

by Prof. Guillermo Gomez-Rivera

# Pilipino and the mis-education of the Filipino



The Author (right) receiving a congratulatory word from President Marcos.

A university professor, linguist and author, GUILLERMO GOMEZ-RIVERA Y LOCSIN, is one of the most level-headed and articulate educational thinkers in the country today. The Ministry of Education and Culture could certainly benefit from his creative ideas.

In 1972 he served as Secretary to the Language Committee of the Constitutional Convention, a position that made him privy to the language problem.

We recall the dramatic incident when the Con-Con President, Diosdado Macapagal, announced that the decreed majority of the Con-Con voted to disapprove Pilipino as the National language. A pandemonium broke out in the galleries. The indignant pro-Pilipino spectators started shouting curses and the anti-Pilipino supporters retaliated with equally interesting expletives.

At the end of the tumultuous session, Rivera was questioned by some newsmen as to what he thought of the happening in the hall.

"You know," he said calmly, "I am convinced more than ever that Spanish is really our national language. You know why? Because all the curses uttered back there by the Tagalogs as well as the non-Tagalogs over Pilipino were Spanish words!"

Everybody, of course, enjoyed the joke.

In 1973 Rivera was chosen "Man of the Year" by the *Asia Examiner* magazine for his studies in culture and languages. In 1975 he received the Premio Zobel "in recognition of his efforts to preserve the Spanish culture and language in the Philippines." Two years later he was proclaimed Visayan poet laureate by the Hiligaynon Writers Association.

Dr. Narciso Albarracin's "Philippine Education: A Challenge to National Purpose" (SIDESTREETS, August 1981) is a milestone in intellectual honesty, candor and altruism. At last, an educator — who is also a product of an educational system that has thwarted the Filipino's desire for true progress in culture, economics and eventually politics — has recognized the basic congenital problems that beleaguer us all.

Lamentably, however, while Dr. Albarracin recognizes the problems, he hardly indicates any solution. He could at least have pointed out the root cause of our educational infirmity by referring to, among other treatises, Rosa Sevilla Alvero's "Critica del Sistema de Educacion en Filipinas" (1936, UST Press) and Dr. Jose Maria Delgado's series of articles published by *Libertas* in answer to Trinidad HERNANDEZ Pardo de Tavera's "History of the Philippines" included in the 1903 national census publication. These are all — alas! — written in Spanish, the



language which, ironically, the very system of education that produced leaders like Dr. Albarracin has all but extinguished.

Many solutions to our present educational problems could be had if we had not lost Spanish as one of our tools of communication and development. Had we kept Spanish, there would not be any "language problem" issue today. Any Filipino who has rid himself of the "Hispanophobia" inflicted by our school system will fully understand this.

After the Spanish *conquistadores* succeeded in putting together so many tribal nations (called "ethnic states" by President Marcos in his *Tadhana*) under a single administration, a clash of native languages and dialects inevitably resulted. The clash must have been formidable, for each of the native dialects, unlike the Chinese languages in Mainland China that use a common script, had its own unique system of writing. Pardo de Tavera's "Cuadro Paleografico," which demonstrates the system of writing of each native dialect, reveals more differences than similarities in those pre-Spanish scripts. Such a condition was certainly conducive to misunderstanding and disunity. It took a Chinaman, turned ardent Filipino through Hispanization — Tomas Pinpin — to decide for us the adoption of the Spanish alphabet for all our native dialects. Unfortunately, Tomas Pinpin occupies an obscure place in our history. In fact, a Manila mayor who had no sense of history at all, had Pinpin's rundown monument barbarously pulled out from Plaza Cervantes and thrown into Plaza Calderon de la Barca in front of the Binondo Church — a bizarre tribute to the memory of the man who gave us a unified Filipino script. Having lost its objectivity due to its diseased preoccupation with things colonial, our educational system has only succeeded in becoming not only colonial but on this account savagely anti-Filipino.

To bridge the disunity of speech

among so many indigenous "ethnic states" that were to become the base of a single Filipino nation, the Spaniards simultaneously Hispanized all the native languages as they began teaching Castilian to all of them. After three centuries of doing this, a national concept, known as Filipino, expressed itself in Spanish through the writings of those who proudly identified themselves as Filipinos, whether Iberian, Chinese or Malay-Indonesian in blood.

Yes, "Filipino" had to start as an elitist concept since there was no other way then possible for that unitary concept of nation to emanate from so many autonomous native groups. Such "regional groups" intermittently suffered hangovers of being different and "independent ethnic states" vis-a-vis the greater Filipino nation that was being forged, wittingly or unwittingly, by the Spanish language itself. The situation finally alarmed the Spaniards who, in their frantic attempts to keep their power, went

But drunk with their victory over both the Spaniards and the Filipinos, the American McKinleyans imposed English through the educational system they contrived, thus starting a new language problem. They sought to eliminate Spanish as the unitary and linguistic influence among so many persistent "ethnic states" and hoped to make all Filipinos speak English. But while the Americans succeeded in persecuting Spanish out of existence, they failed to make English the language of all Filipinos. English thus became the language of an elite, many of whom became political parasites in and out of the Philippine government. The grass roots were compulsorily subjected to its teaching but they never accepted it as their language to replace their respective ethnic vernaculars.

Worse, when the Americans turned over the country's educational system to their Filipino minions, the latter adopted their mentor's biases against what is Hispanic in the Filipino but

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to the extent of even prohibiting Spanish among the disparate indigenous population. But such preventive measures against Spanish came too late. For the Filipino nation had already been born, *in Spanish*, in the same way that the Mexican, Peruvian and other Latin-American nations were born in Spanish despite all the preventive measures put up by the Madrid governments of those times.

Claro M. Recto, whose nationalism cannot be assailed, pointed out that "had not the Americans arrived with their language (English) there would be no question about Spanish being our sole and primary official and national language." ("*La Cruzada por El Espanol en Filipinas*," *Manila Chronicle* Supplement, Oct., 1960)

failed at the same time to nurture the good seeds of the English language left by an imperialistic, bigotry-ridden McKinleyan regime of some 40 years.

Had the Americans made the Philippines a member-state of their United States, there could have been a conscientious and properly motivated teaching of English from which good things could have surfaced, including possible solutions to what we now refer to as a national problem.

English could have been properly taught, and properly learned by the Filipinos, if there was a clear intention to annex the Philippines as a member state of the American union. As there was none, the McKinleyan imposition



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of the English language could only purvey what was inimical and irrelevant to our national interest.

The logical thing to do was to return to Spanish so that the interrupted evolution of our nationality since 1521 could be returned on its original historical tracks. However, the American regime, in its drive to keep the Filipino perpetually confused and marginal, encouraged instead the "formation of a national language based on Tagalog." With this ploy, the former Tagalog "ethnic state," in relation to the Visayans, Mindanao-enses, Ilocanos, Bicolanos, Kapangpangans, etc., became the "fourth colonizing power" within what remains of the authentic Filipino national framework.

Thus the "ethnic states" — and regionalism — were resurrected, but with a cruel innovation against the non-Tagalogs who now find themselves being linguistically colonized by rabid *surian* Tagalistas.

Along this cruel twist of events, and possibly because of it, some regional groups, like the Moslem Filipinos, prefer to secede from the entire national dichotomy. Because the American system of education in English has betrayed what is Filipino, we are now being made to think that with "Pilipino," a deliberate corruption of "Filipino," we shall at last achieve "national unity." That is why we now have the Ministry of Education and Culture decreeing Pilipino a compulsory subject in college and as the medium of instruction for "humanity subjects," aside from virtually making it the language in the elementary and high school levels to cover up for their failure in teaching English.

But with Pilipino we will not solve the educational problems cited by Dr. Albarracin. We will only compound them the more, for Pilipino is not an academic language. It can hardly be intellectualized. Moreover, there are no books in science, world

information, culture and technology in Pilipino to an extent that would reasonably enable us to refer to it as a "storehouse" of world knowledge. To progress, Filipinos do not need "Pilipino" in their school curricula, except in the primary grades — in the Tagalog-speaking areas of the country.

Pilipino could well be developed as the national language, if indeed that is really what we need in this age of global interaction. But its propagation must be done *outside of the educational system*. Instead of the educational system, the media could do the job. For the real challenge now is how to save English as the primary medium of our education if we mean what we say when we talk about "national development" and "national goals." And to save English, *we must remove*

from the secondary and tertiary curricula and the reinforcement of the teaching of English in all levels with modern methods and audio-visual systems and the intensification of Spanish as a foreign language requirement in high school and college.

To be nationalistic, Filipinos do not need the regionalistic and chauvinistic outlook of parochial minded Tagalistas and the growing number of diploma mill operators we now have. Their ilk is a disquieting and brutish impediment to the attainment of progress through adequate education for all Filipinos, including many in the Tagalog community who do not share their homegrown and regional imperialism. The MEC should leave to Nora Aunor and to Vilma Santos and the rest in the entertain-



*Pilipino from the high school and college curricula.* We are not to lose English just to please the devious entrepreneurs of the billion-peso Pilipino textbook business.

Imagine if after losing Spanish we were to lose English too! Is it not a wonder why most Pilipino-oriented citizens of this New Republic do not have a global outlook of things? The foreign imperialists and colonizers must have been evil indeed, but let us not allow that to blind us to the fact that we direly need English, and, to a certain extent, Spanish. The solution, therefore, to the language and, in effect, to all the other education problems cited by Dr. Albarracin, is the immediate removal of Pilipino

ment world — to the media, that is — and to honorable Tagalog foundations, the development of Tagalog as a widespread language among Filipinos who may need it. Later on, if Tagalog proves to be a practical and adequate substitute to English as our primary tool of education, then the objections to its adoption as a language of instruction and as a developmental tool would have been nullified.

Dr. Albarracin has clearly identified the basic problem of Philippine education — the language problem — a problem made more damning with a new colonialism: the imposition of Pilipino in our school system. The issue is as clearcut as that — a situation that condemns equivocation. ●