

GOSCHNICK, HELLA ELEONARE. 1989. The poetic conventions of Tina Sambal. Manila: Linguistic Society of the Philippines. Pp. 452.

CIRILIO F. BAUTISTA
De La Salle University

This valuable addition to Philippine linguistic scholarship focuses on the poetic formalities of Tina Sambal, a language spoken in five northern towns of Zambales -- Iba, Palauig, Masinloc, Candelaria, Sta. Cruz -- and a few barrios of Infanta in Pangasinan, just across the border. No serious study of this language has hitherto been done in the context of its poetic characteristics. Tina Sambal literally means, to outsiders in Botolan, 'bleached Sambal', that is, adulterated or impure.

The author's objectives in the study are, first, to discover the characteristics of the different poetic genres of Tina Sambal and, second, to provide an analysis of the poetic conventions found in them. Thus, Tina Sambal poems and songs are analyzed from the aspects of their phonological, grammatical, and semantic qualities.

The second objective actually comprises the larger portion of the corpus, and in this regard the author holds with Kenneth L. Pike that 'language is best described in terms of three overlapping hierarchies, namely phonological, grammatical, and semantic'. The author believes that answering questions about poetic formalities 'is a step towards developing a model for poetry analysis in a culture with its own poetic conventions, not analyzable in terms of English or other Western forms'. Needless to say, such a model makes the poetry of any obscure language more available to a wider audience and makes further investigations more feasible.

In Chapter I, the author discusses the nature, characteristics, and community functions of Tina Sambal poetic genres. She identifies eleven genres: 1) Aladibino (Religious poetry), 2) Aral (Hortatory songs), 3) Biyay (Life-story songs), 4) Liwa-liwa (Entertaining songs), 5) Poga-poga (Comical songs), 6) Komposon Intagama (Compositions for special occasions), 7) Tola (Poems), 8) Kawkantan Pangharana (Serenading and Caroling songs), 9) Palasinta (Courting songs), 10) Birso (Love letters), and 11) Sintiminto (Sad love songs). In the main, these songs and poems are intended for either entertainment or for special occasions -- religious festivities, fund-raising, courtship, wedding, funeral rites, singing contests, etc. In the list, number seven, Tola or Poems, refers to compositions that have not been set to music and therefore will never be sung.

Chapter II discusses the poetic conventions discovered by the author through a study of the aforementioned genres. Considering phonological formalities, she describes the conventions

under the topics of Segments, Word Stress, Poetic Stress Groups, Stanzas, and Length; considering grammatical formalities, the conventions are broken down into Word Structure, Phrase Structure, Clause Structure, Clause Linkage, and Text Structure; and considering semantic formalities, the conventions are discussed under Uncommon Vocabulary and Uncommon Collocations and Larger Semantic Devices. The author's ability to relate poetic conventions to the linguistic and musical exigencies of the milieu provide us with an enlightening understanding of Zambal culture, specifically its aesthetics. At the same time, through the translations in English of the works studied, we gain initial knowledge into the Zambal artistic consciousness. One song, for instance, reminds us of tragic Medieval English ballads: 'Here, Neneng, here's the dagger/ To take away this life;/Bury me in the yard/Directly in front of your stairs'.

Some interesting discoveries of the author: in Tina Sambal songs, word stress is suppressed by musical stress; the majority of these songs and poems are dodecasyllabic, with two hemistichs of six syllables each; traditionally, they are four-lined stanzas; and they are often narrative in character.

Apart from the scholarly investigations found in Chapter II, the chrestomathy stands out as the author's singular contribution to Philippine linguistic studies. A product of long research and collation, the various works therein will serve as primary source for students of Tina Sambal. This is all the more significant in the light of the fact that the Tina Sambal heritage is in danger of disappearing due to the dominance of English and Filipino in these areas and the growing popularity of commercial entertainment. Singing contests, communal rituals, and occasions wherein Tina Sambal songs and poems are a necessary feature are fast losing their importance for the people. A large segment of the younger generation of the community is actually ignorant of this poetic heritage. A more intensive collection of Tina Sambal poetic materials must be done, the author suggests, to preserve this heritage and to trace its historical development in the stream of Philippine culture.