

LINGUISTICS AS A DISCIPLINE IN THE PHILIPPINES¹

Andrew Gonzalez, FSC
De La Salle University

When I returned in December 1970 full of dreams and hopes in helping to establish Linguistics as a profession and academic specialization in our country, I joined the group of creative and active linguists led by Bonifacio P. Sibayan and Teodoro A. Llamzon who had established the Linguistic Society of the Philippines. One does not need hordes to establish a profession. The Prague School started with six East European linguists who found themselves in exile in Czechoslovakia after the Russian Revolution of 1917. I am told that Mathematics in Japan was established by seven mathematicians. In the Philippines, the late Cecilio Lopez had been alone since 1928; the new linguists were post-War and started returning from training abroad in the 1960's. After ten years, in 1969, it was time to join forces, found a society, have monthly meetings for research forums, establish a journal, and above all, train a generation of linguists at the Ateneo, Philippine Normal College, and University of the Philippines. Teodoro Llamzon single-handedly recruited a group of young and bright people to take up linguistics as a profession—from various centers of graduate work—who became Asia Foundation scholars for full-time graduate study. The Ford Foundation helped with post-doctoral research experiences.

In looking over the work of this group, I decided that the best way to help was not to be a member of the Board but to be an Executive Secretary to remove the burden of administration from the researchers. I volunteered to become Executive Secretary of the LSP in 1971, following the example of Archibald Hill who did the same for the Linguistic Society of America. I held that post for more than twenty years, until Emma Castillo kindly took over, then Edilberta Bala for a while, and now Emma Castillo once more.

After Teodoro Llamzon moved to Penang to take on a foreign teaching stint, I ended up with the editorship of the Journal. I had William Bright in mind when I took up the editorship, hoping to institutionalize the Journal by a long stint. It was not till 1996 when I finally turned over the editorship to Ma. Lourdes Bautista.

The greatest source of encouragement was the number and caliber of our PhD graduates during the first five years, till 1975. After that, the numbers became fewer, but the quality of the work remained the same. Our graduates have since then made their careers, some abroad, many as school administrators, others as researchers. Because of the tremendous time constraints in which our academics work in this country, the research output has not been as much as I would have liked to see. The potential is there; it is time that is the greatest luxury for some of us.

What has happened is that we now have the money and wherewithal to do research and publication.

What is still lacking, however, are the linguistic scientists with time and leisure to be productive. I am especially looking for the new generation, since Bonifacio P. Sibayan is 82, Teodoro Llamzon is 72, I am pushing 59, and some of our Consortium graduates are in their 50's. To give us hope and encouragement that indeed linguistics has become an institution in this country, we need people in their 20's, 30's; we do have some in their 40's, but few in their 20's and 30's.

Today there are only two places where one can do serious linguistics since for reasons of its own, the Ateneo has discontinued linguistics; language teaching at the UP College of Education needs to replenish its dwindling ranks immediately, but happily Linguistics is alive and well in the Department of Linguistics. And of course we have Language Education and Applied Linguistics at De La Salle University. Philippine Normal University has not yet replaced its stars after their retirement.

To have a profession, one needs resources, a society, regular meetings, a journal, a definable discipline and a steady stream of scholars. We have the resources, the society, regular meetings, a journal, a clearly defined discipline, thanks to the Language Education Council and the Philippine Social Science Council, but we now need a steady stream of scholars who have the time and the leisure to do the massive amount of research that still needs to be done. Only the Summer Institute of Linguistics (Philippines) has been able to do this consistently for more than 47 years in the Philippines. We still do not have a historical linguist, for a field which is absolutely necessary to appreciate the larger role of language in human endeavors.

We should now direct our efforts, with the resources possible, to renew our ranks so that linguists may find a home in all the major institutions of learning in our country, for one cannot study human beings in all their dimensions without looking at their expressive creations and sign systems.

ENDNOTE

¹An earlier draft of this brief paper was given in response to the donors of the Andrew Gonzalez, FSC Distinguished Professorial Chair in Linguistics established at De La Salle University on February 29, 1996.