

# Politico-economic influence and social outcome of English language among Filipinos: An autoethnography

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## ABSTRACT

Deeply rooted with the influence of the American culture to Philippine Education, most curricula are centered on the English language as the medium of instruction. Until today, most of the classes are taught in English while inconspicuously discourage the use of the lingua franca during discussions and even within school premises. The culture of reverse ethnocentricity in communication is motivated by the assumed status symbol in the community. This autoethnographic study analyzed the positive and ill effects of English-centered curriculum among bilingual and multilingual Filipino students. Noble consequences include: (1) considerably comprehensible to good command of the International language; (2) prodigious chances of employability in foreign countries; and (3) tourism, education and business attraction. Proficiency in the English language as a status symbol has unfavorable effects which include: (1) poor mastery of the lingua franca both in oral and written communication; (2) perceiving the lingua franca as a second-class language; (3) stereotypes and inferiority among non-English and poor-English speaker; (4) challenged cultural identity; and (5) threatened nationalism and patriotism.

**Keywords:** *autoethnography, bilingual/multilingual, culture, English, Filipino*

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*“For many years, invasion and conquest have been major forces in bringing different language speaking groups in contact. When languages come in contact, three principle outcomes are possible: (1) a population may decide to continue using their native language*

*for all functions; (2) choose to use the newly introduced language instead of the native language in all functions; or (3) choose to use the native language in some domains and the additional language in others.” (Sharon Clampitt-Dunlap, 1995).*

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The third millennium brought us to the issue of globalization which leads us to learn English to be competent (Engram & Sasaki, 2003). Marcos Fleury (2011) claimed that: (1) English is spoken by more people than any other language, after Chinese-Mandarin; and (2) English is the international language in almost all aspects, if not all. Currently, almost all non-English speaking nations are trying to make their people learn English as their second language.

In the Philippines, though an etymologically-engineered (Clampitt-Dunlap, 1995) Filipino is the national official language and each region has its own *lingua franca* (official auxiliary), English is the official medium of instruction (Lewis, 2009; Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines, 1987). McFarland (1993) identified about 120 to 175 languages contingent to the means of classification. Four of which have no known identified speakers.

We Filipinos are known to be good in English which makes us in-demand in the global market. Though there are plenty of advantages in learning English, I have observed that there are also disadvantages. Thus, it is the intention of this undertaking to explore and analyze these based from my personal experiences and observations.

## II. ATHEORETICAL STANCE

My study followed an atheoretical stance. *A priori* were suspended prior to the actual data collection (Polit & Beck, 2008). Literature review and identification of theoretical framework were done after data were gathered. An inductive process was tracked as summarized in the schematic diagram below (Berg, 2001):

Figure 1. Inductive Research Process.



## III. METHOD

This is an autoethnography (Maréchal, 2010) of my life as a: (1) multilingual student; and (2) teacher for bilingual and multilingual students. I was also doing content analysis of relevant narrative materials to analyze and substantiate my observations and experiences.

**Sampling.** I am sampling my personal experiences in this study. There is no term utilized in sampling auto narrative studies – thus, I will coin the word “autosampling” which I define as “purposively sampling personal experiences of the researcher himself that is substantial to the domain of inquiry”. My experiences were chronicled to position my observations in a clearer context.

Furthermore, 18 books, 31 journal articles, 9 news articles, 4 blogs, 1 thesis, 2 government documents, 2 documents from international institutions, 1 class notes, and 1 conference paper were sampled to confirm my claims and to provide parallel evidence to my experiences, observation and assertions.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Demographics.** The 1987 Constitution of the Republic of the Philippines declares that the national language of the Philippines is Filipino and for tenacities of formal instruction and universal communication, English. The Department of Education, Culture and Sports promulgated Bilingualism Policy thru its Department Order No. 52, s.1987.

*“Bilingual Education aims at the achievement of competence in both Filipino and English at the national level, through the teaching of both languages and their use as media of instruction at all levels.” (DECS order No. 52, s. 1987).*

The goals were to: (1) enhance learning by amalgamating bilingualism or multilingualism to attain quality education; (2) propagate Filipino as

the language of literacy; (3) promote the growth of Filipino as a philological emblem of unanimity and personality of the country; and (4) to cultivate and elaborate Filipino as a language of scholarly discourse.

The Philippines has a simple literacy rate of 93.4% with a functional literacy rate of 84.1% (Republic of the Philippines National Statistics Office of the, 2009; United Nations Development Programme, 2009) and that it is about equal for both gender (Central Intelligence Agency, 2009).

**My Autoethnography as a Student.** I was cultured in a prestigious private primary and secondary education in Cebu City where English is emphasized as the mode of instruction. Speaking the dialect is highly discouraged. Every time I speak my native tongue, I am obliged to pay 25 centavos per word for noncompliance to the English Zone Campaign of the institution. This is one of the double standards I have observed in the Philippine Education System. Educators ostentatiously emphasize nationalism and patriotism, but they are confusing the learners by discouraging them to speak their *lingua franca*. All the while in my young years, I thought it was the best and the only acceptable language to use and inferiority begin to sink into my system. I began to compare my English competency to others and became more vigilant not to commit errors to avoid mortification from peers.

Later on, I was consumed by the system and became one of them. I begin to acknowledge errors from peers and begin to laugh at their mistakes. This is a classic example on how the English language mandated by political structure (Sankoff, 2001) ill-marked the social structure. English as a medium of instruction, had contributed to class identification (Weinreich, 1953). On the other hand, this system had improved my English proficiency. I begin to attain confidence while speaking the English language. However, these confidences have two sides: (1) I was able to communicate efficiently; and (2) it exalted a regal status symbol in me.

Eladio C. Dioko (2007) claimed that it is precisely disgraceful that the language of the

child, which the child is very much comfortable, the language of his mind and heart, has only become an auxiliary medium of instruction. He further claimed that it may unintentionally propel an erroneous signal to the child: the awareness that his identity is not adequate because the very hallmark of his origin, his own language, is reckoned inadequate.

Though we speak English in school and everyone is expected to be very good at it, I have observed that, for most of us, English comprehension skill is not so good. We may understand what we hear and read cursorily, but not really to the extent of capturing its perfect essence.

I think my experience is further explained by Dioko (2007). He stressed that in some Philippine classroom where English is the sole mode of instruction, dual task for the learner will occur: (1) learning the new language as it is – already a difficult work in itself; and (2) learning the concepts and skills in the target lesson. As far as my recollection is concerned, I stepped into the classroom where straight English instructions were given – and I admit, I encountered difficulties. Dioko was right, it is necessary for the learner to learn English first before they are expected to learn the lessons:

*“Such is the scenario today in Philippines schools-elementary schools, especially. As the child steps into the classrooms for the first time, he is immediately confronted with a language which is not his home language. His teacher begins talking to him in a strange tongue. And he is made to learn to read words and registers with unfamiliar sounds. One can just imagine the feeling of inadequacy the child feels. Lifted from the friendly environment of the home, his alienation is at once made consummate with the introduction of a foreign medium of learning. Thus starts his blundering years of classroom work where lessons are half-learned and learning is half-baked.” (Dioko, 2007)*

This is also the case in speaking and reading the *lingua franca*. Since there is no formal training for the native tongue, we cannot speak and read it perfectly. In fact, we tend to mix both English and Cebuano-Visaya or even with Filipino-Tagalog when we socially and academically communicate. This greatly shows that, even though we learn two or more languages, we fail to master at least one.

I am just afraid that in the near future, the Philippines may be like: (1) Singapore who speak so many languages but have not perfected even one: effects of bilingualism (Oha, Uwajeh, Daniel & Iyere, 2010; Valdés, 2005); or (2) Taiwan whose youngsters have difficulty in speaking or understanding Taiwanese Hokkien, the tongue of their parents (Talk: Taiwanese Hokkien, 2012):

*"I'm not sure how correct this is, but, from my understanding and from what my Taiwanese friends and family tell me, the new generation (teens to mid-twenties, I believe) typically don't speak Taiwanese anymore. It's come down to the point that most of the kids these days only understand it, but can't speak it. Or people who can speak fluently only speak it to older people who speak Taiwanese. So, I'm not sure about that statistic about 70 percent of the Taiwanese population speak Taiwanese is correct – or rather, I guess it's close enough to correct, but... perhaps some mention that culture-wise, Taiwanese, as a language, isn't as pertinent to the new generation as it is towards the older generation would be appreciated."*

Language competition may have caused this phenomenon. In the study of Wang and Minette (2005), they presented the idea that language invasion may lead to the endangerment and maintenance trepidations of the *lingua franca* (Mufwene, 2004). The aim towards language universality may correspond to loss of linguistic diversity.

My experience was far out from what J. Aleta R. Villanueva and Ani Rosa S. Almario's

(2008) claim in their study. They clinched that bilingual classrooms do more than just preserve national identity by the propagation of Filipino, it also result in numerous benefits on the part of the learner. Benefits highlighted more on students' performance in class during examinations (Lindholm-Leary, 2005). The language switch-code exposures allow them to be more analytical (Cloud, Genesse & Hamayan, 2000). They further stressed that educators and educational researchers should endeavor to work towards making bilingual learning systematic and effective.

**My Autoethnography as an Educator.** When I was a novice lecturer in my university teaching sophomores, I delivered my lecture in straight English. I have noticed that some of my students had a hard time catching up my inputs. I noticed my students': (1) blank stares during lectures; (2) meager interaction in class; (3) pitiable recital in class activities; and (4) poor performance during examinations. Then I recognized that there is a problem in learning the concepts in straight English.

I made a quick assessment and realized that most of my students come from a provincial public school where English instruction is not so good. Because of that, I modified my teaching strategy by allowing them to express in Cebuano-Visaya or in any language they are more comfortable. After that, I instructed them to try expressing it in English to enhance their skills. I have noticed that students: (1) were more able to explain their opinion; (2) began to interact with each other thru an intellectual debate; and (3) improved their academic performance. With this strategy, learning was much more effective.

The strategy I have done was supported by Bernardo and Gaerlan (2011). They claimed that bilinguals and multilinguals tend to develop interesting cognitive learning processes: Bialystok and colleagues established in their researches that bilinguals and multilinguals have heightened their executive control skills (Bialystok, 2007; Bialystok, Craik, & Luk, 2008; Emmorey, Luk, Pyers, & Bialystok, 2008; Martin-Rhee & Bialystok,

2008) and perform better in enormous learning processes like non-verbal problem solving activities (Bialystok 2010; Bialystok & Majumder, 1998) compared to monolinguals. The executive control skills mentioned have 8 pillars according to Cox (2007): (1) initiation (getting started); (2) flexibility (allow the changing of channels and gears); (3) attention (responsiveness to needs and details); (4) organization (putting things in order) (5) planning (putting activities in sequence and facilitating to work); (6) working memory (benefits of recollection); (7) self-awareness (recognition and utility of skills and limitations); and (8) regulating emotions (control of the self). These were all related to selective-discerning attention that is very important in learning and performing multifarious tasks.

Also cited by Bernardo and Gaerlan (2011) was the study conducted by Blot, Zarate and Paulus (2003). It explained why bilinguals and multilinguals functioned better from monolinguals. It was framed that language codes are highly cerebral processes that allowed them to cultivate an exceptional rational process. When they were instructed to switch languages, students were: (1) stimulated to generate more insights; and (2) allowed to gain a stretch of information for knowledge exemplifications; obtainable from the different language encryptions. Bernardo (2005) pointed that the competency to communicate in two or more languages is an essential resource in the learning system.

Aside from increasing access to skills, Carol Benson (2004), in her research, concluded that the superiority of mother tongue-based bilingual instruction in basic education increases by means of interaction and integration of prior knowledge and experiences in the classroom that result in new learning. She further explained that bilingual education was made by conventionally relegated students in the progression of: (1) being literate in the acquainted language; (2) obtaining access to communication and literacy skills in the second or third language; (3) establishing a culture that respects language diversity, which is appreciated

and respected by formal school; (4) feeling proud and comfortable in the learning environment; (5) being able and even encouraged to demonstrate their learning; (6) engaging in personal learning; (7) devouring the audacity to interrogate and interact in class; (8) appearing in class and taking a respectable chance of success; and (9) not being taken advantage of. Some of these findings by Benson were observed by me when I modified my strategy from mono to multilingualism.

Choosing the language inside the classroom is a very fundamental choice. Eladio C. Dioko (2007) pointed in his paper that if students do not understand what the teacher is saying or what he reads in his books, learning does not occur. He further claimed that the best medium of instruction should be the learner's own *lingua franca*. If the *lingua franca* is used: (1) learning is facilitated because concepts and ideas are readily understood; and (2) there is direct recognition of meaning.

**Observed Effects of English Instruction to the Society.** Graduates in Philippine Education have the competency in English language since it is emphasized in the instruction. This contributed in the great demand of employability in foreign countries.

*"November 25, 2011 – Hong Kong nationals still prefer hiring Filipino workers because they know how to speak the English ..."* (GMA News, 2011)

*"Americans favor Filipino workers because we (Filipinos) can understand them (Americans) and they (Filipinos) speak English,"* said Loreto Soriano (Jimenez, 2006)

Sankoff (2001) claimed that language contact has economic implications. English proficiency among Filipinos opened the doors for business attraction in the country. Foreign investors primarily choose the Philippines as one of the best choices for education, outsourcing and

tourism. This observation is similar to the claims of Abrams and Strogartz (2003) that language adoption is proportional to its economic benefits accumulated by using the language. This invites more frequency of learners to attain that benefit.

*"Outsourcing workers from the Philippines has been considered as one of the best options for any foreign companies ... The Philippines remain as a top BPO destination for the estimated \$150-billion business process outsourcing industry ... reason why foreign companies choose Filipino workers is because our ability to speak and understand English. There is no doubt about it. Filipino workers could really communicate with the English language. Although, some are not that fluent, but foreigners can actually understand what they are trying to say." (Jenna, 2010)*

*"CEBU CITY, March 20, 2012 — A Japanese English language learning center based in Cebu will hire this year at least 2,000 more Filipino teachers to address the online demand for Japanese students who want to learn to speak English as a second language ... Urabe said that nine out of 10 Japanese would prefer having a Filipino teacher than native English speakers like Americans." (Garcia-Yap, 2012)*

Because of these beneficial enumerations, it may have cultured an archetype of arrogance masked in an extolled status symbol which has detrimental effects. I observed that most Filipinos: (1) have poor mastery of the *lingua franca*; and (2) treat the *lingua franca* as a second-class language. Furthermore, those who are proficient in English antagonize poor and non-English speakers.

Aside from the economic implications, Sankoff (2001) claimed that language contact has political implications. I am personally convinced that the political prescription of using English as the medium of instruction in the Philippines had subconsciously nurtured class stratification. English being used as a standard of instruction amalgamated with the prominence of being

economically-preferred human resource may unconsciously contribute to identify a class of supremacy over poor English speakers. This further integrated a relative social pressure (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988). This form of divide is expressed in social stratification (Labov, 1972) as an explicit form of language dominance. Abrams and Strogartz (2003) claimed that the *lingua franca* and the invading language socially compete with each other. The competition is proportional to its position, which is determined as a measure of prestige and economic benefits.

Munat (2005) argued that when an invading language occupies a certain milieu, it violates that society. It produces a persistent sentiment of inferiority complex and powerlessness. When English was politically enforced as a medium of instruction, it reduced the *lingua franca* for informal communication that unconsciously signaled its declassification.

Guy (1988), Giles and Powlsland (1975) claimed that language determines social class. How we speak defines our social identity (Ellis, 1967; Smedley & Bayton, 1978; Triandis & Triandis, 1960; Dienstbier, 1972) and partialities transpire based on the social class' expectation (Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner & Fillenbaum, 1960; Ryan & Sebastian, 1980). Studies reveal that the presence of the outgroup language activates cognitive elements associated with that language (Higgins, 1990) and people may hold differential outlooks pertaining to that language-based social classification (Maass, Milesi, Zabbini & Stahlberg, 1995).

Dogged as a superlative language, unconscious communal actions to the high-class use of English (Hornblower, 1995; Padilla et al., 1991) taint cultural pride and esteem (Tajfel, 1972). It should be noted that the use of *lingua franca* contributes to self and social categorization (Glies, Taylor & Bourhis, 1977). The unconscious alienation to it leads to identity shift and class labeling. This initiated inferiority among those being alienated and challenged the cultural identity of both proficient and the non-proficient threatening nationalism, patriotism, regionalism and cultural

heritage. We must realize that our own *lingua franca* defines our group membership (Eastman, 1985; Louw-Potgieter & Giles, 1987).

*"... In previous press interviews where the Pacman (Manny Pacquiao, the Philippines pride in international boxing) spoke, always without an interpreter, he would find himself grammatically challenged and his fight assessments always appeared simple-minded as though the English words that would articulate his actual deep insights were beyond his reach. In contrast, whenever the Mexican fighters spoke, with interpreters, they seemed to express more depth in their analysis. I always wondered why the Pacman didn't just speak in Tagalog and have an interpreter translate his words..." (Rodis, 2008)*

*"Dozens, if not hundreds of Filipino blogs, commented overnight on Janina's selection (as Miss Philippines 2008) with most making fun of Janina's accent and poor grammar. Many questioned how she could possibly win the world title when she can't speak English properly. But if anyone of these blog commentators ever watched any of those beauty pageants, they would note that the questions were always posed to the Spanish-speaking contestants in English, translated by interpreters into Spanish, and the Spanish answers then translated into English. The translated answers showed their poise and articulation, which account for why so many South American beauty queens have won these contests." (Rodis, 2008)*

Munat (2005) pointed out that proficiency in English can be dangerous since it can lead to elitism. The examples enumerated above simply boosted English as the *sine qua non*. Although we recognize that the use of English is essential for globalization, we must also recognize that it may lead to inequality.

**Scenarios in Other Countries.** Other countries had also experienced the same ordeal.

In Finland, English language had troubled the academia (YLE, 2013). The French believed that English invasion threatens more than the Nazi's (Samuel, 2010). Spanish purists acknowledged the considerable problems (Caitlin, 2012). Chinese believed that English invasion must be stopped to avoid substantial destruction to their pure language (Moore, 2010).

## V. CONCLUSION

The English language invasion in the Philippines: (1) is initially induced thru the historical invasion of the Americans; (2) is sustained thru the synergy of political and economic influence; and (3) had produced positive and negative social outcomes. Political influence that sustained the English language invasion is the new weaponry for the modern conquerors. It is operated as a tool for power and its acquisition as a measure of elitism. The monetary equivalence of English proficiency in human resource for economic utility is seen as a motivator (influence) and product (outcome). The association of efficacious accounts marked preeminent group taxonomy, a form of divide. Although positive effects like global proficiency and its monetary equivalence are domineering, negative effects pertaining to socio-cultural identity may also progress.

There are always two sides of a coin — just like learning English as a second language. Inasmuch as it brings avenue for global competitiveness in diverse facets, it may also unintentionally taint personal and social identity. The mother tongue can be a very effective tool in education. Speaking the mother-tongue need not contradict national educational objectives. I strongly agree with the move of the Department of Education thru DepEd Order No. 74 signed by Secretary Jesli A. Lapus on July 14, 2009 institutionalizing mother tongue-based Multilingual Education (MLE).

*"While proficiency in a foreign language is commendable, especially in this era of globalization, the value of a foreign language should not be gained by*

denigrating our national language. Tagalog or Pilipino should be given the respect it deserves and be allowed to co-exist alongside all other languages... only then will we begin to appreciate and respect who we really are as a people." *Self-respect. (Philippine News, 2008)*

Measures to strengthen cultural identity must be emphasized among Filipino learners.

Inasmuch as learning English is encouraged for global competitiveness, the *lingua franca* must be preserved with intentionality and pride. Strong cultural identity exercises must be integrated side-by-side with learning English proficiency. Learners must also be equipped with self-awareness techniques to refrain from language related superiority or inferiority complexes.

Figure 2. Influence-Effect of Language Contact Model.

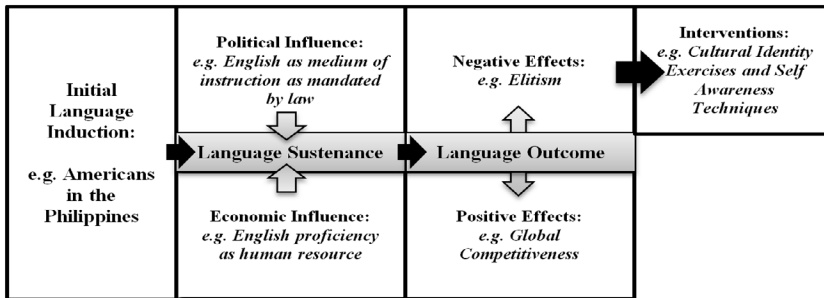
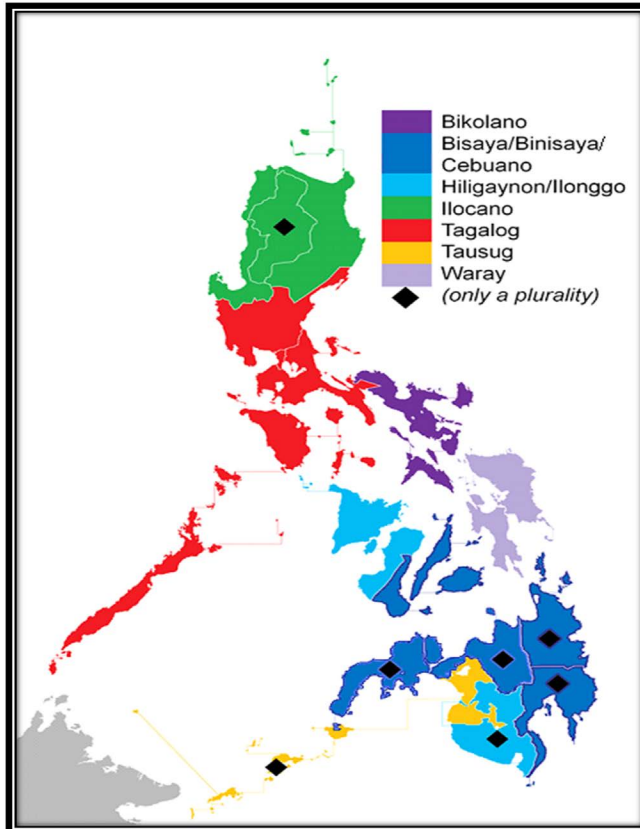


Figure 3. Distribution of Languages in the Philippines.





Originality Index:	98 %
Similarity Index:	2 %
Paper ID:	353071273
Grammarly:	Checked

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