

The Nationalization of a Language: Filipino

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1. It is to be expected that a country with a long colonial history and numerous indigenous languages should have difficulty in resolving what language should be recognized as its national language. Such is the case of the Philippines where the burning issue was not only about the choice between the colonial language and an indigenous one but also whether it should be an amalgamation of the numerous indigenous languages, an absurdity taken seriously by the uninformed, or whether it should be the indigenous language proposed by an influential group.

1.2 This complicated situation started with Spain's almost four hundred years occupancy of the over seven thousand islands in the Pacific which they claimed by force and by the cross. These now comprise what is known as the archipelago where the state of the Philippine is located. These islands were inhabited then as now by over one hundred ethnolinguistic groups (EG) speaking diverse but closely related languages belonging to a sub-group of the large Austronesian family of languages. Binding these islands and diverse groups into a colony by Spain spawned the problem of language choice and issues which to this day are heatedly discussed but which in real terms have been resolved by the widespread use of a national lingua franca.

1.3 This paper will discuss the nationalization of a language, Filipino, by its speakers who were spurred on by their urgent and strong needs to communicate with each other. Filipino is widely used today despite its being doggedly rejected as the national language or despite attempts at forcing it into a mold perceived to be the correct form by certain influence groups.

2. The linguistic situation in the Philippines was highly conducive to the birth of a national lingua franca. Over a hundred languages in use made a common language chosen for intergroup communication inevitable. It has been established that there are five regional lingua francas¹ presently in use for communication within the regions of contiguous EGs. But impelled by economic, political and personal motives,

¹This was established by research conducted by the Department of Linguistics, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines.

interaction became necessary between members of these groups drawn together not only on the regional but also on the national level. This then resulted in a *lingua franca* spoken throughout the country or at the very least in highly populated or urban areas.

2.1 Besides interaction between groups, the significant impact of the culture and language of two colonial powers, Spain and the United States of America, and that of the countries which traded with the different groups even prior to the colonial period, e.g. China, further contributed to the complexity of the situation.

2.2 One other factor that should be considered in accounting for the emergence of the national *lingua franca* (NLF) was the dominance of Tagalog, the language spoken in Manila the capital city and till the last decade, the only prominent center of trade. A variety of this language called Pilipino was taught in schools nationwide since 1935. This fact accounts for the large Tagalog element in the lexicon of the NLF. Along with this, is the portion of the language identified as the common core or universal nucleus found in all the other Philippine languages (Paz, 1995.)

2.3 Several studies have shown that language universals exist (Jakobson, Fant and Halle, 1952; Greenberg ed.1963), more so in related languages. Studies have also shown that the languages in the Philippines are closely related with common elements on all the levels of the languages (Conant, 1908, 1911, 1912; Dyen, 1947, 1953; Constantino, 1965, 1970, 1971; Constantino, Paz and Posoncuy, 1967; Paz, 1981.) It is these commonalities which helped facilitate the formation and spread of the NLF or Filipino.

The sounds *i, a, u, p, t, k, ʔ, b, d, g, s, h, m, n, ng, l, w* and *y* belonging to this core are present in Filipino along with *f, v, z, ʃ, θ, ʝ* and *r* which came into the language from other Philippine languages (PL) and from Chinese, Spanish and English. Stress is phonemic and the basic form of the syllable is (C)CV(C) as in all other PLs. Although it is the lexicon of these languages which makes for the greatest difference between them, a high cognate count is present (Lopez, 1971, 1974; Yap, 1977; Paz, 1981.) Besides these historical or indigenous cognates, a great number of cognates originating from words borrowed from foreign languages exist. This portion of the lexicon made up of loans mostly from Chinese, Spanish and English have built up the common element in PLs. A large number of these loans have found their way into Filipino e.g. **lugaw** 'rice porridge', **ate** 'older sister' from Chinese; **libro** 'book', **pamilya** 'family', **bintana** 'window' from Spanish; **tren** 'train', **nars** 'nurse', **gaas** 'kerosene' from English. There has also been more recent borrowing from different languages directly into Filipino such as: **basketbol** 'basketball', **meykap** 'makeup', **otomatik** 'automatic', **kompyuter** 'computer' from English; **dorobo** 'thief' and

japayuki meaning an overseas contract worker who works in a night club from Japanese ‘; **lahar** ‘pyroplastic material or volcanic debris’ from Indonesian through English, and so on.

2.4 Aside from the common core, the rest of the features of Filipino reflect the impact of its users who speak different native languages. This is shown in the terms for the material culture of the EGs which have been adapted by speakers from other groups such as those for food, implements, woven products etc. Highly evident today are the varieties of Filipino spoken in the different parts of the country characterized by the distinct elements of the first language of the EGs. Hence a speaker may use any of the following:

titser/ticher, guro ‘teacher’
skul/iskul, iskwelahan, paaralan ‘school’
nandito/narito ‘here’
so, kaya ‘so’
nagkain, kumain ‘ate’

The lexicon therefore of Filipino consists of the common core made up of cognates and loans from PLs and foreign languages. The morphology and syntax is like that of any other PL as evident in the common core. These structural similarities facilitated the spread of this language throughout the country especially where socioeconomic needs prevailed.

3. Tremendous pressure on members of EGs continue to draw speakers of various languages together. Members of smaller EGs or those in remote areas are highly motivated to move out of their group and into urban centers or areas of commerce pursuing the promise of a better or more exciting life. This inevitably results in problems of communication and the eventual choice of the more prestigious as the common language. Those who live in urban areas or centers of population usually speak more than two languages, their native language and Filipino and if they were able to go to school for at least four years, English or an indigenized version of this language. But more often, besides their native language they speak the lingua franca of the region plus Filipino and English. The more widespread languages such as the regional lingua franca and the NLF enjoy a very obvious prestige. In the province of Isabela located in Northeastern Luzon, there are three EGs indigenous to the area but socioeconomic reasons have drawn others to the area complicating the linguistic situation. Native speakers of Gaddang and Yogad would initially claim Iukano, the regional lingua franca, as their language. They would usually know the language of their spouse if he or she belonged to another EG, and could communicate fluently in Filipino. In collecting data for baseline information on the

different EGs², it was discovered that it was often the case that a Yogad from Isabela in Northeastern Luzon could speak:

Yogad	- the native language of the EG,
Gaddang	- language of a neighboring EG,
Iukano	- regional lingua franca,
Filipino	- national lingua franca,
English	- language of school (limited use).

3.1 Still quite prevalent is the tendency of members of EGs to intentionally hide their origins and claim their native language to be whatever the regional lingua franca is. Others simply do not bother to identify their native language thinking their group to be unknown. In this way they unconsciously contribute to marginalizing their own group. A Kalinga from the remote town of San Mariano, Isabela, when asked what his language was, would most likely say Iukano.

3.2 In contrast, there are areas where there is still some kind of resistance to Filipino partly due to the fear that the native language of the group may go into disuse, decay and disappear. This is because of the belief that Filipino is in effect Tagalog, the language of a prestigious dominant group, hence a begrudging acceptance and at times even open hostility is shown towards it. The place where this is most apparent is Cebu, a city located on an island in Central Philippines or the Visayan region. There is the perception here, by a group led by politicians and teachers, that Filipino is just a version of Tagalog, probably because of the high cognate count between these languages. They feel threatened and fear that the Tagalogs would eventually become the most powerful EG. They demonstrate this feeling by refusing to sing the national anthem in Filipino and sing it in Sugbuanon, the native language of this EG. They also refuse to follow the directives of the Department of Education on the use and spread of Filipino. But the great apolitical majority unmindful of this controversy, use Filipino in dealing with outsiders in this city where commerce and trade thrive.

3.3 The need to participate in the larger community in activities of national scope, or suffer marginalization, fostered the use of the national lingua franca by those wishing to integrate into the national community. A number of EGs are still marginalized partly due to their distance from centers of commerce and government

² This was done in the first phase of an ongoing research, presently in its third phase, to establish the commonalities among the different EGs in the country. One of the objectives of this extensive research is to setup baseline data on these groups. The main proponents of the research are C.J.Paz, C.N.Zayas and E. Constantino of the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines.

but also significantly due to their inability to participate by way of their native languages. The government still uses English as the medium of written communication or a version of Tagalog incomprehensible to non-Tagalogs and at times even to Tagalogs themselves.

3.4 Being a lingua franca, its very nature makes Filipino more readily receptive to changes brought about by changes in its milieu. An area where an industry is set up for example, understandably draws migrants from other areas who before long, settle permanently among the EG(s) of the area. As mentioned earlier in this paper, such a mix of EGs demands a language common to all. In the early 50s the government encouraged homesteading in most parts of Mindanao, the largest island in the south. A good number of people from the Ilocos, Cebu and neighboring islands took this opportunity thus creating a situation conducive to the spread of the national lingua franca. Such too was the case in Palawan, an island located in the southwest. Great tracts of uninhabited land, unfortunately virgin forests, were eventually populated by people coming from various parts of the country who set up communities in areas formerly though sparsely occupied by native Tagbanua, Batak and Palawan.

Adapting to whatever change brought about by these population movements was easier in the common language because the speakers did not have to contend with deep-seated language habits or language loyalties. This therefore was a force which made Filipino very useable and essential.

4. It was probably because language legislation has been constantly part of the language scenario that the most recent constitution of the country includes a language provision which gives Filipino unqualified status as the national language. As early as 1550 (Frei, 1959), the Spanish colonial government, recognizing the difficulty of dealing with numerous languages, established Spanish as the official language. Despite almost three centuries as such, this language did not function as a national language although it left its indelible mark on the lexicon of the different languages.

The next colonial power, the United States of America, likewise legislated English as the language of instruction in schools and of government. However, it took a few years before English won over Spanish as the language of education and of the elite but it rapidly became the most prestigious language and the mark of the highly educated.

Three constitutions have been written since 1934 and each had a section on what the national language should be. The 1934 constitution of the Commonwealth period was promulgated pronouncing the development and adoption of a common

national language based on one of the native languages. Manuel Quezon, the first Filipino president of the then Commonwealth government which was still under the rule of the U.S.A., exerted his influence to legislate Tagalog as this language. This was the language of the area where Manila, the capital city, was located. Consequently, and due to a strong purist bloc, what was to be known as Pilipino was taught in schools. It was a version of Tagalog that even native speakers did not find acceptable and hence was only used in the classroom and by some writers in Tagalog. The next constitution, written in 1973 under the Marcos dictatorship stipulated that the national language was to be developed thus implying that this language was still to be developed. A new constitution was again promulgated in 1987, this time by the government established right after the successful uprising against the dictatorship. Article 14 of this constitution recognizes Filipino, the common language spoken all over the Philippines, as the national language. This significant act established Filipino as the official language albeit along with English until such time that this was changed by law. Thus, Filipino was given added status by legislation, making its spread mandatory.

5. Since the NLF or Filipino is used extensively as the language of oral communication throughout the country or at the very least in the centers of population, it can be said that it is virtually the national language. Some sceptics may challenge this statement by pointing out that it still falls short as the language of government and instruction, because it is not consistently used in formal written communication. One reason for this is that the policy makers are waiting for a ready made standard version of the language. The issue here is whether to follow orthographic rules set by Spanish grammarians and perpetuated by those who followed them blindly or to hold close to the spoken language for a more natural and effortless fit. If the later is to be pursued, the result would be a phonemic orthography, which could more easily adopt the countless recent borrowings from foreign languages, e.g. English to Filipino, which are mostly found in the vocabulary of science and technology. Furthermore, the great majority of the population, especially those who drop out early from school, follow the natural tendency to write as one hears it as the following examples show: **iskul** 'school', **krosing** 'crossing', **detektib** 'detective', **otomatik** 'automatic', **komander** 'commander'. Words from indigenous languages have also been undergoing change, e.g. **siya - sya** 'he/she', **buan - bwán** 'moon', **kailan - kelan** 'when', **meroon - meron** 'there is/are'. Presently, media, specially TV, have taken the lead in following closely to sound in spelling borrowed words. Being powerful as it is, media will almost surely resolve the issue. It must also be said that Filipino is increasingly being used formally and in fact academic papers have been written in this language. What started as a common oral language therefore has been progressing towards a written form acceptable to its speakers.

5.1 In sum, the process of the nationalization of Filipino involved intergroup communication hinged on economic, political and cultural factors brought about by internal migration and urbanization and was facilitated by the ready adaptation to the results of language contact due to a common core, legislative measures and the emerging written standard.

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