

**PRIVILEGED SPEECH BY THE  
HONORABLE REPRESENTATIVE MAGTANGGOL T. GUNIGUNDO  
IN COMMEMORATION OF BUWAN NG WIKA 2013**

House of Representatives

August 5, 2013



Ginoong Ispiker, bilang paggunita sa Buwan ng Wika, nais ko pong talakayin ang tungkol sa estado ng mga lengguwahe ng ating bansa at ang tungkol sa ahensyang inatasan upang pangalagaan ang mga ito.

Gusto ko pong magsimula sa mga pangalang “Tagalog”, “Pilipino”, at “Filipino”, Ginoong Ispiker. Makailang beses na rin nating binagu-bago ang pangalan ng ating pambansang wika nang hindi naman naiiba ang esensya nito. Sa mga paaralan, tinuruan tayo na ang “Tagalog / Pilipino” ay tumutukoy sa dating pambansang wika na ang basehan ay Tagalog lamang. Tinuruan din tayo na ang “Filipino” naman ay ang kasalukuyang wikang pambansa na nakabatay sa lahat ng wika ng Pilipinas.

Parang may mali sa ganitong mga haka-haka, Ginoong Ispiker.

Kumbinsido ako, Ginoong Ispiker, na ang “Tagalog”, “Pilipino”, at “Filipino” ay iisang lengguwahe lamang. Bakit ko po nasabi ito? Ito’y sapagkat malayang nagkaka-intindihan ang mga nagsasalita ng Tagalog/Pilipino at nagsasalita ng Filipino. Sa wikang Ingles, mutually intelligible ang Tagalog/Pilipino at Filipino. Ito ang pangunahing paraan ng mga linguista para malaman kung ang dalawa o higit pang pananalita ay nabibilang sa iisang wika o magkakaibang wika. Ang isa pang panukat para malaman kung nagsasalita ang mga tao ng iisang wika o magkaibang wika ay ang gramatika. Ang mga pananalita ay itinuturing na kabilang sa isang wika kung magkapareho ang kanilang gramatika. Ang tanong ay: Magkaiba ba ang grammar o balarila ng “Tagalog”, “Pilipino”, at “Filipino”? Malinaw po na hindi. Kung gayon, ang “Tagalog”, “Pilipino”, at “Filipino” ay nabibilang lamang sa isang wika.

The next question is: Are other speech varieties, like Binisaya, Ilokano, Hiligaynon to name a few, languages or dialects? The answer is they are full-fledged languages, Mr. Speaker, since they are not mutually intelligible and they have different grammars. In fact there are 170 separate Philippine languages. They are NOT “dialects.” The term “dialect” is reserved for geographical linguistic variants, like Tagalog-Bulacan, Tagalog-Batangas and Tagalog-Quezon, or Cebuano-Binisaya, Iliganon-Binisaya, or Davao-Binisaya. When answering “yes”, for instance, there are Ilocanos who say either “wen” or “wə”. Some have the “e” sound while others have the “ə” sound. Despite the variation in pronunciation, intonation and vocabulary, these Ilokano speakers can understand each other, and therefore it is correct to say that they speak different dialects of the same language.

The discussion, Mr. Speaker, takes us to “Filipino” which is the name chosen for our national language under the 1987 Constitution. As I have said, that language is supposed to be based not only on Tagalog but also on other Philippine languages. But Mr. Speaker, I must admit that Filipino is still “evolving” into its ideal multilingual character. At present, it is still predominantly Tagalog/Pilipino and probably will stay that way for several generations. I don’t find anything fundamentally wrong with that so long as this language is accepted by our people. After all, it is the people who use and sustain languages and not those who study them.

But a quarter of a century after the national language was renamed Filipino, most people still refer to it as Tagalog, except in school where it is called Filipino in reference to the subject. They call it Tagalog because they recognize it to be the same language they have come to know a long time ago and because they refuse to kowtow to the arbitrary wishes of those who want to police the expressions of our national and collective life.

Mr. Speaker, the designation of Tagalog, then Pilipino, and afterwards Filipino as wikang pambansa, has led to a dangerous misconception that our pambansang panitikan or national literature should be written in the national language. Thus, any work written in a language other than in the wikang pambansa is not considered part of the national literature but of the regional literature.

The over-focusing and over-privileging of one region's language and literary imagination has a parallel development in the writing of our nation's history. The struggles in the various regions for freedom and democracy have been ignored in favor of the political center's narrative of the making of the nation. Hence, the pantheon of heroism in the national struggle marginalizes the roles of Dagohoy of Bohol, Leon Quilat of Cebu and Sultan Kudarat of Mindanao, among many others in successive generations of Philippine heroes.

In order to correct these historical and cultural inequities, Mr. Speaker, a kambyo sa pananaw—as some Bisayan friends call it—is very much in order, especially on how we value our linguistic and cultural diversity. It is this diversity that we must recognize as our social and cultural resource, and our intellectual capital. By this diversity we shall be able to evolve a truly liberating education, an education that teaches our people the collective virtue of a Philippine nation built upon the variety of the memories, experiences, dreams, aspirations, and ambitions of our different ethno-linguistic communities. Our people know we are many, and out of this many-ness we are committed to be one national community. This, Mr. Speaker, is our guiding light in nurturing our cultural pluralism.

It must be pointed out that while the people have embraced Filipino as our common language, they have done so without repudiating their own native languages. According to the latest census, the number of speakers of large-sized languages (such as Tagalog, Binisaya, Iloko, Bikol, Waray, Kapampangan, Maguindanao) and medium sized-languages (such as Kankanaey, Ibanag, Manobo, Ifugao, Masbateño) continue to grow. It is the small languages (such as the Aeta languages) that appear to be threatened with extinction.

The country's native languages, including Filipino sign language of our Deaf population, have been given official status through the institutionalization of mother tongue-based multilingual instruction in our education system. Republic Act No. 10533 signed by President Aquino last May 15, 2013, provides that basic education shall be conducted in the learner's native languages throughout kindergarten and the elementary grades. English and Filipino shall be gradually introduced beginning Grade 4 until such time that these can become the primary languages of instruction at the secondary level.

The multilingual provisions in RA 10533, also known as the K-12 law, are incontrovertible evidence that our country has shifted from a "one nation, one language" mindset to one that recognizes our linguistic and cultural pluralism. We are witness to the steady realization of President Aquino's vision of using English to connect with the world, the national language to connect with our country, and the native languages to connect with our heritage. In short, Mr. Speaker, that kambyo sa pananaw that I am talking about has already taken place among our people.

However, these goals have been muddled by the very institution we have entrusted to take care of our languages so that they may survive and thrive. Recently, the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino announced that it is changing the official name of our country from "Pilipinas" to "Filipinas". Is KWF not aware of Sec.2, Article XVI of the 1987 Constitution that gives Congress the authority to change the name of our country? Is KWF not aware of Republic Act no. 8491, sections 41 and 42 that provides that the coat of arms and seal of our country must contain the words "Republika ng Pilipinas" with a "P" not "F"?

Is KWF not aware that the President uses Pilipinas to refer to our country, as he did in his State of the Nation Address? If no less than the President of the Republic of the Philippines uses "Pilipinas" in his SONA, then I am certain without fear of being validly contradicted that this is official.

In other countries, the responsibility of establishing principles, policies and procedures for the naming of places and other geographical sites rests on a geographical names board, and not on a language agency. In the Philippines, changing the name of our country is the constitutional mandate of Congress.

Republic Act No. 7104 which was enacted in 1991, created the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino, our national language agency. Section 6 of this law explicitly states: "No one shall be appointed as commissioner unless

he/she is a natural-born Filipino citizen, at least thirty (30) years old, morally upright and noted for his/her expertise in linguistics, the culture and the language of the ethno-linguistic region and the discipline he/she represents.” It is clear from the wordings of the original law that a KWF commissioner must be noted for his/her expertise in linguistics. The original Implementing Rules and Regulations dated April 15, 1992 accurately reflects the text of R.A. 7104 pertaining to this particular qualification on linguistic expertise.

Curiously, when the proponents of “Filipinas” took over the language agency, one of the first things that they did, Mr. Speaker, was to promulgate a new IRR on February 13, 2013 that deleted this particular qualification. Instead of “kadalubhasaan sa linggwistika”, we now find in the 2013 IRR “kadalubhasaan sa wika, panitikan, kultura, at disiplinang kinakatawan.”

“Kadalubhasaan sa wika at panitikan” translates to “expertise in language and literature”, Mr. Speaker, which is not the same as “expertise in linguistics.” The former refers to the use of language; the latter to the scientific study of the nature of languages. One may be good at using a language in writing and in speech, but may be completely ignorant of how languages are described in scientific terms, and hence, on how a language works.

Many are asking, Mr. Speaker: Are the new KWF officials not experts in linguistics? Were the new IRR of 2013 written to justify their appointment? I call on my colleagues in the Commission on Appointments to scrutinize the qualifications of these KWF officials on the basis of the original wordings, spirit and intent of RA 7104. It is an accepted legal principle that the law is superior to any implementing rules and regulations.

Mr. Speaker, let me be straightforward about all these. I think that it is time we re-invent the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino and discard the “one nation, one language” concept under which it was built. In its ashes, let us establish a Komisyon ng mga Wika sa Pilipinas or Commission on Philippine Languages. Let us inscribe in its banner “one nation, many languages” as its official motto, and declare “respect for all Philippine languages and cultures” as its guiding principle.

The new Komisyon shall undertake, coordinate, and promote research for the development, propagation, and preservation of Philippine languages, including the national language, without valorizing one or two languages and marginalizing others.

The new Komisyon shall have regional sub-commissions composed of representatives and staff from the various languages and cultures in the regions who will carry out most of the commission’s study, research, development, and publication functions. The new Komisyon shall be governed by a board consisting of the heads of these sub-commissions, democratically chosen by their constituents and whose appointments are affirmed by the President.

Bilang pangwakas, nais ko pong isalaysay sa inyo ang isang katutubong paniniwala sa pagpapalit ng pangalan ng bata. Kapag ang bata ay nagkaroon ng malubhang sakit, nakasanayan nang palitan ang kanyang pangalan. Ginagawa raw ito upang iligaw ang masasamang espiritu at hindi sila makapagdulot ng sakit sa bata. Magandang kuwento ito, Ginoong Ispiker, sapagkat walang iniba ito sa ginagawa nating pagpapalit ng pangalan ng ating mga maysakit na institusyon nang hindi naman ginagamot ang karamdaman ng mga ito. Walang katuturan ang pagpapalit ng pangalan kung hindi natin matukoy ang sakit at mahanapan ito ng mabisang lunas.

Maraming salamat po, Ginoong Ispiker.

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