"Viva Kay Señor Sto. Nino!": Towards a Critical English Language Studies in the Philippines

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This paper is concerned primarily with a critique of modern linguistics, especially the assumptions upon which the English Language Studies Program of the University of the Philippines is based. It problematizes the basic tenets of modern linguistics to foreground socioculturally relevant nuances in the use of English (and other languages for that matter) in the country.

It sets out to perform three tasks. First, it critically explores some of the major ideas of modern linguistics as taught in an English Language Studies Program in the Philippines. Second, it will give an example of a critical linguistic analysis in the context of newspaper headlines culled from *The Philippine Daily Inquirer*. The last part explores the implications of a critical English language studies for culturally relevant texts such as the Ati-atihan Festival of Kalibo, Aklan — specifically, the most dominant linguistic text the Ati-atihan has produced: the institutionalized "*Viva kay Señor Sto. Niño! Viva!*".

English Language Studies in the Philippines

One of the first things I learned as an English language major in the University was this: "Linguistics is descriptive, not prescriptive". All studies I have done have been grounded in this very powerful and far-reaching axiom. Most books on linguistics that I came across also invoked, explicitly or implicitly, the same axiom (*e.g.*, Fries, Hockett). The major courses in English language I have taught also used this as a guiding principle. But is linguistics really descriptive, not prescriptive? Do we really have a clear dichotomy between description and prescription everytime we do language analysis? Or, is linguistics just a one-norm observing and value-judging discipline masquerading as an objective, impartial one?

A language description has for its purpose an analysis of

language supposedly without value judgments. "Leave language alone", descriptivists would say (*e.g.*, Hall). This means that a descriptive linguist is not interested in whether a particular language use is good or bad, or correct or wrong. As Tannen puts it, "(u)nlike grammarians, we don't tell anyone how they **should** speak; rather, we try to account for the ways they **do** speak" (12). Thus, for example, if Filipinos use "cope up with," instead of "cope with," or "result to," instead of "result in," then that's the way it is.

Language prescription, on the other hand, is supposed to be everything that language description is not. It passes value judgments on language by invoking authority or power as the source of correctness in the use of language. In fact, "use" is a misnomer in this kind of approach. "Usage" is a better word, implying that we should use language not according to how people use it, but according to what experts of the language consider the correct way of using it. It does not matter, therefore, that more and more Filipinos use "cope up with" and "result to"; these are still unacceptable idioms because they do not conform with Standard English and are, therefore, wrong. Prescriptivists tell us that there must be some kind of authority that we must consult to maintain order in language. Correctness in the usage of language is the basic criterion for prescription.

The discourse of objectivity and the discourse of value are then what define language description and language prescription respectively. Linguistics is defined by what it is not. If the dichotomy is broken down, it loses its ground and becomes something else. In following paragraphs, I will explain how linguistics, with its descriptive nature, is actually another form of prescriptivism almost always passing value judgments on the "object" of its study: language. I hope to help reorientate the objectives of linguistics in order for it to respond more critically, socially, and politically to the current demands of uses of English in the Philippines and, in general, uses of language around the world besieged by sociolinguistic struggles between speakers, instances of policy control over language planning and education, and marketized and technologized uses of discourses (Fairclough). Of course, in order to do this, so much of linguistics

needs to be problematized.

Let me start with the following question: Why does linguistics value description? The answer to this can be traced back to its affinity with objectivity which is, in turn, greatly influenced by the academic prestige bestowed upon any analysis and research in the scientific tradition (Cameron 83; Hocket in Joseph 55). The scientific revolution, engendered in part by Darwin's theory of evolution, brought science to the forefront of intellectual life and was therefore given primary status over other fields, including the liberal arts and humanities. It is, in fact, one of the two "significant changes in the course of human history", the other one being the 'technological revolution' of the Iron Age (Halliday and Martin 10). Perhaps thus, Chomsky says, the term 'science' is "honorific" (*Language and Responsibility* 106). This is the reason why linguistics had to abstract language from its sociocultural contexts so that it could be studied and systematized in detail (Ventola 11, 16). Meaning in language was deprivileged because it could prove counterproductive to this process of systematization. Meanings can defy logic. They are messy and, in many ways, unpredictable (Birch 169). Science brings order to chaos, not the other way around. Linguistics thus repudiated the role of meaning in language analysis. This does not mean that linguistics denied the existence of meaning in language; it simply did not consider it helpful in any form of analysis, again because its inclusion will contribute to the destabilization of linguistics and will thus make it "unscientific" .

Three of the greatest proponents of this kind of linguistics (descriptive, objective, or scientific), Ferdinand de Saussure, Leonard Bloomfield, and Noam Chomsky, therefore worked within the scientific ideological context of their time (Banfield in Milner 33-5). This led Saussure to call for the study of "langue", not "parole". Langue is the social aspect of language which is beyond the control of the individual. Parole is the individual aspect of language which the individual can control. It becomes clear therefore why he considered parole as beyond the concerns of his linguistics; certainly he thought it existed, but it could not be the object of linguistic inquiry because it could not be systematized. It will likewise help us to understand this better

when we learn that Saussure was, first and foremost, an advocate of scientificity whose specialization was in the history of sound changes in the Indo-European family of languages (Hodge and Kress, *Social* 15). Despite the fact that he later on abandoned history in favor of society as the perspective from which language could be studied (a pivotal paradigm shift since this "initiated" modern linguistics [Stern 121]), he still brought with him scientific tools with which to study language.

Bloomfield was also steadfast in his belief that language should be objectified for it to be studied fully. Meaning had to be completely separated from linguistic study. He treated language like a laboratory specimen to be torn apart and studied piece by piece in a vacuum. Like a scientist, therefore, a linguist studies language "impartially", as if it were possible to be neutral one day and biased the next. For similar reasons, Chomsky privileged linguistic competence over linguistic performance. Competence, a speaker's ability to use language, could lend itself easily to systematization because it is governed by underlying rules which all speakers of the language share. This is the motivation behind his description of language using the ideal speaker-listener who is both a member of a completely homogenous community and who knows his/her language perfectly (*Aspects* 3). It is in this light that Chomsky is likewise aligned with modern linguistics, despite the fact that his Transformational-Generative Grammar, a theory of language built on the agenda that knowledge of a language could be explicitly made, was also a revolutionary move away from Saussure and Bloomfield's structuralist linguistics. Of course, even this move is also arguable because much of his work is also structuralist in orientation (Joseph 68). In fact, as Halliday puts it, his work was anything but revolutionary (*Introduction* xxviii).

What all these have to do with our concern in this part of the paper, which is to show that linguistics is also a form of prescriptivism, is to put descriptivism in its critical perspective in order for us to denaturalize its status in linguistics. That is, description is not a commonsensical, natural approach to language study and is also governed by social and ideological factors. It is therefore not difficult to understand why linguistics

and descriptivism may not necessarily and completely be locked together. Moreover, if we describe a particular language use, then we will be inclined to acknowledge the fact that our decision not to be involved in value judgment is rooted not in the practice of linguistics itself, but in a larger context dictated somehow by the sociohistorical valorization of science.

Can linguistic items then be "truly" described? Here then lies the contradiction. For, if these items are subjected to a descriptive analysis of language, which finds its origin in scientificity, then systematization has got much to do with it. This is not always explicit in any language description, but much of it really has something to do with systematization, with the establishment of norms. Language descriptions, after all, no matter how objective they are, still "must be" normative in orientation because, in order for them to be accurate, they still need to coincide with the norm of the community where the language in question is spoken (Milroy in Cameron, *Verbal* 7). To put it in another way, a language description has to be true, and to be true is to say that it is normative; it cannot say otherwise because, if this happens, then it may mean that description here is a description of those deviances which linguistics has attempted to disregard. These deviances, or anti-norms, are linguistic realities that defy convention, and which thus pose a problem to the scientific or systematic urge of linguistics. Anti-norms are called such precisely because they are not norms. Can linguistics describe anti-norms? Certainly. But it has to do it within its scope; that is, it can describe anti-norms for as long as it seeks to find a possible underlying system that governs their use. Anti-norms are chaotic, and linguistics has to bring it order. Either way (whether to describe anti-norms or norms) linguistics, to remain itself, has to be normative.

Thus, in its desire to be anti-prescriptive and objective, linguistics nevertheless slides into prescriptivism by invoking norms of language use. Of course, it is unlike prescriptivism because the latter is explicit in its agenda to form rules of usage with which all language users must conform. Prescriptivism invokes correctness through authority, while descriptivism invokes correctness through norms of language use. But it is like

prescriptivism simply because both are rooted in the notion of correctness. If, say in teaching English, we tell our students that it is appropriate to use English in a particular way in a specific context, we do so because we (perhaps informed by linguistics) have found that such use of English in this context is the norm. It is how people in this context **use** English and, therefore, this is how we **should use** it. The difference between use and usage therefore should not be grounded in whether one is descriptive or prescriptive; it should rather be taken from the source from which correctness is derived: use, if correctness is derived from the norms of language use; usage, if correctness emanates from a perceived authority.

Still another crucial point to consider is the fact that language descriptions per se have biases towards certain theories of language. Although Saussure, Bloomfield, Chomsky, even (to some extent) Halliday and the functional linguists, and the early discourse analysts, all employed descriptive approaches to language, they still differed in the way they treated language. Saussure considered language as a semiotic system. Bloomfield viewed language as an object, thus also his scientific approach. Chomsky studied language as a system of formalized rules, not as a symbolic system. Halliday's view of language was paradigmatic, where it is defined as a system of meanings emanating from the system of choices. Likewise, other functional linguists (Halliday and Hasan), and discourse analysts (Sinclair and Coulthard, Brown and Yule, Hoey, Stubbs) also described language according to its functions, sometimes not only within itself, but also within its larger sociocultural context. Thus, language descriptions here, no matter how objective they can be, still project varying (in fact, competing) points-of-view about language. "The point is that", Cameron contends, "both prescriptivism and anti-prescriptivism invoke certain norms and circulate particular notions about how language ought to work" (*Verbal* 8).

Perhaps one of the greatest contradictions in linguistics is best exemplified by Chomsky. In one of his landmark books, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, he remarks: "Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal-speaker listener, in a

completely homogenous speech-community, who knows his language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors (random or characteristic) in applying his knowledge of the language in actual performance" (3). His notion of language, concretized by his transformational-generative grammar, is thus limited to aspects that can be formalized and/or systematized. It is therefore understandable that his theory is primarily a syntactic one, because anything beyond the sentence — paragraph or discourse — is hard put to fulfill the generative requirement that grammars have to be perfectly explicit (Botha 9). Syntactic transformations (say, from active to passive sentences) are also therefore accorded the status of fundamental units of linguistic structure (Botha 9). What is likewise implicit here, however, is the view of language as autonomous or separate from society and history, a notion which Halliday and Martin reject because "the history of language is not separate from the rest of human history" (10); and likewise a notion which Voloshinov opposes because the utterance, the most basic unit of language, is "a social phenomenon" (124) and, thus, language is a free-flowing process "implemented in the social-verbal interaction of speakers" (143). It is in this context that Fowler refers to Chomsky's transformational-generative theory as a kind of "autonomous linguistics" ("Critical" 5).

In this light, Chomsky's privileging of linguistic competence over linguistic performance is consistent with his belief that language is abstract and must be studied through an "ideal speaker-listener". Competence refers to this speaker-listener's knowledge of the language, while performance refers to his/her actual use of this knowledge. The dichotomy is striking because it is explicit in its agenda to highlight some aspects of language while downplaying the others; it thus perpetuates the Saussurean existence of a binary opposition which Chomsky calls competence/performance which is similar to the form/meaning opposition. The advent of functional linguistics, specifically Halliday's systemic-functional linguistics, which has a long history that can be traced back to the influences of the Prague School (*e.g.,* Mathesius' Functional Sentence Perspective) and the British Tradition (*e.g.,* Firthian linguistics and

Malinowski's "context of situation"), has long problematized this binary opposition (Berns 1-24). This is echoed by later linguists involved in ideological and political analysis (*e.g.*, Hoey, Kress, Krishnamurthy, Morrison, Van Leewen, Wodak) who, "unlike Chomsky, feel that it is indeed part of their professional role to investigate, reveal and clarify how power and discriminatory values are inscribed in and mediated through the linguistic system..." (Caldas-Coulthard xi).

Chomsky's transformational-generative grammar is descriptive, but ultimately explanatory. It attempts to help explain the following basic 'mentalistic' questions necessary for the understanding of the nature and properties of the human mind: (1) What constitutes knowledge of language?; (2) How is knowledge of language acquired?; (3) How is knowledge of language put to use? (Botha 3). His theory of language is (allegedly) not prescriptive; it does not tell us how we should speak. I question this matter, however; in fact, many others much earlier have revealed the underlying contradiction or paradox in his theory. For one, the theory constructs a kind of grammar that valorizes norms and standards while blatantly dismissing the others as "grammatically irrelevant conditions". This is one instance of value judgment which cannot be automatically gleaned from the theory's 'surface structure'. Since an individual's speech or use of language is determined by his/her access to norms of the language in question, this social position thus gives or denies him/her access to the norm of the language in question. Since Chomsky through his TG reifies a language that reinforces the linguistic status quo, he likewise thus tacitly denies the existence of social heterogeneity and cultural diversity, especially as they relate directly to language use. Because his language is not "heteroglossic", borrowing Bakhtin's term for a socially pluralistic language (195-224), his transformational-generative grammar (or, generally, his theory of language) thus "participates in a repressive, police-state politics" (Henkel 88): since Chomskyan linguistics acknowledges only nonpoetic, well-formed sentence meanings (Henkel 88), and that it can be likened to what Fish calls a "theoretical machine" to which a rule follower "surrenders his judgment" (in Henkel 88), the generative grammar thus "becomes associated

with the evils of a computerized world" (Henkel 88). Chomsky's language is one which, in Fowler's words, "contributes to inequality" ("Power" 62).

These underlying messages from Chomsky's theory of language are to me very enlightening in my experience as an English language studies practitioner in the Philippines. For one, Chomsky's idealized speaker "who knows his language perfectly" is not Filipino who may make his/her mark on the English language. In fact, his idealized English is never Filipino English. It is American Standard English spoken in a "completely homogenous environment" (read: excluding native speakers who do not speak the standard form). In possibly all counts, the theory does not acknowledge the existence of not only English as spoken in the Philippines, but also the socioculturally significant uses of English by speakers of other languages. To me this explains why research and scholarship in English language studies in the Philippines (apart from English language teaching) have not progressed as much as they should have; because the theoretical frameworks used in the study and analysis of English in the Philippines have been those (and not just Chomsky's) which abstract the language from its context and, worse, those which compel us to genuflect in front of an idealized native speaker of English with whom we Filipinos do not share many social and historical experiences.

What is more interesting than all these criticisms is the fact that Chomsky has long moved into the political matrix of equality and justice for the world. Similar to the criticisms above, Chomsky rallies against capitalism, inequality, deception, racism, and other forms of discrimination. Since the early 1970's to the present, he has spoken against evils in society some of which his theory of language might have perpetuated. Some of these books are: *Peace in the Middle East: Reflections on Justice and Nationhood, Turning the Tide: U.S. Intervention in Central America and the Struggle for Peace, On Power and Ideology: the Managua Lectures, Language and Politics, Media Control: The Spectacular Achievements of Propaganda,* and *Chronicles of Dissent.* Chomsky implicitly admits the contradictions between the politically oppressive implications of his theory of language and the

liberative avowals of his discourses on politics and society, when he claims that there is very little connection between his formal syntactic theory and his other political convictions (see *Language and Responsibility*). Henkel feels that this is a "mistake" whose possible outcome is "a final dismissal not just of generative grammar but of the political work of someone who in the context of criticism has come to seem possibly naive" (93). Caldas-Coulthard and Coulthard in their preface as editors to a pioneering book *Texts and Practices: Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis*, probably express most appropriately and clearly what I have been concerned with in the previous many paragraphs:

> One of the paradoxes of modern linguistics is that its most distinguished practitioner, Noam Chomsky, although world-famous as a political activist and campaigner, professes no professional interest in language in use — neither in analyzing the speeches, committee meetings, letters, memos and books which he claims are subverting the democratic process, nor in reflecting on his own highly effective rhetoric (xi).

Chomsky has constructed a language of oppression while calling for an end to it. Despite his explanatory and "purely descriptive aims" (Henkel 91), Chomsky slides into prescriptivism or a fabrication (though implicit and unconscious it may be) of a rule-centered theory of language. This is one powerful force which linguistics has continuously suppressed and denied. This is the 'other', in the Bakhtinian sense, which has always been 'there' and whose restrained presence we can now set free in order for real dialogue, not forced dialogue (Danow 133) which allows one to exert authority over another, to ensue between this 'other' and linguistics. In self-negation, linguistics finds itself in the form of its other.

Must linguistics prescribe then? This is a question that needs more explanation. First, I advocate a kind of linguistics which makes value judgments, but which does not prescribe. Prescription, precisely because of linguistics' strong stance against it, has always been associated with authority, power, conservatism, and elitism (Cameron 9). It is for this reason that Cameron coins the term "verbal hygiene" to refer to both

description and prescription as aspects of just a single normative activity, which is a "struggle to control language by defining its nature" (8). A study of language thus viewed is a study of verbal hygiene practices, how they are formed in discourses and become naturalized, where they come from, and how they are negotiated and resisted (17). In the context of the Philippines, this implies that the study of language in the country must critically look into some manners in which language is used consciously or unconsciously to confuse, deceive, or control other people. This requires decisive attention on the languages of popular culture (advertisements, comics, customs, etc.) media (newspapers, newscasts, etc.) politics (speeches, propaganda materials, etc.) business, and law. All these — must be put under greater linguistic scrutiny. With the country's shift from dictatorship to democracy, we are seeing more and more instances of power and control carried out through discursive means, and not through forceful intimidation and threat.

I am drawing connections here between the study of verbal hygiene practices and the sociocultural and critical approaches to the study of language in the tradition of critical linguistics (Fowler *et al.*; Birch; Fowler, *Linguistic*, "Critical"), critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk, Fairclough, Caldas-Coulthard and Couthard), feminist stylistics (Mills), social semiotics (Hodge and Kress, *Social*); as well as the study of language in the context of social linguistics (Gee). All these are politically-motivated approaches to the study of language beyond descriptivism. Because they view language as a practice that "contributes to inequality", they all have an explanatory and critical agenda dedicated to an emancipatory language studies. Thus, courses or fields of study like English in the Professions, English in Media, and English in Pop Culture, specifically in the Philippines, will sit perfectly well within this critical framework. I believe that, for English language studies to be relevant in the Philippines (as well as anywhere where English has had a history of colonial power and control), we need to reorient English language studies programs to accommodate those which enable us to understand, scrutinize, explain, and show the various sociocultural and political nuances, tensions, and conflicts that construe and are construed by English language use in the

Philippines.

English in the News: A Critical Linguistic Analysis

The term 'critical linguistics' involves a tradition associated primarily with some scholars from the University of East Anglia in Great Britain. Prominent figures include Roger Fowler, Robert Hodge, Gunther Kress, and Tony Trew. Their book *Language and Control* initiated the birth of critical linguistics and encouraged more research geared towards contextualized and politically-motivated language analyses. Thus, Fowler defamiliarizes "literary" texts in *Linguistic Criticism*; Hodge and Kress extend critical linguistics to cover other semiotic systems in *Social Semiotics*; and Mills draws likewise on critical linguistics to construct her own theory of language in *Feminist Stylistics*. Critical discourse analysis also capitalizes in part on the limitations of (syntax-based) critical linguistics in broadening the scope of discourse analysis (Caldas-Coulthard and Coulthard).

Critical linguistics is dedicated to a belief that "there are strong and pervasive connections between linguistic structure and social structure" (Fowler *et al.*, 185). For them, syntax is never neutral and innocent. This is a direct assault on modern linguistics which deprivileges meaning for the sake of science and objectivity, and seeks to create "idealized worlds, not actual worlds" (Birch 150).

Critical linguists furthermore argue that our perception of the world comes from our relation to the institutions and socio-economic structure of our society. Our ideology is "linguistically mediated" (Birch 150), and thus becomes dangerous if we remain unaware of the ideological constraints constructed by the structures of the languages that we speak. All of us have been socialized into systems of beliefs which manifest largely in our use of language. Thus, for Fowler, we need to demystify our own use of English (and other languages for that matter) by exposing habitualized biases and ideologies that reside in and determine language use (*Linguistic* 27-37). He sees language as a social practice that crystallizes and stabilizes ideas (18) which originate from and are authorized by "the dominant interests of

the culture" of the people who speak it (30).

What draws me to critical linguistics is its focus on language in context. Specifically, it offers me an opportunity to study English language use in the Philippines because of its interest in individual uses of the language, as opposed to the abstractions that characterize modern language approaches to the analysis of texts. Critical linguistics has a workable and practical framework that allows a contextualized, more socially relevant linguistics to function, as in the case of an English language program studies in the University of the Philippines.

In the 17 June 1997 issue of *The Philippine Daily Inquirer*, the appearance of two news headlines gives us a very interesting case for a critical linguistic analysis. The biggest headline, occupying the third to sixth column, reads: "Palace blamed for listing snafu". On the left, occupying the first two columns, reads: "Erap belittles FVR forecast".

The juxtaposition of the headlines is, of course, politically-motivated because of the context in which it appears. The President and the Vice President belong to different political parties concerned with the 1998 Presidential Elections. Although President Ramos will no longer seek the presidency, he is still actively engaged in the campaign for support of an "anointed" administration candidate who will continue his programs of action as soon as he vacates his office next year. Vice President Estrada, on the other hand, who is not the administration candidate (at least, given the current political tide), hopes to gain the support of a few parties which have decided to field just one presidential candidate. Estrada is certainly a strong choice and a genuine threat to Ramos' administration party because of his consistently very high ratings in practically all surveys.

The political background against which the headlines in question are constructed is necessary to adequately expose the political biases of *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* as these motivations manifest in the writers' use of language. From a critical linguistic framework, the writers' syntax is not neutral and innocent; rather, they (through this syntax) construe a reality

that is relative to their own political biases. Being critical often of the Ramos administration, they construct headlines that largely manifest such biases.

In the Erap headline, "Erap" functions as the agent, "belittles" as the process involved, and "FVR forecast" as the affected entity. The headline places Erap in an active and dominant position/voice where he has something to act upon (FVR forecast). "FVR forecast", on the other hand, receives passively the process "belittles", thus completing the linearity of the "actor-process-acted upon" syntax of the headline. The newspaper has constructed for Erap a thematically significant position where he is the known or given entity and doer of an action which, from our perspective, is certainly politically meaningful.

In the other headline, the "Palace", which is almost usually associated with the president, likewise takes the same syntactic position as that of "Erap". It is similarly a thematically significant position because it functions as the known or the given entity of the headline. However, unlike Erap, the Palace does not act as an agent or the doer of an action. Rather, it receives the action "blamed" in the context of a circumstance "for listing snafu".

What is of great interest in this headline, however, is the absence of the actor or agent. If one asks "Who blamed the Palace for listing snafu?", s/he cannot get the answer right away, unless s/he starts to read the news. Indeed, the first paragraph starts with "Opposition leaders accused Malacañang and the Commission on Elections of engaging in a "grand conspiracy" to commit massive fraud in the 1998 elections...." Opposition leaders like Erap in the other headline could have been given the same agent or actor position; yet, *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* saw no need to put them in that position. "Who was being blamed" rather than "who blamed" was what mattered most to them. In the other headline, "who belittled" was considered most significant. In this sense, it is more than coincidence that those "grammatically disadvantaged" (FVR forecast and Palace) are opposed to the "grammatically advantaged" (Erap and

opposition leaders). Since syntax is never neutral and innocent, as has consistently been asserted in this paper, and since "judgments and choices we make in producing texts and making meanings are not arbitrary, but are institutionally and ideologically determined" (Birch 42), the language of the two supposedly neutral headlines of *The Philippine Daily Inquirer*, which claims to bring "Balanced News and Fearless Views", participates in the construction of reader-subject positio vis-a-vis the newspaper the writers' own political views on us through a careful handling of syntax.

"Viva Kay Señor Santo Niño!: A Critical Language Analysis"

The analysis above reveals interesting insights into the interplay of language and politics. The linguistic formations and political biases of *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* construct a view of language which is more complex than just linguistic determinism (where language determines our perception of the world) or mimesis (where language simply reflects reality). Language construes a reality (concretized here by how the syntax of the two headlines constructs its own rendering of the news events in question) in as much as the reality in question likewise construes language (concretized here again by the way the two news events, mediated by the political motivations of the writer/perceiver/interpreter, construct the syntax of the headlines).

I use newspaper headlines because these texts have dominated much of critical linguistic work since the publication of *Language and Control* in 1979; because I am introducing a theory which has concerned itself with a particular kind of text. Although Fowler does his linguistic criticism on "literary" texts, he still expounds on his theory by giving an analysis of newspaper headlines. He exemplifies this further in his book *Language in the News: Ideology in the Press*. The same is true of *Language as Ideology* (Hodge and Kress). Mills extends these concerns to the analysis of the language of news and advertising. In critical discourse analysis, issues in gender (*e.g.*, Morrison) and race (*e.g.*, Krisnamurthy, Wodak) emerge from discussions of texts from the media.

I must say, however, that critical linguistics (or even critical discourse analysis and feminist stylistics) has not adequately dealt with other culturally significant texts. These texts, like the one I will analyze below, are rooted not only in the ideological formations of a particular group of people (such as the editorial staff of *The Philippine Daily Inquirer*), but in the cultural histories of a people involved in customs and traditions like the Ati-atihan Festival.

Critical linguistics in the Philippines needs to broaden its scope to include linguistic materials that will help us better understand the implications (cultural, political, social, economic) of our customs and practices from which we may derive the construction of our identity as a people. A "critical language analysis" therefore is more encompassing than "critical linguistic analysis" because the former draws eclectically on a number of critical traditions within the study of language. It does (or should) not only deal with texts from the media, literature, the academe, and the professions, but also with cultural texts such as "*Viva kay Señor Sto. Niño!*".

I choose the Ati-atihan of Kalibo, Aklan as the context of my critical language analysis for many reasons. First, I am an Aklanon who was born into the Ati-atihan. I am therefore speaking as an insider who, having been socialized into its system of beliefs and practices, presumably would have completely been unaware of the nuances (especially sociolinguistic nuances) of the Ati-atihan. I also speak Aklanon, which is my first language, and thus understand how specific linguistic forms are appropriated in the context of the festival. Second, the specific text in question, "*Viva kay Señor Sto. Niño!*", is non-English; yet, I can show that the analysis of this text can also reveal significant insights into the nature of the Ati-atihan and our culture as a whole. A critical language analysis is a loose category because it does not confine itself to English texts. It works simply in a broad framework that treats language as ideology. We can therefore still use critical linguistics in as much as we can also frame our work within feminist stylistics, critical discourse analysis, social linguistics, and Bakhtinian linguistics,

although distinctions between these approaches should no longer heavily preoccupy any analysis. A simple critique of a language theory as it is read from a Filipino perspective may also be considered as a critical language analysis.

The theoretical problem with this loose framework is certainly obvious: it lacks the rigor and definitiveness of an established approach. But even if I can use any of the critical approaches above, as I did with the headlines, I believe that to impose a Western theory on a culture-specific linguistic text will defeat that whole enterprise of subverting dominant colonial discursive formations and practices in the country. Any theory, despite claims of emancipatory agenda, still directs us to approach a text from a given perspective; the labels and concepts it uses already connote a system of biases towards certain forms and meanings of the text in question.

One can refer to my MA Thesis which zeroes in on the analysis of classroom interactions from a critical linguistic framework. There I realized that, despite critiquing a Western theory of classroom discourses (Sinclair and Coulthard's Initiation-Response-Feedback Structure), a critical linguistic framework would still be inadequate because of its failure (or was it mine?) to historicize my analysis within a sociocultural perspective.

I therefore encourage any critical language analysis in the country because it has yet to gain ground. When we shall have produced ample work in this direction, then we could begin to construct our own framework of analysis. In cases when this framework may be tried out, we can then be assured that, at least, we begin from a Filipino perspective. Whether it will work or not should not be our present concern. All we need to do now is actually build interest in critical English language studies and to establish the belief that there is, indeed, some future for such language studies in the Philippines. This will enable us not only to examine uses of English in the Philippines, but also to 'retrieve' cultural nuances from these uses in order to create alternative 'Filipino' structures and meanings.

The text "*Viva kay Señor Sto. Niño!*" is an Ati-atihan chant that is heard almost from any group participating in the festival. Anybody can shout the chant, although one person may be assigned to do it in a group; the rest answer "*Viva!*" in unison as loud as they can while dancing and gyrating on the streets amidst a chaos of sounds of drums, horns, whistles, bamboos, cans, and even laughter. There is the element of camaraderie in the chant especially when "*Viva!*" comes from friends and acquaintances from different Ati-atihan groups who happen to cross their paths while dancing. In the Ati-atihan, unlike the other festivals like the *Sinulog* of Cebu, *Maskara* of Bacolod, and *Dinagyang* of Iloilo, there are no choreographed steps which only members of the group can perform; distances between groups and participants are largely not monitored. Participants also take on different directions so it is inevitable that groups will cross paths, merge their already chaotic sounds at one moment, change groups, and part ways only to meet again a little later.

The unpredictably of the Ati-atihan makes it an exceptionally interesting festival held annually on the third week of January, culminating on the third Sunday of the month. There is the belief that there are actually no spectators in the Ati-atihan because they can join any group anytime they want to, especially if they are pulled from the crowd by somebody in the group who may have known them before. Ati-atihan is the time when people cross boundaries and are brought together (psychologically, perhaps) by a shared "*Viva kay Señor Sto. Niño!*".

The text "*Viva kay Señor Sto. Nino!*" is linguistically intertextual to start with. "*Viva*" and "*Señor Sto. Nino!*" are Spanish words while "*kay*" is an Aklanon word. As I grew up in my hometown, I was made to believe that the Ati-atihan came about a few centuries before the Spanish came in the 1500's as a celebration that depicted the established bond between the Atis of the Island of Panay (composed of Akean, now Aklan; Irong-irong, now Iloilo; and Hamtik, now Antique) and the Bornean datus and their families who bought the island with a golden "salakot" in order to seek refuge from the harsh economic and

political maneuverings of a Bornean magistry. When the Spanish came, the celebration was supposed to have been appropriated in the context of Catholicism, thus the *"Sto. Niño"* in the phrase which refers to the Baby Jesus whose religious celebration in the Catholic calendar falls on the third Sunday of January coinciding with the mango season during which the 'original' Ati-atihan was supposed to have been celebrated. Of course, even if all this were true, it is still an uncritical account of the emergence of a Catholicized Ati-atihan because the Spanish appropriation of the festival should be seen beyond the mere merging of the two (local and Spanish) practices; the Catholicization of the Ati-atihan was a careful maneuvering to bring a colonial tool like religion into a local social practice to hasten the conversion of the people into Catholicism and, thus, their submission to a colonial power. *"Viva!"* concretely reveals this political nuance in the celebration because, being used mostly as a command during the Ati-atihan, it requires a referent or a recipient of an honor that befits the use of the word; in our context, the *Sto. Nino* receives that honor in as much as President Ramos, the Pope, the Aklan governor, or the province's fiesta queen, can receive it.

At the outset, then, *"Viva kay Señor Sto. Niño!"*, especially if it emanates from a designated leader of the group, already creates some kind of subject position from where we view the Ati-atihan festival. The celebration is a religious gathering mediated by local practices which are themselves historically produced. *"Viva!"* and *"Sto. Niño!"* are Spanish words loaded with biased perceptions of what the Ati-atihan is all about; in fact, they occupy the dominant positions in the chant compounded by the use of *"kay"* that now relates *"Viva!"* to *"Sto. Niño!"*. If translated to English, the chant would have sufficed even without *"kay"* because *"Viva Senor Sto. Niño!"* could already mean "Long Live Sto. Niño!" The existence of *'kay"* mediates between the two Spanish words although in an extremely problematic fashion.

For one, the chant with the *"kay"*, literally translated as "Long live to the Sto. Niño!", now presupposes an agent who should assume the burden of directly carrying the historico-

pragmatic properties of *"Viva!"* to the passivized yet dominant icon *"Sto. Niño"*. If put in context, this burden is assumed by those who, upon hearing the chant, answer *"Viva!"* in unison certainly oblivious to the colonial implications of the exchange. A few paragraphs back, I mentioned that the Spanish tactically "penetrated" Filipino practices and traditions such as the Ati-atihan to impose their own system of beliefs and practices on us; with *"Viva kay Señor Sto. Niño!"* they succeeded in doing so when the grammatically absent agent of the chant (now the revelers, normally Aklanons or Filipinos in general) lurks around the nuances of the structure, eternally yet inconspicuously present. With the chant, we are made to genuflect in front of a colonial icon without us consciously knowing that there is actually some force, colonial force, that pushes us towards a certain system of beliefs and practices in the guise of experiencing what we think are our own beliefs and practices.

The neutrality of language, syntax specifically, is here again problematized. Language is not a repository of culture and history. It **is** culture and history. Lest this be misinterpreted as reductive, I would like to stress that by the assertion I mean that we practice and experience our language as much as we do our culture and history. We can never completely escape from our language, culture, and history, although we can manage to establish some critical distance from them in order to realize that so much of our language and social practices actually did not come from us, but from others who certainly had their own agenda themselves. As if *"Viva kay Señor Sto. Niño!"* has not made this point, perhaps we can try a new version of the chant which has entered into the discourse of the Ati-atihan since the local elections a few years back: *"Viva Corazon!"* which means "Long live Corazon!", actually referring not to the heart, but to the first name of Aklan's former governor whose supporters must have seen the Ati-atihan in the same way as the Spaniards did centuries ago. It will therefore not be a surprise later to see the *Sto. Niño* being displaced by a more contemporary political icon. Or perhaps, they will both co-exist. Or perhaps, they will both die. My language —certainly not Chomsky's —will hopefully live to tell that story.

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