



Journal of Natural Language and Linguistics (JNLL)

ISSN: 2995-9837 (ONLINE)

VOLUME 4 ISSUE 2 (2026)



PUBLISHED BY
E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA

A Study on the Spelling Preferences of Surigaonon Speakers in Surigao Del Sur: Basis for the Development of a Spelling Guide and Manual

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Article Information

Received: November 02, 2026

Accepted: January 06, 2026

Published: September 17, 2026

Keywords

*Corpus-Driven, Orthography,
Spelling Preference, Surigaonon
Language, Surigaonon
Community*

ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify and describe the spelling preferences of speakers of the Surigaonon language in the province of Surigao del Sur, specifically in the municipalities of Carrascal, Cantilan, Madrid, Carmen, and Lanuza (collectively known as CarCanMadCarLan). The findings serve as the basis for the development of a comprehensive spelling guide and manual for the said language. The research employed a combined corpus-driven, practical, and theoretical approach deemed appropriate for analyzing the current state of the Surigaonon language and for proposing concrete steps toward standardizing its orthography. The study utilized consultative and participatory methods, conducted through extensive data collection from 1,791 participants who are active speakers of Surigaonon. A checklist-type survey questionnaire was used, containing Surigaonon words that exhibit more than one spelling variant. Based on the analysis, from a total of 500 base words included in Eliciting Material A: Word List by the UP Department of Linguistics, 127 words in the Surigaonon corpus were identified to have two or more spelling variants. Of this number, nineteen (19) words were found to have three variants, while the remaining 108 words had two variants. The data indicate that approximately 25.4% of the original word list reflects heterographic representation. One example is the Surigaonon word *babaje* (girl/woman), which had three variants: *babaje*, *baje*, and *babaji*. Among the 1,791 participants, 90.9% (1,628) selected *babaje* as the preferred spelling, while 7.2% (129) chose *baje*, and 1.9% (34) selected *babaji*. This demonstrates a clear community consensus in favor of *babaje* as the more widely accepted form in written discourse. In conclusion, a single preferred spelling was selected for each word to be used in the formal writing of the Surigaonon language.

INTRODUCTION

The development of a systematic framework for the written representation of a language requires a careful examination of its sociolinguistic status, structural properties, and patterns of use within the speech community. A foundational consideration in this process concerns the functional domains of the language; whether it operates primarily as an oral medium or whether it has achieved sustained use in written communication. This distinction significantly shapes the direction of standardization efforts. For languages that remain largely oral, initial initiatives typically focus on documenting linguistic features and representing phonological structures in written form. In contrast, when a language is actively used both orally and in writing across literature, social media, education, and official communication, the emphasis shifts toward establishing consistent spelling conventions that reflect community practice, promote clarity, and support formal and academic functions. Within this broader context arises a central inquiry, “What form of standardized spelling system is appropriate for the Surigaonon language?” Surigaonon serves as the native language of communities in Surigao del Norte and Surigao del Sur, particularly in the municipalities of Carrascal, Cantilan, Madrid, Carmen, and Lanuza collectively referred to as CarCanMadCarLan. As one of the living languages in the Caraga Region, Surigaonon is

actively used in everyday communication and serves as a language of instruction in some schools (Eberhard, Simons, & Fennig, 2025).

Previous linguistic studies have documented various names for the language, including “Surigaonon-Cantilan” (Camar, 2020), “Sinurigao” (Paredes, 2015; Eberhard *et al.*, 2025), “Cantilan” or “Cantilangnon,” “Naturalis” (Dumanig, 2015), and “Jaon-jaon” and “Waya-waya” (Zorc, 1977). Surigaonon belongs to the Austronesian language family, specifically within the Malayo-Polynesian subgroup, Greater Central Philippine group, Central Philippine languages, Bisayan, and South Bisayan (Zorc, 1977). Although it shares similarities with Cebuano, Butuanon, and Boholano, Surigaonon demonstrates distinct phonological, lexical, and syntactic features that establish it as a separate language.

Structurally, Surigaonon exhibits a well-defined grammatical system. According to Paredes (2015), its parts of speech include Ngayan (noun), Pamuli (pronoun), Dajig (adjective), Hingas (verb), Orason (adverb), Adiser (preposition), Pansumpay (conjunction), and Syagit (interjection). The language also features structural components such as Pormada (form), Tunada (intonation), Plastada (order), and Pasabot (meaning). These descriptions indicate that Surigaonon possesses a comprehensive grammatical foundation capable of sustaining a stable written system.

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From a phonological perspective, Dumanig (2015) reported that Surigaonon consists of seventeen (17) consonants and seventeen phonemes, three (3) vowels with five vowel sounds, twenty-five (25) consonant clusters, and four (4) diphthongs. The language likewise exhibits the use of stress, tone, and morphophonemic changes. These characteristics further affirm that Surigaonon has a complete and robust structural system grounded in empirical linguistic analysis.

A significant institutional development in the recognition of the language occurred on August 28, 2009, when SIL International replaced the former ISO 639-3 language code [sul] with [sgd]. The earlier code referred to Surigaonon as a generic designation for both provinces, whereas the revised code acknowledges Surigaonon as a distinct language and lingua franca of Surigao del Norte and Surigao del Sur. This revision reflects the language's depth, vitality, and widespread use within Surigaonon society.

Despite its extensive oral use and increasing presence in written contexts, Surigaonon continues to lack standardized spelling conventions. This absence presents challenges in domains requiring formal documentation, such as education, research, and official communication. Spelling variation, although indicative of dynamic language use, may hinder the production of instructional materials, scholarly works, and formal texts. The establishment of systematic spelling conventions therefore constitutes a critical step in the codification of the language, a process that seeks to organize and stabilize linguistic norms to support higher forms of communication and knowledge production. If successfully developed, such conventions would provide a solid foundation for the intellectualization of Surigaonon at both regional and national levels.

In response to this need, the present study aims to provide an empirical basis for the development of standardized spelling conventions for Surigaonon. The primary objective of the research is to identify and describe the spelling preferences of Surigaonon speakers in the province of Surigao del Sur as a foundation for a comprehensive spelling system. Specifically, the study focuses on Surigaonon lexical items derived from the Eliciting Material A: Word List of the UP Department of Linguistics. Using this instrument, the research analyzes spelling variants as they appear in the corpus and invites participants to select the variant they consider most appropriate or natural based on their usage, understanding, and perception of consistency within their linguistic community.

Through systematic analysis of these preferences, the study seeks to generate a list of words with standardized spellings that may serve as a reference for teachers, students, writers, translators, and other users of the Surigaonon language in written communication. Ultimately, this research aspires to strengthen the unification of spelling conventions, thereby advancing the codification and intellectualization of Surigaonon as a language capable of sustaining academic discourse,

formal instruction, and scholarly production

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research constitutes a proactive initiative grounded in the position that the initial steps toward the standardization of the Surigaonon language particularly in relation to spelling conventions are both timely and necessary. The study argues that early and deliberate intervention is essential to prevent the further proliferation of inconsistencies that may eventually complicate efforts in education, documentation, and linguistic scholarship. Addressing variation at this stage allows for a more systematic and community-informed process of language development, rather than attempting to resolve fragmentation after it has become deeply entrenched.

At present, variation in the spelling of Surigaonon words is readily observable. Such inconsistency generates confusion not only among native speakers but also among writers, educators, and other users who employ the language in formal and informal contexts. This condition poses a substantial barrier to the systematic production of linguistic resources, including dictionaries, instructional materials, and literary texts, all of which are crucial to the intellectual growth of the language. If left unaddressed, these variations may impede scholars and language advocates in their efforts to establish stable conventions, rendering future standardization more complex and protracted.

In response to this situation, the study advances a consultative and participatory approach designed to identify the spelling preferences of Surigaonon speakers. This framework rests on the principle that native speakers are central agents in shaping the conventions of their language, as they are its primary users in both spoken and written domains. The selection of a single, community-endorsed form for each lexical item is treated as an initial step toward establishing consistent spelling practices that reflect authentic usage.

Within this perspective, Surigaonon is approached not merely as an oral medium, despite earlier classifications that have at times associated it with vulnerable or lesser-documented languages, but as a language with an emerging and expanding written tradition. An increasing body of written materials, including literary works, academic papers, journal articles, essays, and personal writings, demonstrates that Surigaonon speakers actively engage in written expression. This growing corpus indicates a developing awareness of written conventions and a collective movement toward greater textual production. Determining which spellings are most widely accepted and employed by speakers therefore becomes a critical step in the codification of the language. This process is not purely descriptive; it is participatory and community-centered, recognizing the legitimacy of speakers' linguistic knowledge. By identifying preferred spellings grounded in actual usage, the research seeks to foster greater consistency, an essential foundation for educational

materials, scholarly documentation, and the broader intellectualization of Surigaonon at regional and national levels.

Methodologically, the study adopts a hybrid research design that integrates corpus-driven, practical, and theoretical approaches. This combination is deemed appropriate for examining the present state of spelling practices in Surigaonon and for addressing the absence of unified conventions. The integration of these approaches ensures that the findings are empirically grounded while remaining responsive to community realities.

The corpus-driven approach serves as the principal methodology. This empirical framework relies on the analysis of language as it appears in authentic texts, treating compiled corpora as the primary source of data for examining linguistic form and structure. In contemporary linguistic inquiry, corpus-based methods are widely regarded as reliable tools for producing descriptive accounts grounded in real-world usage. Although many corpus studies employ digital databases and computational tools, the present research utilizes a manual process of data collection and analysis. The data were derived from printed materials such as literary works, journals, newspapers, research documents, and other written texts in Surigaonon, whether published or unpublished.

Consistent with Tognini-Bonelli's (2001) conception of

corpus-driven research, the corpus in this study functions not merely as supporting evidence but as the foundation for hypothesis formation, interpretation, and conclusion. Rather than imposing predetermined theoretical assumptions, the analysis allows patterns to emerge from close observation of actual language use. In this sense, theoretical insights are derived inductively from empirical data.

The lexical items examined in the study are drawn from Eliciting Material A: Word List of the UP Department of Linguistics, which serves as a reference lexicon. Using this list, the research systematically organized and compared the spellings found across multiple texts, enabling the identification of variant forms within the Surigaonon-speaking community.

Following the identification of these variants, Surigaonon speakers were invited to select the spelling they considered most familiar, natural, and representative of their usage. These selections were treated as preferred forms and served as the basis for determining the most widely accepted conventions. This participatory dimension strengthens the practical relevance of the study, as it integrates textual analysis with the lived linguistic experiences of native speakers. By combining empirical corpus data with community judgment, the research advances a grounded and inclusive approach to the development of consistent spelling practices aligned with the linguistic realities of Surigaonon speakers.

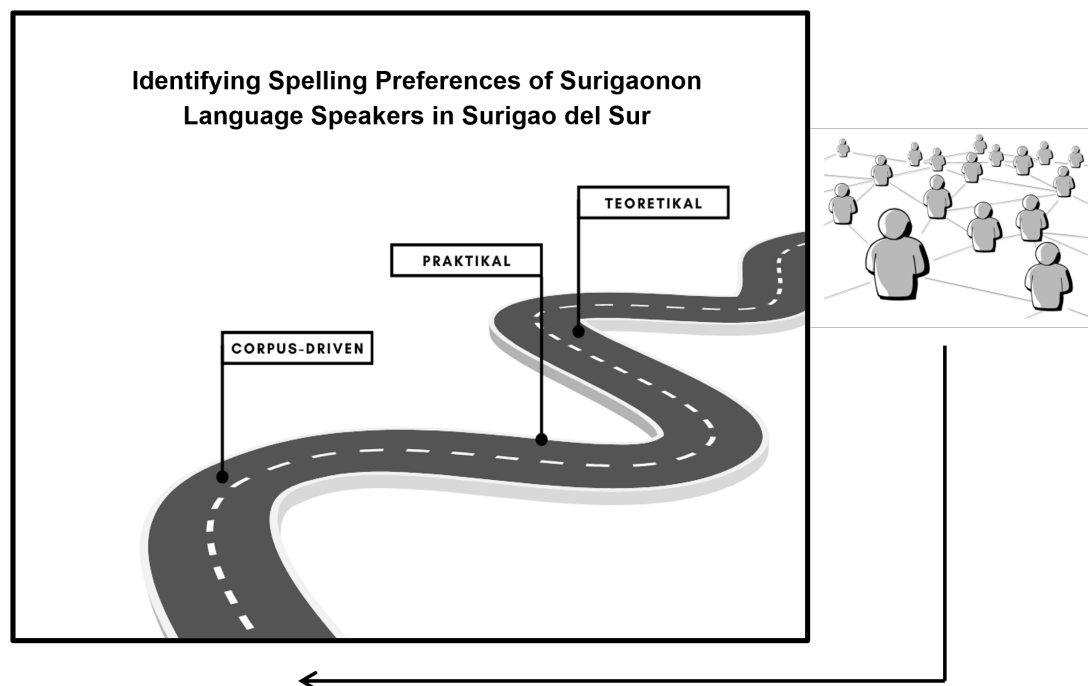


Figure 1: Schematic Diagram of the Study

The diagram illustrates that the selection of preferred spelling in the Surigaonon language is a cyclical and dynamic process. It is anchored on three essential factors: 1) the use of actual words from written texts (corpus-driven), 2) the observation of how the language is used by its native speakers (practical), and 3) the grounding in

linguistic studies and established rules (theoretical). These three serve as the guiding pillars in the entire process of determining the appropriate spelling of Surigaonon words.

At the center of the diagram is a large box representing the anticipated output of the study; a list of Surigaonon

words with agreed-upon and community-selected spellings. Inside this box are the key concepts; “corpus-driven,” “practical,” and “theoretical”, depicted as flags or signages that symbolically guide every step of the process. These flags serve as both theoretical and methodological markers, shaping the direction of the standardization process.

Also within the box is a depiction of a road with dashed lines, symbolizing the process of spelling selection; a path that, although complex and full of possible divergences, is consistently directed toward a clear goal, as represented by a forward-pointing arrow within the box. This arrow indicates that each stage in the process is geared toward systematic progress and communal consensus regarding the spelling of words.

At the end of the road, the Surigaonon-speaking community members are illustrated as the primary beneficiaries of the study. This representation emphasizes that unity in language use, particularly in spelling, is a collaborative endeavor that requires the active participation of the entire community. Their collective action and decision-making serve as the foundation for an authentic standardization, not imposed from the top down, but rather emerging organically from the language users themselves.

On the outer part of the box, there is another arrow pointing back into the process, signifying the cyclical and adaptive nature of choosing spelling preferences. This return indicates that whenever a new Surigaonon word is identified with multiple spelling variants, the process is repeated; starting again with corpus analysis. This reveals that standardization is not a one-time event, but a continuous process of adaptation and refinement, aligned with evolving language practices.

It is also crucial to underscore that integrating the corpus-driven approach means that spelling preferences are empirically grounded; each word is drawn from real usage within existing texts, and not merely speculative. Meanwhile, the practical design implies responsiveness to real-life language use in the community, and the theoretical design refers to linguistic principles that guide language analysis, such as phonology, morphology, and the sociolinguistic relationship between language and its users.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The study employed a descriptive qualitative–quantitative research design to examine spelling practices grounded in actual community data. Through the descriptive component, the researchers identified Surigaonon words from various printed corpora, including books, articles, newspapers, research papers, and other written materials. Words exhibiting multiple spelling variations were systematically enumerated to illustrate the current condition of non-uniform spelling practices in the language.

The qualitative dimension involved contextual analysis of these words as they appeared in authentic texts, complemented by a participatory checklist-type survey administered to native speakers. In this survey, respondents selected the spelling forms they considered most familiar, natural, and representative of their everyday usage. These selections provided a community-based basis for compiling a consensus-driven word list that may serve as a foundational reference for the codification and standardization of Surigaonon spelling conventions.

The quantitative component focused on determining the frequency of preferences for each spelling variant. By calculating the number of respondents who favored a particular form, the researchers were able to identify the most widely accepted spellings for words with multiple variants.

This integrated methodological process ensured that the identified preferred spellings were empirically grounded, reliable, and reflective of authentic community usage. In doing so, the study supports the broader objective of establishing an evidence-based and systematically developed spelling system for the Surigaonon language.

Respondents of the Study

The number of respondents in the study was determined based on official data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), as published in the 2020 Census of Population and Housing: Population by Province, Municipality, and Barangay of Region XIII (Caraga). According to the agency’s records, the total population of individuals aged 50 to 79 years old in each municipality is as follows:

Table 1: Respondents of the Study

Name of Municipalities	Total Population Census 2020	Age Distribution			Total
		50-59	60-69	70-79	
Carrascal, Surigao del Sur	24, 586	1, 940	1, 265	548	3, 753
Cantilan, Surigao del Sur	34, 060	3, 144	2, 036	1, 120	6, 300
Madrid, Surigao del Sur	16, 653	1, 548	1, 1 79	619	3, 346
Carmen, Surigao del Sur	11, 720	1, 071	724	386	2, 101
Lanuza, Surigao del Sur	13, 642	1, 098	883	429	2, 410

Ten percent (10%) of the population in each municipality served as the respondents for this study; 375 in Carrascal, 630 in Cantilan, 335 in Madrid, 210 in Carmen, and 241 in Lanuza. In total, there were 1,791 respondents in this study.

The respondents or participants were selected using purposive sampling based on the following criteria: 1) legitimate residents who have lived in the municipality for more than ten years, 2) native speakers of Surigaonon,

3) male or female, 4) aged 50 to 79, and 5) with clear hearing and vision, literate, and capable of engaging in conversation.

In compliance with ethical standards in research, each respondent was provided with an Informed Consent Form. This document contained important details about the study, including the title, objectives, scope, methodology, and expected responsibilities of the participants should they agree to be involved. It also stated the participants' rights and assured them that all responses would remain confidential and be used solely for the purposes of the research.

The form was written in Filipino, and its contents were explained verbally in Surigaonon to ensure full comprehension. Participants were given sufficient time to read and reflect on the form, and it was made clear that there was no coercion or undue influence by the researchers in obtaining their consent. Participation was entirely voluntary, and the signing of the form signified their free and informed agreement.

Overall, these steps were undertaken to uphold the integrity and ethical standards of the research and to safeguard the rights and welfare of the study's participants.

Locale of the Study

This research is centered in the province of Surigao

del Sur, a province located in the Caraga region in the northeastern part of Mindanao. The study specifically focused on selected municipalities collectively known as CarCanMadCarLan, an acronym referring to the municipalities of Carrascal, Cantilan, Madrid, Carmen, and Lanuza. These towns are interconnected not only geographically but also in terms of culture, language, and history. The term CarCanMadCarLan was coined as a practical label for these contiguous and interrelated municipalities, which are often jointly addressed in various local programs and provincial projects.

In these areas, Surigaonon serves as the lingua franca or the primary medium of communication in the daily interactions of the people. It is spoken in households, markets, public discussions, and even in local institutions such as schools, churches, and government offices. For this reason, Surigaonon was chosen as the central language of the research in order to examine its sociolinguistic and educational dimensions within the local context.

The focus of the study on these towns is based not only on their shared use of a common lingua franca but also on the goal of analyzing the language within a specific geographical scope, where its actual and living use can be observed.

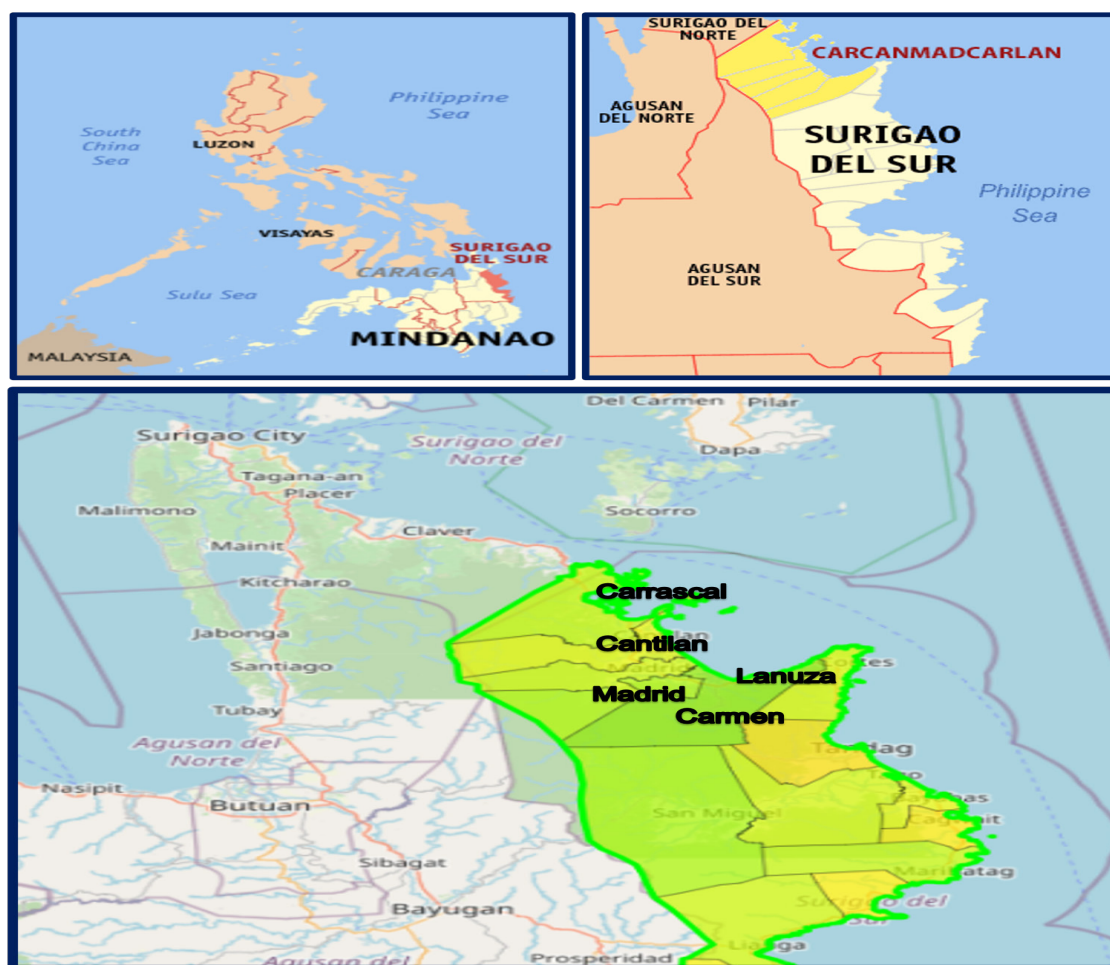


Figure 2: Map of the Philippines showing the island of Mindanao and the location of the province of Surigao del Sur, specifically highlighting the municipalities of Carrascal, Cantilan, Madrid, Carmen, and Lanuza (CarCanMadCarLan).

Data Gathering

The researchers began by determining the number of respondents needed, taking into account factors such as each municipality's population, the scope of the study, and the expected level of participation. This ensured that the selected participants possessed adequate knowledge of the topic and that the findings would be credible. After establishing the required number, the researchers visited the Municipal Mayors within the study area and submitted a formal request outlining the study's purpose, methods, and scope. Their approval provided the legal and ethical basis for conducting data collection.

With the mayors' approval, the researchers coordinated with the Barangay Captains, who assisted in identifying qualified respondents capable of providing reliable answers to the survey checklist. Once potential participants were identified, the researchers approached them individually to explain the study and the questionnaire. Each respondent was given time to review the Informed Consent Form, which clearly stated the study's objectives, their role, and the assurance of confidentiality. Only those who voluntarily signed the form were included in the study, ensuring adherence to ethical research standards.

A corpus-driven approach was used to gather data, relying on published or unpublished Surigaonon texts as the primary sources. The researchers collected materials such as books, literary works, dictionaries, song lyrics, research papers, articles, and social media posts. Using the Eliciting Material A: Word List from the UP Department of Linguistics, the researchers matched the entries with their Surigaonon and Filipino equivalents. The collected

corpus was then examined to identify all existing spelling variants of each word.

Based on this, the researchers developed a survey checklist containing Surigaonon words with multiple spelling forms. Respondents selected the spelling variant they preferred; the one they considered more acceptable, commonly used, and suitable for their writing and everyday language. The spelling most favored by the majority was included in the final list of Surigaonon words, which became the foundation for developing a writing guide and reference for the standardized orthography of the language.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and analyzes the Surigaonon words extracted from the compiled corpus that exhibit various forms of spelling representation. The analysis focuses on the variations in the spelling of words based on their actual usage by native Surigaonon speakers.

To ensure a systematic approach, the study used Eliciting Material A: Word List from the University of the Philippines Department of Linguistics as a reference. This list contains 500 commonly used words in elicitation sessions for linguistic documentation and served as the standard for identifying words present in the corpus.

The identified words are organized in Table 1, where comparisons of the spelling variants of each word are displayed. The goal is to identify possible patterns or rules in the spelling practices used by speakers, as well as the implications of these practices for the standardization of spelling in Surigaonon words.

Table 2: Surigaonon Words (Based on Eliciting Material A: Word List of the UP Department of Linguistics) with Spelling Variants and the Preferred Spelling of the Community

Words in Filipino	Variants of Spellings			Preferred Spelling
	Spelling 1	Spelling 2	Spelling 3	
abo	abo	abu		abo
araw	adlaw	adlao		adlaw
alon	bayod	bayud		bayod
ako	akô	ako	aku	akô
amoy	bahò	baho		bahò
anay	ánay	anay		ánay
apoy	kiyajo	kyajo	kayajo	kyajo
aso	iro/ido	iru/idu		iro/ido
baba (chin)	ku-ko	koko	kuko	ku-ko
baba (to go down)	na-og	naog		naog
babae	babaje	baje	babaji	babaje
baga (ember)	bága	baga		bága
baga (lungs)	bagà	baga		bagà
bakit	uman	oman		uman
balahibo	barhibo	barhebo		barhebo
bangka	baruto	baroto		baruto
banlaw	waswas	was-was		waswas
basa (wet)	basâ	basa		basâ

bathala	gino-o	ginoo		ginoo
batok	tanggu-an	tangguan		tangguan
bibig	ba-ba	baba		ba-ba
binti	bitiis	biti-is		bitiis
bituin	bito-on	bitoon	bituon	bitoon
bituka	tina-i	tinai	tina-e	tina-e
bubong	atop	atup		atop
Búkas (tomorrow)	silom	silum		silom
buháy	buhî	buhi	buhe	buhî
bukás (to open)	abri	abre		abre
bulag	buta	bota	butah	buta
bulaklak	buyak	boyak		buyak
buwaya	bu-aja	buaja		buaja
daga	ambaw	ambao		ambaw
dibdib	dub-dub	dubdub	dubdob	dubdob
diin	do-on	doon		doon
dumi/tae	ta-i	ta-e	tae	ta-e
gabi (night/evening)	duyom	doyom		duyom
galit	ísog	isog		ísog
ginto	boyawan	buyawan		boyawan
gitna	tungâ	tunga		tungâ
halaman	tanóm	tanom		tanóm
iba	lahî	lahi		lahî
ihi	ihi	ihe		ihi
ilan	ibán	iban		ibán
ipis	ok-ok	uk-uk		ok-ok
isip	huna-huna	hunahuna		hunahuna
itim	itom	itum		itom
ito	ini	ine		ini
iyan	jaón	jaon		jaón
kailan	kun-o	kon-o		kon-o
kain	ka-on	kaon		kaon
kalabaw	karabaw	karabao		karabaw
kalbo	opaw	upaw	opao	opaw
kaliwa	wayá	waya		wayá
kayo	kamo	kamu		kamo
kanan	tu-o	tuo		tu-o
kawayan	kawajan	kawadjan		kawajan
kili-kili	kilikili	kili-kili		kilikili
kinabukasan	pagkasilom	pagkasilum		pagkasilom
kindat	kilô	kilo		kilô
kita (to see)	kità	kita		kità
laban	áto	ato		áto
lakas ng loob	ka-isog	kaisog		kaisog
lalake	liyake	lyake		liyake
langgam	lagalaga	laga-laga		lagalaga
leeg	li-og	liog		liog
linis	limpyo	limpyu		limpyo

mabaho	bahô	baho		bahô
mabilis	pas-pas	paspas		paspas
mabuti	bu-otan	buotan		buotan
madalas	pirmi	pirme		pirme
	sigi	sige		sige
madilim	dugyom	dugyum		dugyom
maganda	guwapa	gwapa		gwapa
mainit	pasò	paso		pasò
makapal	bagâ	baga		bagâ
malalim	layom	layum		layom
malaki	dako	daku	dakuh	dako
malapit	apiki	apike		apike
malayo	lajo	laju	ladjo	lajo
malinis	limpyo	limpyu		limpyo
mamaya	ngaj-an	ngads-an	ngadz-an	ngaj-an
mapait	pait	paet		pait
mapurol	habol	habul		habol
marami	hamok	hamuk		hamok
	dabo	dabu		dabo
masama	bagis	bage		bagis
masikip	hi-ot	hiot		hiot
matalim	ha-it	hait		hait
mukha	wayong	wayung		wayong
ngayon	kuman	koman		kuman
ngayong araw	kuman na adlaw	koman na adlaw		kuman na adlaw
paa	siki	sike		siki
pagong	ba-o	bao		ba-o
pangit	ya-ot	yaot		yaot
paruparo	kabakaba	kaba-kaba		kabakaba
paso (singè)	pasò	paso		pasò
pasok (to go in)	suyód	suyod		suyód
patpat	bunáy	bunay		bunáy
payat	ka-ig	kaig		kaig
pipi	pu-a	pua		pu-a
pinto	pirtahan	pertahan		pirtahan
pinuno	daku-dako	dakudako	dakodako	dakudako
pito (seven)	pitó	pito		pitó
pukpok	dukdok	duk-dok		dukdok
pula	puya	poya		puya
punong-kahoy (tree)	punò	puno		punò
	kapun-an	kapon-an		kapon-an
punô (full)	punô	puno		punô
pusò	kasingkasing	kasing-kasing		kasingkasing
putik	lapok	lapuk		lapok
sabi	la-ong	laong	laung	laong
saksak	buno	bono		buno
sipsip	sup-sop	supsop		supsop
sisiw	pisô	píso	piso	pisô

suso	súso	suso		súso
	tutoy	totoy		totoy
talampakan	lapa-lapa	lapalapa		lapalapa
takbo	jagan	dyagan	djagan	jagan
tama (to hit)	igô	igo		igô
taog	ta-ob	taob		taob
taon	tuig	tu-ig		tuig
tatlo	tuyó	tuyo		tuyó
tayo (we)	kitá	kita		kitá
tiyan	tijan	tidjan		tijan
tubo (sugarcane)	tubó	tubo		tubó
tulog (to sleep)	túyog	tuyog		túyog
tulu	tuyô	tuyo	tuyu	tuyô
tuyo(dry)	mayá	maya		mayá
usok	asó	aso		aso
wala	wayâ	waya		wayâ
walo	wayo	wayu		wayo

Based on Eliciting Material A: Word List of the UP Department of Linguistics, which comprises 500 foundational words used in linguistic research and documentation of Philippine languages, it was found that 127 words from the list appeared in the Surigaonon corpus and exhibited various spelling variants. Of these, nineteen (19) words had three spelling variants, while the remaining 108 had two variants. Some examples of words with three spelling variants include:

ako – akô, ako, aku

apoy – kiyajo, kyajo, kayajo

baba (chin) – ku-ko, koko, kuko

babae – babaje, baje, babaji

bituin – bito-on, bitoon, bituon

bituka – tina-i, tinai, tina-e

buháy – buhí, buhi, buhe

bulag – buta, bota, butah

dibdib – dub-dub, dubdub, dubdob

dumi/tae – ta-i, ta-e, tae

kalbo – opaw, upaw, opao

malaki – dako, daku, dakuh

malayo – lajo, laju, ladjo

mamaya – ngaj-an, ngads-an, ngadz-an

pinuno – daku-dako, dakudako, dakodako

sabi – la-ong, laong, laung

sisiw – pisô, piso, piso

takbo – jagan, dyagan, djagan

tulo – tuyô, tuyo, tuyu

These variations in spelling can be attributed to factors such as phonological assimilation, regional or dialectal influences, and the absence of a standardized orthographic system in Surigaonon. For example, the word *apoy*, which appears as *kiyajo*, *kyajo*, and *kayajo*, demonstrates systematic phoneme deletion or elision, along with the insertion of the sounds [a] and [i] between [k] and [y], which may reflect local pronunciation patterns or phonotactic constraints in Surigaonon. Similarly, *bituin*

with forms *bito-on*, *bitoon*, and *bituon* shows alternation in the representation of glottal stops and stress, common issues in languages with a strong oral tradition. This illustrates sociolinguistic variability, a typical phenomenon in widely distributed languages lacking standardized orthography.

Nevertheless, with the help of community members, who possess in-depth knowledge of Surigaonon and hold the right to determine spelling preferences, final word forms with a unified spelling were established for writing purposes.

An illustrative case of orthographic variation in Surigaonon can be seen in the word *babae*, which has three variants: *babaje*, *baje*, and *babaji*. According to survey data from 1,791 participants, the spelling *babaje* was most preferred by Surigaonon speakers. Of the total, 90.9% or 1,628 participants selected *babaje* as the most appropriate spelling. Meanwhile, 129 participants (7.2%) chose *baje*, and only 34 (1.9%) favored *babaji*. This result demonstrates a strong consensus at the community level that recognizes and uses *babaje* more commonly in both discourse and writing. This indicates a relative orthographic standardization at the community level (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006; Sebba, 2007). Moreover, the data show that although alternative variants such as *baje* and *babaji* exist, they remain marginal due to limited usage. These alternatives are not competitive in terms of acceptance and usage compared to the more dominant and widely accepted spelling *babaje*, underscoring its stronger presence in the language community.

It is important to note that this process of selecting spelling variants is not merely a linguistic matter but also a sociocultural practice deeply rooted in the history, identity, and collective experiences of the language's speakers. It is not a purely technical decision about which spelling is "correct," but rather a dynamic process of negotiation within the community, one that involves familiarity,

frequency of use, and the symbolic value a form holds for members of the society.

This can be analyzed through the lens of bottom-up orthographic development, a concept in applied linguistics referring to the organic emergence of spelling standardization, where decisions about writing conventions arise from the language users themselves, based on actual usage and everyday interaction (Lüpke, 2011).

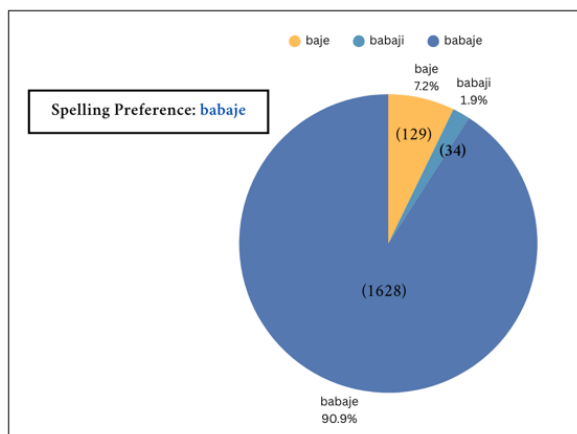


Figure 3: "Babaje" Spelling as the Preferred Choice of Surigaonon Speakers

From this perspective, the choice of a specific spelling form such as babaje instead of baje or babaji, is not simply a matter of orthography but an active assertion of identity, ownership, and lived experience of the language. In other words, with each spelling choice, the community inscribes its own representation in literature, education, and other formal domains of language use.

CONCLUSION

In the process of analyzing and selecting the words to be used in the writing and documentation of the Surigaonon language, the local people particularly the active speakers of the language, played a crucial role in clarifying and asserting their linguistic preferences regarding word spelling. Contemporary linguistic research, as emphasized by Fishman (1991) and Grenoble & Whaley (2006), posits that community participation is vital to successful language documentation and revitalization, as native speakers have direct access to the actual usage and form of the language in daily life.

This implies that it was the community members themselves who validated the final forms of the Surigaonon words, based on their collective experience and recognition of which spelling variants are more commonly used, understood, and accepted within their

community. This process was not merely a technical selection, but a democratic initiative that acknowledged the linguistic authority of the community rather than imposing decisions from external documenters or academic institutions.

As a result, a finalized list of Surigaonon words was established, with a single preferred spelling chosen for each word. This process is not simply about the arrangement of letters, but a linguistic undertaking aimed at standardization, an essential component in strengthening and enriching the language, especially for those with limited representation in written form.

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