

# A Study on the Secret Language of the Mochas in Iligan City

Lourd Gregory D. Crisol, MAELS and Lovely A. Parungao, MAELS

**Abstract**— This study entitled “A Study on the Secret Language of the Mochas in Iligan City” analyzed both the verbal and nonverbal language used by the mochas. *Mocha* is a term used to refer to a class of young male prostitutes in Iligan City. Purposive sampling was used to determine the 27 respondents of this study. In studying the mocha language, the descriptive-survey method was employed to obtain the data while the questionnaire and the FGD were the main instruments used in eliciting information needed to determine: 1) the profile of the respondents 2) the linguistic features and the development of the mocha language, and 3) the nonverbal language employed by the said group of individuals in negotiating with their clients.

The results revealed that borrowing from gay language was the major morphological process that enriched the lexicon of the secret language of the mochas. They also employed semantic shifting using words that come from Cebuano and English as well as proper names. In terms of phonetic processes, it was observed that they used deletion, epenthesis, and metathesis. It was also observed that the major morphological processes they employed in word formation were prefixation, suffixation, circumfixation, reduplication, blending, and coinage. Staring, nodding and clapping of the hands to the clients were some of the nonverbal cues employed by the mochas when dealing with their clients. Furthermore, the mocha language was formed from the people who have usual contact with the mochas who are Cebuano speakers, English speakers, and Swardspak speakers.

**Keywords**— mochas, morphological processes, non-verbal language, phonetic processes, verbal language

## I. INTRODUCTION

Prostitution is considered to be one of the oldest professions in the world. However, many people overlook one factor which links their world to the mainstream world and that is language. It is because of this factor that they are able to do transactions with their clients without being too obvious. And, it is because of this that they continue to exist until today.

In analyzing language and prostitution, perhaps it would be fitting to first define what a prostitute is. According to Merriam- Webster Dictionary, the simple meaning of a prostitute is a person who has sex with someone in exchange for money [1]. Given this light, prostitution therefore encompasses a wide variety of people from different genders, races, ages, and even educational backgrounds. That is why this research only focused on a group of prostitutes in Iligan City which are locally known as *mochas*. In a study done by

Gaburno and Paloma in 2008, they defined *mocha* as young male prostitutes who have sexual involvement with gays in Iligan City. They are heterosexual males who perform oral sex to male homosexuals. *Mocha* comes from the Cebuano word *mokaon* which means to eat. The third syllable –on is deleted from the word *mokaon* and then is spelled as *mocha* which is a flavoring or beverage made by mixing coffee and cocoa, which has a similar sound of the word *muka* [2]. These young male prostitutes operate in many major *barangays* in the city however there are certain known places which they are frequently seen.

Generally, the language used by the *mochas* in Iligan City is *Cebuano* but when transacting with clients and patrons or when conversing with fellow *mochas*, these young male prostitutes use nonverbal cues and shift to another language which is quite alien to the mainstream society. Further, it was identified that this language exhibits changed meaning of various existing words and exhibited a rich use of gay lexicon with various nuances; hence it could perhaps be labeled as a form of secret language.

This is the main reason as to why the researchers engaged in this research- to try and decode the “secret” of the *mocha* language.

Moreover, this paper sought to answer the following questions:

1. hat is the demographic profile of the *mochas*?
2. What are the linguistic features of the *mocha* language?
3. What nonlinguistic features are used by the *mochas*?
4. How was the language of the *mochas* formed?

## II. METHODOLOGY

This study involved 27 purposively chosen *mochas* in Iligan City. These respondents come from the different *barangays* in Iligan City such as Buru-un, Sta. Filomena and Dalipuga among others. This study employed the descriptive survey method which involved survey questionnaires, Focus Group Discussion and observation. These methods were utilized to determine the demographic profile of the *mochas* as well as the linguistic and nonlinguistic features of the group. It also aimed at identifying how the language was formed.

III. PRESENTATION OF DATA

A. The Demographic Profile of the Mocha

Based on the findings of the researchers, it was revealed that most of the mochas were between the ages of 15 and 17. There was also one as young as 13 years old.

TABLE I: AGE

Age	Frequency	...	Percentage
13	1		3.70%
14	3		11.11 %
15	8		29.63 %
16	6		22.22%
17	9		33.33%
Total	27		100%

This data is also verified in the study of Gaburno and Paloma which stated that, among their mocha respondents, the oldest was 17 and the youngest was 13 years old [2]. However, it is also important to note that age, in the world of the *mochas* does not affect their language skills because even the youngest *mocha* can understand and interpret meaning conveyed both by their fellow *mochas* and the clients. In a circle of *mochas* there is also no age exclusiveness. This means that mochas are not really very much particular of their age group but on their kinship.

Next, in terms of educational attainment, it could be clearly perceived that most of them are out of school youth. They either dropped out from elementary or high school. This is shown in the next table.

TABLE 2: EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Educational Attainment	Frequency	Percentage
Elementary (on-going)	1	3.70%
Elementary (dropout)	2	7.41 %
Elementary (graduate)	9	33.33 %
High School (on-going)	3	11.11%
High School (dropout)	11	40.74%
High School (graduate)	1	3.70%
Total	27	100%

The reason for this dropout rate is revealed in the study of Gaborno and Paloma wherein, practically, most of the respondents belonged to the lower class stratum of the society since their parents are unemployed and engaged only in odd jobs and contractual work for they could not access to better paying jobs. And because most of the *mochas* are not attending school anymore, they spend most of their times hanging out with their friends, sharing hobbies, and vices together [2]. Thus, because of this, they somehow get more exposed to the language.

Another factor which affects the *mocha's* learning of a language is his number of years in being in that group of people.

TABLE 3: NUMBER OF YEARS OF BEING A MOCHA

Years of Being a Mocha	Frequency	Percentage
Less than a year	10	37.01%
One (less than two)	8	29.63%
Two (less than three)	4	14.81%
Three (less than four)	3	11.11%
Four and above	2	7.41%
Total	27	100%

According to Wardaugh in 2006, Language is both an individual possession and a social possession. We would expect, therefore, that certain individuals would behave linguistically like other individuals: they might be said to speak the same language or the same dialect or the same variety, i.e. to employ the same code, and in that respect to be members of the same speech community [3]. And it is because of this communal property of language which allows people to assimilate the values of a group as well as their language. In the world of *mochas* length of exposure to the language as well as their value system would affect how proficient they would become in using the language to their peers as well as their clients. Thus, even though they are as young as 14 but have already been exposed to the language longer than a 16 year old *mocha*, then the younger one would definitely have more grasp in the language than the latter.

B. Linguistic Features of the Mocha Language

a. Phonetics and Phonetic Processes

According to O' Grady (2000), phonetics is the study of the inventory and structure of sound patterns of a language [4]. And it is believed that speakers of all languages use phonetic processes that allow them to articulate sounds with greater ease and efficiency. In the case of the *mocha* language, phonetic rules and articulatory processes are employed to modify the production of sounds found in Cebuano, English, and Gay lingo to make *mocha* language distinct.

One of these linguistic processes used by the *mochas* is deletion which is sometimes accompanied by epenthesis. According to O' Grady (2000), deletion is a process that removes a segment from certain phonetic contexts. Deletion occurs in everyday rapid speech in many languages. While epenthesis refers to a process that inserts a syllabic or nonsyllabic segments within an existing string of segments [4]. Table 4 shows some examples used in the *mocha* language.

TABLE 4: DELETION AND EPENTHESIS IN MOCHA LANGUAGE

Word	Deletion	Metathesis	Result
Virgin	v3:ʳ-	dʒur-	dʒurdʒɪn (Jergin)
Chupa (fellatio)		-pɛms	tʃupa pɛms (chupapems)
Gwapa (beautiful)	Gwa-	ʃ o-	ʃ opa (shopa)
Siya (him/her)	Si-	dʒu-	dʒuja (juya)
Pranka (frank)	-r-		Paŋka
Ako (me)	a-	ʃ o-	ʃoko (Shoko)
Siguro (maybe)	Si-		Guru
Bi		-la	Balla (bayla)
Mingaw (lonesome)	m-	-g-	ɪŋgaw
Yarok (drink, esp. alcohol)	-ok		jar (yar)

These two articulatory processes usually come hand in hand with each other and help enrich the *mocha* language. Based on the interviews, it could be surmised that these two processes could be attributed to the *mocha's* exposure to gay language and their gang/ fraternity involvements making it a hybrid of different languages. As mentioned by O' Grady (2000), language can reflect not only the identity of a speaker but also relationships between speakers [4].

Moreover, the transcription that follows is provided to show how some of the words mentioned in table 4 are used in conversation among the *mochas*. It involves three *mochas*, of which the two are teasing the other one because of his relationship to a client.

- Mocha 1: waaa... chipska! (waaa you are gay!)
- Mocha 2: Asnik? Si shoko? (who? me?)
- Mocha 3: Bulbahan na gyud waki. (you're already gay dude)
- Mocha 2: edj pa tanto uy. (not so much yet)
- Mocha 1: Pagchur dira, animal ka! (make sure of that, idiot!)

Another phonetic process present in the language of *mochas* is metathesis. According to O' Grady (2000), metathesis is a processes that reorders a sequence of segments. Metathesis often results in a sequence of phones that is easier to articulate. It is also employed in the *mocha* language to make their conversations incomprehensible to non-speakers. The conversation that follows demonstrates how metathesis occurs in the *mocha* language.

- Mocha 1: Asnu man ota bay? (what's up dude?)
- Mocha 2: aan ayis booking. (he has a client later)
- Mocha 1: anik? (who?)
- Mocha 2: tobma . (I don't know)

Those who are unfamiliar with the process may think those words, which result from the reordering of segments, are nonsense words or perhaps would think that the speakers were speaking another language. *Mochas* employ metathesis to exclude outsiders from their conversation especially if it pertains to private matters. Table 5 shows some commonly metathesized words in the *mocha* language.

TABLE 5: METATHESIS IN MOCHA LANGUAGE

Original Word	Meaning	Mocha words using metathesis	Meaning
Bayot	Gay	Toyab	Gay
lkaw	You	Waki	You
Inom	Drink (esp. alcohol)	Moni	Drink (esp. alcohol)
Kaun	Eat	Nuak	Eat
Sira	Suffering from STD	Is-ar	Suffering from STD
Iyot	To have sex	Toyi	To have sex
condom	A male contraceptive	Modnoc	A male contraceptive
Lubi (from the word lubot)	A coconut tree	Ibul	To engage in anal sex
ampu	To pray	Upma	To have sex
lami	Delicious	Imal	Attractive

The table shows that when words are metathesized, there is a tendency of having semantic retention. However, there are also times in which they also change meanings. This semantic shift is revealed in the words *ibul*, *upma*, and *imal*. This is most probably done to further disguise the language from the mainstream society.

b. Morphology and Morphological Processes

As defined by Payne (2006), morphology is the study of the shapes of words, or, more specifically, how words are constructed out of smaller meaningful pieces in order to express variations in meanings. In the language of *mochas* words are constructed through certain morphological processes [5].

The processes observed in the *mocha* language involve the use of affixation. To cite O' Grady (2000), it is the process of attaching an affix or affixes to the base of a word [4]. Specifically, the affixes used in the *mocha* language are prefix, suffix, and circumfix. According to Payne (2006), prefixation involves the addition of a morpheme (a prefix) to the beginning of a root. Often, languages allow several prefix to be attached to one root. On the other hand, suffixation involves the addition of a morpheme (a suffix) to the end of a root. As with prefixes, there can be more than one suffix on a word. Finally, circumfixation is a rare morphological process in which one morpheme has two parts- one that appears before the root and another after the root [5]. Table 6 shows some words which use affixes.

TABLE 6: AFFIXATION IN THE MOCHA LANGUAGE

Root word	prefix	suffix	circumfix	Result	Meaning
lubi	Nagpa-			Nagpalubi	To be penetrate in anal sex
bayot	Nang-/nam-			Namayot	To look for/ book gay clients.
apuch	Gapa-			Gapaapuch	To undergo oral sex.
spoy	Mag-			Magspoy	To smoke
irbil	Magpa-			Magpai rbil	To be treated (to something)
nuak	Mang-			Mangnuak	To eat
yar	Ga-			gayar	Drinking alcohol
tira		-han		tirahan	To put tattoo
tulis		-an		tulisan	A person who always asks for money
Bayu		-on/hon		bayuhon	To go on a boyfriend or girlfriend relationship with someone. Someone who is a member of gangs/ fraternities and hurts other people
birahay			Ma- -ay	mamirahay	Someone who is attractive or appealing
lami			Ma- -on	malami on	

\*note: the first 3 prefixes signal past events, the 4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> prefixes signal future events while the last prefix signals an ongoing action.

Another morphological process identified in the *mocha* language is the use of reduplication which is a process that involves the repetition of a part or all of a root [5]. This is exemplified in table 7.

TABLE 7: REDUPLICATION IN THE MOCHA LANGUAGE

Original Word	Meaning	Mocha Reduplicated Words	Meaning
bayu	Boyfriend/ girlfriend	Bayubayu	Boyfriend/ girlfriend
Laki	A heterosexual man	Laki-laki	A bisexual/ discreet gay
ampu	To pray	Ampu-ampu	Having intercourse
keda	Drug addict	Keda-keda	Drug addict
chat	converse	Chat-chat	To chat online usually with deeper motives.

Further, blending and coinage are also used in enriching the

*mocha* language. Blending makes new words by putting together fragments of existing words in new combination while coinage, which is sometimes called as word manufacture, creates word from scratch [5][4]. These processes only show how *mochas* can play with sounds and be able to combine these sounds to produce helpful tools for communication. This ability of the speakers to use, to innovate, and to generate words, reveal their seeming creativity. Table 8 and 9 show some blended words and *coined* words in the *mocha* language.

TABLE 8: BLENDING IN THE MOCHA LANGUAGE

Unblended words	Blended words	Meaning
Army + Sapa	Arsap	A soldier assigned near the stream (of Lawis)
Insomnia+ iyot	Insomniot	Cannot go to sleep without doing sexual intercourse
Taya + utok	Taytok	foolish

TABLE 9: COINING IN THE MOCHA LANGUAGE

Coined words	Meaning
Bulbahán	Gay
Spoy	Cigarette
Hudoy	Drunk
Tuks	Virgin
Tuyaps	gay
Tarima	rugby

Finally, based on the data gathered, it was also discovered that *mochas* employ semantic shifts in their language. This is done by changing the meaning of already established words. These semantic shifts were categorized by the researchers into two. The first category comes from proper names while the second category comes from borrowed words from English, and Cebuano. Their language is also enriched by purely borrowing from the Gay Language. Table 10 and 11 reveal some of these semantically shifted and borrowed words.

TABLE 10: SEMANTICALLY SHIFTED WORDS FROM PROPER NAMES

Proper Name	Original meaning	Mocha Meaning
Choco Mucho	A brand of chocolate bar	Another term for mocha
Dyosa	A primetime telenovela in a local TV station	A beautiful gay
Tom Jones	A singer	Hungry
Bea Allonzo	An actress on TV	Used to describe a beautiful woman/ gay
Coca-cola	A brand of softdrink	Used to describe a sexy woman/ gay

TABLE 11: SEMANTICALLY SHIFTED WORDS AND PURELY BORROWED WORDS FROM OTHER LANGUAGES

Word	Origin	Original Meaning	New Meaning
Cymbals	English	A percussion instrument	A lesbian affair
Mocha cake	English	A kind of cake	A variety of the term for mocha
Surplus	English	a second hand item	A woman who has been used by other men
Bomb	English	An explosive device	Sexual intercourse
Seminar	English	A form of orientation	To experience sexual intercourse
Balbal	Cebuano	A monster	Bum
Bongkol	Cebuano	To strike someone (esp. on the head)	Sexual intercourse
Mangahoy	Cebuano	To look for wood	To look for gay customers
Tinta	Cebuano	Squid ink	Semen
Hubag	Cebuano	swelling	A woman with big breasts
Kabayoy	Cebuano	Horse	Gay with muscular built
Atabishi	Gay		Child
Notaveli	Gay		male sex organ
Jacky	Gay		To masturbate
Kaki	Gay		Man
Yeye	Gay		Gay

C. Non-Linguistic Features of the Mocha Language

Other forms of human communication do not involve words or any kind of speech. These utterances are called body language or kinesics. Between the mocha and their clients, body language performs a significant role- before any verbal transaction happens. Certain actions are exhibited by the mochas to signal to prospect clients or welcome their usual ones. Table 4 shows these non-verbal cues.

TABLE 12: THE BODY LANGUAGE EMPLOYED BY THE MOCHAS

Body Language	Frequency	Percentage
Staring at a client	13	48.15%
Clapping of hands	6	22.22%
Making a sign language	3	11.11%
Others: asking a cigarette, whistling, smiling	5	18.52%
Total	27	100%

D. Formation of the Mocha Language

Based on the data gathered, the researchers found out that the language used by this group of young individuals was created because of their contact with speakers that use other codes of language such as those who use gay language as well as gang language. However, the most crucial finding in such linguistic innovation is that it was mainly learned, formed, and created because of the need to camouflage transactions from the watchful eye of the mainstream society.

IV. CONCLUSION

Languages are not purely linguistic entities. They serve social functions. In order to define a language, it is important to consider its social and political functions, as well as its

linguistic features. Obviously the role of language is to unite the individuals in that speech community through communication. But communication can happen only when these individual share the same meaning of the codes used[6].

From the data gathered, the researchers arrived at the following conclusions: 1) linguistically, the *mochas* were able to enrich their language through the use of various phonetic and morphological processes. 2) Nonverbal cues are used to supplement the verbal cues used to transact with clients, and 3) Gay language and the language used in gangs helped enrich the *mocha* language.

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