

BUILDING THE NATION WITH WORDS

Benigno C. Montemayor, Jr.

JEJEMON, WANGWANG, AND ENDO (2014)ⁱ are just three of the one hundred seven words culled by the Filipinas Institute of Translation (FIT) from thousands of other words that have gained currency in the past fourteen years and nine iterations of *Sawikaan: Salita ng Taon*—a project patterned after the American Dialect Society’s “Word of the Year” and similar programs. But what do these words mean and how were they chosen as *Salita ng Taon* among so many other words that have also become popular and widely used in the country? Why is there a *Salita ng Taon* in the first place? More importantly, what are the implications of these words vis-a-vis Philippine language, culture, nation, and nation-building?

In this paper, I will attempt to show that the concept of the Philippine nation and nation-building, as explored by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities*, where he defines “nation” as “an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (6), are *manifested and realized through language and culture*, particularly through the examination of FIT’s *Sawikaan: Salita ng Taon* project. I will first historicize the development of the Philippine national language through various legal provisions. This will be followed by a discussion on the cultivation and expansion of Filipino culture through a common education system. Finally, I will draw the links between language and culture to nation-building through the *Salita ng Taon* project.

THE BIRTH OF A NATION

Prior to 1565, there was no “Philippine nation” composed of more than 7,100 islands collectively named “Las Islas Filipinas” by Ruy Lopez de Villalobos after King Philip II of Spain (Philippine History; Anderson 166) but a polity of neighboring sultanates, rajahnates, kedatuans, and wangdoms independently governed by their respective authority figures (Philippine Republic). In 1898, Filipinas was turned over to the United States of America for \$20M.

Alarcon, Caplan, and Moallem note that the “breakup of the colonial world . . . proliferated the creation of nation-states” (3). With the USA ostensibly championing the emancipation of colonized territories, the Republic of the Philippines was born in 1946. The newly-emancipated state now needed to govern itself; and to maintain its sovereignty it had to identify itself as a “nation”—a geographical location with clearly-defined boundaries whose people possess a history, culture, and language(s) that distinguish them from other peoples in other territories.

The peoples of the Philippines of course have their own history, culture, and language(s) that distinguish them from other peoples in other territories. The complication, however, lies in the fact that *peoples* meant sub-groups within the nation who share loyalties (i.e., history, culture, language) that also distinguish them from other Philippine ethnolinguistic groups. There are the Bisaya, Tagalog, and Ilocano, to name just a few. It is therefore necessary for the Philippines to establish commonalities so that these ethnolinguistic groups would be able to identify with each other. Andres Cristobal Cruz (2015) succinctly illustrates this idea in his discussion of Philippine language, culture, and nation-building:

Developing Filipino language and culture, when planned and implemented as a national program for inculcating a sense of national purpose and unity, can be a challenging project for strengthening the national identity. It can also make the advocacy for an understanding of the relationship of language to culture and vice-versa a most relevant program.

In “Nation-Building and Integration Policy in the Philippines,” Kazuya Yamamoto explains that attempts at nation-building are usually done through integration policies implemented by the state, usually classified into two types: policies that assimilate ethnic groups into a single nation and policies that create systems of power-sharing between ethnic groups. Yamamoto expounds on the first type as “usually done by creating a common language and education system” (195)—a claim that will be supported by analyses in the succeeding sections of this paper.

THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE ISSUE

In the second chapter of *Language Policy Challenges in Multi-Ethnic Malaysia* titled “Language, Nation-Building and Identity Formation in a Multi-Ethnic Society,” S. K. Gill begins her discussion of the concepts of nation and nation-building in Malaysia by pointing out that the French Revolution influenced the development of nationalism in both Europe and Asia. Yet a relevant difference between the emancipation of the French and the Malaysians is the issue of national language. In France, as it was in most of Europe, people were mostly mono-ethnic and had a “common direction forged through similarity of ethnicity, culture and tradition” that made the state rely on language as the “means of developing a national identity and ‘sociocultural authenticity’” (19). Gill adds that a “broadly shared language is the most significant and critical component in the building of a nation” (Tarling; Nair; Gomes and Rahman qtd. in Gill 17). Gill’s work is relevant to this paper because the nation-building situation in Malaysia is very similar to that of the Philippines.ⁱⁱ Gill notes that “[m]ost developing countries in South and Southeast Asia, especially in the post-independence period, were constantly confronted with the problems of ethnic and cultural diversity” (17), and this observation applies to the Philippines and Malaysia, who both followed the European model of nation-building through a national language despite the fact that, unlike the Europeans, Filipinos and Malaysians are not only multi-ethnic but also multi-linguistic and possibly hold smaller but more personal loyalties that transcend the great idea of nation, such as political and religious affiliations.

This notion of language as a binding factor in establishing sovereignty must have been what the framers of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of the Philippines had in mind, for in Art. XIV s.3, it is stated that “The Congress shall make necessary steps towards the development and adoption of a common national language based on one of the existing native languages” (“1935 Constitution”). It must be noted that this provision was a deliberate attempt to slowly and partially dissociate the Philippines from the USA, at a time when English was both the official language and the medium of instruction in academic institutions, especially after the Monroe Survey Commission of 1925 reported that “no other difficulty has been so great as that of overcoming the foreign language handicap (Monroe qtd. in Bernardo 30). In 1936, the Institute of National Language (INL) was created

[t]o choose the native tongue which is to be used as a basis for the evolution and adoption of the Philippine national language. In proceeding to such election, the Institute shall give preference to the tongue that is the most developed as regards structure, mechanism, and literature and is accepted and used at the present time by the greatest number of Filipinos. (“Commonwealth Act” s5.5)

The INL recommended Tagalog as the basis of the national language, with the approval of then Philippine Commonwealth President Manuel L. Quezon. But there was strong opposition to the choice and a perception of marginalization by the Filipinos who speak the other 175 endemic Philippine languages despite Tagalog being considered “by common consent, the most developed and its written literature the most advanced” (Agoncillo qtd. in Tupas, “The Politics” 590).

Due to lingering rancor among other Filipino sub-groups, especially given that a bigger portion of the population spoke Bisaya than Tagalog at the time (Smolicz&Nical qtd. in Tupas and Lorente 169), the Department of Education renamed Tagalog to “Pilipino” in 1959, a move that seemed closer to the idea of a national language by “de-ethniciz[ing] Tagalog to allay fears of Tagalog imperialism through language” and by serving as an “anti-colonial symbol that would help the country extricate itself from the clutches of American influence” (Tupas, “The Politics” 591) given the strong and stable position of English as medium of instruction.

The relative peace brought by renaming Tagalog into Pilipino did not last very long, however. In 1973, Pilipino was replaced by a non-existent “Filipino.” Andrew Gonzales skeptically opines that Filipino “assumes a linguistic principle that one can develop a language which is an amalgam of many languages,” including their grammatical rules and lexicon (327). It was to be the language that would unite all the peoples of the Philippines despite ethnolinguistic differences, as Gonzales also describes Filipino as “an artificial symbol (like the flag, the national anthem, the name of the country, boundaries, laws, systems) of national unity not imposed but supposedly to be developed together, with representation from all sides” (336-337).

Still, some argued that Filipino is simply Tagalog, the language of the National Capital Region, with inclusions of a few words from across and outside the archipelago; while others held that Cebuano or Bisaya should be the national language since more Filipinos speak it. Even after several decades, the arguments about national language persisted, and it got to a point where questions were raised whether there really was a need for a national language at all (Belvez, Alcayde, Rodriguez, Yusingco). But by this time, Tagalog, Pilipino, or Filipino (whatever one wants to call it) has already made headway as national lingua franca largely due to the Bilingual Education Policy in 1974 and subsequently in 1987 (Espiritu; “The 1987...”), imposing the use of both English and Pilipino/Filipino as media of instruction, and partly because of the fact that English, the language of the colonizer, seemed to be the only other option.

The challenges to Filipino as the national language are however not yet over. In “The Politics of ‘P’ and ‘F’: A Linguistic History of Nation-Building in the Philippines,” Ruanni Tupas theorizes on the metamorphosis of the appellation of the national language from “Tagalog” to “Pilipino” to “Filipino,” and asserts that while Filipino took the diverse ethnolinguistic groups into consideration, it still did not confront English “as a neocolonial language which had contributed to the perpetration of various forms of inequalities in the country” (592). Tupas further examines the role of English in the Philippines and argues that “the needs of the poor majority in terms of education and social mobility are constructed toward the ideology of language pragmatism where English is deemed indispensable and must take precedence over

questions of identity, social and educational equity, poverty, cognitive development . . ." ("World Englishes" 74).

Nevertheless, the position of Filipino as national language was cemented in the 1987 Constitution. In Art. XIV s.6, it is stated that: "The national language of the Philippines is Filipino. As it evolves, it shall be further developed and enriched on the basis of existing Philippine and other languages." Section 6 further states that: "Subject to provisions of law and as the Congress may deem appropriate, the Government shall take steps to initiate and sustain the use of Filipino as a medium of official communication and as language of instruction in the educational system." It is clear in these provisions that Filipino was meant to transcend its "national symbol" position to the status of a plastic and pragmatic driving force towards nation-building and identity-formation. In addition, Art. XIV s.9 provides that: "The Congress shall establish a national language commission composed of representatives of various regions and disciplines which shall undertake, coordinate, and promote researches for the development, propagation, and preservation of Filipino and other languages." This provision led to the creation of the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino (KWF). The mission-vision of the KWF are specified in one of NCCA's webpages as "to make Filipino an effective instrument of national development. Its mission is to undertake, coordinate and implement research programs and projects for the further development and enrichment of the Filipino language. KWF likewise aims to preserve and maintain other native languages of the country."

Noticeably, KWF, unlike its institutional predecessors, no longer incorporates the idea of the national language in its official name; rather, it places Filipino front and center, with the implication that the issue of national language is (almost) over and that its efforts are geared towards development and enrichment of the national language instead of searching for it. If the National Statistics Office's (NSO) survey in 2000 is any indication, it would appear that the KWF has succeeded (surely with the help of other factors, such as media and policies on academic medium of instruction) in its efforts because the survey reports that 96.4% of all the household population who were able to attend school could speak Filipino ("A New" 166-67).

PHILIPPINE CULTURE

If language is a source of identity, so is culture. Tope asserts that “[i]n its complex form, language is culture . . . [a]s culture, language is transformed into a bearer of values which form the ‘basis of people’s identity, the basis of their particularity’” (261). In addition, Edward Said illustrates in *Culture and Imperialism* how culture includes a society’s “reservoir of the best that has been known and thought” in light of what the world has to offer that allows for a “refining and elevating element” that results in an “us” vis-a-vis “them” mindset, which eventually leads to a sense of identity often associated with the nation. Said also claims that decolonized societies’ resort to a “return” to a culture of “rigorous codes of intellectual and moral behavior has produced varieties of religious and nationalist fundamentalism” (xiii). On that note, what then constitutes Filipino culture as an amalgam of Philippine society in light of the numerous Philippine ethnolinguistic groups? Whose culture would surface and influence all the others if the nation has to be built and distinguished from other nations? These questions go hand in hand with all the issues associated with the basis or choice of national language, since language and culture develop together and influence each other as they evolve (Day Translations). Following this logic precisely explains why there was (and perhaps still is) a strong pushback against Tagalog/Pilipino/Filipino as the national language because of its hegemonizing and marginalizing ramifications on all the other Philippine languages (read: cultures), since language is what is used in social events where culture may be expressed or understood, orders given or executed, questions asked or answered (Duranti 7); and especially because “[i]ts use in communication tends to be seen primarily in terms of the function of controlling or influencing action” (Hymes 5). However, culture is a concept that is more difficult to grasp compared to language because it encompasses many other elements of society, namely ideas, norms, and resources (Cruz). This may be the main reason why focused attempts at nation-building through culture have only been concretized much later than that of language.

One of the earliest attempts by the Philippines to build the nation and its identity was by creating a common education system as was pointed out by Yamamoto, which took charge of culture and its

development. Case in point is the creation of the Rizal Billⁱⁱⁱ in 1956, implemented and carried out by the Board of National Education. Caroline Hau claims in *Necessary Fictions* that the Rizal Bill is the legal handmaiden of the (Philippine) state that sought to regulate education to accomplish its declared task of developing “moral character, personal discipline, civic conscience, and teaching the duties of citizenship” (4), assuming that Rizal’s novels *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo* serve as “artifactual, concrete examples of a ‘Filipino culture,’ conceived as the sum total of all the products of a society’s creative labor and aspirations” (2-3). However, the education sector is unable to consistently preserve, develop, and promote Philippine culture due mainly to insufficient resources and its other numerous duties (for one, the sports programs of the country were also under the education sector at this point).

In 1992, the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA) was created. In 1999, five other cultural agencies were placed under the NCCA umbrella^{iv}. These agencies were eventually administratively attached to the NCCA in 2001, with the addition of the KWF. The NCCA has become, in effect, the Philippine Ministry of Culture (“History and Mandate”), especially because at this time, the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS) was renamed the Department of Education (DepEd), transferring all its administrative duties on culture to the NCCA.

In Republic Act 7356 ss.2-6, culture is identified as having the following core principles:

SECTION. 2. *Culture as a Human Right.* Culture is a manifestation of the freedom of belief and of expression and is human right to be accorded due respect and allowed to flourish.

SECTION. 3. *National Identity.* Culture reflects and shapes values, beliefs, aspirations, thereby defining a people’s national identity. A Filipino national culture that mirrors and shapes. Philippine economic, social and political life shall be evolved, promoted and conserved.

SECTION. 4. *Culture of the People.* The Filipino national culture shall be: a) independent, free of political and economic structures which inhibit cultural sovereignty; b) equitable,

effectively creating and distributing cultural opportunities and correcting the imbalance that has long prejudiced the poor and other marginalized sectors who have the least opportunities for cultural development and educational growth; c) dynamic, continuously developing in pace with scientific, technological, social, economic and political changes both in national and international levels; d) progressive, developing the vast potential of all Filipinos as responsible change agents of society; and e) humanistic, ensuring the freedom and creativity of the human spirit.

SECTION. 5. *Culture by the People.* The Filipino national culture shall be evolved and developed by the people themselves in a climate of freedom and responsibility. National cultural policies and programs shall be formulated which shall be: a) pluralistic, fostering deep respect for the cultural identity of each locality, region or ethno-linguistic locality, as well as elements assimilated from other cultures through the natural process of acculturation; b) democratic, encouraging and supporting the participation of the vast masses of our people in its programs and projects; c) non-partisan, open to all people and institution, regardless of creed, affiliation, ideology, ethnic origin, age, gender or class, with no organized group or sector having monopoly of its services and d) liberative, having concern for the decolonization and emancipation of the Filipino psyche in order to ensure the full flowering of Filipino culture.

SECTION. 6. *Culture for the People.* The creation of artistic and cultural products shall be promoted and disseminated to the greatest number of our people. The level of consciousness of our people about our own cultural values in order to strengthen our culture and to instill nationhood and cultural unity, shall be raised formally through the educational system and informally through extra-scholastic means, including the use of traditional as well as modern media of communication.

It is apparent in the preceding Sections that the core principles of Philippine culture put premium on both inclusivity and nation-building—seemingly an ideal combination of Yamamoto’s first and second type of integration policies for nation-building. But what appears to be ideal in theory remains to be largely realized in practice.

SAWIKAAN: SALITA NG TAON

The word “translation” is mentioned twice in RA 7356, the Act that created the NCCA—first in Section 12 C.4, which states that one mandate of the NCCA is to “encourage and monitor a comprehensive translation program which shall make works by Filipinos and selected foreign classics equally accessible to Filipino as well as international readers”; and second in Section 15 C, which states that the Subcommittee on Cultural Dissemination “shall cover but will not be limited to the following areas: language and translation, cultural events, cultural education and information.”

But these two provisions, however necessary they may seem in the nation-building project, would understandably not be a major priority given the myriad tasks of the NCCA. It would then appear that this circumstance gave birth to the establishment of the Filipinas Institute of Translation, Inc. (FIT), a non-profit, non-stock organization in 1997. FIT identifies itself as a “support group cooperating with the government (through NCCA, the University of the Philippines (UP), and KWF) in implementing policies and crafting programs and projects on language to augment the limitations of the government” (Abiera qtd. in Narvaez 49; translation mine). FIT’s objectives pertinently suit the two provisions on translation in RA 7356, and more. These objectives, as identified on FIT’s website⁶, are as follows:

- (1) pagtataguyod sa pagpapaunlad ng wikang pambansa;
- (2) paglinang sa sining at kulturang Filipino;
- (3) pagbibigay ng pagkakataon sa mahusay na pagsasalin sa mga teknikal at akademikong teksto mula sa katutubo o dayuhang wika patungo sa Filipino, at vice-versa;

- (4) pagsasanay sa mga propesyunal na tagasalin sa pamamagitan ng pagsasagawa ng palihan at seminar sa pagsasalin; and
- (5) paglalathala ng mga akdang naisalin.

One of FIT's several projects is *Sawikaan*^{vi}: *Salita ng Taon* (established in 2004), patterned after the American Dialect Society's (ADS) "Word(s) of the Year" (WOTY) program. The WOTY is an assessment of the most relevant word(s) or expression(s) in public use during a specific year. Each WOTY sponsor has a particular set of purposes for choosing the word of the year, although these purposes may intersect in several ways. For the ADS, the objective in choosing the word of the year—"the study of the English language in North America, together with other languages or dialects of other languages influencing it or influenced by it" (ADS "Constitution")—can be gleaned from their criteria: "demonstrably new or newly popular in the year in question; widely and/or prominently used in the year in question; indicative or reflective of the popular discourse; and 4) not a peeve or a complaint about overuse or misuse" (ADS "All of the Words...").

FIT's criteria in choosing the *Salita ng Taon*, in contrast, are

- (1) kabuluhan ng salita sa buhay ng mga Filipino at/o pagsalamin nito ng katotohanan o bagong pangyayari sa lipunan;
- (2) lawak at lalim ng saliksik sa salita, gayundin ang retorika o ganda ng paliwanag, at paraan ng pagkumbinsi sa mga tagapakinig; at
- (3) paraan ng presentasyon.

It is evident from these criteria, especially the first item, that the *Salita ng Taon* project aims to consciously identify words of certain social relevance—regardless of origin—and incorporate them into the Filipino language to enhance and stabilize its position as the national language that represents all Filipinos. As Narvaez claims, *Sawikaan* is a "creative and effective strategy to showcase the uniqueness of Filipino as national language" (62; translation mine). The very first *Salita ng Taon*, for example,

is *canvass*, followed by *ukay-ukay*, and *tsugi* and *tsika* both in third place. *Canvass*^{vii} is English, not from any other indigenous Filipino language or dialect. *Ukay-ukay*^{viii} is Cebuano, while *tsugi* and *tsika*^{ix} are both gay lingo, though the former is a neologism while the latter is a Spanish derivation in Filipinized spelling. This aim to incorporate various words that have become relevant to the Filipino society and psyche in particular moments into the national language for nation-building can also be observed in the other ninety-two (92) words that FIT has so far collected. The table below shows the list of Salita ng Taon from 2004 to 2018.

Salita ng Taon 2004-2016								
2004	2005	2006	2007	2010	2012	2014	2016	2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • canvass • ukay-ukay • tsugi • tsika 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • huweteng • pasaway • tibak/T-back 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lobat • botox • toxic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • miskol • roro • Friendster 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jejemon • Ondoy • korkor • tarpo 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • wang-wang • level-up • pagpag 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • selfie • endo • Filipinas 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • fotobam • hugot • milenyal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tokhang • fake news • dengvaxia
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dagdag-bawas • dating • fashionista • jologs • kinse-anyos • otso-otso • salbakuta • tapsilog • terorista & terorismo • text 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • blog • call center • caregiver • coño • e-vat • gandara • networking • tsunami • wiretapping 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • birdflu • chacha • karir • kudkod • mall • meningo • Orocan • payreted • spa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • abrodista • extrajudicial killing • makeover • oragon • party list • safety • sutukil • telenobela • videoke 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ampatuan • emo • load • namumutbol • solb • spam • unli 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Android • fish kill • impeachment • palusot • pik-ap • SALN • trending • wagas • WiFi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • imba • kalakal • riding-in-tandem • peg • hashtag • CCTV • storm surge • PDAF • bosing • whistle blower 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bully • founding • lumad • meme • netizen • tukod • viral 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DDS • dilawan • federalismo • foodie • quo warranto • resibo • TRAIN • troll
total: 14	12	12	12	11	12	13	10	11

FIGURE 1

Salita ng Taon from 2004 to 2018.

The annual top three words are in the upper row and the rest in the lower.

Sources: Narvaez (81) and Geronimo (“Fotobam”; “Tokhang”)

All the words in the list reflect and refract the vicissitudes of Philippine society and its peoples' lives, coming into currency due to their great impact on Filipinos. *Ondoy*, a tropical storm in 2006 that damaged lives and properties in Metro Manila, was so disastrous that it has become the yardstick of destruction caused by succeeding storms. *Ampatuan*, the last name of a political clan in Maguindanao alleged to have masterminded the massacre of 58 people, became infamous in 2009; *SALN* is the acronym for Statement of Assets and Liabilities, a legal document whose concept became current via the 2012 televised impeachment proceedings against then Supreme Court Chief Justice Renato Corona due to his failure to declare all his assets and liabilities as required of government employees; *PDAF* (Priority Development Assistance Fund, more popularly known as "pork barrel") was in circulation in 2013-14 due to the controversy involving high-ranking government officials in fund-scamming activities discovered in that period; and *fotobam*, a Filipinized spelling of "photobomb," which means to "spoil a photograph of (a person or thing) by unexpectedly appearing in the camera's field of view as the picture is taken, typically as a prank or practical joke" (ODE), has had a more controversial nuance in the country due to the DMCI condominium "fotobam-ing" and becoming an eyesore to the Rizal monument in Luneta Park. These words show a picture of what has been happening in the country (or parts of it) at a particular period in recent Philippine history.

Conversely, *Ondoy* has also become a word used to describe the magnitude of personal devastation, especially emotional. *Jologs* and *jejemon*, words generally identified with the lower socioeconomic classes' fashion sense and manner of talking/texting, are used to describe a particular behavior or characteristic even if it is only incidentally exhibited by someone from the upper social classes. *Level-up* has transcended its role-playing game (RPG) origins and now generally means to do better in any aspect of one's life, particularly those of the millennials'. *Toxic* is no longer only used in its chemical sense but also in certain unpleasant situations, people, and moods (even an academic subject can be toxic). *Peg*, an advertising jargon referring to a mood, style, or theme that serves as a guide or an inspiration (Maog), has entered mainstream usage connoting anything worthy of praise or

ridicule: *Angelina Jolie ang peg* (attempts sensual, pouty lips) or *millennial lang ang peg* (an older person who acts or behaves as though they belong to a much younger generation).

In the development of Filipino as the national language, Narvaez also shows the linguistic origins of the eighty-six *Salita ng Taon* and the discourses and experiences that brought about the currency of the words (excluding the 21 in 2016 and 2018 which are not part of *Sawikaan*). Figure 2 shows that the composition of modern Filipino, based on the words gathered by FIT for the *Salita ng Taon* project, is inclusive and does not discriminate against other Philippine indigenous languages—the primary contention against Tagalog and Pilipino. In fact, the greater number of gathered words originated from the English language, even greater than all the other linguistic sources combined. At the same time, the 15% share of Philippine languages in the *Salita ng Taon*, by labelling them in that manner, seems to suggest that all Philippine languages are all on equal footing, with the implication that while Filipino continues to develop, any Philippine word regardless of origin can penetrate the national consciousness and can come into currency.

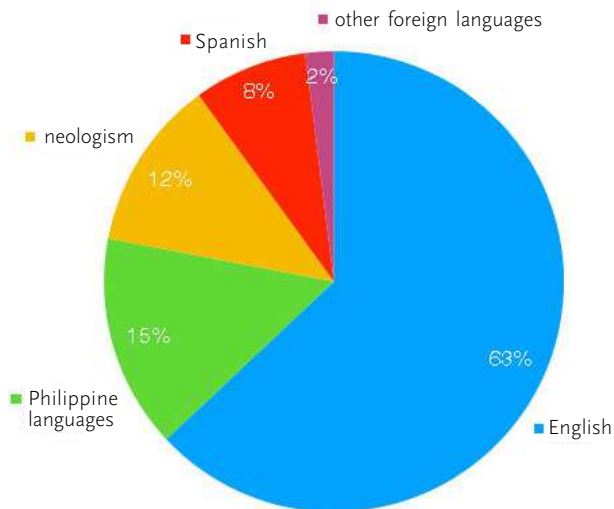


FIGURE 2
Origins of the *Salita ng Taon* gathered from 2004-2014
(Narvaez 165)

The *Salita ng Taon* project is well and good, for it brings issues and events that shape and influence the development of the nation to the fore. However, huge questions and quandaries loom over the project's perceived inclusivity and openness to all languages and cultures. For example, what does the 63% English and 8% Spanish (plus 2% "other foreign languages" for a total of a whopping 73%) words mean in the grand scheme that is nation-building, and why do these words surface when we are supposedly free from colonial control? From which Philippine social strata did these words originate and which groups continue to use them? Is Filipino, as a national language, unique (as Narvaez claims) because of the huge number of foreign-sourced vocabulary in its development? If so, what are the implications of these words on our culture, and what do they say about our educational institutions who are primarily tasked to preserve, develop, and circulate Filipino culture? Which social classes and demographics does the 15% "Philippine languages" represent? Does this indicate a "silencing" of the 85%? Why is it that *ukay-ukay*, *sutukil*, *oragon*, and *lumad* are the only words of regional origins that appear on the list when there is a total of 175 indigenous languages in the country^x? What is the significance of the absence of farming vocabulary on the list when the Philippines employs a full quarter of its labor force in agriculture^{xi}? Who generates neologisms and brings them into currency? Ultimately, who do these "salita ng taon" represent and how are these words significant to issues of power relations?

Figure 3, meanwhile, shows that technology has the highest impact as far as discourse origins is concerned. This was followed by politics, pop culture, and experience and values. The contribution of Science and gay lingo in the *Salita ng Taon* project is statistically similar. One certain thing about these numbers on discourse origins is the role of social media and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) in the direction Philippine language and culture is taking. The Philippines has after all been known as the texting capital of the world, and now also the most social nation in the world (Opera Team).

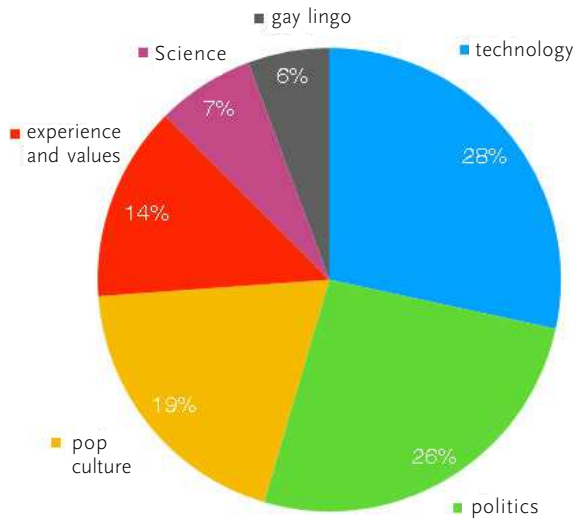


FIGURE 3
Discourse origins of Salita ng Taon 2004-2014
(Narvaez 170)

This mapping of Salita ng Taon’s discourse origins gives us a general idea of what informs our current social atmosphere. But then, it also induces questions that could lead to a more informed and inclusive nation-building project. For example, if technology has the highest impact as far as discourse origins is concerned, then it is important to ask who has access to these advancements, especially when some areas in the country are stranger to electricity, much less to ICT. A November 2017 Open Signal report for instance places the Philippines on the 74th spot out of 77 in terms of 4G speed and 69th in terms of LTE availability (Marcelo). The implications of this irregularity range from how these “salita ng taon” are reflected on or refracted by those who have limited or zero access to technology to whether they are even aware of this FIT-sponsored project, without which automatically precludes them from being part of nation-building. And then, why does technology dwarf Science (28% to 7%) when the two almost always go together? Does this reflect a consumerist rather than a productionist culture? If so, what could and should we do about it? In the 26%, whose political power is

being exercised (and suppressed by virtue of its absence)? Whose culture is pop culture? Whose experiences and values gets applied and reinforced, and whose are deemed irrelevant, backwards, and/or deviant? To what extent have *tsugi*, *tsika*, *karir*, and *gandara* penetrated the consciousness of the people, including the non-LGBT? Finally, who are the proponents of the Salita ng Taon project? Who joins the contest, how is it conducted, and who decides^{xii} what the Salita ng Taon are? To what degree does FIT realize its stated objectives? All of these questions beg for a deeper scrutiny of power relations and promotion of inclusivity in nation-building projects, public or private, such as FIT's Salita ng Taon. For after all, when we talk about progress, the first and the most important question is "for whom"?

CONCLUSION

The Philippines is still a young nation, in the face of both world history and the current trend towards globalization, where countries paradoxically expand their horizons while vigilantly guarding their borders. It is still too early to tell whether the project to build the nation through a national language and the culture reflected and refracted in it will succeed, especially in light of the perhaps-inadvertent-but-still-apparent exclusion of certain linguistic groups from the project. There are a multitude of stumbling blocks and obstacles both at home and outside of it, such as being able to transcend religious and ethnolinguistic tendencies for the sake of the Motherland, that Filipinos have to hurdle if they are to move forward to finally identify themselves as part of the nation called the Philippines. Every venture then towards nation-building, whether by the government or by organizations outside of it, should be given a chance. However, the institutions, organizations, and the people in charge of these projects should take into account the questions above, the answers to which are essential to the success of building the nation. On the other hand, as the greatest resources of the country, Filipinos should scrutinize nation-building programs such as FIT's Salita ng Taon—its objectives, processes, and even the people who manage these projects—since they are the ones who will bear the ramifications and (or hopefully enjoy the fruit) of these endeavors.

Although the Philippines still stands under the dark shadows of its colonial past, Filipinos must be aware of where their leaders and institutions are leading them so that they could eventually stare into the light with their eyes wide open^{xiii}, for we cannot afford to leave anyone behind as we build our imagined community. In its experienced youth, the nation has a perfect opportunity to learn from the mistakes of the past and strive for a truly inclusive language and culture for all Filipinos.

NOTES

- i Jejemon: Refers to a person (or the text itself) who composes text messages (SMS) using numbers, punctuations, and other symbols in place of letters. *Jejemon* reflects the economic disparity of Filipinos even in text and on social media. Wangwang: Primarily referring to the sound of a siren, *wangwang* was made current by former President Benigno Aquino III by relating it to the corruption of government leaders through the use of privilege and abuse of power as exemplified by their use of the siren to get ahead of traffic when it is only usually used by the ambulance and fire trucks. Consequently, critics of the president also used the term to refer to his “empty” promises of change (San Juan qtd. in Narvaez 130-31). Endo: Contraction of “end of contract”; mainly refers to contractual workers but can also mean the end of the contract itself or the last day of the employee at work (San Juan and Briones qtd. in Narvaez 140). Contractualization is a controversial labor practice implemented even or especially by employers who can manage to regularize their employees. These words became *Salita ng Taon* in 2010, 2012, and 2014 respectively.
- ii With the privileging of the bumiputera (meaning “son of the land”), the indigenous peoples of Malaysia, language policies were directed towards Malay being the national language, the language of nation-building which represents the concept of traditional Malay cultural practices (Rappa and Wee 36).
- iii “An Act to Include in the Curricula of All Public and Private Schools, Colleges and Universities Courses On the Life, Works and Writings of Jose Rizal, Particularly His Novels *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*, Authorizing the Printing and Distribution Thereof, and for Other Purposes.”
- iv The Cultural Center of the Philippines (CCP), the National Historical Commission of the Philippines (NHCP), the National Museum, the National Library of the Philippines, and the National Archives of the Philippines.
- v FIT’s website is no longer accessible. However, presented data may still be retrieved via the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine.

- vi Coined by National Artist and FIT Adviser Virgilio S. Almario. Mariano Miclat defines Sawikaan as “pagbabanyuhay ng salita sa pamamagitan ng wika” (Narvaez 61).
- vii In reference to the national elections in 2004, especially the hotly-contested presidency between Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo and Fernando Poe, Jr.
- viii “Paghahalungkat sa mga damit na itinumpok sa mesa, itinambak sa kahon, o ikinalat sa nakalatag na sako” (Narvaez 83). This word signifies poverty since these clothes are usually second-hand or defective and are sold at a much cheaper price in sidewalks and alleys.
- ix Tsugi: “Anumang bagay, karanasan, tao, at pagkatao na negatibo” (Narvaez 85). Tsika (from *Sp. chica*: little girl): “Kuwentuhan ng malalapit na magkaibigan; biro” (Narvaez 85).
- x See bibliographic entry on Ethnologue.
- xi According to The World Bank, 25.2% of the country’s 2018 labor force is employed in agriculture.
- xii Narvaez admits that FIT may have control over the nominated words in the project since it is the organizer (170).
- xiii In its enthusiasm to present Filipino as the national language, the current Philippine government has committed a faux pas by printing “FILIPINO AS THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE 1935” on the P20 bill. The 1935 Constitution only came up with a Philippine language policy in 1937, one based on Tagalog.

WORKS CITED

- Alarcon, Norma, Caren Kaplan, and Minoo Moallem. Introduction. *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalisms, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*, ed. Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcon, Minoo Moallem, Duke UP, 1999, p. 3.
- “All of the Words of the Year, 1990 to Present.” *American Dialect Society*, www.americandialect.org/woty/all-of-the-words-of-the-year-1990-to-present. Accessed 8 Jul. 2019.
- Alcayde, Joseph Solis. “National Language.” *Sun Star Cebu*, 17 Aug. 2015, www.sunstar.com.ph/cebu/opinion/2015/08/17/tell-it-sunstar-national-language-425231. Accessed 9 Jul. 2019.
- Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*. 2nd ed., Verso, 2006.

- Belvez, Paz M. "Development of Filipino, the National Language of the Philippines." *National Commission for Culture and the Arts*, 29 Apr. 2015, ncca.gov.ph/subcommissions/subcommission-on-cultural-disseminationscd/language-and-translation/development-of-filipino-the-national-language-of-the-philippines/. Accessed 10 Jul. 2019.
- Bernardo, Allan B. I. "English in Philippine Education: Solution or Problem?" *Philippine English: Linguistic and Literary Perspectives*, ed. Ma. Lourdes S Bautista and Kingsley Bolton, Hong Kong UP, 2008, pp. 29-48.
- "Commonwealth Act No. 184." *Official Gazette*, www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1936/11/13/commonwealth-act-no-184/. Accessed 9 Jul. 2019.
- Cruz, Andres C. "Language and Culture." *National Commission for Culture and the Arts*, 30 Apr. 2015, ncca.gov.ph/subcommissions/subcommission-on-cultural-disseminationscd/language-and-translation/language-and-culture/. Accessed 10 Jul. 2019.
- Day Translations. "The Relationship Between Language and Culture Defined." 11 May 2018, www.daytranslations.com/blog/2018/05/the-relationship-between-language-and-culture-defined-11480/. Accessed 11 Jul. 2019.
- Duranti, Alessandro. *Linguistic Anthropology*. Cambridge U P, 1997.
- Espiritu, Clemencia. "Language Policies in the Philippines." *National Commission for Culture and the Arts*, 30 Apr. 2015, ncca.gov.ph/subcommissions/subcommission-on-cultural-disseminationscd/language-and-translation/language-policies-in-the-philippines/. Accessed 8 Jul. 2019.
- Ethnologue. "Philippines." www.ethnologue.com/country/PH. Accessed 8 Jul. 2019.
- Filipinas Institute of Translation. "Tungkolsa FIT." web.archive.org/web/20170717125902/www.fit.org.ph/p/tungko-sa-fit.html. Accessed 8 Jul. 2019.
- Geronimo, Jee Y. "Fotobam' ang Salita ng Taon 2016." *Rappler.com*, 6 Oct. 2016, rappler.com/nation/148398-sawikaan-2016-salita-taon-fotobam. Accessed 9 Jul. 2019.
- _____. "Tokhang' ang Salita ng Taon 2018." *Rappler.com*, 26 Oct. 2018, www.rappler.com/nation/215197-tokhang-salita-ng-taon-2018-winner. Accessed 9 Jul. 2019.

- Gill, S. K. "Language Policy Challenges in Multi-Ethnic Malaysia." *Multilingual Education* vol. 8, 2014. *Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht*, doi: 10.1007/978-94-007-7966-2_2.
- Gonzales, Andrew B. "The 1973 and The Bilingual Education Policy of the Department of Education and Culture." *Philippine Studies*, vol. 22, nos. 3-4, 1974, pp. 325-337.
- Hau, Caroline S. Introduction. *Necessary Fictions*, by Hau, Ateneo de Manila U P, 2000, pp. 2-4.
- "History and Mandate." *National Commission for Culture and the Arts*, 02 Feb. 2015, ncca.gov.ph/about-ncca-3/history-and-mandate/. Accessed 9 Jul. 2019.
- Hymes, Dell. Introduction. *Language in Culture and Society: A Reader in Linguistics and Anthropology*, Harper & Row, 1964, pp. 3-14.
- Maog, Elise. "Ansabeh? 'Ang Pinaka' Lists Popular Expressions for 2014." *GMA News Online*, 27 Aug. 2014, www.gmanetwork.com/news/newstv/angpinaka/376664/ansabeh-ang-pinaka-lists-popular-pinoy-expressions-for-2014/story/. Accessed 10 Jul. 2019.
- Marcelo, Ver. "Report: PH among lowest ranked countries in internet speed, availability." *CNN Philippines*, (updated) 10 May 2018, cnnphilippines.com/news/2017/11/03/philippines-lowest-rank-internet-speed-availability.html. Accessed 10 Jul. 2019.
- Narvaez, Antoinette Eilene G. *Sawikaan: Isang Dekada ng Pagpili ng Salita ng Taon*, Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino, 2016.
- "1973 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines." *Official Gazette*, www.officialgazette.gov.ph/constitutions/1973-constitution-of-the-republic-of-the-philippines-2/. Accessed 9 Jul. 2019.
- "1935 Constitution Amended." *Official Gazette*, www.officialgazette.gov.ph/constitutions/1935-constitution-ammended/. Accessed 9 Jul. 2019.
- Opera Team. "The Philippines—from Text-Messaging Capital to Most 'Social Nation.'" 30 Jul. 2015, web.archive.org/web/20180207040902/http://www.operasoftware.com:80/blog/smw/the-philippines-from-text-messaging-capital-to-most-social-nation. 11 Jul. 2019.
- Philippine History. "Spanish Expeditions to the Philippines." *Philippine History.org*, 01 Mar. 2017, www.philippine-history.org/spanish-expeditions.htm. Accessed 8 Jul. 2019.

- Philippine Republic. "History of the Philippines." *Wordpress*, philippinerepublic.com/history/. Accessed 8 Jul. 2019.
- "Photobomb." *Oxford Dictionary of English*, Oxford UP, 2019.
- Rappa, Antonio L., Wee, Lionel. *Language Policy and Modernity in Southeast Asia: Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand*. Springer Science+Business Media, 2006.
- "Republic Act No. 1425." *Official Gazette*, www.officialgazette.gov.ph/1956/06/12/republic-act-no-1425/. Accessed 8 Jul. 2019.
- "Republic Act No. 7356." *National Commission for Culture and the Arts*, 11 Feb. 2015, ncca.gov.ph/republic-act-7356/. Accessed 8 Jul. 2019.
- "Republic Act No. 9155." *Official Gazette*, www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2001/08/11/republic-act-no-9155/. Accessed 10 Jul. 2019.
- Rodriguez, Bertrand. "Should We Even Have A 'National Language' in the First Place?" *Rappler*, 03 Jun. 2015, www.rappler.com/move-ph/ispeak/66958-filipino-national-language. Accessed 10 Jul. 2019.
- Said, Edward W. Introduction. *Culture and Imperialism*, by Said, Vintage Books, 1994, p. xiii.
- "The Commonwealth of the Philippines." *Official Gazette*, www.officialgazette.gov.ph/the-commonwealth-of-the-philippines/. Accessed 10 Jul. 2019.
- "The Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines." *Official Gazette*, www.officialgazette.gov.ph/constitutions/1987-constitution/. Accessed 08 Jul. 2019.
- "The 1987 Policy on Bilingual Education." *Department of Education*, www.deped.gov.ph/orders/do-52-s-1987. Accessed 10 Jul. 2019.
- "The Philippines—from Text-Messaging Capital to Most 'Social Nation.'" *Opera Business*, 30 Jul. 2015, www.operasoftware.com/blog/smw/the-philippines-from-text-messaging-capital-to-most-social-nation. 10 Jul. 2019.
- The World Bank. "World Development Indicators: Philippines." databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=2&series=SL.AGR.EMPL.ZS&country=#. Accessed 10 Jul. 2019.
- Tope, Lily Rose. "Negotiating Language: Postcolonialism and Nationalism in Philippine Literature in English." *Philippine English: Linguistic and Literary Perspectives*, ed. Ma. Lourdes S Bautista and Kingsley Bolton, Hong Kong U P, 2008, pp. 261-278.

- Tupas, Ruanni. "The Politics of 'P' and 'F': A Linguistic History of Nation-Building in the Philippines." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, vol. 36, no. 6, 2014, pp. 587-97. tandofline.com, doi: 10.1080/01434632.2014.979831.
- _____. "World Englishes or Worlds of English?: Pitfalls of a Postcolonial Discourse in Philippine English." *Philippine English: Linguistic and Literary Perspectives*, ed. Ma. Lourdes S Bautista and Kingsley Bolton, Hong Kong U P, 2008, pp. 67-86.
- _____. and Lorente, Beatriz P. "A 'New' Politics of Language in the Philippines: Bilingual Education and the New Challenge of the Mother Tongues." *Language, Education, and Nation-building: Assimilation and Shift in Southeast Asia*, ed. Peter Sercombe and RuanniTupas, Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, pp. 165-180.
- Yamamoto, Kazuya. "Nation-Building and Integration Policy in the Philippines." *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 44, no. 2, 2007, pp. 195-213. *Sage Publications*, doi: 10.1177/0022343307075122.
- Yusingco, Michael Henry. "Is There Still Need for a National Language?" *Inquirer.net*, 10 Jan. 2017, opinion.inquirer.net/100715/still-need-national-language. Accessed 9 Jul. 2019.