

## THE LANGUAGE OF COCKFIGHTING: A LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

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**Abstract:** Every language is in need of new words in order to name new inventions and changes that enter our lives, and in order to communicate about them. Language is dynamic and constantly evolving. Just like all other languages, the Filipino language also has evolved with the time as influenced by many factors. One of these factors is the tradition of cockfighting among Filipino men. The language of cockfighting has its own contribution in enriching the language of the Filipinos. It is the goal of this linguistic investigation to determine the linguistic features that aid the sabong aficionados in communicating to one another during a game. Specifically, it seeks to process the language of cockfighters according to the expressions used and their categories, its morphology and semantics, and its functions. Verbal data were provided by five purposely-selected respondents who have engaged in the sport for at least ten years using interview as a research method. Findings show that the morphological processes involved in the formation of cockfighting language are mostly borrowing, derivation, affixation, compounding, and connotation through image. Hand signal is found to have a crucial role in the language of betting. The functions of language in cockfighting are mostly metalingual, emotive, conative, and phatic. In extracting the meaning of their language through processing the morphology, semantics, and functions, this study offers a way of understanding the world of cockfighting in Philippine context.

**Keywords:** Cockfighting, linguistic analysis, morphologic analysis, semantics, functions of language, hand signs.

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## Introduction

Because of new inventions and changes, every language is in need of new words – borrowed, derived or otherwise formed – simply because new things need new words (Wagner, 2010). The human community is steadily growing and developing, just as the tool we use to communicate: language. When new inventions and changes enter our lives, we are in the need of naming them and to communicate about them. Language is dynamic and it changes constantly.

The Philippine language has evolved with the time as influenced by many factors. Among others, aspects of Philippine culture, specifically traditions, have brought influences on the development of vocabulary or lexicons among the Filipinos. One interesting tradition among Filipino men is cockfighting or sabong. It is, after basketball, the second-most popular hobby in the country. Thus, the Philippines is known as “a cockfight-paradise” (Bethge 2002).

Cockfighting is deeply-rooted in our history and culture that even Jose Rizal mentioned cockfighting as the “national vice” in his novel *Noli Me Tangere* (Bethge 2002) ; former President Ferdinand Marcos recognized it as a “vehicle for the preservation and perpetuation of native Filipino heritage and thereby enhance the national identity” that he passed the Cockfighting Law of 1974 (Stuart, Jr. 2014). Cockfighting in the country is regarded as a “national pastime” which is enjoyed with equal fervor by both the rich and the masa (Bethge 2002).

In terms of linguistic contributions, Morrow (1995) stated that cockfighting has bestowed upon the English language an array of popular idioms upon which modern sports depend heavily. In boxing they include, match (in weight, to pit one against another), main event, battle royal, the ring (early pits were round instead of the squarish or rectangular ones ultimately used), weigh-in, handlers, and clean-cut (de-wattled). Even boxing gloves are a descendant of cocks’ spurs covered with muffs for sparring. In Philippine language, cockfighting has also contributed lexicons and



expressions specific to the sport and spoken by sabong aficionados.

To understand the language of a group is to understand the kind of life that they are in (O'Neil 2006). This study shows the language features that aid the sabong aficionados in communicating to one another during the game day.

### Objectives of the Study

The goal of this research is to put into record and analyze linguistically the language of sabong aficionados in Negros Occidental, Philippines.

Specifically, it processes the classification, word formation process, semantics, and functions of the following cockfighting expressions:

1. cockfight participants,
2. betting odds,
3. implements & other related terms, and
4. Kristos' hand signs.

### Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Yule's English Word Formation Theory, Jacobson's Function of Language, and Armstrong's Gestural Theory of the origin of Language. Yule, as cited by Gascon, et al (2015) described the "word formation processes" as the investigation of steps on how new expressions evolve. The emphasis is on the process of coining new naming units (words). This is described by an onomasiological model, which takes as its point of departure the naming needs of a speech community, and proceeds through conceptual reflection of extra-linguistic reality and semantic analysis to the form of a new naming unit. As a result, it is the form which implements options given by semantics by means of the so-called Form-to-Meaning Assignment Principle. Word-formation is conceived of as an independent component, interrelated with the lexical component by supplying it with new naming units, and by making use of the word-formation bases of naming units stored in the lexicon. In the world of cockfighting, participants make use of jargon specific to the game. These terms were formed using various morphological processes.

Jacobson's functions of language proposition identify essential elements for the facilitation of communication. According to Jacobson as cited by Hebert (2011), any act of verbal communication is composed of six elements, or factors, namely: (1) a context (the co-text, that is, the other verbal signs in the same message, and the world in which the message takes place), (2) an addresser (a sender, or enunciator), (3) an addressee (a receiver, or enunciatee), (4) a contact between an addresser and addressee, (5) a common code and (6) a message. Each factor is the focal point of a relation or function that operates between the message and the factor. The 6 functions of language are referential, emotive, conative, phatic, poetic, and metalingual.

Moreover, this research assumption is also anchored on the Gestural Theory of Language Origins advanced by Armstrong (2008). He posited the idea that iconic visible gesture had something to do with the origin of language, particularly speech.

Armstrong presented recent evidence supporting the idea that language first arose as visible gesture; this evidence is culled from several lines of research, including research on the neurological underpinnings of gesture, i.e., research on mirror neurons; new research on the gestural communication of African apes; research on the cognitive basis of the signed languages of the deaf; and research on the emergence of new signed languages. This theory has bearing on the present study as sign language is one of the essential modes of communication among sabong aficionados especially when the arena erupts into a deafening din of kristos calling out and taking in bets from the spectators game after game until the last cockfight is fought.

### Linguistic Research Methodology

This research utilizes the qualitative research method in data-gathering and the structural analysis of sabong aficionados' expressions using the word formation process.

### Sources of Verbal Data

The sources of verbal data come through referral, having 5 sabong aficionados in Silay and Talisay City, Negros Occidental agree to participate in a recorded interview. The respondents are composed of key participants in the cockfighting game and have been actively indulging in the "sport" for at least 10 years. They have been selected using the purposive sampling method.

### Data-gathering Procedure

This study includes three phases: (1) identifying and classifying the expressions used, (2) processing their morphology and semantics, and (3) determining their functions.

**Phase One. Identifying and classifying the expressions used.** In identifying and classifying the expressions used by the 5 respondents, common terms specific to cockfighting are collated and classified based on the category and meaning.

**Phase Two. Processing their morphology and semantics.** Expressions used by the sabong aficionados are described linguistically in their word formation processes as well as their semantics or meaning. Word formation can be through any of the word formation processes, namely: affixation, compounding, symbolism, suppletion, reduplication, acronymy, clipping, blending, borrowing, back-formation, word coinage, functional shift, conversion, and derivation (Yule 2006). Hand signs used in making bets are also identified and described semantically based on the existing hand signals used by bet callers in Negros Occidental.

**Phase Three. Determining the Functions of Language.** This phase requires determining the functions of the language of cock owners and kristos as defined by Jacobson: referential, expressive, conative, phatic, metalingual.

### Findings

The expressions used by sabong aficionados were summarized and classified according to their function. The roles or purpose of each category are then provided for better understanding of these expressions.

**On Expressions for cockfight participants**

Table 1. Expressions for cockfight participants

Expressions	Description	Word Formation Process	Connotation/ Contextual Translation	Role/Duties
<b>Promotor</b>	Derived from the English word “promote”, the suffix – or is added to nativize the word	Derivation	promoter	He is a manager, responsible for the organization of fight. The owners of cocks make their "inside"-bets with him. He is financed through admissions- and entrance-fees and shares of bet money.
<b>Llamador/</b>	A Spanish word referring to someone who makes a living by calling people for specific purpose	Borrowing	Bet taker	He is the manager for the "outside betting" of the audience. His name derives from Christ because outstretched arms are typical for his body language. He calls the "odds", encourages bet offers of the audience and confirms bets. As he takes the bets, his hands and arms go wild in the sign language of bets and odds.
<b>Kristo</b>	Derived from the name of Christ as exhibited by the outstretched arms typical for body language used	Connotation through images		
<b>sentensyador</b>	Derived from the Spanish word “sentenciar” meaning to ‘declare’; the spelling is nativized by changing ‘cia’ to ‘sya’ and replacing ‘r’ with the suffix - dor	derivation	referee	One who declares the winner
<b>Manugtakod</b>	The prefix manug- is added to the verb ‘takod’ changing its class to a noun which means ‘one who attaches’	(Hiligaynon) affixation	gaffer	Often a trusted person of the owner; one who determines the fitting length and form of the steel spores. He should have at least eight knives. He is the one who attaches the spores on the cock’s leg, a task that must be done very carefully as it is very crucial to the game.
<b>Manugtahi</b>	The prefix manug- is added to the root ‘tahi’ (sew), changing the word class to a noun meaning “one who sews”	(Hiligaynon) affixation	Cock doctor	He is responsible of tending to the wounds of the cocks after the fight by sewing the cuts.
<b>Manugbulang</b>	The prefix manug- is added to the root ‘bulang’ (cockfight) to mean one who participates in cockfighting	(Hiligaynon) affixation	A fan of cockfighting	One who participates in cockfighting by betting on the fighting cocks.
<b>Casador</b>	Borrowed from Spanish which means one who annuls or repeals	(Spanish) borrowing	The manager or organizer of the cockfight	He is responsible for the organization of the fights. The owners of the roosters place their bets with him. He is paid by the owner of the cockpit. He announces the opposing bets and when needed solicits amounts from the ringside bettors to equalize the bets.

In cockfighting, participants have specific roles to take in order for the sport to take place. The names of the cockfighting participants are formed in various ways. Table 1 shows that the prominent morphologic processes are borrowing, affixation, and derivation. These morphologic processes facilitate the creation of new words based on the context of cockfighting.

**On Expressions for betting odds**

Table 2. Expressions for betting odds

Expression	Description	Word Process	Formation	Denotation/contextual Meaning
Patas	Derived from the Spanish word “empatar” meaning “a draw in a match or competition”; orthography has been mutated resulting to the new spelling	Derivation		Both cocks die during the match. There is no winner; a draw is declared.
Parehas	Derived from the Spanish word “Parejo” meaning the same or even. The spelling has been nativized by changing the J to H and replacing the “o” with the suffix -as	Derivation		1000 wins 1000/ same amount of bet is won
Diez-siete	A compound word made up of Spanish terms for ten (diez) and siete(seven)	Borrowing compounding		700 wins 1000 30% of the bet is won
Diez-seis	A compound word made up of Spanish terms for ten (diez) and seis(six)	Borrowing/ compounding		600 wins 1000 40% of the bet is won
Logro-nuebe	A Spanish compound word made up of logro meaning “profit” and nuebe from the Spanish word “nueve” meaning nine	Borrowing compounding		900 wins 1000 10% of the bet is won
Logro-singko	A Spanish compound word made up of logro meaning “profit” and singko from the Spanish word “cinco” meaning five	Borrowing compounding		800 wins 1000 20% of the bet is won
Tatlo-duha	A compound word made up of Hiligaynon terms for three(tatlo) and two(duha)	compounding		600 wins 900 35% of the bet is won
Pilu	Hiligaynon term which means “fold”; contextuality, it means double the amount or two-fold			500 wins 1000 50% of the bet is won

Cockfighting is a betting sport; betting is a sine qua non of sabong(Stuart, Jr. 2014). Without it, cockfighting loses its appeal and glamor. Betting discharges the adrenaline and stokes the din and theater of the kristos or llamador. The language of betting is interesting and requires a clear understanding of its mechanics in order for the sabong aficionado to participate in the sport. As shown in Table 2, most of these lexicons in betting are formed through borrowing, compounding, and derivation. Most of the terms are Hispanic in origin and are compounded.

**On Expressions for cockfighting implements & other related terms**







Table 3. Expressions for cockfighting implements & other related terms






Expression	Description	Word Process	Formation	Denotation/contextual Meaning
Rueda	A Spanish term used to refer to a ring or a wheel	borrowing		Cockpit
Tari	A Cebuano term that refers to a metal spur attached to a gamecock’s leg	borrowing		The blades or spurs attached to the legs of the cock; a gaff
Kurong	A word derived from Tagalog “kulungan” meaning to cage	derivation		cage
Llamado	A Spanish word that means “named”	borrowing		the one with the larger bet or favored game cock
Dejado	A Spanish term which means ‘careless’	borrowing		The one with the lesser bet; the underdog

Pot-money	From the English phrase “pots of money” compounded into pot- money	compounding	Applied only in derbies; entry fee of each participating team; accumulated amount is then used as prizes for the winners
Waay-kalu (agaw/inilog)	Hiligaynon compound word that means no cap or hat	compounding	The one determining the betting amount
Biya	Hiligaynon word that literary means to leave or abandon(v) but has a different meaning in the context of cockfighting and is used as a noun	Functional shift	The one accepting the amount of higher bet
Pago	A Spanish word that means payment	borrowing	the act of agreeing or consenting to or accepting a request or an offer by the llamador or casador to bet on one of two roosters about to fight each other in the rueda
Fastest kill	An English phrase that literary means the shortest time that a cock is killed	borrowing	An added feature in cockfighting wherein the cock who kills its opponent in the shortest time (usually 10 seconds or less) is declared the winner and is given a prize (could be in cash or in goods)
Derby	An English term that refers to a race or contest open to all comers or to a specified category of contestants	borrowing	The derby is the cockfighting event for the serious aficionado and deep-pockets where the cocks are paired according to weight. Each team enters with a team-name and a fixed "pot money" amount (ex: P10,000 for each of 10 teams makes a 100,000 total pot) that becomes the prize-money for the team with the most wins. A 3-cock derby may last deep into the night or past the midnight hours; a 7- or 9-cock derby may last for days.
Soltada	A derivative of the Cebuano-Visayan word “sultada”	borrowing	It refers to a round of cockfight.
Lusok	A Cebuano-Visayan word that means gouge out	borrowing	A type of cockfight where fights are only arranged by cock owners. Cocks are not weighed and are paired upon agreement of the cock owners

**On Kristos' hand signs expressions**

Table 4. Kristos' hand signs expressions

Hand sign	Description	Denotation/contextual Meaning
	<p>Downward fingers</p>	<p>Each finger is equivalent to a 1000-peso bet; 7 fingers, 7,000 pesos. Caution is given in pointing the fingers downward twice, as this will be interpreted as a 14,000-peso bet.</p>
	<p>Sideward fingers</p>	<p>Each sideward finger is equivalent to 100 pesos. In the figure, the four fingers denote 400 pesos.</p>
	<p>Two upward fingers flashes then closes to form a fist</p>	<p>The raised fingers closing to a fist indicate a bet amount by ten thousands. In the picture, the two fingers followed by a closed fist denote 20 thousand.</p>
	<p>sideward fingers moving right to left</p>	<p>Sideward fingers that move from right to left indicate bets by a hundred thousand. The figure shows a bet of 100 thousand.</p>
	<p>Sideward fingers moving right to left followed by a scribbling motion by the pointing finger</p>	<p>A moving sideward finger followed by a scribbling motion denotes a bet of one million. The number of fingers indicates the bet in millions.</p>
	<p>Raised open hand with the thumb flicking</p>	<p>This is the hand signal for logro-singko; a bet of 800 wins 1000.</p>

	<p>This is the hand signal for logro-nuebe; a bet of 900 wins 1000.</p>
	<p>Hand closed in a fist with the thumb flicking up and down Hand signal for diez-seis</p>
	<p>Three fingers raised with two fingers linked together Hand signal for tatlo-duwa / tatlo-dos</p>
	<p>Grabbing of the shirt Hand signal used to initiate or close a bet with a spectator; also used to help spectator identify the kristo he has made a bet with from among all other kristos</p>
	<p>Tapping of the head Another hand signal used to help the kristo and the spectator recognize one another.</p>

Language is not necessarily spoken: it might alternatively be written or signed. Aside from verbal communication, sign language is also used as a means of communication in cockfights. Sign language is employed by kristos as their way of communicating inside the arena. Because of distance and the deafening noise, kristos have to rely on hand signs to communicate their bets with other kristos. Knowing the arithmetic language of fingers facilitates communication with a kristo and adds a fascinating facet to the sabong experience.

**Functions of Language**

The functions of language used by sabong aficionados are mostly metalingual, conative, emotive, and phatic. The metalingual function is the use of the code to discuss and describe itself. The message can not be understood outside the context; thus, a “code” should be common fully or partially to the addresser and addressee

(Hebert 2011). This function is mostly observed in the betting process where the intricate language of bets (the code) is employed between the kristos and the sabungeros. It establishes mutual agreement on the code and provides an explanation to have a clearer interaction by the addressee.

Knowledge on the language code of betting is essential to enable a spectator to communicate his bet to the kristo. The conative function is an orientation toward the addressee; it helps us to make people do something. It is mostly observed in the actions of the kristos in convincing other kristos to take the bet. In cases where the bets are not equal, the kristos convince the spectators to increase or to make their bet in order to equalize the bet of the “Agaw” or “Meron”. The emotive function is mostly observed at the start of every cockfight when the din gradually increases into deafening decibels. Every deadly slash made by the opposing cocks, every graceful parry elicits a cheer, a moan, a grunt, or a

groan. Interjections like “Naan!!, Bunal! are common expressions. The phatic function is used to know whether channel works or whether the contact is still there. The purpose in this function is firstly to maintain the contact with the person spoken to. In the language of cockfighting, maintaining contact inside the arena is done verbally or through signs, especially if the persons involved are far from one another. Hand signals like tapping the head or grabbing one’s shirt in repetitive motion are means of initiating contact before placing one’s bet on a kristo.

## Conclusion

The language of cockfighting is expressed both verbally and through signs. The linguistic processes and language functions categorically facilitate the consummation of the language among sabong aficionados. The lexicon used by sabong aficionados are basically formed through various morphologic processes such as borrowing, affixation, derivation, and connotation through image. Hand signals provide an effective means of communicating the language of betting. In cockfighting, language functions in several ways, namely: metalingual, emotive, conative, and phatic.

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