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AN ANALYZIS OF THE FILIPINO-ENGLISH DIGLOSSIA THROUGH SOCIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF LANGUAGES

Théry Béord
Université La Sorbonne-Nouvelle, Paris 3, ED268 DILTEC EA2288
&
Universiti Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia France Institute
thery.beord@laposte.net & thery@unikl.edu.my

We propose in this article to analyze the linguistic representations associated with the two official languages of the Philippines: Filipino and English –both at the heart of the educational system. Referring to the systems of values and affects attached to languages, the concept of linguistic representation – or social representations of languages – has been adopted by sociolinguists and educational specialists in so far as it plays a key role in the process of identity construction as well as in the transmission of language. A collective interview organized in one of the most prominent university in Manila has allowed us to bring forward the social representations of Filipino and English among students before measuring their respective importance through the administration of a questionnaire. The study of these representations among socially privileged Filipino will bring us to question the language configuration and more specifically the place of English in the social structure of this former US colony marked by the permanency of extreme social inequalities. We will see that the medium of instruction and its representations are a tool to analyze neocolonial issues.

Keywords: *Linguistic representation, diglossia, historical forgetting, neo-colonialism, English in the Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

Since its introduction as the sole language of education by the US President McKinley in 1900, English has remained pre-eminent in the Philippines. At the core of the assimilation, the implementation of a school system patterned on the American model was also the occasion to rally the local elite. Reversely, the latter found an opportunity to back up its privileged position after the changeover of power which saw the Spanish Crown leave the archipelago more than three centuries after Magellan first landed (Tupas, 2008). Thereafter, the language of instruction has represented a major political issue especially since the independence gained in 1946. It has consistently crystallized the opposition between nationalists and advocates of neoliberalism. If one were to summarize the evolution of the language policy in education throughout the 20th century, one could argue that the Philippines have moved on from a monolingual system under the American colonial occupation to a bilingual system that associates the Filipino language to English, and recently to a multilingual system that provides space for regional languages at the beginning of education. Along with the promotion of Filipino to unify the archipelago, English has shift from the position of first to second language. Whether it will now shift from a second to a foreign language remains to be seen (Gonzales, 1994). Indeed, the nation-building is challenged since the 1970's by a major evolution: the implementation of a labour export program by the State to tackle unemployment (Hau, 2005). The expanding of economic globalization at the turn of the century has enshrined the transnational labour flows as well as the dependence to the remittances of Oversea Filipino Workers (OFW). The latter have been described by the former President Corry Aquino as "the new heroes". Together with the inflation of the Philippine diaspora that reaches currently 10 million Filipinos, the surge of the Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) has made it necessary to maintain and develop the mastery of English. The coexistence of Filipino and English in the educational system for different agendas raises questions. Such bilingualism can be analysed in terms of diglossia which means that they may compete or conflict with each other. Values assigned to them are most likely to vary in nature and in importance or even to establish a hierarchy. The task we have set ourselves consists in measuring how these languages

are perceived by students and determining the functions, affects or values attributed to each. In order to bring forward such linguistic representations we have organized a collective interview with students coming from one of the university that trains the elite of the country. The results discussed in this paper concern therefore the upper part of the Philippine society which belongs to the Tagalog ethnic coming from the capital and its region.

Literature review

The notion of linguistic representation reached linguistics in the late 1990's when its role in language appropriation and transmission was acknowledged (Matthey, 2000, Moore, 2001). Since then it has often been utilized in the Francophone area to analyse situations of diglossia, namely cases of conflicting coexistence of languages, either in a postcolonial context (see Maurer, 2013, for a recent example) either in the context of regionalism in Europe (see Lafont, 2000, for the Occitan-Catalan school). Diglossia differs from a theoretic neutral bilingualism in the sense that it describes the linguistic configurations in dynamic terms, entailing an unequal distribution between a dominating language and a dominated one – where the former is in the process of absorbing the latter. The functions, prestige or images associated to the languages in presence structure a system of positive or negative values and thus determine a hierarchy which in turn induce the transmission or substitution of these languages (*ibid*). Thus, the paradigm of linguistic representations constitutes a mean to identify the process of diglossia, its dynamics and, more acutely, its structuring ideology (*ibid*).

METHODOLOGY

The modus operandi of our work can be described as follow: a collective interview with some twenty students recorded and transcribed, the preparation of a questionnaire based on the interview, the submitting of a questionnaire to another group of thirty-four students in the same university and the analysis of the results. The survey took place in one of the most prestigious universities in the country with students practicing both Filipino and English. As a first step, the group of students has been invited to express its views on these languages through two simple and neutral questions: "what do you think of English? What do you think of Filipino language?" The interview has been transcribed in its entirety. From this discourse the representations of languages has been identified, sorted and condensed with full respect for the student's formulations. Based on this, questionnaires have been prepared for each language, consisting of twenty propositions synthetizing the respondent's representations. They have been presented under the form of a twenty items-table, with a blank cell at the end of each line. Three days after the collective interview the questionnaires have been submitted to evaluation to another group. After inviting students to read and ensuring that they understand the items, we have asked them:

-to grade +2 the four propositions best suited to evoke the language
-then to grade -2 the four propositions which evoke the least the language
-to grade +1 the four propositions which evoke rather well the language
-to grade -1 the four propositions which evoke poorly the language
-to grade 0 the four remaining propositions which have been neither rejected nor selected

From this evaluation one can measure the importance of the selected representations among the group in terms of adherence or rejection of the item. Indeed a calculation the results' average reveals the adherence to the item, with a maximum of +2 (case where all respondents graded +2 an item) and a minimum of -2 (case where all respondents graded -2 an item).

FINDINGS

The results of the survey can be presented under the form of two tables where the representations are ranked in descending order.

Table 1. Linguistic representations of the Filipino language

Representation of the language	adherence score
(1) Filipino language contributes to the prospect of the national identity or national consciousness	1.64
(2) Filipino is a really rich language	0.94
(3) Filipino language is connecting us with the history of the Philippines	0.82
(4) Filipino language is a connection to the Filipinos	0.79
(5) Filipino language is poetic	0.45
(6) Filipino is the language of Filipinos	0.42
(7) Filipino is a mixture of many of the languages of the Philippines	0.3
(8) Filipino language fits the best to Filipino culture	0.24
(9) Filipino is heavily based in Tagalog	0.21
(10) In the Philippines, Filipino language is useful when you travel in the provinces	0.18
(11) It's easier to speak in Filipino with the maid or the driver	-0.18
(12) New generations don't really know Filipino language	-0.24
(13) Filipinos tend to forget their national language	-0.42
(14) You cannot find all words to express yourself in Filipino	-0.48
(15) Filipino language makes you feel special or unique	-0.52
(16) If you can convey your thoughts in Filipino it shows how educated you are	-0.52
(17) Filipino language is hard	-0.61
(18) It easier to speak Filipino with the family	-0.76
(19) It irritates me that Filipino is a forbidden language at school	-1
(20) Many words in Filipino are outdated	-1.27

Table 2. Linguistic representations of the English language

Representation of the language	adherence score
(a) English is a bridge to communicate with other nationalities	1.74
(b) English is the teaching language used in school and in university	1.21
(c) In the Philippines, English is mostly spoken in the urban developed cities	1.18
(d) In the Philippines, if you are fluent in English, people look at you differently	1.15
(e) We are surrounded by English language everywhere we go	0.79
(f) It is easier to read and write in English	0.79
(g) English is a language of convenience	0.68
(h) To be a good English speaker shows that you have a good academic background	0.47
(i) In the Philippines, to be a good English speaker shows that you belong to the higher social class	0.29
(j) In the Philippines, when you are fluent in English, people believe that you have a superiority complex	-0.03
(k) English threatens the maintenance of the Filipino identity	-0.12
(l) We are forced to place English on a higher pedestal	-0.47
(m) English doesn't really give you a root	-0.62
(n) English is a common means of communicating within the linguistic groups of the archipelago	-0.76
(o) English is a language we are forced to talk starting high school	-0.91
(p) To be a good English speaker shows that you are rich	-0.94
(q) To be forced to learn English makes it harder to like it	-0.97
(r) English fits English the best, Filipino fits Filipinos the best	-1.06
(s) English is the ultimate language	-1.09
(t) English is difficult to learn	-1.26

As one can observe in the figures above Filipino and English are hierarchically organized and dominated by a single representation supported by three closer elements. With the acceptance of Filipino as the

uncontested symbol of nationhood (1), it is the integrative function of the language that is highlighted. Being a relatively recent nation-state confronted with a multidimensional fragmentation, this dimension is a significant indicator of the existence of a national awareness. It means that the ethno-linguistic divisions of the country (about 200 languages and dialects) as well as its geographic dispersal (7107 islands) are overcome by the national language which plays well its role of interethnic communication (4). On the other hand it endorses a mythic role by connecting the people with the past of the archipelago's history (3). This is marked by over three centuries of Spanish colonization followed by half a century of American one. One can note however that putting into words the national consciousness is done very prudently. The formulation proposed in the questionnaire, taken from the interview, indicates indeed the ongoing process of the national identity construction described as being in a phase of "prospect". The language is appreciated for its richness (2) and its beauty (5) at the same time as its putative image of outdatedness is unequivocally rejected (20). Filipino language is the subject of an emotional investment reinforced by its proximity with Tagalog language (9) which is widely spoken in the capital and its region.

By contrast, English appears clearly as an instrumental language as it is at once the language of communication with abroad (a) and the medium of education (b). But whereas English finds its roots in the American colonial period, the issue of its colonial features doesn't emerge during the interview. No reference is made to the imported or foreign nature of this language in the country: the American linguistic bequest, it seems, remains unspoken, nested in the limbs of the collective sub-conscious. Yet, should we analyse this oversight as a mark of acclimatisation or appropriation? The clear reject of the cognition stating that "English doesn't really give you a root" tends to prove it as well as the image of a language "easy to read and write" (f). But if we are to believe the French sociologist Bourdieu (1990) the forgetting of colonial configuration is in fact a political imperative structuring the society and revealing its social inequities. Theorizing what he calls "symbolic violence", Bourdieu describes how historical forgetting, as misrecognition, represents a practice of symbolic violence that imposes legitimate significations covering up underpinned power relationships (1970). Eventually it allows the institutionalisation of a power that remains unknown. Bourdieu states that "forgetting prevents us from drawing connections between past and present conditions. It also prevents us from historicizing the present" (Bourdieu, 1990). As such the forgetting could appear as a strategy to maintain social structures favourable to the dominant classes with the implicit consent of the dominated classes. If the place of English in Philippines history is not debated by our group of students it is by far a major issue among Philippine scholars most specifically in the post-colonial context. Among them, Tupas (2008) has identified the politics of forgetting as a "national problem" in the archipelago. In this way historical misrecognition would be at the basis of the social inequalities and English the "last bastion of soporific colonialism" (*ibid*).

The role of social divider of English arises indeed strongly in the interview to such an extent that we have identified five cognitions which refers to varying degrees to the social status conferred by English (d, h, I, j, p). Two of them are formulated so that they are criticizing the role of English in the society. In addition to the afore-mentioned refusal to reject English as "a root", students also disapproved the cognition according which they "are forced to place English on a higher pedestal" (l). Given that we have highlighted the great number of cognitions putting forward the feeling of superiority attached to English, the question might be asked whether this pressure does not exist or whether our respondents are not exposed to it because of their social origin. The fact that they recognize leaving in an Anglophone environment where they are "surrounded by English language everywhere [they] go" seems to be indeed an indicator of their position in society. Be that as it may, the student's rejection of these criticisms towards English shows their acceptation of the language and even more their refusal to challenge its pre-eminent position.

CONCLUSIONS

Although it has long been marginal Filipino appears as the undisputed language of the nation in the group of students. It is considered as an element facilitating the unification of the country despite a

multidimensional fragmentation. In addition to performing mythical and symbolic functions Filipino is able to ensure the intertribal communication. It would be relevant to extend this kind of survey to other provinces of the archipelago to confront the adherence to the national language in the capital to more local forms of identity anchored in an ethnical frame and in a regional language. On the other hand the linguistic representations of English give us a glimpse of the social gap that undermines the foundation of the Philippines. Much more importantly, it shows that English has a class dimension in a society where social inequalities are extreme. For these students enrolled in the university of the political and economical elite, English is the language of daily environment. The survey shows their uncritical acceptance of English and more precisely the absence of aware link with the American imperialism. English appears neither as a foreign language neither as a sign of the continuous hegemony of the USA in the country until our time. The historical forgetting seems to legitimize the maintenance of English and through it the neo-colonial social structures. Thus, the Anglophone environment in which the elite live perpetuates an economical advantage by endowing the language with a social prestige. Here again it would be valuable to compare the representation of English of this group with representations of lower part of the society leaving in a non-Anglophone context.

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