

Translating *Vocabulario de la Lengua Bicol-Español*, 1856 Edition

Maria Lilia F. Realubit

University of the Philippines

Two years ago I was asked to comment on an English translation being done of the Lisboa *Vocabulario de la Lengua Bicol-Español*, 1856 Edition. The translator was an elderly lady, Mrs. Leticia Caldera-Sabino, age 80-83 at the time she worked on it. Upon reaching the letter **R** she suffered a mild stroke and her daughter, Prof. Evelyn Soriano, Chairperson of the Department of Modern Languages at the Ateneo de Manila University, took over the work of translating the remaining portions from **S** to **Z**.

Without seeing the work, I suggested a thorough examination. I was familiar with the book, having used it many times in my studies on Bikol, but I believed that a collective look would be more credible. A group was organized composed of native Bikolanos from different professions. We would work whole afternoons to late nights at a snail's pace due to two stumbling blocks--the strange old Spanish abbreviations and the unfamiliar vocabulary. Often we would mull over each word, discuss the printed glosses and even glow at finding new words, new terminologies. We were all struck by the realization that our vocabulary was rich in composite expressions of all sorts.

The book's lexicographer, Fray Marcos de Lisboa of the Franciscan Order, was parish priest in the capital town of Naga and two other Bikol towns from 1602 to 1616. In fourteen years stay in Bikol, he was able to learn and write the first full-length dictionary of the Bikol language. Records reveal that he died in Mexico in 1628. If he wrote the dictionary during those years, and this 1856 volume we are using is a reprint of the posthumously printed 1754 first edition, then the Bikol language confronting us is of the 17th century and is almost four centuries old.

That the dictionary was written for the Spanish user is obvious even at first glance--in the big and bold letters used in the Bikol portion and the small print in the Spanish half of the book. Consisting of 10,495 words on 417 pages of 22" x 33" size sheets, the Bikol section is arranged in the conventional alphabetic order. The lexical range or coverage is broad in social scale and localization. Lisboa ministered in towns which spoke varieties of the Bikol language as spoken in two provinces, Albay and Camarines Sur, and which are mutually intelligible. The dictionary gives a nearly total view of the language.

For every Bikol term presented, the Bikol meaning is given followed by its Spanish translation. There are items however not supplied with lexical meanings except for varied examples which he could have classified into types. Some entries, like the question word **ano** 'what', has 58 examples, mostly locutions and circumlocutions which could have been simplified.

Of the grammatical terms which appear in every entry, it seems that Lisboa knew of only one tense, the imperative. In fact, there are words marked *Imperativo* which are actually verb roots such as **ani** 'to harvest', **abulag** 'to throw something forcefully', **abong** 'to catch or help catch an animal', **abis** 'to stab somebody', etc. He marked the following words as disjunctives

alonon 'love or appreciation for something', **agadad** 'noise or sound of sailing vessels when they strike against sand or stones', etc. Just what did he mean by *Imperativo* and *Disjunctivo*?

The dictionary's large lexical file could have been enough for Lisboa to describe the grammatical system of Bikol. Ninety per cent of the words are listed in their canonical form with affixed expansions under each stem. But the Bikol affix system gets mixed up in Lisboa's hands. The looseness in the presentation of these affixed forms, complicated by the unexplained *Imperativo* and *Disjunctivo* are problems for the translator.

For almost every word he used the prefixes **nag-**, **na-**, **pinag-**, **y-**, **ypinag-**, **yquin-**, etc. without identifying what these are and what they mean. In the Bikol language predication is signalled by the verbal affix in relationship with a focus marker. There are action affixes such as **nag-** and **na-** which stand in actor-focus relationships, and goal affixes such as **y-**, **ypinag-**, etc. which stand in goal-focus relationships. It is clear that the grammatical description could not be described because the affixes could not be clarified, thus neglecting to identify the parts of speech.

Ten per cent of the entries, especially those under the **ma-**, **na-** and **pa-**, are affixed words such as **ma-** + **gayon** 'beautiful', **na-** + **raot** 'destroyed', and **pa-** + **sibog** 'to go back'. The affix **ma-** indicates quality possessed by the base word, **na-** indicates accidental action, perfective tense, and **pa-** means 'to let or permit something to do a thing.'

Many entries contain an exhaustive amount of data. Basically, **ano** is a question word meaning 'what'. The dictionary classifies three meanings: **ano** 'what', 'quality' and the idiomatic 'to hurt somebody or oneself'. With the first class of **ano**, a compact listing of the illustrative examples could have been done so as to give some succinctness in expression. Briefness and clarity may serve the Spanish or target-language speaker better; it may also enable the Bikol or source-language speaker to express himself in Spanish.

Together with lexical meanings and examples, a large number of entries contain figurative definitions. The word **sibagat** is defined in English translation as

'... a name for the undercurrents that flow in the Bikol river before they hit the stone piles just like a woman in labor pains before childbirth.'

For the word **abucay** which is a big white bird, one can say:

Nagnagnabucay na an dagat 'The waves in the sea are turning big and white.'

Apos is a half-burned piece of wood or the burned part of a candle or cigarette. But one can say **Naapos na бага si pagca guinoo niya** 'He has lost his respectability.'

The Spanish section consists of 5,588 words in 125 pages. Words in Spanish are given Bikol equivalents. But contrasted with the Bikol section, the description here is very sparse. Except for one or two word equivalents in Bikol, there is no selection of entries and no decision as to which lexical units should be coordinated with the Bikol section.

A dictionary, wrote Gleason, is the meeting place of all the systems, linguistic and non-linguistic, which bear relevantly on speech behavior. From the linguist's point of view it is essential that for every morpheme or word (or whatever sort of items are to be included) the dictionary gives its relations to the grammar in terms of the classes and subclasses to which it is related, its relations to the content structure in terms of the classes, hierarchies and

collocational restrictions to which it is related, and of course its phonemic and/or morphophonemic shape.

Of the linguistic—phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic and lexical—the Lisboa dictionary has fallen short of the first, second and third aspects. More study should have also been done on the semantic level. No phonological or morphological descriptions have been done, simply a lexical list. At least there is consistency in the spelling of words, but even for a Bikol native the pronunciation of words spelled as **aboabonanbical**, **agugnaang**, **apeu**, and **ariuarao** are difficult. There is a semblance of class and subclass in his treatment of **ano**, but generally the classification is loose.

As regards relating the vocabulary of Bikol to the culture of the people, Lisboa gives statements about the cultural implications of the items in various culturally definable situations. It is in this aspect that this dictionary is valuable. The need to translate is dictated by two purposes—to have the words disseminated to our people so that our writers can have words again and have the feel of Bikolness again, and to be able to capture the sociocultural life of the Bikol people in the past as reflected in its rich store of words.

On the problem of translating the dictionary into English, a linguistic description of Bikol grammar must be done first by consulting the transformational study of Bikol by M.L.F. Realubit.

REFERENCE

Householder, Fred W. and Sol Saporta, eds. 1967. *Problems in Lexicography*. Indiana University