INVENTING VERNACULAR SPEECH-ACTS: ARTICULATING FILIPINO SELF-DETERMINATION IN THE UNITED STATES

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Abstract
How vital is an immigrant's native language for group self-affirmation? While the Filipino American community in the US (now the largest group of citizens of Asian descent) has not so far demanded bilingual education in the way the Chinese Americans or Chicanos have, the influx of new immigrants more conversant in "Filipino" (the official term for the national language of the Philippines) than in English is producing changes in ethnic self-identification more serious than before. The demand for college courses in Filipino is only a symptom of the greater awareness of exclusion and marginalization within the larger polity supposedly characterized by pluralism and multiculturalism. Filipino professionals and workers speaking in Filipino are growing, but they have been penalized in many ways. Can language serve as a means to assert national autonomy? The right to speak or communicate in one's native language is not just a minor attempt in identity politics but represents a crucial index to elucidating and unraveling the liberal-democratic rationale for the continuing neocolonial subordination of the Filipino people to white-supremacist corporate globalization.

Keywords
bilingualism, Filipino-American, identity politics

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Editor's Note
This paper was presented in a forum organized in June 2001 for the Conference of Filipino Organizations on Language and Community in the University of California at Irvine. This was part of the educational mobilization by Filipino student groups to demand that the university offer credited classes in Filipino/Pilipino. While there are credited and sustained courses in Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, and other Asian languages, there is none for Filipino despite the fact that Filipinos and Filipino Americans constitute a substantial bulk of the ethnic student population. It has been noted that Filipinos today constitute the largest bloc in the Asian-American category—roughly 3 to 4 million in the total of 12 million—but they have not asserted politically their demographic presence.

From the time Filipinos arrived in the United States as "colonial wards" or subaltern subjects in the first decade of the twentieth century, the practice of speaking their vernacular tongues (whether Ilocano, Cebuano, Tagalog, or any of the other dozen

regional languages) has been haunted by an interdiction. This accompanied the defeat of the revolutionary government of the first Philippine Republic at the end of the Filipino-American War (1899-1903) and the institutionalization of English as the official medium of communication in government, business, education, and so on. American English became an instrument of political and ideological domination throughout colonial rule (1898-1946) and neocolonial hegemony (1946-). With competence in English as the legal and ideological passport for entry of Filipinos into the continental United States as *pensionados* and contract laborers, the vernaculars suffered virtual extinction in the public sphere. In exchange, the Philippines acquired the distinction of belonging to the empire of English-speaking peoples, texting messages intelligible at least to the merchants of global capitalism if not to George W. Bush and the Homeland surveillance agents at the airport. That is also the reason why Filipina domestic workers are highly valued in Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, and other countries in Europe and the Middle East—for their ability to speak English useful for their employers' needs.

US linguistic terrorism has continued via subtle cooptation and juridical fiat. Up to the last quarter of the twentieth century, the custom of speaking the vernacular in the workplace was discouraged, if not prohibited. Filipino nurses and government employees talking in Filipino/Pilipino were penalized, triggering legal suits by the aggrieved immigrants or naturalized citizens. "English Only" needs to be vindicated. Filipinos need not be heard or listened to so long as they performed according to expectations. Why learn

or study the Filipino vernaculars when "they" can speak and understand English? With the sudden increase of Filipino migrants after 1965 and the growth of the multicultural ethos of the eighties and nineties, Filipinos discovered anew that they have always been speaking their native languages even while they ventriloquized in English. Filipino (usually referred to as "Pilipino") has indeed become a lingua franca for recent immigrants in the "land of the free," making it possible for the newly arrived from the "boondocks" to read post-office guidelines and tax regulations in Filipino.

But Filipino is still an "exotic" language, despite its vulgarization and accessibility via Internet and satellite media. While today courses in Arabic have become necessary aids for preparing all students for global citizenship, a college course in Filipino is a rarity. In the fifties and sixties, when the Huk insurgency disturbed the peace of the Cold War Establishment, courses in Tagalog were introduced in the universities as part of Area Studies; experts were trained at least to read captured documents from the underground, if not to assist in the propaganda and psy-war effort of the local military (San Juan). In the seventies, politicized Filipino Americans successfully initiated projects to teach Tagalog inside and outside the academy. With the displacement of the Philippines as a contested zone in Southeast Asia (despite the Abu Sayyaf and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front), administrators have shifted resources to the study of Indonesian, Thai and Vietnamese cultures. After all, is not the Philippines now a suburb of California? And has not the current Arroyo administration reversed the trend of Filipinization by promulgating English as truly the privileged language for individual success, prestige, and acceptance?

Historical necessity has once more intervened in the "belly of the beast." Filipinos have become the largest group in the Asian-American ethnic category and are slowly beginning to realize the political impact of this demographic trend. With the upsurge of Filipino Americans entering college and moving on to graduate schools, and given the heightened racial and ethnic antagonisms in this period of the borderless war against terrorism (recall the hundreds of Filipinos summarily deported in handcuffs and chains), a new "politics of identity" seems to be emerging, this time manifesting itself in a demand for the offering of credited courses in Filipino as part of the multiculturalist program (San Juan). Last year I was requested by the community of Filipino and Filipino-American students at the University of California, Irvine, to share my ideas about the "language question." The following provisional theses attempt to address this question in the context of the struggle of the Filipino nationality in the US for democratic rights and the Filipino people in the Philippines and in the diaspora for national self-determination. There are other still undiscerned factors overdetermining this complex conjuncture, particularly

in this stage of the advanced corporatization of the US university in late modernity; the following observations are meant to induce an exploration of the totality of social relations subtending this issue.

I.

In dealing with the issue of linguistic freedom and bondage, I begin with the thesis that language cannot be separated from material-social activity, from human interaction. Marx and Engels write in *The German Ideology:* "Language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other humans" (50). Language is essentially a social phenomenon, embedded in collective human activity. Consciousness and language cannot be divorced; both are social products; they originate from work, from the labor process, whose historical changes determine the function of language as a means of communication and, as an integral component of everyday social practice, a signifier of national or ethnic identity.

Work or social labor then explains the structural properties of language. This does not mean, however, that given the unity of thought and language, linguistic structures imply different ways of thinking, world outlooks, etc. Race, culture, and language are not equivalent, as proclaimed in Hitler's idealizing slogan: "Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Sprache." We do not live in isolated language compartments with singular "takes" on reality. Forms of thought manifest a certain universality that are not affected by linguistic differences, even though speech acts derive their full import from the historical contexts and specific conditions of their performance. "Ideas do not exist separately from language" ("From the *Grundrisse"* 53). And since the ideas of the ruling class prevail in every epoch as the ruling ideas, the uses of a particular language often reveal the imprint of this ruling class. Various classes may use the same language or operate in the same linguistic field, hence this domain of sign usage becomes, to quote Voloshinov/Bakhtin, "an arena of class struggle" (23). For example, Rizal used Spanish to counter the corrupt abuses of the friars and reach his Spanish-speaking compatriots as well as reform-minded Spanish liberals in Spain. Likewise, Tagalog and other vernaculars were used by the Filipino elite in persuading peasants and workers to conform to American policies and ideas.

In sum, language as a practice of signification is not only reflective but also productive and reproductive of antagonistic social relations and political forces. It is a vehicle and an embodiment of power. Language usage manifests the pressure of

contradictory class relations and concrete ideological structures that are registered on the level of special subcodes and idiolects. Language then is a socio-ideological phenomenon whose empirical manifestation can be investigated with scientific rigor.

Within this frame of inquiry, let us examine the status of Filipino/Pilipino vis-a-vis English within the Filipino community (totaling nearly three million) in the United States. A historical background is imperative in assessing the worth of languages relative to each other, specifically in the context of the fraught relations between the Philippines as a former colony, now a neocolony, of the United States, and the hegemonic nation-state, now the "only remaining superpower" in this period of "endless war" against terrorist multitudes.

With the violent conquest of the Philippines after the Filipino-American War of 1899 to 1914 (I include the wars that tried to pacify the Moros) which cost 1.4 million Filipino lives, the US imposed colonial institutions on the subjugated natives. The process of what Renato Constantino famously called "the mis-education of Filipinos" began with the imposition of English as the chief medium of instruction. This was not because the teacher-volunteers in the St. Thomas knew no Spanish, as one historian puts it (Arcilla), but because this was the language of the US ruling class, the vehicle in which to inculcate the American "way of life," its institutions and normative practices, in their colonial subjects. Contrary to the supposed intention of democratizing society, the use of English "perpetuated the existence of the *ilustrados*—American *ilustrados"* loyal to the United States, analogous to the Spanish-speaking Filipino elite who sought reforms within Spanish hegemony. Constantino cites Simoun's denunciation of the latter in Rizal's novel *El Filibusterismo*:

> You ask for equal rights, the Hispanization of your customs, and you don't see that what you are begging for is suicide, the destruction of your nationality, the annihilation of your fatherland, the consecration of tyranny! What will you be in the future? A people without character, a nation without liberty—everything you have will be borrowed, even your very defects!…. What are you going to do with Castilian, the few of you who will speak it? Kill off your own originality, subordinate your thoughts to other brains, and instead of freeing yourselves, make yourselves slaves indeed! Nine-tenths of those of you who pretend to be enlightened are renegades to your country! He among you who talks that language neglects his own in such a way that he neither writes it nor understands it, and how many have I not seen who pretended not to know a single word of it! (qtd. in *The Filipinos in the Philippines* 55)

In 1924, the American scholar Najeeb Saleeby deplored the imposition of English as the means of trying to accomplish what Alexander the Great and Napoleon failed to accomplish, that is, impose the conqueror's language on the multitudinous groups speaking different tongues. It was already a failure twenty-five years since the US established schools in the pacified regions. But in preserving imperial hegemony, the policy was not a failure at all. It has proved extremely effective: English as linguistic capital has functioned to sustain the iniquitous class hierarchy and maintain the subordination of the nation-state to the power that monopolizes such capital in the form of control over the mass media, information, and other symbolic instruments and resources in a globalized economy. I think the purpose was not to make every Filipino a speaker of English, just those classes—the elite and intelligentsia—that have proved crucial in reinforcing and reproducing consent to US imperial rule.

The historical record is summed up by Constantino: "Spanish colonialism Westernized the Filipino principally through religion. American colonialism superimposed its own brand of Westernization initially through the imposition of English and the American school system which opened the way for other Westernizing agencies" (*Neocolonial Identity* 218). Superior economic and technological power, of course, enabled the American colonizers to proceed without serious resistance. Inscribed within the state educational apparatus, American English as a pedagogical, disciplinary instrument contributed significantly to the political, economic, and cultural domination of the Filipino people. American English performed its function in enforcing, maintaining, and reproducing the values and interests of the imperial power and the dominant native class. Its usage was not neutral nor merely pragmatic; it was a deliberately chosen ideological weapon in subjugating whole populations (including the Muslims and indigenous communities), in producing and reproducing the colonial relations of production, and later of neocolonial relations.

Again, as I said in the beginning, no language (like English) as a system of signs is by itself exploitative or oppressive. It is the political usages and their historical effects that need evaluation. Consequently, the use of the colonizer's language cannot be separated from its control of the educational system, the panoply of commercial relations and bureaucratic machinery which instilled consumerist values, white supremacy, and acquisitive individualism within the procedural *modus operandi* of a so-called "free enterprise" system. Over half a century of tutelage de-Filipinized youth and "taught them to regard American culture as superior to any other, and American society as the model par excellence for Philippine society." (Constantino, *Identity and Consciousness* 39)

Individual and public consciousness had been so Americanized that a Filipino national identity was aborted, suppressed, unable to emerge fully except in outbursts of revolt and insurrection—a durable tradition of revolutionary resistance that we should be proud of.

What of Filipino and the other vernaculars? When the Philippines was granted Commonwealth status in 1935, an attempt was made to develop a national language based on Tagalog. Pilipino evolved, despite the objections of other regional groups; so deep was the legacy of the "divide-and-rule" strategy that it undermined the weak Filipino elite. Note that, of course, the ruling bloc of local landlords, compradors, and bureaucrats was completely subservient to US will even up to and beyond formal independence in 1946. Up to now, it is no secret that the Philippine military is completely dependent on US largesse for its weaponry and logistics, including the training of its officers in counter-insurgency warfare (as witness the prolongation and systematization of joint training exercises against the Abu Sayyaf and other insurgents in violation of the Constitution). Over 80 percent of Filipinos can speak or understand Filipino in everyday transactions throughout the islands. While some progress has been made today in institutionalizing the use of Filipino as an intellectual medium in university courses, English remains the preferred language of business and government, the language of prestige and aspiration. Decolonization of the Filipino mind has not been completed, hence Filipino remains subordinate, marginalized, or erased as a language of power and self-affirmation of the people's sovereign identity.

Just as in other colonized parts of the world, the Philippines was a multilingual society during the heyday of Spanish imperialism. While formal colonialism no longer obtains, a linguistic imperialism continues, with English employed as the international language of science, technology, business and finance, world communications, and international academic studies—despite some nativization of American English in the Philippines. This will continue unless the political economy and power relations in the whole society are changed.

II.

The rise of the US Empire in Asia beginning with the defeat of Spanish power translated into a reassertion of Anglo-Saxon "manifest destiny." This is a continuation of a long saga of territorial expansion from the Eastern seaboard of the continent. When Filipinos entered US metropolitan territory, first in Hawaii as recruited plantation workers in the first three decades of the last century, the US was already a racial polity founded on the confinement of the indigenous Indians, the slavery and segregation of blacks, the

conquest of Spanish-speaking natives, and the proscription of Asian labor. The US was and is a multilingual polity, with English as the hegemonic language.

A language community is not by itself sufficient to produce an ethnic or national identity. English cannot by itself define the American national identity as such, even though it is within this linguistic community that individuals are interpellated as subjects, subjects as bearers of discourse—persons defined as subject-positions sutured within discourses of law, genealogy, history, political choices, professional qualifications, psychology, and so on. This construction of identity by language is open to incalculable contingencies; what makes it able to demarcate the frontiers of a particular people is a principle of closure or exclusion. And this fictive ethnicity is accomplished in the historical constitution of the US nation-state based on the discourses of the free market and white supremacy.

Etienne Balibar has shown how the French nation initially gave privileged place to language or linguistic uniformity as coincident with political unity; the French state democratized its citizens by coercively suppressing cultural particularisms, the local patois. "For its part," Balibar observes, "the American 'revolutionary nation' built its original ideals on a double repression: that of the extermination of the Amerindian 'natives' and that of the difference between free 'White' men and 'Black' slaves. The linguistic community inherited from the Anglo-Saxon 'country' did not pose a problem—at least apparently—until Hispanic immigration conferred upon it the significance of class symbol and racial feature" (104). In other words, the phantasm of the American race defined as English speakers materialized when the Spanish-speaking indigenes of the Southwest were defeated in the war of 1848. Thus, the national ideology of the "melting-pot" of a new race emerged "as a hierarchical combination of the different ethnic contributions," based on the inferiority of Asian labor immigrants and "the social inequalities inherited from slavery and reinforced by the economic exploitation of the Blacks" (Balibar 104). It is within this historical process of ethnicization of the American identity on an assimilative or pluralist ideology that we can then locate the supremacy of American English over the other languages of various ethnic groups within the polity. It is also in this historical context of the formation of the American multicultural pluralist imaginary that problems of citizenship, equality of rights, multilingualism, neocolonialism, nationalism or internationalism, should be placed and analyzed.

In the United States today, various languages are spoken and practiced everywhere—Spanish being the most widespread, Black English vernacular (BEV), creole in Louisiana and New York City, Russian in Brooklyn, and so on—testifying

to a multilingual society. But as studies have demonstrated, the failure of the school authorities in the US to recognize BEV as a separate language have continuously retarded the educational progress of black children (Spears). BEV, as well as the other varieties of Spanish, function as symbolic markers signifying membership in a particular ethnic group.

Why is one's use of a particular language important? Language usage or behavior is closely connected with the individual's perception of herself and her own identity. The British sociolinguist Robert Le Page has proposed a theory of language use in terms of acts of identity. According to Le Page, "the individual creates his or her own language behavior so that it resembles that of the group or groups with which he wishes to be identified, to the extent that: he can identify the groups; observe and analyze such groups; is motivated to adapt his behavior; and is still able to adapt his behavior. By so doing the individual is thus able to locate himself in the 'multi-dimensional' space defined by such groups in terms of factors such as sex, age, social class, occupation and other parameters for social group membership, including ethnicity" (Cashmore 173). In Britain, the use of a modified Jamaican Creole by second-generation Britishers of Caribbean descent is an example of acts of identity-formation, an assertion of an ethnic identity associated with such cultural interests as Rastafarianism, reggae music, and so on. By consciously adopting this Creole or patois, the youth are expressing their solidarity, ethnic pride, and symbolic resistance to what they perceive as a repressive and racist society.

One may ask: Has the Filipino community in the US considered language as one of the most important social practices through which they come to experience themselves as subjects with some critical agency, that is, not merely as objects trained to consume and be consumed? Have Filipino scholars examined language as a site for cultural and ideological struggle, a mechanism which produces and reproduces antagonistic relations between themselves and the dominant society? In my forty years here, except for a few academics influenced by the late Virgilio Enriquez, I have not encountered among our ranks any special awareness of the importance of Filipino and the other vernaculars.

In the dismal archive of ethnic studies of Filipino Americans, we encounter a species of identity politics that is unable to escape the hegemonic strategies of containment and sublimation. Ironically, this politics is really designed for encouraging painless assimilation. For example, Antonio Pido's *The Pilipino in America* (1986) is a repository of scholastic clichés and rehash of received opinions, at best an eclectic survey that tries to coalesce the contradictory tendencies in the research field as well as those in the community during the Marcos dictatorship. Recently, the collection *Filipino Americans: Transformation and Identity* (1997) edited by Maria P. P. Root, tried to advance beyond

the Establishment banalities, but to no avail, although gays and lesbians have succeeded in occupying their niches amid the cries for "healing the cultural amnesia and sense of shame" (78). I have no problem celebrating Filipino firsts, but I think historical memory of this ingratiating kind cannot decolonize our psyches since we use such memory to compete with other people of color in grabbing a piece of the American pie. Pido's contribution to this anthology compounded the muddle in its reflection of a neoconservative climate of the nineties with the multiculturalist belief that Filipinos have transcended their ethnicity in assuming some kind of mutant or freakish existence: "Such solidarity did not happen to the Pilipino Americans because they are Pilipinos who are in America, as their parents and grandparents were, but rather because they are Americans who are Pilipinos" (37). An ambivalent opportunist indeed if not an enigmatic trickster figure. None of the essays, if I recall, deal with the discrimination of Filipinos on account of their speaking Pilipino/Filipino at the workplace, or elsewhere.

In a study on Filipino Americans, Pauline Agbayani-Siewert and Linda Revilla comment on the Filipino group's lack of a "strong ethnic identity." They give a lot of space to the issue of whether Filipino should be spelled with an F or P. In spite of disagreements among post-1965 and pre-1965 immigrants, they note that Filipinos are distinguished by their adherence to "traditional Filipino values" relating to family togetherness and respect for elders. So what else is new? What is interesting about their survey is that they touch on the issue of language, remarking that "language is a questionable indicator of Filipino immigrants' acculturation," without adding that of course their country of origin has been thoroughly Americanized in language, if not in customs and habits. They cite a study which indicated that 71% of Filipinos speak a language other than English at home, although 91% of them claimed being able to speak English well or very well. Their conclusion: "This suggests that most Filipinos who have been naturalized citizens [Filipinos have a 45% naturalization rate, the highest among Asian groups] and who can speak English well still prefer to speak their native language at home" (152). What does this signify? In general, third generation children no longer speak the languages of their grandparents.

One interpretation is that of Yen Le Espiritu, author of the ethnographic collection, *Filipino American Lives* where he concedes that Filipinos, despite some mobility and cultural adaptation, are still not fully accepted as "Americans." This is not bad because Espiritu claims that Filipinos are really "transmigrants," that is, they resist racial categorization and at the same time sustain "multistranded relations between the Philippines and the United States" (27). This hypothesis is flawed. Espiritu wants Filipinos to have their cake

and eat it too. While some may succeed in manipulating their identities so that they both accommodate and resist their subordination within the global capitalist system—a tightrope performance not really warranted by the biographies she presents—they do not constitute the stereotype. Especially in the case of those who came in the last two decades, Filipinos have not really become full-blown hybrids conjured by postmodernists-postcolonial academics. The majority of the testimonies gathered by Espiritu provide incontrovertible proof that despite sly forms of resistance, institutional racism has continued to inflict damage on the lives and collective psyche of the Filipino community, whether some of them are perceived as transmigrants or not.

In fact the transmigrant paradigm cannot explain adequately the linguistic behavior of Filipinos. Siewert and Revilla report that Filipinos have begun to challenge the "English only" policies at the workplace. They cite one case in the Harborview Medical Center in Seattle, Washington, where seven Filipino workers filed a grievance for having been penalized for being told to use English only for business purposes. The policy was eventually rescinded, but we are not informed what the views of the experts are. Since they are obsessed with acculturation or cultural assimilation, they probably feel that the case was not really significant since Filipinos are bilingual anyway, and they can be flexible or versatile in adapting to the exigencies of their minority situation. Never mind that they have to suppress their need to speak in Filipino.

To recapitulate: The development of US capitalism concomitant with the growth and consolidation of American English has proceeded up to 1898, with the onset of imperial expansion. The Civil Rights movement succeeded (through the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and later the Bilingual Education Act of 1968) to mandate the use of non-English voting ballots and the funding of bilingual education programs serving primarily Hispanics to expedite their transition to competent English users. Due to various revisions, bilingual education programs (which started in 1963 in Miami, Florida, to help the children of Cuban exiles) only serve a small proportion of the total population. And yet some were alarmed by the increase of Hispanics in many states. One of them, Senator S. I. Hayakawa, a naturalized Canadian immigrant of Japanese descent, founded the US English in 1983 after sponsoring a bill in 1981 to make English the official language of the US (Fischer et al.[n.p.]).

In actuality, what has been happening in the last decades involves an implicit "reorganization of cultural hegemony" by the ruling elite faced with a sharpening political, social, and economic crisis of the system since the end of the Vietnam War. We may interpret this English-Only movement as an index to the resurgent nativist hostility to the recent influx of immigrants from Latin America and Asia—aliens that supposedly

disunite America and threaten the supremacy of the "American Way of Life" (Nunberg). The English First anti-immigrant phenomenon can easily be demystified and translated as the symptom of a moral panic, a fanatical zeal to preserve the status quo, "a fear of cultural change and a deep-seated worry that European Americans will be displaced from their dominant position in American life" (Douglas Massey qtd. in Zelinsky 192). This symptomatic reading finds its rationale in Antonio Gramsci's insight:

> Each time that in one way or another, the question of language comes to the fore, that signifies that a series of other problems is about to emerge, the formation and enlarging of the ruling class, the necessity to establish more "intimate and sure relations between the ruling groups and the popular masses, that is, the reorganization of cultural hegemony. (16)

III.

In 1985 then Education Secretary William Bennett judged bilingual education a failure because it only promoted ethnic pride despite the fact that programs like the Transitional Bilingual Education program and the Family English literacy programs no longer seek to fund classes conducted in the original ethnic languages. Four million language-minority students are now herded to monolingual "immersion" English classrooms which, according to one expert, often fail to teach anything but English. And this is supposed to explain why they don't have equal educational opportunities and become complete failures.

One opponent of the bills to make English the official language, Rep. Stephen Solarz, expressed a sentiment shared by many liberals who endorse pluralism or multiculturalism under the shibboleth of a common civic culture. Language is a matter of indifference so long as the cement of the civic culture holds the market-system, individual rights, and private property together. Solarz argued that the proposals

> represent a concession to nativist instincts and are incompatible with the cultural diversity and ethnic pluralism that constitute fundamental strengths of our nation…. We are … a tapestry of many races, creeds, religions, and ethnic backgrounds—each independent, but all interwoven with one another…. The glue that bonds these diverse communities together is not commonality of language, but a commitment to the democratic ideals on which our country was founded." (251)

Aside from these banalities, Solarz also opined that those proposals could pose significant threats to the civil and constitutional rights of citizens with little or no English proficiency.

> In this he was right because English triumphalism signifies a mode of racialization: the institutional subordination of other communities and other languages to white supremacy and its cultural hegemony. This was in part the thrust of the challenge made in the class-action suit of 1970, Lau v. Nichols, in which 1,790 Chinese children enrolled in the public schools in San Francisco, California, argued against the SF Unified School District that they were not being provided with an equal education because all instruction and materials were in English, which the children did not understand. Futhermore, the plaintiffs contended that English-only education for non-English-speaking children was unconstitutional because it violated the 14th Amendment, which guarantees to all citizens the equal protection of the laws. Moreover, such education was illegal under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, which rules that "no person in the United States shall be … subjected to discrimination under any program receiving Federal financial assistance" (the District was receiving funds from the federal government). The Supreme Court ruled unanimously in favor of the Chinese students, but only on the basis of the Civil Rights Act; the Constitutional issue was avoided and the Court left the remedy to local school boards. (Fischer et al. 242-5)

It is this 1974 Lau decision that can serve as the basis for litigation against public educational institutions that refuse to provide language services to students of limited English-speaking ability. It is a legal precedent on which institutions receiving federal money can be held accountable. But it is not one which engages the question of injustice, discrimination, and inequality in a racial polity such as the United States. It is not one which addresses, more specifically, the subordination of nationalities (like Filipinos) and their diverse languages as a consequence of the past colonial subjugation and present neocolonial status of the Philippines, their "national origin." This is not a matter of personal opinion, feeling or subjective speculation, but a matter for historical inquiry and empirical verification.

Following the mandate of federal laws, Tagalog or Filipino is now being used in census forms, ballots, postal notices, and even in public announcements of flights to the Philippines in some airports. Is this a sign that the racial polity has changed and abolished

institutional impediments to the recognition of the identity and dignity of the Filipino as a cultural-political subject? Are we now living in a class-less and race-blind society? Scarcely. Such events as Filipino History Month or Independence parades, in fact, confirm the hierarchical placing of the various ethnic communities within the pluralist schema that reproduces monolingualism and Anglocentrism in everyday life. Even the concession to fund classes in Filipino, or, to cite a recent trend, Arabic—suddenly classes in Arabic multiplied after 9/11—may be a deceptive means of convincing a few that linguistic, racial, and sex discrimination are amenable to such piecemeal reforms.

Apart from the neoconservative backlash of the eighties and nineties, the advent of post-9/11 hegemony of the "only remaining superpower" entrenched in a National Security State, the imperilled "Homeland," almost guarantees a regime of unmitigated surveillance and policing of public spaces where ethnic differences are sometimes displayed. Filipinos speaking Tagalog make themselves vulnerable to arrest—recall the case of 62 overstaying Filipinos deported in June, handcuffed and manacled like ordinary criminals throughout the long flight back to Clark Field, Philippines; and recently, the case of eight Filipino airport mechanics in Texas, victims of racial profiling and suspected of having links with Arab terrorists.

Filipino sounds completely unlike Arabic or Russian. What has made Filipino or Tagalog visible in our multicultural landscape is of course the huge flow of recent immigrants who are not as proficient in English as the earlier "waves" after 1965. Movies, music, and other mass-media cultural products using Filipino are more widely disseminated today than before. In addition, the resurgent nationalist movement in the Philippines, despite the lingering horrors of the Marcos dictatorship from 1972-1986, has brought to center-stage the nightly televised images of rallies where the messages of protest and rebellion against US imperialism are often conveyed in Filipino. The nationalist resurgence in the Philippines, as well as in the diaspora of 7-9 million Filipinos around the world, has rebounded miraculously from the sixties and has continued to revitalize Filipino as the language of critical protest and nationalist self-determination. I don't have to mention the anxiety and tensions provoked when children cannot understand their parents who, as Siewert and Revilla indicate, prefer to use Filipino or other vernaculars at home.

IV.

We are surrounded now by a preponderance of newly-arrived Filipinos who use Filipino to make sense of their new experiences, a necessary stage in their arduous life

here, before they are able to gain mastery of standard English and feel more capable of directing their lives. But learning English language skills alone does not automatically translate to access to limited opportunities, not to mention genuine empowerment, as witness the plight of black Americans, or the 60 million functionally illiterate citizens in this affluent, technically superior society. Meanwhile, these Filipinos feel dispossessed and marginalized, completely alienated, either resentful or more servile, depending on the complex circumstances of daily life. If and when they enter school (formal or informal), their language experience (in Filipino or other indigenous languages) is delegitimized by a pedagogical system which operates on the assumption that knowledge acquisition is a matter of learning the standard English, thus abstracting English from its ideological charge and socioeconomic implications.

Correct me if I am wrong, but I don't recall anytime when Filipinos have demanded access to bilingual education in the same way that Latinos and Chinese Americans have, as noted earlier. And I know that your request for classes in Filipino/Tagalog is nothing compared to the substantial programs in bilingual education among Hispanics. Still, it might be useful to quote the educational scholar Donaldo Macedo's comments on the current philosophy:

> The view that teaching English constitutes education sustains a notion of ideology that systematically negates rather than makes meaningful the cultural experiences of the subordinate linguistic groups who are, by and large, the objects of its policies. For the education of linguistic minority students to become meaningful it has to be situated within a theory of cultural production and viewed as an integral part of the way in which people produce, transform and reproduce meaning. Bilingual education, in this sense, must be seen as a medium that constitutes and affirms the historical and existential moments of lived culture….. [S]tudents learn to read faster and with better comprehension when taught in their native tongue. The immediate recognition of familiar words and experiences enhances the development of a positive self-concept in children who are somewhat insecure about the status of their language and culture. For this reason, and to be consistent with the plan to construct a democratic society free from vestiges of oppression, a minority literacy program must be rooted in the cultural capital of subordinate groups and have as its point of departure their own language. (309)

Macedo rightly emphasizes the daily lived experiences of linguistic minorities

rooted in collective and individual self-determination. He considers their language as "a major force in the construction of human subjectivities," since language "may either confirm or deny the life histories and experiences of the people who use it." Again, I refer to my earlier premise that it is language use that is decisive and consequential. We need to underscore the role of language as cultural or symbolic capital, a theme which Pierre Bourdieu has elaborated in his works.

Literacy must be based on the reality of subaltern life if it is to be effective in any strategy of real empowerment, in the decolonization of schooling for a start. It is only by taking into account the language of everyday lived experience and connecting this with the community's struggles to survive and maintain its integrity and autonomy, can we fully grasp what role the use of Filipino plays in the nationality's pursuit of a truly dignified and creative life as full-fledged citizens. This is, to my mind, a pursuit that cannot be achieved except as part of the collective democratic struggles of other people of color and the vast majority of working citizens oppressed by a class-divided, racialized, and gendered order.

And this system—globalized or neoimperialist capitalism—is the same one suppressing the possibilities for equality, justice, and autonomy in the Philippines. There is as yet no truly sovereign Filipino nation. I believe it is still in the process of slow, painful becoming. If so, how do we size up or assay persons who claim to be Filipinos, or whose geopolitical identities are somehow linked to the nation-state called the Philippines? Benedict Anderson theorized that modern nations are "imagined communities" made possible by print-capitalism and the "fatal diversity of human language" (46). If that is true, then the Philippines was imagined through American English mediated in schools, mass media, sports, and other cultural practices. Both the institutions of print capitalism and the schools were controlled and administered by the United States for half a century; even after formal independence, most of us dream and fantasize in English mixed with Tagalog (Taglish), or one of the vernaculars.

We see then that language and the process of thinking form a dialectical unity. While Filipino has become the effective *lingua franca,* the community in the Philippines is still imagined in a babel of languages, with Cebuanos, for example, refusing to recite the pledge of allegiance unless it is in Cebuano. Less a political gesture than a symptom, this situation reflects the inchoate or abortive project of constructing a Filipino national identity, the clearest proof of which is the failure to develop one language through which the intellectual, political, and economic development of the masses can be articulated.

We have no alternative. We need to continue the task of reshaping our cultural identity as Filipinos whether here or in the Philippines, in this perilous age of anti-

terrorism. I want to quote Paolo Freire, the great Brazilian educator, whose work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* has been a profound influence everywhere. Freire reminds us:

> At a particular moment in the struggle for self-affirmation, when subordinated to and exploited by the ruling class, no social group or class or even an entire nation or people can undertake the struggle for liberation without the use of a language. At no time can there be a struggle for liberation and self-affirmation without the formation of an identity, and identity of the individual, the group, the social class, or whatever…. Without a sense of identity, there can be no real struggle. I will only fight you if I am very sure of myself…. This is why colonized peoples need to preserve their native language…. They help defend one's sense of identity and they are absolutely necessary in the process of struggling for liberation. (186)

Whether here or in the Philippines, we are still, whether we like it or not, entangled, caught, implicated, in this ongoing process of struggling for liberation. A liberatory and radical approach to language as part of cultural production and pedagogical praxis is in order. How can we tell our stories in our own words? How do we retrieve the lost voices of our people, valorize their lived experiences, and in the process transform the way Filipinos as a group are treated in the metropolis?

To re-appropriate the submerged or erased revolutionary legacy of our people, we need a language that is an integral and authentic part of that culture—a language that is not just "an instrument of communication, but also a structure of thinking for the national being" (Freire 184), that is, a tool for self-reflection and critical analysis, a creative and transforming agent committed to solidarity, social responsibility, and justice for the masses. That language needed to reconstruct our history and reappropriate our culture cannot be English but an evolving Filipino, which draws its resources from all the other vernaculars. If we allow English to continue in the Philippines as a hegemonic cultural force, this will simply perpetuate the colonial legacy of class-racialized inequalities—need I remind you that we are still a genuine neocolony—and allow imperial ideology to determine the parameters of our historical and scientific development, the future not only of the Philippines but also the future of those who choose to leave and settle in other lands that, however, remain, alas, still part of an inescapable globalized market system. This is the task challenging us today and for as long as we speak English to request or demand the authorities that the teaching and learning of Filipino be given some space in this university.

Allow me to conclude with quotes from Lenin on the question of the equality of languages:

> Whoever does not recognize and champion the equality of nations and languages, and does not fight against all national oppression or inequality, is not a Marxist; he is not even a democrat…. For different nations to live together in peace and freedom or to separate and form different states (if that is more convenient for them), a full democracy, upheld by the working class, is essential. No privileges for any nation or any one language! … such are the principles of working-class democracy. (100, 116)

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