A Field Report on Iraya: Preliminary Findings on Language Vitality and Morphosyntax

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We present preliminary findings on the language vitality and morphosyntactic properties of a language at risk of being endangered, Iraya. Iraya is a language spoken by one of the eight indigenous Mangyan groups on the island of Mindoro, Philippines. Research on Iraya has been very limited, only covering its genetic relationship with other Mangyan and Philippine languages (Zorc, 1974; Barbian, 1977; Reid, 2017), or with its phonology and morphology. This study aimed to fill in these gaps by investigating the morphosyntactic properties of the language, as well as its language vitality.

Method. The Iraya data were gathered from fieldwork (April 2014) in Baras, Oriental Mindoro, Philippines. Four native language speakers, who are also fluent in Tagalog, were consulted during this time. Two instruments, a Swadesh list modified for Philippine languages [500 lexical items], and a Tagalog sentence list [570 items; Hernandez (2015)], were used to elicit data. To verify the initial data, another native Iraya Mangyan speaker was interviewed on January – February 2017.

Findings on Language Vitality. While Iraya is identified as a "developing" language based on EGIDS (Simons & Fennig, 2018), field observations and interviews report the language being rapidly replaced by Tagalog as its speakers shift to this dominant language of the region. Many Iraya parents no longer pass down the language to their children, and students also do not learn nor use it in schools. While a major educational reform in the country has pushed for the Mother-Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), early education for the Iraya community faces concerns such as the lack of licensed Iraya teachers and inadequate Iraya teaching materials.

Preliminary Findings on Basic Morphosyntactic Properties. As is with most Philippine languages, Iraya is a primarily predicate-initial language. Verbs contain a voice affix that identify the syntactically prominent element (the *pivot*). The pivot argument is always marked with either *da* or *pag*. Non-pivot core arguments can be optionally marked with *da* or *pag*, while oblique arguments are marked with *sa* (for common nouns) or *kay* (for proper nouns) (1)-(3).

(1) Agent Voice
Mag-tabuy   **da**   **unga**   da   butakan   sa   danggasen.
AV.NPST-give   **CORE**   **child**   CORE   flower   OBL   young woman
'The child gives the flower to the young woman.'

(2) Patient Voice
Nag-tabuy   da   unga   **da**   **butakan**   sa   danggasen.
PV.NPST-give   CORE   child   **CORE**   **flower**   OBL   young woman
'The child gives the flower to the young woman.'

(3) Goal Voice
T<in>abuy-**an**   da   unga   butakan   **da**   **danggasen**.
<PST>give-**GV**   CORE   child   flower   **OBL**   **young woman**
'The child gives the flower to the young woman.'

Agents encoded as personal pronouns tend to occur in the pre-verbal position (4)-(6).

(4) Agent Voice
Aku   **mag**-tabuy   da   butakan   sa   danggasen.
1SG.PVT   AV.NPST-give   CORE   flower   OBL   young woman
'I give the flower to the young woman.'

(5) Patient Voice

Na'ay	**nag**-tabuy	da	butakan	sa	danggasen.
1SG.NPVT	**PV.NPST**-give	CORE	flower	OBL	young woman

'I give the flower to the young woman.'

(6) Goal Voice

Na'ay	t<in>abuy-**an**	butakan	da	danggasen.
1SG.NPVT	<PST>give-**GV**	flower	OBL	young woman

'I give the flower to the young woman.'

Given that core arguments receive the same nominal marking, word order is relatively strict in this language which disambiguates the thematic roles of arguments. As observed from the data, the basic constituent order of Iraya tends to be agent-patient-goal-oblique:

(7)

T<in>abuy-an	da	unga	bungkalo	da	ido	sa	balay.
<PST>give-GV	CORE	child	bone	CORE	bone	OBL	house

'The child give the dog a bone in the house.'

Most Iraya transitive verbs take the following affixes based on the following voice/aspect paradigm. What is interesting from this paradigm is how the Proto-Austronesian agent voice affix *maR- or *maŋ- (Blust, 2009) manifests as the Iraya patient voice nag-.

Table 1. Voice affixes for the different aspectual types.

Voice	Past	Non-past
AV	-um-	mag-
PV	-in-	nag-

While these findings remain preliminary, more work is necessary to verify these findings. We recommend further research to explore (1) how the pivot behaves in various syntactic operations; (2) the influences of animacy to word order; as well as (3) the variation of verb affixes depending on voice and aspect. Nevertheless, findings from understudied language such as Iraya offers useful contributions to typological, theoretical, and historical linguistics. These study results may also be beneficial in the creation of pedagogical materials that may be utilized for future language revitalization.

GLOSS: CORE = core argument; NPST = non-past; NPVT = non-pivot; OBL = oblique; PST = past; PVT = pivot

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