

**Critical language awareness, language ideologies, and language sensitivity
of college students: Basis for language competency program**

Alexiz Jane L. Blancaver*

Filamer Christian University, Inc., Roxas City, Capiz, Philippines

Dr. Erlyn C. Beup

Filamer Christian University, Inc., Roxas City, Capiz, Philippines

Email: erlynbeup@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This mixed-sequential explanatory research aimed to determine the levels of critical language awareness, language ideologies, and language sensitivity of college students in state universities and colleges (SUCs) in the province of Iloilo, and to examine the differences and relationships among these variables as basis for an Enriched Language Competence Program. Specifically, it sought to assess the level of each variable, determine the differences in language sensitivity when grouped according to critical language awareness and language ideologies, and identify the relationships among the three variables. The respondents of the study were college students enrolled in selected SUCs in Iloilo. Data were gathered using a validated survey questionnaire and were analyzed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical tools. The level of significance was set at 0.05. Results revealed that the level of critical language awareness of students is high. The level of language ideologies is also high. The level of language sensitivity is very high. Significant differences are found in the level of language sensitivity when students are grouped according to their levels of critical language awareness and language ideologies. Significant relationships are also found among critical language awareness, language ideologies, and language sensitivity; however, the relationships are weak. Based on the findings, a Language Competency Program is proposed.

Keywords: Critical language awareness, language ideologies, language sensitivity, language competence, language beliefs, purposive communication.

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INTRODUCTION

Language is not merely a neutral tool for communication; it both reflects and reproduces social relations, power structures, and historical inequalities. Critical Language Awareness (CLA), as conceptualized by Norman Fairclough, emphasizes the need for learners to critically examine how language functions ideologically within society and how dominant

*Corresponding author / Email: lexxellopez@gmail.com

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linguistic practices sustain inequity. From this perspective, language education extends beyond grammar and vocabulary instruction toward fostering critical reflection on language, identity, and power.

Despite the prominence of CLA in critical pedagogy and applied linguistics, empirical studies examining learners' actual levels of critical language awareness remain limited, particularly in non-Western higher education contexts. In the Philippines, language research has largely focused on proficiency, policy, and medium-of-instruction issues, while students' critical engagement with language ideologies and linguistic power relations remains underexplored. This gap is significant in a multilingual society where language continues to shape identity, social mobility, and educational access.

Existing studies demonstrate the persistence of hierarchical language ideologies in Philippine education. Research by Chavez (2025) revealed that many Generation Z students continue to prefer English because of its perceived association with prestige, employability, and global competitiveness. Similarly, Hernandez (2023) found that although students recognized the legitimacy of Philippine English, many still privileged inner-circle English varieties over localized forms. These findings suggest the continuing influence of colonial linguistic hierarchies and the internalization of dominant language norms within academic spaces.

At the same time, studies on translinguaging and linguistic inclusivity indicate growing student openness toward multilingual practices. Vergara and Sumayo (2024) observed that students viewed translinguaging positively because it enhanced comprehension and classroom participation, although institutional practices continued to privilege English-only instruction. Research on linguistic sensitivity likewise highlights the sociocultural implications of language use. Quimosing et al. (2018) reported that students experienced both inclusion and exclusion through language, while Villanueva et al. (2021) found that awareness of gender-inclusive language did not consistently translate into practice. Collectively, these studies suggest that students may demonstrate awareness of linguistic diversity without necessarily developing the critical frameworks needed to interrogate language-based inequality.

Although related literature on CLA, language ideologies, and linguistic sensitivity is increasing, these constructs are often examined independently. Few studies investigate how students' critical awareness of language informs their ideological beliefs and how these beliefs, in turn, influence sensitivity toward linguistic diversity. Consequently, there remains limited understanding of how students in Philippine higher education negotiate language, identity, and power within multilingual academic environments.

Anchored in Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural Learning Theory, this study viewed language awareness and communicative practices as socially constructed through interaction and cultural mediation. The study further drew from Fairclough's Critical Discourse Theory, Language Ideology Theory, Pierre Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital, and sociolinguistic and intercultural competence frameworks to explain how students develop critical awareness, ideological beliefs, and sensitivity toward language use. Guided by these perspectives, the study examined the levels of Critical Language Awareness, language ideologies, and linguistic sensitivity among students in Philippine State Universities and Colleges, with the aim of understanding how learners perceive and negotiate language, diversity, and power in academic contexts.

Statement of the problem

This study aimed to determine the levels of critical language awareness, language ideologies, and language sensitivity of college students in State Universities and Colleges in

the province of Iloilo, and to examine the differences and relationships among these variables as basis for a Language Competency Program.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of critical language awareness of college students in State Universities and Colleges in Iloilo?
2. What is the level of language ideologies of college students in State Universities and Colleges in Iloilo?
3. What is the level of language sensitivity of college students in State Universities and Colleges in Iloilo?
4. Is there a significant difference in the level of language sensitivity of college students when grouped according to their level of critical language awareness?
5. Is there a significant difference in the level of language sensitivity of college students when grouped according to their level of language ideologies?
6. Is there a significant relationship among critical language awareness, language ideologies, and language sensitivity of college students in State Universities and Colleges in Iloilo?
7. Based on the findings of the study, what Language Competency Program may be proposed to enhance the critical language awareness, language ideologies, and language sensitivity of college students?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a mixed methods research design integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the levels and relationships among Critical Language Awareness (CLA), Language Ideologies, and Language Sensitivity among college students in State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Iloilo during the academic year 2025–2026. The quantitative component utilized a descriptive correlational design to determine the levels of the variables and examine their relationships, while the qualitative component employed Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to provide deeper insights into students' and teachers' perceptions and experiences. The integration of quantitative and qualitative approaches enabled a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomena under investigation by combining statistical analysis with participants lived perspectives and interpretations.

The study was conducted among selected State Universities and Colleges in Iloilo, specifically Iloilo Science and Technology University, Iloilo State University of Fisheries Science and Technology, and Northern Iloilo State University. The participants consisted of 371 first year college students enrolled in Purposive Communication courses under the College of Education in these institutions. The respondents were selected through criterion based purposive sampling to ensure that participants met the specific qualifications required for the study. In addition to the student respondents who participated in the quantitative phase, seven faculty members and six students were included in the Focus Group Discussions to provide qualitative data that would enrich and contextualize the quantitative findings.

Data were collected using four researcher made instruments: the Critical Language Awareness Questionnaire, the Language Ideologies Questionnaire, the Language Sensitivity Test, and the Focus Group Discussion Guide. The Critical Language Awareness Questionnaire and the Language Sensitivity Test each consisted of 30 item situational multiple-choice assessments designed to measure respondents' levels of critical language awareness and language sensitivity. The Language Ideologies Questionnaire utilized vignette-based responses that were evaluated through a holistic rubric to assess participants' language ideologies. The

Focus Group Discussion Guide was employed during the qualitative phase to facilitate discussions and gather detailed accounts of participants' perceptions and experiences related to the study variables. Prior to administration, all instruments underwent expert validation to establish content validity and were subjected to pilot testing to determine reliability. The results yielded acceptable reliability coefficients through Cronbach's alpha, indicating that the instruments were suitable for use in the study.

The collection of data was carried out following established ethical considerations and data privacy protocols. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and all information gathered was treated with confidentiality and used solely for research purposes. Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study to ensure the protection of participants' rights, privacy, and welfare.

The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were utilized to determine the respondents' profiles and the levels of Critical Language Awareness, Language Ideologies, and Language Sensitivity. To determine significant differences among variables, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed. Pearson r was used to examine the relationships among the variables included in the study. All quantitative analyses were conducted using SPSS at a 0.05 level of significance. The qualitative data obtained from the Focus Group Discussions were analyzed through thematic analysis. This analytical procedure facilitated the identification of recurring themes and patterns within participants' responses, thereby providing explanatory insights that supported and enriched the quantitative findings. The integration of statistical results and thematic interpretations enabled a more comprehensive examination of the levels and relationships among Critical Language Awareness, Language Ideologies, and Language Sensitivity among college students in the selected SUCs in Iloilo.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results presented in this section are based on data gathered from 371 first year college students enrolled in Purposive Communication courses under the College of Education from selected State Universities and Colleges in Iloilo, namely Iloilo Science and Technology University, Iloilo State University of Fisheries Science and Technology, and Northern Iloilo State University. Using a mixed methods research design, the study employed criterion based purposive sampling and collected quantitative data through the Critical Language Awareness Questionnaire, Language Ideologies Questionnaire, and Language Sensitivity Test, while qualitative insights were obtained through Focus Group Discussions involving faculty members and students. The analysis utilized descriptive statistics, including mean and standard deviation, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), Pearson r correlation analysis, and thematic analysis of qualitative responses. The discussion that follows is grounded in the empirical data gathered and interprets the findings directly in relation to the objectives of determining the levels of Critical Language Awareness, Language Ideologies, and Language Sensitivity and examining the relationships among these variables.

The findings revealed generally high levels across the three language related variables examined. Students demonstrated a high level of Critical Language Awareness, with a mean of 23.11 and an SD of 5.39. This result indicates that the respondents possess a strong awareness of the ways language reflects power relations, social meanings, and inclusivity. The findings suggest that students are capable of identifying biased or discriminatory language and are able to critically reflect on the ethical and social implications of communication. The qualitative findings reinforced this result, as both students and teachers observed that learners consciously adjust their language according to context and audience and are increasingly aware of the

potential effects of words on others. This pattern may be associated with students' exposure to critical literacy practices, academic discourse, social media engagement, and instructional approaches that encourage reflective and socially responsible language use. The finding is consistent with the work of Beaudrie (2023) and Fajardo (2025), who emphasized that exposure to critical discourse practices and socially contextualized language instruction contributes to the development of learners' metalinguistic and critical awareness. Viewed from the perspective of critical language theory, the result supports the notion that language awareness extends beyond linguistic competence and encompasses the ability to recognize the social and ideological dimensions of communication.

The results further showed that students exhibited a high level of Language Ideologies, with a mean of 7.78 and an SD of 1.76. This finding indicates that respondents possess well developed beliefs and attitudes regarding language use, appropriateness, prestige, and linguistic value. The result suggests that students recognize language as closely linked to identity, culture, and social status and understand that language can serve as both a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion. Focus Group Discussion participants confirmed that language beliefs are shaped and reinforced through school experiences, media exposure, and social interaction. In particular, participants frequently associated English proficiency with intelligence, success, and opportunity. Such observations reflect broader sociolinguistic processes in which language beliefs are socially constructed and reproduced through institutions and social practices. The findings support the arguments of Lippi Green (2012), who emphasized that language ideologies reflect social hierarchies, power structures, and cultural values. The high level of Language Ideologies observed in this study suggests that students are actively negotiating and interpreting language values within increasingly multilingual and socially diverse environments.

Among the three variables, Language Sensitivity registered the highest level, with a mean of 26.80 and an SD of 3.55, interpreted as Very High. This finding indicates that students are highly aware of the ways language may reinforce discrimination, bias, or exclusion and that they consciously strive to use language in respectful, inclusive, and socially appropriate ways. The result suggests heightened sensitivity to issues involving mental health, bullying, gender inclusivity, and discriminatory expressions, particularly within online and multicultural contexts. Qualitative evidence further revealed that exposure to social media and increasing public awareness of social issues have contributed to students becoming more reflective and cautious in their communication practices. These findings align with the studies of Villanueva et al. (2022) and Quinto et al. (2024), which demonstrated that exposure to multilingual and socially diverse contexts enhances learners' awareness of the ethical and interpersonal consequences of language use. The Very High level of Language Sensitivity reflects a growing recognition among students of the importance of responsible communication and the need to consider the potential impact of language on individuals and communities.

Taken together, the descriptive findings indicate that students in State Universities and Colleges in Iloilo possess strong critical, ideological, and ethical awareness of language. The consistently high and Very High levels across the three variables suggest that educational experiences, sociocultural exposure, and evolving public discourse have contributed substantially to the development of students' communicative awareness. These findings support contemporary perspectives in language education that emphasize critical literacy, social responsibility, and culturally responsive communication as essential components of language competence.

To determine whether differences in Language Sensitivity existed across levels of Critical Language Awareness and Language Ideologies, Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted. The results revealed a statistically significant difference between Language Sensitivity and Critical Language Awareness, with $F = 5.517$ and $\text{Sig.} = 0.001$. At the 0.05 level of significance, this finding indicates that the null hypothesis of no significant difference should be rejected. The result suggests that students with higher levels of Critical Language Awareness demonstrate significantly greater Language Sensitivity than those with lower levels. This finding implies that learners who possess a stronger understanding of the social and ideological dimensions of language are more likely to communicate in careful, respectful, and context appropriate ways. The result supports theoretical perspectives advanced by Fairclough (1992) and van Dijk (2011), who argued that awareness of language, power, and discourse contributes to more socially responsible communicative behavior.

Similarly, the ANOVA results revealed a statistically significant difference between Language Sensitivity and Language Ideologies, with $F = 3.54$ and $\text{Sig.} = 0.007$. Because the obtained significance value is below the 0.05 level, the null hypothesis is likewise rejected. This finding indicates that students with stronger and more inclusive language ideologies tend to exhibit higher levels of Language Sensitivity. The result suggests that beliefs and perspectives about language significantly shape the manner in which students interpret, evaluate, and use language in diverse social contexts. Students who hold more reflective and inclusive language beliefs appear more likely to communicate in socially aware and respectful ways. This finding is consistent with the discussions of Siegel (2006) and Razfar and Rumenapp (2012), who emphasized the influence of language beliefs on communication practices and social interaction. Collectively, these ANOVA results highlight the importance of fostering critical reflection and inclusive language perspectives within educational settings to strengthen students' socially responsible communication.

Pearson r correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationships among Critical Language Awareness, Language Ideologies, and Language Sensitivity. The analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between Critical Language Awareness and Language Ideologies, with $r = 0.260$ and $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$. At the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis of no significant relationship is rejected. This result indicates that students who demonstrate higher levels of Critical Language Awareness also tend to possess more developed and reflective Language Ideologies. Although the relationship is positive, its magnitude suggests a relatively weak association, indicating that while the variables are related, they are influenced by additional factors beyond those measured in the study.

The analysis also revealed a significant positive relationship between Critical Language Awareness and Language Sensitivity, with $r = 0.211$ and $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$. Since the significance value is below the 0.05 threshold, the null hypothesis is rejected. The result indicates that students with higher levels of Critical Language Awareness tend to demonstrate greater Language Sensitivity. Although the correlation is positive and statistically significant, the relatively weak magnitude suggests that awareness alone may not fully determine sensitive communication practices. Rather, language behavior appears to be influenced by a combination of awareness, personal experiences, contextual demands, and social interactions.

Likewise, a significant positive relationship was found between Language Ideologies and Language Sensitivity, with $r = 0.184^*$ and $\text{Sig.} = 0.000$. At the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected. This finding indicates that students who possess stronger and more inclusive language ideologies tend to exhibit greater sensitivity in their language use. However, the relatively weak correlation suggests that language beliefs do not always translate directly into communicative behavior. This observation is consistent with the arguments of Garrett (2010) and Pavlenko (2013), who noted that language attitudes, ideologies, and

communicative practices often vary across contexts and may be shaped by multiple social and psychological influences.

Overall, the correlation results demonstrate that Critical Language Awareness, Language Ideologies, and Language Sensitivity are significantly and positively related. Students who exhibit higher critical language awareness tend to develop more reflective language ideologies, while those with more inclusive language beliefs are more likely to demonstrate heightened language sensitivity. Nevertheless, the weak relationships among the variables indicate that awareness, beliefs, and sensitivity do not always develop or operate uniformly. Actual language behavior may continue to be influenced by contextual, social, and personal factors, including peer pressure, communication habits, emotions, and situational demands. These findings underscore the complex and multidimensional nature of language use and suggest that language competence extends beyond knowledge and attitudes to include the dynamic interaction of cognitive, social, and contextual influences.

The findings of this study support the view that Critical Language Awareness, Language Ideologies, and Language Sensitivity are interconnected constructs that collectively shape students' communicative behavior and social use of language. The significant positive relationships among the variables provide empirical support for the theoretical perspectives of Fairclough (1992) and van Dijk (2011), who emphasized the interconnected roles of language awareness, ideology, power, and social meaning. The results further demonstrate that students' beliefs about language influence their sensitivity to linguistic diversity and communicative responsibility, supporting the sociolinguistic perspectives advanced by Siegel (2006) and Razfar and Rumenapp (2012). At the same time, the relatively weak correlations highlight the complexity of language behavior and reinforce the arguments of Garrett (2010) and Pavlenko (2013) that awareness, beliefs, attitudes, and communication practices do not always operate consistently across situations.

In synthesis, the study achieved its objectives by establishing that students possess a High level of Critical Language Awareness ($M = 23.11$, $SD = 5.39$), a High level of Language Ideologies ($M = 7.78$, $SD = 1.76$), and a Very High level of Language Sensitivity ($M = 26.80$, $SD = 3.55$). Significant differences in Language Sensitivity were identified across levels of Critical Language Awareness ($F = 5.517$, $Sig. = 0.001$) and Language Ideologies ($F = 3.54$, $Sig. = 0.007$), while significant positive relationships were observed between Critical Language Awareness and Language Ideologies ($r = 0.260$, $Sig. = 0.000$), Critical Language Awareness and Language Sensitivity ($r = 0.211$, $Sig. = 0.000$), and Language Ideologies and Language Sensitivity ($r = 0.184^*$, $Sig. = 0.000$). These findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on language awareness, ideology, and socially responsible communication by demonstrating that critical reflection, language beliefs, and sensitivity are interconnected dimensions of communicative competence. The results further underscore the need for educational interventions that strengthen critical language awareness, promote inclusive language ideologies, and cultivate context sensitive communication practices. These findings provide a strong empirical foundation for the proposed Language Competency Program (LCP), which is discussed in the succeeding section as a strategic response to the identified needs and patterns emerging from the study.

CONCLUSION

The study concluded that college students in selected State Universities and Colleges in Iloilo possess a high level of Critical Language Awareness, a high level of Language Ideologies, and a very high level of Language Sensitivity. These findings indicate that the

students are generally aware of the social, cultural, ideological, and ethical dimensions of language use. They recognize that language is not only a tool for communication but also a means through which identity, power, inclusion, exclusion, and social values are expressed and negotiated.

The study further concluded that students' level of Language Sensitivity significantly differs when they are grouped according to their levels of Critical Language Awareness and Language Ideologies. This implies that students who are more critically aware of language and who hold more developed beliefs about language tend to demonstrate greater sensitivity in their communication practices. Thus, critical awareness and language beliefs play important roles in shaping students' ability to use language in respectful, inclusive, and socially appropriate ways.

The findings also established significant relationships among Critical Language Awareness, Language Ideologies, and Language Sensitivity. However, the weak relationships among the variables suggest that although these constructs are connected, they do not always develop or operate consistently. Students' actual language behavior may still be influenced by contextual, social, emotional, and personal factors, including peer interactions, habits, communicative situations, and prior experiences.

Overall, the study concludes that strengthening students' language competence requires more than developing linguistic proficiency. It also requires deliberate instruction that promotes critical reflection, inclusive language beliefs, and socially responsible communication. Based on these findings, the proposed Language Competency Program is necessary to enhance students' critical language awareness, deepen their understanding of language ideologies, and further cultivate their language sensitivity in academic, social, and multicultural contexts.

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