

Culture Contacts and Linguistic Hybridity

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The juxtapositioning of one language community with another is a feature of a culturally-diverse country like the Philippines. In Mindanao, this partly resulted from culture contacts in historical times. It began in the 1860s with the efforts of the Jesuits to settle new Christians among the indigenous peoples into agricultural villages on the plains (Arcilla 1990). The Americans followed it up from 1904 to 1913 by settling first the Muslims and the indigenous peoples near the plantations on the island (Esteban 1991). Then migrants from Luzon and the Visayas came into agricultural colonies from 1913 to 1935. The settlement of Mindanao intensified from 1935 to 1941, when the commonwealth government relocated homesteaders from Luzon and the Visayas to the still uncolonized districts of the island (Esteban, 2004a).

The lure of land encouraged migration, which occurred in two successive stages, the pioneer stage and the group stage. This led to two types of culture contacts, namely, between a “high culture” and “low culture,” and between “cultures on a level” (Petersen 1958, 257). In Mindanao from 1919 to 1941, contacts between cultures on a level involved Christian colonists; while contacts between higher culture and lower culture involved the Christians, the indigenous peoples and the Muslims. The spontaneous settlement of Titay, a small valley at the middle of the crook of the Zamboanga Peninsula, during and after that period exemplified both types of culture contacts. The Ilocanos were the first Christians to settle in the valley from 1929 to 1941, followed by the Ilongos from 1941 to the 1950s, then the different Visayan groups like the Cebuanos from the 1950s to the 1960s. The valley was then home to two swidden agriculturist groups: the animist Subanens (Christie 1909; Finley and Churchill 1913; Frake, 1955) and the Muslim Kalibugans, the Subanen-Muslim hybrids (Esteban 2002).

The Ilocanos were a breed of land-loving, land-seeking pioneers. Once they opted to settle in the valley, they gathered together as a language group in villages sustained by paddy rice culture and resumed their old life-ways (Esteban 2004a). They propagated the same crops for food, practiced the same crafts, and married within the group. This way, the persistence of history, culture, and ethnicity helped attenuate the alienating effects of *diaspora* among them in a new ethno-ecology (Esteban 2004b). But even as they transitioned into the valley’s land-owning and educated class, the pressures of survival did not only entail flexibility to the demands of paddy rice culture in a forest environment, but also adaptability to other cultures in the valley and its environs. Adaptability involved the appropriation of words from these cultures, to help come to grips with new experiences that came with frontier life. A consideration of some loan

words that had formed part of the linguistic repertoire of the Ilocanos would show how culture contacts led to linguistic hybridity.

Owing to the landlord-tenant relations that the Ilocanos entered into with the Ilongos, the Ilocanos were influenced by their Ilongo tenants through linguistic borrowing. Some of the loan words pertained to the vegetation cover of the valley before World War II, such as *kakugnan*, *kalasangan*, and *kabuugan* (USA, President, 1939). What the Bureau of Lands called *cogonal* (President of the Philippines 1939), meaning “open land” (Castillo 1961, 10), or lands cleared of the forest cover and overgrown with *cogon*, the Ilocanos called *kakugnan*, Ilongo for *cogonal* (Esteban, 2004a). The Ilocanos used *kalasangan*, from the Ilongo *lasang* for “forest” (Bas 1971, 59), “jungle, tree of such land” (Wolff n.d., 166), or “woodland” (Hermosisima, 1966, 109), to refer to the virgin forest or the woodlands still thick with big trees. They also used *kabuugan*, from the Ilongo *buug*, for lands covered with secondary forest growth (Esteban 2004a), or the *kaingin* left to follow for years as was the practice of the Subanens and Kalibugans (Esteban 2001; Frake 1955). Shunning the *kakugnan* on the hills, they preferred the *kabuugan* on the valley over the *kalasangan* because they were easier and cheaper to convert into *basakan*, Ilongo for “rice fields” (Bas 1971, 37; de la Encarnación 1883, 39).

The Ilocanos had the notion that unoccupied land, whether *kakugnan*, *kalasangan*, or *kabuugan*, was free land and theirs to own. Since neither The Homestead Act of 1919 nor *The Public Land Act* of 1936 provided the modes of land acquisition, and since purchase was not the only mode of land acquisition in the frontiers, they laid claim to idle lands through *angkon-angkon*, from the Ilongo *angkon*, meaning “to lay claim” (Hermosisima 1966, 26), or “to acquire, take or get possession of, appropriate” (Kaufmann, n.d., 45); hence, an outright claim of ownership over a piece of idle land. They called *posisyon* an *angkon* or claim marked with a piece of wood with the name of the holder on it (Esteban, 2004a). Although *angkon-angkon* became the acceptable mode of land acquisition in the frontiers during the pioneer stage, an unoccupied *posisyon* was a tenuous land claim. Incomers who pushed from the coast to the valley for land during the group stage of migration would try to contest the unoccupied *posisyon*. Overlapping claims over a *posisyon* was a potential cause of conflict. To avoid violence, the Ilocanos resorted to *husay*, an Ilongo word meaning “to settle dispute” (Hermosisima 1966, 240), which a mediator tried to effect based on prior claim over a contested lot (Esteban 2004a).

Towards the end of the Commonwealth period, however, the Philippine legislature passed *The Public Land* of 1939, which introduced sales application as a new mode of land distribution (Castillo 1961). Through sales application, lots were surveyed, their market values assessed, and then put on sale through public bidding. Imitating Chavacano employees of the Bureau of Lands in Kabasalan, the municipal district where Titay was placed before and immediately after World War II, the Ilocanos used

the word *compra*, from Spanish *comprar*, meaning “to buy, purchase” to refer to sales application (Esteban 2004a).

By law, only occupied and cultivated lands were eligible for titling. The Ilocanos had difficulty complying with the law because most of them were young heads of families, with neither an able-bodied brother nor son for help. In compliance with the law, as well as to deter newcomers from contesting the lots, they had to organize community-based labor pools called *pintakasi* (de la Encarnación 1883, 36, 290). *Pintakasi*, a form of mutual help, involved the solicitation and reciprocal exchange of labor considered to be same value (Hollensteiner 1979). A logical recourse owing to poverty, it enabled Ilocanos to save on land development cost (Esteban 2004a).

When the government tried to hasten land titling after World War II, the Ilocanos resorted to letting the land to new settlers. They contracted a form of share tenancy that the Ilongos called *agsa*, Ilongo for “to work another’s fields” (Kaufmann, n.d., 290). The share-cropping arrangement was called *tinunga*, Ilongo for “sharing of equal part” (Kaufmann, n.d., 966), from *tunga*, meaning, “half” (Hermosisima 1966, 55). *Tinunga* was a modificatory practice to the *tercia*, the Spanish word which means “the third part of a thing” (de la Encarnacion, 1883, 311) or “a third of the harvest after all the expenses had been deducted” (Cortes 1990, 72), the mode of share-tenancy that the Ilocanos experienced in Luzon.

Even after World War II, the lands in the valley were difficult to plow. The *tuod*, Ilongo for tree “stump” (Bas 1971, 414; Hermosisima 1966, 612) and *batang*, Ilongo for “log” or timber (Hermossima 1966, 62), made plowing impossible. The only means of cultivation was through *tasok*, Ilongo for *kaingin* on well-watered areas (Esteban 2004a). The *tasok* or dibble was a stick sharpened on one end. Through it, the *manugpangas* or sower, from the Ilongo *pangas*, meaning “plant in hills” (Hall 1911, 230), made a hole on the ground, dropped the grains into the hole, and covered the grains with dirt using the feet. As elsewhere in the country during the period, the Ilocanos raised *ilon-ilon* in the valley. But in the *kaingin* on the hills, they propagated two rice varieties that the Subanens and Kalibugans used to raise, *kabustre* and *kurikit* (Esteban 2004a).

Life in the frontier was difficult. While the well-watered areas were ideal for paddy rice, the streams and creeks that drained into the valley were breeding grounds for carriers of infectious and parasitic diseases. Death from malaria stalked the villages in the valley in a magnitude never before witnessed by the Ilocanos. Coming either from the mountain villages of Ilocos or Central Luzon where malaria had been put under control by the Americans before World War II (Russel 1931), the Ilocanos dreaded most the *takig*, Ilongo for “malaria” (Kaufmann, n.d., 886). Those who succumbed to it either bore the disease through life or died from it. Health officers in Kabasalan distributed *Atabrine*, a crystalline extract of *quinacrine* from the quinine tree that became the universal cure for malaria since 1934.

Being generally poor, the Ilocanos did not bring the sick to the hospital in Zamboanga town. For lack of *Atabrine*, the absence of a doctor, and lack of means for hospitalization, they resorted to indigenous cures, such as ingesting bitter substances, ranging from snake bile to the juice of *ampalaya* leaves. The most effective was a concoction made of *panyawan*, Cebuano for Job's tears, a wild vine, whose roots and seeds were used as a cure for gas pains (Bas 1971, 242; Laconsay 1993, 315). The preparation of the concoction involved pounding the roots and seeds into a poultice, boiling the poultice in water into a certain consistency, and giving the cooled liquid to the sick (Esteban 2004a).

Unlike medicine, food was not much of a problem. After surviving the first year in the valley, the Ilocanos had more than enough rice to last them until the next harvest. Dire times came though during World War II, when the Japanese razed the villages and either burned or sprayed the grains with poison to flush out the Ilocanos from their hiding places in the forests (Esteban 2004a). Rat infestations in the 1950s and floods in the 1960s also caused economic distress. The words Ilocanos called rats that ravaged the fields from 1952 to 1959 as *balabaw* or *ilaga*, Ilongo words for "rat," (Hall 1911, 31, 148). In the 1960s, the *balabag bato* the Ilocanos used to refer to the cataract of the Palomoc River that would rise above the valley floor (Esteban 2004a). The term is a compound of *balabag*, Ilongo "lie across a path" (Hermosisima 1966, 89) or "athwart" (Wolff n.d., 81), and *bato* for "rock;" hence, "hinder, obstruct, blockade" (Hall 1911, 31, 43). By damming the runoff from heavy and continuous rains, *balabag bato* caused the water to back off and inundate the fields.

Man-made and naturally occurring disasters threatened famine. The Ilocanos tried to survive calamity by subsisting on *cayos* as replacement for rice. *Cayos*, Ilongo for *Dioscoria tryphylla* (Blair and Robertson, 1903-1909), is a toxic wild tuber that grew on the forest floor. Preparing *cayos* was a tedious and painful process. It involved paring the tuber, slicing it thinly, and soaking it in salt water or in running water for three nights. High in cyanide, the yellowish *cayos* juice had a bleaching effect on the skin, causing the palms to crack and bleed. When properly prepared, *cayos*, a carbohydrate-rich tuber, went well with meat, poultry, or fish. The Ilocanos hunted for wild boar and *usa* or *binaw*, Ilongo for the white-tailed deer (Kaufmann n.d., 991), which were abundant in the hills and the grasslands. They fished for mudfish, catfish, *bonog*, Ilongo for gudgeon or goby (Wolff n.d., 173), and *kagang*, Ilongo for "freshwater crab or river crab" (Kaufmann n.d., 363), that were abundant in the valley.

Before and immediately after the war, acts of banditry breached the peace and order in the valley. Easy escape into the forests, anonymity, and the distance of the valley from the Philippine Constabulary detachment in Kabasalan, the limited number of constables for reconnaissance, the abundance of cattle, and the existence of markets for stolen beasts in farming villages across the range that separates the valley from the coasts encouraged these crimes (Frake 1955). Armed bands from outside the

settlement sallied forth from the hills to the valley, rustling cattle from the Ilocanos with impunity. Ilocanos could only remember the title, *pangeran*, Indonesian for “prince, lord” (Echols and Hanson 1989, 407) or Malay for “noble” (Wilkinson 1957, 840) of the dreaded band’s leader, allegedly a Joloano from Ipil, the municipal district under which the valley was placed in the 1950s.

The settlement of Mindanao from the last quarter of the 19th century to the Commonwealth period brought into close culture contacts the settlers and the indigenous populations of the island. Such contacts, whether involving cultures on a level or between a high culture and low culture, led to linguistic hybridity as happened among the Ilocano pioneers of Titay Valley, Zamboanga Sibugay. Linguistic borrowing was a selective process that involved the appropriation of words that did not only enable the Ilocanos to adapt flexibly to paddy rice culture in a forest environment, but also to live peaceably and harmoniously with the natives of the valley, the Subanens and Kalibugans, and the Christian settlers who followed them, the Ilongos and the Cebuanos, including the Chavcanos. The Ilocanos, though, borrowed more extensively from their tenants, the Ilongos, with whom they had the most frequent contacts.

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