

PHILIPPINE LINGUISTICS, FILIPINO LANGUAGE AND THE FILIPINO NATION*

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INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I am presenting the importance of linguistics and its role in the search for national identity in a democracy like that of the Philippines. The present state of the Filipino nation can be deduced through the study of the diverse languages of the country.

PHILIPPINE LINGUISTICS

With a population of 75 million scattered over 7,107 islands, the Philippines is a multiethnic and a multilingual country. The word 'multilingual' is enough to remind the linguists in the Department of Linguistics of the University of the Philippines (UP) of their gigantic task in relation to these voluminous indigenous languages. In the country, it is only UP Linguistics Department that offers courses and award degrees in pure linguistics. Applied linguistics is offered in the UP College of Education, the UP College of Arts and Letters and other universities.

Since the establishment of the UP Department of Linguistics in 1923, the formal inquiry on Philippine languages is made to the fore by the Filipino linguists themselves. One of the distinguished Filipino linguists is in the person of the late Dr. Cecilio Lopez. He was the first one to study the Philippine languages from the scientific point of view. His notable works on Philippine linguistics made him earn the title as the "Father of Philippine Linguistics." It was his proposal, called the "universal approach," which was adopted by the 1971 Constitutional Convention that would eventually lead to the development of Filipino language (Constantino, 1977).

Based on the researches conducted by the UP Department of Linguistics, the republic has more than 100 languages and dialects. Of these languages, there are at least eight major languages with considerable number of native speakers. These languages are Tagalog, Ilocano, Bicol, Kapampangan, Pangasinan, Cebuano, Hiligaynon and Waray. Geographically, the first five languages are widely spoken in Luzon while the last three languages are in the Visayas region. It is interesting to note that no language from the Mindanao region qualifies as a major language. All of the eight languages have native speakers in Mindanao due to migration in the last century. These eight languages are spoken with any of the minor languages spoken in Mindanao. The number of the native speakers of these languages constitutes

the verb *biliun* 'to buy something' takes a theme-NP **asukar** 'sugar' to function as its subject and the agent-NP **Rabang** as its agentive complement. In (4), the verb *bilian* 'to buy for' takes a beneficiary-NP **ya isu** 'the child' for its subject, the theme-NP **asukar** 'sugar' as its object, and agent-NP **Rabang** for its agentive complement. All of the subjects are either marked by the definite determiners *ya* or *si*. Non-subject complements are marked by either *na*, *sa*, *kay* or *ni* depending on the theta roles assigned to the arguments and the inherent meaning of the verb.

At this point I would like to say that generally the Philippine languages, including Filipino, exhibit the same typological and other linguistic characteristics.

Out of more than 100 languages and dialects, five Philippine languages are designated as regional lingua francas based on the names of cultural groups which speak the languages. In the multilingual regions, the need to communicate caused the development of these lingua francas. In Luzon, these are Tagalog and Ilocano. In Visayas and Mindanao, these are Cebuano and Hiligaynon. In Basilan, Sulu and the southern region of Palawan, the lingua franca is Bahasa Sug. It is noteworthy that every Filipino is knowledgeable of another language, the regional lingua franca, aside from his native tongue. Add to this linguistic repertoire is the knowledge of English language. This state makes him not only a bilingual but a trilingual or even a multilingual.

THE FILIPINO LANGUAGE AND THE COLONIAL LANGUAGES

In this part I am presenting the emergence and the development of the Filipino language. This is complemented with the discussion on the Spanish and the English languages and their influence toward Filipino.

A The Filipino Language

The lingua franca based on Tagalog developed further and became the national lingua franca. This national lingua franca is known as Filipino. Constantino (1998) stressed that the rapid spread of this lingua franca is due to the mass media. I would like to add that it is also due to (1) the teaching of '*Balarila*', the encompassing term for the heavily Tagalized Filipino in its early years and (2) the 1974 and 1987 Bilingual Education Policy, the policy wherein Filipino and English are used in teaching in all education levels in the respective domains.

Presently, Filipino serves as the national language. Its legal basis is provided in Section 6, Article XIV of the 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines which states that "the national language is Filipino. As it evolves, it shall be further developed and enriched on the basis of existing Philippine and other languages.

Moreover, in Section 7, Article XIV provides that "for the purposes of communication and instruction, the official languages of the Philippines are Filipino and, until otherwise provided by law, English."

However, the constitutional provision does not mean automatic implementation. In the academic domain, the use of Filipino as the medium of instruction was met with much howling and barking. Many issues were brought out

which unfortunately caught the ears and the eyes of the vicious politicians. Thus, making the situation more complicated. Some politicians say that the use of English helps the Filipinos find jobs abroad as Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW). This claim makes me think whether it is still true among OFW's or not. I think to be a domestic helper or a construction worker (which constitutes the bulk of exported Philippine labor force) does not need the caliber of an English professor to practice their respective trades in the foreign countries. What they really need is not the attainment of English language proficiency but a decent paying job in the Philippines. (I do not deny the fact that other OFW's work as professionals abroad. And that even among the domestic helpers and construction workers, there is a very high number of displaced professionals among them.) I hear some OFW's speaking the most terrible English just like the politicians who proposed for the maintenance of English.

The other politicians wanted to maintain English because of its prestige and the power that it has for the deliberation and the decision-making processes in the governmental and political arenas. On the contrary, the plain truth is that even among the politicians themselves, only a handful can be labeled as proficient in the English language. The others are among the most unscrupulous English grammar criminals. The lack of political will in the implementation of Filipino is perceived as a blatant blow to the democratic principles. How can the masses participate in the decision-making process when they do not have the required linguistic instrument? At stake here is the participatory right of every Filipino citizen as provided in the same Constitution. Through the use of common national language, the unified and empowered citizenry can make a better nation. True and pragmatic literacy enables the ordinary citizen to exercise his constitutional rights and claim his rightful position in a democracy.

On the issue of the standardization of Filipino, Paz (1995) pointed out two problems in this particular issue. These are the questions on intellectualization and spelling. Among the contentions is that of the lexical borrowing of the technical terms from foreign languages. I do not think that there is a problem in borrowing technical terms because it is natural for every language to change. Changes can be caused by language contact, cultural exchange and the need for technical terms especially in science and technology. So far the trend is to copy the technical term completely and either italicize it or write it in bold-face and/or both. There was a time in the teaching of *Balarila* that new terms were invented to replace and simply just to avoid the usage of the technical terms. The resultant words were cacophonously ridiculous and sacrilegiously artificial. Eventually, these mutants either died peacefully or vanished to oblivion.

In terms of spelling, I just wonder what these opponents of the Filipinization of foreign words and terms would say when they realize that some Philippine words are not really native words at all but just mere Filipinized Spanish words. The lexicon of every Philippine language is loaded with Spanish loanwords due to the almost 400 years of language contact. The Spanish-ignorant opponents to the standardization of spelling must realize that the Filipinization of Spanish words and terms has been

successful. If the Spanish greeting *¡Como esta!* 'How are you?' is Filipinized as *Kumusta*, then why the English word *faculty* cannot be Filipinized and spelled as *fakulti*? It is interesting to note that in the daily discourse, no one uses the Spanish *facultad* but the English *faculty* is commonly used. While the standardization of Filipino spelling is still on the process, I think that the sound of the word would be used as the sole guide of codifying the spelling. At present, the usual objection is that the new spelling can cause malignant eyesore. This myopic viewpoint is grossly devoid of any form of knowledge of the phonological and morphological systems of the Philippine languages. They may not be knowledgeable of the fact that current researches of the variety of Filipino show that this language is now loaded mostly of English words as heard in the big cities nationwide and as used in the mass media.

In view of the issue of standardization of Filipino, I would like to say that there must be a governmental effort and support for the translation and publication of glossaries and dictionaries of the respective registers in every field of knowledge. But in a country where economic development, separatist movements, and peace and order are given more priority, the process of standardization of its national language is further delayed.

Even if the issues arise locally in the Philippines, the language is also taught outside the country particularly in the USA. Since America's domination of the Philippines from 1898, the Filipinos started to speak the American language and dream the American dream. As a former colony, some of the Filipinos migrated to the USA. Among Asian Americans, the Filipinos' number, more than two million, is second to the Chinese. In there, the Filipino language serves as the lingua franca among the Filipinos. Among the US universities which offer courses on Filipino are the University of Hawaii, various campuses of the University of California, Cornell University, University of Michigan, University of Wisconsin, University of Pennsylvania, and other universities long enough to crowd the list. In Asia-Pacific region some universities in Australia and Malaysia offer courses in Filipino.

B The Spanish Language

The Spanish language is brought by historical accident to the Philippines under the leadership of, paradoxically, the Portuguese Fernão de Magalhães or Fernando de Magallanes in 1521. History bears witness to the fact that the purpose of Magellan's coming to the Far East is to find means of controlling the spice trade thereby helping the impoverished court of Spain. The arrival of Legaspi's fleet in 1565 signaled the onset of the Hispanization of the Philippines. This objective is made concrete when the Spanish Crown authorized the creation of Cebu City in 1565. Until 1781, the Philippines was administered as a Spanish colony via Mexico which was called then as Nueva España. Onwards, it became a province of Spain until 1898 but devoid of representation in the Spanish Cortes. Among the legacies of Spain are the Catholic faith, the Hispanized Filipino culture and cuisine, Spanish names and surnames, Spanish language, and other stuffs like the prolonged hatred between Christians and Moslems in the southern Philippines.

The use of Spanish language in the Philippines has its start when the Catholic missionaries preached among the natives. To understand the native languages, comparative linguistics was applied for the purpose of preaching the faith and learning the language of the target group of people as well. Spanish became the medium of instruction when the University of Santo Tomas was established in 1611 in Manila. From then, other institutions of learning were established mostly by religious congregations.

The variety of Spanish used in the Philippines is that of Mexico. This is historically sound because Spain ruled the Philippines via the viceroyalty of Mexico. Some of the Mexican Spanish words are still in use today like *abokado* (avocado), *papaya*, *zapote*, etc. The major languages in the Philippines have thousands of Spanish loanwords in its lexicon. Though most Spanish words are used, these words normally undergo phonetic, orthographic, structural, and semantic changes.

In 1973, the Spanish language lost its status as one of the official languages as stated in the Philippine Constitution. It also ceased to be a required course in tertiary level of education in 1987. At present, the fate of this language in the Philippines can be said as doomed to death or already dead as some scholars stressed out. It is only spoken by (1) those of Spanish descent in social gatherings among themselves and (2) elderly people in some regions of the country. Educationally, this language is demoted to a mere elective course. To date, there are only few thousands of people able to speak Spanish. However, it is still taught and offered as a degree course in the undergraduate and graduate levels at University of the Philippines, University of Santo Tomas, and other institutions of higher learning. With the Instituto Cervantes – a Manila-based Spanish institution specializing for the promotion and teaching of the Spanish language, Spanish survives.

C The English Language and its Current State

English came to the Philippines through the Americans when the Philippine Islands were ceded to the US by the Spaniards in 1898. Together with Spanish, the English language became one of the official languages of the Philippines in 1935 as stated in the Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines.

Currently, it is used as the medium of instruction at all levels of education. In the elementary and secondary schools, English is used primarily in teaching the sciences and mathematics. The social sciences are taught in Filipino. It is common knowledge among educators that the learning task among students is twofold – (1) to understand the language of instruction and (2) to digest the lessons. To address the problem of acquiring proficiency in English, the Commission on Higher Education added a new course in English known as English Plus in addition to the existing four or five courses on English communication skills. English Plus is the equivalent of pre-university English wherein the student is taught the rudiments of grammar which should have been acquired in high school or even in the elementary level. Why the addition of English Plus?

Added to this set-up is the fact that not all English teachers possess the

caliber of a qualified English teacher. This situation is further aggravated by the fact that in the far-flung rural areas the pseudo-teacher of English is the only available model of both written and spoken English language among learners. This horrible state is a fertile breeding ground and a first class accommodation for duplicating the error of the bogus English teacher. This results to the type of English commonly known in the Philippines as “carabao English.”

Even if the Commission on Higher Education will add more English courses in the general university education stream, which is the first two years of the 4-5 years of tertiary studies, it will not be successful since the very root of the problem is somewhere in the implementation of the language policy.

In the Professional Board of Examination, the government body that grants licenses to practice the professions, all of the exams are generally conducted in English. In spite of the fact that English is the medium of instruction, still the passing rate of licensure examinees is quite low. It is also common knowledge among educators that code-switching from English/Filipino to vernacular is employed freely in teaching university courses. Granting that this is the way teaching is performed, how could one expect for a high passing rate of examinees in the licensing exam when all of the questions are in the standard variety of English?

English also serves as the official language of government. It is used in the official communications in every branch of the government – legislative, judiciary, and executive. Such official communications are written by highly qualified English communication specialists. It is for sure that written skills are acquired skills in contrast to the oral skills. But when caucus is heard at the House of Representatives, one can see and hear for himself that it is indeed a House of English Grammar Criminals. Being a good politician is not similar to being a good grammarian and a good English speaker. I wonder how they understand each other in this august chamber.

More questions can be asked and more points can be stressed but I would like to end this part by saying that the language policy makers and legislators should consider the respective domains of English and Filipino. These policy makers should also consider the proposals of experts in the field of language and linguistics and other social scientists and not their (policy makers’) whims in their virtual world.

THE FILIPINO NATION

There are many nations today in this green earth. Nations are or can be organized in terms of geography, physical attributes, race, politics, culture, language, religion, etc. In this paper, I presume that no one will object if I say that (1) a nation is an organization of people ruled under one government or (2) a group of people related as attested by similarity and unity of culture, language, history and other parameters. I do not want to qualify further the notion of being organized or what caused them to organize or how are they ruled for the same can be found and expounded in the political history of any nation. However, a nation can be big like the Arab nation although it is separated by political boundaries. A nation can be small like the island

nations in the Pacific.

The Filipino nationhood has its start when the populace rallied behind Islam. This religion was brought to the Philippines by the traders in the 14th century. Islam became the force that united the indigenous Filipinos which enabled them to realize the need for a common identity. This common identity eventually united the different indigenous people groups of Mindanao under the banner of Islam. Tribal, linguistic, and cultural differences were set aside when the vacuum was filled by Islam. This force led to political awareness among the populace which further led to the establishment of the Sultanate of Sulu in 1375 AD and the Sultanate of Maguindanao in 1450 AD. Philippine nationhood was born in this part of the archipelago. Although these political organizations are shaky but it serves the purpose as any sultanate should be. It did have trade, commerce, and ambassadorial representations with the other sultanates and states in Southeast Asia and China. It brought peace and prosperity toward its citizens. Cultural exchange and civilization were enhanced by then.

Let me continue this part by saying that my focus here is Mindanao. It is where one can find representatives of the various cultural communities in the country. It is where one can witness the plethora and the ensemble of Philippine languages and cultural set-ups and mind-sets. To exemplify, when one asks any of the residents of Mindanao whether they are Filipino or not, the normal and spontaneous answer ranges from “I am Cebuano, I am Waray, I am Ilocano, etc.” to the detail of one’s village. These settlers from the northern and central Philippines say their locative identity with pride. The same setting is seen when someone from Mindanao meets another fellow abroad.

In the case of the Muslim brothers, especially the Tausugs, generally they say, “I belong to Bangsa Moro.” It is among them that one can hear the straightforward negation of Filipino identity. This remark is born out of their consciousness of their history being the only group (the Bangsa Moro) which was not dominated by the foreign masters. In the history of the Philippines, only the Muslims and the *lumads*, the aborigines, are considered as the original inhabitants of Mindanao. Other people groups are mere migrants.

At present, the mass media likely classify the people of Mindanao into three groups – Christians (Catholics), Muslims and *lumads*. The coming of the members of the major cultural communities is treated with suspicion and dissent. To understand this aspect, I would like to present another aspect of Philippine history focusing on Mindanao.

It is the purpose of Spain to seek new colonies in the East and to win souls that made them come to the Philippines islands. To accomplish their colonial objectives, they instituted the divide-and-rule tactic. This tactic effected further division among the natives because even before the arrival of the Spaniards they were already divided due to geographical situation, language differences and religious beliefs (newly accepted Islam versus ageless animism). In the plight of the Spaniards to eradicate Islam in Mindanao (extension of purging of the Spanish Empire), the Spaniards

employed the Catholicized natives in fighting against their Muslim brothers in the guise of defending Catholicism. In spite of the 300 years of Moro Wars, the Spaniards failed in its bid to eradicate Islam. This failure unfortunately gave birth to fear, hatred, suspicion, and contempt to each other – Muslims and Catholics alike.

When the Americans came, they employed different tactic. They used pacifism in the hope of attracting the Muslims. The Commonwealth Government in 1912 sponsored the settlement of Luzon and Visayas migrants in the fertile plains of Mindanao. This resulted to the neutralization of the resistance of Muslims to American rule which is called the “Mindanao Problem.” Agrarian problems existed when the settlers brought with them the supposed Land Certificate of Titles – declaring ownership over the vast tracts of land which were cultivated since time immemorial by the Muslims and *lumads* alike. This newly introduced institution caused the displacement of many original Mindanaoans. While the migrants became economically independent, the majority of the Muslims and *lumads* either became tenants or were driven away to the hinterlands and subsisted on whatever remained of their ancestral lands.

Cagas-de la Cruz (1998) wrote that for the Tausugs, Maranaos and Samas the outsiders are called *kapil/kafil/kapir* ‘infidels or non-believers’. This is the term for the lowest class of human beings and is also a generic epithet especially hurled at Christians (Catholics) against whom such acts as thievery and a litany of inhumanities are not counted as a crime. In the case of the *lumads*, their descriptions of the outsiders are as follows: *mang-aagew tu pasok* and *mafas fantad* which means ‘land/property grabbers.’ Among the outsiders, they call their Muslim brothers as *moklo* ‘lowly human beings’ and the lumads as *dili sibilisado* ‘uncivilized.’ Cagas-de la Cruz also quoted Haig Bosnaijan’s book “Dehumanizing People and Euphemizing War” (1994) who spoke of “the power to subjugate that comes from the power to define others...” She further noted on how metaphoric languages affect “people’s conceptual systems and thought processes, influencing how they perceive others, and determine their views and behavior.” The rest is history and grim reality.

CONCLUSION

What I have written in the preceding paragraphs is a glimpse of the present state of Philippine linguistic situation and Filipino nationhood. The question on national identity is a profound mystery that is not easy to answer. The long history of foreign domination leads to the present state where there is no clear-cut description of the Filipino national identity and nationhood. The introduction of the Filipinos to the outside world by its colonial masters brought rapid change to the Filipino society and political economy. It could have been easier to define the national identity of the Filipino people if they have (1) one common national language which enables him to express his sentiments, speak out his mind, reveal his feelings, and be heard; (2) experienced common historical accidents; (3) praised one Deity; and (4) very good governance.

But not every misfortune in the Philippines is worth crying and howling for.

In the social psyche of the Filipino, it made him stronger which in turn made him persevere and become resilient and a survivor. The Filipino is armed with the English language, good education and the undying aspiration which enabled him to play his role and position himself in the global village. Through the process of time and circumstances, the Filipino people move on to find and search for their identity.

ENDNOTES

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