

Written by Atty. Lope Lindio

Tuesday, 05 February 2008 12:48 - Last Updated Wednesday, 18 June 2008 10:08

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At the risk of fatiguing the readers, this is not about being for or against the bill of Rep. Eduardo Gullas (Cebu Province, 1st District), which seeks to use the regional languages in the grade school and revive the teaching of English as the medium of instruction in the Philippines, in the upper level. I will just cover the feedbacks from different sources, notably Ben Ongoco, the noted bilingual enthusiast of Tagalog and English writing.

Editor's Note: We are pleased and honored to announce that Atty. Lope Lindio of Houston, Texas, will now be writing a column for this web site. We hope that readers may enjoy Atty. Lindio's very-thorough analysis of issues such as the national language of the Philippines.

He insisted that putting back English to its preeminent position in the country is not the key to economic progress, as the bill proponents claim. The Gullas bill, he said, will undermine developing a national language which he contended could unify the Filipinos, because "love of a national tongue ... foster(s) national unity and self-discipline which the Filipinos lack." Just look at Germany, Italy, France and other non-English speaking world economies, he pointed out. They didn't "change to English to attain success in industries, finance, commerce, electronics, robotics and nuclear or cyberspace technology."

This rhetoric was a familiar refrain during the era of Recto, Laurel, and Tañada. It wind-powered the young who were surfing the wave of nationalism sweeping the country. I used to hear, and I learned to believe, that having a national language was one step of the long staircase towards reaching full nationhood. My Bisaya' friends were in agreement but only if their predominantly spoken Bisaya/Cebuano was going to be the national language. But I held on to the heretical notion of learning Tagalog, as my own personal contribution to the building of the Filipino nation.

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Nation building shouldn't include forcing citizens to abandon their mother tongues and replace them with another, even for patriotic reasons.

But learning Tagalog was dispiriting, even for a self-described patriot, and would-be hero. It did not help that I was born in Pasay, Rizal, and my mother had a good command of the language. My friends and I worked hard to get good grades but they really never cared to learn the language and I lost interest in the ensuing struggle to learn it.

Looking back, I realize that nation building shouldn't include forcing citizens to abandon their mother tongues and replace them with another, for patriotic reasons. The Nigerian and Philippine experiences are case studies of the choices in developing a national-language policy. Nigeria supports developing the major mother tongues of the regions and the study of English, much like as proposed in the Gullas bill. In the Philippines, all the regional languages are disregarded and replaced by Tagalog by force of law.

The result is enlightening. Nigeria has seen a mature development of the native languages and prepared Nigerians to excel abroad, including the United States. The world of letters has seen best sellers written by Nigerian authors, like C. Nwakanma and Chinua Achebe, a feat no Filipino author has accomplished. There are still more that can be said here but we don't need to rub it in. In the Philippines, the growth of the regional languages has been stunted and the country is still debating if the adoption of Tagalog was the right policy.

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Even the Tagalog-speaking students find the study of Tagalog superfluous, and unnecessary, although the process is like eating rice every day because it's their native tongue. The non-Tagalog speakers consider it an unfair imposition, a useless effort, and time wasted because it is of dubious value. For unlike the teaching of the internationally and routinely useful Chinese Mandarin, French, or German, in the regions in those respective countries, where these languages are not spoken at home, all that you get in learning Tagalog is fill the abstract need of a perceived common language, however, outmoded and unworkable that idea might be.

So, instead of inspiring students to excel and advance in learning academic Tagalog, with all the linguistic bells and whistles, they take it only as a matter of duty and not for scholarship or to help their career. To many Filipinos, it is easier and less burdensome to learn Tagalog from film flicks or while interfacing with folks from the region. The government might even take this clue in adopting a pragmatic policy of taking the classrooms to the movie houses. I'm sure students wouldn't mind learning Tagalog watching never-say-die heroes and unwrapped beauties.

Filipinos should be able to read in Tagalog the classics, Greek-Roman ancient speeches, Nobel literary-prize winners and scientific journals, without losing the original thought.

Yet Tagalog might still be accepted as a basis of a national language if it can be upgraded to the level of English, Japanese, Spanish, French, German. Since the purpose of an educational system is to make Filipinos truly *educated* in the classical sense of the word, and make them competitive in a global economy, the only sound and sane policy is to enable them to become like the Japanese or the Chinese, or the Germans, whose national languages equip them with the key to unlock the wisdom of the ages. Filipinos should be able to read in Tagalog the classics, like the Iliad, the Greek and Roman ancient speeches, the Nobel literary prize winners, and the scientific journals, without losing the original thought. They should be able to improve their Tagalog every day because they will be reading major newspapers in Tagalog, and the Tagalog edition of the world's great publications, like The Economist, Time and Newsweek, The

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Wall Street Journal, Psychiatry Today, etc.

Singapor  
is now

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reportedly adopting English as its medium of instruction. And

Japan

is Anglicized since English is taught alongside Japanese. Policy makers around the world are driving their young people to learn English. But the Filipino leaders are more concerned about keeping Tagalog predominate over the others and apparently giving up whatever little English gains they have had for years.

When skillful Filipino writers wouldn't disdain writing in Tagalog, and the system can turn out Filipino college graduates who can discuss knowledgeably and write fluently in good and literate Tagalog the issues that really matter, then perhaps, Filipinos will not suffer much if Tagalog is kept as the medium of instruction at the lower level.

Tagalog is still handicapping non-Tagalog speakers to whom it is a foreign language for all intents and purposes.

But this scenario will not resolve the other major problem facing the teaching of Tagalog. It is still handicapping the non-Tagalog speakers to whom it is a foreign language for all intents and purposes. Wouldn't it be fair to require also the Tagalog region to learn Cebuano, Ilocano, Kapangpangan, etc., in order that the playing field will be leveled for everyone?

Unfortunately, that is not going to happen. Those advocating strongly for the teaching of Tagalog are really looking for linguistic domination in the guise of patriotism. Anyone with a flicker of brainpower should realize by now that this business of developing a national language is all about power. They're finding it difficult to give up the linguistic advantage handed on a

silver platter by President Quezon to his linguistic group.

But it's palpably obvious that the teaching of Tagalog through the years is just to make Filipinos understand and learn to converse in the language, but hardly to use it at work, in written communication, or to read the work product of the world's wise men. I will be pleasantly surprised if there's 5% of the Filipinos, whether Tagalog, Bisaya, or Ilocano, who took the trouble of reading the Tagalog classics, "Florante at Laura" or the "Banag at Sikat." I still have to read of a Tagalog scholar whose specialty is the study of the Balagtas or Santos masterpieces. If nobody finds that lofty, or interesting, or worthwhile, or if only a handful bother to improve their knowledge in Tagalog, for scholarship, pay or profit, I don't know why the advocates of the language would want to push it down the throat of the 83-million other Filipinos and turn them all to become educated fools.

This language power struggle for dominance or survival is illustrated in a recently released movie, "Sakal Sakali Saklolo." Written and directed by a certain Jose Javier Reyes, a clip in the movie was supposed to have this dialogue: Yaya to grandchild: *"Ayaw ug dagan, basin madam-ag ka."* Grandchild: *"K*

*adyut lang, nagduwa pa ko."*

(Grandfather, with bulging eyes, grimaces incredulously at the Visayan words of his grandson.)

Yaya:

*"Anhi dinhi."*

Grandmother (with a pained expression) to Grandfather:

*"Carlo, did you hear that?"*

Mother:

*Ay naku Ma. Nakuha ho niya 'yon sa yaya niya. Sinabihan na namin si Susan na huwag niyang Binibisaya si Rafa. Dapat Tagalog."*

Grandmother:

*"But the boy should be talking in English."*

Mother:

*"Hayaan niyo na sa eskwelahan matutunan 'yon Ma. Dapat Tagalog kasi Pinoy ang anak namin eh."*

Their Bisaya' ancestors wrote Filipino history with prowess, blood, and craftiness back in 1521.

Bisaya' Senator Nene Pimentel injudiciously protested, but the great majority in the Bisaya' regions were indifferent and bemused watching such a ridiculous and pitiful preemption of Filipino identity. Their Bisaya' ancestors wrote Filipino history with prowess, blood, and craftiness back in 1521 when (what is now) the Philippines was just Cebu, Bohol, Samar, Leyte, and Northern Mindanao. The Bisaya/Cebuano Enrique came with Magellan in March 1521 and thus became the first circumnavigator of the world. And what else would remain of Philippine history if Magellan was not defeated in Maktan. The folklorist balladeer Yoyoy Villame relived the battle when he sung, Homer like, Magellan's encounter with Lapulapu, who skillfully and playfully raised and swung his arms in more ways than one to the navigator's face, and stiff-tongued him in Bisaya': "*I have two hands, the left and the right, hold them up high, etc.,*" Yoyoy was alluding to the native martial art of *arnis*

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□

Magellan, not knowing what hit him, and cried in his delirium, "*mother, mother, call the doctor quick because I'm very sick!!!*"

Did not the well-armed Legazpi sue for peace with crafty Bohol's Sikatuna, who only had bolos and *luthang* in his arsenal, in a treaty which marked the first diplomatic triumph of the Filipinos? Lakandula could have done better than just flee in the face of the advancing Spanish forces.

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If the rest of the country is not careful with their ways, and continues to be defensive and overplays their insecurity, the Bisaya/Cebuano people might just as well make their worst nightmare come true. They'll roll their mats and take Filipino history with them. Then the Tagalogs will have to reckon their history from 1898. # # #

**Editor's Notes: Lope Lindio is a lawyer, practicing law in Houston, Texas. He is also licensed in Illinois.**

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