

The Metamorphosis of Filipino as National Language

Jessie Grace U. Rubrico

Introduction

Filipino, the term used in both the 1973 and 1987 Philippine Constitution to designate as the "national language" of the Philippines --whether in sense of *de jure*, or *de facto*, it matters not-- has come full-circle to prick the national consciousness and lay its vexing burden at the feet of our national planners, as well as of the academe. For indeed, the past six decades (since 1935) has seen "Pilipino" (or, "Filipino," its more acceptable twin) tossed in the waves of controversies between the pros and the antis as each camp fires off volleys of linguistic cognoscente or even garbage, as the case may be, while the vast majority watched with glee or boredom.

With a strong constitutional mandate to evolve, further develop, and enrich Filipino "on the basis of existing Philippine and other languages" (Art. XIV, Sec.6, 1986 Constitution), our language planners were supposedly equipped to deal with the legal and administrative details of the problem, after the sad episodes appurtenant to its admittedly emotional sideshows in the 1971 Constitutional Convention (Santos, 1976) and the polemical articles of Vicente Sotto, *et. al.* (Rubrico, 1996), among others.

Key Issue and Sub-issues

But after more than 60 years, has Filipino *truly* metamorphosed into a Philippine national language? To what extent? What has been its "success stories"? Its failures? What is its current state or condition in the present? What needs to be further done? What is in store for the future? What are the development prospects of the other non-Tagalog languages of the Philippines for integration into Filipino? What are the pervasive influence of English or of other foreign languages on today's speakers?

This paper is an indicative study of Filipino's current lexicon, particularly borrowings from the English language --an ineluctable task, but necessary nonetheless, if one has to face honestly the current phenomenon to be described more fully in this study. The researcher fully agrees with the observation that a national language can be a unifying concept of our continuing struggle against our colonizers (Atienza, 1996), of freeing ourselves from our colonial mindset (Maceda, 1996). Still, the illusory pitfalls (Constatino, 1996) warned about in the development of the national language compendium can be cause for some soul-searching pause, even as others deny them (Almario, 1996) with equal logic.

But if debates must continue, let the "game" begin and may the best argument -as perceived by its arbiters. the officials and the public, especially--win. Language and culture are, after all, inseparable, with the people's lexicon mirroring their culture.

The Corpus

Virtually everyone agrees that *media* -print, radio, and television (and now, cyberspace) has had a profound influence on people, especially on their language. The Filipino spoken today, especially by the young (35 years old and below) is undeniably distinctive, to use a loose term, and may have

been so influenced by media to a greater extent. This Filipino is spoken by a significant segment of the population and it warrants a linguistic inquiry. Selected articles from Filipino tabloids and dailies, scholarly papers from the University of the Philippines Press, candid and structured interviews of college students, television news, sitcoms and talk shows, and radio programs in Metro Manila are some of the culled sources for the Filipino words, phrase, or sentences found in this study. Filipino, Tagalog, and Cebuano words are arrayed for cognate purposes, with English juxtaposed as a metalanguage. The corpus is found at the end of this paper as Appendix.

The conclusion derived therefrom from the bulk of the recommendations of this researcher, particularly on the "key success variables" that could ensure the continuing development and metamorphosis of Filipino as the national language of the Philippines in the next century.

Historical Perspective

The issue of our national language has been around for the past 60, or maybe even 90, years. The inhabitants of an archipelago with over a hundred languages need a common language with which they could communicate with each other and express themselves as a people of one nation.

The 1987 Constitution provides that, "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."

Perhaps it is unfortunate that when the Philippine Commission passed a bill in 1908 providing for an establishment of an Institute of Philippine languages and the training of public school teachers thereon, the Philippine Assembly rejected it through Leon Ma. Guerrero, its Chairman on Public Instruction who recognized the need for a common language for the Filipinos but opted to adopt a foreign language instead of the native ones. Through him, the Philippine Assembly spoke, thus:

"The idea of studying the languages of the Philippine Archipelago is very plausible; but the present aspiration of those who are interested in these languages is to unite them or reduce them into a single language which, based on the principal dialects of the Islands, might constitute the means of inter-communication of ideas in the entire Archipelago, and which might obviate the absolute need now felt of using a common foreign tongue as a means of transmission of ideas, sentiments, and aspirations of the inhabitants of the Philippines." (Romualdez, 1936; p. 302).

In 1931, the ex-officio Secretary of Public Instruction, Mr. Butte, addressing the Catholic Women's League, encouraged the use of the vernacular as medium of instruction in the primary grades (I to IV). He opined:

"If we may assume that one of the national objectives of the Philippines will be to preserve the important native languages, as far as practicable, the schools may contribute to the realization of this national objective by abandoning English as the sole medium of instruction in the elementary schools . . ." (Romualdez, 1936).

It must be noted that Lope K. Santos addressed the First Independence Congress on 30 February 1930 by expounding on "The Vernacular as a Factor in National Solidarity and Independence." In 1932, Representative Manuel V. Gallego authored Bill No. 588 which provided for the use of the vernacular as the medium of instruction in all public elementary and secondary schools. In 1934 and

1935 the national language issue was discussed during the Constitutional Convention. And the Constitution mandated in Section 3, Article XIII: "The National Assembly shall take steps toward the development and adoption of a common language based on one of the existing native languages. . ."

The National Language Institute was established on 13 November 1936 pursuant to Commonwealth Act No. 184, and it was tasked with "the study of Philippine dialects in general for the purpose of evolving and adopting a common national language based on one of the existing native tongues." This involved studying each language spoken by not less than half a million people, collecting and collating cognate sets and phrases from these languages, adopting a system for Philippine phonetics and orthography, comparing critically all Philippine affixes, and selecting the language which was the most developed in structure and literature and widely accepted and used by most Filipinos -- which will be the basis for the national language (Sec.V Art.1-5). The Institute was given a year to accomplish this.

Once the language is selected, the Institute is to prepare its grammar and dictionary within two years. Then it shall purify the language by weeding out the unnecessary foreign words, phrases, or other grammatical constructions, and enrich it through borrowing from the native languages and dialects, from Spanish, and from English --in that order. And any word adopted into the national language should be subjected to the phonological rules and orthography of the Philippine languages.

In 1937, the Institute recommended Tagalog and came up with the *Balarila* and the *Tagalog- English Dictionary*. In 1959, the Department of Education called the Tagalog-based national language Pilipino. In 1965, some congressmen took the cudgels against the propagation of Pilipino, which to them is "puristang Tagalog," as the national language. This period witnessed the purists coining words like *salumpuwit* (chair), *salimpapaw* (airplane), *sipnayan* (mathematics), etc. In 1969, some non-Tagalog speakers, like the Madyaas Pro-Hiligaynon Society and some Cebuano groups complained against the movement of Manila toward "purismo." This gave rise to the problems that needed to be resolved before the non-Tagalog speakers could accept Tagalog as their own "wikang pambansa."

Be that as it may, the Board of National Education ordered in 1970 the gradual shift to Pilipino as medium of instruction in the elementary starting with Grade 1 in the school year 1974-75 and progressing into higher grades, a level each year. It was also adopted as the medium of instruction for Rizal and history subjects in colleges and universities. In 7 August 1973, the Board of National Education introduced the bilingual approach to teaching --that is, using two languages as media of instruction in the schools, to wit: the vernacular for Grades I and II, Pilipino for Grades III and IV, Pilipino and English for secondary and tertiary levels.

This bilingual approach serves to promote the intellectualization of the national language --that is, to use it as medium of intellectual exchanges in the academe, government offices, as well as in other disciplines in the process of acquiring knowledge about the world which could be expressed by the said language. In addition, it will bring about a national unity and identity among Filipinos, as they can now express themselves and communicate with each other in a common language.

The 1973 Constitution states the National Assembly should endeavor towards developing and formally adopting a common national language to be called Filipino. Meantime, Pilipino and English remain the official languages unless repealed by law. Filipino is anchored on Pilipino. Pilipino has borrowed and adopted a lot of words from the Spanish lexicon, Spain being the country's colonizer for over 300 years. These words are carried over to Filipino as Pilipino, as these lexical items have now undergone phonological and morphological processes and appear to be native terms. The borrowing from Spanish has now somewhat waned. What is prevalent in Filipino

today is the rampant borrowing from English. Tabloids, dailies, weeklies, showbiz magazines, even the Cebuano weekly *Bisaya* are awashed with English words. The academicians as well as the newscasters in radio and television have adopted English words freely and liberally (please refer to Exhibits A-F)

Filipino Today

The evolution of the *Wikang Pambansa*, now known as Filipino, has not remained uneventful, as one finds out from the its historical perspective in the previous section. From 1935 onwards, to the present 1990s we have seen this language develop, first as Tagalog-based that barely ill-disguised itself as the "national language"--a clear victory of Manuel L. Quezon and the espousal of the *tagalistas* over the Bisayan hopes of Sotto and his *Ang Suga* advocates-- then, in 1959 acquiring the term "Pilipino" given to it by executive fiat to remove the last vestiges of "tagalogism" and imprint its national character. In 1965, when the "puristas" (purists) attempted to enhance the vocabulary through artificial wordsmithing and thereby intensifying the 'word war' with their critics. Then, beginning in the 1970s which saw Pilipino *finally* being used as medium of instruction at the primary and secondary levels of public and private schools. And, lastly, from its 1987 constitutional enshrinement as "Filipino" to the present --an amalgamation of Pilipino/Tagalog, Spanish, and a preponderance for English in respelled forms.

Some lexical items given in the Appendix will now be discussed here as representing a type of dominant Filipino written or spoken in: (a) the academe; (b) a language journal; (c) a Cebuano weekly of general circulation; (d) an article written by a noted Filipino linguists; (e) a series of TV news broadcasts, and (f) some Metro Manila daily tabloids. The choice of sources for these lexical items is rather arbitrary, albeit on firm linguistic ground that the best sources of data are the people themselves --what they speak, what they read, and so on. In this study, Tagalog and Cebuano speakers are taken as a combined language group comprising more than 50 per cent of the Philippine population (Atienza, 1996, citing NSO 1989 figures) with 92 per cent of Filipinos being able to speak the *wikang pambansa*, thus effectively establishing Filipino as the lingua franca of the country, if not, as the national language itself.

Exhibit A (please see Appendix) presents some lexical items used by professors of the University of the Philippines in their publications in Filipino on the same topic. These terms are arrayed alongside their English equivalent. Thus, *konsiderasyon* is "consideration" (respelled form), *natural* is, likewise, "natural" (adopted form). The original data of about 600 terms show consistency on the aforementioned forms.

Exhibit B, with lexical items sourced from the writings of of a distinguished group of Filipino writers, exhibits the same forms --respelled, affixed, or adopted (e.g., *diyagram*, *kategorya*, and *minimal*). Exhibit C, with lexical items from the highly popular and widely-circulated Cebuano weekly, *Bisaya*, shows a close congruence of Filipino usage as its staid counterparts above (Exhibits A and B). For instance, *anawanser* for "announcer," *ideposito* for "to deposit," and *tiloring* for "tailoring."

Exhibit D shows some lexical items from one of the works of the foremost proponent of the "universal approach" to Philippine languages (Constantino, 1974). These items are unabashed borrowing from the English language, such as *fyutyur* (future), *vowel* (vowel), *tsok* (chalk), *sabjektiv* (subjective), and *diksyunari* (dictionary).

Exhibit E is a transcription of terms used in selected, highly-rated TV newscasts in Filipino. Typically, the commentary is fast-paced, accompanied by live "on the spot" camera footages, with words pouring out in staccato manner, like *administrasyon, kovereyj, masaker, trafik apdeyt, insedente, aprobahan*, and the like. (The respelling of these English equivalent in Filipino is the researcher's alone, consistent with the phonological rules of Philippine languages.)

Exhibit F lists lexical terms from the proliferating Metro Manila tabloids written in Filipino and read by the *masa*, the "man in the street" literally. Familiar words like *mentaliti* (mentality), *sektor* (sector), *isyu* (issue), and *abroad* (abroad).

Taken as a whole, the lexical items drawn from Exhibits A to F reveal a common, tell-tale pattern of usage one can ignore at his/her own peril. **All point of a heavy and consistent borrowing from the English language.** Why this phenomenon is so will be explained in the next section.

Towards a Theory of Filipino

What do academicians say about Filipino? Dr. Ernesto A. Constantino, a distinguished Filipino linguist says: "*Ang pinili naming wika na idedebelop bilang wikang pambansa natin, ang tinawag naming linggwa prangka o Filipino.*" [We chose to develop as national language Filipino, that which we refer to as the lingua franca] (Constantino, 1996:p.180). Atienza (1996) describes it as "*isang wikang kompromiso, o lingua franca.*" Flores(1996) points out that Filipino is the language of the "kulturang popular na nagmula sa Metro Manila at pinapalaganap sa buong kapuluan." Another view is that of Isagani R. Cruz of DLSU who states that for him Filipino is the English-Tagalog code switch. On the other hand, Alegre (1989) expresses that "contemporary Manila Tagalog is the basis of Filipino." He claims that Tagalog is developing into the national language as it is the lingua franca of the non-Tagalog provinces.

Is the Tagalog-based Pilipino really Filipino? Dr. Constantino cites the differences between Pilipino and Filipino, to wit: Filipino (1) has more phonemes; (2) has a different system of ortography; (3) manifests a heavy borrowing from English; (4) has a different grammatical construction. Based on the trend of development of Filipino as manifested in the data presented in this study, as well as the actual usage by the linguistic trendsetters in Philippine society --newscasters (both in radio and television), Filipino writers and some academicians, showbiz personalities--it would appear that his theory is closest to reality.

There is a consensus, however, among the academicians above that Filipino is the lingua franca in Metro Manila which is inexorably pervading the regional centers through the print and broadcast media, through the songs that the local bands sing, through intellectual discussions among academicians, etc. It is the language through which a prominent Filipino linguist communicates (Exhibit D), as well as the medium of expression among academicians (Exhibit A), and of the "caretakers" or "authority" of national language development in the University of the Philippines System, namely, the writers and editors in the Sentro ng Wikang Filipino(Exhibit B).

Even the leading Cebuano weekly, *Bisaya* (which has been around for the past 68 years) has now printed in its pages loan words from English which, more often than not, retain their original spelling despite their being subjected to the Cebuano rules of grammar. One can safely say that Cebuano, like Tagalog, is undergoing linguistic change through lexical borrowing from English. Right now the Cebuanos adopt two alternate forms --the original spelling and the modified. Soon

only one form will be retained, by theory of simplification as embodied in the universals of language.

At the moment, it is very clear that English borrowing has a dominant and pervading influence in the shaping of the lingua franca which is the penultimate form of Filipino, the national language. But will this trend continue? **Language is dynamic.** This researcher is of the opinion that as long as English remains the official language of commerce, science, and technology **the trend will continue.**

Unfortunately, there isn't much borrowing from other Philippine languages. Maceda (1996) introduces some Cebuano words and phrases in her discourse. So natural was the insertion, the reader can contextualize the meaning. Atienza, in the same book included in his text "pakikipag-lakipan," the rootword of which, "lakip", is also found in the Cebuano lexicon. At the UP campus, one sees Cebuano signs like "Balay Kalinaw" and "Ugnayan sa Pahinungod." Would a little bit more adoption of words from other Philippine languages foster goodwill and unity among the ethnolinguistic groups in the country in the future? Being a Cebuano, the researcher feels proud that some Cebuano terms are now significant in the national context. Probably members of disparate ethnolinguistic groups would most likely feel the same.

On the other hand, there are expressed illusory hindrances to the concept of a unifying language, to wit: (1) it is impossible to develop a national language from one of the country's 100-plus languages; (2) the emergence of a national language will wither the other languages; (3) it is equally impossible to develop a national language based on two or more languages; (4) regionalistic pride prevails over nationalistic aspiration --like the Cebuano who insists on using his own language over Pilipino.

But considering the rapid linguistic development of both Cebuano and the Metro Manila Filipino, there seems to be hope for Filipino. And this is manifested in the perceived **convergence** of Pilipino and Cebuano through their respective borrowings from English. A few examples are given below:

English Terms	Pilipino Form	Cebuano Form	Filipino (convergence)
abroad	abroad	abroad	abroad
advertisement	adbvertisement	adbvertisement	adbvertisement
announcer	anawnsner	anawonser	anawnsner
category	kategorya	kategorya	kategorya
effect	epekto	epekto	epekto

One is confident that the converging process will continue, not only for Pilipino and Cebuano but likewise for other Philippine languages like Hiligaynon, Bikol, Ilokano, Waray, Kapampangan, and so on. Language change is, however, gradual and it will probably take several years before a substantive convergence can occur. What is apparent for now is that the convergence is already taking place.

Meanwhile, Almario (1997, p.9) gives an update on Filipino:

"Nasa kalooban ngayon ng Filipino ang paglinang sa "sanyata" at "ranggay" ng Iloko sa "uswag" at "bihud" ng Bisaya, sa "santing" ng Kapampangan, "laum" at "magayon" ng Bikol at kahit sa "buntian" ng Butuanon at "suyad" ng Manobo. Samantalay hindi

ito hadlang sa madaliang pagpasok ng "shawarma" "shashimi," "glasnost," "peres-troika," "shabu," "megabytes." "odd-even," at iba pang idadagsa ng satelayt at FAX sa globalisasyon."

What does one make out of this assertion? Are we now to believe that the process of borrowing from other Philippine and foreign languages is now a linguistic reality? Judging from the data gathered and presented here, perhaps this is only partially true. That is, borrowing is almost exclusively from the English language. And why is this so? It is difficult to give a substantive answer to this particular question, given the limited scope of this study. Perhaps one indication why there is a lot of borrowing from English compared to other Philippine languages is the facility and appropriateness or applicability of English terms to modern day-to-day living of the average urban Filipino. More so because the urbanized Filipino is constantly exposed to the trappings --high technology, media, etc.- of modern society which adopts English as its medium of communication, commerce, and education. As for Filipinos living in rural communities, the far-reaching radio and television broadcasts bring to them the linguistic trend emanating from the urban centers.

Thus is the metamorphosis of our national language, Filipino. Quick to adapt and change with the times and the demands of its speakers' culture and politics, it had initially lain quiescent beneath the controversies and debates over its birth and composition. But now, thanks to globalization and the rising quality of life of the average Filipino, it has, like the moth, grown uncomfortable inside its cocoon prison and longed for freedom of expression. Much may yet have to be done, but Filipino as national language of unity has arrived.

EXHIBIT A	EXHIBIT B	EXHIBIT C
EXHIBIT D	EXHIBIT E	EXHIBIT F

Copyright@ 1998 Jessie Grace U.Rubrico
<jaguar@broline.com>
<www.geocities.com/CollegePark/Field/4260>

REFERENCES:

- ALMARIO, VIRGILIO S. 1997. "Mulang Tagalog hanggang Filipino." In *Daluyan*. Vol. VIII, No.1-2 (1997). Quezon City: Sentro ng Wikang ilipino, University of the Philippines System. pp.1-10.
- ATIENZA, MA.ELLA. 1996. "Ang Pulitika sa Paggawa ng Palisi ng Wika." In Constantino and Atienza (eds.) *Mga Piling Diskurso sa Wika at Lipunan*. Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press. pp. 133-156.

- CONSTANTINO, ERNESTO A. 1996. "Mga Linggwistik na Ilusyon sa Pilipinas." In Constantino and Atienza (eds.). *Mga Piling Diskurso sa Wika at Lipunan*. Quezon City: UP Press. pp.179-186.
- _____, Rogelio Sicat and Pamela Cruz. 1974 *Pilipino o Filipino?* Manila: Rex Bookstore.
- CRUZ, ISAGANI R, 1997. "Ang Filipino sa Internet." In *Daluyan*, Vol VIII, No 1-2 (1997). Quezon City: Sentro ng Wikang Filipino. UP System. pp. 69-74.
- FLORES, PATRICK D. 1996. "Pamamangka sa Maraming Ilog: Ang Deseminasyon ng Filipino at ang mga Daluyan nga Kulturang Popular." In Constantino and Atienza (eds.). *Mga Piling Diskurso sa Wika at Lipunan*. Quezon City: UP Press. pp. 219-230.
- LIWAYWAY PUBLISHING HOUSE. *BISAYA (Nag-unang sinemanang Magasin sa Binisaya)*. Oktubre 16, 1996; Marso 26, 1997; and Hunyo 25, 1997. Makati:
- LOPEZ CECILIO. 1932. "Our Language Problems." *Philippine Social Science Review*, Vol. IV. No. 2 (April 1932). pp. 93-100.
- MACEDA, TERESITA G. 1996. "Wikang Pambansa: Pagpapalaya kay Bighani." In Constantino and Atienza (eds.). *Mga Piling Diskurso sa Wika at Lipunan*. Quezon City: UP Press. pp 187-194.
- RUBRICO, JESSIE GRACE U. 1997. "An Annotated Bibliography of Works and Studies on the History, Structure, and Lexicon of the Cebuano Language: 1610 to1996." Thesis (MA Linguistics),University of the Philippines, Diliman,Quezon City.
- SANTOS, EMMANUEL. 1976. *The Constitution of the Philippines: Notes and Comments*. Manila: The Philippine Society of Constitutional Law, Inc.



Copyright © 1998 Language Links. All rights reserved.

www.geocities.com/ijrubrico
jaguar743@yahoo.com; jaguar@broline.com