

Taglish

Taglish is derived from **Tagalog** and **English**. It is the colloquial language of Filipinos, especially in the metropolitan Manila area, home to 12 million people. The national language of the Philippines is Filipino, which is based on Tagalog. However hardly anyone will say they speak or understand Filipino. It is almost always referred to as Tagalog. For the record, I hate Taglish. That's why this essay is being written.

I've always believed that one should speak and write well in their native language. That includes grammar, vocabulary and spelling. So, I'm showing my age. The more languages you can master the better for you. Europeans are masters of proficiency in two or more languages while a lot of Americans are strictly monolingual. But that situation is probably a function of their respective geographies. Colloquial use of Taglish is one thing, but it's another matter to carry it over to politics and the media. Unfortunately this is what's happened.

The practice has even invaded the corporate world. McDonald's in the Philippines advertises some of its products by saying "*love ko to.*" Not only is it Taglish, the grammar is wrong too. Of course McDonald's does it on purpose, to appeal to their young core consumers. They could easily have said "*ibig ko ito*" or "*gusto ko ito.*" Or used the original North American ad "I'm loving it." But Taglish won out. (The company translated the phrase to more than a dozen languages for their campaign.) McDonald's announced their delivery service at their website by saying "*pa-deliver na.*" Incidentally, Filipinos never say McDonald's, it is always "*McDo.*" McDonald's is good at adapting. In the Philippines, they have been serving garlic fried rice for breakfast for a while. But could we spare the Taglish?

Taglish dates back to my boyhood days but we didn't call it Taglish then. Here's a brief introduction to Taglish 101. Say we went to a dinner, party or show. Someone will invariably ask "*nag-enjoy ka ba?*" Notice the interjection of "enjoy." Ok, why didn't you just say "did you enjoy yourself?" You could have asked the question in Tagalog, "*nagustohan mo ba?*" The great majority of Filipinos in Metro Manila are proficient in English. That's the reason call centers are everywhere, one of the biggest industries and employers in the country. GlobalEnglish Corporation, a unit of the U.K. Company Pearson, has ranked the Philippines as first in business English proficiency. Whenever you ask someone "how's it going" or "how are you doing," the common reply is "*ok-lang.*" "*Ok-lang*" is as ubiquitous as "you know" in the U.S. Where did that ok come from anyway? There is a perfectly applicable word in Tagalog that would be the appropriate answer for this kind of question, "*mabuti*" or good. The American sailors and airmen who used to be based in the Philippines are long gone. Did we pick up the ok expression from them?

The current President, Benigno Aquino III or "P-Noy," sticks to either English or Tagalog in his speeches. He will slip in an English term or two if appropriate but doesn't mix the two languages the way most people do. He is articulate in both languages. He is setting a great example. That is not the case with his younger sister Kristina "Kris" Aquino. She might be considered the bete noire of proper language. Kris is highly educated, smart, a successful TV personality and entrepreneur so there shouldn't be any excuse for her having to resort to Taglish. Here is an excerpt from a Philippine Star article when she talked during her son's high school graduation "*kasi **you know**, hindi niya siguro **ma-express** na nagseselos siya, pero siyempre may selos na **forever** na lang yung **little brother** niya ang napapansin. So gusto ko lang naman **mag-compensate.***" Got it? It

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only gets worse from there. Read the whole interview and weep. Sorry, Kris, you were the “best” example I could think of after listening to you.

The Philippines has some great writers whose medium is English. There is Quijano de Manila (nom de plume of Nick Joaquin) and my favorite F. Sionil Jose. Jose still writes – in English – at age 87. His work has been translated into 22 languages. Jose should have been awarded the Nobel Prize for literature a long time ago. He has been writing 30 years longer than the 2012 winner Mo Yan of China. Convince me that the Stockholm committee isn’t pandering to the Chinese government to make up for the 2010 Peace Prize brouhaha. There were newspaper correspondents turned columnists like Maximo “Max” Soliven and Teodoro “Teddy” Benigno. In my view, they could write English as well as any American or British writer. Each could handle a third language as well, Teddy in French and Max in Spanish. Both were recipients of prestigious awards from the governments of France and Spain.

When I was growing up, there were popular debates conducted entirely in Tagalog called “*balagtasan*.” It was named after the 19th century Filipino poet named Francisco Balagtas. He is better known as Francisco Baltazar, after having to change his name to conform to a Spanish edict. The catch of the “*balagtasan*” was your arguments had to rhyme. The debaters had to extemporaneously compose poetry while expressing their side or refuting their opponent. You’ll find some YouTube videos of “*balagtasan*” today. So some people or organizations are keeping this tradition alive.

No language is spared when people mix up languages. The French suffer with “*Franglais*.” They even try to pass laws against it. Americans of Hispanic heritage have their “*Spanglish*” or Spanish and English. Some have capitalized on the practice, such as comedian George Lopez. His skit is hilarious; you don’t even have to understand Spanish to appreciate it.

I know what people are going to say, “You don’t live there so why do you care if people speak in Taglish?” As attested to by its writers, public figures and call center technicians, the Filipino can be proficient in languages. My mother never went to college but was a polyglot. She not only spoke Tagalog and English, but some other dialects as well. The ultimate reason then is because we can do better. “*Ok-lang, ha?*”

Mario Orosa
11/6/12