

Filipino – the dialect of the unlearned

How a simple question evolved into a heated debate: Is Tagalog a language or a dialect?

<http://getrealphilippines.com/blog/2011/09/how-a-simple-question-evolved-into-a-heated-debate-is-tagalog-a-language-or-a-dialect/>

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By Miguel Tajan

The answer is simple, Tagalog is a language. Why make such a simple question into something so complex?

I believe that the answer lies in the confusion between the definitions of a language and a dialect. We all know what a language is; it's what we speak everyday to communicate, so let's take a closer look on the meaning of dialect. A dialect is a language variety spoken by a population within a geographical region. This can confuse those who believe that dialects are those words and sounds from people's mouths in an area that is different from others and from a different region of others. It's natural to think this way, because most individuals think with an egocentric perspective, thinking that their way of doing things (even their own way of speaking such as grammar, slangs, and whatnot) is correct while others aren't. The truth is, this process of thinking is biased. Critical thinkers often think outside the box and for an issue such as this, we will go through that process of thinking outside the box. For this process, we will examine four countries and their linguistic statuses. It's important to note that your egocentric perspective should not get in your way when examining these linguistic statuses of the countries as that perspective is biased.

A dialect is a language variety. What is a language variety? We know what a language is, so now the question is, what is variety? It simply means many different types. A language variety is many different types of spoken words in a language. Note that a dialect is a language variety, not a variety of languages which would mean many different types of languages while a language variety is many different types of spoken speech in ONE language; note how it is not plural in language variety as opposed to varieties of languages. Therefore in a single language, we have a variety of speeches among people, and every person has their own way of speaking the language that differs from others who speak that same single language, which is known as an idiolect.

A collection of idiolects among a similar group of people is called a dialect. Normally these dialects are clustered in an area, usually a geographical or regional area, but dialects also exist among peer groups and certain communities of people who speak alike in that language. The following examples will show how this dialect-language issue is put into play.

1.) **China** – As we know, the majority of Chinese people speak a language called Mandarin, which also happens to be the world's top most spoken language with over one billion people who speak it. However, little do many of us know that aside from Mandarin, there are also other languages spoken in China by China's ethnic minorities that dwell among the shadows of the Chinese regime. Languages such as Yue (Cantonese and Taishanese), Min (Hokkien/Fukien and Taiwanese (Hokkien)), Uyghur and Arabic, Manchurian, Mongol, Wu (Shanghaiese), Tibetan, Hmong, Portuguese and Macanese, Vietnamese, and much more are spoken all over the country. Although these languages are separate languages and that speakers from each group cannot understand each other, i.e.: a Macanese speaker cannot understand a Shanghaiese speaker, these languages are constantly referred to as dialects because of a regional distance from other populations who speak a different word, which by now you should

know that is wrong. A similar situation is apparent in The Philippines and will be examined about later.

Written language is not considered as language since pronunciation changes over time. The perfect example for this is English, as her spelling is not the same way it is spoken since pronunciation has changed in English over centuries. In Chinese, orthography characters may be shared and used among other Chinese languages, but when pronounced, the pronunciation is different and varies; therefore, written language can not be considered language. We must rely on our ears and what we hear to determine if what we hear is a dialect of a language or not, that's why spoken language is much more crucial.

Our example will be the language, Mandarin. Mandarin is spoken not only in China but also in Singapore and Taiwan. Speakers of Mandarin from Beijing will differ in their speech variety or dialect from Mandarin speakers in Taiwan. Some common differences are the –r endings that Northern Mandarin has while the absence of this –r ending is in Southern Mandarin. Another common difference is the use of “*hé*” and “*hàn*” for the word “and.” Although both of the speech groups speak different dialects of the same language, these difference do nothing to impede the understanding or the intelligibility between the speakers; hence, people who speak dialects of the same language will always understand each other will little or no difficulty.

It is a given rule that everyone speaks a dialect of their own language and that includes everyone to have an accent, even if we do not think that we speak with an accent. Again, do not let the egocentric thoughts fool you as you do have an accent to other listeners or if you think you speak the more “correct” or “proper” form of your language. The fact is, there is no “correct” form of a spoken language. Every dialect is acceptable, although some dialects are more preferred than other as certain dialects are much better understood by majority of speakers who speak other dialects of that language. An example would be General or Standard American, which is the name of a type of dialect spoken in the USA, and leads us into the next country.

2.) The **United States of America** – English is the national language of this country despite not claiming an official language. English is spoken everywhere throughout the country, and knowing how this country is geographically vast in size, the English language will definitely experience a variety of speeches spoken among various regions of the USA. Southern, Pacific West Coast, New England, the North, the Midwest, Ebonics (African-American English), and the Mid-Atlantic are all major types of English dialects spoken in the USA. Among these dialects was created a general/standard American English dialect which is considered to be more “neutral” among every dialect since this dialect is the most widely understood English dialect spoken among Americans in media and nationwide. It is also the best representative of American English among the international community.

Evidently, people who speak General/Standard American are bi-dialectal with their own regional dialect. Since English is not regulated by a governing language body, prospects for English to evolve and change in grammar and vocabulary are open as evident in comparison from today's English from English spoken in the 1800s and early 1900s. Although there doesn't exist an official language in the USA, English is the national language of the country; however; there are countries that try to differentiate what is and what isn't the national language verses the official language and what is a dialect verses what is a language, which takes us to the next country to be surveyed, Spain.

3.) **Spain** – Spain is well-known today as the motherland of Spanish. Her golden age of the Spanish empire heightened the spread of the Spanish language world-wide. Spanish is also spoken in Latin America, Latin Africa, and Latin Asia but prospects for these Spanish dialects of Spanish to develop into separate languages are very slim as the Spanish language is regulated by the *Real Academia Española*. Spanish, like many other sister Romance languages, descended from Vulgar Latin in the Iberian Peninsula.

When the Roman Empire collapsed, the Latin language was spoken across southern Europe and stretched from present-day Portugal to Israel and all across northern Africa. Since Latin was a language spoken in vast regions, dialects of this language were obviously evident as speech communities of Latin spoke in various types with regional accents. Since the Latin language was never governed or regulated in grammar and vocabulary by anyone, these dialects over many years had evolved into their present-day Romance languages such as Spanish, Occitan, French, Portuguese, Italian, Romanian, Catalan, and Galician. These are now separate languages since speakers from these languages will have difficulty in understanding what speakers from the other languages say, in short there is a low degree of mutual intelligibility among some of these speakers.

Going back to Spain's issue, in the Iberian Peninsula exists more than just the Spanish language. Portuguese, Galician, Occitan, Catalan, Leonese, Aragonese, Asturian, Basque, and Aranese are spoken in Spain. Although Spanish is mandatory as a language that every Spaniard needs to know and has official status, four more languages in Spain share official status as regional languages, and they are: Catalan, Basque, Galician, and Aranese. Some regionalists and separatists describe their own regional variant of their language as a separate language. An example would be Catalan speakers in Spain's Eastern coast. The Northern part speak Catalan with a unique Catalan dialect while the Southern part of the Eastern coast speak the same language as well, Catalan, but speak a Valencian dialect of Catalan and consider their variant or dialect to be a separate language when in fact, speakers from both parts will understand each other with no difficulty. Some extremists of Spanish will also say that the Catalan language is just a dialect of Spanish since there is some mutual intelligibility or understanding between the two languages. This is a form of Spanish nationalism where Spanish speakers would say that regional languages that sound similar or close to their language are just dialects of their language. Remember again, do not let your egocentric perspective get in the way as it is biased, and do not let nationalism or regionalism fool you. Speaking from this nationalism and regionalism spur come our country next. The last country that we will examine is our very own beloved "*Patria Adorada*," the Philippines.

4.) The **Philippines** – The linguistic situation of The Philippines is one of a very complicated situation. As many of us know, according to the 1987 Philippine constitution, English and Filipino are the only 2 official languages with Filipino being the national language. Filipino came about when the development of a national language was started. The original language that was thought to be the national language was Tagalog. Overtime, this Tagalog was masked by the word, Pilipino, then evolved into a conceptual language called Filipino, which is essentially based on Tagalog and will further be in development and evolve as more vocabulary from other languages enrich it. Filipino is basically a language that will soon evolve and mutate into a monstrous language with a wealth of who-knows-what-and-where the grammar and vocabulary will come from. The state of Filipino as of right now is still a developing baby, and is regulated by the Commission of the Filipino Language (KWF) so thus far remains mutually intelligible to the language that it was derived from, Tagalog, until further notice and development which is slow at the moment.

Basically, Filipino is still a dialect or variant of Tagalog as speakers of both can still understand each other with no difficulty, but once Filipino starts to grow and mutate into the predicted monster it will be, that dialect will evolve into a separate language, just how the dialect of Vulgar Latin developed into Spanish, except this development process isn't natural nor natural-made, but forced. Aside from English, there are over 170 languages spoken in The Philippines and Filipino is a required subject that every Filipino is supposed to learn and be able to speak fluently. That means a speaker of Ilocano, Cebuano, Cuyonon, etc... are not only supposed to learn English, but the dialect of Tagalog right now, called Filipino. Tagalog speakers also have to not only learn English but also take a course on their language's other dialect, Filipino. Tagalog speakers are dreaded with the problem of learning another

dialect of their language while the rest of the non-Tagalog speaking Filipinos have to learn a completely new language to them which isn't even spoken at most homes.

One big contradiction with Filipino to develop is that the Filipino language is regulated by a governing body, the KWF, and when ever a language is regulated by a governing body, the growth and development for a language to evolve will drastically slow. Unlike Vulgar Latin dialects, which didn't have regulating bodies, the Latin dialects evolved into modern-day Spanish, French and Italian. Spanish and French are some languages that have governing bodies (La Real Academia and La Academie Française) to protect the French and Spanish language and help regulate their grammar and vocabulary. If the mission of the KWF is to further develop and grow the Filipino language, then they shouldn't be regulating what should be and shouldn't be a part of the Filipino language. Otherwise the Filipino language will never develop into the language it is supposed to be and will just remain in the same status it is in which is a status as a dialect of Tagalog.

The bottom line is: Tagalog is a language with her own dialects. Once a Tagalog speaker can no longer understand other speakers around her, then the speakers are speaking a different language. Some examples of Tagalog dialects are the infamous Filipino, Marinduque, Quezon, Rizal, Metro Manila, Caviteño, Batangas, Bataan, and Tayabas. Despite that these dialects speak Tagalog differently, every Tagalog speaker of these dialects will understand each other with little or no difficulty at all since they all speak the same language, Tagalog. The same goes with other Philippine languages such as Cebuano, Ilocano, and so fourth.

The best solution? Encourage the usage of English more alongside with the teachings and developments of native regional languages. Possibly develop literature and media in unhealthy status-type languages. Re-introduce Spanish into full teachings until graduation and get rid of the Filipino language once and for all! It is only delaying the development of other dying languages and hindering the communication barriers among Filipinos, moreover; it is promoting regional division within a country that is already struggling.

We as Filipinos need to get rid of our egocentric perspectives and think with the importance of English and Spanish, no more “inglesero or kastilaloy/katsilaloy” attitudes.

The DILA forum had several reactions to Philstar columnist William Esposito's ill-informed criticism of the Soriano piece on Filipino among others.

Reaction to Esposito

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/DILA/message/24073>

September 6, 2011

By Bangkaw

Comparing the Philippines with its diverse ethnolinguistic groups to China and Japan is insanity.

There is no similarity at all from a historical and cultural perspective. How can one dissect an apple from an orange? Though both are fruits they are not similar.

China has had a unifying system in their written language for 2,000 years give or take a century here and there. The Chinese whatever dialect/language they speak understand each other because of the universal ideograms they used. Japan too has a unifying system not only in their written language but

also their spoken one. In a word, they are a homogenous people while we are not one people.

So what about us, the "Filipinos"? There is no comparison. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand why we cannot imitate the Chinese or the Japanese because they are not us. Then the article talks self righteously of a "loss of identity" because it is being replaced so-called with a foreign language. What baloney.

Whatever foreign language we learn to speak our identity remains as our forefathers - Visayan! Did these bright boys ever figured out that Jamaicans are Jamaicans and not English though their language is English? English and Spanish were a unifying system of communication we've used for many centuries without a hitch and no one pretended we were kano or espanyol with our flat noses and thick lips.

I don't know what identity we lost because as far as I know a Tagalog is a Tagalog and a Cebuano is a Cebuano until now. We never lost our identity. Unless if we course we believe the lie that "Filipino" is our identity before the Spanish came. Maybe they will say next that F. Sionil Jose lost his Ilocano identity and by extension the Filipino one because he is a literary genius in English. So you see where the analogy falls flat on its face?

It is hard to reason with people who are unreasonable. They just don't see that what they are doing is creating a Tagalog identity fronting as Filipino because that's the only one recognized as Filipino. In the process we are made to lose our true regional identities as Visayans.

For me, singing the national anthem or lupang hinirang doesn't do it in the slightest. I don't mean to be callous but the Filipino Spirit - whatever it is - has Spanish influence written all over it. I won't ever reject it because that is the authentic Filipino. The Filipino Spirit is best captured when we sing our national anthem in our own ethnic languages. That is unfortunately lost to the narrow minded zealotry of people who want to destroy reality and create from fiction.

Falsehoods

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/DILA/message/24155>

October 1, 2011

By Harvey

There are a few factual falsehoods inherent in this brief paragraph of Resty Cena. First, Cena claims that Tagalog only serves to "develop functional communicative skills in the language". However that is not the way the high priests of the national language are promoting it in real life. Their argument, and Tagalistas like Teodoro Agoncillo, Apolinar Parale, Conrado de Quiros and even the anonymous Tagalistas who wrote up that indoctrination pamphlet published by CICT make it clear--the reason for pushing the national language is because of the presumption that one can't be a Filipino without mastering Tagalog.

Second, between 1940 until the Marcos years, Tagalog was merely taught as a subject but even then Tagalistas like Apolinar Parale in "The Case for Pilipino" was whining that merely teaching Tagalog as a subject was not sufficient in promoting the national language. They were arguing that in order for "Pilipino" (as they called the national language at that time) to really become the national language, it should be used as medium of instruction and eventually phase out English and Spanish. It is dishonest for Cena to claim that he is in favor of using the mother tongue for the non-Tagalogs while he silently

approves of his ideological comrades' push for the national language to crowd out our other languages. Thirdly, Cena is utterly silent about laws like Republic Act 8491 that explicitly make it a criminal act to sing the national anthem in the original Spanish or the non-Tagalog translations.

By the way, if the cement buyer in Cena's fairy tale really thought of buying cement from a Cebuano distributor, didn't that mean that there was communication to begin with? Before Tagalog intruded in Visayan shores, Cebuanos, Warays, and Ilonggos were communicating with each other using their respective languages--they only needed to expose each other to each others respective tongues as they needed and communication happened. All without the need for a national language.

Supporters of the national language did not like Spanish and English as means of communication even though both languages were at one time official languages of the Philippines. If English and Spanish aren't good enough because they supposedly are "foreign", then non-Tagalogs are equally entitled to reject Tagalog/Pilipino/Filipino as equally foreign. Tagalistas can't reject this logic without admitting to dishonesty. And who says a language has to be declared a "National language" before it can be used as a means to communicate? How did those delegates at the constitutional convention of 1934 communicate with each other? Smoke signals?

The truth is, it is not the idea of separate cultures that have done us harm, quite the opposite. The idea that there was one nation, one culture gave rise to the idea that there should be one national language. It is the idea of "one nation" and "one culture" that gave us the poisonous tree of Quezon to begin with.

And here is the one that started it all, censored promptly by mb.com.ph for fear of offending the Tagalista Nazis.

Language, learning, identity, privilege

August 24, 2011

By James Soriano

English is the language of learning. I've known this since before I could go to school. As a toddler, my first study materials were a set of flash cards that my mother used to teach me the English alphabet.

My mother made home conducive to learning English: all my storybooks and coloring books were in English, and so were the cartoons I watched and the music I listened to. She required me to speak English at home. She even hired tutors to help me learn to read and write in English.

In school I learned to think in English. We used English to learn about numbers, equations and variables. With it we learned about observation and inference, the moon and the stars, monsoons and photosynthesis. With it we learned about shapes and colors, about meter and rhythm. I learned about God in English, and I prayed to Him in English.

Filipino, on the other hand, was always the `other' subject — almost a special subject like PE or Home Economics, except that it was graded the same way as Science, Math, Religion, and English. My classmates and I used to complain about Filipino all the time. Filipino was a chore, like washing the dishes; it was not the language of learning. It was the language we used to speak to the people who washed our dishes.

We used to think learning Filipino was important because it was practical: Filipino was the language of the world outside the classroom. It was the language of the streets: it was how you spoke to the tindera when you went to the tindahan, what you used to tell your katulong that you had an utos, and how you texted manong when you needed "sundo na."

These skills were required to survive in the outside world, because we are forced to relate with the tinderas and the manongs and the katulongs of this world. If we wanted to communicate to these people — or otherwise avoid being mugged on the jeepney — we needed to learn Filipino.

That being said though, I was proud of my proficiency with the language. Filipino was the language I used to speak with my cousins and uncles and grandparents in the province, so I never had much trouble reciting.

It was the reading and writing that was tedious and difficult. I spoke Filipino, but only when I was in a different world like the streets or the province; it did not come naturally to me. English was more natural; I read, wrote and thought in English. And so, in much of the same way that I learned German later on, I learned Filipino in terms of English. In this way I survived Filipino in high school, albeit with too many sentences that had the preposition 'ay.'

It was really only in university that I began to grasp Filipino in terms of language and not just dialect. Filipino was not merely a peculiar variety of language, derived and continuously borrowing from the English and Spanish alphabets; it was its own system, with its own grammar, semantics, sounds, even symbols.

But more significantly, it was its own way of reading, writing, and thinking. There are ideas and concepts unique to Filipino that can never be translated into another. Try translating bayanihan, tagay, kilig or diskarte.

Only recently have I begun to grasp Filipino as the language of identity: the language of emotion, experience, and even of learning. And with this comes the realization that I do, in fact, smell worse than a malansang isda. My own language is foreign to me: I speak, think, read and write primarily in English. To borrow the terminology of Fr. Bulatao, I am a split-level Filipino.

But perhaps this is not so bad in a society of rotten beef and stinking fish. For while Filipino may be the language of identity, it is the language of the streets. It might have the capacity to be the language of learning, but it is not the language of the learned.

It is neither the language of the classroom and the laboratory, nor the language of the boardroom, the court room, or the operating room. It is not the language of privilege. I may be disconnected from my being Filipino, but with a tongue of privilege I will always have my connections.

So I have my education to thank for making English my mother language.