

LANGUAGE CONTACT IN THE VISAYAS THE CASE OF ATI ETHNO-PHARMACOLOGY

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1. Introduction

The essence of this paper¹ is captured in the two bottles called *birhen-birhen* 'virgin (Mary)-like'. On visual examination, the small bottle contains the image of the crucified Christ, while the bigger bottle has the image of the Virgin Mary. Besides these images, both bottles contain rocks, shells, roots, and barks immersed in oil. Collectively referred to as *herbal* (< English 'herbal') or simply, herbal medicine, I shall refer to these materials technically as *materia medica* in this paper.

This report deals essentially with lexical borrowings and, in a larger context, with cultural borrowings. Aspects of language contact are manifested in the lexical items used to refer to the different items in the *materia medica* peddled by the Ati to other ethnolinguistic groups in the Visayas, Central Philippines (Map 1).

2. Background of the study

This paper is a result of an on-going research, which began in May 2000 among the Ati, an ethnolinguistic group (EG) of itinerant peddlers who sell native herbal medicine, amulets, etc. This collection or 'bag' of objects that they carry contains the healing system that encapsulates the long time contact among the various EGs in central Philippines. This paper argues that EG identities are blurred as a result of the EGs' belief and patronage of the efficacy of Ati remedies, and that this interaction represents the complexity involved in the language contact of the various EGs in one cultural area, the Visayas.

This preliminary analysis is based on the data set obtained from two keys Ati peddlers from Cebu which will be used as the main data together with those gathered from

Sibulan, Dumaguete and Iloilo. This data set represents one “spread” of healing materials laid-out (Plate 1) on sidewalks. The details of this data set are as follows: local name(s), scientific and/or English names, language(s) used, uses, and preparation (Table 1).

2. Language contact: EG situation and the Atis of central Philippines

There are more than one hundred EGs scattered all over the Philippine archipelago. Filipino linguist (Paz 1996) theorizes that EGs must have belonged to different cultures in the past, but through migration and trade their cultural differences have become blurred. As a result, ethnic identities continue to be associated with their mother tongues. This is the reason why linguists prefer to label the various cultural communities in the Philippines as EGs.

The situation in the Visayan Islands of central Philippines illustrates how EGs use various languages when interacting with other EGs. The natives, speakers of a mother tongue from these islands, collectively identify themselves as Bisaya. The Bisaya are composed of several EGs – Sebwano, Waray, Ilonggo, Masbatenyo, Kapulnon, Romblomanon, Ati, Bukidnon, and Magahat – who speak, in addition to their mother tongue, at least either one of the two regional lingua francas, Sebwano for those in eastern Visayas and Ilonggo/Hiligaynon for those in western Visayas, and Filipino, the national lingua franca which is constantly enriched by the vocabulary of its speakers. The majority are coastal dwellers who practice fishing, farming and trading, as well as artisan activities like pottery, weaving, blacksmithing, and recycling industrial products for their local needs. The Bisaya are the major clients of the Ati healing system.

For the past three decades the intensification of trade and commerce, as well as the availability of reliable transport system, enhanced the exchange among the already mobile Bisayan population. Consequently, language contact among the islanders increased with more vigor and intensity. The result of this contact gave rise to the increase in loan words, here in the domain of ethno-pharmacology, as well as in

trilingualism of Ati ambulant peddlers. Besides their native tongue, Inati, the Atis are conversant in Ilonggo/Hiligaynon and/or in Sebwanon, the lingua francas of the region.

The Ati or Ata, an EG who live in central Philippines, have Negroid features. In the past they were found mainly in the islands of Panay and Negros, however, in the last three decades of the 20th century, they have been seen in the urban centers of the neighboring islands peddling herbal medicine and amulets. Their traditional subsistence is by hunting and seasonal slash and burn agriculture. During planting and harvesting seasons they also work as farm helpers to other EGs such as the Sebwanos and the Ilonggos. At present there are very few of them (less than one percent) who own the land where their houses are situated.

In my own survey between May 2000 and April 2001, and from the data of the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples, the Ati refer to themselves as Ati, Ata (Mascuñana 1997) or Antiki depending on where they come. They number about 9,680 or 1,913 households/families living together in settlements that range from of 5 to 15 households in their non-traditional homelands such as Cebu, Bohol, Leyte, Samar, Biliran, Camotes, Siquijor, Carabao, Boracay, Romblon, and Tablas².

3. Ethno-pharmacology, knowledge and power

What is referred to here as ethno-pharmacology is that body of knowledge which deals with the well being of people and the alleviation of human suffering through the use of the traditional remedies of the Atis in the context of person-society-nature-supernatural relationships (Worseley 1983:315-48). This body of knowledge is enriched through the dynamic interaction between the Atis and the other EGs who patronize them.

The Ati and the Bisayan healing systems have a common belief in healing, i.e. the person, society, nature and the supernatural are all interrelated. The sources of human ailments are framed on these relationships. Knowledge of the Ati healing system, like that of the Bisaya (Arens 1956, 1957, 1971; Hart 1978; Lieban 1967; Mascuñana, et. al., 1998;

Tiston 1983) is socially distributed among fellow Atis in the process of a person's life cycle. Children also participate in the gathering and the assembling of healing materials, as well as in the peddling of the products at a certain age. But part of the knowledge belongs to the "specialists". The *Maaram* 'the knowledgeable one' (Magos 1992) or the *siruhanos* (< Spanish *cirujano* 'surgeon') have spiritual powers through privileges given to them by supernatural beings, or as rewards for the long period of apprenticeship with their parents who are themselves endowed with "power". In simple terms, knowledge would include the activity of gathering herbal materials, minerals and rocks, or the knowledge of medicinal ingredients of nature. Power is concretized in the possession of *mutya* 'magical stone' or magical prayers (Seki 1996).

3.1 *Materia Medica*

Materia medica is the prototype of all medicines, which addresses the illness of people. Medicines can alter the state of ill health for better, or for worse, as in the case of sorcery. The data taken from two Ati informants from Cebu illustrates a cross-section of the range of materials that are being peddled to a non-Ati population (Plate 1 and Table 1). These can be differentiated into four types based on their functions or uses. These types of *materia medica* address: (a) body aches and pains caused by the entry of cold air into the body, (b) the need for protection against harm from environmental spirits and other persons through sorcery, (c) luck in one's business, trade, job hunting, friendship, and prosperity for one's household, and (d) simple itches of the skin, dog bites, etc. The basic ingredients used in types (a) and (d) are roots, barks and seeds of medicinal plants. These are either boiled and drunk, or rubbed (with oil) on the affected parts of the body. On the other hand, types (b) and (c) consist of stones and minerals gathered from caves, outcroppings on hillsides, or seashells and corals. These are immersed in oil, placed either in bottles or assembled in plastic tubes to be worn as bracelets, or are placed in plastic containers and wrapped in red cloth to be tied around the waist or pinned on one's clothes.

4. Women traders and peddlers

Materia medica is mostly peddled by Ati women and traded by Bisaya women who control the wholesale market in Cebu. According to the husband of one of my informants who regularly accompanies his wife selling their goods, women are better sellers than men because they are not shy. Moreover, women can explain better what their products are, their uses and how these are used.

In this paper I present three women who are linked together by virtue of their participation in a complicated network of peddlers and traders who need each other in order to move the goods and assemble them to sell. The first is Susan, a Bisayan trader from Cebu. The two others, Normalita and Amelia, are ambulant Ati peddlers from Cebu and Sibulan, Negros Oriental, respectively. When compared to Normalita, Amelia spends a longer time in searching the materials she needs in making or assembling the *materia medica* she peddles as she can not easily get supplies from Susan. Nevertheless, the assistance given to her by her relatives in the search for materials helps. Since the local government of Cebu is very strict regarding the gathering of raw materials within a declared forest park of the island, Normalita, on the other hand, is handicapped by the limited supply from nature which she would rather gather herself with the help of her husband. Supplies can be had from Susan, who has a wide network of suppliers from all over the Visayas and Mindanao. Her situation is like that of other Cebu traders who have developed a resource-starved coralline island as a trans-shipment point for various goods and raw materials passing through their markets. Yes, Ati, as well as Bisaya *materia medica*, have also been absorbed in this system of trans-shipping of goods.

5. Observations and conclusions

Many points can be raised in the analysis of Ati *materia medica* from the point of view of language contact. At this point, I would like to just limit myself to two observations.

Firstly, the language mostly utilized in the Ati *materia medica* is Binisaya or Bisaya, the *lingua franca* in Cebu. In essence, lexicon has been borrowed by the Sebwano and the

Ati in the normal trade transactions among them. But in reality, the languages involved here are not only Binisaya/Sebwano and Inati. There are also lexical borrowings from Ilonggo/ Hiligaynon, Spanish, or even English in very few instances. I have said earlier that there is a tendency for most Ati ambulant vendors to be trilingual. Heavy lexical borrowing from Inati to Bisaya and/or Sebwano, as well as from Bisaya to Inati, is very evident. Often informants could no longer distinguish the original Inati term. The terms used are almost always associated with either Sebwano or Ilonggo/Hiligaynon. Borrowings from Spanish are more pronounced. Is it because it is a foreign language? This can be seen in the naming of minerals or rocks and calcified shells. For instance, under type b there are entries where the use of the Pan-Philippine term *batu* ‘stone’ and the Spanish loan word *dyamante* ‘stone or diamond’ are clearly differentiated as shown in example no. 13 in Table 1:

batu ara (stone + *ara*) ‘sacred stone’

dyamante tapul (diamond + *tapul*) ‘violet colored stone’

These examples are more pronounced in the data set gathered from an informant in Sibulan where the stones meant to protect whoever holds or owns them were specifically identified (Table 2). The use of either *batu* or *dyamante* seems to indicate that when the loan word from Spanish *dyamante* is used, the material is “pure”, i.e. it is not calcified, as opposed to the use of *batu*, as in example no. 16 *batu libun* ‘stoned shells/stones from thickets’ which are partially or fully calcified rocks. The material is considered “pure” if it is in its original form, such as examples nos. 1-10, 13, and 16. On the other hand, the Pan-Philippine term *batu* is used to refer to objects which are considered to be more powerful, thus more potent, because these have been calcified or transformed to stone from their original state of being sea or swamp shells as they have been found in mountain caves. Aside from no. 16 already cited above, other examples are nos. 11 and 12.

Secondly, in spite of the heavy lexical borrowings in these languages, cultural differences between the Bisaya and

the Ati may still be gleaned by going deeper into the analysis of some items. For example, going back to the data set from Cebu (Table 1), the cultural differences between Ati and Bisaya, in this case, Sebwano, may be gleaned from the following examples:

habak (Sebwano) ‘amulet for adults against poison and sorcery’

tangkil (Inati) ‘amulet for children against stomach gas and as protection from evil’

This particular case may imply that the reason why Atis retained their original Inati term *tangkil* may probably be due to their closeness to the well being of women and children, a big concern for the Ati healing system. On the other hand, they have borrowed a Sebwano term *habak* to distinguish the function of the object meant for adults. Definitely, the form and contents of these objects are not the same. A child’s amulet is sewn or packed in plastic bags, while an amulet meant for adults is encapsulated in an empty and bent bullet shell. The latter suggests a certain valuation of age grade or, to a certain extent, a hierarchical notion of gender. Women and children belong to the category of “vulnerable”, while adults/males, on the other hand, belong to the category of “powerful” as seen in the use of an empty bullet shell.

The world of Ati ethno-pharmacology illustrates how various beliefs and practices are incorporated in a “shared” healing system among the EGs in the Visayas through the lexicon they use in various situations, Sebwano, Ilonggo/Hiligaynon, Inati, etc. Ati ethno-pharmacology has been patronized by many of the EGs in this archipelago as reflected in the many languages used: Spanish, Filipino, Sebwano, Ilonggo/Hiligaynon, Kinaray-a, etc., besides the Ati language called Inati.

To conclude, the borrowed lexical items suggest three points. Firstly, lexical borrowings between Inati and a regional lingua franca takes place in a “gendered” situation, i.e. women, more than men, dominate the trading and peddling of goods which are generally intended for the well-being of women and

children. For instance, two terms are used for the same category of objects; an Inati word is used for items meant for children, while a borrowed word is used for objects meant for adults, usually, men. This was already illustrated in the use of Inati *tangkil* and Binisaya *habak* above.

Secondly, lexical borrowing by the Ati and/or Binisaya from Spanish is viewed from the standpoint of the native notion of power. For example, two words are used to refer to the concept of *mutya*, a native term that may mean 'stone, jewel, source of magical or spiritual power': the Pan-Philippine word *batu* and the loan word from Spanish *dyamante*. As mentioned above, objects which are more powerful are referred to as *batu* + an adjective. Powerful in this sense means that particular objects have undergone calcification or transformation from their original state, i.e. sea or swamp shells, into stone having been found in mountain caves. Transformation suggests wonder or mystery; thus they have become objects endowed with power.

And finally, Christian symbols, i.e. the cross, the Virgin Mary, etc., like lexical borrowings from Spanish are devices to conceal native (i.e. non-Christian) beliefs which were originally banned as paganistic by the Catholic Church, while peddling the native concept of *materia media*. At the same time the use of Christian symbols communicate a belief system to a hybrid or *mestizaje* culture, the present speakers of Binisaya/Bisaya.

Notes

- 1 I would like to acknowledge the University of the Philippines, Archaeological Studies Program for giving me the time to undertake field research in between my teaching and administrative duties. This paper would not have been read at the SEALS XI Conference if not for the Research Dissemination Grant of the University of the Philippines, Diliman. The Program for the study of the Ethnolinguistic Groups in Philippines (PPEG), of the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, U.P. Diliman, partially financed the research.

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- 2 In many of my field trips, informants tell me that there are Negritos in Biliran (the Mamanua from Surigao) and in Siquijor (offsprings of Ati and Bisaya unions). According to Paz (1996), there are also some in Boracay and Carabao Islands. Ruing my most recent visit to Cebu, Joel Sanger of Davao, who was visiting his relatives in Tinaan, Naga, Cebu told me, that there is also a big community of Atis in Baranggay 93, Nabunturan, Davao. He added that these Atis no longer peddle their goods since they began to cultivate rice. Of the almost ten thousand Ati population, roughly more than ten percent of them are engaged in the collection, assemblage and trade of healing materials. It should however not be over looked that a fraction of Bisayan people also take part in the gathering, assembling and trading of healing materials being sold by Ati ambulant peddlers.

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Plate 1. Ati Materia Medica

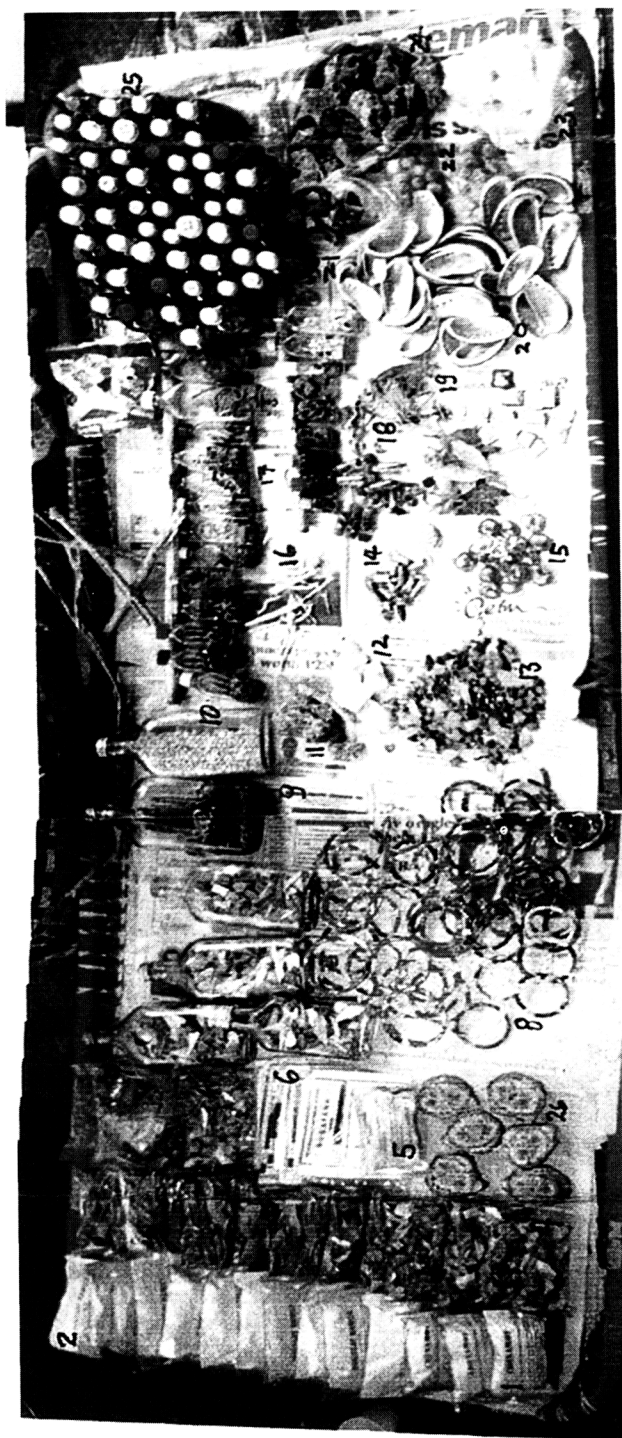


Table 1. Materia medica from Cebu, display of Mary & Dagul Legaspi 00.05.16 revised 01.04.11

Local name	Description	1 2 2a 2b 3 4 5					Uses
		1	2	2a	2b	3	
Type a							
01 chinamot							for pregnant women to remove body cold
02 dugusay	Arcangelisia Flava (Linn) Merr	0					relapse, abdominal pain
03 mahogany	seeds of mahogany tree	0					high blood pressure
04 agusu	ingredients with local wine	0	0	0			abdominal pain
05 kamyas		0	0	0			to induce menstruation,
06 bugayana		0					colic, abdominal pain, cough, spasm
07 agusu		0	0	0			
19 hambubukag (in Sebwan, tamkagan)	flying lizard (male-black, female-light color)						medicine for asthma
22 balogbog (in Ilongo, dalugdog)	seed of balogbog tree	0	0	0			cold air in the body
Type b							
08 brislit	bracelet				0	0	protection from sorcery
09 birhen-birhen	various ingredients with 3 wooden women				0		protection from sorcery
10 malagaya (in Sebwan, magaya)	variety of upland rice		0	0	0		colic, fever
11 batu kulibra	(< Spanish culebra 'snake')		0	0	0		
12 batu ara	(< Spanish ara 'sacred altar stone')		0	0	0		
13 sagul sa panagang	various stones		0				protection against sorcery
batu ara	calcite crystal		0		0		
batu saylan	seed of a tree		0		0		
tawas tapul	copper sulphate		0	0	0		protection from poison
dyamante tapul	tektite		0		0		
dyamante negra	shiny stone		0		0		
batu balisung	white coral		0		0		
14 habak	bent bullet, filled with various ingredients		0				amulet for adults against poison, sorcery
15 tangkil	same ingredients as no. 13		0		0		amulet for children against evil, stomach gas
17 pangontra sa aswang	oil and other things		0				against witches
16 pangamay	twig shaped like a hand		0	0	0		to attract customers, business

Table 1. Materia medica from Cebu, display of Mary & Dagul Legaspi 00.05.16 revised 01.04.11

Local name	Description	1	2	2a	2b	3	4	5	Uses
Type c									
18 pinulut									
20 kapinan	elephant ear abalone	o				o(?)			ritual for house building
27 pangangaw	tree branch				o				purifying fish net
24 kamangyan	resin usually from almaciga tree				o				purifying the body, house, animal
28 kabayo-kabayo (not in photo)	sea horse								prosperity
Type d									
21 abara	deer horn or bone?						o		dog bites
23 tawas	alum				o		o		armpit odor
25 himag (in Inati, dita)	<i>Alstonia scholaris</i>				o				itches, allergies
26 abi-ab (in Bisaya, duguan)	Family Myristaceae Genus <i>Myristica</i> Linn						o		itches

Legend: 1 Brand name, 2 Bisaya, 2a Ilongo, 2b Sebwano, 3 Inati, 4 Spanish loan word, 5 English loan word

Table 2. *Materia medica* from Sibulan, from Amelia Babao 01.04.12

No	Native name	Scientific name	Languages used							Remarks
			1	2	2a	2b	3	4	5	
Stones										
1	dyamante dalag	bentonite	o					o	o	diamond (stone) + yellow
2	dyamante bayolit	opal	o					o	o	" (stone) + violet
3	dyamante tapul	obsidian	o					o	o	" (stone) + dark color
4	dyamante negra	pyrite	o					o	o	" (stone) + black
5	dyamante grin	green chert	o					o	o	" (stone) + green
6	dyamante pula	chert	o					o	o	" (stone) + red
7	dyamante brawn	brown chert	o					o	o	" (stone) + brown
8	kabilyada	opal						o		
9	dyamante puti	calcite crystal	o					o	o	" (stone) +
10	dyamante blu	broken glass	o					o		" (stone) +
11	batu ara	calcite crystal	o					o		stone + ara
12	batu itum	siltstone	o						o	stone + black
13	dyamante bulaw	calcite	o					o	o	" (stone) +
Shells and corals										
14	batu balisung	coral branch	o						o	
15	banawug	black coral	o							
16	batu libun/kinasung	star fish	o							
17	bunaw	clam	o							
18	diwaiwal		o							
19	susu		o							
20	kuol (sa bukid)		o							
21	shel, tipay		o					o		
22	tuyom		o							
23	tuway		o							
24	bagungon		o							
25	bulalo		o							
26	(conus shell)									
27	litub									
Chemical										
28	tawas tapul	blue alum	o					o	o	alum + dark color
Plants										
29	bahay		o							
30	samsamon (root)		o							
31	badbaran (root)		o							
32	pangongboay/bong?		o							
33	panggoon (tree)		o							
34	tagu lapus (kahoy)		o						o	

Note: Stones were identified by my colleague, Dr. Graciano Yumul, of the National Institute of Geology, National Institute of College of Science, University of the Philippines, Diliman Geology, College of Science, University of the Philippines, Diliman.

Legend: 1 Brand name, 2 Bisaya, 2a Ilongo, 2b Sebwano, 3 Inati, 4 Spanish, 5 English