

Descriptive Analysis of the Surigaonon Language

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Abstract

This study describes and analyzes the Surigaonon language, an ethnic language spoken by people in Surigao del Norte, Surigao del Sur, Agusan del Norte, Agusan del Sur and Davao Oriental. More particularly, this paper describes in details the consonant and vowel sounds, stress, intonation patterns, and morphophonemic processes of the Surigaonon language. The data in this study were gathered from 100 participants of different age groups ranging from 15 to 70 years old. The data gathering was conducted using two methods: written communication and oral communication. In this study, some phonemic changes are described and analyzed. These changes are the results of morphophonemic changes, such as deletion, alternation, and metathesis. Furthermore, the findings of the study reveal that the Surigaonon language consists of 17 consonants with 17 sounds and 3 vowels with 5 sounds. It has also 25 clusters and 4 diphthongs, which are similar to the Cebuano language (Rubrico, 1999). Generally, the Surigaonon language is distinct as compared to other languages in the Visayas and Mindanao because it has its own consonant and vowel sounds, stress, intonation patterns and morphophonemic processes.

Key terms: Surigaonon language, Surigao, phonemic changes, Surigaonon vowels, Surigaonon consonants

1. Introduction

The Philippines is a multilingual and multicultural country, consisting of 165 languages and dialects (Constantino, 1998). In the latest survey of Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) it shows that the Philippines has 92 languages or dialects (SIL, 2003). Except for the Chavacano, a Spanish creole spoken mostly in the Zamboanga Peninsula in Mindanao, all indigenous languages in the Philippines are Austronesian (Paz, 1995). Across the country, there are at least eight major languages each with a considerable number of native speakers. These languages are Tagalog, Ilocano, Bicol, Kapampangan, Pangasinense, Cebuano, Hiligaynon and Waray. Of these languages, only Tagalog, Cebuano and Ilokano are extensively studied. Most minor languages are not studied widely and a lot of them are still unexplored up to this time. One of the minor languages in the Philippines is the Surigaonon language which only few researchers have explored. The limited number of studies about the Surigaonon language is the motivation for undertaking this descriptive analysis of the Surigaonon language. This study focuses on the description of the Surigaonon vowels, consonants, consonant clusters, diphthong, stress, and the morphophonemic processes such as assimilation, deletion, alternation, and metathesis.

This paper would be of great help in developing a description the Surigaonon language, which is believed to have no exact census figure of the total number of speakers (McFarland, 1981). However, a survey conducted in the Caraga Region (Census, 2002) revealed the approximate number of speakers of the Surigaonon to be 88,129, which is equivalent to 22.40% of the total population in the region. Suffice it to say that the data is misleading because of a high rate of bilingualism in Cebuano, a normal phenomenon in any multilingual community.

McFarland (1981, p.16) argued that Surigaonon is similar to Cebuano and therefore Surigaonon is not recognized as a distinct language, since Cebuano is spoken as a second language throughout the area where most speakers have claimed it as their second language and others claimed it as their first language instead of Surigaonon. Although Surigaonon is typologically related to Cebuano and other languages in the region, it is deemed necessary to say that Surigaonon language is entirely a distinct language because of its different characteristics and linguistic properties.

2. Background of the study

Surigao is divided into two big provinces: Surigao del Norte and Surigao del Sur. Surigao del Norte is located in the Northeastern part of Mindanao, Philippines. It is part of the Caraga region, formerly a part of Region 10. Its capital is Surigao City in Surigao del Norte. The whole province has 434 barangays with 27 towns and has a total land area of 2,739 square meters. Surigao del Norte has a total population of 409,468 (Census, 2010). On the other hand, Surigao del Sur is located on the eastern coast of Mindanao with a population of 561,219 (Census, 2010). It has a land area of 493,270 hectares consisting of 17 municipalities with two cities and its capital city is Tandag (Census, 2010).

Surigaonon is the local language spoken in the district of Surigao del Norte and some parts of Surigao del Sur. Surigao was once a part of the old territory that existed in the Northern Mindanao called “Caraga”, named after ‘Calagnus’ who believed to be Bisayan, who inhabited the place at that time. The use of Surigaonon is very limited. In fact, the total number of speakers could not be easily determined because the language is mixed with Cebuano.

In the last survey (Census, 2002) Surigaonon accounted for 22% of speakers in the entire Caraga region, which is presented in the table below.

Table 1. Languages and Dialects Spoken in Caraga

Languages/Dialects	Number of Households	Percentage
Caraga	393,362	100%
Cebuano	116,633	29.65%
Bisaya/Binisaya	111,416	28.32%
Surigaonon	88,129	22.40%
Kamayo	21,756	5.53%
Manobo	12,546	3.16%
Boholano	11,546	2.94%
Hiligaynon	7,851	2.00%
Butuanon	6,407	1.63%
Other local ethnicities	17,055	4.34%
Other foreign ethnicities	121	0.03%

In the province of Surigao del Norte, 95% of the people speak Surigaonon as their primary language. This language shares linguistic properties with the Cebuano and Boholano languages. A few people in these regions speak Waray and Tagalog. The majority claimed the ability to speak English. Surigaonon language is spoken in the whole province of Surigao del Norte and in Carascal, Cantilan (Kantilan), Madrid and Lanusa, towns which are part of the province of Surigao del Sur.

Moreover, Surigaonon has its dialects, such as Jaun-Jaun, Cantilan (Kantilan), and Naturalis. Typologically, Surigaonon is classified as the Austronesian, Malayo-Polynesian, Meso Philippines, Central Philippines and Bisayan language. Previous studies show that Surigaonon has 82% lexical similarity with Dabawanon Manobo, 81% Agusan Manobo, and 69% with Butuanon. It is also reported that the Surigaonon speakers have the highest rate of bilingualism in Cebuano.

To show the genetic typology of Surigaonon, Figure 1 below shows the position of the Surigaonon language in the Austronesian tree.

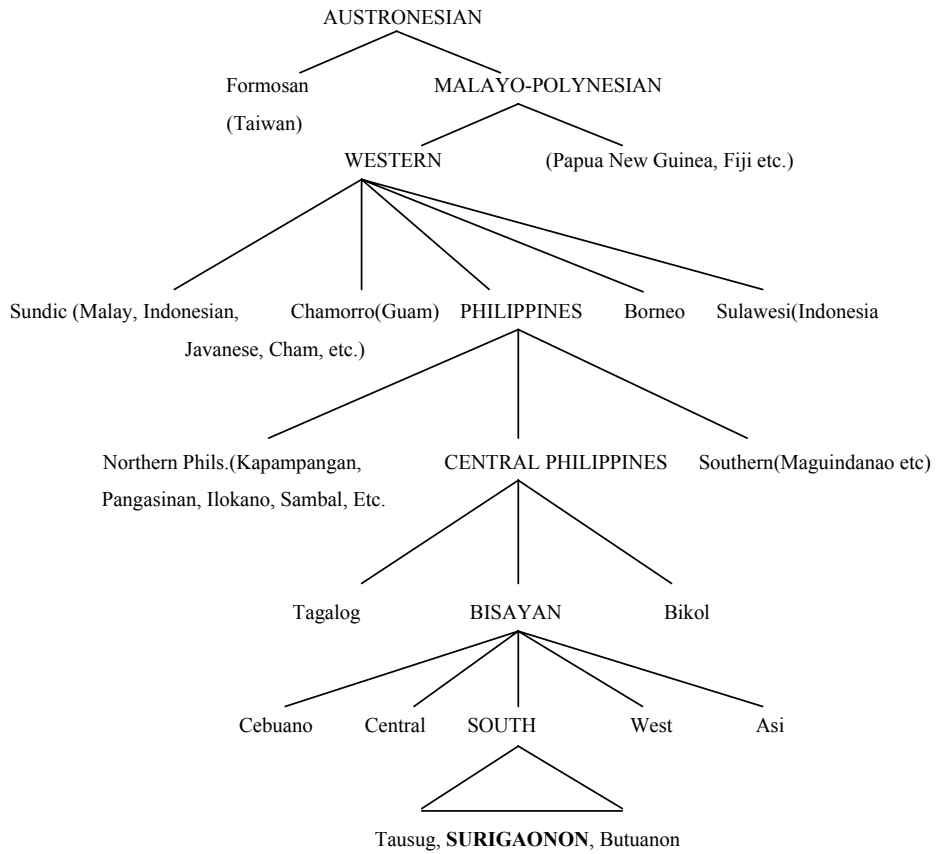


Figure 1. Surigaonon in the Austronesian Language Family

Source: Lobel, J. W. (2000). An introduction to the languages of Romblon

3. Methodology

This study used the descriptive method where the researcher tried to examine and to analyze the Surigaonon language in particular by establishing the number of vowels and consonants in the Surigaonon phonemic inventory. In addition, this study also examined and analyzed the vowel sounds, consonant sounds, diphthongs, consonant clusters, Surigaonon stress and the morphophonemic processes. Section 3.2 explains the data gathering procedure and plan for analysis.

3.1 Participants

The participants of the study are native speakers of Surigaonon who grew up in the region for at least 15 years. Moreover, the researcher himself contributed a lot in the study because of his being a native speaker. The participants were selected according to their age bracket and knowledge of the Surigaonon language. There were 20 participants whose ages range from 50-70 years old, 20 participants from 40-49 years old, 20 participants from 30-39 years old, 20 participants from 20-29 years old and 20 participants whose ages range from 15-19 years old. Most of the participants were professionals and students who were working and studying in Metro Manila.

3.2 Procedure

The written texts were gathered through letters, which were collected by the researcher to trace, describe and analyze the morphophonemic processes, such as assimilation, deletion, alternation and metathesis. There were 80 long and short letters collected from the native speakers of the Surigaonon language including the letters written by the researcher himself to his family members and friends in Surigaonon language.

On the other hand, the verbal communication was gathered by recording the conversations of the Surigaonon speakers who were currently working and studying in Manila. The recording was done to identify the participants’ production of the Surigaonon consonant and vowel sounds, intonation patterns, and word stress.

There were also informal interviews conducted using the Surigaonon language as the medium of communication. Most interviews were recorded to identify how the vowels and consonant sounds are produced and to check the correct Surigaonon stress.

Both the interviews and letters were examined and analyzed to trace the Surigaonon vowel and consonant sounds and stress. Moreover, morphophonemic changes in Surigaonon were also studied by identifying the root word, the affixes and the morphophonemic processes.

4. Results and discussion

This section presents the results and the discussion of the study. This proceeds with the establishment of the consonant and vowel sounds, the stress, the consonant clusters, diphthongs, and the morphophonemic processes.

4.1 The consonants of Surigaonon

The study reveals that the Surigaonon language consists of seventeen (17) consonants and three (3) vowels. These are /b,d,g,h,j,k,l,m,n,ŋ,p,r,s,t,w,y,ʔ/ and /i, a, u/ respectively. The Surigaonon consonants are articulated as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The Articulation of Surigaonon Consonants

Surigaonon Consonants	English Key	Surigaonon Words	English Gloss
b	bay	bayay	house
d	day	duyom	night
g	gay	gayay	camote tops
h	hair	hayok	kiss
j	jar	jari	here
k	kitchen	kayaha	pan
l	late	latajan	bridge
m	march	minju?	Marry
n	new	nijug	coconut
ŋ	ring	ngisi	smile
p	pay	payot	bark
r	red	relo	watch
s	say	sajaw	dance
t	tail	taghoy	whistle
w	way	wayong	face
y	yell	bayo	widow
ʔ		amo?	monkey

The Surigaonon consonants are classified according to the manner of articulation and the place of articulation. The manner of articulation is divided into stop, fricatives, nasal, lateral, affricates, flap and glides. The place of articulation is also divided as bilabial, lingua-dental, lingua-alveolar, lingua-palatal, lingua-velar and glottal.

The complete consonantal inventory of the Surigaonon language is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. The Surigaonon Consonants

Manner of Articulation	Place of Articulation											
	bilabial		Lingua-dental		Lingua-alveolar		Lingua-palatal		Lingua-velar		Glottal	
Stop	b	p	d	t					g	k	ʔ	
Fricative						s				h		
Nasal		m	n						ŋ			
Lateral			l									
Affricate					j							
Flap			r									
Glide	w						y					

This study adapted Mata and Soriano’s (1998) description of the manners of articulation of the Surigaonon consonants.

Stop – this is characterized by the stopping of breath and a sudden release which results in a slight explosion.

Fricative – this is characterized by partially obstructing the breath and by releasing air through the narrow opening with audible friction.

Nasal – this is characterized by the breath in the oral cavity, the lowering of the soft palate and the pushing out of air through the nasal passage.

Lateral – this is characterized by diverting the breath in the oral cavity and by releasing air over the sides of the tongue.

Affricate – this is a combination of a plosive and a fricative and is characterized by the stopping of breath followed by the release of breath through a narrow opening with audible friction.

Glide – this is characterized by the continuous movement of the speech organs during the production of the sound and by a very slight form of closure resulting in a relatively open cavity and minimum amount of friction.

Flap – this is characterized by a rapid contact of the tip of the tongue against the alveolar region. In inter vocalic position it is usually articulated with a single tap trill.

4.2 The vowels of Surigaonon

The Surigaonon language has only three vowels but it has five vowel sounds. The vowels /e,o/ are sometimes present in writing or sometimes used in spelling but they are not produced as [e] or [o] in oral communication. Whenever a vowel is replaced with [e] or [o] the meaning and the pronunciation of words remain the same. Table 4, below, shows the inventory of the vowels in Surigaonon.

Table 4. The Surigaonon vowels

Surigaonon Vowels	Front unrounded	Center unrounded	Back rounded
High	[I]		[U]
Mid	[i]		[u]
Low		[a]	

Table 5 shows how the Surigaonon vowels are articulated. The description of the vowels is adapted from Trosdal’s (1992) description on how these vowels are articulated. In the Surigaonon language, the [i] sound is voiced, high-front, unrounded vocoid. The jaw is slightly lowered and the lips are slightly opened. The tongue is arched forward accompanied by some tension of the throat musculature. It is not lengthened at all. The [I] sound is voiced lower than the low-high front, unrounded vocoid. The jaw is progressively lowered; the tongue arch is farther back and lower than [i] with slight throat tension. The progression from [i] to [I] is not marked. Although an occasional [I] is heard, such production of the barred [i] should be avoided. The [a] sound is voiced, low central, unrounded vocoid. The jaw is low, the lips unrounded without any tension, the tongue resting low in the mouth without throat tension. The [U] sound is voiced, high back, rounded vocoid. The jaw is slightly depressed and the lips are slightly rounded.

The tongue is arched high and back with some tension of the throat musculature. It is not lengthened at all. Lastly, the [u] sound is voiced, lower than the low-back, rounded vocoid. The jaw opening is slight, there is little lip rounding, the tongue is slightly lowered and less backward with little throat tension.

The articulation of the Surigaonon vowels is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. The articulation of the Surigaonon vowels

Surigaonon Vowels	English Key	Surigaonon Words	English Gloss
[a]	far	ayok abot	witch arrive
[ɪ]	eat	bitiis kandiis	leg dimple
[i]	kiss	isda inday	fish i don't know
[ʊ]	boot	tugut kunut	allow crumpled
[u]	put	abu trapu	dust rag

4.3 The stress of Surigaonon

The stress in Surigaonon is indicated by an apostrophe (') where the stressed syllable is always given more emphasis by increasing the pitch and loudness. In some cases, the change of stressed syllable also changes the meaning of the word. This phonological characteristic is shown in Table 6.

Penultimate Stressed Words	Final Stressed Words
buyag (adj. separate)	buyag' (to separate)
waya? (none)	waya' (left)
'amo (master)	amo? (monkey)
buhi? (to free)	buhi? (alive)
'uban (white hair)	uban' (accompany)
'tuyo? (spill)	tuyo' (three)

Table 6 shows the sample of stress which distinguishes meaning among similar Surigaonon words. This finding shows that there are words in the Surigaonon language that are spelled similarly but pronounced differently according to their stressed syllables. The difference of the stressed syllables also shows the difference of functions of words. Some words function as adjectives or nouns depending on how the syllables are stressed as shown in Table 6.

4.4 The consonant clusters of Surigaonon

Typical to indigenous Philippine languages, Surigaonon phonotactics permit consonant clusters. The Surigaonon language has 24 consonant clusters such as br, bl, bw, by, dr, dw, dy, gr, gw, kr, kl, kw, mw, my, nw, pr, pl, pw, py, sw, sy, tr, tw, ty, and hw. Table 7 presents this phonotactic property.

Table 7. Consonant Clusters in Surigaonon

Clusters	Sample Words	Gloss	
b	r, l, w, y	brilyante, blangko, bwinggit, byahe	diamond, blank, eye disease, travel
d	r, w, y	drayber, dwende, diamante	driver, dwarf, diamond
g	r, w	grabe, gwapa	very, beautiful
k	r, l, w	krus, klima, kweba	cross, climate, cave
m	w, y	mwebles, myerkules	furniture, Wednesday
n	w	nwebe	nine
p	r, l, w, y	presko, plano, pwera, pyano	fresh, plan, force, piano
s	w, y	swerte, pasensya	luck, patience
t	r, w, y	trapo, twalya, tyanak	rag, towel, vampire
h	w	hwes	judge

4.5 The diphthongs of Surigaonon

The study shows further that the Surigaonon language has diphthongs which share similarities with the Cebuano language as Rubrico (1999) illustrated in her book *Magbinisaya Kita* (Let us speak Bisaya). There are four diphthongs in the Surigaonon language such as /aw/, /ay/, /iw/, and /uy/.

Table 8 presents the Surigaonon diphthongs with some sample words.

Table 8. The Diphthongs in Surigaonon

Diphthongs	Sample Words	English Gloss
/aw/	anahaw, karabaw, huyaw, bahaw, payaw	footstool palm, carabao, dry season, left over rice, caladium or caladium bulb
/ay/	bayay, gayay, sudlay, inday, gamay	house, camote (sweet potato) tops, comb, I don't know, small
/iw/	buliw, kagiw, taliwtiw	a type of palm, leave, long and slender
/uy/	buguy, ungguy, babuy	naughty, monkey, pig

4.6 The morphophonemic processes in Surigaonon

In Surigaonon, there are some phonemic changes that happen in certain sonar environments. These changes are the results of morphophonemic changes, namely, deletion, alternation and metathesis as shown in Table 8.

4.6.1 Deletion

It is observed that in Surigaonon the final vowel of the base could be deleted after suffixation, thus a new word is obtained. The occurrence of deletion follows a certain pattern. When the root word is added with the suffix “han, an, i, and ha” then the vowel between the root word and the suffix is deleted. Table 9 shows some of the common words which present the occurrence of deletion in the Surigaonon language.

Table 9. Deletion in Surigaonon

daya	daya+han	dayahan	dayhan	‘bring’
kaon	kaon+an	kaonan	kan-an	‘eat’
hilabot	hilabot+an	hilabotan	hilabtan	‘annoy’
ibut	ibut+an	ibutan	ibtan	‘remove’
sarado	sarado+han	saraduhan	sarhan	‘close’
higot	higot+i	higuti	higti	‘tie’
higot	higot+an	higutan	higtan	‘tighten’
igo	igo+an	igu-an	ig-an	‘hit’
sabot	sabot+an	sabutan	sabtan	‘understand’
kita	kita+an	kitaan	kit-an	‘see’
kalimot	kalimot+an	kalimutan	kalimtan	‘forget’

lingi	lingi+an	lingian	ling-an	'turn'
daya	daya+ha	dayaha	day-ha	'bring
tigib	tigib+i	tigibi	tigbi	'give a small piece'

4.6.2 Alternation

Similar to other indigenous languages, the Surigaonon language has the process of alternation. The alternation could be based on a more established language like the Cebuano. The following are instances of alternation.

The phoneme /L/ in Cebuano is deleted when it is placed between two /a/ and substituted with [y] except with the borrowed words. This is shown in Table 10.

Table 10. The Alternation of Phoneme /l/

Cebuano	Surigaonon	English Gloss
balay	bayay	house
wala	waya	left
bulak	buyak	flower
halang	hayang	spicy
sulat	suyat	letter
wala?	waya?	none
dala	daya	bring
balo	bayo	widow
tulo	tuyo	three
halok	hayok	kiss

The phoneme [y] is altered when it is in between two vowels and substituted with [j] which is shared with the Boholano language. This type of alternation is presented in Table 11.

Table 11. The alternation of phoneme /y/

siya	sija	he/she
iya	ija	his/her
biya	bija	leave
dayun	dajun	post throw
buyog	bujug	bee
sayop	sajup	mistake
babaye	babaje	girl
bayo	bajo	pound
ayaw	ajaw	not interested
payong	pajong	umbrella

4.6.3 Metathesis

The process of metathesis of the Surigaonon language is evident when the phonemic sequence is reordered. The reordering of the phonemic sequence happens by the deleting the final vowel after the suffixation. The occurrence of such patterns like affixation, deletion, and metathesis is evident and follows a similar process of metathesis of the Cebuano language (Rubrico, 1999). The deletion of the vowel is made in the second syllable. The sample of metathesis in Surigaonon is presented in Table 12.

Table 12. Metathesis in Surigaonon

Affixation	Deletion	Metathesis	Gloss
inom + an	inuman - inman	imnan	to drink
bilin + an	bilinan - bilnan	binlan	to leave
atop + an	atupan - atpan	aptan	to put a roof
tanum + i	tanumi - tanmi	tamni	to plant

inom + a	inuma - inma	imna	to drink
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5. Conclusion

The results of the study as discussed in this paper show that Surigaonon is a local language with close affinity to other indigenous languages in the Philippines. Of so many languages, it is the Cebuano that shared with the linguistic properties of Surigaonon. For instance, it is very evident that most Surigaonon words are shared lexically with the Cebuano language. This is the reason why Surigaonon speakers have a high rate of bilingualism also speaking the Cebuano language.

The analysis of Surigaonon, paves a way to discovering that this is a distinct language. It shows distinctions in its consonant and vowel sounds, stress, intonation pattern and morphophonemic processes.

This is only an initial attempt at describing the Surigaonon language, so it is recommended that further studies be made in relation to other linguistic aspects of the language. In addition, more studies are needed in Surigaonon to fully realize that this is indeed a distinct language that needs to be examined by linguists.

This paper provides only a descriptive analyses of the Surigaonon language and it suggests that more studies can be conducted particularly on the structure of Surigaonon, which includes the sentence construction and the parts of speech.

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