

The Historical Development of Philippine
Languages Within Austronesian -
PHILIPPINE MACROGROUPS AND SUBGROUPS

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Any linguistic scholar who is broadly interested in Philippine linguistics should be at least *passively aware of*

- (1) the number and names of all 190 languages <lects> in the Philippines. One recent statement of such is in Zorc, Lobel & Hall [ZLH] 2024. Consult section 7.2 through 7.2.13. [Available at: <[https://zorc.net/RDZorc/PUBLICATIONS/142b=Ch07\(OUP\)-Zorc-Lobel&Hall\[2023\].pdf](https://zorc.net/RDZorc/PUBLICATIONS/142b=Ch07(OUP)-Zorc-Lobel&Hall[2023].pdf)>]
- (2) The names of the **13 major subgroups**. [See Table 1 below or ZLH 2024:Op.cit.]
- (3) It would also be beneficial to have an overview of the **3 major Philippine Macrogroups**: NORTHERN PHILIPPINE, GREATER CENTRAL LUZON, and SOUTHERN PHILIPPINE [See Table 2 below.]

This survey does not include the various Negrito languages because they descend from a completely separate linguistic phylum. They are clearly important in their own right and well deserve the attention given them by scholars such as Lobel and Reid.

TABLE 1.

MAJOR PHILIPPINE **SUBGROUPS** (as per Zorc, Lobel & Hall 2024)

1. Batanic/Bashiic
2. Northern Luzon (“Cordilleran”)
3. Central Luzon
4. Umiray Dumaget
5. Manide-Alabat
6. North Mangyan
7. Greater Central Philippines (and Palawanic)
8. Kalamianic
9. Inati
10. Southwestern Mindanao
11. Southeastern Mindanao
12. Sangiric
13. Minahasan

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TABLE 2

PHILIPPINE **MACROGROUPS** AND SUBGROUPING**1. NORTHERN PHILIPPINE**

6. Ilokano

7. Cagayan Valley (Ibanag, Atta Faire, Atta Pamplona, Atta Pudtol, Central Cagayan Agta, Gaddang, Itawit/Itawis, Isnag/Isneg, Malaweg, Yogad) <=| Negrito = Agta
 Northeastern Luzon (Dupaningan Agta, Pahanan Agta, Dinapigue Agta, Casiguran Agta, Nagtipunan Agta, Paranan) <=| Negrito

8. Central-Cordilleran (Balangao, Bontok, Isinary, Luba, Manabo, N & S Kankanaey, Itneg, Kalinga)

9. Southern Cordilleran (Pangasinan, Bugkalot/Ilongot, I-wak, Ibaloi, Kalanguya, Keley-i Kallahan, Karao)

10. Altan (Northern Alta, Southern Alta) <=| Negrito

11. Arta <=| Negrito

Umiray Dumaget <=| Negrito

Manide-Alabat <=| Negrito

2. GREATER CENTRAL LUZON

12. Bashiic: Yamic, Vasayic, Batanic

13. Sambali-Ayta <=| Negrito

14. Kapampangan

15. Remontado | Hatang Kayi

16. North Mangyan: Iraya, Tadyawan, Alangan <=| Negrito = Iraya

Ate or Inati <=| Negrito

3. SOUTHERN PHILIPPINE

17. Greater Central Philippine [South Mangyan, Central Philippine (= Tagalog, Bikol, Bisayan, Mansaka, Mamanwa), Palawanic, Danaw, Manobo, Subanen, Mongondow-Gorontalo]

18 Kalamianic (Agutaynen, Calamian Tagbanwa, Karamianen)

19. Southern Mindanao

20. Southwestern Mindanao (Teduray, Tboli, Koronadal & Sarangani Blaan)

21. Southeastern Mindanao (Bagobo Klata)

22. Inete/“Inati” and the Ata of Negros <=| Negrito

23. Sangiric (Sangir/Sangihe, Talaud, and Sangil)

24. Minahasan (Tondano, Tonsea, Tombulu, Tontemboan, Tonsawang)

MAJOR QUESTIONS THUS FAR SUBMITTED

1. In your comparative work, what are the most consistent phonological or morphological innovations across significant subgroups in the Philippines?

PHONOLOGICAL

Matt Charles (1974) established that there are no significant phonological innovations that would serve to classify Philippine languages. The **retention** of ***j** could not count!. I agree that we virtually get nowhere with regard to consonant and vowel phonemes. In my dissertation on Bisayan (1977:219-221) in section 8.11 “Evaluation of phonological criteria as techniques for subgrouping” I demonstrated that the sound changes noted in Bisayan only made sense if they were superimposed on a subgrouping based upon lexical and functor surveys and shared innovations.

In brief, some phonological changes can indicate something of significance, such as the Yamic changes of the sequence *-**aRa-** > *-*ala-* (instead of expected ***-aya-*) set them apart from all other Bashiic languages. The development of the Aklanon velar semivowel [ɯ] does set it apart from all other Bisayan lects. We must note that the loss of PPH ***l** is an AXIS PHENOMENON (Baran 2022) that affects some languages in the Greater Central Philippines, Sangiric, and Sama-Bajau subgroups, which share no special genetic affinity apart from Proto-Western-Austronesian. My experience in Australia bears this out: most Aboriginal languages, even those with a chasm of genetic diversity from each other, have a phonological system that is a carbon copy of a single template: labial, dental, alveolar, retroflex, palatal, velar, with or without a glottal stop

ACCENT

A sufficiently large and genetically diverse number of Philippine languages maintain contrastive accent patterns (accented open [CV-] penult = vowel length vs ultima accent) to propose that their immediate ancestor (Proto-Philippine) had phonemic accent¹. This has been lost even in close dialects; Kuyonon does not have contrastive accent, whereas its sister West Bisayan dialects (Aklanon and Kinaray-a) maintain it. Tausug on Jolo (but not necessarily Tausug on Palawan) has lost contrastive accent, whereas other South Bisayan dialects (Butuanon, Siargaonon, Surigaonon) retain it. Accent was generally lost in Bashiic, Pangasinan, Kalamianic, Manobo, Subanen, and Bilic. It was retained in Ilokano, Ibanag, Central Cordilleran, Sambalic, Kapampangan, South Mangyan (Hanunoo, Buhid, Tawbuid), Tagalog, Coastal Bikol, most West Bisayan, all Central & South Bisayan, Cebuan, Asi’, and Bagobo Klata.

¹ Zorc, R. David. 1978, “Proto Philippine word accent: innovation or Proto-Hesperonesian retention?” 2ICAL:1. *Pacific Linguistics* C.61:67-119. | 1983. “Proto Austronesian accent revisited.” *Philippine Journal of Linguistics* 14.1:1-24. | 1993. “Overview of Austronesian & Philippine Accent Patterns,” *Oceanic Linguistics* SP24:17-24. | 2020. “Reactions to Blust’s ‘The Resurrection of Proto-Philippines’”, *Oceanic Linguistics*: 59:1/2:394-425. – Section 3. ACCENT pages 396-397.

PAN, PMP *R

[r] Ilokano, Arta, Teduray

[l] Central Cordilleran, Kalamianic, Southern Mindanao = Bilaan or “Bilic”, Tboli, Klata

[g] Cagayan Valley (e.g., Ibanag), Greater Central Philippine

[y] Greater Central Luzon

PAN, PMP *j

[g] Cordilleran

[d] everywhere else, but with subsequent changes to [r] or [l]

PAN, PMP *ə (schwa) – widely retained, but otherwise merged with *a (Kapampangan), *i (Tagalog), *u/o (Bisayan), *a... *u (Bikol), *ə ... *a (Malay).

CASE-MARKING PARTICLES [Reid 1978², 2002³]

PERSONAL – tend to be conservative throughout the Philippines [ACD, ZDS]

cm-pn-nom-sg ***si** cm-pn-gen-sg ***ni** cm-pn-obl-sg ***ki** cm-pn-loc-sg

cm-pn-nom-pl ***sa** cm-pn-gen-pl ***na** cm-pn-obl-pl ***ka** cm-pn-loc-pl ***da**

COMMON NOUNS – a pool of widely-divergent forms [ACD, ZDS]

cm-cn-nom ***su** ~ ***ya** cm-cn-gen ***nu** cm-cn-obl ***ku** cm-cn-loc ***di** ~ ***du** ~ ***sa**

Note. It was primarily the Central Bisayan dialects (descended from Proto-Warayan) that introduced the final *- **ŋ** in the case markers ***saŋ** [cm-cn-obl-definite] and ***siŋ** [cm-cn-obl-indefinite] based on the development of a Proto-Central-Philippine nominative marker ***aŋ** (Tagalog, Kinaray-a, Bulalakawnon, Kuyonon, Romblomanon, Hiligaynon ~ Ilonggo, Surigawnon, Butuanon, and Kamayo, with an ***an** alternate in Masbatenyo, Sorsogon, Gubat, Coastal Bikol, Northern Catanduanes). These, along with Pangasinan, Bikol and Maranao **su** support the analysis that among Philippine languages: *-**a**- marks {definite}, *-**i**- = {indefinite}, and *-**u**- = {specific}.

2. What role do borrowed lexicon and areal features play in complicating the comparative method in the Philippine context?

Borrowed words can give insights into prehistory, just as can innovations and retentions.

Virtually any word in any meaning can be borrowed or innovated.

As to an areal feature, most Philippine languages have an inherited DECIMAL system through the hundreds ***isa**, ***duSa**, ... ***puluq**, ***Ratus**. However, ‘thousand’ and higher almost always seem

² “Problems in the reconstruction of Proto-Philippine construction markers.” In *Second International Conference on Austronesian Linguistics: Proceedings, Fascicle I —Western Austronesian*, ed. by S. A. Wurm and Lois Carrington, 33-66. Pacific Linguistics Series C, No. 61.

³ “Determiners, nouns or what? Problems in the analysis of some commonly occurring forms in Philippine languages.” *Oceanic Linguistics* 41(2):295-309.

to be borrowed. This implies that historically Filipinos could count from ‘one’ through ‘999’ The etymology for ‘thousand’ should be ***Ribu**, but the Malay cognate /**ribu**/ (along with appropriate sound changes) is widespread. Only Bugkalot (Ilongot) has a QUINARY system, so this must have been a reversal, but is an indication that such a system may have also been in use historically.

3. Could you speak to the significance of lexical innovation in determining historical relationships among Philippine languages?

It would appear that lexical innovations are mainly most of what we have, along with functors like PRONOUNS and CASE MARKERS. As a result of my Bashiic study I have come to realize that DEICTICS are subject to the greatest diversity and innovation.

I propose that CONTRASTIVE ACCENT is a significant phonological innovation shared among many Philippine languages. Several minimal or near-minimal pairs can be attributed to Proto-Philippine.⁴

4. How can linguistic reconstruction contribute to understanding the prehistoric migration patterns of Negrito and Austronesian groups in the Philippines?

It is quite clear that the Philippine Negritos preceeded the Austronesians by many millenia. However, they seem to have adapted to or adopted whatever local language took over their immediate environment. Unique words could have been retentions from their Aboriginal language or innovations made as a result of <axis> or networking relationships. The time depth of their residency in the Philippines excludes any serious comparative linguistic analysis once 10,000 years have passed.

5. What challenges do you encounter in distinguishing between contact-induced change and genetic inheritance?

Basically this has to do with inheritance (descendancy from PAN, PMP, PWMP, PPH, etc) as opposed to an axis, changes made among genetically different groups that occupy a single *banwa (living and subsistence territory) and innovate in common.

6. How should we evaluate “Philippine-type” languages outside the Philippines (e.g., North Borneo or Northern Sulawesi)?

⁴ In terms of individual languages: Ilokano *bá:ra* ‘hot’ ~ *bará* ‘lungs’ | Kapampangan *ʔá:piʔ* ‘lime’ ~ *ʔapíʔ* ‘fire’ | Tagalog *ʔá:so* ‘dog’ ~ *ʔasó* ‘smoke’ | Klata *má:yad* ‘will pay’ ~ *mayád* ‘want’, Historically: PPH ***águm** ‘appropriate for oneself’ ~ PPH ***agúm** ‘associate with s.o.’, PMP ***bú:lu** ‘body hair; feather’ ~ PMP ***bulú** ‘wash up’, PPH ***há:ɟut** ‘stench, odor’ ~ PPH ***ha ɟút** ‘gnaw, chew on’, PPH ***ká:bit** ‘vine: *Caesalpinia* spp.’ ~ PPH ***kabít** ‘lead, support (as a feeble person)’, PMP ***sá:kay** ‘ascend’ ~ PMP ***sakáy** ‘ride, catch a ride’, PPH ***tá:nud** ‘guard, sentinel’ ~ PPH ***tanúd** ‘thread a needle’ [v].

Basically, either the language has inherited items from PAN with regard to the focus system, functors, and lexicon. Regarding Northern Sulawesi, Gorontalo and Mongondow are genetically Greater Central Philippine languages, while Sangiric and Minahasan are Southern Philippine. Lexically, however, many Bornean languages have borrowed from Greater Central Philippine languages. As to Borneo, while some lexical items may have been innovated when they were still in Mindanao prior to their migration, it is clear that GCP languages did have influence within Borneo, such as the establishment of an Ilanun community on the western coastal plain of North Borneo, which descended from Proto-Danaw. Charles (1974) cited 20 etymologies for Kadazan, but only 4 are shared with PPH: ***bətuŋ** ~ PPH ***libətuŋ** ‘pool’, PPH ***sədaʔ** ‘food eaten with rice; fish’, and ***səjəb** ‘burn’. Apart from the loan of Malay *bədil* ‘gun’, the remainder descend from PAN or PMP.

7. What advice would you give emerging Filipino linguists pursuing research in historical-comparative linguistics?

Being honest, from the perspective of “bread and butter linguistics” (i.e., making a living for oneself and one’s family), I have noted three career possibilities: (1) a professorial job in academia (as did Robert Blust, Andy Pawley, Malcolm Ross, etc.), (2) a linguist position or become a language teacher for the government or a private school or company (as I did working for Dunwoody Press and the Language Research Center of Hyattsville, Maryland for 25 years), or (3) an evening or weekend “hobby” while working for an insurance company or becoming a bank teller, real estate developer, shoe salesman, as did Matt Charles.

There are many ways to “enjoy” linguistics depending on one’s interests and predilections. I have noted that many colleagues were initially “bitten by the linguistic bug” (as I like to describe the phenomenon). Although I had been encouraged to pursue a career in linguistics, I joined the Peace Corps to avoid making any decisions I might regret. Having been trained in Tagalog but sent to Aklan, I was fascinated about why some words were identical (*matá* ‘eye’, *dila* ‘tongue’), some were similar (*ká’in* – *ká’on* ‘eat’, *bituwín* – *bitú’on* ‘star’), and others were completely different (*páwis* – *húyas* ‘sweat’, *ipagbilí* – *balígya* ‘sell’). These questions ultimately led me into linguistics broadly and historical-comparative linguistics specifically, and I certainly have no regrets. To this day, even in retirement, I happily reflect that I was paid for doing something I thoroughly enjoyed.