

**Lexical Variations In Danao Languages: A Comparative Linguistic Analysis**

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**Abstract**

Language preservation and documentation are some of the essential tools in maintaining cultural and indigenous heritage. Several indigenous languages are facing extinction. This study determined and analyzed the interconnections and peculiarities of the Danao Languages, specifically Maranao, Maguindanao and Iranun through a comparative analysis of their phonological, lexical and semantic attributes. These languages are inherited to the Austronesian lineage but have different features due to cultural, geographical, and historical factors. Though these languages have a distinct phonological similarity in terms of consonant and vowel structures, lexical, and semantic, it differs. As such, these differences justify a very dynamic language that involves each local setting and influence on foreign languages. In this paper, it aims to probe into the significance of cultural and historical importance of these languages as a living repository of identity, tradition, and knowledge.

This study foregrounds the issues of globalization and linguistic imperialism, as well as the needs in keeping and renewing language, with such efforts in rigorous documentation, inclusion in frameworks of education, and people-centered efforts. The outcome of this research contributes to the corpus of Austronesian linguistics by drawing attention to matters of the divergence and convergence of language and to more general implications for human cultural heritage of linguistic diversity.

**Keywords:** interconnections and peculiarities, Danao Languages, Linguistic Analysis, linguistic imperialism

**Introduction**

Language is often described as a means of communication, yet this definition only addresses one part of its complex nature. Linguists recognize also that language is a system of rules and structure that shapes our expressions, ideas, emotions and cultural identities (Ramus et al., 1999; Schleppegrell, 2001). In the Philippines, there are over 150 languages are spoken by more than 76,500,000 Filipinos who live in an archipelago of around 7,000 islands that stretches over 1,500 kilometers from north to south, and about 800 kilometers from the most western point of Palawan to the most easterly point of Mindanao. Most of

the languages are dialectally diverse, with several constituting extensive dialect chains (Reid 1971).

All Philippines languages belong to the prominent Western Malayo-Polynesian group within Austronesian language family. In archaeological evidence it suggests that Austronesian speakers first arrived in the Northern Philippines, probably from what is called Taiwan about 5,500 years ago. This marks the beginning of migrations that later took them to the Indo-Malaysian archipelago and into the Pacific. Since the time of the Philippines, the original Austronesian language diversified into several distinct subgroups (Blust 1991). One such subgroup, the Danao languages, includes Maranao, Maguindanaon, and Iranun, which face unique challenges amid modern influences.

The preservation of the Danao languages, such as Maranao, Maguindanaon, and Iranun, is now more crucial than ever because of the rapid modernization and globalization that affects the Philippines. These languages are under pressure from dominant national and global languages like Tagalog and English, their continued use and transmission to younger generations are at risk. Beyond their role as communication, these languages are living depositories of the cultural, historical, and social identities of their speakers. These efforts not only help in saving unique linguistic traditions but also in the preservation of rich cultural diversity in the Philippines. Besides, the study of Danao languages bears broader implications for Austronesian linguistics since it illuminates historical migration patterns, contact influences, and linguistic evolution within the region. Through their genetic unity and reconstruction of proto language, this study therefore contributes to the comprehension of complex relationships that exist in the web of relationships among Austronesian languages.

Out of the 167 ethnolinguistic groups in the Philippines cited in Grimes (1999), at least ten languages are spoken by over a million people and constitute what have been referred to as the ‘major’ Philippine languages including the Tagalog, Sebuano, Ilokano, Hiligaynon, Bikol, Samar-Leyte, Kapampangan, Pangasinan, Maranao and Magindanao.

In the southwest part of the Philippines island of Mindanao there are three large groups of Muslim people- the Maranao, the Magindanao, and the Iranun. These three belongs to Danao languages- Maranao, Magindanaon, and Iranun-along with Illanun of Sabah, share a close genetic relationship. This connection shows the similarities of their linguistic ancestry, evidenced by a common phonology, syntax, and vocabulary (Conklin 1955; Thomas and Healey 1962; Llamzon 1974; 18-9; Leber 1975:35; Allison 1979; Walton 1979). On the recent studies (Llamzon 1962 and Martin 1976; Walton 1979), have demonstrated that the Danao languages are closely related to the Subanon group, together with the Manobo languages, with both forming part of the Meso-Mindanao subgroups of the Southern Philippine languages (Walton 1979:78).

### **The Danao Languages**

Danao speakers exhibit awareness of their own language and its intricate relation with other Danao languages and dialects. In several ways, Danao speakers manifest by

identifying a person's origin based on variations in speech, includes their accent and intonation. Moreover, they can recognize numerous nuanced distinctions among dialects, which leads to form multiple dialects within Danao language. Each dialect is further subdivided into specific subdialects with each unique characteristic.

Generally, subdialect within the same dialect is distinguished primarily by intonation and patterns. However, there are dialects that are different and more pronounced, involving each phonology and lexical variations that create a distinct linguistic identity for each. On a broader scale, the distinction among Danao languages such as Maranao, Maguindanaon, and Iranun- are not limited when it comes to their phonology and vocabulary. Each language exhibits its unique structures and rules as they extend their grammar. This rich diversity and cultural heritage within Danao communities, where language serves as their crucial marker of identity.

### **The Maguindanao**

The Maguindanao/Maguindanaon (ISO code MDH) has 3 major dialects: Taw sa ilud, Taw sa laya and Biwangen. The Taw sa ilud dialect used by the “*people of the lower river*” referring to those living in the lower reaches of the Pulangi river, where the river flows downstream. The ‘Magindanawn’ dialect has three barrios like Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, which are located across the Pulangi river from Cotabato City. Taw sa laya consists of the dialects spoken in the former Sultanate of Buwayan. It is characterized phonologically by strong retroflexion of the /l/ and other alveolar consonants (Eck, 1974 and Lee, 1962, 1964b). And Biwangen/Biwangan refers to those Magindanaons now living in South Cotabato Province and their dialects.

### **The Maranao**

Maranao/Maranaw (ISO code MRW) is an Austronesian language belonging to the Greater Central Philippine subgroup. Predominantly spoken on the southern Philippine Island of Mindanao, specifically in the provinces of Lanao del Sur and Lanao del Norte. It shares close linguistic ties with *Iranun and Maguindanaon* (Blust 1991). The Maranao-speaking population is divided into two groups: the *Maranaw Ranaw (Maranaw of the Lake)* and *Maranao M'ragat (Maranaw by the sea)* (Lobel & Riwarung, 2011).

### **The Iranun**

The Iranun language (ISO code ILP), spoken in the Philippines, is concentrated primarily along Illiana Bay. Its speakers are found mainly in these Municipalities of Buldon, Parang, Sultan Kudarat, Sultan Mastura in the Province of Maguindanao, as well as the southeast tip of Cotabato. Beyond its primary location, Maranao also spoken in Kalingan in Bukidnon and in several municipalities within Cotabato province- Alamada, Banisilan, Carmen, Libungan and Pigcawayan. This language has two distinct dialects. One dialect is spoken along the coastal areas of Illiana Bay and the other is *Isebanganen (or idalemen)* is used by those living inland (Fleischman, 1981).

The Maranao language includes four additional heavy consonants which are not only aspirated and exert a significant raising and tensing effect on the following vowel

(Lobel & Riwarung, 2009). In contrast, Iranun preserves the original homorganic voiced-voiceless clusters from Proto-Danao which are reflected in *Maranao* as heavy consonants.

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this comparative linguistic analysis is to examine the phonological and lexical similarity between the Maranao, Maguindanao and Iranun languages and analyze semantic similarity and difference in their lexical terms. This research aims to deepen the understanding of linguistic relationships and unique characteristics among the three languages, adding value to the preservation and appreciation of their cultural and linguistic heritage.

#### *Research Questions*

1. What are the phonological and lexical similarities between Maranao, Maguindanao and Iranun languages?
2. What are the semantic similarities and differences in lexical terms among Maranao, Maguindanao and Iranun languages?

#### **Theoretical Lens**

This study will take a comparative linguistic approach to the lexical similarities and differences between Maranao, Maguindanao, and Iranun languages. By looking at core vocabulary, everyday language use, and the impact of language contact, we will look for patterns of lexical borrowing, semantic shifts, and phonological adaptations. This research will help in the deeper understanding of the linguistic relationships between these languages and the factors that have shaped their development.

#### **Methods**

This is a comparative linguistic study in the sense that it researched, collected, and analyzed documents that contribute to understanding, preserving, and furthering the development of the Danao languages. Qualitative approach was employed for the analysis of results and discussion in synthesizing the data from the linguistic and cultural perspectives. The present study adopted a comparative linguistic approach to compare the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic features of the Danao languages: Maranao, Maguindanao, and Iranun.

#### **Results And Discussions**

Through this study, I found the intricate relations of the Maranao, Maguindanao, and Iranun languages with regard to the phonology, lexicon, and semantics. Indeed, findings on these relate to common ancestry and, therefore, unique linguistic qualities that inform their cultural-historical implications.

#### **Phonology**

All of the three phonological systems of Maranao, Maguindanao, and Iranun have strong similarity to each other, so that they manifest their common linguistic origin. The inventories of stops are phonemically stable for these languages (/p/, /t/, /k/), nasals (/m/, /n/), and vowels (/a/, /i/, /u/), all of which are necessary for meaning distinctions. Maranao, however, has the feature of aspirated stops, hence the language has a different tonal flavor from the other two. This probably evolved for specific communicative or stylistic reasons in the community.

Maguindanaon, on the other hand, has more retroflex sounds; its phonological adaptation is perhaps due to neighboring linguistic groups. Iranun combines both of these features, with its own simplifications in terms of vowel cluster reduction, making speech easier to produce—an adaptation that may well come from its maritime history, where clear and efficient communication is a must.

### **Morphology**

Morphological analysis shows a common reliance on affixation for grammatical and semantic modification. Prefixes, suffixes, and infixes are used quite often to mark tense, plurality, and relational concepts. Examples include the prefix ka-, which is commonly used to form nominal forms across the languages, as in kapatid ('sibling').

Each of these languages contains morphological innovations. Maranao's system of morphology retains most of the archaic forms, which gives insight into its historical linguistic background. For Maguindanaon, the morphology does reflect external influence, with borrowed affixes that augment its lexicon. Iranun features a balanced system that has both preservation and innovation, and the distinctive circumfix patterns emphasize spatial and relational nuances.

It also manifests vowel harmony in which the vowel sound of added words is adjusted to be that of the root, a more pleasant speech. The Maguindanaon stresses consonant reduplication upon verb inflection, resulting in an almost musical language. These morphological changes add fluency and clearly reflect social values of those societies which they are native to.

### **Syntax**

These languages grammatically have a verbinitial structure common in the Austronesian language families. In most instances, sentences start with a verb and then follow up by the subject and the object as used in the example, 'He/she ate a banana'. Nagkaon siya ug saging This, in itself, places so much emphasis on action and events rather than the usual dynamic stories. Maranao prefers actor-oriented verbs, in which the doer of the action is specified. Maguindanaon uses goal-oriented constructions quite considerably and seems well suited for trade and interaction contexts. Iranun uses both approaches, as they are quite versatile in changing communicative environments.

Another important syntactic feature is the use of focus markers. Maranao relies heavily on verbal affixes to indicate focus while Maguindanaon relies on independent particles, and thus more flexible. Iranun uses a combination of the two strategies, and thus affirms its role as a linguistic bridge between the two.

### **Semantics**

Semantic analysis provides common meaning as well as distinctive evolution of vocabulary. Common words such as mata ('eye') and anak ('child') show universal experiences of the cultures. On the other hand, semantic changes illustrate how different languages adapt to their distinct environment and history. For instance, ranaw in Maranao and Iranun means 'lake' because they are geographically near water bodies, and in Maguindanaon, danaw evolves to mean 'flood' or 'inundation,' a reflection of the Pulangi River that is present in their lives.

Maranao has unique terminology in rituals and spiritual practice, which highlights the cultural heritage of the richly embedded background. Maguindanaon expanded

Maranao	Maguindanaon	Iranun	English
bulutu	binaludto	buludtu	rainbow
petad	pedtad	pedtad	sand
matitu	matidtu	matidtu	straight
bau'u	baw	baw	turtle
bitu'un	bitun	bitun	star
kaga'i	kagaj	kagay	yesterday
mama'an	mama	maman	areca nut
pamamanai	pamamanay	pamanay	sew

vocabulary about trade-related terminologies as a trading hub throughout history. The presence of nautical terms in the Iranun vocabulary indicates a rich tradition of maritime cultures and sailing skills.

### **Phonological and Lexical Similarities Between Maranao, Maguindanaon, and Iranun Languages**

The linguistic analysis of Maranao, Maguindanaon, and Iranun shows a common core that indicates their origin from a single ancestral language. Although they diverged into different languages, their phonetic and lexical similarities serve as evidence of their complex histories and shared cultural backgrounds.

#### **Phonological Comparison**

All the three languages have strong consonant and vowel systems which are relatively similar to each other by their common Austronesian ancestry. All the languages have the same consonants such as /p/, /t/, and /k/ that appear everywhere uniformly. For example, for the word 'head' ulu is pronounced and used without change in pronunciation in all the three languages. This consistency reflects how the core phonemic element is preserved.

Maranao has distinctive phonetic characteristics, such as aspirated stops in katok ('to knock'), making it different from the smoother phonetic realization of the same word in Maguindanaon and Iranun. Retroflex sounds also add an identifiable layer of phonological complexity in Maguindanaon.

Iranun is the middle term that bridges Maranao and Maguindanaon, having features from both, making it all the more an intermediary linguistic term.

### **Table 2: The Danao Phonology**

#### **Lexical Similarities**

Lexical similarities reflect the fact that the languages share a common genetic root. For example, words like mata ('eye'), ulan ('rain'), and anak ('child') are phonetically and semantically identical. These represent cultural and environmental constants in the lives of their speakers.

But, however, lexical divergence becomes apparent in specialized vocabulary. Maranao retained much more archaic terms as it preserved its historical tie to Proto-Danaw. The lexicon of Maguindanaon, meanwhile, shows influence from other languages due to trade and contact, while Iranun's vocabulary balances preservation and innovation, reflecting its geographical and social role.

### **Semantic Similarities and Differences in Lexical Terms**

Apart from showing similar meanings, semantic analysis also shows some very interesting changes that demonstrate dynamic interaction between language and culture.

### **Semantic Continuity**

In Maranao and Iranun, two languages spoken around Lake Lanao and Illana Bay, the word ranaw, meaning 'lake,' shows semantic continuity. In Maguindanaon, it becomes danaw, which means "flood" or "inundation," indicating the natural conditions of the Pulangi River basin. This is an example of how language is affected by cultural and geographic factors.

### **Unique Semantic Innovations**

Maranao's vocabulary is well-enacted with its rich and meaningful cultural and ritual practices in which it gives heritage through preserving its words and jargon. In Maguindanaon, one could find very strong and powerful vocabulary. For in it, a rich source of borrowings, in which Cebuano and Tagalog dominate Maguindanaon vocabularies and reflects that there is much interaction in linguistic groups.

Iranun has developed specific semantic adaptations that align with its identity as a seafaring community. It includes terminology related to navigation and trade that is absent in the other two languages.

### **Broader Implications**

The findings of this research highlight not only the linguistic ties among Maranao, Maguindanaon, and Iranun but also the broader cultural and historical significance they carry.

#### *Cultural Identity*

Language is a living, vital reservoir of cultural identity. It reflects the values, beliefs, and perspectives of its speakers. Shared linguistic traits in Maranao, Maguindanaon, and Iranun are expressions of a common heritage, but where they diverge shows how these communities understand and engage with the world differently. Such minutiae of language, whether it be particular words, idiomatic expressions, or grammatical structures, portray the social practices, tradition, and collective memory of each group, hence stressing the importance of language as a cultural lens.

#### *Historical Insights*

Similarities in phonology and vocabulary among Maranao, Maguindanaon, and Iranun indicate a common historical background, most probably originating from a single protolanguage. These likenesses hint at a history of closer contacts, be it through kinship ties, trade, or migration. On the other hand, the differences between the languages reveal the effects of geographical isolation, local innovations, and external influences. Historically, these have been imprinted by episodes of migration, trade, and even periods

of separation; yet, they themselves become linguistic maps that reflect, on their own, developments socio-politically, economically.

### **Preservation and Revitalization**

The complex and interesting linguistic features of the Maranao, Maguindanaon, and Iranun serve as a very important contribution to their cultural heritage, yet the forces of globalization and urbanization and major language dominance threaten their continuation. There is an imperishable need for documentary work and teaching efforts targeting these languages. Some of these significant efforts include dictionary formulation for these languages, making a record of oral tradition, and integrating these in school curricula. The revitalization projects will ensure that the linguistic knowledge will be transmitted from generation to generation and restore their pride and identity.

### **Academic Contribution**

This paper gives a wide-based comparative analysis of phonological, lexical, and semantic features of Maranao, Maguindanaon, and Iranun, thus contributing to the general field of Austronesian linguistics and answering various questions on language divergence and convergence within this language family. It is important to linguists, educators, and policymakers in establishing a ground for further comparisons and giving insights on how to develop preservation strategies for these languages. Moreover, it enlightens the world on how a language changes according to cultural, historical, and environmental factors.

### **Conclusion**

The Maranao, Maguindanaon, and Iranun languages each have unique characteristics in phonology, lexis, and semantics; however, they are strongly related by a common heritage of language. This study explored the phonological aspects (sound patterns and pronunciation), lexical elements (words and phrases), and semantic dimensions (the formation of meaning within various cultural contexts) of these languages. It would give us a glimpse of the cultural and historical journey of the communities that speak Maranao, Maguindanaon, and Iranun. Although related, the similarities also present a common ancestry- perhaps with early Austronesian-speaking populations in the Philippines-and the differences shed light on the impact historical migration, trade, geographical isolation, and other causes would have had on each linguistic development.

This study lets us know the richness of the linguistic but also the values and traditions as well as their worldview embedded in the said languages. Language is no longer a means to facilitate communication but also the vessel that carries history, knowledge, and identity. Among these are the languages in the collective identity of Maranao, Maguindanaon, and Iranun communities which allow the bonding of generations due to common stories, rituals, and worldviews shared between them.

What's most significant about this finding is the preservation of those languages in a world fast becoming increasingly globalized by the hegemony of language, as smaller, regional, or indigenous languages recede. A language disappears with its culture and individuality; therefore, without that language, an intrinsic connection to history is broken. As such, saving and renewing these languages are essential not only to the people who speak

the languages but also to people who can gain a new understanding of linguistic diversity and human heritage.

## **Recommendations**

### **Documentation and Archiving**

Massive documentation work should be conducted to preserve the phonological, lexical, and semantic features of Maranao, Maguindanaon, and Iranun. This may include creating dictionaries, collections of oral history, and grammatical descriptions. These can then be made accessible through digital platforms for use by native speakers and linguists from all over the world.

### **Language Education and Integration**

Integration of Maranao, Maguindanaon, and Iranun into formal education systems is hence a must for their revitalization. Courses on the languages should be offered in schools and universities, while community-based learning initiatives would bridge the generation gap. Teachable materials like textbooks, audio materials, and digital tools for learning the languages will be developed to support the effort.

### **Community-Based Language Programs**

Such community-based efforts could allow these languages to be passed down to younger generations. The effect of having the local elders teaching the children and promoting cultural activities within their native languages helps to instill pride and ownership in the language as well. Also, immersion programs could be set up in schools where young people are encouraged to use their native language when interacting on a daily basis

### **Collaboration with linguists and scholars**

This, of course, necessitates cooperation between all linguists, anthropologists, and local communities who may contribute to these language preservations. The researchers are providing professional services in recording and analysis of languages; the locals, on their part, will go on to avail very important insights on meanings and cultural contexts indispensable for complete understanding.

### **Government Support and Policy Development**

Top on the list of those that should be involved in language preservation efforts are governments. This can be done through funding language revitalization projects, developing policies that will promote multilingualism, and supporting cultural programs that emphasize the importance of indigenous languages. Recognition in official settings, such as media and government publications, can also raise awareness and encourage the use of these languages.

### **Public Awareness Campaigns**

Public awareness campaigns could also be used to help promote the importance of linguistic diversity and the need to maintain indigenous languages. This could be directed toward the general public and, importantly, the younger generation, in order to instill pride in their linguistic heritage and to incorporate these languages into everyday life.

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