

Tagnish

Some months ago I wrote an essay decrying the prevalence of *Taglish* in the Philippines, especially among younger Filipinos. The subject was treated with humor, but I was being unduly harsh. For one thing, what Filipinos speak today could be more properly called *Tagnish*, another portmanteau, but of Tagalog and Spanish. We can avoid all the English or pseudo-English words we want, but official Pilipino could not exist without Spanish. English words from the internet and smartphone age that have found their use in Pilipino. But Spanish words that are imbedded in Pilipino vastly outnumber English words. Before we proceed further, here's a short primer on terms. Philippines is the country, Filipino or Filipina (slang is Pinoy or Pinay) is the person and Pilipino is the official language dictated by the 1987 constitution.

Jose Villa Panganiban was a noted lexicographer who advocated the development and adaptation of a national language. He served as Director of the Institute of National Language under four presidents. He wrote a book entitled "Spanish Loan-words in the Tagalog Language." He estimated that of the 30,000 Tagalog words in existence, 5,000 were Spanish loan-words. I wonder why he used the word loan, it is a permanent situation.

For a very long time, I always thought that the language we spoke at home was Tagalog, pure and simple. Then when I started taking Spanish classes in high school, I quickly found that a lot of "Tagalog" words were actually Spanish. This may not go over well with purists and nationalists, but Tagalog is a very incomplete language. As a national language, Pilipino is based on Tagalog, which is spoken by people in the provinces surrounding Manila. My father was from Batangas, a Tagalog province. Tagalog is the mother tongue of at least a quarter of Filipinos. In the post WWII era, public schools taught and conducted classes in Tagalog. Thus an overwhelming majority of Filipinos now speak Tagalog/Pilipino. (The other medium of instruction is English, making the Philippines the fifth largest English speaking country, with more English speakers than the UK.) Widespread knowledge of Tagalog wasn't the case early on because of the number of languages spoken throughout the archipelago. There are 185 individual languages in the Philippines. No common language existed and we were sometimes placed in the somewhat awkward position of having to speak English if we wanted to talk to someone from other provinces. In our household, there were at least three or four languages prevailing. My mother was from Zambales, with their *Sambali* language. Our help were a disparate group, speakers of *Pangasinense*, *Cebuano* and *Bikol* from the provinces of Pangasinan, Cebu and Bicol. If Tagalog did not exist, it would have had to be invented. Filipinos should take credit for not getting into a brawl about the creation of Pilipino from Tagalog. Other countries have had serious spats, even riots and wars about language. Look at Belgium and Sri Lanka. Even Canada has bickered on English vs. French.

Let's go back to the contention of Tagalog being an incomplete language. The Oxford English Dictionary or OED, is the keeper of English words. It puts the current total at around 600,000. Another source estimates 175,000 in modern use. Please remember that counting words isn't as simple as it may seem. For example, would a homograph be considered one or two words? Do you count Latin words used by lawyers or fashion words that are French? Are obsolete words ever taken out? OED doesn't. Shakespeare would be pleased. Other estimates place the

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number of English words significantly higher, as many as a million. Whatever the case may be, the number of Tagalog words is dwarfed by English. What about other languages? Here they are in descending order - the estimate for the number of German words is 180,000 with Spanish and French each having 100,000. The Chinese and Japanese reportedly have about 50,000 characters. This places Tagalog, even with the loan-words, at a huge disadvantage. Imagine translating a J.K. Rowling book into Tagalog. Or how about the polysyllabic William Buckley?

Let's look at some of those loan-words for a minute. Except for Sunday, there aren't any Tagalog words for the days of the week. We use the Spanish *Lunes*, *Martes*, *Miercoles*, etc. Only Sunday is different, *linggo* vs. *Domingo*. That sounds close enough that something may have been missed during transliteration. The same is true for the months of the year - Enero, Febrero, Marzo, etc. In almost all cases the spelling of the loan-word is Pilipinized, like *Disyembre* for Diciembre or Marso for Marzo. Nearly every household term is Spanish, from *cuarto* (room), *cama* (bed), *baño* (bathroom) to *vaso* (drinking glass), *cuchara* (spoon), *silla* (chair) and *mesa* (table). The Pilipino spelling would be slightly different. Come to think of it, Villa Panganiban's estimate of 5,000 out of 30,000 sounds a little low.

Villa Panganiban passed away forty years ago, but I wonder what he would suggest to make our beloved Pilipino language well rounded in the age of the internet. How can she survive without sounding silly? Purists be damned, I would say. I'll side with the modernists. Look at English, words are added constantly. The OED publishes a quarterly report on new words and over the course of a year, hundreds or even thousands of words are added. The words may not be elegant but if the use is widespread enough, into the OED it goes. Even texting acronyms are in. OMG, I'm LMAO! That's English. At 30,000 words, Tagalog/Pilipino has a long way to go. Take a lesson from Hebrew. For centuries it was rarely used. With the emergence of Israel, Hebrew was revived and modernized. Let us be more neologistic. And how do you say that in Pilipino? I would love to be a part of the team producing a KDP or *Kumpletong Diksiyunaryong Pilipino*. It is a lifetime job. After all, OED has been working on English since the late 19th century.

Mabuhay ang Pilipino!

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