

## PHILIPPINE MINOR LANGUAGES AND LANGUAGE PLANNING

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It is a pleasure and a privilege to talk before you today to discuss the subject of Philippine minor languages and language planning (LP). I am specially pleased to have been invited because of my being considered a son of Kankana-ey speaking peoples. I am proud of my minority language background. It has made my life richer. I look back with a great deal of happiness to the mountain provinces and the people who speak their minor languages.

When we speak of minor languages (ML), I suggest that the focus be on the people who speak them. Such a concern for minor languages is a manifestation of our concern for the people who speak them. This will give us the proper perspective or at least a much better view when we talk of LP involving minor Philippine languages. It is appropriate that the theme of this Congress is the Philippine minor languages and the Filipino. Allow me to congratulate the organizers of this congress for the choice of the theme.

It is a good idea if we try, at the outset, to understand what we mean by language planning. In its broadest sense, LP is what a people do or what a nation does with language or languages. We may treat language as a resource, one of the most important resources. However, in LP the presence of too many minor languages may become a problem or a burden.



LP may be well-planned, well-financed, and pursued with vigor. LP may be engaged in by government through its legislature, its executive branch, and supported by the judiciary. LP may also be under the auspices of a private organization, a group, or by individuals.

We may look at Philippine minor languages in a negative way: any Philippine language that is not Cebuano, Tagalog, Ilocano, Hiligaynon, Waray, Kapampangan, Bikol, or Pangasinan is a minor language. You will please note at once that all major Philippine languages are spoken by Christian Filipinos. These constitute approximately 85 to 90% of the total Philippine population (1975 census). One of the main characteristics of a minor Philippine language is that it is spoken by less than 700,000 people (1975 figures). Another characteristic is that it does not have an extensive written literature.

Aside from the foregoing characteristics, what is the most important difference between a major Philippine language and a minor one? In my opinion, the most important difference is in how the government and other people treat the speakers of the minor language: the speakers of major languages have many advantages. For example, when the government translates important official documents into the Philippine languages other than Pilipino, the major languages get top priority. The Surian ng Wikang Pambansa translates many documents and papers for dissemination into the more important Philippine languages; never in very minor Philippine languages.

In the language of the common people and in Pilipino: "kawawa naman



ang mga speakers ng minor languages". They never seem to count in most planning, including LP.

This kind of treatment, of course, is not unfamiliar. The big and the powerful always have the best of everything. Most plans are for the 85-90% speakers of major languages. The possible exception to this are those in the Muslim areas but this is not due to the language they speak as we all know.

One of the most important difficulties that we face in treating minor Philippine Languages in LP is the lack of accurate information on ML on such important matters as 1) number of speakers, 2) where they live, 3) whether they want their languages maintained or are abandoning them in favor of a regional or local lingua franca (for example, many speakers of languages in the mountain provinces speak Iloko), 4) the kind of support both from government and the people themselves in "propagating" the language, for example the kind of literature that may be available in these languages.

The major sources of information on minor languages (as well as major languages) are the 1) official census taken by the Philippine government and 2) the work of linguistic scholars. As McFarland has pointed out (1980:8-9) the census figures are inaccurate for a number of reasons among the most important of which are 1) the people responding may not really know what is being asked or they may be giving different names for the same language or vice versa and 2) census takers are not really that informed on languages and (3) many speakers of minor languages are missed



by census takers because they live in remote communities.

It is in the area of accuracy that scholars such as those in the Summer Institute of Linguistics and Ernesto Constantino and his associates at the UP, to give one very good example, are needed. There is therefore much work to do just on accuracy of information and other data on minor languages if we are to engage in LP for the people who speak them.

To give you an example in the accuracy or inaccuracy of data, I will give figures on two very important so-called minor languages: Maranao and Magindanao. The 1975 census puts the speakers for Maranao as 602,613 and Magindanao as 503,097. A 1981 figure given by Allen quoting figures by Parshall gives Maranao 670,000 (an increase of roughly 68,000 people in six years) whereas for Magindanao it is 674,000 or an increase of 171,000 persons or almost three times that of Maranao.

It seems to me that soon Maranao and Magindanao may have to be declared major languages, making ten major languages instead of only eight. This will be good for many reasons - at least two major languages are spoken by many who profess the Muslim faith.

The 1973 Philippine Constitution is supposed to be translated into languages that are spoken by at least 50,000 people. Inasmuch as the census figures would be the basis for determining the languages, the Constitution would be translated only in 27 minor languages with a total population of 4,997,023 (1975 census quoted in McFarland 1980:14-15). The constitution would not be available to speakers of 37 minor



languages with a population of 474,394 or about half a million people. If you count those that were not included in the "net" of the census, the number can be much bigger.

That may not be a big number but if you think of the fact that these are the people who live in the mountains, in the hills, they are important. We need to communicate with our people who live in the hills because in these troubled times, the hills are very very important.

In my opinion, one of the most fruitful ways of discussing LP especially with reference to minor Philippine languages is to discuss LP in terms of language domains. Some of the most important domains of language are

- the home
- the community
- religion
- education
- government
- the courts and the law
- business and industry
- science and technology
- mass communication
- the military
- entertainment

Historically, LP with the use of the Philippine languages may be said to have started in the domain of religion with the learning of



the Philippine languages (dialects in the literature) by the Spanish friars to teach the Christian doctrine to the inhabitants of the Philippines formerly called derisively as indios (the term Filipino having been reserved to refer to Spaniards born in the Philippines).

I have no data on how many and which Philippine languages were learned by the friars and which were used to teach Christianity. I suggest that a student of Philippine languages do this for a term paper.

This tradition of using the local languages in the domain of religion has continued in Philippine life. There are three traditions in this regard: that of the Catholic church which went from partial use of the local language to full use when the Vatican finally allowed the use of the vernaculars in the mass so that today, it is possible to say the entire mass and all other transactions in the local language; 2) earlier of course the Aglipayan church conducted their religious rites in the local language thus antedating the Catholics by more than half a century; 3) most of the Protestant religious denominations including the Iglesia ni Cristo have used the local languages; and finally 4) the scientific study of the minor languages exclusively to bring the Bible to speakers of these languages, the most important of which is that by the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

Allow me to digress here a little regarding the work of the Summer Institute of Linguistics. A recent visitor to the Philippines, Professor Conrad Brann of Nigeria, questioned the wisdom or advisability of translating the bible into a language that is spoken by as few as less than



a thousand people. I told him that while I am not aware of the rationale of the SIL, I personally and professionally consider their work important. In the process of such translations, the languages which face the possibility of extinction are recorded. The SIL work is therefore a contribution to scholarship. Another reason I gave is the availability of God's Word in the people's native languages it would mean more to them. I do not know whether this kind of justification satisfies those in the SIL but that is what I told Dr. Brann.

Let us now address ourselves to some of the most important LP activities with special reference to Philippine minor languages.

The first major language planning activity that involved the entire Philippines in this century was the decision to use the English language in the education of the Filipinos at the turn of the century. In this decision, all the Philippine languages were set aside, none considered fit for the education of Filipinos on a national scale.

The second event of the utmost importance was made in 1936 when the Institute of National Language was established for the primary purpose of building a national language. In this historic move a token statement was made implying a consideration of the minor languages in the following words: "The National Language Institute shall make a study of the Philippine dialects in general for the purpose of evolving and adopting a common national language. . ." (Commonwealth Act No. 184 approved Nov. 13, 1936: Section 5.) However, the minor languages were



ignored by the same law by providing that the INL would "...make a study and survey of each of the chief tongues of the Philippines at present spoken by at least half a million inhabitants." (CA 184: Section 5(1).) From the best accounts of what really took place, this was not even done. From that day on, the minor languages have received the scantest official attention in terms of LP.

It is in the domain of education that the minor languages have received the most attention in LP. Beginning in 1939 when the late Jorge Bocobo declared that the vernaculars may be used as an auxiliary medium of instruction, the various Philippine languages have attained more importance in the education of the child. Even in this regard, however, the minor Philippine languages have practically been ignored. When the Philippine government with the aid of the U.S. Agency for International Development printed books in the local language, only thirteen languages were used - the major languages plus five of the minor languages. This project was discontinued, however, when the money was all used up.

What may be considered the golden years of LP in education for the minor languages were the years from 1957 to 1974 when they were used as medium of instruction in the first two grades. There is no accurate data, however, on how many Philippine languages were actually used in the education of the child. A study on this subject would be good for a M.A. thesis or a doctoral dissertation if properly planned and undertaken in depth. Some student of language and education should



really "revisit" the use of Philippine languages during this golden period. Today the local language is relegated to the status of auxiliary medium of instruction in the first four grades.

While it may be true that linguistics has very little to say on the teaching of language, there is one thing that a knowledge of the structure and grammar of a language can do for teaching and teachers: the knowledge will make a teacher understand the difficulties of a student learning a second language because of his first language. If only for this understanding, which is so important in education, that is enough.

One cannot talk of the use of language in the education domain without saying something about the intellectualization of that language. The reason English is used in Philippine schools aside from the fact that it was imposed on us in the beginning is that it is only in English that we may be able to get a full education in any discipline or area of knowledge at present. This is where Pilipino falls short: it is not yet intellectualized in many domains of language; many of the most important disciplines are not available in Pilipino. Physics, chemistry, mathematics, the most important of the social sciences including linguistics, sociology, the law and others are not available in Pilipino. So that Pilipino may be used as the main language of instruction in Philippine schools it needs to be intellectualized as rapidly as possible.

It is clear that no minor Philippine language will ever be intellectualized. Most of those that have been reduced to writing will there-



fore be good only for the initial education of the child — for the child to learn his alphabet and the initial notions of numeracy and writing. After that, the minor language has to give way to a partially intellectualized language which has to be learned because of nationalism and national unity and to an intellectualized language for the higher mental processes. This is a sad fact but part of the reality of life that we have been confronted with for many years.

In the other language domains such as those of international business and industry, the courts and the law, science and technology, the minor languages will practically have no part. Because of this harsh fact, the speakers of minor languages are doomed to the use of an imposed language, English, for the higher mental activities and to a national language in which their language will hopefully play some part in its building.

In the meantime I reiterate that our knowledge and information on minor languages should be improved so that any kind of planning in which they have to play a part will be done on a more intelligent and much more humanitarian basis. I suggest that a Committee on the Study of Philippine Minor Languages be formed. Count me as an applicant for membership. The speakers of very minor languages are truly at a disadvantage: not only are their lands being taken away from them, but also their languages.

Because of this, scholars like you must study their languages and their lives so that if someday these languages will lose their last



speakers as what happened with some American Indian languages, we will have a record of them.

Finally, this perhaps is the most important matter regarding LP with people who speak minor languages: What is it that we or the government want to do with speakers of minor languages: 1) do we want them to come to the fold of so-called civilized society, or 2) should we just allow them to live their own lives the way they have always lived, free - not even paying taxes, not even building schools for them because the school as we conceive it and run it and use it may not be what they really want, or 3) shall we do something between these two extremes? If so, what should be done? If we are to bring the school to them and that seem to be the policy, what is it that should be taught to them in terms of language? If English is to be taught to them, should we not make it possible for them to really benefit from learning such a language? If it is Pilipino, how should it be done? These and a host of other questions must be answered when we deal with speakers of minor languages.

We must engage the best scholarship to help find answers to these questions.

To all students of Philippine minor languages I extend my appreciation and best wishes. For the opportunity to say these things I want to thank you very much. To Ernie Constantino, linguistic scholar and friend, and his associates at the University of the Philippines go my most fervent thanks.



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