

HILIGAYNON

R. David Zorc

Language Name: Hiligaynon. **Alternate:** *Ilonggo* (a term that is sometimes applied to the entire dialect chain).

Location: Hiligaynon is spoken in the Philippines throughout Negros Occidental (the western half of the island of Negros), the eastern and southern portions of Panay Island, and most of Guimaras Island, and by immigrants in large pockets on Mindanao (e.g., the Davao area) and Palawan (in and around Puerto Princesa).

Family: Bisayan subgroup of the Central Philippine group of the Western Malayo–Polynesian branch of the Austronesian language family.

Related Languages: Most closely related to Romblomanon (spoken in the Philippine Islands of Romblon and Tablas islands), Masbateño (of Masbate), Samar-Leyte, and Waray Bisayan, all comembers of the Bisayan subgroup of Central Philippine languages.

Dialects: Hiligaynon has many dialects. For example, the alternate language name *Ilonggo* originally referred only to the dialect of Iloilo City. Almost every town, especially those along language borders with CEBUANO, Kinaray-a and Aklanon, has some variation in lexicon and intonation. Those dialects that have notable differences include Capiznon (which is spoken in Capiz Province on central eastern Panay; it has several lexical idiosyncrasies) and Kawayan (which is spoken in the town of Cauayan, south of Bacolod City on Negros; it has a phonological idiosyncrasy wherein an [l] between vowels is often replaced by a [y], e.g., Hil *ulán*, Kaw *uyán* ‘rain’).

Number of Speakers: 4.5 million (fourth largest Philippine language)

Origin and History

When the Spanish arrived in the Philippines, Hiligaynon was (and indeed still is) a major trade language in the western Visayas. Legends recorded in the *Maragtas*, a book by Pedro Alcantara Monteclaro, tell of 10 *datus* (‘chieftains’) who left Borneo to found settlements on the island of Panay in the central Philippines, but these have been critically analyzed by Scott (1984: 91–103) and shown to be well-intentioned fabrications. More serious still was the purported discovery of a law code and pre-Hispanic calendar, but Scott (104–135) has shown these to be forgeries by Jose E. Marco, a Filipino chemist. Each of these has unfortunately made its way into postwar Philippine history books. As Scott concludes: “The summary above discloses a considerable discrepancy between what is actually known about the pre-Hispanic Philippines and what has been written about it. The popular texts present a picture of law codes, membership in Asian empires, and political confederations projected against a background of 250,000 years of migrating waves of Filipino progenitors, almost complete with their points of departure, sailing dates and baggage.”

Archeological and linguistic evidence, as well as a few Chinese reports are all we have to determine the prehistory of any Philippine group. Written history starts with the advent of the SPANISH. Thus, Kobak (1969: 22) reports that the Spanish researcher Alzina recorded the fact that the Hiligaynons of Oton (and elsewhere on Panay) traced their origin to Leyte. Zorc (1977: 45f) concludes that based on order of diversity, Hiligaynon (as well as all of the 35 other Bisayan speech varieties) developed in either the eastern Visayan region or on northeastern Mindanao.

The name Visayan was the Spanish rendition of the adjective *bisayá* referring to a person or item from the central Philippine islands and the verb *binisayá* meaning ‘to speak Bisayan’. It applies to 36 different speech varieties, the most well-known of which include Cebuano, Waray, Hiligaynon, and Aklanon. Together, these groups represent over 40 percent of the Philippine population, almost double that of any other language in the archipelago. The word probably derives from a dialect variant of a MALAY loan *bicara* ‘to speak’, based on the propensity of many Filipinos to name their language based on some idiosyncrasy of that language, e.g., Waráy ‘there is none,’ Ja’ún ‘over there’, The Kinaray-a say *bisára* ‘to mention,’ Aklanon has *bisáta* ‘to utter’ and *bilisad’un* ‘saying, maxim,’ while the Banton, Odiongan, Surigao, Kawayan, and Romblon dialects use *bisáya* ‘to say, speak’. [See Zorc 1977: 42–45 for more details.]

After the arrival of Magellan in 1521, the Spanish conquest introduced Christianity through Roman Catholicism (which still coexists with the indigenous animistic beliefs), hundreds of loanwords, and a Western outlook on the world. The United States introduced a widespread elementary and high school education program, whereby own-language and ENGLISH literacy became the norms. The legal system and the press follow U.S. language and traditions. It is not uncommon for the wealthy to have had higher education in Manila, Cebu, or the U.S.

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