

## Bilingual Education In The Philippine Context

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### 1 Preliminary

This paper consists of five parts: 1) a preliminary describing the background of bilingual education in the Philippines, 2) the paradox of bilingual education in the Philippines, 3) the complementarity of Filipino and English 4) the nature of English borrowings in Filipino and 5) some final remarks focusing on the intellectualization of Filipino through English.

The Philippines consists of 7,083 islands covering an area of 115,850 square miles (300,000 sq km.). The more than 100 languages spoken in the country form its very interesting linguistic mosaic. The languages are spoken by some 54 million Filipinos inhabiting 3,000 islands. The rest are un-inhabited.

The 1980 census indicates that ten languages are generally spoken in an aggregate of 89.54% of private households, as follows:

Tagalog	29.66%
Cebuano	24.20%
Ilocano	10.30%
Hiligaynon	9.16%
Bicol	5.57%
Waray	3.98%
Kapampangan	2.77%
Pangasinan	1.84%
Maranao	1.06%
Maguindanao	1.00%

The remaining languages are each generally spoken by a fraction of a percent of the private households.

As of today, most Filipinos are trilingual, using the vernaculars as the language of the home, Filipino and English as learned in school and used as medium of instruction. The only ethnic group that may be considered truly bilingual is the Tagalog, to whom Filipino (which is Tagalog based, for the large part 86.6%) is a first language and English is a second language. To all other ethnic groups of Filipinos, Filipino and English are second languages.

In the Philippines, language policy has always been politically motivated to neutralize regionalistic prejudices. For more than eight decades now the Philippines has been beset by a complex problem

that is due mainly to its historical past: the almost four centuries of Spanish domination and less than half a century of American occupation until our independence on July 4, 1946.

The bilingual education policy first formulated in 1973 was intended to alleviate the language problem. English and Filipino are to be taught as separate subjects and specific subjects are to be taught in each language: English for mathematics and the sciences, and Filipino for the social sciences and the practical arts. After more than ten years it was found out that it would be most practical to continue the bilingual education policy; hence the 1987 bilingual education policy is supposed to be an improvement of the 1973 bilingual education policy.

In consonance with the provision of the 1987 Philippine Constitution that Filipino and English are the official languages and that Filipino shall be used as medium of instruction, the Department of Education, Culture and Sports promulgated the 1987 Bilingual Education Policy. It is interesting to note its general goal.

The general goal of the policy on Bilingual Education is to bring about competence in both Filipino and English at the national level, that is to say, the aspiration of the Filipino nation is to have its citizens possess skills in both languages to equal their functions and duties as citizens in Philippine society and equal to the needs of the country in the community of nations.

However, we note more emphasis on Filipino:

The culti say its intellectualization, is the responsibility of tertiary level institutions (colleges and universities).

## 2. The Paradox of Bilingual Education in the Philippines

I shall now point out the paradox of bilingual education in the Philippines as seen in the 1987 Policy on Bilingual Education as well as my own observations. While it is true that the 1987 Constitution provides that 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, two of the specific goals of the Bilingual Education Policy are rather contradictory to this constitutional provision: 1) enhanced learning through two languages to achieve quality education as called for by the 1987 Constitution and, 2) the maintenance of English as a Language of Wider Communication for the Philippines and as a non-exclusive Language of Science and Technology. These two specific goals seem to express the dilemma that confronts education in the Philippines. While we recognize the need for improving the quality of life of the so-called subsistence population (farmers, unskilled laborers, the landless laborers - all comprise some 70% of our population) through

better elementary and high school education, we also realize the continuing need for English for quality higher education.

The problem simply boils down to this: choosing a language that would be most effective for the education of Filipinos. There is no question that Filipino would be more effective as the sole medium of instruction in the elementary level while at the same time teaching English as a subject to the point that students will attain competence in taking up science and mathematics in English at the high school level. Elementary education should enable the students to gain some skills in the practical arts and in agriculture. The use of Filipino as medium of instruction in the elementary level would be useful in the inculcation of cultural values. Since science and mathematics begin to be more complicated in the high school level, these subjects would be better taught in English. All other subjects - the social sciences and the practical arts are to be taught in Filipino. We thus see the instrumental value of teaching English as a subject, in both the elementary and high school levels. Filipino should also be taught as subjects in both levels to enable the students to gain proficiency and thus better understand the subjects where Filipino is to be the medium of instruction.

One stark reality has to be accepted: at present it is not possible to study advanced science in Filipino. Hardly anyone has written a book on any advanced science in Filipino. We have to admit the inadequacy of Filipino in dealing with technologically complex concepts.

Translation of books on the sciences is needed. But it is the specialist himself with the help of a language specialist (if he finds this necessary) who will be able to best translate a book in his field. What is needed is competence in both Filipino and English as well as mastery of his field. Translation by the language specialist alone only confuses the reader.

Whether we like it or not, we have to accept that English is the major source of knowledge in practically all fields of learning. Since advanced knowledge in all disciplines are accessible in English, the university student should at least be able to read such material in English rather than laboriously read a book that is not well translated in Filipino. We thus see that English serves as primary resource language for the tertiary level. Only 20% of textbooks used in the tertiary level are in Filipino, generally on Philippine literature Filipino language, social sciences like history and psychology. Paradoxically, Filipino has to depend on English materials for its intellectualization.

In the tertiary level proficiency in reading and writing in English cannot be over-emphasized in a country like the Philippines where English had been the sole medium of instruction up to the outbreak of World War II, and the major medium of instruction up to the present. It would be a pity to just totally discard English simply because of anti-Americanism.

Despite the intense nationalism that now pervades in the Philippines we see the many roles that English plays in our everyday lives. English continues to play a major role in government, education, print media,

what is most needed are reading and writing skills in English. There is difficulty in understanding ideas learned in a well-developed language like English and there is even more difficulty in re-expressing them in Filipino. The students might as well read the material in the original English text. At the elementary level the introduction of simple scientific concepts are best done in Filipino.

### **3. The Complementarity of Filipino and English**

Today English is being eclipsed by Filipino in various domains of life in the Philippines. The problem, however, is that there is a dearth of good materials in Filipino, particularly in the various academic disciplines. The 1987 Bilingual Education Policy is good, but teachers of Filipino particularly in the tertiary level are far from prepared and therefore are uninspired. A great part of the success of the implementation of the 1987 Bilingual Education Policy lies in them.

In the limited time that Filipino and English are taught as subjects, the skills learned in one could complement the skills learned in the other. My own experience of using English scientific articles as springboard for class discussions and writing compositions in Filipino corroborates this idea. A word of caution, though. This situation is possible only when the student has about equal proficiency in Filipino and English, as most students in the University of the Philippines have; the teacher likewise must have equal proficiency in the two languages.

In connection with this idea of complementation between the two languages, it is important that the teachers be "educational engineers" who can make use of all available resources, combining them into the most profitable mixture, giving their own individuality and that of their students.

However, two extremes should be avoided. on the one hand over-sophisticated procedures which place too much emphasis on the use of instruments and techniques change, and on the other hand easy solutions which they rely on too much simply on the ground of common sense.

### **4. The Nature of English Borrowings in Filipino**

As to be expected, because of the historical event that brought the American colonizers to our country in 1898, the English language has made substantial contributions in six domains: 1) administrative (army, government, organization, politics, etc.), 2) education, 3) domestic



(food, house, clothing, family, etc.), 4) recreation, 5) science and technology, 6) miscellaneous. All these were the result of the introduction of a democratic form of government, a strong sense of public education, as well as bringing in the notion of a need for relaxation at the end of a day's hard work by means of sports and other forms of recreation. And even after we formally separated from the U.S.A. on July 4, 1946, these ideas prevailed. Thus borrowing of English words was necessary in order to meet new conditions that came about as a result of American colonization. This borrowing continued even after 1946 for the reason that more concepts have come up in the areas of democratic form of government, public education, recreation, science, and technology - aspects of day-to-day living that we have learned to love and to assimilate into our culture.

There are at least five ways by which English words are borrowed. First by direct borrowing the original spelling of the borrowed words are retained: *vendor, bill, driver, kidnapper, drug, commuter, brown-out*. The plural form of borrowed nouns are also borrowed. *vendors, bills, drivers, kidnappers*, etc. Continued borrowing of the plural form of English. I feel, would not endanger the morphology of Filipino nouns. While there is a tendency to combine the plural marker *mga* with the plural form of English nouns as in *mga drivers, mga vendors*, Filipino nouns with ending are very unlikely to occur. Thus *mga bahags* ('girls'), *mga bulaklaks* ('flowers') are unlikely to occur for such forms would be jarring both to the eye and the ear. However the forms *mga girls, mga flowers* would not really be revolting to our sight and ears. Students under our bilingual education are aware that girls and flowers are plural forms in English, but as students of Filipino they cannot help incorporating the plural marker *mga*, which also occurs in many Philippine languages.

I might add that English borrowings in their original spelling still unstable in form, for in the classroom hardly any teacher of Filipino will tolerate them in written compositions. Hence the teacher has a great role in the standardization of the national language.

The second method of borrowing English words involves re-spelling the English words into the Filipino spelling system: *aprub* ('approve'), *badyet* ('budget'), *bilib* ('believe'), *kendi* ('candy'), *kolateral* ('collateral'), *kolokyum* ('colloquium').

They might seem easier to read because the spelling is phonetic but to a Filipino who has at least finished high school, words like these above might not appeal to his sight, which has gotten used to the English spelling of such words. But to those who are not so competent in English, the modification of the shape of these English loans is acceptable because it is in keeping with the phonology of Filipino.

The third method of borrowing English words involves affixation, i.e., using a Filipino affix with an English base. In most cases the

English base undergoes no change at all, as in the following:

*nag-apply, nag-abroad, pag-ambush, bina back-up, mag-bold, pang-break, na-carnap, nag-defect*

In other cases the English base to which an affix is added undergoes some change, as shown in the following:

boxing	x --- ks	boksing
control	c --- k	kinokontrol
deliver	e --- i	ididiliber
	v --- b	
issue	ssu --- syu	mag-isyu
hold-up	u --- a	holdap
		hinoldap
		holdapan
snob	o --- a	snab
surrender	rr --- r	pagpapasurender

The fourth method of borrowing English words is to make it appear as though they were borrowed from Spanish but actually certain endings in Spanish like *-a* and *ero* have been added to the English base.

<i>Filipino</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Spanish</i>
tsansa	chance	fortuna, sucrte
aplikante	applicant	suplicante
groseriya	grocery	especieres
boksingero	boxer	pugil
dentisteriya	dentistry	ortodontogia
siyentipiko	scientist	persona versada en scicneia

On the other hand, it is sometimes difficult to ascertain the source of a borrowed word in Filipino because the English and Spanish cognates are identical.

<i>Filipino</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>Spanish</i>
artipisyal	artificial	artificial
lokal	local	local
miserable	miserable	miserable

A fifth method of borrowing is through calquing or loan translation as illustrated in the following:

bahay-bata	uterus
bahay-kalakalan	business firm
mamatay-sunog	fireman
bahay-sanglaan	pawnshop

Many cannot help harbor the fear that too many English loans would creolize Filipino. I think this fear need not bother us since we know that the physical content of our culture is changing largely in terms of science and technology rather than in terms of Filipino traditions and values. The growing amount of borrowing can be attributed to two factors: education and mobility. Our so-called bilingual education policy gives emphasis to the development of competence in both Filipino and English. It is thus understandable why more English loans keep creeping into Filipino; bilingualism facilitates the admission of loan words. There is no need to fear that English has entered into the lexical heart of Filipino. I feel, as a student of language, that we are borrowing English words in the direction of native patterns, i.e. there is a strong tendency to accommodate English loans into the Filipino spelling system.

##### **5. Some Final Remarks**

It is at the tertiary level that the problem regarding using Filipino as a medium of instruction in the various disciplines arises. Since at present the main problem that besets the Philippines is its deteriorating economy, there is hardly money to allocate for the development of teaching materials in Filipino and to translate various works in English into Filipino. The government has more urgent problems to attend to. There is therefore a need to use English as a medium of instruction on the tertiary level. So there is still a need for teacher training programs in English as well as improvement of curricula in teaching English as a second language. Some universities like the University of the Philippines, De la Salle University, Ateneo de Manila University, Silliman University and some other universities in the Visayas and in Mindanao have to be the bastions of the English language not because we want to remain as puppets of American imperialism but because it can be used for selective modernization without necessarily being westernized.

While it is stipulated in the 1987 bilingual education policy that Filipino is to be developed for scholarly use in the various disciplines on the tertiary level, I think it is going to be a very slow process. The intention of the 1987 bilingual education policy is good but until such time when we have a continuous rapid production of good

materials in Filipino, English will remain the source language for the intellectualization of Filipino. It is indeed a paradox! As William McKey (1978) says.

“Only before God and the linguist are all languages equal. Everyone knows that you can go further with some languages than you can with others.”

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