

An arresting case: The Hanunóo of Mindoro, Philippines

With the arrival of the Spanish in the Philippines over four hundred years ago, the Indic scripts fell into disuse in all but the least accessible places. In 1947, Conklin (1949B) found the scripts still in use among three cultural groups, two in the mountains of Mindoro (Hanunóo, Buhid) and one on the island of Palawan (Tagbanua). The Hanunóo still use a distinctive Indic script to read, write, memorize, and exchange messages on a wide range of topics. They use the point of a knife to incise graphs onto bamboo—and, to a lesser extent, trees, house beams, and whatever else comes to hand. The main genre of writing, accounting for up to 85% of written communications, is love songs (Conklin 1949A, 1955, 1960; Postma 1989). The other major function of the script is correspondence. About 70% of the six thousand Hanunóo are literate enough to be full participants in the rounds of courtship and poetry that dominate Hanunóo leisure. Every family has a minimum of one person who can read and write.

Literacy has a central place in Hanunóo culture, and most adolescents achieve it quickly. Not learning carries no penalty, although it is apparently more fun to read, write, and court than just to court (Conklin 1959). In Conklin's (1960) account, a young girl, Maling, at the start of adolescent courtship took an interest in transcribing and memorizing love songs. Within a few months, not long after her original practice texts had likely been devoured by weevils, Maling could write down her own songs. The Hanunóo do not have a conventional order for memorizing their letters, and Maling worked first with the letters of her own name and gradually added new ones. If she had been left-handed, she could have worked in a mirror image, for the Hanunóo read with equal skill in all directions.

Words in Hanunóo are primarily disyllabic, and syllables can be closed by a final consonant in a CVC shape. The Hanunóo script, shown in TABLE 45.7, represents only vowel-final syllables.

Three graphs represent the vowels alone; fifteen graphs represent syllables consisting of a consonant–vowel pair; in addition, each of the fifteen CV syllables can have its final vowel changed by the addition of a *kulit*, a small diacritic on the left or

TABLE 45.7: *The Hanunóo Syllabary (after Conklin 1971)*^a

	q-	h-	p-	k-	s-	l-	r-	t-	n-	b-	m-	g-	d-	y-	ñ-	w-
-a~ ^b	∩	∪	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩
-u~	∩	∪	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩
-i~	∩	∪	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩	∩

- a. Listed in the 16th-century Tagalog sequence, with the addition of *r-*; no Hanunóo order is known today.
 b. The symbol ~ represents any consonant or no consonant.

right of the syllable graph that changes, e.g., \curvearrowright *ba* to \curvearrowright *bi* or \curvearrowright *bu*. In TABLE 45.7, the graphs are oriented horizontally, and the *kulit* marks appear on the top and bottom; graphs can be read from any direction, but all the graphs in a single line must be similarly oriented. Each syllable can receive a final consonant, and a reader must use word context to choose from among sixteen possibilities: for example, \curvearrowright *ba* can be read as [ba], [baʔ], [bab], [bad], [bag], [bak], [bal], [bam], [ban], [ban], [bap], [bar], [bas], [bat], [baw], or [baj] (Conklin 1953: 9).

Many of the love songs, called '*ambāhan*', take traditional form in a seven-syllable line. The sample text is a seven-line '*ambāhan*' (from among thousands available, Postma 1989 offers a translation of 261 ranging in length from 3 to 135 lines). The example is written in columns, from bottom to top, away from the body, as is the usual but not required Hanunóo custom. A two-to-one closed-to-open syllable ratio holds for most '*ambāhan*', although an account of less formal writing would reverse the percentages. In this text, individual Hanunóo graphs are all oriented vertically with the *i* diacritic appearing on the left and the *u* diacritic appearing on the right.

SAMPLE OF HANUNÓO

This '*ambāhan*' is sung as a lullaby ('*iyaya*) to a child. Reading proceeds from bottom to top, starting at the left.

𐄀	𐄁	𐄂	𐄃	𐄄	𐄅	𐄆	𐄇
𐄈	𐄉	𐄊	𐄋	𐄌	𐄍	𐄎	𐄏
𐄐	𐄑	𐄒	𐄓	𐄔	𐄕	𐄖	𐄗
𐄘	𐄙	𐄚	𐄛	𐄜	𐄝	𐄞	𐄟
𐄠	𐄡	𐄢	𐄣	𐄤	𐄥	𐄦	𐄧
𐄨	𐄩	𐄪	𐄫	𐄬	𐄭	𐄮	𐄯
𐄰	𐄱	𐄲	𐄳	𐄴	𐄵	𐄶	𐄷

1. <i>Hanunóo:</i>	𐄰	𐄱	𐄲	𐄳	𐄴	𐄵	𐄶	𐄷	𐄸	𐄹	𐄺	𐄻
2. <i>Transliteration:</i>	da-ña	ma-lu-	mi-ma-	lu-mi /	ki-ta	ma-nu-	ga	ku-ti /				
3. <i>Transcription:</i>	da:ŋa	maglumi-	maglumi?	kita	madnugan	ku ti?						
4. <i>Gloss:</i>	don't	keep.crying		we	will.be.heard	cat						
1. 𐄰 𐄱 𐄲	𐄳	𐄴	𐄵	𐄶	𐄷	𐄸	𐄹	𐄺	𐄻	𐄼	𐄽	𐄾
2. ku-ti gi	sa	si-ya-ñi /	ma-qi-ña	ma-ya-ya-ñi /								
3. kuti gin	sa	sijañi?	magʔinjaw	magjanjaji?								
4. cat coming	from	Siyangi	will.screech	scream								

1.	ɤ w	ʒ	ʒ	ʒ	ʒ	ɤ w	ʒ	ɤ w	ʒ	ɤ w
2.	ki-ta	qu	ma	qi-ba-wi /	ka-ta	ba-ka	na-ba-ri /			
3.	kita	ʔud	maj	ʔiba:wi?	kanta	baŋkaw	naba:ri?			
4.	we	do.not	have	effective.arms	our	spear	is.broken			

1.	ɤ w	ʒ w	ɤ w	ʒ
2.	ka-ta	qu-ta	na-lu-bi	
3.	kanta	ʔutak	nalumbi?	
4.	our	bolo	is.bent.in.two	

'Don't cry anymore, or we'll be heard by the wild cat
 The wild cat from Siyangi, who will let out a terrifying cry
 And we can't do anything about it, because our hunting spear is broken
 And our bolo is bent in two.'

—From Conklin 1955, side 1, band 4 of the record: page 4 of the booklet.

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