

Diversity Shock

By Firth McEachern

Diversity Shock is a series of articles about the value of languages and multilingualism. It explores behaviors, attitudes, policies, and trends surrounding languages in the Philippines, from the perspective of a foreigner who came to the Philippines as a young man and fell in love with its rich yet fragile linguistic diversity.

Part 1

When I first arrived in the Philippines and journeyed north to my new home, La Union, the first thing I noticed was how many people inhabited this country. The road north from Manila exhibited a near continuous line of sari-sari stores, food stalls, local government halls, churches, and many other buildings, all overlooking a road teeming with children, animals, trucks, buses, farmers, and people sitting wayside to observe the activity. In Canada, journeys between cities are much more desolate, and the transition between wilderness and settlement is abrupt. Here, the activity and people lent a sensation of being perpetually on the outskirts of Manila, and just as I thought to

be leaving civilization, another town plaza would appear. Given that my country has a third the population of the Philippines in 30 times the area, the difference in density is expected. But there was something even more shocking that I was not prepared for. In just 6 hours, my new office friends had noted passing four realms of languages. As we crossed into Pampanga from Bulacan, my escort and soon-to-be officemate mentioned, “Gloria Macapagal Arroyo is from here. They speak Kapampangan.”

“Kampan...Kampondunkin?” I repeated woefully inaccurately, the word having gone by too fast. “Do they actually use it or do you mean historically?”

“No, they actually use it,” he said.

How cool! My eyes drifted to the window, amazed by the fact that the endless line of seemingly identical sari-sari stores and general humanity did in fact harbor great variety. It soon became a game in which, whenever we crossed into a new province, I would ask, “What language do they speak here?” To which my officemates would reply something new. In Pampanga, it was Kapampangan; in Tarlac, mostly Tagalog; in Pangasinan, the Pangasinan language, and finally in La Union, Ilokano. My initial judgement of everything being the same was based—rather naively—on appearance. The Philippines has in fact much greater diversity than the cosmetic differences I was looking for, a fact I have gradually come to appreciate more and more. In Canada, one can travel 1000 km and not even detect a difference in accent. While the scenery is many-hued, people are for the most part talking the same way, eating the same things, and interacting with each other in similarly predictable ways. Of course there are immigrant communities, class differences, and some regional variations, but the country’s young age ensures these differences are small, and further dulled by the overriding imprint of American culture from the south.

I came to Northern Luzon originally thinking I would learn Tagalog, but when I heard other languages (especially Ilokano) being spoken everywhere in the streets, the markets, and indeed our office in the San Fernando City Government, I decided I would try out Ilokano. I am glad to have made that choice, for it has prompted many an intriguing conversation. When I ask people for the meaning of a certain word, they often tell me the Tagalog one, assuming that is the language I wish to learn. Many regard me quaintly for wanting to learn a local language, and others have even been hostile about it.

“Why aren’t you learning the national language?” they say. “You must learn it.” These interactions exposed me to a deep set of issues regarding language that I probably would have overlooked had I passively learned Tagalog as per common advice. It has prompted me to learn more about how Filipinos view linguistic diversity, mother tongues, and education, the history of language planning in the Philippines, and the current government attitudes surrounding it. Finally, it has led to the inescapable conclusion that huge linguistic and cultural transformations are taking place in this country, which is affecting everyone—whether you speak Ibaloi, Pangasinan, Ilokano, or even Tagalog. Please join me on this series to explore these transformations from an outsider’s perspective. What is happening in the world of Filipino languages and why? Are there questions we should be asking? Should the country’s current language trends be redirected somehow? If so, how? See you next week!

I was at the supermarket a month ago and decided to try out my fledgling Ilokano on a pretty staff girl. “*Manu daytoy?*” I asked her, as I picked up a can of corn beef. I don’t even like corn beef, but it was a convenient opportunity to gain a smile from a cute girl.

“Oh, you speak Tagalog!” She said, impressed.

“Actually, Ilokano” I told her, confused.

“Ay!” she bleeped in that universal Filipino exclamation of surprise. I assumed the wrong word came out, and didn’t think anything more of the incident.

The same bizarre thing has happened five times since. Granted, my skewed accent probably makes it difficult for listeners to identify certain words, but I don’t think that “*Agyamanak*” could possibly be construed as “*Salamat*,” no matter how bad my accent is. There was even a time when a person who had mistaken my Ilokano speaking for Tagalog continued to rattle away in the latter language, despite my showing no signs of comprehension and repeatedly addressing him in Ilokano. I finally had to directly tell him, “Look buddy, I don’t speak Tagalog so I don’t know why you keep talking to me like that.” He acted surprised, as if all the evidence pointed to the contrary.

There was something deeper behind these seemingly innocent mixups, and I wanted to find out what. It turns out that it is so rare for foreigners to learn other Philippine languages other than Tagalog (especially on Luzon), that there is a deep rooted assumption that if a foreigner knows a language of these islands, it is probably Tagalog. Unless one is listening attentively, an exception to this rule may be missed. Another factor in these mixups is my own unwitting fault. Upon hearing Tagalog on the television, I was shocked to discover

that many of the words in my Ilokano repertoire are in fact Tagalog —no wonder it's not immediately obvious to people what language I'm trying to speak! I had no idea that people had been teaching me words from both languages; even more shocking was the realization that the regular "Ilokano" heard on the street is heavily mixed too. How can I learn a foreign language properly when it is being so bastardized by another?

This problem motivated me to find out more. Why do so many Filipinos, especially the youth, speak a "*halo-halo*" version of their mother tongue and Tagalog? The mixing phenomenon is only slight among adults, as in my office, but a walk through a plaza and you will hear many conversations peppered with "*wala*", "*mayroon*", "*hindi*", and "*dapat*." Mixing two languages is not necessarily a bad thing; speakers of Spanglish in the U.S., for example, have recently become advocates for the flexibility and wealth of expressions that mixing can afford. But if mixing becomes so habitual that you cannot speak formally in either language, this is a problem. If you have never been challenged to speak your own language properly, your vocabulary can be stunted, reducing the complexity and scope of conversations you can have. Thus limited, you shall never be able to fully appreciate the depth and power your own language can offer, and in frustration or indolence, continue to drift away from it. If you, your friends, or your children are doing the same, this is not just symptomatic of the decay of your own linguistic abilities, but of the entire language.

Presented with this possibility, it was crucial for me to find out whether the adoption of Tagalog words by non-Tagalog youth was merely a playful social affectation or a symptom of widespread language decay. Are Filipino youth gradually losing vocabulary in their native tongues? If 30% of the words used by non-Tagalog youth are Tagalog, will it be 50% in a few years time? 60%? 70%? Will the streets of Dagupan, San Fernando, Baguio, Naga, Angeles City, and maybe even Davao be 100% Tagalog some day? The thought worries me, and next week, I'll tell you why.

In my last column I wondered whether all the Tagalog words I heard being used by Ilokanos and other language groups meant something serious. Is Tagalog replacing the local languages in Northern Luzon? Or are people just playfully mixing the two languages without neglecting their mother tongue? The answer in the cities, I'm afraid, is the former. And as someone who has been sent to the Philippines from a Canadian organization called Sustainable Cities, I am obviously worried by the fact that cities in the Philippines are not sustaining their linguistic diversity.

The realization first came to me at a *carenderia* near my house. A cute little girl was wandering between the tables, and I decided to engage her in small talk. "*Anya ti nagan mo?*" I asked her in Ilokano. She responded with a blank stare. "*What's your name?*" I repeated in English. Still no reply.

"*Tagalog isuna,*" her father (the *carenderia* owner) told me.

"Oh, I'm sorry! What province are you from?" I asked him, thinking he would tell me Rizal or Quezon or something.

"Here in La Union." He replied.

"You mean you are Ilokano?" I asked incredulously. "Then why doesn't your daughter speak it?!"

"We are speaking Tagalog to her." He said cheerfully.

"Why?" I asked, confused. "Is her mother Tagalog or something?"

"No, she is Ilokana."

I was shocked. I have met Filipinos abroad whose children only speak English; for the sake of integration, they spoke English at home. But I have never met a mother who, in her own linguistic homeland, has neglected to teach her children the mother tongue.

"This is Northern Luzon, the bastion of Ilokano. Ilokano has been a dominant language here for hundreds, if not thousands of years. And

you parents are both Ilokano, and speak Ilokano to each other. Yet you only want to speak Tagalog to your child?" I pressed.

"Because it is our national language." He replied.

This statement made me pause for a moment. So what if Tagalog (or Filipino, technically) was the national language? What did the existence of a national language have to do with parents not passing on their own tongue to their children? Why can't children learn to speak *both*?

"Ok," I said. "And?"

"So it's good to know it." He replied.

I still wasn't following his logic. I don't dispute the fact that speaking another language is useful to know, especially one so prevalent as Tagalog, but why would a parent not want pass on their mother tongue?

"Well, don't they learn Filipino at school?" I asked. Why do you need to speak to her in Tagalog at home?"

"That is the trend. If she doesn't know Tagalog by the time she already goes to school, she will be made fun of. Ilokano is considered too 'native'."

"Native'? I asked, even more dumbfounded. "What does that mean? What's wrong with that?"

"Corny, old-fashioned, low class," the father explained.

Things were just going from bad to worse. Why should a native language have such a low reputation? La Union is 93% Ilokano. It is a traditional Ilokano province. Why should Ilokanos be ashamed of their own language, especially when they are mostly surrounded by other Ilokanos? Do people not realize that Ilokano has just as rich a language as Tagalog, and a long history of literacy too?

Healthy cultures do not dismiss themselves so readily. If the majority of mothers in Philippine cities are now speaking mostly Tagalog to their children (and a smattering of English), they threaten to kill the languages they grew up with. This is disrespectful to one's language,

one's culture, and the generations of parents who came before, all of whom, until now, succeeded in passing on their native language.

In my next column, I shall explore how and why we have come to this situation. Why is there a measure of self-disapproval among non-Tagalog groups in this country? Why are local languages associated with words like “native”, “corny”, and “old-fashioned”? And I'll try to give you reasons why it doesn't have to be like this.

Part 4

There are very significant and unfortunate reasons why Filipinos devalue their mother tongue. Whether you are Iloko, Bicolano, Pangasinense, or from any of the other 120+ language groups, you are more likely to view Tagalog and English as more important, and might even fail to teach your child your own language. Why is this? The first factor I'll deal with is education.

Teaching Filipino (which uses Tagalog as its basis), is mandatory in all schools, but there is no formal instruction of vernaculars like Ilokano alongside it, at any level. Rumours have it that next year DepEd will start incorporating local languages in early primary school curricula, which would be an excellent idea. Like many great ideas, however, it may fall short in implementation. So far the vernaculars have been consistently excluded from educational settings, and have even been outright banned: the antiquated penalties for speaking local languages in schools are widely practiced in private schools and unofficially practiced in some public schools, decades after European countries have removed such discriminatory policies for their minority languages.

At first I did not believe this practice could still be found in the Philippines (a barbarism imported by Western countries, in truth). But a few days ago I found proof in a local nursing, arts, and sciences

college! I was waiting in the hall and happened to overhear a teacher leading his classroom. He was speaking in English most of the time, but would occasionally switch to Tagalog. Most of the children (Grade 3) were chattering in Tagalog with each other, which the teacher didn't seem to mind. But one time a boy said something in Ilokano to his friend, and the teacher said, "No Ilokano here!" I was shocked. If this is a so-called English school, why would the teacher allow Tagalog and not Ilokano? If he thinks speaking Ilokano is unhelpful to learning English, then the same should apply to Tagalog. Either they should both be allowed in school, or neither. Allowing one language and not the other is discriminatory, regardless of their official statuses.

In truth, banning any language in a school—especially a native one—is against international human rights standards. The Philippines is a signatory of the **UN Charter on the Rights of the Child**. Article 29 clearly declares: "*State Parties agree that the education of a child shall be directed to [among other goals]...The development of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms,*" the child's "*cultural identity, language, and values,*" and "*peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin.*" How, may I ask, can Filipino schools pretend to be respectful of students' "identity, language, and values," or true advocates for "tolerance," if they discourage or even sometimes penalize the use of the mother tongue? They cannot.

Let me proceed to the next section of the same document that the Philippines has signed:

*Article 30. In those States in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities or persons of indigenous origin exist, a child belonging to such a minority or who is indigenous shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of his or her group, to enjoy his or her own culture, to profess and practise his or her own religion, or to use **his or her own language.**"*

Every language group in the Philippines constitutes a minority, because no language is natively spoken by more than 50% of the population. Tagalog is native to around 30% of the population, Cebuano by 20%, Ilokano by 10%, and so on. Therefore, all these languages are protected by the UN Charter on the Rights of the Child, and Filipino children should be allowed to speak whatever vernacular they desire. I urge private schools, public schools, and the educators who run them to stop the barbaric practice of suppressing children's natural inclination to use their native tongue. Teachers should feel free to use the local language in addition to English and Tagalog, as one is no more inferior to the other.

To suppress the use of local languages contravenes the promises the country has made to the international community, and is in fact unnecessary from a pedagogical perspective. Many studies have shown that integrating the mother tongue in the classroom can help a child understand better, encourage participation, enhance cultural awareness, and raise their confidence, resulting in improved learning—including the learning of English!

Some day I hope to walk into a fancy school like Lorma Colleges in La Union and hear Ilokano, Tagalog, and English being spoken freely. In an ideal society, all languages would be perceived equally and could be used by rich or poor without judgment.

Part 5

This week I shall analyze the exclusion of local languages in media.

First, I start with radio. Why is it that almost all the FM radio stations in Luzon are in Tagalog and English? I visited Pangasinan with my officemates and we excitedly flipped through all the radio frequencies looking for a Pangasinan radio station. Out of 11 stations, not one was in

Pangasinense. One might justify the choice of Tagalog because it (or Filipino, to be precise) is the national language, so everyone can understand it.

But aren't we forgetting the fact that many radio stations around the world are located in places where the language is not universally understood? In Canada, my home country, I can turn on the radio and find English or French FM radio stations, even though I don't speak French and neither does everyone know English. In England, I can turn on the radio and find FM channels in Arabic, Punjabi, and several other languages besides English, even though English is far more widespread than the others. The majority of the listeners of the other language programs, like the Punjabi and Arabic stations, also understand English, but they CHOOSE to tune into these stations because they LIKE to hear their native tongue. My point is that we should have more options when it comes to FM radio in Luzon. There should be FM radio in local languages, Tagalog, English, and any combination thereof, as found in other countries with diverse populations.

You might ask, "Well, why is it necessary to offer FM stations that use local languages like Iloko or Pangasinense if you can already find them on AM stations?" First, AM stations rarely offer the frequency or modernity of songs that FM stations offer, so are less attractive to young people. Second, many of the smaller languages like Bolinao don't even have AM radio stations. Thirdly, FM stations have more reach. Most radio stations are based in urban areas, so it's ironic that the stations that extend *furthest* into the rural areas (in which local languages are most spoken), are the ones that only use Tagalog and English! Lastly, if English is incorporated into FM broadcasting, why can't native languages be too? The bias for English is perplexing given that the National Achievement Scores in English have hovered around 50% only, so English is not even understood very well. The vernaculars, without exception, are more widely understood in their respective regions than English, yet for some reason they remain almost completely excluded from FM broadcasting!

Television is even less representative of the diversity of Filipinos. Despite the fact that Tagalog and English are second/third languages for 70% of the population, almost all hours of every Filipino channel broadcast in Luzon are in these languages. Typically, only one hour per day is allocated to regional programming on the main GMA and ABS-CBN channels, and these are not even always in the predominant regional language. Unlike GMA, at least ABS-CBN has local TV Patrols in different vernaculars, such as TV Patrol Bicol, TV Patrol Pampanga, and TV Patrol Ilocos. I applaud ABS-CBN for providing such a service, but there are still gaps. For example, I am perplexed by the fact that despite La Union province being 93% Ilocano, we do not have a single second of television in Iloko. The regional broadcast of *TV Patrol Northern Luzon*, based in Baguio, is in Tagalog. One might say this is because Baguio is mixed, but as the lingua franca of the region—including Baguio—Iloko deserves at least an hour out of 24 hours of Tagalog and English.

The same issue is faced by the provinces of Region II: despite being predominantly Ilocano, *TV Patrol Cagayan Valley* is only in Tagalog. Iloko is the 3rd largest language in the Philippines, spoken by 10 million people and serving as the *lingua franca* for around 17 provinces, yet ABS-CBN only has one regional TV patrol in Iloko, serving a mere two provinces.

Mind you, the odd media patterns found in Luzon are not the same across the country. In the Visayas and Mindanao there are many TV Patrols, all of which patronize the major regional languages like Cebuano, Chavacano, Waray, and Ilonggo. Furthermore, there are Visayan news channels, game shows, and even telenovelas like “Saranghe”, “Summer Sunshine”, and “Amor Chico.” And as for radio, most of the FM radio stations are in one of the Visayan languages. Why should Northern Luzon be any different? Why do our radio stations shy away from using our languages? The Visayans do not view their language as inferior to English and Tagalog, and rightly so. All people, cultures, and languages under God should be considered equal, regardless of the political circumstances.

“Adda ti Black Forest Sundae yo?”

“Wala po” the Jollibee cashier replied.

“Adda Beef with Mushrooms?” I asked again.

“Mayroon po.”

“Ilokano ka?” I probed.

“O’o Sir.”

“Tapos, apay ta agtagtagalogka ket Ilokano ti pagsarsaritak kenka?” I asked her, curious.

She blushed and looked surprised. “Diak ammo sir.”

This is the scene I go through practically every time I go to establishments like Jollibee’s, McDonald’s, Greenwich, KFC, and the CSI mall here in San Fernando. Even though I speak to them in Iloko, they frequently respond to me in Tagalog, even if they are Ilokano!

What ever happened to the maxim, “The customer is always right?” If I am a paying customer, it is up to the establishment to be as accommodating to the customer as possible. If I speak in Tagalog, they should respond in Tagalog. If I speak in Iloko, they should respond in Iloko. Of course, this is not always feasible because not every waiter is guaranteed to know the local language, but if he or she does, there is no reason not to.

I wanted to find out why it was so hard to get staff at medium and high-end establishments to speak to me in the regional language. So one day I asked the manager of a local Max’s restaurant about it. The very friendly, thoughtful man told me that many managers will tell their employees to only speak in Tagalog and English.

“What’s wrong with that?” You might ask. “Tagalog is the universal language here in the Philippines so everyone understands it. And English is also an official language.”

Both are true statements. But if a customer begins speaking in the local language, what better proof does the staff member need in order to know that the customer speaks the local language?! The evidence is in her face! In other words, the decision of an Ilokano employee to continue talking in Tagalog with someone who is blatantly speaking Iloko to her is no longer about ensuring understanding. The employee is simply being inattentive and rude to the wishes of the customer. Therefore, it would be in the best interest of everyone if managers told their employees to speak in whatever language their customers used, when possible.

There is one impediment to this idea. Since it has been such a habit of fast food chains and department stores to speak Tagalog to their customers, many customers are already shy or unaccustomed to addressing staff in the local language.

There are two preferred options to overcome this minor glitch. Out of respect for the local language, commercial establishments should by default greet their customers in it. In Hawaii, for example, it is common to hear establishments greet their customers with “Aloha” instead of “Hello”, even though English is much more commonly spoken. This practice gives Hawaii a fun and unique flavor. The same could be applied to the Philippines. Establishments could greet customers in the predominant language of an area (in Ilocos and Cagayan Valley—Iloko) and then the customer can feel free to reply in that language, Tagalog, or English—whatever he’s most comfortable with.

The second option would be to do what many Canadian agencies and establishments do in bilingual areas. In my hometown of Ottawa, which has a large English and French population, employees will often greet clients with two languages simultaneously. “Hello, *bonjour!*” they tell you as you walk in. This way a client immediately knows that the establishment has both English and French-speaking employees, and can speak in either language. In government offices this is in fact mandatory by law. It would be cool if establishments in the Philippines got in the same habit, so that if you walked into Vigan Jollibee’s for dinner some evening, the cashier would alternately say, “*Naimbag nga*

rabii! Magandang gabi!” kind of like the news anchor on GMA’s Balitang Amianan.

These changes are small but potentially revolutionizing. They would make the experience of going to restaurants/shops in different regions more unique, raise the reputation of local languages, and most importantly, improve customer service by demonstrating greater flexibility.

I leave you with one revealing comparison: why is it more likely to hear Spanish at a McDonald’s in Los Angeles than it is to hear Iloko in McDonald’s here, despite the fact that Spanish has no official recognition in the United States and that there is only 41% Spanish-speaking people in Los Angeles compared to 93% Ilokans in La Union? This fact should illuminate the extent to which local languages are discriminated against here, and that something should be done about it.

Part 7

I’ve offered some glimpses of why Philippine vernaculars are declining: the exclusion of local languages from education, the underrepresentation of local languages in media, and their stigmatization in various business settings. This week, I turn to government.

The City of San Fernando government is very vernacular-friendly. Everyone in my office knows how to speak the local vernacular (Iloko, or commonly known as Ilokano), and it is the main language of verbal communication in City Hall. If someone comes into our office, we are happy to serve them using Iloko, Tagalog, or English, depending on their preference. The same applies to the provincial government and indeed most provincial offices around the country.

Politicians are also excellent patrons of the vernaculars. During election time, I was happy to hear all the councillors give eloquent speeches in Iloko. The Honorable Manuel C. Ortega always prepares billboards and public messages in Iloko, including the provincial slogan—“Agay-ayat kadakayo amin.” Ironically, the Ortegas are originally a Spanish family, yet they learned and continue to patronize the local language. The former mayor of San Fernando, Hon. Mary Jane Ortega, likewise learned fluent Iloko even though she hails from Cavite. The Ortegas, and indeed many political families, are great models in respecting the heritage of the respective regions of the Philippines.

However, improvements can still be made. Few city or provincial documents are produced in the local language, as English dominates all the interdepartmental correspondence in writing. Sometimes I see posters and pamphlets in Iloko, but they are becoming less common. By contrast, I browsed the Department of Health website of the State of Hawaii yesterday and guess what I found? Health documents and advisories, written in Iloko! If the Hawaiian government provides Iloko documents in topics as obscure as anthrax, why can't we? Why is it harder to find Iloko publications in the Ilocos region than it is to find Iloko publications in a foreign country with a much smaller minority of Ilokanos? If this inconsistency does not strike you as strange, I don't know what will.

I saw a great pamphlet about climate change written in both Iloko and English by UP Los Banos; it would be wonderful if such bi/tri-lingual documents were more common here. In Canada, all official government documents are produced in both French and English. Other measures can also be adopted. In Quebec, the French part of predominantly English-speaking Canada, they keep French alive with signage laws, universal use in government offices, and mandatory education. In Fryslan—the Frisian-speaking area in the Netherlands—citizens can take oath in courts and produce evidence as witnesses in the local Frisian dialect, even though most of the country speaks Dutch. In the northern parts of Norway, the Sami language receives equal status with Norwegian, even though Sami is only spoken by around 20,000 people. What I mean to show you is that there are many countries in the world

that have minority languages and dialects. More importantly, these languages are given recognition by the municipalities or provinces in which they are found, sometimes even by the country as a whole. That's because countries are now realizing that they should be proud of their diversity and try to protect it.

It would be a simple yet tremendous step for a province of the Philippines to grant similar kind of recognition to its vernacular(s), alongside English and Filipino. This would not contradict the National Constitution, as the Constitution already gives recognition to the major regional tongues as “auxiliary official languages”— provincial recognition would merely extend this idea. At the very least, provinces or municipalities could pass some kind of Language and Cultural Preservation ordinance, prescribing fairer representation of native languages in media, education, and government itself.

While the members of government in La Union and many other Region I/II provinces continue to know Ilokano—from streetsweepers all the way up to the governors—the public, especially the youth, are using it less and less. Almost every new child born in cities nowadays represents another person who will be raised primarily Tagalog-speaking. If provinces and municipalities want to pass regulations to ensure the continued use of the local language alongside Tagalog and English, then it is critical that these regulations are passed now. The youth of today will be the leaders tomorrow, and being a generation whose proficiency in the local languages is lacking, they are unlikely to have the reason or motivation to try to save these languages. Therefore, language preservation laws must be passed now, or we shall forever silence our tongues.

Many young people and professionals are abandoning their mother tongue in preference for Tagalog and English, and this is unsustainable for Filipino diversity. I am only 24, and it frightens me that in the same amount of time, many Philippine languages may become extinct.

Perhaps the most concerning threat to Philippine languages is the low level of knowledge about them. The vast majority of Filipino society do not even know that the tongues they call “dialects” are, for the most part, full-fledged languages. This is not a case of the public not remembering the proper terminology taught in school. It is a case of the schools themselves misinforming their students, with textbooks and teachers erroneously calling Ilocano, Hiligaynon, Bikolano, and the other languages as mere dialects. This claim, whether intentional or not, dangerously undermines the importance of the other Philippine languages. Losing a dialect is losing one variant of the same language, but losing an independent language—which represents thousands of years in the making—is even more serious. In dismissing a language as a dialect, therefore, one absolves oneself from the urgent responsibility to protect it.

Why is it incorrect to refer to Philippine languages as dialects? The mainstream, internationally accepted definition of a dialect is that it is mutually understandable with another dialect. That is, speakers of different dialects should be able to understand each other. If you say Ilokano and Kapampangan are dialects, for example, that implies that an Ilokano person and a Kapampangan person can understand each other even if it is the first time they have heard the other dialect. But that is clearly not the case. A Kapampangan cannot understand Ilokano, and visa-versa. Kapampangan and Ilokano, therefore, are separate languages. This applies to the rest of the 100+ languages of the Philippines. In fact, many Philippine languages have less in common with each other than European languages have, like Italian and French.

If you don't believe that the various mother tongues of the Philippines are languages, go research for yourself. Check on Wikipedia. Check on Ethnologue, the world's compendium of languages. Check your very own Constitution! Article XIV, Section 7 correctly refers to the vernaculars as "*languages*", and further recognizes them as "*auxiliary official languages in the regions*." It is also interesting to note that the Constitution proclaims these regional languages as "*auxiliary media of instruction*." This means that penalizing a pupil for speaking a major Philippine language like Ilokano or Pangasinan violates the most supreme law of the Philippines. To put it simply, teachers and schools who have punished or fined their students for speaking a vernacular have actually broken the law. Those who feel reluctant to use the local language in school—don't be ashamed. You have a constitutional right to do so.

Even though many people misuse the word dialect, I must clarify that dialects do exist in the Philippines. The true meaning of dialect, however, is not what the general public is familiar with. In truth, dialects represent variations of the *same language*. Southern Tagalog, for example, is different from Manila Tagalog. These would be correctly classified as *dialects* (i.e. variations) of one *language*, Tagalog. Similarly, the Iloko spoken in Ilocos Norte is a little bit different from the Iloko spoken in La Union and Isabela, yet they can still all understand each other. These regional differences are dialects, but viewed together they make up the whole Iloko language. Similarly, Bikol Legaspi and Bikol Naga City are dialects of the Bikol language. By this criteria, there are 300 dialects in the Philippines, representing 120 or more distinct languages.

As explained by Dr. Andrew Gonzalez, former DepEd Secretary and Professor of Linguistics at De Le Salle University: "The other Philippine languages (not dialects), as of the last count, were put at 120 (see McFarland, 1993). If one adds the varieties which are mutually intelligible (hence genuine dialects), the estimate extends to over 300. Part of the confusion in the literature on the Philippines during the American period (1898 to 1946), and even now among non-linguistically trained academic researchers, is that authors still speak of the 120

Philippine languages (by linguistic definition, mutually unintelligible) as if they were ‘dialects’.”

Now that you know your local “dialects” are in fact complete languages according to the international community and according to mainstream science, any threat to their survival should be taken very seriously. If children are not speaking the mother tongue as fluently as their parents, and if local languages continue to be excluded from media, education, and business, then you risk losing something as important, as old, and as celebrated as the English language itself.

Part 9

For all of you who have been following my column, thank you. It has so far been a pleasure exploring the maze of language issues in the Philippines, especially in Northern Luzon. For those new to this column, I am a foreigner working in La Union for 6 months in the San Fernando City government. As a representative of a Canadian organization that champions sustainability, I became unexpectedly mesmerized by the huge changes occurring in people’s language habits in this country. Almost all of the small languages in this country (like Bolinao, Isneg, Zambaleno), and even the big ones (like Ilokano, Kapampangan, and Pangasinense) are threatened, because people in the cities are speaking more and more Tagalog and English. (If you are confused why I am using the word ‘language’ instead of ‘dialect’ by the way, please refer to my last column in which I explain the proper use of these terms).

Since cities are the centers of development, it is only a matter of time when a city trend becomes a reality of the countryside. If local languages are being replaced in the cities, then rural folk will notice this trend, and in an effort to give their children the opportunity to find jobs in the city, parents will emphasize Tagalog and English, at the expense

of their mother tongue. You might not think this is a problem because Tagalog and English are much more “useful.” But isn’t it better to know how to speak three things—English, Tagalog, and your mother tongue—rather than just two things, English and Tagalog? Anyway, if we are going to save our languages, we must secure them in the cities first. If they are alive and vibrant in the cities, then they will continue to be alive and vibrant in the countryside.

So why are local languages declining in the cities? One persistent problem is the fact that immigrants are not obliged to learn local languages. Since everyone knows how to speak Tagalog, and there is no formal instruction of the local language, there is no incentive for immigrants from other areas to try to learn it. This creates an obvious dilemma. To use San Fernando, La Union as an example: when a group of 10 Ilokano-speaking people are found together, they can freely communicate in their own tongue. But if a single non-Ilokano joins the group, it makes sense to switch to Tagalog to politely include the new person. The same principle applies to much larger scales. If enough people arrive from other parts of the Philippines to San Fernando, and they are not able, encouraged, or compelled to learn Ilokano, then eventually everyone will switch to the common Tagalog. As more and more of one’s friends, colleagues, and potential mates fail to speak your native tongue, it becomes too impractical to continue speaking it on a regular basis, or pass it to one’s children. I know a Tagalog woman who has lived in the Ilocos region for 5 years and only knows one phrase in Ilokano: “Diak maawatan!”

This problem could be avoided if provinces implemented some form of local vernacular instruction in school, even if it were only one class during Home Room, so that immigrants could learn the basics. Such language policy thankfully exists elsewhere, such as in Canada. If an English Canadian moves to the French-speaking province of Quebec, he is required to learn French in school even though his mother tongue is English and even though the rest of the country is English. A similar policy in the Philippines would mean that if a native of Quezon moved to Ilocos Norte as a child, she would grow up to learn English, Tagalog, and Ilocano in school, while a young migrant from Ilocos Norte to

Pampanga would learn English, Tagalog, and Kapampangan in school. This would preserve the policy that all Filipinos learn English and the national language, but it would also ensure the linguistic identity of each province was respectfully maintained.

From a social perspective, it is our collective responsibility to preserve the culture and language of each region for the benefit of Filipino heritage. It is partly the responsibility of newcomers to learn the local language, and it is also the responsibility of the locals to help newcomers learn it. A common complaint I get from immigrants to La Union is that the Ilokanos always speak to them in Tagalog so it's difficult to learn Ilokano. Instead, we should all enthusiastically embrace the opportunity to teach and learn the vernacular, as an expression of cultural respect and exchange.

Part 10

I was standing in a school courtyard in Sagada, Mountain Province. Some boys, not more than 10-yrs-old, were noisily playing a make-shift bowling game. A few of their words sounded Ilokano, but I assumed it was my imagination. When I spoke to them, I was just as much surprised that they understood Ilokano as they were surprised to hear a foreigner speak it.

“Aren't you Kankana-ey?” I asked them.

“Yes” they replied.

“So how come you are speaking Ilokano?”

“Because most of the people around here are speaking Ilokano. It's mixed.”

Many a time have I spoken out against the supplanting of Iloko by Tagalog in traditional Ilokano areas like La Union and Ilocos Sur. But now I was faced with a different situation: Iloko was not the victim in

Sagada, it was Kankana-ey! The irony hit me like a brick. Here in Mountain Province many of the Kankana-ey prefer Iloko. In La Union, many of the Ilokanos prefer Tagalog. And in Manila, many of the Tagalogs prefer English. Why does everyone prefer a language different from their own? It's a domino effect, and nobody is happy with who they are.

This mentality permeates other aspects of Filipino society. People frequently admire my American-bought shoes, my "guapo" Caucasian nose, my white skin, my surfer shorts, and other artifacts of my foreignness. What is so great about these things? My American shoes, which so many of my Filipino friends have requested, have fallen apart after only 3 months of use. Meanwhile, the cheap shoes that I bought here for only \$3 have lasted me 6 months! Just because it comes from abroad does not mean it is good. And what's so great about Caucasian noses? Who said large slender noses are better than cute button noses? A nose that looks beautiful on one person's face may not work for another, so there is no such thing as the ideal nose. And as for skin...I would gladly trade my white skin for the smooth brown skin of a Filipino. Brown skin is more resistant to sun damage, it looks more youthful, moles and other blemishes are more camouflaged, and it simply looks better!

Another manifestation of Filipinos' dismissal of local creations is the music scene. American pop and RnB are by far the most popular music here. Even popular Filipino music sounds like American music, with very similar styles, instruments, and content that American bands are producing. Most of the music that reaches these shores is simply the redone, overplayed, simple, and uncreative pap found among the Top 40 list, but there is so much more music to experience that simply isn't heard here. Why don't Filipinos—like South Asians, Africans, and Middle Eastern people—develop their own brand of music influenced by their own traditions?

My point in describing all this is that there pervades (and please speak up if you disagree), a deep-seated apathy for local traditions in this country, whether it be local music, local clothing, local anatomy, or

local vernaculars. In addition, whenever a trend comes along, masses of people chase it without questioning whether or not it is actually good. Ilokano and Pangasinenses sometimes call their mother tongue “corny” or “not useful”, and try to teach their children Tagalog instead. I’ve asked many Ilokano mothers, “Why are you only speaking Tagalog to your child?” and many say, “Because that is the trend.” And? So what if it’s a trend? PERHAPS IT’S NOT A TREND WORTH FOLLOWING! Wouldn’t it be better if you taught your child both languages? And won’t your child learn Tagalog at school, from Tagalog friends, and from television anyway!?

For those who want to follow the trend and abandon their native tongue, I should probably add: teaching your children Tagalog will not miraculously fix their situation. One trip to Central Luzon and you will realize there are millions of Tagalog-speaking poor people. The people you see on television are a very small minority of wealthy, fair-skinned celebrities, and getting your children to talk like them won’t make them any closer to stardom. Unless other self-help measures are taken, a poor person who switches languages is still a poor person—all she has accomplished is the loss of her culture and heritage. So now, in addition to having little money, she has lost a piece of her identity as well.

Poverty, in essence, is relative. It’s not just about a lack of money; it can be many other things too. Poverty is an existence in which everything valuable is defined by someone else. Poverty is the acceptance of trends without room for your own creativity. Poverty is when everyone has to be the same, rather than respect and learn from each other’s differences. You are poor if money is the only way you measure progress. If you lose your culture, and then for some reason lost all your money, what would you have left to support you?

“Ano ang paborito mong pagkain?” the MC asked.

“Pizza po,” said the little girl.

“Yan! Masarap!”

I guess they think Ilokano is not “cool” or “fancy” enough for a Little Miss Barangay contest, I thought, as I watched the event. Don’t they realize that Ilokano is just as rich and old a language as Tagalog? And don’t they realize that by excluding the local tongue from high profile events like Little Miss contests, they further undermine its prestige?

I turned to the gentleman to my right, the Hon. Vice-Governor Aureo Q. Nisce, and said, “I’m sad that these little girls are being forced to answer in Tagalog. The MC should set an example and speak Tagalog AND Ilokano interchangeably, so that the girls know it’s acceptable to answer in either. Otherwise they will just grow up thinking Tagalog is superior to Ilokano, which is not a positive belief.”

“Yes, I noticed this too. They should not be ashamed of using Ilokano,” the Vice-Governor said.

“Is there anything that could be done about it?” I asked.

“You know what? If I am reelected I will suggest more events for Ilokano, like poetry readings and song competitions.”

“That’s great!” I said, glad that someone high up in government noticed the marginalization of mother tongues too.

In previous columns I’ve discussed the exclusion of local language in business, education, and other places, but as demonstrated by Tagalog and English-dominated events like pageants, the vernacular is also excluded from many social situations. That’s why Sir Aureo’s idea to create more Ilocano events is very important. My suggestion is that these events not just be ABOUT the Iloko language, since that is too specific for most people’s taste. (And anyway, there are already such events organized by organizations like GUMIL, the Association of

Ilokano Writers). In order to expose the vernacular to a wider audience, therefore, it's important to also have events that simply USE it. We should establish all sorts of events — such as science fairs, health drives, pageants, job fairs, or musical performances — with the only difference being that that they are conducted in the local language. They are ordinary events with a twist, that send a message to the public that it is acceptable to use Ilokano in many situations, not just when the topic is about Ilokano itself.

The most common argument against using the local vernacular in public events is, “What if some people don't understand?” For me, that is precisely the reason why we SHOULD use the vernacular at public events. If some people don't understand the local language that means some people are failing to learn it, and the tongue is destined to decay. Therefore, we need to provide non-speakers of Ilokano the opportunity to hear and learn it, so that the linguistic heritage of La Union is kept intact. The same goes for any other part of the Philippines. The only way to ensure the survival of local languages is to use them, so their use in public should be encouraged.

The older generation, especially the politicians, instinctively know this. They are not ashamed to speak in the local tongue even in the most high profile events. When his Hon. Jejomar Binay came to La Union, the Governor, the 2 congressmen, and the ex-Mayor of San Fernando all managed to incorporate Iloko into their speeches, even though Binay is a native Tagalog! Binay was not fazed or upset that his hosts used the local language; on the contrary, he wryly told the audience that, although he could not speak the local language, his skin at least looked dark enough for Northern Luzon! It was a humorous and completely relaxed atmosphere.

By contrast to the free way adults use the vernacular, the younger generation is reluctant to do so. I don't know why, but it might be a shame that is hammered into them in school. Most of the young people who walk into my office introduce themselves in Tagalog. When I ask them why, they say they are trying to be polite and are also not sure if the staff speak Ilokano. In reference to their first concern, being polite is

not about what language you use, but rather HOW you use it. And as for the second concern, so what? Use your mother tongue first, and if the listener gives you a blank stare, switch languages. It's as simple as that. No hard feelings, no problem. It's high time young people start respecting their heritage.

Part 12

I had an argument with a young teacher from a private school last week. I noticed she spoke the local language (which is Iloko/Ilokano here in La Union) with her friends and fellow teachers, but whenever addressing students, even informally in the halls, she spoke in Tagalog. "Why do you resist using Ilokano with your students?" I asked her. "Even when you are just asking what they are eating for lunch, you speak to them in Tagalog!" I added.

"Because Tagalog and English are for the school. Ilokano is for the home," she quipped snobbishly.

"That's ridiculous." I said. "First of all, I understand that in a Tagalog-based subject, such as Filipino or Makabayan, you would naturally use Tagalog. But outside the classroom, it doesn't matter what language you speak! If it is just in the hallways, the playground, or lunch area, you should feel free to chat with students in the native language — Ilokano. Secondly, didn't you know that DepEd is introducing mother tongue-based education in all Philippine primary schools by 2012? That means the national government is wisely declaring that school is not just for English and Tagalog, but also for the mother tongue. And anyway," I continued, "if you keep speaking to them in Tagalog, what if they lose their Ilokano?"

"They won't lose their Ilokano," she replied. "As I said before, they learn it in the home."

"Actually Ma'am, let me explain..."

I then went on to describe why her assumption is simply incorrect. Many children are unfortunately NOT learning the local language/dialect in the home. I have collected informal data about language use in San Fernando during the 6 months I've been here. About 40% of child-bearing Ilokano mothers are speaking exclusively in Tagalog to their children, while a further 40-50% are speaking a mix of Tagalog and Iloko. When I ask these mothers, "Aren't you worried your children will lose their mother tongue?" they usually respond, "No no, they will learn Ilokano from their friends and relatives. But if most of the other mothers are also speaking Tagalog to their children, then it is likely that a child will not learn Ilokano from other children. Furthermore, if children are pushed to speak Tagalog and English in school, it is even more unreasonable to assume they will just "pick up" Ilokano elsewhere.

Let's be methodical. I will analyze the assumption that children will automatically learn their mother tongue, and hope to prove to you that in the case of many cities, this assumption is false. There are 24 hours in a day. How long is a typical Filipino child at the age of 10 being exposed to Tagalog, English, and his mother tongue?

- The average school-age child spends 8 hrs/day at school, almost all of which is in English and Tagalog.
- The average child spends 8 hrs/day sleeping, during which there is no language transmission.
- The average Filipino spends 200 minutes/day watching television, the second highest rate in Asia. Television is almost all in Tagalog and English.
- Subtracting these three activities from 24 hours, the balance is 4.7 hours remaining, during which time the child is primarily eating, interacting with family, hanging out with friends, or doing errands. Since many mothers are choosing to speak Tagalog or English to their children, and many young friends speak Tagalog to each other, this means that only a fraction of the remaining 4.7 hours of a child's day actually involves his native tongue. Adding to this the Tagalog and English he is exposed to in music, radio, newspapers, books, billboards, street

signs, and commercial establishments, it would be a fair estimate that the average Filipino child is exposed to only 2 hours (8.3%) of his native tongue per day, and some even less so.

Thus, even if the vernacular seems to be widespread for parents, the same does not hold true for their children. As television ownership has skyrocketed in the last few decades (from about 0% when the country got independence to 71% today), and as Tagalog has been creeping into other domains, children simply do not have the same kind of exposure to their native tongue that their parents had. The assumption that they will automatically learn it is no longer valid.

Analyzing the exposure times to different languages, it is not surprising that many children are growing up speaking a mishmash of mostly Tagalog and their native tongue, and are incapable of speaking their mother tongue fluently. And it will just get worse in the next generation unless *i*) Mothers start passing their native language to their children; *ii*) The government passes some reforms, and *iii*) Schools start becoming allies in the preservation of heritage, rather than accomplices in its destruction.

Part 13

“We have so many dialects in this country. Too much. It’s not good,” a wealthy businessman told me while drunk at a party.

After correcting him about his misuse of the word dialect (the Philippines, contrary to what is commonly taught in schools, has between 120-170 *languages*, not dialects), I tried thinking of reasons why it might be a *good* thing to have so many languages. So far in this column I’ve mostly talked about the threats to Philippine languages, but I haven’t really explored why we should be worried about them. So what if the vernaculars die? What use are they anyway? In the next few

articles in this series, I'll explore this question. It's a valid debate, and I'll try to present the case for why multilingualism is good for the country.

In the nationalistic fervor of the 19th and 20th centuries, numerous countries sought to homogenize language as a way to strengthen national identity. Some Filipinos still assert the same kind of rhetoric—that a National Language is necessary to promote peace and to demonstrate pride for one's citizenship. Times have changed, however, and attitudes towards national identity---at least in other countries---are thankfully softening. As communities learn how to assert themselves and diversify due to migration, strategic governments are becoming more sensitive to diversity in their internal policies.

Unity need not be achieved with homogenization, but rather through a communal respect for each other's differences. Even China, the economic power house of Asia often regarded as very nationalistic, recognizes distinct cultural groups within its borders---such as Uyghurs, Zhuang, and Mongols---and encourages the development of their own languages. The Philippine government should provide similar room for its many tongues, to enrich a holistic national identity.

We can still have a National Language, but it does not have to be at the expense of minority languages. They can coexist. The more languages we have, the more ways of disseminating information, the more ways of expressing ourselves, and the more ways to learn. Educating children in their mother tongue, especially early in a child's school career, can complement and enhance later learning of Tagalog-based Filipino and English. A pilot test under the Estrada Administration using vernaculars to teach young school children was highly successful, resulting in greater attentiveness, spontaneity, and comprehension. As Philippine languages are all related, any early advances in literacy in one's mother tongue can transfer easily to Tagalog. Later in a child's school career, when education becomes almost exclusively in English and Filipino, the increasingly complex learning of Filipino can have a "washback" effect (Gonzalez 1998), whereby literacy in a child's local language is enhanced as well. This is a perfect example of how Tagalog and the other Philippine languages can co-exist, and even benefit each other.

So, as I was saying, diversity is a good thing. If properly treated, it can lead to more unity, not less. On the other hand, it is the suppression of local languages and cultures in the name of “national unity” that may lead to violent conflicts and dissension. This is what happened to former Pakistan, whose rulers wanted Urdu to be the sole and exclusive official language. As a result, the people of East Pakistan, who speak Bangla, rebelled and formed a separate Bangladeshi state.

National pride, therefore, should be a deeper celebration of Philippine diversity, not just pride for nationalism’s sake. Teachers make students memorize the National Flower, National Tree, National Bird, National Fish, and the National Language, some of which aren't even official. But true patriotism is not a simple matter of creating symbols that everyone shall respect or conform to. True patriotism is recognizing the basic truths of your country and celebrating what makes it special. Diversity is one of these things. The Philippines is the 10th most linguistically diverse countries in the world, so clearly it has something that 95% of the world does not. That makes it special. It also means the Philippines has a responsibility to the world to protect its own languages, as one of the world’s greatest cradles of human diversity.

True patriotism is also recognizing your people for who they are. The reality of this country is that it has many foods, environments, cultures and languages. This is the true Philippines, and the government should recognize it as an asset rather than a burden, a fundamental part of Filipino identity. In fact, the government should do everything in its power to protect these things, and ensure the future is as rich as our past.

The illusion of English. It is often perceived that English is dominating the Philippines' language scene, and threatens to replace the native languages. It is true that English is found in many spheres of Filipino life, especially in business, media, and high levels of government. Indeed, this column has been mostly in English and so is this newspaper. But nevertheless, I think people tend to exaggerate English's prevalence.

In written terms, yes, English is everywhere. The most prestigious newspapers are in English. Many street signs, banners, and placards are in English. Most product information, food labels, and health warnings are in English. Most university classes are conducted in English. And the most formal settings are usually in English, such as court, provincial board, and congressional sessions.

If you dig a little deeper, however, the penetration of English is rather weak. Filipinos are some of the biggest TV watchers in the world (200 min/day, on average), and the two most-watched channels---GMA 7 and ABS-CBN 3---are mostly in Tagalog. There are many more ads in Tagalog than 30 years ago, and most of the English ads are actually Taglish. While they play a lot of English songs on FM radio here in San Fernando, the host speaks Tagalog about 95% of the time (I once timed it for an entire day). Furthermore, the majority of Filipinos can't afford, don't understand, or don't like the large English broadsheets, so many end up buying the Tagalog-based tabloids like Bulgar and Tiktik. The Asia Research Organization found that only 14% of Filipinos read English broadsheets, and this number is falling. This compares to 38% of the population who read the Tagalog tabloids. Similarly, only 4 out of the 39 magazines printed in Metro Manila are English.

In the commercial sector, although most staff greet new customers in English, that's pretty much where it ends. After the first "Hello, good morning sir," you would get many a startled look if you proceeded to

ask a question in English. In cinemas, department stores, and restaurants, English is nothing more than the token “Hello” or “Goodbye” at the end of the encounter. The same thing applies to many public events like shows and competitions. The MC will throw in a few English phrases here and there but most of his explanations are in Tagalog or the local language.

As for schooling, I have sat in many public classrooms, and even in subjects that are supposed to be taught in English (under the current system which is being phased out), teachers actually speak more Tagalog than English. And in the informal setting of hallways, teachers will often not address their students in English or in the local language, but Tagalog instead. This contrasts to the first half of the 20th century (before 1942) and the 1950s, when all schooling was conducted in English except for the Tagalog subject. This is one of the reasons why elderly Filipinos often have a high command of English.

I don't necessarily consider the changing patterns of English vs. Tagalog a bad thing. I'm not an English imperialist and I certainly don't think English is the key to all of Philippine's economic problems. But I just want to point out that most people are exposed to a lot more Tagalog than English or even their mother tongue. When you add up the daily number of hours dedicated to school, television, FM radio, and other sources, the average urban middle-class student in Northern Luzon is exposed to Tagalog about 50% of waking hours, 40% English, and a mere 10% of their local language! Of course this fluctuates significantly depending on the city, the language pattern of the home, and the social habits of the individual, but this estimate should make us wonder how on Earth youth could master their mother tongue if they spend so little time listening to it?! It also surprises me, when I bring up the issue of local language loss, people often say, “Yes, it's a shame families are switching to English.” *No, they are not! Don't you see the thousands of Ilocano mothers switching to Tagalog?* I think to myself. *What gives you the idea that English is replacing Ilocano when youth are speaking Tagalog to each other and many can barely speak English?*

The sad truth of the matter is that the national language may be accomplishing what no colonial language has achieved: the slow eradication of the native Philippine tongues. They can coexist, but unfortunately little political action has been taken to ensure such a future. Ironic that, after centuries of colonial imposition, this independent nation is now the reaper of its own cultural loss.

Part 15

How did Tagalog become the basis of the national language?
I went home and looked the history up. Just out of curiosity.

During the Spanish time government bureaucracy was conducted mostly in Spanish. However, given the persistently low level of knowledge of Spanish among the commoners (partly due to the lack of universal education until very late in the Spanish era), many of the Spanish authorities—especially the religious sector—learned Philippine languages. Around their main settlement, Manila, this was Tagalog. But in other parts of the archipelago, they learned the other languages too, which is why families of Spanish descent, like the Ortegas of La Union, can speak Ilokano today.

Towards the end of the Spanish era, and again after the Americans left, Filipino leaders were anxious to create a strong national identity, and looked to create symbols of nationality in almost everything—which is why the Philippines now has a national flower, fish, hero, tree, and even a language. But what are the origins of this national language?

The first time Tagalog was elevated to the status of a national language—or was attempted to be so—was in 1897. The Revolutionary (aka “Biak-na-Bato”) Constitution of 1897 was drafted in defiance of the Spanish, and although this constitution was never enacted, it listed Tagalog as the national language. Interestingly, all the revolutionary

leaders who drafted this constitution were native Tagalog speakers. People from other ethnolinguistic groups—like Warays, Ilokans, Pangasinenses, etc—were not represented in the assembly.

The Malolos Constitution of 1899 was more equitable in making the use of all Philippine languages optional, alongside Spanish for “public authorities and judicial affairs.” No Philippine language, like Tagalog, was considered to be any more important than any other. Unfortunately, the Americans arrived shortly thereafter and only recognized English and Spanish. In 1935, the idea of an indigenous national language reemerged. The Constitution of the First Republic (aka “Commonwealth Constitution”) instructed the National Assembly to adopt a common national language based on one of the existing ones. The Constitution did not specify which one, but President Quezon probably had Tagalog in mind.

It was not until the Japanese Occupation that the Constitution specifically mentioned Tagalog, and demanded that steps toward the “development and propagation of Tagalog as the national language” be taken. Before the Japanese, Tagalog was only taught in the fourth year of high school, but the Japanese incorporated it into all grade levels. Future constitutions inherited this Tagalog bias (and English), largely to the exclusion of all other languages of the Philippines. The Constitutions of 1946, 1959, 1973, and 1987 made minor changes, such as changing the name from Tagalog to Pilipino to Filipino. But even though the name was changed to make it seem as if the national language were somehow representative of all people, the fact of the matter has not changed: Filipino is merely a politically motivated name for a variation of Tagalog. Nobody can deny that they share the same grammatical rules and vastly similar vocabularies.

So, the next time someone tells me, “Oh, but Tagalog-based Filipino is our National Language”, I’ll remind them that it was the Japanese that first made this a reality. And why would it have been in their interest to make it so? Because a population is much easier to influence and control if they all speak the same language. Furthermore, it helped

dissociate the Philippines from the United States, who were Japan's bitter enemies.

Many governments in history have sung praises of "unity," but this is often just a euphemism for "Let's all think and talk the way we do in the seat of power (Manila)." Those countries that continue to shy away from preserving their linguistic diversity are still stuck in the World War mentality of "one country, one language." Diversity was seen as inconvenient at best, and a recipe for mutiny at worst. Nations felt it necessary to present unified fronts. As countries today are not as vulnerable to invasion and outright war as last century, they have begun to look inward and notice that:

a) Diversity is valuable;

b) Trying to make everyone the same makes people less happy, not more;

c) We don't all have to think the same way or speak the same language in order to be a strong, proud, peaceful country. We can preserve the national language alongside the local languages. Some countries even have multiple national languages.

Unfortunately, with its lack of government support for non-Tagalog languages and dialects, the Philippines is still stuck in World War II paranoia, when symbolism and uniformity was considered necessary for nation building. It may give lip service to diversity, but the government has yet to truly embrace it.

Part 16

Why are languages worth preserving?

Languages contain a treasure trove of information. Ancient texts are written in myriad tongues, but if a language becomes truly lost, those texts can become inaccessible to historians, just as Etruscan writings are today or Egyptian hieroglyphics before their decipherment. How can

the details of an ancient battle, a political union, a high-profile love affair, or a famine be known if their documentation is in a language we no longer understand? Language is the key to the doorway of history, giving indispensable access to primary sources.

Anthropologists need language, meanwhile, to study both past and present societies. The idiosyncracies of vocabulary and expressions; the differences in verbal and written communication; formal and informal usages; the ritualistic employment of language; the different registers of youth, elders, women, and men--- such language traits reveal wide-ranging characteristics about a society. Characteristics of marriage, the path to adulthood, social hierarchy, perceptions of life and death, relationships between various groups, attitudes on success, and the role of the environment in a society can all be illuminated by the language they use.

Linguists study language to better understand language itself. Why do we speak the way we do today? How do we arrange our words and our sentences? In how many ways can we change a root word to make a new meaning, using suffixes and prefixes? What is the size of our vocabulary? How many languages have influenced our own? Have we borrowed grammatical structures from other languages, or just vocabulary? Which languages of the Philippines are most closely related? Which are furthest apart? Have our languages remained relatively unchanged over the last few hundred years or are they changing rapidly? If so, how and why? What is the future fate of our languages? These are all some of the questions linguists ask, and can help us answer. That is, if our languages survive long enough to offer such an opportunity.

Ecologists often work with linguists to learn new things about the environment. People are products of the environment they grow up in, and develop extensive vocabularies for plants, animals, and natural phenomena within their habitat. While English is a rich language, it can't beat the richness of Tibetan in mountain terminology, or Bedouin Arabic in desert terminology, or Inuktitut for winter terminology. Since languages develop over hundreds of years, they are an accumulation of

many generations of acquired knowledge. Observations such as the mating habits of animals, hunting or foraging strategies, sleep patterns, competition with other species, and physiological changes that plants undergo is all information that our ancestors became keenly aware of and incorporated into their vocabularies. By studying native languages in their environmental contexts, ecologists can therefore learn of biological complexities otherwise unknown to modern science. Indigenous knowledge of local ecology may even offer direct benefits to human health, such as antidotes for snake bites, herbal drinks to combat cancer, nuts and root crops that are less fatty, serums that may be used for anaesthesia, etc.

Finally, archaeologists and human evolutionary biologists study languages to unravel the migration patterns of people. It is largely through a study of the similarities and differences of different Pacific languages that researchers were able to determine when and how humans moved across Oceania. Most of the languages of Oceania descend from an ancestral language in Taiwan, whose speakers migrated south into the Philippines about 6000 years ago (Blust 1999). Over time, their language diversified as they spread to the Malay Archipelago, Madagascar, and across the entire Pacific ocean, including Fiji, New Zealand, Vanuatu, French Polynesia, Hawaii, Easter Island, and many other island groups. Being one of the first stops in these migrations, the native Philippine languages (which number between 120-171 and include Aklanon, Maranao, Asi, Itawit, Tausug, Tagalog, Romblon, and any other “dialect” you can think of), are some of the oldest Austronesian languages: older than this country, older than the countries that colonized us, and older than the Bible. As the “grandfathers” of most Austronesian languages, don’t you think we have a particular responsibility in preserving them?

From a scholar’s perspective—whether she be a linguist, anthropologist, historian, biologist, geographer, or political scientist—the death of any language is a disaster, as it removes yet one more data point, one more object of academic inquiry, one more piece in the puzzle to understand language evolution and society as a whole. There is still so much research to be done on Philippine languages --- any person involved in

the field will asseverate that we have barely scratched the surface. There remains a tremendous amount of information locked up in them. If we let them die, that information will be much harder to uncover, if not impossible.

Part 17

The Philippines has around 120-171 native languages (such as Ilokano, Itbayaten, Bukidnon, and many more) and 10 foreign language communities (such as Chinese, Korean, Arabic, etc). But some say that it would be better if we all spoke one language, as everyone would understand each other. I disagree. Misunderstanding is primarily a mindset, not a language barrier. I remember when my family lived in Egypt we had a German neighbour who didn't speak a word of English, yet somehow she and my mother carried on a remarkable relationship. They were always warm and embracing of each other, would make baked goods together, go on walks, and through a creative use of body language, intonation, and facial expressions, managed to chat about anything from the health of their children to upcoming travel plans.

We don't all need to speak the same language to relate to one another. The Swiss people have four main language groups, all of which are official: German, French, Italian, and Romansh. Yet they are all proud to be Swiss. Not only that, Switzerland is one of the most peaceful countries in the world, and prides itself on having remained neutral in multiple European wars. Even if you don't believe my claim that language differences can be easily overcome, there is no harm in holding on to your mother tongue in addition to learning whatever language you think is useful for greater communication.

Others say that it would be great if we all spoke one language for the sake of peace and unity. But peace and unity depend more on key social and economic conditions, such as equality of all people under law, fair

access to resources, freedom and professionalism of the press, religious tolerance, education quality, economic opportunity, environmental stewardship, land rights, immigration factors, and others -- not necessarily on how few or how many languages a country has. The top 20 most linguistically diverse African countries, for example, contain countries in both the top most peaceful African countries (eg. Mozambique, Zambia, Cameroon, Tanzania) and the least peaceful countries (Chad, Central African Republic, Nigeria, Congo) according to the Global Peace Index. That is to say, linguistic homogeneity is not a prerequisite for peace, because for every unstable diverse country, you can find examples of countries that are both peaceful and diverse.

Similarly, countries with only a few languages can be unstable too. Of the 6 least diverse countries in Africa (based on Greenberg's Diversity Index), 4 are in the bottom 20% least peaceful countries, and one of them---Rwanda---was the setting for one of the worst genocides in the 20th century. It is clear that, if not a cause of inter-ethnic conflict, low diversity is no guarantee for peace. It is erroneous to think, therefore, that we would automatically be a more stable country if we had fewer languages. Instead, a country's ability to *effectively manage* its linguistic diversity is a more important ingredient for peace, and those countries that have embraced their multiculturalism, respected the rights of minorities, and tried not to dominate one ethnic group over another tend to be much more harmonious.

There are many countries that are both more linguistically diverse than the Philippines and more peaceful. Of the 23 countries that rank higher than the Philippines on Greenberg's Diversity Index (GDI), 21 of them are also more peaceful. This fact can't all be blamed on our economic woes, because many of the 21 countries with higher GPIs and GDIs are in fact poorer than the Philippines. One reason countries like South Africa, India, Vanuatu, and Papua New Guinea are more stable, despite being more diverse, might be because they have much more inclusive ethnolinguistic policies, such as recognizing regional languages and using vernaculars in education. The stability of Mozambique and Cameroon, meanwhile, might be attributed to the fact that they made foreign colonial languages the only official ones, thereby not favouring

any indigenous group over another. These examples contrast with the Philippines, which does not treat its regional languages officially (even though the Constitution affords them some official status), does not include local languages in education, and has implicitly benefited one language group over all others in the promotion of Tagalog-based Filipino as the sole national language.

Of all the countries for which Global Peace Index (GPI) has been evaluated, the Philippines ranks in the bottom 20%. Many factors go into calculating a country's Global Peace Index, including levels of internal conflict, political instability, corruption, level of respect for human rights, violent crime, size of jailed population, etc., but suffice it to say that the Philippines is not a very stable place. The propagation of the national language and successive presidents pedalling nationalistic rhetoric have not improved the situation.

Part 18

As we've discussed, linguistic homogeneity is *not* a prerequisite for harmony. But is the opposite -- linguistic diversity -- outrightly good? In a previous article, I explored this question from an academic perspective. Languages contain a wealth of information that anthropologists use to study societies, biologists to study human evolution, historians to study history, and linguists to study language. Languages are rich scientific resources. But there are other advantages to sustaining linguistic diversity within a country.

This week I'll explore some of the other benefits of having many languages. Scholar Francois Grin divides the benefits of multilingualism into four main categories: 1) private market value; 2) private non-market value; 3) social market value, and; 4) social non-market value. These terms are a bit clunky, but to put it more simply: "private" refers to those qualities of multilingualism that mainly benefit the individual;

“social” benefits are those for society as a whole; and “market” refers to those benefits that are economically, politically, or otherwise traditionally and concretely advantageous. “Non-market” benefits are those that benefit you in subtle ways, the kinds of things that you might appreciate but which might not be directly marketable for jobs or other people.

For now, let’s discuss number one and two, the private values of multilingualism. That is, what are the rewards you, as an individual, may obtain from being able to speak more languages?

If you know many languages, you are likely to have access to a wider choice of jobs, because you will be able to apply yourself in a variety of contexts. I guarantee that, given all else equal, a city government in Ilocos will hire someone who speaks Ilokano, English, and Tagalog over someone who only speaks English and Tagalog, because he will be comfortable in interacting with practically anyone, no matter who enters the office and no matter what language is used. With a wider choice of jobs, you are likely to find a job that suits your interests best, and hence find work more fulfilling. With a wider choice of jobs you are also likely to find one that satisfies you financially. A Swiss study by Grin & Sfreddo (1997) found a correlation between the number of languages people knew and their salaries. When comparing thousands of people with different linguistic abilities and job positions, every additional language known results in an average increase of 4-20% in net earnings. If you speak more languages, it indicates to companies that you are adaptable, smart, eager to learn, and culturally aware, which is why multilingual people tend to get the juicier jobs.

Multilingual people also have access to lower prices and better access to information. This fact didn’t seem obvious to me when I first read it, but it makes sense. When I go into the market and speak the local language, vendors treat me like a local, and give me local prices. The same thing for services too. A few weeks ago my foreign friends went to a laundrette, where they were told they had to pay 50% extra if they wanted their clothes ready by the next day. To see if they were being ripped off, I went in the same day with my laundry. I asked them in

Iloko, “Mabalin nga agsubliak tuno bigat?” They said yes, I could pick up the laundry tomorrow, and made no mention of a 50% surcharge! While you may disagree with the practice of charging different customers different amounts, it’s a universal trait. In Mexico, India, Nepal, Cambodia, Egypt, and every other country I’ve been to, shopping is easier in the local language. There’s an immediate familiarity and rapport established between shopper and buyer, usually deflating the need or desire for hostile bargaining. There’s also the element of respect. By attempting to speak in the other person’s language, you are showing that person respect. You are not forcing the person to operate on a level that behooves you, but instead are willing to swallow your pride and interact on their terms. I think one of the reasons people from Manila and foreigners rarely learn local vernaculars, despite years of living in the regions, is that they don’t like the feeling of sounding stupid or not being able to communicate properly. It’s difficult to start learning a language from scratch, so outsiders just stick to what they’re most comfortable with – English or Tagalog. The fact that these two languages are so widely understood makes it especially easy to avoid learning the local language, but what people don’t often realize are the smiles, the helpful tips, the discounts, and the stronger friendships that they may miss out on.

I was going to try to fit all the benefits of knowing more languages in this one article, but alas, there are more to tell. Till next week. And in the meantime, hold onto your languages!

Part 19

If you have many language groups in a small country like the Philippines, then people are compelled to learn more languages. Most Filipinos (except those in Tagalog areas) are trilingual in their native language, Tagalog, and English. In the Cordilleras, many people are even more multilingual, knowing their native language, English,

Tagalog, Iloko, and at times another neighbouring local language. Similar conditions exist in other parts of the country, such as Mindanao, where there are numerous languages occupying small areas.

I don't see this multiplicity of languages as a problem. As long as we have lingua francas covering wide geographic areas (such as regional languages, Tagalog, or English), it doesn't matter how many other languages we have. The role of lingua francas is to facilitate communication between disparate groups; as long as such widely understood languages exist, there should be no limit or distaste for additional languages, no matter how small and obscure. In fact, we should appreciate having so many languages. As mentioned last time, there are numerous benefits of multilingualism, both for the individual and society as a whole.

In addition to benefits like greater job opportunities, more interesting jobs, higher wages, and access to lower prices, multilingualism offers easier access to information. If you speak more languages, the more information sources you have use of. News, for example, is often heard in different languages and at different times. If you turned on the radio during a serious warning or an important announcement, and you didn't understand the language, you could be in big trouble! The more languages you know, the more likely you are able to comprehend different sights and sounds, whether that be a local radio drama, a national tsunami warning, a street fight, a question from a stranger, a scientific journal, or the two sexy women gossiping about you at a café!

Another plus is that multilingual people are often better at learning languages. Admittedly, a multilingual person might know lots of languages because he's good at learning them, but it goes both ways. The more languages you know, the easier it is to learn another one. That's because you become accustomed to the requirements of learning a language, such as the memorization of words and the need to practise it. That is, the task seems a lot less daunting when you know the effort it entails. Two, one's brain becomes adept at recognizing grammatical structures. When you learn a new language you can compare the grammar rules with your own language: the similarities will help

fasttrack your correct use of the language while the recognized differences might be equally informative. Since I never formally learned English grammar in school, most grammatical terms I know, and can now apply to English, are those taught to me while learning new languages.

Three, you become better at hearing and reproducing sounds. Rarely can a monolingual person pull off a convincing accent of another language, getting tripped up in rolling R's, glottal stops, velar fricatives (like the 'kh' and 'gh' sounds in Arabic), and other such sounds. The more languages you know, the better you become at differentiating phonemes, and imitating whole accents.

Fourthly, as an experienced language learner, you know what the best strategies are for learning. You presumably have experimented with a variety of learning methods -- such as computer programs, grammar books, informal conversation, watching movies, etc. -- and can immediately embark on your preferred method for faster results.

The relative aptitude of multilingual people in language learning may be demonstrated by contrasting the Philippines with different Asian examples. Korea and Japan are some of the most linguistically homogenous countries in the world, and despite pumping vast amounts of money and time into English education, English competency remains surprisingly low. When you're surrounded by only one language, and rarely need to adapt to someone else's speech, it's difficult to learn a new one. Filipinos, on the other hand, are used to a multilingual environment. They are used to picking up several languages. Perhaps this is one of the reasons why, on a relatively small budget, the country can produce a citizenry with the highest English prevalence in Asia, a consistent selling point for foreign investment and employment. Yet one more reason the Philippines should be protecting and promoting its linguistic diversity!

A society with lots of languages is, I believe, a healthier society. To be more precise, a society that allows for the preservation and development of many languages is healthier than one that passively or actively destroys them. Right now the Philippines is in the latter camp, with probably 90% of their indigenous languages at risk of going extinct (or at least moribund) in 100 years. One of the reasons why I think the Philippines should try to preserve its native languages is for DIVERSITY.

Diversity is a secret weapon to many of the world's ills. To use a biological example, if there are a million species, and a virus targets one species, the other 999,999 are okay. But if you have only one species, and one individual gets hit, all other organisms are at risk. As life has evolved, it has proliferated into myriad species, each of which has potentially unlimited varieties. One can see the variety that permeates all levels by just looking at how different even siblings can be. All of these species meanwhile inhabit a cornucopia of environments, from super hot springs, dark caves, mountain tops, underground tunnels, salty pools, deep-sea vents and inside other organisms. It may be surprising that life finds itself in so many varieties and in so many places, especially given the challenges that have threatened life: asteroid impacts, toxic volcanic provinces, global ice ages, disease, floods, and intense competition. But, it is exactly because of the abundant varieties and niches of life that have allowed it to persist.

David Suzuki, a Canadian scientist and environmental activist, explains eloquently: "And through it all, life has persisted. Its strategy for surviving these apocalyptic and continual changes has been diversity, complexity and unpredictability.... Scientists have finally realized that biodiversity is at the very heart of life's resilience and adaptability. Rigid sameness results in disease and death, as we see everyday, without, perhaps, taking it suitably to heart. Monocultures [are] extremely dangerous because it reduces an organism's resilience when a new

parasite, disease, or change in climate occurs.”

The equivalent of disease in terms of language might be a degradation of speech ability, through the excessive use of fill words like "like" and "you know" and "um" (to give examples in English) or “yanni” in Arabic or “ano” in Tagalog. Some language degradation can be accompanied by a decline in written capability too, evinced by the Ancient Mayans who lost their ability to write a few hundred years ago. If one language is embattled by diluting, uncommunicative speech or written decay, at least other languages may be safe. They may have their own fill words or be subject to other erosive social conditions that lead to decreasing literacy, but problems facing one language don't necessarily spread automatically to others. Other forms of viruses could be demeaning words or ideas -- like the cultural significance of the word ‘nigger’ or ‘fag.’ The spreading of such words is not just a spread of the words themselves, but also the general disrespect and low value afforded such groups. If you have multiple languages, each with their associated habits and beliefs, such odious attitudes are less easily spread.

Homogeneity can rear its head to enormous consequences. Powerful World War II antagonists were able to garner their people's support for outrageously destructive acts, such as the invasion of Manchuria by the Japanese, the bombing of Hiroshima by the Americans, the systematic killing of Jews, gypsies, gays, and the disabled by the Germans, etc. To legitimize their nefarious actions, these countries emphasized their populace's sameness, versus their enemies' differences. If each country accommodated a wide variety of languages and cultures, it would be much harder for governments to paint other countries, similarly diverse and difficult to stereotype, to be inferior. Secondly, since their populations would be accustomed to variety within their own borders, they would not feel as threatened by differences, real or imagined, of other countries. Diversity is a shield against the manipulations of politicians and strategists who, in the name of patriotism and unity, commit people to acts that are often not beneficial to them or the world.

From the first bacterium to trillions of organisms alive today, life has become ever more diverse and numerous. And it is more resilient as a result. Meanwhile, humans are marching in the opposite direction, towards fragile sameness. Protect Philippine languages and protect one of our most empowering characteristics: diversity.

Part 21

Would you be surprised if preserving and strengthening language diversity had economic advantages too? It's quite a reasonable proposition actually. Regional languages prompt the need for customized regional services. If the 10 major languages of the Philippines, for example, were given official status by the national or provincial governments (as the main languages have in India and South Africa), this would create a boom in activity to incorporate such languages in educational materials, radio shows, TV broadcasts, newspapers, and consumer products within their respective regions, as well as services like legal advice, translation, government help, and customer service of private companies.

There is a more fundamental economic implication to language diversity. Regional identities—reinforced by regional languages—promote differentiation. This differentiation, together with the home-grown economic activity necessary to adequately serve the distinct language base, can be a promising catalyst for decentralized development. If regional languages are preserved and well integrated into the economies of their respective regions, cities outside Manila will have reason to create their own TV stations, for example, and develop all the high technology and skilled labour associated with them. Or if a band from Ilocos Sur would like any chance of success, it may not be necessary to “get big” in Manila but rather seek fame in whatever future city is recognized as the cultural hub of the Ilocos region, such as San Fernando, Vigan, or Laoag. And similarly, a university student should be

able to find a cutting-edge education in any course he desires at a university closer to home. Cebu partially plays such a role in the Visayas.

While admittedly there would be costs associated with adapting a regional economy to its previously underserved language, such a transformation however would enhance the region's individuality, spur nucleated development based on the specific needs and attributes of each region, and facilitate the development of multiple cultural and economic hubs. In such a case, citizens would have more choice in where they go to live, advance, and prosper. Manila would no longer have a near-monopoly on the highest level functions of society, such as the higher forms of media (television), education (the biggest/best universities), and the private sector (large corporations). Tourism would also be boosted and better spread across the country: as cities grow and differentiate in their own way, they will each have something different to offer variety-loving visitors.

A large percentage of developing countries focus their resources on single primate cities, which suffer from massive overpopulation, housing crises, water shortages, pollution, and crime---Manila is no exception. Moreover, a city that dominates a country's economy carries the burden of diffusing development to the rest of the country, a much slower process than decentralized nucleated development. It is not surprising that the lowest tier developing countries are more often characterized by primate cities (such as Lagos, Nigeria; Tehran; Iran; Cairo, Egypt; Kathmandu, Nepal; Dakar, Senegal; Dhaka, Bangladesh) with poorly-served hinterlands, whereas developing countries with more vibrant economies tend to have multiple cities of significant size, importance, and function (such as Pretoria, Johannesburg, Cape Town, and Durban of South Africa; Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam; Delhi, Calcutta, Mumbai, of India; Abu Dhabi and Dubai of UAE; Rio de Janeiro, Sao Paulo, Salvador, and Brasilia of Brazil; Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Chongqing, and Hong Kong of China, etc). We should be aiming, however possible, to steer the country towards the multi-city economic framework of these countries. One way to do that is by promoting regional diversity.

Spain is a good example of economically robust regionalism. A common misconception is that Spain is entirely Spanish, when in fact it hosts a large Catalan-speaking region called Catalonia. It is not unusual for a country to host multiple languages, but whereas many countries favor one language to the detriment of others, Catalan has a firm and respected place in Spain. In Catalonia, Catalan is taught in schools, found on manufactured products, is the language of instruction in universities, and even has its own top-level internet domain, .cat. Furthermore, Catalonia boasts the world class city of Barcelona, as culturally and materially rich as Madrid. These two cities—one Catalan-speaking, the other Spanish-speaking—help to distribute Spain’s demographics, economic activity, and heritage treasures. Their continued importance, meanwhile, is uplifted by a healthy spirit of competition between the two cities, even in football. A similar phenomenon exists in Switzerland, where Geneva act as the hub of the French-speaking part, Zurich of the German part, and Lugano of the Italian part. If language planning in the Philippines left room for the continued survival and development of regional languages, as has been done in Spain and Switzerland, it could indeed be part of a larger vision of the Philippines’ cultural and economic vitality.

Part 22

Language is sort of a gatekeeper of culture. It can keep the complex threads of a culture intact, and it can also act as a buffer against the less appealing aspects of more dominant, invasive cultures. If you lose your mother tongue, your culture may lose its main glue and defense. You and your community may undergo changes far beyond the language you lost. If an Igorot youth loses his native tongue for example (because his parents chose to “modernize” him and speak Tagalog), and Tagalog becomes his main mode of understanding and communicating, suddenly the center of his cultural universe shifts from the mountains

and rice terraces of the Cordilleras to the glittery, plastic, and superficial game shows he sees on TV, the rock bands that flood the radio waves, the polluted, crowded streets of the capital city, the austere high-rise buildings (symbols of economic “progress”)...basically whatever is associated with the biggest, most obvious, and most prolific place of his new language: Manila. He is still an Igorot, even if he doesn't speak his native tongue. But now that another language has direct access to his conscience, his ideas, hopes and dreams become centered on someone else's definition of progress. And things that are valued by his adopted language community, so far and different from the Cordilleras, are things he is not likely to have. It's a recipe for self-deprecation. Money and Manila are the future. Staying in the province is a waste of time, he thinks. And at the nearest opportunity, he leaves. For everyone else remaining at home, his departure strengthens the impression that they also have no future unless they leave. It's a stubborn drain.

This theoretical example sounds very airy-fairy and sentimental. But my point is that when you are exposed to a language, you are exposed to a lot more than the language itself – you're exposed to all the cultural aspects transmitted by the language too. This might not be a bad thing, but if these imported cultural aspects come with a hint of superiority, it can lead you to believe that someone else's culture and language is better than yours. People challenge, “So what if many Filipinos are choosing Tagalog over their own languages? It's practical. There's more opportunity if you speak Tagalog.” But that statement only makes sense if you believe that what's on offer in Manila is a better lifestyle than what's on offer in your province. And the main way you would come to such a conclusion is if you bought into the image of progress transmitted by said imported culture! The more you are exposed to that language and that lifestyle, even from a distance, the more likely you are going to think it's something desirable. And in the words of Blas Ople, ironically (or perhaps most revealingly) one of the most vocal Constitutional Commissioners for Filipino as the national language: “One has to believe in the superiority of an alien culture before he can be truly subjugated.”

I personally don't think that there is anything inherently better about having a nice apartment, a high salary, and being able to shop at all your favourite malls. A simple life, with much fewer resources, can be just as spiritually fulfilling. As long as one is well off enough that basic shelter, clothing, food, transport, and some entertainment needs are met, happiness is a mindset, not an economic condition. My family has represented many ends of the economic spectrum over the years, with little change in who we are or our happiness. Family, friends, nature, and spirituality have been much more important in the grand scheme of things.

We all have to take a step back at times and reevaluate our assumptions. Are the things that are most often talked about on TV the most important or relevant issues for me? Are the stated ambitions of my country's government appropriate for all groups living inside it, including mine? Will switching to Tagalog and moving to Manila solve all my problems? What are my problems, and how exactly do I want to fix them? Is it possible to follow my financial dreams and hold on to my past? If you are proud of your origins, the value of your culture, and your native tongue, it can help put some of these questions in perspective. Knowing the true value of what you have—like a strong social support system, fresh, healthy food, clean air, physical activity, natural beauty, low crime, leisure time, etc—can help lessen the impact of a political and social environment insinuating that someone else / somewhere else is better than you / your place. If you dismiss your language and culture, you are almost certainly to fall prey to such an insinuation, but if you hold on to them, your goals in life are likely to find a better balance: hopefully, a blend of both economic realism and spiritual fulfilment. That is, so that you can pick and choose which external forces of change to accept, and what to politely decline.

The other day I had the following conversation. It is a remake of a conversation I've had at least 100 times in my 8 months here. The man, about thirty, was wearing a nice pair of jeans, a clean white collared shirt, new looking sneakers, and sunglasses around his neck. His clothes, along with the fact that we were in the City's main badminton club, told me he was up-and-coming; at least middle to upper class. This meant I could predict most of his opinions regarding language. I also predicted he would sprinkle his Ilokano with Tagalog like the well-oiled social climber he was. He overheard me talk Ilokano to the badminton club caretaker, and said,

“Marunong ka bang Ilokano?”

“Wen. Basit laeng.” I responded.

“Ang galing mo ng Ilokano!” he exclaimed.

“Agay-ayamka ti badminton?” I asked him if he was going to play.

“Hindi. I'm just waiting for my friend.” He clearly understood my Ilokano, so it had suddenly become a battle of stubbornness. Who was willing to adapt to the other's language first? I decided to pull one of my standard tactics: challenge his Ilokano ability to bring him out of the closet as a pretender!

“Saanmo ammo nga agsao ti Ilokano?” I asked in a fake sorry look.

“Ammok, siempre! Taga 'toy ak.” He said in an authentic accent.

Hah, just as I thought. He's actually Ilokano, and for some reason, like so many others with nice jeans, pressed shirts, and sunglasses, finds the need to flaunt his Tagalog and English. “How do you know Ilokano?” he proceeded to ask.

“Dagiti katrabahoak ken karubak ti nangisoro kanyak.” I answered dutifully.

“Wow, you speak better Ilokano than my 6 yr old son!” He said light-heartedly. It was supposed to be a compliment, but it was a bit depressing.

"I've only been here for 8 months yet I speak better than your son, who lives in an Ilokano province and whose parents are Ilokano?! That's unfortunate. I suppose it's because you use Tagalog at home."

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Because Tagalog is..."

"...the National Language." I finished for him. I've heard that answer before.

"It's also what they use in school, so it's necessary for him to learn." He added.

"True. What language did your mother use when you were young?" I inquired further.

"Ilokano of course!" He said incredulously.

"And what languages do you know now?"

"Ilokano, Tagalog, English."

"So even though your mother spoke to you in Ilokano, you still know Tagalog and English. Why?" I asked.

"Because Tagalog and English we learn in school."

"But even still, I would think that if she spoke to you in Ilokano you wouldn't be as good as you are in Tagalog and English," I said searchingly, knowing full well it was possible. I wanted him to arrive at the conclusion himself.

"Well, Tagalog and English are also on TV, movies, radio, you know. It's not hard."

"So...why do you speak Tagalog to your son if such a thing was clearly not necessary for you?"

"Uhh..." he paused, followed by an awkward smile.

"So your son speaks 2 languages, and you know 3 and a bit. If you spoke to your son in Ilokano, he would also be guaranteed to know three languages. It might take him a couple more years, but eventually he would be like you I guess." What is better, knowing 2 languages or 3?"

"Three of course."

"*Tapos, apay ta tagtagalogem diay putotmo?* It just doesn't make sense to change a perfectly good system employed by your mother if all it

accomplishes is your child knowing less, not more. I'm curious. And confused."

"Nowadays professionals speak more Tagalog," he said.

"I don't think that the language one chooses to speak in the home has much to do with how professional you are. It's a private choice," I postulated. "You might speak incredibly fluent, educated, poetic Ilokano, or horribly rudimentary Tagalog, and visa versa. How professional you are depends on how you speak, not what you speak, no? Secondly, Let's pretend for a moment that I agreed with you. Let's say that Tagalog is more professional than Ilokano, and knowing Tagalog was a sign of professionalism."

"Ok, go on," he said.

"Is someone who knows English, Tagalog, AND Ilokano less professional than someone who knows just English and Tagalog?" I asked.

"No."

"If you spoke Ilokano to your son you could have raised the first kind of person, the person you've become. So, why do you purposefully choose to speak Tagalog at home?"

His eyebrows raised a little, surprised perhaps. Then we fell into silence.

Part 24

Ariel Dorfman is a novelist, poet, human rights activist and distinguished professor at Duke University in the United States. He was once the cultural advisor to the President of Chile, and wrote a book about US cultural imperialism, *How to Read Donald Duck*. In his book, *The Wandering Bigamists of Language*, he eloquently captures the feeling of what it's like to be part of a linguistic minority:

"Do you come from a place that is poor, that is not fully incorporated into modernity, that does not control a language that commands respect? Do you inhabit a language that does not have armies behind it

and bombs and modems and technology? Do you reside in a language that will one day be extinct or whose existence does not have value in the marketplace and can't even get you a good job and help you in the everyday struggle to survive? Do you dwell in a language that is wonderful only for making love or teaching your children the difference between right and wrong or serves to pray to God? Is your language perfumed with unpronounceable words by poets with unpronounceable names describing their unpronounceable forests and guttural maidens? How does a language defend itself against the globalizing world?"

Given the fact that the Philippines is a relatively small country in land area, and is not a global economic or military power, it is likely that Professor Dorfman's words resonate with a lot of Filipinos. We are all born at a certain time and place, and can't control what family we are born to; a large percent of the world are born into families who do not speak a powerful, globally recognized and useful language. But this is especially true for Filipinos, most of whom have two layers of domination to contend with: English, one of the principal languages of business, science, and intergovernmental communication on Earth; and Tagalog-based Filipino, the national language that dominates the remaining domains of education and media in the country.

If you are not a native Tagalog, you are actually part of a majority in the Philippines. Only 30% of Filipinos are native Tagalog, while the rest of the ethnic groups make up the other 70%. Yet still, your languages are not yet taught in most schools, are hardly represented on television, large publications, books, new music, government communications, and corporations. Cebuano, Hiligaynon, and Iloko each have active literature scenes, but even these big languages are still not adequately included in education or television.

When a Filipino family move to the United States, what usually happens to their children and grandchildren down the line? They switch to English. But when a Tagalog family moves to an Ilokano region, what normally happens? Nothing. They continue speaking only Tagalog and few of them ever learn Iloko properly. In the meantime, some Ilokano families may even switch to Tagalog due to the high rates of in-

migration of people who don't know and don't plan to learn the local language. That's not globalization, that's something else entirely. That is a form of linguistic and cultural imperialism facilitated by national policy. If local languages were taught in schools and were required for getting hired to most jobs in the regions, and if the government set up TV stations in languages other than English and Tagalog, the other Philippine languages would be a lot more vibrant, respected, and useful than they are today.

As Prof. Merlie M. Alunan of UP College Tacloban City said at a multilingual conference earlier this year, "I'm not even worried about the globalizing world. I am mainly concerned about our language policy, which, like it or not, has the unfortunate effect of reducing the rest of the countryside to minority status. We must always remind ourselves that the Cebuano or Waray or Hilgaynon that we speak today have always been with us before history catapulted us to invasion, colonialism, conversion, war, independence, economic depression, diaspora, and now, globalization. Throughout this passage, these mother tongues have survived."

The irony is that over the last few decades, the percentage of speakers of every Philippine language has gone down, except Tagalog. The National Statistics Office has been keeping track of this. So despite surviving so many other threats, native Philippine languages might not survive their latest challenge: the spread of Tagalog. It's quite surprising that the national government has been able to successfully brand one language as somehow representative of its entire population and in the country's best interests. But it's even more surprising that the majority---the 70% who are not native Tagalogs---have not yet exercised their linguistic, cultural, and economic freedoms. It's surprising how they continue to let Manila dominate their affairs. They are a marginalized village, 70 million-strong!

The Philippines has a long history of less-than-stellar public participation in language planning.

In 1897, the first ever Philippine republic was declared by Emilio Aguinaldo and other members of the *Katipunan*. They formulated the Constitution at Biak-na-Bato, (copied is perhaps a more appropriate term as their constitution is almost identical to the first Cuban Constitution). Article VIII states “*El tagalog sera la lengua official de la Republica.*” The choice of Tagalog is not surprising, given that the revolutionary society behind the making of the Biak-na-Bato Republic---the *Katipunan*---was established in Manila, almost all its members were native Tagalog speakers (including Emilio Aguinaldo and the drafters of the Constitution, Felix Ferrer and Isabelo Artacho), and the *Katipunan* used Tagalog as its official language.

Were the implications of choosing a single official language even analyzed properly when they drafted the Biak-na-Bato Constitution, or did they just include it because Cuba did? It would be laughable if the country’s first ever language provision, which first introduced the idea of having an exclusive language, rested on the simple fact that a couple of guys chose to copy the constitutional text of a far more linguistically homogenous country, for which declaring Spanish as the official language would have been a no-brainer. Despite having many more language groups than Cuba, it appears the Philippines’ first national language was nevertheless born from such a flippant act of copying. And while the Biak-na-Bato Republic only lasted a month, it marks the first in a long list of instances when people, acting supposedly for the entire Filipino people, have made enormous decisions about the country’s languages without adequate representation or due process.

Similar to the Biak-na-Bato Constitution, the 1943 Laurel Constitution stated that, “The government shall take steps toward the development and propagation of Tagalog as the national language.” Again, the choice

of language is not surprising as President Laurel was Tagalog and had a nationalistic mindset akin to the Japanese. And we know the Laurel constitution was not representative to begin with, having been drafted by a committee appointed by the Japanese-installed Philippine Executive Commission and ratified by the KALIBAPI (a Tagalog acronym), the sole-party allowed under Japanese occupation, which actively supported the propagation of Tagalog.

But even legitimate Constitutions have had dubious results when it comes to language. The 1935 Commonwealth Constitution stated: “Congress shall take steps toward the development and adoption of a common national language based on one of the existing native languages” (Article 14, Sect 3). While this provision is an improvement from the pure Tagalog Biak-na-Bato and Laurel Constitutions, it’s actually more restrictive than it was supposed to be. As Yabes (1993) and others have pointed out, the original 3 drafts of the language provision state that the national language shall be developed based on “the existing native languages,” but in the final and fourth draft, it says, “on **one** of the existing native languages.” No substantial changes should have happened from the 3rd to the 4th draft, as it was only supposed to be superficially beautified in terms of grammar and punctuation by the Style Committee. Given that the nationalist (and Tagalog native) Claro M. Recto presided over the constitutional assembly, and the fact that Manuel L. Quezon was on the Style Committee (yes, the very same President who declared Tagalog to be the sole national language 8 years later), the change from many to one language base was probably not an accident. In fact, Quezon may have personally intervened to initiate the change (read “Language and Nationalism” by Andrew Gonzales). The Style Committee had no right to make or allow such a fundamental change, and they probably knew the deceit they committed: the Con-Com Proceedings weren’t made publicly available until 30 years later. Oh well, at least they didn’t specify which language to favor...yet.

Shortly after, Pres. Quezon released Executive Order 134 (1937), declaring Tagalog as the basis of the national language. Quezon’s Executive Order, upon the advice of the Institute of National Language (all members appointed by Quezon), essentially *unilaterally* decided

what the basis of the national language would be. No public outreach, no dialogue, no consultation with the regions---not even a debate in Congress. Seeing that they were the body constitutionally tasked to develop the national language, I would have expected them to reject or accept the findings of the INL with a Congressional Act, rather than Quezon immediately passing an Exec. Order. In the proclamation, he also states “the opinion of Filipino scholars and patriots of divergent origin...are unanimously in favor of the selection of Tagalog as the basis of the national language...not to mention the categorical views expressed by local newspapers, publications, and individual writers.” Really Sir President? *Unaminously* in favour? Was a survey conducted to back this tall claim? And why am I not surprised that “local” writers in Manila, the throne of Tagalog, were in favor?

Part 26

Wishful Thinking, or Smokescreen?

In December 1937 Pres. Quezon issued Executive Order 134, stating, among other things:

“...in fulfillment of the purpose of evolving and adopting a common national language based on one of the existing native dialects...I, Manuel L. Quezon...hereby approve the adoption of Tagalog as the basis of the national language of the Philippines, and hereby declare and proclaim the national language so based on the Tagalog dialect, as the national language of the Philippines. This Order shall take effect two years from the date of its promulgation.”

Notice that Quezon’s Executive Order did not say, “Tagalog is the national language.” Instead, he said, Tagalog would just be the *basis* of the national language. In Quezon’s own words, a new national language would be evolved and adopted. Let’s study how this “evolution” took place then shall we?

In the grand scheme of things, 2 years is nothing. I can barely learn a language in 2 years, never mind create one. But that's the amount of time Quezon gave until his Exec. Order came into effect. When these 2 years lapsed, Congress released Commonwealth Act 570, declaring the "Filipino National Language" as one of the official languages of the Philippines, effective July 4, 1946. But before 1946 even arrived, the Bureau of Education released Circular No. 26 (1940), which mandated teaching the national language in all schools. It thus became a subject in the fourth year of high school, nationwide. Given the impossibility of creating a non-existent language in such a short period of time (not to mention having teachers be fluent in it), the instruction of the national language, in practice, could not have been any different from Tagalog.

In 1944, the Institute for the Teaching of the Filipino Language (ITFL) was opened, to help with the nationwide instruction of the national language, which became a subject across all grade levels of basic education by 1946. You might think that the opening of an Institute would help turn the teaching of the national language into something different from Tagalog, as that's the only form the "national language" subject took when introduced in 1940, having predated the ITFL. But sadly, it didn't.

And it can't really be blamed either. A teaching institute cannot train teachers to teach a new Filipino language if the instructional materials aren't in the new language! Lope K. Santos was the Tagalog representative of the group established by Commonwealth Act 184 to select the basis of the national language, and after Tagalog was decided upon, he was appointed the director of the Institute of the National Language in 1939. This Institute was in charge of developing the National Language, including preparing it for its use in schools. Santos wrote the *Balarila ng Wikang Pambansa*, which was the grammar bible for the national language as taught in schools; that is, the grammar used by teachers trained at the Institute for the Teaching of the Filipino Language. If you actually read this book, you'll realize it's just a grammar book of Tagalog, which had not been formalized in a book of such size before. So yes, Santos's creation was new, in that it made a valuable contribution to the Tagalog language. He even made some

reforms to conventions like spelling. But all languages have undergone reforms, many more drastic than the changes that appeared in national language textbooks at the time, and that doesn't make them new languages. Santos' instructional materials were Tagalog in everything but name.

It's not surprising that his works never represented anything but Tagalog. Both his parents were Tagalog, he won the *dupluhan* in his youth (a popular Tagalog poetical joust), he was the editor of several Tagalog publications, and he won many awards for his Tagalog literary works---all this before he was ever tasked with developing the national language. How would one so steeped in a language, someone whose very own reputation had been nurtured from a young age by his Tagalog abilities, commit suddenly to creating another language? He didn't. He stuck to what he knew best and wrote the best Tagalog language instruction books yet. Even Santos did not have any misconceptions of what language he was helping to concretize as the national language. On his deathbed in 1963 to his wife Mona, he said, "My last hours on earth have come, but I regret that I will breathe my last without knowing what will happen to the Tagalog language...Whether indeed it will become the national language."

Thus, while Quezon said Tagalog would only be the *basis* of the national language, in practice it was being refined as *the* national language.

Part 27

Political Name Juggling

In the past few weeks we've taken a look at the history of the national language up until 1950, and how by then it was still essentially synonymous with Tagalog. Today, some people will tell you that the national language, Filipino, is now different from Tagalog.

It's a romantic idea to think that the national language is a rich, representative mix of all Philippine languages, uniting the nation. So let's take a look at events since 1950, and see if this notion stands up to scrutiny.

In 1950, the *National Language-English Vocabulary* had its fourth printing, courtesy of the Institute of National Language. Like the 3 versions before it, it contained almost no words from other Philippine languages besides Tagalog.

In 1959, 19 years after Tagalog became a subject in the fourth year of all Philippine high schools and 13 years after it became a subject in all grade levels, the education secretary Jose E. Romero issued Department Order No. 7. This Order officially designated the national language as Pilipino. Before this order, the classes teaching Tagalog were called "national language" classes, even though, as I explained in the last column, the language being taught in these classes bore very little difference from Tagalog.

The name change to Pilipino, however, was not accompanied by steps to reincarnate the language such as the release of a new grammar or vocabulary book incorporating elements from other languages. While altering its name may have intended to portray a national character and dissociate it from Tagalog, it was only an aesthetic change. The national language, now called Pilipino, continued to be taught in the same way as before. In fact, this de facto Tagalog instruction was extended from being just a subject to a medium of instruction from grades 1-4!

In the 1973 Marcos Constitution, the official language retained the name "Pilipino." But since members of the Constitutional Assembly correctly pointed out that Pilipino was basically Tagalog, the development of a national language was seen as unfulfilled. They therefore tasked the *Batasang Pambansa* to "take steps toward the development of a common national language to be known as Filipino" (Article XV, Sect. 3).

Do you think a new national language was successfully developed, one that was different enough from Pilipino/Tagalog to warrant a new name? Did the “universalist” Filipino ever arrive? Well if you read the 1987 Constitution you would be forgiven in thinking that Filipino---a new language supposed to be synthesized by language experts and naturally enriched---was realized. After all, the 1987 Constitution refers to Filipino in the present tense, as if it already exists: “The national language of the Philippines is Filipino,” it bluntly states (Article XIV, Sect. 14).

What was the language meant by “Filipino” in the 1987 Constitution? If you read the records of the Commission’s debates on language, you will find that Wilfrido V. Villacorta (the Chairman of the Committee on Human Resources, which drafted the language provision) and one Commissioner Ponciano Bennagen are the main defenders of the idea that Filipino was already a language in 1986. And their main basis was a letter submitted to the Commission by Dr. Ernesto Constantino, a Professor of Linguistics from the University of the Philippines, who claimed:

“The term Filipino refers to the Philippine national lingua franca, i.e. the language used all over the country as a medium of communication.... Filipino is different from Pilipino which in accordance with the 1935 Constitution is based on only one language, Tagalog. Filipino, on the other hand, is based on the language usage, similarities, and peculiarities of the different Philippine ethnic groups.”

Before getting deeper into what else Dr. Constantino said in his letter and what its consequences were, let’s analyze his claim. Despite the fact that the 1973 Constitution obligated Congress to wean the country off Tagalog/Pilipino and develop a pluralistic language called Filipino instead, there was not a single act passed to create a National Language Commission between 1973 and 1986, by either the Interim Batasang Pambansa of 1978 or the elected Batasang Pambansa of 1984. In other words, Congress failed to create any mechanisms for the development of Filipino.

What justification did Dr. Constantino have, therefore, to state that Filipino existed, and that it was different from Pilipino/Tagalog? If Congress didn't take any steps to evolve Pilipino/Tagalog into something new, and never even released an official name change from Pilipino to Filipino, what so-called "Filipino" was Dr. Constantino talking about? It's an important question, because ultimately Villacorta, Bennagen, and most of the rest of the Constitutional Commission believed him, and went ahead to declare it as the national language. Wouldn't you love to find out that Dr. Ernesto's letter was largely inaccurate?

Part 28

Political Name Juggling (part 2)

Pilipino was dismissed by the '73 Constitutional Commission as insufficiently distinct from Tagalog and not an acceptable national language. Hence, while the '73 Constitution recognizes Pilipino as an official language for the mean time, it demands that a new, universal language named "Filipino" should be created in its place to serve as the national language. UP Prof. of Linguistics Dr. Ernesto Constantino agreed in a note to the 1986 Constitutional Commission that Pilipino was based only on Tagalog and had been "developed almost exclusively by the so-called Tagalistas." However, he claimed that the Filipino that the '73 Constitution aspired to, based on the language characteristics of all Philippine ethnic groups, had actually been realized---that it was a living language "used all over the country as a medium of communication." As an invited resource person to the Committee on Human Resources (which drafted the language provision of the '86 Constitution), he further recommended that Filipino already be declared the national language. This recommendation was also stated in a letter to the Con-Com written by him and several other UP folks. In the end, the Constitution followed his advice.

It is interesting to compare his recommendation with the opinions of other resource speakers/groups invited by the Committee on Human Resources. Director Ponciano Pineda of the Institute of National Language said Pilipino (with a 'P') should be named the national language, because much time/money had been invested in it, it was already taught in schools, and had already been serving as an official language since 1935. In other words, the INL favoured Pilipino in its traditional purist Tagalog form to be the national language. In a letter sent to the Con-Com, the INL resisted the idea of "Filipino" (with an 'F') being declared the national language, because such a language didn't exist yet! They write:

"Ang Filipino ay wikang konseptuwal na nahati sa dalawang paniniwala. Filipino na batay sa lahat ng mga wika sa Pilipinas. Ang Filipino ay bubuuin pa lamang sa paraang walang kaseguruhan. Ito'y walang gramatika, walang sariling bokabularyo, at walang masasabing literatura sa pasalita o pasulat man. Hindi magagamit karaka-raka bilang kasangkapan sa programa ng pagpapaunlad."

The Linguistic Society of the Philippines was also in support of Pilipino---not Filipino---being declared the national language. The President of LSP, Dr. Bonifacio Sibayan, explained to the Committee on Human Resources (during the same 18th of June 1986 meeting in which Dr. Pineda and Dr. Constantino offered their opinions) that the lingua franca used to be English and now it was Pilipino. He further mentioned that Pilipino was quite different from Tagalog as it has borrowed from English and other languages.

So what is behind the discrepancy between the comments made by the resource persons? Constantino said Pilipino was just a pure form of Tagalog. Sibayan said Pilipino was a diverse language with lots of borrowings. This is a direct contradiction. Constantino said Filipino existed as the national lingua franca and Pineda said Filipino didn't exist yet and was not likely to ever. This is also a direct contradiction. Were these people living on different planets?!

This extreme array of conflicting statements is the classic symptom of a semantic argument. In a situation with a lot of terms but not much to distinguish them, definitions are what you make them. That's exactly what these men appear to have done, and what countless people continue to do when it comes to the national language debate. While 'Filipino' was the term ultimately chosen in the '86 Constitution (and most of the Commissioners were persuaded into thinking that it was an existing language distinct from Tagalog/Pilipino), one can continue to find many inconsistencies within the Committee and Plenary session minutes---enough to arouse deep misgivings about the legitimacy of the whole language provision, especially regarding the choice of 'Filipino.' Most of the Commissioners didn't seem to know exactly what they were voting for when they approved the language provision, while a small eloquent minority spent most of the time trying (successfully I might add), to depict 'Filipino' as a realistic, inclusive, and grand truth. I shall offer snapshots of the Commissioners' revealing comments in my next column.

Part 29

Confusion in Constitutional Debates

On paper (i.e. the Constitution), Filipino is the national language. But what is Filipino? Is it the same as Pilipino or Tagalog? Does it even exist? If so, when did it form? What was its status in 1987, when the Philippines' most recent Constitution came out declaring it as the national language?

Well, if you read the records of the 1987 Constitutional Commission, these questions would not be clearly answered. You would be unsettled to discover how little agreement there was between the Constitutional Commissioners regarding Filipino. While all 43 votes cast in the Plenary Session of September 9th 1986 were in favor of the sentence "The national language of the Philippines is Filipino," their discussions in the

lead up to this vote would suggest people had very different ideas of what Filipino is or should be.

Here are some direct quotes from their sessions:

“Yeah. Because Pilipino is not yet ready. I mean with ‘Tagalog’ as the nucleus.” ~Quesada

“When we listened to the experts all of them were agreed that the lingua franca is not Tagalog but something a little bit different, an expanded Tagalog which is Pilipino which includes words from other vernacular languages.” ~Villacorta

“Filipino is different from Pilipino which is based on only one language, Tagalog. Filipino...is based on different Philippine languages.” ~Villacorta

“We cannot distinguish between Tagalog and Filipino, it’s just because we are older. The children who go to school, they all say Pilipino,...they don’t say Tagalog.” ~Tan

“It is now accepted, the more or less purist Tagalog. Because Pilipino has been accepted now, the Pilipino with the “P” is accepted as a mixture, you know. It is a modernized version...” ~Brocka

“What I am saying is that the government should remind itself one more of its responsibility to use Pilipino...” ~Bennagen

“Like in entertainment...we definitely use the Filipino language, that is, Pilipino.” ~Brocka

“Once that it is developed we [can] pass a law that our official language will only be Pilipino or Filipino.” ~Rigos

“It was either referred to by some linguists as Filipino, others as Pilipino and others simply as national lingua franca.” ~Bennagen

“May I start by saying that Filipino, with a capital ‘F,’ is Spanish.”
~Concepcion

“...there is a living franca which can be called Filipino.” ~Villacorta

“The lingua franca in the Philippines is not Filipino, and I can challenge anyone on this. How could it be the lingua franca when only the University of the Philippines has offered the subject known as Filipino?”
~Davide

“In spite of all those proposals and intentions to develop a national language, not much was done.” ~Bennagen

“These are scholars that are indeed active in the advancement of Filipino as a national language” ~Bennagen

“Is the language of Commissioner Tadeo Filipino? Were those phrases mentioned by Villacorta meant to be Filipino?” ~Bacani

“I am confused about the meaning of the two. What is ‘Pilipino’ and what is ‘Filipino’?” ~Colayco

“And when we speak of Filipino, can it be a combination of Tagalog and the local dialect, and therefore, can it be ‘Taglish’?” ~De Castro

Confused yet? Well that beast is the Philippine’s national language, whatever it’s supposed to be. And it’s not clear what that is. In conversation, the Commissioners frequently used the terms Filipino, Pilipino, and Tagalog interchangeably; some of them said they are all the same, others said they are different; to some, these are static entities; to others, they are evolving. Some were adamant that Filipino doesn’t exist, and should not be declared as the national language because its present form is Tagalog in disguise. Some said Filipino should be strategically developed, some said it should evolve naturally, others claimed it had already evolved.

With such divergent interpretations of Filipino, why did they all vote in favour of its explicit declaration as the national language, and to be further enriched from other Philippine languages? My guess is that they were all voting for the concept that best suited them. The venerable Hilario Davide, who gave a convincing argument for the non-existence of Filipino, probably voted for the provision anyway because he fancied the idea that Filipino would one day *not* be the Tagalog clone it is. Meanwhile, the ‘Tagalistas’ among the Commission probably voted for it knowing full well that in practice, Filipino would always be shackled to Tagalog. Given that nothing had been done to wean Pilipino off Tagalog over the previous decades, it was reasonable to assume that history would repeat itself. They could hence vote for an empty phrase like “shall be further developed and enriched...” without undermining the security of Tagalog’s dominance.

The unified vote, therefore, may not have been an endorsement of what the national language has become today, but rather a reflection of what it could have been, which was different for each Commissioner. Soon we ask: what vision of Filipino ultimately won out?

Part 30

Mutual Intelligibility

In linguistics terms, a language is defined as being **MUTUALLY UNINTELLIGIBLE** with another language. That is, speakers of two different languages will not be able to understand each other if they talk in their respective tongues. If they mostly understand each other, they share---by definition---the same language.

Many people erroneously think Tagalog, Pilipino, and Filipino are different languages. I encourage you all to conduct your own tests of this hypothesis. Arrange 3 random adult Filipinos to speak together in one room about any topic for 1 minute. Beforehand, tell one of them

that he shall speak Tagalog. Tell the other to speak 'Pilipino.' And arrange for the third person to speak 'Filipino.' Do not tell them what the purpose of the exercise is. Furthermore, they are not allowed to tell each other which 'language' they have been directed to speak.

I predict two results from such an experiment. If you asked each participant in private what language the other two were speaking, he would not correctly identify the 'languages' of the other speakers. He will likely say they were all speaking the same language. Even if you gave each participant a multiple-choice question containing 3 possible names---Tagalog, 'Pilipino,' and 'Filipino'---I bet there would be no consistency in the language names chosen by the 3 participants. Secondly, if asked to summarize the conversation that the 3 people had, each would be able to. And just to make sure that an inability to summarize the conversation is not a result of memory loss, record the conversation with a tape, play it to each participant separately, and then re-ask them to summarize it. You will find that all three will be able to explain the gist of the conversation, and likely each sentence too. And if for some reason one person was incapable of understanding the others, repeat the experiment 100, 1000, 10000 times if necessary, with different sets of random Filipinos, and you will find in the vast majority of cases, the results will conform to my predictions.

The results described above would demonstrate that A) In practice, no one has a clue what the difference between Tagalog, Pilipino, and Filipino are; and B) They are all mutually intelligible. And what does it mean for speech varieties to be mutually understood? THEY ARE THE SAME LANGUAGE.

Despite this fact, a Professor of Linguistics from the University of the Philippines, one Dr. Ernesto Constantino, submitted a letter to the 1986 Constitutional Commission asserting:

“The term Filipino refers to the Philippine national lingua franca, i.e. the language used all over the country as a medium of communication.... Filipino is different from Pilipino which in accordance with the 1935 Constitution is based on only one language, Tagalog. Filipino, on the

other hand, is based on the language usage, similarities, and peculiarities of the different Philippine ethnic groups.”

The claim that Filipino existed, and was different from Pilipino/Tagalog, was repeated in another letter sent to the Con-Com, entitled “*Proposal para sa ConCom: Probisyon para sa pambansang wika.*” This was coauthored by Dr. Constantino, a couple other UP Philippines colleagues, and the President of *Pambansang Samahan sa Wika*. But going back to the definition of a language, we know that Filipino *cannot* be classified as a different language from Tagalog, because they are mutually intelligible. That is, if a person speaks Tagalog to a person who is speaking Filipino, they will both understand each other. It is impossible to believe that Constantino and his UP colleagues, who were linguists, would not have known this most fundamental of language definitions. Of course they knew it. That is why Constantino never explicitly claimed Filipino as a different language, but instead resorted to the vague statement, “Filipino is different from Pilipino.” How different, may I ask? None of the members of the Con-Com were linguists, and the subtle phrasing had the desired effect on them. Without making a direct statement like “Filipino is *a different language* from Pilipino,” which would have amounted to academic dishonesty, the UP professors left the Commissioners with the impression that Filipino was in fact a distinct language from Tagalog/Pilipino. This misinterpretation is one of the reasons the Con-Com was swayed into thinking it was appropriate to declare Filipino as the national language in Article XIV of the 1986 Constitution.

As the Con-Com used Dr. Constantino and other UP professors to shed light on language issues, I would have hoped the experts would have been absolutely frank about the status of Filipino, Pilipino, and Tagalog as a single language. But they didn’t. In fact, there are equally misleading claims they made. We shall explore these, and possible reasons for them, in due time.

The National Language: Plan vs. Reality

Here are three sentences, which you probably understand:

*Saan kayo magtutungo pagkatapos dito?
Naku! Magnanakaw pala yung binata.
Huwag ka man magtakbo.*

And here are the same 3 sentences in another language, which is probably not as familiar:

*Sain kayo maglakad dini?
Yawa! Kawaton pala ang soltero.
Huwag ka ngang tumakbo ngarud.*

Now, which set of sentences is in Filipino? The first, or the second?

You probably think this is a trick question, because it's obvious to most of us that the first group is Filipino, at least in the way we've been exposed to it. 99% of people would choose the first set without batting your eyelashes. This is highly ironic.

In 1987, the Committee on Human Resources was responsible for drafting the provisions on education, culture, sports, science/technology, and language for the new Constitution, in which the national language of the Philippines was declared to be Filipino for the first time. Wilfrido Villacorta, the Chair of the committee, provided the first set of sentences as examples of Tagalog, and the **second set of examples of what Filipino is supposed to be**---a language with a vocabulary adopted from many existing Philippine languages. This was his assurance that Filipino *is not* and *would not* be the same as Tagalog. As you can see, the second set of sentences includes Tagalog, Cebuano, Hiligaynon, and Ilokano words; in reality, however, the 'Filipino' projecting from every television and textbook of today does not resemble Villacorta's sample cocktail.

In the Constitutional Commission records, you will find many statements made by Chairman Villacorta and others that emphasize what should be a flexible, pluralistic language. During the Plenary Session of the ConCom of Sept 1st, 1986, Villacorta said the basis of Filipino would be Pilipino (the 'puristic' Tagalog that was declared in 1959 and maintained in the 1974 Constitution), but "this does not mean that we should limit ourselves to the syntax or to the vocabulary of Pilipino." Commissioner Ople agreed in the same session that the language "is open to all influences." This was partly in response to advice given to the Human Resources Committee meetings by the likes of Dr. Bonifacio Sibayan, President of the Linguistic Society of the Philippines at the time, and Dr. Ernesto Constantino, a UP professor of linguistics. Position papers were also submitted to the ComCom from various external groups, to the same effect. The Concerned Muslim-Christian Citizens group voiced, "To be acceptable as a national language, it must include all the dialects of the Philippines." Juan R. Francisco of the Philippine-American Education Foundation stated, "A common vocabulary must be developed from all the languages spoken in the Philippines. However, there should be no attempt to obliterate the various ethnic languages." The Multi-ethnic Citizens Committee submitted a statement saying, "We should stop making Pilipino/Tagalog as the medium of instruction in some subjects until we have developed and formally adopted a common national language acceptable to all Filipinos." In Pilipino's present instructional form, being just a formalized Tagalog, a non-Tagalog pupil "has absolutely no chance whatsoever to perform on par with his Tagalog-speaking countrymen. This makes him a second-class citizen cruelly oppressed and discriminated against by unfeeling educational leaders who have sworn to do justice to every man," they vented. Even Commissioners on the Committee expressed concern over the fact that the national language up until then had not been adequately inclusive of the many Philippine languages. Commissioner Quesada in a Committee meeting on the first draft of the sections on language (June 25, 1986), commented, "The feeling really from Mindanao is that Pilipino is so much associated with Tagalog and they feel that we are really

dominated by the Tagalog-speaking, that is why they would like something that will not be associated with that kind of dominance.”

The Constitutional Commission fortunately listened to all these voices, and the final 1987 Constitution explicitly calls for the incorporation of other languages in the national language: “The national language of the Philippines is Filipino. As it evolves, it shall be further enriched on the basis of existing Philippine and other languages” (Article XIV, Sect. 6).

But going back to the beginning of this article. What set of sentences, may I ask, more closely resembles the language we would see in a “Filipino” class? And the books we read in “Filipino”? And the “Filipino” we hear on television? I might be deaf, but when I turn on the TV, I hear “*Dito sa TV5,*” not, “*Dini sa TV5.*” And I’ve never heard a food ad exclaim “*Masarap ngarud!*” And the last time the President referred to corrupt thieves, he used the word “*magnanakaw*” not “*kawaton.*” In other words, the Filipino today has not changed much from the Tagalog sample provided by Chairman Villacorta in 1987, contrary to the Constitution’s vision.

Part 32

Say It Like It Is

So last time we demonstrated that Filipino has not, unfortunately, lived up to its constitutional goal of becoming a language “enriched on the basis of existing Philippine and other languages” (Philippine 1987 Constitution, Article 14, Sec. 6). From 1937 to 1987, the “Pilipino” or “National Language” taught in schools was pretty much just formal Tagalog. As Ponciano Bennagen of the Constitutional Commission of 1987 pointed out, “In 1940...the INL [Institute for National Language] published the *National Language-English Vocabulary*, and this is pure Tagalog....In 1950, the *National Language-English Vocabulary* had its fourth printing. It still did not contain any non-Tagalog dialectal words. In 1977, the *Talahulugang Pilipino-English* was released by the Bureau of

Printing. And then, at about the same year, *the English-Tagalog Dictionary* by Fr. English had its first printing, and it was approved for use in public and private schools [note: the title didn't even try to pretend it was something other than Tagalog]. In 1985...the *English-Tagalog Dictionary* by Fr. English had its ninth printing, and the INL gave him a citation for excellence, meaning, in spite of all those proposals and intentions to develop a national language, not much was done.”

So up until 1987, a national language based on Tagalog and including many other languages had not been created. The language appearing in dictionaries and being taught in schools was mostly just Tagalog, with very few words inserted from other Philippine languages. In the words of William Villacorta, Chairman of the Committee on Human Resources of the 1987 Constitutional Commission, “There have been no resolute efforts on the part of the government to really develop the national language officially.”

But the declaration of Filipino in 1987 as the national language was hailed as something new, a “dynamic, more open-ended” mixture of many languages. Indeed, if you look up a modern Filipino dictionary, you will see a lot more words of Spanish and English origin listed than in a traditional ‘Pilipino’ or Tagalog dictionary of the past. But, it is important to note that these words were already in common use 10, 25, and 50 years ago. Read any manuscript or watch a movie of someone casually speaking Tagalog in the last 50 years, and you will be amazed at how similar the vocabulary is, regardless of year. In particular, it will contain many Spanish and English-derived words, just like today.

In other words, the arrival of the “new and improved” pluralistic Filipino in the 1987 Constitution did not magically usher in all these Spanish and English words that we now see in Filipino texts or hear during the news hour. They were already a part of ordinary speech! It was merely an admission that Tagalog had long since adopted words from other languages, and unlike the puristic ‘Pilipino’ or ‘National Language’ dictionaries of pre-1987, we were now going to accept such borrowings as legitimate. The coined term ‘Filipino’ represented this belated

recognition of what Tagalog had naturally become. It officialised what was already being spoken on the street/TV, which was Modern Tagalog (that is, traditional Tagalog with lots of Spanish and English loan words).

For transparency and clarity, it would have been much better if the 1987 Constitution just called it 'Modern Tagalog' instead of "Filipino." Calling it 'Filipino' would be equivalent to New Zealand renaming English to "New Zealandish" as one of their official languages! New Zealand English has slight differences from other varieties of English, just as Filipino has slight differences from ordinary Tagalog, but it doesn't mean that completely new names have to be invented for them. If no one used the term historically to describe the language, it comes off sounding contrived. Needless to say few people actually say "Filipino" when referring to modern Tagalog, and it makes perfect sense why that is the case.

There are some who insist on calling it Filipino, and look disdainfully on people for continuing to call it Tagalog, as if they are unenlightened. Not only is it unnecessary to be so tyrannical on terminology, it is also insulting to people's intelligences. People are smart enough to recognize an apple for an apple, and what was known as Tagalog before the appearance of any alternative names still looks like the same apple, so they have little reason to call it anything else. And regardless of English and Spanish loan words, there is still very low representation of other Philippine languages in Filipino. Anyone is welcome to use the official government term 'Filipino' if they want, but they shouldn't posture themselves as being more correct than the 99% of Filipinos who naturally, and reasonably, continue to call it Tagalog.

The Truth Comes Out

The late Brother Andrew Gonzales, former Secretary of Education, well-known linguist, and De La Salle University professor, wrote in the *Journal for Multilingual and Multicultural Development* in 1999, “The national language of the Philippines is Filipino, a language in the process of modernisation; it is based on the Manila lingua franca which is fast spreading across the Philippines and is used in urban centres in the country. *De jure*, it is named in the 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines as a language that will be enriched with elements (largely vocabulary) from the other Philippine languages and non-local languages used in the Philippines. *De facto*, the structural base of Filipino is Tagalog.”

So there you have it. One of the ardent supporters of Filipino as the national language admitting that, while Filipino is officially supposed to be enriched by many Philippine languages, it in practice closely reflects the Tagalog language as spoken in Manila. And to get a sense of how much this lingua franca has assimilated words from other Philippine languages, we take note of the introduction of Zorc and Miguel’s *Tagalog Slang Dictionary* published in 1990. As a friend of mine pointed out, slang is much more receptive to borrowings than formal registers of a language, yet even in the most informal speech of Manileños, Zorc states that no more than 3% of all the words are from non-Tagalog Philippine languages. The vast majority of the vocabulary is Tagalog, English, or Spanish in origin. That’s a pretty poor record of Philippine language enrichment!

A letter of Dr. Constantino sent to the Constitutional Commission in 1986, stating that Filipino “is based on the speech of the various Philippine ethnic groups,” thus seems shockingly out of touch with reality. This claim, for which they gave no data or even anecdotal evidence, was regurgitated by several members of the Commission to highlight the existence of “Filipino”, and its alleged differences with Tagalog. Commissioner Villacorta, for example, stated in a Plenary

Session on Sept. 1st, 1986: “We consulted many language experts on this matter, and they said that even before the 1973 Constitution was promulgated, there was already a language evolving which we can rightfully call Filipino – a lingua franca that incorporates different words from several Philippine languages.” Commissioner Davide astutely pointed out that, if Filipino already existed way back in 1973, why did the 1973 Constitution say that a language known as Filipino WILL be developed and formally adopted as a common national language? If it already existed, surely the Commissioners of 1971 and their invited linguistic experts would have known about it before devising a plan to create it?! “It was clearly an indication that as [of then] there was no such language known as Filipino,” Davide stated.

Villacorta’s counter was that Filipino already existed as a lingua franca in the 70’s, it’s just that people didn’t call it that. [Of course, they called it Tagalog, as they have sensibly done for as long as historical records]. Davide cuts straight to the point. “What was the name of the lingua franca?” he asks. This time Commissioner Bennagen responds, equally evasive. “It was referred to by some linguists as Filipino, others as Pilipino, and others just simply as national *lingua franca*.” Ha! Even now, 25 years after the formal adoption of the term, few people refer to Tagalog as Filipino. I have a hard time believing people used it back in 1971, or in 1986 when these Commissioners were arguing. Even more absurd is the pretense that people called it “national lingua franca.” I can just imagine a Manila taxi driver telling me, “*Ay, hindi ako marunong ng English, pwede mag-national lingua franca ka?*”

The blunt truth of the matter is that the vast majority of people call the national lingua franca Tagalog, and Mr. Bennagen and Mr. Villacorta’s refusal to speak the word suggests a self-conscious recognition of the truth. They are aware that people know how virtually indistinguishable Tagalog and the national lingua franca are, and hence nervously try to avoid bringing up the association.

Regardless, Davide finally forces an admission from them. He asks where they get the idea that Filipino exists and is different from Tagalog. Bennagen refers him to the letters submitted by Dr.

Constantino et al. Davide points out that one of these letters, supposedly written in ‘Filipino’, does not have a single word unique to a Philippine language besides Tagalog! At which point Commissioner Gascon parrots a sentence in Constantino’s letter: “At this stage of the development of Filipino, this language bears more similarities with Tagalog than with any other Philippine language.” No kidding. Constantino and Co. thus had no business peddling Filipino as a new language “based on the speech of the various Philippine ethnic groups.” Read their own ‘Filipino’ letter over again, and good luck finding representations of the other Philippine languages!

Part 34

The Nationalist Agenda

Many of the ideas surrounding the national language debate of the Constitutional Commission of 1986 stemmed from the opinions of a few intellectuals like Dr. Ernesto Constantino, Dr. Consuelo J. Paz, Prof. Jesus Fer. Ramos, Dr. Bonifacio Sibayan, Dr. Andrew Gonzalez, and Ponciano Pineda, to name a few.

These respected individuals transmitted their opinions through letters and meetings with the Committee on Human Resources, which was responsible for the formulation of the Language provision of the country’s most recent Constitution. Unfortunately, we have witnessed in previous articles that some of these expert opinions were flawed. For example, the idea that Filipino is a distinct language from Tagalog, and is a mixture of many Philippine languages, is misleading to say the least. If that’s the case, why can you slip a quotation from Jose Rizal or Manuel Quezon into a ‘Filipino’ textbook without people thinking much of it? Apart from perhaps a few spelling differences, the quote would be easily understood by a person versed in ‘Filipino,’ reflecting Tagalog and Filipino’s very close relationship.

Jose Rizal lived before the national language was established, developed, and supposedly enriched from other Philippine languages, but I'm sure he would have no problem in watching ABS-CBN today, or sitting in a 'Filipino' subject classroom. Fortunately for him (and unfortunately for those who wished the national language to be more pluralistic), very few words from other Philippine languages have been incorporated into Filipino, so his Tagalog fluency would be rather adequate in understanding a 'Filipino' teacher.

But that's beside the point. The point of this article is to ask, if the assertions of these language experts were not entirely true, why were they making them?

Well, one particularly influential group of these experts came from the University of the Philippines. In the "Note on the Filipino Language" submitted to the '86 Con-Com, Dr. Constantino, a linguistics professor from said university, explained that the UP changed the name of their Pilipino department to Filipino in 1973. As one of the first institutions to champion the use of the term Filipino instead of Pilipino, it makes sense that the UP advocated for the naming of the national language to be Filipino rather than Pilipino. But 1973 was exactly the year the '73 Constitution came out, which indicated that Filipino, as an assorted language not yet in existence, was to be developed *in the future!* So the UP departmental name change was largely a symbolic gesture rather than an action prompted by a real evolution of the language.

De jure, UP's paradigm for the development of Filipino was in line with the ambitions of the 1973 Constitution. In good faith, it perceived a "universalist" development of Filipino, accepting influences from any language. But the idea was that this would happen naturally; it would not be designed and systematically injected with external elements. So basically the UP aimed to teach and cultivate whatever form the national lingua franca took. And what form was this? Left to its own devices, the national language's development has been overwhelmed by the cultural and economic power of Manila, and its omnipresent media. That's why 'Filipino' today, as I've given examples of in the past 5

articles, resembles very much the Tagalog language (specifically, the variety spoken around NCR) 10, 25, and even 50 years ago.

Admitting Filipino was still pretty much the same as Tagalog by 1986 would require one to recognize the speciousness of the premise that the language would incorporate other Philippine languages by itself. Therefore, it would seem a matter of pride and vindication for the UP, who advocated for the natural approach, to insist that Filipino now existed, and that had been successfully evolved and enriched according to the constitutional mandate of 1973. It's not surprising therefore that 3 out of the 4 experts who signed the letter entitled "Proposals to the Con-Com: Provisions for the National Language"---which asserted that Filipino as a lingua franca did exist, that it differed from Tagalog, that it represented the speech varieties of all ethnic groups, and that it should be declared the national language---were professors of the University of the Philippines.

While the opinions of other Resource Persons (RPs) were a little more realistic, the influence of the UP school of thought was strong. About half of the dozen or so RPs invited to give their recommendations on the national language to the Committee on Human Resources were connected to UP, and the key elements of the Constitution's language provisions, when completed, closely reflected the proposals put forward by this group. Today, I think the UP is gradually becoming more embracing of all languages, but we are still feeling the effects of the staunchly pro-Filipino attitudes of the 1980s, which essentially excluded all other Philippine languages from taking substantial roles in education and government due in part to a misplaced confidence in Filipino's future diversification.

The Question of Migration and Language Enrichment

In the Plenary Session of the Constitutional Commission on September 1st, 1986, Commissioner Bas Ople justified the change of the spelling of the national language from Pilipino to Filipino: “[Filipino with an F] is a code word for a highly liberalized Filipino, open-ended, not only ready but eager to accept contributions from Cebuano, Pampango, Ilocano, Hiligaynon, Tausog, and all the other languages of this country. And, therefore, it is to be distinguished from Pilipino as a more static, already finished product.”

While the Commisioners liked the idea of Filipino becoming richer, they were not generally in favour of enriching it by design. Commissioner Bennagen explains in the same Plenary Session of Sept 1, 1986, “we look at language as an organic thing which has its own logic of growth; therefore, we must follow that” and, in the words of Ople, the Committee will not establish “quotas of assimilation from different languages.” In other words, we’ll let Filipino diverge from its Tagalog mother by itself.

Is this presumption of natural divergence likely?

Given that a pure form of Tagalog had been taught in all schools for more than 40 years before the 1987 Constitution, and that it had already been widely disseminated through media ever since the Japanese had supported its use, Tagalog had already become the default communication between people from different regions. The 1987 Commissioners recognized that fact, admitting that Tagalog/Pilipino is “already understood” to be the nucleus of Filipino. Visayan Commissioner Tingson also conceded that “it is a fact now that the Cebuanos are learning more and more Filipino or Tagalog for the simple reason that it is there already; it has a headstart of 50 years [in the educational system] and the Cebuanos, I think, are reconciled to the fact that Cebuano cannot at this stage become the Filipino language.”

So by 1987, Tagalog-Pilipino was already widely spoken throughout the country, and this was to serve as the core of a language that was supposed to become more diverse through natural adoptions of words from other Philippine and international languages. International languages like English are omnipresent and economically vital, so it is reasonable to assume that it will continue to influence Filipinos' speech without planning so. But the same cannot be said for other Philippine languages. Languages like Masbateno, Bikol, or even Cebuano, do not have metropolitan areas with 20 million people like Manila, accounting for 33% of the nation's GDP, acting as the indisputable transport hub of the country, and hosting the vast majority of the Philippine's nationwide media, manufacturing, and service companies. If you want to make it big in the Philippines, it usually means you need to make it big in Manila. People are understandably attracted by the higher salaries and wider range of employment; once they move to Manila, and start families, using Tagalog as their primary medium of communication is a matter of course. Studies have shown that by the 2nd generation, immigrants to Manila already switch to Tagalog in the home.

The opposite effect takes place in the regions. If you move to a new region with a different local language, it is not often imperative to learn the local language – after all, 97% of Filipinos know how to speak Tagalog! Most of the Kapampangans, Pangasinenses, Tagalogs, and other groups living in Ilocos, in my observation, do not learn Ilokano substantively, and certainly don't adopt it as their home language.

Migration, therefore, increases the number of Tagalog speakers in Manila over time, and also introduces more Tagalog speakers to the regions. The Commissioners of the 1987 Constitution would like to have believed interaction of various peoples would “enrich” the national lingua franca and steer it away from its Tagalog-dominated roots. But let's think logically about this. While immigration to Manila is high, the number of immigrants from any particular language group is still a very small fraction of the total population. If an immigrant from Samar, for example, decided to slip in a few Waray-Waray words into his speech, the majority of his conversants would not understand him. They might even make fun of him. He would quickly realize it would be easier to

eliminate his “Waray-isms” from his speech and imitate normal Manila speech. After all, he learned Tagalog-Filipino in school, whereas Manileños do not formally learn Waray or any other Philippine language. It is therefore obvious which group will linguistically adopt to the other. Consequently, recent adoption of words from other Philippine languages into Manila speech has been minimal, and Filipino is no less a variety of Tagalog than it was in 1986.

You might hope that, while immigrants to Manila might not have a significant effect on the lingua franca, perhaps the real enrichment of Filipino takes place in the regions. Perhaps, since people are learning Tagalog-Filipino in school and speaking the local language outside, some kind of mixture would develop – the kind of enrichment of the Filipino language that the Constitution expected. But, as we shall explore in the next column, this presumption is also naively optimistic.

Part 36

Diglossia or Language Shift?

In the last article, we studied the reason why local dialects/languages are unable to impact the speech patterns of Manileños very much, and in turn, why the national language---at least in the context of the National Capital Region---has not been able to incorporate many Philippine languages other than Tagalog. This is despite more than 20 years after the last Constitution enjoined that Filipino “shall be further developed and enriched on the basis of existing Philippine and existing languages” (Article XIV, Section 6).

Perhaps, however, the enrichment of Filipino does not happen in the NCR. Perhaps our hope for the enrichment of Filipino lies in the regions. Since people are learning Tagalog-Filipino in school and speaking the vernacular outside, maybe some mixture will eventually develop that resembles the enriched Filipino language that the Constitution expected?

That's what Ponciano Bennagen of the Constitutional Commission had in mind, when he spoke in front of all the Commissioners in September 1986: "If I go to Mindanao, as in fact I did in early April, a language that you would call Filipino would rely on Tagalog and partly on Cebuano and English. A language that one would speak in the North would partake of other languages and these have to be codified in a planned manner to accelerate and facilitate the growth of this emerging language," he told the Plenary.

Commissioner Bennagen was right in some ways. It is indeed true that Tagalog is influencing the regional languages. Diglossia is reported in many languages, with Tagalog words like 'di ba', 'talaga', and 'ayos' commonly thrown into local speech. If the influence is strong enough, it could lead to a full creolization of the vernaculars. To some this may be called "enrichment," to others it is encroachment, bastardization, dilution, and deterioration of Philippine languages.

Regardless of your opinion on "halo-halo" speech habits, the creolized varieties in each region, no matter how "enriched" with Tagalog they are, would still not be transferable to other regions. Mix Pampangan with Tagalog and you would obtain something completely different from mixing Tausug with Tagalog. There wouldn't be just one language developing (creolizing), but many! Bennagen realized that such Tagalog-Vernacular fusions would not be compatible, and thus urged for them to be "codified in a planned manner" in order to properly incorporate them in an emerging, diverse Filipino.

Despite the need for deliberate planning, The *Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino* (KWF) created in 1991 by constitutional mandate is not actively designing a mixed language. The Commissioners decided that they would not establish "quotas of assimilation from different languages" into Filipino (as discussed in the Plenary Session of Sept 1st, 1986), so the KWF is just standardizing and promoting the national lingua franca (barely distinguishable from the Manila variety of Tagalog, which includes some English and Spanish loan words) as it spreads around the country. Resolution 92-1 of the KWF indeed defines the national

language as “the language spoken in Metro Manila and other business centers of the country.” No mention of deliberate attempts to further enrich Filipino with other Philippine languages, so it looks likely that the KWF will continue to promote the national language in its present form regardless of how under-representative it actually is.

At this point (and even back in 1986), a hands-off evolution of Filipino is skewed to entrench the Tagalog elements of the national language and eliminate local languages, due to the impracticalities of region-to-region communication, economic imbalances, and low representation of local languages in media and education. The fact that the *Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino* (KWF) was not instructed to design an enriched language is therefore tantamount to intending it not to exist, given the unlikelihood of it happening naturally.

Thus we arrive at the most profound and subtle paradox of the 1987 Constitution. It demands Filipino to be developed and enriched. “The government ought to be able to accelerate or speed up the development of that language,” Commissioner Bennagen stated---hence the creation of the KWF. But the Commissioners also agreed upon his added caveat: “*respecting its own logic of development.*” Therefore, the KWF is somehow supposed to enrich Filipino with other Philippine languages without being given the mandate to deliberately enrich it (for that would be disrespecting its own logic). They have no choice but to watch and even glorify Filipino’s spread across the country, ensnared to the largely unenriched Tagalog lingua franca of Manila.

I sympathize with the KWF’s impossible position. They have two unpalatable options. One, either they have to carry on propagating the currently stunted Filipino as an official language of communication and education, and falsely advertise it as the enriched product we’ve all been waiting for. Or two, admit that very little has been done to incorporate other Philippine languages (lexically or syntactically) into Filipino, the language as taught in schools and shown on TV is nearly identical to what it was in 1986, the Constitutional vision of Filipino has not been fulfilled, and nor is it likely ever to be.

Policies' Powerful Effect on a Language's Future

In the Constitutional Commission Plenary Session of Sept. 1st 1987, Commissioner Blas Ople summarizes the vision of how Filipino should develop: “Yes, it is a Darwinian concept – evolution, natural selection. And in the process, if the Pampango language succeeds in contributing a disproportionate volume of words into this evolving Filipino language, then that will be a tribute to the Pampanguenos.”

Dr. Neville Alexander (2010), a multilingual advocate and former prisonmate of Nelson Mandela writes, “It is not true that languages simply develop “naturally”, as it were. They are formed and manipulated within definite limits to suit the interests of different groups of people. This is very clear in the case of so-called standard languages, as opposed to non-standard varieties (dialects, sociolects). The former are invariably the preferred varieties of the ruling class or ruling strata in any given society. They prevail as the norm because of the economic, political-military, or cultural-symbolic power of the rulers, not because they are “natural” in any meaning of the term. The importance of this proposition derives from the fact that it validates the claim that languages, just like cities or families, *can* be planned. Indeed, it is a fact that in any modern state, whether or not it is explicitly acknowledged by governments, languages are *always* planned, in that legislation prescribes, often in great detail, where and how one or more languages are to be used.”

Consistent with Dr. Alexander's analysis, let me remind you that the language situation of the Philippines by 1986 was anything but natural. Since 1940, Tagalog had been systematically introduced into schools, its name had been changed to Pilipino, and very little was done to officially incorporate words from other Philippine languages. It had become the lingua franca of the country-- whereas it had never been before--and opened the doors to its mass use by media. And yet, when challenged by Commissioner Davide on why no formal steps had been done to enrich Filipino (that is, make it less like Tagalog), Human Resources

Committee Chairman Villacorta made the presumptuous claim: “Madam president, a language is not legislated. It is not evolved primarily through legislation, although legislation can help expedite the development.” If a language is not legislated, what about Commonwealth Act 184 that established the National Language Institute, tasked to choose a national language? What about Executive Order 134, declaring Tagalog to be the basis of the national language? What about Commonwealth Act 570, declaring the Filipino National Language? What about Secretary of Public Instruction Department Order No 1, ruling the teaching of this formalized Tagalog language in all schools across the country, and Bureau of Education Circular 26, specifying its insertion in the 4th year of high school? How about Department of Education Order 7, changing the name to Pilipino and ordering its use as the Medium of Instruction (MOI) from Grades 1-4? And the introduction of the Bilingual Policy in 1974, making Pilipino the MOI for all subjects except English, Science, and Math? What about Executive Order 335 (1988), demanding the heavier use of Filipino in government? And Presidential Proclamation 35, which established a National Language Week? Proclamation 186, which moved the Week to August, specifically so that schools would partake in the enforced celebrations? Proclamations 19 and 1041, expanding the period of national language propaganda to one month?

In other words, decades of persistent legislation created the problem in the first place: a national language largely restricted to the speech habits of one part of the country (Manila) and spreading like wildfire so as to gravely threaten the future of other Philippine languages. Only a dedicated, full-blown policy shift could fulfil the Constitutional ambition to develop and enrich Filipino with other Philippine languages. Yet, astonishingly, the consensus of the 1986 Constitutional Commission was to follow the Darwinian approach: in effect, not to do anything that may interrupt the “natural” outcome of a 50-yr-long, one-track language agenda. And supposedly, their justification was because language cannot be “legislated”?!

Had there been concrete steps taken to evolve Filipino, such as the *Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino* (KWF) purposefully 1) inserting large

amounts of vocabulary from other Philippine languages into a new Filipino lexicon; 2) acting upon the academic findings of Dr. Ernesto Constantino, who showed that even syntactical structures of different languages could be combined into one; 3) partnering with all sectors, especially media and education, to ensure that the truly evolved language is used in influential domains of daily life; and 4) setting up measures to prevent said language from wiping out other native languages, then *perhaps* we wouldn't be in the situation we are today. The hands-off approach decided upon by the Commissioners and ultimately practiced by the KWF, however, was guaranteed to fail the Constitutional vision for Filipino. Commissioner Ople's musing that Pampango might contribute substantively to the "evolving Filipino language" rings all the more empty considering that, today, Kapampangans are struggling to keep their language alive.

Part 38

The term Filipino as referred to the National Language leads many to believe there is only one language in the Philippines.

Tourists who don't know anything about the country, for example, often wonder what language they speak here. Following the common pattern of languages being identified with nationalities (Japanese people are said to speak Japanese, Italian people speak Italian, Thai people speak Thai, etc), foreigners would be likely to guess that Filipino is the language of the Filipinos, and that it always has been. And if they searched or googled the word, their guess would be all but confirmed, since that is the official name for the national language. The tourist would applaud himself for his good exercise of logic and buy a "Filipino" dictionary for his upcoming trip to the Archipelago. Thinking the case solved, he would be unlikely to stumble across the other important facts: that unlike the Japanese and the English, the Filipinos are a much more linguistically diverse people, and the language so called Filipino is

not the overwhelming mother tongue of the population, and only became a lingua franca of the entire archipelago within the last several decades due to government policy. He would also be confused, upon arrival, at why everyone referred to the language as Tagalog (having not been told about the history of the naming of the national language, and that Modern Tagalog and Filipino are nearly one in the same). And when touring the provinces, he would be befuddled why his 'Filipino' phrasebook did not help to decipher the dialogue heard on the street.

This information gap about Philippine language diversity is evident everywhere. For instance, Filipino/Tagalog is the only language explicitly mentioned in the Lonely Planet Guide (one of the most popular travel guide series); they don't even mention Ilokano in the chapter on the Ilocos region! It always shocks me when I meet surfer bums who have hung out in La Union for 3 weeks and still don't realize that there is a local language distinct from Tagalog. I guess most of these visitors don't know enough Tagalog to notice that it is not Tagalog being spoken behind the hotel counters, but in fact Ilokano. I blame cursory guidebooks (which seem to want to equate one language with one country in a neat formula) and general lack of awareness on the part of the visitors.

The Google search page and Facebook wouldn't be any more revealing to those wanting to find out more about the linguistic make-up of the Philippines, because the only Philippine language supported by them is "Filipino," again, making it sound as if the language accounts for absolutely everyone in the country and no other languages are important enough to offer service in. With populations of 22 and 12 million people, respectively, Cebuano and Ilokano must represent some of the largest languages without Google or Facebook support in the world, not to mention the other regional languages that have millions of speakers each.

The lack of other Philippine languages offered by such online giants like Facebook and Google contrasts starkly with their Indian operations. India is like the Philippines in many ways: developing country, large population, very multilingual (both countries have over 100 native

languages). They each have a national language (Hindi for India, Filipino for Philippines), while other major languages enjoy some form of official status in the states/regions (the Philippine constitution defines the regional languages as auxiliary official languages). Why then does Facebook and Google offer many Indian versions of their sites, like Gujarati, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Punjabi, and Malayalam, yet not the equivalent Philippine languages like Cebuano, Iloko, Hiligaynon, Bicol? While the vast majority of Filipinos would be able to understand either the English or the Tagalog versions of online sites, the same can be said about English and Hindi in India. Similarly, while practically all Catalonians, Basques, and Galicians are bilingual in the their own languages and Spanish (the national language of Spain), Google Spain and Facebook Spain still offer versions in these other native languages. The selection of which languages to support is thus proven not to be just a case of comprehensibility, but choice. Offering Google in the Galician language is not because the Galicians can't effectively use the Spanish version, but because Spanish is not the only language they speak. In the same way, web services of Cebuano, Ilokano, and other Philippine languages should be available to Filipinos for the simple reason of having the option to surf in their mother tongue, regardless of whether or not they understand English and/or Tagalog.

These web companies, resources like Lonely Planet, and other foreign windows into the Philippines need to do a little homework before making very serious language decisions that affect millions of people. They should recognize that despite a national language, the Philippines has several large ethnolinguistic groups who could benefit from more choice, recognition, and respect in the delivery of information.

In the last article I discussed how easy it is for foreigners to get the wrong linguistic impression of the Philippines, because most readily accessible resources don't reveal its true multilingualism. For example, the Philippines entry in my Oxford American Dictionary reads, "a country in Southeast Asia that consists of an archipelago of over 7000 islands; capital, Manila; languages, Filipino (based on Tagalog) and English."

While Filipino and English are the official languages, they are certainly not the only languages, and the Dictionary doesn't even bother mentioning the major regional languages that have Constitutional recognition! On a related note, I must admit this is one of the reasons why I'm not a big fan of the official name of the national language. Since it shares the same word as that used to identify the people of the Philippines, it implies that Filipino is somehow native to all Filipinos. The truth is that it is native to Central Luzon, and the mother tongue of only 30% of all Filipinos. The rest are merely compelled to learn it through education and/or fed it through television. And this state sponsorship allows it to end up in foreign dictionaries without a whisper about the other Philippine languages.

The information gap about Philippine languages is not just found in external accounts of the country. Its pervasive inside as well. If you turn on the TV, you are likely to hear very few Philippine languages being spoken, except Tagalog. The major regional languages get some exposure, an hour at most per day, but more typically only once per week or not at all. For most of Northern Luzon (La Union, Pangasinan, all provinces of Cagayan Valley Region, Baguio, and the Cordilleras), there is not a single program in any local or regional language (even Ilokano) on GMA, ABS-CBN, or TV5. Similar situation for FM radio. Local language programs are usually reserved for the wee hours of the morning (4am-6am), with the rest of the time reserved for Tagalog and English songs, commentary, and adverts.

When someone is interviewed on regular TV (the free, mainstream terrestrial channels of GMA, ABS-CBN, and TV5), reporters never use the local or regional language – always Filipino. The interviewee may personally know the reporter, and know he/she speaks the same dialect as him, but is shy to speak in his mother tongue because of the reporter’s insistence on the use of Filipino. The excuse is that Filipino is universally understood, so it should be the language used to reach the widest audience. But this excuse is rather flimsy -- even large international news corporations like BBC let their interviewees speak in whatever language they want, and it is up to the BBC to have it dubbed or subtitled. Does a 14 billion peso company like GMA mean to say that it does not have the capability of dubbing or subtitling their recordings?

The second excuse of the media companies would be: “But why is that necessary? The people speak Tagalog anyway, so why don’t they just use it in answering our questions?” The issue should not be about whether or not one can speak Tagalog. A person should be able to CHOOSE the language he is being interviewed in, and CHOOSE the language he replies in, and the media rep should accommodate him accordingly. Using a language other than Tagalog does not mean the person does not know how to speak Tagalog properly (which is a common accusation, audacious as it is); it simply means he loves his own language and wants to use it. It’s called freedom of expression. Afterall, the news channel is requesting his opinion on something for free, directly benefiting from his largesse. The least they could do is accommodate his language preference.

Language aside, the content of the media is also highly limiting in its presentation of Philippine cultures. Having watched shows like Mara Clara, Imortal, and Nita Negrita for the last 6 months, I can count---on one hand---the number of times a character or even a reference to another Philippine ethnic group besides Tagalog has been introduced. Despite Cebuanos, Ilokanos, Bikolanos, Warays, Ilonggos, and Maranaos collectively making up a majority of the Filipino nation, very rarely are main characters in Filipino dramas from one of these groups, very rarely are the shows set in their geographic regions, and very rarely

are places, historical events, or issues particularly important to these groups touched upon. It's almost as if they don't exist.

Part 40

Last year I saw an independent film called *ASTRO MAYABANG* in the EDSA Shangri-la Mall in Ortigas Center. It was entirely in the Kapampangan language, with English subtitles. Set in Angeles City, it featured a boy who falls head over heels for a Pam-Am (Pampango-American) girl, and runs into all sorts of financial, emotional, and sexual problems along the way. It was fascinating to watch: good acting, funny, realistic plot, and a window into the life of Pinoy youth outside Manila. While I was a little disappointed with how abruptly it ended (and without a happy ending for the main character's love life), I felt exhilarated by the deeper significance of the movie: the first full-length Kapampangan movie ever made.

The language of the Kapampangans has penetrated another domain, and provides a ray of hope for the continued expression and evolution of Kapampangan identity. The sad irony, however, is that very few Kapampangans know of the movie. I think the movie did not show in cinemas in Pampanga or Tarlac, because independent films simply aren't shown commercially in the Provinces. Due to economic calculations, only those mass appeal movies are screened, resulting in a small subset of American and Filipino films (usually action or romantic comedy blockbusters) represented.

To most Kapampangans' knowledge, having not heard of the *Astro Mayabang* film, cinema still eludes their language. Meanwhile, the Manileños who saw the film were likely amused at watching a Philippine-made movie other than Tagalog, and further suppose that Kapampangan language, culture, and people are still going strong. What most people don't realise, however, is how unfortunately wrong that

supposition is. Experts cited in a Sunday Times article on September 2, 2007 predicted that the Kapampangan language will be effectively extinct in 20 years if major changes in policies and practices aren't made. A large majority of Kapampangan parents no longer speak to their kids in their mother tongue, which is one of the foremost ways to doom a language to extinction (Krauss, 1992).

So while cinema-goers got to experience full Kapampangan immersion in the *Astro Mayabang* movie, Kapampangans actually living in Pampanga hardly live a day without hearing Tagalog being spoken around them, Tagalog in restaurants, and Tagalog being used by almost all the children. Cultural loss is severe and noticed by locals, but reality perhaps escapes those living in the City. One can find all sorts of wonderful museums in Manila extolling the diversity of Philippine culture. One can buy Ilokano, Pangasinan, and other regional literature from the National Commission on Culture and the Arts, and purchase a range of Philippine dictionaries in Manila bookstores, yet be hard pressed to find them in their respective regions! You can hear all sorts of languages on the streets of Quezon City. Universities host myriad performances and travelling exhibits to analyze, showcase, and enjoy the fare of various Philippine ethnic groups, yet in many cases the practices on display have long since fallen out of general disuse.

To some extent, wealthy citizens (and crucially, those people in Manila running the country), live in a giant cultural bubble. They have all the riches of Philippine culture imported to them, masking the fact that these riches are under threat. Meanwhile, what does Manila give in return? Three television networks pumping out nearly the same asinine content every day across every province (Pinoy Henyo is the most hilarious contradiction). A selection of extremely repetitive advertisements consisting of a few dozen corporations (Shinier hair anyone? Whiter skin? Brighter laundry? Want to drink what Pacquiao drinks?). Some girl fretting about her love life to a midnight Manila radio DJ. The latest sex gossip from *Bulgar* and *Tiktik*. 'Educational' programs for kids, like the upcoming "*Pinoy Ako*" (the title alone smells like nationalistic propaganda). School textbooks describing grand

Filipino culture, praising the Ilokano epic “Buhay ni Lam-ang,” not even deigning to state its original title in Iloko.

Without the delicacies imported from the regions, the native crafts, and the medley of ethnic groups converging in Manila, the metropolis would be rather more anaemic than it is today. It feeds and flourishes off the diversity of the country. And exposed to this diversity, law makers see little evidence of the drastic changes going on in the provinces, and thus do not feel the urgency of more inclusive language planning, anti-discrimination laws, mother-tongue education, plurality in media, and other reforms. Meanwhile, the lack of these reforms continues to bring a much narrower segment of Manila society straight into the arteries of provincial life, conditioning people to give up the very cultures the City feeds off. One day, when Kapampangan only identifies someone who resides in Pampanga rather than someone who retains any Kapampangan characteristics (such as, speaking the language), I think there will be a few startled individuals. Or maybe people won't even notice.

Part 41

Tariq Rahman is a professor at Quaid-i-Azam University and has written about the damage inflexible linguistic policies have had on Pakistani society. Like the Philippines, Pakistan reacted to colonialism in a very nationalistic way, defining only one native national language (Urdu) and elevating its role in education and government, alongside English, while essentially ignoring the other languages of Pakistan. When Tagalog was declared as the basis of the national language in 1937, it was spoken by less than 20% of the Philippine population. Similarly for Pakistan, less than 10% of Pakistanis spoke Urdu, with the bulk of the people speaking one of the regional languages such as Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, and others. Prof. Rahman writes in his

paper, “Language policy, multilingualism and language vitality in Pakistan”:

“The state’s use of Urdu as a symbol of national integration has jeopardized additive multilingualism as recommended by UNESCO and, of course, by many eminent linguists and educationists. As Urdu spreads through schooling, media and urbanization, pragmatic pressures make the other Pakistani languages retreat.... As people learn languages for pragmatic reasons, they are giving less importance to their heritage languages and are learning Urdu. Instead of being an asset, [their native tongue] becomes a liability. It prevents one from rising in society. In short, it is ghettoizing. Then, people become ashamed of their language, or, even if not [explicitly] ashamed, they do not want to teach the language to their children because they think that would be overburdening the children with far too many languages.”

When I first read this passage, I had to wipe my glasses clean. Was I reading about the Philippines? The similarity of the Pakistan and Philippine case is striking. Just as with Urdu, the Tagalog-cum-national language of the Philippines has been given a boost in prestige and prevalence through its use in schooling and media. The exclusion of other Philippine languages from these domains, meanwhile, has rendered them less useful and less desirable. You can see the evidence of this on the streets of Baguio, Taguegarao, Angeles City, Urdaneta, Dagupan, Tacloban, and many other cities. If I spot a group of teenagers here in San Fernando, La Union, for example, I can guess what language they are speaking to each other with about 90% accuracy. If they look well-dressed, maybe with some brandname clothes, the girls sporting salon-sleek hair—they are almost always speaking Tagalog when I walk past. If on the other hand their clothes seem rather cheap, the boys aping a grunge gangster look, their complexions a little darker—they are usually speaking Iloko.

The same experiment can be repeated with other variables. Tell me the profession of an Ilokano parent based pretty much anywhere except Ilocos Sur and Norte, and I’ll be able to tell you what language he is speaking at home with his kids. Doctor? Professor? Engineer? Med-

Tech? Teacher? Tagalog. Laborer? Tricycle driver? Guard? Plumber? Vegetable seller? Iloko.

Tell me a 10 year old's school, and I'll tell you the common language he uses both with his friends and parents. Private? Near the center of town? Takes vehicular transportation to get there? Tagalog. Public school? Not in the city center? Has to walk to school? Iloko.

Boy eating a Yum Burger in Jollibees and a little on the plump side? Tagalog. Skinny boy sitting by the side of the road in a plastic chair, watching people go by? Iloko. I wish it were not so painfully consistent, but it is. Everyone in La Union therefore has developed an in-built language radar to adjust to these language divides. If a scruffy boy with sandals and carrying a water jug walks into our office, the staff address him in Iloko. If however the visitor is a pretty, fair-skinned student, for example, they speak in Tagalog. And 90% of the time their guess as to which language the visitor most commonly uses is correct. In this way, "sosyal" Ilokano youth who lack the ability to speak Iloko (due to their parents' emphasis on Tagalog and English) are conveniently spared the few potentially embarrassing consequences of their parents' language abandonment, because no one even bothers attempting to speak Ilokano to them.

When I remark on the prevalence of Tagalog now, people commonly say: "Oh well, San Fernando is mixed now. It's part Ilokano, part Tagalog." But this belies a crucial point. It's not as if these two languages have been mixed randomly or isotropically into the La Union population. Who speaks Tagalog and who speaks Iloko in the home follow very clear patterns along class divides. And this divide---like skin color, clothing, and all the other characteristics that enable a wider gap between rich and poor in this country---further stigmatizes local languages and those who speak them. Just as Prof Rahman described in his paper, an asset has been turned into a liability; and that does not bode well for these languages' survival.

Outside native Tagalog areas of Luzon, Tagalog is associated with the upwardly mobile. The local languages, meanwhile, are most often the domain of the underprivileged, and increasingly so. As more upper and middle-class folk abandon their native languages in the home, the more undesirable these languages become. Thirty years ago, a person you might have looked up to and aspired to be (anyone—let’s say a director for a regional office, the manager of a bank, or the owner of a local company), reliably spoke in his or her native language. Ilokano youth had role models that demonstrated that one could be Ilokano-speaking and successful at the same time. But now, while these professionals know Ilokano, they are choosing not to speak it to their children. Knowing the local language is no longer part of the ideal image of success, if it ever was. Worse off, it has become so devalued as to render it not worth passing down to the next generation, even *for free*, meaning that trilingual Ilokano parents are choosing to raise bilingual, non-Ilokano speaking kids. This is called “voluntary language shift”, but as Prof. Tariq Rahman of Quaid-i-Azam University hinted at, the word “voluntary” is quite misleading.

A friend of mine posed the valid question, “if parents are the ones choosing to switch to Tagalog, what’s the big deal if Tagalog ends up replacing the other Philippine languages? It’s the natural trend.” Well my friend, let’s have a little reality check. If you were looked down upon and even penalized for speaking your mother tongue in school, if your mother tongue has never been represented in a movie, on television, or a government notice; if your mother tongue has never been required to get a job; if your mother tongue is frowned upon in commercial establishments; if your accent has been actively made fun of in mass media; if it is illegal to sing your National Anthem in your native tongue; if only a handful of internet pages exist in your mother tongue; if no famous actors or singers use your mother tongue in their work; and if your children shall struggle in a Tagalog and English-only environment at school---is it really a fair choice when it comes time to

decide what language to pass on to your young child? State policies create social environments for or against linguistic diversity. In the Philippines case, it's mostly against. This is exactly why Dr. Tove Skutnabb-Kangas of the University of Roskilde, Denmark, asserts, "Languages do NOT just disappear naturally. Languages do NOT 'commit suicide', i.e. in most cases speakers do NOT leave them voluntarily, for instrumental reasons, and for their own good. Instead, languages are 'murdered.' Most disappearing languages are victims of linguistic genocide" (2004)."

The sad thing is, those parents who bow to social pressures and abandon their native language exacerbate the situation. Other parents who are considering which language to use in the home may, upon witnessing their colleagues speaking in a more dominant language to their children, feel compelled to do the same. Even if rationally there are alternative solutions, people are no doubt influenced by trends. Parents should thus realize that their language choices can have significant consequences beyond their home.

Parents who are non-Tagalog but raise children in a more dominant language like Tagalog are undermining the usefulness of the local language. Because for every extra child who doesn't know the local tongue, all the people associated with the child, even remotely, must speak in Tagalog when interacting with him/her. If the majority of parents in a community switch languages, the remaining parents thus have little choice but to follow, due to the loss of functionality of their mother tongue. An added nail in the coffin is the attitude such trends engender. As a native language loses functionality, it may increasingly be seen as an obstacle to advancement, making the remaining speakers most vocal in its uselessness and most eager to jettison it.

Choosing not to pass your native tongue to your child is not just a personal choice therefore: it affects the future of the whole community's language attitudes and practices.

While there can be benefits of having a national language, such as ease of communication between disparate groups, there can also be some unpleasant social side effects.

The institutionalization of a national language usually results in its inclusion in education, media, government, and other sectors. If this is not balanced by meaningful representation of local languages also (at least in their respective localities), then this creates a prestige imbalance. After decades of occupying privileged domains, people often come to view a national language as being more sophisticated, glamorous, and intellectual than their own native tongues. This perception can eventually become reality since, if people receive no formal education in their mother tongue for generations, the depth and breadth of one's vocabulary is sure to decline---especially when being pumped with other languages like English and Tagalog (not to mention the effect of TV). Sure enough, every local and regional Philippine language has suffered increasing "shallowness," with most people exhibiting smaller vocabularies in their native tongue than their elders, especially in cities.

It is a double-edged sword. The fewer words, metaphors, jokes, and other devices you know in your native tongue, the harder it is to express yourself. Given its restricted scope and usefulness, you will grow to prefer other languages in which you have been given formal instruction. And hence, the symbolic prestige of a language like Tagalog (aka Filipino) being designated as a national language eventually garners real utility as it begins to outshine people's knowledge of their own mother tongues. People grow to associate their own languages with simple, informal, even crude speech, while they reserve formal, polite, or sophisticated speech for languages of status like English or Tagalog.

This imbalance in prestige creates a climate where local languages and their associated ethnic groups are frequently looked down upon. In one

insulting scene in the 2006 movie *Sakal, Sakali, Sakolo*, a nanny was derided for teaching Bisaya to a child, while another character claimed that “Pinoy” children must grow up speaking Tagalog. This movie, while fictional, reflects the disrespect that Visayans (and other Philippine ethnic groups) frequently endure, and also exposes the narrow view that one’s citizenship is somehow predicated on speaking one language and no others.

Examples of linguistic imperialism are plenty. In Pinoy Big Brother Princess Lieza Manzon was instructed to refrain from conversing in Cebuano with provincemate Paul Jake. (Fortunately Miss Manzon exercised her constitutional rights of freedom of expression and continued to speak in Cebuano, prompting Big Brother to acquire a translator). In another example, Lito Osmena was not allowed by ABS CBN to air his political TV adverts using Cebuano (for the Cebu market) without first submitting a Tagalog translation. (I fail to see the merits of this requirement...If ABS CBN just wanted to make sure the ad didn’t say anything controversial, could they not have found a single person to translate his submission for them, given all their resources and army of staff?!)

The discrimination faced by speakers of minority languages can sometimes result in self-consciousness or even disdain for one’s own identity. Youth hardly ever sing videoke songs in the ‘dialect’ since they are considered “corny” or “*baduy*.” Teenage girls will often speak in Tagalog instead of their native language because they think it makes them sound cuter and will improve their chances with the boys. FM radio hosts rarely speak the native tongue, and I noticed that when they do, they put on this stereotypically crude accent. The peasant-voice affectation is intended to be humorous, but it illustrates the fact that A) local languages are objects of mockery, even by native speakers, and B) normal, pleasant, neutral use of the local language is being undermined by its low class associations.

Prof. Tariq Rahman’s description of the language situation in Pakistan resonates here:

“There are many literary works in Urdu and other languages that show how embarrassed the poor are by their houses, their clothes, their food, their means of transportation and, of course, their languages. In short, the reality constructed by the rich and the poor alike conspires to degrade, embarrass and oppress the less powerful. This relates to language-shame—being embarrassed about one’s language—and hence to possible language death.”

He is absolutely bang on. If a dominant group in a country manage to control the way marginalized groups are represented, those marginalized groups can end up internalizing these prejudices and even make fun of themselves. Most of the wealth, highest levels of politics, and media are concentrated in Manila, so that is the voice that dictates the mainstream representation of other Philippine groups. This representation, unfortunately, is often derogatory. And now, we are seeing these belittled groups turn upon themselves and join in on the jeering.

Part 44

The denigration of native languages and peoples is common practice in the Philippines.

When groups outside the NCR are represented on Philippine TV shows, it is stereotypically negative: “extremists” and “terrorists” in Mindanao, uneducated yayas from Visayas, head hunters and rebels in the Cordilleras, people with silly accents...the list goes on.

If anything, these groups should be getting more respect---for surviving an education and media climate that excludes their native languages; for coping economically despite great challenges, sometimes having to leave home for years at a time to seek marginal work in Manila or abroad. Even so, people from the provinces have managed to preserve

their culture better: speaking more languages than the average Manileño, imitating less egregiously the trends of the West, and representing a more traditional Filipino identity than that found in the SM Mall of Asia. Yet still, in a perverse twist of rationality, they are the ones made fun of.

Education, meanwhile, continues to conspire with media to humiliate ethnic groups. Teachers are still frowned upon for speaking the vernacular in the classroom (even though the regional languages are recognized by the Constitution as auxiliary media of instruction), such that when principals visit the classroom, the teacher exerts herself only to speak Tagalog (in Filipino subjects) or English (in English subjects). This antipathy for the local language then gets passed on to children. While the days of fining students for speaking the vernacular are technically over, they are still reprimanded for using it. All these habits give the impression that local languages are counterproductive, have low value, and should be stamped out.

A Pakistani linguist once said, “If a child is told that his or her language is inferior, the message being conveyed is that he/she is inferior. In short, one is giving a negative image to children by telling them that the ‘cultural capital’ they possess is not capital at all but a stigma and a handicap. This makes children reject an aspect of their legacy, history, culture and identity. What is created is ‘culture shame’—being ashamed of one’s own true identity.”

I can see this effect everyday. Without even noticing, my Ilokano friends often switch to Tagalog if they walk into a mall, fast food franchise, or places like the San Fernando Badminton Club. Apparently they don’t want to be heard speaking Ilokano (aka Iloko) if they are within earshot of upperclass people who may judge them negatively. They worry they might be considered “*provinciano*.” But we actually LIVE in the province, why should we be ashamed of being *provincianos*? Provincianos live far away from the higher pollution and crime of Manila, have healthier lifestyles, eat fresher food...it is a respectable life with its own advantages and disadvantages; it need not be something to shamefully conceal.

The embarrassment that people have gradually grown to feel about their own languages permeates other regions too. When I visited Pampanga and tried to learn a few Kapampangan words, many people tried to dissuade me from learning it. They would say, “No no, learn Tagalog instead,” giving various reasons such as “Kapampangan is too harsh” or “ugly” or “dirty” or “not useful.” Former professor at Holy Angel University, Michael Pangilinan, has meanwhile noted that Kapampangan youth often court and make love in Tagalog, imitating the romantic dramas on television and deeming their own language too vulgar for such activities. And whereas most politicians in Pampanga used to conduct their campaigns in Kapampangan, including Diosdado Macapagal himself, many now use Tagalog instead.

It turns out that a low self-image existed in Kapampangans even as far back as 1970s. A survey of ethnic attitudes conducted by the Filipinas Foundation revealed that a significant percentage of the Kapampangan people chose Tagalog over their own as the most favoured ethnic group. Only 31% of the Kapampangan people chose themselves as favourable.

Given its proximity to NCR, Pampanga identity has been strongly eroded by the culture and language of Manila, perhaps more so than any other major ethnic group. It is therefore intriguing that they are also, according to surveys, the most self-critical group. The correlation between language loss and cultural shame is evident. And while Kapampangans might be the hardest hit, other groups are starting to show the same signs of psychological defeat.

This phenomenon should be a clarion call for people to preserve their native tongues, not just for the languages themselves, but for their own self-esteem.

I like riding public transport. For one, it is more environmentally-friendly than private transport (if the transportation system meets certain standards and is properly maintained), and is often cheaper than owning your own car.

But there's another dimension to public transport I like: interesting social dynamics. Jeepney drivers here in La Union, to my delight, almost always speak Iloko (aka Ilokano) when communicating with their passengers. “*Nagapuam?*” “*Papanam?*” “*Mano ading?*” “*Sino makin-2o?*” “*Adda pay tugaw ‘toy la-ud apo.*” “*Adda agpadaya idiy waiting shed apo?*” they might say over the course of a route. If a particular passenger does not understand, the driver will switch to Tagalog or English when addressing that passenger. Nevertheless, the default is the local language. This practice is respectful to the locals, down-to-earth, and also encourages outsiders like me to learn the local tongue.

The same cannot be said about the passengers. While La Union is 90% Ilokano, you will hear it being spoken less than 90% of the time because many Ilokans of medium/high economic status (especially youth) avoid speaking it, or use it selectively. The jeepney is hence a fascinating place to watch sociolinguistics in action. Pretty much everyone above the age of 30 will be talking amongst each other in Iloko. Below 30, it's a bit of a gamble. Males will likely use Iloko. For females, it usually depends on socioeconomic class or educational background. If they are upper class, they will often speak in a mix of Tagalog and Iloko to each other. The younger they are, the more Tagalog. And in calling out to the driver publicly, the girls usually speak in Tagalog. Perhaps they feel a stronger need to put on a classy façade in front of the other passengers, or perhaps they have just been conditioned in school to avoid the local tongue when being polite. A bizarre convention of politeness if you ask me. Shouldn't politeness depend on how you say something, not what language you speak?

This brings me to another phenomenon of the jeepney. Passengers who speak Iloko to each other often speak in quiet tones, whereas those who speak loudly are more likely to be using Tagalog. I'm not sure why. Perhaps since Tagalog is a more prestigious language, backed, as they say, by "an army and a navy," its speakers feel emboldened by it. It is the language that blares through the television into everyone's homes; it is the language that celebrities speak; it is the language the President speaks; it's on Philippine money; it is the home language of most of the rich people in La Union, especially among the younger generation. Reinforced by government sponsorship and associations of class ascendancy, I think speakers of Tagalog in non-Tagalog provinces (especially in Luzon) feel a sense of security in using it. Security, self-assurance, and maybe even satisfaction. They are not only confident that they are safe from being made fun of, but more than willing to advertise the fact that they are speaking Tagalog so that people will think they are upper class...hence the loud melodramatic voices. The other passengers speaking in their mother tongue, meanwhile, stick to regular tones.

Two teenage girls speaking clamorously in Iloko might be labelled as *provinciano* and unladylike, whereas two girls speaking loudly in Tagalog might be considered sophisticated and cute. These inequitable perceptions may account for why Ilokano youth speak their native language somewhat apologetically, and anyone who has made the "transition" to Tagalog assumes an air of entitlement. The role of Tagalog in some non-Tagalog provinces is somewhat similar to the role of English in Tagalog provinces. Hearing Tagalog is entirely ordinary in Manila, but elsewhere it has an upper class connotation. It has sadly become a weapon of social stratification at the expense of native identity.

The other day I watched two young women in their spotless nurse uniforms climb onto the jeepney. They were speaking Tagalog to each other, but were probably Ilokano by parentage. Seated across, I eagerly waited to see them being plunged into the Iloko environment of the jeepney. These girls may avoid speaking their native tongue to each other, and were sheltered from it in their fancy college, but at least

they'll be exposed to it here, I thought. But as soon as they had passed their fare to the front, one put on her earphones while the other called a friend and proceeded to chatter into her phone. "Saan ka na?! Pauwi na ako!" she whined, bulldozing over the other conversations. The occasional Iloko words and announcements that the driver made fell on deaf ears. It seemed a metaphor for the country's linguistic future.

Part 46

I've often discussed the benefits of language preservation, but one topic I hadn't explored was environmental stewardship. Once I read about the connections between language and environment, my skeptical curiosity turned to, "Yeah, that makes perfect sense, why didn't I think of that before?"

Recent research (Posey ed 2001) links the imminent extinction of more than 2,500 world languages to a great loss of environmental knowledge. Why? Native peoples have thrived for millennia in rich natural habitats and managed them for the benefit of themselves, and often, the animals and plants as well. Those groups who have managed to employ stable yet slowly evolving survival strategies for thousands of years must surely know something about sustainable practices, or they would not be around today. While modern science has many answers, a tremendous amount of very specific and useful information remains with indigenous peoples. It is hard to rival the sheer length of time and intimacy with which they have experienced particular environments. Their languages, meanwhile, are the gatekeepers to this experience.

Native languages are repositories and transmitters of information on how to acquire food without compromising its future viability, how to make constructions of local materials, navigate and track wildlife, interpret signs of habitat change and predict their impact, distinguish between myriad species, their behaviors, and developmental stages,

overcome dangers posed by the local environment, and many other survival strategies and facts about the natural world.

You might be thinking, “Well, even if a people’s language dies, don’t they still all know those things? The language may have died, but the skills remain.” It is true that a community that has lost a language doesn’t suddenly become powerless, memory-less, and hopeless. But it can definitely be constraining. Their traditional language has developed alongside generations of folk struggling, adapting, and overcoming the challenges of their own particular environment. The language has had to accommodate the complete variety of species the people regularly come across, the particular palette of illnesses that are likely to be contracted in that place, the particular mood swings of the weather.

Every language has different strengths and weaknesses in expression: some languages may have a broad set of vocabulary for certain things, while be weak in other areas. And these differences usually arise from the demands of the environment. Having many synonyms for snow is simply not a priority for a place where it only snows once a year. In a place of abundant snow, where differentiating types can cut travel time, signal changes in weather, and even influence the acquisition of food, a richer vocabulary is warranted. Therefore, when a native language is replaced by another language that has developed in a different context, there may be a mismatch between the new language and the local environment---a piece will be “lost in translation,” so to speak.

Not everyone believes this postulation. Some assert that any language is capable of expressing anything that you could possibly want to express. This may be true. Even if an imported language did not have the specific word for X plant, for instance, you could string enough sentences together to fully describe it. Regardless, the original language may still hold an edge over the imported; as Hunn (1990) points out, precise labels for different thoughts and images can be called up by name at will, and hence dramatically increases memory capacity. It is not an accident that those indigenous groups who have suffered the most language loss are often those who are least in touch with their traditional skills, knowledge of the local environment, and cultural

practices. And tragically, this void can be coupled with rising rates of alcoholism, unemployment, and other modern scourges.

Klaus Toepfer, Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) stated in 2001: “Indigenous peoples not only have a right to preserve their way of life. But they also hold vital knowledge on the animals and plants with which they live. Enshrined in their cultures and customs are secrets of how to manage habitats and the land in environmentally friendly, sustainable, ways. Much of this knowledge is passed down from generation to generation orally... So losing a language and its cultural context is like burning a unique reference book of the natural world.”

Part 47

The role of language in local knowledge systems, in particular environmental and ecological knowledge, is rarely recognized by non-natives, urbanites, and those who have gone through a conventionally rigid classroom/textbook education. As McConvell and Thieberger (2001) write in a report on Indigenous languages of Australia:

“The knowledge which a people possesses, which enables them to live fruitfully in a particular ecological niche in the physical and biological environment is encoded in the language that they use to describe and work with the land, animals and plants. Studies both overseas and in Australia have shown the immense richness of the language associated with Indigenous ethnobiological concepts and practices.”

An example the scholars give is an indigenous group in North Queensland, named Dyirbal. In the Dyirbal language, there are many names for eel depending on the species. Interestingly, the feminine form of Dyirbal grammar indicates not only a female individual of a species, but also a dangerous species. Unfortunately, this language is

highly endangered. Many of the Dyirbal youth only know one term for eel (“*jaban*”), and are no longer aware of the other connotation of the feminine form, thus losing a convenient grammatical method to recognize and classify dangerous species.

A native language that loses environmental terminology can suggest two things. Firstly, its native speakers are likely under pressure to adopt a new language—through education, media, or other external factors—and parents might not want or be able to effectively pass on their mother tongue to the next generation. In the case of the Dyirbal youth, the words they are losing for eels and other species are not even being substituted with English. That is, not only are they losing precision in their own language: their entire communication ability is being compromised!

Secondly, loss of environmental vocabulary could also reflect a change or degradation of the environment itself. If a species becomes extinct, locals are eventually likely to forget it. There may be a transitional period whereby the word for an extinct animal is still remembered, but no longer used. My friend told me that some languages of the Philippines have native words for elephant, suggesting that elephants once inhabited parts of the Philippines. I don't know if this particular example is true, but it is true that language can reveal both the presence or absence of something in nature that you might not have expected. In this respect, transformations in language can be a valuable indicator for transformations in the environment, such as habitat loss and climate change.

No matter which way you look at it, local languages, culture, and values are inextricably linked to their environment. The Tofa reindeer herders of Siberia have a boggling array of reindeer terminology, to the point that a 2-year-old, male, uncastrated, and rideable reindeer can be described in a single word. English, or probably any other language for that matter, could not provide us with such specificity about reindeer.

In the Halkomelem language of Western British Columbia, meanwhile, a single word is used for what in English are identified as two

taxonomically distinct fish—trout and salmon. However, genetic tests in the 1990s revealed that the two types of fish were in fact the same species! This is an example of how indigenous knowledge can sometimes be more accurate than modern thinking or presumed scientific fact. This is not always the case, but as linguist David Harrison of Swarthmore College points out, we shouldn't cast aside the potential insight native languages can offer science, being “ the product of millennia of close observation of nature, a kind of ‘living’ experimentation.”

Considering the close relationship between native language and environmental know-how, McConvell and Thieberger write: “If linguistic knowledge could be passed on to the younger generation it would also increase their sensitivity to biological diversity and conservation in their own country, where they live, and [enable them] to continue their traditional role as caretakers of the land and sea in the most effective way. This knowledge and linguistic expertise could realise its potential if combined with greater involvement of Indigenous people in major conservation projects.”

This is an enlightened suggestion for the Philippines. If the Department of Natural Resources (DENR) and other environmental organizations started paying attention to the languages of native people, they could glean detailed information about the habitats they are trying to protect. Researching the knowledge embedded in native languages would be a first step, but environmental organizations could even go further than this. If they actively encouraged the preservation, use, and teaching of local languages and cultural practices in communities, they would also be sustaining the communities' ability to be effective environmental stewards for generations to come.

In the last few columns we explored how native communities often have their own traditional environmental practices, and their efficacy goes hand in hand with the health of their languages and cultures. Thus agencies like the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) should approach the preservation of habitats, languages, and cultures as a holistic whole.

Around the world, language and culture are increasingly being involved in environmental work. In Australia, ethnobiological knowledge has been tapped to characterize threatened and extinct species, with an emphasis to reclaim this knowledge, the native languages that describe it, and in some cases facilitate the reintroduction of lost species (McConvell & Thieberger 2001). Similar research is oriented towards how Indigenous knowledge and language maintenance can help preserve biological diversity through fostering beneficial human-environment relationships. One important aspect of these ethnobiological researches is that Indigenous people are some of the active investigators, being trained in the relevant disciplines and are native speakers of the groups being studied (Ellis 2000; Dobson 2000).

We in the Philippines should follow their lead. Native languages continue to be a neglected source of environmental information and capacity-building. Reaching out to indigenous people and involving them in ethnobiological research would support multiple goals: to uncover new undocumented information about the environments we are trying to protect; to make this information accessible to wider audiences; to affirm, instill pride in, and revitalize native languages and traditions; and to engage local communities in determining suitable conservation plans that find inspiration from both international and indigenous practices.

As a specific example, if managing a national park, coordinating bodies should 1) record and display local names of species and geographical

features; 2) collect local information about animals and plants, such as breeding, migration, flowering, medicinal and other uses; 3) integrate native resource management in the formulation of conservation strategies; 4) ensure park activities such as tourism are not disruptive to the traditional livelihoods of locals; 5) educate outsiders on the role native knowledge has played and continues to play in the conservation of the specific locality; 6) provide support mechanisms for the continued transmission of the native language and environmental knowledge to local youth; and 7) as McConvell & Thieberger suggest, the maintenance of traditional ecological knowledge in language can be included as indicators in future State of the Environment reporting.

The Convention on Biological Diversity, which is managed by United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) and which grew out of the Rio Earth Summit of 1992, makes specific reference to the need to protect the world's Indigenous cultures and traditions as bulwarks against environmental degradation.

The positive relationship between indigenous groups and the environment is even evident at large scales. Recent research (Posey ed. 2001) makes the tantalizing observation that areas of the world with a wealth of wildlife often coincide with areas of great linguistic diversity. Does this mean that biological diversity fuels a proliferation of different human groups to fill the many biological niches, or does a medley of human groups promote biological diversity? I surmise both processes are at work. The former proposition is intuitive. With regards to the latter, it makes equal sense that having so many different communities, each shaping their purlieu in unique ways, would promote the development of divergent characteristics across habitats over time, and thus biodiversity at a grand scale.

Given the parallels between language diversity and biological diversity, some scholars and language activists actually refer to the concept of "language ecologies." Languages encompass all the complex interactions that exist in a community. Language domains--- like government, media, education, market, in the home, pillow talk, etc---are different niches or habitats. Languages can be revitalized, degrade, become

mixed, or destroyed, just like real habitats. They can go through long periods of relative stasis or otherwise be in rapid flux. They can lose their worth to the beings (humans) that inhabit them, who may chose to 'migrate' to another language. And for all the complexity that is one language, there are 6000 others of different sizes, histories, and prospects that overlap and affect one another. Languages are the endemic species spawned by humans, while simultaneously being the mental habitats in which we operate.

While I think the “linguistic ecology” analogy can only be stretched so far, it presents the issue of language loss in terminology that the public is familiar with (since environmentalism has grown in prominence over the last half century). The analogy helps to convey why, just like the environment, we can't afford to let our languages go...or at least not without a proper conversation about it.