**CEBUANO**

*John U. Wolff*

**Language Name:** Cebuano.  **Alternates:** Visayan, Bisayan, Cebuano Visayan, Sugbuanon.  **Synonyms:** Binisayáʔ, Sibuwánu, sugbuʔánun.

**Location:** Central Philippines (islands of Cebu and Bohol, and on the smaller islands in the vicinity).

**Family:** Bisayan subgroup of the Central Philippine group of the Western Malayo-Polynesian branch of the Austronesian language family.

**Related Languages:** Tagalog, Hiligaynon, Bikol, and the other languages in the Philippine group. Cebuano is more distantly related to Malay, outside of the Philippines.

**Dialects:** Cebuano is marked by a certain amount of dialectal variation which is regionally based. The dialect spoken in Cebu City is the most influential.

**Number of Speakers:** 12 million.

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**Origin and History**

Cebuano or an ancestor of this language has probably been spoken in the Cebu heartland since Proto-Austronesian times, perhaps 6,000 years ago. This is not to say that Cebuano has likely passed in an unbroken tradition from the earliest times up to the present. Internal evidence and a study of ongoing developments of Cebuano and other languages of the Philippines reveals that Cebuano, like the other languages of the region, has developed by repeated processes of overlay, whereby a closely related language (or even a not so closely related language) comes to the area and replaces the language originally spoken and receives substantial substratal influence from the language replaced. Alternatively, the introduced language does not replace the original language but alters it significantly. Cebuano has spread from its base in Cebu to adjacent areas, probably in the last few hundred years, and has replaced closely related languages which were spoken there. Dialectal differentiation is largely due to the influence of languages which were replaced.

The first recorded text in Cebuano is a word list gathered in Cebu by Pigafetta, the chronicler who accompanied Magellan on his trip westward in search of the Spice Islands in 1521. The Spaniards returned to Cebu in 1564, and beginning a few years after this time, the first catechisms were prepared. The word lists and grammars date from the following century, although the printed versions of these materials appear only in the eighteenth century. None of the indigenous literature has survived in published form, although there is a certain amount of orally transmitted material which has an unbroken history predating the Spanish Conquest. There is almost no published literature prior to the twentieth century, and the only earlier specimens of the languages come from catechisms, or other religious texts, or sample sentences in grammars and dictionaries. Earlier grammars and dictionaries reveal that the language has undergone rapid changes in the course of the last four centuries. The sample sentences in the older sources show numerous grammatical forms which are not known nowadays. Many entries in the earlier dictionaries are for words which no one seems to know today, and many of the old folk songs and older religious texts use grammatical forms which are not part of the colloquial language but, rather, are used in elevated literary styles.

**Dialects:** The Cebu City dialect is spreading throughout the Cebuano speech area. Cebuano speakers note dialects which drop /l/ between two /a/’s, two /u/’s, between an /a/ and a /u/, or between a /u/ and an /a/, and dialects which retain /l/ in those environments. The isoglosses which mark these phonological changes are for words which no one seems to know today, and many of the old folk songs and older religious texts use grammatical forms which are not part of the colloquial language but, rather, are used in elevated literary styles.

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**Cebuano is spoken on the islands of Cebu and Bohol as well as in areas of the surrounding islands (shaded areas).**
logical features coincide with numerous other isoglosses involving lexical items or morphological features. The l-dropping dialects extend on the island of Cebu from an area immediately to the south of Cebu City northward throughout the island, over the island of Bohol, and over the areas of Leyte which are Cebuano-speaking. The Cebuano areas to the south of Cebu City and those on Mindanao and Negros are l-retaining. There are other dialectal differences which the community does not remark on overtly, but which are important phonologically and distinguish rustic dialects from sophisticated dialects. One of the most important is the merging of /e/ and /u/, which has taken place throughout the Cebuano speech area except in pockets or speech-islands which preserve /e/, although not necessarily in all forms which formerly had /e/. Also, there are areas in which /e/ is preserved in the speech of certain groups or classes. That is, in some areas, /e/ still remains in some words but is a stylistic marker.