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The State of Blaan and Tboli Linguistics

Rudelyn V. Bantilan, Sajed S. Ingilan, & Andi Asrifan

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Abstract

The Philippines, a diverse archipelagic country with over 7,000 islands, is home to 184 living established languages, 175 of which are indigenous. Lying within the prolific landscapes of Mindanao are the Blaan and Tboli indigenous communities, who have cultivated unique linguistic traditions that form the foundation of their cultural heritage. Although research on the different linguistic domains of the Blaan and Tboli languages has been conducted, most are outdated, and few explicitly discuss the current situation of Blaan and Tboli linguistics. This paper attempts to fill the gap by focusing on the developments of Blaan and Tboli linguistics. This paper uses archival research to review what has been accomplished in the development of Blaan and Tboli linguistics in the areas of lexicography, phonology, morphology and syntax, discourse, and literacy materials. The concluding section assesses the implications of these studies for the field and offers suggestions for future work.

Author Information:

Rudelyn V. Bantilan

rudelynvbantilan@gmail.com
orcid.org/0009-0004-4348-9640

Instructor

College of Arts and Sciences,
Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges
General Santos City, Philippines

Sajed S. Ingilan

ingilan.sajed@usep.edu.ph
orcid.org/0000-0002-4466-2028

Associate Professor

College of Arts and Sciences,
University of Southeastern Philippines
Davao City, Philippines

Andi Asrifan

andi.asrifan@unm.ac.id
orcid.org/0000-0002-4064-894X

Assistant Professor

Universitas Negeri Makassar
Makassar, Indonesia

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The United Nations (2018) estimated that one indigenous language dies every two weeks. The threat stems directly from the practices and effects of colonialism, which led to the eradication of indigenous peoples, their traditions, and their languages. Furthermore, language endangerment patterns are anticipated to be significantly influenced by colonial expansions and political climates, such as support for bilingual education (Romaine, 2017). Moreover, a study by Bromham et al. (2022) raises the alarm on the future of linguistic diversity, revealing that out of the world's 7,000 recognized languages, approximately 6,000 are Indigenous, around half are currently endangered, with 1,500 at critical risk of disappearing. In this context, the loss of an indigenous language represents more than just the erosion of the accumulated knowledge of its speakers; it also represents the disappearance of the world's cultural and biological diversity (UNESCO, 2022). As the UNESCO (2001) Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity states, "Cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature." Thus, safeguarding language diversity is crucial to protecting cultural and biological diversity.

The Philippines is one of the regions in the world with a high index of linguistic diversity (Usero, 2021). With over 7,000 islands, this archipelagic country shelters 184 living established languages, and 175 are indigenous (Eberhard et al., 2023). The most recent assessment conducted by Ethnologue reported that 11 languages in the Philippines, and another 37, are in danger of extinction. Furthermore, if significant interventions are not implemented, additional languages will soon fall into these groups based on the narratives acquired from the field (Eberhard et al., 2021, cited in Lee, 2023b).

Linguists like McKaughan (1971) and Constantino (1971), as cited in Reid (1981), have summarized the state of Philippine linguistics. Moreover, McFarland (2004) explored the linguistic situation of the Philippines and reported that the country is experiencing a period of language convergence, with an increased borrowing from prominent languages such as English and Tagalog, resulting in the extinction of some indigenous languages. Additionally, the studies of Gallman (1983), Burton (1996), and Pallesen (1985) illustrate how contact effects have given shape to the lexicon, phonological history, and typology of several regions within the southern Philippines.

In the context of recent studies on Mindanaoan languages, significant progress has been made in documenting and analyzing the region's linguistic diversity. For instance, Ingilan and Jubilado (2021) summarized the state of the two indigenous languages spoken in Mindanao, the Tausug and Sama-Bajau. In addition, Iglesia et al. (2024) traced the development of Kalagan and Isamal linguistics, emphasizing contrasting research trends: while Kalagan linguistics has benefited from extensive scholarly attention, Isamal remains understudied and poorly documented. This disparity emphasizes the need for focused efforts in documenting Isamal linguistics. Furthermore, it is worth noting that there is still a great need to document other Mindanaoan languages, such as Blaan and Tboli.

The Blaan and Tboli are Austronesian languages classified by Dyen (1965) in the Bilic subfamily of the Sulic Hesion of the Philippine Hesion. Blaan and Tboli also belong to the Southern Mindanao axis, alongside Tiruray and Bagobo Klata (Zorc, 2021). They are Bilaan and Tagabili in Dyen's classification (Dyen, 1965, cited in Porter, 1977). Additionally, these Bilic languages are significant typological types of the Philippine languages that have evolved from complex Philippine-type systems to simpler systems resembling Indonesian-type languages (Zorc, 2019, cited in Dumoran, 2023).

Although research on the different linguistic domains of the Blaan and Tboli languages has been conducted, few academic studies explicitly discuss the current situation of these languages. This paper fills in the gap by focusing the discussion on the state of Blaan and Tboli linguistics. Moreover, this paper reviews what has been accomplished in developing Blaan and Tboli linguistics based on existing academic publications from the past to the present. It offers suggestions for future work, providing directions and theoretical insights for scholarly endeavors on indigenous languages.

Materials and Methods

This paper utilizes archival research as the primary method due to its ability to facilitate the investigation of documents and textual material produced by and about organizations. Archival research, in its most classic essence, involves the study of historical documents and textual materials, providing access to organizations, individuals, and events from the distant past. Moreover, scholars also use archival research for non-historical investigations of contemporary organizations' documents and texts, including digital texts like electronic databases, emails, and web pages (Mohr & Ventresca, 2017).

Furthermore, an extensive survey of research publications, books, and other textual materials was carried out to gather vigorous and reliable literature related to Blaan and Tboli linguistics. Moreover, citation chaining was employed to identify additional significant works. This involved reviewing the reference lists of key publications, dissertations, and journals that contributed to the thorough investigation of the Blaan and Tboli linguistics.

Finally, to ensure the veracity of the contents in this paper, the data are gathered from Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) Archives, abstracts of theses and dissertations from Mindanao State University and The University of the Philippines- Department of Linguistics, peer-reviewed academic journals, and the web.

Results and Discussion

Indigenous languages like Blaan and Tboli hold great significance as archives of distinct cultural knowledge and historical identity of indigenous peoples in the country. Existing literature reviewed in this research reveals the extensive contributions made by non-Filipino scholars to the fields of Blaan and Tboli linguistics, underscoring the need for increased involvement from Filipino researchers.

Contributions to Blaan Linguistics

This study highlights the contributions to Blaan linguistics, particularly in the fields of lexicography, phonology, morphology and syntax, discourse, and literacy materials. This provides a comprehensive overview of the developments in Blaan linguistics from the past to the present. Moreover, the discussion includes studies on the different variations of Blaan language across different sociolinguistic contexts.

Lexicography

Research on Blaan linguistics has been recorded by James and Gladys Dean (1953-1955), Norman and Doris Abrams (1956-1970), Betty McLachlin, and Barbara Blackburn (1959-1971) of the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

The first compilation of the Blaan lexicon was done by James and Gladys Dean in 1954, when they compiled the *Bilaan Linguistic Questionnaire* of the Tri-Institutional Pacific Program, Department of Anthropology, Yale University. This linguistic questionnaire summarized the Blaan sound system and wordlists— basic *Bilaan* vocabulary from the Swadesh Test List.

Eight years later, Betty McLachlin and Barbara Blackburn compiled the *Sarangani Blaan wordlists* with 304 lexical items and English glosses. The initial list aimed to create a clear Philippine list that demonstrates the relatedness and mutual intelligibility between the languages SIL works. In 1966, an expanded Sarangani Blaan word list with 372 lexical items with English gloss along with the 1962 Sarangani Blaan wordlist was printed to enhance and revise the list to align more with general use lists, making the information more useful to SIL works and others. In the same year, another

noteworthy contribution came from Norman Abrams, who compiled the expanded Philippine word list for the *Koronadal Blaán*, which contained 372 lexical items with English gloss and phonological information.

Moving forward to 1970, the Summer Institute of Linguistics contributed to the documentation of the Blaán language by publishing the *Blaán Vocabulary*, a six-page article containing a word list in Bilaan and English. That same year, Earnest Lee of SIL compiled the *Bilaan-Kablan wordlist* (Yale). The Yale wordlist has 208 lexical items with English gloss. The words were elicited using Maguindanao, and Lee obtained this information at Lumubi, Buluan, and Cotabato from two native speakers, Balutan Gulandai and Summa Gendi.

The first Blaán dictionary produced by Blaán-writer volunteers, *Tnanin Liblu Gugatek Dad Talu Blaán* (*Ang Unang Diksiyunaryong Blaán*), was published in 2017 through the *Flalok* Project of Conrado & Ladislawa Alcantara Foundation (CLAFI). The Blaán dictionary is the immediate output of the *Flalok* Project, which was implemented through the funding and sponsorship of USAID. An online Blaán dictionary is available online through websites like glosbe.com and Austronesian Dictionary Online. A Swadesh List of Sarangani Blaán is also available at rosettaproject.org.

Phonology

The first attempt to describe Blaán phonology was made by James and Gladys, Dean of the Summer Institute of Linguistics, in 1954. According to them, the Blaán phonology comprises six (6) vowels: /i/, /i/, /u/, /o/, /e/, /a/. Further, they noted that /i/ has a lowered allophone found in closed syllables, except when the final consonant of a closed syllable is the glottal stop /ʔ/ or /h/, /e/ has a lowered allophone with the same distribution as above. On the other hand, /i/ has the allophone of a high central variety in open final syllables with a lowered central, mid-variety elsewhere. Additionally, Dean and Dean noted that no final decision has been reached regarding the uniting or separating of /u/ and /o/. Hence, they suspect only two phonemes will be in back positions. Moreover, the Blaán phonology has 15 consonants: /p/, /b/, /d/, /t/, /k/, /g/, /ʔ/, /f/, /h/, /l/, /m/, /n/, /ŋ/, /l/, /r/ and two semivowels: /w/, /y/.

Dean and Dean (1955) further investigated the Blaán phonemes through short stories such as “Story of Creation,” “The Snake and the Rat,” and “The Old Man and Old Woman” written in Blaán texts. Three language observations were observed: seven vowel phonemes, word consonant initial clusters, and word-final /h/. The seven vowel phonemes in Blaán are the /i/, /e/, /ɛ/, /a/, /u/, /o/, and /ɔ/. Moreover, the fifteen consonant phonemes which consist of six stops: the voiced— /b/, /d/, /t/ and the voiceless— /k/, /g/, /ʔ/ and nine continuants: the fricatives which are composed of the labiodental flat /f/, alveolar grooved /s/, and glottal /h/; the nasals which consist of bilabial /m/, alveolar /n/, and velar /ŋ/; lateral alveolar /l/; non-syllabic vocoids, back /w/, front /y/. Meanwhile, the non-suspect syllable patterns in Blaán are CV, CVC, CCV, and CCVC.

In 1963, Norman Abrams, an American missionary, accounted for the development of Bilaan vowels in his paper titled, *Historical development of Bilaan vowels and some consonant reflexes in Bilaan and related dialects*. In this 17-page article, Abrams summarized the development of vowels and consonant reflexes in Koronadal Bilaan. To account for the development of seven Bilaan vowels from the Proto-Malayo-Polynesian four-vowel system, he proposed a temporary sound hypothesis: vowels a, e, (peppet vowel), i, u. The Bilaan vowels á (back low unrounded), é (front, mid unrounded as in Spanish *tres* ‘three’), and o were added to the four proto vowels.

On the other hand, the most recent study on Blaán phonology of Ojanola and Tarusan (2023) found significant phonological differences across four sociolinguistic contexts in SOCCSKSARGEN: Sarangani Blaán (SBL), Koronadal Blaán (KBL), Columbio Blaán (CBL), and Tulunan Blaán (TBL).

This includes variations in vowel phoneme production (/a/, /e/, /é/, /i/, /o/, /u/), the use of accent marks on vowel phonemes, the number of accented and unaccented vowel phonemes, phonetic and phonological change, and phoneme addition.

Morphology and Syntax

Wood (1951), in his *Notes on the Bilaan of Cotabato*, described the characteristics of Cotabato Bilaan. In 1958, James Dean studied the principal grammatical relations of Koronadal Bilaan, which was included in the Oceania Linguistic Monographs series. In 2015, Ivan Bondoc of the University of the Philippines-Diliman did a study titled *A Grammar Sketch of Blaán* for his master's thesis. The study developed a grammatical sketch of Blaán, a Philippine language with similar characteristics to most Philippine languages: its agglutinative morphology, predicate-initial verbal structure, ergative properties, and types and variations of sentence constructions. It emphasized unique features like phonological systems, morphophonemics, and aspectual particles.

As early as the 1960s, SIL missionaries began their investigation of the morphology and syntax of the Blaán. Abrams (1960), in his master's thesis at the University of Washington, did a study titled, *The verb complex in Bilaan*. The study provided detailed information on verb morphology, focus, and syntactic aspects, amplifying Dean's shorter paper and identifying types of verb bases not covered in the Sarangani and Koronadal dialects. Due to its activity-focus system, Abrams suggested that Bilaán has a narrow distinction between referent-focused and goal-focused activities. Moreover, Abrams noted that the *n-* marker in certain verbs signals reference-focused activity, while a zero marker signifies goal-focused activity.

Following his master's thesis, Abrams (1961) published an article titled, *Word Base Classes in Bilaan* as part of the series *Lingua*. Abrams classified the word bases (which can be inflected) into three syntactic classes: verb, noun, and adjective.

Doris Abrams and Norman Abrams in 1967 studied the Blaán sentence, specifically Koronadal Blaán. They noted that Blaán that sentences have a nucleus and optional periphery, with fourteen contrasting nuclei for each sentence type, and common periphery elements for relator-axis sentences or phrases. Unlike most Philippine languages, wherein sentences are classified into simple, complex, and compound, the Blaán language has distinct sentence types. The Blaán 14 sentence types are as follows: simple sentence, merged sentence, equational sentence, series sentence, sequence sentence, result sentence, coordinate sentence, antithetical sentence, alternative sentence, conditional sentence, concessive sentence, correlative sentence, direct quotation sentence, and indirect quotation sentence.

Nevertheless, focus is a crucial feature of Philippine language clause systems. Thus, directing attention to a single nonpredicate nuclear element within a clause is necessary. McLachlin and Blackburn (1968) described the types of verbal clauses in Sarangani Blaán using the following criteria to contrast the types: (1) the focus of the clause, (2) the stem classes in the predicate, (3) the obligatory and optional elements of the clause nuclei. Their study followed the tagmemic model. Verbal clauses are categorized into active and causative types, with four types based on the grammatical focus of the predicate: subject focus, object focus, direction focus, and accessory focus.

The Blaán morphology was again given attention in 1970 with the study of Norman Abrams titled *Blaán Morphology*. In this article, he discussed word bases in relation to the category of focus. The parts of speech described in the paper were prefocus (that is, unaffixed), subject, object, and instrument verbal bases and noun and adjective bases. Furthermore, the paper briefly summarized the presentation on focus affixes and dealt in more detail with the parts of speech, verbal aspect affixes, nominalizing affixes, and adjective affixes.

In response to Abrams article published in 1961, *Word Base Classes in Bilaan and Bilaan Morphology* in 1970, Mary Rhea (1971) of SIL wrote her paper, *Prefocus and Verbal Orientation in Sarangani Bilaan*. Unlike many Philippine languages, she noted that Bilaan verb bases can be inflected with one or more focus markers. But most of the Bilaan may indicate one kind of focus without overt affixation.

Building on these foundations, Ojanola's and Tarusan's (2023) study described the variations of the Blaان language in the four sociolinguistics contexts of Blaان in SOCCSKSARGEN mentioned in the preceding section. Their study found differences in tense markers, degrees of comparison markers, and other morphological features of the lexical categories of Blaان. For instance, some nouns in Blaان are expressed differently in SBL, KBL, CBL, and TBL despite having the same meaning. Meanwhile, semantic variations include words with positive meanings in one context but with offensive meanings compared to others. The syntactic variations include the forming of yes-no questions in Blaان and the placement of question markers.

Discourse

In 1967, Norman Abrams summarized the Blaان discourse through an article titled, *Summary of Paragraph and Discourse Types in Bilaan*. He noted that the Bilaan paragraphs have the following types: narrative, procedure, explanatory, hortatory, and dialogue. The evidence thus far evaluated indicates three homogeneous discourse types: narrative discourse, monoclimate, narrative discourse, multiclimatic, and dialogue discourse, while in the heterogeneous discourse type, expository discourse, both explanatory and hortatory paragraphs occur.

Four years later, the Sarangani Blaان was given attention to in McLachlin and Blackburn's (1971) article, *An Outline of Sarangani Bilaan Discourse and Paragraph Structure*. They suggested four discourse types for Sarangani Blaان: narrative, procedural, expository, and hortatory. The narrative discourse is categorized into three sub-types: episode narrative discourse, monoclimate narrative discourse, and multi-climate narrative discourse.

Two Filipino scholars attempted to describe the Blaان discourse through folk literature texts. In 1974, Theresa Balayon analyzed Blaان tales: a trickster tale, a Marchen, and an animal tale. In this article, she briefly described the ethnology of the Blaans. Meanwhile, the study of Lutero (1986) in his master's thesis at the University of the Philippines put together all collected folk literature texts and added to more items collected from the field. The whole collection is then presented and analyzed in terms of its content and form, as well as in the context of the Blaان setting and the Blaان way of life.

Notably, most of the papers produced by SIL are concerned with providing an outline of paragraph structure and discourse types of Blaان. Balayon (1974) and Lutero (1986) attempted to analyze the form and content of Blaان folktales; however, these studies are outdated. A recent addition to the study of Blaان discourse is the work of Trocio, Campos, and Yu (2023), which examined the Blaان Indigenous peoples' culture in General Santos, Sarangani, and South Cotabato, Philippines, as reflected in their *flalok* (oral lore). Using Thompson's Motif-Index Theory, the study revealed frequent Blaان cultural motifs often centered on familial relationships, domestic work, tribal war, competitions, animal trapping, and agricultural farming.

Literacy Materials

Since 1953, the Summer Institute of Linguistics, in collaboration with the Department of Education, has been conducting research projects on minor language groups in the country. The Institute's primers are being used in schools in several provinces, providing detailed data on Philippine languages and aiding their gradual assimilation into national life (Wolfenden, 1963).

Dean and Dean, in 1954, published a 29-page Bilaan linguistic questionnaire for the Tri-Institutional Pacific Program at Yale University. This linguistic questionnaire provides a summary of the sound system and wordlists of Koronadal Bilaan.

With the goal of preserving the integrity and dignity of the Philippines' diverse people, emphasizing the importance of reading skills for students' motivation and confidence in learning the national language, the Summer Institute of Linguistics published different primers in Koronadal and Sarangani Blaان.

In 1955, Gladys and James Dean, along with Alice Maryott, published *Atngánin/ Atmadol / Gatlu / Agfat / Aglima / Agnam liblu abnasa* primers 1-6 written in Koronadal Bilaan. This set of charts and primers was designed to help Blaان people master the Filipino National language and other languages more easily and quickly by learning to read their own language first. That same year, a few Blaان were engaged in preparing the primers. Daton Ontic and Miss Laytan Tule assisted Gladys and James Dean translate the pre-primer Pepe. The pre-primer Gisak was their first translated output.

Consequently, instructions for using the Bilaan primers and literacy charts and an English-free translation of the primers were published in 1956. In 1957, the SIL published *Bila-an Literacy Chart Numbers 1 to 10*. These literacy charts are to be used in conjunction with Primers 1-5.

In 1961, McLachlin and Blackburn prepared a primer, *Masa Ito*, to teach the Blaان people of the southernmost part of the Cotabato province to read their language. Consequently, in 1963 and 1965, the SIL published the second and third editions of *Masa Ito*, by Kent, McLachlin, & Blackburn, respectively. McLachlin et al. designed a drill book to be used alongside the *Bilaan Masa Ito* Primer series I-IV, following the instructions provided in the Teacher section and the Notes to Teachers section. Additionally, in 1969, Doris and Norman Abrams prepared the primer *Tnanin liblu* to teach the speakers of Blaان to read in their language as a step toward literacy in the national language.

Aside from the primers, the Summer Institute of Linguistics has also produced primer workbooks. In 1977, Mary Rhea and Charing Roque prepared *Gambet Ito Masa*, a primer workbook, which includes seven pre-reading lessons for Blaان language speakers in South Cotabato and Davao del Sur. In 1978, Dominga Dacan, Rhea Mary, and Charing Roque created *Masa Ito*, a reading primer workbook for the Sarangani Blaان people, with stories, lessons, and a teacher's guide. It is to be taught following the pre-reading workbook, *Gambet ito Masa*. The stories for this primer workbook were prepared by Charing Roque and Dominga Dacan, while the lessons and teacher's guide were prepared by Mary Rhea of SIL with the assistance of Mrs. Roque and Mrs. Dacan.

The SIL has also prepared primer workbooks for reading teachers in Blaان in South Cotabato and Davao del Sur. Rhea prepared *Smulat i* in 1982, *Smulat i to Kagu i to faglut: Katdò i to tamdò* in 1984, and *Kaglabat i Bnasa* in 2006. The workbook primers were designed to increase fluency and comprehension in reading and to teach cursive writing.

The Summer Institute of Linguistics collaborates with the Department of Education to prepare instructional and supplementary reading materials such as health booklets. The SIL has published several health booklets in Koronadal Blaان, such as *Kibò kbulung dad fđas* written by Doris Abrams and Ricardo Baro in 1969, *Kagbetgu gablà di Bulung: Mutà na Milong* in 1986.

In 1973, Rhea and Blackburn, with the help of Beted Mariano, Dominga Dakan, and Islaw Magi, translated a health book prepared for the Sarangani Manobo. *Fye knè di ta tanà, Dee bung tduk, and Fye ninum yéél* were among the many publications of SIL which provide vernacular reading material.

A few Blaans also participated in producing various Blaan reading materials by participating in writer's workshops. Cuma Saya compiled and illustrated *Liblu ftuk*, while Rogelio Lintang wrote and illustrated *Dad anuk mayeng* during their participation in a National Writers Workshop sponsored by SIL in 1979. The book aims to provide additional reading materials for the Blaan people of Southern Mindanao. In 1984, *Dad santulen gablà di dad lmanaf*, a collection of short stories in Blaan written by Myrna Lakim, Naida Lakim, Baby Salali and Cuma Saya, participants in the first Blaan's Writers' Workshop in Landan Polomolok added to reading materials of the Blaan in South Cotabato.

With the advent of technology, traditional educational systems are adapting to changing student needs, focusing on mobile learning. In 2018, Smart Communications, Inc. launched *Taalām*, a mobile literacy application that teaches basic Arabic language, prayers, and values. This was followed by *Tahderriyah* for Davao City's Matigsalug tribe. *Tahderriyah* teaches Arabic letters and numbers to Bangsamoro region students. In 2020, Smart Communications launched *Gnare Blaan* for the Blaan tribe of Sarangani Province. The Gnare Blaan app, created by the University of Southeastern Philippines, aims to educate young learners about their alphabet, numbers, folklore, values, culture, arts, vocabulary, prayers, and games. The materials target subjects under Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), Math, Filipino, and English from Grades 1 to 3 (Garcia, 2020).

The Department of Education through DepEd Order 62 s. 2011 or the National Indigenous People Education Policy Framework institutionalized the IP education Program in 2011. The policy follows a rights-based approach, focusing on the social and cultural context of IP learners and directing the implementation of education (DepEd Order 62 s. 2011). Additionally, the IPed Program supports MTB-MLE, promoting inclusive, culture-sensitive, and flexible standards for localization, indigenization, and enhancement in community contexts. However, no learner's materials written in Blaan are found in the DepEd Learning Resource Portal.

Meanwhile, Conrado & Ladislawa Alcantara Foundation, Inc. (CLAFI), in partnership with Blaan Indigenous Cultural Communities of Region 12, DepEd, National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), Summer Institute of Linguistics International, Save the Children, and KafyeBlaan Empowerment Inc. with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) has launched the *Flalok* Project in 2015. The *Flalok* Project has produced 72 *Flalok* Big Books, Teacher Guides (TG) each for Grade 1 and Grade 2, Learner Materials (LM) for each Grade 1; Grade 2 and Alternative Learning System (ALS), Blaan Dictionary, and Compendium of *Flalok* stories. In 2017, over 6,000 Big Books were distributed to 76 Blaan schools in South Cotabato, Sarangani, General Santos, and Koronadal City, aiming to teach Grade 1 and Grade 2 students in their native language. Moreover, the learning materials are now used in *Flalok* classes of grade 1 and grade 2 learners, aiming to teach Blaan kids to read and write in their language. The *Flalok* Project seeks to include the Blaan language in DepEd's official mother tongue (CLAFI, 2017).

Contributions to Tboli Linguistics

This section discusses the contribution to Tboli linguistics across key areas, including lexicography, phonology, morphology, syntax, discourse, and literacy materials. It synthesizes studies conducted by both Filipino and non-Filipino scholars. These contributions provide a comprehensive overview of the current state of Tboli linguistics, emphasizing the need for further research to address emerging developments in the field.

Lexicography

Vivian Forsberg of the Summer Institute of Linguistics pioneered the compilation of the Tboli lexicon. The Tboli dictionary appeared as early as 1923 when the *Tagabili vocabulary* compiled by Vivian Forsberg of the Summer Institute of Linguistics was published in cooperation with the Bureau of Public Schools and the Institute of National Language of the Department of Education.

This contains expanded lexical items in Tagalog and Tboli languages. In 1950, the Summer Institute of Linguistics compiled the *Tboli wordlist* with 238 lexical items.

In 1955, Vivian Forsberg compiled the *Tboli Kiamba Linguistic Questionnaire*. This linguistic questionnaire for Tboli, spoken near Kiamba in Sarangani Province, contains 215 lexical items and three pages of additional grammatical items. Forsberg, in that same year, along with Alice Maryott, compiled *Tagabili vocabulary* spoken in the barrio of Sinolon in the Alah Valley. The data were gathered through the help of Alfredo Piang and Mariano Antay, son and nephew of *Datu* Piang Edwards, who also made valuable contributions. Another Tboli, *Datu* Dungan, submitted a word list that has been incorporated into the Tagabili vocabulary (Forsberg, 1955).

Forsberg's compilation of the Tboli language continued in 1966. She compiled the expanded Tboli word list with 372 lexical items, additional pronouns, and demonstratives. The 1966 Expanded Philippine Word List in Tboli, published in *Philippine Minor Languages: Word Lists and Phonologies*, includes an English gloss.

In 1980, *Diksyunadi bè udél, English, Tboli, Pilipino ne Hiligaynon (Dictionary in the languages of English, Tboli, Pilipino, Hiligaynon)* was designed to help speakers of Tboli enhance their proficiency in the national language, local dialect of Ilonggo, and English, using a thesaurus format and classified word list by Neri Zamora and Lou Hohulin. The dictionary authored by Lillian Underwood and Walan Tuan was prepared with the help of Fiedang Gendulan, Tony, and Silin Wanan and was created under the Summer Institute of Linguistics. The Hiligaynon data was supplied by Ana Parcon.

In 2004, the SIL published a 720-page Tboli-English dictionary compiled by Forsberg, Awed, and Underwood. In 2018, a dataset containing words and lists of URLs for Tboli can be accessed online through the Crubadan Project website. At present, Tboli dictionaries are available online via Webonary, Glosbe Dictionary, and the Austronesian Comparative Dictionary Online.

Of particular note, the Tboli people significantly contributed to the creation of the Tboli dictionary, demonstrating their pride in their heritage and dedication to language preservation.

Phonology

The sound system of Tboli was studied in 1959 by linguists Vivian Forsberg, Allan Healey, and Alice Maryott. Their study, *The Phonemes of Tagabili*, became the primary source of phonological data for the Tboli language. Lawrence Reid (1971) made this as his reference material for his article, *Philippine Minor Languages: Word Lists and Phonologies*, published in *Oceanic Linguistics Special Publications*.

The Tboli phonemes has seven vowel systems: /a/, /i/, /u/, /ə/, /ɛ/, /ɔ/, /ɒ/. There are also 15 consonants in the Tboli phonology: /b/, /k/, /d/, /f/, /g/, /h/, /l/, /m/, /n/ /ŋ/, /s/, /t/, /w/, /y/, and the glottal stop (ʔ).

Doris Porter (1977), in her study, *Grammar of Tboli*, noted a few variations in the Tboli language, specifically in shifts in vowel quality and the interchanging of phonemes *h* and *f*. She concluded that these variations are dependent on geographical area. Also, there are four patterns in Tboli stems: CV, CVC, CCV, and CCVC.

Morphology and Syntax

The exploration of *Tboli grammar* first appeared in 1977 when Doris Porter of the Summer Institute of Linguistics did a study titled *Tboli Grammar*. The study aims to provide data and analysis

for a lesser-known language like Tboli to scholars and individuals interested in the language. The analysis uses data from 1963-1974 in Tboli municipality of Surallah, under SIL's auspices. The data from text materials and interviews were obtained with the help of Tboli, namely, Gadu Ugal, Selanting Tohol, and Walan Tuan.

Vivian Forsberg described the Tboli morphophonemics in her unpublished paper titled *Tagabili Morphophonemics*. Her study provided the syllable description of the phonemic syllable in Tboli, which occurs in four Tboli stems: CV, CVC, CCV, and CCVC. Furthermore, Tboli syllables with consonant clusters have a restricted distribution, occurring only in the stem and word-initial. The CV pattern has an allomorphic variant consisting solely of the consonant in its prefixes. There are two voice marking affixes occurring as infixes: [-em-] and [-en-].

Porter also explored the Tboli word construction in her unpublished paper titled, *Tboli Morphology*. The Tboli morphemes are divided into three major divisions: affixes, particles, and roots. Affixes are bound morphemes, while particles and roots are free. Moreover, Tboli particles, which include adjuncts, exclamations, pronouns, and interrogative substitutes, are described as syntactic particles, while roots are inflectable forms. They may be divided into closed and open classes. They are limited in two ways: by the number of members in the class and by the affixation potential. Open classes are patient-oriented verb roots, accessory-oriented verb roots, nouns, and statives.

Doris Porter and Nancy Howison co-authored the unpublished paper, *Sentence in Tboli*. A sentence in Tboli is internally defined as an obligatory nucleus with the optional occurrence of sentence-level peripheral elements. The sentence's nuclei can be expressed through a single clause or multiple clauses with a single primary relationship. Further, these clauses are linked through seven logical relationships: temporal, amplification, conjunction, implication, equational, cause-effect, and quotation. In 1966, Vivian Forsberg studied the phrases of Tboli in her study titled, *Phrases in Tagabili*. She identified three types of Tagabili phrases: kernel phrases, marked and key phrase.

The Forsberg study titled *A Pedagogical Grammar of Tboli* aims to help non-Tboli interested in learning to speak Tboli, which was published in 1992. This includes a discussion of spelling and pronunciation in the alphabet and spelling rules. The text also covers various forms of grammar, including nouns, adjectives, adverbs, personal pronouns, phrases, nonverbal and verbal sentences, focus systems, location, time words, negatives, and questions.

Most of the *Tboli grammar*, morphology, and syntax studies are conducted by non-Filipino scholars. Consequently, few studies have been done by Filipino scholars in this field. In 2013, Ma. Jezia Talavera of the University of the Philippines studied the tense aspect of Tboli. Her study, *Typology of Tense-Aspect in T'boli and BIM*, provided a comparative analysis of the inventory of lexical markers in Tboli and Bahasa Indonesia/Malaysia (BIM), which is analyzed using the Contextual or Semantic TAM framework. The study emphasizes the importance of morphosemantically analyzing lexical markers in both languages, as they are highly optional and contextual in nature.

Discourse

The characteristics of Tboli discourse were described in the study of Porter (1977), *Tboli Grammar*. Similar to the other Philippine languages, the Tboli discourse is classified into four genres: narrative, procedural, expository, and hortatory. The SIL has produced several papers focusing on the Tboli discourse. One is by Hale and Porter (1997) titled, *Focus Ranking in Tboli discourse*. The paper seeks to identify the factors that influence the selection of focused items in Tboli phrases and determine how they interrelate within a discourse. Factors relevant to the choice of focused items in Tboli are (1) verb classes and how they rank roles within the clause; (2) eligibility for focus and participant groupings; (3) promotion and demotion, exceptions to normal ranking; and (4) continuity

and conflict among participant groupings within discourse.

In the same year, Porter studied one of the interesting features of the Tboli language: the extensive use of figures of speech. She noted in her study titled, *Figurative uses of 'breath' in Tboli* that *nawah* or breath is widely used in figurative expressions, especially in expressing human characteristics of emotions.

At present, Casinto (2022) of Bahrain Polytechnic studied the Tboli's worldview through their oral traditions. His study titled *Looking from a Window: A Critical Analysis of the T'boli's Worldview Through their Oral Traditions* published in International Journal of Language & Literary Studies identified that the Tboli's oral traditions are characterized by the controlling imageries of a deity and a body of water. The Tboli's worldview is shaped by their values of faithfulness, generosity, respect, and obedience to authority, which are deeply ingrained in their cultural and religious practices.

Literacy Materials

The volumes of *Tagabili* literacy materials produced by the Summer Institute of Linguistics are a testament to their dedication to promoting literacy to the Tagabili or Tboli people. As early as 1953, Vivian Forsberg and Alice Lindquist have been preparing primers for Tboli.

Translation is one of the strategies that the Summer Institute of Linguistics used to stimulate reading interest in Tagabili. *Tuha libun na kun sadò*, the translation of the short story "The Old Woman and Her Pig, translated by Forsberg and Maryott along with Alfredo Piang in 1955, has become one of the literacy materials of the Tagabili people. *Tehe kosok huhed ngà Bés ne Kmò kehgulam huhed ngà*, originally written by a Tboli, Silin Wanan, in 1983, was translated by Underwood (1989) to provide interesting reading material for the Tboli.

As early as 1955, the SIL produced volumes of translated texts; some of the translated texts are *Pepe luwuh lah Pilar, parts 1, 2* translated by Forsberg, Maryott, and two Tagabili Mariano Antay and Alfredo Piang in 1955, *Babasahing Pilipino*, translated by Bilhamin Gulili (1970), and *Mekisig, yem ngà hulung hedem lemwót bè Maktan* of Nancy Cohen (1980).

Primers were also prepared to teach reading to the Tagabili. Forsberg and Maryott (1957) prepared *Sulat hennagi 1-3*. This primer comes in three series. The first series teaches preliterate speakers of the Tagabili dialect by introducing the *e, a, i, o, l, b, n, t, m* and glottal stop from the 22 alphabets of Tagabili. Meanwhile, the second and third editions are prepared to teach the Tagabili people to read in their vernacular to develop literacy skills in their mother tongue. The primers introduce the 22 Tagabili alphabets.

The Tboli people also made their contributions to developing text materials to enhance the literacy of the Tagabili. Gadu Ugal (1975) wrote *Tutul bè onuk bnès*. This was written to help the new readers develop fluency in reading their dialect. Aning Tohol, in 1979, wrote *Tutul kem tau gnan* during her participation in the Writer's Workshop held at Nasuli Bukidnon.

Text materials were also prepared to teach cursive writing to the Tboli. In 1986, Lillian Underwood designed the *Dnalang tekuy yem sulat sensogot* to help Tboli, who has learned to read and write using the primer *Sulat Hennagi*, to write cursive manuscripts by following instructions and drills.

Notably, the SIL has produced volumes of literacy materials; however, these materials are outdated. The most recent study was by Michelle Diangco and Orjean Soroysoy (2019), an undergraduate thesis from Mindanao State University titled *Production and Validation of Comic*

Strips Tboli Folktales. Their study aimed to produce validated instructional materials and a reading comprehension workbook for grade 7 students to improve their reading comprehension competencies. Five Tboli folktale stories were adapted into comic strips with 13 tasks and 17 questions, gaining high acceptance and validity from 30 students and 5 MA Teachers, which makes it valid for use.

In connection to the Department of Education's Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) and Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), it is concerning to note that no learner's materials for the Tboli language are available in the DepEd Learning Resource Portal. Thus, this study highlights the need for more inclusive educational resources that recognize and preserve Tboli culture.

Conclusion

This study examines the state of Blaan and Tboli linguistics in the areas of lexicography, phonology, morphology and syntax, discourse, and literacy materials. The works presented in the preceding section revealed that the majority of the studies in Blaan and Tboli Linguistics were done by non-Filipino scholars, underscoring the need for local researchers' involvement in this field. Moreover, the study emphasized how little research in these languages has been done in recent years. To address these gaps, this study provides recommendations for future work, highlighting areas for in-depth exploration.

Blaan linguistics has made significant strides in the area of lexicography. Numerous bilingual dictionaries in Sarangani and Koronadal Blaan have been produced by the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). Furthermore, a noteworthy development in 2017 saw the collaboration of CLAFI, Blaan Indigenous Communities in Alabel, Malapatan, Maasim, Malungon, Polomolok, Tupi, Tampakan, Koronadal, and General Santos City, and other partners publish the first Blaan dictionary compiled by native speakers. However, there is still much work to be done. Dictionary for other varieties of the Blaan language, like the Columbio Blaan (CBL) and Tulunan Blaan (TBL) have to be developed. This is pivotal to addressing lexical variations on nouns and semantic variations articulated in the study of Ojanola and Tarusan (2023).

Interestingly, unlike other Philippine languages, the Blaan phonology has seven vowels in its phoneme systems. However, phonological variations in Blaan vowels were observed in four sociolinguistic contexts: Sarangani Blaan, Koronadal Blaan, Columbio Blaan, and Tulunan Blaan. This striking feature makes a comparative analysis of the phonological systems of this Bilic language a compelling area for further research. Nevertheless, exploring these sociolinguistics variations would not only add to the few academic studies on this particular linguistics field but also provide a comprehensive understanding of its functions across different sociolinguistic contexts.

As for the morphology and syntax of Blaan, significant attention has been given to the verbal complex, sentence structure, word base classes, and morphology of Koronadal Blaan by non-Filipino scholars in the past. Consequently, Sarangani Blaan, Tulunan Blaan, Columbio Blaan, and Davao del Sur remained less explored. This gap underscores the need for extensive research that highlights the grammatical structures of these understudied varieties. Filipino researchers, particularly those from Mindanao, could look into focus affixes of Blaan verb bases, ergative properties, and variations of sentence constructions across different sociolinguistic contexts.

Furthermore, studies on Blaan discourse offer another critical component to achieving an understanding of the language at its full complexity. While the papers produced by SIL are primarily concerned with providing an outline of paragraph structure and discourse types in Blaan and Tboli, significant gaps remain. Filipino researchers, particularly those from the SOCCSKSARGEN region,

could look into conversational patterns like politeness and turn-taking strategies to shed light on the dynamics of Blaans' daily interaction. Moreover, the Blaans have extensive myths about their deities. This could be a good source of materials for investigating the patterns of storytelling, structures of narratives, and cultural representations.

Shifting focus to Blaans' literacy materials, the SIL initiated the publication of primer workbooks in Koronadal and Sarangani Blaans as early as 1955, alongside health books as instructional and supplementary reading materials. Furthermore, the translation of texts with the assistance of Blaans' native speakers was done to promote reading fluency. Complementing these past initiatives, the Conrado Ladislawa & Alcantara Foundation, Inc (CLAFI) through the *Flalok* Project has an extensive collection of literacy materials on its website. Ironically, the Learning Resource Portal of the Department of Education currently has no available learner materials for the Blaans language. Accordingly, this paper recognizes DepEd's commitment to Indigenous Peoples Education (IPEd) and Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), especially its admirable works in developing instructional materials that support learning across diverse learners, including Blaans. However, this paper seeks to emphasize one significant gap—the lack of learner's materials in the Blaans language in the DepEd Learning Resource Portal. The absence of learner's materials in the Blaans language underscores the need for inclusive, linguistically accurate, and culturally responsive education supporting indigenous languages' preservation.

On the other hand, the compilation of the Tboli lexicon was pioneered by Vivian Forsberg of the Summer Institute of Linguistics as early as 1923. Of particular note, the Tboli people significantly contributed to the creation of the Tboli dictionary, demonstrating their pride in their heritage and dedication to language preservation. However, in recent years, the Tboli lexicon has not seen publications, representing a significant gap in efforts to document recent developments in the Tboli lexicon. Researchers, lexicographers, and the local government unit of Tboli should explore partnerships with non-government organizations that advocate cultural preservation and revitalization. Moreover, the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino (KWF) can enhance efforts to sustain and revitalize indigenous languages, including Tboli, upholding its integration into an educational framework for long-term preservation.

The phonological system of Tboli was first documented in 1959 by Vivian Forsberg, Allan Healey, and Alice Maryott in their work, *The Phonemes of Tagabili*, which became a foundational reference for Tboli phonology. While foundational studies have provided insights into the Tboli phonology, there is a significant need for updated research to account for recent developments in the language. Researchers could further explore Porter's (1977) claim that the shifts in vowel quality and interchanging of phonemes *h* and *f* in Tboli depend on geographical area.

The *Tboli grammar* has seen significant developments as early as 1977, with SIL exploring the *Tboli grammar*, Tagabili morphophonemics, and Tboli morphology. Notably, existing studies documenting recent developments in Tboli morphology and syntax remain scant, highlighting the pressing need for recent studies to describe the full length of the Tboli language. While early studies by non-Filipino scholars laid the foundation of *Tboli grammar*, their outdated findings call for renewed efforts, especially for Filipino researchers. Given the dynamic nature of language, future studies could highlight the validation and expansion of Tboli morphophonemics, exploration of geographical and sociolinguistic variations, and documentation of grammatical changes.

Additionally, the Tboli discourse is characterized by both structural and cultural dimensions, including genre classification, figurative expression, and oral traditions. One interesting feature of Tboli discourse is the extensive usage of figures of speech like "nawah" to express human characteristics and emotions. Furthermore, the Tbolis' oral traditions are characterized by imageries of a deity and a

body of water (Casinto, 2022). Future studies should build on these findings, investigating how Tboli discourse shapes linguistic practices, social values, and cultural identity.

The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) has played a pivotal role in promoting literacy among the Tboli, producing volumes of literacy materials since the 1950s. Furthermore, primers were developed to foster literacy skills in the vernacular, while cursive writing guides were designed to advance writing skills among Tboli learners. However, it is concerning to note that no learner's materials for the Tboli language are available in the DepEd Learning Resource Portal. In this regard, researchers could look into possible limiting factors that hinder the accessibility of learning materials for the Tboli language. Additionally, a needs assessment can be carried out to identify the specific needs of Tboli learners and educators, including the types of resources needed and their challenges in accessing them. Consequently, this study does not undermine DepEd's initiative to craft literacy materials for Tboli learners. Instead, it emphasizes the need to address this gap to ensure that Tboli learners can access literacy materials that reflect their linguistic and cultural identity.

As the old adage goes, "*It takes a village to raise a child,*" and the same principle applies to language documentation and preservation. Safeguarding Philippine indigenous languages, just like Blaan and Tboli, requires collective efforts from scholars, educators, non-government organizations, indigenous communities, and the government. Each stakeholder plays a crucial role in ensuring these languages thrive for future generations. Hence, it is hoped that this paper will inspire Filipino scholars to do research on Blaan and Tboli linguistics, as these languages, though considered a minority, represent the rich linguistic heritage of the multilingual Philippines.

Conflict of Interest Statement

We have no conflict of interest to disclose.

AI Disclosure

We declare that this manuscript was prepared without the assistance of artificial intelligence. Hence, the content of this paper is original.

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