

# A Grammar of Bisaya in Davao

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**Abstract:-** This research presents a detailed linguistic description of the Bisaya in Davao language based on the examination of Basic Linguistic Theory. Three primary language consultants are native speakers of the language who translated and recorded word and sentence lists for accurate pronunciation. The analysis reveals the language's phonological, morphological, syntactic, and morphosyntactic characteristics. Based on the translated eliciting materials spoken and pronounced by the language consultants, there are three vowels and sixteen consonants in the phonemic inventory. Distinct phonological characteristics such as minimal pairs, diphthongs, and phonotactics are readily apparent. It demonstrates that the language has morphological characteristics and follows ergative-absolutive and verb Initial structure, precisely like other Austronesian languages in the Philippines. This description provides actual language documentation, additional research on language contact or migration, linguistic typology, and crosslinguistic study. This is vital for students and teachers in DepEd Davao in teaching the Bisaya in Davao as a mother tongue.

**Keywords:-** Applied Linguistics; Bisaya, Language Description; Linguistic Features; Philippines.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Cebuano (ISO 639-3 ceb) language belongs to the "Austronesian, Malayo-Polynesian, Greater Central Philippine, Central Philippine, Bisayan, Cebuano, Mansakan, Davaweño. It is extensively spoken in the Bicol region, including parts of Mindanao and the Visayas (Ethnologue, 2021). Although the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIS) (Simons & Fennig, 2022) considers the language to be institutional, that is, it has been developed to the point and is used and sustained by institutions beyond the home and community; the language still needs to be documented to add to the language's sustainable and functional literature.

In her study, Rubrico (2012) defined Cebuano, referred to as Bisaya or Binisaya by the people of Davao, as the language most people speak. In addition, she cited Ethnologue (2009), one in every three (33.32%) is Cebuano. The regional quarterly publication of the Davao NCSO gives the following ethnolinguistic groups distribution in Davao: Cebuano, 74.56%; Tagalog, 3.86%; Hiligaynon, 3.43%; Bagobo, Guiangao, 3.16%; Davaweño, 1.26%; Tagacaolo, 2.38%; Bilaan, 1.67%; Ilocano, 1.01%; Waray, 0.55%; Manobo, 2.15%; Maguindanao, 1.91%; Mandaya, 2.01%; other languages, 2.04%; uncertain, 0.01%. According to Ethnologue 2009, Davawenyo synthesizes

Filipino, Cebuano, and other Visayan dialects. In addition, Lobel and Pouzevara (2021) added that the only Philippine language with a native speaker population that approaches Tagalog (16 million) is Cebuano. Additionally, Cebuano, which is spoken as a native tongue in the central part of the Philippines, is the only language to match its geographic range, the majority of central and eastern Mindanao, the Visayan Islands, and beyond. Compared to Tagalog as the most extensively studied language among the various academic studies on the Philippine languages, as claimed by Jubilado (2021), Davao Bisaya is scarce and limited as studies were focused richly on the Visayas region. Moreover, it appears to be undocumented throughout Mindanao, particularly Davao City. Some literature available on the linguistic analysis of Cebuano is rich and timely. However, as a result, it is critical to preserve this Davao variety. Hence, it is important to document this Davao variety to add to the rich literature of Philippine languages. Language is an ever-evolving entity it is difficult to predict when it will change (Atos, 2015). Therefore, language documentation is an essential task for any linguist and research enthusiast to consider. However, high-quality data and literature availability are critical for continuing these investigations. Speakers of all languages must consciously document their languages so that future generations can utilize them as guides or references.

The documentation of languages, cultures, and histories of the world's peoples has been an exciting undertaking in the past, as Hinton, Leanne, et al. (2018) put it. She cited epi-Olmec hieroglyphic writing, one of the many writing systems developed in Mesoamerica and used thousands of years ago. Besides, the works of Campbell, L. & Rogers, C. (2015) and (Klessa, 2014) made a brief review of the history of linguistic ideas shows. It intensified that language documentation is among the oldest traditions in the linguistic field.

New literature, such as grammar, would be a great addition. While it is true that this language is thriving and valuable in some pillars of society, it is still undeniable that it will be a rich addition to the teaching of the mother tongue under DepEd's Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTBLE) to uphold its Four Minima for a language to become a mother tongue: weaving to standard orthography, grammar, dictionary, and literacy materials. In this case, this study would address the grammar requisite. Suffice it to say that this endeavor of the Grammar of Bisaya in Davao is significant.

It is for this cause that this proposal is postulated. Writing a Grammar involves two primary objectives: documentation of threatened or endangered languages and

(making these languages mother tongues. Documentation includes a detailed description of the language's phonological, morphological, and syntactic aspects.

## II. METHOD

The research design of this paper is qualitative descriptive research, specifically descriptive which explores the documentary analysis and involves gathering data through comprehensive interviews from the selected three informants who are Bisaya native speakers. The research participants or language consultants were three Davao Bisaya, native speakers in Davao City. Before data collection started, I prepared the elicitation materials, which are the 505 Wordlist and 700-sentence list from the University of the Philippines Linguistics Department, within the parameters of my research study. Experts validated the elicitation materials to ensure the viability of the expected output. The language consultants of this study were three participants who were native speakers of the language. They are more than 20 years old. They were educated enough to translate from their native language to Bisaya and Tagalog.

Barlow (2020) noted that people older than 30 tended to be fluent speakers (of varying proficiency). In contrast, people in their twenties only seemed capable of producing basic phrases (although their comprehension might have been quite good). The translation was conducted in the comfort of their preferred location during their free time. For further clarification and validation of the elicited data, these respondents were interviewed in person and via Facebook messenger.

To gather sufficient data for this study, I used the elicitation technique to collect the data for this study. I utilized the elicitation materials, such as the 505-Word List and the 775-Sentence List designed and enhanced by the linguistics department of the University of the Philippines (Diliman) (UP Department of Linguistics, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). The elicitation materials were used with appropriate consent from the rightful owner. The first three materials enumerated above are all wordlists, which have been utilized to collect lexical data from the Bisaya language to decide how to test the emerging conclusions.

This study was conducted with a firm adherence to the ethical protocols. The researcher religiously requested and secured from key school officials the corresponding permission necessary to complete this research. Furthermore, the researcher ensured the appropriateness of identified recruiting parties and reviewed the risks and measures to mitigate these risks (including physical, psychological, and social-economic. Proper authorization and consent are also obtained from the sample of the study, in which they are assured that all their rights would be fully protected, specifically in handling the data such as, but not limited to, voluntary participation, privacy, and confidentiality, informed consent process, recruitment, benefits, plagiarism, fabrication, falsification, conflict of interest (COI, deceit, permission from organization/location: Technology Issues and authorship.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

With roughly 16 million native speakers, Cebuano is the only language spoken in the Philippines, close to Tagalog's native speaker population. Moreover, speaking as a native tongue in the central region of the Philippines, Cebuano is the only language to match its geographic breadth—the majority of central and eastern Mindanao, the Visayan Islands, and beyond.

### ➤ *The Place where the Language is Spoken*

Bisaya or Binisaya is a variety of the Cebuano (ISO 639-3 ceb) language. It belongs to the "Austronesian, Malayo-Polynesian, Greater Central Philippine, Central Philippine, Bisayan, Cebuano, Mansakan, Davaweño. Widely spoken in the Bicol region: south Masbate province; parts of Mindanao; throughout the Visayas regions (Ethnologue, 2021). Cebuano is classified as ISO 639-3 ceb, a member of the "Austronesian, Malayo-Polynesian, Greater Central Philippine, Central Philippine, Bisayan, Cebuano, Mansakan, and Davaweño" ethnic groups. The Philippine language is widely spoken in the Bicol region, including south Masbate province, sections of Mindanao, and the Visayas. It is natively called by its generic term Bisaya or Binisaya.

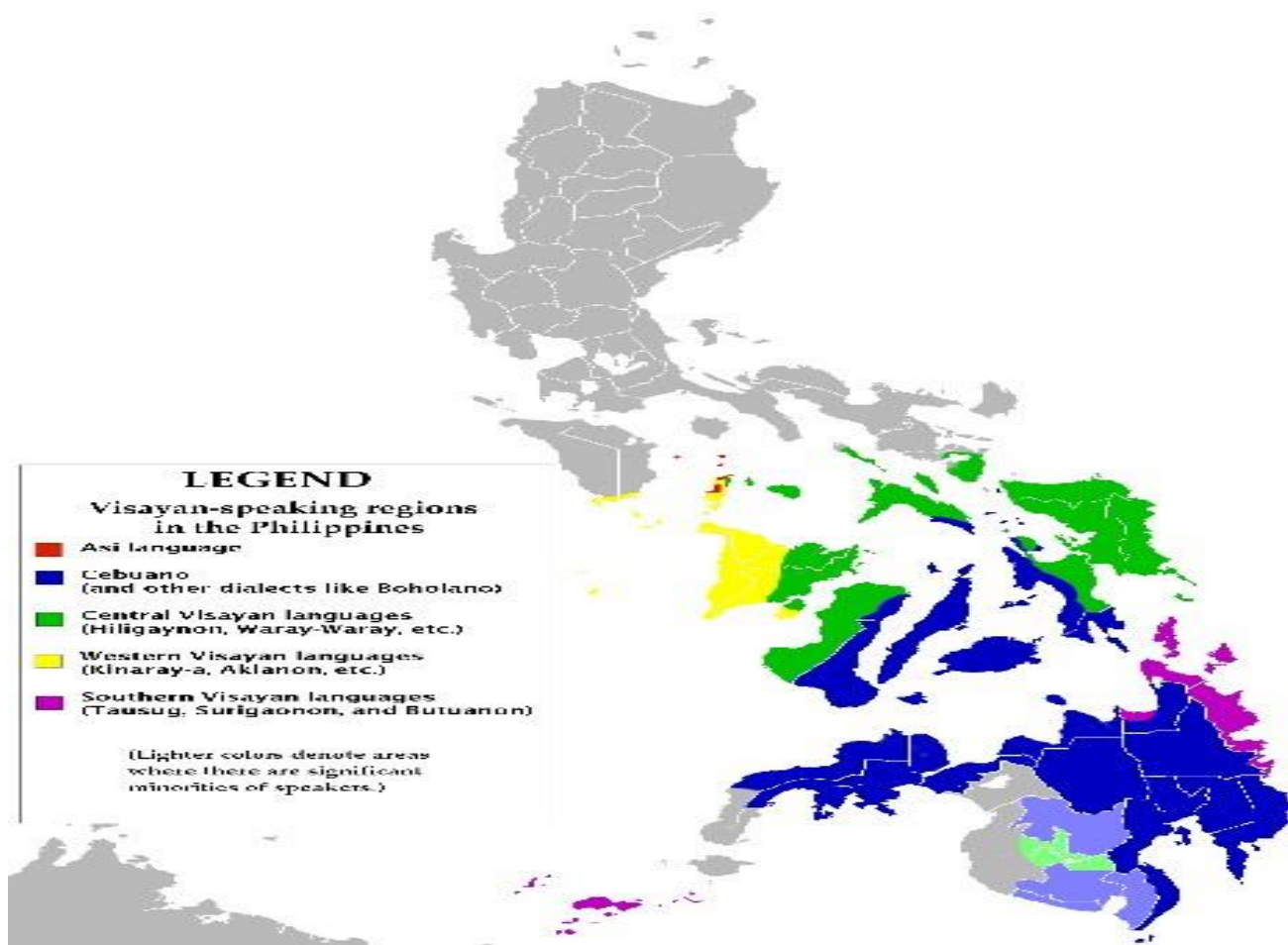


Fig 1 Visayan Language Distribution Map  
 Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org>

➤ *Bisaya in Davao Phonological Component*

The Bisaya's phonological structure in Davao comprises the phonemic inventory of vowels and consonants, phonotactics, which addresses the restrictions on phoneme combination, and phonological constraints, which address Bisaya in Davao consonant clusters, and the observable phonological processes employed to simplify their speech.

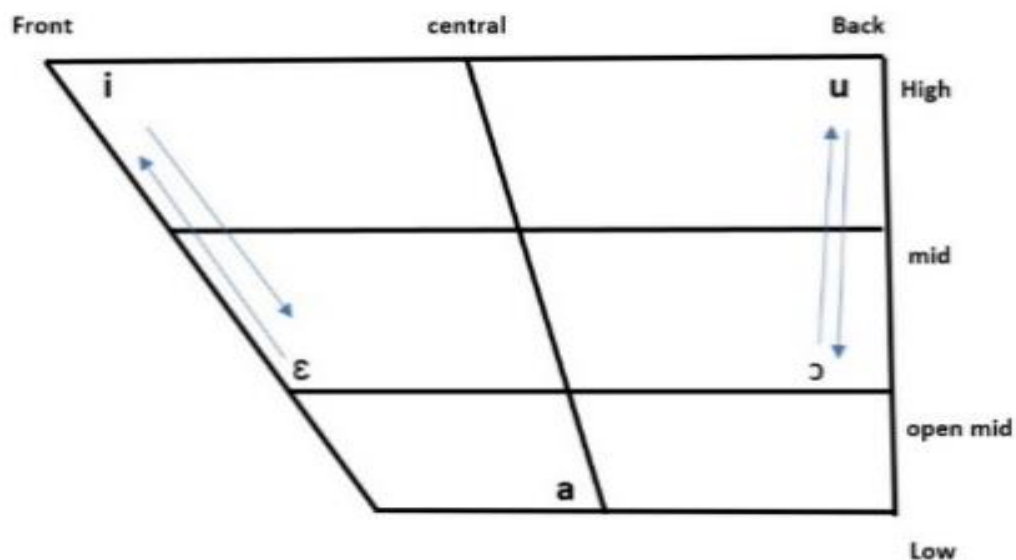


Fig 2 The Davao Bisaya Vowels

Based on the translated eliciting materials spoken and pronounced by the language consultants, Bisaya in Davao vowels and consonants are applied to Bisaya in Davao's sound system, as in all other Philippine languages. Three sounds—/a/, /i/, and /o/u—are the critical discoveries for vowels. They could be in diphthongs, minimal pairings, and open and closed syllables. Consonants consist of 16 sounds,

including /b/, /d/, /g/, /k/, /h/, /l/, /m/, /n/, /p/, /r/, /s/, /t/, w/, /y/j/, and /ʔ/ (Refer to Table 1). They are divided into four groups based on how they are articulated: stops, fricatives, nasals, flaps, and approximants. Also, the consonants are categorized in their places of articulation based on the tongue positions; bilabial, dental/alveolar, velar, and glottal.

Table 1 The Bisaya in Davao Consonant Phonemes

MANNER OF ARTICULATION	PLACES OF ARTICULATION							
	BILABIAL		DENTAL/ALVEOLAR		VELAR		GLOTTAL	
	Voiced	Voiceless	Voiced	Voiceless	Voiced	Voiceless	Voiced	Voiceless
<b>STOPS</b>	b	p	d	t	g	k	ʔ	
<b>FRICATIVES</b>				s				h
<b>NASAL</b>	m		n		ŋ			
<b>FLAP</b>			r					
<b>APPROXIMANTS</b>	w		l		y/ j			

#### ➤ Bisaya In Davao Morphological Features

Although Bisaya in Davao is simpler than other Philippine languages, it is ideal to be aware of the slight complexity of the morphological process. Morphological awareness is fundamental because, according to Borleffs et al. (2019), in the study of Lobel and Pouezevara (2021), after mastering basic decoding, morphological awareness continues to be a crucial skill for reading development in higher grades. In some languages, it is also connected with the capacity to read words. Morphemes are the primary/smallest unit of language that bares meaning. These morphemes are also observed in the Bisaya in Davao variety. Some of which are inflectional, derivational, and free. Inflected words retain their lexical categories. The affixes added to the root word add information or grammatical functions needed by the word, such as tense, case, number, and agreement to other words. The Bisaya in Davao verbs demonstrate this morphological process (Refer to Table 2).

Table 2 Bisaya in Davao Inflected Words

Root Words	English	Inflected Words	English
tindog	stand up	nitindog	stood up
		motindog	will stand up
tanom	plant	nitanom	planted
		motanom	will plant
tao	person	mga tao	persons
balay	house	mga balay	houses

Bisaya in Davao root words changed forms in the above examples through the affixes attached, but their lexical categories remained unchanged. For example, the verb *tindog* stand up changed the form to *nitindog* stood up by adding the prefix *ni* became a contemplative form of a verb, which denotes that the action has already been completed. In the same manner, adding the prefix *mo-* to the word will make it an imperfective tense of the verb; transforming it to *motindog* will stand up, thus making it an action still to be completed at some point in the future. This is also true for the verb *tanom* plant, respectively. As a result, the affixes added to Bisaya in Davao root words provide additional information or grammatical structure. *Tindog* and *tanom*, two root words used in the examples, are verbs. No matter what affixes are added, they still function as verbs in that sense; the only difference is between their contemplative and imperfective tenses. The plurality in Bisaya in Davao is expressed periphrastically expressed through *mga*. The root words, *tao* person and *balay* house are singular nouns. When the plural marker

*mga* precedes them, they become plural, *mga tao* persons; *mga balay* houses but remain a noun as their lexical category. In this case, the number changes, but not their lexical category. Inflectional morpheme combinations do not form new words. Delahunty, G. P., & Garvey, J. J. (2004) added that they merely alter the word in which they appear to denote grammatical features like plurality.

#### ➤ The Syntax in Bisaya in Davao

Languages require more than simply stringing words together to form whole sentences. To create a notion, certain words must be joined together, and groupings of words must be grouped to produce a thought. These groupings are controlled by rules, or what is known as syntax. Each language has syntax, which means that syntax is universal. However, the syntax is also language-bound, meaning that a language's syntax may be like or different from other languages. The sequence of words is essential for comprehending sentences in languages because each language has its distinctive sentence structure and word



order. The Bisaya in Davao exhibits characteristics of being an Ergative - Absolutive language and a Verb Initial language, just like other Austronesian languages in the Philippines. The presentation of the language analysis covers sentence patterns as well as phrase and clause structure. Traditional grammatical analysis presents an immediate distinction between intransitive and transitive verbs.

In contrast to intransitive verbs, transitive verbs take objects or a patient. In Bisaya in Davao, several transitive and intransitive constructions are shown. The number of necessary noun arguments a verb can take in a grammatical formulation depends on its transitivity.

The verb has a big role in Bisaya in Davao and other languages. How many nouns are required to build the phrase depends on the verb. This idea of transitivity is akin to valency, which also encompasses nouns other than the one the verb directly affects. Intransitive construction contains just one distinct argument, like all other languages: the subject. The absence of an object renders the statement comprehensive and comprehensible but lacking essential details. This construction has also been made evident by the Bisaya in Davao transitive construction.

#### ➤ *Verb Initial Sentences in Bisaya in Davao*

The verb initial patterns in Philippine languages are vital to sentence formation. Predicate occurs first, then the subject of the sentence, a pattern also seen in Austronesian languages. In both spoken and written language, this arrangement comes naturally. Although additional languages, such as Tagalog, may allow the inverse order, the natural and straightforward way of constructing sentences in these languages, including Bisaya in Davao, is verb first, followed by the arguments.

#### ➤ *The Morphosyntax in Bisaya in Davao*

The markers are one of the most observable features of Philippine languages categorized as Austronesian. These are words that do not have language equivalence in other languages. They do not have an accurate literal translation. Their primary purpose is syntactic. The sentences may have all the main parts, verbs, and nouns but would still sound awkward and complete with these markers. The discussion above shows that these markers are also found in Bisaya in Davao sample sentences. The markers are one of the most distinguishing characteristics of Austronesian-classified Philippine languages. These terms do not exist in other languages in the same way. They are not translated literally and accurately. Their primary objective is syntactic. Even though the sentences contain all the necessary nouns and verbs, they would sound odd and unfinished without these markers.

#### ➤ *The Verbal Affixation and Case Marker in Bisaya in Davao*

As previously mentioned, the co-indexing of the absolutive markers to the affixation of the verb in the sentence is a very noticeable morphosyntactic trait of Austronesian languages spoken in the Philippines. This characteristic is typically

seen in Bisaya in Davao as well. Depending on the verbal affixation, the "ang," the absolutive marker in Bisaya in Davao, adopts a different voice or emphasizes a particular aspect. The aspects of a verb in a sentence are altered by changing its affixes, as is the verb's necessity for the absolutive case to take on voice. Like other Philippine languages classified as Austronesian languages, Bisaya in Davao contains a trait known as verbal affixation related to its arguments in sentences. These languages may be studied well using this morphosyntactic feature, which also provides a very understandable description of the typology of the languages.

## IV. CONCLUSION

The extensive discussion on the widely spoken Bisaya in Davao, a Cebuano variety, demonstrated the relevance of the need to document this. This research offers a linguistic description of the language's grammar based on an evaluation of Basic Linguistic Theory and strict adherence to the functional theory of grammar in assessing the language's peculiarities. The study identified the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and morphosyntactic features of the language with the assistance of the three principal language consultants (of varying ages), who are native speakers of the language and diligently translated and recorded word and sentence lists for accurate pronunciation. Despite Bisaya in Davao's relative simplicity compared to other Philippine languages, it is advisable to be aware of the language's morphological system's slight complexity. It illustrates an intriguing set of morphological traits from which morphemes can derive or inflect. Language's morphological procedures and the existence of the lexical categories of prefixes, infixes, and circumfixes are excellent sources for linguists to study further and investigate.

They are also a valuable resource for MTBLE teachers in their instruction and a source of knowledge for Bisayan speakers in Davao to learn. This description paves the way for future researchers on actual documentation of the language and pursues research topics like dialectal distinctions in Visayas and Mindanao, language contact, survival of the language despite the presence of other prominent and dominant languages, language migration, linguistic typology, and even crosslinguistic study. I hope other linguist enthusiasts will continue what this paper may not have comprehensively addressed in some areas and may have overlooked some significant works expected discussions. This significant undertaking may provide a concrete reference for Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) for students and teachers in DepEd divisions in Davao. As a result, the teaching of Bisaya is a mother tongue because it introduces linguistic notions that support pedagogical strategies and resources. Furthermore, this humble research endeavor hopes to strengthen the community's awareness of preserving languages regardless of their status through language documentation in partnership with the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP).

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