

## ASSESSING THE BILINGUAL POLICY IN EDUCATION: THE VISAYAN VIEWPOINT

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### *Rationale for the Policy*

From the national perspective, there seems to be three major justifications for the decision requiring the use of Pilipino along with English as the medium of instruction in the Philippines. The first is that it will bolster the international image of the Filipino; second, that it would enable Filipinos to both comprehend and express abstractions better and, third, that it would reduce illiteracy since using Pilipino will make better readers even of those who drop out after Grade IV.

Because the Philippines is now in the process of creating a Great Tradition in the Redfieldian sense, it is understandable that language becomes a major symbol for fostering a national identity. The slogan, "Isang bansa, Isang diwa" becomes an ideal to work up to and schools are perceived as the best implementing vehicle for the achievement of this ideal. Thus the desire to use Pilipino for wider purposes coupled with the fact that 87 percent of Filipinos now speak "Pilipino" (BCSO 1960) have made it easy to apply the language as a medium of instruction even in those areas that do not have Tagalog as their native tongue. In its essence, Department of Education and Culture (DEC) Order No. 25, S. 1974 discontinues the use of the vernacular as the language of instruction in Grades I and II and replaces that language with Pilipino. In secondary and tertiary levels of education, it requires the teaching of defined subjects (social studies, character education, work education, health

education and physical education) solely in Pilipino but allows for the teaching of other courses according to the language in which the teacher is proficient.

### *Reaction to the Policy*

In the Visayas, the bilingual policy has been met by many first with disbelief and disappointment, then with frustration and anger. Do not the decision-makers realize how unrealistic the bilingual policy is in the non-Tagalog areas? Given the general lack of preparation of teachers and the nonavailability of instructional aids such as books, the general sentiment is that the educational consequences will be detrimental.

Among language planners in Manila, there is a tendency to regard the Visayan appraisal lightly, for many believe that the Visayans as a linguistic group have always looked at the implementation of the Tagalog-based national language with disfavor and that there is in fact a "Visayan resistance" against Pilipino. In an attempt to answer some, if not all, of the points raised, we shall provide data from field research on the islands of Negros and Panay.

The term Visayan entails a cultural-linguistic-geographic designation and covers not only the Cebuano-speaking natives of Cebu, Bohol, Negros Oriental, Siquijor, Leyte, Masbate and northern and eastern Mindanao but also the Waray-speaking Samaritans and the Kinaray-a and Hiligaynon speaker from Panay and Negros Occidental. Collectively, Visayan

speakers comprise 40 percent of the Philippine population (BCSO 1960). It is said that the educational, social, political and economic elite of this region resist the implementation of Pilipino as the national language and as a medium of instruction.

To ascertain the accuracy of this contention and to determine whether age, level of education, mobility and exposure to mass media are predisposing factors to the acceptance/rejection of Pilipino, 115 persons from the political, educational and mass media elite of two communities in Panay and two communities in Negros Oriental were interviewed. Specifically, the following hypotheses were tested:

1. Persons below the age of fifty are more likely to accept Pilipino as the national language compared to persons above fifty years old.
2. Persons who have had instruction in Pilipino are more likely to accept Pilipino than those who have had no instruction.
3. Persons who have resided in Tagalog speaking areas are more likely to accept Pilipino as a language than those who have not resided in Tagalog speaking areas.
4. Persons who watch/listen to Tagalog programs are more likely to accept Pilipino as a national language than those who do not watch/listen to Tagalog programs.

By extension, it is assumed that those favoring the implementation of Pilipino as the national language also favor the intensification of the drive through bilingual instruction.

The provinces of Iloilo and Negros Oriental were selected because they represent two main Visayan groups: the Cebuano and the Hiligaynon speakers. Fifty-six percent of the 115 respondents are from the urban communities of Iloilo and Dumaguete and 44 percent are residents of the rural communities of Dingle, Iloilo and Siaton, Negros Oriental. The 89 males and 26 females in the study range in age from 24 to 70. They are generally highly educated (90 percent have college or advanced

degrees) and 47 percent of them have studied in the Manila area. Seventy-four percent of the sample have had the national language as a subject during various periods of their schooling but only 8 percent had continuous instruction in the language from the elementary grades through college. The rest were taught the language either from the elementary to high school; high school to college; or when they were already in college, as a requisite to the degree. Finally, 40 percent of the interviewees are educators, 30 percent are politicians, 24 percent are government administrators and 6 percent are in control of various mass media facilities.

Although a majority of the respondents believe that there is a language problem in the Philippines because of the existence of many "dialects" and the division of the nation into several linguistic regions, they also hold that the schools have not been effective in remedying the language situation because of the "language glut" (viz. the teaching of English, Spanish, and Pilipino) in the Philippine curriculum. A few maintain that there is no language problem because English and Tagalog can be used for interregional communication. Others maintain that there is a language problem because the two languages are not understood in the rural areas and rural dwellers do not like to change or feel insecure about shifting to a less familiar one.

Although the teaching of the national language was initiated to solve the language problem that is presumed to exist, many of the respondents are convinced that the goals of implementation have been or are being accomplished. It is the observation of those interviewed that even teachers do not speak Pilipino outside the classroom, hence there is no follow up of instruction. They hold that English is easier than and preferable to Tagalog because of its wider applicability. Furthermore, they believe that the "so-called gains" in Pilipino are overstated. As one respondent said: "We don't have a native national language and it will be a long time before we will have one. Students take Pilipino only because it is required."

Instead of uniting the country, they believe that Pilipino has splintered it and has bolstered regionalism. However, there are those who believe that the teaching of the national language has been effective because by compelling the students to take the subject, the students are made to understand and speak the language. Nevertheless, they concede that although the rudiments have been learned, it will take a long time to achieve a "real" solution.

Thus the Visayans sampled in this study generally oppose the move of the National Board of Education to require all schools to begin to use both English and Pilipino as the languages of instruction. Seventy-five percent consider the move to be simplistic and to be of doubtful effectivity. These are some of their comments:

"Learning Pilipino will only add to the mess since English isn't even properly learned."

"There is a lack of teachers and instructional materials and using Pilipino as a medium will lead to the confusion of the schoolchildren since it is not the language of the home."

"The use of Pilipino will retard education. If English is to be replaced it is better to use the vernacular rather than Tagalog."

"The move is all right for the Tagalog areas but not for the Visayas."

The consensus is that English is more practical than Tagalog because Tagalog is not only not understood, it will also pose problems in the teaching of courses dealing with science and technology. The Visayans consider as shortsighted the main argument that Pilipino will improve the reading skills of the potential dropout. Because of the syllabic nature of Pilipino and all other Philippine languages, teaching the national language in schools may enhance the probability of a dropout's retention of basic reading ability after he leaves the school environment. But these Visayans believe that making the potential dropout the primary concern encourages mediocrity. Further, they believe that English is a necessity in the modern world. To quote one respondent: "Tagalog might be taught as a subject but it should not be the medium of instruction."

The 25 percent who favor the use of Pilipino

as a medium of instruction do so "with reservations." Their argument is that it is feasible if teachers and materials are available because the use of Pilipino will intensify the drive for national identity. Yet when asked later in the survey what they prefer as medium of instruction, 66 percent chose English, 3 percent favored the vernaculars and 21 percent were for maintaining the status quo. Only 10 percent favored Pilipino.

Those who preferred English as the medium of instruction justify their selection by saying that, for all intents and purposes, English has become the Philippine national language. Being an international language, they maintain that it is more useful than Tagalog and is also more capable of accommodating the sciences. Furthermore, English has been taught longer: teachers are more familiar with it and "a shift in languages now involves work, money and trouble."

Supporters of the status quo or the co-existence of English and Pilipino regard the present as satisfactory — "English can be used for practical reasons and Tagalog for nationalistic reasons" and characterize the DEC ruling as abrupt.

Advocates of the regional languages explain their position by saying that "we are Visayan speakers and the vernacular is more effective for teaching our children. Other languages should be allowed to develop too." They regard as coercive and antagonizing the move to use Pilipino as a medium of instruction.

In their daily activities, 84 percent of the respondents ordinarily use Visayan and English. The rest claim that they sometimes have to use other languages, such as Tagalog and Spanish. Yet these persons had never been in a situation where they had to use Tagalog and where English was of no help. Even when in the Manila area, only 26 percent felt that they had to use Tagalog and this was in dealing with "certain" (i.e. uneducated) people. As to the language of the newspapers and magazines that they read on a regular basis, 98 percent preferred English. With regard to radio and television programs, 35 percent listen solely to

English language programs, 28 percent to English and Visayan, and 37 percent to English, Visayan and Tagalog. Only nine of the 115 respondents go to Tagalog movies but "only when there is nothing left to see." Tagalog movies according to some respondents tend to be corny in plot and largely imitative of Western films. "Technically they are lousy, besides having bad acting." Thirteen percent do not see Tagalog movies because they do not understand the language.

It is not surprising, therefore, that 85 percent disapprove of the government directive to start using Pilipino in intra-governmental communication because they are "sure" that it will seriously affect the efficiency of office work. "We can't even speak the language, how much more write it?" The move is considered "impractical, time-wasting and a mistake."

Even though the reasons given are varied, 98 percent are agreed that the Philippines needs a national language. Those who do not think so hold that English is already serving as the national language and is more successful as one because it is "neutral." Over all, the respondents care about the Philippines having a common language but it does not matter to them personally whether it should be based on a native Philippine language. "The object is communication and if any language accomplishes that, that is the most important qualification."

Does Tagalog have more status because it has been proclaimed as the basis of the national language? Seventy-five percent answer in the affirmative. Because of this, are they resentful of Tagalog? Thirty-five percent answer yes. They maintain that Tagalog is not representative of the Philippines. Seventy-three percent of the respondents believe that Tagalog has become better known because it is taught instead of the stipulated conglomerated language (Filipino) and is given more importance than the vernaculars. Twenty-four percent assert that Visayan is just as good, if not more beautiful than Tagalog. They maintain that the Tagalogs "maneuvered" the National Language Committee and that Quezon's leadership made Tagalog a national language.

It was originally hypothesized that those who have resided and studied in Tagalog-speaking areas would be more sympathetic to Pilipino as a national language. The data, however, does not support the proposition. Respondents who have studied in Tagalog areas can use Tagalog effectively, but they still object to it as a medium of instruction. Like the other Visayans in the study, they regard the focus on the national language as a needless waste of resources because of its limited applicability.

Respondents who have had instruction in the national language were presumed to have a more favorable attitude toward Pilipino than those who did not receive such instruction but the findings of this research demonstrate that such is not the case. Of the respondents who had been taught the subject (85 of the 115), only 21 percent find the bilingual policy of the National Board of Education acceptable. Given the power to select the medium of instruction, 73 percent indicate a preference for English with only 4 percent for Pilipino. The rest are for the vernacular (15 percent) and for the maintenance of the status quo (8 percent). They claim not to resent Tagalog as a national language but they concur that the language has been unduly elevated to that position. Although close to unanimous in their view that the Philippines needs a national language, only 32 percent express the belief that it is of personal importance to settle on a national language that is native to the Philippines.

It was also hypothesized that older Visayans are less accepting of Pilipino than the younger Visayans. The assumption is that those who are above the age of fifty have not had instruction in Tagalog and cannot function in it and, therefore, are not amenable to the dissemination of Tagalog. It was also initially assumed that their sense of regionalism would be stronger than that of their younger counterparts and that they would view Tagalog as an upstart, rival language. On the other hand, those who are below fifty were thought to be more accepting of Tagalog because, having had instruction in the language, they are more conversant in it. Furthermore, having grown

with more forms of mass media available to them, it was believed that younger Visayans would have a lesser sense of region and a greater sense of nation.

However, the study reveals that there are no marked differences between the attitudes of those who are fifty and below and those who are over fifty. What is furthermore startling is the evidence that, in many instances, the younger respondents manifest more of an opposition to Pilipino than the older generation. For example, the three respondents who are thirty years old and below are all against Pilipino as a medium of instruction. Two of them are of the opinion that it does not make a difference whether or not the national language is a native language and, in fact, they prefer English to assume this role. In spite of the age difference among the respondents, a basic message is conveyed. English is far too useful for it to be replaced with Pilipino. Twenty-six percent of those interviewed reject the idea of retaining Pilipino for nationalistic reasons. A sexagenarian summarizes the sentiment in this manner:

We are a country, right? And we claim to be all Filipinos, right? So what can be a better statement of unity than that? The trouble with Filipinos is that we are more concerned with externals. So we show to the world that we have our own "national" language, that we are nationalistic. But what does that mean if the people don't really want that so-called "national language?"

To him and many like him, the implementation of Pilipino is a step backwards. The pervasive sentiment is that Tagalog "disguised as Pilipino" is not what will solve the Philippine language problem.

How much of these comments and criticisms are shared by the teachers themselves, since they are the ones most affected by the bilingualization of education? Is the bilingual policy indeed a nuisance? Why?

#### *The Visayan Teacher and Pilipino*

It is interesting that, as a group, Visayan educators tend to be more docile about the national language issue. Eighty percent of the 45

teachers and administrators who were interviewed state that "if the government so orders [Pilipino], then we will have to follow it." Yet the respondents who are teachers of Pilipino admit to knowing it "only as far as teaching it as a subject," generally a time slot of forty minutes, and to being "hard-pressed" if they were to sustain it for a longer period. They say they cannot circulate in the community speaking Pilipino because people will laugh at them. If they were Tagalogs, it might be all right, "but not when everybody knows you are a native Visayan speaker." Although not protesting loudly, they take a dim view of the proposed use of Pilipino as a medium of instruction. In private they declare that teachers and parents should have been consulted as to what they believe is the best language educationally for their children. They are convinced that the teaching of Pilipino is one more course to add to the "linguistic indigestion."

Findings indicate that the average Visayan teacher, especially at the elementary and secondary levels, was born, raised and educated in the same language area as the place where he/she teaches. Although he has had at least six units of Pilipino as a requisite to the education degree, his oral ability is limited. Thirty-six units are required for the Pilipino major and 24 units for the Pilipino minor but because of the emphasis on grammar-translation, the development of oral proficiency takes a back seat. If the teacher has been to Manila at all, it was usually for a short period, and hence insufficient to reinforce previous learning in Pilipino. In his specialized field, he is more proficient in English and he feels inadequate whenever Pilipino is required of him. Although he might read Tagalog quite well, speaking it is altogether a different matter.

If teachers feel inhibited about speaking Pilipino in their own communities, one can surmise the kind of follow up, not to mention inducement, that the schoolchild is getting. Just as his teacher, the average Visayan student was born and raised in the same language area as his native tongue. His parents are generally both Visayans and they speak that language in his

home. Although he may go to Tagalog films and read popular literature such as Pilipino comics, he uses the Visayan language for all practical purposes. If there are reading materials in his own home, the chances are that they would be in English or in the vernacular.

For the few privileged families that can afford television sets, there is reinforcement of the limited Pilipino learned in the schools because some programs are broadcast in Tagalog. But those who reside in the municipalities and the barrios do not always have these opportunities. Siaton and Dingle do not have a moviehouse and most of their residents are dependent upon the radio and magazines for entertainment and for news. *Bisaya* and *Hiligaynon* magazines are popular in these towns. Occasionally, students can be seen toting Tagalog comics but, as one teacher observed, comics are visual and one can be entertained by them even if the captions are not understood.

Given the composition of the Visayan classroom, it is understandable that the bilingual policy is received with so much apprehension. Outside of their personal inadequacies in regard to the language, materials in Pilipino are difficult to come by, even those for use in the Pilipino courses themselves. If this is the case, how much less can the teachers of other disciplines expect? It is a fact that there are more, varied, and appropriate instructional materials in English at present. With the emphasis on bilingualism, it is anticipated that translations will be conducted on a larger and an accelerated scale. But the nagging question persists: will output match needs? If teachers' knowledge of Pilipino was firmly anchored, one might expect them to do their own translations and not wait for some national institution to do it for them. But such is not the case and, sadly, the planners of the bilingual policy did not pave the way for it by first saturating the target areas with Pilipino materials that can be used in the classes which are now part of the Philippine curricula. The bilingualization of Philippine schools is a grave enterprise and its impact could have been cushioned by providing as much of the basics as possible.

### *Attitudinal Correlates of Bilingualism*

Language learning can be facilitated by the motivation behind it. If a language is perceived as useful, people will desire to learn it and speak it of their own accord. Thus it is necessary to examine why the present "national language" does not appeal to non-Tagalogs especially. Is it enough to say that the Visayans oppose the bilingual policy because of regional chauvinism? It seems that this is not the whole of it, particularly when the survey conducted by the Philippine Normal College or PNC (Otanés and Sibayan 1968: 141) demonstrates that even native speakers of Tagalog do not want their children to have Pilipino as the language of instruction.

Tagalog parents want their children to be exposed to English in schools and learn the language well so that they can use it as a tool in the quest for upward mobility. Those sampled for the PNC study believe that the vernacular is still the most important language for most communication purposes but English is preferred for general scholastic purposes. Although schools are seen as "the best vehicle for accelerating the development of Pilipino as the national language," the general sentiment is that the dissemination of this language should not jeopardize the well-being of the child. If Tagalog parents feel this way when their vernacular is the other side of the bilingual coin, how much more those who belong to the other language regions? As noted by the evaluators of the PNC survey, all the reasons for using English are related to personal goals and advancement; therefore,

... it appears that one of the important steps that need to be taken in order that Pilipino can gain more importance than it now has is to stimulate its growth such that it will serve not only the more abstract goals associated with nationalism or citizenship but also the concrete and immediate professional needs of the individual. (Otanés and Sibayan 1968).

How is this kind of growth encouraged: by fiat or legislation? Is the bilingual policy an act designed to stimulate this kind of growth? Will the bilingual policy *create* the need for the language? Or are we not, in fact, putting the

cart before the horse? It would seem more reasonable to start from a position where there is a language meeting the personal needs of the individual that is then elevated to meet his intellectual needs, not the other way around. Whether or not decreed, a language will manifest itself if cultural forces are favorable.

### *Recommendations*

To echo the teachers, the bilingual policy is here: What can we do? We are now in the middle of Phase I (1974-1978), yet the same problems are still mentioned: materials are lacking and the training and upgrading of teachers is not taking place. The teaching of Pilipino in the schools has not been anticipated by distributing prepared instructional materials in the critical areas (viz., non-Tagalog regions), perhaps in the false assumption that Tagalog is "similar" to the other Philippine languages and is being coveted by the other linguistic regions because of its being the language of the capital. Because language permeates all spheres of human activity, a policy of this nature necessitates the mobilization of a variety of disciplines. If the policy-makers are serious with this policy, there are at least two things that they can set into motion.

First, the onus of the bilingual policy falls on the teachers, therefore, a training program must be initiated to ensure that they can carry the responsibility. A suggestion has been made to increase the number of Pilipino units for all teachers. This is not seen as the solution. Until it was repealed, students were required to take twenty-four units of Spanish prior to graduation, yet most graduates are not able to carry on a simple dialogue in Spanish. It might be a partial solution if the audiolingual approach is emphasized, but what is needed is an intensive, total-immersion study of the language. How can this be done? Although we recognize the need to go to the United States for further English studies, we have never envisioned making a similar such transfer for the study of Pilipino.

In this paper, I propose a teacher exchange program between non-Tagalog and Tagalog regions. Although we say that Pilipino is not Tagalog, in fact it is Tagalog, so let us start by

peeling this facade and stare the problem in the face. It need not be expensive for the government to undertake such a program. Assuming that the salary scale is the same, the Tagalog teacher can serve his tenure in other language areas and be the native-speaker model. The other-language teacher can serve his time in a Tagalog region and steep himself in the language and culture. If indeed similarities exist among all Philippine languages, such immersion should produce proficiency in a non-Tagalog speaker in a schoolyear or less.

The second recommendation is that administrators give teachers released time for the development of instructional aids in Pilipino. This time could be used to improve their grasp of Pilipino by going back to school or by intensive personal study and to shape their courses in Pilipino. As it is, teachers complain about the lack of time to do anything else. If it is so, we cannot realistically expect them to do anything more than they are doing now. There needs to be a system of rewards for developing a competence in Pilipino.

Given the need to bolster our national identity and to keep abreast with the world, the bilingual policy may have been seen by the language planners as the perfect solution. However, from the standpoint of a non-Tagalog speaker, a moratorium on the bilingual policy is necessary until a thorough appraisal of the readiness of the actual implementors, the teachers, is made. Otherwise, we play a game of ready-or-not-here-it-comes, of the one-eyed leading the blind — which could be quite fun, if not for the enormous kitty at stake, the educational viability of generations of Filipinos.

### *Note*

The author read this paper at the 1977 national convention of the Philippine Sociological Society held at Iloilo City. She is with Silliman University, Dumaguete City.

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