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Notes and Comments

THE ROLE OF THE FILIPINO BILINGUAL IN THE MODERN WORLD*

Emy M. Pascasio

BILINGUALISM — A PHENOMENON OF THE MODERN WORLD

Of the various social and technical problems which beset the new and developing nations in particular, a sizable number turn out to be directly related to language in some way. In the Philippines widespread illiteracy is not the problem. Some of our problems are lack of a standardized and fully registered national language, the need for pedagogical tools in locally adapted language teaching, and the lack of modern technical vocabularies for communicating scientific knowledge.

Bilingualism is a phenomenon of the modern world. Bilingual countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America have initiated programs oriented to the recognition and preservation of important languages within the national territory, supplemented by the adoption of one or more languages to serve for official purposes and for communication across language boundaries within the nation as well as with other nations.

Bilingualism, as well as multilingualism, — the facility to use two or more languages — is an integral aspect of social interaction in Philippine society. There is no common language in the country but there are three official languages — English, Pilipino, and Spanish. One's choice of what language to use depends on what purpose, to whom, when, where, and why. Language maintenance and code switching are both used as devices to maintain, or alternatively, to reduce language distance or social distance between Filipinos who come from a linguistically diverse and a highly stratified society.

THE BILINGUAL EDUCATION POLICY

Language plays an important role in manpower development, especially in the Philippines, where manpower is one of the greatest resources. The National Board of Education is cognizant of this, and in consonance with the new Constitution of 1973, upon its recommendation the bilingual

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education policy was enunciated officially in Department Order No. 25, series 1974, on June 19, 1974 by the Secretary of Education and Culture, in order to develop a bilingual nation competent in the use of English and Filipino. It is felt that bilingual education can be a great force in fostering educational change in the Philippines.

Filipino and English are to be used separately as media of instruction in definite subject areas, beginning in Grade I, with the vernacular in the locality as the auxiliary medium of instruction in Grades I and II. Filipino will be the medium of instruction for Social Studies/Social Science, Work Education, Character Education, Health Education and Physical Education; whereas English is the medium for Mathematics and Science, Music and Art.

The aim of this bilingual education policy is to define more specifically the roles of the two languages — English for international communication, science and technology; and Filipino for social and cultural life. Furthermore it will accelerate the progressive development and dissemination of Filipino so that it can play its Constitutional role as one of the official languages and so that it can fully serve its purposes as a unifying force and a medium to express the Filipinos' national heritage, sentiments, and culture.

THE ROLE OF THE FILIPINO BILINGUAL IN THE MODERN WORLD

In our research, we consider the bilingual to be any individual who possesses at least *one* of the four language skills (reading, writing, speaking, or listening) even to a minimal degree. We view bilingualism, therefore, as a continuum which extends from *dominance* in Language P (Filipino) to *balance* in Filipino and English to *dominance* in Language E (English). A native speaker of Tagalog, for example, who also understands or speaks, but does not read or write, a little English would be considered a Tagalog-English bilingual who is Tagalog dominant. A person who is equally able to understand, speak, read, and write in two (or more) languages would be considered a balanced bilingual in those particular languages. Understandably, balanced bilinguals are relatively few and far between, although in the Philippines there are many who are native speakers of a Philippine language and who possess a considerable degree of skill in English. This does not mean, however, having absolutely equal competence in the two languages. The position in which most of us educated Filipinos find ourselves at the present time is that we are able to use either of the two languages without any apparent difficulty whenever the need arises.

The Filipino bilingual is expected to be able to control with competence at least two of his linguistic systems, English and Filipino, for these are his tools for learning various concepts, acquiring information, manipulating symbols, and for communicating his thoughts and experiences to others. These are all basic aspects of intellectual functioning. Since the Filipino bilingual lives in a world where events are presented to him in all their

complex immediacy, his control of just one language such as Pilipino or English would be inadequate.

It is through bilingual education, that is, the use of Pilipino and English as media of instruction in the schools, that we can hope so to equip the Filipino bilingual that he will be better prepared to examine the nature of change in this modern world, including its speed and dimensions, and also to enable him to understand better the distinctions that must be made between change in the past and that which is on-going. He must be innovative and he must also be adaptive to those circumstances that he cannot change. His competence in English will equip him to handle modern technological developments, and he can then keep up with the rapidity of technological change. Much of the world's store of knowledge is more accessible in English than in Pilipino. The accelerated pace of research has even made it more difficult for scientific, technical, and operating personnel to keep abreast of recent developments. The time lag is minimized, however, if one knows English, for he can use it as a tool for acquiring and disseminating the necessary information. The role of English may be diminishing on the national level, but certainly there is still a great need of it for international participation and to enable the Filipino bilingual to cope with the information explosion, since it is a language of wider communication at the international level.

However, we do not want to continue with English as the only medium of instruction, since this is no longer realistic. Furthermore this runs contrary to our effort at finding ourselves and developing a sense of nationhood out of our own indigenous identity. Perhaps we can say that the Filipino bilingual of today possesses a strong national identity but must seek to render it more functional for the purposes of national well-being in the modern world. Pilipino rather than English can better serve as a medium to express our cultural traditions, values, beliefs, and national aspirations. It is through the Filipino bilingual's competence in Pilipino that we as educators can hope to develop in him a deep sense of selfhood, creativity, love for work, efficiency in human interpersonal relationships. Only then can we expect responsible Filipino leaders and a national citizenry that the country can be proud of.

Modernization and development of Pilipino has been accelerated within the past decade, but to make it adequate for instructional purposes from the elementary to the university level will take time. At this stage, it is not possible to shift to Pilipino as the sole medium of instruction in all instructional levels. Perhaps this is feasible in some schools in the Tagalog speaking regions on the lower levels, elementary and secondary, and where there is no need for English. To move, however, toward monolingualism in the medium of instruction, that is, Pilipino, is rather premature. In my opinion, it would be a very myopic perspective to aim at this goal of monolingualism in this modern world where advancement of knowledge and technological developments could only be accessible through the use of several languages.

A timetable for the implementation of the bilingual education policy has been given whereby during the school year 1984, all graduates of

tertiary curricula should be able to pass examinations in English and/or Filipino for the practice of their professions. Let us therefore give this particular educational policy a chance to be effectively implemented. This can only be done by a concerted team effort between the educators and administrators to design a curriculum where we can develop the Filipino bilingual's potentialities to the maximum. Only then can we hopefully produce Filipino bilinguals who will be well educated, highly knowledgeable, and can take pride in the Philippine institutions, and work to alleviate the conditions of poverty, inequality, illiteracy in this country and to raise the standard of living.

From now until 1984 a systematic program of evaluating the various bilingual education programs being implemented in the country and more research studies on the Filipino bilingual and Philippine societal bilingualism should be encouraged. For these results will serve as the basis for careful language planning for future directions. Careful assessment of manpower, materials, and financial resources tied to our needs and aspirations should also be taken into serious consideration whenever reforms are promulgated, for they affect the bulk of the Filipino population. We cannot afford to be haphazardly shifting from one language policy to another without having looked into all the pros and cons objectively.

THE NEED FOR SUITABLE AND RELEVANT BILINGUAL EDUCATION CURRICULA

We need a curriculum appropriate for today's Filipino bilingual and to build toward future planning. It should provide a variety of intellectual, artistic, creative, and athletic activities from which each learner could take according to his abilities, needs, and aspirations. The curriculum should be relevant to the lives of the children and youth for whom the curriculum exists. Through their reading materials, for instance, city children must meet people like themselves. For them the realities of the city must become part of their subject matter if they are to improve human relations, develop citizenship, widen horizons, and meet the problems of urban living.

It is not impossible to achieve a viable bilingual education curriculum from the elementary continuing through the tertiary level where there is a balance of the three streams: science and mathematics, social studies/social sciences, and the humanities; for these comprise our national life and scientific technology. The school should be the place where, in addition to being trained for performing the techniques necessary for earning money, the Filipino bilingual is helped to become a better person in all facets of his future life. Making a living is not restricted to accumulating monetary wealth, but it includes searching for and achieving wisdom, understanding of self and environment, and happiness.

It would not be pedagogically sound to design a uniform bilingual education program for all the Philippine schools, but certainly we could have for a general aim a near optimal fulfillment of the Filipino bilingual's

own capacities in the face of accelerating technological and depersonalized forces. The Filipino bilingual through English and Pilipino as media of instruction should be brought into the modern world as easily and as quickly as our schools can bring him, while preserving in him the desirable values of his own society. English and Pilipino (as a second language for the non-Tagalog speakers) should be approached through the mother tongue. The transition should be made as smoothly and as gradually as possible. The amount of the second language used may be increased gradually, with the speed controlled by local factors. As soon as the competence of the class allows the learners to understand the subject matter well enough, the second language can, if necessary, be used as the medium of instruction.

An effective bilingual education program should take into account the cultural and language experiences the child brings with him and build upon these. Beginning instruction through the medium of the child's native language is not only pedagogically desirable from the standpoint of increased educational efficiency; in such a program, the child and his culture are recognized as worthy of consideration. Giving him pride in his cultural heritage will at once help him to improve his self-image and increase his success potential, so that he will be able to benefit more from what the educational system has to offer him.

There can be variations in the bilingual education programs for the different schools. Where all or almost all the learners are proficient in Pilipino there is no problem in implementing the bilingual education policy. Where Pilipino is not the native language, the shift from the mother tongue to Pilipino needs to be programmed, depending on the availability of instructional materials, proficiency of the teachers and learners in the language, and financial resources to implement the necessary changes.

The degree to which the students are expected to use English and Pilipino will also modify the program. For those who are not following a curriculum leading to college education, more attention should be placed proportionately on learning practical things, such as community development work, through the mother tongue; for those who are working for entrance to college, the second language, be it English or Pilipino or both, will become increasingly important.

Functional bilingualism in English and Pilipino for the Filipino will enrich him and make him more flexible and adaptable to his diversified linguistic environment and the modern world.