

The Suitability of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) Learning Materials: An Analysis of K to 12 Ilocano Short Stories

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Abstract

The country's archipelagic nature is an ever-present feature of any Filipinist discourse. This is especially palpable when crafting language policies. Contemporary Philippines displays a discernible paradigm shift in its approach on the language question. The nationalist discourse appears to be replaced by a cultural imperative to preserve indigenous heritage, which owes its vibrancy to the country's plural composition. In 2012, the unprecedented Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) scheme was implemented as a crucial component of the Department of Education's radical adoption of the K-12 Basic Education Program. Despite the scheme's noble objective of making "Filipino children life-long learners in their L1 (MT), L2 (Filipino, the national language), and L3 (English, the global language)" (DepEd, 2013), policy implementation falls short due to the scarcity of readily-available learning materials. Of the eighteen indigenous languages adopted by the MTB-MLE scheme, Ilocano is the only regional language represented on DepEd's online didactic platform. This paper is a language-specific study of the suitability of learning materials made accessible on DepEd Tambayan which features a compilation of nineteen Ilocano short stories. It interrogates the short stories' linguistic and sociocultural elements, drawing attention to the glaring inaccuracies that pervade these texts intended as learning materials. The proposal of flawed didactic materials is unfortunately indicative of the department's ineptitude in implementing the mother-tongue framework, which in turn is symptomatic of the hastiness of the whole K-12 project. The questionable quality of these short stories attests that the development of learning materials had been grossly overlooked by education policymakers. **Keywords:** materials development, multilingual education, mother tongue-based multilingual education, language policy, language planning

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Constructing the National Language

The country's archipelagic nature is an ever-present feature of any Filipinist discourse. This is especially palpable when discussing the role of language in nation-building, both in an ideological sense, as in constructing national identity, and in a pragmatic sense, as in crafting national policies. One can imagine the overwhelming linguistic diversity that characterizes an archipelago which consists of 7,641 islands, and counting (Lasco, 2017). To be exact, the Philippines is home to 187 individual languages, of which 183 are presently spoken while the remaining four are officially classified by linguists as extinct or 'dead' languages (Simons & Fennig, 2018). The very institution of our national language, which was viewed within the nationalist framework as an essential stride towards political unification, reflects the Filipino people's tumultuous road to self-determination.

It shall be recalled that the inception of the Philippine national language was made possible in 1937 under the auspices of then President Manuel L. Quezon. Hailed consequently as the *Ama ng Wikang Pambansa* 'Father of the National Language', he ordered the formation of a linguistic think tank which would have the principal task of recommending only one, among the hundreds of indigenous languages, to be adopted by the national government. By virtue of Commonwealth Act No. 184 of 1936, the National Language Institute (NLI) was tasked to conduct: 1) a comprehensive study of the principal languages spoken in the Philippines with a population of half a million at the time; 2) a lexical survey of said languages, categorizing a) phonetically and semantically similar lexical items b) phonetically similar yet semantically different lexical items c) phonetically different yet semantically similar lexical items; 4) a comparative morphological study of Philippine affixes. All this preliminary linguistic research would culminate into the fulfillment of the institute's single most important mandate:

(5) To choose the native tongue which is to be used as a basis for the evolution and adoption of the Philippine national language. In proceeding to such election, the Institute shall give preference to the tongue that is the most developed as regards structure, mechanism, and literature and is accepted and used at the present time by the greatest number of Filipinos.

The ethnically Tagalog statesman appointed a Hiligaynon linguist, Jaime de Veyra, to head the NLI, aided by a multilingual membership: Santiago Fonacier (Ilocano), Casimiro Perfecto (Bicol), Felix Salas Rodriguez (Samaron), Felimon Sotto (Cebuano), Cecilio Lopez (Tagalog), and Hadji Butu (Maranao-Maguindanao). Isidro Abad (Cebuano), Zoilo Hilario (Pampango), Jose Zulueta (Pangasinan) and Lope K. Santos (Tagalog) joined the committee the year following its creation. Each of the eminent linguists that comprised the think tank represented a major linguistic group (Belvez, 2015).

The decision to adopt Tagalog as the basis of the national language was shrouded in controversy both of a symbolic and of a legal nature. In his introduction to Panlasigui's groundbreaking sociolinguistic work 'Language Problems of the Philippines', Pacis drew attention to the unconstitutionality of this decision. According to Pacis, the 1987 Constitutional Convention voted between these two contending resolutions regarding the would-be national language: 1) the resolution put forward by Cebu delegate Mariano Jesus Cuenco calling for the outright adoption of Tagalog as basis for the *Wikang Pambansa*, and 2) the resolution proposed by Camarines Norte delegate Wenceslao Vinsons calling for the development of the *Wikang Pambansa* based on the chief native languages (*plural*). The first resolution was overwhelmingly rejected, paving the way for the approval of Vinsons' proposal; yet the body that drafted the constitution supposed to have distorted the meaning of the second resolution, changing the crucial word 'tongues' (*plural*) into its singular form.

Beyond questions of legality, criticisms hurled towards the Tagalog-based national language voiced strong regionalist sentiments emanating from the political periphery. Although linguistic regionalism did not entirely cripple Quezon's romantic project of using language to unite a people (or peoples) who had been assailed by waves of foreign domination, it certainly brought to light the limitations of the unifying role of language in a multicultural, polyethnic context. Although the oft-cited 'role of language in the task of nation-building' has largely been perceived as a given rather than adequately examined in conjunction with other variables (Llamzon, 1973),

scholarly literature is now problematizing the notion that a single unifying language is a viable vehicle for national solidarity in a heterogenous society.

Even though language is a symbol for identification among people who speak it and a vehicle for the expression of their collective, regional, or global feelings— as well as their values and aspirations— such feelings, values, and aspirations are created by other factors external to language. Language expresses the unity that these factors facilitate and not the unity so identified with it (Nasong'o, 2015: 156).

A handful of ethnolinguistic groups questioned the validity of Tagalog as the basis language, defending the suitability of their local language to gain national prestige based on the rubrics set forth by the National Assembly. The Cebuanos decried the decision, since their language was the lingua franca of the Visayan region, which in itself comprised one-third of the principal geographical divisions of the archipelago. On top of this, a significant population of Mindanao belongs to the Visayan ethnolinguistic group, thus falling within the lingua franca's sphere of usage. The Ilocanos shared the same sentiment, since their language boasted an electric literary activity, one product of which is the remarkable *Biag ni Lam-ang* (The Life of Lam-Ang), the first ever Philippine folk epic to be documented in written form. Ilocano also serves as the lingua franca of the ethnolinguistically plural population of the Northern part of Luzon and is the language of assimilation used by the indigenous peoples of the North.

Adopting a Mother Tongue Approach

After having been through a destructive world war, a questionable declaration of independence, and a kleptocratic dictatorship, contemporary Philippines displays a discernable paradigm shift in its approach on the language question. The nationalist discourse seems to have been replaced by a cultural imperative to preserve indigenous heritage, which owes its vibrancy to the country's plural composition. There are now institutional efforts to address the question of multilingualism, not by privileging 'imperial Tagalog', but by promoting the use of regional languages and encouraging their literary development. One such effort is the unprecedented Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) system, a crucial component of the Department of Education's (DepEd's) radical educational reform known as the K to 12 Basic Education Program. K to 12 is a shorthand for the levels that comprise primary and secondary education standardized by the state and implemented by public education institutions in various countries like the United States, Canada, Australia, Singapore, Japan, Germany, China, and recently, the Philippines.

In School Year 2012-2013, the Philippine basic education system began its transition from the old 10-year program to the enhanced K to 12 curriculum, which DepEd describes as 'carefully studied and designed based on research from other countries and our own local successes and failures in education' (Estacio, 2015). Internationalization was the primary impetus behind the enactment of the structural reform since the 12-year program represented the globally recognized standard for pre-university education. As argued in a policy brief prepared by the Senate Economic Planning Office (2011), 'nearly all countries have complied with the 12-year global standard and the Philippines is one of the last holdouts. If less-developed and poorer countries can commit to providing a longer basic education cycle, why can't the Philippines?' But terms like 'global' and

‘internationalization’ have now become recognizable signposts of neoliberal thought, buzzwords that necessitate more critical elaboration. There is ample literature in Philippine academe that enquires into the politico-economic implications of adopting the K to 12 system, although the present study neither contributes to nor extends such enquiry, since its scope is minimized to only one reform covered by the K-12 restructuring.

One of the most significant changes brought about by the implementation of the Enhanced Basic Education Program was the introduction of the MTB-MLE. It is an approach to basic education that privileges the learner’s mother tongue, since its main directive is that the medium of instruction be the language of the region where the school stands. The bill that proposed MTB-MLE gained momentous support from proponents of cultural and heritage preservation, as there had been virtually no hitherto initiative on a state level towards this direction. In fact, the provisions of the Article on Education in the 1987 Constitution can be interpreted as a hierarchization of the proposed languages of instruction, with the regional language relegated to the bottom of the ladder.

Section 7. For purposes of communication and instruction, the official languages of the Philippines are Filipino and, until otherwise provided by law, English.

The regional languages are the auxiliary official languages in the regions and shall serve as auxiliary media of instruction therein.

Spanish and Arabic shall be promoted on a voluntary and optional basis.

Among the 175 indigenous living languages in the country, eight are categorized as major regional languages as they have the greatest number of speakers; these are Bikol, Sinugbuanong Binisaya (Cebuano Visayan), Hiligaynon (Ilonggo), Iloko, Kapampangan, Pangasinan, Tagalog, and Waray. All the major regional languages are covered by the MTB-MLE, with the inclusion of eleven other languages, namely, Ybanag, Bahasa Sug, Maguindanaoan, Maranao, Chavacano, Ivatan, Sambal, Akianon, Kinaray-a, Yakan, and Sinurigaanon. Within the mother tongue-based framework, these languages are implemented in two modules, both as an individual subject area (Mother Tongue) and as the medium of instruction in all learning areas except Filipino and English. In addition to the Mother Tongue subject, the two official languages of the Philippines are common subject areas across all regions.

The Department of Education’s decision to adhere to the mother-tongue framework is backed by numerous studies in the field of child pedagogy that substantiate the developmental advantages associated with using the child’s first language in the early stages of education (Cummins, 1978; Benson, 2005; Ball, 2010). While the principle is scarcely disputed by practitioners and theorists alike, there is much pragmatic debate surrounding the cost-effectiveness of its implementation. In 2004, Kimmo Kosonen, member of the UNESCO Regional Language and Education Issues Advisory Committee, did a comparative study of the language policies in the eleven nation-states comprising Southeast Asia, a region wherein a sizeable proportion of each national population is either bilingual or even plurilingual. After having assessed the conditions particular to each country, Kosonen (2005: 19) recommended that policymakers in all of Southeast Asia embrace a pro-mother tongue approach when crafting education policies, underscoring the financial feasibility of translating this approach into practice.

Research and practical experiences from around the world prove that the use of local languages in education is feasible. Curriculum development and materials production in

local languages can be cost-effective. Innovative teaching and learning practices and the use of “volunteer” teachers (native speakers of local languages) can help alleviate challenges that may seem to hinder the provision of education in the mother tongue. [...] This is an extremely important point, as a common argument against bilingual and multilingual education is its assumed costliness.

DepEd (2016) itself had conducted three language-teaching experiments to assess the supposed strengths of the native-language method; the first experiment was carried out in Iloilo from 1948 to 1954, followed by the Rizal Experiment from 1960 to 1966, and finally, the second Iloilo Experiment from 1961 to 1964. In all three experiments, the groups that were taught in their native tongue displayed significant achievement over the control groups whose medium of instruction was either English or Tagalog. The results of these experimentations corroborated abundant research in favor of the mother-tongue framework. DepEd (2016) concludes that ‘there is reason to believe that, especially at an early age, using the mother tongue helps the learning process by introducing concepts to students in the language they are most used to’. To facilitate multilingual learning that is developmentally appropriate, DepEd (2016) provides a timeline for the use of the mother tongue as medium of instruction, as well as the introduction of the additional languages, namely Filipino and English.

As a medium of instruction, the mother tongue is used in all learning areas from Kinder to Grade 3 except in teaching Filipino and English subjects. Filipino is introduced in the second quarter of Grade 1 for oral fluency (speaking). For reading and writing purposes, it will be taught beginning in the third quarter of Grade 1. The four other macro skills which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing in Filipino will continuously be developed from Grades 2 to 6.

This study examines the mother tongue as a learning area rather than evaluate its practice as the language of instruction. Foreign language teaching and second language pedagogy, regardless of the methodology adopted by the teacher, uniformly aim to develop the four major linguistic competencies: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Usó & Martínez, 2008). Since auditory perception plays a fundamental role in the cognitive and linguistic processes through which a child acquires his/her first language (Rost, 2002; Brown, 2012; Renukadevi, 2014), formally teaching said language primarily aims to hone the other three macro skills. DepEd (2016) echoes this, stating that ‘as a subject, mother tongue education focuses on the development of speaking, reading, and writing from Grades 1 to 3 in the mother tongue.’

Examining K-12 Literary Materials in Ilocano

When developing a learner’s literacy in written comprehension and in written and oral production, be it in the native tongue or in a second or foreign language, the success of the project cannot be divorced from the quality of the reading materials. While DepEd has made information about the Enhanced Basic Education Program and the MTB-MLE readily accessible, providing pertinent details about the program’s rationale and its methodology on their official website, there is a tangible lack of access to proposed learning materials for the Mother Tongue subject. This is not to say that there is virtually no attempt to address this gap on the department’s part. In fact, DepEd has created an online platform specifically to provide didactic materials in different learning areas, such as test questionnaires, reviewers, worksheets, teaching guides, and reading

materials. This instructional platform, which main objective is to aid public grade school teachers in preparing their daily lesson plans, is called DepEd Tambayan. Among the learning materials made accessible on the website are short stories for use in language classes. Of the eighteen indigenous languages (excluding the national language) adopted by the MTB-MLE system, Ilocano is the sole regional tongue represented on the online didactic platform. The compilation featured a series of 19 short stories written in the Ilocano language.

The other two compilations are in Filipino and in English, consisting of 31 and 10 short stories respectively. A complete list of the titles that comprise each collection, including an English translation of the Ilocano titles by the researcher, is provided for in Appendix A.

Through textual analysis, this paper seeks to examine the extent to which the Ilocano short stories provided by DepEd Tamabayan satisfy two of the four pillars of holistic learning that a mother tongue-based approach is believed to develop in the early stages of the child’s formal education, and which it will eventually strengthen as the child’s cognition and reasoning advance. According to DepEd’s (2016) rationale for enforcing the mother tongue methodology as a salient feature of the K to 12 curriculum, the following four areas of development will be adequately targeted:

Language Development	Students will establish a strong educational foundation in the language they know best; they will build a good “bridge” to the school language(s), and they will be prepared to use both/all of their languages for success in school and for life-long learning.
Cognitive Development	School activities will engage learners to move well beyond the basic questions of who, what, when, and where to cover all higher order thinking skills in the learners’ language of thought. These higher order thinking skills will: (1) transfer to the other languages once enough Filipino or English has been acquired to use these skills in thinking and articulating thought; and (2) be used in the process of acquiring English and Filipino more effectively.
Academic Development	Students will achieve the necessary competencies in each subject area and, at the end of the program, they will be prepared to enter and achieve well in the mainstream education system.
Socio-cultural Development	Students will be proud of their heritage language and culture, and respect the languages and cultures of others; they will be prepared to contribute productively to their own community and to the larger society.

Since the scope of the study is limited to the text, i.e., the language and content of the given didactic materials, only the linguistic and sociocultural elements of holistic learning can be considered when interrogating the suitability of the short stories in focus. An adequate assessment of cognitive and academic development would necessitate a quantitative data analysis of student performance; thus, these aspects of the learner’s development fall outside the present study’s purview. For this reason, this paper can be read as a language-specific preliminary study of the quality of learning materials and teacher guides made accessible by DepEd to public school teachers who handle the Mother Tongue subject.

The principal objective of MTB-MLE is to make ‘Filipino children life-long learners in their L1 (MT), L2 (Filipino, the national language), and L3 (English, the global language)’ (DepEd, 2013). The mother tongue is hence perceived as the child’s gateway to learning a second language, and in the Philippine context, even a third or a fourth one. As mentioned above, this study will focus on the mother tongue as a learning area, rather than a medium of instruction. It shall nevertheless be noted that the two are not mutually exclusive. For the latter to be a viable gateway or, as DepEd qualifies it, a ‘strong bridge’ to building core skills in the L2 and L3, it is imperative that a solid foundation of the native language itself be established in the learner’s formative years. The child must therefore gain a linguistic and semantic understanding of his/her first language that extends beyond mere acquisition. This point cannot be stressed enough, especially in a multilingual society like the Philippines where colonial and national tensions are translated into the politics of language. This kind of politics has been historically manifest through the privileging of the national language on one hand, and the global language on the other. Even between the two there remains an undeniable partiality towards the use of the English language by the formal sector, starting from primary education all the way up to the professional realm. Within this context, the regional language is consequently consigned to use in the socio-familial sphere, at home with the family or with one’s *kababayan* (townmate). Given all these considerations, the Mother Tongue as a learning area proves critical to the success of the entire MTB-MLE framework.

For the successful enactment of the MTB-MLE curriculum, DepEd (2013) proposes that educators utilize the two-track method which targets both linguistic accuracy (via the primer track) and semantic competence (via the story track). Below is a table that illustrates the standards set forth by DepEd following the two-track method in teaching the Mother Tongue subject.

	Story track <i>Focus on meaning</i>	Primer track <i>Focus on correctness</i>
Listening	Listen in order to understand, think critically, respond creatively	Recognize and distinguish sounds; recognize parts of words
Speaking	Speak with understanding to communicate knowledge, ideas, experiences	Use correct vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar
Reading	Read with understanding to apply, analyze, evaluate, and to create new knowledge	Decode by recognizing parts of words, sentences
Writing	Write to communicate knowledge, ideas, experiences, goals	Form words properly and neatly; spell words accurately; use correct grammar
Viewing	View in order to understand, think critically, respond creatively	Recognize and distinguish print and non-print materials and be able to critique the materials objectively

From this illustration, it is evident that literature emerges as instrumental to establishing and eventually strengthening the child’s semantic and linguistic competencies. That literature is adapted as a didactic material in the form of short stories is appropriate for primary education. Although it is not explicitly stated on the DepEd Tambayan website, the compilations are intended for reading by students from Grades 1 to 3, as these are the three levels in which the

MTB-MLE curriculum aims to develop speaking, reading, and writing skills in the mother tongue (DepEd, 2016).

The short stories that comprise the Ilocano compilation have an average length of 194 words. Most of the short stories are one-pagers. The longest of the collection entitled *Naragsak a Paskua* ‘Merry Christmas’ has a word count of 420, while the shortest one entitled ‘News Story’ consists of only 119 words. Despite the brevity of the stories, there seems to be no trace of any proofreading mechanism before the stories had been made public and easily accessible online. This is evidenced by the numerous errors that pervade every single one of the stories in the collection. After a thorough proofreading of the nineteen short stories that comprise the Ilocano compilation, the researcher found repetitive errors which can be classified as follows:

ORTHOGRAPHIC	GRAMMATICAL
<p>ERRONEOUS SPACES</p> <p>Error: <i>Sumrek ta</i> ‘Let’s go inside’ should be written as <i>Sumrekta</i> Explanation: <i>ta</i> is an enclitic first-person-dual pronoun; Ilocano has enclitic absolutive personal pronouns which attach to the preceding word</p>	
<p>CAPITALIZATION</p> <p>Error: <i>Sika</i> ‘Elbow’ Explanation: Some common nouns are capitalized while there are proper nouns that are not capitalized.</p>	<p>INCORRECT DETERMINERS</p> <p>Some stories do not differentiate the following Ilocano determiners from one another and use them interchangeably:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>ti</i> (common article for singular direct case) - <i>dagiti</i> (common article for plural direct case) - <i>iti</i> (common article for singular oblique case) - <i>kadagiti</i> (common article for plural oblique case)
<p>GRAPHEME OMISSION</p> <p>Error: <i>Pasit a miredatayo</i> Explanation: The above phrase means nothing in Ilocano but sounds like <i>pansit a meriendatayo</i> ‘pancit that we will eat for snacks’.</p>	
<p>WORD OMISSION</p> <p>Error: “<i>Hello ikit, uliteg, Kumusta kayo?</i>” <i>sana inyawat ti [?] tapno agmano.</i> Explanation: Translating the above sentence reveals a lack of direct object to form a complete sense (“Hello auntie, uncle, How are you?” then he extends [?] to pay respect).</p>	<p>INCORRECT VERBAL ASPECT</p> <p>Error: <i>Madamak man a tarimaanen</i> ‘I am currently going to fix it’ Explanation: The adverb of time is incongruent with the aspect of the verb.</p>

For the reader to gain a sense of the volume of deviations from standard Ilocano grammar that percolate the texts, the researcher has included a proofread copy of the longest story, *Naragsak a Paskua* ‘Merry Christmas’ written by Conchita Rarangor (see Appendix B). The huge quantity of linguistic deviations is, simply put, disturbing, as it carries drastic implications for the quality of language learning that can be expected from using these texts as didactic materials.

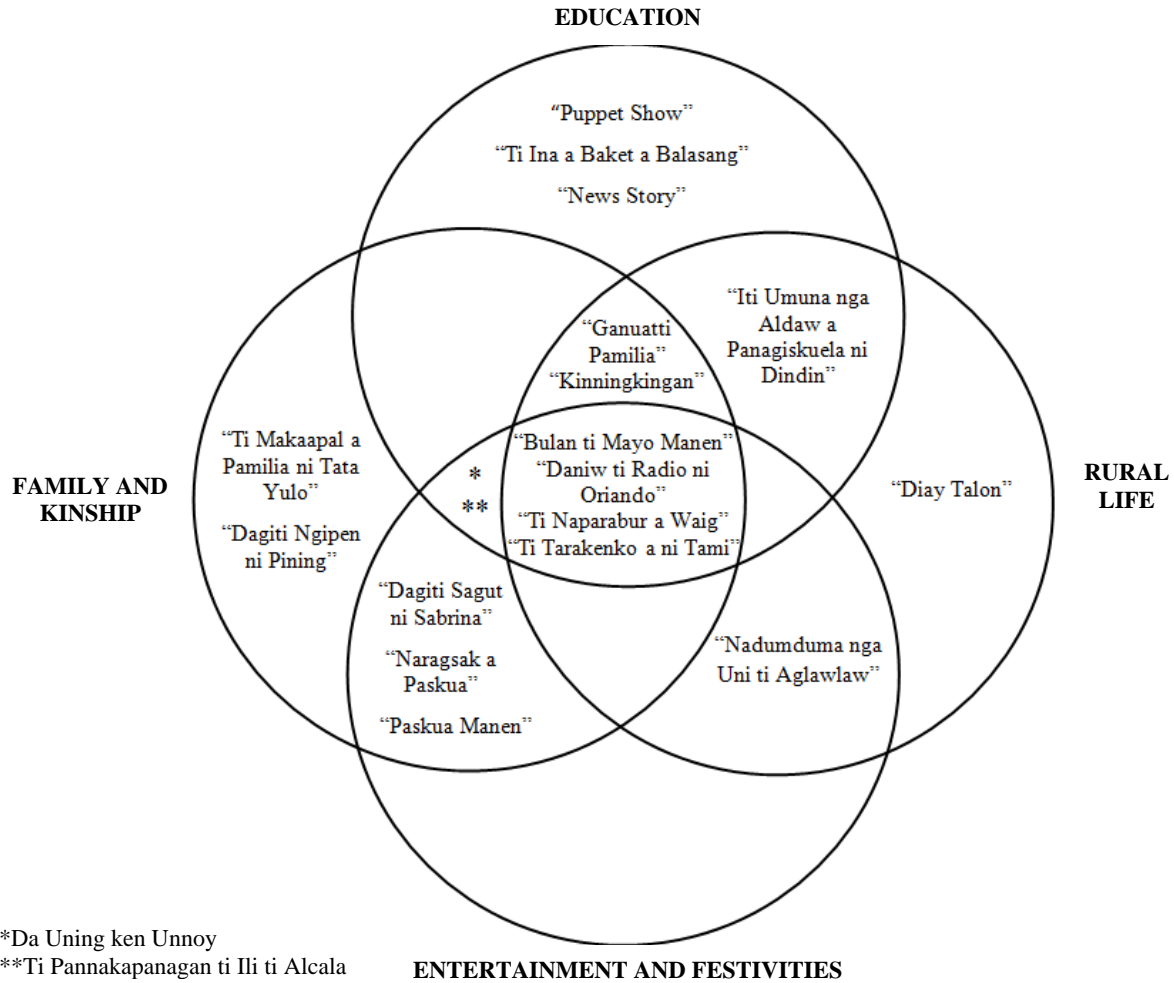
Here we must highlight the often-overlooked distinction between language acquisition and language learning, specifically in the case of the child's first language. While the former occurs naturally through social situations that inevitably involve communicative interactions, the latter is carried out formally through a conscious effort to gain structured knowledge of the features of the target language, often in an institutional setting (Da Cruz, 2015). Thus, a child who grows up in the Ilocano-speaking province of Tuguegarao will acquire Ilocano thanks to a quotidian exposure to the language in her formative years. When this child enters a public elementary school and reaches first grade, she will 're-learn' her own language in a classroom setting through the Mother Tongue subject. This time, however, she is supposed to be made aware that there are rules that govern the way she reads, speaks, and writes, and is thus expected to be conscious of how to accurately perform these activities. Unfortunately, it is common practice not to differentiate these two developmental processes. From this derives a general tendency to minimize the importance of classroom language learning when the target language is the native language itself. There is a misguided assumption, from the students and the teachers alike, that learning the rules of the language will come automatically. On an institutional level, the abovementioned tendency is manifest in the lack of precision with which learning materials are curated, if there are any materials at all.

Two important questions pertinent to the present study arise from this argument. First, who was responsible for selecting the stories featured by DepEd Tambayan and how were they selected? Second, how are these materials disseminated among the Mother Tongue teachers? While DepEd's official website has provided open access to the research and rationale of the entire Enhanced Basic Education Program, the Department's instructional portal does not reflect the same level of transparency. In the case of the K to 12 Ilocano compilation, the selection process remains unknown to the researcher due in part to the scarcity of readily available information about how the learning materials were designed and developed. Nine of the 19 Ilocano short stories were penned by Leila P. Areola, Ph.D. of the Office of the Schools Division Superintendent of the Department of Education's regional office in Cagayan. An interview with the author herself, or a knowledgeable representative of the Schools Division Office, is necessary to gain an insight into the division of work that produced this compilation. This is an important point that begs to be elaborated on through further research, and which cannot be addressed presently owing to the stubborn lack of response from said office.

In any case, there is an evident danger in using these mistake-ridden stories as reading materials for first to third grade-level students in public schools across *Ilocandia*, the homeland of the Ilocano people extending from the Ilocas Region to the Cagayan Valley and the northernmost areas of Central Luzon. Going back to our example of the first-grader from Tuguegarao, her learning process will be muddled rather than facilitated, since the language input from the reading materials might prove inconsistent with the language input from her natural environment. Furthermore, the capacity for error analysis cannot be expected to occur at such an early stage in her language development, causing her to have difficulties in identifying the mistakes in the stories. Unless proper feedback is provided for, the danger persists that she will grow up thinking that these misspellings and misusages are correct. Considering that the K to 12 curriculum prescribes the instruction of the Mother Tongue as a learning area only until the third-grade level, and supposing that the source of learning materials is uniform throughout, these mistakes might eventually be fossilized. In such a case, MTB-MLE's two-method track

would fail to deliver, seeing that the story track intended to convey meaning would doubtless interfere with the primer track meant to develop accuracy among the learners. How can the child achieve the level of writing proficiency required to ‘form words properly and neatly’, ‘spell words accurately’, and ‘use correct grammar’ (DepEd 2013), if the materials for reading comprehension – which is a prerequisite skill for written production – are grammatically and orthographically flawed? In sum, a rudimentary linguistic analysis of the K to 12 Ilocano short stories provided by DepEd Tambayan, the department’s didactic portal, points to failure on the part of the institution itself to meet the standards that it had specified on its curriculum guide. If the quality of the reading materials in question prove inadequate in targeting linguistic accuracy among the Ilocano mother tongue learners, how suitable is the narrative content in achieving the learning competencies laid out on the MTB-MLE story track?

A quick look at the Ilocano titles tells us that the stories that form the collection do not include translations of popular stories originally written in a language other than Ilocano. This is in contrast with the Filipino compilation which features well-known children’s tales in the Anglophonic imagination that have been adapted into Tagalog, like ‘Jack and the Bean Stalk’ and Aesop’s ‘The Lion and the Mouse’, on top of biblical parables such as the story of Cain and Abel and the ubiquitous ‘Noah’s Ark’. Nor does the Ilocano compilation contain any well-loved fable that is very much present in the Filipino folk literature, for instance, *Si Pagong at si Matsing* ‘The Turtle and the Monkey’. Reading through the Ilocano stories, it is bared apparent that none of these can be classified as allegorical tales nor do these shorts contain moralizing tropes that are characteristic of many works of children literature. The stories unfold through a consistently straightforward style of writing that seems to depict objective reality, which in turn evokes an unmistakable sense of familiarity to its intended audience, i.e. children of six to nine years-old enrolled in public elementary schools. While it is imperative to acknowledge that people – even those borne into families of equal socioeconomic status – do not perceive one monolithic reality, children who grow up in the same tight-knit community will inevitably share certain lived experiences. Rather than infuse the stories with fantastical elements that are anticipated to appeal to a child’s fanciful imagination, all nineteen authors seem to highlight the banalities of daily life, eliciting this perceptible familiarity in the narrative. There are overarching themes that characterize the compilation such as education, family and kinship, rural life, and entertainment and festivities. The stories can be grouped according to these common themes, as illustrated by the following diagram:



As depicted above, twelve stories (which translate to roughly 63% of the compilation) mentions the child’s schooling, whether simply interspersed in the dialogue or as the story’s central theme itself. In *Puppet Show* (author unknown) – the sole story set in the classroom – several working adults visit the class to introduce themselves to the students and explain what kind of work they do. Among them are an engineer, a policeman, a farmer, a plaza vendor, a fisherman, a nurse, and a town councilor. They are warmly welcomed by the students who are thankful for their visit: *Naragsakan dagiti ubbing a dimngeg kadagiti sangailida. Nagyamanada kadakuada iti iyuumayda*. ‘The children are delighted to listen to their townmates. They thanked them for coming to visit’. The world of adults is portrayed to the students with equal respect for the professional sector and the rural working class alike. It shows how the children can draw inspiration from the grown-ups of their hometown.

The story that most explicitly situates education within the community’s ethos is *Ti Pannakapanagan ti Ili ti Alcala* ‘How the Town of Alcala Got Its Name’ by Grace Donata Abugan. The following dialogue between Pepe and his grandfather exemplifies the people of Cagayan’s profound reverence for education: *“Nagpintas gayam ti kaipapanan ti nagan ti ili tayo, Apong,” kinuna ni Pepe. “Agpaypaysodata, apok. Isu nga agbasaka a nasayaat tapno sika let agbalin a pigsawenno sarikedked ti ili tayo,” kinuna ni Apong Pedong. “Wen Apong,”*

insungbat ni Pepe. “The meaning of our town’s name is beautiful after all, Grandpa,” Pepe said. “That’s true, my grandchild. That’s why you should study hard so that you will be our hometown’s strength or fortification.” Here, education is painted as being instrumental to the success of the whole community and not just of the individual. Andres (2005) makes an ethnographical note, stating that the great value attached by Ilocano people to education is reflected by their veneration of highly educated people. Such respect is further expressed politically, as electoral candidates who possess laudable educational qualifications tend to have greater success. Among the sixteen Philippine presidents, six are of ethnic Ilocano descent, namely Elpidio Quirino (Ilocos Sur), Ramon Magsaysay (Zambales), Carlos P. Garcia (born and raised in Bohol by parents from Abra), Ferdinand Marcos (Ilocos Norte), and Fidel Ramos (Pangasinan).

Ti Pannakapanagan ti Ili ti Alcala (How the Town of Alcala Got Its Name) is, furthermore, the only story that makes any mention of history, specifically, the Spanish colonial occupation. This period of Philippine history was cited matter-of-factly as a mere reference point to which the characters’ hometown owes its present name: “*Nasukatandaytoy iti Alcala idi panawen dagiti Kastila kas pammadayaw kenni Don Francisco de Paula Alcala, ti Gobernador Heneral ti Pilipinas iti dayta a panawen. Ti kaipapanan ti sarita nga Alcala ket pigsawenno sarikedked,*” *intuloy ni Apong Pedong*. “This was changed to Alcala during the time of the Spaniards as an honor to Don Francisco de Paula Alcala, the Philippine’s governor general at that time. The word Alcala means strength or fortification,” continued Grandfather Pedong. The tone employed by the grandfather seems of utmost neutrality, since the innocuous word ‘time’ is used instead of a visibly loaded phrase like ‘colonial rule’ or ‘occupation’. Yet this rhetorical device is likewise noticeable in spoken Filipino, especially among elders who would talk about the past using periods of colonization as time markers, with all-too common expressions like *noong panahon ng mga Amerikano* ‘during the time of the Americans’ and *noong dumating ang mga Hapon* ‘when the Japanese arrived’.

The only listening story of the collection, *Da Uning ken Unnoy* (Uning and Unnoy) by Marjunetly B. Manzano, talks about the evening routine of Uning and her little brother, Unnoy. Although the story highlights the siblings’ joyful banter while playing hide-and-seek, it nevertheless ends on a scholastic note: *Nagpaysuro dagiti agkabsat kadagiti leksionda ken ni nanangda sakbayda a naturog. Nalag-an ti riknada a nakataruog [ta] nadalus ken nabanglo ti bagida*. ‘The two siblings asked their mother to teach them their lessons just before going to bed. They felt light and at ease as they slept, their bodies clean and fresh.’ That the children’s day would not be complete without having studied their lessons is clearly suggested here. The story can also serve as a gentle reminder to children that they have tasks to accomplish after playing, such as helping with domestic chores, keeping themselves clean, and finally, doing their school work for the day: *Tinulonganda metten ni nanangda a nagidaar iti pangmalem*. ‘They helped their mother serve dinner on the table’; *Idi makainnawda, nagsipilyo dagiti ubbing ken nagsarunoda a naglabar diay asideg ti bubon. Binuguan ni Unnoy dagiti ima ken sakana. Sinabon met ni Uning a nalaing dagiti uring-uring a rupa [ken] sikona*. ‘After washing the dishes, they brushed their teeth and washed themselves near the well. Unnoy washed his hands and feet. Uning, on the other hand, washed her dusty face and her elbows well’.

In *Iti Umuna nga Aldaw a Panageskuela ni Dindin* (Dindin’s First Day of School) by Dr. Leila P. Areola, our little protagonist is woken up by her mother then greeted with a warm “*Naimbag a bigatmo, Dindin...*” “Good morning to you, Dindin...” by each member of the family. She eats a hearty breakfast which her parents prepared to get her ready for her first day. The story ends on a cheerful note: *Siraragsak ni Dindin a simrek iti pageskuelaanna*. ‘Dindin joyfully goes to her school.’ Both stories mentioned so far underscores the important role that parents play in their child’s education. Here we must note the stronger emphasis placed on the mother with regards to educating the child. Curiously, the ancient custom of dowry (*Bigaycaya* ‘lit. give what one can’) observable among the inhabitants of Ilocos had conditions specific to the mother of the bride. “Included in the *Bigaycaya* is what they called *Pangimuyat*, which is what had to be paid to the mother for the sleepless nights and work she had put into bringing up and educating her daughter” (De Los Reyes, 2014: 119).

Underscoring parental roles is part of a broader facet of culture that is integral to Ilocano, and in the same vein, Filipino lowland identity: the significance of kinship. All the stories that revolve around or include elements of kinship have as a focal point the division of labor among the different members of the family. One story in particular, *Ganuatti Pamilia* (Family Work) by Beverly S. Cordero, is a simple breakdown of the duties assigned to each family member on a particular Saturday. The way the story opens suggests that even on a day of rest, there is much work that needs to be done: *Bakasyon. Aldaw ti sabado. Adda ganuat dagiti pamilia ni Mang Gaspar iti pagtaenganda*. ‘Summer. Saturday. Mang Gaspar’s family has errands to do for the household.’ The father wakes the whole family up, and with a commanding tone, starts assigning tasks: “*Agriingkayon annako ta arramidenyo daitoy ibagak!*” *awag ni tatang*. “Wake up, my children, and do as I say!” the father called out. The father does not assume an assertive tone throughout the story, because soon enough the children, one after the other, cheerfully volunteer to do certain tasks, such as watering the plants, feeding the animals, and washing the dishes: “*Wen, Tatang, agsibugakto pay. Kargaak dagitoy gallon ti danum idiaq bubon,*” *sirragsak ni Gabo a nangibaga kenni tatangna*. “Yes, Father, I will water the plants too. I’m going to fill these pails with water from the well,” Gabo joyfully told his father; “*Siak met mangpakan dagitoy taraken tayo aganso, Tatang,*” *insaruno ni Galo*. “And I’ll be the one to feed our geese, Father,” Galo continued; “*Ugasak met dagitoy garapon a nagyanan iti gatas, Nanang,*” *kinuna met ni Grace* “*And I’ll be the one to wash the jars that contained milk, Mother,*” *Grace said*. A common feature among the children in the stories is their readiness to do errands. These children characters are portrayed as drawing genuine joy from assisting their parents. While the adults remind them of their responsibilities, they execute their chores with ease and independence.

Several of the duties and responsibilities expected of children are evidently applicable in a rural setting, often depicting the simple joys of farm life. In the story, *Diay Talon* ‘In the Fields’ by Elvie Salas, the protagonist Elyo visits his brother Danilo and sister Dana in their house deep into the rice fields where he sees the many different farm animals that give them life (*panagbiag*): *Dakkel ti maitulong dagitoy a dinguenta iti panagbiagda. Inaldaw nga agakasda kadagiti itlog dagiti manok ken patoda. Dakkel a tulong dagiti maalada a gatas dagiti kalding, baka ken nuang nga ilaklakoda*. ‘These farm animals are such a big help for their livelihood. Every day, they harvest eggs from their chickens and ducks. Also a big help is the milk that they get from the goats and carabaos that they sell.’ While there is one story that features a household pet such as the fat goldfish in *Ti Tarakenko a ni Tami* (My Pet Tami) by Dr. Leila P. Areola,

animals are generally depicted as integral members of the household without which the family would not be self-sufficient. The mother in *Ganuatti Pamilia* (Family Work) best exemplifies the undeniable interdependence of man with nature, a philosophy that still holds true among rural Ilocano folks: *Innayun pay ni Nanang, “Kasta anakko, aggaggaget, agsalukag kayo, taripatukenyo dagiti dinggen ken mulmulatayo tapno adda kanayon a pangalaan iti pagbiag tayo.”* Mother added, “That’s right, my child. Work hard, persevere, look after our animals and plants so that we will always have something to get our livelihood from.” Perhaps the most well-known stereotype directed towards the Ilocanos by other ethnic groups are their being stingy. This often-maligned trait is interpreted by Ilocanos themselves as a reflection of their being hardworking. That they are perceived both from within and without as an industrious people arises from the material conditions of *Ilocandia*’s occupants, whose sustenance they largely owe to agriculture and fishing. Ilocano farmers work hard because their land is unforgiving. Often hit by storms and other such natural calamities that damage their crops and obstruct their livelihood, the inhabitants of Northern Luzon consider their hard earnings as extremely valuable (*napaténg*), and as such they spend these with extreme caution and allocate their money with much precision. Andres (2005) notes that many of Cagayan’s inhabitants consider going to the hospital a luxury and would prefer to seek medical help from a faith healer, so that the money saved from medical fees can be used in more important things such as investing in a house, a business, and the children’s education. Despite the perceived stinginess of Ilocanos, a few stories in the collection depict an appreciation for festivities which bring the family together. The simple fare of *udang* (shrimp), *ubog* (bamboo shoot), and *inabraw nga uggot ti kamotit ken utong* (vegetable broth with sweet potato shoots and string beans) that occupy the dining table in *Da Uning Ken Unnoy* (Uning and Unnoy) reads as a stark contrast to the hearty dishes that are served during Christmas day, the most festive part of the year. Amidst the jovial mood in *Naragsak A Paskua* (Merry Christmas) by Conchita Rarangor and *Paskua Manen* (It’s Christmas Time Again), the division of labor in the kinship system, including extended family members, is nonetheless present. Every member is expected to contribute to ensure that the feast is a success, and each one exhibits an unaffected sense of joy in doing so. When the children in the stories receive gifts, they never fail to display their gratitude and are ever affectionate to all the family members, especially to the adults, like Nanang (Mom), Tatang (Dad), Lilo (Grandpa), Lila (Grandma), Uliteg (Uncle) and Ikit (Aunt).

The simplicity of the register with which all the stories are written is appropriate for beginner reading in the child’s mother tongue, and the familiar narrative is something that a child might easily identify with. The first is instrumental in harnessing the child’s semantic competence, while the latter is especially significant for language learning’s sociocultural dimension. Although the Ilocano compilation is neither marked by allegorical elements nor by moralizing tropes, there are core values that are presented to the reader in an effortless manner through realist circumstances and familial set-ups. Rather than propose an entirely new value system to the child, the stories seem to reinforce ideal traits that already exist within the target culture. She is made aware of the importance of education both on an individual and on a societal level. That education is professed as the child’s key to becoming the ‘strength’ of her hometown instills in her a sense of obligation to the community who raised her. She is expected not just to be responsible, but to know what her responsibilities are, to be self-sufficient, and to help others (especially her family) without a second thought. She is taught to treat animals and plants with utmost respect, knowing that they offer so much to human beings. She is encouraged to play and

share modest pleasures with her friends and siblings, yet she must always be grateful for what she receives.

Conclusion

Having read the Ilocano short stories with the two-track framework in mind, the researcher has discerned a drastic gap between the texts' language and their content. Through the texts, the learner could easily gain the capacity to interpret meaning; yet these same stories will obstruct the development of the learner's linguistic accuracy. It goes without saying that neither is more important than the other. For the Mother Tongue as a learning area to be instrumental in realizing both the language and sociocultural pillars of MTB-MLE, development in both aspects of learning must be parallel. If the primary rationale behind enacting the mother-tongue approach is to provide every Filipino child regardless of ethnolinguistic origin the necessary toolkit to gain competencies in additional languages and in other areas of learning, then the Department of Education should see to it that properly assessed and carefully designed resources are provided for. Not only does utilizing flawed didactic materials fall short of MTB-MLE's noble objectives, it will eventually create more problems by widening the already disparate gap between the learner's native language and other more culturally prestigious and more commercially remunerative languages. Equally worrisome as the questionable quality of the Ilocano texts are the non-existent literary materials on the DepEd-run didactic portal in the seventeen other languages adopted by the MTB-MLE system. Instead of creating a level playing field among the children in the nation's political center and those who find themselves in the periphery, the lack of suitable materials will reinforce the marginalization of regional languages with respect to the national language, and that of the national language with respect to the global language. While DepEd Tambayan's effort to provide reading materials for the Mother Tongue subject is a commendable step, it is unfortunately indicative of the department's ineptitude in implementing the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education Program, which in turn is symptomatic of the hastiness of the whole K to 12 project. As mentioned above, there are gaps in this study that need to be addressed through a more thorough research and data-gathering activities such as surveys and interviews with learners, educators, and policymakers.

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Appendix A

Below are the titles that comprise the three compilations of short stories uploaded by DepEd Tambayan (DepEd, 2017). These stories are also available on the official Facebook page of DepEd Tamabayan.

K-12 Short Stories Compiled (Based on TGs and LMs)		
Filipino	English	Ilocano
Ang Batang May Maraming Bahay	A Lesson for John Benedict	Bulan ti Mayo Manen (It's May Once Again)
Ang Hardinerong Tipaklong	Androcles and the Lion	Da Uning Ken Unnoy (Listening Story) [Uning and Unnoy (Listening Story)]
Ang Kwento ni Binibining Repolyo	Emang the Enchanter and the Three Brats	Dagiti Ngipen ni Pining (Pining's Teeth)
Ang Leon at ang Daga	Fish is Fish	Dagiti Sagut ni Sabrina (Sabrina's Gifts)
Ang Pambihirang Sombrero	Mushroom in the Rain	Daniw ti Radio ni Oriando (The Melody of Oriando's Radio)
Ang Pamilyang Ismid	The Green Bird	Diay Talon (In the Fields)
Ang Puting Sapatos	The Grouchy Ladybug	Ganuatti Pamilya (Family Work)
Ang Sikretong Rekado	The King of the Forest and His Three Advisers	Iti Umuna nga Aldaw a Panagiskuella ni Dindin (Dindin's First Day of School)
Arroz Caldo ni Lolo Waldo Story	The Tomatoes of Peles	Kinningkingan (Hopscotch)
Basura Kid	Tower to the Moon	Nadumaduma nga Uni ti Aglawlaw (The Many Different Sounds in our Surroundings)
Handog Kay Isabella		Naragsak a Paskua (Merry Christmas)
Hipon at Biya		News Story
Jack and the Beanstalk (TAGALOG)		Paskua Manen (It's Christmastime Again)
Laki sa Hirap		Puppet Show
Lolit, Lamok ng Dengue		Ti Ina a Baket a Balasang (The Old Spinster's Mother)
Magtanim Upang Mabuhay		Ti Nakaapal* a Pamilya ni Tata Yulo (Tata Yulo's Envious Family)
Mariang Sinukuan		Ti Naparabur a Waig (The Gift-giving Stream)

May Lakad Kami ni Tatay	Ti Pannakapanagan ti Ili ti Alcala (How the Town of Alcala Got its Name)
Puno Para sa Lahat	Ti Tarakenko a ni Tami (My Pet Tami)
Si Bing ang Munting Butanding	
Si Cain at si Abel	
Si Dindo Pundido Story	
Si Emang Engkantanda at ang Tatlong Haragan	
Si Faisal at Si Farida	
Si Gong Galunggong	
Si Jose, Ang Batang Magalang	
Si Nina at ang bayan ng Daldadlina	
Si Noah at ang Malaking Baha	
Si Pagong at si Matsing	
Si Sibol at si Gunaw	
Talagang Maipagmamalaki ang Bagong Bayani	

*The title has a typographical error. The word *nakaapal* does not mean anything in Ilocano and should read as *makaapal* to mean ‘envious.’

Naragsak ^{lc} A Paskua

Sarita ni Conchita Rarangor

Inawis da tata Homer ken Nana Huling ⁿⁱ da Mang Hulio ken ti pamilana nga umay makipaskua idiyay balayda. Naragsakan ⁿⁱ ti Henry a nakaammonga agawid da uliteg na a Hulio a kabsat ni tatangna. Maysa isuna a ^e hepe ^{e it} ti pulisya

"Nanang ania ngarud ti lutuem para Noche Buena?"

sinaludsodna. Aglutuakto ti sinuman, tupig, pansit, macaroni ken tay paborito ni ulitegmo a bibingka a kahoy kinunana.

"Ala anak tulungannak nga agdalus dito balay ket dandanidan sumangpeten. Bayat pinagdaldalusda ket nakangeg ^{ng it} ti danarudor ti lugan ni Henry.

Timmaray arimmuar tapno kitaen ^{iti} simmangpet.

"Tatang, Nanang adda ^{en} da uliteg Henry" impigsana. "Hello ikit, uliteg, Kumusta ^{lc} kayo?" sana inyawat ^{imana} ti tapno agmano. "Hello! insan ^{ng} nagguapo kan [#] inyangaw na inabrasa.

Simrek ^{iti} da ngarud ^a ti uneg nga bitbit ni Mang Hulio ti maysa a dakkel a kahon. Sinabat ida ni Nana Huling sana kinuna [#] "Ala aginana ^{kayo} kayo pay lang."

"Pagiin-nanaanyo agmiryenda ^{e i} kayo ta innak mangisagana ^t

pangaldaw tayo," kinunana.

"Manang, apay kasla awan ni Manong?" saludsod ni Mang Hulio.

"Adda dita garahe ading inkan danunen, siguro saan na nadlaw ti isasangpetyo," insungbat met ni Nana Huling. Napan ngarud ^{idiay} ~~diay~~ garahe ni Mang Hulio.

"Kumusta Manong? ania aya dayta pakakumikumam?" sinaludsod na "A, e..., adda ^{kay} [^]

~~kay~~ gayamen ading." "Kaasi ni Apo nasalunaat kam met."

"Madamak man a ^{tar} tarimaanen toy hawla dagitoy taraken a kuneho daytoy kaanakam, ikkakman ^{iti} ^{iti} rehasna tapno makalang-ab ^{iti} ^{iti} presko nga angin" insungbat manen ni Mang Homer.

"Tatang ^{ic} Uliteg mangan tayan" awis ni Henry. Naragsakda a nagpipinnadamag bayat pinnanganda.

Iti mumalen ^m oras alas tres makumikom da Nana Huling ken Nana Heling nga mangisagsagana't makmakan para NocheBuena.

Bayat panagsagsaganada adda met da Henry ken henyo ^{idiay} ^{diay} hardin.

Pinalusutan da dagiti kuneho sada pinagpipinnalumba.

Nakaragragsakda ket saan payen mapuotan ^{ti} ^a pinaglabas iti oras.

"Henry, henyo isardeng yon agay-ayam rumabiin inkay agbuggon ta mangrabii tayan" kinuna ni Nana Huling. "Wen, ikit" "Wen nanang naggiddan da a simmungbat."

Napanda ngarud nagbuggo. Innala ni Henry ti tualya ken balde.

Bitbit met ni Henyo ti habonera a pagyanan ^{iti} ti-sabon.

Alas onse ti rabii nagriing da Nana Huling ken Nana Heling tapno
inda isagana ^{ti} nadumaduma [#] amakmakan para Noche Buena [#] Adda

suman, tupig, bibingka a kahoy, [#] pansit, ^k macaroni ken adda pay

hamon a paborito da Henry ken Henyo. Inkabilda dagitoy iti

dadakkel a pandehado. [#] Nadanonan ti alas dose ti rabii, [#] naragsak ^{da}

nga nagkikinnablaaw sada pinagsasangoan ^{dagiti} inda insagana ^{da}.

Naragsakda ^{nga} a-agi-innawat ^{iti} regalo kas paset ti pinagkikinnablaawda.