

## **Prospective Transnational Migrant Workers' Language Practices During Internal Migration**

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### ***Abstract***

This study examines the language practices of prospective Filipino migrant workers who temporarily relocate to Metro Manila to complete pre-departure activities to secure a job opportunity abroad. Using self-reported language logs, the study documents 450 communicative events across familial, professional, and social domains. Findings show that Tagalog is the most frequently used language, functioning as both a practical lingua franca and a culturally anchored medium in the metropolis. Local languages remain vital within familial and interpersonal interactions, reinforcing regional identity despite urban pressures. English meanwhile is used predominantly in formal and professional transactions, while Taglish (Tagalog-English) serves as a flexible hybrid language that bridges communicative demands across contexts. Overall, the study highlights how in-migrants negotiate linguistic adaptation and cultural continuity, offering insight into the complex dynamics of language shift during internal migration in the Philippines.

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## **1. Introduction**

Language shift research has been a tradition in language and migration studies (e.g., Dorian, 1981; Fishman, 1991). Fasold (1981) defined language shift as the process in which an individual or group of speakers gradually choose to use one language over another for various reasons. These language practices are essential in our understanding of the dynamics of language use in the context of human mobility, particularly among prospective migrant workers in the Philippines.

Filipinos working in countries outside the Philippines are commonly referred to as Overseas Filipino Workers or OFWs. However, the term has evolved driven by political factors, hence, terms such as Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs) and Bagong Bayani (New Heroes) have also been used in literature (e.g., Serquiña, 2016). In more recent times, OFWs are commonly referred to as migrant workers following the rebranding of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) to the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) (Eugenio, 2023).

Migrant workers undergo a rigorous process of application before they are officially employed outside the country. Their journey usually leads them to Metro Manila, the country's capital, to complete necessary pre-departure procedures like obtaining passports, participating in Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) trainings, signing agency contracts, and attending the Pre-Departure Orientation Seminar (PDOS) among other essential procedures at the DMW (Zoleta, 2022).

In doing so, these applicants are introduced to a new environment which may be fast-paced compared to their usual environment, especially if they are coming from a laid back locality in the rural provinces. Moreover, they are inducted into a diverse group of people who belong to various ethnolinguistic backgrounds. Applicants are often unfamiliar as many have lived in their home provinces using only their local languages for almost all the domains. Acuña (2020) reported that Metro Manila is experiencing significant population pressures, with a 2015 census indicating a population of 12.5 million. This context emphasizes the critical migration flows – particularly from Bicol to Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon with 52,551 individuals, and from Central Luzon to the capital, accounting for 43,658 individuals –

showcasing the pivotal movements towards the nation's urban epicenter. Relatedly, these figures are a testament to the varied linguistic backgrounds of (prospective) migrant workers who come from the rural to the metropolis for the aforementioned pre-departure activities.

The movement of individuals within national borders, primarily gravitating towards urban and suburban locales adjacent to Metropolitan Manila, is known as internal migration (interchangeably used with the term in-migration) (Jolipa, 1980), which is most of the time driven by economic aspirations. The prevalence of internal migration in the country points to its role as a pivotal element of national development, necessitating a nuanced understanding of its implications for urban and rural growth policies (Jolipa, 1980; University of the Philippines Population Institute & Demographic Research and Development Foundation, Inc. [UPPI & DRDF], 2020). Aside from this, it also points to the fact that the move to Metro Manila and the interactions therein prompt significant linguistic shift among the migrants. While migration studies mostly focused on transnational mobilities vis-à-vis language shift (e.g., Lanza & Svendsen, 2007; Smolicz, Nical, & Secombe 2000; Tungohan, 2013) and language practices of OFWs (e.g., Darvin, 2022; Dumanig et al., 2020; Lorente, 2017; Meniado, 2019, among others), little attention is given to the language practices of prospective migrant workers who are mobile for pre-departure activities. Additionally, there is a scarce discussion highlighting language practices in the context of internal migration (cf. Kamwangamalu, 2013). Therefore, this study addresses these gaps by investigating the language practices, particularly the language preference and language shift of the prospective migrant workers coming from the provinces to the capital to participate in the activities prior to their employment abroad. We argue that the prospective migrant workers' language practices are determined by the nuanced situations that take place in the in-migration activities in general, and the various undertakings that surround their pre-departure preparations necessary for obtaining the job overseas in particular.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Language Preference**

Language preference serves as a key concept in understanding how in-migrants navigate the multilingual and culturally diverse environment of Metro Manila. It reflects the deliberate or instinctive choices individuals make when selecting languages for communication, driven by cultural ties, emotional resonance, and situational practicality which is coherent with Fishman's (1991) framework that emphasizes the interplay of sociocultural factors in

linguistic decisions. In workplace language dynamics, language preference reflects power hierarchies and accommodation strategies. Filipino migrant workers in Malaysia employ English with employers and other multinational colleagues, but shift to Filipino with co-ethnics, demonstrating strategic code-switching based on social relationships and professional hierarchies (Dumanig et al., 2020). This asymmetrical convergence, where subordinates accommodate superiors linguistically, reveals how preference patterns reflect organizational positions. Moreover, call center work environments, where migrant workers interact with multilingual clients, create unique conditions for language preference expression. Agents use scripts strategically to scaffold communication while developing genuine linguistic competence (Woydock & Lockwood, 2020). The affordances of workplace environments determine whether workers feel able to express language preferences or must suppress them for employment security.

Language preference among migrants also manifests in their aim for integration in the host country (Borey et al., 2025; Foged & Van der Werf, 2023), and may sometimes mean using the heritage language less. The relationship between language preference and successful integration, however, proves complex and nonlinear. Contrary to assimilationist theories, heritage language preference does not necessarily impede integration. Instead, the evidence suggests migrants can maintain strong heritage language preference while developing adequate host language proficiency for social and professional functioning (Al-khresheh, 2025).

Locally, language preference shapes the daily interactions of in-migrants, particularly, their choices between Tagalog, English, and local regional languages, and even hybrid forms – not only as tools for practical communication, but also as markers of identity and cultural connections. Noting the study of Gonzalez (1980) which emphasized Tagalog's institutional reinforcement as a unifying language in the Philippines, he further mentioned the strategic use of dominant languages like Tagalog and English. These languages function as tools for both integration and cultural continuity, attributed to dual dominance of institutional support, particularly education and governance, which reinforce the widespread use of both languages as practical and cultural tools.

The significance of language preference lies in its ability to reveal patterns of communication that reflect deeper sociocultural dynamics. For instance, the use of Tagalog in informal interactions may point to its role as a cultural anchor, while the preference for English in professional contexts highlights its association with economic mobility and global competence (Sicam & Lucas, 2016). Notably, a hybrid language such as Taglish, a result of

code-switching between Tagalog and English, is used when there is a lack of local terms which demonstrates how linguistic adaptation can serve as a bridge between cultural preservation and the demands of urban living (Pan, 1975 as cited in Bautista, 2004; Wei, 2018). Similarly, regional languages such as Cebuano persist as a dominant medium in informal settings, even as Filipino and English take precedence in formal domains. This duality emphasizes the resilience of regional languages, highlighting their role in preserving cultural identity while enabling individuals to navigate the linguistic demands of urban life (Dreisbach & Demeterio, 2021; see also Ponce & Lucas, 2024).

## **2.2 Language Shift**

Language shift, defined as the transition from one language to another within a community, leads to significant linguistic and cultural transformations or norms (Grenoble, 2021). Language shift often occurs in response to socio-economic pressures (Devos et al., 2025), and the pursuit of integration within the host society (Borey et al., 2025). Factors such as the perceived economic benefits of the dominant language, educational policies favoring monolingual instruction, and diverse social networks, can lead individuals to gradually adopt a new linguistic identity often at the expense of their heritage language (Borland, 2006). In the case of the Philippines, similar forces drive in-migration to urban centers like Metro Manila, where the linguistic environment is different from where they were raised (Quisumbing & McNiven, 2005).

Filipino immigrants in the U.S. face a comparable dynamic where English is the dominant language, leading to a prevalent language shift among Filipino immigrants and their children who often avoid heritage language classes (Angeles, 2015). In 2013, 1,844,000 Philippine-born immigrants resided in the U.S., making them the third largest Asian immigrant group after those from India and China (Angeles, 2015; McNamara & Batalova, 2015).

In the same occurrence, Tungohan (2013) provides a compelling case study of Filipino live-in caregivers in Canada, focusing on the challenges of language shift from native languages to English within the workplace. This scenario exemplifies the broader implications of language shift as a critical aspect of adaptation and integration into new societies, driven by migration and work. The research highlights how, amidst the backdrop of in-migration, caregivers navigate the complexities of shifting language use from their native tongues at home with their families, to English at their workplace. This transition presents distinct challenges,

underscoring the broader implications of language shift as a crucial aspect of their adaptation and integration into Canadian society.

Moreover, in exploring the dynamics of linguistic adaptation among the Filipino diaspora in Australia, Smolicz et al. (2000) conducted a pivotal study focusing on speakers of Cebuano, Ilocano, and Waray. This research highlighted the critical role of exogamous marriages in precipitating language shifts, leading to either the adoption of Filipino/Tagalog or English within these communities. Conversely, in the Philippines, languages like Kapampangan are being replaced by a blend of Tagalog and English (Taglish), leading to the gradual loss of the native language (Gutierrez, 2022), which urgently calls for language preservation efforts to protect endangered Philippine languages. While language shifts are a commonplace in most migrant communities internationally, these shifts have not been thoroughly explored in the process of in-migration, especially of linguistic groups from the local communities in the outskirts to the capital.

### **3. Methodology**

This study aims to explore the language practices of Filipino internal migrants in Metro Manila. It seeks to contribute to a nuanced understanding of the language practices of migrants from the provinces who travel and live temporarily in the capital for pre-departure preparations prior to job opportunities abroad. Specifically, this investigation addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the preferred languages of the prospective migrants?
2. In what communicative events are the languages used?

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The study employs a qualitative case study design to investigate the experiences of prospective migrant workers in a specific procedural context. According to Yin (2018), a case study is particularly suitable for in-depth examination of a contemporary phenomenon – in this case internal migration – within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. This method allows for the collection of rich, detailed data, making it feasible to study a small number of participants effectively.

### 3.2 Participants

The study recruited fifteen participants at the beginning, but six of them did not complete filling the log. Hence, their entries were discarded in the analysis. As noted by Stake (1995), a small number of participants can readily provide comprehensive insights into the case being studied. Moreover, Creswell and Poth (2018) emphasize that qualitative research focuses on the depth of information rather than the breadth, making a small sample size appropriate for achieving rich, detailed data.

In selecting the participants, the following were used as the inclusion criteria:

- (i) First-time travelers abroad who are processing their papers for overseas employment.
- (ii) Individuals who come from outside Metro Manila and speak a local language(s) other than Tagalog and English.
- (iii) Participants who have to reside in Metro Manila to complete their overseas pre-employment application process.

Table 1 shows the participants' descriptions, where pseudonyms were used to conceal their identities.

**Table 1. Demographics of the Participants**

Participant Pseudonym	Ethnicity	Languages Spoken
Ariel	Kapampangan	Kapampangan, English, Tagalog
Bebang	Ilocano	Ilocano, English, Tagalog
Chad	Hiligaynon	Hiligaynon, English, Tagalog
Dayne	Pangasinense	Pangasinense, English, Tagalog
Kopico	Ilocano	Ilocano, English, Tagalog
Kulits	Cebuano	Cebuano, Talaandig, Bicolano, English, Tagalog
Meny	Batangueño	Batangueño, English, Tagalog
Zia	Bicolano	Bicolano, Bisaya, English, Tagalog
Zimbah	Ilocano	Ilocano, English, Tagalog

### 3.3 Data Collection

The data for this study was gathered through a self-reported language log. With some modifications from Kamwangamalu's (2013) survey questionnaire, this log generally determines from the participants: *Who speaks what language to whom about what in everyday conversations in different domains?* Additionally, the log provided a space where participants indicated their reasons for deciding to use a particular language in a particular situation, topic, and interlocutor. The participants were guided how to fill out the log by conducting an actual exercise. The participants documented their language activities for two weeks.

### **3.4 Data Analysis**

The data analysis for this study used frequency count and thematic analysis to rigorously interpret the qualitative data collected from self-reported logs. All the collected logs from the participants were encoded for clarity. Following this process, the language use was manually counted to determine which languages were mostly used by the participants. In total, there were 450 instances of language use among the participants from different communicative events. Moreover, data was initially analyzed using ChatGPT. The output generated several categories which grouped participants' responses according to topic, interlocutor, and the reason for using the particular language. After this, the themes were manually checked for accuracy, and categories that were similar were combined.

### **3.5 Ethical Considerations**

The confidentiality of participant information is paramount. All data collected were handled with the utmost confidentiality. Participants signed a confidentiality agreement ensuring that their information is used solely for research purposes and kept secure. This measure safeguarded their personal and sensitive information, ensuring that their participation in the study has no bearing on their current or future employment applications.

#### ***3.5.1 Confidentiality and Data Protection***

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#### ***3.5.2 Voluntary Participation and Right to Withdraw***

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and non-committal. Participants were informed that they had the right to refuse to answer any questions or withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. This non-obligatory nature of the research ensures that participants feel comfortable and empowered throughout the conduct of this study.

### 3.5.3 Informed Consent

Participants were also informed about the study’s purpose, the nature of their involvement, and how their data was used. They were provided with a detailed consent form that outlines all aspects of the study, ensuring they are fully informed before agreeing to participate.

### 3.5.4 Ensuring Non-Influence on Employment Processes

It was clearly communicated to the participants that their involvement in the study is completely independent of their application processes for employment abroad. This separation was strictly maintained to prevent any perception that participation might influence their employment opportunities.

## 4. Findings

The analysis of self-reported logs from nine participants reveals the preferred languages of prospective migrants during their in-migration activities in Metro Manila. Out of 450 documented instances, Tagalog emerged as the dominant language, with 184 occurrences, reflecting its role as a unifying medium across diverse contexts. Participants used Tagalog consistently in familial and other interactions, mostly informal settings, making it a practical and culturally significant choice for migrants navigating a multilingual urban environment.

**Table 1. Preferred Languages Used by Prospective Migrants During In-Migration Activities**

Language	Instance
Tagalog	184
Local Languages	133
Ilokano	49
Bikol	26
Hiligaynon	22
Kampangan	15
Pangasinense	14
Cebuano	4
Aklanon	2
Talaandig	1
Hybrid Languages	99
Taglish	78
Ilokano- Tagalog	7
Kapampangan-English	4
Kapampangan-Tagalog	4
Bisaya- Tagalog	2
Pangasinense- Tagalog	2
Bikol- Tagalog	1
Bisaya- Bikol	1
English	34
<b>Total</b>	<b>450</b>

Moreover, the use of their respective local languages is also noticeable with 139 instances. These include Ilokano (49 instances), Bikol (26 instances), and Hiligaynon (22 instances), that reflect the participants' connection to their local languages and cultural heritage. In addition, hybrid languages are also often used by in-migrants in their communicative routines. Commonly, they used Taglish (78 instances) which is a seamless linguistic switching from Tagalog or Filipino to English among the majority of Filipino speakers. This highlights linguistic creativity and speakers' access to their linguistic repertoires. Meanwhile, there were only 34 reported instances of the participants' use of English that suggests it is used in very limited domains.

Furthermore, the findings of this study reveal the varying roles of Tagalog, English, hybrid and local languages in the communicative practices of in-migrants in Metro Manila. Each language demonstrates specific functions and preferences based on topic and interlocutors.

*Theme 1: Tagalog as a Resource for Practical Communication and Social Connection*

Tagalog was predominantly employed in professional transactions, such as job applications or inquiries with local service providers, for purposes of clarity and professionalism. Zia shared that she used Tagalog "because the agency is located in Manila," emphasizing how Tagalog is perceived to be a default language in the capital and thus helps facilitate formal interactions. Similarly, Dayne noted her use of Tagalog "to ensure quick understanding" when "they talk to her" during medical consultations, indicating that communicating in Tagalog minimizes misunderstandings in time-sensitive or high-stakes situations. This shared reliance on Tagalog becomes even more significant given that these prospective migrants came from different provinces and ethnolinguistic backgrounds. By using Tagalog, they adopt a common linguistic ground that aligns with institutional expectations in Manila while also reducing potential communicative barriers. Consequently, their use of Tagalog guarantees smooth communication with service providers in the agencies they visit for document processing and medical appointments, demonstrating how language choice becomes an essential strategy in navigating the application process.

In addition, Tagalog plays an essential role in social interactions, where it fosters emotional depth and authenticity in conversations. Participants noted that using Tagalog enriched their connections with colleagues and friends, allowing them to engage more openly and comfortably with those around them. For example, Kulits explained that "she would understand other applicants better when they use Tagalog," highlighting how shared language

becomes a bridge for empathy and clearer interpersonal communication. Similarly, Chad echoed this sentiment, saying, “when they spoke to me in Tagalog, I responded in Tagalog,” demonstrating how reciprocal language use strengthens rapport and reinforces group belonging. These accounts show how mutual understanding is facilitated through shared linguistic practices, enabling in-migrants to forge meaningful social bonds within unfamiliar environments. This consistent preference for Tagalog across different domains underscores its overarching significance as both a practical and socially viable medium, enabling in-migrants to adapt and thrive during their stay in the capital. This social anchoring through Tagalog also sets the stage for understanding how language shapes their experiences in other domains of daily life.

*Theme 2: English as a Language of Professional Mobility and Formal Integration*

English, although used more sparingly than Tagalog, is predominantly utilized in professional and formal contexts, underscoring its importance as a global language and its role in facilitating upward social mobility and professional integration. Many participants noted that English is often required during job interviews, document submissions, and interactions with employers, positioning it as an expected linguistic competency within recruitment and institutional settings. For instance, Dayne wrote that “English was required for the interview” during their meeting with the heads of recruitment agencies, pointing to the institutional preference for English as a marker of preparedness and credibility. In a specific communicative event, Ariel recounted that he used English “because the employer can’t understand another language,” referring to the foreign interviewer. This example illustrates how English enables communication across linguistic boundaries and reinforces its perceived association with professionalism and competence.

Outside formal interviews, participants also reported using English in casual conversations with family and friends as part of their intentional preparation for future employment opportunities. Bebang, for example, remarked that she is “practicing her English grammar,” demonstrating that everyday interactions serve as informal training spaces where migrants build linguistic confidence. This shows how English functions not only as a requirement imposed by institutions but also as a self-directed tool for enhancing employability.

Moreover, English played a critical role in medical and official interactions to ensure clarity and avoid misunderstandings. Zimbah indicated that he used English “for formality with the doctor,” reflecting the belief that medical consultations require a heightened level of

linguistic precision and respect. His choice suggests that English is associated with authority and is considered appropriate for high-stakes or expert-driven interactions. Taken together, these findings highlight the purposeful and strategic use of English as a medium for clear communication, institutional compliance, and seamless integration in both formal and multicultural contexts.

*Theme 3: Local Languages as Anchors of Cultural Identity and Community Belonging*

Meanwhile, local languages play a vital role in preserving cultural heritage and strengthening a sense of belonging among in-migrants. These languages function within familial and interpersonal domains that are closely linked to participants' identities. Through local languages, migrants maintain cultural ties and navigate social interactions in ways that feel familiar and emotionally grounded. One participant said, "I used Ilokano because this has always been the language of my mother and father." This statement shows how local languages connect individuals to their family history and how these languages move from one generation to the next. The use of local languages also creates a sense of continuity that supports family relationships.

Interactions with neighbors and friends further show the importance of local languages. Chad said that he used his local language because he was "talking to a fellow Hiligaynon, and [they] were able to talk and understand each other." His account explains how a shared linguistic background helps people understand each other more easily. It also shows how language affirms shared identity and strengthens trust within the community. These examples show that local languages operate as anchors of cultural identity and as tools for building meaningful social ties.

*Theme 4: Taglish as a Flexible Communicative Strategy in Hybrid Linguistic Environments*

On the other hand, there is also a preference for a hybrid language use of Taglish (a blend of Tagalog and English) among the in-migrants. Taglish functions as a practical and adaptable linguistic choice that helps bridge the gap between formal and informal communication, allowing migrants to adjust smoothly to the diverse linguistic demands of Metro Manila. The findings show that Taglish is used in casual conversations as well as in situations that require linguistic flexibility, especially when participants interact with individuals who shift between languages themselves.

Participants often mentioned that they used Taglish when dealing with recruitment agencies and other local service providers. One participant explained, "I used Taglish because

my agent spoke to me in both Tagalog and English.” This example shows how Taglish accommodates the language preferences of interlocutors and ensures clearer communication in professional interactions. In more casual, non-familial encounters, Taglish also supports effective expression by allowing speakers to draw from two linguistic resources. As Kulits noted in her log, “Sometimes it’s easier to explain in Taglish, especially when there are English terms I don’t know in Tagalog.” Her experience illustrates how Taglish enables smooth, fluid communication and allows speakers to convey ideas more precisely. Overall, the participants’ use of Taglish highlights the linguistic adaptability required of in-migrants as they navigate pre-departure activities in the capital. This adaptive strategy also prepares the ground for examining how language practices continue to shift as migrants move into new social and professional contexts.

## **5. Discussion**

What can be seen so far is that Tagalog is the preferred language in the majority of in-migration activities, affirming its role as a lingua franca in Metro Manila. Its dominance in both formal and informal contexts highlights its practical utility for communication and its enduring cultural significance. This aligns with Borland’s (2006) argument that language shift happens because of the power of dominant languages spoken in certain communities. Since Metro Manila is a large Tagalog-speaking metropolis, most of the in-migrants who have relocated from the province for work or education purposes have willingly adapted and forged the dominance of the language.

The results also reveal a significant yet nuanced role of Tagalog in the communicative practices of in-migrants in Metro Manila, as it emerges to be a unifying language primarily used in informal and social interactions. This echoes the findings of Sicam and Lucas (2016) that found strong preference for Filipino alongside English. Participants explained that Tagalog was preferred when clarity and inclusivity were prioritized in job application or casual interactions. Additionally, Miranda (1980) underscored the importance of Tagalog in maintaining Filipino traditions and values, viewing it as a vital cultural anchor for in-migrants adapting to Metro Manila’s multilingual environment. This contrast challenges Grenoble’s (2021) assertion in the language shift literature that dominant languages replace minority ones. Instead, Tagalog coexists with other languages, fulfilling a specific cultural and practical role while maintaining its significance in informal and professional settings.

Significantly, local languages such as Ilokano, Bikol, and Kapampangan, among others, remain in familial and community interactions that serve as markers of regional identity and cultural heritage. Dreisbach and Demeterio (2021) observed a similar trend, where regional languages persist in informal domains despite the dominance of Filipino and English in formal settings. Ponce and Lucas (2024) also found local languages as link to ethnolinguistic identification and even religion.

Moreover, notable occurrences of Taglish were found to bridge the gap between formal and informal settings, offering flexibility and clarity in communication. Wei (2018) noted that translanguaging enables individuals to flexibly draw on linguistic resources to function effectively in multilingual contexts while sustaining cultural ties. Participants in this study frequently used Taglish in interactions with recruitment agencies, medical professionals, and even in casual conversations, emphasizing its practicality. The findings challenge traditional language shift narratives by illustrating how hybrid forms enrich rather than erode linguistic practices. Fishman's (1991) framework on sociocultural factors in language selection resonates here, as Taglish embodies the interplay of cultural preservation and urban adaptation. Unlike Grenoble's (2021) assertion that dominant languages lead to the erosion of minority languages, the prevalence of Taglish demonstrates a subtle form of linguistic resilience and innovation.

Conversely, a striking pattern with English is its exclusive role in professional and formal communication. The findings show that in-migrants associate English with professionalism, competence, and upward mobility. The prestige that English enjoys has long since been in place and is forged by discourses equating the language to intelligence, power, and superiority (Bacon & Kim, 2018; Ponce, 2025; Tupas, 2022) as if it is the only language that enables one to access opportunities like what was pointed out by one participant: "[I]t was required for the interview," underscoring its perceived importance in ensuring professionalism and credibility. However, it cannot also be denied that the preference for English highlights the perspective that Filipinos are inherently adaptive, allowing for the incorporation of another linguistic influences to meet practical and cultural needs. This pattern reveals English as a global tool for career progression and a medium for navigating socio-economic demands in Metro Manila during their application for employment abroad.

The findings of this study offer a critical perspective on language shift literature, particularly the works of Grenoble (2021) and Borland (2006), which emphasize the replacement of minority languages by dominant ones due to socio-economic pressures. While these studies highlight valid concerns about the erosion of heritage languages, the results of this study suggest a more dynamic interplay of linguistic adaptation and cultural resilience.

The patterns of language use among in-migrants reveal a dynamic balance between adapting to new linguistic environments and cultural preservation. Tagalog functions as a binding language for both formal and informal interactions, while English dominates formal and professional domains; Taglish serves as a flexible medium bridging these two spheres, and local languages anchor regional identities.

## **6. Conclusion**

The findings of this study reveal the strategic ways in-migrants in Metro Manila navigate their language use. It bridges the need to preserve cultural identity with the challenges of adapting to urban life. Language is indeed an “indispensable agent of migration (Borlongan, 2023, p. 38), and language preference is a key factor that shapes migrants’ language choices in various situations, driven by practical needs, emotional connections, and cultural values.

This study underscores the complexity of language practices among in-migrants in Metro Manila, revealing how they navigate language shift while maintaining cultural ties through strategic language preferences. The findings demonstrate that Tagalog plays a dominant role as a practical and inclusive medium, facilitating communication in professional, social, and familial contexts. Participants consistently relied on Tagalog for clarity and inclusivity, particularly in professional settings such as recruitment and medical consultations, while its cultural importance anchored their interactions in informal and familial settings. English, on the other hand, emerged as the language of professionalism and global mobility, often reserved for job interviews, medical discussions, and interactions requiring a formal tone. Taglish bridged the gap between formality and informality, offering flexibility in communication and reflecting the linguistic blend that characterizes urban life in Metro Manila. Regional languages, meanwhile, retained their significance in familial and community interactions, preserving cultural heritage and fostering social, regional bonds.

This study highlights the relationship between language shift and preference, where the pressures of urbanization and socio-economic integration do not fully erase linguistic diversity, but instead, create spaces for coexistence. The findings reflect how in-migrants’ linguistic choices are shaped by practical, emotional, and cultural considerations, allowing them to navigate the challenges of urban life without losing their cultural roots. By examining these dynamics, the study contributes to broader discussions on how migration influences language practices and identity formation, offering insights into the interplay between language, culture, and socio-economic integration in a rapidly changing environment.

The study acknowledges certain limitations, such as the reliance on self-reported logs, which may not capture the full complexity of participants' language practices, and the small sample size, which may limit generalizability. Future research could expand on these findings by exploring language practices in other urban areas or incorporating additional qualitative methods, such as interviews or ethnographic observation. Nonetheless, the study provides valuable insights into the linguistic realities of in-migrants, emphasizing the importance of supporting policies that recognize the coexistence of dominant and regional languages to foster both integration and cultural preservation.

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