TAMBARA 24 (2007): 7-16

Language, Power, and Defining the Filipino Soul

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I had written a paper on the process that led Jesuits finally to adopt English as the medium of instruction in their schools, primarily the Ateneo de Manila and later the seminaries entrusted by the bishops to their care. For fear however that I might bore you with details on the intramural struggles regarding language among the Jesuits, I decided that probably the best way of drawing some fruit from my labors as a student of history is to do the following: First, to summarize in a concise way what I think are some data brought to light by historical research into this Jesuit process; second, to raise some questions about the relationship between language and identity given a particular reading of our context today; and third, to present a tentative framework regarding this relationship given today's globalizing world.

Background on Jesuit educational work in the Philippines

The shift from Spanish to American sovereignty in the Philippines produced radical changes on various levels of life.[1] These changes were all in the service of a policy of Americanization of Philippine society. The strict political demarcation of Church and State dictated by American constitutional principles spelled the demise of the *patronato real* as the legal-canonical arrangement governing Church-State relations during the Spanish regime.[2] This meant that public funds could no longer be used for Church-based and Church-sponsored activities. Thus in the realm of education for example, the Church had to fend for itself. Where the Jesuits were concerned, the *Escuela Normal Superior* had to cease operations as a state-financed teacher-training institute and the Ateneo municipal de Manila had to drop its appellation of "municipal" and transform itself into a private school.

The American regime drew up a plan for a public school system to replace the one systematically instituted under the Spaniards in the 1860s. The plan covered the whole range of education, from the primary to the university level. Implementation of this plan involved the use of English as medium of instruction. Though Spanish continued to be used in government, particularly in court proceedings, the trend clearly was toward supplanting the language of Calderon with the language of Shakespeare.

Much better able to adapt to and live under this radically changed situation were the new religious congregations invited to work in the country. In the first decade of the twentieth century alone, Irish Redemptorists, Dutch Mill Hill Missionaries, Belgian Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM) Fathers, Dutch Sacred Heart Fathers, and the German Divine Word Missionaries (SVD) entered the country and in time would spread out to the rest of the archipelago. Women religious congregations predated and accompanied these men religious congregations. Aside from the contemplative nuns of Santa Clara, the Beaterio de Santa Catalina, the Beaterio de la Compañía de Jesus (which would become the Religious of the Virgin Mary or RVM Sisters), and, somewhat later, the Recoleto-directed Beaterio would become active in the educational apostolate. Joining them were the new European women congregations: The Daughters of Charity in 1862, the Augustinian Sisters in 1883, and the French Assumption Sisters in 1892. During the American regime, the following arrived in the Philippines: The St. Paul de Chartres Sisters in 1904, the Benedictine Sisters in 1906, the Immaculate Heart of Mary (ICM) Sisters in 1910, the Holy Spirit Sisters, the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary, and the Good Shepherd Sisters in 1912.

Church-related educational institutions connected to the older religious orders for men would take quite some time to adopt English as medium of instruction. The Ateneo de Manila would do so definitively only in 1921 and the University of Santo Tomas in 1923. Various reasons could be given for this delay: Some reasons were due to the internal conditions in which the religious orders found themselves; other reasons were due to a lingering doubt with regard to American political intentions in the Philippines, at least until the middle of the second decade of the twentieth century when the passing of the Jones Bill clarified American intentions.

Briefly, the questions then in people's minds had to do with the duration of American colonial rule. Was independence imminent? Was it to be long in coming? If so, how long? If the Americans were to give up the Philippines in a few years, say in five to ten years, would it make sense for Church-based educational institutions to shift to English? I make the claim that these questions had pragmatic import. Spanish had been the *lingua franca* of the islands for three centuries; English for merely a decade. If the Americans were to leave, would English then survive? The Americans of course would stay on for more than three decades, but this was hardly obvious in the first half of the second decade of American colonial rule in the Philippines. Besides, Filipino elite rhetoric then was full of agitation for independence at the earliest possible time. The decision to shift from Spanish to English as medium of instruction in the schools was first and foremost a political issue tied to colonial rule.

In general, it must be noted that the Catholic Church that survived the Philippine Revolution, the Spanish-American War, and the Filipino-American War was a beleaguered Church, assailed on all sides by various threats, both real and imaginary. Real however were the following: First, there was the challenge posed by an aggressively proselytizing and logistically superior Protestantism making its new presence absolutely felt in the country. Second, there was the schism initiated by Gregorio Aglipay and companions; the *Iglesia Filipina Independiente* claimed at least a fourth of the Catholic population as its membership in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Third, there was the enmity of anti-clerical and anti-Catholic elements, mostly members of the Filipino elite, who were out politically and socially to discredit the Church and to exploit its weakened public position.

Specific observations regarding Jesuit educational work

The Jesuits were royally expelled from Spain and all Spanish dominions in 1767. The Jesuits of the Philippines received their marching orders in 1768 and, in the next two years, they were shipped in several groups to exile in the Papal States in Italy. In a papal bull, Pope Clement XIV would then suppress the Society of Jesus in 1773. Restored worldwide by a papal fiat of Pope Pius VII in 1814, the Spanish

Jesuits returned to the Philippines in 1859 after almost a century of absence. Their primary mission was the evangelization of Mindanao, then targeted by the Spanish colonial regime for economic development and political consolidation. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Spanish Jesuits who composed the Philippine Mission of the Province of Aragon had charge of the whole island of Mindanao, except for a few places still under the Augustinian Recollects and those given to the Benedictine order. They also had two schools in Manila, the Ateneo municipal de Manila and the Escuela Normal Superior. A source of pride was the *Observatorio de Manila*.[3]

At least initially, the Spanish Jesuits were in principle not opposed to the adoption of English as medium of instruction in their schools. There is a charming picture of Spanish Jesuits gathered in the courtyard of the Ateneo municipal de Manila in 1899; they are portrayed as going through a crash course on the English language. It is difficult not to see in this exercise a refreshing optimism about the future. In fact, Father Francisco Javier Simó, one of the Jesuit professors at the Ateneo, was commissioned by his superiors to write a textbook on English grammar in 1900. The book was never published, much to the consternation of its author, who began to suspect that superiors had changed their attitudes toward the English language. However, due to problems of teaching staff and lack of expertise, the Spanish Jesuits never did feel equipped to make the shift from Spanish to English. True nonetheless was a lingering nostalgia for the Spanish past, an ironclad but ultimately reductionist identification between the Catholic faith and the Spanish language, and an emotional attachment to their own national identity.

After the shift of sovereignty from Spanish to American hands, a sprinkling of American Jesuits would find their way to the Philippines. Their primary task was to help the Philippine Mission in its dealings with organs of the American colonial regime. Initially, they were also supposed to minister to the pastoral needs of American Catholics in Manila. Some of them would help out in the Manila Observatory, one of only two Jesuit works that the American colonial regime financed.[4] The presence of these American Jesuits was *ad hoc* in nature; however, it was becoming clearer by the year that the Spanish Jesuits, after it became apparent that American colonial presence was going to continue indefinitely, could no longer respond to the situation.

To make a rather long and complex story short, the Jesuit Superior General in Rome, Father Wlodzimierz Ledochowski, decreed a change: Spanish Jesuits of the Philippine Mission were to move to the Bombay Mission to take over the work of the German Jesuits who had been expelled from India by the British during World War I. American Jesuits of the Maryland-New York Province were to take over the Philippine Mission from the Spanish Jesuits of the Aragon Province. The first big group of American Jesuits arrived in 1921. They were given the Ateneo de Manila and the Colegio-Seminario de Vigan to run. This year marked the official change of Spanish to English as medium of instruction. In 1926, the American Jesuits took official and definitive control of the Philippine Mission when the first American Jesuit in the person of James Carlin, then Rector of the Ateneo de Manila, was named Mission Superior. In general, it must be said that the American Jesuits were as committed as any other American in the Philippines to the process of Americanization that the American colonial regime had set for the Archipelago.

When Horacio de la Costa was still a Jesuit scholastic in his early twenties, he wrote a book on the history of the Jesuits in the Philippines from 1859 to the decade just before World War I. The book *Light cavalry*, a delightful read even if already somewhat dated, takes pains to show that the Spanish Jesuits did all that was possible to them to teach English to their students. He quotes at length the Spanish Jesuit Father Juan Villalonga's instructions on the teaching of English from the elementary grades to high school. Nevertheless, he also says that the use of English as medium of instruction would find its effective place only when the American Jesuits finally arrived to take over the Ateneo de Manila.

In time, the American Jesuits would also set up schools in various places in the Philippines, schools that, in the course of time, would evolve into the four Jesuit universities in Mindanao and the Bicol region today. Two other Jesuit schools, the Ateneo de Tuguegarao and the Ateneo de San Pablo, would not prosper because of difficulties experienced with the ecclesiastical authorities in those places during their incumbency.

When Filipino Jesuits took over the Philippine Province of the Society of Jesus in the post-World War II period, the various Jesuit Ateneos remained committed to English as medium of instruction. Nevertheless, in the 1960s and 1970s, a reawakened nationalist consciousness among students and faculty called for the Filipinization of education. We cannot go into the details of this quite recent phenomenon. Suffice it to say that, at least in the Ateneo de Manila, the move to Filipinization took place in the area of the Humanities. Two exemplars of this move come to mind: Now deceased national artist Rolando Tinio in the Pilipino Department and the Jesuit Roque Ferriols in Philosophy.

Today, English continues to be the primary medium of instruction in all Jesuit educational institutions. In a globalizing world, the call has been for the strengthening of this commitment to English. In the institution where I teach, the Loyola School of Theology, plans are being drawn for making the school the center of theological education for Jesuit scholastics coming from the diverse regions of East Asia and Oceania. Already we have scholastics from as far as Sri Lanka studying with us. In the near future, Jesuit scholastics from as diverse countries in Asia as East Timor, Myanmar, Vietnam, and South Korea will be coming to our part of the world to study theology. Only one language is deemed necessary and useful for this enterprise: The English language.

Language and identity: Some questions

In my reading of historical texts about the shift from Spanish to English as medium of instruction in Jesuit schools, one inescapable question continues to play in my mind: What view of language was consciously or unconsciously operative in all the discussions and debates about shifting from one to the other language? A preliminary answer given by an analysis of the sources is that language was fundamentally construed as an instrument of what Glenn May (1980) terms as social engineering. Perhaps a better term would be cultural engineering given that the Americanization process was concerned to change not only the political, economic, and social structures, but also the cultural values deemed necessary to underpin those structures. In any case, the question remains relevant today: What view of language is operative in our promotion of English today?

How effective has been this instrumental view of language in the social and cultural engineering of our history? In his book *Pasyon and revolution*, Rey Ileto (1979) describes the differences in the perception of the revolution by two groups of Filipinos: The Spanish-educated and Spanish-speaking ilustrados like Rizal and the Tagalog masses whose worldview was shaped by the Tagalog *pasyon* texts of that time. The dissonance in the reading and interpretation of the signs of the times between the elite and the masses has its contemporary analogues. The most obvious example I can give now for this contemporary dissonance is our estimation of the Erap presidency.[5]

If this view of language as an instrument of social and cultural engineering is what is operative then and now, what are its implications for the development of a Filipino identity? In a post-Wittgensteinian and post-Heideggerian age, when language is viewed not so much as instrument but as the "house of being," as defining who we are and as constitutive of living in a world, could English (or Spanish or any other foreign language for that matter) carry the burden of defining the Filipino soul, of explicating Filipino identity? Can the English language understood as instrument be transformed into a language as an authentic matrix of Filipino meanings and values? Or are we cast into a dramatic performance in which, depending on the role to be played, we are called at one point to use one language for some pragmatic purpose and then called at another point just to be, to live, to exist in the other language? Is it possible to live in a world that is constantly in need of being translated from one language to the other? Vicente Rafael (1993), in his book *Contracting colonialism*, deconstructs conventional readings of Philippine history and weaves a tale of constant negotiations of our identity through linguistic strategies of evasion and domestication of what is foreign. Or do we now have Filipinos for whom English has in fact ceased to be an instrument but has become a matrix of meanings and values for their own lives?

The American Jesuits shifted to English as medium of instruction in all their Ateneo schools in the Philippines. English was of course their own world-constituting language. They lived in the world made possible by that language and by the traditions it carried. Filipinos learned the English language however as an instrument, and as such it required a constant negotiation of their identity through translation.

Could it be that the never-ending translations Filipinos had to engage in have produced some changes in that same identity? What does it mean therefore for a Filipino to live in a constantly translated world? Could the pathologies of the national character be attributed precisely to the ever-shifting linguistic grounds on which we are required to stand?

A reflection on how language locates Filipino identity today

It seems to me that it is becoming more and more typical of Filipinos to be multilingual. I speak Taosug whenever I find myself among family members in Zamboanga. In my religious community at Loyola House of Studies, I converse in Tagalog. And every Sunday when I have to preside at mass in Montalban or Pansol or Our Lady of Fatima Parish in Mandaluyong, I deliver my homily also in Tagalog. But when I email foreign-born friends abroad, I use English or Italian. I have cousins whose mother tongue is the Samal language. I have other cousins whose primary language is Cebuano or Ilocano.

Whatever the conditions of relative isolation in which our ancestors found themselves in pre-Hispanic Philippine society, the situation of the Filipino today is markedly different. Born into one language, she is called to learn Filpino or Tagalog at a young age. By the time she is done with elementary schooling, our young Filipino speaks two or three languages at the very least: Her mother tongue, Tagalog, and English, in various degrees of skill and proficiency. If, at some point in her young life she finds herself working abroad in a non-English speaking country, a fourth language very often now forms part of her linguistic repertoire. I spent eight years of studies in Rome. There, some of our Filipino migrant workers have come to speak fluent Italian. It is easy enough to imagine many of our fellow Filipinos working in other countries speaking Arab, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, German, French, among others.

Who then is the Filipino today? Perhaps it might be helpful to note that Filipino identity is implicated in three worlds. First, there is the world of her birth and childhood, the world of family and relatives, the world of her local community. Second, there is the world of what Benedict Anderson (1991) calls her imagined national community; she

is heir to a common history that tells her she is Filipino. Third, there is the international community; it could be that, at some point in her life, she finds herself working in some country having to speak a foreign language. The fact that she speaks English is very often touted to be a plus, and therefore an advantage for her. If it happens that she gets employed in a call center in Eastwood in Quezon City or some such place, she will most probably be speaking in English.

At least three worlds therefore: The local, the national, and the international. In every world, she speaks a language. The three worlds are not of course clearly demarcated among themselves. It could be that the sense of belonging to a national community remains the least developed in her. The Filipino does not seem to possess the same attachment to the Filipino language as the Japanese is to hers, or the Korean, or the Vietnamese.

What implications are there therefore for Filipino national identity when she has to live in three worlds and express herself in, through, and across three different languages? Could it be that social injustice in our time must also mean being reduced to speaking one and only one language? Could it be that poverty in our time means the absence of any opportunity to speak one or two other languages than one's own mother tongue?

Notes

[1] The Treaty of Paris signed on 1 October 1898 effectively ended the Spanish-American War. For the price of USD 20M, Spain ceded colonial power over Philippine Islands to the United States.

[2] The Spanish colonial period covered 1565 to 1898.

[3] Then anglicized as Manila Observatory, this served as the Philippine Weather Bureau between 1901-1946 financed by the American colonial government.

[4] The other would be the Catholic chaplaincy in the Culion Leprosarium.

[5] Erap is Joseph Ejercito Estrada, thirteenth President of the Republic of the Philippines (1998-2001). He was elected to power by an overwhelming, unquestionable majority of vote, but was deposed in January 2001 by a civil society-led revolt. Four months later, his supporters among the urban poor would riot in the streets of Manila to demand his restoration to power. A special court found Estrada guilty of plunder on 12 September 2007. President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo granted him pardon seven weeks later.