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Oscar Tantoco Serquina Jr.

University of Melbourne, Australia; University of the Philippines Diliman, Philippines,
oserquina@student.unimelb.edu.au

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Institutionally Speaking: Speech Departments and the Making of a Philippine Eloquent Modernity

Oscar Tantoco Serquiña, Jr.
University of Melbourne, Australia
University of the Philippines Diliman, Philippines
otserquina@up.edu.ph

This essay initiates a historiographical account of speech departments in the University of the Philippines (UP) and Silliman University. Founded in 1959 and 1965, respectively, these academic formations are the two existing bastions for the comprehensive and disciplinary study and practice of speech/speech communication in the country and the rest of Asia. This essay explores a) the use of speech as the organizing principle of scholarly inquiry in the modern Philippine university, b) the pedagogies composing Philippine speech curricula, c) the performances enacted by speech programs in UP and Silliman University, d) the speaking subjects that speech departments seek to develop, and, finally, e) the relationship of these institutions to what may be termed an eloquent modernity. Some pertinent questions concerning the nature and the future of the discipline of speech/speech communication in a postcolonial nation like the Philippines comprise the essay's conclusion.

Keywords: speech/speech communication, Philippine academic departments, institutional histories, the University of the Philippines, Silliman University

A paradox lies in the fact that only two fully formed academic departments devoted exclusively to teaching, researching, and performing speech exist in a country like the Philippines, whose people are deeply engaged in various acts of speaking and heavily invested in events such as public speeches and platform performances. These institutions include the Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts of the University of the Philippines and the Department of Speech and Theatre Arts of Silliman University. Founded in 1959 and 1965, respectively, both evolved from efforts that broke down roomy English departments as well as from an institutional ambition to accord sufficient attention to the extensive study and organized practice of speech. These two departments have since then contributed immensely to Philippine tertiary education, not only by defining and directing the curricula of speech and theatre arts programs in the country but also by producing notable alumni serving different sectors of society: from politics, to law, to public governance, to mass media, to education, to business and commerce, up to advertising and public relations.

The period of restoration and reconstruction that came in the wake of the Second World War saw speech departments emerging from a number of private colleges and universities based in the Philippine capital, such as the Far Eastern University and the University of the East. However, as the American Wallace Bacon noted in the early 1960s during his one-year stint as a Fulbright Visiting Professor of Speech in the University of the Philippines, they focused more on “business concerns” and bore debatable educational attainments, even if they carried “some very fine students.”¹ No wonder that institutions of this nature have eventually morphed into something else, if not totally fallen apart, in the face of multifarious pressures, ranging from the commercially driven to the academically motivated, that have restructured Philippine academia over the years. That being said, speech departments have failed to grow quantitatively and qualitatively in the country: a fact that makes UP and Silliman University the remaining bastions tasked to secure and sustain the academic discipline of speech on this side of the academic world.

Quite unfortunately but not unexpectedly, the rarity of speech departments in the Philippines has been more of a liability than an asset. For one, it has made these academic formations difficult to categorize and therefore easy to dismiss. For another,

it has rendered them without any appropriate and stable peer, collaborator, and interlocutor. And so, it is likewise unsurprising to note that despite their multiple pedagogical, scholarly, and artistic interventions, surviving speech departments in the Philippines have not received the same hype, esteem, and critical consideration that other departments in the arts and the humanities are enjoying. If one adds to this the fact that institutional histories of these speech departments have glaringly remained undocumented, whether nationally or internationally, and that an honest-to-goodness examination of their so-called best practices has yet to be written, it is tempting to put in question the importance of these institutions and render their academic role and position marginal, if not inconsequential, in the overall structure of the modern Philippine university.

A number of reasons may clarify such seeming marginality and conspicuous irregularity. The first reason involves the connection of speech study in the Philippines to a colonial system of education that deployed English-centric pedagogies notoriously at the expense of local forms of orality (Rafael; Sibayan). The second reason, which is connected to the previous point, relates to the postcolonial and nationalist bias against those who speak the English language, whom anti-colonial intellectuals have marked not only as vassals of a destructive foreign tongue but also as outcomes of a faulty education ensnared in colonialist logics and politics. Renato Constantino, for instance, trenchantly criticized the prevailing preferences of Filipinos to utilize English, rather than the native languages, in the country’s educational system. Not only did Constantino deride how Filipinos believe that “no education can be true education unless it is based on proficiency in English,” but he also pointed out the “deleterious effects” of such a pedagogical belief especially on the social and political lives of the Filipino people. In a famous passage, Constantino strongly argued that English “became the wedge that separated the Filipinos from their past and later was to separate educated Filipinos from the masses of their countrymen” (24). Such prejudice against the English language is in charge, to be sure, of portrayals of English-speaking Filipinos as artificial and detached from realities on the ground, where folk fluencies purportedly flourish without much codification or a routinized method. Furthermore, such a nationalist intolerance may also be driving the notion that to

become an eloquent speaker, as well as to possess the gift for gab, is to lapse into “mere rhetoric” or “pure words,” if not to be devoid of thought and action. Another prospective reason behind the inattention to speech departments concerns the presumption that regards speaking as a natural human capacity or merely a basic skill that one hones through day-to-day interactions with others, not through concepts and theories found in the university. Finally, the fourth reason relates to the disciplinary discounting of speech as an outmoded communicative form or as a secondary knowledge-source in comparison to visual or scriptural mechanisms (Goody; Havelock; Ong). The last two reasons may partly explain why several academics have disparagingly likened speech education to an exhibitory bag of tricks that has no practical value in the learning process. Furthermore, the third and fourth points bring to the open why speech study and practice have received minor status within language or literature departments; why they have simplistically meant being able to “speak well,” “project properly,” and “sound nicely” to those teaching in the discipline of theatre arts (Bernad; Cruz 160; Joaquin 28–29; Leonardia 21–40); and why they often get eclipsed by the more institutionally acknowledged, if not stable, discipline of mass communication, which focuses more on issues around technological mediation and transmission (Braid and Tuazon; Jose; Maslog).

I do not have the space here to flesh out these matters in complete detail. But it should suffice to state, at this point, that passing over to silence the transcripts and transactions taking place within speech departments can bear more disadvantages than imagined. Toward this end, my aim here is to offer a genealogy of what such institutions are and how they actually operate. Over the course of this essay, I will explore, albeit cursorily, how these departments approach speech as their main organizing principle. I will then delve into the ways in which these departments cultivate the consciousness and embodied practices of students as speaking subjects. And lastly, I will reflect on how these institutions serve as major drivers of what I will broadly outline in the conclusion as a Philippine eloquent modernity.

This essay is first in examining the circuits of pedagogies and performances in which speech departments in the country function and on which they rely. As such, it will throw into sharp relief the “regularities,” the “logics of recall,” as well as

the “densities and distributions” of these speech departments (Stoler 92). Furthermore, this essay will pause at, rather than automatically bypass, departmental conventions—or those practices that comprise an institution’s “unspoken order, its rubrics of organization, its rules of placement and reference” (Stoler 94). Foregrounding and inspecting these conventions may reveal two pathways: one leading to these speech departments’ shared logics of practice, another to their diverse points of discord. To become cognizant of these aspects and components, I argue, is a critical phase in figuring out the types of interventions necessary in shaping and reshaping these academic organizations.

Speech as a Disciplinary Knowledge and Practice

Prior to 1959 and 1965, several instructions and activities pivoting around the spoken word were already in lively existence in the modern Philippine university. In fact, during the first half of the twentieth century, a long and strong debate and oratorical tradition in UP and Silliman University was already producing competent speakers known not only within the country but also internationally (Claudio; Romulo). Via their departments of English and colleges of law, both institutions of higher learning were also offering a pool of subjects in spoken English, speechwriting, oratory, debate, and public speaking under the tutelage of several notable American and Filipino teachers.² Having said that, it is not an exaggeration to make the claim that coterminous with the emergence and expansion of these American-founded universities were curricular and co-curricular avenues that honed the talents, skills, intellections, and other potentialities of Filipino students as speaking subjects.

This panoply of speech pedagogies and performances notwithstanding, there was no system or structure in place that treated speech as the organizing principle for disciplinary knowledge and practice. It was only in a postcolonial milieu that a group of faculty members from the UP Department of English advocated to be separated from their peers in language and literature, so that they could finally institute an autonomous department whose principal interest resided in formally teaching, researching, and performing oral communication. As these speech faculty members averred, “The present Department of English has

become very unwieldy. It is necessary that more concentration be given to teaching of the English language and literature; and in order that this can be effectively done the department that should take charge of it should not be burdened with other courses that may dissipate its attention.” Additionally, they stated that “[o]ur students need much training in Speech. They need both regular and remedial courses in this subject...It is absolutely necessary that Speech and Drama be created under a separate department so that courses under this could be better attended” (Minutes of the 661st Meeting 24). In Silliman University, on the other hand, some professors were starting to realize the need to give utmost primacy not only to speech over writing but also to an audio-lingual system over a derivative visual-graphic system that was supposedly based upon it. In his short 1965 essay titled “Speech and Language Learning,” Frank Flores questioned the orthodox approach to language teaching in the Philippines, which placed the ability to read on top of the ability to write. This method of teaching, according to Flores, positioned “the cart before the horse.” “The horse’s rightful place is before the cart,” Flores argued. “Oral mastery must precede ability in reading or writing” (n.p.).

These foundational arguments suggest how the study and practice of speech suffered a peripheral position within old English departments. Faculty members of speech did not receive enough attention, their subjects were not wholly developed, and their students could not obtain comprehensive speech education and training. Hence, the separation of speech from English was a way of addressing the unwieldiness of a large academic institution. Moreover, it was an occasion to break ground for academic personnel who wanted to break free from their insubordination and independently manage their own full-fledged disciplinary formation. Edifying in this regard is how Flores conceived of what language learning should ultimately become. For him, it “is not concerned with problem solving, but with the formation and performance of oral habits. It is less interested in grammatical analysis, parsing, but emphasis rather is on graduated oral drills designed to establish as habits the phonological and grammatical patterns of the new language” (n.p.). This statement tries to broaden the pedagogical field of language study in a way that accounts for other forms of expression besides what is written and printed. It likewise foregrounds the significance, if not the centrality, of

embodied procedures, such as “graduated oral drills,” in imbibing and speaking a tongue such as English.

Upon the foundation of these speech departments, a web of discourses and practices revolving around oral expression and communication would eventually come about. A stable roster of experts in speech has been consolidated, which then enabled the steady generation of research projects, scholarly outputs, pedagogical resources, and artistic productions over the years. Physical structures for the teaching, learning, and performing of speech have likewise been built accordingly. And finally, events highlighting speech repertoires, speech acts, and figures of speech have proliferated. It is to these individual but intertwined components of speech departments that I now wish to turn.

Pedagogical Interventions

Essential to the intellectual redefinition and professional growth of speech departments was the process of introducing and consolidating subjects that endeavored to educate students in the academic and pragmatic dimensions of speech. Before 1959, speech-related subjects in the old UP Department of English only included English 31 (Fundamentals of Speech), English 136 (Forms of Public Address), English 137 (Group Discussion and Conference Leadership), and English 138 (Directed Speech Activities) (University of the Philippines 148 and 152). When the UP Department of Speech and Drama officially came into existence, its pioneering faculty attempted to honor their historical links to elocution, forensics, debate, public speaking, oratorical composition, and oral interpretation, on the one hand, and their pragmatic entanglements with professions and industries necessitating speech in their day-to-day operations, on the other hand. Thus, UP’s speech faculty cobbled together an eclectic selection of subjects in the areas of drama and theatre (i.e., oral interpretation, interpretation of children’s literature, interpretation of drama, elementary stagecraft, playwriting, acting and directing, and art history of the theatre); rhetoric (i.e., argumentation, forms of public address, discussion and conference leadership); radio (i.e., basic radio techniques, radio writing, radio speech, program building, radio production procedures, programs and audiences, and station management); and speech education (i.e., directed speech activities and audio-visual communication). By the Academic Year

1965–1966, Speech 111 (Voice and Diction), Speech 115 (Bases of Speech), Speech 146 (Directing), and Speech 185 (Principles of Speech Correction) began to appear in the department’s list of available subjects.

Akin to its counterpart in UP, Silliman University’s Department of Language and Dramatic Arts offered subjects such as oral interpretation, interpretation of drama, contemporary drama, and speech education. In contrast to the former, however, the latter added to this mix subjects dwelling on historical topics and structural issues concerning the English language. In 1967, the department pursued some reforms, which involved changing its institutional nomenclature to the Department of Speech and Theatre Arts. As a consequence of this modification, language subjects migrated to the Department of Literature and Creative Writing, which in turn reverted its name to the Department of English. This administrative amendment—from language to speech, from dramatic arts to theatre arts—was unquestionably a shift in both epistemological and methodological paradigms. From a more literary or academic examination of drama, the now Department of Speech and Theatre Arts veered toward the craft, technique, and practice of theatre. Students were expected to work on lighting properties, sound, scenery, costume, makeup, publicity, and finance. They were also required to act and work as stage managers and assistant directors in department productions (Silliman University 34–35). New theatre subjects centering on design, stagecraft, and theatre practice became available to students eventually. The department also took on the task of staging a number of plays presented on campus each year, such as Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s *The Visit*, Edward Albee’s *Zoo Story*, and Euripides’s *The Trojan Women*.

In 1977, the UP Department of Speech and Drama likewise changed its name to the Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts. “Now no longer confined to public speaking, the discipline has grown to encompass almost all kinds of human behavior—from the simple experience of perceiving to symbolic interaction in society; from the intimate face-to-face interpersonal talk to the technological world of radio, TV, film and satellites. Speech is thus communication” (Minutes of the 895th Meeting 12). This reform signaled an official departure from narrow notions limiting speech study to issues of voice and diction and to classes in public speaking.

It was also meant to differentiate the academic department from privately operated speech clinics proliferating in Metro Manila during that time, which almost always dwelled on the teaching of voice and diction in the English language. As pointed out in an undated archival material by Professor Alejandro J. Casambre, the first Filipino to have obtained a PhD in Speech Communication and a major mover behind the department’s titular transformation, to insist that “speech is communication” was not only to terminate the misconception that speech is an “art for the ‘cultured’ and the ‘talented’” but also to duly democratize the academic discipline. Furthermore, in emphasizing the function of “communication in a democratic society,” Casambre indeed wanted to foreground how speech is fundamentally a “requisite for participation and leadership in human affairs.”²³

It is not difficult to notice that both departments in UP and Silliman University seem to be following what American scholars call the “Midwestern” model to the academic study of speech (Eadie 174; Keith 25). This blueprint tries to hospitably accommodate every single activity that involves human speech. “The Midwestern-style department,” as speech historian William Keith explicates, “would typically have four areas: 1) public speaking and debate, 2) theater and performance, 3) speech disorders, and 4) (with the advent of radio) some type of mass media” (Keith 25). The adoption of this disciplinary style or institutional framework in the modern Philippine university comes with little astonishment, especially when viewed in light of the fact that the founding chairperson of UP’s Department of Speech and Drama, Professor Consuelo V. Fonacier, graduated with an MA in Speech from Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, while Professor Frank Flores of Silliman University’s Department Language and Dramatic Arts obtained his postgraduate degrees in Linguistics and in English Language and Literature from the University of Wisconsin and the University of Michigan, respectively.

Important to note, though, that while these academic departments share this fundamental similarity, they also have developed their respective curricula in distinct paces and via different routes. For one, while UP began with a clear distinction between speech and drama, Silliman University did not. Perhaps in accordance with Flores’s educational background, the latter started out by fusing together language and dramatic arts. For another, while the Manila-based university exerted

effort to expand from speech to speech communication, the so-called “university by the sea” has yet to do the same. This configuration can partly illuminate why the former, at present, carries a more diverse set of speech subjects than the latter. The current curriculum of Silliman University’s BA program in Speech and Theatre Arts shows thirty subjects in theatre arts and only a meager six in speech. This setup can possibly explain why UP has successfully instituted sovereign, wide-ranging, and well-rounded undergraduate and graduate programs in speech communication and in theatre arts, whereas Silliman University still only offers a BA in Speech and Theatre Arts.

Having been able to thoroughly improve its BA and MA programs in Speech Communication, it is without much wonder that UP’s Department of Speech Communication and Theatre Arts has served as the country’s main, if not sole, hub for speech-related scholarship and research. In the speech communication issue of the *General Education Journal* that Professors Casambre and Josefina A. Agravante edited in 1973/1974, members of the UP speech faculty not only exhibited the intellectual terrains that they treaded individually or in ensemble but also sketched the broad sympathies of their academic discipline. Entries such as Casambre’s “A Man Speaking” show an inclination toward humanistic philosophizing. Patricio Lazaro’s “The Oral Interpreter—Critic and Revivifier of Literature” and Benjamin Cervantes’s “Focus on Support for University Theater” exemplify investments in drama, theatre, and performance. Angelina Jaena’s “The Communication Problems of the Aging,” Agravante’s “Listen!,” and Ma. Nenita Vicencio’s “A Descriptive Study of Non-Fluencies Occurring in English and Filipino Impromptu Speeches of Forty Speech I Students” illustrate predilections for social scientific inquiries. Rosette Lerias’s “Communication in Social and Political Movements,” Celia Tobia-Bulan’s “The Triad: Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian,” and Josephine Angsinco’s “Needed: Rhetorical Criticisms of Philippine Public Address” reveal rhetorical interests. And lastly, studies like Rozella De Jesus’s “An Introduction to Speech Pathology” uncover leanings toward the scientific or the medical field. Over the course of the succeeding years, undergraduate and graduate students have likewise yielded scholarly outputs that illustrate the development of the speech program’s intellectual interests. These outputs include, inter alia, descriptive

analyses of the self-concept and self-esteem of a line of communicators, exploratory examinations on the use of computer-mediated communication in diverse communicative contexts, quantitative analyses of different forms of persuasive communication and their impact on multiple publics, and rhetorical criticisms of public addresses and performances by political leaders, popular celebrities, and other social actors.

When considered alongside the course offerings enumerated above, these pieces of scholarship confirm that UP’s Speech Department is no longer limited to studying the expressive aspects of speech alone; instead, it is also disposed to building theory and analyzing problems concerning what Casambre calls “a dynamic process of symbolic interaction that involves both speakers and listeners” (Casambre and Agravante iii–iv). In addition, this relay of academic subjects and scholarly works brings to light the epistemic breakthroughs that UP’s Speech Department has pursued and engendered. First, one senses the desire of this department to go beyond scriptocentrism, which has long defined—and continues to define—departments dedicated to the teaching of reading and writing. Second, one recognizes this department’s investments in issues concerning the production, transmission, circulation, and reception of messages. Third, one notices its initiative to dislodge the prized figure of the author as the singular spring of power and to interrogate textual artifacts as the principal arbiters of intelligence. The same can be said about Silliman University’s Speech Department, which similarly deals with questions about how a speech may be composed and effectively performed; how a message may be crafted to serve informative, entertaining, or persuasive ends; how diegetic and poetic details may be animated through vocal performance or bodily action; and how oral expression may be rendered suitable for a spectrum of environments and situations. In other words, speech departments in UP and Silliman University underscore the elements, agents, dimensions, and factors at play in a vaster, more dynamic field of communicative or performative interactions. Finally, one perceives how these speech departments fundamentally and adeptly intertwine the humanistic and the social scientific, the theoretical and the technical, as well as the liberal arts and the practical arts.

Such intertwinement comes into more prominent focus when, in 2009, the Department of Speech and Theatre Arts of Silliman University transferred from

the College of Arts and Sciences to the College of Performing and Visual Arts. In 2018, what used to be a Bachelor of Arts program in Speech and Theatre became a Bachelor of Performing Arts major in Speech and Theatre. These structural reforms were in recognition of the academic discipline's engagement not only with theory but also with craft, its investments not only in scholarship and research but also in embodied and applied practice, as well as its entrenchment not only in academic circuits but also in various cultural, creative, and commercial industries. Meanwhile, in UP, a watershed transpired in 2018 when the Speech Communication program reconsolidated its curriculum and introduced four major streams of academic concentration, namely, rhetoric, performance, interpersonal communication, and instructional communication. This move was a nod to the need to highlight the pedagogical and scholarly strengths of the Speech Department's faculty, as well as to specialize and streamline the disciplinary formation's course offerings and other academic concerns. The aforementioned streams drew from the program's historical interests in public speaking, its inclination toward the comparatively new field of performance studies, and its concern for human communication and speech education.

Performative Events

While instilling in their students concepts and theories about the art of speech, speech departments concurrently compel them to participate in performative occasions spotlighting various genres, repertoires, acts, and figures of speech. One such occasion is the speech festival whereby students, professors, and even the alumni of speech departments would join efforts in lining up for the whole academic community activities ranging from oral interpretations to group discussions, from public speeches to dramatic presentations. In this sense, this weeklong collegial and competitive affair aims to underscore the disciplinary knowledge and practice of speech not in their abstract, conceptual sense but rather in their enacted and embodied manifestations.

In the University of the Philippines, the so-called festivalization of speech commenced when a handful of faculty members, then handling speech classes in the yet-to-be-divided Department of English, banded together in January 1958 to brainstorm the university's

first ever speech festival. A brainchild of the most senior of the lot, Professor Consuelo V. Fonacier, this initiative finally materialized from the 3rd to the 7th of March of the same year. Animated by the goal of providing "incentive and opportunity for students of speech to express themselves effectively in public" ("6th Speech Festival Reels off Monday" 2), it not only garnered support from its respective audiences, including officials of the College of Liberal Arts (later renamed the College of Arts and Sciences), but also came to be known afterwards as a "novel activity" in the university and "probably in the whole country" (Jose, Samson, and Sabio 167).

When the Department of Speech and Drama was founded, the speech festival continued to be a much-publicized, much-anticipated, and much-attended university event. Usually heralding its five-day run in the 1960s was the UP carillon playing chimes of predominantly Western compositions from such world-renowned composers as the Austrian Franz Schubert and the Germans Franz Liszt, Robert Schumann, and George Frederic Handel. It would then proceed with a series of play readings, choral recitations, speech model presentations, oral interpretation performances, dramatic productions, and debate competitions that normally involved students from the College of Liberal Arts and the College of Law. The speech festival customarily ended with an interclass variety speech contest called Speech Fun Night, which consisted of student-led skits, spoofs on Shakespeare, poetry recitals, and musical and dance numbers.

In Silliman University, the very first speech festival happened in March 1965. Going by the official name *Dia Eufonia*, a Greek term that means "through pleasant or beautiful sounds," it featured students participating individually or collectively in dramatic readings, orations, declamations, chants, choric interpretative recitals, and other speech art performances. Such an affair, according to one of the event's official programs, was meant to "remind ourselves to appreciate the rich heritage of beautiful speech forms and techniques that are ours today. This festival should be a means of establishing the place of speech education for the student who must eventually take his position in life and deal with his fellowmen and should communicate to them *dia eufonia*" (Souvenir Program of *Dia Eufonia* 2).

Whether staged in UP or in Silliman University, speech festivals aimed to foster camaraderie among

their student participants and afford them “an insight into how speech is useful in our everyday life” (“Arts and Sciences Speech Festival a Big Success” 2). They intended to transform students into formally trained speakers aided by costumes, props, scripts, and other technological tools. In addition, they sought to elevate acts of speaking in that they took them out of ordinary life through a relay of training and rehearsals. Here, speech was not everyday talk, while speakers were not mundane chatters. Speakers must come across as prepared and masterful (such as in public speeches), fully synchronized with others (such as in chamber theatre productions), knowledgeable about their movements on stage and on the platform (such as in a stage play), and technologically attuned to channels and devices of communication (such as in radio management and broadcast). Festivalized speeches, on the other hand, must register as consciously deliberate, artistically wrought, smoothly performed, and properly executed. Indeed, both speakers and speeches were rationalized, tempered, and methodized by an aesthetic education that rested upon and thereby privileged certain idealized stereotypes, codified rules, and pedagogical instructions.

Across the activities of these speech festivals, students dealt with a kind of civic education that emphasized the sociopolitical aspects of speaking and, more pressingly, their duties as communicative citizens in building and shaping Philippine society. Students engaged in debates about issues such as nationalism, independence, elections, and democracy. Here, they labored to arrive at the most intelligent, most reasonable, and most well-crafted arguments, so that they could properly enlighten their audiences about the current wars of social, historical, and political positions. Additionally, they attempted to propagate Filipino culture through oral performances of Philippine literature, stage productions of Filipino plays, exhibitions of Filipino folk costumes, and radio presentations that discoursed upon the everyday life of the Filipino people. In 1963, the annual speech festival in UP took on, for the first time in its short history, a Filipino motif and offered a *balagtas*, *harana*, and a spate of plays in Filipino. As per a report from the *Philippine Collegian*, this effort was in consonance with the Nationalism Projection Series spearheaded by then UP President Carlos P. Romulo (“Speech Festival with Pilipino Motif Scheduled in February at AS Theater” 2). Moreover, in response

to the nationalist ferment in the 1970s, particularly to growing calls for national development and the cultivation of one’s speech in one’s first language, teaching the general elective course called Speech I in the vernacular became a regular program in the UP Department of Speech and Drama. This movement to Filipinize aspects of the academic discipline surely affected the speech festival, whose sixteenth run was conducted in Pilipino.⁴ In the archival collection of Professor Leticia H. Tison at the UP Main Library, an extant copy of her welcome remarks for an activity held during the said event reads as follows:

Kauna-unahan at maipagmamalaki sa kasaysayan ng paaralang ito ang ating gaganapin at dinadaluhang paluntuntunan ngayong umaga. Pagkalipas ng labing-limang taong singkad na pagdiriwang ng U.P. Speech Festival, na palaging ginaganap sa wikang Ingles, ngayon po lamang tayo pinagpala ng pagkakataon na maisagawa, sa Wikang Pilipino, ang karapatdapat na hakbanging maharap sa madla ng isang timpalak upang piliin ang pinaka-mahusay na mambabasa sa ating mga mag-aaral na kumukuha sa kasalukuyan ng Speech I. (n.p.)

Beyond an aesthetic and a civic education, speech festivals likewise introduced students to a professional training that stressed the practical applications of speech study. The speech discipline, after all, is not confined to the abstractions of theory. Nor does it purely pivot around the endless imitation of idealized speakers or the programmatic delivery of remarkable speeches. As these speech festivals demonstrate, the speech discipline is conscious of and responsive to the need to directly relate knowledge to daily life and immediately translate theory into instrumental praxis. Indeed, way before “practice as research” has become trendy in contemporary academia, speech departments have already been teaching and living out this concept even without fully knowing it or having an identified label for it. Through performative occasions such as the speech festival, these academic institutions come to train their students not by simply asking them to master the rules and regulations behind speechmaking or to analyze models approximating different communicative realities. Instead, students learn by doing and by wrestling head on with the messiness of mounting public presentations and

theatrical productions. Students leave the proverbial four corners of the classroom and inhabit a much larger “geography of learning,” to use a term coined by performance studies scholar Jill Dolan, where they come to maximize not only typographic, chirographic, and technological materials but also their kinesthetic and sonic imaginations and capacities. As speech festivals make more visible, students of speech occupy physical spaces such as theaters, where they stage their theatrical productions and oral performances; spacious classrooms with foot-high elevated platforms and tiered seating arrangements, where they rehearse, present, and listen to their drama skits, debates, public speeches, and oral interpretations; speech laboratories, where they develop their habits in oral communication; and radio booths and stations, where they hone their knowhow in radio announcing, radio management, and radio broadcasting. These arenas are certainly not mere extensions of the classroom but rather the classrooms themselves, the very fertile ground where students and faculty alike experience speech in all of its declensions as an act, artifact, and activity.

Figures of Speech

By authorizing standardized practices, formalized studies, and programmed performances, speech departments are responsible in producing and developing educated and trained speaking subjects in the Philippines. Such figures of speech, as I call them, can function in communicative and performative fields of social production. They can intervene in the formation and figuration of reality primarily through their disciplinary knowledge and practice of speech. Furthermore, they can survive in cultural, political, and aesthetic economies largely, though not exclusively, through oral communication. Finally, they are shaped by the discursive intricacies and the systematic methodologies composing and are, by turns, composed by institutions such as speech departments or, more expansively, modern universities.

All of these features differentiate figures of speech from ordinary talkers, epic chanters, or basic raconteurs, to name only a few. Unlike the latter, the former are institutionally sanctioned. This is not to say, though, that figures of speech lose their attachments to everyday life or their capacities for nonacademic talk. Or that they, conversely, are entirely structured by and completely subsumed under a certain kind of

schooled speech. This is to make the claim, rather, that upon entering speech departments, imbibing speech pedagogies, and participating in speech performances, these figures of speech become part of an institutionalized system. And by virtue of their consciousness of the aesthetic quality, the social function, and the professional purchase of orally communicating well, they become less of a concept or a personality and more of a privileged status.

Figures of speech are self-aware speaking subjects who know how to compose and analyze a speech, how to order and deliver a speech performance, and how to mount an oral, radio, or stage presentation. Not only do they aestheticize themselves as speakers, they also evaluate or criticize their performances accordingly. They are conscious of how they sound and what they say. They can talk about talk, speak about speech, and act out what are codified in speech or theatre books and manuals. At once the recipients and the results of the normative and normalizing instruction and training coming from speech departments, they are sensitive to moments when they are committing speech errors, exhibiting communicative incompetence, and evincing rhetorical blunders. Thus, they are disposed to do self-regulation and self-correction.

I delineate these initial points to underscore what may come across as an elementary but nevertheless oft-elided argument: that there are no naturally born orators, debaters, oral interpreters, announcers, and even actors. In the same manner that there are no inherently noteworthy speeches that automatically deserve to be included in an oratorical canon, for example. It scarcely needs to be said that such categories are framed by a system of signification and a grid of practice that evaluate actual speakers and their speeches as good or bad, effective or ineffective, competent or incompetent, fluent or inarticulate, and so on. From this perspective, figures of speech may therefore be viewed as the products of a relay of evaluation and judgment, discrimination and selection. Likewise, they are the consequences of the exercises of a particular authority and power that essentially, although not exhaustively, determine their shape, substance, and significance. It is through these determinations that figures of speech come to know, for instance, that an orator is not the same as a debater because the rules governing their respective engagements in performing the spoken word are different. Relatedly, an oral interpreter cannot be mistaken as a radio announcer, not only because what

they speak about and how they deploy speech are two discrepant things but also because their intentions to speak also differ to begin with. Such differences are not given but instead defined and refined through discursive systems, pedagogical operations, and embodied practices.

Another aspect of figures of speech is linked to the interdisciplinary and interprofessional instruction and training that they obtain from speech departments. The identities and capabilities of these figures of speech are groomed through an institutional and disciplinary configuration that steeps them in the humanistic pursuit of holistically fostering and fashioning the self; that lets them grapple with the managerial, logistical, and organizational demands of staging productions; that immerses them in the practical training occurring in radio booths, speech laboratories, and theatre stages; that requires them to research on speech artifacts, cultures, genres, and practices; and, finally, that compels them to venture into activities that promote civic consciousness. With that being said, figures of speech are educated and trained to operate for and within an expansive domain that addresses, but is in no way restricted to, aesthetic concerns and conditions. Their communicative capacities flexibly fit an ample array of circumstances—ranging from the literary, the rhetorical, the interpersonal, up to the technologically mediated. Their roles and responsibilities, furthermore, are tangled with humanistic, moral, and ethical imperatives, such as “to be humane” and “to be socially aware,” as well as with techno-bureaucratic and professionalist directives, such as “to communicate competently” and “to address or solve communication barriers efficiently.” Put more explicitly, figures of speech are cultivated in such a way that they can cater to the technical demands of radio and theatre, respond to the pedagogical and theoretical necessities of the academe, and lend service even or especially to market-oriented enterprises. As such, they personify what performance studies scholar Shannon Jackson refers to as the “cultural/technical chiasmus” or “the interdependence between the production of ideas and the production of professionalism” (Jackson, “Genealogies of Performance Studies” 78). In doing so, they effectively render the entanglements of speech study with practical training, skilled labor, and culture and society less easy to disavow (Jackson, *Professing Performance* 49). Indeed, this capacity to thrive in such an interstitial location, as well as service several sectors

and professions, is one of the many characteristics constituting these figures of speech.

Eloquent Modernities

Speech departments propagate what I refer to as an eloquent modernity. *Modernity* is a fraught term that commonly connotes capitalism, nation-state formation, industrialization, urbanization, colonization, and imperialism that collectively accelerate the dispersive movement of people, technologies, resources, and finances, to name only a few, across colonies and metropolises. In his summation of the views of Jürgen Habermas and Anthony Giddens, influential thinkers who extensively explicated on the concept of global modernity, Latin American anthropologist Arturo Escobar outlines the key historical, sociological, cultural, and philosophical characteristics of this phenomenon. According to Escobar, modernity is historically identified as Eurocentric in its temporal and spatial origins. Sociologically, it is linked to certain statist institutions and involves features such as self-reflexivity, the annihilation of time and space, and the detachment of social life from local context. Culturally, it is known for the proliferation of different types of specialized and rational knowledge that frequently emanates from the administrative apparatuses of the market and the state. Finally, modernity is philosophically invested in the anthropocentric and phallogocentric belief that “Man” is “the foundation for all knowledge and order of the world, separate from the natural and the divine” (Escobar 182). For literary scholar Susan Stanford Friedman, historical changes and conditions coalescing under the mantle of modernity take place with extreme acceleration, velocity, and dynamism. Interweaving the spheres of culture, economy, religion, the family, technology, and aesthetics, these changes and conditions may take both utopic and dystopic directions, as well as bear, in Friedman’s words, “an experiential dimension that includes a gamut of sensations from displacement, despair, and nostalgia to exhilaration, hope, and embrace of the new” (433–434).

How can this capaciously construed modernity be understood through the disciplinary study and practice of speech? Additionally, how can an examination of speech departments uncover more facets of modernity in the Philippines? In this final section, I will incipiently chart how speech departments in UP

and Silliman University have perpetuated pedagogies and performances that reproduce and reify modernist mentalities. If modernity essentially entails, engages with, and engenders expressive dimensions, as Friedman argues, then speech departments surely participate in and contribute to this process.

For one, speech departments constantly sustain an academic framework that guides Filipinos on how to speak in concert with modernist standards. They initiate and institutionalize pedagogies and performances that shore up a social order—or better still, a social imaginary—in which speakers become conscious about how they speak, especially when they represent themselves publicly, relate to people and communities, and play out in the world. These departments' course offerings and regular activities often involve, among other things, the elimination of so-called lingual impurities and the deepening of comprehension about largely Western models of speechmaking. Furthermore, speech departments are in charge of the incorporation of both faculty and students in logocentric systems that, at one point, cultivate an appreciation for the value, beauty, and potency of the spoken word and, at another point, advance principles such as order, clarity, and rationality that rebuke communicative or linguistic errors and even local inflections. Hence, these academic institutions tend to structure wayward talk to produce comprehensible speech, contain unregulated sounds to generate modulated voices, correct mispronounced words to yield clear verbal and vocal expressions, and control corporeal excesses to achieve moderated bodily behaviors. All of these procedures are surely connected to the founding mythos of modernity that, in the words of theatre and performance studies scholar Kim Solga, "has relied for its self-fashioning upon both the labor and invisibility of a host of bodies deemed 'other'" (13). If modernity, according to Denise Albanese, "produces itself through othering, through discursive and material mechanisms that effectively bifurcate regions of culture" (qtd. in Solga 2), then an eloquent modernity comes into full swing partly through measures that create a hierarchy of speakers and strip speeches of elements estimated as unnecessary. In considering clear expression, sound argument, strategic deliberation, and sensible debate as essential aspects of lettered Filipinos, as well as primary features of civilizational formation, political or civic participation, and bureaucratic development, speech departments proliferate ideologies that are

at the base of modernity's progress narratives and developmental rationalities. These ideologies propel, prop up, and pivot around the apartheid between human beings who are understood as competent or incompetent, articulate or inarticulate, and effective or ineffective. In addition, these ideologies about the need to speak a language properly, to communicate effectively, and to aspire for clear channels and uninterrupted flows of communication sync very well with modernity's propensity for aesthetic efficiency, mastery, and advancement.

Second, speech departments accredit and actualize pedagogical codifications. These academic institutions require students to become knowledgeable about speaking. More specifically, they expect students to capably put on paper their ideas about speaking, annotate their performances, and replicate speech acts and repertoires. To state it in another way, students should be able to demonstrate that they can—and that they do—comprehend and live by a set of ordered discourses about speaking properly, acting effectively, channeling messages logically and persuasively, interpreting a text virtuously, and utilizing the perimeters of a platform or a stage purposefully. It then comes with no wonder that speech journals, manuals, textbooks, and even dissertations must consistently come out of speech departments. These publications are tangible outputs of academic labors that wish to codify speech behavior, speech performance, and speech practices into something legible and investigable. They are, in addition, artifacts that circulate theoretical, historical, and applied knowledge that must crucially be taught and studied, remembered and mastered, and enacted and embodied again and again in order for people to attain a degree of expertise and predictability in how they behave and communicate themselves to one another across contexts.

Another role of speech departments in the construction of an eloquent modernity is tied to how they transform speech into a spectacle. This embodied procedure, as my discussion of speech festivals has tried to carve into high relief, consists of routines and rituals that gather people into an institutional fold, that highlight the spoken word through productions and presentations, that alter or convert physical spaces into performative venues, and that solicit and elicit among audiences certain judgments, whether affirmative or critical, about speakers and their speeches. The mandate to organize events centering on speech is a cause and an

effect of a kind of modernity that conditions speakers to become conscious and deliberate about what they say and how they say things *in the presence of*, as well as *for the sake of*, other people who watch and listen to them.

Finally, speech departments have taken charge of the erection, operation, and maintenance of interconnected physical structures: from theaters to radio booths to speech laboratories up to classrooms with elevated platforms. In these structures, pedagogy and performance manifest in tandem. In many instances, it is also in these venues where pedagogy is performed and performance is taught. A student in a radio class, for instance, can learn firsthand how to become a technician, an announcer, a manager, and a specialist in other phases of radio work inside a radio booth. Additionally, a student in a voice and diction class can receive instant correction not just from their teacher or classmates but also from machine-recorded sounds being played in a speech booth. Finally, a student in oral interpretation or public speaking can simulate the feeling of being in a rhetorical situation or in a spectacular event by performing on a permanently mounted stage inside a big speech classroom. These *in situ* pedagogical performances or performative pedagogies illustrate that speech departments embed their students in situations and locations where education and training take place by doing, where thinking manifests through speaking, and where theorizing or intellectualizing takes form through performing. In other words, speech departments assist in mounting a modernity that is not only experienced visually, as it is often the case in traditional expositions about modern life, but also sensed orally and corporeally. In setting the stage for more speakers to come to fore, in enabling these speakers to speak and body themselves forth differently through the help of specialized structures and innovative technologies, speech departments accentuate the necessity of modernity for self-conscious orality and educated eloquence.

Conclusion

Oftentimes speech is understood as a panhuman or anthropological activity that is organically part of a public culture or a social community. But by pulling together different, dispersed, but interconnected ideas and practices, I have offered in this essay a glimpse

into how speech is not organic or natural to the body, that it is not metaphysically pure and technically or technologically unmediated, as scholars like Jacques Derrida have argued. Instead, certain institutions, such as academic departments in the modern Philippine university, enhance, problematize, discourse upon, and perform speech.

Speech departments in UP and Silliman University, in particular, have surely inflected the disciplinary study and practice of speech with Philippine effects and realities. Additionally, they vigorously pursue scholarly work that revises the teleological metanarratives of modern communication from Euro-America and the rest of the developing world. This means that these speech departments do not fully succumb to Western aesthetic exceptionalism. Nor are they simply derivatives of Anglo-American intellectual traditions.

But it is equally accurate to say that existing speech departments in the country, for more than half a century now, have remained partial to, if not embroiled in, Anglophone understandings not only of who a speaker is or what a speaker should be but also of how and why a speech must be written and conveyed. In both UP and Silliman University, speech departments glaringly follow a framework that is concerned with controlling the body and the voice, regulating communicative practices, and standardizing protocols for delivering a speech and becoming a speaker. In voice and diction classes, for example, students continue to undergo ear-training with the aim of perfecting their articulation and pronunciation. Classes in public speaking, moreover, are busy ensuring that the physical movements, facial expressions, and other corporeal dimensions of students suit the intentions of both the speaker and the message. At present, the speech communication program in UP seeks to produce students who “a) demonstrate communication competence; b) produce scholarly work grounded in communication theories and concepts; c) adopt critical and analytical approaches in addressing issues in various communication situations; d) exhibit creativity in performing communication-related tasks; e) engage social issues; and f) exemplify a sense of accountability for self and others.” These students, as the program further envisions them to be, may hopefully end up working in “education and training, public relations, government and nongovernment institutions, and other communication-related industries.”

Concepts such as “communication competence,” “communication theories and concepts,” and “communication situations” are not stable and neutral. They are, at their core, Western constructions that carry with them a specific network of discourse and practice that speech departments in the Philippines mediate. Instead of comprehending these goals as given and settled, it might thus be productive to approach them not objectively but deconstructively—that is, subjecting the terminologies and meanings that give them ballast to constant evaluation. In relation to this point, it might likewise be vital to map the definitional, scholarly, and methodological operations of these institutions in order to better grasp not only how speech is sanctioned institutionally but also how it gets embroiled in a congeries of value judgments. What is a good speech? Who is a speaker? How should oral communication take place? How must one listen to a speaker or a speech? What defines a “proper” and “effective” message? What qualifies as an “error” or a “mistake” in a vocal or a verbal production? Finally, the current moment demands Philippine speech departments to toil over how they epistemologically and methodologically contend with their sources and influences, their traditions and trajectories. How might they teach communicative competence without deploying the prevailing logics, procedures, and mechanisms that aim to smoothen, if not get rid of, linguistic and nonlinguistic irregularities, so that a notion of perfection, order, and legibility can be ultimately achieved? How might they understand and examine the often-messy flows of communicative situations without lapsing into the reductions of universally prescribed models, oftentimes coming from Euro-American scholars, that tend to flatten, if not suppress, the complexity of expressive forms and practices embedded within or emanating from local contexts? How might they expand the allowable locations in which their institutionalized speech instructions and performances are usually learned, rehearsed, and applied—namely, the radio booth, the speech laboratory, and the proscenium stage—so that they can also lock horns with other unofficial yet no less lively locations where differently constituted embodied forms of communication take place? Finally, how might speech departments transform students into becoming figures of speech without consecrating or canonizing a particular set of idealized sounds, images, actions, looks, and ethos that, when imbibed, tends to

diminish, if not disavow, difference and turn against, instead of make sense of, nonconformity, informality, roundaboutness, indirection, and so on?

There is no easy and definitive way to respond to these inquiries, to be certain. Purely negating the prevailing categories of the academic discipline might be too shortsighted a move. Completely extricating the institutional formation from its Anglo-American linkages might be an ahistorical act. Opening the departmental floodgates to a surge of Filipino speakers/communicators and their attendant practices might be an appealing response insofar as the politics of representation is concerned, but such a gesture could also be myopic or tokenistic at best and parasitic or predatory at worst. The continuing obligation of scholars and academics in twenty-first-century Philippine academia is to wrestle with what is often left unmarked as the ideological dimension of the schemes of instruction, training, acculturation, and habituation happening within and pulsating from Philippine speech classrooms or departments (Navera). A great deal of reflexive, critical, and innovative work—one that neither finds satisfaction in hand-me-down dogmas nor waxes sentimental over institutional inheritances—is needed in constantly undoing and diversifying the disciplinary or institutional production and embodiment of knowledge about speech. By cursorily foregrounding what is happening and how are things happening in speech departments in UP and Silliman University, it is my hope that this essay has added texture to an ongoing conversation, if not jumpstarted a much-needed discussion, not only about where else the study and practice of speech in the country could still feasibly go but also about how its key agents could proceed with deciding judiciously upon their disciplinary and institutional futures.

Endnotes

¹ See the letter of Wallace Bacon to his parents, dated September 15, 1961. Wallace Bacon (1914–2001) Papers, Philippine-Correspondence, Box 11, Folder 4. University Archives, Northwestern University.

² In UP, Carlos P. Romulo, Serafin Hilado, Victoriano Yamzon, and the American pedagogue Dean S. Fansler taught subjects in public speaking, debate, and oratory. In the first half of the twentieth century, the couple Walter and Rebecca McIntire, Anne B. Walters, and Abby R. Jacobs comprised the prominent American instructors who taught

English declamation, public speaking, speech choir, and drama to students in Silliman University.

³ See Alejandro J. Casambre archival collection, University of the Philippines Main Library.

⁴ *Pilipino* is the term that Tison used. In 1973, *Filipino* was introduced as the new name of the country's national language.

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