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## **Pinoy English: Language, Imagination, and Philippine Literature**

R. Kwan Laurel

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## ***Pinoy English: Language, Imagination, and Philippine Literature***

R. Kwan Laurel

*English has been in the Philippines for a hundred years, yet some of the best Filipino writers in English express ambivalence as to what should be done with it. This ambivalence is a product largely of a particular type of nationalist rhetoric that challenges the use of English in the Philippines. The paper argues for the need to understand English as a global language and to claim Philippine English as our own language. Rather than protract the language debate, the need is to generate a Philippine literature in English, Filipino, or any language that can spark the imagination of Filipinos and promote a wider readership.*

KEYWORDS: *Englises, Philippine English, Philippine literature, Filipino writers*

Just a year before the Marcoses would be booted out of power by the People Power uprising of 1986, the nationalist discourse on the language issue was reaching one of its peaks. Some of the leading Filipino intellectuals, writers, and scholars who were working in Tagalog and Pilipino—recognized today as some of the best in the land—were declaring that English would soon enough be a dead language in the Philippines. It was said that English would not even outlive the twentieth century. Pilipino was to be the language to express Filipino sentiments and political loyalty. Some even went so far as to say that Filipino scholars and writers who wrote in English had to apologize for it.

Today, our policy makers and politicians and intellectuals, instead of defining themselves and the world for us, remain caught in the quag-

mire of trying to decide which language our children should use in schools. Gloria Macapagal Arroyo, as president, in 2004 talked to writers who write in Tagalog and Filipino about supporting Filipino as a national language, yet in the same week announced that all public schools should pursue English as the medium of instruction. This flip-flop is symbolic of the difficult relationship we have with the issue of language.

One great fiction for the failure of the Philippines to take off is that it is hampered by language and that its development will come only when the country has become, to a great extent, monolingual. There may be plenty of concessions given to the promotion of Hiligaynon and Cebuano, or even French and German, but for some of the key intellectuals of this country Filipino is the only way to development.

Pagod na rin ako sa kakukulit sa mga may kapangyarihan na sundin ang utos ng ating saligang batas na gamitin ang Filipino bilang pangunahing wika ng pagturo. Ngayong malapit na akong magretiro bilang guro at iskolar, kita ko na—tulad ng nangyari sa napakaraming mga pantas mula pa sa panahon ni Socrates—na walang kabuluhan ang lahat ng aking pagsikap. Patuloy na mananatiling mangmang, kung hindi ang nakararaming kabataan, ay ang kanilang mga magulang, guro at opisyal. At dahil ang lahat ng kabataan, sa loob lamang ng iilang taon, ay magiging magulang, guro, at opisyal din, patuloy na iiral sa mundo ang tinatawag ni Balagtas na kalihuhan, ni Rizal na kamangmangan, at ni Marx at ng mga Marxista na gahum ng naghaharing uri, lahi, bansa, at wika. (Cruz 2005a, 126–27)

Language is said to be the main culprit of our problems. Hardly is anything said about bad teachers, or bad writing, or poor nutrition, or corruption. At the same time, there is no way we can separate the issue of the use of English in Philippine literature from the broader canvas of Philippine life: its economy, its entanglements with globalization (which should imply imperialism), its poverty, its class contradictions, and its hopes (which should imply potential).

No doubt, English is the language of the elite. It made possible their entry to the United States with ease, the power that eventually became the sphere of their political loyalty. But the country's criminal elite, which time and again has been exposed to be corrupt, will not have been different if we did not have English. From the very start of Philippine formation as a nation, it already had three centuries of colonial management and mismanagement. Long before U.S. imperialism thought of the Philippines, long before a language of a colonizer found wide use in the Philippines, problems with the overdevelopment of underdevelopment, corruption, lack of self-esteem, ignorance, and looking toward the West for intellectual affirmation had already plagued us. To argue that English is what imprisons us is a disservice to the cause of liberation.

### **No Room for English in Philippine Literature?**

Clearly, our educational system, in using English as medium of instruction, cannot develop among our young a genuine interest in reading, for the language in which they are forced to read fails to engage the culture of the young reader. The truth in this contention is obvious enough, but our educators have been entrapped by the system into insisting on a pedagogical practice that is self-defeating. Unless the government finds the will to replace English with Filipino as medium of instruction, we will continue to be plagued by the problem of young readers resisting the enticements of reading. (Lumbera 2000, 119)

Bienvenido Lumbera (*ibid.*, 108) asserts: "Sa pamamagitan ng Ingles, natutuhan nilang tingnan ang ibang daigdig na iyon mula sa pananaw ng mga Amerikano."

I cannot resist belaboring the point of how useful English has been for us by quoting Lumbera about the state of translation in the Philippines: "Namumukod ang tagasaling si Mario Miclat sa kanyang ispesyalisasyon sa isang wikang Asyano. Isinalin niya mula sa orihinal na Mandarin ang isang dula ng dakilang modernong dramatistang Tsino na si Ts'ao Yu" (*ibid.*, 114). However, authorities on issues of translation

from Mandarin to Filipino, such as Caroline S. Hau, are of the opinion that Miclat's translation was "mediated" by English; the claim that Miclat's translation comes directly from Chinese is erroneous. I belabor this point because it is indicative of the problem with a certain kind of nationalism that valorizes what is not there and devalorizes what is. For example, in the extract below, one finds an uncritical use of the word history (*kasaysayan*), as if history were a simple monolithic narrative. I am not arguing for some postmodern theory, but only wish to point out that to call on history to legitimize a position on language will require a scholar to take into consideration the complexities of our diversity and geography.

Ang kailangang pasiglahin ay ang pagsasalin mula sa iba pang wika bukod sa Ingles. Napabayaang sa Pilipinas ang ganitong pagsasalin dahil pinapaniwala tayo ng ating sistema ng edukasyon na sa wikang Ingles natin gaganapin ang pakikipag-ugnayan sa ibang kultura. Ngayong ang daloy mismo ng kasaysayan ang nagpapamalas ng magaganap na paglaya ng mga Filipino sa bilangguan ng Ingles, kailangan nang harapin ang paghahanda para sa panahon ng paglaya. (Ibid., 114)

The nationalist discourse that came with the activism of the 1970s brought along the notion of abolishing English. One consequence is the almost complete disappearance of Philippine proletarian literature in English, which began with writers like Manuel Arguilla and Carlos Bulosan. Coinciding with the anti-Marcos movement in the early seventies was the rise in the number of entries in Filipino that outstripped the number of entries in English in the Palanca competition (Lapeña-Bonifacio 2002, 483).

Below I quote at length from a report that appeared on the Ateneo de Manila University's website on a recent lecture by Lumbera:

Dr. Bienvenido Lumbera, the multi-awarded critic, teacher, poet, and literature-aficionado, delivered his Irwin Chair lecture titled "Bending English for the Filipino Stage" on 27 September 2005 at the Natividad Galang Fajardo Conference Room, De la Costa Building, Ateneo de Manila University, Loyola campus. . . . Over the years, the influence of our Western colonizers has seeped through our art

and culture, as a result of which, many of our local writers and playwrights use English as their language medium. Needless to say, we cannot deny that the English language has already become a part of our everyday lives. Despite his strong stand on writing plays in the vernacular, Dr. Lumbera recognizes that it is difficult to take the English language completely out of Philippine theater. He says that to a general audience in Manila, for example, Filipino might be a better option. But on certain levels, to make a play believable, the use of English may actually be necessary. For example, when depicting characters in a middle class Metro Manila setting, the use of English could be more convincing. However, Filipinos have a particular way of speaking the language. There are now different forms of English that make this American inheritance uniquely Filipino. Local forms of English play an important part of Philippine theater, such as the *yaya's* way of trying to speak to the *amo's* child in English, and that of a *probinsyano's* English with a regional accent, and even a University student's way of speaking "educated" English. This is what Dr. Lumbera points out as "bending English," a term coined by Christina [sic] Pantoja-Hidalgo when she discussed the Philippine Novel in English in the 21st century. This "bending" of the English language will create a new dialect that is still Filipino despite being foreign in origin. (Taylor 2005)

I suppose wishful thinking on the part of some Ateneo students and faculty somehow found its way to the crafting of this report. I note how different the report is from the actual lecture.

Let me start by quoting from the English department's email announcing the Lumbera lecture:

The Henry Lee Irwin Chair is a project of ADMU Class 54. It has helped the English Department over the years to recognize and honor more publicly the expertise and talents of creative writers who are also gifted with teaching skills to be able to facilitate the enhancement of our students' creative abilities using English as a writing medium. The Irwin Chair recipient teaches a 3-unit Creative Writing Course in the English Department. This semester, the Department is honored to have Dr. Bienvenido Lumber as the Irwin Chair holder. He is teaching Playwriting.

In the actual lecture, which I attended, Lumbera talked about the requirement for his English class in playwriting as a play written in Filipino, in spite of the objections of his students who enrolled in a playwriting class that was offered by the English department and meant to enhance the “students’ creative abilities using English as a writing medium.” Lumbera acknowledged his students’ strong resistance to this requirement. But his lecture made very clear that English is not fit for Philippine theater. A large part of the lecture, in fact, gave samples of hilarious lines from different plays that tried to translate the Filipino idiom into English, such as “Why do you wear a funeral on your face?,” “You might as well write that promise on water,” and “When I was making love with your mother I was giving her mani and balut.”

In the open forum Lumbera admitted that Nick Joaquin’s “Portrait of an Artist as Filipino” succeeded in connecting with its Filipino audience. However, he also pointed out that the Filipino translation made the play more successful and made it accessible to the Filipino audience. The answer he gave for the ability of this play to defy the seemingly insurmountable issue of language was the “vision” of its author. Eventually some names were also given of those who wrote plays in English that succeeded in connecting with the Filipino audience: Marcelino Agana (“New Yorker in Tondo”), Amelia Lapeña Bonifacio (“Walking Canes and Fans”), and Rolando Tinio (“Life in the Slums”).

It was strange that Lumbera was willing to acknowledge that for some Filipinos a play in Ilonggo or Waray may be appropriate, but he was unwilling to acknowledge or give way to some of his students’ belief that English is a good and legitimate language to communicate to a Filipino audience. One of his students stood up to say that *yaya* English is used by caregivers, and it is only natural to have a play in such a language when the characters are caregivers. Lumbera answered that an entire play could not be in *yaya* English. His response begged the question: why not, when whole books in creole are being published, translated and distributed worldwide to great acclaim?<sup>1</sup> His position is indicative of the kind of nationalism that killed Philippine proletariat literature in English, and eventually Filipino plays in English.

The anecdote about the Lumbera lecture is also emblematic of the need for fascism if Filipino as a natural language is to succeed fully in



the country. It must be forced and coerced by a certain kind of nationalism. Dipesh Chakrabarty provides a good view in his critique of subaltern studies. He writes about the violence it took to make Frenchmen out of the peasants in France. Relating it to India, he questions the idea of progress, about how “beginnings, however ugly, do not matter,” for what matters in the end is the story of progress (Chakrabarty 2000, 271). The same can be said also of Thailand where Chinese surnames had to be changed to make them blend with the majority. Benedict Anderson has thoroughly analyzed the strategy of manipulating print-languages to suit the vision of the state for a unitary national consciousness, eliminating linguistic differences in forming the modern nation (2003, 45–46). Although states succeeded with it in the past, this strategy requires rethinking in this age of globalization and diaspora.

Akin to Lumbera, some of those who should be the strongest advocates of the use of English as a part of Philippine life also have an ambivalent relationship with the language. Let us examine what two of them say about the use of the language.

The *Likhaan* fiction editor of 1996 stressed: “Was its language at least competent (but better brilliant!) in terms of handling usage and grammar? Did it do something new for my understanding of how language works, beyond grammatical correctness?” (Dalisay 1997, 83). The fiction editor of the *Likhaan* anthology of 1997 counseled, “Always we begin with the reminder that English, is, for us, a borrowed language, a language learned late. We have been speaking and writing it for less than a century” (Hidalgo 1999, 91).

Simply put, this is the problem: To affirm the position of English in the Philippines is seen as a negation of Philippine culture. To affirm Filipino as *the* language for the Philippines is to affirm Philippine culture and history.

### **American English: Forever the Touchstone of Philippine English?**

Amid globalization and the worldwide spread of English, it has been observed that standard varieties of British English and American En-

lish are touchstones for all other varieties and all learners of English worldwide:

The standard varieties of British and American English are touchstones for all other varieties and all learners of English worldwide; in terms of pronunciation, spelling, grammar, vocabulary, usage, slang, and idiom they are the reference norms, and seem likely to remain so for the foreseeable future. However, comparison and contrast are difficult matters, as people throughout the world know when they seek to follow one or other norm consistently, or at least to know what it is. Indeed, the Americans and the British are not themselves clear on just where the dividing lines run: in some parts of the world blends have grown up, traditionally for example in Canada and more recently in the mainland countries of the European Union. (McArthur 2002, 245)

In the Philippines the bone of contention is that we will always look to the United States as the touchstone of a “foreign” language that we use.

The same insecurity, however, cannot be found in literary anthologies that come from India, their English certainly very different from that of the British, certainly classified as a variety of English, which also uses an imperial country as its touchstone for “correctness.” Their literature has traveled far from the days of Tagore, Raja Rao, and R. K. Narayan. India, however, also has plenty of languages competing for national prominence, but the confidence with the ownership of English is worthy of study.<sup>2</sup> One important reason for this confidence is that their writers, based inside and outside India, have made great strides in imagining their nation for the Indian people and for the world. Even if there are many debates in and outside India as to how their literature must speak for its people, they know that the English language is a part of their history and has come to be a part of their lives.

Certain possibilities are presented before us, and we are obliged to these possibilities. Tradition is really what we cannot escape. We belong to tradition, as much as tradition belongs to us (Gadamer 1999, 258). Tradition is not a thing that is concrete and can be held by the hands or diagramed, it is a reality that comes to life when we engage it, which shapes us and we shape it.

The practice of many Filipino users of English has only heightened the nationalist sense of linguistic insecurity. Many of our writers and scholars, in their effort to make it in the West, to win that Fulbright to attend some Ivy League school, to get published in some New York-based magazine, are only too willing to sell the country short. In this context, understandably, Pantayong Pananaw (PP) has gained a following. It has been described, and rightly so, as being the most comprehensive theoretical position developed in the Philippines to explain the intellectual currents in the country, providing a rigorous critique of the pitfalls of a scholarship that is not primarily aligned with the Filipino. Its originator, Zeur Salazar, has argued for a distinctive way of studying the Philippines that can be differentiated from the Western-based approach to Philippine studies:

Implicitly, Pilipinolohiya's concern is to report and explain about Pilipinas to Filipinos in their own terms and with a view of strengthening Filipino nationality, to pursuing Filipino national goals and ideals (*pambansang adhikain at mithiin*). It is in this sense that Pilipinolohiya constitutes the basis for knowing or studying (*and understanding*) other nationalities and cultures in the world within "area studies" which the University of the Philippines is just beginning to develop.

In contrast, Philippine Studies is precisely an "area studies" for the nationalities and cultures studying the Philippines from their own viewpoints (which Pilipinolohiya does not dispute from them but also claims for Pilipinas). In other words, Pilipinas is "the Other" for others but is not and cannot be for itself! Pilipinolohiya thus studies Pilipinas as the Filipino collective national Self, an endeavor which other nationalities carry out implicitly for themselves, generally with the support of various "area studies" for the understanding of the world around them.

As "the Other," Pilipinas is not and cannot be the vantage point, much less the primary focus, of Philippine Studies. Philippine Studies has varied vantage points, since it starts from the needs, images and problems and ways of seeing things of a wide variety of cultures, mainly western. Pilipinas just happens to be the meeting

ground of several national-cultural “consciousnesses” (if such a plural exists), each with its own world-view, understanding and agenda, which the term “Philippine Studies” more or less summarizes. In that sense and in contrast, Pilipinohiya is concerned (happily) only and primarily with Pilipinas! (Salazar 1998, 314)

Interestingly, this Othering is a tendency found in some of those who have the interest of the Philippines in their work. They try to find the authentic Filipino by Othering the Chinese, the Chinese-Filipino, and the Chinese mestizo.<sup>3</sup> It is not an issue of language, for it can be found in those who write in Filipino, like Amado Hernandez in *Mga Ibong Mandaragit*, Edgardo Reyes in *Sa Mga Kuko ng Liwanag*, and Malou Leviste Jacob in *Anatomiya ng Korupsyon*. It can also be found in those who write in English, like Antonio Enriquez’s *Subanons*, Leoncio Deriada’s short story “Dragonseed,” and Timothy Montes’ short story “The Great Darkness.”<sup>4</sup> F. Sionil Jose is notorious for Othering the Chinese in his novels (see *Tree* for example) and essays to advance a simplistic explanation for our many problems:

These taipans came to the Philippines very poor as all immigrants from China were. Through their industry, cunning and exploitation of elite politics, they built profitable conglomerates, then remit billions made in this country to China, billions that should have stayed here to build industries so our women don’t have to go abroad as housemaids and prostitutes. (Jose 2005, g-2)

Nor is this a question of nationality, as the book *Power and Intimacy in the Christian Philippines* of Fenella Cannell shows us, where the Chinese exploit the innocent Filipino; in fiction there is James Hamilton-Patterson’s *Ghost of Manila*, where the criminal syndicates are run and controlled by Chinese. These works are driven by the desire to explain how the Filipino is corrupted, or manipulated, or exploited by the foreign.<sup>5</sup>

Although prejudice can be written in any language, advocates of Pantayong Pananaw, in reacting against English, are emphatic that its scholarship must be written in Filipino. Ramon Guillermo (2003) explains:

It is thus suggested that PP be explicitly reformulated along the following lines:

First, the principle of using the national language as the primary means of communication in Philippine social sciences should serve as the principal and broadest basis of unity and fruitful discursive exchange. The “pantayo” as a category of social scientific practice should thus cover a much broader, if less defined, group of practitioners.

Second, communication and translation protocols should be developed to facilitate a more productive intellectual interaction between Filipino and English language traditions in Philippine social science. Discourses of incommensurability and mutual incomprehension should be deflected into discourses of approximation where possible. PP’s determination and principled position of strength in regard to its use of the national language should allow it to be more expansive and accommodating to scholars with different linguistic preferences.

Third, the “pananaw” in PP should not be considered as pertaining to a coherent *Weltanschauung* but only as a broadly nationalist and critical viewpoint towards the development of an autonomous dynamic for the development of Philippine social sciences closely articulated with the aspirations of the Filipino people.

Fourth, efforts to develop appropriate and effective mediating structures between Philippine social science and the Filipino people, which PP has already begun, should be continually pursued and experimented upon as essential steps towards the radical restructuring of Philippine social sciences. However, progressive proponents of PP should emphasize that any such attempts at developing new methods of social and political interaction should never be idealistically understood in abstraction from the wider context of political and economic domination and exploitation. The whole point of these efforts is, after all, the liberation of the Filipino people.

At the same time, in spite of the prescription in the extract above for a more “productive intellectual interaction between Filipino and

English language traditions in Philippine social science,” Guillermo (2003) exhibits ambivalence about the use of English in this passage:

The privileging of hybridity as the alternative to the construction of national languages, as proposed by post-colonial theorists who point to the liberative appropriation by the “former colonies” of the advantageously “evolved” (Roxas-Topé 1998) English language, just completely fudges the issue. Paraphrasing Marx, we could even say that that “all we want to do away with is the miserable character of this *appropriation*, under which the ‘native’ lives merely to increase the Englishes of the world.” PP therefore does not emphasize linguistic in-betweenness but rather the commitment of the scholar to the strengthening and consistent embrace of the national discursive domain (or *poók*) in the national language. Furthermore, if the social sciences are understood as forms of liberative self-understanding rather than as alienated and alienating sciences of manipulation, their results should from the beginning be open *as much as possible* to the perusal, critique, and intervention of their purported object (e.g., the Filipinos as a “people”) before translating it “for a wider audience” is considered a priority. The active use and development of a national language is crucial in the attempt to mitigate the extremely alienated and undeniably elitist status of the social sciences in the Philippines.<sup>6</sup>

Guillermo’s (2003) caricature of Philippine English above characterizes it as if it were a mere echo of American English, which would render it, in his terms, as an “unqualified Platonism.”<sup>7</sup>

McArthur’s (2002) point cited earlier about American and British English as touchstones of world Englishes raises the stakes against the use of English in the Philippines. The point is constantly raised that, in countries like the Philippines where Filipino linguists are insisting that there is a legitimate variety of Philippine English, the linguists themselves are using American English in their own writings, not Philippine English. Different Filipino writers continue to grapple in different ways with the question of what is “correct” English. Nationalist scholars and writers resist the very idea that we must meet American and British standards, when proof can and will often be cited that we cannot beat

them at their own game and, if we do, we lose something important, which is our Filipino self.

One writer has analyzed the situation in these terms:

I greatly suspect, though, that Filipino novelists in English very often write about Philippine society and being Filipino, even to the point of preaching about these concerns, in order to be more relevant to the rest of the nation. Their novels, after all, are written in a language not very many Filipinos read as literature. It is common knowledge that the best selling literary works among Filipinos, here and abroad, are written in Filipino—novels, short stories, songs, comic books, radio and television plays, and feature films. And interestingly enough, all the novels this paper deals with call attention to the matter of language. (Brion 2000, 40)

Calling attention to the matter of language is due, according to Rofel Brion (*ibid.*, 40), to the fact that the “novels incorporate myths, legends, and other tales . . . told originally, and more commonly, in Tagalog, Filipino and other Philippine languages.”

There, too, are the Filipino/Filipinized names in many novels that do not make much sense in English but are nevertheless important to the novel’s meaning: Adrian Banyaga in *State of War*, Pucha Gonzaga in *Dogeaters*, Kilat and Buhawi in *The Great Philippine Jungle Cafe*, Alapaap, Matanglawin, Salamat, Madagundong, and Tarik in *Firewalkers*. (*Ibid.*, 41)

The paper of Brion has no appreciation of Philippine English in this example of hypercorrection:

In *Killing Time in a Warm Place*, “killed the lights,” which comes from the novel’s narrator, becomes a glaring example of Filipino English especially since the rest of his prose is almost always in flawless American English. In an essay on writing, Dalisay himself presents the language problem this way:

If you plan to write in English, master the language. No amount of insight will excuse atrocious grammar and graceless usage. We don’t have to be embarrassed by this to begin with,

because whatever we say, it isn't our language, especially in the literary mode. But if you write professionally in it, they (sic) you'll have to learn it as well as doctors and carpenters know their trades.

His novel, in fact, shows how English "isn't our language" through its occasional use of Tagalog words, even if they are somehow translated into English within the same paragraph. (Ibid., 43)

Not only is "killed the lights" part of American usage, but the use of Philippine English or the use of Filipino names is given as proof that English—as if there were only one and only one kind—can never be ours. Thus, the Filipino writer in English is said always to be writing about the nation because he must defend his use of English, which can never be his to use because he and his material are unavoidably programmed as Filipino. But all the studies of the Filipino novel in any of its many languages point to the fact that nation is a major theme of most Filipino novels. This is the crux of the problem: what is Filipino is confined to and said to be expressible only in a "native" and "homegrown" language. My own view, however, is that the continuing search for the native is disrupting the intellectual growth and liberative possibilities of nation, which, despite attacks coming from various persuasions, may yet be the best protection of the weak and dispossessed in this truly globalizing world dominated by transnational capital.

In Singapore Singlish has a vibrant life, yet the Singapore government is resisting the very idea (McCrum, Cran, and Macneil 1993, 333). It boils down to the point of McArthur (2002). There is a schizophrenic relationship with the core language, to use Braj B. Kachru's circles. (The core is comprised of Britain, the United States, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. With the exception of New Zealand and Canada, we can read the core as countries where right now the ethos of imperialism dominates foreign policy).<sup>8</sup> There are many efforts to be independent of the so-called metropolitan countries, yet there is an inescapable use of the imperial center as the standard. The fact that the United States and Britain have remained imperialists makes the issue still contentious in spite of the language's long and vibrant life in countries like the Philippines.



But the reality is that, as much as there is talk about French, German, Latin, Spanish having had their day as global languages, there is no language that has had the reach of English, ever, in history. This phenomenon of a truly global language is something new. There is, therefore, a need to approach this complex issue in a truly multidisciplinary manner, as history, or linguistics, or anthropology cannot do it alone.<sup>9</sup>

### Philippine English as Our Own

The challenge to the Filipino writer in English is to respond to the observation made by San Juan (1996, 56):

In general I would contend that the “English” practitioners have as a group never represented the nation in process of emergence, much less the people constituted as the victims of U.S. conquest and rule; and that the authentic organic intellectuals who sought to organize the spontaneous national-popular energies and infuse them with conscientizing purpose rooted in the notion of justice in an egalitarian community are the vernacular writers such as Amado Hernandez, Magdalena Jalandoni, the anonymous artificers of the Moro epics (*parangsabi*), committed novelist and dramatists in Cebu, Ilocos, Pampanga, and other regions; the collaborators of *Hulagpos* (1980); and the contributors to *Mga Tula ng Rebolusyong Pilipino* (1982).<sup>10</sup>

A critique of the Centennial novels in English bears out the contention that many Filipino writers in English have avoided the issues that plague Philippine society. The grand prize winner, Eric Gamalinda, even goes as far as degrading the Filipino. Although there has yet to be a study comparing the English and Filipino novels that won the Centennial prizes, Gamalinda simply exoticizes the Philippines in the most offensive manner possible (Kwan Laurel 2003), thus adding ammunition against the use of English. The pitfalls of Gamalinda’s novel, *My Sad Republic*, serve as a warning: including elements of revolution and nation do not automatically make for liberating literature; neither does winning the Centennial Literary Contest.

As much as Gémino Abad (through his monumental anthologies of Philippine poetry) has shown that English has become a language we own, we are in danger of losing the great strides of writers ranging from Amador Daguio to Gregorio Brillantes, from Manuel Arguilla to Mila Aguilar. Contrary to the notion that we need more readers, my contention is our writers in English are in danger of losing a country. Those whose political and geographical allegiances remain to be with the Philippines must push to produce literature that is relevant to Filipinos. Going by Rizal's famous essay, "The Philippines a Century Hence," degrading the Filipino is irrelevant, is very harmful to the Filipino, and literature produced by a Filipino that is harmful to the Filipino is ultimately also bad for the language used. Certainly it does not help for a writer like Ninotchka Rosca to migrate to the United States and say in an interview to the *Sunday Inquirer Magazine*: "I don't know if I can settle back in a country that allows the likes of Imelda to flourish. I'd probably be angry all the time" (Azarcon-dela Cruz 2004, 6). It is precisely essentialist arguments such as this that either degrades what is supposed to be native, or glorify it no end.

F. Sionil Jose, in fact, has been an advocate of English as a language of power for Filipinos, asking in his column "Hindsight": can FPJ and Noli de Castro argue in English? His answer: "If they can't then they have no business running for president" (Jose 2003, g-1). Jose displays an elite form of nativism that would exclude everyone who does not speak English, which will only add to the nationalist attack that we are making something out of nothing, a borrowed language that is not natural to us.

But—it may have been given to us, we may have been bamboozled to acquire it, it may have been something we would have bought if it meant social mobility—there is no doubt: it is ours already. What, after all, is "native"? If challenged, a linguist can trace many of what we consider to be native languages as imports from some other place that will be considered foreign.

The long and short of it is that Philippine English, which draws from American English, is our very own. There is no use in denying that American English is the touchstone of Philippine English, and it

will be so in the foreseeable future. The point is that what we do with the language is what will determine if we will forever remain a colony, or we will strike out on our own. South African literature in English is alive, vibrant, and leading the postcolonial literature's surge toward ways of imagining a world independent of the colonizer, not by using Afrikaans (a language certainly developed, evolved, and still widely used in South Africa), but by using English. Chinua Achebe (Nigerian)<sup>11</sup> and Nadine Gordimer (South African)<sup>12</sup> have a lot to tell us about this subject.

Amos Tutuola is very instructive for the Filipino writer. He is a writer of very limited education and means, a messenger in a government agency, yet he is able to capture the postcolonial and anticapitalist spirit in his pathbreaking novel, *The Palm-wine Drinkard*.

Tutuola's language is not so much West African Pidgin English, which has its own syntax and structure, as the writing of an inspired pupil whose exuberance has overtaken his command of basic grammar. Nor is it exactly the "rotten English" that Ken Saro-Wiwa used in *Sozaboy* (1985). Close to automatic writing—if the first draft of *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* spilled out of the author in two days—no wonder it often seems uncorrected and unpolished. And therein lies much of the joy of his novel. The images are fresh and original (and definitely at odds with European models); both the story itself and the language are filled with hyperbole, unfathomable exaggeration, even surrealism (when the Drinkard passes through the door of the Faithful Mother's tree, he doesn't enter a delineated space but an entire new world). (Larson 2001, 11)

Chinua Achebe (1990, 100) has praised Tutuola's novel, yet he also points out its contentiousness as a work of art even among those who side with the Third World:

A young Nigerian woman doing a higher degree in America said to me when I taught there in the 1970s, "I hear you teach Tutuola." It was not a simple statement; her accent was heavy with accusation. We discussed the matter for a while and it became quite clear that she considered *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* to be childish and

crude and certainly not the kind of thing a patriotic Nigerian should be exporting to America.

“Relevance” is a word bandied around very much in contemporary expression, but it still has validity nonetheless. In *The Palm-Wine Drinkard*, Tutuola is weaving more than a tall, devilish story. He is speaking strongly and directly to our times. For what could be more relevant than a celebration of work today for the benefit of a generation and a people whose heroes are no longer makers of things and ideas but spectacular and insatiable consumers? (*Ibid.*, 112)

We have the tradition of writing for the Filipino in NVM Gonzalez, and many other writers like Manuel Arguilla, Carlos Bulosan, Estrella Alfon, Kerima Polotan, Nick Joaquin, Gregorio Brillantes, Mila Aguilar, and Edel Garcellano. This is not to say that our writers “being Filipino cannot help their own nature, no matter from what language they speak” (Abad 1989, 21). On the contrary, divergent approaches by Filipino writers in English can be discerned. There is the Jose Garcia Villa road, which Eric Gamalinda has taken; but there is the NVM Gonzalez road (pioneered by many, Manuel Arguilla being certainly one of the trailblazers), which Estrella Alfon and Kerima Polotan and G emino Abad and Edel Garcellano have taken. The former have decided to be something else other than Filipino, and in the process have become anti-Filipino; while the latter have consciously decided to carve out new terrain in English on the battlefield of and for the Filipino imagination.

In the introduction to Manuel Arguilla’s collection of short stories in 1940 is found the interesting view of American editor A. V. H. Hartendorp (1940, 9):

Of all the notable school of Filipino writers in English, the development of which is truly amazing to these who have not, like myself, seen it come into being, Manuel E. Arguilla has remained among the most forthrightly Filipino, using English almost as if it were a Philippine dialect—so adequate he finds it for his purpose. His work affords new proof of the singular adaptability of that great world-language, which the Filipino writers are further enriching by new human as well as new philological elements.

Hartendorp's observation, written twenty-nine years before Teodoro A. Llamzon coined the term Filipino English, is a strong support for the argument that Filipino writers have colonized the colonizer's language. As Abad (1997, 170) announced in a forum:

This means, for me, that if I'm asked, "Do you write correct English?" I would say, "Of course, it's correct. I'm the one writing it. You're not the one writing it. It is correct." In other words, we have our own—I sense this all the time—we have our own way of thinking. We have our own way of feeling, by which we then use this language called English. So that English is ours. We have colonized it too.

In the end, when we talk about American English being the touchstone of Philippine English, we are talking about grammar, idioms, syntax. What makes a language powerful are not these mechanical issues, it is how we portray ourselves in literature, and how we choose to appropriate what the language offers us (Kwan Laurel 2004, 276).

### **What then is correct English for the Filipino?**

I don't know. But consider the two views represented in these passages. In 1984 a work on the "new Englishes" argued that

The creoles themselves or speech close to them at the basilectal end of the speech continuum cannot be considered as New Englishes. They did not develop through the education system but from pidgins. They are, in themselves, interesting speech varieties. (Platt, Weber, and Ho 1984, 8)

By 2003 a Southeast Asian perspective could assert

This section on "Which English?"—global, glocal or international varieties—is premised on the notion that the "nativization" of English is taking place in all the three Kachruvian circles, although more rapidly in the Outer Circle than in the Expanding Circle.

More than once, there has been the suggestion that we view the Kachruvian concentric circle as overlapping ones—with constant intersections at points of arcs on all three circles. At these intersections, the users of English as a global language, of English as a glocal language or as an international language crisscross paths and pre-determine patterns of value and use to the kinds of English. (Pakir 2003, 76)

Although the second quotation does not deal with creole languages, the contrast in the confidence of how to classify varieties of English is apparent. The gap of eighteen years in the publication of these two works is short, but it is a gap that seems like forever in the study of languages. There is something happening to English as a global language, and linguists are themselves not yet sure where this is going. The acceleration of the process of English going global is a phenomenon that has never been experienced before by the world, and it is forcing a redefinition of many meanings, Kachru's concentric circles being only one of them.<sup>13</sup>

Creoles have gained respectability now that there is acknowledgment that they have their own systems and rules. What used to be something not worthy of study has now become chic for doctoral dissertations in linguistics.

Without doubt, creoles are the more interesting languages to study because they are so different from the so-called varieties of English. The legitimacy creoles have gained (such as Talk Pisin in Papua New Guinea) is dramatic. There is now an official acceptance of some creoles as national languages in countries where these have arisen.

Creoles have been gaining prestige also precisely because they cannot easily be classified as having emerged from English. Creoles are not usually placed by linguists in the concentric circles of Kachru precisely because, emerging as contact languages, creoles must be shown to have come from a different base that is not used by the imperialist, and that their histories are unique and important in the struggles of peoples from the margins. As such, creole languages are seen as independent of the metropolis, and therefore have a very respectable history. Some countries now taking pride in creole languages were once imperial slave

economies. Analogously, the desire for autonomy is one of the reasons for the drive for the language Filipino.

Kachru's framework is very simple, thus very useful at the time of its conception. It shows the history and evolution of English as a global language. But it does not show the complexity of the global situation, which we are able to appreciate more and more as linguistics also becomes more and more sophisticated in its appreciation of independent movements within the varieties of English, and people using different languages who are resisting the onslaught of British and U.S. imperialism. The shift from prescriptive linguistics to descriptive linguistics is one clear acknowledgment that language is not something we can legislate or control. The change in the status of creoles in their respective countries and their change in status in linguistics itself tell us that more shifts in paradigms are just around the corner, changes not one of us can predict.

One is tempted to say that, in the postcolonial age, the center no longer holds, but this will be an illusion, as the United States is clearly taking the lead in spreading and shaping the global language, which is English. In the Philippines, for example, where dire predictions have been made as to the future of English, nobody anticipated that the local entertainment industry would rely on foreign telenovelas that have sparked an interest in the Spanish language, a "colonial" language most have taken for granted but which we also must learn for a better understanding of our country's over three hundred years of history. Clearly, however, Hollywood reigns supreme in the Philippines now more than ever, and we cannot ignore the depth of penetration of the U.S. entertainment industry in our part of the world.

### **What now for *Pinoy* English?**

Up until five years ago it was frowned upon to have an American accent. Now to have an American accent commands a premium. Unfortunately, but it is a fact, some of the best graduates of our universities are landing jobs in call centers. Their ease with the use of English still offers the possibility of a job, providing an alternative to migration. Cable television was also just beginning to be all the rage a

decade ago, and the flood of bargain books from the United States was just about to come. Now we look at bookstores and the call of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo and the presidents of most of the leading universities to reinvigorate English in the classrooms, and we can conclude that English may just live on in the country. The move of Manila mayor Lito Atienza, however, to require students to speak only English in Pamantasan ng Lunsod, except in designated “free” zones on campus, will only add to the idea of English as solely an instrument of colonization (otherwise called globalization), and the servicing of the global economy run in Washington.

I am not sure if Brion’s observation in 2000, that novels and movies in Filipino were outselling materials in English, can easily be made today, not only with the dying local movie industry, but with the flood of American movies in pirated DVDs that are equally as badly made as most of those made in the Philippines. University presses are the first to point out that there is no difference in the sale of their books that are either in English or Filipino. The fact still remains that Filipinos don’t read. Given the television shows foisted by the elite on the poor, the need is not a debate on language but rather to produce quality materials for Filipinos, imaginative works worthy of being taught in classrooms.

To improve the learning ability of our students, the need is not to prolong the debate on which language should be used to teach in the classroom. Quadrupling the salary of teachers to attract into the education sector some of the best of each generation will go a longer way than engaging in the language debate.

There is a belief held by a number of well-meaning, educated, and highly placed individuals, some of them (sadly) in academe, that Filipino children would be able to learn and understand science and technology better and faster if they were taught in their native language from the beginning. Unfortunately such a view is, to say the least, naïve. (Sibayan 1998, 149)

In studies done by linguists on our education system and its effect on the language issue, there is no correlation shown between bilingualism



and the grasp of the subject by the students. There is, however, a strong correlation between learning and the quality of teachers.

Gonzalez's essay "Language and Nationalism in the Philippines: An Update" gives a detailed history of the travails of the search for a political solution to the effort to look for a language that can be a unifying symbol of the country. Gonzalez (1996, 22) makes the point that non-Tagalog people do not begrudge the use of Tagalog Filipino in the mass media; what they begrudge is the privileging of Tagalog as the symbol of our national unity. The great contribution of Gonzalez's essay is that, as he himself grapples with nationalism all throughout the book, he tells us that

language is not necessarily equated with a sense of nationhood; utility more than integration takes priority. This is clearly the case with Singapore; in the Philippines, this is the preference of the majority although there is a vocal minority that is presently challenging this and once more contributing to the forces of division in Philippine society. (Gonzalez 1996, 26)

This nonequation of language with nationalism is supported by Filipinos, as noted by Gonzalez in his study of the surveys done by linguists. The multilingual-based Filipino language is a political solution; it is not a linguistic solution. This happened with the 1986 Constitution, which was not at all acrimonious with the Filipino language decision, as it was acrimonious in the 1935 and the 1973 constitutions.

So what is this hang-up over a "borrowed language" that is English?

Sa pagdami ng gumagamit ng Ingles sa internet ng mga website ng tungkol at para sa mga Pilipino ay lalong napananatili ang mababang pagtingin natin sa ating wika at identidad. Ang ganitong kolonyal na pag-iisip ang siyang dahilan kung bakit hindi umuunlad ang bansa dahil parati itong tumitingin sa ibang bansa upang hingan ng tulong, makunan ng ideya o hindi kaya ay bilang point of comparison. Ito ang dahilan kung bakit hindi matatag ang ating kamalayang Pilipino, hindi matatag ang pagtingin natin sa ating sarili bilang Pilipino, bilang tao. (Tauro-Batuigas 2004, 171)

Tauro-Batuigas's point in the quotation above helps in the attack against the use of English of whatever kind, perhaps lessens its prestige among aspiring users, but it also isolates Filipino, or Tagalog, or whatever language it wants to promote because it puts the question in binary opposition. At the same time, the article itself obviously benefited from English as it is littered with quotations in English, without the effort of translation into Filipino, from Lyotard, Braid, Benedikt, Gramsci, Thiongo, Salazar, Eco, Nash, Said, Roy. It will only succeed in converting the converted.

As much as the nationalist discourse would have us not privilege English over Filipino, the underprivileged whom the nationalists say they represent want to learn English:

Affluent Filipinos in relatively well-off colleges and universities, sensitized to the nationalism issue, opt for the wider use of Filipino in all domains of Philippine life including higher education; less affluent Filipinos, insecure in their knowledge of English but already secure in their knowledge of Filipino, insist on the maintenance of English for higher education and for future use. The affluent ones have arrived in their mastery of English; they are less secure in their mastery of Filipino. If secure in both languages, their success is certain, since in the perception of businessmen (Sibayan and Secovia 1982), knowledge of both languages is needed for success in Philippine life. (Gonzalez 1996, 27)

English will remain in the Philippines because, as Gonzalez has concluded, utility is the most compelling reason to use a language. And the power of the United States at the moment, which is all encompassing in trade, war, banking, education, and sports, assures English's continuing utility. The earlier we accept this fact, the more likely we will be able to use Filipino, English, Cebuano, and whatever language we want to fashion ourselves, and, more importantly, to help attain a more egalitarian society. The more it will be easier to sell Filipino and English as languages worth cultivating and empowering to use. There is no binary opposition; it is only a figment of a certain kind of nationalist, sometimes xenophobic, view of the world. Too much time has been

taken up already by the language issue, too much confusion inflicted on students.

Our view of Philippine English will change if we accept that Philippine English is a legitimate variety of English, and that Filipinos may be evolving more variants. We also need to realize that, because of the Filipino diaspora, the Philippines is contributing significantly to making English a global and dynamic language.

Gonzalez (*ibid.*, 35–37) rightly points out that “a monolingual country is really the exception more than the rule, since the normal state of affairs is linguistic and cultural diversity with many of the citizens being bilingual, trilingual or even multilingual.” Switzerland has three official languages; Singapore has Malay, but the government actively uses and promotes English and Mandarin. That the language Filipino needs to undergo a process of “intellectualization,” a process of building a body of scholarly and scientific works using that language, is true and must be supported and encouraged, not by attacking the development of Philippine English, but by making sure Filipino writers in Filipino are given the opportunity to write their best and to publish these works. Translation must also be encouraged, while Filipinos who only read books in English must be made to realize how much they are missing in not reading writers in Filipino. There is no arguing that writers in Filipino, because of the limited possibilities of gaining a foothold in the international market, have remained rooted in Philippine issues, with little temptation of exoticizing the country. The Filipino writer in English must learn from them.

### **The Literature We Need**

We may assume that the Filipino mind was colonized by language—first by Spanish and then by English. Many of their words, not rooted in our native languages, have become our eyes: look anywhere in our archipelago, and you will see, for the same reality, only *botica*, *farmacia*, drugstore, Mercury. (Abad 1993, 11)

To be historically more precise, a few Filipinos acquired Spanish, in spite of the great reluctance of the colonizers to give it to us, precisely

to fight back against colonial abuses. We never really had Spanish, but Rizal and company thought we needed it to gain power. Aside from the sword, we were colonized with the Bible, using our own “native” languages. One way to fight back today is to have great literature in English and Filipino and any other language we desire independent of the colonial and colonized imagination. Developing such literature has absolutely nothing to do with language, yet it has everything to do with language. As English will continue to have a deeper penetration in all countries, certainly including the Philippines, it is paramount that we move out of the language debate. In the end, the question about the politics of the text is inevitable for the Third World writer and reader. It is the most important question. It can be argued as too narrow and essentialist, but there is no other way around it for the Filipino writer.

## Notes

1. See, for example, Chamoiseau’s novel, *Texaco* (1997).

2. Raja Rao (1967, vii) already exhibited this confidence over half a century ago:

The telling has not been easy. One has to convey the various shades and omissions of a certain thought movement that looks maltreated in an alien language. I use the word ‘alien’ yet English is not really an alien language to us. It is the language of our intellectual make-up—like Sanskrit or Persian was before—but not of our emotional make-up. We are all instinctively bilingual, many of us writing in our own language and in English. We cannot write like the English. We should not. We cannot write only as Indians. We have grown to look at the large world as part of us. Our method of expression therefore has to be a dialect which will some day prove to be as distinctive and colorful as the Irish or the American. Time alone will justify it.

Salman Rushdie (1997, xiv–xv), in an introduction to an anthology celebrating fifty years of Indian writing, published to coincide with the anniversary of Indian independence from Britain, says:

The point about the power of the English language, and of the western publishing and critical fraternities, also contains some truth. Perhaps it does seem to some ‘home’ commentators, that a canon is being foisted from the outside. The perspective from the West is rather different. Here, what seems to be the case is that Western publishers and critics have been growing gradually more and more excited by the voices emerging from India; in England at least, British writers are often chastised by reviewers for their lack of Indian-style ambition and verve. It feels as if the East is imposing itself on the West, rather

than the other way around. And, yes, English is the most powerful medium of communication in the world; should we not then rejoice at these artists' mastery of it, and at their growing influence? To criticize writers for their success at 'breaking out' is no more than parochialism (and parochialism is perhaps the main vice of the vernacular literatures). One important dimension of literature is that it is a means of holding a conversation with the world. These writers are ensuring that India, or rather, Indian voices (for they are too good to fall into the trap of writing nationalistically), will henceforth be confident, indispensable participants in that literary conversation.

3. See Aguilar's (2005) excellent article on the subject of tracing origins, which is important reading for anyone interested in issues of race, nationalism, language, and Pantayong Pananaw.

4. Many thanks to Caroline S. Hau for the discussions about writers who are still practicing voodoo nationalism.

5. For an engaging comparative study, see Aguilar's (2001) article on Indonesia.

6. See Roxas-Topé's (*Un)framing Southeast Asia* (1998).

7. Yet Pantayong Pananaw also looks for the essential and true Filipino language and the true Filipino, as if such were genetically programmed into the Filipino, opening it to the charge of using essentialist arguments. Zeus Salazar (1998, 62) writes:

These "ties" are conceived here more in relation to our own languages, principally the one which has become our national language, Tagalog/Pilipino. Certainly, linguistic affinity with the rest of Asia should not be construed in the light of our common cultural enslavement. We know that within the last twenty years, English has been spreading with the Anglo-American and Australian commercial and socio-cultural penetration of Southeast Asia. In this context, affinity should not refer to anything beyond our national language and, if at all, other Filipino languages. Our common borrowings from English cannot be construed as a legacy; they are at best acquisitions incident to our contact with the West. As for the English language itself, it cannot be taken seriously as a factor of unity in the region but rather as one of alienation from our common moorings in the past, from the cultural kinship which has only begun to be more consciously perceived.

8. Braj B. Kachru (1997, 2) writes:

There is no paucity of metaphors, in Asia or elsewhere, to refer to various attitudes toward world Englishes. The metaphors 'the world language,' 'the language on which the sun never sets,' and 'a universal language' refer to the imperial spread of the language. Then there are metaphors of distance and otherness which refer to the deception perceived in the medium and its message, for example, 'a Trojan horse,' 'the other tongue,' and 'step-daughter.'

And on the other extreme is the characterization of the English language as 'the most racist of all human languages' (Ngugi 1981). In this jungle of metaphors English is Hydra-like with many heads, including the one that in India's metaphysical writer Raja Rao's view, is uplifting for, as he says, it '...elevates us all' (1978). Rao has no hesitation in equating English in India with the Brahmanic sacred language Sanskrit. The metaphors 'the Flowering Tree' or 'the Speaking Tree' point to yet other dimensions of English—its multiculturalism and pluralism.

9. I find it significant that even Isagani Cruz (2005b, 16) has accepted English as something we need, although he frames it purely in economic terms:

The key word here is globalization. Since the Philippines cannot move out of its poverty without looking for business elsewhere, it has to use English, which is the international language of business. (This is my reason for being in the ESU [English Speaking Union], despite my well known advocacy for removing the language from its inordinate position in the educational system.)

10. In an endnote to another paper, San Juan (2000, 384) writes:

When I first broached in the sixties this idea of the decline of English as a literary medium for expressive cultural forms, I was attacked by the American New Critic Leonard Casper and his Filipino disciples. Should Filipino literature continue to be judged by the imperial master's criteria? Casper's entry on Filipino poetics in the Princeton *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (1965) is typical of such procedure when it denigrated the vernacular while seeming to judge Filipino poets objectively in English, oblivious of its own discriminatory reductiveness. And Casper's recent revision of the entry compounds his doctrinaire selectiveness.

11. Chinua Achebe (1990, 41) writes:

I realize that a lot has been made of the allegation that African writers have to write for European and American readers because African readers where they exist at all are only interested in reading textbooks. I don't know if African writers always have a foreign audience in mind. What I do know is that they don't have to. At least I know that I don't have to. Last year the pattern of sales of *Things Fall Apart* in the cheap paperback edition was as follows: about 800 copies in Britain; 20,000 in Nigeria; and about 2,500 in all other places. The same pattern was true also of *No Longer at Ease*.

12. Nadine Gordimer (1983, 344) in an interview states:

There are givens that are understood only in South Africa, that perhaps people in England and America simply don't understand. But it's happened to me again and again, since I've traveled after my books have been written and have talked to people or perhaps been interviewed, that these blanks obviously do

exist. But this is something that happens after the event, after the book has been written, and I could put my head on a block—I'm not lying to you when I say that I never think about them when I'm writing.

13. The expanding circle is said to have the following countries: China, the Caribbean Countries, Egypt, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Korea, Nepal, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South America, and Zimbabwe. The outer circle is said to have the following countries: Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Kenya, Malaysia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Zambia. The inner circle is said to have the following countries: the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand.

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