Field: Linguistics
Country: Philippines
Dissertation Title: Central Philippine Dialectology

NARRATIVE

1) Statement of questions to be examined and the description and justification of the research methods to be used.

This dissertation is primarily a comparative study of the Central Philippine languages, with three aims: (1) to describe, compare, and contrast the speech varieties comprising the Central Philippine subgroup in terms of phonology, morphology, grammatical systems, and lexicon; (2) to reconstruct the phonology, morphology, grammatical systems, and lexicon of Proto-Central Philippines and compare these with existing reconstructions for earlier proto-languages up through Proto-Austronesian; (3) to form a principled hypothesis of the subgrouping within the Central Philippine subgroup. The dissertation will end with a speculative discussion on population dispersal, migration patterns, and language leveling in the Central Philippines. Data from approximately 150 Central Philippine speech varieties will be presented in the dissertation, nearly half of which have never before been discussed in the literature.

First, both synchronic and diachronic analyses will be presented in the areas of phonology, morphology, grammatical systems, and lexicon of the Central Philippine speech varieties. All of the major grammatical systems will be described and compared and contrasted between the languages under discussion, and attention will be drawn to innovative features or lexicon that are common to certain groups of speech varieties.
Second, reconstructions will be presented for the phonology, morphology, grammatical systems, and lexicon of Proto-Central Philippines as well as for lower-level proto-languages such as Proto-Tagalog, Proto-Bikol, Proto-Southern Bikol, Proto-Bisayan, Proto-Western Bisayan, Proto-Central Bisayan, Proto-Southern Bisayan, and Proto-Warayan. Considerable space will be devoted to the problems of reconstructing the morphological and grammatical systems of Proto-Central Philippines, presenting previously undiscussed data from Spanish-era texts and data from previously undescribed dialects to explain some of the phenomena that have previously caused controversy in regards to the subgrouping of Central Philippine languages.

Third, a hypothesis about the internal subgrouping of the Central Philippine languages will be proposed based on lexical, phonological, and morphological innovations. Spanish-era grammars and dictionaries from as early as the 17th century will be analyzed for clues about the development of these languages over the past 400 years. The argument will be presented that within the Central Philippine subgroup, phonological innovations are of little if any help in determining the internal relationships. Special attention will be paid to situations where a previously-existing speech community has been overrun by migrations of speakers of other languages, resulting in mixed languages with a grammatical substratum from one language but a lexicon overwhelmingly borrowed from a second language, as is the case with Porohanon of the Camotes Islands, Bantayanon of Bantayan Island, and Haya of Southern Leyte. Consideration will also be given to problems such as the position of Cebuano and Asi/Bantoanon within Bisayan, the internal subgrouping of the Bisayan languages, and the position and divergent history of Tagalog vis-à-vis the other Central Philippine languages.

Finally, a hypothesis will be presented on the initial dispersal of the Central Philippine languages, as well as an analysis of recent expansions of the major languages such as Cebuano,
Tagalog, Northern Bikol, and Ilonggo. These latter expansions have reshaped the linguistic geography of the Central Philippines in some cases even within historic times (i.e., the past five centuries), and clues about these expansions can often be found both in early Spanish-era works as well as by analyzing the considerable differences in population between each language's so-called "standard" dialect and its other "non-standard" dialects.

The research stage will consist of a full year of fieldwork, collecting a list of words and sentences from native speakers of these speech varieties in the towns in which they are spoken natively. My research tools—constantly revised over years of fieldwork and refined after discussions with leading Philippine and Austronesian language experts—will allow me to accomplish my goals. These tools consist of (1) a carefully-selected wordlist of 1,500 items which are prioritized according to the amount of phonological, morphological and lexical information that each will provide me; and (2) a list of approximately 500 sentences designed to provide a wide array of grammatical, morphological, and semantic information and various nuances thereof. In addition to these, I will also be collecting narratives in order to be able to analyze naturally occurring discourse.

2) Relationship of the research to the literature on the topic and to major theoretical issues in the field, and the project's originality and importance in terms of the concerns of the discipline.

Four works—Zorc (1977), McFarland (1974), Griño (1975), and Soberano (1980)—comprise nearly all of our modern knowledge about the linguistic geography of the Central Philippines, covering a total of 73 speech varieties, compared to approximately 150 which exist in the Central Philippines. Each of these studies was significant in its own right: Zorc (1977)
and McFarland (1974) covered entire language subgroups (Bisayan and Bikol, respectively), but by no means included all of the speech varieties that comprise these subgroups. Griño (1975) and Soberano (1980) were comprehensive town-by-town linguistic surveys, but each covered only one island (Panay and Marinduque, respectively).

Since these four works, no large-scale dialect surveys have been published for the Central Philippines, and having traveled throughout five regions of the Central Philippines, I know of no such surveys being conducted today. In comparison, the Northern and Southern Philippines have been the subject of a considerable amount of research in the past two decades or so, e.g., by Reid (e.g., 1989, 1999), Himes (1997, 1998, etc.), and a multitude of SIL (Summer Institute of Linguistics) linguists. The Northern Philippines as a whole was even the subject of an extensive language geography (McFarland 1977). It is also noteworthy that while the SIL maintains a strong presence in the Philippines, only six of the 41 languages it works on are Central Philippine languages, which contrasts with the fact that native speakers of Central Philippine languages account for nearly two-thirds (65.7%) of the population of the entire Philippines. Even for Tagalog—by far the most often described Philippine language in the literature—Himmelmann (2004) states that “no in-depth study of Tagalog dialects exists.” Likewise, McFarland (1980:92) attests that Samar, the Philippines’ fifth-largest island, “is apparently an area of extensive dialectal diversity which has yet to be studied thoroughly; when a thorough study is made, it may be found that SAMAR-LEYTE is actually an L-complex or even a group of languages, like ‘Bikol’.” In fact, McFarland’s observation is quite an understatement, and after conducting fieldwork in the Eastern Visayas for nearly two months during the Summer of 2004, I concluded that I would need an additional two months to adequately document this region’s 25+ diverse dialects for my dissertation!
As such, the goal of my research is two-fold: first, to nearly double the number of documented speech varieties in the Central Philippines, and second, to present them together in a work that concentrates on the Central Philippines as a whole, and not just one part of it. In both respects, this work will be a first, and will hopefully fulfill my vision of presenting a single work that will be the major reference tool for future researchers of Central Philippine languages. Additionally, my dissertation will be original in incorporating a discussion of the early Spanish-era grammars and dictionaries including several originally written in the 17th century (Lisboa (1865) for Bikol, Mentrida (1841) for Ilonggo, Ezguerra (1747) for Waray-Waray, etc.), not simply mentioning their existence, but discussing the details of what these early works tell us about the structure of these languages centuries ago.

3) Preliminary research conducted in the US and overseas...and the kinds, quality and availability of data for the research in the host country or countries.

My research into the linguistic geography of the Central Philippines began in the U.S. in 1996 when I began familiarizing myself with the literature and interviewing Filipinos about the dialects of their hometowns. I collected primary references in the Philippines during a short stay in March-April 1998, and after completing my Master's Degree in Linguistics in 1999, I left almost immediately for the Philippines in order to conduct fieldwork in the Bikol Region, one of the Central Philippine regions with the most dialect diversity. During my stay in the Philippines from 1999-2001, I also made several trips to various parts of the Bisayan Islands' three regions to conduct preliminary surveys and follow-up research on the dialectology of those regions. More recently, during the summer of 2004, I spent four months conducting surveys and doing in-depth data collection in several parts of the Central Philippines.
Data from native speakers of these speech varieties is readily available in the towns in which they are spoken natively. Upon having reached each island by air or sea, these towns are easily accessible by public transportation via cement or dirt highways, except for a few towns on the interior of islands like Samar where travel by river is required. My experience over the nearly two years that I spent researching in the Philippines is that many native speakers are more than happy to share their language knowledge, especially if they are receiving fair reimbursement for their services. Travel to the individual towns is more efficient both economically and in terms of time, in comparison with simply searching for speakers from these towns in larger cities or universities. By traveling to the town or area where each speech variety is spoken, one can be sure to find a large number of speakers who interact with their fellow first-language speakers on a daily basis for a number of purposes, in comparison with resorting to finding speakers from various towns living in larger urban centers where they no longer use their home dialect in the majority of daily transactions. Also, being in the place where each speech variety is spoken natively makes it easy to find additional informants when I want to double-check the data that I have elicited. In other words, much more diverse, reliable and accurate data can be collected in the towns where these languages are spoken natively.

4) The justification for overseas field research, and preparations to establish appropriate and sufficient research contacts and affiliations abroad.

As stated earlier, it is very difficult—if even possible at all—to find speakers of many of these speech varieties here in America, and even if speakers were available, the data would be less reliable because the speakers who have immigrated to America have been removed for some time from the larger language community and thus relatively “out of practice” in comparison
with speakers of the same speech variety in the community where that speech variety is spoken. Also, the amount of time needed to try to track down speakers here in America, especially on Oahu, would add a considerable amount of time to the one year that I have projected for completion of my dissertation research. Even if speakers could be found for all the speech varieties of the Central Philippines, it would be next to impossible to verify data with a second or third informant if and when needed.

I have made a large number of contacts throughout all five regions of the Central Philippines during my two years of living there. Contacts include dozens of high school and university teachers and administrators, authors, priests, librarians, and government officials. Since my research involves traveling to dozens of towns to which I have never traveled before, it would be impossible to have a contact in every town, and such pre-existing contacts are unnecessary: In every case, in traveling to a new place, I have always received enthusiastic help from employees of the public schools, churches and city halls that exist in every town and city in the Central Philippines.

5) The applicant’s plans to share the results of the research in progress and a copy of the dissertation with scholars and officials of the host country and countries.
As my dissertation topic is in reality the realization of a lifetime aspiration of being able to produce a comprehensive reference guide offering both broad and in-depth coverage of the entire Central Philippines, it is all the more important for me to be able to make my work widely accessible and affordable in the Philippines, and not merely to students and academics with the luxury of U.S.-style university libraries. I have already given my word to representatives of dozens of schools and local government offices that I would give them a copy of my dissertation. As such, in addition to searching for a publication outlet for international distribution, I also plan on insisting upon the right to have my dissertation published in the Philippines by a publisher that will sell it at an affordable price (i.e., comparable to the prices at which we offer our self-published books on Bikol). Lacking such an affordable outlet for the Philippine audience, I will spend my own money to self-publish my dissertation in book form, with the goal of being able to donate at least 1,000 copies to university, high school and municipal libraries, first and foremost in locations that were of assistance to me in conducting my research. While such an attitude may sound startling, it is simply a reflection of my deep-rooted belief that researching third-world languages is pointless if native speakers of those languages will not also have the opportunity to access and learn from the output of that research.
6) The guidance and supervision of the dissertation advisor or committee at all stages of
the project, including guidance in developing the project, understanding research
conditions abroad, and acquainting the applicant with research in the field.

For my dissertation committee, I will have five of the top scholars in the field of
Austronesian Linguistics and Philippine languages. My dissertation advisor will be Dr. Robert
Blust, scholar of Austronesian languages and Historical and Comparative Linguistics, and a
prolific writer who has published on diverse Philippine languages, including Tiruray and
Tagalog. The other four members of my dissertation committee each brings an important
specialization to my committee: Dr. R. David Zorc, scholar of Philippine languages who has
done work on over 40 Philippine languages, mostly members of the Central Philippine subgroup;
Dr. Kenneth Rehg, scholar of Micronesian languages, phonology, and language documentation;
Dr. Michael Forman, scholar of Philippine languages and sociolinguistics; and Dr. Teresita
Ramos, head of UH Manoa’s Filipino and Philippine Literature Program and author of a number
of analytic and pedagogical texts on the Tagalog language.

I plan to work extensively with my entire dissertation committee, not just my dissertation
advisor, throughout the entire process of my research and dissertation writing. My goal of
authoring a state-of-the-art reference work on Central Philippine languages would be greatly
undermined if I did not give the experts with whom I’ve chosen to work the opportunity to
comment, criticize, and make suggestions throughout the entire dissertation process. Even when
away from the University of Hawaii, the cheap cost of internet rental in the Philippines will
allow me to keep in contact with the members of my committee, as well as with other experts on
Philippine languages. With my laptop, I will also be able to type up my data, observations and
analyses so that I may share them for comment and feedback.