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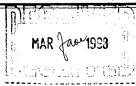
# Readings in Philippine Sociolinguistics

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## Language and nationalism in the Philippines: An update (1990)

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Andrew B. Gonzalez, FSC

### Introduction

In 1980, I published a book entitled *Language and Nationalism: The Philippine Experience Thus Far*.

It has been nine years since that book appeared and a lot of water has flowed under our bridge since then. I should like to give an update of these developments and draw attention to what we in the Philippines have learned thus far from our experience.

### Recent Developments

In order of importance, the writing of our present Constitution in 1986 and its ratification in 1987 is perhaps the most significant event, for in this basic document of the land is the following article on our national language:

Sec. 6. The national language of the Philippines is Filipino. As it evolves, it shall be further developed and enriched on the basis of existing Philippine and other languages.

Subject to provisions of law as the Congress may deem appropriate, the Government shall take steps to initiate and sustain the use of Filipino as a medium of official communication and as language of instruction in the educational system.

Sec. 7. For purposes of communication and instruction, the official languages of the Philippines are Filipino and, until otherwise provided by law, English.

The regional languages are the auxiliary official languages in the regions and shall serve as auxiliary media of instruction therein.

Spanish and Arabic shall be promoted on a voluntary and optional basis.

Sec. 8. This Constitution shall be promulgated in Filipino and English and shall be translated into major regional languages, Arabic, and Spanish.

Sec. 9. The Congress shall establish a national language commission composed of representatives of various regions and disciplines which shall undertake, coordinate, and promote researches for the development, propagation, and preservation of Filipino and other languages.

What was amazing for us students of national language in my country is that the selection of FILIPINO as our national language was so smooth and actually noncontroversial, whereas during the hearings in 1971 and 1972 preparatory to our 1973 Constitution, ethnocentric regionalism manifested itself by bickering and even acrimony during the discussions on the national language. The Constitutional Convention delegates could not agree, the only solution to the impasse being a mandate to 'take steps towards the formation of FILIPINO, a common national language' to be formed from the existing Philippine languages. Elsewhere (1974), I have called this solution a 'legal fiction' since if one were to take the mandate seriously as a linguist, what we would have ended up with was a Philippine Esperanto, a language no one spoke natively and the chances for the use of which would be almost nil, based on the Esperanto experience and the experience of all artificially contrived international languages.

During the entire period from 1973 to 1988, in spite of the fact that we had a form of rubber-stamp parliament under the dictatorship of Ferdinand E. Marcos, no bill on creating an implementing agency to form this national language was ever seriously considered, although I know of more or less four attempts to present a bill to the Committee on Language and Education, largely at the instigation of the Institute of National Language. For those not familiar with the Philippine language situation, I must explain that the 1973 Constitution de facto undid the work of the Institute of National Language from 1936 to 1973 when it repudiated Tagalog-based Filipino in favor of a multibased language yet to be formed and to be called FILIPINO.

My suspicion is that there was no real political will during the period of the Marcos years to pursue national language issues, given the other problems of the time. Perhaps, too, most of those in government were afraid to open a Pandora's box and stir up the national language 'verbal wars' which prevailed in the early 1960's (Gonzalez 1980).

In any case, uplifted by the euphoria of the so-called February Revolution of 1986, upon the naming of the commission of 50 to draft a new Constitution, my colleagues and I in the Linguistic Society of the Philippines were gearing for a prolonged debate and were ready to submit position papers, as I am sure other similarly inclined language-related societies in the country were prepared to do. Surprisingly, there was little controversy.

No longer were we searching for a national language; the Human Resource Committee (which included education and language) stated in the present indicative that 'the national language of the Philippines is FILIPINO', and that, in the future, a National Language Commission would be formed to promote the development of this language for use in official functions as well as in schools, and that, in addition to promoting FILIPINO, the National Language Commission would likewise oversee the preservation of other Philippine languages especially the regional languages.

The battle for the selection of the basis of the national language, which was waged so eloquently and earnestly in 1934 and in 1971-1972, prior to the approval of the 1973 Constitution, seemed finished. Selection seemed to be a non-issue. From the deliberations of the committee (Gonzalez and Villacorta, forthcoming), it was clear that a more enlightened linguistic consciousness informed the decision on Filipino since it was evident from the minutes of the committee meetings that what the constitutional commissioners had in mind when they spoke of FILIPINO was the current Tagalog-based Filipino enriched with vocabulary from all the Philippine languages and other non-Philippine languages the influence of which was present in Philippine society (Spanish and English principally, Arabic secondarily). Loanwords from other languages have always been instruments for language development; it was structural mixing which was not linguistically feasible.

After ratification of the Constitution in 1987, my mind was at rest. Selection was no longer a problem; neither was propagation a problem since Tagalog-based Filipino had been spreading by leaps and bounds (Gonzalez and Postrado 1976). The problem of standardization could be solved as the language was used more and more for writing; the principal task ahead was cultivation and elaboration, including what Gärvin and Mathiot (1968) call 'intellectualization' or the use of the language for scholarly discourse in academia and in more abstract discourse. Thus, in early 1988, the Linguistic Society of the Philippines held the first of what was hoped to be a series of round-table conferences on the intellectualization of Filipino, where it mapped out the tasks ahead for developing the national language for various intellectual uses, the addition of lexicon being only one among many other tasks (*Philippine Journal of Linguistics* Volume 29, Number 2).

Each year, in the Philippines, during the week on which the birthday of the late Manuel L. Quezon, President of the Commonwealth from 1935 till his death in 1944 and considered the 'father of the national language' falls, Filipinos celebrate National Language Week (August 13 to 19), his birthday falling on August 19. Under the sponsorship of the former Institute of National Language (since 1987, renamed Institute of Philippine Languages), an agency under the Department of Education, Culture, and Sports, different symbolic activities are held to promote the national language. At the suggestion of the Institute, an Executive Order (No. 335) signed by the President and dated 25 August 1988 was promulgated reminding all citizens that based on the Constitutional mandate, Filipino should be used for official functions in government. The order did not announce any new directive but repeated existing policy on the official use of Filipino as the national language. Even from a casuistic and legalistic viewpoint, one interprets rules of this type as desiderative in purpose, to be implemented as much as possible, where possible, and when possible. It was really for symbolic purposes that the existing rule was repeated. My earlier reaction was that the Institute was repeating something innocuous to justify its continuing existence (there is pending legislation to constitute the National Language Commission, a congressional body, which would then take over the functions of national language development for the country from the present Institute).

Unexpectedly, and to the surprise of many in linguistic circles, a verbally vitriolic contribution appeared in the daily column of one of the more respected columnists in the Philippines, Maximo V. Soliven of the *Daily Star*; he discussed the Executive Order and repeated the same arguments against Tagalog-based Filipino (the columnist is a native Ilokano) as previous opponents in the past. It was obvious from the attacks made by this columnist that he had not read the Executive Order but merely heard about it, for he attacked a straw man in the belief that the Executive Order was, likewise, ordering the exclusive use of Filipino as the medium of instruction in schools (instead of the current bilingual education scheme in Filipino and English). This attack was taken up by an influential weekly with a credible past record, the *Philippines Free Press* under the editorship of senior journalist Teodoro Locsin, who pictured the Secretary of Education, Culture, and Sports on the cover in insulting terms – with a pencil between her ears! The whole issue decried the continuing deterioration of Philippine education now to be accelerated in its decline by a senseless law making Filipino the exclusive medium of instruction to the detriment of English.

Similar editorials and comments and letters to the editor followed for several weeks.

One was somehow faced with a Kafkaesque situation where the old nightmares of 1934-1935 and 1971-1972, which we thought had been laid to rest, were resuscitated!

As a student of the sociology of language, I have tried to understand the phenomenon with sympathy. I can only partially explain it in charitable terms as the awareness that Filipino is not sufficiently developed and cultivated as a language of scholarly discourse and a fear that if Filipinos were to take the plunge and in effect legislate a monolingual system instead of our current bilingual system, the system of education in the Philippines will face even worse problems than it is already encountering at present. What was unfortunate about the whole brouhaha was the fact that the Executive Order had either not been read or had been misread. It never ordered anything with regard to the schools. The Secretary of Education, Culture, and Sports had to go on national television and face a barrage of questions on the language policy and program of the schools and to allay the fear of people about the 'internal colonization' of non-Tagalogs by Tagalogs.

From a political viewpoint, one likewise emerges with the impression that selection issues in language take time to be settled; they are not laid to rest except by time, and time means several generations. The length of time is a function of the consciousness of nationhood in the society and the development of a sense of nationalism which identifies language with this sense of nationalism.

Another development during this period, germane to the national language question, was an evaluation of eleven years of bilingual education nationwide (1974-1985) to measure, if possible, the effects of the policy and its implementation (Gonzalez and Sibayan 1988). The Linguistic Society of the Philippines was mandated by then Minister Jaime C. Laya of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports in 1985 to undertake a nationwide evaluation of the program begun in 1974.

The evaluation tested achievement in Pilipino, English, Science, Mathematics, Social Studies (Araling Panlipunan) as dependent variables with length of exposure to the bilingual education scheme as the independent variable. Other intervening variables were likewise measured (competence of the teachers teaching the classes, indicated by results of tests on the subjects being taught; socio-economic status; school variables in terms of library, quality of faculty, departmental structure, school management). In addition to the achievement tests, the group likewise measured attachment to the country and indicators of nationalism (surmisable from opinions on language, language of education, plans to leave the country permanently, nationalism) among teachers, students, and parents.

Some of the findings were surprising (Gonzalez, in press): length of exposure to the bilingual education scheme was a poor predictor even in Pilipino and Araling Panlipunan; type of school, socioeconomic status, competence of teachers were the best predictors of academic success. Contrary to our expectations, attachment to the country had no significant correlation with length of exposure to the bilingual education

scheme (heavily loaded in favor of Filipino). Among parents, teachers, and university students, nationalism was not equated with competence in Filipino. While a bilingual scheme was overwhelmingly endorsed, a monolingual scheme found no support among the three groups; all were nearly unanimous in asserting that one's nationalism should not be measured by competence in Filipino or by one's preference for English as the medium of instruction for some subjects in primary and secondary school and as the almost exclusive medium of instruction at the university. Most Filipinos aspire to work abroad but only to earn money (a utilitarian motive) with plans to resettle in the Philippines upon accumulation of funds; this was true of both students (at different levels) and teachers.

The Department of Education, Culture and Sports used the results of the survey to reexamine its bilingual education scheme and promulgated the Bilingual Education Program of 1987 and its implementing guidelines, basically reinforcing the bilingual education scheme, although opening the door in the future to the use of Filipino not only for social science subjects but also for mathematics and the natural sciences. It restored the use of the vernaculars as initial transitional languages (where needed) and put the burden of intellectualization and cultivation on the universities by enjoining them to come up with creative programs for this purpose.

### **Insights from the Experience of the Past Fifteen Years (1973-88)**

More important than the bare facts of my recital, however, are the insights that can be gleaned from our Philippine experience of the past fifteen years. The events in the Philippines are specific to her history and her journey as a people; however, the insights from the experiences of our society are for all and would have applications to the respective situations of other countries in the quest for the development of their national languages and linguistic symbols of unity and national identity.

1. In a multiethnic society such as the Philippines, the selection of a vernacular on which to base the national language is fraught with problems that only time can solve. The language itself is merely a sign of what lies behind, competing ethnic and linguistic loyalties symbolized by a language. In a semiotic context, the very symbol of linguistic unity becomes the apple of discord and the cause of disunity, resentment, the fear of 'internal colonization' by the ethnic group the language of which has been chosen as the basis of the national language. The issue is not solved by executive fiat or the charisma of a leader (in the case of the Philippines, Quezon, the President of the Commonwealth; his personality overrode objections but did not solve the problem which has kept

reappearing across the history of the Philippines, to be revived anew in 1988). Just when Filipinos thought that the problem of selection had been laid to rest by the Constitution of 1987, it reared its head once more in 1988.

What is ironic about the situation, however, is that legitimization for the Filipino carries with it special connotations that facticity does not; in other words, the Filipino is not bothered by the fact that Tagalog-based Filipino has been disseminated widely through the mass media and the educational system. It has become a national lingua franca and is developing its own varieties depending on the regional urban center where it is established and is spreading; the mass media, largely nationally based, are a force for standardization and convergence. It is not the fact of Filipino, enriched with vocabulary as Filipino, which is being challenged but its legitimate status as the symbol of linguistic unity and national identity, a status which some non-Tagalogs, now diminishing in proportion after fifty-two years (1937-1984), still begrudge it.

The solution to such an ethnolinguistic impasse was novel and worthy of an eighteenth century Jesuit casuist. The Constitutional drafters adopted a legal fiction by calling a language-as-yet-to-be-formed in 1973 as FILIPINO, to be composed of all existing local languages, a linguistic formula that was legally viable but linguistically unrealistic. Filipinos became more realistic in 1987 by calling this language FILIPINO, till then a name without a denotation, by accepting the reality of Tagalog-based Filipino being enriched with lexical entries from local and foreign languages, now to be called Filipino. The comforting note for non-Tagalogs is that this language is yet in formation, it is not yet and hence, with perfect confidence, the non-Tagalog groups threw a tantrum in 1988 protesting the imposition of Filipino in new domains (education). What I read between the lines in this behavior is a plea for more time.

### *Festina Lente*

The breakthroughs thus far in selection seem to be: acceptance of the need for a linguistic symbol of unity and national identity; grudging acceptance of one among several languages as the basis of the national language; a demand that, for acceptance, this language incorporate at least vocabulary (if not syntax, a linguistically non-viable option) from other languages in danger of becoming disenfranchised; a long process of standardization; even a longer process of cultivation. The Philippines is only at the standardization phase of language development, and beginning its cultivation and intellectualization phases more or less simultaneously. Thus, not a sequential model but a simultaneous multidimensional model of language development is needed.

Actually, the process of convergence is itself symptomatic of a larger process of societal convergence, from a historically and sometimes



artificially combined or confectioned conglomeration (the Filipinism used is 'aggrupation') to a polity with the trappings of government (executive, legislative, judicial) and the ritual for elections, and structures such as national, regional, and provincial bodies. The problem, of course, with the Philippines as with some other multiethnic societies is that the process of jelling together as a nation has been a series of discontinuities: the period of nationalism during the last quarter of the nineteenth century under an inefficient Spanish Empire grown old and decrepit, the failed Revolution of 1896, the aborted Malolos Republic in the midst of an uncertain relationship with a new colonial power in 1898, the ambivalent search for independence between 1898-1935, the Commonwealth years from 1935 to 1941 – sic (1935-1946), and then independence in 1946. Throughout this period, there were peaks of a supraethnic consciousness raising, for example, during the Malolos Constitutional Convention of 1898, the 1934 Constitutional Convention preparatory to the Commonwealth government (when, however, regional loyalties surfaced on the language question), the common struggle against the Japanese occupational forces (1942-1945), and the struggle against a dictator during the four-day events of February 22-25, 1986. In between, however, Filipinos tend to be divided more than united among themselves. The conflict on language is only one manifestation of this division of the nation painfully attempting to unify itself now without a common enemy but with a common objective of nation-building and a more equitable distribution of wealth. Hence, if Filipinos are divided on the question of selection of language, it is because they are still divided as a nation, by ethnic loyalties, by social classes, now by ideology: The language-issue is only a symbol of larger dividing issues. A common linguistic symbol of unity and national identity is possible only when a country is already united; it is a symbol of a prior unification as well as a reinforcer of this unification. Of itself, however, unless energized by the unity which already exists in the society, it is either an empty symbol (as it is in some countries) or a cause of discord (as it has been in Philippine life).

2. The other insight that the Philippine experience imparts is that the process of internalization and acceptance (a prelude to national unification) takes several generations, and that each generation in turn must internalize its acceptance of and support for the linguistic symbol of unity. Undoubtedly, there will come a time and a stage of social development when the forces of ethnicity and divisiveness no longer exert as powerful an influence, but as long as they are there to pull the society apart, then the quest for unity and nationhood and the internalization of its symbols must be something renewed by each generation through the educational system and through the symbol-making activities of the society, in its societal rituals and liturgies. It

seems that for this present generation of Filipinos, the commitment to FILIPINO must be made consciously once more; otherwise, there will be a repeat of the recriminations and misunderstandings and miscommunications that took place upon the promulgation of Executive Order No. 335 in 1988.

One barrier to the unification of a society that has hitherto been traditionally divided along ethnic and class lines is the intervening factor of a colonial language which was dominant and which still offers economic rewards for its maintenance. The shift from second language to foreign language is difficult in such circumstances, as is demonstrated by the case of English in the Philippines. For instrumental, not integrative, reasons, the large majority, an overwhelming one, wish to maintain English as a language of wider communication, for business and international relations, as an academic medium of instruction especially for higher education, specifically, in the domains of science and technology.

The 1985 evaluation of the bilingual education program in the country (Gonzalez and Sibayan 1988) shows the overwhelming acceptance of a linguistic symbol of unity and national identity, indeed, its desirability, and the necessity of developing such a symbol, even among non-Tagalog-based Filipino. What is NOT acceptable is to equate mastery of Filipino with a sense of nationalism, for non-Tagalogs aver that they are just as nationalistic as Tagalogs although they have no competence or a desire to be competent in Filipino. Here, nationalism is not equated with a specific language or with the mastery of that language. Filipinos – the majority of them – take a purely instrumental view of language, Filipino OR English. And since they perceive that English is still the medium of science and technology, they do not want it replaced by Filipino at the tertiary level, while accepting the scheme of two languages in general education. A monolingual system of education at the primary and secondary levels, one solely in Filipino, will not be accepted; in fact, there is a backlash at present among influentials in society, including the education sector, expressing a desire for a return to a monolingual system in English after fifteen years of the bilingual education scheme.

What this seems to be saying to sociologists of language is that in certain societies, language is not necessarily equated with a sense of nationhood; utility more than integration takes priority. This is clearly the case with Singapore; in the Philippines, this is the preference of the majority although there is a vocal minority that is presently challenging this and once more contributing to the forces of division in Philippine society.

Another deterrent to the full flowering of a national code would be competing policies of government caused by special economic situations; hence, language ambivalence becomes the reason or manifestation of economic and social forces present outside of language. Thus in the Philippines, the avowed policy of the Department of Labor and Employment is to encourage overseas employment (for which English is an

absolute necessity) to generate foreign exchange for the country's balance of payments problem, while the policy of the Department of Science and Technology is to attract overseas talents back to the Philippines in the fields of science and technology to contribute to the country's growth. Of course, this seeming contradiction is partially resolved by the statement that workers being sent are not in the same category as the highly trained scientists and technologists that the Department of Science and Technology is attempting to attract back. However, in the area of technology, there is a real conflict since some of the top technologists of the country need to be harnessed as managers and leaders for overseas projects.

3. Elsewhere (Gonzalez 1980), I have referred to a linguistic security/insecurity dimension in the on-going debate with regard to the maintenance of English, and to the widening domains in Filipino. Affluent Filipinos in relatively well-off colleges and universities, sensitized to the nationalism issue, opt for the wider use of Filipino in all domains of Philippine life including higher education; less affluent Filipinos, insecure in their knowledge of English but already secure in their knowledge of Filipino, insist on the maintenance of English for higher education and for future use. The affluent ones have arrived in their mastery of English; they are less secure in their mastery of Filipino. If secure in both languages, their success is certain, since in the perception of businessmen (Sibayan and Segovia 1982), knowledge of both languages is needed for success in Philippine life. Thus, they feel less threatened by nationalist sentiments urging the expanded use of Filipino whereas those in non-Tagalog areas and in less prosperous regions of the country perceive the need for English for economic advantages, see the utilitarian disadvantages of Filipino, and have opted for more English in the educational system. One perceives that the national language will develop faster in urban Tagalog areas, where the use of the code-mixing variety is gaining ground faster (Santos 1984) than in non-Tagalog areas where Filipino is making slow progress. English will most likely be maintained longer, without code-switching, in these latter areas.

4. In national language development, with nationalism as a moving force leading to the expanding domains of Filipino, the natural deterrent is the relatively uncultivated state of Filipino vis-a-vis a competing language, English, for academic work. For this specific purpose, no amount of rhetoric or drumbeating for the national language or for the cause of nationalism will make up for the difficult and tedious work of cultivating and intellectualizing a language. The Philippine experience shows that this is best done through scholarly work in academic institutions whereas literature is better cultivated through the mass

media. The work of intellectualizing any language is more than vocabulary building; it is register-building, including aspects not only of lexicon but especially of discourse (grammar and rhetoric). A cascading model (top-down) more than a grassroots model (bottom-up) (see Sibayan 1988) seems more suitable for this phase of national language development.

5. Another insight from the Philippine experience, based on the nation-wide testing of Filipino and English competence in 1985, is that for utilitarian, not integrative, reasons, non-Tagalogs learn Filipino well, as attested by high scores in Filipino and Filipino-medium test among Surigaonon-Cebuanos, Kapampangans and Pangasinenses, even if there is only less than enthusiastic acceptance of the language as the selected basis of the national language. Our findings indicate that the biggest factor for success in learning is socioeconomic status and the type of community (an urban, preferably Metro Manila, open community) more than ethnic background. For success in propagating and disseminating the national language, one must rely not only on an integrative reason; perhaps a more powerful propellant for learning a language is utility. If Filipino is eventually socially engineered to be a factor for success in school and in business, its learning and use and expansion of registers will come almost as a matter of course without coercion and pressure.

## Summary

If one were to summarize the lessons of the Philippine experience, one could come up with a qualitatively describable equation such as the following:

Progress in the development (dissemination and cultivation) of a national language and in the internalization of its use as an integrating linguistic symbol of unity and national identity is a function of the following:

### *Positive variables*

- Widespread use of the language selected as a language of trade and as a language of the capital city and as a national lingua franca
- Widespread use of the language selected in the mass media

### *Negative variables (constraints)*

- Perceived lack of connection between the national language and its mastery and its widespread use as a language in schools to indicate nationalism

- Economic utility of a competing post-colonial language
- Relatively uncultivated state (especially for academic purposes) of the local national language
- Perceived academic and social advantages of the former colonial language as a language of wider communication and of international business
- Non-acceptance of the selection of the basis of the national language

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