

Castilian Friars, Colonialism and Language Planning: How the Philippines Acquired a Non-Spanish National Language

The topic of the process behind the establishment of a national language, who chooses it, when and why, came to me in an unexpected way. The UBC Philippine Studies Series hosted an art exhibit in Fall 2011 that was entitled MAHAL. This exhibit consisted of artworks by Filipino/a students that related to the Filipino migratory experience(s). I was particularly fascinated by the piece entitled Ancients by Chaya Go (Fig 1). This piece consisted of an image, a map of the Philippines, superimposed with Aztec and Mayan imprints and a pre-colonial Filipina priestess. Below it was a poem, written in Spanish. Chaya explained that “by writing about an imagined ‘home’ (the Philippines) in a language that is not ours anymore, I am playing with the idea of who is Filipino and who belongs to the country” (personal communication, November 29 2011). What I learned from Chaya Go and Edsel Ya Chua that evening at MAHAL, that was confirmed in the research I uncovered, was that in spite of being colonized for over three hundred and fifty years the Philippines now has a national language, Filipino, that is based on the Tagalog language which originated in and around Manila, the capital city of the Philippines (Himmelmann 2005:350). What fascinated me was that every Spanish colony that I could think of, particularly in Latin and South America, adopted Spanish as their national language even after they gained independence from Spain. This Spanish certainly differed from the Spanish in neighboring countries and regions, as each form of Spanish was locally influenced by the traditional languages that had existed before colonization, but its root was Spanish and it identified itself as Spanish. How then, did the Philippines managed to come out of colonization by that same country, with a Filipino language that is locally influenced by Spanish, rather than the other way around? It was this question that prompted my paper.

This paper will first briefly discuss the colonial history of the Philippines and the linguistic influence of the Spanish colonization. It will then briefly compare and contrast Tagalog and Filipino, after which it goes on to discuss language planning in the Philippines, and the role of education and policy in language planning. I consulted three primary sources for the purposes of examining this question of linguistic history. The first is The Promise of the Foreign: Nationalism and the Technics of Translation in the Spanish Philippines by Vincente L. Rafael, a Filipino professor at the University of Washington, while the second is The Language Planning Situation in the Philippines by Andrew Gonzalez, a Filipino linguist who taught at De La Salle University in Manila, and was secretary of the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DLSU 2009), the government body in charge of language policy in the 1970’s to 1990’s (Gonzalez 1998:496). Lastly, I consulted The Austronesian Languages of Asia and Madagascar, first of all because it was a language dictionary, and therefore theoretically only concerned with the linguistic components of language. Additionally, because it gives a background to each of the languages concerned, I was curious as to how this Western source, produced in North America and Europe, would explain the histories of Filipino and Tagalog as compared to the two Filipino sources I had consulted.

For clarification, I will later argue in favour of the following differentiation: throughout my paper I will refer to the version of Tagalog that, with all of its various influences (Gonzalez 1998:487) and government sponsored expansion (Himmelman 2005:350), was established in 1987 (Gonzalez 1998:488) as the official language of the Philippines as “Filipino”, whereas when I say “Tagalog”, I am referring to the original Manila-centered language on which Filipino is based.

The Philippines has a long and complicated colonial history that was initiated by the Spanish entering the archipelago in 1521 (Gonzalez 1998:516), and intensifying their colonization around 1565 (Gonzalez 1998:516). This colonization would last for over 350 years, until 1898 (Gonzalez 1998:516). The Spanish relied almost exclusively on the galleon trade as the source of their wealth (Rafael 2005:5-7) and radically mismanaged their attempts at harnessing Filipino nature resources and agriculture (Rafael 2005:6-7). During the last one hundred years of the Spanish occupation however, there was an influx of British and North American merchants who invested in Filipino production, particularly in cash crops like tobacco, sugar, coffee and abaca (Rafael 2005:7), and they were able to establish steady and profitable business, quite often “through networks of Chinese wholesalers and retailers with long-standing ties to the countryside” (Rafael 2005:7). One Spanish observer went so far as to declare that “from the commercial view, the Philippines is an Anglo-Chinese colony with a Spanish flag” (Rafael 2005:8). Due in part, in the later years, to the civil unrest in Spain during the Napoleonic invasion, Carlist wars and revolution (Rafael 2005:6), there was a relative revolving door of Spanish officials coming in and out of Manila (Rafael 2005:6). As such, with undetermined tenures and constant changes, greed and corruption abounded (Rafael 2005:6). The Filipino colonial situation was compounded by the fact that when the Spanish entered the Philippines they were discouraged by the colonial powers in Spain from living outside of walled communities in Manila (Rafael 2005:7). Rafael attributes this to the Spanish reacting to what had happened in their other colonies, particularly in the Americas, when Spaniards mixed with the indigenous populations, giving rise to large mestizo populations that “came to challenge colonial rule” (Rafael 2005:7). In spite of this discouragement, some intermixing between the Spaniards and Filipino society did occur. This influence was predominant in the emergence of the ilustrados, or enlightened ones, who would go on to become the first nationalists (Rafael 2005:13-35, Steinhauer 2005:75-76). The ilustrados were primarily the Filipino upper-class who were among the very few indigenous peoples allowed into the Spanish schooling system in the Philippines (Himmelman 2005:75-76).

Given that the majority of the Spanish colonists were contained within the walls of Manila, the only Spaniards who ventured into the rest of the Philippines, were the missionaries. Both Rafael and Gonzalez note that the missionaries chose to become fluent in the local language, and restrict the teaching of Spanish to religious terms (Rafael 2005:8-9, 23, Gonzalez 1998:495), which was how languages throughout the Philippines acquired their first Spanish loanwords. Gonzalez indicates that the impetus behind this also lay in a fear that Filipino fluency in Spanish would enable them to understand the civil unrest that was happening in Spain at the time and would inspire rebellion among the Filipino citizens (Gonzalez 1998:495). Rafael notes the way in which

knowledge of Castilian enabled the ilustrados to communicate with the previously unreachable colonial powers (Rafael 2005:20-25). This became a part of their nationalist movement for the spread of Castilian to all Filipino people so that they too could know this language of communication, without the need for interpreters, a job for which only the missionaries were capable, and therefore gave the friars an extraordinary amount of power (Rafael 2005:25-27). However, Rafael also notes that it was when the ilustrados were met with dissent from the missionaries when they tried to spread Castilian to the people, that they realized the Spanish were not interested in the equalizing features of common language, but rather, were intent on keeping it from the Filipino people (Rafael 2005:27).

It is this monopolization of power through language by Spanish friars that answers my initial question of why Spanish did not spread more readily through this colony as it did through others. (Rafael, Gonzalez 1998:495, 512-517). Though this fact was agreed upon by both Rafael and Gonzalez to a certain extent, Gonzalez asserts that the role of the Castilian friars in subverting the local teaching of Spanish is overstated, and in fact it was more so the lack of teachers and teaching resources that prevented the Filipino populace from becoming fluent in Spanish (Gonzalez 1998:513). That being said, it is important, in this instance, to note that Gonzalez was a Christian Brother (DLSU 2009) and as such, may have had a slight personal bias with respect to the blame placed on the Spanish missionaries.

The establishment of a Filipino national language occurred during the second phase of colonization in the Philippines, when the United States took over in 1898 and intensive Anglicization began (Steinhauer 2005:76). It was under American rule that in 1939, following the 1936 establishment of the National Language Institute on the basis that the Philippines was in need of a national language (Gonzalez 1998:513), that Tagalog was officially proclaimed to be the structural base of what would become the official Philippine language. Once it had developed “a written grammar and a dictionary (actually a bilingual word list)”, it would be disseminated through education (Gonzalez 1998:513). However, this would not occur until well after the Philippines gained independence from the United States in 1946.

Technically speaking Tagalog, is the language that is spoken in and around Manila (Gonzalez 1998:487, Himmelmann 2005:350), and one of the ten major Filipino languages out of the estimated 120 in the archipelago (Gonzalez 1998:489). Tagalog was renamed Pilipino in 1959 (Gonzalez 1998:487), but the spelling was later changed to “Filipino” in the 1970’s in order to reflect the voiceless labiodental fricative present in some Filipino languages outside of the regions where Tagalog is spoken, particularly further north, on Luzon (Gonzalez 1998:488). This change was primarily influenced by the Cebuano people (Gonzalez 1998:489), who speak another of the nations major languages, Cebuano Bisayan, and have the next largest population of speakers in the Philippines to Tagalog (Gonzalez 1998:490-492). This period during the 1960’s was referred to as the ‘National Language Wars’, as the Cebuano opposed the choice of Tagalog and argued that it was unconstitutional, since it referred explicitly to a specific ethnic group within the Philippines (Gonzalez 1993:487-488). However, by the time that the 1987 constitution passed, and with it the official legislation of Filipino as the national language of the

Philippines, there was little dissent, given the volatile political environment that had preceded the new constitution (Gonzalez 1993:488).

In The Austronesian Languages of Southeast Asia and Madagascar Himmelmann argues that the only difference between Tagalog and Filipino is a lexical difference (Himmelmann 2005:350). I argue that, based on the development of a grammar specific to Filipino (Gonzalez 1998:513) and the variety of its influences from other languages, including other Philippine languages in addition to Malay, Arabic, Spanish and English (Gonzalez 1998:487), in addition to its conscious government sponsored lexical expansion, that Tagalog and Filipino should be differentiated. I cannot say whether or not the Tagalog that is still spoken in and around Manila differs drastically from Filipino, or if they have become more or less interchangeable, but I do argue that given the drastic changes to the base of Tagalog in order to arrive at Filipino, that it is its own distinct dialect, and therefore, for academic purposes the terms should not be used interchangeably.

Given the distinct difference between Tagalog and Filipino, it is interesting to examine how they are represented in Western linguistic literature. Is there differentiation, or are they equated? How much of Filipino history is incorporated into the explanations? What do they identify as the impetus behind a Philippine-based national language? I was particularly interested in how they might be discussed in a language dictionary, which for most inquisitive minds would be the first stop in answering a question of a linguistic nature.

In terms of categorizing Tagalog and Filipino, they are part of the Austronesian language family (Gonzalez 1998:492, Adelaar, et. al. 2005), the Malayo-Polynesian Group of Languages (Gonzalez 1998:492), and the Western Indonesian Subgroup (Gonzalez 1998:492). Interestingly enough, The Austronesian Languages of Asia and Madagascar (Adelaar et. al. 2005) lists Tagalog and Filipino separately, however the first pages listed for “Filipino” are describe the linguistic history of the Philippines (Adelaar et. al. 2005:75-78), and the only other page number listed for “Filipino” directs the reader to the “Tagalog” entry. In comparison to these three pages featuring “Filipino”, there are sixty eight entries on the subject of “Tagalog”. In the chapter on Tagalog, it identifies the only difference between the two as a lexical difference, due to the systematic expansion of the Filipino lexicon by the Institute of National Language (Adelaar, et. al. 2005:350) and only mentions Chabacano/Chavacano in a brief statement about Spanish and Portuguese based creoles in Southeast Asia. By contrast, Gonzalez expands his discussion of Chabacano to include such details as its initial appearance as a pidgin amongst citizens who lived in close proximity to Spanish settlements, but that it is an established mother tongue and was accepted as a separate language after it was creolized (Gonzalez 1998:493). In his discussion of Philippine languages, Gonzalez notes that they are characterized by Verb-Object-Subject word order, considerable verb morphology, a somewhat simple phonological system and topicalization (Gonzalez 1998:493).

Though Rafael and Gonzalez approach language in the Philippines in different ways, I was fascinated to discover that Gonzalez refers to Filipino as a “second language” of the Filipino people (Gonzalez 1998:498), in much the same way that Rafael discusses Castilian, historically,

as a “second language” in the Philippines (Rafael 2005:14). Rafael states that for the nationalists in particular, Castilian was seen “as the medium of translation, a second language with which to articulate ones first” (Rafael 2005:14, 20). Similarly, Gonzalez illustrates that, even in families who have moved to Manila, or into Tagalog speaking areas, a families native tongue is generally used in the home, whereas “a colloquial variety of Filipino” is spoken “in the neighborhood”, or therefore, to interact with those around you (Gonzalez 1998:501). Indeed, Filipino is used in combination with English in a similar way to the one in which Castilian was used by the first nationalists, to enable them to communicate with the those in charge, and afford them opportunities for mobility. Additionally, both Rafael and Gonzalez highlight the role that these languages played, in their time, with regards to “interethnic communication” (Gonzalez 1998:518), and each author, in the context of their own research, refers to the language they are examining as the lingua franca (Rafael 2005:19, Gonzalez 1998:518). While discussing language policy, Gonzalez states that “[t]he current policy on the use of Filipino and English is the product of a compromise solution to the demands of nationalism and internationalism” (Gonzalez 1998:506), which could also easily have been argued by the ilustrados in favour of fluency in Castilian. However, it is important to bear in mind that although Filipino came to be while the Philippines was under American colonization, it is not the language of the oppressor and therefore, can not really be equated with Castilian. That is not to say though, that the American linguistic influence was not felt. In fact, it is the power that lies in ones ability to communicate in both Filipino and English that is encouraged through contemporary Filipino language policy and education.

The ultimate focus of the Philippines language policies is educating youth (Gonzalez 1998:501-506), with national language education beginning in Grade 1 (Gonzalez 1998:501). The government in the Philippines, both through the Institute of National Language and the Department of Education, Culture and Sports, has taken an active role “building” the national language through legislation and sociolinguistics (Gonzalez 1998:488, 499). Additionally, there was a push in the 1990’s to “develop Filipino as a modernizing and intellectualizing language” through the Commission on the Filipino Language following Republic Act No. 7104 (Gonzalez 1998:511). Notable under this act is the focus on developing Filipino as an academic language, a push for both standardization and multi-lingual dictionaries, and work to preserve and continue teaching other Philippine languages and literature. This is somewhat indirectly encouraged by the education system in that Gonzalez notes that, in terms of literacy, systems of writing in Philippine languages are very similar, and decoding is relatively straightforward, so children can typically become literate in their local language while becoming literate in Filipino (Gonzalez 1998:497). In terms of the history of language policy, there was a push to decolonize the system and have all subjects taught in Filipino (Gonzalez 1998:506), but the bilingual system was introduced as a compromise between linguistic decolonization and the overwhelmingly English instruction that existed prior to 1974 (Gonzalez 1998:506). As such, both English and Filipino are used as the mediums of instruction (Gonzalez 1998:496-521), though students pursuing concentrations in history at higher levels are usually encouraged to learn Spanish (Gonzalez 1998:501). According to the language policies set forth by the Department of Education, Culture and Sports in the 1970’s-1990’s (Gonzalez 1998:496), English is used for teaching mathematics,

the English language and science, whereas Filipino is used for all remaining subjects, with regionally specific, local vernaculars being used where needed to ensure that the class is understanding the material (Gonzalez 1998:499). However, this does serve to create a language hierarchy in which English is used as the medium of instruction for “cognitive subjects” (Gonzalez 1998:501). Gonzalez also points to the reality that there is a good deal of codeswitching between English and Filipino, which continues through high school and often to the university level as well (Gonzalez 1998:499).

Within the Philippine education system there is a distinct bilingual emphasis. Gonzalez mentions the “ideal of a balanced bilingual competent [sic] in both Filipino and English” (Gonzalez 1998:501), and states that “the ideal objective of language education in the Philippines was to produce the balanced bilingual equally able to carry on communication and higher order cognitive activities for his education in both Filipino and English” (Gonzalez 1998:502). Without saying so explicitly in the language policy, the system of education is equating Filipino and English in terms of importance. He also mentions the importance of foreign language acquisition, where possible, but notes that this is often restricted to more affluent families that can afford to study and travel abroad (Gonzalez 1998:501-502). Gonzalez does acknowledge that this idealized bilingualism in Filipino and English does not exist in its entirety (Gonzalez 1998:501), indicating that children often graduate grade school more fluent in English than Filipino. He attributes this, in part, to the fact that English language instruction is enforced subconsciously outside the school in the form of radio, television and film (Gonzalez 1998:503), and to the emphasis placed on English as the teaching tool for “cognitive subjects” (Gonzalez 1998:501).

In terms of the intensive involvement of the government in the creation and maintenance of Filipino, it is almost as though Filipino was as much purely an act of nationalism as it was a means by which the government could connect the varied cultural and linguistic groups within the archipelago. In the first chapter of The Promise of the Foreign, Rafael states that “the beginnings of nationalism, at least in the Philippines (but no doubt elsewhere) [sic], was enmeshed in a linguistic politics that anticipated and accompanied an economic revolution” (Rafael 2005:14). I would extrapolate from this statement and say that contemporary linguistics in the Philippines is itself enmeshed in politics and economic revolution, though the new revolution is globalization, albeit accompanied, as it was historically, by ills.

The sources that were consulted for the purposes of this paper unanimously agreed that one of the primary reasons that Spanish never became as prevalent in the Philippines as in other Spanish colonies was in the resistance of the Spanish friars to teach Spanish to the local people, out of fear of rebellion and that they would lose their power and control. Also, Spanish missionaries in the Philippines learned the local languages (Gonzalez 1998:513) rather than undertaking the task of teaching Spanish to fluency, likely for the aforementioned fear of rebellion and power loss. Additionally, based on the experience of the colonizers in earlier colonies, the Spanish colonizers in the Philippines were discouraged from living beyond the walls of Manila, which constrained their cultural and linguistic influence, compared to their other colonies, where they were more

integrated throughout the country. Linguistically, it is important to differentiate between Tagalog and Filipino. Filipino, though based on Tagalog, has had such influence from other languages, as well as such significant government intervention, that it is entirely separate from the Tagalog that existed in the Philippines prior to 1939. I came to understand that the Philippines was a unique colonial situation in more ways than one, but it was particularly distinct in the evolution of its national language within the archipelago throughout the colonial and neo-colonial periods. Through and through, it was made exceedingly clear that the language situation in the Philippines is a deeply political issue, one that stems back to the initial arrival of Spain in the 1520's, was continued with the conscious expansion of Filipino by the Institute of National Language and under the language policies set forth by the government of the Philippines, and is increasingly affected by globalization today.

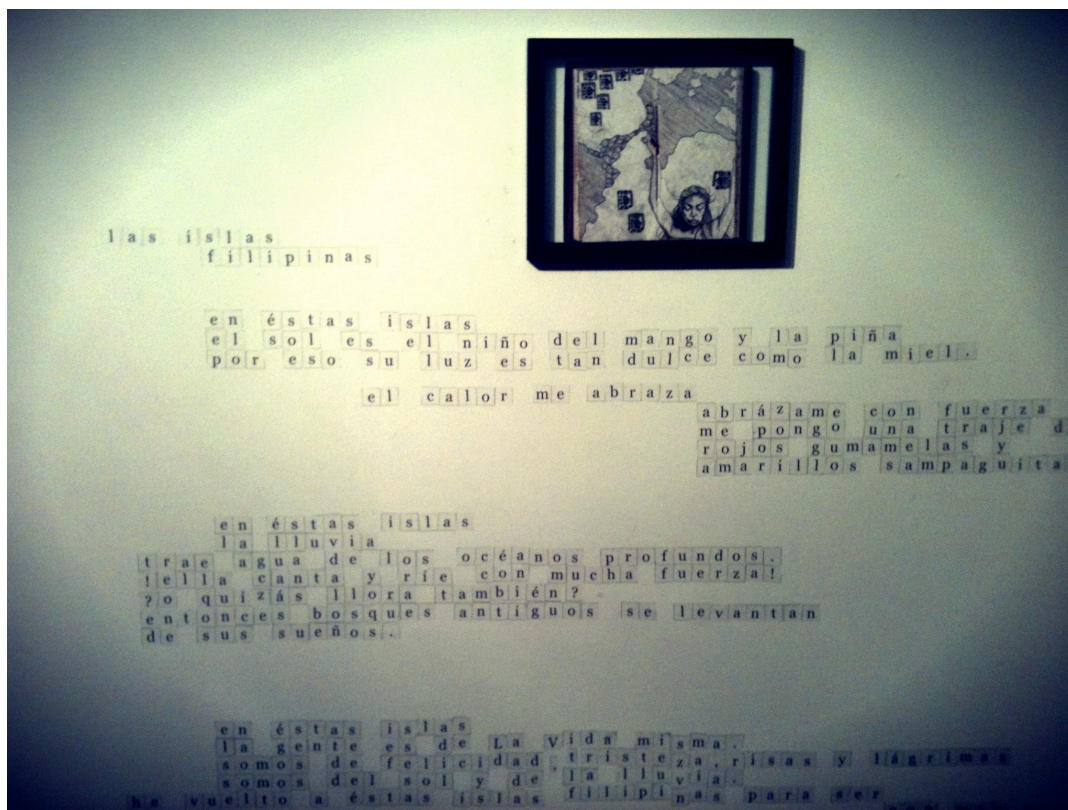


Fig 1. Ancients by Chaya Go (October 2011)

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