
Diglots in the Philippine context¹

by Kermit Titrud

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My goal in writing this paper is to present some reasons for why the Caluyanun New Testament was published as a diglot with Tagalog and how it has been received. I also hope to encourage my fellow Bible translators to consider the option of publishing the Scriptures for the minority language groups in a diglot form. Based upon my experience in other language groups in the Visayas and Mindanao, as well as reports I have heard from my colleagues concerning the language situation in Luzon, I do not believe that the Caluyanun situation is unique. More than likely, it is the norm among the Philippine language groups.

The Caluyanun speakers live on 10 islands between Mindoro and Panay. There are also a large number of villages around San Jose, Mindoro, where the majority of the population speak what is basically Caluyanun. Although most of the islands are made up of more than 95 percent Caluyanun speakers, two of the larger islands and most of the Caluyanun-speaking villages on Mindoro have a large population of non-Caluyanun speakers, mainly Tagalogs and those that speak Kinaray-a.

There are two main reasons why I published the Caluyanun New Testament as a diglot with Tagalog:

1. There are words used on the island of Caluya that are not used on other islands or villages that speak Caluyanun, and it is not always possible to find an alternative word that is mutually intelligible. Since Tagalog is the main trade language, it was reasoned that if a Caluyanun word was not understood, the Caluyanuns could compare it with the Tagalog usage and, thereby, determine the meaning in most cases.
2. There are barrios where there is a mixture of Caluyanun and Tagalog speakers. Previously, I had asked the Caluyanun speakers of these mixed communities—where the majority are still Caluyanun—which New Testament they would prefer to buy, Tagalog or Caluyanun. Almost all preferred Tagalog. However, when asked which they preferred, Tagalog or a diglot with Caluyanun, almost all chose the diglot even if it would double the price.

There were three reasons given by some of my colleagues for why I should not publish the Caluyanun New Testament as a diglot with Tagalog:

1. The Caluyanun speakers would read the Tagalog and not the Caluyanun.
2. The Caluyanun would be compared with the Tagalog. If the Caluyanun translation is different in meaning, it would be rejected.
3. It would cost more.

¹ This article is a revision of: Titrud, Kermit. 1994. "Diglots in the Philippine context." *Notes on Literature in Use and Language Programs* 42:23–28.

It should be noted that there was no proof given to substantiate the first and second concerns. Regarding the third concern, it is true that a diglot costs about 50 percent more to print, and this is reflected in the selling price. For most of the languages we are working in, this would increase the total publication cost by less than \$10,000. In light of the fact that it costs about one million dollars to produce a translation (if you consider the support quota of two expatriate workers, support personnel, plus publication and other administrative costs), the extra \$1,000 to \$10,000 is relatively insignificant, being less than one percent of the total project cost.

To make sure a diglot would sell, I had some Scripture portions printed in two formats: 100 copies of Caluyanun alone and 100 copies of Caluyanun with Tagalog. The Tagalog was in smaller script. We sold the Caluyanun for three pesos and the diglot for five pesos. The diglot sold more rapidly. I then went ahead and had the New Testament published as a diglot.

On November 17, 1990, at the Bible dedication on the island of Caluya (which has a population of 3,000), we sold about 100 copies. The following week we sold another 100 copies on the island of Semirara (which also has a population of about 3,000).

Fourteen months later I went back to Caluya to continue distribution and to find out how the diglot was being used.

1. I interviewed over 30 people who had purchased the diglot more than a year before. When I asked them which translation they read, I found out that only one person reads more frequently from the Tagalog than from the Caluyanun. It appears that he bought the diglot so that he could learn Tagalog. If the publication were only in Caluyanun, he may not have purchased the translation. At least he is now reading the Word. All the others I interviewed read mainly from the Caluyanun.
2. With respect to concern number 2 above, I asked the Caluyanun pastors if there has been any negative feedback regarding why the Caluyanun differs at some points from the Tagalog. (We did not feel bound to always follow the exegetical choice of the Tagalog translation.) They were not aware of any negative effect upon the readers. Also, among those I interviewed, no one raised the issue. There did not seem to be any negative repercussions. This finding substantiated the observation of Jannette Forster and Myra Lou Barnard concerning the Dibabawon-Cebuano diglot. They were not aware of any negative reactions with regard to why the Dibabawon did not always concord with the Cebuano. And they did not even attempt to concord with the Cebuano since they decided on a diglot just prior to publication.
3. On the island of Caluya, the Caluyanun is read in the church, which has an attendance of over 200 each Sunday. When a passage is read from the Old Testament, the Bible in another language, Hiligaynon, is used. The Caluyanun is also used during the weekly services throughout the barrios on Caluya. On the island of Semirara, the four pastors interviewed said they use the Caluyanun when they are ministering to a homogeneous Caluyanun congregation. When the congregation is mixed, they use both the Caluyanun and the Tagalog. I believe that if the publication were only in Caluyanun, the Scriptures read from the pulpit in these mixed congregations would be mainly from the Tagalog Bible, since that was what was done in the past. The reason for preferring the Tagalog Bible is that they know

that the Caluyanuns can partially understand Tagalog, whereas the Tagalogs would understand very little, if any, Caluyanun. Also pastors, just like everyone else, do not like to carry around a multitude of Bibles or finger the pages of two Bibles at the same time.

4. None of those I interviewed, including the pastors, regret having a diglot. The following reasons were given as to why they like the diglot with Tagalog:
 - a. Some of the Caluyanun words are not understood, but when they are compared with the Tagalog translation the meaning is usually made clear.
 - b. You can take the diglot “anywhere,” for example, Mindoro, Manila, Panay, and still use it.
 - c. You can learn Tagalog, which is the base for the national language.
 - d. Those who want to learn Caluyanun also can do so using the diglot.
 - e. One pastor, who ministers in a barrio on Semirara where most of the inhabitants are from Tablas, said that many of the church members bought the diglot because they are deficient in both Tagalog and their language. The diglot is a help to them.
5. I asked a few pastors if they could see any disadvantage of having a diglot. They could not think of any.
6. After observing the use of the diglot and its potential for sales, I have no regrets. I know that if we did not have a diglot, we would have had very few sales, if any at all, among the Caluyanun speakers on Iling and Mindoro. Regularly they have contact with Tagalog speakers. And the Caluyanun used on Caluya is different enough that they would not have been interested if not for the diglot.

There is one payoff for the diglot that I had not expected. We have been able to sell some of the Caluyanun diglots to those who speak Kinaray-a, Tagalog, or the Visayan languages of Tablas chiefly because it is a diglot. If it were just in Caluyanun, they would not have been able to handle the language. But as it is, they can compare the Caluyanun with the Tagalog, or vice versa. Also the non-Caluyanun pastors on Mindoro who minister to Caluyanun congregations were excited about the diglot. They would not have been able to make much use of the translation if it were just in Caluyanun.

I believe that the Caluyanun situation is not unique in the Philippines. It is probably the norm. This was verified further when I did some distribution in February 1992 among the Western Bukidnon Manobos (WBM) at Migbadiang. Out of curiosity, after not being able to sell any Manobo New Testaments, I asked about 10 young Manobos which New Testament they would prefer to buy, Cebuano or Manobo. They all chose Cebuano. The main reasons given were: (1) “anywhere we go we can use the Cebuano”; (2) “some of the words in the Manobo we do not understand.” Then I asked them if they would prefer a diglot (WBM with Cebuano) even if the cost were double. They all answered yes. I then asked the pastor of the Baptist church if we could meet with the young people at the parsonage that evening so that I could check their comprehension of the Cebuano New Testament and the WBM New Testament. I had each one read from a different section of the New Testament. Most had WBM New Testaments and three read from the Cebuano Bible. I asked them

to tell me when they came across a word or concept they did not understand. During the course of about one hour, we came up with five Manobo words and three Cebuano words that were not understood. It demonstrated to me that their comprehension of both Cebuano and WBM was good. What was most significant was that whenever they did not understand a particular concept in one translation, they were able to understand it from the other.

For one week in August 1992, Pat Cochran and I went around the countryside where Mansaka and Dibabawon are spoken. Our goal was to sell the Mansakan and Dibabawon translations. We did not limit ourselves to one area but toured much of the countryside where Mansaka and Dibabawon are spoken. However, we still did not sell even one item in Mansaka (and I consider myself a fairly good salesman when it comes to selling Scriptures). The reason why the people were not interested was because there are words in the Mansaka translation that the present generation does not understand. They understand the Cebuano Scriptures better. The older people who seemed still to understand the terms used in the Mansaka translation were not interested in buying the translation, since in most cases they either could not read or their eyesight was failing and they did not have reading glasses. I interviewed dozens of people and many had a Mansaka New Testament that had been given to them. However, when I asked if they read it, the answer was no. They read the Cebuano translation.

Nor were the Dibabawons interested in their translation. The Dibabawon orthography is more difficult than the Mansaka orthography for those accustomed to the Cebuano and Tagalog orthographies. Also, among the Dibabawons we met, it seemed that they had more difficulty understanding the terms used in the translation than the Mansaka people had with the Mansaka translation. And yet we were able to sell some Dibabawon New Testaments. The reason, I believe, we were able to sell a few was because I was able to show them that it was a diglot with Cebuano. I also noticed that when they stumbled on a Dibabawon word, they were able to figure out the meaning when comparing it with the Cebuano translation. Even though the younger generation does not understand a number of the terms used in the Dibabawon translation, it can still be used due to the fact that it was published in diglot.

Besides the rapid changes in the minority languages from one generation to the next, dialectical variations are also a consideration. Probably all the languages in the Philippines have many dialectical variations. No translator will be able to check every single barrio to see if all the words used in the translation will be understood. And even if he or she could, it probably would be impossible to come up with a set of terms that would be mutually understandable by all the groups. For example, on Caluya there is only one term for "faith," which is "pagtoo." However, among the Caluyanun speakers on Mindoro, "pagtoo" is not understood. They use "pagsampalataya," a term loaned from Tagalog. We could not come up with an acceptable term for both groups. That is one reason why having a diglot in the trade language is so beneficial.

If we do not publish in diglot, it may be that we are chopping off one of our arms, maybe even more than one arm. I believe that the reasons given above for diglot can apply to most of the other minority language groups in the Philippines. There may be some situations, however, where a diglot may not be helpful, such as among Muslim groups where the existing churches strongly support the vernacular and where the majority of speakers of the language are homogeneous.

The Dibabawon translators, Jannette Forster and Myra Lou Barnard, told me the reason they decided to go with a diglot was that while they were on furlough, Cameron Townsend highly recommended they do so. Cameron Townsend is well known for his foresight. My prayer is that my fellow translators will at least consider his suggestion. I, too, believe that diglots are an extremely beneficial tool for the minority groups with whom we are serving.