

Contemporary Spelling Rules for the Cebuano Language

by
Benjie Yballe
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Introduccion

The best government is no government. Therefore the best spelling rule for a language might also be to have none, you simply would know what is wrong and what is right. English words are not ruled by hard and fast rules of orthographic prescription yet no one is at a loss on how incorrect spelling can be determined. If you've had the correct education you will know if a word is spelled wrong and when in doubt, English has hard and soft tools to consult. When reading something in English you are not reading a pronunciation

guide. Literacy in it requires serious effort from an early age.

Achievement of literacy in Cebuano should be automatic for those whose families protect them at an early age from the noise of other languages and for whom exposure to the accepted written form is jealously ensured. In 2017 all children are incompetent in our language as a result of households all over the Cebuano nation allowing the intrusion of too many languages that are foreign to our Visayan heritage. One foreign language at their age is enough. I'd say choose wisely but like the vampire invited to enter a house, the wrong language proceeds to take away your life.

Bisaya Magasin, the Akademiya and DepEd (under the baton of KWF, the agency of the Philippine government tasked with the destruction of the non-Tagalog languages). Recent memory has them publishing definitive rules of their own for Cebuano spelling and certainly so have many other institutions and regional bodies who follow different sets. Nothing wrong as long as we are talking about native stakeholders who seek to advance their own notion of how Cebuano orthography should be applied by Cebuanos spelling the words of their language. But if it is the national government seeking to fix spelling rules for us to follow then we should be suspicious because Cebuano is certainly not the language of the Imperial Manila government.

That government's KWF is pushing for a uniform spelling standard that will be consistent with its cherished Tagalog national language. It's also tried creating a separate department of culture which points to its intent to converge all existing culture groups (over a hundred since culture corresponds to language) into a Tagalog monolith encompassing the archipelago. The obvious reason they need orthographies to be uniform (Tagalog-patterned is another way of saying it) is that the schoolchildren of K-3 who are allegedly beginning academic life with vernacular or mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) would henceforth already be familiar with the spelling system for Tagalog national language. The easier will it be for the young ones to transition fully to immersive Tagalog instruction perhaps even as early as Grade One. Nothing new there since the earliest proponent of "multilingualism" in early elementary, SIL, meant it as an irreversible pathway to Tagalog "education" or rather indoctrination. But if the vernacular system that in theory is being learned first bears no similarity to Tagalog, transition gets no help.

Cebuano has been spelled many different ways over the centuries, some of you may have encountered samples with Q and special characters on top of vowels. Diacritical markings are impressive if you know how to use them or strike the appropriate keys. To simplify matters let's make

these optional and at the same time adjust our regular spelling to match the 26 English letters and reduce synonym-homonym instances.

I cite the Bisaya Magasin solution for Ug and Og. Usa (one) and Osa (yet) should be another. Give thought too to the revival of Umari and Umabot and how to permanently banish *pinaka*, *ate* and *kuya* from our nation. A self-respecting writer of Cebuano will not trouble himself with the spelling of Tagalog words, he won't use them, period.

To cut this long story short before proceeding to the meaty part below it, here are three points of concern:

1. No more hyphens. Or at the very least keep them to a minimum. The average texter takes five seconds to enter a hyphen on a cellphone and three seconds on a smartphone. It's much less time than that on an actual keyboard but if you are following any of the usual conventions, every paragraph you type will have around a dozen hyphenated words and eliminating most of these means time savings. Which will also encourage texters and the not casual writers to use Cebuano as much as they can, come up with longer verses with less effort and with maximum impact. We want more output and more than that we want these to be of the kind that Cebuanos will actually want to read or hear.

2. Short and abrupt O, long and a bit softer U. For the most part I position those two vowels the same way the magazine beloved by the Cebuano world for several decades now had been doing. (Last time I saw BisMag sold on a stand was two decades ago.) Take the English words for hole and cooking rice or corn. Lungag is hole. Longag is the cooking word instead of the hyphenated one, Lung-ag, whose obsolescence is humbly proposed before the court of public opinion.

3. As much as my preference is for re-adopting the Spanish alphabet because of its historical relevance, all of the physical and virtual keyboards in use today (polymer QWERTY or capacitive touchscreen) are American English. So I use all 26 characters even as I stick to the Spanish spelling or original Spanish words as much as I can. You cannot possibly mistake Sto. Nino for anything else, I do not know a living person who will, but you have my undying admiration if enye is just a fingertip away. If I have to borrow a foreign word, I will borrow only from Spanish and almost never from English because I want to respect English as a separate language that should not be mixed carelessly with formal Cebuano. The presence of Spanish spelling will also be a constant reminder to me that this here is a terminology we have yet to come up with an indigenous equivalent for. Formal Spanish has disappeared from our local context so making use of its technological terminology is a safe recourse. But formal English should be learned and should be used separately by

Cebuanos if they have ambitions to be competent in both their native language and the only global worldwide international language there is. And you are free to learn the Tagalog national language if you desire useless things in life. And be balla (the other word is ammunition in Spanish so the latter and not the former is the one that gets to be the one with one L).

Simple instructions on how to successfully encode a Cebuano word

Don't worry, the cc in the introduction is intentional and the rest will be briefer than what is normally expected for our important subject. We begin with a few example words.

tobo	tubo	tubu
(cane)	(tube)	(grow)

cuarta
(this is considered by many materialistic human beings to be the most precious object in the universe after the Tagalog national language; needs to be contextually distinguished from the gear in between tercera and quinto)

tu	to	'to
(three)	(drip)	(that)

tuo
(believe)

tu-o
(right)

wala, wa
(none)

wa-la, wa-
(left)

ba-ga
(ember)

baga
(lung, this is the more commonly used term so this is the one with no hyphen)

bagga
(thick, notice the double G?)

lata
(tin. Spanish terminologies take precedence or else the more prevalent word gets the simplest spelling which means the other one that many spell with the same letters, la-ta, gets a hyphen)

But it need not be a hyphen. I'd use whatever one-two press punctuation or connective is available on your mobile gadget. So it could be / . , * or -. Or make it latta.

Here are typical key charts from old and newer phones to illustrate this.



Even on a smartphone it is not the easiest thing in the world to compose in Cebuano, losing the ubiquitous hyphen helps a lot.

Now before proceeding we ask what's the point in all this? Something informative from Atty. Faelnar to enlighten you.

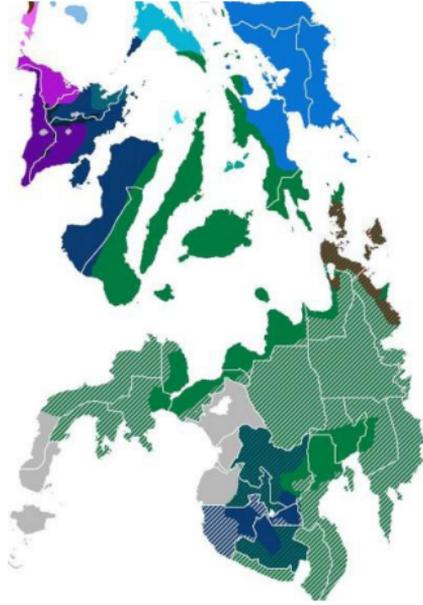
Manny Faelnar - Defenders of the Indigenous Languages of the Archipelago (DILA)

Ang Tinagawog maoy makapatay sa atong mga lumad nga pinulongan. Naa man to si kanhing Blas Ople, gaawhag nga dili na gamiton sa publiko ang mga lumad nga pinulongan ug mag-Tinagawog na ang tanan. Dakong garbo ni kanhing Blas Ople nga namatay ang Chavacano isip pinulongan sa binayloay sa Habagatang Mindanao ug pulihan kini sa Tinagawog. Sa Cotabato City tulo na lang ka barangay nga nahibilin nga Chavacano ang sinultian. Patay na ang Chavacano sa Davao City.

Nahinumdom baya ang akong bayaw nga kaniadto makadungog pa siya sa mga Intsik sa Davao City nga mag-Chavacano. Karon, kay pinugos lagi nga makat-on ta og Tinagawog ug wala pod kita tudloi sa atong lumad nga pinulongan (sa wala pa moabot ang MTB MLE) ug multahan pa gayod og magbinisaya, ang mga mga batan-on dili na kahibalo magbinisaya og tarong. Daghang mga lumad nga pulong gipangpulihan na og gamit nga Tinagawog sama sa pinakalami inay sa kinalamian o labing lami.

Cebuano is not an insignificant language spoken by mere hundreds or few thousands, it used to be undisputed as the largest Philippine language in pre-Hispanic, Hispanic,

American and pre-Marcos times. For most of our physical history it has had roughly this geographic presence.



Wikipedia lists these as Cebuano provinces. (Samar not so much though compared to Leyte which is 50-50, and there are no Davaos and Cotabatos.)

- 1 Sugbo
- 2 Bohol
- 3 Negros Occidental
- 4 Negros Oriental
- 5 Siquijor
- 6 Biliran

- 7 Leyte
- 8 Southern Leyte
- 9 Samar
- 10 Northern Samar
- 11 Masbate
- 12 Surigao del Norte
- 13 Agusan del Norte
- 14 Surigao del Sur
- 15 Agusan del Sur
- 16 Misamis Oriental
- 17 Bukidnon
- 18 Lanao del Norte
- 19 Misamis Occidental
- 20 Zamboanga del Norte
- 21 Zamboanga del Sur
- 22 Zamboanga de Sibugay

Conventionalizing the way to spell Cebuano words is only the first part of the job. To make the language stick with future writers you need to set how these words are used and the best way to do that is by setting their equivalence to terminology in technical and literary English. Mahinuklogon clearly means meaningful. Hinuklog can be the word for analyze. Piho, to ascertain. Tino, to scrutinize. Suta, to investigate. Sukitsukit, to interrogate. Susi, to inquire.

All this work requires command in both standard English and a particular dialect of Cebuano if that select committee is to be assembled prior to a permanent institute for Cebuano. My output as a writer in both English and Cebuano would benefit from the existence of a competent dictionary for English-Cebuano built into MS Office, Libre Office or Open Office because I can right click to view curated entries corresponding to the word I have typed.

Warning: Avoid translations from English to Cebuano and vice versa that implement the online artificial "intelligence" tools of Google and Facebook. Useless garbage as you can see in this actual sample from 2019 for which I won't reveal if it's Google or Facebook because both are hilarious:

Unsaon paglambo sa (locality) kung si (candidate) mobalik ug pagpangawat sa lungsod. Wala paba ta makuntento sa iyang gipangawat sa 9 years

How to grow in (locality) if (candidate) mobalik and pagpangawat in the city. We don't have to be contented with that gipangawat in 9 years - Translated from Filipino

Even those who have been writing or broadcasting in our language for many years can be problematic in their delivery of Cebuano:

Way kapuslanan ang 8888 by Leo Lastimosa

Nov. 28, 2020 The Freeman

Nag-unang Globe sa Martes ug nisunod ang Smart sa Huwebes.

Leo follows Tagalog spelling for Thursday which is pronounced HOY BIS, both syllables in the hard Cebuano tongue. There really is no way to be consistently phonetic with our language and we are fools to kowtow to another language that is intended by nationalists to kill us. Ignorant kids are already enunciating NO BYEM BRE. Use **jueves** in writing, say it with your hard tongue. Write **noviembre**, at least that's also from the original source.

Ignore the invented “Cebuano” “words”

Lina Quimat few decades ago not only conjured laughable “historical” details about the warlord of 1521 Mactan but also falsified “old” words for January, Sunday and individual hours of the day. Falsification evidently even just from *tigburukad* for Monday which she derived from Antiqueno Visayan verbiage. As for her month “names”, no native has ever heard of these before, even more so those alleged hours

of the day like ten in the morning, *tig-iritlog*. These have predictably been impressive to the gullible but no dishonesty is ever not harmful so watch out. By gullible this refers to those who can be made to believe that pre-Magellan inhabitants were jabbering to each other about the time being past eleven in the morning of a certain February 29 that was a Wednesday. Nationalist nonsense.

Jess Tirol has his own technical jargon sourced more honestly in my opinion but except for probably a handful, we'd really be better off with Spanish. Inasmuch as memorization is demanded, the writer has no way of independently recollecting those new jargon and it would be far easier to look up an online or offline Spanish dictionary. I am not an English hater but I would rather see English usage purged from formal Cebuano speech and writing. I want us to strive for competence in pure English and to be separately competent in pure as humanly possible Cebuano fortified technolinguistically by our traditional source, Spanish.

It offends my eyesight to see a lot of hyphens in a paragraph. We should take offense similarly that our rich repository of authentic Cebuano vocabulary remains negligently undeployed in the technical-literary realms. Usig is done by dogs, they are harassing humans by their barking or by intimidating motions. So there you have the word for harass. But how about usage of *puangod*, *sapayan*, etc. in other

contexts, in literally relevant life situations that instantly sound sensible to you the first time you hear it?

Below is a small sample of Cebuano words that are commonly spelled the same way howsoever the disparate and inconsistent manners with which the public and writers are used to or are predisposed with them. The words I list are re-spelled according to my preference for spelling Cebuano words. In it U is long and O is short. Spanish spelling won't be pidginized anymore. Comoesta is how I write it but you should know how I say it if you are a Cebuano like me. According to yours truly, Matod Nila is not the title of the song. pushable=matod/matulod. We should stop using the hyphen as a separator for pronunciation purposes but relegate it sparingly for distinguishing the words whose definitions differ. Like most things this will take getting used to but the payoff is a much more fluid and expressive writing environment.

bata-bata (adjective, younger)

batabata (noun, subordinate)

gipang-ayo (plural verb for being repaired)

gipangayo (v, request)

kabuntagon (n)

kabuntagun (adj)

matod (adj)

matud (v)

tabon (v)

tabun (n)

If you have seen the 1,290-page Wolff (Cornell University) dictionary compiling “Cebuano” words back in the 1970s you'll see the need for sense in the matters of word acquisition and transcription.

End potential confusion for Osab, Usab and Otro to know which stands for also or for change or for repeat again another time once more. Grandfather and grandmother should be lettered in reflection of the ABUELO root in Spanish: LULA and LULO. LOLO whose pronunciation is shortened and rougher, now means onanistic utilization of the genital. Rules are essential but the fewer the better, the easier to accept.

Ug dinhi nahuman ang hamubong pamalandong nga kuwang sa pagbugalbugal busa sundan nato kini sa tamay, biaybiay ug pagpanaway. Pinaagi sa duruha nga sanglitan nato sa hinubarang unsaon pagminaampingong di magkinaunsa.

Kidnap

The worst political thriller published in the history of mankind
by Anonymous Mocker

After they removed his blindfold and gag, Rodrigo Duterte was not about to open his mouth without finding more about this place he was brought to. The window and door were shut and he could not say if there was airconditioning in this small room but it did not seem so hot inside and since his eyes had been shut for hours he probably could see better in this low light than his captors although the funny glasses they were wearing might have been for night vision.

"Who are you son of a bitch?"

"Good afternoon to you Mr. President. My name is the religion of peace. ASailorMalayCum. AlohaHacker!"

"Release me!"

"Don't you love us anymore, Rod? To prove our feeling for you, I am going ask my brother here to kiss your lips."

"No! Are you using a video camera on me?"

"Calm down or I will slap you with my slippers. You recently announced on television you planned to give extra clips to your anti-terrorism soldiers so they can suicide upon capture before we can decapitate."

Lots of screams and curses followed but he didn't take long to relent and acknowledge their god to be the truest god he's subscribed to for the longest time and that he'll behave. Satisfied, they let him go unharmed.

"I don't know if we can rely on his word. You now, he really believed we are what we said we were. But all that time he talked to us in Tagalog."

Ang kinalawgawang politicanhong pangulbahinam nga nahipatik sa tibuok saysay sa tawo ni Wailhing Mabiaybiayon

Human tangtanga ang taptap ug sampong sa baba ni Digong,

Hopefully this exercise has not unduly distressed you. If you wish, you can finish the translation started in Cebuano right

above. Pretend that this is from the usual American English novel with the expected standard vocabulary. It's not going to be easy. To be honest with you, even the sample below would give me one hell of a hard time.

Last laugh to the pandemic denier

The angel of death had taken a long vacation and when she came back, his first destination was the one place on earth that rang the loudest false alarm for coronavirus. Satan visited your country and understood firsthand why his/her Alqaeda fans and their jihadist ilk felt distraught by the virus of Wuhan bringing to them unfair competition.

BONUS SECTION

John Wolffe was working on the linguistics of Cebuano between 1963 and 1969 with support from Cornell University. He had local contributors helping him with that and they came up in 1974 with a dictionary. They collected the most extensive data possible from the field and it remains the most comprehensive study of our language but

just by looking at this portion you can conclude that a platoon of pure Cebuano linguistic scholars would have done a purer job.

There is no better way than this to show why Cebuano usage should be treated with deeper respect. Especially by us.

blak-anwayit *n* black and white shoes.

blak-áwut *n* blackout in wartime. *v* [B6; c1] have, cause blackout. *Átung iblak-áwut (blak-awtun) ang tanan sa syudad,* We will black out all the lights in the city.

blak-ay *n* black eye. *v* [AB26; a1b2] give, have a black eye. *Miblak-ay (nablak-ay) iyang mata,* He got a black eye.

blakbins *n* name given to salted black beans (*tahusy* in cans. *v* **1** [A13] eat salted black beans with the staple food. **2** [b6] cook with salted black beans.

blakbur, blakburd *n* blackboard. *v* [c16] make into blackboard.

blakbúting *n* block voting. *v* [A1; c1] engage in block voting.

blakdyak *n* **1** game of blackjack. **2** blackjack in card game. [A23; a] play blackjack. **2** [A12] get blackjack. *Nakablakdyak ku,* I got a blackjack. **3** [B26] for car accident.

The game of words is fun, confounding or a matter that should be left to people who actually understand the usage of true Cebuano Visayan?

kinaiya person's character
panginaiya personality of a character
kinaiyahan his innermost self
kinaiyahanan nature of a person

Of the four it is the latter that is best descriptive of mother nature. One to one equivalence of English and Cebuano terminologies is requisite for us to stop writing in primitive Cebuano. Languages that cannot be written with minimum sophistication gain no respect especially from its own users. Not only is skill required for selection and propagation but also effort.