

FILIPINO IN THE CONSTITUTION: A CASE FOR LANGUAGE PLANNING

PONCIANO B. P. PINEDA
Institute of Philippine Languages

1. Constitutional Provision

For discussion purposes I am quoting hereunder relevant provisions of the 1987 Constitution particularly on the subject of language under Article XIV.

Section 6. 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.

Subject to provisions of law and as the Congress may deem appropriate, 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.

Sec. 7. For purposes of communication and instruction, the official languages of the Philippines are Filipino, and until otherwise provided by law, English.

The regional languages are the auxiliary official languages in the regions and shall serve as auxiliary media of instruction therein.

Sec. 9. The Congress shall establish a national language commission composed of representatives of various regions and disciplines which shall undertake, coordinate, and promote researches for the development, propagation, and preservation of Filipino and other languages.

A critical reading of the foregoing texts reveals a myriad problems and issues that should excite the imagination of language planners and scholars.

I propose to treat each of the potential problems under two rubrics, viz. corpus planning and utility planning.

Corpus Planning

Clearly, the first sentence of Section 6 declares as fact, as reality, the existence of Filipino as the national language of the Philippines. But what is 'Filipino'?

It is important to recall that prior to 1987, Pilipino Tagalog (P_i) was the national language until it became official language only since the ratification of the 1973 Constitution. The Freedom Constitution after EDSA even if it was in effect only for a few months prior to the writing of the new Constitution, reinstalled P_i to its proper place as the national and official language of the

Republic prior to the martial law years.

A relevant question arises. What happened to P_1 from the time that its status as national and official language was negated by the 1973 Constitution? Was there a language that developed by itself which replaced P_1 ? Or did the 'EDSA miracle' include a mystical language baptized as 'Filipino' by the authors of the 1987 Constitution?

It is useful to go into the Journal of the minutes of the deliberations of the Constitutional Commission to find the clue to the language called 'Filipino'. Witness the following:

From page 183 of the Journal

Mr. Ople: . . . The development in grammar, syntax and the rules of language that have pertained to Pilipino with a capital "P", although amended to become highly liberalized, will not be discarded because we are recognizing Filipino with a capital "F" as the national language . . .

Mr. Villacorta: It is inevitable . . . that the starting point would be Pilipino because that has already been developed in the past as an evolving national language, but then this does not mean that we should limit ourselves to the syntax or to the vocabulary of Filipino which is based on Tagalog.

From page 481 of the Journal

Bishop Bacani: . . . Is Filipino not yet an existent national language? Is it a language that is still to be formed?

Mr. Villacorta: . . . It is an existential national language and the nucleus is Pilipino with a "P". The contemplation of the committee is that the nucleus is still Pilipino because it is already a widespread existing language - Pilipino with a "P". We also said that there is an existent broadened, expanded language called Filipino and its formalization has to be done in the educational system and others but it does not mean that since it is not yet formulated, it is non-existent. It is a lingua franca.

The term lingua franca keeps surfacing in the course of the deliberations. Regarding this phrase we appeal to the authorities.

Lingua franca historically means 'A contact vernacular used during the Middle Ages and Renaissance in the Mediterranean area and based primarily on Italian, but with heavy admixtures from Arabic, French, Spanish, Greek, etc. A tongue of common intercourse among people of different language backgrounds. Syn.: Vehicular language. Area of relational language'.

It will be noted from the definition that lingua franca has a language nucleus, core or basis.

In the light of the foregoing evidence, we conclude that the nucleus, the core, the heart of the lingua franca is P_1 , and therefore Filipino, the liberalized variety of P_1 which the Constitution declares as a fact, a reality. This specification is indispensable and necessary in the planning process. In other words, this kind of Filipino is the main corpus that has to be subjected to 'deliberate intervention'.

The direction becomes clearer in the second sentence of Sec. 6, viz.: 'As it evolves, it shall be further developed and enriched on the basis of existing Philippine and other languages'. The phrase 'as it evolves' implies the continuous growth of the language on its own. Usage is a self-propelling act. Language artists, police and arbiters of language contribute to the enlivening process of enrichment and spread of the language.

The clause 'it shall be further developed and enriched on the basis of existing Philippine and other languages' (Sec. 6, par. 1) opens up a very wide field for the language planner to explore and to deal with. The implication is that the language nucleus (P_1) does not have to be left alone to flourish and to spread by natural accretion. This creates peculiar problems for the particular core areas of morphology, phonology, syntax and semantics. A special kind of language treatment has to be applied to each structural property in terms of 'discrete units of various sorts and rules and principles that govern the way those discrete units can be combined and ordered'. For my immediate purpose, I shall devote more space to meeting the questions of further development

and enrichment at the vocabulary level. Simply stated, the need calls for the incorporation of lexical elements from 'existing Philippine languages' and 'other languages'. I take the latter phrase to mean foreign influencing languages. Necessarily, the intervention must intrude into Filipino's phonological and grammatical structures.

Doubtless, what is apparent is the intent of this provision, which manifests the political will, to take exception to the principle of natural language growth. In other words, it disturbs the established tenets of pure descriptivism, which disturbance I consider as an ally of progressive language planning.

As a general principle the sources are first, the native languages and second, foreign languages that have some degree of linguistic and cultural influence in the country.

It appears that the interest of the writers of the Constitutional provision is centered on lexical enrichment. The exercise seems to be very simple on the surface, but it in fact raises more serious issues. Selection should be scientific but practical at the same time. Scientific in the sense that the deliberate incorporation of vocabulary items to be established lexicon on the language-nucleus (i.e., P) must be geared towards greater efficiency of the language that is being planned. The process refines the language towards greater precision, economy and elegance. Practical because it is more convenient to use and understand. The addition of linguistic elements does not impede the smooth flow of oral written expression.

There are three processes involved in the development and enrichment of the language. First, intellectualization. This is enriching the vocabulary, lexical elaboration is more graphic, so that the language may be used for scholarly or intellectual pursuits. In general, this is resorted to to place Filipino in readiness for the surging wave of the sci-tech revolution. Borrowing in this process shall have for its main source foreign languages.

Second, lexiculturization. This process adopts from other native languages vocabulary items that reflect the uniqueness of the culture of a particular group. The mainsprings of this process are the native languages of the country.

Third, utilizing the innate creativity of Filipino. By this process all the linguistic devices of the language operate either singly or all at the same time to attain maximum communicative utility in all conceivable human endeavors.

As a result of intellectualization, lexiculturization, and utilization of the innate creative power of Filipino, a new system of expression as well as novel rhetorical devices shall be added inevitably to the corpus of Filipino in the course of time. Thus, the growth of the language shall be accelerated on the basis of progressive planning and rigorous linguistic treatment.

Towards this end, the Institute of Philippine Languages, formerly Institute of National Language, started implementing a seminal project titled 'Diksyunaryong Filipino-Ingles'. The original title was 'Leksikon para sa Filipino'. The dictionary project shows the participation of various languages in the lexical elaboration of Filipino. The objectives of the project are:

1. To develop a lexical system that aims to unify and integrate the nation linguistically.
2. To infuse Filipino with the unique cultural heritage of the different ethnic groups in the country.
3. To attain national objectives in the field of education and culture, economics, politics, government and society.
4. To enhance the efficiency and elegance of Filipino.

The guidelines for the selection of lexical items are as follows:

1. Unique words. (Root words, affixed or derived forms in such order).
2. Loan Words.
3. Cognates.

In the codification of norm, the controlling considerations are:

1. Words for ideas, customs and things that have no equivalents in Filipino although such word may be found in only one native language.
bulanon (Bk.), n. full moon

- intawon (Sb.), Interj. What a pity!
 jihad (Ar.), n. religious war
 Ramadan (Ar.), n. the ninth month of the Mohammedan year; the fasting month.
2. Words found in at least three languages are listed as synonyms unless a similar form of Filipino has a different meaning.
 - inday (Hlg., S-L-Sb.), n. affectionate term for a girl.
 - kalipay (Hlg., S-L-Sb.), n. joy, happiness.
 - Tg. tuwa, ligaya
 - kasingkasing (Hlg., S-L, Sb.), n. heart.
 3. Native words whose meanings might have a funny or pejorative meaning in the other languages.
 - baba (Hlg., S-L, Sb.), n. mouth
 - baba (Kpm., Png., Tg.), n. chin
 - bayag (Ilk., Png.), n. prolonged duration of time
 4. Words that are similar in form but different in meaning.
 - agay-ay₁ (Tg.), n. atmosphere, ambient air; breeze.
 - agay-ay₂ (Hlg.), n. tiny worms that feed on and spoil husked rice and bread.
 - babag₁ (Sb.), n. hindrance; obstacle around.
 - babag₂ (Tg.), n. impact; collision; clash.
 - babag₃ (Tg.), n. scuffle; fight.
 - kabyaw₁ (Tg.), n. milling of sugarcane
 - kabyaw₂ (Hlg., S-b.), n. blanket fish net.
 5. Words that are currently used by media, including foreign borrowing that have influenced Filipino language and literature.
 - karate (Hap.), n. the art of self-defense.
 - sauna (Finnish), n. a steambath treatment.
 - smorgasboard (Swedish), n. a meal featuring a varied number of dishes served buffet-style.
 6. Words whose original forms have national currency and are stable in the lexicon of the native languages.
 - balcony (Ing.), n. projecting platform with an entrance from an upper floor or building.
 - chess (Ing.), n. game played by two persons on chequered boards divided into 64 squares.
 - xerox (Ing.), n. an apparatus for making photographic copies of drawing, maps, etc., without a negative or prepared paper; a trade mark name.

Translation is one of the strategies in the further development and enrichment of Filipino. I mean translation to Filipino of materials written in the native as well as foreign languages. This activity enriches not only the vocabulary but the rhetorical aspect of Filipino. Translation transfers knowledge and information to Filipino. Translations, coupled with original writing, either in the nature of fiction or non-fiction, are contributory factors in the expansion of the language corpus, and therefore in its intellectualization and lexiculturization.

There will also be a need to make grammatical adjustments as well as refinements in the emerging rhetorical mode. The affixation systems of a number of languages differ in several ways.

Related to such activities is the orthographic reform in Filipino. The new alphabet consists of 28 letters, to wit: a, b, c, d, e, f, g, h, i, j, k, l, m, n, ñ, ng, o, p, q, r, s, t, u, v, w, x, y, z. Accompanying the change is the upgrading of the spelling rules. The reform might undergo another revision in the near future specially if and when the contemplated national language commission shall have been established or when another change or adjustment becomes inevitable.

3. Utility Planning

The provision of Section 6, quoted above, concerns two things: (1) Filipino as medium of official communication and (2) Filipino as language of instruction in the school system. The two functions being assigned to Filipino may also be included in the sphere of development and enrichment, and considered under dissemination, which is a component of development.

It will be noted that there is a need for Congressional action to implement this particular provision. But this does not imply that we have to stop whatever we have been doing to attain the goals of this mandate. To me, what we should do in the meantime that Congress has not acted accordingly, is to intensify our programs and continue to widen the domains of use of Filipino. For instance, the bilingual education policy together with its implementing guidelines has been revised and strengthened.

One of the most stimulating topics in academic circles nowadays is the daring move to use Filipino as a medium of instruction in higher disciplines. People who have no trust in or affection for Filipino vehemently oppose the idea mainly because they are natural Tagalophobes. On the other hand the thinking oppositors have been raising points worth considering.

The latter argue that instructors are not fully prepared to teach in Filipino; that teaching-learning materials are not available in Filipino; and that Filipino is a very deficient tool for acquiring and/or imparting knowledge and information that English alone can provide. These problems are not impossible to solve. The solution may be found in careful planning and implementation supported by adequate funding.

I propose to overcome the third difficulty by applying the theory of the dynamics of linguistic progression. This means assigning to Filipino increasing responsibilities, calibrated burden, or progressive weight. Let me elaborate: To cushion the expected shock, the medium for a particular discipline must not be total at once at the same time. It has to be by phases. The study of physics or mathematics, or of the behavioral sciences, etc., starts with the fundamentals or introductory courses onwards to the more complicated or advanced courses. In other words, Filipinization of the medium has to be done in stages, i.e. by course, by semester or by year. (I understand that UP Diliman is targeting five years within which to Filipinize its medium).

I offer a concrete example from the bilingual education experience. Filipino is the language of instruction in social studies, which is the course in the elementary grades. The subject area becomes social sciences in the secondary level up to the tertiary level. Under such label are the fundamental or basic curricular offerings. To satisfy the needs of the moment, the IPL (then the INL) developed terminologies for such subjects which have now become permanent in the teachers' pedagogic lexicon.

By such steps Filipino is being developed further as the teacher is being upgraded in the mastery and use of the language. The exercise shall bring forth the flowering of virile Filipino as a language for the sciences, the technologies, the humanities and the arts, etc.

This suggestion calls for serious thoughts towards comprehensive planning, meticulous treatment and meaningful implementation.

For being the official language, Filipino should be used without exception in the three branches of government: legislative, executive and judicial. I do not expect the immediate implementation of this directive. I appreciate the predicament. Nevertheless, the constitutional provision is a challenge to the sincerity of Government itself, which is dependent to a large extent on the pertinent legislation that Congress shall undertake.

Existing structures in the use of Filipino in government affairs have to be looked into for possible strengthening. We envision the installation of a simultaneous translation service in Congress for the benefit of legislators who still lack proficiency in the use of Filipino. Steps would also be taken to the end that bills be written in Filipino or filed in English together with a corresponding version in Filipino.

In mid-1988, the President issued Executive Order No. 335 urging all government offices to intensify the use of Filipino in official communication and correspondence. I see this as one initiative on the part of Government which the above-quoted provisions means.

There is also a need to plan for the role of the regional languages in their assigned tasks as auxiliary media of official communication as well as auxiliary languages of instruction in their respective geographical areas of dominance.

Section 9, which mandates the creation of the national language commission, also beckons the language planner to systematize 'the development, propagation, and preservation of Filipino and other languages'. This section alone portends sporadic language-related wars.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to claim that in point of further development, enrichment and propagation of Filipino, the Institute of Philippine Languages, has been doing what it perceives as things to be done. What is needed is the expansion and intensification of its activities. There are also modest beginnings in the areas of development and preservation of other native languages.

Congress has yet to enact the necessary enabling laws. In the meantime language planners and scholars are encouraged to exert their efforts towards providing guideposts for the legislators as well as for the future workers in the commission on national language which is under consideration in both Houses of Congress. Interest groups are encouraged to participate actively in the discussion - air their views and present the ideas and principles that they espouse.

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