

MTB-MLE a Trojan horse

by **Robby Tangingco**

DepEd Order No. 16 s. 2012, which launches the MTB-MLE (Mother Tongue-Based Multi-Lingual Education) Program this school year for kindergarten, Grades 1, 2 and 3, is so sparsely worded that schools are interpreting and implementing it in so many different ways.

For example, it does not define “mother tongue,” and so some schools take it to mean the dominant language of the province, while others define it as the dominant language at home. It’s “the language the child is born with,” but it can also be “the language the child grows up with.”

And so today, as schools across Pampanga struggle to implement MTB-MLE, some parents who raised their kids as Filipino speakers are insisting that Filipino is their kids’ mother tongue and therefore should be the medium of instruction.

And teachers who still haven’t organized their Kapampangan teaching materials, or are poor Kapampangan speakers themselves, are only too glad to agree with these parents.

And so, MTB-MLE, which was hailed as the greatest thing that ever happened to the promotion of indigenous languages in this country, is turning out to be another vehicle promoting the already overpromoted national language!

It’s a gift that turned out to be a trap, which turned the celebration into mourning, for Kapampangan and all the other regional languages that have suffered as a result of the government’s privileging of Tagalog as national language.

First of all, our mother tongue is Kapampangan. It’s the original, dominant, and official language of this province. If some Kapampangan parents refuse to speak Kapampangan to their children, that’s an anomaly. An anomaly should not be imposed as the norm for the rest of us.

If a Kapampangan child grows up understanding only Filipino and/or English but not Kapampangan, that’s also an anomaly. That child was born a Kapampangan. He was supposed to be raised a Kapampangan in accordance with his history and destiny, until his parents imposed their will on him.

Linguists say that our ancestors’ linguistic genes—the way they constructed sentences, their vocabulary—are imbedded in our cells and are already with us at the moment of birth. They conducted a study where they observed a child growing up with a pack of dogs, with no human contact whatsoever. You’d think the child would bark and yelp like a dog. He didn’t. He spoke, although haltingly, as his parents did—a triumph of nature over nurture.

There are Kapampangan parents who teach their child to speak only Filipino and/or English because they find Kapampangan too lowly, too pedestrian, and too plebeian.

There are also Kapampangan parents who do it not because they shun Kapampangan. They only want to equip their child with another language that will be useful to him, Filipino being the national language and English being the international language.

To them I say: Kapampangan is more useful than Filipino and English because it is the language in which your child can best express his innermost sentiments and aspirations. Kapampangan is his nature, the spirit of his ancestors, the culture of his land. How can Filipino or English, which are just borrowed languages, express all the intimate details of your child’s heart and mind?

If your child can express himself well in Filipino and/or English today, that’s okay, but he should not do it at the expense of his native language, because that’s going against his nature. And I am sure he would be able to express himself a lot better in Kapampangan than in Filipino and English if you did not suppress his natural ability to speak Kapampangan.

Many of us who can communicate in Filipino and English today, like I do, should make the same admission that we, too, could have been a lot better off expressing ourselves in Kapampangan had we not lost the chance when we were younger.

The MTB-MLE program, if properly interpreted and implemented, should clarify and solved these problems. However, its ambiguity is fanning more confusion across the province.

What DepEd should do is issue a clarification that the real intention of the DepEd Order is to use the region’s dominant language as medium of instruction in that region. The DepEd Order even mentions the eight major

languages to use in the classroom, and Kapampangan is on the list.

There is no need to do a survey of pupils to find out what language they best understand, because the expected answer would be the national language, Filipino, which practically all Filipino children learn from television where every superstar, star and starlet speaks Filipino.

(Conducting such a survey is just tantamount to giving a leading question. We know that Tagalog is now well-known by almost everybody all over the country after years and years of being bombarded with it. So, it's like trying to defeat the purpose of DEPED 74 which is the use of the mother tongue as language of instruction. - E. Turla)

If Kapampangan children speak Filipino and not Kapampangan, this should give schools all the more reason and urgency to use Kapampangan as medium of instruction to correct an anomalous situation—anomalous because the children are being made to go against their nature and not being equipped to deal with their environment.

The first task of education is to help a child reconnect with his inner self, which is Kapampangan. The second task of education is to help him understand the world around him, his immediate environment, which is Pampanga, which is Kapampangan.

Both teachers and students will be groping at first, but in no time at all, everyone will be reconnecting with their real Kapampangan selves and resonating with their mother tongue like newly tuned bells.

I urge Kapampangan parents, therefore, to let nature take its course and allow, even help, their child speak Kapampangan. He can learn Filipino and English in due time. National and international research shows that children who are taught lessons in their mother tongue learn those lessons better, and that they learn other languages (Filipino and English) faster if they first learn their native language (Kapampangan).

I urge teachers and school heads not to succumb to pressure from parents, and not to water down the DepEd order with their own self-serving interpretations and convenient excuses. I know many teachers themselves lack the confidence and expertise to teach in Kapampangan, but really, all it takes is a few weeks of adjustment. You don't have to translate everything into straight Kapampangan, and you don't have to use literary, archaic, and hifalutin Kapampangan.

As top Kapampangan linguist Dr. Anicia del Corro keeps saying, we are all experts in Kapampangan because we are Kapampangans. Who else knows our language except ourselves?

And because the ultimate purpose of language is to communicate, we should be free to use the kind of Kapampangan that our children will best understand. It may contain Filipino and English words here and there, but that's how all languages evolve.

And besides, we who try everything to protect our amanung sisuan won't be around forever to keep protecting it. These children will take over, whether we like it or not. The language belongs to them, and it's theirs to protect or to mutilate. We can show them the map, but they and they alone will decide if they want to follow that map.

The classroom under the MTB-MLE program is the arena where the future of our language will be made or broken, not in the Internet or in debate halls where poets, writers and cultural advocates shout their arguments until their voices are hoarse.

If the teachers and their students mangle the mother tongue, it means it will be a mangled Kapampangan language that will survive in the future.

If they murder it, well then, there won't be a Kapampangan language left to speak in the future, will there?