

TEACHING PHILOSOPHY IN FILIPINO

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is divided into two parts. The first part deals with an account of my experience of teaching philosophy in Filipino at the Ateneo de Manila University. The second part attempts at a reflective analysis of that experience. I will conclude with some practical suggestions for the teaching of philosophy in Filipino.

I do not intend to give justifications for the teaching of philosophy in Filipino. I think so much has already been said about that. Neither will I speak for the others who are teaching philosophy in Filipino. My only hope in this paper is that by sharing my experience and reflection, others will benefit and can help towards the intellectualization of Filipino, particularly in the field of philosophy.

2. MY EXPERIENCE OF TEACHING PHILOSOPHY IN FILIPINO

I started teaching philosophy in Filipino in 1975, six years after Fr. Roque Ferriols, S.J., first taught it. It is interesting to look back now that the pioneers of teaching philosophy in Filipino were not Tagalogs. Fr. Ferriols is an Ilocano, Dr. Emerita Quito of De La Salle University is a Kapampangan, and I am a Cebuano. When I ventured to teach philosophy in Filipino, I said to myself at that time, 'If Fr. Ferriols, an Ilocano can do it, why can't I, a Cebuano?' There was also a support system from the Ateneo Dean, Fr. Bienvenido Nebres, S.J., who organized a special Filipino class for a group of about eight faculty members who would meet twice a week with the teacher, Fe Quetua.

The first course that I taught in Filipino was Philosophy of Man, a basic two-semester course required for all juniors of the Ateneo de Manila. In the first semester, I taught it in Taglish, which was a mistake, because the students got used to it and later in the second semester found it difficult to switch to straight Filipino. The second

semester found me and my students groping to philosophize in Filipino. In many instances, my students corrected me, especially in my tenses. In some others, they helped look for the appropriate Filipino words for certain philosophical terms in English. I must say now that it was a humbling but enriching collaborative experience for me.

The Philosophy of Man course uses the existential phenomenological approach, a method that is experiential and descriptive. In the course of teaching the course in Filipino, I discovered that many insights of Existential Phenomenology were better clarified in Filipino than in English. For instance, the main insight of Phenomenology is that consciousness is intentional, that consciousness is always consciousness of something other than consciousness itself, that the subject is always the subject of an object or that man always intends a world. In Filipino, this would be: *Walang kamalayan kung walang namamalayan; walang mundo kung walang taong may malay-tao*. A bonus would be that the term *kamalayan* is a natural word to link consciousness and freedom since both have the same root word *laya*. The unity of man and world is even brought out more strongly in Visayan-Cebuano because consciousness and world have the same word--*kalibutan*. *Walay kalibutan, walay kalibutan*. (No consciousness, no world.) Another example would be the Existentialist search for meaning. Man's search for meaning became more understandable and meaningful in the use of the Filipino word *kahulugan* and relating its root word *hulog* to the English phrase 'fall into place'. *Makahulugan ang buhay ko kung may kabuoan at hindi watak-watak o sabog* (My life is meaningful if everything falls into place and is not dispersed or scattered).

The use of Filipino in teaching philosophy also led me to the discovery that some issues in Western philosophy may not be at all a problem for the Oriental mind. A case of this is the dubiety of existence in scepticism, whether relative (do I exist?) or absolute (does anything exist at all?). This is problematic for the Western mind because the verb 'to be' in English is also a linking verb that connects the subject and the predicate. The dichotomy of the subject and the predicate is already at the back of the Western mind. Such is not the case in Filipino. 'You are beautiful' is '*maganda ka*' and not '*Ikaw ay maganda*'. The subject and predicate are not separated. '*Umiiral ako!*' is one indubitable unity.

This discovery of the differences between the Western mind and the Oriental mind, in particular, the Pilipino mind, influenced me to be selective in the topics and problems to discuss in my classes in Filipino. The criterion for selection was of course relevance to the Pilipino mind and experience.

The next big problem my students and I encountered was the texts; they were in English. We were reading in English but discussing in Filipino. We were performing a double task of doing philosophy and translating. To remedy the situation, I ventured into writing a Philosophy of Man textbook in Filipino. But for this I did not have the time and I could not possibly do it alone. So I collaborated with Fr. Ferriols and Mr. Eduardo Calasanz in producing *Magpakatao, Ilang Babasahing Pilosopiko*, our first philosophy textbook in Filipino published by the Ateneo de Manila University Press in 1979 and edited by Fr. Ferriols. Except for three chapters which are translations from Gabriel Marcel's *Mystery of Being, Volume I*, the book contains our class lectures on some essential topics in Philosophy of Man in Filipino.

The next philosophy course that I taught in Filipino was Ethics or Foundations of Moral Values. Again, the problem was the texts in English, more so in this course because I was using the historical approach, going through the moral philosophies of Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, and Immanuel Kant. What I did was to invite students in pairs to do optional work of translating our texts from English to Filipino. In a year's time, I had the initial Filipino translations of all our English texts. The opportunity to go through them came--I never had the time to read them during the semester because of deadlines

for submission of grades--during my sabbatical leave in schoolyear 1983-1984. There was also the incentive from the APCAS (Association of Philippine Colleges of Arts and Sciences) grant to produce a textbook in Ethics in Filipino. So in the cold winter of Washington D.C., I read through the translations made by my students while attending the three-month seminar on the Foundations of Moral Education at the Catholic University of America. To my frustration, most of the translations done by my students were actually transliterations. I had to rework most of them, comparing them with the English translations, especially the texts of Aristotle, St. Thomas, and Kant. I encountered no difficulty with the text of Confucius, nor with my own paper on Max Scheler's philosophy of values, perhaps because Confucius is Oriental and Scheler belongs to the contemporary period. As I finished a chapter I would send it to Manila through the late Mr. Bonoan's PAL office in San Francisco for Fe Quetua in Ateneo to edit.

The problem did not end there. Mrs. Quetua could not edit it because lacking a philosophical background, she could not understand my translation. She had to wait for my return before the two of us could sit down and edit the translation. This we did for about four months after my return from the U.S. In our sessions together, I would explain to her the moral philosophy of the philosopher whose text we were translating and I used this word and that. For instance, in translating St. Thomas's 'separate substance', I explained to her the metaphysics of substance and we decided to translate this term as *hiwalay na kalamnan* but with *anghel* in parentheses. Translating Kant's *Groundwork of a Metaphysics of Morals* was the most difficult task, and we had two English translations of the original German to compare.

The book *Mga Babasahin sa Pilosopiyang Moral* came out in 1985, the first Ethics anthology in Filipino. Up to now I still receive complaints from students and readers of the difficulty of reading the Filipino translations of the excerpts from the works of Aristotle, St. Thomas, and Kant. And my standard reply to these complaints: Try reading the English translations, and see if they are not as difficult.

The difficulty of reading the texts of Aristotle, St. Thomas and Kant in Filipino was reduced by the complementary background lectures I gave in class in Filipino. Lecturing in Filipino forced me to relate the moral theories to contemporary moral problems. As part of the course requirements, my students had to submit a group report on a moral issue recorded on a cassette tape. Without my asking them, they were applying the moral theories naturally to the issue they had chosen to tackle, and in Filipino. Even the taped interviews were in Filipino.

The next course I taught in Filipino was Philosophy of Religion, and this only recently, schoolyear '84-85. Again there was the problem of the text being in English. Added to this was the reality that to the Pilipino the existence of God is not the issue. A great number of the readings in English of the course, however, deal with the different proofs for the existence of God. At present I have the initial translations of some of the readings of this course made by some students in the first class I taught in Filipino. It may take another sabbatical leave for me to work on them, or I may set them aside since a colleague, Mr. Tomas Rosario, is presently working on a textbook in Philosophy of Religion in Filipino.

3. REFLECTIVE ANALYSIS

It seems to me I went through three stages in my experience of teaching philosophy in Filipino.

The first stage is the actual classroom teaching of philosophy in Filipino. The first obstacle to surmount is fear, the fear of doing something new and different from what you are used to. There is no other way to overcome this fear except by plunging into the

task. As Fr. Ferriols used to say in his class, '*Lundagin mo, baby!*' The next obstacle that you are faced with when you are in class is *hiya*. *Nakakahiyang magkamali, at baka pag-tawanan ka pa sa punto mong Bisaya*. The key to the problem here lies in one's attitude to teaching. Teaching is a collaborative learning experience. My students are not carpers out to find fault in me; rather they are my partners in the learning of philosophy.

The spirit of collaboration is important in the teaching of philosophy in Filipino. For one, you are consoled and encouraged in the thought and fact that there are already pioneers to this task. For another, you are helped by support systems and others who are doing the same thing. *Hindi ka nag-iisa!*

This spirit of collaboration is even more necessary at the second and third stages.

The second stage is translating texts. Here, aside from the problem of finding time off to write, the foremost difficulty is learning the art of translation, finding the appropriate Filipino words for some philosophical terms. I say 'art' because it seems to me that there is no fixed formula to follow in translating texts. What is important to remember is that translation is not transliteration. The principle to follow is the hermeneutical principle: To translate is to interpret, and to interpret is to fuse horizons, the horizon of the author of the text and the horizon of the interpreter who cannot detach himself from his historical present. Language is not a closed reality possessed only by those who speak that language; rather, a language already opens us to another, to the possibility of being translatable into another language. The philosophical presupposition here of course is that the world is through and through linguistic, and being linguistic, the world is a shared world. Once again, translating texts is a collaborative endeavor.

The third stage is what I would like to call *creative repetition*. As you continually teach philosophy in Filipino, without your being conscious of it, you are actually thinking in Filipino, philosophizing in Filipino. Even if you may be just repeating the ideas of past philosophers, by doing it in Filipino, you catch glimpses of the Pilipino mind, bits of insights at the beginning, perhaps, but which may eventually evolve into a unified whole. Let me cite as an example the chapter in *Maggakatao, 'Isang Penomenolohiya ng Pagmamahal'* which was just at the start a compilation of ideas on love from several philosophers translated from English to Filipino. But after putting the ideas down on paper in Filipino, I was amazed at the finished product; it was a text speaking from my own experience. A year later, a philosophy instructor from Davao asked for an English translation of it to be used in his class. I found it hard to translate the chapter back to English, so I gave him my English notes of the topic which were not quite to his satisfaction. The same thing happened to the chapter '*Ang Tao at Maykapal*'. It is a case of a creative repetition of ideas on faith.

I think a lot of this third stage is happening in philosophical researches done in Filipino. Worth mentioning is Fr. Ferriols's latest publications and Albert Alejo's soon-to-be-published master's thesis on *loob*.

The philosophical presupposition of the third stage is none other than the power of language to open to us a world. The Filipino is a window to the Pilipino world.

Where is the collaborative spirit in this third stage? I would like to think that creative repetition is not quite the work of an individual genius alone but a combination of talent and immersion into the Pilipino culture, being with the masses, *pagbababad sa masa*.

4. SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE TEACHING OF PHILOSOPHY IN FILIPINO

1. Have no fear in teaching philosophy in Filipino. *Lundagin mo, baby!*

2. **Avoid Taglish.** If teaching in Filipino (which admittedly is Tagalog-based) is quite a jump for you, then begin lecturing in your native tongue (Cebuano, Ilocano, etc.) or mixed Cebuano-Tagalog, Ilocano-Tagalog, etc. The Filipino language will be enriched by the use of other local languages.
3. **Do not be afraid to make mistakes.** The best way to learn is to learn from one's mistakes.
4. **Learn from students and colleagues.** Teaching philosophy in Filipino is a collaboration of Filipino minds.
5. **Do not hesitate to borrow foreign terms** if at the beginning you cannot find an appropriate Filipino equivalent. A language is partly enriched by borrowings from other languages.
6. **Immerse yourself in Pilipino culture:** watch Pilipino films and shows, read Pilipino literature, komiks included.
7. **Write your lectures in Pilipino and have them published.**

In conclusion, let me say: *Ang pilosopiya ay buhay, at higit na makahulugan ang buhay sa sariling wika.*