

CHAVACANO LANGUAGE – and the many several varieties of this creole and their classification

Chavacano (as a proper noun and a derivative of the Spanish adjective "chabacano" and as it is generally accepted in literature, the broadcast media, and Zamboanguenos) or Chabacano (from the Spanish adjective) is a creole language or more precisely, the common name for the several varieties of the Philippine Creole Spanish spoken in the Philippines. The word chabacano—which the name Chavacano is derived from—is Spanish for "poor taste," "vulgar," "common," "tasteless," "tacky," or "coarse".

The Chavacano language is the only Spanish-based creole in Asia. It has survived for more than 400 years, thus making it one of the oldest creole languages in the world. It is the only language to have developed in the Philippines (a member of Philippine languages) which does not belong to the family of Austronesian languages although it shows a characteristic common to the Malayo-Polynesian languages, the reduplication.

Chavacano speakers are concentrated mostly in Zamboanga City and in the island province of Basilan. It is also spoken in some areas of the provinces of Zamboanga del Sur, Zamboanga Sibugay, Zamboanga del Norte, Cavite City, Ternate, Davao, and Cotabato. According to the official 2000 Philippine census, there were altogether 607,200 Chavacano speakers in the Philippines in that same year. The exact figure could be higher as the 2000 population of Zamboanga City, whose main language is Chavacano, far exceeded that census figure. Also, the figure does not include Chavacano speakers of the Filipino diaspora.

Speakers are also found in Semporna, Sabah in Malaysia—not surprisingly—because this northern part of Borneo is close to the Sulu islands and Zamboanga Peninsula and was once part of Spanish Philippines until the late 19th century. Some people of the Muslim ethnic tribes of Zamboanga such as the Tausugs, the Samals, and of Basilan such as the Yakans also speak the language. In the close provinces of Sulu and Tawi-Tawi areas, there are muslim speakers of the Chabacano de Zamboanga.

There are several varieties of this creole and their classification is based on their substrate languages and the regions where they are commonly spoken. The three known varieties of Chavacano/Chabacano which have Tagalog as their substrate language are Caviteño (spoken in Cavite City), Ternateño (spoken in Ternate, Cavite), and Ermitaño (once spoken in Ermita and now extinct). The other varieties which have Cebuano as their substrate language are Zamboangueno (spoken in Zamboanga City), Davaoeno (spoken in areas of Davao), and Cotabateño (spoken in Cotabato City). Zamboangueno is the variety with the most number of speakers, being the main language of Zamboanga City.

Chavacano is primarily and practically a spoken language than a written language. Its vocabulary is predominantly derived from the Spanish language, while grammar is mostly based on other Philippine languages primarily, Tagalog and Cebuano. It is used in education, print media, television and radio.

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