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ABSTRACT

When news of an uncontacted ‘lost tribe’ began emanating from the island of Bohol in the southern Philippines, visitors were fascinated by the group’s unique language and complex writing system, used today by some 500 people in limited domains. Though few have attempted to analyse the language, exotic theories of its origins are widely circulated by outsiders. According to speakers, however, Eskayan was created by the ancestor Pinay who used the human body as inspiration. For Pinay a language and its written mode were inextricable. In the 20th century Pinay’s language was rediscovered by the rebel soldier Mariano Datahan who retransmitted it to his followers. This creation story is consistent with my linguistic analysis which points to a sophisticated encryption of the regional Visayan language. Further, the particulars of how Eskayan was designed shed much light on the sociocultural conditions motivating its (re)creation. Implicit notions of linguistic materiality, boundedness and interchangeability are reflected in the relexification process carried out by Pinay/Datahan. In defiance of all imperial claimants to the island, Pinay and Datahan effectively reified a language community whose territorial rights were corporeally inscribed.

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INTRODUCTION

In about 1980, agricultural advisors reported the discovery of a 'lost tribe' in a mountainous corner of the Philippine island of Bohol (Ramos 1980; Abregana 1984). Members of this isolated community were said to be speaking a peculiar tongue, altogether unlike the Visayan language spoken throughout Bohol and its neighbouring islands. Even more remarkably, the language was represented in an elaborate and unrecognised script. Before long, word of the newly discovered 'Eskaya' tribe reached the National Museum of the Philippines which was preparing to send an archeological team to Bohol. Since the planned excavation sites were not far from the territory in question, a side trip was quickly scheduled to investigate further. The Eskaya were described by the archeologists as a small 'cultural community' whose economy was based on rice, corn and *kamúti* (a variety of sweet potato). Most belonged to a single clan descended from a legendary figure known only as Anoy. Through a series of interviews the museum team was able to copy out a reference syllabary of the group's complex script, record a basic word list and describe the number system. The final document included photographs, a comparison of the script with known Philippine writing systems and some conclusions about where the group belonged within the ethnolinguistic picture of the Philippines (Peralta J, pers.comm). The report was never made public and no copies have survived.

[EDITOR: Insert Map 1 approximately here: Kelly-Map1-Bohol.tiff]

Map 1 Bohol and environs, indicating the five Eskaya settlements of Canta-ub, Taytay, Lundag, Biabas and Cadapdapan.

The circulating stories of a lost tribe in Bohol also piqued the curiosity of Brenda Abregana, an eccentric local librarian who, unaware of the museum's fieldwork, embarked on a personal expedition to the community. Her aim was to examine a collection of old manuscripts rumoured to be in the possession of the tribe. After a short stay in the Eskaya village of Taytay, Abregana drafted a grant application for the Fund for Assistance to Private Education in Manila (FAPE). In this document she

claimed that the lost ‘Bisayan Eskaya’ people of Bohol were the indigenous custodians of ancient texts written in an undocumented language and script (Ramos 1980). These native records, she explained, were of incalculable value and had been hidden away for almost 450 years for protection against the destructive policies of Spanish missionaries. She argued, as a matter of urgency, for a properly resourced expedition to be launched in order to make formal contact with the long-estranged Eskaya people, and to document their records. Further, her proposed project would attempt to determine the origin of the Eskayan alphabet with a view to discovering whether it was, in fact, the earliest alphabet in human history. ‘Since archeological evidence points to Southeast Asia as the first home of man,’ she argued, ‘there is enough reason that the alphabet must originate also in a Southeast Asian country’. Within her draft budget were provisions for trained interpreters to facilitate communication.

Despite backing from Bohol’s governor, no support was forthcoming from universities or government departments. In the meantime public interest in the Eskaya was served by the local tabloid press. Journalists invariably took a supernatural angle on the unique culture of the Biabas and Taytay communities, a theme encouraged by Abregana herself. Some writers amplified earlier reports, weaving in sensational theories of the group’s ancient and biblical connections (Cuizon 1980; Amparado 1981). Those who actually visited the Eskaya villages returned with equally sensational stories of dire native prophecies on the cusp of fulfilment and of chieftains with paranormal talents (Abregana 1981; Payot 1981; Abregana 1984). These implausible reports, mostly written in Visayan for a Visayan audience, failed to attract any attention beyond Bohol and its neighbouring islands. When the Eskaya community did eventually find itself in the national spotlight it was as the subject of a feature in *Who*, a Manila-based English-language magazine (Logarta 1981). Striking colour pictures accompanied the article, showing Eskaya women in long, elegant dresses with matching headscarves. Eskaya men stood barefoot in smart *barung* (‘formal shirts’) woven from raffia. The language and script, both unintelligible to the

observer, were being actively taught in a purpose-built school. The reporter's first-hand description of an Eskayan language class in Taytay was vivid: students were crammed into the top floor of the simple two-storey building where segregation of the sexes was rigidly observed. Younger students studied grammar and lettering, while the more advanced were taught origin stories and 'human psychology'. These classes were patrolled by the Tres Marias, three women of authority who answered individual queries. In the room below them, 'librarians' copied out Eskaya books that would later be bound by hand.

Impressed by the lively spectacle, the author, Margarita Logarta, was nonetheless dismissive of the esoteric claims of previous journalists as well as the testimony of the Eskaya themselves regarding the antiquity of their culture. But most astonishing were her own conclusions about the language. When she presented the linguist Ernesto Constantino with examples of romanised Eskayan text, he commented, 'That it is a 'lost' language is as good as anyone's guess [...] It might be an artificial language invented by one person or a group of persons. Like disguised speech when you don't want people to know what you're saying. Actually, you are using your own native language with some distortions and additions' (1981: 6). She proposed, on this advice, that the Eskaya were little more than a curious rural cult speaking a fabricated language. In Logarta's view a hidden motive explained the community's enthusiasm for its purportedly invented tongue. Poverty stricken and isolated in the mountains, the people of the village were desperate for any form of institutional development. Thus the so-called 'Eskaya' had developed a unique culture and exotic language with the sole aim of attracting potential government patrons.

As local journalists continued to speculate feverishly on the origins of Eskayan, academic interest in the Eskaya was limited to postgraduate students. Milan Ted Torralba, a Boholano seminarian, began compiling linguistic data with the aim understanding the history of the language, and to challenge an emerging claim that Eskayan was related to Etruscan (Torralba 1991; Torralba 1991; Torralba 1993). Sadly, his superiors urged him to abandon this work. Aida Hinlo's thesis (1992) was

a proposal for a tribal education project aimed at raising literacy standards. She noted that the Eskaya were second-language speakers of Visayan (or ‘Cebuano’ in her terminology) and had reduced levels of literacy in this language. The following year, Cristina Martinez submitted a comparative literature thesis (1993) that presented the Eskaya community of Taytay as a subaltern postcolonial movement actively subverting the hegemony of foreign discourses. While raising the question of whether the language script was intentionally developed, Martinez made no attempt to resolve the issue definitively. The first actual grammatical sketch of Eskayan was a thesis by Stella Consul (2005) and her description of Eskayan syntax mapped directly onto the grammatical categories of Cebuano-Visayan as it had been described by Angel Pesirla (2003). Based on the structural symmetry between the two languages she concluded that ‘the linearity of Iniskaya [Eskayan] is basically Malay sharing the same immediate constituents with the languages of the Central Philippines’ (205: 99). The historical implications of this finding were not explored.

CONTEMPORARY ESKAYAN AND THE HISTORICAL QUESTION

For ten months over 2005-2006, I was employed as an AusAID volunteer with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples in Bohol’s capital, Tagbilaran. My task was to produce basic linguistic research materials to contribute to negotiations over land use and resource management. I soon became aware of the diversity of opinions on the status of the language and in the course of my research I was frequently asked by locals if I considered Eskayan to be ‘real’. Understood literally, the question can have no satisfying answer—Eskayan is manifestly spoken and written by a community of people who live in the southeast interior of the island, even though I have encountered those who still doubt this. But I came to understand that it was not so much the existence of the language that was questioned but its *right* to exist, a right that is almost always disputed in historical terms. In response, Eskaya people regularly invoke history as a means of defending and authenticating their linguistic

subjecthood. These questions and attitudes inspired a more specific interest in the history of the language, and I returned to Australia to study linguistics, eventually enrolling in a PhD program. For about six months, spread over the dry seasons of 2009 to 2011 I lived in southeast Bohol, documenting and analysing Eskayan from a linguistic, historical and anthropological perspective. My research was mostly centred around the Eskaya settlements of Biabas and Taytay, and later in Cadapdapan which has a well-established Eskaya community. Other villages with Eskaya populations are Lundag and Canta-ub but at the time of research Eskayan language use was limited in these areas (see Map 1).

According to local government data these villages are towards the poorer end of the scale however my Eskaya consultants tended to describe themselves as neither poor nor rich, identifying simply as ‘middle class’ (using the English term). Abregana’s demand for Eskayan interpreters in 1980 and Hinlo’s reports of low second-language competence in Visayan in 1992 contrasted sharply with my own experiences. In the course of my fieldwork, no individual I interviewed claimed to have been raised with Eskayan as their first language. Nor, when compiling genealogies, did anybody declare their parents or grandparents as mother-tongue Eskayan speakers. The principal language of communication in the field site was Visayan, a language spoken by Bohol’s 1.25 million inhabitants and by a further twenty million people in the southern Philippines. Most Eskaya under the age of 50 were able to speak and understand Tagalog and a little English. Two consultants (one in Tatyay and the other in Cadapdapan) were highly proficient in English. The most regular use of Eskayan was witnessed in the volunteer-run schools that operated on Sundays. Outside the classroom Eskayan was used for praying, singing, speech-making and the reading and writing of Eskaya literature. More rarely Eskayan was employed in order to exclude an overhearer. Some speakers at village meetings I attended, for example, would switch to Eskayan when the discussion concerned my activities in the community and the speakers did not want me to understand what was being said. For visitors and locals alike, common imperative phrases were frequently

rendered in Eskayan with a certain self-conscious jocularity, among them **griyu** ('come in!'), **milyamun** ('let's eat!') and **uchdirim** ('come and drink!').¹ Use of these simple and formulaic expressions often belied a far greater linguistic sophistication on the part of the speaker, as I was later to discover during elicitation sessions.

In Biabas, Taytay and neighbouring villages with Eskaya populations, I asked teachers for their estimates of the numbers of Eskayan speakers in their localities. Based on their local reckonings I in turn estimate that there are a total of between 500 and 550 speakers of this special language today. This figure represents about a quarter of the total number of individuals who identify themselves as Eskaya. Though historically Biabas and Taytay were exclusively Eskaya villages, today my impression is that Eskaya people make up roughly one quarter of the Biabas population and about two thirds of the Taytay community. I have personally encountered at least twenty individuals who have displayed a very high degree of linguistic competence, to the extent that they are able to speak, read and write Eskayan with little hesitancy. All of the most fluent speakers attained proficiency through regular attendance at one of three volunteer-run schools in Taytay, Biabas or Lundag. Built by the community, these single-room schools host classes every Sunday, beginning after the morning church service and continuing until midday. In Taytay, classes run until 5pm with a break for lunch. Attendance is voluntary and typically there are about twenty children and ten adults on any given Sunday. Teachers are highly respected but not paid for their work. All classes begin with the Filipino national anthem sung in Eskayan. Separate classes for children and adults take place simultaneously at different ends of the room. Children from ages six to eleven years old learn the basics of the Eskayan script, principally the **abidiha**, a primary 'alphabet' of 46 mixed alphabetic and syllabic characters. Teachers mostly use Visayan as a medium of instruction and ask students to chant responses in unison. This call-response technique is a common pedagogical method in Philippine schools. Adults practice the **simplit**, the full syllabary of over 1000 characters which incorporates the **abidiha**.

[EDITOR: Insert Figure 1 approximately here: Kelly-Fig1-Biabas_school.jpg]

Figure 1. Children salute the Eskaya flag before the Sunday lesson at the language school in Biabas.

[EDITOR: Insert Figure 2 approximately here: Kelly-Fig2-Taytay_school]

Figure 2. An adult class in the ‘Tribal Hall’ of Taytay. Separated by a wooden panel, the children’s class is taking place in an adjacent room in the background.

Beyond the classroom, Eskayan is used to a limited extent for prayer and singing in church, and for secular songs that are direct translations of patriotic Visayan anthems. On important occasions such as the arrival of a special guest, the celebration of a fiesta or a significant anniversary a respected elder may make a short speech in Eskayan (see video at [EDITOR: Insert URL]).

THE SPECIAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

Since all consultants were second-language speakers of Eskayan they were unable to produce provide grammatical ‘intuitions’ in response to my queries. More complex questions were addressed by my informants through a consultation of their own hand-copied Eskayan texts, or discussion with another speaker—often a combination of both. These transcribed texts are regarded as the ultimate authority on ‘correct’ language. The ability to read and faithfully transcribe the traditional literature is considered a primary marker of linguistic aptitude. In other words, literacy and linguistic competence are understood as one and the same, and this knowledge is made manifest in a collection of written texts that form a self-sufficient corpus. Thus Eskayan documents are only decipherable with reference to other texts, in the form of wordlists and reference syllabaries, or by accessing linguistic knowledge acquired through their meticulous study.

In the 1980s and 1990s, local journalists routinely referred to secret *karaang mga libru* (Visayan: ‘old books’), imagined as wooden tablets, stone slabs or leather-bound volumes (Cuizon 1980; Ramos 1980; Payot 1981; Echeminada 1989; Echeminada 1990; Deguit 1991; Tirol 1993). Whether these books physically exist is unclear. Both Juan Datahan, the current chieftain of Biabas, and Fabian Baja, late chieftain of Taytay, related that although the stories used in the schools were old, it was the revered predecessor Mariano ‘Anoy’ Datahan who was the first to dictate them for transcription. Six individuals are remembered as Anoy’s former scribes. The last to pass away was Faustina Viscayda (1925-2009), and the oldest for whom biographical data is available was Domingo Castañares (1912-1985).

[EDITOR: Insert Figure 3 approximately here: Kelly-Fig3-literature.jpg]

Figure 3. Eskaya literature from the notebook of Alberta Galambao, Taytay. The lefthand page is in Visayan and the righthand page in Eskayan.

The canonical literature is always reproduced with an accompanying official translation such that Eskayan is found on the left page of the notebook with its Visayan rendering on the facing page, or vice versa (see Fig 3 above).ⁱⁱ In my own assessment of these facing-page documents, it is apparent that the Eskayan text is actually a translation from a Visayan original and not the other way around. I base this claim on the fact that the Visayan text displays a greater diversity of synonyms for common items of vocabulary and more specificity in its verbal affixation (for an explanatory analysis of this, see Kelly 2012). It is hard to explain how a translated text might regularly acquire *greater* detail and precision in the process of its translation. Likewise, certain lines from the story ‘Pinay’ that embed Visayan explications of the meanings of Eskayan words are coherent in Visayan but would be nonsensical if rendered only in Eskayan. Eskaya narratives contain a number of tropes typical of the regional oral folklore. A founding tale of Eskaya colonists arriving in

Bohol from Sumatra echoes a nationwide legend that the ancestors of Filipinos today were originally from Sumatra. The figure of the trickster monkey, a literary entity found elsewhere in the Philippines (Behrens 2007), appears as a peripheral character in the story ‘The Louse-mite Tumaw’ a tale which also combines themes from the biblical Genesis. Accounts of Ferdinand Magellan’s (historically unattested) visit to Panglao island are still circulated within Bohol and one version of this tale is embedded in ‘Pinay’. Meanwhile, ‘Daylinda’ is an almost wholesale retelling of a popular Visayan potboiler of the same name (Osorio 1913) which was performed as a play in Datahan’s hometown of Loon in 1914. A well known Boholano story of a white bell concealed in a river is dramatically recounted in a story referred to as ‘The Story of the Old Philippine Visayas’. This and other ‘recuperation’ narratives from Bohol, in which lost objects are predicted to be retrieved by future heroes, echoes the tale of Mariano Datahan’s discovery of hidden Eskayan documents.

Beyond these relatively minor concurrences, Eskaya literature does not appear to be substantially informed by the better-known literary traditions of Bohol or the region at large. Before any useful comparative generalisations can be made, however, it would be necessary to perform a thorough translation and annotation of the material—no mean task. To date I have collected in excess of 25,000 words of Eskaya texts and I know that even more is available. In addition, a body of purely oral stories concerns local history events, tales of the Japanese occupation, and millenarian prophecies. These represent an important intertextual framework for making interpretive sense of the written material.

ESKAYA HISTORIOGRAPHY

Through written and oral accounts, speakers of Eskayan have maintained their own practice of auto-historiography, and these narratives provide an essential frame of reference for a historically directed linguistic analysis of Eskayan. According to tradition the chieftain Dangku with his eleven sons and one daughter sailed from west

Sumatra to Bohol in the seventh century and intermarried with the locals. They maintained a distinct culture under the leadership of an individual known as Pinay who is described as the first **immunsiktur** (Eskayan: ‘Pope’) in the Philippines. Pinay was divinely instructed by a being known as Sunu to create the Eskayan language and to base its form on a human body. This is why Eskayan letters resemble the human body in various poses, or individual body parts including internal organs. Pinay taught this language to the people; the language they spoke beforehand is unknown. His language, which was called ‘Bisayan Declarado’, was used throughout the island. Well-known figures of Boholano history, such as chief Sikatuna who made a famous pact with the conquistador Miguel de Legazpi in 1565 (Scott 1992), and the rebel fighter Francisco Dagohoy (c1724-c1782) are claimed as ancestral speakers of Bisayan Declarado.

Use of the language continued, these traditional accounts say, until the Spanish established a sustained presence in Bohol. Intent on destroying the indigenous culture, the Spanish suppressed Bisayan Declarado by systematically burning all the native records. Fortunately, some of these records were hidden in a cave until they were discovered by the rebel soldier Mariano ‘Anoy’ Datahan. In another version, it was Mariano Datahan who received direct linguistic inspiration from the ancestral past, and he wrote down the language onto wooden tablets which were then stored away for protection in a cave. In any event Datahan, who died in 1949, is credited with the feat of reconstructing the Bisayan Declarado of Pinay and of retransmitting it to his followers. The term Eskaya was promoted as a language name in the village of Taytay in the 1950s, and this label later gained currency in Biabas. Many of those who migrated out of Biabas to lower-lying villages have held onto the term Bisayan Declarado, and the compound Bisayan-Eskaya is also in use. This nomenclature suggests that the language of Biabas was historically characterised by its speakers as ‘Visayan’, a mainstream designation referencing Visayan culture and territory—a point to which I will return.

WHAT THE FORM OF ESKAYAN REVEALS ABOUT ITS HISTORY

In this section I summarise a few of the core findings of my linguistic analysis with a view to exploring how the form of Eskayan tells the story of its own genesis. For reasons of rhetorical convenience I refer to ‘Pinay’ as the putative creator of the language, even though the historical existence of an individual by this name in Bohol is unverifiable. Despite these historical uncertainties, much can actually be surmised about this personage through a forensic dissection of the writing system, grammar and lexicon he constructed. For a language that is held to have been fashioned from human flesh, the linguistic anatomy of Eskayan may well embody the image of its creator.

Foundational to any spoken language is its phonology, or the system of combining sounds in meaningful ways. My analysis suggests that Pinay took immediate inspiration from the Visayan sound system as both languages have an identical inventory of phonemes. Of interest, however is the fact two phones in Visayan, namely /tʃ/ (as in the first sound of ‘chip’) and /ɟ/ (the first sound of ‘joy’) are only found in a small set of loanwords, such as *tsinilas* / tʃinilas/ (‘slippers’, from Spanish *chinelas*) or the boy’s name ‘George’ /ɟurɟ/, borrowed from English. In Eskayan, on the other hand, these two sounds are relatively frequent, turning up in common non-Hispanic and non-English words like **rachdiyamis** (‘bitter’), **chdip** (‘permeate’) and **wilchdiyu** (‘saliva’).

Likewise, the phonotactics of Visayan and Eskayan words—that is, the patterned ways that individual sounds are fused together to make syllables and words—are governed by the same combinatory rules in both languages. Importantly, however, many syllables that occur with high frequency in Eskayan can be located only in those Visayan words that are borrowed from Spanish and English. To the Visayan ear, these exotic combinations give Eskayan a marked Anglo or Hispanic flavour in words like **aminahadu** (‘leave behind’) and **subiriyu** (‘food or money to take on a trip’). The length of Eskayan word roots is similarly exotic from the point of view of a Visayan

speaker. Visayan roots are typically no longer than two syllables, except in borrowed vocabulary. Eskayan, meanwhile, includes extraordinary roots of up to five syllables for such basic words as ‘think’ (**wasnangpanudlu**). Again, roots of this length are, to the Visayan ear, redolent of the relative ‘lengthy’ foreign borrowings into Visayan like *implimintar* (‘implement’, from Spanish *implementar*) and *pligrawun* (‘playground’ from English). These marked European elements in the Eskayan sound system are immediately suggestive of a post-contact genesis, and this hypothesis is lent further validity by an analysis of the writing system, grammar and lexicon.

As we have seen, the written representation of Eskayan sounds is of central importance to Eskaya people who draw no categorical distinction between literacy and linguistic competence. The writing system, as learnt through reference texts, is regarded as a material embodiment of the language. By implication, whenever the script is used to represent languages *other* than Eskayan—such as Visayan, or in rarer cases, English—the resulting text is still designated as ‘Eskayan’.

The initial set of Eskayan characters is known as the **abidiha** (‘alphabet’). The symbolic relationship between the letters in the **abidiha** and the parts or arrangements of the human body they are derived from is made explicit in classroom charts and in a traditional pedagogical text known as **Atikisis**. Of the 46 letters in the **abidiha** the first 25 are alphabetic though a large proportion of these have a dual alphabetic-syllabic value.

[EDITOR: Insert Figure 4 approximately here: Kelly-Fig4-abidiha.jpg]

Figure 4. An **abidiha** displayed on a wooden board at the Eskaya school in Biabas

What this means is that certain consonantal alphabetic characters may be realised either as C (consonant) or as CV (consonant-vowel), according to a judgment made by the reader. Thus the characters *Ḃ* and *Ḅ* can represent /b/ and /t/ respectively in the alphabetically written word *Ḃ Ḅ Ḉ Ḅ* (<r><i><t> **brit**: ‘female plant or animal’)

but may be realised as /bi/ and /ti/ in the word *ḃ ḥ* (**biti**: ‘skilled’). That these alternative syllabic realisations often have /i/ as an inherent vowel is no accident: the sound corresponds to its conventional pronunciation in a recited Visayan or Spanish alphabet. This alphabetic-syllabic flexibility is reminiscent of the way a Visayan speaker today might exploit the dual acoustic realisations in SMS messages such as ‘naa sa haws cla’ (*naa sa house sila*: ‘it’s at their house’), or an English speaker might write ‘c u l8r’ for ‘see you later’.

The **simplit** (‘syllabary’) is the full set of approximately 1065 syllabic characters: the precise number varies from text to text. Though too extensive to reproduce here, the **simplit** includes many characters for syllables that are never attested in Eskayan or Visayan words, such as *ḥḥ* <tsul> and *ḥḥ* <trum>. When I asked Eskaya speakers about these redundant symbols, some expressed surprise that they were not attested in the literature, while others assumed that I was mistaken in my analysis.

In creating the writing system, Pinay did not take inspiration from known historical writing systems of the region for which no consistent similarities can be detected. Only the method of optionally realising an inherent vowel in historical Indic scripts of the Philippines could be said to have had an influence on the **abidiha**. A handful of elements in the Eskayan syllabary are, however, plausibly related to a connected Roman alphabet. Among these, the very first letter of the **abidiha**, *A*, resembles a capital copperplate ‘A’ in both form and sound value. Likewise, most syllables which have the sound /a/ as a nucleus are a variation on this first character. Eg, *A* (<Ad>), *A* (<Da>), *Kali* (<Gram>), and many others.

At the basic level of word order and phrase structure, the relationship between Eskayan and Visayan is regular and predictable. Indeed, the traditional translations have the distinct quality of word-for-word calques or of encoded text—rarely does an Eskayan sentence exceed or fall short the number of words in its accompanying Visayan rendition. Consider the following Eskayan sentence together with its Visayan counterpart from the story ‘Daylinda’ⁱⁱⁱ:

Yi	Omanad	aripirna	huntun kun	Jomabad.
SPEC	Omanad	soldier	under GEN	Jomabad
<i>Si</i>	<i>Omanad</i>	<i>sundalu</i>	<i>ubus ni</i>	<i>Jomabad.</i>
SPEC	Omanad	soldier	under GEN	Jomabad

‘Omanad was a soldier under the command of Jomabad’.

Without prior knowledge of either language, it is clear from this example that the underlying syntactic structures are symmetrical. In fact, the principle of word-for-word translation is so strong that a pair of homophones in Visayan will have a corresponding set of homophones in Eskayan. Thus, the Visayan forms *ning* (a demonstrative marker) and *ning-* (an inflectional affix) have quite different etymologies and grammatical functions but are represented in Eskayan by the homophonic pair **chdin** (demonstrative) and **chdin-** (inflection). This principle holds for pronouns, where for example, the Visayan first person singular pronouns *naku* (possessive/genitive position) and *naku* (an abbreviation of *kanaku*, locative-dative position) are both represented as **tumpuy**. In effect, the Eskayan language appears to be grammatically Visayan with a substituted lexicon.

Complicating this picture are irregularities in Eskayan verbal morphology. There are twenty-four verbal affixes in Visayan that signal to the listener that the action is, for example, completed or ongoing, or potential, among other possibilities. In Eskayan a mere five forms **muy-**, **dil-**, **pur-**, **yu-** and **yi-** can *each* do the work of *every other* Visayan affix, even though some are more frequently found in given positions than others.^{iv} Further, Eskayan has a large set of irregular verbs where the inflectional morphology is implicit. For example, the word **imprus** (‘was taken on’) corresponds to the Visayan word *gipuslan* where the prefix *gi-* signals that the action was performed on the subject is now completed. No corresponding morpheme can be isolated in the Eskayan counterpart. Despite this unsegmentability, or perhaps because

of it, Eskayan is all the more dependent on Visayan structures. As we have seen Eskayan texts are always chaperoned by their Visayan translation (Fig 3), so wherever a multivalent affix or irregular form is encountered in the Eskayan text, the reader can quickly resolve the ambiguity by referring to its accompanying Visayan translation.^v

Pinay's imagination, though bold, was constrained by the available sounds and sequences in Visayan, including those of foreign origin. That is, he could access and exploit the novel structures available in introduced colonial languages but could not overstep their inherent structural constraints. Nevertheless, in coining new words to populate the Eskayan lexicon, Pinay did not treat Visayan or colonial languages as primary linguistic muses. Indeed, a mere 2.2 per cent of Eskayan vocabulary can be plausibly associated with other languages. Nonetheless, the type and distribution of foreign-inspired words in Eskayan is revealing.

Of the almost 3000 attested Eskayan words that Pinay coined at least nineteen appear to be inspired by Visayan or Visayan relatives; among them: **kinsa** ('who') from *kinya* ('who'), **tutulan** ('teacher') from *magtutudlu* ('teacher'), and **lumad** ('tribe') from *lumad* ('native', 'native-born'). Another eighteen terms are inspired by post-contact Visayan words that were originally sourced Spanish, such as **bandi** ('flag') from Visayan *bandira* and ultimately Spanish *bandera*, and **biyabi** ('visitor') from Visayan *biyahi* ('journey') which is in turn from the Spanish *viaje* ('journey'). But there are an additional set of Spanish-inspired words in Eskayan with no Visayan intermediary such as **miridu** ('husband') from the Spanish *marido* ('husband') and **ligar** ('go around', 'surround') from Spanish *legar* ('bind'). Also intriguing are the English-inspired words **klir** ('make space for'), **lup** ('lip') and **drinkir** ('hot chocolate drink').

The presence of foreign-inspired words in Eskayan offers a useful means for dating the lexicon. Spanish loans in Philippine languages tend to cluster in predictable semantic domains. Imported products, concepts or species for which no suitable equivalent was available in the local lexicon were often represented with a Spanish loanword. For example the Spanish word *caballo* ('horse') was universally adopted

into regional Philippine lexicons to denote the unfamiliar quadruped species brought from Europe. This tendency does not hold for Eskayan where words for Spanish imports are not generally inspired by Spanish, as shown in the table below:

Table 1 Selected acculturation terms in Spanish, Visayan and Eskayan

Introduced product/concept	Spanish	Visayan	Eskayan
horse	<i>caballo</i>	<i>kabayu</i>	bril
paper	<i>papel</i>	<i>papil</i>	sampris
pencil	<i>lapis</i>	<i>lapis</i>	dutal
slippers	<i>chinelas</i>	<i>sinilas</i>	gulada
table	<i>mesa</i>	<i>lamisa</i>	lasiku

Since the items listed in the first column of Table 1 were unheard of in pre-Hispanic Filipino society their Eskayan terms are necessarily lexical innovations. Considering the calque-like substitutability of Eskayan and Visayan words in Eskaya texts, and the lack of shared vocabulary with regional languages, there is good reason to imagine that lexical innovation was widespread within the Eskayan vocabulary. Conversely, foreign-inspired words are found in semantic domains where ‘native’ Eskayan words might be expected. Borrowed words for body parts are almost unheard of in natural languages but in Eskayan two terms in this domain are directly inspired by colonial languages: **lup** (‘lip’) and **pyil** (‘skin’), from Spanish *piel* (‘skin’).

This state of affairs invites the strong supposition that Pinay’s construction of Eskayan vocabulary was more or less a single simultaneous event, rather than an incremental and long-term process, and occurred *after* historical contact with Spanish and English speakers. In effect, the notional ancestor Pinay, mediated by Mariano Datahan, used Visayan as a grammatical matrix through which a complete lexicon of Eskayan coinages was expressed.

Why, then, did Pinay create the language? Why was it necessary for Datahan to resurrect it? And how does the recorded history of Bohol relate to the linguistic analysis and oral narratives?

THE REVELATION OF DECLARED VISAYAN

In oral accounts, Mariano Datahan is remembered as a linguistic genius who could communicate in any language he pleased. With such skills he would have been a worthy mediator of Pinay, and I view Pinay and the folkloric Datahan as alternate manifestations of the same entity. Indeed, one Eskaya prophecy relates that Datahan, now deceased for over sixty years, will one day be reincarnated. At the appointed moment, the language that Pinay created through a dissection of a human body, will be gathered up and re-incorporated into the resurrected Mariano Datahan.

[EDITOR: Insert Figure 5 approximately here: Kelly-Fig5-Mariano_Datahan.jpg]

Figure 5. The elderly Mariano Datahan, photographed in Biabas in 1948, four months before his death.

Datahan's life spanned one of the most tumultuous periods in Bohol's history. His own brief autobiography, a Visayan-language document held to have been dictated on his deathbed, is a long litany of rebellions, battles and skirmishes from the Philippine Revolution (1896-1898) to the Japanese occupation of Bohol (1942-1945). Datahan was born in the west of Bohol at a place called Loon, probably in the 1870s, to a poor fishing and herding family. Christened Mariano Sumatra, his family name resonated with the legend of past Filipino migrations and foreshadowed the Eskaya foundation myth he would later articulate. In his teenage years, Mariano was taken on as an altar boy and caretaker to a local Spanish priest, and was moved around through various parishes on the island. As a sacristan he would have been exposed to Spanish—a language to which only the educated Filipino elite had access—as well as liturgical Latin. Further, the Spanish priests on Bohol were educated in the prestige dialect of Visayan spoken on the more prosperous island of Cebu to Bohol's northwest. Though mutually intelligible with the Boholano dialect, Cebuano-Visayan was promoted as a

standard language by the Spanish clerics while Boholano-Visayan was not recognised as a legitimate variety, let alone documented.^{vi}

It is at least circumstantially plausible that one of the priests served by Mariano Sumatra was Fr Felix Guillen, assigned to the parish of Datahan's family in the late 19th century. A missionary with a keen interest in language, Guillen would go on to publish a grammar of Cebuano-Visayan (Guillén 1898) but his possible influence on Datahan's education is a matter of speculation. In his late teens, Sumatra left the church with a handsome deposit from his employer which he used to buy land in the west of Bohol. Those who worked the land paid him rent (*data*) and his position as landlord earned him the nickname *datahan* ('one who receives loan repayments').

This enterprise was interrupted by his conscription into the Spanish army and he fought in Mindanao against the Moro chieftain Datu Pakpak. At this time the Philippine Revolution erupted in Luzon and Bohol remained relatively peaceful; most of the Spanish had evacuated the island unscathed by the end of 1898. But when the uprising descended into the Philippine–American War, Bohol was the last province to hold out against the US. Between 1898 and 1900, the island was notionally answerable to the leadership of the Philippine nationalists but in practice it operated as an independent republic, even going so far as to produce its own escutcheon (Scriven 1900). The US army eventually invaded Bohol in March 1900 and full-scale conflict erupted later in the year. Datahan fought as a soldier for the resisting Boholano government and there is a record of his court-martialling for insubordination in March 1901. By this time, 'Datahan' had become his *nom de guerre*, entirely replacing the Sumatra family name (Apalisok 1992).

The US army adopted a scorched-earth tactic in Bohol. Most of the coastal towns were razed to the ground and the cattle slaughtered precipitating mass displacements inland. When the Boholanos eventually surrendered in November 1901, it appears that Datahan refused to accept the peace and led a community of people from his hometown of Loon in the west to a place called Biabas in the uplands of the southeast. There he was considered a sufficient threat to the new administration that he was

mentioned—though not by name—in a report of the Philippine Commission to Congress in 1903 (Taylor 1904).^{vii} It was in Biabas that he became an advocate for the revolutionary church known as the Iglesia Filipina Independiente and established many parishes throughout the region. He designed a flag and, at odds with the liberal spirit of the Iglesia, he codified an austere system of laws for his community prohibiting gambling, drinking and dancing. Unorthodox too was his polygamy, with genealogies indicating that he married at least sixteen women. From 1914 onwards, Datahan began legally acquiring many hectares of land in and around Biabas, some of which was purchased from Pedro Samson, former general of the disbanded Boholano army (Records of the Provincial Assessor's Office, unpublished data).

It is a matter of consensus among Eskaya people in Biabas today, that the first Eskaya school was constructed in about 1920. Thus, the revelation of Pinay's language must have occurred prior to this. The Eskaya school was partially modelled on the American school system which was, by this time, well established in Bohol. As early as 1902 the US administration had begun building and staffing new schools in Bohol's major towns, with classes for adults and children. English language was taught at all levels, but appropriate textbooks were not immediately available. To cope with this, existing textbooks for teaching Spanish to Visayan speakers were modified and republished with English glosses inserted (Tirol 1975). This practice established a ready precedent for the didactic methods employed by Datahan. A document believed to have belonged to Domingo Castañares (a fellow scribe of Faustina Viscayda) and now in the possession of the Bohol Museum gives important clues as to how Eskayan acquired its vocabulary. The Castañares Document is a hand transcription of one such modified Spanish textbook republished by American teachers to include English glosses.

[EDITOR: Insert Figure 6 approximately here: Kelly-Fig6-Castanares.jpg]

Figure 6. The Castañares Document

Among pedagogical explanations in Visayan of features of Spanish grammar is a Spanish–English–Visayan wordlist of several thousand items, with example sentences also translated into English (Fig 6). But what is interesting about the Castañares Document is that it represents a third modification whereby an inserted Eskayan layer actually supplants the original Visayan, resulting in a Spanish–English–Eskayan wordlist with three-way example sentences. The structured wordlist format provided a ready template for relexification and sheds light on why many Eskayan words are unsegmentable. After all, why should Pinay take the inflectional categories of Visayan as a model, when these affixes have no explicit counterparts in English or Spanish?

The development of a literary canon in Eskayan came some time later, as Faustina Viscayda (born 1925), remembers transcribing ‘Daylinda’ and ‘Pinay’ directly from Datahan when she was a ‘young lady’ (Martinez 1993). It is likely then, that Viscayda acquired her literacy in an American school and the canonical texts she transcribed were not created until the late 1930s. Although she recollects Datahan dictating these stories to her in Eskayan, textual analysis (see earlier) suggests that a Visayan version was probably produced first.

Despite issuing a written invitation to President Manuel Quezon to observe classes in his language, Datahan would pass away in 1949 without recognition of Bisayan Declarado, and there is no mention of the language or school system in his autobiography.^{viii} Use of Eskayan reportedly went into decline after his death as his sons squabbled over his Biabas landholdings. On Datahan’s advice, a favoured disciple by the name of Fabian Baja, decided to establish a new Eskaya settlement. Thus, in the early 1950s, the village of Taytay was carved out in the densely forested mountains above Biabas. Eskayan lessons took place in Baja’s house from 1951 until a two-storey school was built in 1963 (Orcullo 2004). Lessons were so popular that students walked all the way from Biabas in order to attend, along a winding thirteen km ridge trail. Indeed, the name Taytay, or ‘bridge’ in Visayan, is a reference to the

raised trail that connects the two communities. The renaissance of Bisayan Declarado in Taytay brought with it other cultural innovations. On formal occasions women began wearing coloured headscarves resembling nun's habits while men wore embroidered berets. New prayers and special ceremonies were devised and an Eskaya women's chapel built above the church. Even Bisayan Declarado was rebranded 'Eskaya', a name of uncertain derivation but which is believed by teachers to have originally denoted the spiritual system of the Taytay community.

Taytay became the new centre of Eskaya culture and for thirty years the population thrived in relative isolation. Then, from the 1980s, the communities were successively visited by a team of archeologists, a local librarian and a string of journalists, as we have seen. Some of the outsiders believed they had discovered a magical native people, some saw a cult with a clandestine agenda, others still found themselves on the threshold of a lost prehispanic world. Pinay-Datahan's articulate vision of a restored Visayan culture was now in the eyes of new beholders.

LANGUAGE AS EMBODIED AUTHORITY

In the years preceding the Philippine Revolution the grievances of Filipino reformists were directed primarily against the monastic orders that had been granted near exclusive governing powers in the Philippines and not against the Spanish state itself (Calderón 1907). Only when their campaign failed did the more radical independence agenda take over. One contentious reform concerned language policy. A frequent complaint was that despite numerous royal decrees, the Spanish friars had failed to implement an education system that would provide literacy in Spanish to ordinary Filipinos (de Achúteghi and Bernad 1961: 47-49). Whether justified or not, the supposed intransigence of the friar-class on the issue of language policy became a symbol of Spanish arrogance and obstructionism.

Not only were the people of Bohol marginalised by the Spanish—as indexed by their exclusion from the Castilian language—but they were marginalised again by

their more prosperous Visayan neighbours on the nearby island of Cebu where the Spanish concentrated their administrative resources. This marginalisation was also inscribed linguistically. Visayan dialects spoken throughout the Visayas were labelled ‘Cebuano’ (literally ‘of Cebu’) and the local deviations from this prestige form were regarded as degenerate. In effect Boholanos were viewed as speaking someone else’s language (Cebuano) and speaking it badly, all the while remaining largely excluded from the language of authority (Spanish).

As the Americans began constructing schools, Spanish quickly lost its former prestige and English, as taught by imported American teachers and American-trained Filipinos, became the language of power and opportunity. In Bohol, Datahan was a rarity: an educated, Spanish-speaking peasant with access to the prestige dialect of Visayan and to the ritual language of liturgy. For Datahan, this period of great cultural insecurity demanded a return to a heroic and pre-colonial past whose robust native traditions were summoned to overcome the suspect knowledge systems imposed by foreigners. The school system he developed for Eskayan was in most respects in direct imitation of the US model. But Datahan’s school defied the newcomers and Pinay’s forgotten tongue was retrieved at a crucial time to stand as a challenge to the outsider language that was in the process of being institutionalised on Bohol. Datahan offered the doubly colonised Boholanos—lowly speakers of ‘bad Cebuano’—an irresistible alternative to the exclusionary Spanish, the elitist Cebuano and the interloping English. Here was a forgotten ancestral tongue from a glorious precolonial past, wholly inaccessible to colonial administrators and their local collaborators.

In this context, it is worth emphasising that Datahan conventionally referred to Pinay’s language as *Bisaya* (‘Visayan’), defaulting to the term ‘Bisayan Declarado’ only when a distinction from the regional language was necessary. Today in Cadapdapan, speakers still distinguish between ‘Bisaya’ (ie, Eskayan) and ‘Cebuano’ (Visayan). In this way Pinay’s language is framed as native and central, as opposed to other and marginalised. The Spanish term *declarado* is semantically proximal to ‘declared’ in English, thus ‘Bisayan Declarado’ encodes an illocutionary act: an

utterance invested with the power to change reality. Indeed, within Eskaya mythology language is characterised as material, substantial and bounded. It can be created and destroyed, lost and found, stored and retrieved, fractured and reconstituted. Such an essentialisation of language, as objective and alienable, is strongly reminiscent of the way Tan (this volume) describes discourses of language activism in contemporary Singapore. But Eskayan is further characterised as possessing spiritual agency—‘the word of God’ vanquishing the Latin words recited by a Spanish friar—calling to mind the account of glossolalia in Fiji provided by Tomlinson (this volume).

The conflation of language and writing system reinforces the *presence* of Eskayan as an exteriorised reality, indexical of a cultural whole. As Roger Keesing has argued with regards to Melanesian history, the experience of colonial invasion encourages communities to take stock of their powerlessness, prompting a more self-conscious perspective on their way of life. This gives way to a reassessment of culture as a reified object, a ‘thing’ that can be proclaimed, accepted or rejected (Keesing 1982). But the objectifying perspective of Eskayan is also turned back against colonial writing systems which are judged as inferior, along with the cultures they index.^{ix} One Eskayan text explains that Spanish is linguistically deficient because its writing system is based on frivolous objects: the letter ‘X’ from a pair of scissors, ‘I’ from a candlestand, lowercase ‘g’ from the tail of animal. By contrast, the anatomically derived Eskayan language is animate and embodied, and thus ultimately *less* alienable than its ephemeral rivals.

Throughout Eskayan literature, and especially in the story ‘Pinay’, language is intimately associated with nationhood and independence. A unique ‘native knowledge’ is compared to a national flag with the implication that such symbols are functionally substitutable. Even the relexification of Visayan involves a symbolic reinscription whereby Eskayan lexemes are planted like flags on the natural and unchanging terrain of Visayan morphosyntax. And yet Datahan’s utopian micro-republic of Biabas was, in effect, a nation-building exercise carried out in reverse. Far from constructing an imaginary community around an existing language as Anderson

(2003) might have it, Pinay-Datahan reconstructed a language in order to legitimise and elevate an existing community. But on these terms Datahan cannot fairly be understood as a subversive deconstructionist or a postcolonial radical. Rather he embraced essentialist notions of nationhood and linguistic prestige without question and harnessed them for his own ends. Exploiting the very same colonial binaries that pushed Boholanos to the margins, Datahan foregrounded his own agenda as the dominant term.

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NOTES

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- ⁱ For clarity, words in Eskayan are rendered in bold throughout this paper to distinguish them from Visayan and Spanish words in italics.
- ⁱⁱ The one exception to this is a simple pedagogical text called 'Atikisis' for which there is no Visayan translation, presumably to prompt the student to produce their own. There are also a number of non-canonical texts that are available solely in Visayan, including an autobiographical statement from Datahan, *Ang mga hiyas ug kaagi ni Mariano Datahan* ('The virtues and experiences of Mariano Datahan').
- ⁱⁱⁱ The gloss SPEC stands for 'specific marker' (similar to 'the' in English) and GEN stands for 'genitive' (similar to 'of' or 'belonging to' in English).
- ^{iv} This analysis is directly at odds with the sketch of Eskayan syntax by Consul (2005) who, interestingly, detected no irregularities in Eskayan inflectional morphology, perhaps because she

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- was adhering to the formal categories devised by Pesirla (2003) or because she elicited linguistic facts from her consultants and did not make use of a corpus.
- ^v A more thorough account of these apparently suppletive processes in Eskayan morphosyntax is available in Kelly (2012).
- ^{vi} Despite claims by Ward (1971) that information on Boholano is recorded in works by Domingo Esguerra and Zueco de San Joaquin, I have not found this to be the case. To date, the only available manuscript that concerns the Visayan spoken on Bohol is an unpublished thesis by Miriam Tinampay (1977).
- ^{vii} Within a review of general unrest in the islands, the Philippine Commission report states: ‘The beginning of the new year [1902] and throughout the month of January brought forth reports from nearly all the provinces of the existence of agents of the dios-dios or pulijan (sic) sect. [...] The lieutenant of the barrio of Biaba (sic) pueblo of Guindulman, on the island of Bohol, is reported to have made some fanatical speeches that gained him considerable followers on the island of Bohol.’ (1904: 116)
- ^{viii} While the original invitation is long lost, a transcript of the reply from Secretary Vargas is carved onto wooden boards, which are still displayed in Biabas and Taytay:
‘Office of the President of the Philippines, Nov 11, 1937,
Dear Mr Mariano Datahan,
This is to acknowledge receipt of your letter the 30th ultimo, together a notebook containing lessons in Boholano dialect addressed to his Excellency the President, and to inform you that your request for the opening night classes for adults in your community will be taken into consideration.
Sincerely Yours,
Sec Jorge B. Vargas’
This invitation was sent at a time when the government of the Commonwealth was discussing the development of a national language.
- ^{ix} Martinez (1993) has argued that the framing of the script as central and superior in Eskaya literature is part of an intentionally orchestrated Eskaya ‘agenda’, but this account tends to obscure the complex and fraught processes of reification outlined by Keesing (1982).