

What factors are threatening Philippine languages?

Language loss impoverishes humanity. It is a retreat in the defence of everyone's rights to be heard, to learn and to communicate.

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1987 Constitution

- The 1987 Constitution recognizes only one national language (Filipino), and one other official language (English)
- It does not provide equal recognition and protection of Philippine languages
- It does not declare the right of citizens to preserve, use, learn, and develop their native languages
- It relegates regional languages to "auxiliary" status
- It demands an increase in the use of the national language in government and education, but does not likewise encourage greater use of other Philippine languages.
- It does not create a body for the *equal* protection and promotion of all Philippine languages
- Its favoritism towards Filipino and English contrasts with the constitutions of other diverse countries, like South Africa, India, Bolivia, Ethiopia, Spain, and Singapore, which give better recognition of local and regional languages and more flexibility to use them

Education

- The current K-12 curriculum does not include local languages after Grade 3.
- Unlike in other multilingual countries, schools, districts, divisions, provinces, and regions have no power over what languages can be used as mediums of instruction. From Grade 4-12, the prescribed mediums of instruction are Filipino and English, nationwide. Mother tongues are not used as mediums of instruction nor as language subjects.
- Mother tongues are not included in the country's premier student journalism competition, the National Schools Press Conference. Only Filipino and English categories are included.
- Colleges and universities require students to take English and Filipino/Tagalog subjects, but no subjects in other Philippine languages. The same goes for their entrance exams.
- Regional languages are generally not offered by college Language Departments, only English, Filipino, and foreign languages.
- Teachers have been conditioned to favor English and Filipino, and look down upon the vernacular. Some even punish students for speaking in their mother tongue, which is against the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child
- 70% of Filipino adults did not get a chance to learn and become literate in their mother tongues in school

Government

- No language preservation or linguistic rights legislation has yet been formulated at the national level
- Citizens are not explicitly granted, nor are aware of, their rights to learn, teach and use their own languages, speak in a court of law using their own languages, and receive translation services.
- National agencies pass down their health, environmental, and other informational materials to the regions only in English and Filipino. Most regional offices don't bother translating them into the vernacular
- Local governments are not obliged to recognize their local languages. Very few LGUs have policies to use, protect, promote, and fund native language activities
- The Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino's charter, organizational structure, funding, and staffing is biased towards the development of the national language. Equal recognition, attention and support for all Philippine languages are not achieved.
- The KWF-led celebration, *Buwan ng Wika*, is generally used to promote the national language. Other mother tongues are not celebrated.
- Most KWF chairs have been experts, writers, or instructors of the national language, rarely other Philippine tongues
- The government has not encouraged or helped companies like Google, Facebook, Windows, etc. for the development of multilingual products for the Philippines. In other countries, local languages (not only their national languages) have already been included in Google Search, Google Translate, Google Maps, Waze, and other apps.

Commercial

- Staff in fast food chains, restaurants, branded stores, banks, and malls usually speak Taglish, especially in Luzon
- There is no attempt to adapt to customers who prefer to speak in the vernacular. Even if a customer speaks in the local language (e.g. Ilokano, Bicol, Waray, etc.), and even if the staff knows the local language, the staff will still respond in Taglish
- Trainings, including scripts, are usually developed by the head office in Manila, without consideration for alternative language scenarios
- Store signs are in English, sometimes Tagalog, and almost never in local languages
- Few protocols exist in companies for the provision of multilingual communications, services, and products

Media

- Tagalog dominates all primary TV networks
- No major networks or channels are dedicated to other Philippine languages.
- Even in provinces, there is minimal use of local/regional languages on television.
- Majority of FM radio hosts use American-accented Taglish, and play songs from Manila or abroad
- Very few publications, newspapers and magazines exist in Philippine languages.
- Only 1 out of a dozen or so Palanca Awards for Literature accepts submissions in regional languages. The rest are all English and Filipino.
- Majority of Filipino youth have never had the opportunity to read a book or watch a film in their mother tongue
- The government does not promote or subsidize multilingual media

In order to counter the marginalization of our native languages, the constitutional provisions on language should be revisited and amended. The future is in our hands.