

## *The Singing Rooster* by Hazel Wrigglesworth

### Foreword

It is a great honor to be asked to write the Foreword to the latest in the long series of books and articles that Hazel Wrigglesworth has published over the last forty years, providing the world with a lasting record of the oral traditions of the Ilianen Menuvù, one of the dozen or so Manobo ethnolinguistic groups whose languages are still spoken in Mindanao, the Philippines [[ISO 639-3: mbi](#)]. These works, along with a number of others containing stories told by local raconteurs from other Manobo languages and translated by members of SIL, Philippines after decades of residence among these groups, provide a body of oral literature possibly unsurpassed among the other so-called “minor” languages of the Philippines.

Why should these works be considered important? Aren't they just embellished re-tellings of folktales, the themes of which in many cases are found in the repertoire of storytellers not only in the Philippines but around the world? To the outsider this may be true, and Wrigglesworth takes pains to identify these themes and provide references to the places and languages in which similar stories are found. But to the insider, as she makes clear, these are not simply stories told for entertaining local audiences. For many of the members of such audiences they are well aware of the story. They know in advance who the characters are, the details of the incidents leading to the climactic peak and the nature of the dénouement that inevitably follows. They interrupt the storyteller with calls of re-affirmation, engaging themselves with the speaker in the intricacies of the plot, calling on the hero to be strong, and the villains to take care lest disaster befall them. These stories are not told just for fun, although they do provide a good laugh here and there! They are believed to be the historical accounts of their ancestors and as such are exemplifications of much of what is considered essential in traditional Manobo culture. They provide justification for the moral values that are being passed on from the older to the younger generation and even become precedents in the settling of custom-law cases. In this sense then, they are not just “folktales”, they are morality plays. They are the oral literature of a formerly pre-literate people and are foundational to their self-identity and self-respect.

The *Story about Ukap*, for example, the lead story in the book, details the experiences of a poor but honorable son, trying to bring food home to his mother, and who is rewarded for his diligence by the appearance of a miraculous singing rooster (hence the title of the book) that provides him with all his needs, until he married the chief's beautiful daughter in disregard of the rooster's command and loses everything. The well-known story of *The Monkey and the Turtle*, from the Manobo point-of-view, is a tale that relates the negative result of foolishness, greed, and desire for revenge, and re-affirms the positive values of smart-thinking. The next three stories, *Kereuu and Tingengew*, *Gaun*, and *Kavus* are moral parables that exemplify the end results of jealousy and impatience, while *Tingengew*, a story about an absent-minded person who couldn't remember his name and thus lost the beautiful girl he had accidentally caught in his animal trap and whom he wished to bring home as his wife, is again an example of the problems that result when a person is not only thoughtless but careless in his eagerness to achieve his selfish goals.

With the passing away of the older storytellers and the spread of literacy, school education and foreign religious beliefs among the Manobo, there is a tendency among the educated to treat this

literature as just a body of mythical “fairy tales,” with little relevance to modern life in the city. Whereas traditionally, as the author notes, “Stories regarding their culture heroes are given as much credence as a news report or an account of oral history,” now a line is drawn between fact and fiction, with the inevitable result that the cultural value of the stories is downplayed and there are fewer raconteurs and occasions on which to tell them. This is not just a fact of Manobo life, the oral literature of most of the small cultural communities of the Philippines is under serious threat from the ever-increasing spread of Filipino/Tagalog through the media, schools and churches and from the onslaught of trade languages such as Cebuano, Hiligaynon, and Ilokano.

Hazel Wigglesworth’s books, then, are not only important as a source for educated Ilianen Manobo people who may be interested in exploring their traditional oral culture, they are of great value also to those of us who find in the texts a permanent record of a language that in a few generations will doubtless be very different from what it is today. And this is why the inclusion of the original Manobo text, along with very careful translations and abundant footnoting not only of the meanings and functions of specific lexical forms but of the rhetorical devices used by expert storytellers provides us with a body of data that will survive the threat of language replacement or language extinction that is hanging over so many of the small societies of the world, such as the various Manobo groups. The extensive references to linguistic and other relevant literature enable the reader to move beyond the immediate work to further explore details that may interest him/her.

We are all in debt to the storytellers who were willing to have their stories recorded for the benefit of Manobo and non-Manobo alike, and to Hazel Wigglesworth for her diligent research and careful scholarship that have brought us this volume and the others that preceded it. We hope that if there are still tapes to be transcribed and translations to be made of other stories, she will be given the time and the strength to add to this body of work.

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