

The Odor Lexica of Philippine Languages

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1 Introduction

The terms that encode body parts are often revisited in the field of diachronic linguistics for these words are considered as parts of the core vocabulary of languages, that is, these words are less likely to change or be replaced by non-cognate forms compared to other lexical items. However, little research has been done on the terms that concern human senses.

It is in this light that this paper seeks to provide a preliminary survey of the terms connected to one of the five human senses--olfaction. This study primarily focuses on looking at how the odor lexica of 25 Philippine languages developed through time. The data show that in the course of the development of the odor lexica of Philippine languages, several semantic changes have taken place. Furthermore, these olfactory terms offer a glimpse of the rich indigenous concepts of various ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines.

2 The genetic relationship of Philippine languages

The lexical items that were analyzed in this study were primarily drawn from dictionaries and other published materials. Additional data were also elicited from speakers of Maranao, Hiligaynon, Ilokano, and Kapampangan. In the interest of providing a valid and comprehensive analysis of the terms associated with olfaction in some Philippine languages, the present paper looks at representative languages from five out of nine microgroups that were identified by Blust (1991), i.e., Bashiic, Cordillera, Central Luzon, Greater Central Philippines, and Bilic. Blust (1991) suggests that the collection of more than 180 languages spoken in the Philippine archipelago can be grouped into nine microgroups: Bashiic, Cordilleran, Central Luzon, Inati, Kalamian, Greater Central Philippines, Bilic, Sangria, and Minahasan.

The islands bordering the Philippines and Taiwan is home to a small group of closely related languages known as the Batanic microgroup. Yami of Lan-yu, Taiwan; Itbayaten of Itbayat, Batanes; Ivatan of Batan and Sabtang, Batanes; and Ibatan of Babuyan Claro, Cagayan are identified within this microgroup (Tsuchida et al., 1987). Contrastingly, a fairly large group of distinct languages named the Cordilleran microgroup is spoken in the northern part of Luzon. The Central Luzon microgroup is a small group of languages found in west-Central Luzon (Blust, 1991, p. 79). It consists of Kapampangan, Sinauna (also known as Dumagat, Remontado), Botolan, Bolinao, Sambali, and a number of Ayta Negrito languages. Among the nine microgroups proposed by Blust (1991), the Greater Central Philippines is the largest. It is further subdivided into seven groups, namely Central Philippines, South Mangyan, Palawanic, Manobo, Danaw, Subanun, and Gorontalo-Mongondow (Blust, 1991, p. 101). Relative to GCP, Bilic and Kalamian can be considered as small microgroups: Bilaan, Tboli, Tiruray, and Giangan Bagobo constitutes the Bilic microgroup; Agutaynen and Kalamian Tagbanwa form the Kalamian microgroup. Two microgroups that belong to the Philippine language group are spoken on the northern peninsula of Sulawesi in Indonesia: Minahasan and Sangiric. Tonsea, Tombulu, Tondano (also known as Toulour), Tontemboan, and Tonsawang belong to the Minahasan microgroup. Likewise, Sangiric is a group of five languages (Blust, 1991, pp. 84-85).

In contrast with the eight aforementioned microgroups, Inati is a language isolate spoken by a community of Negritos on the island of Panay (Blust, 1991, p. 80). The idea that the languages in the Philippines form a distinct group was already accepted by many scholars way before Blust published his initial work on the subgrouping of Philippine languages (see Blumentritt, 1901; Conant, 1910; Blake 1920). However, Reid (1982) is not convinced that the Philippine languages belong to a single unit under the Malayo-Polynesian family, stating that there exists no compelling evidence to prove this claim.

Until the present, the debate regarding the existence of a distinct Philippine subgroup is not yet settled. In fact, Blust (2019) published a 104-page article dubbed as "The Resurrection of Proto-Philippines." In this article,

Blest further forwards his initial claim regarding the existence of the Proto-Philippines, citing phonological and lexical evidence to support his assumption.

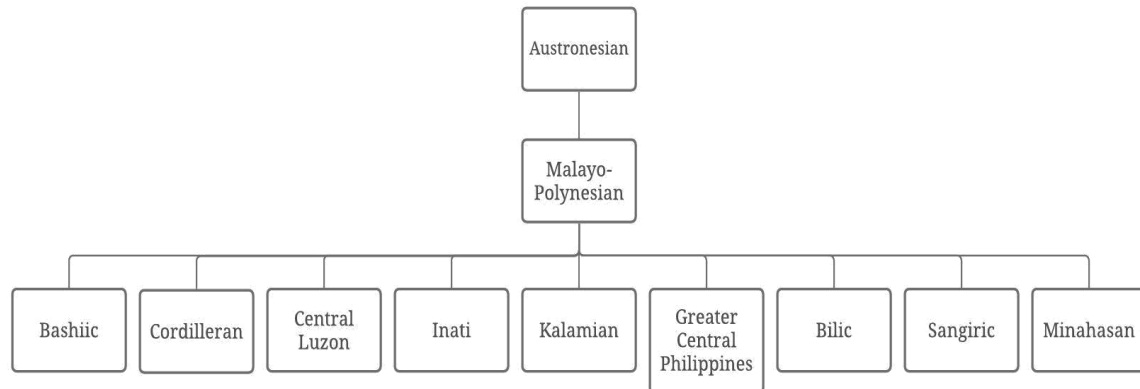


Figure 1. The Nine Microgroups Under the Philippine Subgroup According to Blust (1991)

3 The odor lexica of Philippine languages

The succeeding discussions of the odor lexica of some Philippine languages are grouped into two parts. The first subsection deals with the terms that correspond to body parts and actions associated with respiration and olfaction, and the second subsection explores the terms used to identify various odors.

3.1 *Body parts and actions associated with respiration and olfaction* The terms for nose in most of the surveyed languages are proposed reflexes of Proto-Malayo-Polynesian (PMP) *ijung ‘nose’. Table 1 presents the terms for nose in the Philippine languages that were surveyed.

PMP *ijung ‘nose’

Agutaynen	ʔoroŋ
Bolinao	agoŋ
Bontok	ʔiŋil
Cebuano	ʔiloŋ
Dupaningan Agta	do:ŋ
Hiligaynon	ʔiloŋ
Ilokano	ʔagoŋ
Kapampangan	ʔaruŋ
Mansaka	ʔiloŋ
Maranao	ŋiroŋ
Masbatenyo	ʔiroŋ
Pangasinan	ʔeleŋ
Sambal	ʔaʔloŋ
Tagalog	ʔiloŋ
Tagbanwa	ʔuruŋ
Tausug	ʔiluŋ

Tboli	ilun
Waray	ʔiron

Table 1: Reflexes of PMP *ijung ‘nose’

Compared to the majority of the surveyed languages, Ayta Abellen and Ayta Mag-antsi register unique terms for ‘nose’. Additional data from Ayta Ambala, Ayta Mag-indi, and Ayta Magbukun reveal that these terms are not only used in Ayta Abellen and Ayta Mag-antsi. It is found that the terms used to denote ‘nose’ in Negrito languages belonging to the Central Luzon microgroup are nearly identical.

Ayta Abellen	balonɔh
Ayta Ambala	balonɔh
Ayta Mag-antsi	balunuh
Ayta Mag-Indi	balunus
Ayta Magbukun	baluju

Table 2: Terms for ‘nose’ in Negrito Languages in Central Luzon Microgroup

Although the term *balunus* (and its cognates) is not used to refer to ‘nose’ in other Philippine languages, the idiomatic expression *kuskus-balungos* ‘unnecessary activity or fuss (that prevents someone from doing a work)’ exists in some Philippine languages. According to Panganiban (1973), the term *balunus* means ‘snout of fish’ in Tagalog and Kapampangan. Likewise, Blust and Trussel (ongoing) reconstruct the root *-ɲus ‘snout.’

These observations regarding the term *balunus* give rise to a couple of questions: (i) Did the term *balunus* undergo a semantic change to ‘nose’ in Negrito languages belonging to the Central Luzon microgroup? (ii) Why is this semantic change only limited to the Negrito languages of Central Luzon?

In contrast to the terms used for ‘nose’, there is only one set of cognates that can be found in the gathered terms used to denote ‘lung’. These terms are said to be reflexes of PAN *baRaq ‘lung’.

PAN *baRaq ‘lung’

Agutaynen	bagaʔ
Ayta Abellen	baga
Ayta Mag-antsi	baga
Bikol	bagaʔ
Bolinao	bara
Bontok	bala
Cebuano	ba:gaʔ
Ibatan	bara
Ilokano	bara
Kapampangan	bagaʔ
Manobo	bagaʔ
Mansaka	bagaʔ
Maranao	bagaʔ
Masbatenyo	bagaʔ

Pangasinan	bala
Sambal	baja?
Tagalog	ba:ga?
Tausug	baga?
Tboli	baga?
Waray	ba:ga?

Table 3: Reflexes of PAN *baRaq ‘Lung’

Casiguran Dumagat and Tagbanwa register terms for ‘lung’ that are distinct from the rest of the gathered terms. Casiguran Dumagat uses *duloj*, which, according to Robinson and Lobel (2013), is a lexical innovation that can also be found in Nagtipunan Agta (p. 5). Whereas, Tagbanwa has *kumba?* to refer to ‘lung’. Himes (2016) notes that this term is a lexical innovation, which can be found in the following languages (or dialects): Aborlan Tagbanwa, Central Tagbanwa, Kalamian Tagbanwa, and Karamiananen (p. 16).

The terms in Table 4 descend from PMP *nihawa ‘breath; life force, breath soul; to breathe; breathe easily, feel comfort, be at ease, have ‘breathing room’; to rest, take a break.’

PMP *nihawa ‘breath; life force, breath soul; to breathe; breathe easily, feel comfort, be at ease, have ‘breathing room’; to rest, take a break’

Agutaynen	linawa
Ayta Mag-antsi	?isnawa
Cebuano	ginha:wa
Hiligaynon	ginha:wa
Kapampangan	?inawa
Manobo	ginhawa
Mansaka	ginawa
Maranao	ginawa
Pangasinan	linawa
Sambal	?inanawa
Tboli	nawa
Waray	ginha:wa

Table 4: Reflexes of PMP *nihawa ‘breath; life force, breath soul; to breathe; breathe easily, feel comfort, be at ease, have “breathing room”; to rest, take a break’

3.2 Smell Before proceeding to the discussion of the terms that describe specific odor qualities, it is important to discuss first the development of the lexical items that encode ‘smell.’

The gathered terms for ‘smell’ exhibit no uniformity; however, two cognate sets can be identified in the data. The first set of cognates are deemed to be reflexes of PMP *haŋut ‘smell, odor’ (see Table 5). On the other hand, the second cognate set consists of reflexes of PMP *bahu ‘odor, stench’ (see Table 6).

PMP *haŋut ‘smell, odor’

Bolinao	?aŋot
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Ibatan	ʔaŋut
Ilokano	ʔaŋot
Itbayaten	haŋot
Pangasinan	ʔaŋob
Sambal	ʔaŋot

Table 5: Reflexes of PMP *haŋut ‘smell, odor’

PMP *bahu ‘odor, stench’

Cebuano	ba:hoʔ
Hiligaynon	ba:hoʔ
Kapampangan	bawu
Mansaka	baoʔ
Tagbanwa	baʔuʔ
Tausug	bahuʔ
Tboli	boo

Table 6: Reflexes of PMP *bahu ‘odor, stench’

Aside from the aforementioned proto-forms, Blust and Trussel (ongoing) reconstruct another proto-form that means ‘smell; to smell’--PAN *Sajek. Interestingly, the reflexes of the said proto-form in Philippine languages are not used to denote ‘smell; to smell’, but rather these terms encode ‘kiss; to kiss.’ This suggests that *Sajek underwent semantic shift in PPH, making various lexical innovations occupy the semantic space it previously had.

3.2.1 Pleasant Odor Originally, at least six terms that denote pleasant odor were expected to be gathered from each of the surveyed languages; but due to the limited number of lexical items found in the dictionaries, only the terms for ‘fragrance’ were collected.

Tables 7 and 8 present the two sets of cognates that are used to express ‘fragrance.’ The first set of terms are reflexes of PPH *baŋ(e)lúh ‘fragrance, pleasant odor.’ The second set are reflexes of PMP *haŋut ‘smell, odor.’

PPH *baŋ(e)lúh ‘fragrance, pleasant odor’

Asi	baŋjo
Ayta Abellen	baŋoh
Ayta Mag-antsi	baŋoh
Bontok	baŋlo
Ilokano	baŋlo
Sambal	baŋlo
Tagalog	baŋo

Table 7: Reflexes of PPH *baŋ(e)lúh ‘fragrance, pleasant odor’

PAN *haŋut 'smell, odor'

Bikol	hamot
Cebuano	humot
Hiligaynon	hamot
Masbatenyo	humot
Tausug	hamut

Table 8: Reflexes of PMP *haŋut 'smell, odor'

3.2.2 Unpleasant odors In a study conducted across twenty natural languages, Rozin, Berman, and Royzman (2010) report that languages tend to favor the lexicalization of words that identify negative situations; thus, it comes as no surprise to observe that there are more lexical items that describe unpleasant odors than those that encode pleasant odors in the surveyed languages.

The words found in Table 9 mean 'bad odor, stench' in nine of the surveyed languages. Similar to those in Table 6, the lexical items in Table 9 are proposed reflexes of PMP *bahu 'odor, stench.' Clearly, the said proto-form underwent semantic narrowing in the following languages.

PMP *bahu 'odor, stench'

Asi	ba:ho?
Cebuano	ba:ho?
Hiligaynon	baho?
Kapampangan	bawu?
Manobo	bohu?
Masbatenyo	baho?
Tagalog	ba:ho?
Tausug	bahu?
Waray	baho?

Table 9: Reflexes of PMP *bahu 'odor, stench'

Similarly, Table 10 contains words for 'bad odor, stench.' However, unlike PMP *bahu, PPH *buŋ(e)tút 'stench, bad odor' has several reflexes in some languages, e.g., it has three reflexes in Tagalog, namely *bantot*, *?antot*, and *lantot*.

PPH *buŋ(e)tút 'stench, bad odor'

Ayta Abellen	bantot	'fedor, fetidness'
Casiguran Dumagat	ben̄tet	'bad odor of manure or flatulence'
	loŋtot	'stench or fedor of stagnant'

Ilokano	luṅtot	water with decaying leaves' 'rotten'
Kapampangan	baṅtut/laṅtut	'repulsive odor of stagnated water'
Tagalog	bantot	'fedor, fetidness'
	?antot	'repulsive odor of stagnated water'
	lantot	'stench or fedor of stagnant water with decaying leaves'

Table 10: Reflexes of PPH *buŋ(e)tút 'stench, bad odor'

In contrast to those that are found in the two preceding tables, the terms in Table 11 did not descend from any of the reconstructed proto-forms of Blust and Trussel (ongoing). Among the surveyed languages, these nearly identical terms are only used in Ayta Abellen, Ayta Mag-antsi, Bikol, and Sambal. With the current data, it is quite impossible to provide a definitive conclusion as to where these terms originated; however, one of the striking observations that can be drawn regarding this is that the three languages that share the term *bata* belong to the Central Luzon microgroup.

Ayta Abellen	bata
Ayta Mag-antsi	bata
Bikol	bata?
Sambal	bata

Table 11: Terms for 'bad odor' in Some Philippine Languages

Reflexes of PMP *laŋ(e)si 'fishy smell' are robustly attested in the surveyed languages. In languages like Binukid and Ata, PPH *laŋesa serves as a second source of innovative 'blood' words in order to avoid using *PAN daRaq 'blood' (Blust, 2013, p. 337).

PMP *laŋ(e)si 'fishy smell'

Agutaynen	laŋsi
Asi	majaŋsa
Bikol	laŋsi?
Bolinao	laŋsi
Casiguran Dumagat	laŋse
Cebuano	laŋsa
Hiligaynon	laŋsa
Ibatan	laŋsi
Ilokano	nalaŋsi
Manobo	jaŋsa
Maranao	lansa
Masbatenyo	laŋsa

Sambal	laŋsa
Tagalog	lansa
Tagbanwa	malan̄si
Tausug	luŋsi

Table 12: Reflexes of PMP *laŋ(e)si ‘fishy smell’

Some of the surveyed languages also have terms that encode very specific unpleasant odors. For example, reflexes of PPH *qaŋ(e)su ‘stench of urine’ are used to pertain to the scent of urine.

PPH *qaŋ(e)su ‘stench of urine’

Bolinao	ʔaŋsər
Casiguran Dumagat	ʔaŋso
Cebuano	ʔaŋsu
Dupaningan Agta	ʔaŋsu
Hiligaynon	paŋsət
Ibatan	ʔaŋsəd
Ilokano	ʔaŋsəg
Tagalog	paŋhi

Table 13: Reflexes of PPH *qaŋ(e)su ‘stench of urine’

3.2.3 Neutral odors Aside from the terms that pertain to pleasant and unpleasant odors, there also exist some lexical items in Philippine languages that cannot straightforwardly be considered as pleasant nor unpleasant. Some of these terms are used to refer to the peculiar odor of fresh fish or certain fresh meat, and the characteristic odor of certain vegetables when uncooked or when cooking has been delayed long after picking.

Due to the cultural significance of rice in the ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines, words that are related to rice also exist in the odor lexica of Philippine languages. The majority of the surveyed languages have terms that describe the odor of burnt rice.

Agutaynen	dāŋi
Asi	ʔantor
Ayta Mag-antsi	baŋeh
Bontok	ʔako:əl
Casiguran Dumagat	ʔaŋsət
Cebuano	ʔanhuy
Dupaningan Agta	ʔattəp
Ibatan	ʔakekset
Ilokano	naksət
Kapampangan	minalituŋtuŋ

Manobo	ʔaŋhuj
Maranao	serok
Masbatenyo	maŋantod
Sambal	təktək
Tagalog	ʔaŋi
Tausug	dukut

Table 14: Terms for ‘odor of burnt rice’ in Some Philippine Languages

4 The significance of olfaction and respiration in indigenous beliefs and practices

The relevance of olfaction and respiration in Philippine ethnolinguistic groups transcends from the physical to the cultural and psychological levels. Their relevance is clearly reflected in the terms associated with olfaction and respiration. Some of the terms that pose great cultural relevance can be found in Table 4. It is mentioned in that subsection that the terms that encode ‘breath’ in most of the surveyed Philippine languages are reflexes of PMP **nihawa* ‘breath; life force, breath soul; to breathe; breathe easily, feel comfort, be at ease, have ‘breathing room’; to rest, take a break.’ As the gloss of the proto-form evidently shows, these terms do not only encode ‘breath’; these terms are also intertwined with the concepts of wellness and ease. In an ethnolinguistic study in 2008, Paz identifies three ideas associated with the umbrella term *ginhawa* (and its cognates): (i) the ability to breathe easily, (ii) the freedom from pressures and problems, and (iii) a physical state of feeling light and easy.

5 Conclusion

This study presents how the odor lexica of Philippine languages developed through time. The gathered data show that in the course of this development, several semantic changes have taken place, e.g., semantic shift and narrowing. Furthermore, the olfactory terms of the surveyed languages reflect how the indigenous concepts of wellness in Philippines are grounded in respiration.

Philippine languages indeed possess a rich vocabulary dedicated to describing olfactory sensations. However, the present paper is not able to take into account every single lexical item associated with olfaction in the surveyed languages because of its limitations (see section 2). Nevertheless, these limitations could be resolved once ample data are elicited from native speakers of Philippine languages, which is not possible during the moment of writing of this paper. Sufficient data might also serve as supporting evidence for the following claims:

- (i) Most of the lexical items associated with olfaction and respiration have a nasal sound, e.g., Tagalog’s *ʔiləŋ* and ‘nose, *baŋə* ‘fragrance’, and Ayta Abellen’s *baləŋəh* ‘nose’ and *bantət* ‘fedor, fetidness.’; and
- (ii) Similarities are hardly observed among terms that encode very specific odor qualities.

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