

## Foreword

Consuelo J. Paz (1933–2022) was a linguist whose works not only contributed to establishing a stronger foundation for Philippine linguistics, but also became instrumental in the advancement of Filipino as the National Language of the country. Her research reflected her expertise in linguistics and language studies, such as the textbook *Gabay sa Fildwurf* (2005), which elaborated her ideas and methods in doing linguistic fieldwork derived chiefly from her decades of experience in the field; a multi-disciplinary research she spearheaded, *Ginhawa, Kapalaran, Dalamhati: Essays on Well-Being, Opportunity, Destiny, and Anguish* (2008), which highlighted core concepts common in Philippine societies; and her groundbreaking work, *A Reconstruction of Proto-Philippine Phonemes and Morphemes* (1988), which established her name in the field of Philippine historical linguistics. In this introductory essay, I focus on this latter work as I reflect on Paz' influence in my career as a historical linguist, as well as her contributions to the Proto-Philippine debate, which continues to be widely talked about in Philippine and Austronesian linguistics.

I became fascinated with historical linguistics because of how it is possible to get a glimpse of the past based on linguistic evidence. Unlike

theoretical and structural linguistics which concern highly abstract concepts such as binding, traces, and chains, the prospects of being able to infer likely events that happened in history, something very concrete and imaginable for me, through the tools and methods of historical linguistics suddenly made linguistics appealing, enough that it made me focus my research track on this sub-field. As a young scholar, one of the works that grounded me on historical linguistics was Paz' aforementioned work on Proto-Philippines. During the time of its publication, the idea that an ancestral protolanguage common for the languages of the Philippines was the widely accepted view. Following a cohort of historical linguists such as Frank Blake, Carlos Everett Conant, and the father of Philippine linguistics, Cecilio Lopez, Paz contributed further empirical evidence in favor of Proto-Philippines by providing a detailed reconstruction of proto-phonemes and morphemes based on data she collected in the field. Through her research, I was able to see how finding sound correspondences is not as simple as textbooks have demonstrated, that sometimes they do form neat patterns if you are lucky, but oftentimes, they don't, and that is when you have to dig deeper in your messy pile of data. The genius of Paz' work was how she was able to identify certain kinds of sound changes that were either consistent or not in the languages she examined. Until now, I go back to her work to see how some Philippine languages behave in particular phonological contexts.

It was around the time of the publication of Paz' *Reconstruction* that the validity of Proto-Philippines was questioned because of the supposed lack of innovations that support it. Decades after, the question of whether or not Proto-Philippines existed as a legitimate protolanguage

is still being discussed among Austronesianists, with Robert Blust and David Zorc as its leading advocates. Scholars who remain skeptical of the protolanguage, including myself, argue that the apparent similarities shared among the Philippine languages are likely the outcomes of a linkage history as well as subsequent contact among the groups. This longstanding debate regarding the history of the Philippine languages has direct relevance to the culture history of the Austronesian speakers in this region and beyond. That is, we can infer population movements (a rapid expansion across island Southeast Asia) as well as social relationships (continued and intense contact across networks of speakers) based on how the languages have developed.

While historical linguistics has certainly seen significant developments since the time of Paz' Reconstruction, most notably the rise of Bayesian phylogenetic methods in analyzing language change, one cannot deny the merits and contributions of her work in understanding the development of Philippine languages. For instance, Paz was able to emphasize the importance of using primary data gathered in the field to inform our reconstructions. While many studies using the Comparative Method of historical linguistics make use of secondary data such as dictionaries and word lists, such lexicographic works are also limited in many ways (such as the biases of the lexicographer and the accuracy of the data collected to name a few), and there is thus the need to complement it with primary data from actual speakers of the languages. Moreover, a bottom-up approach in our reconstruction provides substantial insights and evidence beyond the confines of our pre-existing hypotheses and biases for or against the protolanguage in question.

Certainly, various limitations constrained Paz in her research, first and foremost having to work on 29 languages firsthand. However, we should remember to approach her work in the context from which it was written—a time without the convenience of computers and the internet. As Zorc writes in his paper, many of Paz’ reconstructions remain valid, and even the errors and gaps in her work offer valuable learning opportunities. Paz’ years of field experience, most of which were done during a time in which research was done literally by hand, served as her foundation in how she did historical linguistics. Moreover, Paz’ strong emphasis on field research, promoting participant observation as central ethnographic tools in understanding the language and culture of a group, led her to establish the Programa sa Pag-aaral ng mga Etnolinggwistikong Grupo (IPEG) during her term as the Dean of the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy at the University of the Philippines Diliman. Until her retirement, Paz continued to be engaged with research on the different ethnolinguistic groups of the country, through lectures, publications, and mentoring.

It is unfortunate that Paz’ contributions largely remain obscure among those who work on the historical development of Philippine languages, given that she was a Filipino scholar directly working on these languages. It is high time that we give her the recognition she deserved as the first Filipina historical linguist who has successfully completed this massive project. It is thus fitting that David Zorc, a prominent scholar in the field, is the one to revisit her work and highlight its merits. I hope that with this publication, we get renewed appreciation for the work Paz was able to do, and how it was able to

contribute to questions and debates that continue to plague Philippine historical linguistics.

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