

# BIKOL

Malcolm W. Mintz

**Language Name:** Bikol. **Alternate:** Bicol.

**Location:** The Philippines, specifically provinces on the southeastern peninsula of the island of Luzon and the offshore islands of Catanduanes, Masbate, Burias, and Ticao.

**Family:** Central Philippine group of the Philippine subbranch of the (Western) Malayo-Polynesian branch of the Austronesian language family.

**Related Languages:** Bikol shows an affinity to all of the languages of the Central Philippine subgroup, in particular TAGALOG to the north, and the North Visayan languages HILIGAYNON (Ilongo), WARAY WARAY (Samar-Leyte), and CEBUANO to the south.

**Dialects:** Dialects of Bikol include the five closely related dialects of standard Bikol (that of Naga City), as well as some dialects which are so diverse that they are not mutually intelligible. To give a clearer idea of the types of differences which are found among the dialects in the Bikol region, sample utterances from a variety of dialects follow. All utterances relate the same information, the translation of the English exchange 'Where did you go/To the market/Were you there a long time?/No, just one hour':

1. Naga City, Camarines Sur (Standard Bikol)  
*Nagsa' in ka? / Sa sa' ód. / Halóy ka dumán? / Da' í, saróng óras saná.*
2. Virac, Catanduanes  
*Nanga' in ka? / Sa sa' ód. / Awát ka dumán? / Da' í, salong óras lang.*
3. Pandan, Catanduanes  
*Nagpasi' in ka? / Sa sa' ód. / Huráy ka do' ón? / Ma' í, sadóng óras saná.*
4. Gubat, Sorsogon  
*Nagkarín ka? / Sa plása. / Awát ka didtó? / Dirí, saró' ka óras hámok.*
5. Sorsogon, Sorsogon  
*Nagka' in ka? / Sa sa' ód. / Awát ka didtó? / Lá' in, isád na óras lang.*
6. Ticao (Masbateño)  
*Nagka' in ka? / Sa paléngke. / Dúgay ka didtó? / Díli, usád na óras lang.*
7. Ligao, Albay  
*Napasa' in ka? / Sa sa' rán. / Eléy ka idtó? / Idí, núsad a óras saná.*
8. Libon, Albay  
*Napáarin iká? / Sa saod. / Ubán iká adtó? / De', usád a óras saná.*
9. Oas, Albay  
*Nagsáin iká? / Sa sed. / Eléy iká idtó? / Dí, sad na óras lang.*
10. Iriga, Camarines Sur (Rinconada Bikol)  
*Napasári iká? / Sa sa' rán. / Naebán iká sadtó? / Dirí, esád na óras saná.*
11. Buhi, Camarines Sur  
*Napasá'ri ka? / Sa sa' rán. / Naegéy iká adtó? / Indí, esád a óras saná.*

**Number of Speakers:** 4–6 million.

## Origin and History

Based on archaeological evidence such as the Kalanay pottery complex discovered on Masbate and the use of iron in the other Bikol provinces, it is believed that the region has been inhabited by the ancestors of the modern Bikolanos for just over 2,000 years. These people came from mainland Southeast Asia to the Philippines, moving northward through the Visayas to the region currently called Bikol.

The long, narrow Bikol peninsula was particularly exposed to migrating groups, especially from the south across the pro-

tected waters of the inland sea. The varied and complex dialect situation in the region and the links these dialects have with the Visayan languages to the south are evidence enough of this. In addition, the general cultural influences found in ancient songs and verse show ties to the south, rather than to the north.

The region was also exposed to Muslim raiders coming from the islands to the south of the Philippines in what are currently Indonesia and Malaysia. These were slave-taking raids that came with such ferocity that some coastal villages were depopulated and unoccupied for generations. These raids continued well into the Spanish period.

The Spanish first came to the Bikol region for gold. They reached the gold mines of Paracale in Camarines Norte in 1571. In 1572 the Spanish began subduing the Bikol provinces, and set up the first permanent settlement in the Bikol River basin in Camarines Sur in 1573. In 1574, they moved on to dominate the remaining Bikol provinces of Albay, Sorsogon, and Catanduanes. The Augustinians arrived with the Spanish conquistadors on Masbate in 1569. The Franciscans arrived in the region in 1577 and were later to dominate the conversion of Bikolanos to Christianity.

At the time of conquest, the Bikolanos used an Indic-based syllabic script to write their language. Similar types of script were in common use throughout the Philippines during pre-Hispanic times and remained in use among some members of the community until the mid-19th century. Father Marcos de Lisboa, a Franciscan friar, was in Bikol from 1602 until 1611; during that time he compiled the *Vocabulario de la lengua Bicol*, probably the finest early dictionary of any Philippine language in existence. It is through the entries in this dictionary that insights into the pre-Hispanic Bikol language and culture can be gained. Lisboa's dictionary is of Standard Bikol, and the modern Bikol examples which are used for comparative purposes in this chapter are also from Standard Bikol, the dialect of Naga City.

From the earliest days of contact, the Spanish used their Roman-alphabet script for the writing of Bikol. Lisboa's dictionary represented all Bikol words in this script, and it remained in common use until after World War II.

Mintz, Malcolm W. 2000. Bikol. In: Garry, Jane and Carl Rubino (eds.) *Facts About the World's Languages: An Encyclopedia of the World's Major Languages, Past and Present*. New York: H. W. Wilson.