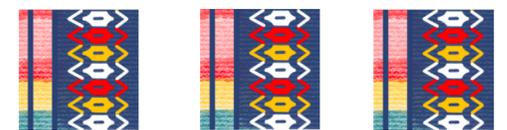


PLENARY LECTURE

Axis Relationships in the Philippines – When Traditional Subgrouping Fails

R. DAVID ZORC



ABOUT THE SPEAKER

R. David Zorc has been blessed with over 40 years of experience in comparative-historical linguistics, lexicography, language teaching, language analysis, curriculum development, and applied linguistics.

He has conducted research on 80 languages of the Philippines, Aboriginal Australia, Armenia, and Africa, encompassing the Austronesian, Bantu, Cushitic, Indo-European, and Pama-Nyungan language families.

His publication of 31 books on 24 languages, 40 journal articles, and 30 presentations at international conferences solidifies his reputation as one of the world's leading authorities on the less-commonly taught languages, especially of the Philippines.

He has produced 6 dictionaries (Aklanon, Eastern Armenian, Somali, Tagalog Slang, Filipino Etymological, and Yolngu Matha). He was awarded the Brother Andrew Gonzalez, FSC Distinguished Professorial Chair in Linguistics and Language Education by the Linguistic Society of the Philippines on February 26, 2005.

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ABSTRACT

Axis Relationships in the Philippines – When Traditional Subgrouping Fails

R. DAVID ZORC

Most scholars seem to agree that the Malayo-Polynesian expansion left Formosa around 3,000 BCE and virtually raced south through the Philippines in less than one millenium. From southern Mindanao migrations went westward through Borneo and on to Indonesia, Malaysia, and upwards into the Asian continent (“Malayo”-), and others went south through Sulawesi also going eastward across the Pacific (“Polynesian”).

If this is the case, the Philippine languages are the “left behinds” allowing at least two more millenia for multiple interlanguage contacts within the archipelago. After two proposed major extinctions: total and central Philippines (Blust 2019), inter-island associations followed the ebb and flow of dominance, expansion, resettlement, and trade. Little wonder then that “unique” lexemes found on Palawan can appear in Mindoro or on Panay; developments throughout the east (Mindanao, Bisayas, and southern Luzon) can appear in Central Luzon, and an unknown, formerly prestigious Bisayan *l > y language left some traces in Umiray Dumaget and other languages on Southern Luzon.

As early as 1972, while writing up my dissertation (Zorc 1975), I found innovations that did not belong to any specific subgroup, but had crossed linguistic boundaries to form an “axis” [my term, but related to German “*Sprachbund*”, “network” (Milroy 1985), “linkage” (Ross 1988. Pawley & Ross 1995)].

“Normally, innovations should be indicative of subgrouping. However, they can arise in an environment where different language communities develop close trade or societal ties. The word *bakál* ‘buy’ replaces PAN **belih* and **mayád* ‘good’ replaces PMP **pia* in an upper loop from the Western Bisayas, Ilonggo, Masbateño, Sorsogon, and then several Bikol lects. This is theoretically important because we have innovations that do not define a subgroup, e.g., “North Bisayan,” but rather a highly interactive area or axis.”

I wrote this note to self [2015.06.08] upon finding evidence for a Central-Mindanao-axis: “The Danao, Manobo, Subanon, and Mansakan languages of Mindanao together reflect an etymon *sidan* < **si+dan* ‘they’, which differs from PMP **si+da* in having a final *-n*. These same languages also reflect an etymon **ʔetaw* ‘person’, which differs from PAN **Cau* in having an innovative prosthesis after reduction of the disyllabic root to a monosyllable. One also discovers that they also share an etymon **qebel* ‘smoke’, but cognates are found in Tboli [kəbəl] as well as Kanakanabu [ʔə̀əvə] and Proto-Rukai *əbələ, so that this represents a shared retention of PAN **qəbəl*.” <https://www.trussel2.com/ACD/>.

Out of over 6,700 etyma in the Zorc Data Sheets [ZDS] (<https://zorc.net/RDZorc/PHILIPPINE-ETYMA/>), 285 represent axis relationships. This is less than 4%, so they do not undo the overall standing of well-established subgroups, which make up its bulk. However, these illustrate undeniably evident interrelationships among languages which subgrouping could not otherwise account for. This paper will discuss at least a dozen such axis relationships that have arisen throughout the Philippines.

