

THE SOCIAL SCIENCES AND POLICY MAKING IN LANGUAGE

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1 INTRODUCTION¹

This collaborative paper seeks to list by topics policy-making activities in language; it documents current realities and demonstrates the role of the social sciences in the development of these policies.

2 TYPES OF POLICIES ON LANGUAGE

2.1 Symbolic and Affective Functions of Language

Although the notion of a national language was bruited about in the first two decades of the American colonial regime, it was really not until the 1935 Constitutional Assembly when the issue of a national language officially became the subject of legislation. So divisive was the issue at that time that it demonstrated that Philippine society had not ‘crystallized’ sufficiently to have a consensus on national language. The 1935 Constitutional provision mandated the establishment of an agency to oversee the selection and development of a national language. The enabling law for establishing the National Language Institute was the Norberto Romualdez Law of 1936; the next year, 1937, saw the establishment of the National Language Institute (renamed by an amendment in 1938 as the Institute of National Language), the choice of Tagalog as the basis of the national language. Its official adoption in 1939 with the availability of a grammar in Tagalog (Lope K. Santos’ *Balarila*) and a bilingual Tagalog-English wordlist (which was considered a dictionary). With this approval, summer courses were held in 1940 to enable Tagalog (named *Wikang Pambansa*) to be taught as a subject in fourth year high school and in teacher training colleges beginning in 1941.

The national language (*Wikang Pambansa*) was slowly standardized by the Institute of National Language, propagated especially during the short regime of the Laurel Government during the Japanese Period, and taught in all grades (primary and secondary) and as a subject in college in the Independence Period. The main task of the language at present, within the mission of the *Komisyon sa Wikang Pambansa*, established by RA 7104 in 1991, is the cultivation of Filipino (its current name after being renamed *Pilipino* in 1959, renamed and confirmed as existing in 1987) as a language of academic discourse.

Basic to the movement to disestablish English and to establish Filipino is the need to have a symbol of unity and a badge of linguistic identity as part of the nationalistic thrust of the Government and its citizenry.

Studies in the Philippines indicate that Filipinos favor Filipino (except some Cebuanos) as a symbol of unity and linguistic identity, but do not necessarily favor it as the exclusive medium of instruction in schools. Thus a bilingual scheme has been accepted. Neither is adherence to language necessarily an effective agent for national cohesion and anchorage to the country, for there are many ethnic rivalries up to now between communities that commonly use Filipino as a *lingua franca* and there are many Tagalog/ Filipino-speaking citizens who work abroad, some of

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whom have migrated to other countries permanently. The correlation between language and nationalism does not always hold.

In attempting to grapple with the complex reality that Philippine linguistics represents, one has to rely on the science of politics to see the symbolic function of language as effective or ineffective in nation building.

The social science disciplines, especially economics and sociology, likewise specify the success of language planning in our society (the selection of the basis of the national language, its standardization, propagation, and cultivation) as well as use in the school system, for rituals and ceremonies, in the domains of religion, business, government, and international relations. Of these realities in these areas presently under study by Filipino social scientists, one can find ways of explaining Filipino social behavior at present in the field of symbolic function of language in nation-building.

2.2 Language of Education

From the time that Aguinaldo declared Philippine Independence 100 years ago until this very day, the question about which language to use in education has been explicitly addressed by policy provisions. The presence of very explicit policy provisions notwithstanding, the medium of instruction issue continues as a contentious matter of debate. The tension seems to be among three competing demands of ethnicity, nationalism, and modernization, each demand calling for the use of the vernacular, the national language, or English, respectively.

The policy that is currently in place is the Bilingual Education Policy of 1987, which has as its goal enhanced learning through two languages to achieve quality education; the Policy keeps most of the important provisions of the Bilingual Education Policy of 1974. The Bilingual Education Policy specifies the use of the vernacular as medium for initial schooling and literacy and the separate use of Filipino and English as media of instruction in basic education for definite subject areas.

The reality of the medium of instruction does not quite converge with policy. In most basic education classrooms, Filipino or English language materials are used for specific subjects as mandated by policy. However, when presenting and discussing the material, teachers very liberally switch to the vernacular, particularly when they sense that the students are having difficulty understanding the material (this observation is true even at the tertiary level). Likewise, although students are required to speak and submit written requirements in either Filipino or English, again depending on the subject, in classroom discourse they often switch to the vernacular.

It is evident that demands of ethnicity, nationalism, and modernization are mediated by the more pragmatic demands of classroom learning and instruction. Therefore linguists, sociologists (particularly, sociolinguists), psychologists (particularly, cognitive and educational psychologists), and educational scientists have been drawn to the debate, as their understanding of the sociological, psychological, and pedagogical dimensions of language use in classroom discourse and learning are critical to make policy formulations work in the classroom, in line with the larger goals of the educational process.

The following section is a brief treatment of the interrelated linguistic, sociological, psychological, and pedagogical questions that relate to the medium of instruction issue. The section will summarize how research in the various social science disciplines has answered these questions; so far, special notice shall be taken of questions that have not yet been addressed or adequately answered by social science research.

In what medium will students learn better? Will that medium differ from one subject to the other? Research in education and learning is very conclusive as regards this question. Students learn better if the medium of instruction is a language in which they have good levels of

proficiency; in other words, learning in one's vernacular is most efficient and effective. It does not make a difference whether the subject is reading, mathematics, science, social studies, music, religion, arts, health, or physical education.

What is the effect of using languages other than the vernacular for instruction? This question is a concern particularly in multi-ethnic countries like the Philippines. Research and theory seem to suggest that at an early age, children's language acquisition mechanisms are still in place and are flexible enough to allow children to develop proficiency in languages other than their vernacular. The assumption is that as long as the language model for the second language is adequate and comprehensible, students who are taught using a second language will be able to learn both the subject matter and the second language. The acquisition of the second language skills is also largely dependent on the students' fluency in the vernacular, and the similarities between the vernacular and the second language. Such research findings provide the motivation for bilingual education programs that provide bridging between vernacular and the second language.

Can the different vernaculars be used effectively to teach all subjects? And is Filipino developed enough to be used for teaching at all levels? There are some who argue that the present state of the different vernaculars in the Philippines is such that the languages are not adequate to express all the materials across different subjects. Others argue that there is no basis for such claims given that all languages are adequate to express any idea; moreover, languages develop as the requirements of the language users grow.

So the matter can be addressed by proper language planning initiatives, particularly those directed towards intellectualizing the vernacular of the Filipino language to suit the requirements of formal instruction. In this regard, sociolinguists and linguists have specified the important factors that will allow for the faster development of languages towards this direction. These factors include the development of printed and other instructional materials, and the preparation of teachers for teaching in the medium, among others.

At this point, we can see that social science research clearly points to the importance of using the vernacular in instruction, as the medium and as a bridge for instruction using a second or auxiliary medium. However, for many different reasons, people in the Philippines see a need to develop competency in a third language, English. This need is shared by some policy makers, members of academe, business, and the population at large. Arguments for this perceived need are English is the international language, our link to the rest of the world,

English is the language of business (global competitiveness),

English is a prestige language,

Not teaching English will create a new elite which will have access to opportunities because only they can speak English,

Most world knowledge is in English,

English is the language of science and technology, and

Proficiency in English is an indicator of intellectual ability.

In the following section we shall consider what social science research has to say about the last three. (The discussion is limited to these items because they are directly relevant to the educational function.)

Is most of what we know now as human beings documented in English? Maybe. In fact most likely, given American domination of media and other forms of discourse. Hence, a good knowledge of the English language will be useful in this regard.

Will we be deprived of this information if we cannot speak English? No and yes, everything can be translated anyway, but the translations are largely not available. Therefore, being proficient in English makes access to specific types of information faster.²

Is English the language of science and technology? Yes, because of the present domination of Americans in most areas of science. Hence, most important findings and ideas are published in English language journals and publications. That was not the case a century ago, but now, English is the *de facto* language of science and technology, although a significant segment of the scientific community does not disseminate its findings using English.

Will students have difficulty understanding science subjects if they do not know English? No, English is only the language of discourse in science, but the ideas of science are not bound to one language. Chinese, Japanese, Russian, German, and French speakers still do very good in science without speaking the slightest form of English. (They even win Nobel Prizes.) Besides, science is not just about knowing terms and concepts; science is a way of thinking and knowing, and that goes beyond language.

Is English proficiency an indicator of intellectual ability? No. Proficiency in any language has never been an indicator of intelligence. However, in the Philippines English proficiency may be considered an indication that an individual has mastered a particular intellectual skill. Because English is not our native language, because English is linguistically very different from our native language, and the use of English is not largely supported in the social environment, mastery of English is indeed an intellectual feat. Hence, good students may end up learning and mastering English better than weaker students. So there is a possible link between English proficiency and intellectual ability. But these arguments would obviously not apply for those whose first language is English. Likewise, some highly intellectual thinking happens among those who have very little knowledge of English.

Still, if we want to maintain some level of proficiency in English, other questions can be raised, questions to which social science should also have answers.

What is the best way to attain proficiency in English? For people who are not native speakers of English, the best way is to teach it as a second language. Teach it well, and maybe teach it for specific purposes. Using it as a medium of instruction might work because that means much time will be devoted to the use of the language; however, success depends on the proficiency of the teachers, or on the adequacy of the language models provided by the teachers. But we should remember that attaining proficiency in any language cannot be fully achieved through formal schooling alone; it needs to be supported by adequate models of the language in the person's social environment.

Will using Filipino or the vernacular as medium of instruction lead to deterioration of English proficiency? If this means less time for English language instruction, then the answer is *yes*. But if English language skills can be supported in other ways (quality of instruction, reading, etc.), then that need not be the case. It is not a purely zero-sum proposition. Moreover, the deterioration of English skills is not simply due to changes in the language of instruction; English skills are deteriorating because people are not using it as their primary means of communication outside the formal educational system (see later discussion on language and other sectors of society in this paper), because other languages can be used to do so more efficiently.

2.3 Language of the Mass Media and Multimedia

² There is an important difference between information and knowledge; information is raw data, knowledge is understanding; whereas most forms of information are accessed in one language or the other, knowledge and understanding are not necessarily a matter of language. Cf. arguments about language of the mind or *mentalese*.

English has traditionally been the dominant language in the media. Since the onset of American rule, when a mass media system patterned after that of the American colonial rulers was established, English has been the primary language used in the mass media. Since 1986, however, Filipino has steadily gained ground as a major language in the media, especially on radio and TV. An examination of the language/s used in the various media will show this. For example, in the print media, the 12 broadsheets which include *The Manila Bulletin*, *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, *The Philippine Star*, *Manila Times*, *Manila Chronicle*, *Philippine Journal*, and *Today*, use English.

The tabloids use English and Filipino. The serious tabloids like *People's Journal*, *Tonight*, and *Tempo*—or those which feature serious columns, news stories, entertainment, news and feature serious articles—use both Filipino and English, with the columns being written in English and the entertainment news and feature articles in Filipino. *Bandera* is written entirely in Filipino.

Other tabloids like *Abante*, *Balita*, *People's Bagong Balita*, and *Remate* are entirely Filipino.

Community newspapers, which number over 300, are bilingual or trilingual. Some use English and Filipino, or English and the local vernacular, or English, Filipino, and the local vernacular. Community papers in the Visayas, which resist the use of Filipino, use English and the local vernacular.

On Philippine radio, Filipino, English, and code-switching in these two languages are used. There are a total of 402 radio stations, of which 246 are AM and 156 FM. AM radio stations, which cater predominantly to mass media audiences in both urban and rural areas, use mainly Filipino, while FM radio stations, which usually specialize in music and are directed toward the upper class, use English.

On television, these two languages, Filipino and English, again co-exist. Cable television, including newscasts and canned programs like game shows, MTV, and movies, use English. Free television, which consists primarily of commercial television shows, use Filipino and English. The newscasts are either in English or Filipino, whereas public affairs programs are predominantly in English.

Indicative of the growing preference for Filipino for the TV watching audience is the fact that newscasts which are in Filipino have been getting higher ratings compared to their counterparts in English, as shown by the popularity of Channel 2's *TV Patrol* and Channel 7's *Saksi*. Presumably, one of the factors for the high ratings of these shows is that the viewers understand the language and, therefore, switch on to Filipino rather than to English newscasts.³

2.4 Language of the Government

The factors that most affect language choice in *oral* government communications are formality of the situation and educational level of the participants. The more formal the situation and the more highly educated the participants, the greater the tendency to use English. Thus, sessions of Congress and meetings of the city or municipal government are conducted in English, while informal barangay assemblies and transactions in government offices are in the local language with some switching to English. In regions without a distaste for Filipino, there may be a conscious effort to give pride of place to the national language. Thus, speakers at general assemblies and big meetings may make a deliberate attempt to use Filipino. In fact, oaths of office are now administered in Filipino. It goes without saying, however, that in international negotiations, government officials have to use English.

In *written* government communications, the prevailing language is English. Income tax forms, voters' registration forms, official receipts, and invitations to bid are all in the English

³ This is an excerpt from an article by Georgina R. Encanto (1997), reproduced here with her permission.

medium. For some of these forms, translations into Filipino are available. It should also be noted that the Constitution was initially drafted in English and then translated into Filipino and the other major languages.

In the matter of communicating with their constituencies, government agencies have to choose between English, Filipino, and the local language. In a survey conducted by the Institute of National Language in the early eighties (Pineda, Bangalan, et al. 1982), the respondents from 13 regions indicated that they wanted information on such livelihood concerns as agriculture, fishing, livestock, and forestry in Filipino first, followed by English, then by the local language. For business and education, however, the preference was for English first, followed by Filipino, then by the local language.

A recent survey conducted in the different regions in connection with identifying materials for use in functional literacy work showed the following: DECS-Bureau of Non-Formal Education materials in the regions were mostly in Filipino, except in Region VII where the materials were in Cebuano; the materials gathered from the line agencies were generally in English, except those from DENR, DA, and DOH, which were mostly in Filipino and/or the local languages (UP-Education Research Program 1996:207).

There is still some resistance to the widespread use of Filipino in government communications. This was evident when Executive Order 335 was issued on August 25, 1988 reminding all citizens that the Constitution mandated the use of Filipino for official functions of government. The Order was misinterpreted by some newspaper columnists and government officials to mean the exclusive use of Filipino for government communications. In pique, the provincial and city government of Cebu started to sing the national anthem in Cebuano and to transact official business in Cebuano.

2.5 Language of the Professions⁴

Currently, although the national language (Wikang Pambansa) was declared an official language (hence, a language of the law) by the year 1946 as a result of a 1941 law, English continues to be the dominant language of the courts. Before World War II, the language of the law and the courts was split between Spanish and English. During the Japanese Period, when Tagalog was the official and national language, one judge formulated a decision in the local language. Subsequently, there have been occasions during the National Language Month (in August of each year) when judges rendered their decisions in Tagalog/Pilipino/Filipino. It was more symbolic, however, than real, since deliberations in courts of law and decisions are given in English, although translator services for Filipino and the local vernaculars are provided if necessary in depositions and testimonies. All instruction in Law Schools is in English, and although the *Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino* at present translates all laws into Filipino, the deliberations, proceedings, and decisions are still in English. English and Filipino/Pilipino are considered official languages under the 1987 Constitution.

The language of law in the Philippines, therefore, is predominantly English. Law students study law in English and take the bar examinations in English. One interpretation of the high failure rate in bar examinations (around 80%) is that a number of future lawyers cannot handle English at an advanced level.

Actual hearings in courts at all levels—local or regional trial courts, Court of Appeals, Supreme Court—are primarily conducted in English. In the lower courts, testimony and affidavits can be given in Filipino or in the local language (with translation provided) or in a code-switching variety, but the promulgations are still in English. There is a disparity in the language preference

⁴ An excellent source on the use of language in law is Gonzalez (1996). The discussion given here essentially comes from that paper.

of lawyers, judges, and court officials, on the one hand, and litigants, on the other, as shown in the study of Suba (1978) of respondents in Nueva Ecija. The professional legal practitioners prefer English as the language of the court, while plaintiffs, defendants, and witnesses prefer the local language.

One person stands out in his initiatives to develop local language for the use in the domain of law. Cesar Peraleja has translated the Civil Code (1974), the Revised Penal Code (1993), the Revised Family Code (1993b), and the Local Government Code of 1991 (1994) into Filipino. He has likewise translated Court Criminal Rules and Procedures (undated) and the Rules of Court Evidence (undated), but these have not been published. Some judges make a gesture during *Linggo ng Wika* to pen decisions in Filipino.

As noted earlier, the fundamental law of the land, the Constitution, was drafted initially in English and subsequently translated into Filipino and other major languages. Deliberations on the provisions of the Constitution by the 50-member Constitutional Commission were for the most part conducted in English. The Constitution is silent on whether the English text or the Filipino text should prevail in case of doubt.

The disparity between the languages of law, English, and the language of the citizenry, the local vernacular or Filipino, points to the need to bridge the gap between them. The proposal given for the short term is to provide translators in the courts to ensure that ordinary citizens enjoy their Constitutional right to protection under the law. For the long term, the proposal is to develop the register of law in Filipino so that eventually all the laws can be translated into Filipino, students can learn the law in Filipino, and the legal professionals can practice the profession in Filipino. This will be a massive undertaking because it will mean a lot of effort and, on top of that, a change of heart. The difficulty in effecting a change of heart among practitioners is indicated in the study of De la Peña (1984), who found that verbal formulae in English for structuring court procedures have been translated into Filipino but are not widely used at present.

In medicine, although doctor-patient consultations can be in Filipino or in English (depending on the social class of the interlocutors, their levels of education, the type of hospital whether public or private, middle or high socio-economic status), prescriptions and diagnosis when dealing with scientific and medical matters are in English. Medical books are in English and the language of the medical education and examinations continues to be in English. In terms of development of special varieties of language, the least developed would be a medicine insofar as Filipino is concerned.

In the domain of religion, there is intellectualization by means of sermons and homilies and devotional writing, but the most frequently used language is still English, now with a mixture of the local vernacular. The picture is mixed with regard to the language of worship and the liturgy insofar as Filipino is concerned; in non-Tagalog areas, the more common language is the local vernacular although in some parts of the North, Filipino more than the vernacular is more widely used.

A sociological investigation into the language(s) of the professionals would need in depth and extensive investigation by disciplines such as sociology and economics before policy can be determined or inferred.

2.6 Language(s) of Trade and Foreign Relation

In multinational companies and other big corporations like PLDT, Meralco, San Miguel, Citibank, BPI, and Shell, English is predominantly used at the management level, although code-switching in English and Filipino is used among peers in informal situations and topics. Among the rank and file, Filipino or the local vernacular is used. When superiors give instructions/ orders to the rank and file, Filipino or a form of code-switching is used. For most of the written communications,

English is used. When settling labor disputes such as strikes, etc., Filipino or the local vernacular is used during the negotiation process.

2.7. Language of Informatics and Information Technology⁵

The universal language of information technology (IT) is English (House 1997). It is the dominant language for using the IT infrastructure such as the Internet and, according to a survey of attendees at the 1997 conference of the Association of Computing Machinery on “The Next 50 Years of Computing,” it will be the *lingua franca* of the Internet 50 years from now (87% yes). In general, English is the language of the operating system (such as Windows 98), the interface between the user and the machine. English is also the basis for most programming languages. English is the language for the analysis and specification of systems and the language for technical communication and documentation.

There are special keyboards for such languages as Chinese, Japanese, German, and French. Programming languages and operating systems have versions in many other languages, particularly in European languages like French and Spanish. French and Spanish, among other languages, have glossaries of words for Information Technology. There are specialized Internet-based newsgroups who converse in their respective languages; it should be noted, though, that the Filipino newsgroup still uses English predominantly. Languages can be learned through the Internet, for example, Swahili and Esperanto, but the learners are few.

For reasons of practicality and proficiency, English is the language of IT in the Philippines. However, nationalism dictates that Filipino should gradually be adopted for some use in IT. UPLB’s Institute of Computer Science has a five-year plan for the use of Filipino in IT. It has begun work on machine translation from English to Filipino and has started preparing technical manuals in Filipino. For its part, at De La Salle University, students of the College of Computer Studies and the Filipino Department have worked together to produce a spell checker and a thesaurus in Filipino.

In Computer Science classes, the medium of instruction is English but teachers and students sometimes code-switch. Theses are written in English, but the defense is occasionally conducted in the code-switched variety.

The use of IT in the Philippines is very minimal, and it can be said, objectively, that computer literacy for the Filipino means literacy in English.

3 CONCLUSION

From the rapid survey based on existing literature and the familiarity of the writers with the local situation in the Philippines, the following insights may be gleaned.

Conscious policy formulations are made by the Philippine government for the national language, the language of education, the language of the mass media and multimedia, but it is actual practice and use which dictates the reality, which may be considered ‘tacit’ or ‘unspoken’ policy arising from custom and usage (*de facto* rather than *de jure*).

The *de facto* reality is that as a result of the development of Filipino from 1937 to the present, it has been accepted as the basis and elaboration of the national language, except in Cebu, where political maneuvering caused the language to be deemphasized. (Cebuanos sing the national anthem in Cebuano and do not use Filipino as medium of instruction for social studies and the social sciences but continue to use English, although they continue to teach Filipino as a subject.)

⁵ The information contained in this section comes primarily from Dr. Arnulfo Azcarraga, who obtained his doctorate in Computer Science from the Institut National Polytechnique de Grenoble, France, and is currently the Vice Dean of the College of Computer Studies at De La Salle University.

De facto, radio programming nationwide is almost 85% in Filipino, with 5% in the local vernaculars, and only about 10% in English; on TV, there is now a proportion of 60:40 Filipino-English programming, although there is a growing body of popular reading materials in Filipino. Although the Department of Education, Culture, and Sports has chosen a bilingual education scheme (1974 and 1987), code-switching especially in the lower grades is quite common, with the local vernacular used as an ‘auxiliary’ medium of instruction to Filipino. Filipino is becoming more and more widespread in the classroom, to the point that in some places, even classes in English and the English class itself use Filipino as a metalanguage.

Less subject to formulation and legislation, and the following ‘tacit’ policy from custom, is the language of the mass media and multimedia. The language of government, depending on the context, is either Filipino or English, the latter for formal meetings and international negotiations. In education, at the tertiary level, it is still mostly English, with a few subjects (mostly in the social sciences) taught in Filipino. In the realm of foreign relations, international trade, and at the highest echelons of business, English continues to dominate. Thus, tacit policy must be looked at empirically, and room for multi-factorial dimensions must be made depending on the domain, the formality or informality of the situation, the competence of the interlocutors, the subject of discourse, and the social relations between the interlocutor.

In fields such as Informatics and Information Technology, so much of the software is for practical purposes entirely in English. Hence, the code used is assumed to be English in programming operating systems using machine language and in writing software for specific purposes.

Thus, in reviewing the impact of the social sciences on policy-making, specifically in the domain of language, one must look at the reality explicitly and expect many variables beyond simplistic formulations, on items such as national language choice, the languages of education, the professionals, the mass media, government, trade and foreign relations, and informatics. To obtain the highly nuanced descriptions and prescriptions for change that one might want to select in order to ameliorate prevailing conditions, one must rely on the social disciplines of psychology (especially in language education), sociology (in language use), politics (for social cohesion), and economics (for motivation and attitudes).

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