

# The Languages of Mindanao and Proto-Southern-Philippine

## R. David Zorc

Wikipedia has this to say about “Mindanao languages”

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mindanao\\_languages](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mindanao_languages)

*“The Mindanao or Southern Philippine languages are an obsolete proposal<sup>1</sup> for a subgroup of the Austronesian languages comprising the Danao languages, the Manobo languages and Subanon, all of which are spoken in Mindanao, Philippines.”*

Zorc comment: Blust (1991) has correctly identified this particular subgroup as “Greater Central Philippine”. Zorc currently and formerly has proposed a **Proto-Southern Philippine** macrogroup that along with **Proto Northern Philippine** (“Cordilleran”) and **Proto Greater Central Luzon** (languages wherein PAN \*R > y) are the immediate descendants of **Proto-Philippine**. This macrogroup includes **Greater Central Philippine** (Blust 1991), **Kalamianic**, **SouthEastern Mindanao (Klata)** and **SouthWestern Mindanao (Bilic, Tboli, Teduray)**

*“Blust (1991) includes the three groups<sup>2</sup> as separate branches in a larger **Greater Central Philippine** subgroup (together with the **Central Philippine**<sup>3</sup>, **Southern Mindoro**<sup>4</sup>, **Palawan** and **Gorontalo–Mongondow** branches), and there is no evidence that they are more closely related to each other than to the other branches of the Greater Central Philippine subgroup.”*

And here is an “AI” Internet statement I downloaded on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

*“Mindanao, the second-largest island in the Philippines, boasts a diverse linguistic landscape, with languages like Cebuano, Hiligaynon, Maranao, Maguindanao, Tboli, and Blaan being among the most prominent.*

Here's a more detailed look at the languages of Mindanao:

Major Languages:

**Cebuano:** A widely spoken language in Central Visayas, parts of Eastern Visayas, and most of Mindanao. –member of the **Cebuan subgroup** in the **Central Philippine subgroup** of **Bisayan** within the **Greater Central Philippine** macrogroup.

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<sup>1</sup> No way is it obsolete. R. David Zorc has been proposing this ever since 1975 in many of his publications: (#019 = 1977 – *The Bisayan Dialects of the Philippines*). 1979 (#022 - *Core Etymological Dictionary of Filipino, Fascicle 1 - "Introduction, A, B"*), 1981 (#033 - 1981f. *Core Etymological Dictionary of Filipino, Fascicle 2: "K"*). 1982 (#041) *Core Etymological Dictionary of Filipino, Fascicle 3: "D, G, H"*. 1983 (#043) – “Proto Austronesian accent revisited”. 1985 = (#052) *Core Etymological Dictionary of Filipino, Fascicle 4: "I, L"*. 1986 (#050) – “Some historical linguistic contributions to sociolinguistics.” Zorc 2022 (#145) – “Axis Relationships in the Philippines”.

<sup>2</sup> Danao-Manobo-Subanon

<sup>3</sup> Tagalog, Bisayan, Bikol, Mansakan and Mamanwa

<sup>4</sup> Hanunoo, Buhid, Eastern Tawbuwid, Western Tawbuwid, Bangon.

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**Hiligaynon** (Ilonggo): Spoken in Western Visayas and parts of Mindanao. – a **Central Bisayan** language in the **Central Philippine subgroup** of **Bisayan** within **Greater Central Philippine** macrogroup.

**Davaoëño** (Dabawenyo): A language of the Davao Region, ~~influenced by Cebuano and Tagalog.~~ – a **Mansakan** language in the **Central Philippine subgroup** within the **Greater Central Philippine** macrogroup..

**Maranao**: A language spoken by the Maranao people in Lanao del Sur, Mindanao

**Maguindanao**: The language of the Maguindanao people in the province of Maguindanao. Both of these (along with **Iranun**) form part of the **Danao subgroup** of the **Greater Central Philippine** macrogroup..

**Tboli**: Spoken in Southwestern Mindanao, mainly in South Cotabato. – This is in the **Bilic subgroup** of **Proto SouthWestern Mindanao of Proto Southern Philippine**. It also includes a third member, *Teduray* or *Tirurary* which is not mentioned.

**Blaan**: Spoken in the southern coast of Mindanao. – In the **Bilic subgroup** of **Proto-SouthWestern-Mindanao** subgroup of **Proto Southern Philippine**. A third member, *Teduray* or *Tirurary* is not mentioned.

**Klata**: A language spoken on the eastern slopes of Mount Apo in Davao. – This is in the **Klata group** of **Proto-SouthEastern-Mindanao** subgroup of **Proto-Southern-Philippine**.

**Chavacano**: A **Spanish** creole language, spoken in Zamboanga City and other areas of the Zamboanga Peninsula.

**Ilocano**: Originally spoken throughout northern Luzon. It is the third most spoken language in the Philippines. This is clearly a Northern Philippine language isolate that migrated south into Mindanao.

UNMENTIONED

**Tausug** – a South Bisayan language which moved from Butuan to Jolo approximately 800 years ago and was greatly influenced by the *Sama(l)* languages of Borneo.

**Manobo** – a huge subgroup of Greater Central Philippine championed and elucidated by Elkins (1968, 1974, 1982, 1984)

**Subanon** or **Subanen** – another member of the Greater Central Philippine macrogroup championed and elucidated by William Hall and later by Jason Lobel.

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**Sangiric** – spoken in the Sangir-Talau Islands and on the northern peninsula of Sulawesi in Indonesia. See Sneddon (1984). Part of Proto Southern Philippine, but not PGCP.

**Minahasan** – inhabitants of the northeastern part of Sulawesi (Celebes), Indonesia speaking five languages: *Tondano, Tombulu, Tonsea, Tontemboan, Tonsawang*. See Sneddon (1978).

**Tagalog** – the basis of Filipino (the Philippine National language). It is a second or third language of many Mindanao residents, regardless of their mothertongue.

Blust, who wrote about “Greater Central Philippine” in 1991 languages, opens with this statement: “A ‘Central Philippine’ or ‘Meso Philippine’ subgroup<sup>5</sup> has been recognized by many scholars of Philippine languages, sometimes as a component of a larger ‘Southern Philippine’ group. However, both the composition of this group and the criteria used to justify it have varied widely. In this paper I [= Blust] propose that **Tagalog, Bikol, the Bisayan, South Mangyan** (but not North Mangyan), the **Palawan**ic languages (but not Kalamian), all of the languages of Mindanao except the South Mindanao group, and the **Gorontalo-Mongondow** languages of Sulawesi (but not the more northerly Sangiric and Minahasan languages) continue an immediate protolanguage, here called “Greater Central Philippines” (GCP). This view of the subgrouping of Philippine languages has similarities with that of Zorc (1986), but differs from Zorc's position in several important respects.

## PROTO-SOUTHERN-PHILIPPINE ETYMA.

Immediately below are some etyma<sup>6</sup> that Blust<sup>7</sup> has assigned to Proto-Philippine (PPH), but based on their distribution exclusively among SPh languages probably represent a **Proto-Southern-Philippine (PSP)**:

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<sup>5</sup> A <subgroup> in linguistics assumes there is a historically ancient (**proto**) language which has two or more descendants. Looking at this from “below” Tagalog and Cebuano, while definitely related, come from an ancestor (**proto**) language called “Proto-Central-Philippine”, However, Tagalog is in its own subgroup (Tagalog or Tagalic) and Cebuano is in a completely different subgroup – a part of the Bisayan family of languages. If we look at any large wordlist (200 or more words) Tagalog and Cebuano will only share about half (50%) of the vocabulary. That is because they are separated by many hundreds of years.

<sup>6</sup> <Etyma> is the plural of <etymon> = an earlier form of the same word in the ancestor-language. For example, English and German are in the same language family, called <**Germanic**>. They share quite a few common etyma (the same words historically) such as: apple – Apfel, blue – blau, book – Buch, brown – braun, fever – Fieber, green – Grün, house – Haus.

<sup>7</sup> Blust = Robert Blust was the most famous Austronesian linguist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He also worked on many Philippine languages. [See: Wikipedia [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_Blust](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Blust).] One of his major contributions is on the Internet: The **Austronesian Comparative Dictionary** (abbreviated: **ACD**) <https://acd.clld.org/> or <https://www.trussel2.com/ACD/>

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PSP \***bulud**<sub>2</sub> ‘mountain’ > Palawan Batak *bulud*, Teduray *burur*, Tboli , Koronadal Blaan *bulul*, Samal = Tausug *buud*, Dumpas *bulud*, Sangir *bulude?*, Uma *bulu?*.

PSP \***bunal** ‘beat up, bruise someone’ > Aklanon *búnauy* ‘beat up, batter’, *bunáuy* ‘stick used for beating’, Hiligaynon *bunál* ‘whip, lash’, Hiligaynon , Cebuano, *búnal* ‘thrash, strike with a whip’, Binukid Manobo *bunal* ‘strike or beat a person or animal hard with a club or other solid object’, Mansaka *bonal* ‘to beat, whip’, Sangir *bunale?* ‘bruse, contusion; wound, injury’.

PSP \***butud** ‘swollen, distended, of the belly’ Naga Bikol *bútod* ‘fish, dead and bloated, found floating in the water’, Aklanon *butúd* ‘swell up (due to gas), become bloated (stomach)’ < PWMP \***buntuD** > Aklanon *buntud* ‘bloated (of stomach, after overeating’ [NID], Malay *buntur* ‘sated, gluttoned with food’

PSP \***kəluŋ** ‘shield’ > Maranao *kəloŋ* ‘shield’, Teduray *kəluŋ* ‘a long, harrow shield decorated with rows of shells, used for fighting and dancing’, Sangir *kəlluŋ* ‘shield, used in various dances’.

PSP \***labát** ‘fence’ > Cebuano *labát* ‘fence; patches made in clothing, walls, fence’, Sindangan Subanon *dlabat*, Central Subanon *glabat*, Tboli *labat* ‘fence; to put a fence around something’, Sarangani Blaan *labat*, Koronadal Blaan *labot* ‘fence’ | Probably a truncation of PSP \***alabát** ‘fence; wall’ > Tagalog *alabát* ‘railing’, Mansaka *arabat* ‘wall’, Tigwa Manobo *alabat*, Western Bukidnon Manobo *əlavat*, Alangan *alabat* ‘fence’, Tondano *alawat* ‘obstruction (esp. on road)’, Mongondow *olabat* ‘beam of a balustrade’.

PSP \***lábut** ‘involvement, engagement, business’ > Aklanon *uábot* ‘affair, concern, business’, Hiligaynon *lábut* ‘business, concern’, Cebuano *lábut* ‘concern, connection, part of, including’, Naga Bikol *lábót* ‘business, concern, care, attention’, Hanunoo *lábút* ‘perpetrator, doer, especially of a nefarious deed; the one to blame’, Tboli *labut* ‘involvement or part in something; to get involved, be a part of activity, argument.’

PSP \***lípay** ‘joy, happiness’ > Hanunoo *lípay* ‘joy, happiness’, Aklanon *lípay* ‘to be happy, glad’, Cebuano *lípay* ‘glad, be happy’, Aklanon, Cebuano *kalípay* ‘happiness’, Binukid Manobo *lipay* ‘happiness, joy’, Western Bukidnon Manobo *lipəy* ‘be happy or elated’ | PSP \***malípay** ‘happy, joyful’ > Aklanon *malípay* ‘happy, glad, joyous’, Agutaynen *malipay* ‘be joyful, feel happy’, Binukid *malipay* ‘glad, happy; to gladden make someone happy’, Western Bukidnon Manobo *məlipəy* ‘happy, elated’.

PSP \***lumáy** ‘love charm, aphrodisiac’ > Tagalog *lumáy* ‘love potion, aphrodisiac, love charm’, Bikol *lumáy* ‘love potion’, Hanunoo *lumáy* ‘love charm, potion’, Maranao *lomay* ‘aphrodisiac’, Agutaynen *lomay* ‘a magic love charm directed by a person at another in order to cause him or her to be attracted to them’.

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PSP \***quhay** ‘rice panicle’ > Tagalog *úhay* ‘stem of grain, stalk of rice’, Aklanon *úhay* ‘stalk (of rice)’, Cebuano *uháy* ‘seed-bearing panicle (e.g. as of rice, but not corn); harvest something by just taking the whole panicle’, Kalamian Tagbanwa *kuay* ‘rice panicle’.

PSP \***quhut** ‘sheaf to which rice grains are attached’ > Cebuano *úhut* ~ *uhút* ‘straw of rice or other grain-bearing grasses’, Kalamian Tagbanwa *kuut* ‘sheaf of rice to which rice grains are attached before threshing’.

PSP \***saru** ‘facing, face-to-face’ Tboli *solu* ‘the front of something or someone; to face toward; to be facing something as a responsibility’, *səsolu* ‘to face each other; to confront, as in an issue; facing each other, as one’s feet or pupils of the eyes’, Teduray *sarəw* ‘to face something or somebody’, Tontemboan *saru* ‘the front of something, the facing side’, *an saru-saru-na* ‘right in front of him’, *kasaru* ‘spouse; opponent’, Proto-Minahasan \***saru** ‘facing, in front of; to face’

PSP \***saysay** ‘to narrate, as in telling a story’ > Tagalog *saysáy* ‘statement, assertion, declaration; testifying, relating or telling, e.g. a story’, *kasaysayán* ‘history; a record of past events’, Aklanon *sáysay* ‘to tell, related, describe, narrate’, Cebuano *sáysay* ‘to narrate, related (as in explaining a situation that happened, a procedure to be followed); narration, declaration’, Naga Bikol *magsaysáy* ‘to narrate or chronicle; to tell a story; to tell of an experience’, Mansaka *saysay* ‘to explain’, Western Bukidnon Manobo *səysəy* ‘to explain’. Note: Casiguran Dumaget *saysay* ‘story; to tell a story’ [probably from Tagalog or Bikol]. Pangasinan *salaysay* supports a PPH doublet < \**salaysay* with an \**<al>* infix.

PSP \***səbaŋ** ‘to rise, of the sun, moon or stars’ > Masbantenyo, Naga Bikol *magsúbaŋ* ‘to rise, of sun or moon’, Cebuano *subaŋ* ‘for heavenly bodies to rise...’, Naga Bikol *subáŋan* ‘the east’, Maranao *səbaŋ* ‘rise as in heavenly bodies, appear, come out’, *səbaŋan* ‘east’ Teduray *səbaŋ* ‘the first visible portion of a waxing new moon; (of the moon) to wax; (of the sun) to rise over the horizon’, Proto-Sangiric \***səbaŋ** ‘to rise (of sun)’.

PSP \***səbsəb** ‘to fall forward’ > Tagalog *sibsib* ‘sunset; to set (referring to the sun)’, Aklanon *subsub* ‘to be headed downwards; dip; fall headlong; have the front down’, Naga Bikol *magsubsob* ‘to fall forward’, Mansaka *sobsob* ‘to fall into (as water)’, Agutaynen *ma səbsəb* ‘to fall on one’s face’

PSP \***taRihtih** ‘drizzle, light rain’ [with a doublet \***tarihtih**]

Besides the above etyma, the following represent significant innovations made exclusively by languages that can be characterized as descendants of PSP.

PSP \***libun** ‘woman, female’ [replacing PAN \***bahi, babahi**] in Palawano, Molbog, Subanen, Sarangani Blaan, Tboli, Teduray, and Klata [with presumed loan status in Bonggi, Idaan, Segulid and Begak - ZDS] cited under NOISE in Blust’s ACD.

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PSP \***gibaŋ** ‘left (side)’ [Replacing PAN \***wiRi**, \***kawiRi**] in Palawanic, Manobo [plus shared doublet \***bibaŋ** with Koronadal Blaam), Subanen (doublets \***dibaŋ**, \***bibaŋ**), Tboli – doublet \***ibaŋ**, shared with Sarangani Blaan, Tagabawa, Obo, and Bagobo Manobo) [ZDS]

PSP \***səléd** ‘inside, within; to enter’ > Kinaray-a *səléd*, Aklanon *suuyód*, Asi’ *suyór*, Romblomanon, Surigaonon *suyúd*, Butuanon, Tandaganon *suúd*, Kamayo, Tausug *su:d*, Mansaka *səléd*, Palawano, Palawan Batak, Kalamian Tagbanwa, Western Bukidnon Manobo *səléd*, Agutaynen *tələd*, Kagayanen *sillid*. [ZDS]

PSP \***siyaw** ‘nine’ [Replacing PAN \***Siwa**, PMP \***siwa** (metathesis) of **wa** to **aw**] > Manobo, Danao, Teduray, Sangiric, Gorontalo, Mongondow. [ZDS]. Note: these languages do not share the innovation of PPH \***siyam**.

PSP \***tiʔəl** ‘foot’ > Ceb, Hil, Sor, Mas, Iriga *tiʔil*, Oas, Daraga-Bikol *til*, Mongondow *siʔol* ‘foot’; Tboli *tiʔol* ‘bone’

## TERMINOLOGY PROBLEMS

<**Bikol**> The late professor Robert A. Blust in his writings and in the ACD used the term “Bikol” for what is more appropriately the **Naga** dialect (as well as Legazpi and Virac) of **Coastal Bikol**. Bikol now is the cover term for the entire Bikol subgroup of Central Philippine that includes **Inland Bikol** and **Northern Catanduanes** as three coordinate branches.

<**Bilic**> – The late professor Isidore Dyen (1953) coined the term “Bilic” to represent Koronadal Blaan and Sarangani Blaan which appeared in Reid (1971), but for which he also had his own resources. More recently this term has been used for the macrogroup consisting of Teduray, Tboli, the two Blaan lects and Bagobo Klata, which is far more appropriately “Southern Mindanao”.

<**Pangasanic**> Similarly, Zorc, in his 1979 article (#025) “On the development of contrastive word accent: Pangasinan, a case in point” coined the term “Pangasinic” which is far more appropriately “Southern Cordilleran”.

<**Tagalic**> - Again, the late professor Isidore Dyen (1953) coined the term “Tagalic” for what is now more appropriately known as “Central Philippine”, including Tagalog along with Bisayan, Bikol, Mansaka, and Mamanwa.