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Language and Nationalism

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Review Article

Language and Nationalism

ROBERT B. KAPLAN

LANGUAGE AND NATIONALISM: THE PHILIPPINE EXPERIENCE THUS FAR. By Andrew B. Gonzalez, FSC. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press, 1980. x + 179 pages.

One of the most interesting and persistent problems in language planning has been the problem of the selection and standardization of a national language. In many instances, the problem, at least in modern times, has occurred in newly emerging nations and, though the history of such a search can and sometimes does antedate independence, in most contemporary instances, as a matter of historical accident, the problem dates only to the middle years of the twentieth century. Thus, the time for evaluating various stages in the process has been significantly restricted. But there is a classic instance of the problem — the instance of the Philippines.

The problem has been significant in the Philippines since the last quarter of the nineteenth century. As a geographic area, the Philippines certainly may be defined as a multilingual area. There are, according to a variety of sources, nine principal languages, each having variant dialects, in addition to several non-indigenous languages. The current Constitution of the Republic (dated 24 November 1972) contains the following language:

Section 3 (1) This constitution shall be officially promulgated in English and Pilipino, and translated into each dialect spoken by over fifty thousand people, and into Spanish and Arabic. In case of conflict, the English text shall prevail.

(2) The National Assembly shall take steps toward the development and adoption of a common national language to be known as Filipino.

(3) Until otherwise provided by law, English and Pilipino shall be the official languages (Gonzalez, pp. 144-45).

During a recent trip to the Philippines, I had the opportunity to visit Cebu City. While there, I was taken to a small bay outside the City where there is

a monument to Ferdinand Magellan, marking the spot where he was killed in 1521. On the seaward side of that monument, and of much more recent date, is a monument to the chieftan who was responsible for his death. In a way, the existence and juxtaposition of these two monuments came to symbolize for me the dilemma of the Philippines, roughly characterizable as the Spanish period, the early American period, the Japanese period, the later American period, and independence, covering a time span of some 450 years. The quest for national identity is revealed in the two monuments; the resurgence of the indigenous character through the layers of foreign intervention. And the quest for linguistic identity is revealed in the 1973 Constitution; the recognition of the influence of Spanish, Arabic, and English on the indigenous languages of the archipelago. It is interesting, in this context, that the 1973 Constitution mandates as the "common national language" a fiction — a language which has its existence only in the minds of some linguists who project an amalgam composed of elements of all the indigenous languages of the Philippines. And it is even more interesting that the 1973 Constitution recognizes as "official languages" one modified version of an indigenous language (Pilipino being a linguistically adjusted form of Tagalog) and one "colonial" language which also happens to be a language of wider communication in the contemporary world. It is also interesting that Japanese is conspicuous by its absence. It is amazing that, at the end of the Spanish period, after almost 350 years of colonial administration, less than 3 per cent of the population spoke Spanish while after less than fifty years of U.S. administration more than a quarter of the population spoke English.

What a minuscule number of Spaniards could not do for Spanish, a similarly minuscule number of Americans were able to do for English, with the help of a large number of Filipinos (p. 27).

The tortuous twisting and turning of men, events, and views of the language problem are the facts traced in Bro. Andrew's extraordinary book. In the Preface, Bro. Andrew summarizes the scope of the book:

In looking at the Philippine experience and the Philippine search for an elusive linguistic symbol of nationhood, a symbol which caused regionalistic loyalties and ethnic conflicts to surface, considerations regarding problems of dissemination and standardization, crises of acceptance of one language over others, and contemporary efforts at intellectualizing the selected language are likewise brought forth. Details of historical interest are reviewed as accompaniments to the thinking and the debate that went on among the country's leaders on the development of the national language (p. viii).

But the book is not merely an historical treatise, reviewing the men, events, and documents that account for the convoluted evolution of contemporary

views of the national language issue. It is, in addition, a thoughtful book, written by a trained linguist, which attempts to look at a variety of theoretical issues in language planning.

. . . theories on language and nationalism propounded by Fishman (1972) are tested against the Philippine experience, for the Philippines represents a country at present which has become a nation but which repudiated its first choice of a linguistic symbol of nationhood only to renew the search once more. The social dynamics that precipitated such an unusual situation are explained and its future prospects analyzed (p. viii).

To a certain extent, the crux of the matter was expressed early in the period studied by Bro. Andrew. He quotes the Philippine patriot Jose Rizal, writing in 1891:

Spanish will never be a general language in the country; the people will never speak it, because the idea of its brain and the sentiments of its heart find no phrases to express themselves in it; every people has its own language as it has its own way of feeling As long as a people keeps its language, it keeps the pledge of its liberty, just as the man preserves his independence as long as he preserves his own way of thinking. Language is the thought of the people (p. 7).

This remarkably modern sentiment obviously applies not only to Spanish in the Philippines; it is a far more universal observation. What is ironic, of course, is that it also applies to the indigenous languages of the Philippines and accounts for the feelings of Ilocanos and Cebuanos and others toward Tagalog-based Pilipino.

The book approaches these complex issues through five major divisions:

Using the frame of a constitution and the formation of a republic, the first chapter focuses on questions of language in the documents and events of the Propaganda Movement and the Philippine Revolution of the late nineteenth century, culminating in the First Republic The second chapter . . . describes events leading up to the 1935 Constitution and the transitional Commonwealth Government The third chapter gives due recognition to the 1943 Laurel Constitution and the Laurel Government's impressive attempts to propagate the national language during the Japanese occupation. [The fourth chapter reviews] the Third Republic . . . begun in 1946 and [ending] in 1973, the postwar period which saw the rise and fall of Tagalog-based Pilipino . . . [and] the events which led to the student movement of 1969-1972, . . . [and] the proclamation of martial law on 21 September 1972 The epilogue looks toward the future . . . (pp. ix-x).

Documentation is thorough throughout; indeed, this book probably could not have been written by anyone else. It depends not only upon access to historical documents in the Philippines, Japan, and the United States, but also upon personal knowledge, acquaintance with the now dying generation of Philippine linguists who lived the history recounted (the Acknowledgements constitute a "Who's Who" of Philippine Linguistics), and a broad knowledge of Philippine languages. In the Epilogue, Bro. Andrew draws together the historical and linguistic strands:

What the Philippine experience dramatizes is that while a linguistic symbol of nationhood is certainly a desideratum and that while in certain specific cases the search for nationhood was simultaneously tied to the development of a linguistic symbol, nationhood and national language are not tied together by a necessary law of association (p. 150).

And he really does look into the future; he ventures a summary of the linguistic situation as it is likely to be in the year 2000 — a most dangerous exercise for a linguist, but one which, in the case of the Philippines, seems entirely appropriate at the end of such a book:

Short of a massive social upheaval or a radical change in the politics of the region, the Filipino will continue to be multilingual, at least, trilingual, using the local vernacular as the language of the home, Tagalog-based Filipino as an urban lingua franca, and English as the language of commerce, legislation, government, and international relations, perhaps using Filipino and English as the languages of education, and paying lip service to the continuing formation of a common national language called Filipino (p. 175).

It is worthy of note that the title of the book implies a tentativeness — *Language and Nationalism: The Philippine Experience* THUS FAR. The story is not finished. Indeed, to a certain extent, the book is an updating of Frei's (1959) careful study, with the implication that in another twenty years it will be necessary to update again. It may well be; political events flow on. Since the publication of this book, martial law has been lifted, there have been significant changes in the education law returning to a somewhat greater influence on English, there has been a conference on the future of English which brought together a variety of threads in contemporary Philippine thought about the language issue, and there are bound to be other events. While it will undoubtedly be necessary to update the documentation, one has the feeling that Brother Andrew's projection into the future will need little modification. Those two statues on the shores of a little bay outside Cebu City haven't yet been wiped away by the winds of time; the heritage remains.

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