

The Tasaday Language: A Key to Tasaday Prehistory^{*}

1. Introduction

In this chapter I examine two bodies of linguistic evidence in order to determine whether there was a systematic attempt to deceive investigators as to the true identity of the Tasaday.¹ First, I will look at the linguistic material gathered from the Tasaday during the 1971-72 contacts by outsiders; second, at the linguistic evidence that has become available since then. I will test the claims of the 'hoax' proponents regarding the identity of the Tasaday against the form of the Tasaday language.

New linguistic evidence now available in papers by Johnston (1992), Elkins (1992), and Molony (1992; Molony with Tuan 1976) makes it possible to draw conclusions regarding a possible hoax.² I will address the following issues: the nature of language versus dialect; the position of the Tasaday speech variety vis-à-vis other Manobo speech varieties; implications for whether the Tasaday are a hoax; and the extent to which the Tasaday may have been isolated from other Manobo communities.

2. Critical Evaluation of the Data

The most prominent claim hoax proponents make regarding the true identity of the Tasaday is that they are Tboli people who are bilingual in Manobo.

^{*} Originally published in: The Tasaday language: A key to Tasaday prehistory. In *The Tasaday controversy: Assessing the evidence*, ed. by Thomas N. Headland, 180-193. American Anthropological Association Special Publications, Scholarly Series No. 28. Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association. (1992)

¹ I make no apology for using the term Tasaday as an ethnonym for the group under discussion, even though Iten (1989:19) claimed that "it would be quite an exception, if in the Philippines an ethnic group would name itself after a mountain. Tribal names generally mean 'people, human being' in their language". This is quite without foundation. The use of prominent landmarks is a much more common ethnonymic practice in the Philippines than the use of the local word for 'person'. Examples are the various communities that surround Lake Lanao in Mindanao, including the Maranao, Magindanao, and the Iranon and, similarly, the Bukidnon and Igorot 'mountain people', the Itneg, who live along the Tineg River in Abra, Northern Luzon, the Matigsalug Manobo who live along the Salug River, and so on. To my knowledge the only groups in the Philippines who use their word for 'person' as an ethnonym are the Negritos of Northern Luzon, and in these cases the term refers only to 'Negrito person', not 'person' in general.

² I wish to express my thanks to Richard Elkins and Clay Johnston for reviewing my comments on Manobo lexical items and to Vivian Forsberg for providing me with Tboli cognates for some of the Tasaday terms discussed.

This position is taken by Duhaylungsod and Hyndman (1989),³ as well as by Salazar, who presented genealogical evidence for such a scenario.⁴ The only non-Tboli is said to have been Balayem (alias Tinda), a speaker of Blit Manobo. I proceed on the assumption that if the Tasaday were really Tboli, they would most likely speak Blit Manobo, characterized by one or more of the following features: (1) the sporadic appearance of uniquely Tboli terms, (2) Tboli cognates of Manobo terms, and (3) Manobo terms spoken with a Tboli accent pattern. I further assume that if the hoax proponents are correct, the first two of these features would probably result in some variation between the two sets of terms (Tboli and Blit Manobo) as they were recorded by different investigators.

A number of problems arise when we try to interpret the linguistic data that have become available. First, there is a fair amount of variability for some terms among the lists; that is, different investigators have recorded different Tasaday terms with the same meaning. Second, the researchers' phonetic transcriptions for even the same lexical item frequently do not match. While it is true that even within a small linguistic community there is often variation in the pronunciation of certain lexical items, it is also true that with any linguistic fieldwork, unless one is a skilled phonetician, there are invariably errors of recognition and transcription during the first stages of elicitation. Thus, the researcher may introduce variation where none actually exists.⁵

Still another problem in interpreting the data is the lack of substantial information from certain speech varieties spoken in the immediate geographical vicinity of the Tasaday. There are four fairly substantial unpublished dictionaries of Southern Manobo languages, each prepared by a member of the Summer Institute of Linguistics after many years of residence in the area. Two of these dictionaries (Johnston 1968 and Errington and Errington 1981) are for the Manobo spoken in Kalamansig, Cotabato (referred to hereafter as MboKC), some

³ Duhaylungsod and Hyndman (1989:13) state that apart from the man Balayem ('the only Manobo made into a Tasaday'), all other Tasaday are Tboli who regularly speak Manobo.

⁴ This evidence has been convincingly refuted by Amelia Rogel-Rara and Emmanuel Nabayra (1989).

⁵ These errors are not necessarily eliminated if one already speaks a Philippine language. A native speaker of Tagalog, for example, will have difficulty distinguishing sounds such as schwa or geminate consonants, neither of which occurs in Tagalog. Knowledge of a closely related language obviously reduces the margin of error, but may not eliminate it entirely if the phonology is at all different from that to which one is accustomed.

25 km west of the Tasaday caves. Another dictionary (DuBois 1988) is for the Tagabawa Manobo spoken on the southern and southeastern slopes of Mt. Apo in Davao del Sur. The fourth (DuBois n.d.) is for the Sarangani Manobo spoken on the east coast of the Sarangani Peninsula and on the San Agustin Peninsula of southern Mindanao. But all that is known of the Blit Manobo speech variety is the brief list in the comparative lists of Fox (Elizalde with Fox 1971a), Llamzon (1971b), Yen (1976a), and Molony (Molony with Tuan 1976).⁶ Nor is there anything available from any of the other supposedly Manobo-speaking communities close to the caves, such as Barrio Ned.

Also lacking is a substantial body of lexical material from those languages generally referred to now as the Southern Mindanao languages. There is a vocabulary of approximately 1,500 words of the Tboli (TBL) used in Sinolon, Alah Valley (Forsberg and Lindquist 1955). There is also a 6,000 word lexicon of Tiruray spoken in Cotabato Province, north of Kalamansig (Schlegel 1971). But for the other Southern Mindanao languages, Koronadal Blaan and Sarangani Blaan, there are only the word lists in the studies of Reid (1971) and, for Ubo, of Yap (1977).

2.1 Fox's Word List

A list of approximately 110 words was collected by anthropologist Robert Fox on June 16 and 17, 1971, about two weeks after the first reported Tasaday contact (Elizalde with Fox 1971a: Appendix I). That Elizalde included Fox in the first group of scientists to visit the area suggests that Elizalde did not attempt to exclude anyone who might be able to detect a Tasaday fraud. Fox, a highly respected anthropologist and former director of the Philippine National Museum, had considerable ability and experience not only in archaeology and ethnographic description but also in recording the languages of tribal peoples in the Philippines.

In this instance, according to Nance (1975:21), elicitation was conducted through a multiple translation process, from English to Tboli to Blit Manobo to Tasaday. The equivalent forms in the intermediate languages were also in many

⁶ There has also been recent linguistic research by Cesar Hidalgo and Araceli Hidalgo among the Tasaday and surrounding Manobo groups, but their data were not available to me during the preparation of this chapter.

cases recorded by Fox. Presumably these are the terms which the translators Mai Tuan and Dad Tuan (for Kemato Tboli) and Igna (for Blit Manobo) used. It was Fox who first recognized the apparent similarities between the speech of the Tasaday and that of what he was told was Blit Manobo.

As we carefully examine each of the terms collected by Fox in the light of what later researchers recorded and compare them with lexical material from surrounding languages, we soon distinguish two sets of data that differ from what we would expect. The first set are what might be called probable elicitation errors, that is, misidentifications of what are probably the actual meanings of terms. They include:⁷

1. *əbaŋ* ‘moon’ (recorded by Peralta and Elkins as *səbaŋ*; cf. MBOKC *səbaŋ* ‘to rise, of the moon’)
2. *bukuwan* ‘arm’ (lit., ‘place of the joint’)
3. *dáoŋ* ‘leaf’ (possibly a typographical error, recorded as *daun* by later researchers)
4. *kaməl* ‘hand’ (but note Tagalog and Kapampangan *kamal* ‘a large handful’, MBOKC *kaməl* ‘finger, toe’, Western Bukidnon Manobo *kaməl* ‘the binder ring on the handle of a bolo’, also *kəmər* ‘finger, toe’).
5. *lablab* ‘wild pig’ (Western Bukidnon Manobo ‘male pig, either wild or domestic’, TBL *ləblab* ‘wild male pig’)
6. *loós* ‘teeth’ (MBOKC ‘gums’)
7. *nafnaf* ‘small bamboo mortar for betel’ (Sarangani Manobo and MBOKC ‘a kind of thin-walled bamboo’, TBL *naf* ‘type of bamboo from which baskets are made’)
8. *səladəŋ* ‘deer’ (MBOKC ‘buck, male deer’, TBL *slədəŋ* ‘male deer’)

There are also a number of unique items in this list, forms that appear to have no cognates in related languages. Some were recorded only by Fox, others by other researchers as well. They include the following:

1. *káləl* ‘smoke’
2. *kamfí* ‘G-string’

⁷ All forms are cited precisely as they occur in the source documents, except that *è* is replaced by schwa [ə] and *ng* is replaced by [ŋ]. In the cited Tboli forms, *e* is replaced by schwa [ə] while *o* represents [ɔ].

3. *laás* ‘monitor lizard’ (but note MBoKC *pəlaəs* and Western Bukidnon Manobo *pəlaas* ‘monitor lizard’)
4. *lágas* ‘vulva’
5. *liṇaw* ‘tusk of wild pig’
6. *nasagbuṇ* ‘local group’
7. *salumfīṇ* ‘beard’
8. *sətaláwmin* ‘family’
9. *túmas* ‘dog’
10. *bukíyaw* ‘lightning’ (also recorded by Elkins)
11. *búgəd* ‘bamboo container for Jew’s harp’ (also recorded by Molony)
12. *iṅkúlan* ‘river’ (also recorded by Llamzon)

How is one to account for these unusual forms? Fox was a competent and careful scholar; he recorded what the translators told him and what he presumably thought he heard uttered by the Tasaday person who was being queried. There is a remote possibility that one or more of the translators attempted to make the language sound more exotic than they knew it really was, but for such a scheme to succeed, the Tasaday themselves must have been in on it. But I think either (or both) of two other explanations is far more likely.

The first alternative explanation is that the translation process was so new to the Tasaday that they missed the point of many of the questions and gave terms semantically unrelated to what was being asked. How did the translators ask for terms for ‘local group’ and ‘family’, for example? It also seems unlikely that a term for ‘vulva’ could have been successfully elicited so soon.

Unfamiliarity with the translation process would also account for at least some of the ‘elicitation errors’ mentioned above. The use of terms such as *dinagán* ‘ear’ (lit., ‘hearing place’) instead of *təliṇa*, *bulawan* ‘arm’ (lit., ‘place of the joint’) instead of *bəlad*, and *ʔighaʔa* ‘eye’ (lit., ‘the thing that sees’, recorded by Elkins) instead of *matá*, suggests that in these early elicitation sessions, the Tasaday had not yet grasped what it was that was being asked of them. It seems that they were interested in describing the functions of the body parts being pointed at, rather than the name they had for the part.

The second alternative explanation is that the terms given may in fact have been genuine terms in the Tasaday language for the meanings that were sup-

plied.⁸ This raises the interesting possibility that the different forms that were recorded later for the same meanings were the result of language adaptation by the Tasaday to the Blit Manobo with whom they were by then frequently interacting. (The Blit Manobo language presumably would have had a higher status than the earlier form of their own language.)⁹

One unique term in the Fox list suggests that this latter explanation may have some validity—*weél* ‘water’. This term is apparently a reflex of Proto-Philippine *waiR. The presence of a final *l* in the Tasaday word marks it etymologically as a Southern Mindanao term (possibly a very early borrowing into Tasaday). All Manobo languages, on the other hand, reflect *R as *g*. But in none of the available word lists of the southern Mindanao languages does the word appear in this full form *weél*. Either the initial consonant has been lost (as in Koronadal Blaan *?e?el*), or the first syllable has been lost (as in TBL *?el*). It is highly unlikely that any of the Tboli people or other outsiders present during the first language elicitation session would have been aware of the etymologically correct initial consonant in the form. The term recorded by later researchers is invariably *wayeg*, showing the appropriate Manobo reflexes of *wa?iR.

There is only one term in Fox’s list that seems to be shared only with Blit Manobo and was not subsequently recorded by other researchers. It is *balanús* ‘nose’ (cf. Blit Manobo *blanús* ‘nose’). This is hardly what one would expect if the Tasaday were either Tboli poseurs who were all bilingual in Blit Manobo, or were themselves native speakers of Blit Manobo.

2.2 Peralta’s Word List

A list of approximately 100 Tasaday terms were collected by Jesus Peralta (1971), presently Chief Researcher at the Philippine National Museum, during

⁸ Such an explanation is available for terms such as *finíngting* ‘grandmother’ (cf. *fèngtingan* ‘ankle’ [Molony]), and *lílud* ‘grandfather’ (cf. ‘knee’ [Molony]). The apparent inconsistency in the meanings of these terms as recorded by Fox and Molony disappears when one knows that body parts such as ‘knee’ and ‘ankle’ are used in many Philippine languages, including Manobo languages, to refer to different generational levels.

⁹ This is apparently the position Hidalgo and Hidalgo have taken to explain the relatively large percentage of unique forms occurring in the Tasaday data that they recently elicited.

short visits on July 20 and 21, 1971 (Nance 1975:47).¹⁰ Peralta is an archaeologist, not a linguist. The list available to me is an unpublished photocopy of Peralta's original fieldnotes, a series of words and phrases that appear to have been jotted down often without semantic connection during the course of his anthropological investigations. They do not appear to be the result of systematic language elicitation, but simply a casual listing of overheard items. The terms collected are generally the same as those gathered by other researchers, but where the lists differ, it appears to be because of Peralta's method of data collection, and because of the fact that he was not a skilled phonetician. This resulted in a number of incorrectly transcribed words as in these forms in which Peralta used *u* to transcribe schwa: *humiguf* 'sip' (cf. *himigəf* 'sip' recorded by Molony); *maidúb* 'sharp' (probably a misidentification of *maidəb* 'pointed' as recorded by Molony, or *maedáb* 'sharp' as recorded by Llamzon; cf. MBOKC *məidəb*). There were also a number of forms whose meanings seem to have been misidentified. They include:

1. *bukal* 'leaf' (recorded by Yen 1976:140 as a kind of plant)
2. *hinaa* 'catch a person' (recorded by later researchers as a form of the verb *haa*, 'to see')
3. *laha* 'penis' (MBOKC 'scrotum', recorded as such by Molony)
4. *nəkabugsəŋ* 'sun' (recorded by Llamzon as *nakabugsáng* 'noon' and by Molony as *nakəbugsəŋ* 'perpendicular'; cf. MBOKC *bugsəŋ* 'to pass over the center of some expanse', used with nonvolitive *naka-* to indicate the noon position in the sky)
5. *sulo-lisan* 'rooster', possibly a reference to a cock's spur (recorded by Molony as *sulu lisèn* 'toenail'; cf. MBOKC *sulu* 'nail', *lisèn* 'leg, including the foot')
6. *tudu* 'finger' (cf. MBOKC *todo?* 'directed toward', *tinudu?* 'point with the finger, aim a weapon'. TBL *tdok* 'finger')

The following appear to be unique terms occurring in Peralta's list, not found in other languages. These may be true Tasaday forms, especially in those

¹⁰ The chronology here is questionable. Nance (1975:70) implies that Llamzon and Lynch's visit postdated the visit by the group that included Peralta; yet an unpublished typed copy of Llamzon's word list states that it was compiled on July 16-17, 1971, which would have been several days prior to the date when Peralta visited the Tasaday.

instances where other researchers also recorded the same forms, but they may also have been misheard or misidentified forms.

1. *igsakag* ‘full’ (also recorded by Llamzon)
2. *lɔtu* ‘ant’
3. *makətú* ‘satisfied’ (recorded by Llamzon as *makáttu* ‘satisfied’)
4. *nukitan* ‘trail’ (recorded by Llamzon as *nukitán* ‘road’)¹¹
5. *lugilak* ‘tongue’ (cf. TBL *dilak* ‘tongue’)

Forms which Peralta collected that have cognates in geographically distant Philippine languages are as follows:

1. *dad-duma* ‘other(s)’. Although the term *duma* ‘other, companion, spouse’ is found in other Manobo languages, the plural form recorded by Peralta is not. It is unusual both in the vowel of the prefix and in the geminate medial consonant. To my knowledge, it is only in Ilokano that the word occurs in exactly this shape.
2. *dafúg* ‘lime’ (also recorded by Llamzon as such). Later researchers recorded the expected Manobo term *?afug*. The term *dafúg* appears to be a reflex of the Proto-Philippine **dapuR* ‘ash’, which is not reflected in any other Manobo language or in any of the Southern Mindanao group of languages, but is found in various Bisayan languages such as Cebuano. It is possible that Tasaday is the only Manobo language to retain a reflex of the protoform.
3. *danjot* ‘root’ (also recorded by Llamzon as *dánjut*). To my knowledge this term is found elsewhere only in Blit Manobo and in Ubo (which is not a Manobo language). Either language could have been the source of this term. It could have been introduced into Tasaday by Igna, or by one of the other speakers of Blit Manobo during the language elicitation sessions. Later researchers recorded the expected Manobo term *dalid* ‘root’.

¹¹ Johnston (pers. comm.) notes, “The [MBoKC] verb root *-ukit* means ‘to pass through/over/by’. I suspect the form [nukitan] should be *inukitan*, where *in-* *-an* combine to mean ‘past- -site’, i.e., ‘site or way over which we passed’. The form *ukitan* is common for ‘road’ or ‘trail’.”

4. *əfak* ‘frog’. Recorded by all other researchers as *bakbak*, the term appears to be a borrowing of the word for ‘frog’ found in the Southern Mindanao languages. (Tiruray has *əfak*; TBL, Blaan, and Ubo have *fak*.) It was also recorded by Molony for Blit Manobo. It could have been introduced by Igna.
5. *sakat* ‘foot’. This term has no equivalents in any Manobo or Southern Mindanao language. It is possibly another Maranao borrowing (Maranao *sakat* ‘to step up’) with a misidentification of the meaning.
6. *tuod* ‘knee’. A cognate of this form appears only in Agusan Manobo *tuhod*. MBOKC *tuəd*, and its cognates Dibabawon Manobo *tuod*, and TBL *tuhod* mean ‘stump’; *tuod* ‘knee’ occurs elsewhere in Mindanao only in Mansaka.

2.3 Llamzon’s Word List

Teodoro Llamzon compiled a Tasaday word list of about 200 items, some 65 of which are acknowledged as being recorded by Fox and used with his permission (Llamzon 1971a, 1971b). Collected at about the same time as Peralta’s list (see note 10), a number of the items which were either misidentified by Peralta or otherwise appear to be unique in his list, also appear in Llamzon’s list. These include the forms for ‘full’, ‘lime’, ‘root’, ‘satisfied’, and ‘trail’.

In his discussion of the data that he collected Llamzon (1971b:1) indicates that he used the translation procedure previously also used by Fox (i.e., from English or Tagalog, to Tboli, to Blit Manobo and then to Tasaday, and back again). (Although he did not explicitly say so, this must also have been the route via which Peralta got his data.) The same translators were probably used by both Llamzon and Peralta, and it is possible that at least some of the problematic forms that are shared by the two lists were introduced by the translation process.

Llamzon’s list has its share of problems too. Possibly misidentified forms include:

1. *taliŋ* ‘go’ (recorded by Molony as ‘wander, roam around’)
2. *tuduk* ‘mountain’ (MBOKC ‘mountain range’)

Unique forms include:

1. *fənágən* ‘drive away’

2. *loongən* ‘fly’
3. *segelə* ‘stick (v.)’
4. *tifaŋ* ‘roof’

Again, I find nothing in this list that would suggest that the Tasaday were actually Blit Manobo, or that they were Tboli who were bilingual in Blit Manobo. The irregular forms are all the result either of insufficient time to adjust to the phonological structure or to the semantics of the language, and are precisely what one would expect given the nature of these early contacts and the elicitation techniques used.

2.4 Elkins’s Word List

Richard Elkins, a linguist and Bible translator who had by 1972 lived with various Manobo groups for many years, spoke Western Bukidnon Manobo, and was a specialist in the historical development of the Manobo languages, spent four days at the Tasaday caves in August 1972. During this period he elicited some 263 Tasaday words (see Elkins 1972), choosing the items from the 372 words in my word list (Reid 1971).

Elkins’s list has a number of forms that are probably incorrectly identified, some of which follow.¹²

1. *bagá* ‘liver’ (recorded by Molony as *baga?* with the expected meaning ‘lungs’)
2. *bunbun* ‘roof’ (recorded by Molony as meaning ‘ceiling, e.g., of a cave’)
3. *daməs* ‘rain’ (MBOKC ‘typhoon, rain, and wind of long duration’)
4. *igtigbas* ‘right (hand)’ (lit., ‘the one used for cutting’)
5. *igha?a* ‘eye’ (lit., ‘the thing used for seeing’)
6. *nəkəpákaŋ* ‘sun’, perhaps used metaphorically to refer to the heat of the sun (cf. MBOKC *pakaŋ* ‘to pound, to split by pounding’)

¹² Elkins used an orthography which approximates that used by Johnston. *p* is used to represent the bilabial fricative since there is no contrasting bilabial stop. Other researchers represented the sound as *f*. In addition, Elkins used *e* to represent the central vowel [ə]. Molony was consistent in using *ə* for this sound (transcribed here by me as *è*), but other researchers, including Peralta and Llamzon represented it inconsistently, sometimes with *ə*, and sometimes with *a*. (It should be noted that there may have been other incorrectly identified terms in Elkins’s list. Johnston 1989 cites some that he feels are incorrect; also see Johnston 1992.)

7. *pədu* ‘heart’ (recorded by Molony as *fədu* ‘mind, feeling’, cf. MBoKC *pədu* ‘gall bladder, the seat of the emotions, mind, thought’)

There are a few unexplainable forms in the Elkins list (as in the lists of earlier researchers). These include:

1. *lipad* ‘to fly’. There are phonetically similar forms in several other Philippine languages (e.g., *lupad* in Kalagan and Tausug, and *ləpad* in Botolan Sambal and Mamanwa), but nothing similar is recorded for Manobo or Southern Mindanao languages.
2. *paway* ‘cloud’

Elkins records one form which, because of its final vowel, is probably Tboli in origin, *kəlipot* ‘forget’. (TBL has *klifot* ‘forget’, Western Bukidnon Manobo, Maranao, Ilokano, and others have *lipat*.) Molony records the expected Manobo form *kəlifon* ‘forget’, which Tasaday shared with Cotabato Manobo.

2.5 Language versus dialect

In discussing the linguistic affiliation of the Tasaday, we must understand how the terms *language* and *dialect* are being used. Considerable confusion has surrounded this matter, primarily because some of those who have written on the Tasaday lack linguistic sophistication. From a linguist’s point of view, the term *dialect* refers to a speech variety that is distinguished from other mutually intelligible dialects by restricted lexical, phonological, or syntactic features (whether restricted geographically or socially). So everyone (the Tasaday included) speaks a language and, depending on the features that are commonly used, a specific dialect of that language.

A variety of techniques have been used by linguists to measure degree of mutual intelligibility in order to draw language boundaries between more distantly related dialects and, conversely, to unite as one language those that are more closely related. Presumably then, when the question arises as to whether the Tasaday have an “independent language,” the issue is whether or not the Tasaday speech variety is mutually intelligible with some other speech variety. The answer to this will depend upon the measure that the linguist uses to determine mutual intelligibility. There is no unequivocally correct answer to such a question.

Questions of whether Tasaday speak an “older” language than some other group are meaningless, since all languages change from one generation to the next and are therefore only as old as the generation that speaks them. Neither is it appropriate to speak of Tasaday as being an “offshoot” of some other presently spoken language, since such terminology implies that Tasaday is somehow younger than the dialect to which it is related. Such ways of thinking and talking about language (and culture) reflect the erroneous view that traditional peoples, particularly more isolated peoples, are purer or more pristine or less changed from some earlier state than “modern” groups, or looking at it from the opposite side, that the dialect of an out-migrating group is a corrupted version of the groups from which they split. This is not to say that peripheral or isolated areas do not tend to be more lexically conservative than central areas; they do, but they cannot be considered to be “older” than non-relic areas.

2.6 The position of the Tasaday speech variety vis-à-vis other Manobo speech varieties

Johnston’s review of Elkins’s word list and of the tape sent to him by Molony provides clear evidence that the Tasaday dialect is probably more closely related to the Manobo speech spoken in Kalamansig (MBoKC) than to other Manobo dialects.¹³ There is no question that they are mutually intelligible by anyone’s measure and therefore constitute close regional dialects of a language that has been called Cotabato Manobo. The number of linguistic features that Tasaday appears to uniquely share with the Kalamansig dialect of Manobo (MBoKC) establishes the relationship between them.¹⁴

¹³ The linguistic nature of the so-called Sanduka and the “Tao Mloy” (Duhaylungsod and Hyndman 1989:12) is not relevant to determining the linguistic affiliation of the Tasaday. The former groups may well be Tboli. We know already that this is a Tboli area, but until the Hidalgos make their linguistic data available one should reserve judgment on even this fact. And to claim that the area was the Tboli “homeland” is to lay claim to a knowledge of prehistory that is simply not available either to the Tboli or to anyone else.

¹⁴ Salazar suggests that Malay may be “closer” to Tasaday than even Blit Manobo is, because his count of cognates between the languages showed Tasaday sharing 40% of its cognates with Malay, but only 28% with Blit Manobo. This is not good linguistics. Subgrouping cannot be based on the number of shared cognates, but rather on the distribution of shared innovations in phonology, morphology, and syntax, as well as lexicon. Most of the items listed by Salazar have good Austronesian etymologies and are shared retentions in the two languages. This tells us only that both languages are Austronesian, nothing more. Neither has Salazar made any attempt to distinguish true cognates from similar forms that are the result of borrowing.

Still problematic is the relationship between this language and that spoken in Blit, from whence, according to some, the Tasaday “poseurs” were recruited. From present evidence, which as I mentioned above is minimal because of the paucity of Blit Manobo language data, it would seem that Blit is either a separate language (judging from the comments of Blit Manobo people who claimed to be unable to communicate with the Tasaday),¹⁵ or it is a more distantly related dialect of Cotabato Manobo (i.e., of MBOKC).

As has been pointed out by others, the Tasaday language is more closely related to geographically remote regional dialects than to the dialects that are geographically closer. The actual degree of relationship between Tasaday and Kalamansig Cotabato Manobo (MBOKC) is partially contingent on whether the terms in the Elkins list that Johnston claims were elicitation errors were in fact errors or whether they have undergone semantic change as is claimed by Elkins. That some of Elkins’s data is in error is certainly possible. However, several of the forms were also recorded by Molony with the same meanings as those provided by Elkins, and these are almost certainly the result of semantic change. These (given with Molony’s fuller meanings) include: *kəladayan* ‘deep, e.g., of a river or valley’; *bəlagkál*, ‘floor, e.g., of a cave or forest’; *əgkəbərɲəs* ‘lonely’; *bunbun* ‘ceiling (e.g., of a cave)’ (Elkins had ‘roof’); *habhab* ‘to smell’; *əgbuələn* ‘to have thirst’. Similarly, Elkins’s *məbága?* ‘boil (infection)’ appears in Mansaka as *baga?* with the same narrowed meaning. Ultimately whether Johnston or Elkins is correct makes little difference: Tasaday and MBOKC would still be very closely related to each other, and more closely related to each other than either is to Blit Manobo.

2.7 Implications for whether the Tasaday are a hoax

I believe that any linguist reviewing the available Tasaday data could only conclude that the Tasaday language has undergone a differentiation from any other Manobo speech variety. This is not to say that the Tasaday speak a different language from their neighbors, but there certainly appears to be at least a

¹⁵ According to Nance (1975:12), “Dudim told Mai he couldn’t talk to these people, he didn’t know their language and could do no good here....Igna had difficulty understanding even half of the words he uttered”.

dialectal difference.¹⁶ There are considerable differences, for example, between the ethno-botanical terms collected by Yen and their Blit equivalents. Whether the differences are as great with equivalent terms used in other Cotabato Manobo dialects has, to my knowledge, never been examined. There are also a number of unique lexical items from the basic vocabulary that are not shared by Manobo or by Southern Mindanao languages. Some of these terms have cognates in other Philippine subgroups and could have been introduced by translators bilingual in one of these languages, but at least one term (*weél* ‘water’) cannot be so explained. There is no evidence that the speakers of the language were bilingual in Tboli or in any other language.

Johnston (pers. comm.) also claims that the lexical accent in the Tasaday tapes to which he has listened indicates that the speakers were probably not Tboli speakers who were speaking a Manobo dialect as a second language. The accent patterns of Tboli are clearly distinct from Manobo accent patterns, and the Tboli accent patterns would probably have been carried over into the pronunciation of Manobo words had these people been Tboli.

2.8 Extent to which the Tasaday may have been isolated from other Manobo communities

All languages change, but the changes tend to affect different language subsystems at relatively different speeds. Following geographical separation and subsequent reduced intercommunication, two kinds of change soon become apparent. One is lexical. Some words, although unchanged in pronunciation, come to be used in slightly different ways than in the home community. Such semantic shifts are often motivated by the different environment in which the break-away community is living. (The changed environment also stimulates the development of unique lexical items, words which would not exist in the original home community.) The second kind of change that is quickly apparent is a shift in intonation.

Other types of change take place over much longer periods. For example, systematic shifts in the pronunciation of the segmental phonemes take longer.

¹⁶ This despite Iten's statement about scientists "who, even now, claim that the Tasaday speak a separate language, a thesis supported by questionable scientific standards" (Iten 1992). Only Olofson, an anthropologist, is making such claims today (Olofson 1989:6).

So do changes in the functional morphology, affecting pronouns, demonstratives, verbal morphology, and so on. Discernible changes in the syntax typically take longer still.

The types of differences that Johnston notes between MBoKC and Tasaday suggest a relatively short period of separation and subsequent differentiation. For all intents and purposes the two dialects are still mutually intelligible. There appear to be no systematic sound changes that distinguish Tasaday from MBoKC. Phonologically (apart from intonation) they appear to be identical. There are a few morphological differences between Tasaday and MBoKC (outlined by Johnston), but whether these morphological features are shared by Blit Manobo is unknown. Neither, as far as I can tell, has there been any syntactic change.

Early studies such as Llamzon's placed too much value on glottochronology to measure the period of time that the Tasaday may have been separated from their neighbors. This method assumes that core vocabulary is replaced at a constant rate in all languages; therefore, the period of differentiation is measurable. It does not measure isolation. But because everybody believed the Tasaday's claims that they had not had contact with outsiders (apart from Dafal), it was assumed that Llamzon's calculation of 571 to 755 years of separation reflected the length of their isolation in the rain forest.

It should be remembered moreover that glottochronology has long since been discredited as a tool for dating periods of linguistic differentiation,¹⁷ although lexicostatistics continues to be used by some as a rough measure of the

¹⁷ Despite Olofson's (1989:6) claim that "[glottochronology] is the most modern we have for reconstructing the evolution of languages," no reputable linguist ever used glottochronology to replace the comparative method that has been used for over a hundred years to establish genetic relationships between languages. Even Dyen, who is one of the few remaining proponents of lexicostatistics as a linguistic tool for subgrouping, looks to traditional use of exclusively shared innovations for qualitative evidence to confirm or disprove subgrouping hypotheses first established using quantitative evidence (Dyen 1970). Olofson's attempts to respond to some of the uninformed linguistic comments that have appeared in the literature is laudable, but in so doing he has misspoken himself in several places, including his reference to Proto-Manobo as an 'extinct' language. Extinct languages leave no daughter languages. Proto-languages are no more extinct than the languages of our grandparents. They are alive and well in the languages of succeeding generations.

degree of relationship shared by genetically related languages. In fact, the basic assumptions upon which the method relied have been shown to be untenable.¹⁸

Can we say anything at all then about the possible period of time since the Tasaday group moved away from their closest linguistic neighbors? Certainly it was not of the order of several hundreds of years. There is insufficient linguistic differentiation to allow for such a period of time. I think it more likely that differentiation has been taking place for no more than five or six generations at the most, perhaps for 100-150 years.¹⁹ Is such a short period of time sufficient to lose the knowledge of agriculture?²⁰ Given the high elevation, the mountainous terrain hostile to agriculture, and an absence of metal tools to clear the terrain and prepare the soil,²¹ the loss of agriculture could have taken place in a very short period of time, even within a single generation. In this case, terminology associated with it would quickly have been lost also. A single generation would have been sufficient.²²

Salazar (1988) has discussed several Tasaday terms in an attempt to show that the Tasaday were not unfamiliar with houses. However, his explanation of the Tasaday word *lawi* ‘lean-to, shed, shelter in forest’ (Molony) as a metathesized form of Maranao and Magindanao *walay* ‘house’, is simply not right. The form (with a final glottal stop) is found in MBOKC *lawi?* ‘lean-to, any temporary shelter without floor’, and is probably a reflex of Proto-Philippine (PPH) **lawiR*

¹⁸ See Blust (1983) for a review of literature and a convincing study that shows considerable variation in retention rate, at least among the Austronesian languages, of which Tasaday is a member.

¹⁹ In this I agree with Salazar: “If separation or isolation there was, it took place quite recently—not more than six or seven generations ago. And it did not involve a great number” (1971:36)

²⁰ According to Llamzon (1971b:8), Frank Lynch proposed that the Tasaday probably never had agriculture, since “571-755 years...would hardly have been time enough for the Tasaday to lose this knowledge.”

²¹ They probably had metal tools when they first moved away from their earlier homes, but given the environment they were in, such tools could not have lasted more than a generation or two, at the most. Without access to a new supply, the development of a stone-tool technology would have been the most reasonable adaptive strategy. That this technology was relatively primitive is further evidence that it was a relatively young technology.

²² It has been only around 20 years since New Zealand switched to decimal currency from its earlier pounds, shillings, and pence. Nevertheless, there are probably very few young New Zealanders today who could, without referring to a dictionary, say what /heypni/ (*half-penny*), /kwɪd/ (*quid*, one pound), or other such formerly common terms used to mean.

‘hut’, with irregular development of the final consonant. (Compare Maranao *laoig* ‘hovel, hut’ [McKaughan and Macaraya 1967:203] apparently borrowed into Tboli as TBL *lowig* ‘field shelter’.) Similarly, his account of the development of Tasaday *tifaŋ* ‘roof’ (Llamzon) as being related to Bikol *atop*, Tagalog *atip*, Ivatan *atəp* (PPH *qatəp ‘roof’) by metathesis, runs into problems since there is no Manobo language with an *i* reflex of PPH *ə, and no source for the final velar nasal.

But even if Salazar’s etymologies were correct, these do not tell anything about whether or not the Tasaday were cave dwellers, or how long they might have spent isolated from other communities.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, then, I argue that there is nothing in the linguistic data to suggest that the early researchers on the Tasaday were participants in, or victims of, a conspiracy to deceive the general public as to the true identity of the subjects of their research. To the contrary, the evidence clearly indicated that Tasaday respondents were linguistically unsophisticated and unfamiliar with the translation process. The data collected represent a dialect of Manobo that is not spoken elsewhere, but is closely related to that known as Cotabato Manobo. Furthermore, from the linguistic evidence presently available, I conclude that the Tasaday may have been living in near isolation from other groups, as they have consistently asserted, but that the isolation may have lasted for only a few generations, possibly no more than 150 years. Otherwise, greater differences would be apparent between the Tasaday speech variety and that of its closest relatives.

4. Postscript

After this chapter had been submitted for publication, I had the opportunity to do fieldwork with the Tasaday for a period of eight days (March 7-14, 1990) in Surallah, Allah Valley, Cotabato. A group of Tasaday, including Dul and her husband Udelen and four of their children, Maman, Okon, Klohonon, and Fakil; Lobo and his second wife, Funding; Natek and Dego (sons of Bilangan and Etut); and Adug, had temporarily left the Tasaday Reserve and were staying at the house of Mayor Mai Tuan in Surallah. Also present at various times during my

visit were several speakers of Blit Manobo, including Datù Mafalo Dudim and his sister Bol; Igna Kilam, a speaker of Sdaf Manobo; Juanito Balimbang, a speaker of Cotabato Manobo; and a considerable number of speakers of Tboli. Lexical and syntactic data were gathered for each of the Manobo dialects for which speakers were available, and I have begun comparative studies on the material. The main Tasaday assistants were Dul and Lobo.

Preliminary analysis confirms that the language spoken by the Tasaday is in no way similar to Tboli and is not mutually intelligible with it. It is clearly a Manobo language and is perhaps less similar to Cotabato Manobo than has been described by Johnston (1989 and this volume). Some of the lexical distinctiveness described by Hidalgo and Hidalgo (1989) has been confirmed, but their characterization of the language as a pidgin form of Manobo is not confirmed. The language has undergone certain syntactic changes which distinguish it from Cotabato Manobo and from Blit Manobo. Evidence for these statements will be presented in a forthcoming paper.

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