



## Kankanaey over time: A dyadic comparison of 1996 and 2023 translations

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### ABSTRACT

Despite existing studies on Kankanaey phonology, there is limited research on how its lexicon has evolved, particularly in relation to phonological changes over time, dialectal influences, and orthographic conventions. This study, therefore, compares Kankanaey lexical items from 1966 and 2023 to identify patterns of phonological consistency and variation. A lexical dataset from both years was analyzed, focusing on phonological shifts such as vowel raising, assimilation, and gemination, with particular attention to changes in spelling and their correlation with dialectal variation and orthographic conventions. The findings showed that 172 lexical items maintained consistent spellings, while others displayed phonological variations, including consonant substitutions, vowel shifts, and assimilation, reflecting natural phonological processes and regional dialect differences. The results indicate that phonological variation in Kankanaey is mainly influenced by natural sound changes and dialectal differences, rather than by standardized orthographic reforms. Future studies should include a broader demographic sample and explore how these phonological shifts impact language use across generations.

### KEYWORDS

linguistic variations, diachronic change, lexical comparison, Kankanaey language, Philippines

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### INTRODUCTION

The state of Philippine linguistics, prior to and during World War II, was relatively stagnant. Constantino (1963, p. 23) observed that there had been limited scientific study of Philippine languages and dialects, with the exception of Tagalog and, to some extent, Ilokano. Even under Japanese occupation, linguistic activities were minimal and mainly centered on teaching the Japanese language and promoting the national language (Constantino, 1963, p. 24). A turning point emerged in the 1950s when Philippine linguistics adopted what Constantino (1963) called the “American Institution,” focusing on questions such as “What Philippine languages are there?” and “How many distinct translation or language development projects does the linguistic diversity warrant?” (Quakenbush, 2003). This new direction led to the establishment of two key institutions: the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) in 1953 (Brichoux, 1974; Constantino, 1963; Stoll, 1953; Wolfenden, 1963), now known as SIL Philippines, and the Philippine Center of Language Study in 1957 (Constantino, 1963, p. 24).

The entry of SIL into the Philippines marked a significant advancement in linguistic research. It introduced descriptive linguistic methods developed in the United States, particularly in the analysis of phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics (Constantino, 1963, p. 24; Wolfenden, 1963). The SIL teams, often composed of missionaries trained in linguistic fieldwork, aimed to document and describe various Philippine languages comprehensively. Their tasks included developing orthographies, compiling dictionaries, and producing instructional materials. By 1953, 39 research teams were already conducting linguistic surveys across the archipelago, each typically composed of two members (Wolfenden, 1963).

SIL collaborated closely with the Philippine Department of Education and established specialized departments, such as the Linguistics, Literacy, and Survey departments, to address specific language development needs (Brichoux, 1974). The Survey Department played a pivotal role in identifying linguistic diversity, conducting initial fieldwork, and guiding the deployment of researchers. According to Quakenbush (2003), SIL has conducted at least preliminary research on over 90 Philippine languages since the 1960s and remains active in about 40 language projects today.

Among the languages studied was Kankanaey, an Austronesian language under the Nuclear Cordilleran group (Hammarström et al., 2022). Spoken in several municipalities of Mountain Province and Benguet, as well as parts of Ilocos Sur and La Union, Kankanaey remains a minority language but is currently classified as safe (Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino, 2018). SIL surveys on Kankanaey covered both the language and its dialects. Fieldwork documented varieties in Bauko, Sagada, Buguias, Mankayan, Kapangan, Kibungan, and other areas (Brichoux, 1974; Wallace, 1974). Comparative studies using Swadesh lists and the Yale Linguistic Questionnaire further examined the dialectal differences in places like Sagada, Kibungan, and Bakun (Gieser & Lyman, 1970; Lyman & Wolfenden, 1970). Informants such as Mr. Anius Pale and Mr. Valentine Lumiked contributed significantly to these early dialect surveys.

It is important to note that SIL's studies were synchronic, not diachronic (Brichoux, 1974, p. 113). They captured the state of the language at a given time, without tracing historical development or change. However, language is inherently dynamic—subject to continuous evolution influenced by political, social, cultural, technological, and moral factors (Mantiri, 2010; Jatowt & Duh, 2014; Zulfia et al., 2022). Changes can occur in various aspects of language, including lexicon, meaning, grammar, phonology, and spelling (Brinton & Traugott, 2005; Fortson, 2017; Bower, 2019). Phonological changes may happen rapidly, whereas syntactic changes typically unfold more slowly (Bower, 2019; Mantiri, 2010).

Given that more than half a century has passed since the SIL surveys were conducted, it is reasonable to hypothesize that the Kankanaey language may have undergone some form of change. As Bower (2019) emphasized, language change cannot be assumed; it must be investigated with empirical data. Since SIL used standardized wordlists in their surveys, it is both feasible and appropriate to replicate similar methodologies today to explore whether Kankanaey has changed over time. Although Kankanaey remains a living and safe language, it is not immune to the pressures that lead to language shift or extinction—such as the death of fluent speakers or preference for more dominant languages (Pelila et al., 2023; Pelila & Ayao-ao, 2024; Pelila & Ayao-ao, 2025). Thus, revisiting and reanalyzing earlier data provides not only a way to monitor linguistic change but also an opportunity to support language preservation efforts (Tullay & Pelila, 2025). Therefore, this study aimed to determine whether there have been changes in the Kankanaey language translations of

selected English words between the 1966 SIL survey and the 2023 community translations, without predicting the nature or direction of such changes. Specifically, the researcher sought to answer this main question: Which English words from the 1966 SIL survey have retained their Kankanaey translations in 2023, and which ones show differences?

## METHODOLOGY

This study follows a comparative research design, aiming to analyze changes in the Kankanaey language over time by comparing the 1966 SIL survey (Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1966) translations with the 2023 translations provided by community informants. A nondirectional hypothesis was employed, as there was no clear prediction regarding the direction or nature of the changes. The researcher sought to observe whether language changes had occurred over time, without making specific predictions, as explained by Barroga and Matanguihan (2022). This design allows for the exploration of potential linguistic shifts, regardless of their nature.

The study was conducted in the municipality of Mankayan, located in Benguet, within the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR) of the Philippines. The area is home to a predominantly Kankanaey-speaking population. The participants were selected based on their extensive exposure to the Kankanaey language and community. They were required to be 50 years or older to ensure that their linguistic knowledge was reflective of the community's historical language practices, as recommended by Azim and Jufrizal (2020) and Humeidat (2018).

Moreover, the primary data gathering tool for this study was a wordlist containing 323 English words derived from the 1966 SIL Survey. This master list, originally containing 372 words, was refined by some validators from the community wherein they excluded 49 words that were culturally irrelevant or unavailable in the Kankanaey language (e.g., “*crocodile*,” “*sea*,” and “*canoe*”). Afterward, the revised wordlist was provided to the participants for translation from English into Kankanaey.

The data collection method used was a Key Informant Survey (KIS), where individuals with specialized knowledge of the Kankanaey language were asked to participate. Although the 1966 survey did not provide specific details on informants, this study established a set of criteria for selecting participants, focusing on individuals with proficiency in Kankanaey and significant exposure to the community's language practices. Participation was voluntary, and a total of nine individuals participated: eight elders/senior citizens and one Barangay Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative (IPMR). While the original plan was for participants to translate the wordlist individually, they decided to collaborate and reach a consensus on each translation due to their shared experience and age. No time limits were imposed to allow for thoughtful translation, and after two meetings, the translations were completed and collected for analysis.

The analysis followed a comparative approach, specifically using dyadic comparison (Bolbakov et al., 2020), which involved a pairwise comparison of the two datasets (1966 and 2023 translations). The translations from both periods were plotted side by side in Microsoft Excel. Each pair of translations was initially categorized into two groups: “unchanged” (where the translation remained the same between 1966 and 2023) and “changed” (where the translation exhibited differences). As the process unfolded, initial classifications of spelling, lexical, and semantic changes were revisited and adjusted. Although many of these

differences were first recorded as apparent shifts, further examination revealed that they did not necessarily reflect actual language change.

To ensure the accuracy of the findings, the researcher, as noted in the methodology, initially withheld the 1966-word list during the survey administration so that participants could provide their own independent translations. The 1966 data was shown only during the validation stage, allowing for a comparison of both datasets. This step led to the identification of mistranslations, synonyms, and other discrepancies, which were clarified through community feedback.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Translations that stayed consistent**

Of the number of words compared between the translations from 1966 to 2023, it was found that 172 recorded words remained unchanged in terms of spelling. Based on Figure 1, many of these are action words or verbs ( $f = 44$ ) in the Kankanaey language that retained their translations, followed by words related to body parts ( $f = 26$ ), conditions or states ( $f = 20$ ), food and plants ( $f = 16$ ), natural elements or environment ( $f = 13$ ), size, quantity, or measurement ( $f = 12$ ), animals or insects ( $f = 10$ ), objects or things ( $f = 8$ ), social roles or relationships ( $f = 6$ ), function words or grammar ( $f = 5$ ), and parts of a house ( $f = 4$ ). Additionally, three (3) words, each related to colors, spatial/position, and time, were found to be retained.

In other words, half of the Kankanaey words surveyed among respondents remained unchanged, as evidenced by their spelling, suggesting familiarity. This can be explained by Pelila and Ayao-ao (2025), who studied the level of familiarity among the Kankanaey people in Suyoc, a barangay in Mankayan, Benguet. They found that many terminologies are retained due to their frequent use in everyday life.

As a result, the pronunciation of these words remains stable, and this stability in pronunciation is reflected in the unchanged translations and corresponding spelling across the 1966 and 2023 datasets.

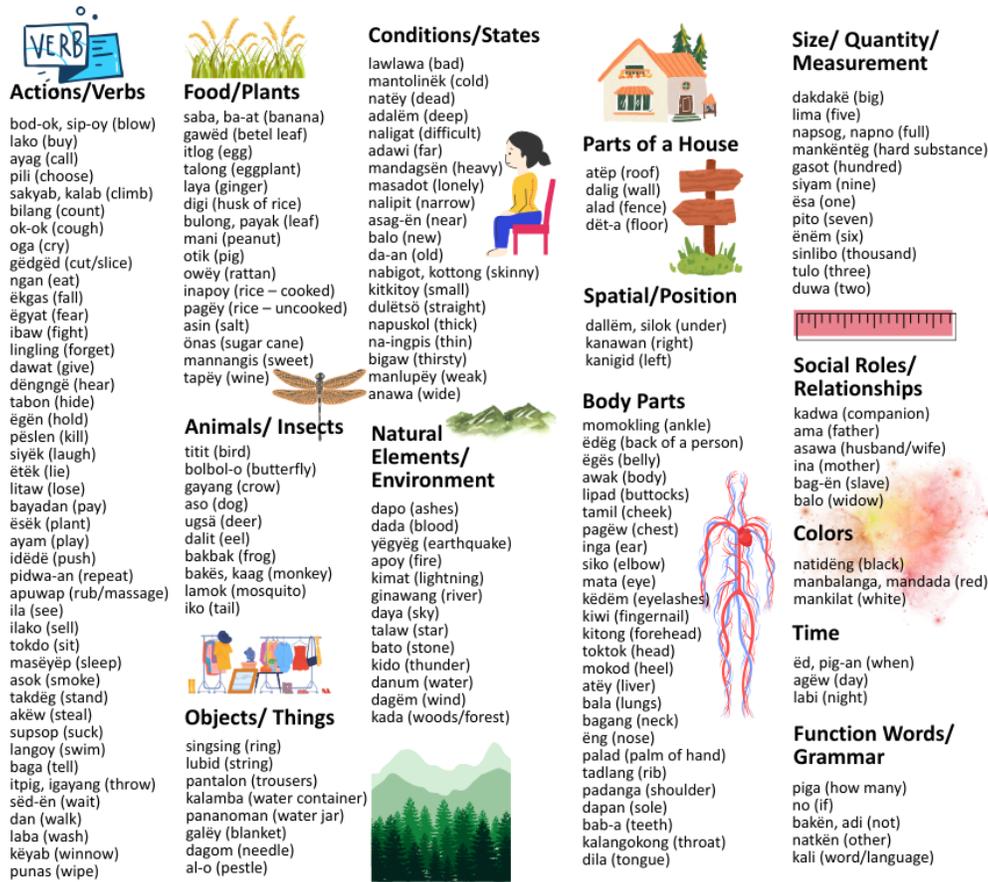


Figure 1. Distribution of 172 Kankanaey Translations that Stayed Consistent 1966 to 2023

### Apparent spelling changes, but actually phonological differences

Although some words appear to have changed in spelling over time, it cannot be conclusively stated that these changes reflect linguistic shifts. For example, certain consonant changes are observed: in the 1966 data, words were spelled with a “c,” whereas in the 2023 survey, the letter “k” is used instead. This is evident in examples such as *aptic* to *aptik* (meaning “short object”) and *cogaban* to *kugaban* (meaning “yesterday”).

Historically, by 1966, the Americans had already left the Philippines, but their influence—along with that of the Spanish—may explain the earlier use of the letter “c” in orthographic representations. Spanish-influenced orthographies often used “c” in place of “k,” which was rare in their writing system. The shift from “c” to “k” may be attributed to the introduction of the Ortograpiyang Pambansa [National Orthography] in 1976, which was further clarified in 2013 by the Department of Education (DepEd, 2013). This national orthographic reform emphasized the consistent use of “k” for the /k/ sound, since “c” is ambiguous—it can represent either /s/ or /k/ in Spanish or English. However, in the

*Ortografiya di Kankanaey* [Kankanaey Orthography] released by the Department of Education–Benguet in 2016 (DepEd-Benguet, 2016), there is no explicit rule stating a preference between “c” or “k.” Therefore, the observed changes in spelling cannot be definitively regarded as orthographic reforms, but rather as variations in usage over time.

The data also shows a change from the consonant “l” to “r,” as in *lamot* becoming *ramot* (meaning “root”). Although this kind of change between “l” and “r” is common in many languages, in Kankanaey it might be a sign of dialect differences or changes in spelling. However, this observation suggests that more study is needed to understand how these sounds are used in Kankanaey and other related Austronesian languages.

Furthermore, there are several lexical items in the dataset reveal consonantal differences between earlier and more recent recordings. These differences fall under three broad patterns which are consonant substitution, consonant addition, and consonant deletion. However, caution must be exercised in interpreting these differences as sound changes, especially when the data come from speakers without formal phonetic training, and when early sources relied on impressionistic spelling.

In particular, there is an apparent consonant substitution observed like *masdem* vs. *nasdem* (afternoon), *sinpu* vs. *simpu* (ten), *sip-ok* vs. *sib-ok* (to blow [on fire]), and *ngitit* vs. *ngisit* (black). While these substitutions may seem to reflect phonological shifts, they are more plausibly explained by natural phonological processes or dialectal variation. For instance, the shift from *sinpu* to *simpu* likely reflects nasal assimilation, where the alveolar nasal “n” changes to bilabial “m” before the bilabial “p” — a common process in many languages. Similarly, the “p” to “b” alternation (*sip-ok* to *sib-ok*) may reflect voicing variation influenced by speech rate or dialect. As to consonant addition, a few lexical items suggest the addition of consonants, such as *inabe* vs. *inabel* (woven cloth) where there is the addition of “l”, and *apin* vs. *aping* (cheek) where there is the addition of “g”. In these cases, the change may not represent a true addition. For example, the shift from *apin* to *aping* could actually involve a change in the nasal’s place of articulation, from alveolar “n” to velar “ŋ” (spelled “ng”), rather than the addition of a “g”. This is supported by phonological patterns in many Philippine languages, where nasal codas often assimilate to following consonants or shift based on dialect or syllable structure (Turnbull et al., 2018). Likewise, the presence or absence of “l” in *inabe* to *inabel* (weaved cloth) and *kiblat* vs. *kibat* (scar) might reflect orthographic variation rather than phonemic difference. As to the consonant deletion, there are recorded cases like there is a loss of “g” or commonly observed in the change from velar nasal to alveolar like in *ngadan* to *nagan* (name), *saping* to *sapin* (trousers), and *itodong* to *itudon* (push). These examples might point to simplification processes such as consonant cluster reduction or variation in final consonant articulation, but again, may simply be the result of spelling variation or dialectal pronunciation rather than clear historical sound change.

Moreover, some lexical items in the data exhibit consonant duplication between syllables, as seen in forms such as *singasot* to *singgasot* (hundred), *takay* to *takkay* (hand/arm), *lalaeg* to *lalla-eg* (fly), and *abonga* to *abongnga* (rainbow). Both translations are accepted in everyday use, suggesting that these alternations are best interpreted as instances of gemination, or consonant lengthening, rather than glottal stop insertion. In Austronesian languages like Kankanaey, gemination is a recognized phonological process that may occur due to morphological derivation, emphasis, or dialectal variation. The doubling of consonants, particularly between syllables, suggests a phonemic or prosodic function rather than a simple orthographic difference. This phenomenon is also consistent with similar processes in other Austronesian languages, where consonant lengthening is often used for

grammatical or prosodic purposes. Unlike glottal stops, which typically appear between vowel sequences, these examples show duplicated consonants that are characteristic of geminate articulation. However, further phonetic and dialectological study may clarify the extent and role of gemination in Kankanaey's speech patterns.

On the other hand, the vowel-to-vowel changes in the dataset show a variety of phonological shifts, dialectal variations, and simplifications that reflect the dynamic nature of language. For example, the shift from *bagas* to *begas* (rice) (a to e) demonstrates a classic case of vowel raising, a common phonological shift where vowels are articulated higher in the mouth over time. Similarly, the shift from *mabaey* to *manbe-ey* (to live) or *baey* to *be-ey* (house) likely represents dialectal variation, where speakers from different regions or communities pronounce vowels differently, leading to these distinct forms. Although these vowel changes are not arbitrary, they follow phonological patterns specific to the speaker's linguistic environment, illustrating the diversity within the Kankanaey language.

The shift from *laboweg* to *libuweg* (dust from a chimney) (a to i) is an example of vowel fronting, where a low central vowel is raised and fronted in the mouth. This is a natural process seen in many languages over time, especially as speakers adjust to ease of articulation or shifts in the acoustic properties of vowels. In a similar vein, the shift from *gayaden* to *guyoden* (pull) (a to o) could be attributed to vowel rounding or a shift in tongue position in the oral cavity, possibly influenced by surrounding consonantal sounds or dialectal speech habits.

Another interesting case is *pitek* to *pitak* (mud), which might represent a vowel shift from e to a. This kind of change is common in environments where vowel sounds shift toward more centralized or back positions, often as a result of coarticulation with neighboring sounds. These types of vowel shifts are also commonly seen in other languages that undergo vowel reduction over time, especially in unstressed syllables. In other instances, such as *menbayo* to *manbayo* (pound rice) (e to a), the vowel shift may be part of a larger regional variation within the Kankanaey-speaking communities. Besides, Pelila and Ayao-ao (2025) can explain this by saying that dialects in Kankanaey may differentiate with the sound of “e” and “a” as in the affix *men-* and *man-* which can be observed in Mt. Province and Benguet, respectfully. But both of the datasets in 1966 and 2023 were obtained in Suyoc which is in Benguet and it was seen the use of both vowels so it could also reflect not just dialectal variations, but a simplification of the vowel system, where one vowel is used in place of another for ease of pronunciation or to fit better with local phonological patterns.

Also, the examples of vowel deletion—such as *simoi* to *sino* (what) (removal of i) reflect the phenomenon of simplification, where unnecessary or unstressed vowels are dropped in casual speech or due to ease of articulation. In languages, this kind of simplification often occurs in fast or informal speech, leading to more efficient pronunciations over time. Similarly, changes like *kodkodan* to *kudkodan* (scratch) (o to u) are examples of vowel assimilation where the vowel changes to match the surrounding consonants or to simplify the articulation process.

Similarly, changes like *kodkodan* to *kudkodan* (scratch), where the vowel shifts from “o” to “u”, illustrate a pattern of vowel assimilation. This phonological process occurs when a vowel changes to more closely match surrounding sounds, often to simplify articulation or enhance phonetic harmony. Several other examples in the data exhibit this same “o” to “u” shift. For instance, *toweng* to *tuweng* (deaf), *otang* to *utang* (debt), *bongget* to *bunget* (get angry), and *bowan* to *buwan* (moon) all show consistent substitution of the mid-back rounded vowel “o” with the high-back rounded vowel “u”. This shift is likely driven by coarticulatory pressures or dialectal variation favoring a more closed vowel quality.

Additional examples reinforce this pattern: *losongan* becomes *lusongan* (mortar for rice), *odan* changes to *udan* (rain), and *otot* becomes *utot* (rat). In each case, the vowel assimilation appears to facilitate smoother transitions between syllables, indicating that the change serves a prosodic or articulatory function. Similarly, *poowan* to *pu-o* (burn a field) and *koto* to *kuto* (lice) further suggest that the shift from “o” to “u” is not random but part of a broader phonological tendency in the language.

Although these shifts primarily reflect sound changes in spoken Kankanaey, they may also be influenced by orthographic conventions. For instance, the DepEd (2016) orthographic guidelines note in the Kankanaey language wherein in Rule 7.3 that “o” often becomes “u” when followed by suffixes (e.g., *uto* – *utu-en*, *puto* – *putuan*), and Rule 7.2 recommends the use of “o” in final syllables when “o” or “u” appears multiple times in a word. While these orthographic rules from DepEd (2016) offer a framework for standardized spelling, the lexical variations observed in this study are primarily shaped by natural phonological processes in actual speech. These processes—such as vowel assimilation or consonant gemination—occur independently of prescriptive spelling norms and may or may not be reflected in written forms. This highlights a crucial point where there exists a dynamic and sometimes inconsistent relationship between sound and spelling in Kankanaey, especially across dialects or informal registers. Understanding this distinction is essential for accurate linguistic analysis and documentation of the language’s spoken forms. The addition of both vowel and consonant in examples like *wading* to *wadingan* (fish) (addition of -an) shows a morphological shift, where a new syllable or morpheme is introduced to provide a grammatical or semantic distinction. This is common in languages with agglutinative or inflectional morphology, where suffixes are added to base words to create new meanings or grammatical forms.

Furthermore, the use of hyphenation in Kankanaey orthography appears to serve a consistent phonological and morphological function, rather than signaling a glottal stop. Data from the 1966 and 2023 lexical comparison reveal that hyphens frequently appear where a syllable ending in a vowel is followed by another syllable that also begins with a vowel. This use of the hyphen helps clarify pronunciation and syllable boundaries. For example, in words like *besa-ang* (pig), *ka-at* (how many), *ma-asneng* (ashamed), and *ta-ep* (husk of rice), the original vowel clusters /aa/, /ae/, /ai/, and others are separated by a hyphen to avoid misreading or mispronunciation. Such changes mark the separation of vowel sounds to reflect syllabic clarity, as in *libo-o* from *liboo* (cloud) or *bo-ok* from *book* (hair).

Moreover, hyphens are used when a prefix or syllable ending in a consonant is followed by a root beginning with a vowel. Examples include *man-ames* (bathe), *man-uto* (cook), *man-ikuto* (delouse), and *man-atong* (hot [as water]). These demonstrate that the hyphen is inserted to mark the boundary between the prefix (e.g., man-) and the root word, preserving both morphological transparency and phonological ease of reading. The DepEd (2016) guidelines further specify that when a prefix like man- or pan- is followed by a vowel, the hyphen ensures separation between the prefix and root word, as in *man-inom* (drink) or *pan-ublaan* (to wash).

A similar pattern is observed when a syllable ending in a consonant is followed by another syllable that starts with a vowel. For example, *kagam-is* (good) and *ad-ado* (many) use hyphens to clarify syllable divisions such as “mi” to “m-I” or “da” to “d-a”, supporting the idea that the hyphen avoids misinterpretation of the syllable break.

The hyphen also plays a role when a prefix ending with a consonant is followed by a syllable starting with another consonant, as in *man-gate* (“itchy”), marking morphological clarity between the nasal ending “n” and the following root initial “g”. In contrast, the

removal of the hyphen, as in the shift from *ipes-pes* to *pespesan* (squeeze [in hand]), shows that when the syllable sequence results in a naturally blended consonant cluster (e.g., “s-p” to “sp”), a hyphen is no longer necessary, and the meaning remains clear. This is in line with the DepEd (2016) observation that hyphens may be omitted in certain cases, such as when consonant clusters naturally form.

Basically, the use of the hyphen in Kankanaey orthography is not arbitrary—it reflects both phonological logic and morphological clarity. A hyphen is used when a syllable ending in a vowel is followed by another syllable starting with a vowel (e.g., *ta-ep*, *bo-ok*, *ka-at*) to avoid vowel coalescence and preserve pronunciation. It is also used when a prefix ending in a consonant precedes a root beginning with a vowel (e.g., *man-inom*, *man-atong*) to separate morphemes. Additionally, it clarifies syllable boundaries in complex structures (e.g., *kagam-is*, *ad-ado*). However, when syllables blend naturally or the sequence is morphologically or phonologically unambiguous, the hyphen may be removed (e.g., *pespesan*). This analysis clarifies that the hyphen does not signal a glottal stop but rather serves as a syllabic and morphological boundary marker.

In other words, without phonetic evidence—such as International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) transcriptions or archival audio recordings—it is methodologically unsound to conclusively interpret spelling differences as indicators of phonological innovation. Orthographic representations, especially those drawn from community-based or non-standardized sources, are often impressionistic and may reflect the individual writer’s perception or preferred spelling rather than actual changes in speech sounds. This is particularly true in unwritten or recently standardized languages like Kankanaey, where orthography is still evolving and heavily influenced by external languages (e.g., Spanish, English, Ilocano) and shifting institutional guidelines. In this context, the use of hyphenation serves as a prime example of how spelling may reflect orthographic conventions rather than phonetic changes.

Hyphenation, as seen in Kankanaey, often marks syllable boundaries or morphological divisions rather than indicating phonetic features like glottal stops or vowel shifts. For instance, a hyphen is used when a syllable ending in a vowel is followed by another starting with a vowel (e.g., *besa-ang* or *ta-ep*), or when prefixes like *man-* are followed by a root beginning with a vowel (e.g., *man-inom*, *man-uto*). These instances illustrate that the hyphen functions more as a tool to clarify syllabic and morphological structure, ensuring the reader’s understanding, rather than a direct reflection of phonological shifts.

Spelling variation may merely indicate stylistic preference, dialectal influence, or increased orthographic regularization over time. For instance, the substitution of “c” with “k” or the shift from “o” to “u” in certain word forms might reflect attempts to align with newer orthographic standards rather than any real phonetic shift in community speech. Thus, in the absence of verifiable phonetic records from the earlier period (e.g., the 1966 wordlist), one cannot definitively assert that a sound change has occurred. At best, it can be hypothesized about possible phonological processes—such as assimilation, vowel raising, or gemination—but these remain speculative unless substantiated by empirical phonetic data. Likewise, the use or removal of hyphens in certain words may indicate an evolving orthographic standard rather than a true phonetic innovation, especially as Kankanaey orthography continues to develop in response to influences from both local dialects and external languages.

## Apparent lexical changes, but actually lexical differences

While there are observable differences between the Kankanaey translations recorded in 1966 and those gathered in 2023, not all of these differences constitute true lexical change in the historical-linguistic sense. A closer analysis reveals that many of the shifts reflect synonymic variation, borrowing (both intimate and cultural), lexical attrition, or replacements due to cultural sensitivity, rather than the complete substitution of one lexical item for another.

Some examples—such as *amin* to *datako* (“all”), *maasneng* to *mabain* (“ashamed”), and *adi* to *aga* (“not”)—are better understood as synonyms or context-dependent variants rather than instances of lexical replacement. These variations may arise from regional dialects, speaker identity, or shifts in pragmatic usage over time. For instance, *datako* is a more specific and inclusive form meaning “all of us,” while *amin* is a more general term for “all.” Both forms coexist within the language and are selected based on speaker intention and social context. Thus, they represent internal variation rather than lexical loss (Dorian, 1994).

In other cases, lexical differences stem from borrowing, either from dominant regional languages like Ilocano and Tagalog or from earlier Spanish influence. Words like *bainti* (for “twenty,” from Spanish *veinte*) and *kalamba* or *koli* (for “water jar,” possibly related to Ilocano *karamba*) illustrate how commonly used items may lead to borrowed terms becoming normalized in everyday speech. When borrowings come from languages of prestige or colonial power, they are considered cultural borrowings (Hoffer, 2002). However, when they penetrate the core vocabulary and replace original words in daily communication—such as *man-ibaw* being replaced by *laban* (“fight”), *nabasang* by *balo* (“widow”), or *iko* by *ipus* (“tail”)—they are more accurately classified as intimate borrowings, typically resulting from prolonged multilingual contact (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988).

Additionally, some older terms such as *tenam* (plant), *padongay* (turtle), and *paddingi* (deer) appear to have fallen out of use due to lexical attrition. Their contemporary equivalents—*mula*, *pagong*, and *ugsa*, respectively—reflect more familiar or regionally diffused terms, likely shaped by second-language (L2) exposure or contact with neighboring languages. This pattern is characteristic of language shift contexts, where infrequently used vocabulary is more susceptible to loss, especially among younger generations (Grenoble & Whaley, 2006).

As Pelila and Ayao-ao (2025) observed, this unfamiliarity does not necessarily indicate language loss but rather reflects evolving exposure patterns. Their study found that reduced familiarity with certain Kankanaey terms was largely due to limited interaction with older speakers rather than the dominance of L2. In fact, participants maintained fluency in Kankanaey, supporting Trujillo’s (2019) argument that acquiring a second language does not inherently diminish native language proficiency. Thus, although there is clear evidence of lexical evolution and external influence, Kankanaey remains resilient and sustained through intergenerational transmission.

Lastly, the omission or substitution of body-related or sexual terms in the 1966 translation—such as the replacement of *anus* (crossed out) with *kimot*, or *penis* (crossed out) with *laday* in the 2023 version, and similarly *vagina* with *itil* or *sipit*—suggests a layer of cultural sensitivity and social taboo. These changes likely reflect euphemistic strategies or avoidance due to modesty, shifting moral standards, or religious influence. Although the global sexual revolution encouraged openness regarding sexuality (Rubin, 1984), rural and conservative contexts may have responded with increased censorship or discomfort around such terms, especially in formal or research settings (Cameron & Kulick, 2003).

Hence, these differences don't reflect a single or consistent process of change in Kankanaey vocabulary. Instead, they point to a variety of overlapping linguistic influences. Some words differ because speakers use synonyms that coexist within the language. Others come from borrowing—either through contact with other languages like Ilokano or English (intimate borrowing) or through exposure to new cultural ideas and technologies (cultural borrowing). In some cases, older terms may simply fall out of use (lexical attrition), especially when they're no longer relevant to daily life. There are also shifts due to sociocultural sensitivity, where certain words are avoided or replaced based on politeness, gender, or generational norms. Because of this complexity, it's important not to treat every word difference as a case of replacement.

### Apparent semantic changes, but actually mistranslations

The apparent semantic changes observed between the 1966 and 2023 translations are, in fact, often due to mistranslations. When examining these differences, it's essential to distinguish between actual semantic shifts and errors in translation that have led to confusion or misinterpretation of terms (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Kankanaey Translations with Mistranslations from the 1966 Translation and Updated Terms in 2023

English Words	Kankanaey Translation (1966)	Definition of Respondents in the Translation	Kankanaey Translation (2023)
breast	<i>pagew</i>	pertains to the chest	<i>soso</i>
belly	<i>bowang</i>	describes the stomach	<i>eges</i>
buttocks	<i>kimot</i>	specifically pertains to the anus	<i>lipad</i>
intestine	<i>eges</i>	generally pertains to the whole digestive system	<i>kinupis</i> (small intestine), <i>inis-i</i> (large intestine), <i>bowang</i> (stomach)
kick	<i>sikyad</i>	used when someone kicks you while sleeping	<i>kudtal</i>
white	<i>pokaw</i> <i>mapesak</i>	describes white jars used to describe a person that is white or fair	<i>mankilat</i> <i>mankilat</i>
worm (earth)	<i>begis</i>	generally pertains to insects	<i>kuwang</i>
ashes	<i>luboweg</i>	refers to soil found or collected in a chimney	<i>dapo</i>
betel nut	<i>gawed</i>	refers to the betel leaf	<i>bua</i>
bite	<i>kat-ob(an)</i>	specifically used when biting into something edible	<i>kat(en)</i>
cold	<i>(man)</i> <i>tengnin</i>	pertains to the cold weather	<i>(man)tolinek</i>
cough	<i>kiyes</i>	describes the cough of those with tuberculosis	<i>uyek, ok-ok</i>
companion	<i>udom</i>	pertains to 'others'	<i>kadwa</i>
cut (a slice of meat)	<i>tega</i>	means to chop	<i>gedged</i>

dust	<i>laboweg</i> (correct spelling <i>libuweg</i> )	refers to soil collected in a chimney	<i>tapok</i>
fruit	<i>lames</i>	means 'it is the fruit of'	<i>plutas</i>
fat	<i>malmalipuken</i>	used to describe animals	<i>(ma)lames</i>
itchy	<i>kodkodan</i>	means 'to scratch'	<i>man-gate</i>
laugh	<i>man-imis</i>	means to smile	<i>manseyek</i>
lightning	<i>kidew</i>	pertains to thunder	<i>kimat</i>
mosquito	<i>ilek</i>	another distinct insect from a mosquito	<i>lamok</i>
offspring	<i>anak</i>	means child	<i>ganak</i>
old (person)	(changed persons to <i>man</i> and translated to <i>nakay</i> )	no direct translation; <i>nakay</i> for old men, <i>nabakes</i> for women	<i>nakay ya nabakes</i>
pain	<i>mansakit</i>	changes to an adjective with the prefix 'man'	<i>sakit</i>
slave	<i>ba-a</i>	means a helper rather than a slave	<i>bag-en</i>
termite	<i>titinge</i>	refers to small ants	<i>anay</i>
	<i>bokbok</i>	refers to small weevils	<i>anay</i>
trousers	<i>kawes</i>	pertains to g-string or loincloth	<i>pantalon</i>
winnow	<i>liga-o</i>	pertains to a winnower	<i>keyab</i>

For example, the Kankanaey word *pagew* was used in the 1966 translation for “breast,” but respondents clarified that it refers specifically to the chest area. The correct translation in 2023 is *soso*, which more accurately reflects the intended meaning. Similarly, *bowang* was used for “belly” in the 1966 version, but it primarily describes the stomach, while the correct term in 2023 is *eges*, which aligns with the common understanding of “belly” as a general term for the area of the stomach.

Another example involves the word *kimot*, which was used for “buttocks” in 1966, but this term actually refers specifically to the *anus*. In contrast, the 2023 translation uses *lipad*, which is the correct term for “buttocks.” Likewise, the word *eges* was used for “intestine” in 1966, but it refers more generally to the digestive system, including the stomach. The current translation breaks this down into more specific terms: *kinupis* for the small intestine, *inis-i* for the large intestine, and *bowang* for the stomach.

Also, some examples show how mistranslations can create an illusion of semantic change, when in fact they are merely errors or shifts in understanding over time. The misinterpretation of *sikyad* for “kick” in 1966, which was used in the context of being kicked while sleeping, was clarified in 2023 with the translation *kudtal*, a more general term for kicking. Similarly, *pokaw* in 1966 referred specifically to white jars, but now the term *mankilat* is used to describe something that is white or fair. The examination of terms like *begis* for “earthworm,” which referred to insects in general in 1966, shows how a more precise translation, *kuwang* in 2023, aligns with the current understanding of a “worm” as specifically referring to earthworms. Likewise, the word *luboweg*, originally referring to soil found in a chimney, is now translated as *dapo*, referring to ashes more broadly.

In many instances, what might appear as a semantic change is actually an example of correcting a mistranslation to match the modern understanding of the terms. For example, the translation of “betel nut” from *gawed* (which actually referred to the betel leaf) to *bua* (the correct term for the nut) is a straightforward case of correcting a misunderstanding. Similarly, the term *kat-ob(an)* used for “bite” in 1966, which specifically referred to biting into something edible, was updated in 2023 to *kat(en)* to reflect a broader meaning of “bite.” This pattern continues with words like *laboweg* (or *libuweg*), which originally referred to the soil collected in a chimney and now has been correctly translated as *tapok*, meaning dust. Similarly, the 1966 term *lamas* for “fruit,” which was used to describe the idea of something being the fruit of something else, was updated to *plutas* in 2023, which more accurately reflects the modern use of the word for “fruit” in general.

Therefore, these examples demonstrate that the differences observed are not indicative of true semantic shifts, but rather stem from mistranslations or misinterpretations over time. It is essential to approach such differences with caution and refrain from assigning blame to any particular group of translators, especially those responsible for the 1966 translation. Translation is inherently a dynamic process, shaped by the cultural and linguistic contexts of its time. Rather than attempting to pinpoint who was “correct” or “incorrect,” it is more productive to view these variations as part of the natural evolution of language and the challenges inherent in translating across different periods and cultural frameworks. As noted by Venuti (2008), translation is a form of “rewriting,” and any attempt to rigidly judge translations from the past without considering the historical and sociocultural context would be misguided. These differences, then, should be seen not as errors but as evolving efforts to refine and restore the intended meaning of the original words.

## CONCLUSION

The comparative analysis of Kankanaey lexical items from 1966 and 2023, spanning 57 years, reveals remarkable consistency, particularly in high-frequency words such as action verbs, body parts, and expressions of states or conditions. This stability suggests that the core language has remained largely unchanged over the decades, with any differences primarily relating to pronunciation or sound rather than shifts in meaning, vocabulary, or spelling. The retention of these terms can be attributed to their continued use in daily life, cultural practices, and intergenerational transmission, reflecting the language’s resilience within the Kankanaey-speaking community of Suyoc, Mankayan. Variations in pronunciation are mostly due to natural phonological processes, orthographic adjustments, or regional dialectal differences, rather than historical language change. Spelling differences often reflect predictable phonological shifts—such as vowel changes, gemination, and assimilation—aligned with DepEd (2016) orthographic conventions. Lexical variation arises from the coexistence of synonymous terms, and semantic discrepancies are typically the result of mistranslations or limited contextualization. Therefore, this study concludes that the Kankanaey language has endured over five decades, with its integrity preserved through active community use, cultural practices, and consistent documentation.

The limitation of this study lies in the lack of demographic details for the respondents in 1966, while the 2023 respondents are confirmed to be from Suyoc, Mankayan, and aged 50 years or older. This discrepancy limits the depth of the analysis, as the variability of language use across different age groups or other demographic factors could not be fully explored. It is recommended that future research incorporate more specific comparisons by

considering well-defined demographic profiles for both historical and current respondents, particularly focusing on factors such as age, community role, and cultural exposure. Additionally, expanding the scope of the analysis to include other languages and conducting more diachronic studies with available historical data, such as those from the SIL surveys in the 1900s, could provide valuable insights into broader linguistic shifts and the factors influencing language change or continuity over time.

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The author declares no conflict of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this paper.

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