have driven the stigma towards the construction. Ultimately, this paper shows a case where language contact has diverging effects on production and acceptability judgments. It also demonstrates how innovative features, contact-induced or not, can form despite community-wide stigma.

- (1) *Shāngá hīge u may- arí hīgē vending machine a?*
who DET have have own DEM vending machine PRT
‘Who owns the vending machine?’ (PHH game data, PC0071)
- (2) *Hīge dúwè phāhsì shāngá?*
DEM girl kill who
‘Whom did the girl kill?’ (PHH or PH game data, PC0082)
- (3) *Sino ang may- ari ng vending machine?*
who DET have own LNK vending machine
‘Who owns the vending machine?’ (Tagalog, native speaker translation)

References

- Gonzales, Wilkinson Daniel Wong. 2018. *Philippine Hybrid Hokkien as a postcolonial mixed language: Evidence from nominal derivational affixation mixing*. Unpublished MA Thesis. National University of Singapore.
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