

## Filipino Diaspora in Australia and the “Language Question”

In the three-stage survey of ethnic newspapers in Australia, *Content Analysis of Australian non-English Language Newspapers*, spearheaded by Rogelia Pe-Pua and Michael Morrissey (1996, 1995, 1994) that aimed “to provide the Commonwealth of Australia with information about eligible newspapers...to facilitate a more sensitive, professional approach by media planners”, possibly hundreds of newspapers in fourteen foreign languages have been analysed (1996: 2). The first impulse for a researcher working on migrant print material culture like me is to search out in the contents whether Filipino ethnic newspapers are included in a significantly funded project such as this.<sup>1</sup> Realizing that no Filipino ethnic newspaper was included in the study raised two basic questions as to why this is so. First, did their exclusion mean Filipino migrants in Australia singularly publish in the English language since their arrival? Second, why did a massive undertaking of multiculturalism zeroed in on “non-English language newspapers” alone? This question leads to an even more political issue of hierarchising the migrant other: that if a minority group chooses to articulate itself in English – orally and/or in their written material culture – does it mean “reading” them comes easy, thus the unnecessariness of the act of translating their media practice in statistical form? While it may be straightforward to see from an administrative point of view how English-language migrant groups can be rendered “legible” compared to the Chinese, the Arabs, the Vietnamese and others wherein characters are not in Roman-centric ABCs, meaning visually “illegible” to the majority, Filipino-Australians occupy an even more liminal space than others because they are neither unreadable nor dominant. They are neither part of the “normative” citizenry at large nor are they given priority as “alien”. As a group of immigrants categorically lumped together by virtue of language-use with “American-Australians” (who do not need an *ethnic* newspaper celebrating whiteness) and “Jewish-Australians” (who are economically and culturally embedded within the structure), Philippine-born migrants whose diasporas in Australia and in the rest of the world are wrought upon by late capitalist and sexualised conditions of labour

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1. To know that Pe-Pua is a Philippine-born academic whose early career started at the University of the Philippines and is now with the University of New South Wales did not mitigate to expect that Filipino-Australian newspapers would be included.

movement that render them not only as liminal but also as doubly invisible.<sup>2</sup> The Filipino woman in Australia is a character that has become a standardised symbol of the transgressive female crossing racial, national, geographical and class boundaries through marriage. Caricatures of the “mail-order bride” such as Rose Porteus, Vivian Solon Alvarez, Cynthia, a character in “Priscilla Queen of the Desert” movie, and dozens upon dozens of dead wives and mothers have not really left the Australian imaginary. While this discourse of the sexualised Filipina is definitive of the diaspora, its discussion requires a separate avenue.

This paper will attempt to describe the practices and choices that define Filipino-Australian community newspapers; in particular, it will historicise the use of the English language primarily and Filipino secondarily as an enduring legacy of American colonial education in the Philippines. Highlighting the case of New South Wales’ Filipino newspapers, *Bayanihan News* in particular, English functions as the virtual *lingua franca* among ethnic Filipinos in Australia instead of the official national language, Filipino. Rather than seeing this phenomenon as the community’s “integrative” action towards an acceptably “Australian” minority group in the process of slow but serious adaptation, I argue that what is at play here are the vestiges of their colonial past and the unabashed elitism of English that goes with it. As a result, the subsequent emasculation of a national language in the Philippines is transported overseas as a kind of dilution of their ethnic identification. The virtual castration of the authority of a national language in favour of imperial English is even more effective and felt within the context of Filipino migration in Anglo-Celtic Australia since migration could only further highlight the many clefs in Philippine society. First and foremost of these clefs is class to which the choice of language is very much a part of. Connecting the case of Filipino-Australian newspapers’ use of English in the quest for “multicultural” Australia as evidenced by the ethnic media project by Pe-Pua and Morrissey discussed in the opening, this paper will argue that while Filipinos are a fabric in the quilt of Australia’s official policy on immigration and race relations, their use of English – an applauded trait of adaptability often cited as sign of a “model minority” – works ironically towards their

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2. The reference to Jewish-Australians is in the context of the group’s successful English-language only newspapers in Australia such as *Australian Jewish Times* and *Australian Jewish News* in Sydney and Melbourne, respectively. Also, like the case of the Philippines, the Jewish is characterized by the absence of a *lingua franca* other than English. There is no attempt to simply the case of Jewish migration to Australia in opposition to the Filipino migration. For further discussion, see Braham (1989).

liminalisation that they are neither within the white society in general nor within the “ethnic”-Australian constitution in particular; thus, furthering their invisibility from both sides of the spectrum.<sup>3</sup>

Apart from a historicising of the use of English in the light of Philippine political and social milieus, other methods used in this essay are content analysis of Filipino ethnic newspapers and interviews with the publishers, editors and other practitioners in the community conducted from 2009 to 2010.

### **Problems of Language in the Philippines: Multilingual and Imperial**

It is fitting to start this discussion on the problems of language in the Philippines by mentioning that there are more than one hundred Philippine languages all over the scattered seven thousand islands. The Austronesian or Malayo-Polynesian varieties can count up to 300 if varieties among these languages are considered (Gonzalez 1980). For example, Tagalog - spoken in Manila and the provinces surrounding it such as Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Quezon, Bataan, Rizal and also in places as far as Central Luzon, the island of Mindoro and Palawan – is a major language but all these areas have a variety of Tagalog specific to each place. People from these areas generally understand one another but they do have distinct differences in intonation and vocabulary. Today, it is possible for one person to know, on average, four languages – one’s native language, the lingua franca in the greater region, Tagalog infamous for being the contested national language and, of course, imperial English. While such effusion of linguistic variety is exciting, it can also be a source of all sorts of problem that has ramifications in language policy, ethnic relations, national education programs, development planning, among others that implicate postcolonial nation-building (Hau and Tinio 2003; Gonzales 1980, 1991). In a nation-state that is just over a hundred years old (this is after Spain but only fifty-four years after American occupation), the presence of ethno-linguistic divisions caused considerable strain in the process of nation-building as much as in the very making of the Filipino nation. The notion of a single vernacular as a

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3. For a more detailed discussion of Australian multiculturalism and race relations, see Ghassan Hage (2002, 1998) and Stephen Castles (1989, 1992, 1999).

“natural” agent of ethnic identification is a much-documented aspect of literatures on nationalism as an ideology (Anderson 1990; Barbour and Carmichael 2000; May 2001). However, saddled by the weight of colonisation under Spain and the United States, not to mention the linguistic diversity in what is now the Philippine republic, the question of one singular, identifying vernacular is out of the picture.

The pressure to learn a second-language became palpable to the Philippine natives upon the arrival of Spanish conquistadores. Evangelization in the islands in the 16<sup>th</sup> century did not prove to be easy; one, for the Catholic priests, the “savages”, “pagans” and “animist” inhabitants were unruly and nomadic; second, and more importantly, they spoke a variety of languages (Rafael 1988). Therefore, Castilian priests were compelled to study the vernacular languages in the archipelago now mapped as the Philippines. The long process of learning the language started by syllabifying languages into Latin script thereby bypassing the native way of writing which would later be eroded in time. Francisco Blancas de San Jose published *Arte y reglas de las lengua tagala* in 1610 with the help of Tomas Pinpin, a native printer (Rafael 1988). A book of grammar and vocabulary, it became the foundation of the early writings of prayers, rituals and Christian doctrines that would in turn convert the people of the islands (except Mindanao) into Christians. Unlike in Latin America where European settlers arrived and formed colonies, the Philippines was way too isolated geographically and therefore was not a priority. These reasons forced missionaries to learn the major vernaculars instead of imposing Castilian like what transpired in Latin America that almost eradicated the vernaculars; in hindsight, it was a truly positive effect in exchange for not speaking Spanish despite 350 years of domination. Although a persistent theory still hovers that the Spaniards did not teach the natives their language in order to contain them, to keep them ignorant and outside the margins of power (Constantino 1975); recent literature on the subject points to the simple fact that the missionaries could not do it logistically even if they wanted to (Rafael 1988).

The arrival of English in the country coincided with the very bitter history of losing the Filipino-American war that started in 1899 after declaring their first republic and then proceeded to being bought for \$20 million from Spain along with Guam and Puerto Rico at the Treaty of Paris. Together with the systematic

introduction of the machineries of civil government (yet the military government did not really go away), William Taft, the governor-general, instituted public instruction to Filipino children; something that Spanish colonisation did not accomplish with its exclusive *beaterios* and *seminarios* (Rafael 1988). Hundreds of American teachers arrived by boat in 1901 to facilitate instruction; they were called “Thomasites” for USS Thomas (Racelis and Ick 2001). Despite the very sudden and crushing effect of colonial institutions and their conduits to the socio-political and cultural lives of the natives, parents and school children thought it better to follow what the Americans offered due to the social mobility it promised to the long-oppressed peasantry in feudalistic Philippines. English then was more than a foreign language that one learned under the “benevolent” and yet fear-inducing white authority; it had become a path to economic salvation.<sup>4</sup> American pacification had been thorough that after a short forty-year gap between the Filipino-American and the damaging World War II, English was a wildfire that swallowed conservative Hispanic influences.<sup>5</sup> Although the Americans did not officially move towards any restrictive use of vernacular languages, the colonial project was too pervasive that *not* to speak it was to be at the bottom of the social ladder: provincial, uneducated, crude, native, illiterate, poor, *de baja clase*. For one century now, in the Philippines, one does not want to be caught without English. In a manner of speaking, it is their web; they are all caught in it.

That English as a regime of power ensuring social mobility has become more evident than ever in post-war Philippines. Without Spanish strongly contending in the hierarchy of languages, English can now only wage its battle against Filipino; or rather, Filipino waging its losing battle against English. In 1939, coinciding with efforts of native bureaucrats for independence from US occupation, every campaign to finally delegate a national language *representative* of the emerging was finally

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4. “Benevolent assimilation” was the official colonial policy of the US government under William McKinley in order to subdue the populace who still waged their guerrilla wars in the country side all over the country. It also was extended to include economic, social and health, education systems that they introduced.

5. This assertion however must be qualified since Filipino culture then and now remains very much Hispanic in its influences. Although Spanish-speakers have dwindled in numbers and classes in schools have been officially dropped, many languages in the Philippines – including Tagalog and Visaya – have kept Spanish loan words. Also, postcolonial theorists especially the writer Nick Joaquin believe that the Filipino today is a hybrid and cannot be undone.

won by Manuel L. Quezon's declaration of Tagalog as *wikang pambansa*.<sup>6</sup> Twenty years after, Tagalog was renamed as 'Pilipino' to satisfy the need for a language that would unify despite of much diversity in the country (Gonzalez 1980). Right after its declaration, persistent protests against this were loudly waged by Ilocanos, Cebuanos and other major-language speakers. It has not abated until now, cropping up every time an opportunity comes. Non-Tagalogs perceive that the immensity of the power to be represented by a language they did not learn as a first language is plain unacceptable especially when Visayas islands and Mindanao do not really speak Tagalog as lingua franca. Such resistance is way too overwhelming to ignore because of the boycott of Tagalog/Filipino; in Cebu, one would not want to be caught dead speaking Tagalog. This same group of critics would rather have English as the country's official medium rather than Tagalog/Filipino. So that fifty years after Quezon's declaration, the 1987 Constitution of the Republic, Filipino had to be reiterated as the *national* language in the process of evolving whereby additions from all other vernacular plus English, Spanish, Chinese, Hindi and Arabic and other languages the country had had some contact with would be accepted for more versatility. For the sceptics, if the government admits it is not a complete, well-rounded language – why privilege it? For Teresita Maceda (2003), however, ethnic/linguistic hostilities against Filipino as a national language is – more than an issue of linguistics and language planning for educational purposes – one that is imagined war waged by an elite few who think within the logic of colonialism. They prefer English on the alleged basis of unpreparedness of an evolving language when all languages are in the process of limitless change. The elite who distinguish themselves by the language they speak – which betray their expensive education, lineage, among other indicators of wealth - defends English against Filipino through everyday practice. True enough, in the Philippines today, government officials, military officers, judges, teachers, job seekers, journalists, advertisers, among the many, all articulate their discourses and interests in English; but when expressing becomes strenuous, then they have the vernacular to depend on.

While the politics of language compounded by ethnic allegiances continued to plague, it experienced a boost, a kind of reinvigoration during the 1960s until the

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6. *Wikang pambansa* can be translated as "national language". In the absence of one language at a time of rebuilding the country and nationalizing after a clearly delineated "postcolonial" period, the leaders of the country had to nominate one that would represent the people and the nation-state.

early 1980s through anti-Marcos activism. Students and academics from universities found it useful to articulate anti-fascist ideology and do mass-organising using Filipino. Through the example by Community Party of the Philippines and the National Democratic Front using Filipino in its treatises and publications, the use of the language in schools, television, radio, newspapers, among others had become a statement not only against fascism but an expression of anti-status quo resistance in any form (Atienza 1992; Maceda 2003). Since many mass-based organisations' activists and cultural workers do not speak Filipino as a first language, the policy to standardise socialist/leftist literature in the national language and put it into use had exemplified that a vernacular language could launch a national movement; something that critics of Filipino language believe is never possible. In 1992, the *Komisyon ng Wikang Filipino* was founded to make sure that language policy-making is geared towards the promise that despite choosing Tagalog as the structural base of Filipino, it will become a richer modern language with a truly national representation.<sup>7</sup>

While the debates on the national language has not abated, the world around has continued to change and with it, the Philippines and its role in world as a postcolonial nation-state. In a globalized world where people from the South find themselves selling labour in the service sectors of first world countries, Filipinos – as endlessly reiterated by its cash-strapped government – are convinced that their English would get them better jobs than other non-English speaking formerly-colonised peoples.<sup>8</sup> While it may be true, it is also believable that English as leverage is no leverage at all in the context of subcontracted economies where professionals are valued only by their capacity to speak English more than anything else.<sup>9</sup> With

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7. The Commission on the Filipino Language under the auspices of the Office of the President is still operating today sponsoring literary contests, publishing materials related to language and language policies, among other project. The foremost criticism targeting the commission is its inefficacious in fulfilling its role to develop Filipino.

8. Walden Bello (2004, 1994), Filipino activist and academic, has written extensively on the Global South's critical view of the existing capitalist economy. For his articles, speeches and interviews, see <http://waldenbello.org/content/blogcategory/16/31/>.

9. To exemplify this point, subcontracted call centres in the Philippines are powered by a mixture of privately and publicly educated university graduates who are all hired for their ability to speak English. As fodder for First World economies, they sleep during the day and work at night to negate time-space difference between the two hemispheres; they also receive a tiny portion of what their equivalents receive in the North. On the other hand, Filipina domestic helpers in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia are paid higher than their counterparts from Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and Thailand because of their so-called "advantage" of knowing some English. However, it must be pointed out that many who work as servants in these destination countries are actually college graduates, if not some years at tertiary education. It is easy to see how English, taught from primary to college, is instrumental in contributing and perpetuating the unjust division of labour among nations.

the diaspora of Filipinos to every corner of the world to support a failed neoliberal economy back home, they find themselves stranded in alien cultures while at the same time trying to survive by re-creating a version of the old country in their communities through cultural organisations, food festivals, print materials, among others. The Filipino ethnic newspapers, among other manifestations of adaptation via material culture, are a way to memorialise this re-creation of the old country and at the same time a diary of celebrating the “Australian life” they think they have acquired through photographs, news and essays in the new homeland. It is not surprising to see that in one issue of one these newspapers, “community news” are comprised of photographs of baptismal ceremony, wedding, birthdays, sporting events, anniversaries, graduates and other familial happenings masked as communal events. If ethnic newspapers are a celebration of things “Filipino” – a general recognition of a national character that binds all of the Philippine-born migrants in Australia, then why not use the national language instead of English?

### **Migrant Print Culture in Australia**

A one time Federal rule in foreign-language press in Australia is the requirement of writing a quarter of its content in English (Birsa-Skofic 1989). This move is most likely an act to ensure some form of tangible integration towards the host society through ethnic media. However, the notion of integration through ethnic media was long preceded by foreign-language publications by and for migrant communities in Australia. The German of *Die Deutsche Post fuer die Australischen Kolonien* published in Adelaide, South Australia in 1848 was the very first non-English migrant newspaper in Australia (Gilson and Zubryszcki 1967). Like *L'Italo-Australino* of Francesco Sceusa, published in 1885, it did not publish in English and was mindful to write beautifully to emphasise patriotism. Since an essential aspect of ethnic newspapers is their capacity to “mediate” between mainstream white Australia and the members of the diaspora, ethnic publications later on needed to accommodate Australia’s increasingly multicultural (multiracial) society. This official ideology that “absorbs” the different, the other, into the manifold has, nonetheless, a clause that the different, the other, must make some effort to meet white Australia halfway. Slowly converting ethnic media readership into English is one of the ways. Needless to say, ethnic newspapers, while avenues of multiculturalism – proof that difference



is recognised – can also be the same tool towards the slow and silent erasure of that difference. Not like German and Italian newspapers of olden days that wrote in their beloved national languages, and unlike today when Vietnamese and Chinese newspapers still write in their own, Filipino-Australian newspapers *then* and *now* publish in English. This is how the notion of the slow and silent erasure comes in. The steady arrival of Filipinos in Australia is fairly recent compared with Italians, Germans, Greeks and other groups although the history of Filipino presence in Australia dates back to the late nineteenth century when they called “Manilamen”. Young, male and unmarried, Filipinos were mostly associated for their participation in the pearling industry in Darwin in the Northern Territory (Ileto and Sullivan 1993). White Australia policy put a stop to the in-flow of Filipinos to Australia for several decades; subsequently, the growth of the immigrant group only came in the 1970s at a time when Australia had liberalised its immigration policies to non-white peoples. In the same vein, the birth of Filipino-Australian publications came shortly after that. Based on the research done for this project, the very first recognisable Filipino-Australian publication in the form of a newsletter was *Bagumbayan*.<sup>10</sup> “The first true running Filipino publication,” *Bagumbayan* first appeared in 1977 under the leadership of Larry Rivera. It was a sincere attempt of the young community to gather together an editorial staff that could do a “professional job”; some of these journalists were Jaime Pimentel, Oscar Landicho and Joe Umali.<sup>11</sup> In 1980, the very first tabloid Filipino ethnic newspaper in Australia was issued: *The Philippine Balita*. Under the editorship of Jaime Pimentel who worked with the Fairfax group, this tabloid had garnered the attention of the growing Filipino diaspora in Sydney while the community was still in its early stages of organising, when Filipino immigrants were drawn towards each other in the western suburbs of Sydney.<sup>12</sup> According to its then-editor, the newspaper was a symbol of accomplishment for the community and that Filipinos were truly proud of *Balita*. Many publications have appeared since *Bagumbayan* and *Balita*; some stayed for a long time, some for a few years. In New South Wales, some titles that saw publication and enjoyed the readership of the Filipino community had been *Sandigan*, *The Philippine Community News*, *The*

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10. *Bagumbayan* is literally translated as “newtown”. *Bayan* can also mean people, masses, home, country, nation. In the context of diaspora in Australia, it means “new home”, referring to the country of destination. Also, in the Filipino history of spaces, *Bagumbayan* makes a special place as it is the name of the place where national hero Jose Rizal was executed by Spanish colonial guards.

11. Jaime Pimentel, email message to author, 16 March 2010.

12. Jaime Pimentel, interview with the author, Burwood, Sydney, 06 March 2010.

*Philippine Herald Newspaper/Magazine, The Philippine Voice, The Filipino Observer, The Pilipino Herald, and Filipin-Oz.*<sup>13</sup> Today, there are three existing tabloids and one newsletter in greater Sydney and possibly in the entire New South Wales: *Philippine Community Herald* published by Evelyn Zaragosa, *Bayanihan News* published by Domingo Perdon, *newsPinoy* by Titus Filio and *Philippine Tribune* by Dino Crescini. The early ethnic newspapers were bilingual in delivering its contents; however, bilingual here does not mean an equal share in terms of using English and Filipino. Very often the newspapers deliver the “hard” items such as headline news, editorial, opinion columns and feature articles in English. Filipino is relegated to routine sections in the entertainment pages.<sup>14</sup> With the one exception of *Pilipino Herald* that heavily printed news from the Philippines, the Filipino-Australian tabloids had been unabashedly articulating their identity and positioning their ethnicity in English. This is not to say that it should not have been the case; indeed, English has been historically, ideologically and socio-politically inserted into the nation’s colonial past and for the Filipino diaspora to transport this American bequest in Australia could only be expected. The ease with which Filipino-Australians have expressed themselves in English, proved by their print production, contrast starkly with the case of the Chinese and the Vietnamese. In fact, according to Tuan Ngoc Nguyen, a professor from Victoria, all sections of all newspapers for the Vietnamese in Australia are in their language.<sup>15</sup> Distinct in their experience of colonisation, what is apparent in the Filipino-Australian case is the absence of the need to write in a national language in order to demonstrate national sentiments, not to mention the accessibility of English and the social value it signifies. Even in the beginning of their practice of ethnic journalism, this diasporic group freely voiced their longing for home in English. Despite the presence of over a hundred languages, several regional languages, and one national language, Filipino-Australians would publish comfortably in English. And it entails no contradiction to the migrants of the postcolonial Philippines who have found a *bagumbayan* in Australia.

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13. This enumeration of the Filipino-Australian tabloids does not claim to be exhaustive at this time; archival work, interviews and detective work have been done to gather all the titles. It is possible that there are titles I have not yet found such as *The Filipino Immigrant* which was referenced in a box of materials in the National Library of Australia but is neither in the catalogue nor mentioned at all by any of the sources interviewed.

14. One exception to this is possibly *Philippine Voice* wherein issues (1990-1991) accessed from the State Library of New South Wales all featured articles in English.

15. Tuan Ngoc Nguyen, paper presentation, “Vietnamese diasporic culture in print advertising in Australia.” in *Rhizomes V: Diaspora: Language and Place*, University of Queensland, 05 February 2010.

To further my argument, I would like to cite a few exchanges during the interviews conducted for this study and also some data as a result of content analysis. *Bayanihan News* from the New South Wales published 75% of its articles in English and 25% in Filipino based from the content analysis done for the monthly issues published in 2003 and 2005.<sup>16</sup> The most important headlines and sections such as immigration news, community news, editorials are all written in English while articles in Filipino are poems, recipes, vocabulary words, puzzles, entertainment, personals and announcements and other routine features found in the last quarter of the newspaper. To be more specific, out of the 375 articles/features (includes word lists and puzzles) in the seven issues analysed in 2005 of *Bayanihan News*, only 102 are in Filipino. Furthermore, in 2003, out of 321 articles/features (includes word lists and puzzles), 78 are in Filipino. Both figures amount to 25.86%; if word lists and puzzles were excluded in the count, this figure would even be lower. The same tendency, although unfortunately without statistics to back it up, is found in Sydney-based *Philippine Community Herald* that has been running since 1993; a feat in its longevity of existence. In an attempt to shed light on this editorial choice, Perdon, writer for *Bayanihan News*, said that he and his brother, the editor and publisher, initially wanted a paper written mostly in Filipino.<sup>17</sup> However, he felt that the paper was not as well received because many of its content in Filipino and so they published more articles in English. When asked what he thought the reason was for this preference to read in English, Perdon – with the first-generation migrants in mind – said that Filipinos would rather consume something in English based on the language’s imagined superiority that they have brought with them to Australia. Not to mention that many of the migrants in the past few years are professionals who have learned to privilege English at home, in schools and at work; an unmistakable sign of middle-class values and lower-middleclass longing practiced “back home”. The allure of English – the language of the powerful – as the appropriate one to use is, without doubt, even more attractive to the diasporic community members given the primacy of English in Australia. Indeed, reading *one’s own* ethnic newspaper in a Filipino/Tagalog can only be

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16. In the year 2003, six issues (January, March, April, May, October and November) and in the year 2005, seven issues were considered (January, February, March, May, June, September, December). Although the missing issues do not complete the years in the study, I still believe that the consistency and pattern shown in what was available are enough to demonstrate the use of English and Filipino languages in Filipino ethnic newspapers using this publication.

17. Renato Perdon, interview with the author, Kensington, Sydney, 17 January 2010.

deemed as alienating, first in the white-dominant surrounding, and second, to someone who has been taught all his life that Filipino (language) is inferior. English, anyway, has always been something strangely familiar; never natural but nevertheless always present.

While Perdon is concerned with the use of English among first-generation Filipino-Australians, another community journalist deals with the issue of language from the vantage point of the second-generation or the 1.5.<sup>18</sup> *newsPinoy*, the newest one to be introduced in the community, is a tabloid not unlike *mx* given away for free in the train stations in the city. The visually attractive paper that is supported only by its advertisers from community businesses is an all-English paper. According to its editor Titus Filio, the ethnic newspapers today are not for first-generation migrants any more.<sup>19</sup> For him, the function of informing the second-generation – kids whose first language is English – is more useful to the community at large than their parents who are already more or less involved. Filio also feels that by giving the paper a less formal, less rigid look, his tabloid will attract more Filipino-Australians who cannot read in the Filipino language at all; at most these younger members of the community can understand and speak a little of Filipino, that is, if Filipino is the Philippine-language they speak at home. In Melbourne, the publisher of *Philippine Times*, George Gregorio, revealed how his children speak English fluently and some French; they could orally understand Bicolano, a major regional language used in the south of Manila (because both him and his wife speak it at home) but they do not speak or read in Filipino.<sup>20</sup> *Philippine Tribune*, a Sydney newsletter edited by Dino Crescini, like *newsPinoy*, is an all-English publication. For Crescini, reaching out to non-Filipino readers, husbands of Filipinas, for example, is of utmost importance; an unmistakable sign that the community is part of the Australian body. Also, it was intuitive for American Jesuit-educated Crescini to write in English, the language he spoke at home, at work and in school all his life.<sup>21</sup> Despite differences in the circumstances of their migration – and possibly differences in ages, educational backgrounds, linguistic backgrounds, socio-political

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18. Generation 1.5 is used to refer to children of immigrants who were born in the Philippines but migrated to Australia at a young age which means their early schooling was completed in Australia. An in-depth look at them is done by Arlene Torres-D’Mello (2003).

19. Titus Filio, interview with the author, Doonside, Sydney, August 2009.

20. George Gregorio, interview with the author, Federation Square, Melbourne, 27 January 2010.

21. Dino Crescini, interview with the author, Blacktown, Sydney, 16 February 2010.

persuasions, among other factors – what remains certain is the ease by the which these Filipino-Australian community journalists have used English in aiding the migrant group to make sense of their evolving identity and position through their publications. The ease by which they chose to articulate in English is reciprocated by the same untroubled reception of the members to consume their news in the language. Whether it is social class, linguistic divisions in diversity-rich Philippines, educational distinction, colonial subjectification or other reasons that the entire community – both producer and consumer – have elected English, the choice *does* have a say in the way Filipino-Australians are placed in the spectrum of the Australian society; the white dominant culture on the one hand and the rest of the multiracial nexus on the other.

### **Invisible and Liminal**

In an anthology entitled *Ethnic press in Australia*, several scholars have predicted the future of ethnic newspapers: “the writing is on the wall, and the writing is in English” (Burke 1989: 245). This statement is prompted by the observation that ethnic presses’ power over the migrant communities would continue to diminish as younger members of the community need no longer “adapt in the way the older ones had to – successfully or not successfully. According to this paradigm, the one significant factor in the eventual obsolescence of the ethnic newspaper is the second and third generations’ ability to speak like Australians, thus, they have no need a newspaper to give “voice” to them; indeed, a battle cry of early ethnic newspapers. They have no desire to belong because they already do; at least in a deeper, more integrated way than their migrant-parents. However, as the Chinese and Vietnamese case cited above, the flow of immigration does not halt all at once; first-generation migrants do not disappear altogether to be replaced by the second-generation. Newcomers will continue to go to their respective ethnic “ghettoes”, snoop around in the stores and pick up a newspaper that calls to them in the name of nostalgia. The writing on wall may perhaps remain *not* in English at all.

However, as presented here, the Filipino ethnic newspapers in Australia did not follow the common path of the foreign language press that passed the stages of national language-use to bilingualism, or not at all. The writing they saw on the wall

is unmistakably clear: English. The Philippine-born community, it seems, appears to be safeguarded from the birthing difficulties that many ethnic groupings have experienced due to their non-English speaking members often perceived as communicatively poor as soon as they open their mouths to speak. In this manner, Filipinos appear to be the “model minority” for not being too difficult; in fact, they even have a little American English inflection here and there. Despite this, Filipino-Australians’ ideal position towards tractable acculturation to the dominant society consigns them to a space shadowed by another shade of otherness from the point of view of multiculturalism, at least to those who translate the principle into rules, actions and funded projects. As in the case of the University of Wollongong’s Centre for Multicultural Studies and Office of Government Information and Advertising joint project, the Filipino-Australian community, despite sharing a space defined by class, race and a culture of otherness in Australia with others, was simply an outsider (again) because they chose to publish in English. In this context, if there was a minority group that did not make the selection as they did, it would be Indian-Australians; both of them are English-speaking, postcolonial developing nations in Asia. For whatever intention this study was designed to serve – “essentially a manual for media planners rather than a sociological study” – Filipino-Australian community (as well as other English-speaking immigrants) remained outside that gambit (Pe-Pua and Morrissey, 1996: 3). But what does it *mean* not to belong to such a study? It means, simplistically, they belong to another category: “English-language ethnic newspaper press in Australia” which almost already sounds like a contradiction. Although it may be plausible that the same government agency may plan a part two of the study – which may include Filipinos, Indians, South Africans – it is more likely not to happen any time in the near future. But what does it *mean* not to be considered an urgent case for “media planning”? There is no handy answer right now. But the simple case is that the very exclusionary and binary design of the study – English versus non-English – is a good indication that those who use English (never mind if non-Australian) are “readable” enough. They can be subsumed under the rug of the English-speaking (though non-white immigrants). To assume the visibility and legibility of the Filipino ethnic group in Australia due to their English, however, puts to the fore their even greater invisibility because of (mis)categorisation as already pointed out. This invisibility, a status often established through practices, performances, privileges and rights accorded to the

migrant in relation to the natural-born citizen, is a fact that diasporic groups know. However, the opacity, the non-presence of the outsider such as the racialised and sexualised Filipino(a) is further subsumed in the liminal space that is neither white and dominant nor coloured and subjugated. What Homi Bhabha (1990) introduced as the “in-between”, the interstices of the racial, sexual and class hierarchies, can be used to describe the liminality brought about by the use of English of a group of people not “meant” to benefit from the power that emanates from it. The twice-invisible Filipino-Australian, as argued in this essay, can further be extended if the “media-planning” objective of the sponsors of the study are to be executed in the grander scale of social and educational services for the minority of the country. What has been considered within the community and in the Philippines as well as the “benevolent” gift of the American occupation, along with the public education system and civil governance, English can be a silent injury that bleeds a diasporic group in a multicultural society. It is even more so when the community itself does not perceive it as such at all.

Indeed, the history of the “love affair” between English and the Filipino people can only be adequately described as shadowy and in-between; both injurious and discriminating at the same time. The transportation of the “language question” from Manila to Sydney, the elitism of English over Filipino, and the imperialism of Filipino over other vernacular languages as a result of the country’s colonial history are all major influences that add to the complexity of this relationship. More so, the preference to use English among the middle class – the social group editors and professional migrants come from – is another telling factor in the making of ethnic newspapers among the Filipino community in Australia. And this historically determined and conscious decision to use English has – no matter how “natural” it is made to appear – defined the community’s position in multicultural Australia in compromising ways. Interestingly, however, this seeming position of leverage brought about by the power of English remains to be seen as manifested by the Filipinos’ liminal place within the marginal space that migrant communities occupy in Australia.

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