

# The Nationalization of a Language: Filipino

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1. It is to be expected that a country with a long colonial history and numerous indigenous languages should have difficulty in resolving what language should be recognized as its national language. Such is the case of the Philippines where the burning issue was not only about the choice between the colonial language and an indigenous one but also whether it should be an amalgamation of the numerous indigenous languages, an absurdity taken seriously by the uninformed, or whether it should be the indigenous language proposed by an influential group.

1.2 This complicated situation started with Spain's almost four hundred years occupancy of the over seven thousand islands in the Pacific which they claimed by force and by the cross. These now comprise what is known as the archipelago where the state of the Philippine is located. These islands were inhabited then as now by over one hundred ethnolinguistic groups (EG) speaking diverse but closely related languages belonging to a sub-group of the large Austronesian family of languages. Binding these islands and diverse groups into a colony by Spain spawned the problem of language choice and issues which to this day are heatedly discussed but which in real terms have been resolved by the widespread use of a national lingua franca.

1.3 This paper will discuss the nationalization of a language, Filipino, by its speakers who were spurred on by their urgent and strong needs to communicate with each other. Filipino is widely used today despite its being doggedly rejected as the national language or despite attempts at forcing it into a mold perceived to be the correct form by certain influence groups.

2. The linguistic situation in the Philippines was highly conducive to the birth of a national lingua franca. Over a hundred languages in use made a common language chosen for intergroup communication inevitable. It has been established that there are five regional lingua francas<sup>1</sup> presently in use for communication within the regions of contiguous EGs. But impelled by economic, political and personal motives,

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<sup>1</sup>This was established by research conducted by the Department of Linguistics, College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines.

interaction became necessary between members of these groups drawn together not only on the regional but also on the national level. This then resulted in a *lingua franca* spoken throughout the country or at the very least in highly populated or urban areas.

2.1 Besides interaction between groups, the significant impact of the culture and language of two colonial powers, Spain and the United States of America, and that of the countries which traded with the different groups even prior to the colonial period, e.g. China, further contributed to the complexity of the situation.

2.2 One other factor that should be considered in accounting for the emergence of the national *lingua franca* (NLF) was the dominance of Tagalog, the language spoken in Manila the capital city and till the last decade, the only prominent center of trade. A variety of this language called Pilipino was taught in schools nationwide since 1935. This fact accounts for the large Tagalog element in the lexicon of the NLF. Along with this, is the portion of the language identified as the common core or universal nucleus found in all the other Philippine languages (Paz, 1995.)

2.3 Several studies have shown that language universals exist (Jakobson, Fant and Halle, 1952; Greenberg ed.1963), more so in related languages. Studies have also shown that the languages in the Philippines are closely related with common elements on all the levels of the languages (Conant, 1908, 1911, 1912; Dyen, 1947, 1953; Constantino, 1965, 1970, 1971; Constantino, Paz and Posoncuy, 1967; Paz, 1981.) It is these commonalities which helped facilitate the formation and spread of the NLF or Filipino.

The sounds *i, a, u, p, t, k, ʔ, b, d, g, s, h, m, n, ng, l, w* and *y* belonging to this core are present in Filipino along with *f, v, z, ʃ, θ, ʝ* and *r* which came into the language from other Philippine languages (PL) and from Chinese, Spanish and English. Stress is phonemic and the basic form of the syllable is (C)CV(C) as in all other PLs. Although it is the lexicon of these languages which makes for the greatest difference between them, a high cognate count is present (Lopez, 1971, 1974; Yap, 1977; Paz, 1981.) Besides these historical or indigenous cognates, a great number of cognates originating from words borrowed from foreign languages exist. This portion of the lexicon made up of loans mostly from Chinese, Spanish and English have built up the common element in PLs. A large number of these loans have found their way into Filipino e.g. **lugaw** 'rice porridge', **ate** 'older sister' from Chinese; **libro** 'book', **pamilya** 'family', **bintana** 'window' from Spanish; **tren** 'train', **nars** 'nurse', **gaas** 'kerosene' from English. There has also been more recent borrowing from different languages directly into Filipino such as: **basketbol** 'basketball', **meykap** 'makeup', **otomatik** 'automatic', **kompyuter** 'computer' from English; **dorobo** 'thief' and

**japayuki** meaning an overseas contract worker who works in a night club from Japanese ‘; **lahar** ‘pyroplastic material or volcanic debris’ from Indonesian through English, and so on.

2.4 Aside from the common core, the rest of the features of Filipino reflect the impact of its users who speak different native languages. This is shown in the terms for the material culture of the EGs which have been adapted by speakers from other groups such as those for food, implements, woven products etc. Highly evident today are the varieties of Filipino spoken in the different parts of the country characterized by the distinct elements of the first language of the EGs. Hence a speaker may use any of the following:

**titser/ticher, guro** ‘teacher’  
**skul/iskul, iskwelahan, paaralan** ‘school’  
**nandito/narito** ‘here’  
**so, kaya** ‘so’  
**nagkain, kumain** ‘ate’

The lexicon therefore of Filipino consists of the common core made up of cognates and loans from PLs and foreign languages. The morphology and syntax is like that of any other PL as evident in the common core. These structural similarities facilitated the spread of this language throughout the country especially where socioeconomic needs prevailed.

3. Tremendous pressure on members of EGs continue to draw speakers of various languages together. Members of smaller EGs or those in remote areas are highly motivated to move out of their group and into urban centers or areas of commerce pursuing the promise of a better or more exciting life. This inevitably results in problems of communication and the eventual choice of the more prestigious as the common language. Those who live in urban areas or centers of population usually speak more than two languages, their native language and Filipino and if they were able to go to school for at least four years, English or an indigenized version of this language. But more often, besides their native language they speak the lingua franca of the region plus Filipino and English. The more widespread languages such as the regional lingua franca and the NLF enjoy a very obvious prestige. In the province of Isabela located in Northeastern Luzon, there are three EGs indigenous to the area but socioeconomic reasons have drawn others to the area complicating the linguistic situation. Native speakers of Gaddang and Yogad would initially claim Iukano, the regional lingua franca, as their language. They would usually know the language of their spouse if he or she belonged to another EG, and could communicate fluently in Filipino. In collecting data for baseline information on the

different EGs<sup>2</sup>, it was discovered that it was often the case that a Yogad from Isabela in Northeastern Luzon could speak:

Yogad	- the native language of the EG,
Gaddang	- language of a neighboring EG,
Iukano	- regional lingua franca,
Filipino	- national lingua franca,
English	- language of school (limited use).

3.1 Still quite prevalent is the tendency of members of EGs to intentionally hide their origins and claim their native language to be whatever the regional lingua franca is. Others simply do not bother to identify their native language thinking their group to be unknown. In this way they unconsciously contribute to marginalizing their own group. A Kalinga from the remote town of San Mariano, Isabela, when asked what his language was, would most likely say Iukano.

3.2 In contrast, there are areas where there is still some kind of resistance to Filipino partly due to the fear that the native language of the group may go into disuse, decay and disappear. This is because of the belief that Filipino is in effect Tagalog, the language of a prestigious dominant group, hence a begrudging acceptance and at times even open hostility is shown towards it. The place where this is most apparent is Cebu, a city located on an island in Central Philippines or the Visayan region. There is the perception here, by a group led by politicians and teachers, that Filipino is just a version of Tagalog, probably because of the high cognate count between these languages. They feel threatened and fear that the Tagalogs would eventually become the most powerful EG. They demonstrate this feeling by refusing to sing the national anthem in Filipino and sing it in Sugbuanon, the native language of this EG. They also refuse to follow the directives of the Department of Education on the use and spread of Filipino. But the great apolitical majority unmindful of this controversy, use Filipino in dealing with outsiders in this city where commerce and trade thrive.

3.3 The need to participate in the larger community in activities of national scope, or suffer marginalization, fostered the use of the national lingua franca by those wishing to integrate into the national community. A number of EGs are still marginalized partly due to their distance from centers of commerce and government

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<sup>2</sup> This was done in the first phase of an ongoing research, presently in its third phase, to establish the commonalities among the different EGs in the country. One of the objectives of this extensive research is to setup baseline data on these groups. The main proponents of the research are C.J.Paz, C.N.Zayas and E. Constantino of the College of Social Sciences and Philosophy, University of the Philippines.