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ARTICLE

Rereading *Casi Casi:* A Linguistic Reinterpretation to Pigafetta's Account[1]

Voltaire Q. Oyzon

ABSTRACT

Pigafetta reported that Magellan performed the casi casi or "blood compact" with Kolambu, and later with Humabon. However, on May 1, 1521, four days after the Battle of Mactan, Tupas and Humabon invited the surviving crew to feast, and they were massacred. The only unharmed member was Enrique de Malacca, the Malay interpreter. This paper aims to offer an emic perspective on this May 1, 1521 event by reexamining the shards of speech of the natives that Pigafetta captured in his narrative. Pigafetta must be viewed as an ethnographer. As a student of the Bisayan languages and a writer in the Waray language, I will offer in this paper an interpretation of Pigafetta's account from the linguistics lens following the postcolonial rubric. I will demonstrate that Pigafetta may have misheard, mistranscribed, or misread some words or phrases in the Waray/Bisayan language, which is often the case in initial cultural contact. Casi (better kasi) means "fellow, friend." In Bisayan morphology, full reduplication involves many semantic senses, such as diminutive or attenuative, which could mean "playfulness; pretend; a little version of X." In other words, Kolambu, Humabon and Magellan's casi casi (better kasi-kási) could be seen as a pretend friendship or brotherhood.

KEYWORDS

linguistic accommodation, cross-cultural encounter, local history, language as historical evidence, postcolonialism

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Introduction

> "To read is not simply to summarize and paraphrase what the author said. Reading is not only a search for information or main idea. To read is to respond to what the author said…To read is to construct a text. To read is to put things together. To read is a process of 're-vision,' or 're-seeing'" (Bartholomae and Petrosky 1996, 2-6).

This study re-examines Pigafetta's account of the Magellan-Elcano expedition and their encounters with the native populations, from the linguistic aspect,

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particularly the term casi casi (Blair and Robertson 1906, 33:116-117, henceforth B&R), and offers an emic interpretation of that encounter—that is, "to examine history from the *other side*" (Warren 2007, xviii; see also Angeles 2007, 7).

Although B&R's (1903-1909) *The Philippine Islands, 1493-1898* is still a highly used source for early Spanish narratives in the Philippines, its editorial viewpoint should be taken under close scrutiny. The collection, as Cano (2008) clearly argues, shows the ideological goals of American colonial officials who try to portray Spain as ineffective and support the U.S. civilizing mission. The argument brings legitimate questions regarding the accuracy of editorial framing, translation decisions, and omissions. This research keeps a critical posture in employing B&R's (1903-1909) writings, appreciating their access to original documents while yet conscious of their possible distortions of indigenous reality.[2]

In this context, Pigafetta must be viewed as an ethnographer (Scott 1984, 55), documenting the culture and language of the people he had encountered. It is widely acknowledged that researchers who are not fluent in the local language may miss important details and have less control over the study (Malinowski 2020; Sepielak, Wladyka, and Yaworsky 2023). The only available eyewitness report is that of Pigafetta. However, Siebert (2022) cautions: "his [Pigafetta's] report needs to be read properly.… He was an interested party and not merely a disinterested scholar. He wrote from a subjective and one-sided viewpoint" (77).

Despite the presence of the Magellan interpreter Panglima Awang (Enrique de Malacca), the Suluan/Humonhon encounter, for instance, presented some linguistic difficulties to Pigafetta. Consider the following:

> **They made signs that the things which the captain had shown them** (that is, cloves, cinnamon, pepper, ginger, nutmeg, mace, gold, and all that was in the ship) grew there where we were going. (Stanley [1874] 2010,74; Cachey 2007, 88 [parag. 53; sentence 321])

This linguistic difficulty could explain the horrible encounter with the Chamorros a few weeks prior.

To complicate the matter further, on Kolambu and Humabon's side, there was also an interpreter, the Siamese trader (B&R 1906, 33:139; B&R 1903, 1:326; Stanley [1874] 2010, 200). This encounter could be visually represented below:

The Rajas[3] < - -> Siamese trader < - - > Enrique < - - > Ferdinand Magellan

The encounter in 1521 at Cebu unfolded through a tripled chain of translation: Bisaya spoken by the rajas moved first to a Siamese trader-interpreter, then to Enrique de Malacca, and finally into Magellan's Portuguese-Spanish (B&R 1906, 33:139). Each relay carried not only different phonologies but different cultural presuppositions; consequently, every statement about ritual friendship or political intent was refracted three times before reaching either side. A Siamese trader acting as translator gestures to a flexible multilingual network spanning the Melayu

world, where cultural translation shapes meanings in addition to language. Such intermediaries would have helped produce complex interpretations of customs like kasi-kási.

Pigafetta's orthographic difficulties compound this opacity. Recording unfamiliar sounds with an Italian script, he rendered *Sugbo* as **Zubu**, *Silong* as **Ceylon**, and *Masawa* as **Mazaua** (B&R 1906, 33:128-33; cf. Oliveira in Schreurs 2021, 46, 96-97). Such substitutions of **s** for /ʃ/ or **z** for /s/ reveal how what he believed he heard was already shaped by his alphabet. Because modern rereadings must reconstruct forms from these spellings, any semantic or phonological argument—such as the reinterpretation of kasi-kási as "pretend friendship"—remains necessarily tentative.

A caveat, therefore, since this rereading is based on phonological reconstruction and semantic speculation, readers are cautioned about the interpretive limits of retrospective meaning imposition.

Review of Related Literature

Contemporary etic narratives amplify the confusion. Pigafetta blamed Enrique for inciting Humabón's subsequent massacre of Magellan's crew (B&R 1903, 33:21). Fernando Oliveira ([1550-1560] 2021, 101), meanwhile, citing another once known survivor of Magellan's fleet and as corroborated by Martin de Ayamonte (Schreurs 2021, 100-101; Schreurs 2000, 93), claimed that Lapulapu coerced Humabón to attack or be destroyed. These versions come from European lenses. What is lacking is the emic angle, the history from our side, or from those who "are not authorized to speak" (Young 2003, 1; see also Gandhi 1998, ix). Mining Pigafetta's Bisayan wordlist offers a partial remedy, yet editors since the 16th century have reproduced that list without linguistic scrutiny; Bausani (1960, 229-31) already lamented copyists' errors in the Malay glossary.[4]

Re-examined, those glosses reveal deep Austronesian linkages: Malay *beras* 'husked rice' aligns with Bisayan *bugas*; Malay *anak* 'offspring' with Bisayan *anak* 'offspring'; Malay *layar* 'sail' with Bisayan *layag* (Blust 1999; Tryon 1995). Such cognates give us a glimpse of the breadth of the Melayu world during the advent of the Western powers in Southeast Asia (Adelaar 2000, 230; see also Collins 1996; Liow 2010). The soon-to-be Philippine archipelago was part of that Melayu world (Andaya 2001; Thomaz 2019). A Bornean outpost in Mactan was reported by the survivors of the Magellan expedition (Scott 1992, 42; Scott 1994, 191). Bunaw Lakan Dula of Tondo, whose Christian name was Carlos Lacandola, had properties in Borneo (Santiago 2020, 45; Santiago 1990, 142). Before the arrival of Magellan, a Bruneian variety of Malay was the lingua franca throughout the Visayan and Mindanao area, which also brought in terminologies of Sanskrit and Arabic origins (Reid 1994, 444). Network modelling by Kratochvíl et al. (2022) shows a Chinese junk could sail Borneo-Cebu in just 3.3 days, making lexical and ritual exchange routine.

"Malayness is something people acquire in their relations with others" (Kahn 2006, 83; see also McVey 1998, 53). Its geographies stretched from Sumatra to the Philippines (Balbi in Bradford 1835, 452), held together by dispersed political authority and a shared maritime economy (Wolters 1999; Mandal 2016; Tambiah 2013). Within this cosmopolis, blood-compacts such as kasi-kási could function as deliberately ambiguous performances—gestures of provisional alliance rather than permanent kinship. Recovering that ambiguity demands attending to layered translation, unstable orthographies, and the multilingual *Melayu* milieu in which Visayan actors operated. Only then can we hear, however faintly, the voice of those "not authorized to speak" and approach a less Eurocentric understanding of that encounter in Cebu in 1521.

Recent work by Susilowati, Sulistiyono, and Rochwulaningsih (2018) helps us understand maritime diplomacy in premodern Southeast Asian coastal civilizations, offering a valuable framework for understanding rituals like kasi-kási. The researchers argue that indigenous groups didn't just use treaties or violence to settle political disputes; they also used culturally significant symbolic activities like gift-giving, marrying, and sharing stories like the Panji stories. This gives us an important way to understand rites like kasi-kási, which may not have been real alliances but rather ritualized displays of temporary peace in a marine area with many languages and ethnic groups.

Forman (1993, 26) discusses the bearings of early encounters from the perspective of a linguist during Europe's Age of Discovery, emphasizing that the vocabulary listed down by Magellan's chronicler Antonio Pigafetta is still recognizable today. Some of these Bisayan words recorded by Pigafetta seem strange, visually speaking, because of the spelling: matta 'eyes'=> **mata** [maTA], pussud 'navel'=> **púsod** [PUsod], dilla 'tongue'=> **díla** [DIla?], since consonant cluster is not allowed in Bisayan syllabic patterns such as: consonant-vowel (CV) and consonant-vowel-consonant (CVC) (Blust 2013, 235). However, when one listens to these words, they become familiar: leghex (lagos [laGUS] 'gums'), delengan (dalúnggan [daLUNGgan] 'ear'), botchen (bukton/bútkon [BUKton/BUTkon] 'arm'), etc. (B&R 1906, 33:189).

We must also consider the cross-cultural mistakes and language misunderstanding latent to Pigafetta himself. Forman (1993) highlights the sounds that are absent in the phonological inventory of the chronicler's first language (L1): "The sounds they did not hear"—like the glottal stop, which is a consonant, therefore, phonemic in Bisayan languages (sometimes represented by the hyphen): as in luy-a 'ginger', with a syllabic pattern of CVC-CV vs. luya 'weak' with syllabic pattern CV-CV. Another sound that Pigafetta failed to hear, according to Forman (1993), is the voiced velar nasal /ŋ/ where the chronicler wrote *ilon* instead of **ilong/irong** [iLONG/iRONG] 'nose', *nipin* instead of **ngípon** 'teeth', *apin* instead of **áping** 'cheek'" (27). These linguistic difficulties, technically referred to in linguistics as accommodation, lead to misunderstanding of local customs. Accommodation is where loanwords that do not conform to native phonological patterns are modified

to fit the phonological combinations which are permitted in the borrowing language (Campbell 1999, 61; Liao 2024, 65-66). Forman (1993), however, limits his discussion to the vocabulary list by Pigafetta (B&R 1906, 33:187-199).

Linguistic Accommodation During the Initial Contact

First contact could be either hostile or friendly. The March 17, 1521 first contact between the people in the Suluan-Humonhon area and the Magellan expedition could be described as friendly contact. Friendly first contact usually involves linguistic accommodation. Ruch and de Benito Moreno (2023, 17) define linguistic accommodation as "the adjustments speakers make to become linguistically more (convergence) or less (divergence) similar to an interlocutor, or to a social environment." Accommodation can also involve non-verbal communication and other kinds of social behavior (Lakin 2013, Dijksterhuis and Bargh 2001) as seen in Pigafetta's account:

> On the 18th of March… **they made signs to us with their hands** that in four days they would bring us Umai, which is rice, cocos, and many other victuals. (Stanley [1874] 2010, 72)
>
> On Monday afternoon, 18 March, after eating, we saw a boat coming toward us with nine men in it; …, **giving signs of joy because of our arrival.** (Cachey 2007, 88 [parag. 51; sentence 297])
>
> Friday, the 22nd of March, the above-mentioned people, … came about midday, …, **to give us to understand that they had poultry in their country**, so that we bought all that they brought. (Stanley [1874] 2010, 74)
>
> At noon on Friday, 22 March, …. **They exhibited great signs of pleasure at seeing us.** (Cachey 2007, 89 [parag. 54; sentence 326])
>
> Most of the communication was through **sign language and some interpretation by a Malayan servant of Magellan**... (Schreurs 1989, 9)
>
> These people became very familiar and friendly with us, and **explained many things to us in their language**. (Stanley [1874] 2010, 73)

At this point, Pigafetta named the earring "schione" (see Pigafetta in Stanley [1874] 2010, 74). Did Pigafetta hear it right, or is this a garbled transcription or misheard phrase?

More or less seventy years later, *The Boxer Codex* observes this same custom: "The men and women have many holes in their lobes, and in these openings, they place many objects and gold ornaments that are made very exquisitely" (Boxer Codex 1590 in Donoso et al. 2022, 40-41); Loarca in B&R 1903, 5:117). Alcina, writing in 1668, identifies this type of earring as *pasuc-pasuc* (better pasok-pasok) (Kobak and Gutierrez 2002, 1:105), clearly different from *panica* (better *panika*) or *pamarang* (Kobak and Gutierrez 2002, 103). Kobak and Gutierrez annotate on pasok-pasok: "perhaps, is derived from the root *pasuk* or *pasukan, paskan*: wooden peg used to join two boards or pieces of wood" (111). From the semantics of this

word, we can say that pasok-pasok is a cognate of the Tagalog and Cebuano word *pasok* meaning 'to enter.'

It was apparent that in the first contact, there were instances that meanings and intentions were not properly transported. "In its very imperfection and errancy, translation can take on a political significance. Its shortcomings and excesses vis-à-vis the original potentially put in crisis the interpretation and circulation of meaning as well as the authority of the original and its author" (Rafael 2015, 86).

Misreading the Native: Schione

The term "schione" appears in Pigafetta's account to refer to the earrings as "pendants of gold jewels" (B&R 1906, 33:108-109). However, "schione," in terms of form and meaning in Waray or any Bisayan language is nonsense. It doesn't fit the CV-, and CVC- syllabic patterns in Austronesian languages (see Blust 2013, 235; Dyen 1953, 360). The closest cluster of phonological features in Bisaya/Waray that are phonemic or meaningful is the phrase "kiyô 'ni." *Kiyô* is from PWMP *kiut 'movement in coitus' (Blust and Trussel, in prog.). Metaphorically speaking, this refers to the beautification or the ritualistic practice of ear plugging (earlobes with holes). Ear plugging is observed in Maitum anthropomorphic jars among the Tbolis in Southwestern Mindanao (Tiu 2021, 7; 15; Boxer Codex 1590 in Donoso et al. 2016, 40-41). When Pigafetta through the translator Panglima Awang asked: what is that (pointing to the gold earring), the native replied: kiyô 'ni"—meaning: 'this is an earlobe with holes' (probably adding the in and out movement of the earring with the hole). The phrase "kiyô 'ni" is composed of a noun *kiyô* and the deictic 'ni, which is short for the demonstrative pronoun ini 'this' (near both the speaker and the hearer). This fits the description of Alcina (1668) on the type of earring called pasok-pasok (Kobak and Gutierrez 2002, 1:105). According to the poet Adonis Durado (2024, p.c.): "The Cebuano meaning of pasok is 'to insert.' As a noun, it means 'stake.' It makes perfect sense that pasok-pasok is an ancient word for 'earring.'"

A first contact chronicler like Pigafetta "shows us instances of cross-cultural mistakes, language misunderstandings. Some of these involve difficulties with handling sounds: luia for ginger (luy-a in Wolff 1972, 694); they did not know how to spell a word that sounded like that—the glottal stop. There were word-final sounds that they did not hear. As in the voiceless velar stop /k/, Pigafetta wrote *boho* instead of buhok, *pilla* for pilak" (Forman 1993, 27).

As to why problems like these are not taken up in Philippine historiography, perhaps is symptomatic of the continuing subsidiary and marginalized roles of local culture (Gandhi 1998).

Misreading the Native: The Case Marker Si and Sang

Case markers are particles that appear before a noun (Brainard 1985, 123; Ho 1990, 102; Fukuda 1997, 47; cf. Reid 2002). In the Bisayan languages such as Waray, there

are two types of case markers—those that precede a generic noun such as *an, it, san/han, sin/hin, sa/ha*[5] as in:

an bata 'a/the child' (absolutive, true all the time)
it bata 'the child' (absolutive, true at the moment of speaking, or for a particular instance)
san/han bata 'by/of the child' (genitive/ergative definite-specific)
sin/hin bata 'by/of the child' (genitive/ergative indefinite)
sa/ha plaza 'at/in the plaza' (oblique/locative)

and those that precede proper names such as *hi/si, hira/sila, nira*, etc. For example:

si/hi Matikat (absolutive, Matikat)
ni Matikat (genitive/ergative, Matikat)
sira/hira Kanbul (absolutive, Kanbul and company)
nira Humabon (genitive/ergative, Humabon and company)

The absolutive case marker *si/hi* like its ergative/genitive plural, and absolutive plural counterparts, is found in Malay/Indonesian/Old Javanese, and other Austronesian languages. It is interesting to note that the use of pre-nominal in Malay/Indonesian/Old Javanese entails social hierarchy. The *si* is used for common people, and the pre-nominal *sang* is used for high-ranking members of the community (Postma 1992, 192; cf. Breukink 1906, 85). In Malay/Indonesian/Old Javanese, one cannot refer to the chieftain *si Raja* 'the king'; *si Pendeta* 'the priest'; *si Putri* 'the Princess.' The proper usage is 'sang Raja,' 'sang Pendeta,' 'sang Putri.' This usage is still true today with Malay and Indonesian languages. The Waray ergative/genitive case marker *san/han* could be a reflex of the Malay *sang*. Ezguerra (1747, 5) describes the prenominal si as 'palabra de dignidad' [a word of dignity] (see also Breukink 1906, 85), whose meaning was lost in the next generation of speakers with regard to the use of the case marker si (cf. Sanchez de la Rosa 1895, 294-295).

Most revisits of Pigafetta's account such as that of the National Quincentennial Committee (Blood Compact | Casi-Casi | Sandugo at Pagbubuo ng mga Bayan), Angeles (2007), Field (2006), Testa-de Ocampo (2010), Dimacali (2018), Noone (1986), and Gerona (2016), to name a few, simply accept the Bisayan terms found in the account. Central to this, as far as this study is concerned, is the word *casi casi*, which "is seldom interrogated in Philippine historiography" (Aguilar 2010, 79).

Theoretical Framework

Language is not only a way to talk about history; it is where history happens. As Adorno ([1951] 2005, 219) affirms, "history does not merely touch on language but takes place in it." This perspective is crucial for rereading early contact narratives like Pigafetta's, where linguistic transcription becomes both a record of encounter and a site of misrecognition. Moreover, Foucault's (1972, 108-11) insight—that history is shaped not just by what is said, but by what is left unsaid—also urges us to pay attention to the gaps, silences, and distortions embedded in the record.

In this rereading, such distortions are not mere noise, but meaningfully symptomatic of colonial asymmetry. Bridging these continental theorists with the Filipino intellectual tradition, Mojares (2002a) situates the "discovery" of the Philippines as a textual event, a construct of words: "The European 'discovery' of the Philippine archipelago is not just an event; it is a text, a construct of words…" (20)—thereby validating linguistic analysis as a legitimate historical intervention. This theoretical convergence grounds the present study's use of morphological and semantic analysis to question the assumed transparency of terms like *casi casi*.

Symbolic anthropologists argue that, like language, symbols are a shared system of meaning that can only be understood within a particular historical and social context. Culture, they believe, lies in people's interpretations of the events and the things around them. In other words, symbolic anthropologists believe we construct our cultural reality (McGee and Warms 2008, 482). Geertz writes, "cultural analysis is (or should be) guessing at meanings, assessing the guesses, and drawing explanatory conclusions from the better guesses" (1973, 20).

In linguistics, reduplication[6] is a morphological process which repeats the morphological base in its entirety, or only partially (Haspelmath 2002, 274), for some morphological purpose (Inkelas and Downing 2015, 502). Full reduplication is the repetition of the entire root. In Bisayan languages, full reduplication has the following semantic functions, as in Table 1:

Table 1. Semantic functions of full reduplication in some Central Philippine languages

Language	Meaning of reduplication
Bikol	express intensity, plurality (i.e. iterativity, reversativity, distributivity, …), diminution (i.e. attenuation, similarity, imitation); the reduplicated form designates something more specific from what is designated by the simplex form (Mattes 2006, 2; Lobel and Tria 2000, 90)
Tagalog	play, game, bahay 'house' > bahay-bahayan 'a play where you pretend to be a family' (Lopez 1928, 1939, 1941); moderation (Kaufman, 2024, p.c.)
Cebuano	the reduplicated form designates something more specific from what is designated by the simplex form, e.g., bahaw-bahaw; (Wolff 1972:87)

In other words, diminution, plurality, and intensity are semantically/cognitively closely related (Mattes 2006, 13; Kouwenberg and LaCharité 2005). Moreover, even if the morphology of the word kasi-kási seems to be ambiguous to non-native speakers, "Most words can be accurately disambiguated on the basis of information in sentences in which they occur" (Miller 1978: 98 quoted in Mattes 2006, 10). "Polysemes do not create problems for the language use, because they are rendered monosemes by their context" (Mattes 2006, 13).

Diminution in nouns means that the root "forms a new stem that refers to a smaller, toy or 'artificial' version of the original referent" (Payne and Oyzon, forthcoming). A similar semantic function is found in Cebuano, Hiligaynon, Bikol (Mattes 2006, 2), Tagalog (Lopez 1941; 1939), Kapampangan (Pangilinan 2014), etc.

This morpheme, a full reduplication of root, is attested in many roots, and stem from other Austronesian languages in the Philippines (cf. Eades 2005, 53). For example, accordingly, *kari* which refers to 'curry' is a Kapampangan meat dish with a thick creamy sauce made of ground toasted peanuts, fresh grated turmeric, safflower, pepper, and garlic, thickened with toasted rice powder, while *kari-kari* means 'curry-like' (Pangilinan 2014). In Kagayanen, full reduplication means "pretend to do X" (Pebley and Payne 2024, 321). The same morphological process in Bikol could "have an augmentative meaning (plural and intensive) on the one hand, and diminutive meaning (attenuative and imitative) on the other" (Mattes 2006, 1), as in *harong* 'house,' *harong-harong* 'house-like.' The same morpheme could indicate "a tinge of lightness (or even playfulness)" in Cagayano Sebanon (Cantular 2018, 33).

To support this hypothesis, let us examine full reduplication in other Austronesian languages (cf. Haiduck 2013, 4) outside the Philippines as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Reduplication in some Austronesian languages

Language	Meaning of reduplication
Javanese	play, pretend, attenuative (Miyake 2011, 5)
	- masak 'cook' > masak-masakan 'cooking game'
	- dhelik 'hide' > dhelik-dhelikan 'hide and seek'
	- pasar 'market' > pasar-pasar 'market game'
Sundanese	play, pretend
	- boneka 'doll' > bobonekaan 'pretending to be doll or a fake version of a doll'
	- imah 'house' > iimah 'pretend house'
Malagasy	play, pretend
	- vary 'cook' > kivarivary 'cooking game'
Balinese	diminution; conveying approximative/toy-like interpretations (Haiduck 2013, 12)
	- sepeda 'bicycle' > sepeda-seped-an 'bicycle toy'
	- be 'fish' > be-be-an 'fish toy'
Tukang Besi	imitative/game-playing (Donohue 1999, 42, 299)
Mangap-Mbula	diminutive/approximative (Bugenhagen 1995, 182)
Gayo	approximation (Eades 2005, 57)
Malay	pluralization; diminutive (Crawfurd 1852, 122)
	- caracoa > kuda-kuda 'small horse' (Combés, Retana, and Pastells ([1667] 1897, 786)

This widespread use of reduplication across Austronesian languages—as a marker of imitation, play, or diminution—provides typological support for interpreting kasi-kási as a performative rather than sincere expression of alliance.

Materials and Method

Using archival materials, dictionaries from the 16th to the 19th century, and early accounts, this study applies internal criticism (Bloch 1953) to construct a rereading of Pigafetta's *Primo viaggio intorno al mondo* using the B&R ([1525] 1906) translation, although other editions were also consulted for cross-checking. In 1953, Bloch (101), discussing the error of perception by witnesses, identified two circumstances that impair the accuracy of perception: 1) condition of the observer at the time, and 2) the degree of attention. To these, as in ethnography, we could add the language barrier as another factor.

Since no account from the native's side survived, I replicate William Henry Scott's method in 1994 in his successful attempt to depict the life of 16th century Bisayan society using the vocabulary found in the dictionaries written by pioneering missionaries.

Discussion

The blood compact was a widely practiced precolonial covenant ritual, signified through the symbolic exchange of blood (Trumbull 1885; cf. Oschema 2006; see also Keegan 1993, 175; O'Connell 1989, 17 quoted in Angeles 2007, 20). The native word for blood compact is *sandugo*[7] (Boxer Codex 1590 in Donoso et al. 2016, 57; Loarca 1582 in B&R 1903, 5:161-163; Sanchez [1617] 1711, 454; Lisboa [1754] 1865, 5-6; Mentrida 1841, 351; De la Encarnación 1885, 332; Noceda and Sanlucar 1754, 483; 284; Wolff 1972, 919; Alcina in Kobak & Gutierrez no date, 4: 156). It is a contraction of *usa nga dugo*, or *isang dugo* 'one blood' (cf. Wolff 1972, 919). White (1994) describes the ritual thus:

> two men met at an appointed time, and each made a small cut on a specific part of his body. Each man offered the other some of his blood, either on a coffee berry or a nut or from his hand. Each then drank or ate the other's blood, they were solemnly declared blood brothers, and the ceremony ended. Any breach of reciprocity or loyalty would be punished by supernatural sanctions, sometimes enacted by supernatural agents, sometimes by the blood itself. (359)

In contrast, the word *kasi*[8] conveys a different semantic field: it denotes 'intimate friend' (Noceda and Sanlucar 1754, 85), 'fellow' (Makabenta and Makabenta 2004, 34), 'neighbor' (Sanchez de la Rosa 1914, 132), or 'comrade' (Tramp 1995, 204). It is the lexical root of kasi-kási (recorded by Pigafetta as casi casi; B&R 1906, 33:117), described by another eye witness Gines de Mafra (Schreurs 2000, 94-5), and once known member of the Magellan expedition (Schreurs 2000, 97-8). While kasi implies elective kinship—chosen fraternity that often supersedes blood ties—its reduplicated form kasi-kási introduces significant semantic modifications. Kasi (Potet 2016, 101) or sandugo is a true signifier of brotherhood and peace—when they become kasi, it means they are equal to if not better than brothers because they have chosen to be so: *magkasi-bugto* or *magkasi-igsuon* 'equal as brothers.'

Kasi also implies the inherent alien status of one versus the other but they chose to be one against the apparent mutual alien-ness of one to the other. There is something sacred and binding in this arrangement. But once *kasi* undergoes reduplication in kasi-kási, the whole concept possibly becomes a sham. Pigafetta would not understand this, but Enrique de Malacca would (see Magdalena 2023, 199), and so would the Siamese trader, Humabon, and Kolambu.

To further sharpen the contrast, it is necessary to distinguish sandugo and kasi-kási not only semantically but also morphologically and pragmatically. While both rituals may have appeared equivalent to Pigafetta and the Spaniards, they occupy distinct positions within the indigenous lexicon of alliance. Sandugo (literally "one blood") is a compound nominal form denoting a binding ritual of unity, typically solemn, reciprocal, and accompanied by supernatural sanction. In contrast, kasi-kási is a reduplicated nominal form whose structure signals attenuation, imitation, or play—suggesting a symbolic gesture rather than a binding oath. The reduplication in kasi-kási undermines the sincerity implied by kasi, turning the ritual into a tactical performance. A structural comparison in Table 3 may illustrate this more clearly.

Table 3. Semantic, morphological, and pragmatic comparison of sandugo and kasi-kási

Feature	***sandugo***	***kasi-kási***
morphological structure	*usa* + *nga* + *dugo* ("one" + "blood")	full reduplication of *kasi*
lexical root	*dugo* ("blood")	*kasi* ("fellow," "comrade," "friend")
semantic domain	ritual kinship, oath, sacred unity	pretend kinship, attenuated alliance
pragmatic function	binding pact, sincere alliance	performative diplomacy, strategic ambiguity
sociopolitical implication	mutual trust, enduring commitment	calculated appearance of alliance
consequence of violation	supernatural or social retribution	ambiguous, potentially deceptive

This opposition emphasizes the misalignment between indigenous and European expectations: while the Spaniards may have believed they had entered a binding alliance (sandugo), local leaders may have staged a kasi-kási—a gesture of diplomatic tact designed to disarm without true submission. Although reduplication in Austronesian languages often signals plurality, intensification, or repetition, such functions are not universally applicable. Specifically, in the case of relational nouns like kasi, reduplication tends to express diminution, simulation, or artificiality. This is evident in examples like tatay-tatayan ('pretend father') bata-bata (doll, side kick), or bahay-bahayan ('playhouse'). Consequently, interpreting kasi-kási as 'many friends' or 'repeated friendship' imposes a verb-centric logic onto a nominal root, thereby misrepresenting its sociolinguistic nuance.

In Philippine and Austronesian linguistics, reduplication of verbs commonly expresses habitual or iterative action—e.g., lakaw-lakaw 'to walk around repeatedly'—but this function does not generalize across word classes. As such, it

does not follow a pattern similar to verbs in terms of their reduplicative function. To read kasi-kási as simply meaning 'many friends' or 'repeated friendship' would thus impose an ill-fitting grammatical analogy and miss the deeper socio-pragmatic cues of the historical context.

As previously discussed, Mattes (2006, 13) emphasizes that polysemy rarely leads to confusion, since contextual cues resolve ambiguity. That is, while a word form may carry multiple potential meanings, the immediate cultural and discursive environment delimits its interpretation. In Pigafetta's account, the context of kasi-kási within a diplomatic interaction suggests not sincere kinship, but a ritualized performance of alliance. Thus, while kasi-kási might, in a different setting, take on other connotations, its use here appears aligned with reduplication's function of simulating or mimicking a social bond, not reinforcing or multiplying it. In this context, kasi-kási functions as a form of "sly civility" (Bhabha 1985 quoted in Huddart 2006, 40), where displays of cordiality mask underlying skepticism, strategic delay, or even resistance. The reduplication, then, underscores not repetition or plurality, but a distancing from the full authenticity of kasi—a vital distinction in interpreting early contact rituals.

This re-interpretation also reframes the May 1, 1521 massacre. While Pigafetta surmised that Enrique incited the attack, a closer linguistic and cultural reading suggests that Humabon and his allies may have engaged in kasi-kási not as an oath of loyalty but as a tactical façade. If sandugo represents sincere and binding alliance, kasi-kási—imbued with imitative and attenuated meaning—signifies diplomatic ambiguity, a calculated display of trust designed to disarm or deceive.

While some might interpret the reduplication in kasi-kási as suggesting "doubleness" or the creation of a symbolic mirrored self—akin to how sandugo (blood compact) represents two persons becoming one—this reading is not supported by historical or linguistic evidence. The root word kasi consistently appears in early and modern sources with meanings related to social affiliation rather than identity fusion. All primary definitions of kasi denote social proximity, not ontological fusion. Reduplication in this case signals imitation, not intensification.

If sandugo was a ritual of binding and sincere alliance, kasi-kási—with its diminutive and imitative sense—may represent a ritual of appearance, an act of diplomatic pretense that cloaked deeper ambivalence or political calculation. Rather than indicating mutual transformation, this could suggest a subtle form of local resistance that outwardly conformed while covertly refusing (Bhabha 1985, 71-80). Thus, while the idea of "doubleness" is an interesting metaphorical possibility, it does not align with the actual semantics or cultural usage of kasi-kási in Philippine languages.

Viewed through the lens of indigenous political performance, as articulated by Angeles (2007), kasi-kási exemplifies the use of ritual as strategy. In "the risk-averse, aggregative, display-oriented, skirmish-style discourse on war," as Angeles (2007, 40) describes it, diplomacy and deception were often intertwined. Accordingly,

what appears as betrayal from a colonial standpoint may in fact constitute covert assertion of agency through culturally sanctioned means of interaction. Antonio Pigafetta's assertion that Enrique deceived Humabon into orchestrating the slaughter of the expedition's surviving crew after May 1, 1521 (see also B&R 1903, 1: 326-27; Moriz 1882, quoted in Mojares 2021, 60, note 15), indicates their incomplete understanding of kasi-kási.

Psycho-Social Context of the Kasi-Kási

Consequently, using Occam's razor, the diminutive/attenuative/imitative meanings explain why Enrique escaped the May 1, 1521 massacre of the Magellan-Elcano crew unscathed.[9] We now understand why there was a massacre. Enrique de Malacca's role in the kasi-kási episode deserves greater attention as a figure situated at the complex intersection of language, power, and cultural identity. Often cast in European narratives as a mere servant or suspected traitor, Enrique should instead be reexamined as a multilingual cultural broker whose agency lay precisely in his liminality. As a Malay-speaking intermediary who likely understood Visayan and had fluency in Portuguese or Spanish, Enrique was uniquely positioned to grasp the subtle semantic distinctions between terms like kasi—attested in Malay as kasih 'affection, love' (Crawfurd 1852, 69), and their reduplicated forms. His exposure to the polysemous functions of reduplication in both Malay and languages in the Philippines would have made him sensitive to the imitative or attenuated meanings implied in kasi-kási. Yet, despite—or perhaps because of—this awareness, he appears to have withheld clarification during the ritual exchanges between Magellan and Humabon. Psychologically, this silence may reflect a form of affective refusal, a survival strategy born of the trauma of captivity and the instability of his status. Linguistically, it suggests a deliberate modulation of meaning through omission, allowing the ritual to proceed as an ambiguous performance rather than a binding pact. Postcolonially, Enrique exemplifies the subaltern translator whose refusal to fully render the local into the colonizer's language becomes an act of resistance. In this reading, kasi-kási itself is not merely a mistranslated term but a space of strategic misrecognition—one that Enrique helped maintain, thus weaponizing misunderstanding to preserve local autonomy in the face of imperial intrusion.The "blood compact" ritual from the very beginning between Magellan and Humabon may not be a kasi or sandugo (i.e., fellowship, equal as brothers), but a kasi-kási (i.e., like to a fellowship, or may be a pretend-fellowship).

The semantics of kasi-kási as 'pretend friendship' may reflect a broader indigenous diplomatic strategy of warfare and diplomacy. Angeles (2007), in his re-examination of the Battle of Mactan, outlines how Visayan martial culture valued strategic display, misdirection, and ritualized confrontation. Within this framework, the kasi-kási, which is different from sandugo, need not signify sincere allegiance but may reflect a tactical performance—meant to delay aggression, manipulate perceptions, or assert cultural agency.

In light of this rereading of kasi-kási, Humabon's behavior is understandable since before their kasi-kási was initiated, there already was a Magellan-Kolambu kasi-kási, which in a way was conducted with some level of uncertainty due to language barrier and distrust (B&R 1906, 33: 113). Kolambu's actions may exemplify such diplomatic deflection. Pigafetta recounts that the Raja of Limasawa offered high-value gifts as a gesture for the Spaniards to leave—a subtle refusal disguised as generosity (B&R 1906, 33:115).

Kolambu and Humabon indirectly defied Magellan without him realizing that he had been deceived. Kasi-kási, therefore, may not have been a sincere blood compact. The Magellan-Kolambu kasi-kási and the Magellan-Humabon kasi-kási could be a form of evasion by the local leaders. This may help to explain why Humabon's nephew (Tupas) acted as an emissary, together with Kolambu in the conduct of the Magellan-Humabon kasi-kási, during which Magellan questioned if the "prince and the king of Mazaua had [the] authority to make peace" (B&R 1906, 33:143).[10] With this, Magellan inadvertently highlighted the ambiguous and performative nature of their earlier ritual engagement.

Maybe this rereading of kasi-kási could explain why the subsequent Villalobos expedition (1541-1546) (B&R 1903, 2:69-70), and the Legaspi expedition (1565) (B&R 1903, 2:201, 111) were perplexed by this behavior of the inhabitants. They could not understand the betrayals after they performed the kasi-kási with the locals. These perplexities become intelligible when kasi-kási is read not as failed diplomacy, but as a culturally resonant form of diplomatic evasion.

Blind Spot in Philippine Historiography

Contemporary Filipino scholars (Field 2006; Rodriguez 2003; Forman 1993; Gerona 2021; Sta. Maria 2021, among others), who revisited the account of Pigafetta failed to see the performative nature of kasi-kási. They accept kasi-kási as unproblematic, thus failing to interrogate its layered performativity. Although Mojares (2002b, 62) was aware of errors, misidentification, and mistranscriptions of terms, personal names, and place names in the Philippine section in Pigafetta's account, he did not delve into the linguistic morphology of kasi-kási. However, Mojares (1997, 107), it must be pointed out, is well aware of the diminutive/similative function of full reduplication.

In the book *Arrivals, Conflict, and Transformation in Maritime Southeast Asia, 1400s-1800s* (2022), an artist's rendition of kasi-kási is spread after the title page. The editors and the contributors didn't comment on the semantics of kasi-kási, an indication that Pigafetta's observation of kasi-kási is acceptable and a non-issue (see also Almario 2003).

This semantic misrecognition is symptomatic of a broader epistemological blind spot in Philippine historiography: the persistent undervaluing of native linguistic forms as keys to cultural understanding (Oyzon 2023). For centuries, Philippine languages have been marginalized in the production of official historical

knowledge. As a result, interpretive possibilities rooted in local grammar and morphology—such as the attenuative nuance of kasi-kási—remain unexplored or dismissed.

Conclusion

The proposed linguistic and cultural re-examination of kasi-kási, as recorded in Pigafetta's account of the Magellan expedition, challenges the long-standing historical assumptions about the nature of early Filipino-European diplomacy. By applying Austronesian morphological analysis, it repositions kasi-kási not as a transparent synonym of sandugo, but as a ritualized simulation of kinship—an act of strategic diplomacy rather than genuine alliance. These meanings—'playfulness,' 'pretend,' or 'a lesser version of X'—appear to have eluded Pigafetta and Magellan, as well as many modern historians.

While the blood compact (sandugo) was likely a longstanding diplomatic institution among local polities, kasi-kási appears to be its performative variant, activated in contexts of linguistic and cultural asymmetry. Drawing on Bhabha's (1985) notion of "sly civility," kasi-kási emerges here as a ritual of resistance—a calculated gesture of alliance that cloaked strategic uncertainty or refusal. Such a performance was possible precisely because of the ambiguity introduced through translation and intercultural contact. This is in line with the premodern Southeast Asian concept of performative loyalty without actual submission as argued by Susilowati, Sulistiyono, and Rochwulaningsih (2018).

Though Magellan had an interpreter—Enrique de Malacca—and Humabon relied on a Siamese intermediary, the encounter remained linguistically mediated and culturally misaligned. It is precisely this asymmetry that enabled kasi-kási to function: a term that appeared familiar to the Spanish but, within the local semantic and political universe, meant something more ambivalent. One can speculate whether Enrique or the Siamese translator grasped the subtlety of this performance (Bergreen 2003, 292-94); their complicity or understanding, if present, may have allowed the local actors to subvert Magellan's expectations from within the very language used to form diplomatic ties.

One interesting question is whether kasi-kási, as a ceremonial form of diminishing or strategic friendship, was carried out just among foreigners or also among indigenous chieftains.[11] While the blood compact (sandugo) as a diplomatic practice was likely an indigenous institution predating the Magellan encounter, the specific variant or performance of kasi-kási—as simulated fellowship—may have been culturally innovated or strategically amplified in response to foreign contact. There is limited evidence in historical or ethnographic sources that suggests local chieftains engaged in such diminished or pretended forms of alliance with one another using the same ritual codes. This may be because local forms of alliance among polities were governed by more stable relational categories such as *kaupod, kasama, kasugbong, kasangkot*, or *kaduha*. These terms connote mutual involvement, not simulated ties.

In this sense, Bhabha's 'sly civility' aligns with the Visayan tradition of indirect resistance through ritual diplomacy. It is a performance that depends on misreading or misinterpretation—the very conditions that emerge when two parties do not fully share language or cultural context. This aligns with the unique multilingual mediation documented during the Magellan encounter, in which messages passed through at least three levels of translation. Between indigenous actors who shared the same language and ritual framework, such ambiguity would be difficult to sustain, making kasi-kási less likely to function as a tool for internal deception. In this reading, the kasi-kási performed for Magellan and his crew was a situational performance—a way of navigating a diplomatically uncertain encounter by staging a version of kinship that was recognizable but non-binding. In the guise of mutual understanding, kasi-kási may have allowed Visayan leaders to weaponize misunderstanding, performing peace while safeguarding autonomy.

The root kasi may index sincerity and closeness, as attested in historical dictionaries (Noceda and Sanlucar 1754, 143; 1860, 85; Sanchez de la Rosa 1914, 132; *inter alia*), but when reduplicated as kasi-kási, the form opens up space for strategic reinterpretation. It becomes not the embodiment of sincere kinship, but its outward performance—a communicative act designed to meet the expectations of a foreign other while preserving one's political autonomy. This reading acknowledges the ritual's indigenous origin while also recognizing the capacity for innovation in the face of colonial intrusion.

Kasi-kási represents a semantic mask, a lexical sleight-of-hand, used not to deceive maliciously but to navigate power imbalances through ritual indirection. In this light, kasi-kási becomes emblematic of the broader dynamic in which indigenous peoples engaged with European colonizers—not with passive acquiescence, but through calculated performances of recognition and refusal.

While Enrique and the Siamese interpreter ostensibly bridged linguistic gaps, the interpretive misalignments remained. Perhaps they perceived the strategic vagueness in kasi-kási, participating—knowingly or not—in a ritual of mistranslation. If, as Robert Young (2003, 118) contends, "a colony begins in translation," then the earliest acts of colonization in the Philippine archipelago were already being resisted in translation.

Endnotes

1. This paper was read during the online academic conference The Common Places of our Lives: A Conversation Series, held on September 20 to 21, 2024, via Zoom. This activity was sponsored by the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) in partnership with the University of San Carlos Cebuano Studies Center (CSC) and the Mamugnaong Anak sa Dagang (MAD).
2. See also McCarl's (2019) "The Transmission and Bibliographic Study of the Pigafetta Account: Synthesis and Update," which talks about how one may find the original manuscripts or earlier publications that different translations and editions come from.
3. It must be noted that there is no j /ʤ/ in Bisayan languages, except for Boholano. Pigafetta wrote Raia (B&R 1903, 1:135), since j in 16th century Europe was a fancy way of writing the letter I, or /i/ sound. For example: San Iuanillo for San Juanillo; Iunio for Junio; Iulio for Julio (Colin and Pastells 1663/1900, Cap. XII, 32; Cap. XI, 45) but uses letter j in medial: mejores, Quijote, arroja for the /h/ sound. So, the Sanskrit raja [ra-ʤa] is articulated as [RAyah] in Bisayan, but [Rahah] in Spanish and borrowed into Tagalog.
4. See also Thomaz (2019) for an updated and detailed discussion on Malay glossary in Pigafetta's account.
5. See Pagsantop han Winaray: Understanding Waray Grammar by Payne and Oyzon (Xavier University Press), forthcoming, for a detailed discussion of these case markers in Waray.
6. In Polynesian, the same grammatical device, reduplication, which has the meaning 'pseudo' or '-like,' is also used in the naming of new flora and fauna (see Biggs 1994, 22; see also Blust 2013, 412-437, for a detailed discussion on the morphological process of reduplication in Austronesian languages).
7. I am grateful to Dr. Rolando O. Borrinaga for providing me with access to Alcina's book 4, where sandugo is discussed as practiced in Leyte and Samar. (See also Kobak and Gutierrez 2002, 1:47).
8. Kasi, in the Sama subfamily of Indonesian languages such as Mapun (Collins, Collins, and Hashim 2001, 235), and even in Malay (Wilkinson 1901, 494-95; Thomaz 2019, 121) and Tausug (Hassan, Ashley, and Ashley 1994, 228), means 'love.' In Waray, the form is igkasi 'fellow' (Makabenta and Makabenta 2004, 66), or 'comrade' (Tramp 1995, 204), and from the same root, kasi. The benefactive affix i-, or ig-, is also found in the forms like igkaanak 'relative,' igsuon 'sibling,' igmanghod 'younger brother,' and ig-uutod 'cousin' (Scott 1994, 137; cf. kási [Sp. casi]), 'nearly, about, somewhat more or less, almost' (cf. bílang, daw); also, kási 'to bet, lay, lay a wager, put one's money on, wager, stake' (Kaufmann [1934] 2016, 221). A cognate to kasi-kási (cf. casicasi 'Diligente' [diligent] Sanchez [1617] 1711, 132) is the Bisayan wine from rice called pangasi (distributive affix paN- + kasi),

which literally means 'for making friends,' "a mixture of honey and water and other ingredients" (Alcina 1668 quoted in Kobak and Gutierrez 2005, 3:437; Boxer Codex 1590 quoted in Donoso et al. 2022, 57; Colin 1663 quoted in B&R 1906, 40:66; Sanchez [1617] 1711, 483). Another cognate to the root kasi is found in the Waray expression 'waray pangasi' or 'waray asiha'—that is, one saw a friend but just got ignored. In other words, one feels not treated as a friend because, metaphorically speaking, one was not given a drink.

9. However, according to the Genoese pilot, Enrique died with Magellan (Stanley [1874] 2010, 14).
10. However, in Oliveira (Wionzek 2022, 53; Schreurs 2021, 97), the Portuguese account suggests that Humabon was personally there to conduct the kasi-kási with Magellan.
11. The pacto de sangre between Datu Bwisan of Maguindanao and the datus of Leyte, a week after the raid of Dulag in 1603, which captured the Jesuit Melchor Hurtado, comes to mind (see de la Costa 1961, 295). One wonders: what term was employed to denote their 'pact of blood'? Kasih, a word for love, affection, or compassion in Maguindanaoan language, is a cognate to Waray kasi 'fellow.' Nota Bene: the name Buwisan could be morphologically analyzed as buhis 'tribute' + -an.
12. According to historian Rolando O. Borrinaga, "Siaui (better Awi) or Siagu in the Spanish chronicles might have been misheard versions of Si Argaw. The root word is Argaw (Premna vestita Schauer), adgaw or abgaw elsewhere, a medicinal plant used for multiple ailments. The raja of Calagan and Butuan who had met Magellan in Mazaua might have also been a tambalan associated with the argaw plant. The name Surigao might have been corrupted from Si Argaw, its raja at the Spanish contact."

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Appendix

Table 4 lists the names of datus mentioned by Pigafetta in his account. In the Visayas, aside from qualities and observable characteristics, children could also be named after flora and fauna: Buaya 'crocodile' (*Crocodylidae*); Pagô 'Yellow vented bulbul' (*Pycnonotus goiavier*); Lapulapu 'grouper' (*Epinephelus spp.*). At a glance, one would notice the repetition of the syllable si/ci in each personal name. This is an indication that the chronicler is not familiar with the language and that he fails to hear the word boundaries. In Spanish, when the vowels i, or e comes after letter c, it is pronounced as [s], and is pronounced as /k/ when it is followed by a, o, or u. In Ifugao, names of children are not taken from a mountain but from a tree or a plant (Manuel 1975, 157; see also Chirino [1604] in Gorriz i Abella and Arcilla 2010, 295). The name Miligoy in Waray folk song is probably taken from flora *Erigeron sumatrensis* Retz (Madulid 2001:482).[12]

Table 4. Names of Datus mentioned by Pigafetta (1521 in B&R 1906)

Datu's name according to Pigafetta	Rereading	Glossary
Sibnaia	si Binaya	root báyà, 'the one who left' (Sanchez de la Rosa 1914, 28)
Simiut	si Miyot	'the one who puts things together, collects, and puts away' (Sanchez de la Rosa 1914, 207)
Sibuaia	si Buaya	'the crocodile' (Sanchez de la Rosa 1914, 57)
Sisacai	si Sakay	'the one who embarks'(Sanchez de la Rosa 1914, 273)
Cilaton	si Laton	'the who strikes twice or more' (Sanchez de la Rosa 1914, 182)
Ciguibucan	si Gibucan or Gibucang	'the open-mouthed' (Sanchez de la Rosa 1914, 58)

Cimaninga	si Maninga	root tinga, 'the one who grinds teeth' (Sanchez de la Rosa 1914, 357)
Cimaticat	si Matikas	root tikas, 'the one who steals' (Sanchez de la Rosa 1914, 351; cf. Noceda and Sanlucar 1860, 335)
Cicanbul	si Cambud	'the one who climbs [like a vine]' (Sanchez de la Rosa 1914, 82)
Cilumai	si Lumay	'the one who charms; the one who captivates by charm' (Makabenta and Makabenta 2004, 79)
Raia Maleggis	Raya Maligis	'the one who grinds' ("moler cacao, trigo, cafe, pintura" [grinds cocoa, wheat, coffee, paint]) (Sanchez de la Rosa 1914, 185)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Voltaire Q. Oyzon teaches Waray language at Leyte Normal University. He also serves as a Senior Lecturer at UP Tacloban College. As a student of Waray language, he is interested in local history, toponymy, and Austronesian linguistics. Some of his research outputs were published in *Kinaadman: A Journal of Southern Philippines*, *Philippine Journal of Linguistics*, and *South East Asia Research*. Some of his collaborative works include articles in *Applicative Morphology: Neglected Syntactic and Non-syntactic Functions* published by de Gruyter Mouton, and in *Reflexive Constructions in the World's Languages* issued by the Language Science Press co-authored with the linguistic typologist Thomas E. Payne. Their book *Pagsantop han Winaray: Understanding Waray Grammar* (Xavier University Press) will be released in 2026.