

# THE TASADAY TAPES

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## 1. Introduction

It is nearly a quarter of a century since the Tasaday people, a band of about twenty-six supposedly isolated, stone-tool using hunter-gatherers, living in caves in the rain forests of Southern Mindanao were first read about in Manila's newspapers (July 8, 1971),<sup>1</sup> and shortly thereafter around the world in hundreds of magazine and newspaper articles. National Geographic and NBC produced TV documentaries which captured the imagination of their viewers and the stage was set for a controversy that has waxed and waned until today. At issue was whether the Tasaday were really a completely isolated group having absolutely no knowledge of the agricultural communities that surrounded their forest home, living a pristine, Paleolithic lifestyle since time immemorial in peace and harmony with themselves and their environment, or whether they were a carefully selected group of Manobo and Tboli farmers, some even well educated, who were persuaded to participate in a well-orchestrated hoax, characterized by some as "the most elaborate hoax perpetrated on the anthropological world since the Piltdown Man" (Mydans 1988), or whether they were something in between these two extreme positions.

In 1986, a conference was held at the University of the Philippines to discuss the Tasaday. Two years later a symposium, organized by promoters of the hoax theory was held at the International Congress on Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences in Zagreb. I happened to attend these sessions and was intrigued that almost nothing was being said about the language that the Tasaday were speaking in 1971, at the time of the first contact. It seemed to me that there should be clear evidence for or against the hoax theory from the language itself. There had been a number of word lists taken by some of the earliest visitors to the group, anthropologists as well as linguists, most were unpublished. Teodoro Llamzon had collected a 200 word list in two days in July, 1971. Richard Elkins of the Summer Institute of Linguistics collected a small body of data in four days in August 1972, before sickness forced him to leave the area. He was followed shortly thereafter by Carol Molony, who in two

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<sup>1</sup> They were first contacted on June 4, 1971, at the edge of the rain forest, by Manuel Elizalde Jr., at that time head of PANAMIN (Private Association for National Minorities), and a member of the cabinet of Ferdinand Marcos.

visits totaling about two weeks recorded some 800 lexical items and some taped texts, 45 pages of which were transcribed, translated and published.

In 1989, I was invited to participate in a symposium on the Tasaday at the 88th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association. I presented my findings (Reid 1992) that an examination of all of the available data from that period gave no evidence of any hoax, but that it seemed the Tasaday were speaking a dialect of the Manobo language spoken in Cotabato, as other linguists had already claimed.

This however did not settle the question of how isolated the group had been from other Manobos. Little was known of the form of the language spoken in Blit, the nearest agricultural community to the Tasaday caves. Could the Tasaday have been speaking Blit Manobo?<sup>2</sup> The answer would have to come from doing fieldwork with both Tasaday and Blit speakers. This research was begun in 1993, when I was able to spend approximately three months living with the Tasaday. Although many of the Tasaday have married wives from Blit (they call the place *Tanà Bayi* “Land of the Women”) and consequently now speak the Manobo language of Blit, the Tasaday claim that the language they spoke before was different, and not mutually intelligible with Blit Manobo. I worked primarily with the man Belayem, alongside a speaker of Blit Manobo, Mafalu Dudim, the half brother of Belayem’s two Blit wives. Belayem gave me hundreds of terms that were supposedly used by the Tasaday before 1971, and which were claimed by Mafalu to be unknown to him as a speaker of Blit. Although, as reported in Reid (to appear), a number of these terms were probably coined by Belayem to accentuate the difference between the two dialects and to authenticate himself as Tasaday, there were also a number of terms that had cognates in languages elsewhere in the Philippines, but which were no longer found in either Manobo or any other language that Belayem could possibly have been in contact with.

### **1.1. Taping the Tasaday**

As part of the endeavor to discover as much as possible about the form of the language spoken in 1971, I decided to try to examine some of the tapes that had been made in the caves within days after outsiders had first visited the Tasaday cave site in March, 1972. John Nance, the reporter who accompanied Elizalde on most of the visits to the Tasaday in the early 1970’s reports in his book, *The Gentle Tasaday* (Nance 1988:150):

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<sup>2</sup> There are two languages spoken in Blit, one is Tboli, the language of the numerically strongest cultural group. The language of the minority is a form of Manobo fairly closely related to the Cotabato Manobo language of the Kulaman Valley. Pascal Lays (personal communication) notes: “The Blit people are culturally closer to Tboli than to Cotabato Manobo; Blit is still a Tboli territory, not Manobo. The influence and the physical presence of Tboli culture and language extend up to the extreme western border of South Cotabato, and one has to go down to the Kulaman Valley in order to find Manobo not linguistically or culturally influence by Tboli. In Blit, some people remain able to communicate in Cotabato Manobo, but use Tboli daily as the dominant local language.”

*On the fourth afternoon of the visit [3/26/72] Elizalde thought of leaving a tape recorder running in the cave when we were not there. He borrowed a small portable unit from Fernandez and put it inside a black leather bag with some clothes. Mai and Dafal took it to the cave in the evening and said they were putting Manda's wet clothing beside the fire to dry. Just before departing Mai switched on the recorder; its microphone rested against a small opening in the zipper. Mai fetched the machine later and then he, Igna, and Elizalde huddled for more than two hours over the thirty-minute tape. By midnight they had completed it, Mai and Igna translating and Elizalde writing everything down by flashlight. It was painstaking work and there were many uncertainties, but the results were fascinating. Elizalde immediately sent to Manila for a larger recorder and a supply of tapes that would record for two hours on each side. After they arrived, several hours of each day were spent rigging up the machine and transcribing what it recorded.*

The next sixteen pages of Nance's book contain "all that was written down by Elizalde at the time of the original transcription" (*ibid.* p. 151) of five recording sessions between 3/26/72 and 4/1/72. Two weeks later, Elizalde and several others including Nance again visited the caves (referred to as the second expedition) and five more recording sessions (eight hours of tape) took place between 4/18/72 and 4/22/72. Translations of some of these tapes are also given by Nance (*ibid.* p. 199-211). Following these two expeditions, Nance states that this "candid" recording technique was only used twice in visits over the following eighteen months for a total of three hours of tape (*ibid.* p. 152). No translations have appeared of any of the latter recordings. As is very quickly apparent, no transcription was ever made of the language that the Tasaday were using on the recordings. Only translations of the tapes are given. So, although they were invaluable for providing clues as to what the Tasaday were talking about when outsiders weren't around, they give us no information at all about how they were saying it.

## **1.2. The Missing Tapes**

In commenting on the taped conversations that Nance described, Gerald Berreman an anthropologist at the University of California, Berkeley, and one of the leading proponents of the hoax theory, characterizes the conversations as "ludicrously improbable", containing "inaneities...enough to exceed one's tolerance for conversational implausibility" (Berreman 1992:34-35). Noting that the tapes had reportedly been lost, he implies that the "transcriptions" may not be real. He says, "If the transcriptions are authentic, the Tasaday must have been hard up for conversational fare" (*ibid.* p. 35). Oswald Iten, a Swiss freelance reporter, and one of the leading skeptics of the Tasaday, similarly faults Elizalde and Nance for failing to provide "inquiring scientists" with tapes (Iten 1992:48). Berreman acknowledges that Nance, in the "Afterward" of the 1988 edition of his book *The Gentle Tasaday*, reports that Elizalde "now claims to have found the tapes..." He further notes, "If so--and as of May 1992 they have not appeared--we will be interested to learn what they contain and in what lan-

guage (and whether, if produced, the ones “found” in fact date from March-April, 1972.) (Berreman 1988:335.)

I have no idea why the tapes were not made available earlier. I was told when I first inquired that I could have access to them whenever I was ready to use them. However, Berreman does have a valid criticism. I have received copies of only three hours of tapes, on two cassettes, only one of which is labeled, and that inadequately. The remaining tapes, of which there must be at least ten hours worth, have still not seen the light of day. There can be no question, however that the tapes that I have examined are absolutely genuine, implausible as the contents may seem to a Berreman or an Iten. They are clearly not fabrications. The conversations on them are in no way staged, and provide significant insights into the enormous impact that exposure to Elizalde and his retinue of associates had on an extremely unsophisticated band of forest dwellers.

## **2. Field Notes**

The transcription and translation of the tapes that were provided to me was done over a period of several weeks in June and July, 1995, first in Kematu, a village close to the township of Tboli, then in Tafal, a Bisayan “Christian” settlement at the end of a former logging road, high in the mountains and a half day’s hike from Blit, and finally in Blit itself.

I had originally planned to do the transcription and translation of the tapes either in Blit or in Magtu Ilingan, the small valley where a number of Tasaday families presently live.<sup>3</sup> However, municipal officials in Tboli would not give permission to enter the Tasaday Reservation, claiming that there had been recent reports of Muslim rebel activity in the area. A messenger was therefore sent into Tasaday to request some of the men to come out to work with me. Kematu was not a good location to listen to tapes however. It is located in a narrow valley with a single road leading to a gold mining area at the head of the valley, and there was a constant stream of noisy motorcycles<sup>4</sup> racing back and forth carrying miners and their families to the market in Tboli. Although there was an excellent water supply and ready access to the market (not a minor consideration when feeding 8-10 people three times a day), the Tasaday were not happy there, often complaining of the noise and of being unable to check on their animal traps in their forest home.

When they would no longer stay there, I arranged for them to return to their homes and to meet me in Tafal, to the west of the Tasaday Reservation, a week or so later.

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<sup>3</sup> The name of the valley is traditionally known to the Tasaday as Libutà “Mud” from the name of a muddy creek that flows through the valley.

<sup>4</sup> So-called “skylabs”, the main means of local transportation. These modified bikes are capable of carrying up to five passengers.

The Tasaday were not comfortable in this place either. Tafal is primarily a frontier settlement of Bisayans originally from Iloilo, usually referred to as “Christians” to distinguish them from Manobos and Tbolis, the so-called “tribal” people, and from the Muslims, who constitute the major population of several adjoining provinces. The Tasaday call the Christians *maghalén*, a borrowing of the term *maghalin* which in some of the Bisayan languages means “to move from a place permanently” and is specifically applied to the families that have migrated to Mindanao (Wolff 1972:292). Because of the settlers’ reputation for attempting to carve out their farms from some of the peripheral areas of the Tasaday Reservation, the less the Tasaday have to do with these people the better they like it. Although in this area, the Tasaday are not considered to be a hoax, they tend to be treated as though they were forest freaks, little better than animals. I had considerable difficulty arranging a dry floor for them to sleep on, and food for them to eat. After a few weeks of this, they left, and in order for me to finish the work I had planned to do I had to follow them to Blit, where I was finally able to complete the work.

In Kematu, the primary Tasaday assistants were Mahayag and the brothers Adug and Gintuy, who were accompanied by two of their Blit wives, Dili and Sita. In Tafal and subsequently in Blit, Adug, Gintuy and Belayem were the main Tasaday assistants. Assisting as translators in Kematu were Antonio Lugan, a native Tboli and a resident of Kematu, who had lived with the Tasaday as a school teacher, and who, in addition to his Tboli mother tongue, could speak Blit Manobo, some Tagalog and a little English; and Igna Kilam, a Sdaf Manobo woman who had acted as a translator into Ilonggo or Tagalog during the initial contacts with the Tasaday in the early 70’s. In Tafal, Tulingan Labi assisted as a translator. In addition to his native Manobo, he could speak some Tagalog and some Ilonggo, the main language of the Bisayan settlers in Tafal. His wife, Bol, the daughter of Datù Dudim of Blit by his first wife Kelaya, also assisted. In Blit, Mafalu Dudim, the Blit half brother of Belayem’s two wives, Sindì and Soleh, acted as a translator. He could speak some Tagalog and had been my main Blit Manobo assistant during my fieldwork in 1994. Finally, Renilda Sison, a young woman from Tafal, who could speak Ilonggo, standard Tagalog and some English also assisted as a cook and interpreter from the non-standard Tagalog of my other assistants to the standard form with which I was more familiar. I am extremely grateful to each of these assistants for the roles that they played in helping me achieve my goals.<sup>5</sup>

It should be noted that communication with the Tasaday during fieldwork was primarily through the language that they commonly use now, that is Blit Manobo. However my control of that language is weak, the result of only three months expo-

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<sup>5</sup> I wish also to express my sincere thanks to John Nance and Douglas Yen for commenting on an earlier version of this paper. I am especially grateful also to Pascal Lays, who having lived with the Tasaday for several extended periods, was able to check my transcriptions of the tapes and to make numerous suggestions for more felicitous translations.

sure to it in 1994. Explanations given to me in Blit of terms that I did not know were often well beyond my capacity to interpret, hence the need for interpreters. The situation was complicated for me by the fact that I could not find a Blit who had any knowledge of English, beyond basic greetings and the like, and further, that it is Ilonggo (which I do not understand) which is the main trade language in the area. Tagalog is not used as a trade language, however many Blit believe that they can speak the language, because of continuously hearing it over the radio, and from the schooling that some have been exposed to. However the form of Tagalog that they use is far from the Tagalog which I know. It is a form of Tagalog, shorn of much of its rich verbal affixation, and without any reduplication, processes which are so important in Tagalog to mark aspect and what is commonly called “focus”, and often without the benefit of the ubiquitous case marking forms which enable Tagalogs to determine who is doing what to whom and with what. Blit and Tasaday have a very limited set of verbal affixes, aspect is not commonly marked in the verb, and case is marked by word order rather than by determiners. Tagalog explanations of Tasaday sentences therefore often turned out to be word for word substitutions of Tagalog lexical items for the Tasaday terms, and often left me little wiser than I was before the explanation.

### **3. The Condition of the Tapes**

The two tapes made available to me are marked CAVE TAPE (1) MARCH 30 [COPY], and CAVE TAPE (2) 3RD TRIP [COPY]. The first tape is recorded on both sides of a 120 min. cassette tape, and probably constitutes a single recording session. It may be the final tape recorded at the end of the first expedition that was taken by Elizalde to the caves. The second tape is clearly labeled as having been made on the third expedition, which lasted from 5/14/72 to about 5/21/72 (Nance 1988:224-239).

Both tapes were obviously recorded in an enclosed area with considerable echo, almost certainly the main cave. The first tape, especially, has continuing interference from environmental noises. Most prominent is the relentless high pitched song of forest insects. It was probably made at night. Combined with the insect noise is the ubiquitous sound of splashing water, apparently from the small waterfall that is located beside the caves. To these noises are added the sounds of children playing, a sick child persistently crying,<sup>6</sup> the frequent coughing of several of the adult men, the sounds of chopping, and beating, all complicated by cross conversation between individuals located at varying distances from the recorder, and often talking at the same time. Mai Tuan, the individual who provided the translations that Nance used, is said to have remarked that “it was the hardest work (like that) he had ever done” (Nance 1988:469).

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<sup>6</sup>This was probably the child Sasà, an albino child covered in running sores who later died.

In order to enhance the quality of the tapes, I had some of the higher frequencies filtered out by technicians at the University of Hawaii prior to taking them back to the Philippines for transcription. Although this eased somewhat the difficulty of interpreting some of the conversations, there was still much that neither I, nor the Tasaday who worked with me on the transcriptions could decipher. One further complication was that Belayem, who at the time the tapes were recorded was probably a young man in his mid-twenties,<sup>7</sup> and was one of the main speakers on the tapes, was, and still is, an extremely eloquent individual, frequently speaking with great emotion, speed and intensity, making it difficult to transcribe everything that he said.

#### **4. What the Tasaday Were Talking About.**

If one reads through the translations of the tapes, it quickly becomes obvious that there is a lot of unconnected discourse. There are a number of reasons for this. The main reason is that there are many places on the tapes that are completely unintelligible, for the reasons discussed above. Often only snatches of conversation, or parts of single utterances could be clearly heard. Gaps of this sort are indicated in the transcriptions by a series of connected periods. Another reason is that in the middle of a sublime peroration by Belayem or Mahayag about the depth of their feelings for the person they had been told to call *Momò Dakel Diwatà Tasaday* “Great Uncle Master of the Tasaday” someone would tell someone to get firewood, or pass the betel chew, or to pick up a crying child, or some other completely unrelated mundane comment.

A third reason is that the meaning of some parts are still obscure, and the closest translation that I was able to get simply did not have any logical connection with what went before it. It is quite obvious that there is a considerable amount of metaphorical speech, a characteristic feature of all of the languages of the area. People, for example, are compared to trees, and their children to the branches of a tree, or to a stream with its tributaries. Belayem, at that time still childless, likens himself to a Caryota palm, without branches. At another point he compares himself to a small hardwood tree. It is probable that some of the otherwise semantically anomalous utterances have metaphorical interpretations, which if known, would make the connection with their contexts quite obvious. Another possible reason is that we did not hear the tape correctly, and consequently came up with an incorrect translation.

Despite these problems of understanding, there are large sections which are clearly understood and which provide us with invaluable insights into the impact that exposure to the modern world in the form of Elizalde, and his friends, and their way of life was having on the Tasaday.

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<sup>7</sup> For whom Elizalde had arranged a marriage with a young widow called Sindi, the first of the women to come from Blit.

Although the tapes that I have do not seem to be the source of any of the translations that are given in Nance's book, the themes that appear in them are precisely those that are discussed by him and which provoked such amusement and disbelief in Berreman. These themes include the following (all quotations are taken from Side 1, of Cave Tape 1, unless otherwise noted):

#### 4.1. *The Adoration of Elizalde*

Apart from the various mundane comments that are scattered through the conversations, everything else that is said is either directly or indirectly related to their experience with Elizalde. Their meeting with him constituted what amounted to a sublime religious experience. Even the sound of the voices of the outsiders coming up from the forest floor below the caves, stimulates Belayem to break out into ecstatic song.

*Belayem: 126. What shall I sing about? 127. My thoughts desire Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday. 128. This is now my song. 129. That is why, Lefonok, this is now the one thing that I shall sing about this month. 130. I am experiencing this love. 131. It would be better for us if Mahayag were here. ....<sup>8</sup> 132. Tomorrow, you will tell Mahayag. 133. Nanaa, nanaa. 134. Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday. 135. This is my news. 136. He<sup>9</sup> is not here. 137. Kuletow has just arrived. 138. Oh Kuletow, today we Tasaday are watching over, ayo duyuy. 139. Where have you been, Gintuy?<sup>10</sup> 140. Where have you been today? 141. Where is Udelen? 142. I have something to sing to you. 143. I already finished making the stone ax.<sup>11</sup> 144. We are beginning to feel sad. 145. Oh, Dula, now, Big Uncle is near. 146. I have to wait around now. 147. Tay ye Big Uncle, tay ye Big Uncle. 148. [We] have to wait around now. 149. That is why all the children ... 150. It would be good if Bilengan were here. 151. Toy ye nanaa nanaa. 152. Belayem is worried, named a Tasaday disek ligbalud tree.<sup>12</sup> 153. Yo, Belayem is beginning to worry now.*

Belayem and Mahayag, the two main speakers, see in Elizalde's actions a pattern of love toward them. They repeat over and over again that it is his actions that motivate their love and devotion toward him. The evidence of Elizalde's love, they say, is the fact that he slept with them in the caves.

*Belayem: 9. He would not have slept here in the cave if his love for us was small.*

*313. If Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday loses interest our feelings will be devastated. 314. What we like about Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday, we did not shift our gaze from him when he slept with us in our place here in the caves. 315. That is the true sign that he really entered into our hearts, he slept with us already. 317.*

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<sup>8</sup> Mahayag had gone out to extract palm starch.

<sup>9</sup> Referring to Kuletow, who arrives as he sings.

<sup>10</sup> Son of Kuletow.

<sup>11</sup> Said to have been requested by Elizalde.

<sup>12</sup> Belayem compares himself to a small hardwood tree.



*Even though, if he did not take us into, into his feelings, into the heart of Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday, he would not yet have slept with us, oh, Mahayag.*

*334. Even so, if he didn't demonstrate to us his love for us, he would never have slept with us, Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday. 335. There is the place where he slept, the place where he stayed, Mahayag.*

For Belayem particularly, it was the provision of a wife for him in the person of Sindi that inspired his devotion to Elizalde.

**Belayem:** 18. *As for us, Sindi, you already married me, Belayem. 19. I, Belayem, am your husband, Sindi. 20. Isn't this so, Lefonok? 24. That is why we are already married, Sindi, because of Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday. 26. Even though his thoughts [for us] are small, he loves us, Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday. 27. He would not have married us, Sindi, sister of Friend Short-One. 28. Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday married [us] ... 29. That is why, Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday, he is not different [from us].*

*73. This, Sindi, you married me, Belayem. 74. Belayem is my name. 75. Belayem, a person who digs yams, digs yams. ... 76. That is why, it is only one [thing], Sindi, our thoughts, our thoughts should always be on Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday. 77. It is only one [thing], Lefonok, our thoughts should always be on Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday.*

Dul expresses the depth of her feelings for Elizalde in the following words:

**Dul (from Tape1, Side2):** 422. *Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday. 423. If Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday leaves me, I will always cry. 424. I will lose consciousness.*

**Belayem:** 425. *That's how we all feel, Dul.*

Elizalde's message of conservation of their forest resources, conveyed through Mai Tuan ("Friend Short-One"), and interpreted by the Tasaday to include even the crabs, frogs, tadpoles and little fishes of the streams, became for them the sacred word, to be carried with them day and night, never to be forgotten.

**Mahayag:** 379. *You see Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday is here with us. 380. Now, [about] those words that he said to us, don't ever let them go, don't ever leave them. 381. Don't ever forget them. 382. Those things that Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday said to us. 383. "All of the things here in your mountain, all of the things in your place, don't give away your wild animals. 384. Don't give away your palm pith. 385. Don't give away your male monkeys, your monkeys, ..*

**Belayem:** 386. *Frogs, frogs...*

**Mahayag:** 387. *"... your wild yams, your tadpoles, all of the things that you eat here in your mountain. 388. [If you do] there will be no more [food] to distribute when [we] go [to get some]. 389. There will be no more tadpoles. 390. There will be no more fishing. 391. When there are no more outsiders with us, wherever they come from." 392. Ha! 393. That is what he says to us now, Belayem. 395. We must always take care of these things now. 396. We must never misplace the words of our*

*Brother Short-One [that he said] to us Tasaday people when Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday arrived here.*

*398. Now, what we are saying to all of us now, to all of our male companions, listen to what I have told you, these words to you. 411. Prepare now to emulate me. 412. You see now this Caryota palm starch here in our mountain. 413. Brother Short-One wants that we do not take it for distributing to even one person staying here. 414. Not one person should eat it. 415. Because [if we do] the palm starch will be depleted from our mountain. 416. The result for us who are the owners of it, our yams will be depleted from our mountain, that is what the result would be for us owners. 417. The palms would be depleted. 418. The things that we own here, here in this mountain would be used up. 419. The fish in the streams would be all gone, the palm pith would be all gone. 420. Isn't that right, Belayem? 421. If we use up all the palm pith here in the mountain, we who are the owners of it, we people who live here in these caves. 422. Since long ago, we have stayed here. 423. This place where our ancestors stayed before is now the place where we stay. 424. That is why we stay inside here.*

*425. We will never again leave from here.*

For Belayem, everything was to be shared with only one other person, Elizalde.

**Belayem:** *494. The words of Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday, the words of Brother Short-One. 496. Your rattan, don't deplete it. 498. Your yams, don't deplete them. 500. Your palm starch, don't deplete it. 502. Don't distribute your palm starch to other people. 504. It cannot be shared with other people. 505. All is for Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday, the palm starch, the tadpoles, the frogs, the crabs. 507. Your monkeys. 509. All of the fish, all of the little fish of the Tasaday. 511. The little things that are eaten here in Tasaday. 513. Yams, the little things that are eaten. 514. Especially the palm starch. 515. Especially the trees. 517. Especially our trees, there is none that can be given away. 518. Especially our rattan, there is none that can be taken. 520. Our rattan, our trees, our Tasaday mountain, our Tasaday tadpoles, our Tasaday frogs, our Tasaday crabs.*

*523. Let's sleep now. 525. Let us carry [those words] when we go to sleep, Mahayag. 527. When we wake up, let us carry them when we are awake. 29. When we leave to go to make palm starch, let us carry them when we go to make palm starch. 531. When we eat, let us always eat those words of Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday. 533. When we are making spear traps, let us always dwell on those words of Brother Short-One. 535. Now, when we make monkey traps, always, always let us not leave them behind, Mahayag, those words of Brother Short-One. 537. Our yams, our palm starch, our tadpoles, our fish, all of the fish, every one of our fish. 538. Those, we must never leave them behind, those words of Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday. 539. Hey! 540. What do we call Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday, if we leave them behind, Mahayag? 542. Those words of Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday, of Brother Short-One. 543. Hey! 544. Where did you hear this from, these words to conserve the fish, words to conserve the yams, words to conserve the monkeys, words to conserve the tadpoles, words to conserve the trees, words to conserve the rattan, words to conserve the wild animals, Mahayag? 546. There was only one person whom we saw come out from where we stay, from these caves. 547. That one is Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday.*

It seems that not everyone was as enamored of their new Master as were Belayem and Mahayag. There was some discontent, apparently because they felt the need to stay in the caves while the outsiders were around. They could not freely go out to get food, as was their custom.

***Belayem:** 84. Let us not keep going out. 85. When Big Uncle goes home then we can go out. 86. That is also what we like about Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday. 87. There is no other way [to think about it], he is your father. 88. It is only he, Big Body. 89. You know, I'll also be different, Sindi. 90. It doesn't matter if all my companions leave me.... 91. [While] all of my companions go out to get food, to extract palm pith, I will stay [here, in the cave]. 93. Just that, Lefonok. 94. If it is up to me, that is truly [what will happen], Sindi, even if it is just us, Lefonok, we will surely stay here.*

*549. Hey! 550. So that is the only thing that we will talk about to all the children, to the men, to all the women. 551. We will talk about it to them. 552. This is the only thing you [should] do, you [should] laugh. 553. This is the only thing you [should] do, you [should] be happy. 554. Why are you not happy? 555. Why are you not laughing? 556. Why do you appear sad? 557. Why are you frowning, when our father, Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday is here?*

## **4.2. Unity in the Face of Change**

The need for unity in the face of change is a consistent theme. Elizalde's appearance had apparently introduced the seeds of discontent, and both Belayem and Mahayag exhort their companions to put aside their differences and to act and speak as one, and to become one with the Master himself.

***Belayem:** 258. Bilengan is not here, he is making palm starch. 259. Hey! 260. As for our feelings, there is no other than to focus our feelings, to be one with Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday. 261. To be one with Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday. 262. That's why we should focus our feelings.*

*282. Hey! 283. All of our sisters. 284. This [should] still be your thoughts, unite your thoughts. 285. Especially us men, let us unite our thoughts. ... 289. The women here, Dul, Dula, Itet, Sikey, four of them here. 290. Not including Ginun, she is somewhat deaf. 291. Ginun is the fifth among us. 292. Now ... unite your thoughts, Dul. 294. Unite your thoughts, Sister Dula. 300. Unite your thoughts, that's also how your thoughts [should be]. 301. Don't distance yourself from Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday. 302. Teach the children. 303. As for us men, let us not distance our thoughts from the thoughts of Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday. 304. Hey! 305. That is why, that is really true, Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday, his love for us, Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday. 306. Why did he come here to be with us in our place? 307. So that, so that the people would be as one. 308. We saw him here in this place where we stay. 330. Hey! 331. Let us not distance our feelings from him, he did not distance himself from us, Mahayag. 332. He showed it to us, that true love of his for us.*

*437. That is why, now, because of this, unite [our] feelings, let us make our thoughts clear to Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday. 438. Now, Mahayag, let us focus our feelings, the feelings of the women, the feelings of the men. 439. Now, Mahayag,*

*don't ignore it, don't disobey it. 440. Now, in this place of ours here, let our feelings be united. 441. And all the women, all the women, and all the men, let the men be as one, also let the women be as one. 442. When a woman speaks, let only one speak. 443. When a man speaks, let only one speak, [rather than] several speaking. 444. Now! 445. And the words of that person, now. 446. [Even if] our place will be all used up. 447. [Even if] the people's feelings be all consumed, [nevertheless, I] will not ever again be tired of teaching their words.*

Old ways die hard, however, and even Belayem is not averse to being critical about one of the absent members of the group.

***Belayem (from Tape 1, Side 2):** 91. The women also, (they) are full of love, the children are also loving, completely united. 92. (But) Bilengan is somewhat different. 93. He has a disposition, Bilengan has a strange disposition. 94. He wants to be first. 95. He acts impatiently. 96. Mahayag, on the other hand, doesn't have that trait of trying to be first. 97. And Udelen has a personality that makes us laugh.*

*129. One of our companions, Bilengan, has bad feelings toward us. 130. As for (his) feelings, when he acts impatiently, he is like a young child. 131. He is really still like a child. 132. Even though he is the oldest among us, Lefonok, he is really like a child, (this) old man of ours.*

### **4.3. Food**

A major theme of the tapes is food, as one should expect from a people whose existence depended on continual forays through the rain forest to acquire it. In these three hours of recorded conversation, there are forty-two references to *biking* “yam”, and about thirty references to *basag* “Caryota palm”, from which they extracted a sago-like starch called *natek*. It should be noted that there is not a single mention of cultivation, or of cultivated foods, such as corn, sweet potato, taro or other foods with which they are now familiar. The only mention of rice is in the context of the food that Elizalde had brought for them, which they referred to then (and still do) as *natek Momò Dakel* “the palm starch of Big Uncle [Elizalde]”.

Belayem's earliest childhood memories after the death of his mother and father are of the foods that his caretakers gave him.

***Belayem:** 109. If it were not for you Kuletow who took care of me when I was small ... when I was small. 110. You carried me on your back on top of the bundles of yams. 112. Kuletow carried me on his back on top of the packages of palm starch. 113. Kuletow took care of me when I was small, when my father ... Sali-buku ... died. 114. This Kuletow, the one who took care of me before Mahayag grew up. 115. Then, Mahayag raised me.*

*122. Hey! 123. Sikey! 124. Sikey raised me on tadpoles, the tadpoles of the Tasaday. 125. As for Kuletow, he fed me the heads of Tasaday monkeys. 126. Kuletow raised me on Tasaday palm starch. 127. Kuletow raised me on Tasaday yams. 128. That's why, we feel the same way.*

Belayem's sole interests, he claims, were always activities related to the search for food. When characterizing himself to his new wife Sindi, he calls himself a "digger of yams". Similarly Mahayag talks of the search for food as the only thing that they know anything about.

**Belayem:** 69. *What interests us is the making of noose traps.* 70. *What interests us is the making of monkey traps, the making of spear traps, the making of palm starch, and digging yams.*

73. *This, Sindi, you married me, Belayem.* 74. *Belayem is my name.* 75. *Belayem, a person who digs yams, digs yams.*

**Mahayag:** 465. *One thing we know is the making of pig traps.* 466. *Another thing we know is the making of spear traps.* 467. *Another is the making of snare traps.* 469. *When [we] make snare traps, the only thing we think about is going to check the snare traps.* 471. *To check the pig traps, the only thing we think about is checking the pig traps.* 472. *The only thing we think about is checking the monkey traps.*

The arrival of Elizalde had interfered with the daily business of getting food, so that several of the group were becoming disgruntled. Belayem and Mahayag try to ease the problem by suggesting that they go out to get food, as long as they return to the caves, so that they will be around should Elizalde want to visit them.

**Belayem:** 100. *We will go and get wood grubs, and we will return.* 101. *We will go to dig yams, as long as we return.*

**Mahayag:** 432. *Even if it is night when we go to look for Caryota palms we will return home from the place where we went.* 433. *We will just come back here.*

There is extensive discussion about the felling of palms so that they do not end up leaning against other trees, and the best places to look for yams that are easy to dig out.

**Mahayag (from Tape 1, Side 2):** 183. *... in the place where we go to look for yams.* 184. *In the place where we fell palms.* 185. *You watch me when you fell a palm.* 186. *If it doesn't fall so that it leans against a tree, you say that the pith will be good (for making starch).* 188. *We say that the starch will be good, if it doesn't fall against a tree, if it doesn't lean (against a tree).* 189. *When we dig yams, if the hole isn't deep, we feel good.* 191. *When we dig yams, some are not already growing deep in the earth, some are situated on top of a rock.<sup>13</sup>* 193. *The place that is not deep, is where you should dig.* 195. *(If we do) that, we will feel happy.* 196. *We will not be tired digging.* 197. *We will not be tired extracting (the yam).* 198. *If there is one, we will fell a palm tree.* 202. *If you see that, whenever you go to dig yams, it is growing along the top of a rock.* 204. *The earth on top of that is not deep, only as deep as your armpit, just dig it out.* 206. *It's too bad, your feelings are good there, (but) you have to wait here.* 207. *You will not ... eat yams today.*

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<sup>13</sup> That is where the soil is shallow, and the yam grows along the surface of an underlying rock.

**Belayem (from Tape 1, Side 2):** 240. Just like what Mahayag said. 241. The yams that are under the roots (of a tree), yams that are under the buttress roots (of a tree), these yams could still be gotten. 242. Before, it was difficult to dig the root of a yam. 243. Right, it was difficult to dig the root of a yam, (when it grew) under the roots (of a tree), under the buttress roots (of a tree), before. 244. Honey bees. 245. [We] climbed up the trunk of the tree. 246. (The tree) was felled and leaned against (another tree). 247. It was felled against (another tree). 248. It was felled leaning like this. 249. Always leaning. 251. That's why, ... we help one another. 252. Hey!. 253. Today, Mahayag. 255. ... the feelings of felling a Caryota palm, whenever we do that, we see the place where it will fall on the ground, Mahayag.

293. You see now, when the children leave to go to dig yams, it's just the top that they get. 295. When the children go to make palm starch, when they fell the palm, it leans against a tree. 296. Because (they) do not know how to fell a tree, (they should) watch Mahayag, whenever (he does it) it always falls straight to the ground, it doesn't lean against a tree. 298. That is why, a child says, how can he do that whenever he fells a palm? 299. That is why, I think, there is someone who is showing pity.

The Tasaday quickly became accustomed to the sacks of rice and other food supplies that Elizalde brought in for them, although they mention that it gave them stomach problems when they first ate it. They also were appreciative of the medical assistance that he provided for them.

**Sindi (from Tape 1, Side 2):** 470. The food is piled up.

**Belayem:** 471. I wonder what it is that Big Uncle eats. 472. What about the tadpoles (we ate) before? 473. We have good thoughts. 474. We have good feelings. 475. We never saw medicine for stomach ache. 476. We got stomach ache before. 477. It was the first time for us to eat them. 478. We don't [get stomach ache] now.

**Sindi:** 479. No.

**Belayem:** 480. We got accustomed to it already...

**Odô:** 481. We already got tired of it.

**Belayem:** 482. Tadpoles and palm starch are what we are accustomed to. 483. It is the rice [literally, palm starch] of Big Uncle. 484. Big Uncle has his rice. 485. If I do not eat again the rice of Big Uncle, I will not feel good. 486. Those things of ours ... they make us feel as though we will die. 487. We have already become accustomed to this, to this rice of Big Uncle.

**Mahayag:** 488. We have already become accustomed to its taste.

**Belayem:** 489. Big Uncle seems to have been (here) a long time.

## 5. How They Were Saying It.

It was clear even from the earliest wordlists, that Tasaday was a Manobo language, but that there were a number of basic lexical items that they were using which were unique.<sup>14</sup> These included the words *pegloʔon*<sup>15</sup> “sun”, and *sebang* “moon”. Both of these terms occur in the tapes. The equivalent Blit Manobo terms, respectively *agdaw* and *bulan*, are not found at all.<sup>16</sup>

Be 129. Ya kenaʔ di, Leponok, ig- 128. This is now my song. 129. That is why,  
kani né sebaʔen naken tinulon Lefonok, this is now the one thing that I  
**sebang** sini. 130. Aken kinam- shall sing about this month. 130. I am ex-  
bang kehidu sini. perienceing this love.

### From Tape 2:

Be Sa guwaʔen ilingʔiling diyaʔ **peg-** What is said, like the sun, what is said, it  
**loʔon**, sa guwaʔen medagtung, sa falls, those what are called rays of the sun.  
guwaʔen sadek, sadek, guwaʔen That, what (we) say, light of what (we) call  
layag, sadu **pegloʔon**. Sak the moon. We suspect the light of the moon  
guwaʔen senang, sak guwaʔen is not real. We suspect that the light of the  
**sebang**. Tibubu ki pa endag sun is not real. Those rays of the sun, those  
pigtuʔu sak senang **sebang**. rays of the moon, they do not reach into the  
Tibubu ki pa endag pigtuʔu sak cave.  
senang **pegloʔon**, sak landaw  
**pegloʔon**, sak layag **sebang**,  
endaʔ nekuwa di dalem ilib.

<sup>14</sup> A list of over 200 possibly unique Tasaday forms is given in Reid (1993). For a discussion of some of these and a list of additional unique items, see Reid (1994).

<sup>15</sup> All transcriptions are phonemic. The phonological inventory of Tasaday is identical to the Manobo dialect of Blit and also that of Kulaman Valley, with fifteen consonants and six vowels, alphabetized as follows: ʔ, a, b, d, e [ə], é [e], g, h, i, k, l, m, n, ng [ŋ], o, p [f], s, t, u, w, y.

<sup>16</sup> Pascal Lays (personal communication) notes, “The word *sebang* occurs in the Cotabato Manobo lexicon and refers to the appearance of the moon when its first quarter rises in the west. As for *agdaw*, as already revealed by Molony and Tuan (1976), it appears as an adjective of plant names: *lawingan agdaw* (incorrectly spelled *adaw*). Molony (1976:17) also mentions *bulan kay*, and translates it by: ‘moon tree’. She got the word from Yen’s list (1976:140) where it is written as one word *bulankay*. This division is wrong for the following reasons: 1. If the name means ‘moon tree’, then it should be *kayu bulan*, since an adjective always occurs after the name (ex. *manuk dakel*, *nefnef usa*, *nanga wayeg*, etc.) and clearly in two words like in *kayu sebang* ‘moon tree’, given by Yen (1976:143). 2. The *bulankay* has been identified as an orchid, and therefore could not enter into the category of *kayu* ‘tree’ but only as *kluon* ‘shrub, herb, grass’ or *sakelab* ‘epiphyte’, then its name should be *kluon bulan* or *sakelab bulan*. Yen (1976:151) also mentions that one plant (without giving its name however) has *bulan* as a descriptive term. The list of Tasaday plant names does not show that; he must refer, through certainly Molony’s suggestion to the same plant: *bulankay*.”

An interesting Tasaday semantic development noted in the above paragraph is the term *layag* “rays of the sun”. In other languages of the Philippines, including Cotabato Manobo, the term means “sail of a boat”.

The Tasaday term *kelu?ku?* “cough” (MboBl *buha?*) occurs once on the tapes. This term has cognates in a number of non-Manobo languages of the Philippines. This term was first elicited during my first visit with the Tasaday in 1990. Molony and Tuan (1976:76) report the Blit term *buha?*, a form which also occurs on the tapes.

- |    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| Be | 14. Ma?en ko <b>kelu?ku?</b> 15. Ubus kag ka?en ubud Kakay Leponok? | 14. Why are you coughing? 15. Did you already finish eating the palm pith, Friend Leponok? |
| Ma | 365. Enda? naken, dakel a <b>buha?</b>                              | 365. Not me, I have a bad cough.   |
| Be | 366. Apay pa <b>buha?</b> pa?a pe?anagan.                           | 366. Even though you still have a cough, [you can do it] slowly.                           |

There is discussion about the merits of using their newly acquired flashlights when they go to catch frogs. The term that they used for flashlight is the common Cotabato Manobo *kulinsung* “fire-making bow”. The semantic extension to include any object that makes light is unique to Tasaday.

- |    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| Be | 39. Medo?o sakit si medo?o duma ta tawé. ... 40. Ula?an ok du?en <b>kulinsung</b> ..... 41. Mapi?on siya dakel <b>kulinsung</b> . | 39. Many of our companions have problems. ... 40. It’s no use if there is a flashlight [that has no batteries] .... 41. The big light is good. |
| Ud | 42. Uppa? da? niko. 43. Enda? iseg di mepi?on siya dakel <b>ku-linsung</b> , meda?et siya. ....                                   | 42. It’s the one that is with you. 43. The big light isn’t really good, it’s bad [for hunting for frogs at night].                             |

Belayem and Mahayag commonly use metaphors to refer to themselves. At one point Belayem calls himself by the name of a small hardwood tree *disek ligbalud*, the name of which is not known in Blit. Similarly, Mahayag, often calls himself *Mahayag Bulul* literally “Clear Mountain” (i.e., a mountain that has no trees growing on it) neither part of which is used in Blit.

- |    |   |  |
|----|---|--|
| Be | 152. Luminaban Belayem, pine-ngadanan <b>disek ligbalud</b> Tasaday. 153. Yo pe?edung lumaba? Belayem igkani. | 152. Belayem is worried, named a Tasaday <i>disek ligbalud</i> tree. 153. <i>Yo</i> , Belayem is beginning to worry now. . |
|----|---|--|



Ma 376. Migkagi a, aken idu **Mahay-** 376. I will speak, I who am *Mahayag Bulul*  
**ag Bulul** a. “Clear Mountain”.

Another Tasaday metaphor is the term *pekelamag* “sexual intercourse”, literally “make the wind blow”.<sup>17</sup> Mahayag in the following exchange claims that the rice that Elizalde had provided for them had aphrodisiac effects. Similarly, the term for “rice”, still used today by the Tasaday, *natek i Momò Dakel* literally means “palm starch of Big Uncle”, and is a unique Tasaday metaphor.

Be 499. Kinadaman ta de sini **natek** 499. We have already become accustomed to  
**i Momò? Dakel**. this rice of Big Uncle.

Ma 500. Mepi?on né siya i **peke-** 500. It is good for making love!  
**lamag!**

A variety of other expressions which Blit speakers claimed were not used by them, also occur. One of these is the expression *muwang (kalé)* which always appears immediately before a conditional prepositional phrase (having either of the prepositions *amuk* or *ok* “if”) expressing either an explicit or an implied negative condition.

Be 7. **Muwang** amuk pinede?isek de 7. It’s too bad if he has already reduced his love  
kehidu di kenita, kowa, Lepo- for us, what do you say, Lefonok.  
nok.

Be 26. **Muwang kalé** ok de?isek pedu 26. Even though his thoughts [for us] are small,  
di, kehidu di kenita, Momò? he loves us, Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday  
Dakel Diwata? Tasaday.

Be 263. **Muwang kalé,** amuk tig 263. If not for this, if he only had a small love  
de?isek kehidu kenita diya? Ta- for us Tasaday, he would not have married  
saday, enda? pesawa?en di si Sindi? si Belayem.

Be 317. **Muwang kalé,** amuk enda? 317. Even though, if he did not take us into,  
iglahuk di kita diya?, diya? into his feelings, into the heart of Big Uncle  
atay, diya? atay di, diya? pu- Master of the Tasaday, he would not yet have  
sung di Momò? Dakel Diwata? Ta- slept with us, oh, Mahayag.  
saday, enda? pa tumudug di diya?

<sup>17</sup> Pascal Lays (personal communication) notes that *hekelemeg* is used by the Tboli of Lake Sebu and possibly other Tboli areas to mean “sexual intercourse”. However the Tboli term for “wind” is *lenos*, not *lamag*, so that the forms are only apparently cognate. The Tboli term *hekelemeg* may be an old borrowing from a Manobo language which has subsequently lost the metaphor.

kenita, o, Mahayag.

- Be 334. **Muwang kalé**, amuk enda? ig- 334. Even so, if he didn't demonstrate to us his  
tulu? di du kenita i kehidu di love for us, he would never have slept with us,  
du kenita, Momo? Dakel Diwata? Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday. .  
Tasaday, enda? tumudug di polo  
diya? kenita.

Belayem on several occasions used the term *agut* which is not used in Blit and is possibly unique to Tasaday. At least in some contexts it seems to function as a conditional preposition translatable as “if”.

- Be 549. Hé! 550. **Agut**, siya da?a i 549. Hey! 550. So that is the only thing that we  
kagi?en ta diya? langun bata?, will talk about to all the children, to the men, to  
me?ama, langun bayi. 551. all the women. 551. We will talk about it to  
Kagi?en ta diya? kagda. them

**From Tape 1, Side 2:**

- Be 117. Ya kena? di, kowa Mahayag 117. That's why, Mahayag! 118. If we act like  
i! 118. **Agut** diya?en ta, kowa that, Kuletow, if we act like old people, we  
Kuletow, **agut** diya?en ta kowa would all be old now, Kuletow.  
palan ki lukes, palan ki lukes  
si egoh di sini, Kuletow.

- Be 153. **Agut**, kowa Mahayag, aken 153. If, Mahayag, I am Belayem, today we will  
Belayem, amuk metawa ki sigoh be laughing. 154. We will be laughing.  
di sini. 154. Metawa ki.

**From Tape 2:**

- Be **Agut** si Kakay De?isek Lawa, si If Friend Small-Body [Dafal], Friend Small-  
Kakay De?isek Lawa, yag ha?a du Body does not go to see the Tasafeng, I will  
sak Tasapeng, nekesepak naken insist on it.  
iyé.

- Be Medo?o tumigdag batu iya. Tako There are many steep cliffs there. You see  
si Kakay Mapoko?, **agut** si Kakay Friend Short-One, if Friend Small-Body, Friend  
De?isek Lawa, Kakay Igna, ok si Igna, or Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday  
Momo? Dakel Diwata? Tasaday (wants to go) to see the Tasafeng. Now, you  
egha?a Tasapeng. Na, wé, take Big Uncle.  
ipanawi ko Momo? Dakel.

A commonly occurring Tasaday phrase used on the tape by three of the male members of the group, *hunan di* “that is why”, literally “reason of it”, is a phonologically reduced form of Cotabato Manobo *huanan di* “therefore”.

- Ma 423. Kena? di ugpa? do? tapay tupu? ta egoh anay kena? ta ugpa? sini. 424. Ini **hunan di** si egoh umugpa? ki dalem. 423. This place where our ancestors stayed before is now the place where we stay. 424. That is why we stay inside here.
- Ma 437. Ya **hunan di**, sini egoh di sini, dana? di de, sigba?en sini pedu pebohol ta kita pedu si Momo? Dakel Diwata? Tasaday. 437. That is why, now, because of this, unite [our] feelings, let us make our thoughts clear to Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday.
- Be 447. Ubus pedu ta etaw, enda? de uman de neletig du?u, tulu? du kagda kagi. 448. Kowa Mahayag. 449. Na! 450. Ya **hunan di** hi, Mahayag. 447. [Even if] the people's feelings be all consumed, [nevertheless, I] will not ever again be tired of teaching their words. 448. Mahayag. 449. Now! 450. That is why, Mahayag.
- Ud 597. Du?en du ma dumineg ko, ya **hunan di** du?en ketulengan. 598. Ya **hunan di**, si egoh ... 597. The things that you heard, because of that there is understanding. 598. Because of that, now ...

It seems clear from the above examples (and from a number of others that there is no room to include) that the Tasaday were not simply using the dialect of Manobo spoken in Blit. They were not a group of Blit farmers acting out a cave man stunt for outsiders, as has been frequently suggested by skeptics. Nevertheless the language is much closer to Blit Manobo than what the Tasaday claim today to have been the case when they were first contacted by Elizalde. It is noteworthy that a number of commonly used terms that are today claimed to have been uniquely Tasaday are not found on the tapes. Their Blit equivalents however are used. These include *kundom* "eat" (MboBl *ka?en*); *melawis* "tree" (MboBl *kayu*); *tebulan* "water, stream" (MboBl *wayeg*); *megemoto* "frog" (MboBl. *bakbak*); *lumitay* "monkey" (MboBl. *ubal*); and *beliboy* "child" (MboBl *bata?*).

- Ma 412. Tako si egoh di sini natek dalem sini tuduk ta sini. 413. Ungaya? si Kakay Mapoko? enda? umunut umun ta da? seba?en etaw ugpa?. 414. Enda? **ka?enen** di seba?en etaw. 415. Balu? me?ami? natek ké dalem sini tuduk. 412. You see now this palm starch here in our mountain. 413. Brother Short-One wants that we do not take it for distributing to even one person staying here. 414. Not one person should eat it. 415. Because [if we do] the palm starch will be depleted from our mountain
- Du 30. Kuwa ko sadu **kayu!** 30. Get some [fire]wood!
- Be 537. Nita ma de biking, nita ma 537. Our yams, our palm starch, our tadpoles,

de natek, nita bitog, seda? **wayeg**, langun seda? **wayeg**, palan de nita seda? **wayeg**. our fish<sup>18</sup> in the streams, all of the fish, every one of our fish.

Be 505. Palan diya? si Momo? Dakel Diwata? Tasaday sini natek, sini bitog, sini **bakbak**, sini kiyumang. 505. All is for Big Uncle Master of the Tasaday, the palm starch, the tadpoles, the frogs, the crabs.

Be 507. Sini **ubal** yu. 507. Your monkeys.

**From Tape 1, Side 2:**

Be 364. Asal ini kagi ku kagda sini du i de?isek **bata?**. 364. I'll just talk to these little children.

The Tasaday claim that they stopped using their older forms in order to enhance communication with Dafal, and with his father Mindal, before him, and subsequently with the Blit wives with whom they have intermarried. The tapes show that this language shift had pretty much been completed prior to the events of 1972, and thus prior to the arrival of Sindì, the first Blit wife. This raises the question as to whether contact with Blit was taking place prior to the arrival of Elizalde, as Headland (1992:218) suggests, probably in order to acquire domesticated foods, such as rice, in exchange for forest products. But no-one in Blit with whom I talked remembers such contact prior to 1972. Datù Dudim claims that he had seen the Tasaday during hunting trips in the forest, but they had fled from him. The Tasaday likewise continue to claim that they had not seen or tasted rice prior to Elizalde's visits, and the discussion on the tapes about rice supports the contention that this was a newly acquired food. I find no independent evidence on the tapes to support the claim that they had been contacting Blit on a regular basis prior to 1972.

There is one term that occurs on both tapes, that suggests that the Tasaday had been in contact with groups outside the rain forest. It is *épe?* "owner", apparently a borrowing of Spanish *jefe* "person in authority", found in many languages of the Philippines. Belayem claims that he learned the word from his father, Salibuku, and not from either Dafal or his father Mindal, the hunters who are said to have introduced the Tasaday to the techniques of hunting and first given them metal tools. The term is used only with reference to the spirit owners of the rain forest plants and animal life, and of the caves themselves.

**(From Tape 1, Side 2):**

Be 326. Ya keti?ig di, du?en matupu? ... du?en matupu? nemu- 326. It is known that there are ancestral ... ancestral plant spirits. 327 Hey! 328. There is a spirit

<sup>18</sup> Literally, any edible creature found in the streams.

la...327. Hé. 328. Sa duʔen that makes yams grow, there is a spirit that  
pemula biking, duʔen pemula ba- makes Caryota palms grow. 329. You see, when  
sag. 329. Tako palas buyu it appears, in our hearts we start to feel good,  
nanam pedemdem dalem kagpaʔ, (because of) the owner of the palms, Lefonok  
épeʔ basag sigoh di sini, kowa 330. Now, there is also the spirit that owns the  
Leponok. 330. Sini, duʔen ma wild animals in the forest, all the wild animals.  
épeʔ usa, dalem ketalunan, me- 331. There is also a spirit that owns the palms.  
doʔo usa. 331. épeʔ basag, 332. Hey! 333. It seems, Mahayag, that the own-  
duʔen. 332. Hé! 333. Nanam er of the yams is beginning to be sad.<sup>19</sup>  
kediyuʔ pedu di, Mahayag, épeʔ  
biking.

## 6. Conclusion

The purpose of this investigation was to try to determine whether at the time of the first visit of Elizalde and his companions the language of the Tasaday was as distinct from the Manobo dialect of Blit as has been claimed. As reported in Reid (to appear) Belayem had provided me during my research in 1994 with over 750 forms, that according to my Blit consultants were not known in that area. Some of these I was able to show were cognate with forms found in languages elsewhere in the Philippines, others were cognate with other dialects of Cotabato Manobo, specifically with the Kulaman Valley dialect for which there is an unpublished dictionary available. There were however a considerable number of terms that were unique. A number of these I was able to show were probably recent coinages, which were explained as follows (*ibid* p.12): “I consider the efforts that Belayem went to in order to “create” differences between his Tasaday language and that of Blit were for the purpose of attempting to validate himself and the other members of the group as a distinct ethnolinguistic group.” It was suggested that the tapes would probably contain some of the distinct Tasaday terms that Belayem had provided, but certainly not the wide range of different terms that he is currently using.

The result of the examination of the tapes confirms what had been suspected. Does this mean then that the Tasaday were acting out a hoax? No, it does not. There is ample evidence that the Tasaday were using a form of language in a number of respects lexically distinct from Blit, although its phonology and major syntactic patterns conform to those found in Blit, and other dialects of Cotabato Manobo.

In Reid (to appear) it is noted that a number of interesting parallels can be drawn between the Tasaday in Southeast Asia and another ethnolinguistic group that has recently been described – the Minor Mlabri, an “evasive” and “extremely shy” group of hunter-gatherers (only eleven surviving members), living in the border area between North Thailand and Laos (Rischel 1995). In many parts of the description of this group one could replace the name Minor Mlabri with Tasaday without doing

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<sup>19</sup> Because they are having difficulty getting enough yams to eat.

violence to the facts. Rischel describes them as follows, “They have in the past lived on food they could find by moving about in the dense forests of the high mountains without settling for more than a few days in any particular place. Until recently their shyness and ability to hide in the forest has prevented their culture and language from being exposed to outsiders except for a few encounters with expeditions” (*ibid.* p. 23). He cites Boeles (1963:150) description of them as “.... a group of people who have not known a stone age and thus have no pottery, who do not make their own clothing, who do not practice agriculture, who do not build houses, and who do not wear ornaments.” He suggests that, “their culture may even reflect *regressions* from more developed stages to a survival culture” (*ibid.* p. 22).

There is another, larger group of Mlabri (the “ $\beta$ -Mlabri”), previously studied by Rischel, hence the term Minor Mlabri (or “ $\alpha$ -Mlabri”) for the smaller group that he describes. The larger group have given up a hunter-gatherer life-style. Rischel says that they are “rapidly adjusting to peasant life since it is becoming impossible to sustain life on the things they can gather in the forest. The  $\alpha$ -Mlabri on the other hand, still prefer to stay in the forest as much as possible in an attempt to survive as part-time hunter-gatherers” (*ibid.* p. 36).

The relationship between the two Mlabri groups parallels in several respects the relationship between the Tasaday and the Blit groups. Rischel states (bold face added),

*The relationship between the two varieties of Mlabri is enigmatic. On my first encounter with speakers of Minor Mlabri, I was intrigued by the paradoxical situation that a large proportion of the words they used in everyday communication were totally unknown to me although they clearly spoke the very language I had been studying for several years together with my colleagues. I was further intrigued by finding that there was virtually no difference in segmental phonology between the two varieties of Mlabri although they differed strikingly in prosody (rhythm and intonation) as well as lexicon. ...*

*Structurally, the two kinds of Mlabri are so extremely close that one may speak of sub-dialects of one dialect. **The two varieties have almost the same phonology and morphology**, and to the extent that lexical material is shared, it occurs in largely the same phonological shape... . There are segmental differences between  $\alpha$ -Mlabri and  $\beta$ -Mlabri in the pronunciation of several words, but there is also idiolectal variation... . The lexical differences may have at least three different causes. They may in some cases reflect the existence of synonymous (or near-synonymous) word pairs in Old Mlabri. Synonymy was then lost as one variety retained only one word, and the other variety retained only the other synonym: ... there are several instances where one variety of Mlabri has an ordinary Mon-Khmer etymon whereas the other variety has a word exhibiting peculiar features, **suggesting that it is a deliberate innovation**... . Often a word used in one variety is known but considered obsolete or stigmatized by speakers of the other variety. In several instances **speakers even deny any knowledge of a word used by the other group**. The linguistic attitudes toward lexical materials is a complex issue... . **The differences in lexicon are so great that one would not expect easy intercommunication between the two groups**... . This lexical divergence, as contrasted with the structural similarity of the two varieties of*

*Mlabri, must be recent but is so strong that it suggests an effort to mark the distinction between the  $\alpha$ - and  $\beta$ -Mlabri (ibid. pp. 16, 26-27).*

The linguistic characteristics noted by Rischel which distinguish the two Mlabri dialects are precisely those that are found between Blit and Tasaday, *viz.*, almost identical phonology and morphology, lexicon which is very divergent between the two groups suggesting, at least in some cases, (relatively) recent deliberate innovation in order to mark the difference between the two groups. The two situations, are however not completely parallel. The two Mlabri groups continue to avoid one another and to maintain their linguistic distinctiveness, whereas the Blit and the Tasaday now intermarry, and are merging as a single group, with the children of Tasaday families studying in school in Blit, and speaking Blit Manobo in the home rather than the using the Tasaday forms of their parents, just as the children of mixed Tasaday-Blit families do.

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