

FORUM KRITIKA

PANTAYONG PANANAW AND THE HISTORY OF PHILIPPINE POLITICAL CONCEPTS

Ramon Guillermo
University of the Philippines (Diliman)
bomen.guillermo@gmail.com

Abstract

Zeus A. Salazar's approach in writing the history of political concepts in the Philippines represents one of the most challenging and insightful directions within his complex body of work. However, despite its positive contribution to this area of study, it seems that further advances towards a more productive and empirical direction is hampered by certain unnecessarily restrictive assumptions. This study is a preliminary critique of a significant flaw in his approach which gives priority to the etymological meaning of rootwords as opposed to a more empirically oriented approach based on the study of the "semantic fields" of concepts and the use of quantitative data.

Keywords

comparative linguistics, etymology, *himagsikan*, *rebolusyon*

About the author

Ramon Guillermo is an Associate Professor at the Department of Filipino and Philippine Literature, University of the Philippines in Diliman. He received his undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University of the Philippines and the University of Hamburg, Germany. He is the author of two books, *Pook at Paninindigan: Kritika ng Pantayong Pananaw* (U of the Philippines P, 2009) and *Translation and Revolution: A Study of Jose Rizal's Guillermo Tell* (Ateneo de Manila UP, 2009). He was awarded the Asian Public Intellectual Fellowship (2009) by the Nippon Foundation.

A series of monographs published in the 1990s by Zeus A. Salazar (1997; 1998; 1999), within the framework of *Pantayong Pananaw*, deliver strikingly original perspectives on writing the history of Philippine political discourse. But this initially very promising body of work which focuses on the cultural specificity of Philippine political concepts has unnecessarily been hampered by certain fixed and inflexible assumptions which, despite its undoubtedly positive contributions, could negatively influence further researches in this important area.

The problems in the current approach may be exemplified by reference to his analysis of two important political concepts found in Tagalog or Filipino, *himagsikan* and *rebolusyon*. (It also applies to his distinction between *katwiran* and "reason," among others.) He starts off the analysis of these concepts by pointing to the etymological meaning of their

respective rootwords. According to him, the European word “revolution” derives from the vulgar Latin verb *revolvere*, which means “to roll,” “to revolve,” “return,” among others. He then takes note of the fact that the political concept of “revolution” in its various European forms no longer just means to “rotate” or “to move in a circular path” but also a “profound change” or “reversal.” Moving on to *himagsikan*, he begins by dissecting its meaning by breaking it up into its constituent rootword, prefix, and suffix, and analyzing these in turn. He finds that the meaning of the prefix “hiN-” has three components: 1) removal of the thing being referred to by the word it prefixes; 2) to receive the characteristic or trait being referred to by the prefixed word; 3) to make somebody else aware of how one feels (“Wika ng Himagsikan” 25-6). The rootword *bagsik*, on the other hand, means “cruel, brutal, ill tempered, strict, effective” (“Wika ng Himagsikan” 27). The suffix “-an” gives the whole word *himagsikan* the connotation of being a “collective” act of letting out one’s ferocity for some reason. In order to thresh out the various meanings of *himagsikan* and *rebolusyon*, Salazar makes use of various dictionaries in bringing out the etymological meanings of their roots and does not substantially refer to any historical instances of their actual usages in textual contexts.

Reflecting upon the gap between the etymological and political meanings of “revolution,” Salazar finds that it is impossible to derive (*hindi mahuhugot*) from the Tagalog word for “to go around” (*pag-ikot*) any notion of “fundamental change” which he says is included (*nakapaloob*) in the European concepts of “revolution.” He asserts that this additional meaning is “the result of an historical experience specific to the European/Western nations” (*bunga ng ispesipikong karanasang pangkasaysayan ng mga bansang Europeo/Kanluranin*) (“Wika ng Himagsikan” 23). Though Salazar acknowledges that “revolution” has in the meantime been borrowed into Tagalog or Filipino as *rebolusyon*, he makes at least two assertions about this fact:

- 1) “the fundamental meaning of the Tagalog/Filipino *rebolusyon* derives from the *revolución* of the Spaniards ... bearing the ‘revolutionary’ bourgeois-liberal ideals and hopes” (*ang pundamental na kahulugan ng Tagalog/Pilipinong “rebolusyon” ay hango sa “revolución” ng Kastila ... taglay ang mga “rebolusyonaryong” ideya’t mithiing burgis-liberal*) (“Wika ng Himagsikan” 21).
- 2) “frequent usage was the reason for the borrowing of *rebolusyon* in order to equate it with *himagsikan*. But the context of usage is different” (*Madalas na paggamit ... ang dahilan ng pagkahiram ng “rebolusyon” ... upang itumbas sa*

“himagsikan.” Ngunit nag-iiba ang konteksto ng paggamit) (“Wika ng Himagsikan” 30). He explains that this word *“rebolusyon”* was used by one part of the Filipino populace who were acculturated into Western culture even though they spoke Tagalog. Because of this, they continued to attach European connotations to *rebolusyon* such as its association with “progress.” Salazar then elevates *himagsikan* as the “authentic” (*taal*) Tagalog or Filipino concept rooted in the *bayan* (people) and in the Austronesian past spanning thousands of years. The political concept of *rebolusyon* on the other hand is simply dismissed as a foreign concept, with a mechanical meaning which cannot be understood by “authentic” (*taal*) Tagalogs or Filipinos. Salazar is thus of the view that the meaning of the borrowed word *rebolusyon* has not departed from the Spanish meaning because those who speak this word are acculturated individuals who only incidentally happen to speak or write Tagalog or Filipino.

These are certainly important points regarding the existence of a possible zone of stratification within Tagalog or Filipino, but Salazar has not yet been able to prove two important things. Firstly, that only “acculturated” individuals speak or understand the word *rebolusyon*. Secondly, he has also not shown how the context of usage of *himagsikan* differs from “revolution” in any actual instances of usage both synchronically and diachronically. This lack of empirical foundations can be traced to the fundamental weakness of Salazar’s approach with its overweening emphasis on etymological explication of the definitions of rootwords. Two testable propositions may be advanced against such an approach:

- 1) The meanings of a political concept clearly cannot be exhausted by merely studying the etymology of its rootword. Meanings continually attach and detach themselves from a word and the study of particular contexts of its usage is capable of shedding more light on its meaning than just fixing one’s gaze on the etymological meaning. This is precisely why Reinhart Koselleck, founder of the German tradition of *Begriffsgeschichte* (conceptual history) in German political thought, pointed out that political concepts cannot be reduced to mere word definitions. He asserted that political concepts concentrate within themselves various meanings and that these are located within particular “conceptual fields” (*Begriffsfelder*) or “conceptual nets” (*Begriffsnetze*). According to Koselleck, “every concept is *eo ipso* bound to its context. No concepts can

be analyzed without opposed concepts, covering and covered concepts, accompanying and neighboring concepts" (101). He cites the example "*Staat*" (State) which covers and includes within itself such concepts/words as "*Gebiet*" (area), "*Grenze*" (boundary), "*Bürgerschaft*" (citizenship), "*Justiz*" (justice), "*Militär*" (military), "*Steuer*" (tax), "*Gesetzgebung*" (legislation), etc. In his own discussion of the political concept of "Revolution," borrowed from the French, he distinguishes three clusters of German words/concepts from which it gains its semantic content: 1) "*Tumult*" (riot), "*Aufbruch*" (rebellion), "*Empörung*" (insurrection), "*Verschwörung*" (plot), "*Aufstand*" (uprising); 2) "*Zwietracht*" (conflict), "*Bürgerkrieg*" (civil war), "*Bewegung*" (movement), "*Wechsel*" (change); 3) to fight against "*Tyrannis*" (tyranny), "*Despotie*" (despotism), "*Diktatur*" (dictatorship) (242). With respect to the issue of the etymology of "Revolution," Koselleck observes a trend, "leading from a naturally derived word-usage to a historical conceptuality which increasingly becomes independent. The metaphor is eclipsed and emancipates a concept of revolution which can be considered as genuinely historical" (251). The political content of the concept of "Revolution" is therefore clarified by its distantiation from its original etymological meaning. For Koselleck, the struggle over the meanings of political concepts is a fundamental aspect of this area of study which Salazar completely ignores due to his reliance on the univocal nature of the etymological definition of rootwords.

(2) It can be argued that the etymological meanings of words in their original context matter very little in processes of linguistic borrowing. The attempt to make a distinction within the Tagalog or Filipino languages between a genuinely Tagalog or Filipino political concept and a borrowed foreign concept (though spoken within Tagalog or Filipino) by appealing to the seemingly ineradicable etymological meanings of words seems methodologically unsound. Given a sufficiently wide usage of a borrowed term in the receptor language, it is rather farfetched to assume either that a borrowed term can carry its etymological meaning around like a turtle with its house on its back into other languages, or to assume that it is impossible to understand the meaning of a word without first knowing the etymology of its root. Speakers of any language are usually stumped when asked the etymological meanings even of the words which they use daily, let alone when the word in question is borrowed from another

language. It is also very often the case that the speakers of a language lose all memory that a significant part of their vocabulary is in fact borrowed from other languages. The line of demarcation between a borrowed and original part of a language is usually not as visible to the speakers as it may be to linguists or philologists. Consistent with their new linguistic environment, new meanings simply attach themselves to borrowed terms without regard to their etymological origins as Koselleck had shown with the German word "Revolution."

It should be more reasonable to treat borrowed concepts as in themselves effective phenomena within a language as much as any other concepts in use in the domain of Philippine politics. Rather than fixing the meanings of political terms upon the original etymological meanings of their rootwords, it is here proposed that a close study of the manifold usages of a significant concept using a variety of textual sources in the flow of time would give a more satisfactory perspective on the history of political concepts. This kind of approach would only be interested in describing and interpreting the various usages of political concepts within a distinct national language community both diachronically and synchronically rather than being tied up with any notion of linguistic or ideological "authenticity" (*kataalan*). It is therefore evident that it cannot endorse the implicit notion in Salazar's texts that each linguistic community possesses an elementary set of basic concepts which form the substance of a unified political ideology for the speakers of that language, and, which furthermore serves as the demarcation criterion for identifying "authentic" (*taal*) and "inauthentic" political concepts. The presupposition of "authentic" speakers of a language who can understand the "authentic" meanings of words as fixed by their ancient etymological roots as opposed to "inauthentic" speakers who speak "inauthentic" (borrowed) words should be abandoned. Certainly, those who wish to pursue this direction are free to do so, but the theoretical and empirical grounds for this kind of project appears tenuous. The methods of comparative linguistics, from which Salazar borrows some of his methods, and which are useful in determining the kinship of languages and developing hypothetical reconstructions of a proto-languages from which related languages are said to have diverged *can and should be* integrated into a study of the history of Philippine political concepts. This is especially the case since written sources are rare or non-existent for the larger part of our history. Robert Blust (1976), for example, notably attempted to hypothetically reconstruct, ancient Austronesian social organization based on a study of proto-Austronesian terms. Much insight can be

gleaned from such interdisciplinary studies. But this should be done without prejudice to other historical sources of borrowing in Philippine political discourse and performed not only in conjunction with, but also in a manner consciously distinct from, what may be termed more properly as the investigation of the historical evolution of political concepts. In our view, the *a priori* determination of concepts derived from the Austronesian past as constituting the sole authentic or genuine basis of Philippine political thought for all time can only cripple a rigorously empirical investigation into actual history of Philippine political concepts and discourses.

The meaning of political concepts should more productively be studied in their contexts of usage and not as something supposedly inherent in the word itself or in its roots. Furthermore, meaning should be viewed as neither being a mere reflection of events nor as being autonomous and self-subsisting in a realm apart from the materiality of history. As an illustration, some data towards a more empirical investigation of the problem of demarcation between *rebolusyon* and *himagsikan* as political concepts can here be presented.

The first example shown below as Table 1 consists of extracted actual word usages of *himagsikan* and *rebolusyon* from the year 1929 from the famous “Balagtasang Hinggil sa Lumang Usapin” (Poetic joust about an old issue) between the two foremost Tagalog poets of their generation, Amado V. Hernandez and Jose Corazon de Jesus (Torres-Yu 175-253). In contrast to Salazar’s blanket claim that there was a difference in the “context of usage,” it appears here that although variations on the rootword *bagsik* were much more frequently used since, as opposed to *rebolusyon* it could easily transform into a verb, both poets use *rebolusyon* and *himagsikan* as nouns interchangeably to refer to a single historical event: the Revolution of 1896. It may be true that Salazar may be correct for some other cases, but actual contexts of usage must be brought up to substantiate this and cannot be made dependent on an argument regarding etymology. In this context, it also does not seem relevant or productive at all to inquire whether Hernandez and De Jesus were acculturated or Westernized minds who just happened to write and speak in Tagalog. If they weren’t “authentic” Tagalog speakers or writers, then who can possibly be?

Another empirical example is Figure 1 below showing the relative frequencies per decade of occurrences of books mentioning either *rebolusyon*, *himagsikan*, or both together. The graph of the number of books published per decade from 1900 to 2009 which contain the words *himagsikan*, *rebolusyon* used singly or in tandem was produced using data extracted from Google books (<http://books.google.com/>). Google books, due to its access to massive US libraries and extremely advanced scanning and optical character recognition

(OCR) technologies, is now undoubtedly the largest Tagalog/Filipino language text corpus in the world. The quantitative data it provides is, however, by no means completely accurate. Some works were actually published much earlier but registers in Google books in the year of their republication as new editions. A number of works register in more than one decade since Google books sometimes registered the publication of new editions. Additional observable inconsistencies and blind spots in the data produced by Google books may be a result of certain quirks in its search algorithm. It has been ascertained however that even though some books which were included in the graph are written in English, the occurrences of *rebolusyon* and *himagsikan* are in Tagalog/Filipino linguistic contexts within these books.

The rise of usages of *himagsikan* in the 1920s seems to revolve around the November 7, 1930 founding of the Partido Komunista ng Pilipinas (Crisanto Evangelista). The drastic downturn during the 1950s seems to point to this as the period of defeat of the Hukbong Mapagpalaya ng Bayan (HMB) during the time of President Magsaysay and the rise of McCarthyist anti-communist witchhunting. (Agoncillo's seminal book, *The Revolt of the Masses* published in 1956, contains only *himagsikan* and not the Tagalog *rebolusyon*.) The sharp rise in the 60s of the usage of both *himagsikan* and *rebolusyon* and their appearance together in single works apparently broadly corresponds to the November 30, 1964 founding of Kabataang Makabayan, the December 26, 1968 founding of the Maoist Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP), the 1970 First Quarter Storm (FQS) and the general youthful nationalist radicalism of that time. The 70s after the September 21, 1972 declaration of Martial Law sees a slower rise in the usage of *rebolusyon* which however catches up with *himagsikan* for the first time. Both terms see a massive rise in usage in the 80s which culminates politically in the February 22-25, 1986 EDSA Revolt. A steady decline occurs afterwards which is temporarily interrupted by the publishing frenzy during the 1998 Philippine Centennial Celebration. Though significant increases in the dual usage of these two terms in a single book occurs in the 60s and around the period of the EDSA revolt, the highest peak was during the Philippine Centennial Celebrations. A hypothesis regarding the phenomenon of increasing dual usage may be proposed by viewing this as an indicator of a rise in the degree of the interchangeability of the two terms. Given the tentativeness of the data and the complexity of the history it seems to recount, a lot of caution must be exercised in interpreting such graphs from an historical point of view. However, a preliminary look at the highs and lows of the graph has shown a certain rough degree of direct or indirect correspondence with concrete historical events pertaining to the history of nationalism and radical movements in the Philippines. Given that the data

only includes published books, it is evident that only a very partial view of the degree of frequency of usage, ubiquity, and dissemination of the relevant terms has been produced.

The words *himagsikan* and *rebolusyon* taken together pertain to the perennial theme of armed struggle and conflict in the Philippine historico-political context. The investigation of the possible transformations in the meanings and discursive contexts of these political concepts through time may reveal certain previously unknown aspects of these lexical phenomena. The general graphic representation gives clues and directions which may serve to guide more detailed investigations into the texts themselves. Only a closer analysis of selected materials among the mass of textual material involved can reinforce or refute the particular hypothesis regarding the upturns of downturns in the frequency of appearance of books mentioning these two terms together or separately. It is simply inadequate to simply refer to the unchanging etymology of the rootwords of *himagsikan* and *revolution* to find explanations for these types of phenomena. Starting from a broad and general perspective, one could embark on a more detailed analysis of the contexts of usage of these words in various phases of Philippine history with minimal presuppositions regarding the meanings of the respective terms. This can be made more exact by to looking into the collocational or intercollocational structures of lexical cohesion both quantitatively and qualitatively. As opposed to the strong etymologism of Salazar's approach, it is here proposed that these empirical approaches promise to allow more, rather than less, insight into the historical and cultural specificity of Philippine political concepts.

Amado V. Hernandez	Jose Corazon de Jesus
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Isang lahing natuto nang manalasa't maghimagsik 2) sa pangakong kalayaan... bigla na bang maghimagsik? 3) na ang lider ng Kahapo'y nanandata't naghimagsik, 4) yaong lahing naghimagsik at humawak ng patalim, 5) ni sandata o tambuling dadalhin sa rebolusion! 6) Ibig mo ban muli tayong sama-samang maghimagsik, 7) Itong bayan ay gising na mula noong maghimagsik, 8) ang utang ding kikilanlin sa naunang rebolusion. 9) na bunga ng tatlong yugtong himagsikang sinuungan, 10) sa madugong himagsikan ay sumugba tayong bigla? 11) Tayo noo'y naghimagsik sa praileng mapangamkam, 12) at ako ang tanging buhay sa maraming naghimagsik? 13) kaya noo'y walang lutas kungdi tayo'y maghimagsik, 14) Nakita mo, di kahapo'y taasnoong naghimagsik, 15) Kung sa baya'y may sandata't kagamitan sa himagsik 16) ipininta mo ang ayos noong tayo'y maghimagsik, 17) nang magsiklab sa magdamag ang apoy ng rebolusion 18) ang magkaron na ng kaya ay nagbango't naghimagsik; 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Katulad mo'y ang pangarap ng anak ng himagsikan, 2) Sasabihin mong si Rizal ay ayaw nang himagsikan, 3) Hindi ko rin masasabing ang Kahapong Himagsikan, 4) hindi tayo maaaring maghimagsik, walang lakas... 5) sa tuwi nang sasaludo ay tapos sa "Himagsikan" 6) sasabihin mong bulkan ka ng nagdaang himagsikan, 7) hindi pala mangyayaring maghimagsik at mangdigma, 8) sila rin daw ang kahapon ng nagdaang himagsikan, 9) Di ka pala maaaring lumaban at maghimagsik, 10) kung lumaya ay paglayang kagaya nang sa himagsik, 11) samantalang yaong ating mga taong naghimagsik, 12) Kung ibig mang maghimagsik ay wala ring magagawa. 13) yaong laya na kinuha sa gitna ng himagsikan? 14) at ang mga diwa't puso ng dakilang rebolusion.

Table 1. Sample Usages of “Rebolusion” and “Himagsikan” by Amado V. Hernandez and Jose Corazon de Jesus.

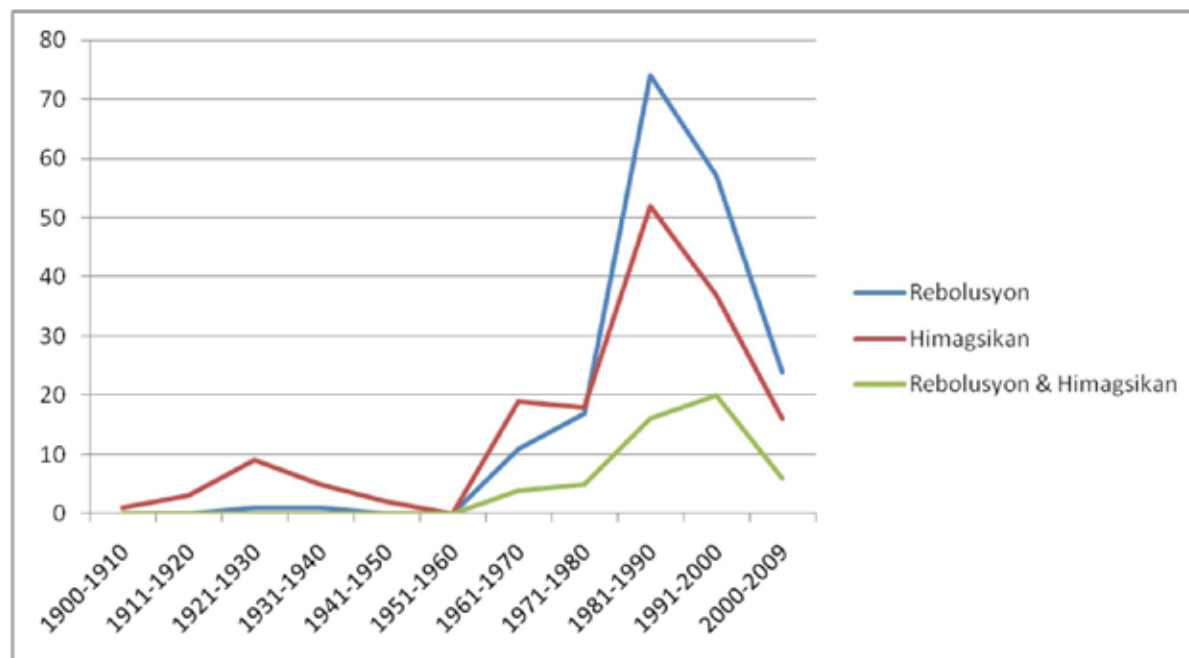


Figure 1. Graph of books published per decade containing the words “Himagsikan” and “Rebolusyon”.

WORKS CITED

- Blust, Robert. "Austronesian Culture History: Some Linguistic Inferences and Their Relations to the Archaeological Record." *World Archaeology* 8 (1976): 19-43.
- Koselleck, Reinhart. *Begriffsgeschichten*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2006.
- Salazar, Zeus A. "Ang Kartilya ni Emilio Jacinto sa Agos ng Kasaysayan." *Bagong Kasaysayan* 5 (1999).
- . "Si Andres Bonifacio at ang Kabayanihang Pilipino." *Bagong Kasaysayan* 2 (1997).
- . "Wika ng Himagsikan, Lengguwahe ng Rebolusyon: Mga Suliranin ng Pagpapakahulugan sa Pagbubuo ng Bansa." *Bagong Kasaysayan* 8 (1998).
- Torres-Yu, Rosario, ed. *Amado V. Hernandez, Tudla at Tudling: Katipunan ng mga Nalathalang Tula, 1921-1970*. Lungsod Quezon: Unibersidad ng Pilipinas, 1986.