Lexicographical Verification of Chabacano Usage in Zamboanga City: A Basis for Lexicographical Revamp through Legislation

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A B S T R A C T

This study aims to verify whether selected entries in the existing Chabacano lexicography of Zamboanga City accurately reflect contemporary language use and to identify the words that speakers actually employ in everyday communication. Specifically, it examines the extent to which the current dictionary aligns with the lived linguistic practices of Chabacano language professionals and explores the implications of any mismatch for language planning and policy. Using descriptive and exploratory research design, the study analyzes responses from Chabacano language professionals in secondary and tertiary educational institutions. Sixty lexicographic entries were randomly selected from the existing dictionary and evaluated through a checklist type instrument, complemented by open-ended responses. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, categorical ranking, and qualitative content analysis. The findings reveal a substantial gap between the existing lexicographic entries and actual language use. A majority of the listed words were identified as rarely used or no longer used in daily communication, while a smaller set remained functionally active, particularly in institutional, legal, and contemporary contexts. Language professionals frequently relied on alternative lexical forms, including Spanish-derived terms, English borrowings, Filipino influences, and descriptive phrases, indicating dynamic lexical adaptation rather than strict adherence to dictionary forms. These patterns highlight ongoing lexical shift, simplification, and borrowing in Chabacano. The study concludes that the current lexicography does not sufficiently represent contemporary Chabacano usage and underscores the need for systematic, evidence-based lexicographical revision. The findings support the adoption of a descriptive, usage-driven approach to dictionary development and provide an empirical basis for legislative and institutional actions aimed at preserving, standardizing, and sustaining Chabacano as a living language in education, governance, and cultural life.

1. INTRODUCTION

Based on a report by the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino (KWF, 2015), the Philippines is home to 135 living languages and that of these languages, Chabacano is said to be the only creole language. Chabacano is spoken in the southwestern part of the Philippines, predominantly in the city of Zamboanga and sparsely in the city of Isabela, province of Basilan. It is a unique mixture of Spanish, Tagalog, and other various indigenous languages reflecting the city's history of a melting pot of cultures (Camins, 1999). Moreover, Chabacano has been spoken for hundreds of years in some parts of Mindanao and Luzon and passed on from one generation to the next (Lear 2 & Reyes, 2023). Sometime in June 2018, the former City Mayor of Zamboanga, Maria Isabelle G. Climaco-Salazar, in her capacity as the local chief executive, led the launching of the Chabacano Lexicography – a comprehensive Chabacano dictionary split into two volumes, with the first volume covering A-M and the second volume taking up N-Z, as part of the observance of the 7th Dia de Fundacion de Zamboanga per City Ordinance No. 374 (Climaco, 2018; City of Zamboanga, 2017). The project director and/or editor was the then-former Assistant City Administrator, the late Dr. Jose Genaro Ruste Yap-Aizon (fondly called as "Sir Jojo"). While such an attempt is commendable in preserving, promoting, and propagating

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the Chabacano language, the researchers of this study received feedback that most, if not some, of the translated words used in the same dictionary, unfortunately do not reflect or capture how Chabacano is used in everyday conversation. The importance of a dictionary in a given culture is without a question, indispensable. In fact, in the field of language research, it is considered to be a treasure reflective of society's heritage and cultural identity; thus, is a vital source of literacy for a group of speakers of a particular language (Merabishvili, 2016). On a different note, Himoro (2019) disclosed that there are evidences to show that Chabacano is no longer the preferred language for interaction and socialization among the younger groups in Zamboanga City which sends quite an alarming message as to its future. Similarly, according to Himoro and Pareja-Lora (2020), using some data from the National Statistics Office (presently the Philippine Statistics Office or PSA) as basis indicate that:

Table 1

Year	%	No. of speakers	Population
1970	58.33%	116,611	199,901
1980	53.15%	182,701	343,722
1990	48.71%	215,490	442,345
2000	46.57%	280,252	601,794
2010	43.39%	350,240	807,129

The above-mentioned data show that although the population in Zamboanga City is increasing, there seems to be a disproportion in the increase relative to the number of Chabacano speakers. This simply means that the number of Chabacano speakers in the city is continuously declining. Motivated by the nationwide implementation of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) in the past and with the growing concern of the eventual demise of the Chabacano language led the City Government of Zamboanga in collaboration with the Department of Education (DepEd) Field Office to take concrete steps in standardizing the Chabacano language by publishing children's books written in the said language and other materials featuring the rich and vibrant history and culture of Zamboanga City as well as by documenting Chabacano music, poetry, and some other literary pieces including formulating the grammar of Chabacano, in 2014, a Zamboanga Chabacano orthography, and in 2018, again, the publication of a lexicography in an effort to preserve the Zamboanga Chabacano and culture (Aquino & Madrazo, 2019).

However, having a lexicography which may not appear to mirror the vocabulary of everyday conversation among Chabacano speakers would make such an attempt of standardizing the said language with the hope to preserve the same be in vain. Despite this, noteworthy in the paper of Genuino (2005) that Chabacano in Zamboanga is still surviving unlike in Ternate and Cavite City, where this language is dying while Chabacano in Davao City and Ermita is dead. In the same study, factors which contributed to the current position of Chabacano in Zamboanga were cited such as intergenerational language transmission and the continuous use of the language in different domains. Although surviving, with the data at hand, the latter sends quite a disturbing message and this further justifies the need to validate (or re-validate) the existing lexicography of Chabacano, although not entirely, and that the results of this investigation may be considered by language planners, policymakers, and key local officials in Zamboanga City and to somehow avert the possibility of a dying Chabacano in the said city.

In addition, and in hindsight, back in 2014, the local government of Zamboanga and the Department of Education (DepEd), Division of Zamboanga City took steps to standardize Chabacano by developing its own orthography. The principle which it has established is that Chabacano words should be spelled based on its language of origin or through etymology which unfortunately creates another layer of concern given that Chabacano speakers, if not all, most actually are non-Spanish speakers and have little to no knowledge of Spanish. This, among others, strengthens the quandary as to the proper way of spelling Chabacano words whether it is through the position of etymology or based on phonological evolution (Himoro & Pareja-Lora, 2022). In the study of Lear and Reyes (2023), Chabacano students who are studying Spanish are not very motivated to learn the latter language. The same further disclosed, and quite surprisingly that the non-Chabacano speakers are more motivated to learn the Spanish language than the Chabacano speakers themselves and that possessing Chabacano as their L1 is considered to be as an interference in the process of learning the Spanish language.

The basis of the existing Chabacano lexicography of Zamboanga City presumably is the Zamboanga Chabacano orthography which was developed in 2011, finalized in 2014, and implemented in all public elementary schools in Zamboanga City from 2016-2017. This study is a kind of its own albeit the numerous researches conducted involving Chabacano words as corpus or corpora, however, there has yet to be an attempt to verify the word utilization of the existing lexicography of Chabacano of Zamboanga City from the perspective of language professionals who at the same time are affiliated with academic institutions in the said city, both in the basic and in the tertiary levels. The researchers of this investigation chose to have them as the ones who will be giving their thoughts about those chosen Chabacano words and other inputs for discussion in this study given their likely strong foundation in the use of the Chabacano language, their theoretical and pedagogical knowledge to language, and evident in their relevant research works. In fact, De Castro (2024) asserted that for lexicographical entries, the expertise of language experts must be tapped to ensure that any efforts for such pursuit are theoretically and methodologically sound. Although preliminarily conducted, the same can bolster further related studies involving other sub-groups in the future.

As stated above, this research is a preliminary study aimed at finding out whether the words listed in the existing Chabacano lexicography are being used by language professionals and what words these professionals actually use relative to the aforementioned lexicography. The study will be set in motion by initially gathering data from language professionals. Further investigation may be conducted to build upon the findings of this study, particularly, to gather data from larger sets of respondents, i.e., laypeople, non-language professionals, and other members of the public.

This work contributes directly to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal Number Four concerned with quality education as it ensures inclusive, equitable, and culturally responsive education through the systematic validation and standardization of the use of Chabacano in Zamboanga City. The study provides an empirically based lexicographical foundation that consolidates the status of Chabacano as a bona-fide language of instruction, literacy, and academia, especially in relation to the mother tongue-based and multilingual education. The study contributes to United Nations Sustainable Development Goal Number Ten focused on Reduced Inequalities as it secures the linguistic rights of local language speakers and diminishes their marginalization in education, administrative governance, and legal documentation. Moreover, the study supports in a way United Nations Sustainable Development Goal Number Eleven on Sustainable Cities and Communities as it promotes the preservation enriched with institutional recognition of linguistic heritage along with cultural sustainability. The study hereby relates linguistic scholarship to legislative action as the empirical study as proposed legislative work brings language development to the fore of the development discourse at the national and local levels.

This study selects 60 words from the existing Chabacano lexicography of Zamboanga City and the number is justified based on the exploratory nature of the research. A sample of 60 words, the researchers suggest, is sufficiently broad to verify the use among Chabacano language professionals. Furthermore, the study does not seek to provide an exhaustive verification of usage of the words but rather to identify patterns that can inform the succeeding comprehensive studies, that is, usage among Chabacano speakers. Should findings indicate significant disparity in use with certain words, subsequent studies may expand the scope to further explore linguistic shifts. Thus, the selection of 60 words is just practical and justifiable for examining the usage of words in real-life communication among Chabacano language professionals.

The current research documents how the Chabacano language is utilized and, through this, guides changes in the systematic revision of the dictionary. This has been taken through the various fields of linguistics, education, empirical social research, and public policy, and ensures that Chabacano is still documented and preserved as a fully functioning language. In doing so, this research also bridges the prescriptive gap in the dictionaries, and demonstrates that Chabacano still has and sustains a relevance in various settings that include learning, teaching, and education, as well as in the administrative and official functions. This research also facilitates the advocacy of public policies and language policy in particular by evidencing that research has been done to create a viable public policy to be used in empirical advocacy. This approach, by moving the boundary of lexicography, describes social science as applied and not just a descriptive endeavor, thus promoting the formal status of Chabacano, the protection of the rights of people who speak the language, and the use of public policy aimed at the preservation of a language over a span of time.

2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study aims to verify the utilization of some words from the existing Chabacano lexicography of Zamboanga City by pursuing the following objectives:

1. Determine whether the Chabacano words listed in the existing Chabacano lexicography of Zamboanga City are currently in use, according to language professionals.

2. Find out the corresponding Chabacano words that Chabacano language professionals actually use in everyday conversation in lieu of those words provided in the existing Chabacano lexicography of Zamboanga City.

3. Formulate evidence-based policy recommendations for the systematic revamp of the existing Chabacano Lexicography.

In a nutshell, judiciously answering the research objectives of this paper specifically by, first, identifying Chabacano words in Zamboanga City's lexicography based on usage, as assessed by language professionals; second, determining the Chabacano words language professionals actually use in daily conversation instead of those in the existing lexicography may justify and further strengthen the use of descriptive lexicography as an approach in developing (or re developing) a dictionary through corpus-based or corpus-driven approach as espoused by Atkins and Rundell (2008), Sinclair (1991), and De Castro (2024) in the hope to obtain a Chabacano lexicography in Zamboanga City that is authentic, objective, and realistic; third and last, the creation of policy recommendations to which the aforementioned revised or updated dictionary be created by a committee of Chabacano Language Experts through legislative proceedings (i.e., city ordinance or executive order). The succeeding sections shall discuss related studies relevant to the present study, the framework, to be followed by the methodology to be employed. Lastly, results along with some discussions will be delineated in accordance with the research objectives set in this study.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

Brief History of Lexicography

The term "lexicography" began to appear in both scientific and general use during the late 19th century. Initially, the concept of lexicography was more applied, focusing on the practical aspects of dictionary creation. Over time, it evolved to encompass a theoretical dimension, which includes the study of the totality of dictionaries for a given language. By the last quarter of the 20th century, lexicography had firmly established itself as an autonomous branch of linguistics (Ubaidova & Ergasheva, 2021). In the "pre-scientific or prescriptive" period of lexicography, lexicographers aimed to standardize spelling, pronunciation, and usage. The primary approach during this period was to create a fixed standard in the spelling, pronunciation, and usage of words. After this period, the modern period in the development of English lexicography emerged; it is called "scientific or historical" because it is based on the following concepts: (1) developing dictionaries using the historical principle; (2) shifting from the normative framework traditionally used in dictionary compilation to a systematic descriptive approach. The Oxford English Dictionary, often regarded as the crown jewel of English lexicography, fully exemplifies these concepts (Eshunqulov & Elmurodov, 2024).

Overview of Chabacano

Chabacano, a Spanish derived creole, shows uneven vitality across its varieties. In Cavite and Ternate, it is mainly spoken by older generations, with little to no intergenerational transmission, while the Ermita variety is nearly extinct. In contrast, Zamboanga Chabacano remains robust and is spoken by the largest Chabacano speaking community, where it is used extensively in daily interaction and local media (Lipski, 2001). Its historical development traces back to an 18th century military garrison, followed by successive layers of influence from Manila Bay Creole, Hiligaynon, Spanish from Europe and Mexico, Cebuano, and later English and Tagalog, resulting in a highly hybridized lexicon and structure (Lipski, 1992).

Scholarly work on Chabacano has examined its grammatical features, orthography, and sociolinguistic positioning, including studies on voice marking, verbal aspects, pluralization, mood, lexical borrowing, and the gap between prescribed standards and actual usage (Eijansantos, 2017; Himoro & Pareja-Lora, 2022; Vicente & Cheng, 2024; De Castro, 2024). As the most vital variety, Zamboanga Chabacano functions as a lingua franca and is increasingly visible in media, religious domains, and education (Steinkrüger, 2013). Media practice reflects both language identity formation and pragmatic multilingualism, as broadcasters engage in translanguaging to enhance comprehension (De Los Reyes, 2024). In education, parental attitudes remain contested, with some studies reporting limited support for Chabacano as a medium of instruction (Lim Ramos et al., 2020), while more recent findings indicate generally positive attitudes across ethnic groups (Lucas et al., 2023, as cited in Eijansantos et al., 2024).

Lexicography in other Creole Languages

Haitian Creole or Kréyòl is the most widely spoken creole language in the world, with approximately 11 million speakers, and serves as one of Haiti's two official languages alongside French. It is spoken primarily in Haiti and in diaspora communities across the Caribbean, North America, and Europe. In French Caribbean societies, creole languages are commonly analyzed through the lens of diglossia, where French holds higher institutional prestige than Creole, a hierarchy that directly shapes lexicographic practices and challenges (Ferguson, 1959). Within this context, dictionaries play a critical role not only in documenting vocabulary but also in affirming linguistic identity and supporting the transition from oral to written traditions. Efforts to legitimize Haitian Creole have focused on developing orthography, selecting sociolinguistic variants, and producing monolingual resources, although full standardization remains incomplete (Schnepel, 2003; Valdman, 2005).

Creole lexicography faces structural difficulties that extend beyond Haitian Creole. Bollée (2007) emphasizes that creole dictionaries must account for language planning contexts, diglossic power relations, and the largely oral nature of these languages. Even with an official orthography, Haitian Creole lacks comprehensive grammars written in the language itself and monolingual dictionaries designed for native speakers, which complicates precise semantic description and translation (Valdman et al., 2017). These limitations illustrate how lexicographic work in creole settings often involves high-stakes decisions about word selection, variation, and representation, especially when written norms are still stabilizing.

Tok Pisin, an English-based creole and one of the official languages of Papua New Guinea, provides a contrasting case with a more extensive lexicographic record. With an estimated 6 million speakers, Tok Pisin draws most of its lexicon from English, alongside contributions from German and local languages (Laycock, 1970). Although the language stabilized in the late nineteenth century, systematic dictionary compilation began only in the 1920s, initially driven by missionaries and later expanded through wartime and postwar needs (Mühlhäusler, 1985; Engelberg & Stolberg, 2017). Contemporary Tok Pisin lexicography increasingly relies on digital platforms, most notably the Words of German Origin in Tok Pisin project, which integrates historical sources, usage examples, phonological data, and sociohistorical analysis, reflecting a shift toward data-rich and usage-oriented documentation (Engelberg & Möhrs, 2016; Engelberg et al., 2017).

Corpora in Lexicography

Corpus-driven and corpus-based approaches differ in how corpora are used in lexicography. The corpus-driven approach treats the corpus as the primary empirical source

for discovering linguistic patterns without prior assumptions, while the corpus-based approach uses corpora mainly to test and validate existing theories (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001). In lexicographic work, corpora provide the volume, diversity, and authenticity of data needed to reliably analyze real language use, far exceeding what citation banks can offer (Atkins & Rundell, 2008). Because corpora reflect everyday usage across varied text types rather than idealized or prescriptive norms, they allow findings to be generalized to broader discourse communities and enable the discovery of previously unnoticed patterns (Lauder, 2010). Supported by advances in computing and grounded in Firth's contextualist view of meaning, corpus linguistics has fundamentally strengthened modern lexicography by anchoring word meaning in actual use and context (Niyazova, 2024).

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The debate on whether or not lexicography has a theory of its own or not was elucidated in the study of Adamska-Salaciak (2018). Accordingly, there is no theory definite for lexicography as such discipline simply borrows theories and models from linguistics and has in fact thrived for decades without any theoretical underpinnings unique to lexicography. After all, since a dictionary essentially deals with words, in effect, lexicography would need some frameworks and ideas from lexicon and language in general. This however is in contrast to the premise of Tarp (2012; 2018) that lexicography is not simply a branch under linguistics and thus, is an independent discipline. On the other hand, Bernard (2010), Atkins and Rundell (2008), and De Schryver (2012) strongly declared their doubt and apprehension as to the existence of a theory explicit to lexicography.

Nonetheless, the researchers of this investigation are adopting descriptive lexicography as opposed to prescriptive lexicography as the general framework of this study. The former focuses on documenting and recording actual language usage through corpus-based lexicography (Atkins & Rundell, 2008) rather than imposing rules and norms in the language which the latter advocates. Embedded physically in the existing lexicography of Zamboanga Chabacano is a write-up of Mangaser (2016) on the Chavacano Orthography which also contains some rules or guidelines as to its proper use, among others. She revealed the basic rationale behind having an orthography and that is the wide array of spelling inconsistencies taken from English and Filipino as evidenced in some Chabacano materials which for her can cause confusion among learners in the long run. Although such observation may be to an extent true, however, the researchers believe that such phenomenon or pattern is something that cannot be mitigated solely by establishing rules or simply through an orthography alone which adopted twenty-nine (29) letters from the Spanish Abecedario. In fact, this runs counter to the findings of Soliman and Lee (2023), albeit the raw data were taken from a local teleradyo program; however, findings indicate that lexical borrowing through English utterances into the Chabacano language is very much evident. This means that at this age or period of time with the influx of technology alongside the exposure of the residents thereat to various media platforms plus the intermingling of the different cultures which Zamboanga City is known for and a city acknowledged too as being the gateway of trade and commerce in the southern and western parts of Mindanao; to insist on the use of prescriptive lexicography may be counterproductive and that the use of corpus-based approach could be more practical and relevant given this context.

In fact, there are already downloadable software (i.e., computational tools and electronic corpora) that can enhance the use of corpus-driven lexicography and would allow lexicographers to interpret datasets based on its actual use and to capture spelling variants, frequency, and collocation patters (Atkins & Rundell, 2008). Moreover, the researchers of this study suspect that the ones behind the production of the existing lexicography in Chabacano of Zamboanga City simply relied on their own intuition and knowledge instead of utilizing empirical evidence from sets of corpora or language data for the vocabulary entries, ideally, again through frequency count, collocation and concordance patterns, and semantic analysis, all these from the standpoint of corpus-based approach which can lead to an improved and authentic lexicographical output. In other words, these large collection of electronic or digital corpora should serve as quantitative and qualitative foundations for lexicographers to better inform the process of compiling vocabulary entries in a dictionary (Sinclair, 1991). Also, there seems to be some apprehension as to whether or not the existing orthography was religiously used as reference in the codification of the present lexicography in Chabacano of Zamboanga City.

In the paper of De Castro (2024), he addressed the issue of the existing orthography in Chabacano of Zamboanga City which adopted an etymological approach in spelling words, this for him furthered the notion that Chabacano is a "corrupted" version of Spanish rather than treating it as a separate and unique Philippine language. He however argued that the Chabacano orthography should have a combination of the phonetic and etymological approaches rather than strictly adhering to the latter. He likewise strongly recommended the use of corpus and/or wordlist where the most frequently used word among variants is to be considered as the main spelling or the base form in the dictionary entry while the rest are to be treated as simply alternative spellings. For him, using the corpus-based approach would result to a more accurate lexicography or a lexicographical resource that truly reflects its actual use and practices and not simply an abstract form.

5. METHODOLOGY

Data Source

Responses were taken from language professionals, referred to operationally, in Chabacano which the researchers estimate to be at least 100 of them and will serve as respondents of this study. According to Subedi (2021), researchers do not need to strictly adhere to rigid rules when determining the number of participants in their study. In qualitative research, the priority should be answering the research objectives rather than ensuring a large sample size. Guest et al. (2006) recommended that a sample size of 6 to 12 participants is sufficient for a qualitative research project. However, Guest et al. (2006) stated that most ethnographic studies require 30 to 60 interviews. Moreover, according to Bernard (2013), there is increasing support for the idea that 10 to 20 key research participants are sufficient to identify and understand the major issues in any phenomenological study. Creswell (1998) also recommends 5 to 25 interviews for a phenomenological study and 20 to 30 interviews for a grounded theory study. Based on these guidelines and the absence of rigid sample size standards for qualitative studies, the researchers have decided to include approximately 30 respondents, considering that the study is preliminary.

Inclusion Criteria

These language professionals have met certain criteria established by the researchers. Language professionals are teachers (1) who have been teaching either English or Filipino in any private or public secondary or tertiary schools within Zamboanga City, and (2) who are communicative speakers of Zamboanga Chabacano. A Chabacano language professional is a language teacher (either English or Filipino) who may intuitively assess the acceptability of Chabacano usage, regardless of his/her place of birth, as birthplace is not always a definitive criterion for language competence. Addedly, while a native speaker is typically identified based on their first language (L1), it is important to acknowledge that, in certain cases, a speaker may demonstrate greater proficiency in their second language. The language professional must also be an expert on the Chabacano grammar—but not necessarily be an authority of its explicit rules rather intuitive and with communicative competence such as being spontaneous and fluent. He must also recognize himself as a "Chabacano competent speaker". Moreover, other Chabacano speakers must recognize him/her as a member of the language community.

Instrument

The source of the responses came from an instrument of 60 items in total likened to a YES or NO checklist and with questions that required respondents to give their brief responses. This tool or instrument, the researchers believe, does not anymore need validation given that all the Chabacano and English words thereat were simply taken from the existing Chabacano Lexicography of Zamboanga City and were randomly picked through lot drawing by one of the researchers, 2-3 words per letter. Majority of these Chabacano words were nouns and few were adjectives. No Chabacano verbs were included in the instrument because of their morphological complexities which require in-depth linguistic and scientific analysis by language experts and/or linguists.

Procedures

After acquiring ethics clearance, researchers asked the heads (or supervisors) of the higher education institutions (HEIs) where the language professionals worked for consent for participation. They submitted written notifications detailing the study's purpose, guaranteeing the participants' anonymity, and making sure that they could communicate any questions freely. The consent letters accompanied the ethics clearance, the informed consent documents, and the research tool that provided details on how the documents should be filled. Respondents were given 4–5 days to complete the documents, and follow-ups were made as needed. Participants were given a link to an online Google Form to facilitate this process. Once the researchers collected the responses, they untangled and systematized the data to analyze it as it fit the predetermined goals of the research.

Data Confidentiality, Processing, Privacy, Access, Disposal, and Terms of Use/Measures to Protect Privacy of Participants

In compliance with Republic Act No. 10173 (Data Privacy Act of 2012), the researchers ensured the privacy and confidentiality of participants by not disclosing any personal information, including names, age, address, or birthday, in publications or to third parties without consent. All physical data were securely stored in a locked drawer and electronic data were kept in a password protected cloud accessible only to the researchers. The data were processed solely for the purposes of the study, securely retained for five years, and properly destroyed thereafter to uphold participants' rights and maintain compliance with the law.

Data Analysis

Data from the responses of the language professionals were extracted and classified manually. No software except for Microsoft Word and Excel will be utilized in this study. To analyze the data particularly for the first research objective, a descriptive method through frequency counting and categorical ranking were employed while a qualitative research design through content analysis method were utilized for the second research objective. The third research objective utilized the synthesis of findings from the first and second research objectives to formulate actionable policy recommendations. The text which was used in this study are the Chabacano words taken in verbatim from the existing Chabacano lexicography of Zamboanga City for analysis of the researchers and identification of patterns or trends as basis in drawing conclusions. Thus, content analysis method refers to and as the term suggests is the process of making valid inferences from a text or any other meaningful material/source/data (Krippendorff, 2013).

6. RESULTS

Verification of Current Usage of Chabacano Lexical Entries Identified in Existing Lexicographical Sources

Table 2
Usage of Chabacano Lexical Entries

No.	English Word	Chabacano Word	YES (Freq)	NO (Freq)	Total	Categorical Ranking
1	Bail	*Fianza*	37	6	43	**Currently in Use**
2	Factory	*Fabrica*	32	11	43	**Currently in Use**
3	Japan	*Japon*	35	8	43	**Currently in Use**
4	Know-it-all	*Sabiondo*	40	3	43	**Currently in Use**
5	Law	*Ley*	31	12	43	**Currently in Use**
6	Majority	*Mayoridad*	31	12	43	**Currently in Use**
7	Occupant	*Ocupante*	39	4	43	**Currently in Use**
8	Pandemic	*Pandemia*	42	1	43	**Currently in Use**
9	Safety	*Seguridad*	42	1	43	**Currently in Use**
10	Tendency	*Tendencia*	32	11	43	**Currently in Use**
11	Unparalleled	*Incomparable*	34	9	43	**Currently in Use**

Table 2 demonstrates that Chabacano speakers retain a broad and stable active vocabulary, based on responses from 43 language authorities. High affirmative responses for items such as *pandemia* and *seguridad*, each affirmed by 42 participants, indicate that vocabulary related to public health, safety, and governance remains deeply embedded in both everyday and institutional communication. These findings suggest that Chabacano functions effectively as an urban multilingual language, where frequent social use reinforces lexical stability and continued relevance (Vicente & Cheng, 2023).

The strong use of Spanish-derived lexical items such as *fianza*, *fabrica*, and *ley* demonstrates the enduring influence of Spanish in formal and abstract domains of Chabacano, particularly in legal, administrative, and educational registers, consistent with Brenninkmeyer's early observations (1924) and supported by sustained institutional reinforcement (Lipski, 2001). At the same time, expressive and idiomatic terms like *sabiondo* indicate the vitality of community- maintained language, while forms such as *Japon* show systematic phonological and orthographic adaptation typical of creole borrowing (Himoro, 2019; Valdman, 2005). Lexical obsolescence is therefore selective, with entries remaining viable when they meet communicative needs and receive social or institutional support, highlighting the importance of usage-based evaluation in lexicographic revision (Tarp, 2018). The eleven lexical entries in Table 2 were selected for exceeding the functional-use threshold, reflecting consistent use and aligning with lexical frequency theory, language vitality frameworks, and sociolinguistic models of active community language use (Nation, 2001; UNESCO, 2003; Fishman, 1991).

Identification of Practiced Chabacano Lexical Alternatives Used by Language Professionals in Everyday Communication

Table 3
Analysis of Chabacano Lexical Alternatives

No.	English Word	Traditional Chabacano Word	Most Frequent Replacement Used by Speakers	Frequency
1	Abrogation	*Abrogacion*	*cancel / abolish*	22
2	Absence	*Ausencia*	*absent / nuay aki (wala dito)*	26
3	Backstairs	*Escalera de Servicio*	*escalera*	31
4	Cahoots	*Confabulado*	*kasabwat / sabwatan*	24
5	Clique	*Camarilla*	*grupo*	27
6	Certainty	*Certeza*	*sigurado / asigurao*	30
7	Debatable	*Discutible*	*questionable / debatible*	21
8	Damp	*Mojoso*	*mojoso / muhaw*	18
9	Efficiency	*Efeminacia*	*mahusay / eficiente*	15
10	Eliciting	*Obtenida*	*obtain / saca / kuha*	17
11	Enemy	*Enemigo*	*kalaban / kontra*	29
12	Failure	*Fallo*	*palpak / kabiguan*	25
13	Gist	*Esencia*	*punto / main*	19

#	English	Spanish	Chabacano alternatives	
			point	
14	Grievance	*Queja*	*reklamo*	28
15	Headband	*Peineta*	*headband / bandana*	34
16	Hairbrush	*Cepillo de Pelo*	*suklay / peine*	36
17	Illiterate	*Iliterado*	*di marunong magbasa at magsulat*	23
18	Immigrant	*Inmigrante*	*dayuhan / immigrante*	27
19	Jam	*Mermelada*	*palaman*	32
20	Kindhearted	*Agradable*	*mabait / buen corazon*	31
21	Kindergarten	*Guarderia de Infancia*	*kinder*	38
22	Labor union	*Sindicato*	*unyon*	26
23	Magnanimous	*Magnanimoso*	*mapagbigay / generous*	19
24	Midwife	*Partera*	*paltera / partera*	34
25	Napkin	*Servilleta*	*tissue*	18
26	Naked	*Desnudo*	*borles / hubad*	16
27	Needy	*Necesitao*	*pobre*	15
28	Obsolete	*Obsoleto*	*luma / hinde ya ta usa*	17
29	Ocean	*Oceano*	*mar*	22
30	Paw	*Pata*	*pata*	19
31	Puberty	*Pubertad*	*pagdadalaga / pagbibinata*	20
32	Racism	*Razismo*	*racism*	23
33	Raffle	*Rifa*	*raffle*	18
34	Rainbow	*Arco Iris*	*rainbow / bahaghari*	26
35	Sarcasm	*Sarcasmo*	*sarcasm / pilosopo*	17
36	Satisfactory	*Satisfactorio*	*satisfactory / pwede na*	16
37	Tardiness	*Tardanza*	*late / tardanza*	21
38	Tenacious	*Tenaz*	*matatag*	14
39	Ugliness	*Fealdad*	*pangit / malakara*	20
40	Undersigned	*Abajofirmante*	*undersigned / pirmao abajo*	16
41	Vast	*Vasto*	*malawak / grande*	18
42	Verbally	*Verbalmente*	*verbalmente / pasalita*	17
43	Watershed	*Cuenca*	*watershed*	16
44	Witty	*Ingenioso*	*witty / matalino*	19
45	Yearbook	*Anuario*	*yearbook*	24
46	Youth	*Joventud*	*jovenes / kabataan*	20
47	Yogurt	*Yogur*	*yogurt*	25
48	Zeal	*Celo*	*entusiasmo*	14
49	Zoology	*Zoologia*	*zoology*	23

Table 3 shows that Chabacano speakers systematically replace many traditional lexicographic entries with alternatives that are clearer, more accessible, and socially reinforced in contemporary use. Across the 49 items, replacement is far more common than retention, indicating that numerous historically documented forms have lost functional relevance in everyday communication. This pattern confirms that lexical change in Chabacano is guided primarily by communicative efficiency and shared intelligibility rather than by loyalty to older dictionary forms, a process that is typical of creole languages undergoing continuous adaptation (Valdman, 2005).

The data show that Filipino and English strongly influence Chabacano depending on the semantic domain, with Filipino dominating everyday, evaluative, and social vocabulary through education, media, and daily interaction, while English prevails in technical, academic, and institutional domains for modern concepts (Eijansantos, 2017; Eijansantos, 2022; Vicente & Cheng, 2024). Traditional Chabacano or Spanish-derived forms persist for concrete, routine concepts, and speakers often use descriptive or phrase-based alternatives to enhance clarity, highlighting systematic, socially shared lexical strategies (Brenninkmeyer, 1925; Himoro, 2019). Lexicographically, retaining obsolete entries without documenting commonly used replacements misrepresents actual language use, supporting user-oriented principles that dictionaries must reflect empirical speaker behavior (Tarp, 2018). The forty-nine entries in Table 3 were selected based on functional use by speakers, following thresholds aligned with lexical frequency theory, language vitality frameworks, and sociolinguistic competence models, ensuring that documented lexicon reflects meaningful, active usage (Fishman, 1991; Nation, 2001; UNESCO, 2003).

Policy Options for Lexicographical Reform

Table 4

Proposed Legislative Recommendations for an Updated Chabacano Lexicography

Legislative Component	Proposed Provision	Rationale Based on Findings	Expected Output / Outcome
Legal Basis	Enact a City Ordinance or issue an Executive Order mandating the revision and updating of the existing Chabacano lexicography.	The findings demonstrate that a substantial portion of lexicographic entries are rarely or no longer used in present-day Chabacano communication.	Legal mandate ensuring continuity, authority, and sustainability of lexicographical reform.
Legislative			

		authority is required to institutionalize corrective action.	
Creation of Governing Body	Establish a Chabacano Lexicography Review and Development Committee composed exclusively of qualified Chabacano language experts.	Empirical results show the need for expert judgment in validating real usage, identifying obsolete entries, and approving lexical alternatives.	An officially recognized body with technical authority over Chabacano lexicographical standards.
Composition of Committee	Include linguists, Chabacano educators, cultural practitioners, translators, and native speakers with documented expertise in language use across domains.	Findings indicate varied lexical behavior across legal, educational, technical, and everyday contexts, requiring multidisciplinary expertise.	Balanced, evidence-based decision-making reflective of actual language practice.
Mandate and Scope	Task the committee to review existing lexicographic entries, remove obsolete terms, validate current usage, and incorporate verified lexical alternatives.	Tables 1 and 2 reveal widespread lexical mismatch between dictionaries and lived usage, necessitating systematic revision.	Updated lexicography aligned with contemporary Chabacano usage in Zamboanga City.
Staff Work and Secretariat	Create a permanent technical secretariat to handle documentation, data processing, coordinatio	Comprehensive analysis and revision require sustained administrative and technical support	Efficient workflow, continuity of records, and timely completion of outputs.

		n, and reporting.	beyond ad hoc consultations.
Funding Allocation	Provide a dedicated budget line for research activities, honoraria, consultations, field validation, and publication.	Without adequate funding, lexicographical reform risks remaining symbolic despite strong empirical justification.	Fully operational lexicography project with measurable deliverables.
Workflow and Process Design	Institutionalize a multi-phase workflow: lexical audit, usage verification, expert deliberation, validation, and final compilation.	Findings show that lexical relevance varies by domain, requiring structured and sequential evaluation.	Transparent, replicable, and methodologically sound lexicographical process.
Data-Driven Validation	Require that all retained or newly included entries be supported by empirical usage data and expert consensus.	The study confirms that reliance on inherited lexicographic entries alone leads to inaccuracies.	Evidence-based lexicography reflecting actual language behavior.
Public and Stakeholder Consultation	Mandate consultations with educators, writers, media practitioners, and community representatives.	Language use extends beyond experts, and findings suggest variation across everyday and institutional settings.	Broader legitimacy and acceptance of the updated lexicography.
Adoption and Institutional Use	Officially adopt the revised Chabacano lexicography as a reference for education,	Findings indicate fragmentation in lexical choice due to lack of an updated authoritative reference.	Standardized yet usage-responsive Chabacano reference across institutions.

	local governance, and cultural programs.		
Periodic Review Mechanism	Require scheduled review and updating of the lexicography every five years or as needed.	Language change is continuous, and findings highlight rapid lexical shifts.	Prevention of future obsolescence and sustained relevance of the lexicography.
Cultural and Linguistic Protection Clause	Recognize the updated lexicography as a tool for linguistic preservation and cultural identity.	Empirical evidence shows erosion of unused terms and emergence of new forms, underscoring the need for guided preservation.	Strengthened protection and promotion of Chabacano as a living language.

Table 4 highlights that updating Chabacano lexicography in Zamboanga City requires formal policy measures, such as a City Ordinance or Executive Order, to address the obsolescence of many entries and prevent fragmented or unsustained revision efforts. A legal mandate ensures that lexicographic updating becomes an institutional responsibility rather than a discretionary cultural activity, positioning reform as a structured language planning function grounded in accountability, continuity, and sustainability (Lauder, 2010; Tarp, 2018). The findings also recommend establishing a multidisciplinary Chabacano Lexicography Review and Development Committee composed of linguists, educators, cultural practitioners, interpreters, and proficient native speakers to validate entries based on actual usage across legal, educational, technical, and everyday contexts. Sustained revision is supported through a permanent technical secretariat, dedicated funding, defined workflows, and periodic review, while public consultation and cultural safeguards ensure the lexicon functions as both a practical reference and a cultural asset.

7. DISCUSSIONS

The findings reveal a clear mismatch between existing Chabacano lexicography and actual language use among Chabacano professionals in Zamboanga City. Many dictionary entries are now rarely used or no longer relevant in everyday communication, while only a limited set of terms remains actively functional, often within specialized domains. This indicates that current lexicographic resources are largely prescriptive and historically oriented, failing to capture the dynamic nature of Chabacano as a living contact language. Unlike relatively stable "peace time" languages, Chabacano undergoes rapid lexical change driven by multilingual interaction and institutional use, making fixed and outdated dictionaries inadequate representations of real usage (Valdman, 2005).

The study demonstrates that Chabacano speakers systematically replace obsolete or unfamiliar lexicographic entries with pragmatic alternatives, with Spanish-derived terms dominating legal and administrative contexts, English prevailing in technical and socio-political domains, and descriptive phrases used for semantic clarity, reflecting communicative efficiency rather than lexical deficiency (Lipski, 2001; Vicente & Cheng, 2024; Engelberg & Meyer, 2015). These usage patterns highlight the inadequacy of existing dictionaries, supporting the need for data-driven, user-oriented revisions that align with actual communicative practices (Tarp, 2018). Given the scale of lexical imbalance, reform requires institutional authority, sustained funding, and policy support, positioning updated Chabacano lexicography as both a linguistic necessity and a tool for governance to maintain the language's vitality and social visibility (Lauder, 2010).

8. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that existing Chabacano dictionaries in Zamboanga City no longer reflect contemporary language use, as many entries are rarely used or obsolete, with speakers favoring alternatives from Spanish, English, Filipino, and descriptive constructions, demonstrating that Chabacano is a living, adaptive language (Valdman, 2005). The persistent gap between dictionaries and actual usage marginalizes lexicographic resources in governance, education, media, and daily interaction, risking continued misrepresentation and constrained language development. Effective reform, the study argues, requires institutional and legislative support, including expert oversight, sustainable funding, and continuous revision, repositioning lexicography as an active process of language governance rather than a static scholarly product (Lauder, 2010; Tarp, 2018).

9. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Chabacano lexicography of Zamboanga City is documented and existing but not used in contemporary times. Hence, it is recommended that the City Government pass a city ordinance or an executive order to revise the existing Chabacano dictionary systematically and by-sample. The study shows that many of the words in the lexicons are either unused or obsolete while the speakers used alternative ones that are from Spanish, Filipino, English, and descriptions. Without legislative action, changes to the lexicon may remain piecemeal, optional, and short-lived. As a result, this may ultimately weaken the vitality of Chabacano in education, governance and public life.

To operationalize this mandate, a Chabacano Lexicography Review and Development Committee composed of qualified linguists, Chabacano educators, cultural practitioners, translators, and recognized competent speakers will be institutionalized. This body should be made responsible for a complete lexical audit to validate them on the basis of empirical evidence, withdraw obsolescence and record authentic usage of others. The process of revising should be descriptive, usage-based, and corpus-driven so that the newly updated lexicons reflect real-life linguistic behaviour rather than prescriptive or historically frozen norms.

Ultimately, the revised lexicography should be officially sanctioned as a reference for local governance, educational, civil society, media and cultural programs with accompanying budget, technical secretaiat and periodic review system (for example, every five years). Integrating lexicographical revision into institutional policies will ensure linguistic rights, prevent socio-educational and administrative marginalization, and affirm Chabacano's meaningful role in sustainable urban identity and cultural continuity. Ultimately the said policy action supports inclusive education, reduced inequalities, and the maintenance of the linguistic heritage in Zamboanga City as a living and evolving community language.

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