

# Waray Language Variations in Calbayog and Catarman: A Morphemic Analysis

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## ABSTRACT

Waray is a Philippine language predominantly spoken in the Eastern Visayas region of the Philippines. Notably, the language exhibits variation in its use across the provinces within the region, showcasing significant morphological diversity across its dialects. These variations influence not only linguistic structures but also the social identities and communicative practices of its speakers. Despite the richness of the Waray language and its dialects, there is a notable lack of extensive qualitative studies investigating morphemic differences across dialects. This study aimed to examine the morphemic variations of the Waray language between Catarman and Calbayog City in Samar Island, focusing specifically on content

words. The assumption that morphemic variations exist between these two speech communities was supported by Parker and Riley's theory of language variation and Chambers and Trudgill's theory of the geographic dialect continuum. In this study, the linguistic analysis method was employed, using five literary pieces written in the Waray language as sources of verbal data. These literary works were considered as the study's corpora. The findings revealed that morphemic variations between the dialects of Catarman and Calbayog City manifested in contextual variation, clipping, and syllable shifts. Based on these findings, it was concluded that morphemic variations do exist between the two speech communities in Samar Island, with a total of thirty-two content words identified: twelve nouns, eight verbs, seven adjectives, and five adverbs.

**Keywords:** *Waray Language, Morphemic Variation, Linguistic Analysis*

## INTRODUCTION

One of the features that distinguish humans from animals is their ability to communicate. Language, as defined by various linguists, is essentially a system of arbitrary signs and symbols, a means of communication, and an identity marker. Language allows us to form social bonds with others and perform certain social functions. It also unites people. However, even if it brings people together, language variations persist.

Language variation is frequently visible in numerous critical areas, including word choice, pronunciation, sound systems, word formation, and sentence structure. Geographic location, cultural influences, and social situations are all potential causes of these variations. For example, people from various locations may use different words for the same object, pronounce words differently, or arrange sentences differently. This type of variability is a normal element of language evolution and reflects the variety of linguistic expressions.

Variability exists not just in dialects, but also in registers, which relate to changes in language dependent on situation, such as formal or informal contexts (Holyk, n.d.). For example, how people speak to friends in casual chat differs dramatically from how they interact in a professional or academic setting. These modifications show how language adjusts to changing societal expectations and requirements. In essence, variety is built into all levels of language and serves as a dynamic, ever-present element that allows communication to be versatile and adaptive.

Wardough (2006) emphasized that regional variation, or the differences in how groups of people from different geographic areas speak the same language, is one of the most apparent and accessible ways to observe language variation. This type of variation is often visible in the distinct accents, vocabulary, and even grammatical structures used by speakers from different regions. For example, English speakers in the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia may share the same language, but their regional dialects can differ significantly in pronunciation, word usage, and sentence construction. These observable differences make regional variation an excellent starting point for understanding how language can change and adapt across various communities.

According to Parker & Riley (2005), linguistic variations may occur even within the same place of different regions. This variation is known as regional dialect which is a product of multiple factors like politics, geography and culture. They further explained that dialects vary because of different reasons. First, the early settlers of one place leave its cultural heritage including language once they leave it. Second, migration routes tend to delineate dialect boundaries. Third, politics and religion contribute to regional dialect differences. Fourth, physical geographical boundaries segregate groups of speakers resulting to regional dialects. As a whole, regional varieties of a language are reflective of a place settlement history and geography.

A parallel situation is observed in the Philippines; words such as *biyahe*, *bintana*, and *sundalo* are of Spanish origin *viaje*, *ventana*, and *soldado* respectively; counting words such as *uno*, *dos*, *tres* are also of Spanish root. This fact can be attributed to three centuries of colonization. In Region 8, the Eastern Visayas Region, the speech communities speak three languages, Cebuano, Waray Visayan, and Abaknon.

Cebuano is spoken in western, central and southern parts of Leyte including Southern Leyte. Speech communities facing Cebu in Biliran Island speak Cebuano while those facing Samar speak Waray Visayan which is the language of the people of Samar Island, Tacloban City, and north-eastern Leyte. A unique language which is not part of the Visayan languages known as Abaknon or Inabaknon is used by the people of Capul, an island in Northern Samar (Dollado, 2022).

Moreover, dialectal variations occur when speakers of one language differ on their sound production, word formation, vocabulary or sentence structure. Explicitly, the mental system involved in word formation or the branch of linguistics that deals with words, their internal structure, and how they are formed is termed morphology (Aronoff and Fudeman, n.d.). A major process in which morpho linguists investigate words, their structure, and their process of formation is through the identification and study of morphemes, the smallest meaningful unit of a language. Morphemes are classified into: free morpheme, and bound morpheme.

Free morphemes can stand alone as words like read and print. On the other hand, bound morphemes are unable to function as free-standing like –er in reader and re- in reprint (Radford, et al). Fasold & Linton (2006) categorized morphemes into: content and function morphemes. Nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs are classified as content morphemes and also often referred to as open-class morphemes. On the other hand, pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and articles are referred to as function morphemes.

Hence, this study employed morphemic analysis to examine verbal data sourced from literary materials collected in Calbayog City, Samar. The corpora consisted of five (5) literary works written in Waray. One of these was the official hymn of Calbayog City “Calbayog Ko”, written by Jose Gomez. Other sources of verbal data were the song “Nalimot Ka na Ba?” by Tomas Gomez, Sunray Balasbas’ poems “Niyang san Imo Paggikan” and “Pagtanom”, and Phil Harold Mercurio’s “Ayaw Pagpudla an Tuog”, which is part of his book “Ayaw Pagpudla an Tuog ngan Iba Pa nga mga Siday.” The literary pieces “Nalimot Ka na Ba?”, “Calbayog Ko”, and “Ayaw Pagpudla an Tuog” were also utilized by Dollado (2022) as corpora in her study. Content words were extracted from the corpora, translated into English, and subjected to validation by language teachers to ensure the accuracy of the translation and classification (e.g., contextual variations, clipping, syllable shifts, etc.). The informants who were residents of Catarman, Northern Samar translated the words to Catarman Waray dialect. This process helped in identifying morphemic variations between the two dialects.

The researcher believes that the importance of this study lies in its contribution to the documentation and preservation of regional dialects. Waray, like many other regional languages in the Philippines, faces the threat of diminishing usage and loss of linguistic identity due to external cultural influences and the dominance of more widely spoken languages. By analyzing the morphemic structure of dialects in Calbayog and Catarman, the study provides valuable insights into the distinct characteristics of these dialects, aiding in linguistic documentation and language preservation efforts. Additionally, understanding the variations in morphemes can enhance the teaching and learning of Waray, particularly in language education and translation accuracy, benefiting both linguists and educators.

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## LITERATURE REVIEW

The Waray language, a member of the Austronesian language family, is predominantly spoken in the Eastern Visayas region of the Philippines, particularly in Samar and Leyte. Within this linguistic landscape, variations exist among different communities, notably between Calbayog and Catarman in Northern Samar. This review synthesizes existing literature that explores these morphemic variations, focusing on content words such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs.

Villas (2019) discusses the introduction and initial reception of New Criticism in the Philippines, particularly at Silliman University. While the "analytical approach" of New Criticism was embraced by some, it faced resistance from others who viewed it as a foreign and unconventional method. The introduction of New Criticism in the Philippines marked a significant shift in literary analysis, emphasizing close reading and textual analysis. This approach can be applied to the study of any language, including Waray.

One factor contributing to the variations of the Waray language is the modulation of other dialects. Alaga–Acosta (2020) revealed that the first settlers of Calbayog City originally came from Cebu and Masbate. Further, the participants showed strong language preservation and maintenance toward Cebuano, as evidenced by their active use of the language and their positive perception of it as a tool for communication. Despite contact with Waray–Waray, Cebuano remains resilient in Calbayog City, demonstrating how a minority language can be maintained and transmitted across generations in a contact situation.

Cabrero (2018) investigated the morphemic variations of Calbayog and Catarman. Results show that first, most nouns spoken in Waray Visayan Calbayog are derivations of those in Catarman with the use of synonymous word variants. Second, Waray Visayan verbs spoken in Calbayog and Catarman communities reveal variations through consonant shifts in final –W to –T, and synonymous word variants. Third, adjectives in Waray Visayan spoken in Catarman undergo variations when spoken in Calbayog through consonant shift in –D to –R, consonant shift in syllables DUL- to SIR-, vowel shift in –I to –A, and synonymous word variants. Fourth, Waray Visayan adverbs spoken in Calbayog are variations from those in Catarman through consonant shift in –L to –D, and synonymous word variants.

Madeja, Lara, and Abenis (2017) explained the stem-based affixation that captures the formal or morphological relationship among affixed forms and highlights the derivational character of a major Philippine language like Waray. Thus, the description of stem-based affixation is based on the following most productive stem-forming affixes for verbs: pag-, paN-, pakig-, and ka- that prepare the constructions for the attachment of new affixes to form new verbs. The new analysis simplifies the more than twenty root-based affixes into four voice forms: -um- ~m- (where m- is a replacive affix and is an allomorph of –um-), -on (the reflex of the –in affix in Tagalog), -an, and i-. The m- here replaces the first sound of pag-, paN-, paka-, pakig-, and ka- stems producing the so-called mag-, mang-, maka-, makig-, and ma- verbs.

Relatively, Payne and Oyzon (2021) also described the transitivity and modality of inflectional affixes in the morphology of Waray. Inflectional affixes are distinct from a larger set of morphological processes which we identify as stem-forming. These processes are not grammatically required and are not

paradigmatic. Zero to four stem-forming processes may contribute to a word form functioning as a verbal predicate. They contend that the "voice system" of Waray is the result of the interaction between the dimension of transitivity in the inflectional paradigm and applicative processes in the stem-forming group. They distinguish these inflectional affixes from stem-forming processes, which are optional and not part of the core grammatical system. Waray verbs can undergo zero to four stem-forming processes before inflection, influencing their function as predicates. Payne and Oyzon argue that the "voice system" of Waray emerges from the interplay between transitivity within the inflectional paradigm and the application of these optional stem-forming processes.

Dollado (2022), morphemic dialectal variations of Waray Visayan language between Catarman and Calbayog City speech communities in terms of content words and function words revealed that the morphemic variations between the two dialects occurred in contextual variation, clipping, and syllable shifts. With these findings, it was concluded that morphemic dialectal variations exist in Waray Visayan language between Catarman and Calbayog City speech communities in Samar Island.

Likewise, Garrido and Romero (2023) determined the morphophonemic variations of Porohanon speech community as to function and content words and delineated the isoglosses utilized by the locals. By analyzing both function and content words and identifying the isoglosses used by the locals, their study highlights the nuanced ways in which the Porohanon dialect varies within its community. Anchored in Parker and Riley's theories of language variation, Chamber and Trudgill's geographical dialect continuum, and Montgomery and Beal's perceptual dialectology, this provides a theoretical framework for understanding the geographical and perceptual factors that influence dialect variation.

In conclusion, the body of research on Waray language variation highlights the complex and evolving nature of this regional language. The reviewed materials provide valuable insights into the internal morphosyntactic processes, such as morphemic variations, affixation, and the role of transitivity and modality, as well as the external influences shaping the language, including contact with Cebuano and the nativization of Spanish loanwords. These underscore the resilience of Waray, as it adapts to sociocultural, historical, and linguistic changes while preserving its distinct features. The language's dynamic nature reflects the ongoing interaction between its speakers and their environment, ensuring that Waray remains a vital and evolving part of the Eastern Visayas' linguistic landscape.

## **METHODS**

The interpretivist perspective is an approach commonly used in qualitative research that emphasizes understanding and interpreting the meanings and experiences of individuals within their specific social and cultural contexts. In the context of this study on morphemic variations between the Calbayog and Catarman speech communities, the interpretivist perspective was applied in several ways.

First, when translating and analyzing words from the collected literary works or verbal data in the study, an interpretivist approach would emphasize understanding how the speakers of Calbayog and Catarman perceive and use certain morphemes. The meanings of these morphemes may vary according to

local customs, beliefs, and regional identities, which are deeply rooted in the social fabric of each community. This aligns with interpretivism's focus on understanding how individuals or groups make sense of their language in context.

Second, the study employed a descriptive qualitative method, specifically linguistic analysis, which is consistent with the interpretivist approach. Interpretivist research focuses on rich, descriptive data rather than quantifying or generalizing findings. In this study, morphemic variations are not just viewed as isolated linguistic facts but as phenomena that reveal the deeper layers of social and cultural meaning. By gathering and analyzing literary works from Calbayog and consulting local informants for translations, the study sought to capture the nuances of meaning behind these linguistic variations. This aligns with the interpretivist view that understanding human behavior (or language use, in this case) requires exploring the meanings and motivations that individuals attach to their actions.

Third, the researchers are not just an objective observer of linguistic differences but are also actively interpreting how these differences fit into the larger social and cultural picture. They reflect on how their own understanding of Waray (or the dialects of Calbayog and Catarman) influences their analysis. For example, their own experiences as teachers in Northern Samar could inform how they interpret the social significance of certain morphemic variations. This reflexivity is a core principle of the interpretivist perspective and helps ensure that the findings are contextually grounded and not oversimplified.

Fourth, the dialectal differences being observed between the two communities are best understood through the lens of the locals, whose firsthand experience of the language forms a crucial part of the data. The interpretivist perspective would advocate for valuing these local insights and recognizing that there are multiple, context-dependent meanings that can be attached to the same linguistic elements.

Fifth, an interpretivist perspective would view morphemic variations as more than just isolated linguistic features. It would encourage a holistic understanding of these variations as part of a larger social system, where language is intertwined with identity, history, and culture. The differences between Calbayog and Catarman dialects are not merely about language; they reflect distinct social histories, cultural practices, and perhaps even historical interactions between these communities.

As mentioned, in this study, linguistic analysis was applied to examine morphemic variations from a corpus of literary texts collected in Calbayog City. The corpora consisted of five (5) literary works written in Waray. One of these was the official hymn of Calbayog City "Calbayog Ko", written by Jose Gomez. Other sources of verbal data were the song "Nalimot Ka na Ba?" by Tomas Gomez, Sunray Balasbas' poems "Niyang san Imo Paggikan" and "Pagtanom", and Phil Harold Mercurio's "Ayaw Pagpudla an Tuog." The researcher organized morphemic variations in terms of content words (e.g., nouns, verbs, adjectives, etc.).

Content words in terms of nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs were extracted from the corpora, translated into English, and subjected to validation by three (3) licensed high school language teachers to ensure the accuracy of the translation and classification (e.g., contextual variations, clipping, syllable shifts, etc.). For iterative refinement, the analysis was adjusted analysis based on new insights or identified errors. The five (5) language teacher-informants, aged 25-50, who have lived in Catarman, Northern Samar for over five years, were purposively selected. They translated the words into the Catarman Waray dialect.

The findings revealed that morphemic variations exist in Waray language between Calbayog and Catarman speech communities. This was supported by the theory of language variation by Parker and Riley and the theory of geographic dialect continuum by Chamber and Trudgill. In the context of this study, Parker and Riley’s theory is relevant because it supports the idea that linguistic variations, such as morphemic differences between Calbayog and Catarman speech communities, arise from distinct social or regional influences. This theory suggests that language variations are natural and often predictable in a given community based on cultural, social, and geographic factors. For example, the different morphemic forms found in the Waray language across these two towns can be attributed to these variations in the way communities evolve and use language.

Likewise, the geographic dialect continuum theory, developed by Chamber and Trudgill, is significant because it explains how morphemic differences between Calbayog and Catarman speech communities might not be abrupt but rather form part of a larger linguistic continuum. As one moves geographically from one area to another, the linguistic differences might gradually change, creating a continuum rather than clear-cut divisions. This theory can account for the slight variations in Waray language forms observed between the two communities, suggesting that they exist on a spectrum of dialects rather than representing entirely separate languages.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1**

*Calbayog-Catarman Morphemic Variations of Content Words (Nouns)*

Calbayog Waray	Catarman Waray	English	Morphemic Variations
kahulop	kabaraka	worry	contextual
umhanan	umahan	rice field	clipping
piktaw	pitad	step	contextual
bakho	haya	grief	contextual
kasubo	pagdumot	resentment	contextual
pudong	putong	headscarf	contextual
adlaw	adaw	day	clipping
bingalog	sapa	stream	contextual
kahintang	kamutangan	situation	contextual
panamilit	panbilin	farewell	contextual
sidlangan	sirangan	east	Shift: first syllable
lamrag	suná	light	contextual

Table 1 shows the morphemic variations of Calbayog-Catarman Waray content words, focusing on nouns. These variations include contextual variation, clipping, and shift. Similar to the distinctions between British and American English, such as the choice between "trash" and "rubbish," "vacation" and "holiday," or "apartment" and "flat," contextual variation in language is influenced by geographical factors. Likewise, the Calbayog and Catarman Waray dialects exhibit contextual variation, as demonstrated in Table 1. The findings from the morphemic analysis align with Parker and Riley's (2005) theory, which asserts that language variation examines linguistic features that systematically differ when comparing distinct groups of speakers or the same speakers in varying contexts. In this case, two speech communities are compared, with morphemes identified as the linguistic features that are variably spoken.

**Table 2**

*Calbayog-Catarman Morphemic Variations of Content Words (Verbs)*

Calbayog Waray	Catarman Waray	English	Morphemic Variations
nabiling	naghanap	look for	contextual
nag-inampo	nagpinangadye	praying	contextual
nagkalakat	nagkalakaw	walked	shift: last syllable
sangyaw	igpabantog	proclaim	contextual
nagsaysay	nag-istorya	told	contextual
nagpukan	nagpatay	killed	contextual
nahapon	hinugpo	perch	contextual
ginkikit-an	giniimdan	being looked at	contextual

Table 2 presents the morphemic variations of Calbayog-Catarman Waray content words, specifically pertaining to verbs. The data reveals that these morphemic variations manifest as contextual variations (where the meaning or usage of a verb shifts depending on the linguistic or situational context) and shifts (where changes occur in the structure of the verb due to the addition, removal, or substitution of affixes). These findings align with Blust's (Asia-Pacific Linguistics: Open Access Monograph) findings, which highlight that Philippine languages, including Waray, are characterized as agglutinative-synthetic. This classification suggests a relative abundance of affixes, coupled with clearly defined morpheme boundaries.

In Waray, the prefixes nag- and gin- are commonly used verbal affixes that convey specific meanings about the action in a sentence, particularly its aspect (whether the action is completed, ongoing, or habitual). For example, the words NAG-INAMPO (from ampo), NABILING (from biling), GINKIKIT-AN (from KITA), and IGSUSUMAT (from sumat) from Calbayog Waray dialect, the presence of the affixes nag-, na-, gin-, and ig- are evident. In the same case that Catarman verbs IGBABAGAW (from bagaw),

MAWARAAN (from wara), NAGLALAKAW and MAGLAKAWON (from lakaw), and NAIMDAN (from imod) show the presence of affixes: ig-, ma, mag-, -an, and -on.

**Table 3**

*Calbayog-Catarman Morphemic Variations of Content Words (Adjectives)*

Calbayog Waray	Catarman Waray	English	Morphemic Variations
tampalasan	magraot	bad	contextual
mahalbo	hilarom	deep	contextual
kawatan	labtanon	thievish	contextual
mahalawhaw	makangirabo	scary	contextual
sadang	sakto	enough	contextual
usa	sayo	one	contextual
bulanon	kadayaw	full moon	contextual

Table 3 presents the morphemic variations of Waray adjectives as spoken in the areas of Calbayog City and Catarman. The data highlight the presence of contextual variation, wherein the forms of words differ significantly while referring to the same concept. This variation aligns with the assertion of Parker and Riley (2005) that specific lexical items and phonological forms are often tied to particular geographical regions. The findings closely parallel those of Cabrito (2018), who observed that adjectives in standard Waray exhibit morphemic variation through processes such as the use of synonymous word variants, shifts, and clipping. These findings emphasize how geographical and contextual factors shape the dynamic nature of language, particularly in morphologically rich languages like Waray.

The observed variations are not merely random differences but reflect the linguistic adaptability of speakers in different locales. In Calbayog City and Catarman, these differences can be attributed to sociolinguistic factors such as localized usage, community norms, and linguistic economy, where speakers naturally shorten or modify words for ease of communication. Additionally, cultural nuances and intergenerational influences contribute to the emergence of distinct linguistic patterns. Such insights underscore the importance of considering both geography and social dynamics in studying language variation and the evolution of dialects within a linguistic community.

**Table 4**

*Calbayog-Catarman Morphemic Variations of Content Words (Adverbs)*

Calbayog Waray	Catarman Waray	English	Morphemic Variations
didto	dithun	there	contextual
dayon	layun	immediately	contextual
sadton	sanhi	before	contextual
katakíp	hipid	nearby	contextual
makausa	makasayo	once	contextual

Table 4 reveals the morphemic variations of Waray content words, specifically in terms of adverbs. The variations evident in the table demonstrate what is known as contextual variation. This observation aligns with Wardhaugh's (2006) assertion that all languages exhibit internal variation and exist in multiple varieties. The distinct terms shown in the table highlight that the Waray spoken in Calbayog and Catarman represents two varieties of the Waray language.

Despite the observed differences in morphemes, speakers from both areas maintain mutual intelligibility, reinforcing the notion that these are dialectal variations rather than entirely separate languages. Their mutual intelligibility stems from shared linguistic roots and the relatively short geographical distance between Calbayog and Catarman. According to Chambers and Trudgill (1998) and their theory of the geographic continuum, linguistic differences tend to increase with greater geographical separation. However, in this case, the variations are minor enough to allow smooth communication between speakers from these regions.

This geographic and linguistic proximity ensures that the variations in adverbs reflect natural adaptations to local speech contexts rather than significant barriers to understanding. It also underscores the dynamic and adaptive nature of dialects within a single language, where regional influences shape expression without disrupting overall comprehension among speakers.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of morphemic variations in the Calbayog-Catarman Waray dialects reveals significant insights into the dynamic and adaptive nature of language. The observed variations—contextual variations, clipping, and shifts—underscore the linguistic diversity present within the Waray-speaking communities. These differences, evident in nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, highlight how geographical, cultural, and social factors influence language use.

The findings align with theoretical frameworks on language variation, such as those proposed by Parker and Riley (2005), Wardhaugh (2006), and Blust, demonstrating that language is inherently flexible

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and responsive to its environment. These variations also reflect the agglutinative-synthetic nature of Philippine languages, where affixes and morphemes play a critical role in conveying meaning.

Furthermore, the study emphasizes the role of sociolinguistic factors, including localized usage, community norms, and linguistic economy, in shaping these dialectal differences. For example, speakers from Calbayog and Catarman adapt morphemes not only for ease of communication but also as a reflection of their unique cultural identities and intergenerational influences.

The geographic and linguistic proximity between these regions demonstrates the concept of the geographic continuum proposed by Chambers and Trudgill (1998). This reinforces the idea that while linguistic variation increases with geographical separation, shared linguistic roots and cultural ties mitigate potential barriers to understanding.

Ultimately, the presence of morphemic variations between speech communities in Samar Island highlights the need for localized and culturally responsive language education. Purcia's study (2022), for instance, explored the ecocritical semantics in the Sidays of Filipino writer Nemesio "Totoy" Baldesco, who is widely recognized for his works in Siday, a form of Philippine poetry known for its distinct use of the Waray language spoken in the provinces of Samar and Leyte. This body of work reinforces the need to promote and expand literary studies centered on local literature in the Philippines. Teachers must recognize and address these linguistic differences to foster better comprehension and communication among learners. By integrating regional language features into instruction, educators can promote linguistic awareness, preserve local dialects, and bridge gaps in understanding that may arise from morphological diversity. This approach not only enhances learning outcomes but also validates students' linguistic identities.

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