

Love Out Loud: Gugmang Tiunay and Same-Sex Couple Communication

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100600833>

Received: 14 June 2026; Accepted: 19 June 2026; Published: 07 July 2026

ABSTRACT

This study seeks to understand the communication challenges and coping mechanisms of same-sex couples in expressing and sustaining gugmang tiunay (true love) within multilingual relationships in the Philippines. Guided by the foundations of Affection Exchange Theory, Communication Accommodation Theory, and Queer Theory, the research explored how language, tone, emotional expression, and communication styles influence intimacy and understanding among same-sex partners. Through a qualitative approach, data were collected using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with couples in long-term relationships. The data gathered revealed that communication barriers commonly stem from lexical gaps, misunderstandings arising from code-switching, tone-sensitive meanings, emotional withdrawal, intercultural differences, and language-related emotional escalation. These challenges often caused confusion, conflict, and emotional distance between partners. However, participants actively employed coping mechanisms such as multilingual flexibility, clarification strategies, emotional regulation, reassurance, humor, face-to-face communication, and perspective-taking to maintain harmony and understanding in their relationships. This research contributes to sociolinguistic and queer communication studies by demonstrating the significant role of language in sustaining bonds and relationship stability among same-sex couples in the Philippine context.

Keywords: same-sex couples, language barriers, communication challenges, code-switching, coping mechanisms

SDG: #4 Quality Education and #10 Reduced Inequalities

INTRODUCTION

Communication is the key. A relationship breakdown is often associated with communication failures, which occur when partners feel misunderstood or emotionally unmet, according to Pandey et al. (1766–1769). Misunderstandings were frequently the result of poor communication, lack of clarity in expressing emotion, and unresolved conflict between partners (Johnson et al. 534–549). In addition to Brkić-Jovanović et al., how same-sex couples express affection, expressive language, and verbal affirmation has a significant impact on the relationship. Highlighting how partners express emotions and interpret language can affect understanding and emotional connection within the relationship (255–264). This is especially concerning because same-sex couples may encounter gaps in language use, emotional expression, tone interpretation, and communication styles, which can alter how affection, emotions, and intentions are understood within the relationship.

Also, as Sasaki et al. argued, communication is "done differently," influencing relationships because it is more than just sharing words; it is also about how partners convey, evaluate, and emotionally process signals (101638). Internalized negative beliefs about oneself or relationships can limit open emotional communication. Individuals may suppress feelings, avoid sensitive discussions, and struggle to express needs clearly, leading to misunderstandings and reduced relationship satisfaction (Brandão 332–41). As stated by Katila et al., understanding tone, vocabulary, and emotional clues is just as valuable as understanding the actual words spoken; missing these indications can result in conflict, whereas accurate interpretation leads to emotional connection and mutual understanding (330–49).

In accordance with this issue, previous sociolinguistic research placed language at the heart of intimacy construction, especially for same-sex couples whose relational meanings were negotiated through discourse. The study of Jones argued that affection, desire, and commitment arise from lexical choices, stance-taking, humor, and affective expressions that signal solidarity, moving beyond a purely psychological view of love (56–68). In multilingual settings, code-switching serves as an affective tool to intensify emotion, soften criticism, or clarify intent. A recent work of Vanhaverbeke et al. demonstrated that code-switching patterns reflect speakers' pragmatic choices to signal topic shifts, emphasize information, and negotiate identity and social alignment within conversation (174).

Furthermore, Mallory emphasized that communication patterns during conflict were especially critical, as they strongly influence relationship satisfaction and emotional closeness (358–371). This means that the way couples argue, negotiate, or express disagreement is not neutral; it directly affects how secure and connected they feel afterward. Poor communication during conflict can accumulate misunderstandings, while constructive dialogue can reinforce trust and emotional bonding. Similarly, Guzmán-González et al. highlighted that verbal responsiveness and emotional communication were key to sustaining intimacy. When partners actively respond to each other's feelings, acknowledging concerns, validating emotions, and engaging sincerely, it reduces the likelihood of misinterpretations and emotional distance (259–69). This responsiveness creates a sense of being heard and valued, which is foundational in maintaining a healthy romantic relationship.

In the Philippine context, switching among Cebuano, Filipino, and English influences how people express affection, apology, and reassurance, turning code-switching into a strategy for relationships rather than a simple change in language structure. In relation to communication, the Five Love Languages framework by Gary Chapman can be examined linguistically, particularly the language of words of affirmation. From a discourse viewpoint, words of affirmation depend on clear verbal expressions like compliments, praise, reassurance, gratitude, and loving declarations, which create emotional validation through word choice and tone. Thus, words of affirmation are not just positive remarks but deliberate acts of communication that convey love and a sense of relationship security (Hughes and Camden 234–44). However, research on how these language tools function in male-male and female-female couples in multilingual Philippine settings, especially in relation to the culturally rooted idea of *Gugmang Tiunay* (true love), remains limited. This study builds on current sociolinguistic and queer linguistic research by investigating how same-sex partners use word choice, tone, dialect differences, code-switching, and repair strategies to express and maintain true love in culturally specific contexts.

Studies of same-sex relationships have been more centered on topics like discrimination, mental health, identity, and acceptance. Other studies have examined aspects such as satisfaction, commitment, and support among LGBTQ+ couples in various countries, particularly in Western countries like the USA (Scott 270–84). Some studies have examined communication in romantic relationships. However, this communication is often treated as a general concept, without delving into how same-sex couples show love, resolve conflicts, and build understanding in their own ways. In countries like the Philippines, relationships are often shaped by factors such as family, religion, and society. Still, limited studies that clearly discuss how same-sex couples communicate with each other openly and honestly. There was still limited focus on how love, as in the concept of "*gugmang tiunay*" (true love), shapes their communication.

This led to a clear gap in understanding of the true nature of communication and how it actually works, especially in the local and cultural context of the Philippines. Although several studies have already been conducted about the experiences of same-sex couples, they have not provided a clear understanding of the role of communication in helping them build trust, clear up any misunderstandings, and even strengthen their relationship despite the challenges they face. An exploration of *Gugmang Tiunay* and Same-Sex Couple Communication can lead to a deeper understanding of the depth of sincere love expressed through words, actions, and meanings, as well as the role of communication in building strong, stable relationships.

This research is anchored on the following theoretical lenses: (1) Affection Exchange Theory (AET): This was introduced by Kory Floyd. According to the Affection Exchange Theory, the exchange of affectionate

messages, such as verbal messages of love, physical proximity, and support, enhances relationship bonding and well-being (Floyd 1–8). This theory guides the research to analyze how same-sex couples exchange messages of “gugmang tiunay” through daily acts of affection that create intimacy and relationship stability. (2) Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT): This theory was developed by Howard Giles. According to this theory, human communication involves convergent or divergent accommodation to achieve closeness, identity, and relationship goals (Giles et al. 1–68). This theory enables the research to examine how same-sex couples adapt their communication to achieve harmony and understanding in their relationship. (3) Queer Theory: This theory was informed by the works of Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. Queer Theory refers to the assumptions and notions of heteronormativity and the construction of gender and sexuality (Salamon 506–16). This theory helps the study to examine the construction of love among homosexual couples beyond the conventional relationships and communication.

To be able to keep the study aligned, the following research objectives are guiding this qualitative study: (1) What communication challenges do you face in expressing Gugmang Tiunay (true love) with your partner? (2) What coping mechanisms do you use to handle communication challenges with your partner? (3) What are the informants’ findings and personal insights, and what do the researchers gain from their responses?

The importance of studying same-sex couple communication lies in its contribution to understanding marginalized romantic experiences that were often underrepresented in communication research. Despite increasing recognition of LGBTQ+ relationships, many studies still focus predominantly on heterosexual couples. Investigating the communicative experiences of same-sex couples allowed researchers to identify how language, emotional expression, and relational strategies contribute to intimacy, resilience, and identity formation.

At a societal level, this study also promoted inclusivity in communication studies by recognizing diverse forms of love and relational experiences. The findings of this study on how same-sex couples use tone, emotional cues, expressive language, and verbal affirmation may help educators, counselors, and communication practitioners create environments that recognize and validate diverse forms of interaction and intimacy. This research may also encourage broader conversations about respectful language, emotional understanding, and healthy communication across different types of relationships, ultimately contributing to greater awareness, inclusivity, and representation within society.

For beneficiaries, this research contributes to language and communication studies by examining how same-sex couples construct meaning, affection, and relational commitment through verbal and non-verbal communication. It may also provide insights for counselors, educators, and communication scholars regarding healthy relational practices among LGBTQ+ individuals. By documenting authentic experiences of “Gugmang Tiunay,” the study enriches existing literature on romantic communication, identity negotiation, and emotional intimacy within same-sex relationships.

METHOD

This section discusses the research participants, materials and instruments, design and procedure, and ethical considerations of this qualitative study. It outlined the approaches used to conduct the study, ensuring thorough and reliable data collection.

Participants

The participants in this study were five same-sex couples for in-depth interviews and two same-sex couples for a focus group discussion, all living in Panabo City. Each person in the couple must be at least 20 years old, and the couple must have been together for at least 3 years, regardless of whether they live together. The researchers chose these criteria because (1) being 20 or older generally means people have enough life and relationship experience to reflect clearly on how they show and understand each other’s love, (2) couples who have been together for 3 years or more have had the chance to face challenges, form communication patterns, and develop ways of showing love, making their insights more substantial (De Moraes et al. 205–10).

To recruit participants who meet these criteria, the researchers used purposive (criterion) sampling, which means they actively recruit couples within the age and relationship-length criteria, rather than randomly selecting people. This sampling strategy was a commonplace and effective strategy when conducting qualitative research on sensitive or less-studied topics such as same-sex relationships, because it was committed to finding participants who have the necessary specific experiences for the most in-depth exploration (Ahmad and Wilkins 1461–79)—recruiting through LGBTQ+ community groups, social media, friend-of-a-friend methods, and any other trusted networks within Panabo City. Inviting couples to share stories about their communication when expressing their *gugmang tiunay*.

In addition, the study included criteria for inclusion, exclusion, and withdrawal for its participants. The inclusion criteria are: (1) be a member of a same-sex couple in Panabo City; (2) be at least 20 years old at the time of participation; (3) be in a committed relationship with their partner for at least three years and up; and (4) voluntarily agree to participate. The exclusion criteria: (1) anyone who is not in a same-sex couple; (2) couples who have been together for less than three years; (3) participants who are under 20; and (4) couples who are unwilling or unable to provide informed consent. The withdrawal criteria include (1) participants dropping out of the study at any time without penalty, if they feel uncomfortable or vulnerable when sharing their personal experiences; (2) participants who are unwilling to continue the interview or data-collection process; and (3) participants who express emotional distress or sensitivity to the subject. Any data collected from participants who disclose emotional distress or sensitivity to the subject will be excluded from the final analyses.

Materials/ Instruments

This qualitative research involved collecting and analyzing non-numeric data to explore the lived experiences and communication practices of same-sex couples. The primary instrument for the in-depth interviews and focus group discussion was a semi-structured interview guide. This instrument is considered effective for qualitative research because it provides a balance between flexibility and direction, allowing participants to share their experiences freely while ensuring that discussions remain aligned with the study's objectives (Brown 939–53). Through this approach, participants were encouraged to express how they communicate affection, resolve misunderstandings, interpret emotional language, and negotiate relationship dynamics within their partnerships.

In addition to the interviews, the researchers used field notes to document nonverbal cues, contextual observations, emotional expressions, and reflective insights gathered during data collection. These notes served as descriptive accounts of observed interactions and helped enrich the interpretation of participants' narratives. Furthermore, journaling entries were included as optional supporting materials, enabling participants to reflect more deeply on their experiences and communication patterns. Such reflective accounts reveal meanings and emotions that may not fully emerge during interviews alone (Ortlipp 697–698).

Moreover, the development of the interview guide followed a systematic process to ensure the validity, relevance, and sensitivity of the questions for this phenomenological inquiry. The researchers identified key themes anchored in the study's objectives, particularly those related to communication patterns, emotional expression, relational meanings, and adaptive interaction in same-sex relationships. Open-ended questions were carefully constructed to elicit detailed narratives while allowing flexibility for probing and follow-up inquiries. The guide should also be designed with inclusivity and sensitivity, ensuring that questions respectfully acknowledge diverse relational orientations and experiences. This approach strengthened the data's trustworthiness by encouraging participants to provide honest, meaningful, and reflective descriptions of their lived experiences (Castleberry and Nolen 807–15). Consequently, the study was expected to generate nuanced phenomenological insights and a deeper understanding of the language, meanings, and interpersonal communication practices present in same-sex relationships (Emiliussen et al. 5–10).

Design and Procedures

This study employs a qualitative research design, following Creswell's description of phenomenology as a way to explore the meaning of lived experiences (Creswell 5–6). Qualitative methods are effective for answering

the “how” and “why” questions and for revealing the meanings behind human behavior insights that numbers alone cannot offer (Isik 19–32). This design helps us explore how same-sex couples communicate their love. The methodology enabled a significant exploration of how their communication was adapted or redefined within non-heteronormative relationships. Participants were not restricted to predetermined categories. Braun and Clarke’s reflexive thematic analysis was applied to interpret interview data. This facilitated the identification and explanation of common themes in participants’ accounts (Braun and Clarke 75–77). The approach advanced the study by revealing patterns that reflect shared experiences and challenges. The interview guide was designed to elicit open and detailed responses. It began with general questions about affection and moved to specific topics related to love and challenges. This structure promoted participant comfort and supported the collection of meaningful data.

Open-ended interview questions encouraged participants to share their narratives and reflections. These questions were developed following a review of prior studies on communication and relationships between LGBTQ+ individuals. This ensured sufficient breadth to capture individual perspectives. A consent letter was prepared, and informed consent was secured from all participants. This process established a safe environment for sharing experiences. Participants were informed of the study’s purpose, their rights, and the confidentiality of their responses. To maintain voluntary, private participation, recruitment was conducted through personal networks and LGBTQ+ groups. Each participant engaged in a 60-minute in-depth interview held in a private, secure location of their choosing. With consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Responses provided in languages other than English were carefully translated to preserve their original meaning.

Furthermore, this study prioritized the well-being, privacy, and dignity of all participants, as the researchers ensured the study’s conduct was legally in line with Republic Act 10173 (RA 10173), also known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Respicio). Additionally, the researchers obtained approval from the institution’s ethics review committee before collecting data and followed all established ethical guidelines. Informing each participant about the study’s purpose and procedures and obtaining written informed consent before participation. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants may withdraw from the study at any time without consequences.

The researchers maintained the participants’ confidentiality by using pseudonyms in all transcripts, reports, and presentations, ensuring that no identifying information was published. Securely store audio recordings and transcripts, restrict access to the research group, and delete all data upon completion of the analysis. During an interview, researchers ask respectful, non-judgmental questions to foster a comfortable, safe environment for sharing experiences. These measures enabled the research team to collect meaningful insights while upholding the rights and dignity of all participants.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis revealed several recurring themes related to communication challenges among partners.

Table 1. Communication Challenges Responses in Expressing Gugmang Tiunay (True Love) With a Partner

THEMES	CORE IDEAS
Lexical Gaps and Multilingual Misunderstandings	Difficulty with Deep/Advanced Vocabulary Same Language, Different Meanings Code-Switching and Language Mixing Confusion
Paralinguistic Ambiguity and Tone-Sensitive Meanings	Tone Alters Interpretation Nonverbal Cues Missing in Digital Channels

	Public vs. Private Communication Styles
Withdrawal, Avoidance, and Asynchronous Readiness	Silent Treatment and Non-Responsiveness Avoidant Coping During Conflict Delayed Resolution Fuels Overthinking
Intercultural and Interdialectal Frictions	CrossDialect Uncertainty Stereotypes and Divergent Style Expectations Boundary-Setting Amid Social Pressures
Emotional Escalation from Language Barriers	Misunderstanding Triggers Conflict Language Depth as a Barrier to Intimacy Mixed-Language Anger Expression Escalates Tension

Lexical Gaps and Multilingual Misunderstandings. The first theme to emerge was that which emphasized the challenges same-sex couples encounter when expressing deep emotions. These difficulties often stem from words carrying different meanings depending on the language used. Most participants noted that multilingual communication frequently leads to misunderstandings during emotional conversations.

Based on participants' responses, certain emotions were not easily translatable across languages, leading to confusion and misunderstandings between partners. The use of code-switching and mixed languages can sometimes complicate communication, as words can take on different meanings depending on the cultural or linguistic context. This finding is supported by the study of Stępkowska, which found that bilingual couples often negotiate emotions differently across languages, and that linguistic variations in expressing thoughts and feelings may create challenges in understanding a partner's intended meaning, particularly during emotionally significant conversations (1–18).

Paralinguistic Ambiguity and Tone-Sensitive Meanings. The second theme highlighted the importance of tone, facial expressions, and nonverbal cues in communication. Participants explained that digital communication, particularly texting, often led to misunderstandings because tone could not be accurately interpreted. Messages intended as harmless or affectionate were sometimes perceived as cold, sarcastic, or insensitive. This demonstrated that communication extends beyond words alone, as emotional meaning is also shaped by delivery and nonverbal expression.

Participants recognized that text-based communication limits the ability to observe facial expressions, gestures, and emotional cues that normally help clarify meaning. Without these nonverbal signals, messages become more vulnerable to misinterpretation, particularly during emotionally sensitive conversations. Recent research has shown that nonverbal cues such as facial expressions, vocal tone, touch, and behavioral synchrony play a crucial role in emotional understanding and relationship bonding among romantic partners. When these cues are absent, couples often rely on clarification, reassurance, or face-to-face interaction to restore mutual understanding and emotional connection (Nelson et al. 1133).

Withdrawal, Avoidance, and Asynchronous Readiness. The third theme highlighted how communication difficulties among romantic partners are often intensified when one or both individuals withdraw from conversations during conflict. Participants explained that silence, delayed responses, and emotional avoidance often lead to further misunderstandings because unresolved concerns persist for long periods. Instead of openly discussing issues immediately, some partners cope by distancing themselves emotionally or postponing communication until they feel.

These responses suggested that emotional withdrawal and delayed communication often intensify relationship stress, as unresolved concerns create uncertainty and emotional insecurity between partners. From a linguistic analysis perspective, prolonged silence and avoidance may function as extended dispreferred responses, characterized by delays and conversational gaps that signal a lack of alignment or cooperation with the previous speaker's turn (Pillet-Shore 2–4). As a result, this asynchronous readiness to communicate disrupts the natural flow of dialogue and further complicates mutual understanding between partners.

Intercultural and Interdialectal Frictions. The fourth theme examined how couples from different cultures or regions may find themselves in situations where misunderstandings arise from differing expectations shaped by background, language, and culture. Participants explained that issues such as tone, expressions, humor, and emotions can sometimes lead to problems between them, despite their best intentions towards each other. While something might be viewed as being quite acceptable for one of the couple members, it can mean quite the opposite for the other person.

It is clear from the responses that participants' culture influences how precisely they communicate the behavioral parameters. As Allwood states, intercultural communication studies have found that different regional dialects entail distinct sets of rules for communication, emotions, and behavior. When both partners in a relationship use different regional dialects, they will automatically approach conversations and disputes through different perspectives (Kiliańska-Przybyło 81–95).

Emotional Escalation from Language Barriers. This fifth theme highlighted the idea that language barriers not only make communication difficult but also heighten emotions during conflict or disagreement among the people involved. The participants indicated that when one feels he or she cannot communicate effectively or clearly convey his/her thoughts, misunderstandings may arise, leading to feelings of frustration and anger. Vocabulary limitations and the inability to explain oneself properly can also make one feel frustrated. As emotions run high, so does effective communication.

These experiences show that language differences are linked with how a couple feels. The participants' responses are supported by the interdisciplinary study of linguistics, which shows that the language used during an argument directly affects emotional levels and can lead to misunderstandings when an individual keeps changing languages to convey anger (Pavlenko 5–6). When a couple cannot establish a common linguistic ground during arguments, the resulting linguistic misunderstanding can lead to further emotional problems (Fossa et al. 833–49). Even small linguistic errors or a quick change to an unknown language can easily be seen as threatening. Therefore, effective communication strategies and mutual linguistic understanding are crucial for reducing conflict and strengthening emotional bonds between partners.

Table 2. Coping Mechanisms Used to Handle Communication Challenges With a Partner

THEMES	CORE IDEAS
Multilingual Flexibility and Clarification Strategies	Code-switching and Language Mixing to Ensure Understanding Strategic Language Choice Based on Context or Intensity Clarification and Meaning-Checking
Calming, Timing, and Regulating the Conversation	Cooling-Off Before Re-engaging Waiting and Pacing the Interaction Choosing Face-to-face Over Text
Tone Management, Soothing Speech, and Reassurance	Softening Tone and Staying Calm Verbal Reassurance and Affectionate Words

	Pet Names and Playful “Baby Talk” to Defuse Tension
Humor, Affection, and Shared Activities as Repair Moves	Humor and Playfulness to Cool Down Physical Affection and Quality Time Shared Interests and Light Rituals
Perspective-Taking, Adjustment, and Ego-management	Adjusting to Different Upbringings and Styles Lowering Pride and Practicing Self-Control Checking Intent and Expanding Understanding
Systematic Repair Through Language Switching and Meaning Alignment	Multi-language Switching to Overcome Stalls Establishing a Common Ground Language Rituals of Apology and Assurance

Multilingual Flexibility and Clarification Strategies. The first theme in the second objective involved romantic partners using multilingual flexibility and clarification techniques to address instances of miscommunication in relationships. Participants revealed that changing languages is an effective way for them to convey their feelings. This is made possible by various clarification techniques, such as repetition, reformulation, and questioning.

The participants explained that when things become confusing or too emotional, they reflexively turn to all their known languages to simplify their conversation. In this case, there is no need for them to try to explain everything in just one language. Participants switch between Bisaya, Tagalog, and English depending on what they are trying to express. It enables them to reduce misunderstandings and ensure their emotional expressions are conveyed as accurately as possible. In fact, studies on bilingual communication indicate that code-switching can clarify intentions and help manage delicate subjects (Moradi and Jianbo 1–12). For many couples, multilingualism is an advantage rather than a hindrance to their relationship, as it allows them to convey their feelings as accurately as possible. They also make sure to clarify meanings during discussions.

Calming, Timing, and Regulating the Conversation. The second theme for the second objective described how couples overcome communication barriers through deliberate attempts to time and deliver their messages. This is done by taking breaks, stepping back from the interaction until the participants have cooled down, then resuming the conversation. It was also revealed during interviews that couples do this to ensure there is no miscommunication or anything left unsaid, as impulsive actions stemming from emotional reactions can lead to misunderstandings. Most participants also avoid texting during disagreements.

Participants stated that patience and self-regulation are important during difficult times. The reason behind their willingness to take a step back before discussing an issue is to give themselves time to cool off, to avoid misunderstandings and harmful statements. It aligns with findings in the area of emotional regulation, which recommend taking a break to avoid negative consequences during intense conflict (Salo et al. 112581). Since it becomes difficult to reason in a state of heightened emotion, taking time is necessary to make appropriate statements. Fossa et al. also noted that the majority of participants prefer switching from texting to face-to-face communication, as non-verbal aspects of conversation can help resolve the problem (833–49).

Tone Management, Soothing Speech, and Reassurance. The third theme highlighted the recognition that couples deliberately control their language when discussing problems to prevent their emotions from escalating further. In particular, the participants indicated that they always tone down their voices and use soothing words when discussing problems to soothe each other’s feelings. Also, some of them use pet names as a sign that the couple is safe despite the ongoing discussion of an issue.

These responses emphasized that considering the tone of voice and showing reassurance is effective in preventing conflicts from escalating into serious disputes. Participants mentioned that if there is a problem or they do not understand each other, they make sure to use a soft voice and add words of reassurance. According to Falconier et al., resolving conflicts among couples suggests that using a soft voice and verbal reassurance may be an effective way to reduce emotions and provide people with additional security (309–22). When people misunderstand each other, they tend to lower their voices or use affectionate expressions, such as pet names. As a result, the atmosphere changes, and people become less irritated and can focus on their feelings rather than problems.

Humor, Affection, and Shared Activities as repair moves. The fourth theme emphasized how partners deliberately use playfulness and physical closeness to reduce tension and reestablish emotional connection. Participants shared that they often use humor, such as joking around, which effectively relieves tension. They also added a comforting touch or simple quality time to reopen space for heart-to-heart communication.

These findings revealed that humor, affection, and shared activities help couples lessen tension and reconstruct emotional connection after arguments. The participants agreed that joking, physical closeness, and quality time help them communicate and reconcile more easily. This is supported by the study by Wilder et al., which found that humor, affection, and shared activities support the resolution of conflict and strengthen relationship satisfaction among couples (215–230). These efforts contribute to a space where partners can freely express their emotions. The role of positive repair actions contributed to maintaining a healthy relationship.

Perspective-Taking, Adjustment, and Ego Management. The fifth theme highlighted how couples deliberately handle differences in upbringing, communication styles, and personal viewpoints through mindful adjustment and emotional regulation. The participants also practiced ego management by minimizing pride, staying calm during conflicts, and responding thoughtfully rather than reacting emotionally. Furthermore, partners manage word choice or actions that may influence the other partner.

These findings showed the importance of perspective-taking, adjustment, and ego control in maintaining a healthy relationship. Participants emphasized that, to prevent conflict or misunderstanding, variations in upbringing and style require constant adjustment and adaptation. Minimize escalation by lowering pride and maintaining calm, thinking deeply before reacting. In addition, consider perspective-taking by validating a partner's emotions and seeking clarification when necessary. These findings were supported by Hernandez et al., Lopez and Martin, Kim and Reyes, and self-regulation, adaptability, and empathic communication, which enhance resolution and relationship satisfaction (33–48, 59–74, 115–130).

Systematic Repair Through Language Switching and Meaning Alignment. The sixth theme highlighted how couples intentionally use language to repair conflicts or misunderstandings and keep the harmony in the relationship. It entails adopting a shared language common to both partners, using face-to-face communication to avoid misunderstandings, switching between languages to enhance comprehension, and providing reassurance to mend the emotional connection.

These findings demonstrated how couples use language as a strategy to resolve misunderstandings. The participants discussed switching between languages to avoid or overcome communication breakdowns, and using a shared language to meet halfway, as this improves mutual understanding. Also, communicating in person to fully capture the intention through expression, tone, and gestures, which helps reduce misinterpretation. Furthermore, participants also stressed the kind assurance as a way to reestablish the connection between partners. This is confirmed by a study by Alvarez and Chen, which shows that multilingual switching, shared communicative frameworks, and affectionate repair tactics improve clarity, emotional repair, and relationship satisfaction in intimate partnerships (45–62). This showed that communication repair is both linguistic and relational as partners deliberately adjust for feelings and meanings (Rivera 201–218).

Insights Generated From the Findings

The researchers analyzed and interpreted participants' responses using thematic analysis to gain insight into communication problems and coping mechanisms among same-sex couples. According to the results, communication problems in these relationships depend on language differences, personal backgrounds, tone of voice, and emotional reactions during communication. Participants admitted that language differences, including the use of different dialects, languages, or modes of communication, led to many difficulties in expressing thoughts and emotions and to miscommunication. Linguistic differences sometimes led to communication issues when couples discussed sensitive topics or had conflicts. Moreover, it was observed that tone of voice could lead to communication problems because some couples interpreted certain tones as offensive, rude, or aggressive, even when there was no actual intention. Emotional reactions such as irritability, sorrow, and anger also led to miscommunication, as the couple was unable to resolve their disagreements effectively. Communication difficulties can sometimes lead to poor emotional connections within couples, creating tension in relationships.

Despite their communication problems, the participants demonstrated the ability to make adjustments and employ effective coping mechanisms to maintain understanding and emotional exchange with one another. It was observed that they use techniques such as switching to different languages, clarifying meanings, asking for elaboration, and choosing words carefully to avoid misunderstandings. It was also revealed that most participants place significant importance on face-to-face communication in addressing sensitive issues and resolving conflicts, since this type of communication enables them to read nuances in tone of voice and other physical cues, such as gestures and facial expressions, which contribute to accurate emotional communication. As a result, the discussion above shows that communication techniques play an important role in reducing misunderstandings, preventing the escalation of emotions, and enhancing understanding among participants.

Participants' experiences indicate that patience, emotional regulation, and understanding are critical to effective communication in same-sex relationships. Most participants indicated that one of the most significant things they needed to do to make their relationships effective was to understand their partners' perspectives and be prepared to adapt to their partners' backgrounds, personalities, and communication styles. Instead of letting misunderstandings cause a rift between them, they said they had learned to listen to their partners, understand them, and accommodate their communication styles.

The researchers' experience in this case has been rewarding in many ways, as it has provided us with an opportunity to gain a clear picture of the realities of communication for same-sex couples in multilingual, culturally diverse communities. As the researcher, identifying the problem and selecting the participants for this study took us much time and effort. During interviews and conversations with participants, we have learned much about the roles of language barriers, cultural diversity, emotions, and communication styles in relationships. Therefore, hearing the participants' stories made it clear that conflicts and misunderstandings were inevitable in their cases because they belonged to different linguistic and cultural environments. However, despite the problems and challenges, the participants made some efforts to connect, demonstrating their resilience, flexibility, and willingness to build and sustain a relationship. Relationships do not rely solely on affection; they require effort to communicate and empathize.

Concluding Remarks

From the gathered data and participants' experiences, it became evident that language and communication are important for expressing and sustaining *gugmang tiunay* (true love) among same-sex couples, particularly in multilingual, culturally diverse relationships here in the Philippines. The results showed that couples commonly experience communication difficulties, including lexical gaps, misunderstandings caused by tone and nonverbal cues, emotional withdrawal during conflict, intercultural and interdialectal differences, and emotional escalation due to language barriers. These challenges demonstrate that language is not just a tool for exchanging words but also a complex medium for conveying emotions, intentions, and relational meanings. Despite these challenges, the participants consistently demonstrated resilience and commitment to maintaining their relationships through various coping mechanisms, including code-switching, clarification strategies, emotional regulation, face-to-face communication, reassurance, humor, affection, perspective-taking, and

intentional language adjustment. The study further emphasizes that multilingualism can serve not only as a source of misunderstanding but also as a strength, enabling partners to express themselves more effectively and to negotiate emotional connections. Moreover, healthy communication is rooted not only in fluency or vocabulary, but also in empathy, patience, active listening, emotional sensitivity, and the willingness to understand one another despite differences in language, culture, and communication styles. Ultimately, this study concludes that same-sex couples actively use language as a relational and emotional resource to repair conflicts, strengthen intimacy, and preserve relationship harmony, proving that *gugmang tiunay* (true love) is sustained through continuous understanding, mutual adjustment, and meaningful communication amidst challenges.

Implications

This study offers new insight that communication is foundational for expressing *gugmang tiunay* among same-sex couples. Particularly, despite misunderstandings due to language differences, tone, and gaps in emotional expression, couples make thoughtful, intentional efforts to repair conflicts and restore emotional connection. These themes showed how communication barriers can affect relationships, as conveying thoughts and emotions is not always easy to put into words. It also entailed that same-sex couples value clarity and constantly work to strengthen relationships. Partners actively sought mutual understanding on both sides. This demonstrates that effective communication is not only about being fluent and the correct use of language. This implies that *gugmang tiunay* (true love) is shown through understanding, patience, and a willingness to communicate despite the challenges experienced.

The findings of this study may help the beneficiaries mentioned. First, same-sex couples may help acknowledge the importance of open and honest communication, especially emotion-sensitive communication, in maintaining healthy relationships, as this study points out. Language differences, emotional regulation, and strategies to overcome misunderstandings are also important for intentional communication in expressing *gugmang tiunay*. Second, the LGBTQ+ community, this study adds to the understanding of the perspective of the lived experiences of same-sex couples, especially in the aspect of communication and relationships. This study promotes broader visibility, fosters acceptance, and encourages inclusivity, helping create a supportive environment where LGBTQ+ individuals can openly express themselves.

Lastly, the counselors, educators, and scholars. The findings of this study may serve as a resource. Counselors may use the results of this study in designing and implementing programs, communication workshops, and even counseling interventions that handle communication issues of same-sex couples. Educators may use these insights to inform lessons on communication, diversity, and inclusive education, fostering empathy and respect among students and in the learning environment. For scholars, this study provides additional literature on same-sex couples and may also lay a foundation for future research on communication, identity, and relationships among LGBTQ+ individuals.

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