

A look at the Proto-Philippines hypothesis through a diachronic comparison of morphological reduplication in the languages of the Philippines

Nathan Adamson

Brigham Young University

adamsnat@byu.edu

ABSTRACT: This paper presents a diachronic comparison of morphological reduplication in the languages of the Philippines in order to discover evidence for or against the Proto-Philippines (PPH) hypothesis (see Blust 2019). Comparative studies on the languages of the Philippines posit that the current languages of the Philippines likely developed directly from Proto-Malayo-Polynesian (the ancestral language of all Austronesian languages spoken outside of Taiwan) by way of a north-to-south dialect chain that historically spanned the length of the Philippine archipelago (Reid 1982). However, more recent comparative Austronesian studies present a large number of lexical similarities shared between the languages of the Philippines (Blust & Trussel ongoing). Some researchers claim that the sheer quantity of these lexical similarities between the Philippine languages is evidence enough to prove that the historic Philippine dialect chain was not in fact a dialect chain of Proto-Malayo-Polynesian (PMP) but rather a dialect chain of an intermediary proto-language, namely PPH, from which all the languages of the Philippines developed (Blust 2019). While lexical similarities between languages suggest the possibility of genetic transmission from a shared proto-language, lexical similarities alone are most often insufficient in proving the existence of a shared proto-language as lexical items are easily diffused through language contact. Instead, morphosyntactic similarities are considered to be much more convincing evidence in determining genetic relationships (Campbell & Poser 2008: 176–177). In spite of this, no morphosyntactic evidence, including reduplication, is presented as evidence for PPH as it has been supposed that a reconstructed PPH morphosyntax would hardly differ from current Proto-Malayo-Polynesian (PMP) morphosyntactic reconstructions (Ross 2005: 13). On the other side of the issue, researchers opposing the existence of PPH argue that the PPH hypothesis is based on invalid methodologies, spurious reflexes, and negative evidence. Such studies maintain that PMP is the only common ancestral language of the Philippine languages (Reid 2020). Similarly, reduplication has not yet been explored as counter evidence for the existence of PPH.

This paper offers morphosyntactic evidence to the PPH discussion through a diachronic comparison of morphological reduplication in the languages of the Philippines. Specifically, I argue that reduplication does not provide evidence to support the PPH hypothesis as reduplication reflexes are not found in all of the Philippine subgroups while reflexes are found in geographically close, but non-Philippine genetic languages. This is demonstrated in Table 1 where reduplicated forms marking the iterative aspect in six Philippine languages are compared against Sama, a Barito language of Indonesia, which is not considered to be a daughter language of PPH. Notably, Sama (using a root reduplication template) is more similar to the majority of the Philippine languages than Tina Sambal (CV- reduplication template) and Tboli (no iterative reduplication), both of which are daughter languages in the PPH hypothesis. This adds support to Reid's (2020) argument of the likelihood of diffusion through language contact (both within and without the supposed Philippine genetic) as the source of the observed lexical similarities. Furthermore, many of the observed similarities in the reduplication structures of the Philippine languages may be explained by factors other than genetic transmission and borrowing such as typological language universals, the possibility of external cognates (retentions from PMP), and iconicity. While reduplication does not offer evidence to support the PPH hypothesis, similarities are observed across the reduplication systems of the Philippine languages that further support the historical existence of a north-to-south dialect chain across the Philippines.

KEYWORDS: Proto-Philippines, reduplication, reconstruction, subgrouping

Table 1. Reduplication marking iterative aspect in six PPH daughter languages and Sama.

Language	Form	Base	Gloss	Reduplicated form	Gloss	Source
Ivatan	root	<i>vidi</i>	‘walk’	<i>may-vidi~vidi</i>	‘take a walk’	Peace Corps 1993: 23
Ilokano	root	<i>kiras</i>	‘scrape’	<i>k<um>iras~kiras</i>	‘repeated scraping’	Rubino 2000: 276
Tina Sambal	CV-	<i>tingkap</i>	‘business’	<i>pawpa-ni~ningkap</i>	‘earning a living’	Goschnick 1989: 61
Hiligaynon	root	<i>buno</i>	‘pierce’	<i>buno~buno</i>	‘repeated piercing’	Zack 1994: 395
Tboli	-	(no attested iterative reduplication)				Forsberg 1992
Tondano	root	<i>legu</i>	‘noisy’	<i>me-legu~legu</i>	‘ringing’	Brickell 2014: 131
Sama	root	<i>kuwi</i>	‘play’	<i>mag-kuwi~kuwi</i>	‘play repeatedly’	Walton 1978: 130

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