

SOME THOUGHTS ON SOCIOLINGUISTIC RESEARCH AND LANGUAGE PLANNING IN THE PHILIPPINES¹

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Once a year we come together in an annual meeting of the Linguistic Society of the Philippines to take stock of the affairs of the society, try to plan for the next year, listen to speakers whose topics are considered important in advancing the discipline of linguistics, exchange notes on a number of things, renew old friendships, and make new ones. It is therefore a pleasure to welcome you to the 14th annual conference of the Linguistic Society of the Philippines.

This year's theme is research in sociolinguistics. There is a need for us to enlarge our concerns especially in the area of sociolinguistics and language planning. We will please note that our people are again engaged in 'reconsidering' the bilingual education program; a number question the wisdom of using Filipino as language of instruction and some advocate a return to English as the sole medium of instruction. Those of us in linguistics cannot afford to be indifferent to what the general population is vitally interested in.

I would like to outline before you today some of the concerns that we should engage ourselves in. Among the most important are the following:

1. The language of the migrants and immigrants—for example, the language of those who go to Cagayan Valley or the kind of Pilipino that is being developed in the Cagayan Valley where there are minority languages but where Ilocano is the *lingua franca*, or the Pilipino that is developing in Davao City where there is hardly a minority language in contrast to the Cagayan Valley situation and where Cebuanos, Ilocanos, Boholanos, Hiligaynons, and others come together. We need to know their contribution to the development of Pilipino. These two places contrast with that of Manila where practically all important ethnic languages are represented.

2. Language conflict—for example, the 'conflict' between English and Pilipino and Pilipino and other languages in certain ethnic communities; also the conflict between ethnic groups vis-à-vis Pilipino and English.

3. Minor languages and the role of the speakers of these languages in such matters as nation building, national language building, the language of various domains in which these people have to deal with—education, commerce and industry, and religion. Let us remember that minor languages and therefore the speakers of these minor languages do not count in most language planning in Philippine life.

4. Levels of speech and writing in organizations such as (1) multinational organizations, (2) local organizations, and (3) government organizations (for example, work should be done on the ethnography of organizational talk and writing).

5. Language of protest—this is very important, for example, that of (1) labor, (2) teachers—the 1982 Education Act does not only permit but more importantly encourages teachers to belong to organizations including labor unions that will protect and advance their interests; (3) opposition groups; (4) rebel groups; (5) media, etc.

6. The language of teenagers in the (1) slums, (2) places of out of school youth, (3) streets such as those of vendors, (4) 'affluent' areas, (5) rural areas, (6) emerging communities such as relocation centers, e.g., San Pedro, Sapang Palay.

¹ Opening remarks, 14th Annual Meeting, Linguistic Society of the Philippines, 18 June 1983, Philippines Social Science Council, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City.

7. The language of women's lib—how much will it affect or influence Philippine society?
8. The language of the sexes—how the language of children, especially the language of the boy's growing up, is influenced or 'damaged' by the preponderance of women in the schools; is it possible that the increase in the 'gay' population may be due to the women teachers (hypothesis)?
9. Language of politics and of power
10. Language and propaganda
11. Language of poverty
12. Nationalism and the kind of English in Philippine life today and in the future
13. Language and identity (I have done some work on this but it needs to be extended and refined)
14. Language and socio-economic development (Also in this I have done initial work with a colleague—see the December 1982 issue of *Philippine Journal of Linguistics*)
15. Language of persuasion such as (1) advertising—why so much is spent on junk food, (2) the government vis-à-vis opposition groups and 'rebels', (3) NPA recruitment literature
16. The intellectualization of Filipino English. This may be a shock to you but let me explain.

In the recent past we have always been talking about the intellectualization of Pilipino. I think we should now seriously consider the intellectualization of Filipino English (the English that is being used in the schools for example). The quality of English being used in the educational system and even in many other places is so low level because of the indifference of our people, our inability or lack of desire or will to treat intellectual things on a high level. We often talk of the intellectualization of Pilipino and bewail the fact that many subjects dealing with higher intellectual processes cannot be taught in Pilipino because there are no scholarly writings in Pilipino—this is what is meant by some people when they refer to Pilipino as an 'infant' language. But the kind of subject matter we handle with English does not require intellectualized English. With the exception of some colleges and universities and some high schools, most schools today do not use intellectualized English.

Note, however, that the kind of English used is a reflection of the breakdown that is going on in practically the entire society.

This leads us to the topic of a return of English as the sole medium of instruction in the belief that this will automatically improve the achievement of our pupils. There is nothing farther from the truth. The mere use of English will not improve our school achievement. As proof of this, I cite the case of the United States. In an international science test given to ten- and fourteen-year-olds in nineteen countries in 1970, Japan (with the use of Japanese—intellectualized Japanese) came out number one in the world while the United States using English (which is the native language of the Americans) came out number fifteen—below the median.

It is obvious, therefore, that the mere use of English will not automatically improve our children's achievement in our schools.

There is a grave concern about the deterioration of English. English has not deteriorated. It is the people, the Filipino people, who have deteriorated in their use of English. Put more correctly, it is the standards of our people that have deteriorated. This lowering of standards (in fact the lack of high standards) plus the very low level kind of subject matter we are teaching in our schools and colleges has made Filipino English the kind of English it is today.

This also holds true for Pilipino. Until we decide to teach more and more difficult subject matters in Pilipino, Pilipino will never be able to be used in the intellectual life of man. Pilipino needs to be used in writing original research.

We need to study the interaction of the desires of our society with the kind of things the people are willing to support, the kind of language they want to use which will be determined by the kind of subject matter content that they are willing to address themselves to. I repeat, if English has ‘deteriorated’ and Pilipino is not being intellectualized, it is because the Filipino people’s standards have deteriorated, or they are not willing to set high standards of achievement.

In conclusion I would like to suggest that this attention to the subject matter that we use to teach language or the kind of subject matter that we want language to treat and handle is one component or area in language planning that has not engaged those in language planning so far. This is a subject that needs to be treated in sociolinguistics research.

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