

philippine studies

Ateneo de Manila University • Loyola Heights, Quezon City • 1108 Philippines

The 1973 Constitution and The Bilingual Education Policy of the Department of Education and Culture

Andrew B. Gonzalez, F.S.C.

Philippine Studies vol. 22, no. 3-4 (1974) 325–337

Copyright © Ateneo de Manila University

Philippine Studies is published by the Ateneo de Manila University. Contents may not be copied or sent via email or other means to multiple sites and posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's written permission. Users may download and print articles for individual, noncommercial use only. However, unless prior permission has been obtained, you may not download an entire issue of a journal, or download multiple copies of articles.

Please contact the publisher for any further use of this work at philstudies@admu.edu.ph.

<http://www.philippinestudies.net>
Fri June 27 13:30:20 2008

The 1973 Constitution and the Bilingual Education Policy of the Department of Education and Culture*

ANDREW GONZALEZ, F.S.C.

1. INTRODUCTION

Much ink has been poured on the question of the national language of the Philippines, the Constitutional provision, and the new bilingual education policy of the Department of Education and Culture.

The purpose of this paper is not to add fuel to the polemics but to clarify the issues on the language question from the point of view of the New Constitution of 1973 and the Language Policy of the Department of Education and Culture, enunciated officially in Department Order No. 25, series 1974, on June 19, 1974, by the Secretary of Education and Culture, upon the recommendation of the National Board of Education.

Having clarified the issues and the policies, problems arising from the policies will be pointed out.

2. THE PHILIPPINES: A CASE STUDY OF LINGUISTIC DISSONANCE

2.1. *The Constitutional Provisions on a Common National Language*

Following the lead of Yabes (1972) in one of his many papers on the national language question, a distinction must be made between national language, official language, and medium or media of instruction.

*An earlier version of this paper was presented as one of the Benitez Memorial Lectures at Abelardo Hall, University of the Philippines, Quezon City, on October 26, 1974.

Section 3, Article XV of the new Constitution has the following three provisions:

- (1) This Constitution shall be officially promulgated in English and in Pilipino, and translated into each dialect spoken by over fifty thousand people, and into Spanish and Arabic. In case of conflict, the English text shall prevail.

This provision of the Constitution merely states the language in which the fundamental law of the land is to be promulgated and translated and which text will prevail in case of a conflict.

Far more significant for the consideration of this study is the second provision of the same section:

- (2) The National Assembly shall take steps toward the development and formal adoption of a common national language to be known as Filipino.

Herein lies the *casus belli* and its implications. What in effect this has done, assuming that the ratification of the New Constitution of 1973 by the *barangays* is valid, is to supersede the earlier 1935 Constitutional provision, namely:

Sec. 3. The National Assembly shall take steps towards the development and adoption of a common national language based on one of the existing native languages.

The veracity of the charges made by certain parties of the underhanded tactics employed by the Style Committee of the 1934 Constitutional Convention in emasculating the substance of the Vinzons compromise formula is not at issue here (see Yabes 1973:2-4, footnote 2.) Whatever the underhanded tactics that were allegedly used, the present section 3 of the 1935 Constitution stands, and it was on this basis that Tagalog (renamed Pilipino in 1959) was chosen as the basis of the Philippine national language and subsequently received support for its development and dissemination.

What is interesting from a legal and historical point of view is the clear implication of the second provision of section 3, Article XV, of the New Constitution, namely, the Filipino people shall have to begin all over again in their search for a common national language.

In plain simple terms, the present provisions is a return to the pre-1935 Constitution situation — the Filipino people are a people once more without a national language. To adapt the title of Pirandello's classic play, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, we are a nation of forty million in search of a common national language — once more. This 'common national language' to be called Filipino clearly assumes a linguistic principle that one can develop a language which is an amalgam of many languages, formally adopt this amalgam and eventually disseminate it.

One cannot mistake the spirit of the provision, judging from the speeches of the constitutional convention delegates as well as from the minutes of their discussions during the meetings of the Committee on National Language. The only formula that the members of the convention would accept as a compromise would be a *Sprachmischung*, a language that would be an amalgamation of rules from the grammars of the Philippine languages, to use the terminology of the Chairman of the Committee, Delegate Gerardo M. S. Pepito, as well as an amalgam of many lexicons from all languages — a 'universal approach' that would take in not only lexical items from the Philippine languages but from almost any language. Again, the phonological system of such a common national language is likewise a conglomeration of all the existing sounds found in the Philippine languages as well as sounds found in English, Spanish, and perhaps for some, given the particular focus placed on the Muslim groups, Arabic.

With the perfervid and stimulating activities of linguistics these days, there is a plethora of grammatical models, ways of conceptualizing how the elements of language interrelate. While there are many disagreements as to models of language structure, there is unanimity that every language must have a sound system, a syntax or system of concatenating words, and words or lexical items — as well as a semantic structure.

Like Bloomfieldians, the constitutional convention delegates shied away from semantics, but they have in effect asked the National Assembly, not yet convened, to take steps to appoint an agency that will amalgamate the phonological systems,

morphological and syntactic features, as well as lexical items, of the various Philippine languages.

If one were to take a currently popular model (Chomsky 1957, 1965) and translate the mandate of the Constitution into linguistic terms, one in effect is asked to create a base structure, generated by base-rules (earlier called phrase-structure rules) which are common to the Philippine languages, to plug in lexical items which are likewise common to the Philippine languages (and in plugging in lexical items also plugging in phonological segments common to the Philippine languages), and presumably to set down a series of transformations to convert base structure into surface structure. Since transformations bring out changes in surface features as their output, presumably, the common national language will likewise use transformations which are common to the Philippine languages.

2.2. Feasibility of a Common National Language

Is this linguistically possible?

Constantino has been successful in setting down common base rules for the Philippine languages (1965, 1970). This is not unexpected, since the Philippine languages belong to one linguistic family and since the languages of the world look very much alike anywhere in their base structure.

What has not yet been done but is theoretically possible is to list down a series of ordered transformations to convert such base structures into surface structures, using a common set of transformations; no one in comparative grammar has as yet attempted such a complete inventory of common transformations, although Constantino's (1965) earlier work made a first attempt at it.

Since all languages of the world borrow extensively from each other in their lexicons and in fact sometimes import an altogether different phonetic system into the language so that in effect we can have what Fries and Pike (1949) call 'co-existent phonetic systems' in the same individual, importing foreign and common Philippine lexical items as well as importing foreign sounds, depending on one's versatility, is possible.

In the complete transformational model of Chomsky, one likewise has phonological rules that convert underlying forms into surface phonetic structures. Again, such rules can be inventoried, the common ones selected, then ordered, and perhaps artificially combined together to make up a common Philippine system of phonological rules. Since so little has been done in generative phonology in this country, we do not know what such a purportedly exhaustive listing of common phonological rules will be like. However, since the Philippine languages belong to one linguistic family, there will be many phonological rules in common. In fact, languages begin to diversify and become dialects, eventually becoming mutually unintelligible and thus separate languages, by specific rules.

The mandate of the Constitution of 1973 in linguistic terms really amounts to an order to do a linguistic reconstruction of Common Philippine (here one can borrow Brandstetter's concept of a Common Language rather than Dempwolf's concept of a Proto-Language, a *Gemein-Philippinesisch* rather than an *Ur-Philippinesisch*), to make an integrated language out of this reconstruction, and eventually to make this language a living language.

The claim of the proponents of the universal approach is theoretically possible. Since language is so complicated a reality, however, and since the more linguists study even only one language, the more they discover its complexities, the practicality and feasibility of such an enterprise is open to question.

Such an enterprise would demand an exhaustive study of all the Philippine languages (or at least of the major ones), listing down all their rules. This enterprise is never-ending for a linguist. Not even the English language has been able to find a linguist bold enough to say that his grammar is a complete grammar; it is always a 'partial grammar' or a 'segment of a grammar'. Then there is the phonology to be studied, an enterprise barely started. Hardly anything has been done in semantics. We are a little better off in the area of lexicography, thanks to the work of the Institute of National Language.

But presuming one has arrived at the codification of such a common national language, put such codification in a prescrip-

tive grammar as well as a dictionary, can one make such a language live? A *langue* does not exist in some empyrean Platonic world of ideas apart from its existence as a system of rules in the brain of each individual as an idiolect. There is enough commonality to make communication possible between individuals of the same community, even of the same country, or perhaps of several countries, but ultimately, a language exists in the brain of a human being and pedagogical and prescriptive and theoretical grammars are imperfect attempts to codify what exists in the brain.

There are no case histories of an artificial language ever being spoken by more than a few cognoscenti, certainly, never as a community.

There are case studies (the classic one being Hebrew) of an ancient language being revived — but there were special sociological reasons that motivated the Jews, after the nightmare of Hitler's Germany, to forge an identity for themselves in a land they were re-claiming. Moreover, the language continued its presence in the daily prayers and spiritual readings of the people. It was a question for Eliezer Ben Yehudah of disseminating a language that was the possession of a religious elite.

A comparable situation does not exist in the Philippines motivating Filipinos to begin speaking a Philippine version of Esperanto to be called FILIPINO.

A language, to become alive, needs living men who accept it, internalize its rules in their minds, and use this language as an instrument of thought and communication. Without such a supportive community, no language will live, least of all, an artificially mixed language. For this mixed language has to be *creolized* — it has to be learned from birth as a first language — only then will it continue to live. It cannot be imposed — it must be accepted. And for it to live, it cannot be learned from books and from prescriptions. It is learned from a community that speaks it.

2.3. *The Legal Dilemma on the National Language*

Much more interesting at this juncture is the legal dilemma

faced by Filipinos on the national language question. During this interim period under Martial Law, when the National Assembly has as yet not been convoked, no action can be taken towards the formation of this common national language. Judging from the discussions of the delegates, the agency for this will be a National Language Academy to replace the Institute of National Language.

Even with the convocation of the National Assembly and the appointment of an agency to oversee the development and presumably dissemination of this common national language to be called Filipino, we shall for some time in effect be without a real national language except a name, FILIPINO, the reality behind which is still *in fieri*, in a state of becoming.

This poses a problem: What is the legal status of Pilipino at present and during the years when FILIPINO is being codified?

This question for understandable reasons disturbed the present incumbent of the Institute of National Language, who posed the question to the incumbent Secretary of Justice. Secretary Vicente Abad Santos' reply is as follows:

This is in reply to your request for opinion on whether or not:

- (1) "Pilipino is still the national language under the New Constitution" . . . (Letter of Secretary Vicente Abad Santos to Director Ponciano B. Pineda, dated May 17, 1973).

The Secretary of Justice continues:

Under the new Constitution, the National Assembly is again directed to take steps towards the development and formal adoption of a "common national language to be known as Filipino," which would seem to be an implied rejection of the Tagalog-based *Pilipino*, as our existing national language. However, there is no question that Pilipino continues to be an official language, until otherwise directed by law, as in fact the Constitution is required to be officially promulgated in Pilipino.

This last sentence is irrelevant to the point at issue, namely, whether, here and now, Pilipino is still our national language.

No one is questioning the law that Pilipino is one of our official languages at present. The letter continues:

Also, the existing law and executive orders issued in accordance therewith [the Old Constitution], which provide the legal basis for the adoption of Pilipino as our national language, continue to be in force, until the National Assembly provides otherwise, as they are not inconsistent with the Constitution. What is contemplated in the new Constitution is the development and adoption of a common national language to be called "Filipino", which, in contradistinction to the provisions of the former Constitution, is not required to be based on one of the existing native languages; nowhere is it provided that the existing national language called "Pilipino" is immediately abrogated and set aside.

The opinion of the Secretary of Justice, undoubtedly much to the comfort of the Director of the Institute of National Language, is that in the interim during which FILIPINO is in process of formation and codification, Tagalog-based Pilipino continues to be the national language.

However, judging from the spirit of the discussions of the delegates and holding only to the letter of the New Constitution of 1973, ratified on January 17, 1973, a case can be made for the proposition that the national language of the Philippines at present is a language called FILIPINO and no longer Pilipino. The fact that FILIPINO is only a name, with a *significatum* ('an amalgam of the Philippine languages') but without a *denotatum* (there is no living language to point to) — hence, a word having a sense but no reference is not material to the legality of FILIPINO as the national language of the Philippines.

This is a legal dilemma that the National Assembly of the future must face.

2.4. *Pilipino and English as Official Languages*

Moving on to the third and final provision of section 3, Article XV:

Until otherwise provided by law, English and Pilipino shall be the official languages.

On March 15, 1973, by Presidential Decree 155, the President added Spanish as an official language 'for certain purposes', presumably for purposes of documentation in government files, 'which are written in the Spanish language pending their translation into either English or Pilipino language.'

Note, therefore, that there has always been maintained in our history a distinction between the national language (presumably necessary as a symbol of our national unity) and official languages (presumably languages acceptable in courts of law, public pronouncements, legal and assembly debates, and above all, languages for official documentation). Official languages are dictated by necessity arising from currency and availability of linguistic tools. Thus, English, in addition to Spanish, was declared an official language in 1910. The 1935 Constitution included the official status of these two languages in the fundamental law of the land. Eventually, in 1946, Tagalog (renamed Pilipino) became an official language. Again, what the 1973 Constitution and Presidential Decree 155 have done is merely to confirm the status quo: namely, there are three official languages in the Philippines — English, Pilipino, and for 'certain purposes', Spanish. Filipino will have to be codified and disseminated before it can become an *official* language.

2.5. Linguistic Dissonance

This section of the paper was subtitled, 'The Philippines: A case study of linguistic dissonance'. The term *linguistic dissonance* is an adaptation of a term from the psychologist Festinger, *cognitive dissonance*, which in the parlance of psychology means that an individual experiences discomfort when he holds logically inconsistent cognitions about an object or event, and that he is thus motivated to reduce the dissonance through cognitive and attitudinal changes. There is thus a lack of harmony, a discordance or dissonance, between two cognitions and a resulting discomfort from such cognitive dissonance and a natural attempt to effect consonance.

The language situation in the Philippines presents a situation of *linguistic dissonance*, a lack of harmony in our language situation between our perceptions of the current situation (a multilingual community in which English and Pilipino are well disseminated either as first or second languages, mostly the latter) and our perceptions resulting from the new Constitution that we are in search of still a third language, FILIPINO as yet not formed, which will become the expression of our national identity. Linguistically, FILIPINO is but a concept, nebulous in its outlines, while Pilipino and English are living realities — as are the other local languages.

One might even argue for a case of *anomie*, another psychological term made famous by the McGill psycholinguists, a state of having no norms, because one is caught between two cultures and two value systems. The Filipino people right now, language-wise, are in a state of *anomie*, where we are really without norms so far as our national language is concerned and in some ways torn between FILIPINO, as yet undefined, and ENGLISH AND PILIPINO, which are clearly defined.

3. DISSONANCE SQUARED: FURTHER LACK OF HARMONY BETWEEN MEDIA OF INSTRUCTION AND NATIONAL LANGUAGE

Earlier, a distinction was made between national language and official language(s). We have to distinguish further between the first two terms and medium/media of instruction — the language(s) used to teach in our school systems.

In a typology of language situations, our present situation, comparable to those of other developing countries with a colonial past, is one wherein our media of instruction do not jibe with our national language. Often enough, national languages are in process of formation or if already existing, in process of standardization, while official languages and languages of instruction are available and suitable for intellectual and scholarly purposes. We are unique however in having selected a national language which is still not existent but which will be formed and amalgamated from existing languages.

In effect, what this means is that as long as the new common

national language is as yet not formed, we have to make use of other languages for media of instruction. There is normally a good fit between official languages and languages of instruction, in this case, both English and Pilipino.

Presumably, this is the thinking behind the policy of bilingual education presently being implemented by the Department of Education and Culture.

The policy, earlier enunciated in principle by President Marcos in a speech at the Marikina School of Arts and Trades for Pilipino supervisors (May 7, 1973), states that we are going to be a bilingual nation, competent in both Pilipino and English. The National Board of Education took this principle, enunciated it as official education policy, and commissioned Dr. Liceria Brillantes-Soriano to form a committee on the implementation of a bilingual policy. The committee submitted its recommendations to the National Board of Education. In turn, the Secretary of Education and Culture operationalized this policy by Department Order No. 25, series 1974, and enunciated the mode of implementation of the policy.

'To develop a bilingual nation competent in the use of both English and Pilipino,' Pilipino and English are to be used separately as media of instruction in definite areas, beginning in Grade I, with the vernacular in the locality as the auxiliary medium of instruction in Grades I and II.

The division according to subject areas is:

Pilipino Social Studies/Social Science, Work Education,
 Character Education, Health Education and Physical
 Education

English Mathematics and Science, Music and Art

This separation of subjects by medium of instruction follows a pattern which has parallels in the Republic of Singapore policy, although our media are two rather than four, as they are in Singapore (English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil).

The aim is to make bilingualism a permanent feature of Philippine life — and to make a division of domains for the use of each language: Pilipino for the domain of social and cultural

life, and English for the domain of international communication and science and technology. Undoubtedly, it is foreseen that the creative minority of our society will become proficient in both and ultimately effect a transfer of skills from one to the other, to the mutual benefit of both languages. English will be enriched, and in turn, Pilipino will be elaborated and intellectualized.

The timetable, the means for implementation, the attendant manpower and materials as well as logistic problems affecting the feasibility and speed of implementation will have to be the subject of an altogether different study.

4. INTERRELATION: THE CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISION AND THE BILINGUAL EDUCATION POLICY

Whereas in developed countries which happily have solved their language problems, we have a situation whereby the national language, the official language, and the medium of instruction are one (for example, the United States, France, Spain, etc.), what we have in the Philippines is a lack of fit between the national language on the one hand and the official languages and media of instruction on the other hand.

The situation between the official status of Pilipino and English and the continuing use of Pilipino and English at all levels of the educational system according to defined domains (subject areas) is consistent and harmonious. One of the principal means of disseminating language knowledge and language use is the school system. In effect, the school system policy has been geared to perpetuate and propagate the use and the development of the official languages recognized in the Constitution.

The lack of fit, or disharmony or dissonance, lies with the national language, which is distinct from the official languages and because as yet not codified cannot even be taught as a subject, least of all, used as a medium of instruction.

In the Philippine situation, the national language — a common national language — has become the product of a political settlement motivated by the emotions and cultural identities of a multilingual and poly-ethnic people — an artificial symbol (like the flag, the national anthem, the name of the country,

boundaries, laws, systems) of national unity not imposed but supposedly to be developed together, with representation from all sides.

The linguistic codification of such a language is theoretically possible, and since it will be the product of consensus, it might even be accepted notionally. Its living quality, however, and its use remain dubious.

The future of FILIPINO, short of a Constitutional amendment which is far from being in the offing, is secure insofar as the mechanism for its formation will undoubtedly be formed. Whether such a mechanism can function successfully remains questionable.

The future of English in Philippine life likewise remains secure under both the Constitution and the DEC policy.

Less secure is the future of Tagalog-renamed-Pilipino from a legal point of view. Will it continue to be an official language and a medium of instruction if and when FILIPINO shall have been codified? The Constitution is mute on this question.

However, a living language is seldom ever really affected by legislation. There are realities governing the dissemination of language which follow inexorable societal rules rather than legislative fiat, even a Constitution. This is most likely what will happen to Pilipino. While the legal existence of FILIPINO is assured (at least until the Constitution is amended), its future as a living language remains questionable. While the legal status of PILIPINO as the national language has become questionable, its status as a rapidly spreading lingua franca all over the islands is assured, principally through the mass media and now through the DEC bilingual education policy.

Unless FILIPINO is grafted on to PILIPINO, FILIPINO will be either a seedling that never even broke out of its seedcoat or at best a wilted plant that never blossomed. A policy of 'benign neglect' will most likely obtain for FILIPINO or merely a change of nomenclature for PILIPINO.