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English in the Philippines from the Perspective of Linguistic Imperialism

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Abstract

This essay analyses English linguistic imperialism (Phillipson, 1992, 46) in the Philippines and identifies the features of linguistic neo-imperialism in the current era. The study rethinks and investigates how English linguistic imperialism plays a dual role in promoting and destroying the Filipino linguistic ecology. The present situation of English imperialism analyzed in this essay shows that the new stage of English linguistic imperialism embodies language hegemony mainly driven by political influence and business interests. At present, English linguistic neo-imperialism is not confined within post-colonial territories but maintains and expands both the language's positive and negative influences as the world's lingua franca. The authors also discuss the Filipino ownership of English and whether linguistic imperialism is entirely applicable to the Philippine context. Evidence shows that the continuing use of English, to a great extent, is Filipinos' choice, not only for the benefit of the United States.

Keywords: English linguistic imperialism, neo-imperialism, the Philippines

Introduction

In the book *linguistic imperialism*, Robert Phillipson (1992, 17-31) discusses how and why English dominates internationally. He defines English linguistic imperialism as "the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages" (Phillipson, 1992, 47). He also claims that linguistic imperialism interweaves with an imperialistic structure in culture, education, social media, communications, economy, politics, and military activities. Essentially, it contains the exploitation, injustice, inequality, and hierarchical use of the dominant language (Phillipson, 2012a, 17). Unlike Spolsky's position that English spreads in the world as an incidental result of colonization and globalization (Spolsky, 2004, 49), Phillipson posits that the role and spread of English in the "core English-speaking countries" and the "periphery-English countries" (1992, 17). He perceives that because the Anglo-American power strategy planned to promote the English language and the benefits in the periphery-English countries and regions, English became hegemonic over and marginalized other languages, thus constituting structural and cultural inequalities between them (Phillipson, 2009, 155).

The further withdrawal of American colonial power from the Philippines has questioned whether English linguistic imperialism still exists. In the view of Sibayan and Gonzalez, English

linguistic imperialism is “a thing of the past” in the Philippines, as it is a characteristic of the colonial period, and Phillipson’s quoted statements about the Philippines are insignificant and biased (Sibayan & Gonzalez, 1996, 165). However, Tupas (2003, 20) holds that through remembering “English linguistic imperialism is not yet a thing of the past,” a way for addressing educational unevenness and the imbalance of cultural practice can be paved in the Philippines. Moreover, the “inequalities of Englishes are embedded in practices and conditions of coloniality today” (Tupas, 2019, 538). When commenting on linguistic neo-imperialism, Phillipson warns that (2012b, 13) “linguistic imperialism is alive and kicking,” and English linguistic neo-imperialism is a sort of language hegemony maintenance motivated primarily by political and commercial concerns. Linguistic imperialism is no longer bound within colonial territories in the current era of globalization, but it has maintained and grown its global effect as the world’s lingua franca. Meanwhile, scholars have discussed the evolution of English in the Philippines and Filipino ownership of this language, using Schneider’s dynamic model (Schneider, 2003) or Gonzales’s theory of Philippine Englishes (Gonzales, 2017). It is, therefore, worth discussing whether linguistic imperialism is entirely applicable to the Philippine context.

In this article, the authors first state the background of English linguistic imperialism in the Philippines. Secondly, the authors comment on linguistic imperialism’s positive and negative influences and identify linguistic neo-imperialism in the Philippine context. At last, the authors discuss the evolution of English in the Philippines and whether English linguistic imperialism is utterly applicable to the Philippine situation.

English linguistic imperialism in the Philippines:: A Historical Overview

Linguistic imperialism has long existed in the Philippines and exerted a lasting influence on its politics, economy, culture, and education. From the 16th to the 20th century, the Philippines was under the colonial rule of Spain and then the United States, and its own culture was powerfully impacted and influenced by linguistic imperialism (Chen, 2011, 70).

Based on Galtung’s theory of cultural imperialism (1980, 128), Phillipson (1992, 52-53) divides the development of linguistic imperialism into three phases (described by Lai, 2019):

- “1) imposition of colonizers of their language and power;
- 2) nurturing a group of local elites and a privileged class, proficient in the colonizer’s language, acting as agents to perpetuate the system in the interest of the colonizer;
- 3) ideological persuasion through the use of media and technology. ” (Lai, 2019, 399)

English linguistic imperialism evolved in the Philippines along the same path. Ever since the United States defeated Spain and took over the sovereignty of the Philippines, schools were set up in the name of “civilizing” to set up a free public primary American education system. In 1901, the United States colonial authority issued Act No. 74 and established the bureau of public education to enhance the free education system (The texts and teachers were all from the United States, and the teachers employed English as the medium of instruction.) (Li, 2011, 759). From then on, English became the most crucial language and the official language of the government departments at that time. Most legal provisions, notes, and government administration records

were in English. It was the first time the government implemented a language education scheme in the Philippines. The history of language policy during the United States' reign in the Philippines can be summarized as expanding English while limiting other languages' usage on the islands.

Seen from the synchronic dimension of the Spanish and American colonization of the Philippines, the language policies adopted by the two colonial powers both reflected the essence of linguistic imperialism (Chen, 2011, 72). Different from Spanish colonial authorities' polarizing language policy, which limited and prohibited ordinary locals to speak Spanish, American colonial rule, adopted a different means of conquest. The United States took a more cautious approach to strengthen the colonial rule of the Philippines, and linguistic imperialism was one of the means. Being aware of the drawbacks of the polarized language policy of the Spanish colonial authorities, American colonizers adopted a relatively "benevolent assimilation" policy to promote American English and culture in phase 1 of linguistic imperialism. Protestant missionaries, American English teachers, and trained Filipino English teachers played a vital role in promoting and popularizing English. The American colonial government believed it was necessary to inculcate American language and culture to carry out colonial rule, religious beliefs, ideologies, and values in the Philippines to cultivate Filipinos who identify with American culture (Chen, 2011, 73). The popularization and promotion of English education in the Philippines proved to be an essential tool for ensuring the smooth implementation of American colonial rule.

Phases 2 and 3 of English linguistic imperialism went quite well in the Philippines due to the language and culture assimilation policy carefully designed by the American colonizer and the inevitable result of the advancement of the economic value of the English language. According to linguistic economics theory, language itself has no value, but the economic value can be reflected when a specific language is used to acquire knowledge and skills or if combined with other knowledge and skills to meet the market demand (Zhou et al., 2015, 128). During the first 35 years of the 20th century, Filipinos gradually found that English played a better role as a "socioeconomic equalizer" (Sibayan & Gonzalez, 1996, 140) compared to other indigenous languages. Children from low-income families learned English in public schools to acquire the main nationwide civil service jobs as teachers and clerks, and many of them indeed won economic and political status thus became part of the social elite. In order to assist the implantation of English, the American colonial government established the system of studying abroad at public expense to make these Filipino students return to serve the colonial administration after studying in the United States. Pennycook (1995, 40) states that the small English-speaking elites in many previous colonies of the U.K. continued the same former colonizers' policies and used access to English as a vital social prestige and wealth distributor. Similarly, in the Philippines, English served as a stepping stone to achievement and as a gatekeeper to university education, better job opportunities, socioeconomic status, and positions after the political handover.

Even after acquiring independence in 1946, the forces of phases 2 and 3 of English linguistic imperialism remained prevalent because English remained the most important language of instruction and a ladder to higher socioeconomic status, and the language conveyed American ideology and values through media and technology like newspapers, books, T.V. programs, and radio broadcasting. However, many insightful Filipinos had always been keenly aware of American assimilation policies and recognized the importance of protecting national languages and culture.

As the domestic nationalist movement continued to heat up, the government began to attach importance to the cultivation of national consciousness and focused on strengthening the promotion and popularization of the Filipino language. Since 1957, the Philippine educational departments of government, even the president, have issued a series of language education policies. Those language policies can be summarized and divided into four stages:

- 1) "promoting and popularizing Filipino to enhance the national image and cohesion" stage (1957-1978);
- 2) "implementing bilingual education with equal emphasis on Filipino and English" stage (1978-2006);
- 3) "ensuring superiority of English to promote the economic and social development of the Philippines" stage (2006-2012);
- 4) "preserving the native national language to inherit culture and promote social harmony" stage (2012-); (Zhang & Fan, 2013, 357-358)

In 2009, "Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education" (MTB-MLE) was institutionalized through "DepED Order No. 74", and the "Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013" was signed by President Aquino III (Tupas & Martin, 2016, 2). These policies include the regional mother tongue as a curriculum in the primary education system, emphasizing the importance and necessity of local indigenous dialects. They also show the Philippine government's willingness to listen to the call for seeking common ground while shelving differences, mutual respect, and joint development in today's world. They also indicate that the language education policy in the Philippines is becoming mature and stable.

The influence of English linguistic imperialism in the Philippine context

Throughout American colonial rule in the Philippines, the United States always carried out their language policy of emphasizing only English based on the popularization of education, making English become the leading language of communication among people with different dialects in the Philippines quickly. Therefore, during the reign of the United States in the Philippines, English was the primary official language and the teaching language in elementary schools and the first universal and popularized language. From the fact that English used to be and has always been the official language and the essential medium of teaching on the islands, we can see how significant English is in the Philippines.

In terms of positive effects, the prevalence of English in the Philippines ended the Philippines' long history of having no common language. As the Philippines has more than 7,100 islands with more than 100 ethnic languages (Zhou et al., 2015, 1), geographical location and transportation restrictions prevent people from all parts of the Philippines from communicating with each other. Although, to some extent, the historical situation of multiple languages and dialects in the Philippines without a national language had ended, with English as the lingua franca, the Philippines had rapidly integrated into the international mainstream society. English closely connects the Philippines and the United States as its ally, connects the Philippines with the whole world, and maintains a linguistic advantage over other peripheral countries.

With the pervasive impact of the American English-only education system and its impact on life and culture in the Philippines during and after the colonial era, people view the introduction and implementation of the system as the “greatest contribution” of American colonialism to the Philippines (Casambre, 1982, 7). The American education system has provided opportunities for upward mobility in colonial, postcolonial, and even today’s Filipino society. English education is favored by many Filipinos at all levels, not only as an opportunity for the poor to acquire jobs in civil service but also as a necessary language skill for the middle class to become the social elites and as an essential tool for the ruling class to safeguard their vested interests. English may be loved or hated by Filipinos of different groups. However, it is necessary to admit that English’s magic is that many Filipinos can get a decent job more quickly after receiving an American English education or entering the upper class after returning from studying in America.

The tremendous economic value of the English language may weaken people’s resistance to linguistic imperialism. The good English-speaking environment in the Philippines has attracted many international organizations and multinational companies, and the “English language advantage” has become a vital driving force to attract foreign investment and promote the economic development of the Philippines (Zhang & Fan, 2013, 359). Philippine FDI hit USD 4.996 billion in 2019, according to the World Investment Report 2020 (UNCTAD, 2020, 239). The English-speaking environment undoubtedly plays a significant role in attracting these foreign investments. Another economic value of English to the Philippines is that it has made its “Modern Day Heroes”-overseas Filipino workers (O.F.W.s). They speak fluent English, travel to more than 160 countries and regions worldwide, and have created many foreign currency remittances for the Philippines. Their competitiveness in employment is a typical example of the economic value of the English language. The income of O.F.W.s abroad has become one of the primary sources of economic growth in the Philippines, which is, to some extent, can be viewed as one of the positive effects of English linguistic imperialism.

Regarding the adverse impacts, Song (2008, 48-58) deems that English linguistic imperialism somewhat hindered the emergence of the Filipino national language and the development of national culture during the colonial rule period. American-style architecture, universities, schools, theaters, shops, hotels, and houses emerged. Swing dancing, American movies, and jazz were all the rage. Zhou (2015, 47) claims that the American lifestyle and popular culture hampered the growth of Filipino national culture, resulting in the country’s literature, movies, music, and dance gradually dwindling. It may be unfair to blame all obstacles to developing the Philippine national language and culture on the American lifestyle and cultural invasion. At that time, as the American lifestyle represented the world’s popular culture, it is not surprising that many Filipinos chose and favored it. Government language policy and measures to improve national cultural protection are frequently more significant than other factors. The language policy’s history in the Philippines under American rule expanded English and imposed restrictions on other languages. On the other hand, the American colonizer vigorously promoted the spread of Protestantism in the Philippines. The Philippines progressively internalized and accepted American ideology and values due to this gentle approach mixed with strict language control.

The Philippines gained independence from the United States on July 4th, 1946. Nevertheless, English imperialism did not fade with the English-only policies withering away. Because of the

global influence of English, in the post-independence period, Filipinos were still willing to learn the language in that American education has cultivated so many American-minded Filipinos and created their unique linguistic advantage. Nationalists, on the other hand, maintained that English had made Filipinos lose their language and culture so that they had failed to safeguard their linguistic and cultural heritage. The result was that the Filipinos, who gradually got used to using English, had produced “instrumental and sentimental attachments” (Chen, 2011, 72) to the language.

When commenting on post-imperial English, Sibayan & Gonzalez (1996, 164) remark that “political liberation does not necessarily mean economic liberation.” The statement indicates the close ties between the colonizers and the colonized countries in the post-independence period. Since independence, the constantly-changing language education policies in the Philippines reflected the determination and ability to get rid of the shadow of colonial rule and enhance the consciousness of national sovereignty after independence. They reflected the dilemma when the Philippine government dealt with the conflicts in promoting socio-economic development and protecting ethnic languages and cultures while also showing the Philippines’ tolerant and open multicultural attitude. Due to the government’s bilingualism policy in Filipino and English, local minorities were more inclined to study these two languages for social and economic reasons (David et al., 2009, 173), influencing the development and survival of other minority languages in the Philippines to a certain degree. Partly because of English linguistic imperialism, the endangerment and extinction of languages have become an urgent and realistic problem faced by contemporary society. In many socioeconomic activities in the Philippines, compared with English, the value of Filipino is relatively lower, let alone the minority languages of other islands. The economic reasons still have a massive impact on today’s world. As an essential influencing factor, English linguistic imperialism promotes the status quo of English as a *lingua franca*. The language’s tremendous economic and communicative value affects people’s language choice, which may not be conducive to the protection and development of minority languages.

English linguistic neo-imperialism in the Philippines

It is tough to describe the current status of English in the Philippines given such a complex sociolinguistic situation. Compared with the colonists’ predatory rule over the people in the occupied areas through land occupation, cultural infiltration, and assimilation in the era of colonialism, neocolonialism is more subtle in contemporary society, particularly in overseas education and media influence.

Up to now, English education may still be been an essential part of the American overseas colonization. Therefore, as one of the recipients of English education, the Philippines inevitably face the challenge of resisting linguistic imperialism, though it may be an arduous mission to accomplish. With the acceleration of globalization in the new era, English has become the world’s *lingua franca*, posing a threat to the world’s multilingual ecology, with many national languages on the verge of extinction. Human experience, history, identity, desires, and aspirations are all expressed by languages. The world’s rich cultural diversity will gradually fade away if the languages embody local culture and identity disappear. Many governments have advocated for

multilingual policies to handle this new challenge as people become more conscious of the interdependence of biodiversity, cultural diversity, and linguistic diversity. In 2007, UNESCO launched the "Linguistic Diversity" Strategy, which aims to encourage, defend, and preserve linguistic and cultural diversity worldwide (Zhou et al., 2015, 149). Influenced by the international environment, the language education policy of the Philippines is moving towards openness. In 2009, DepED Order No. 74 prioritized strengthening mother tongue-based multilingual education and enhancing Filipino and other languages like English and Spanish (DepED, 2009). However, due to English's influential international role and status, people are more inclined to learn it well, and the future of learning Filipino is in doubt. In the new century, the languages of the Philippines are facing a new pattern. Sugbo (2003, 6) points out that even with the help of legislation, the national language Filipino has been elevated to secondary status and has not successfully replaced English in the controlling domains.

After the Second World War, the old imperialist countries gradually declined, and the former colonial countries gained independence one after another. As an emerging superpower after the war, the United States had achieved its global influence through the advantages of various aspects. The existing world order and the great economic and military power of the United States made it possible to sustain and expand English influence in these countries. At present, as the most powerful nation in the world, the United States still influences the policies and cultures of the Philippines and other countries by exerting its influence. The global spread of English has benefited from the policy support of language promotion programs in the core English-speaking countries, which exports the language as a cultural product to enhance national competitiveness. Phillipson (2009, 93) perceives that linguistic imperialism has not ended in the current era but has progressed to a new phase. The language policy of neo-imperialism maintains English hegemony driven by commercial interests, aiming to maintain The United Kingdom and the United States' tremendous economic benefits through language inequality and English superiority. One means of linguistic neo-imperialism is that governmental organizations, non-governmental organizations, and academic institutions play an increasingly essential role in promoting English (Phillipson, 2011, 442). The British Council, for example, has been committed to encouraging the use of English around the world since the 1930s. It now provides consulting services to more than a hundred countries (Du, 2015, 62) and is involved in English teaching and testing, from which it generated three-quarters of its revenue. In the annual report of the British Council, its overall revenue has increased to £1,250 million, owing to a sound output from its operations in English teaching and examinations, and higher income from contract work, and a rise in grant-in-aid income from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (British Council, 2019, 80).

Another example is the Education Testing Service (E.T.S.) of America, the largest private educational testing and evaluation company globally. It creates, administers, and scores over 50 million tests per year in over 180 countries and at over 9,000 locations, including the TOEFL, TOEIC, GRE, and Praxis. TESOL and TEFL have also generated substantial economic benefits from providing English teachers, teaching resources, relevant training, and tests (Du, 2015, 63). A careful examination of the function of organizations in the globalization of English reveals that during the neo-imperialist period, the fundamental motivating factor for global expansion and growth was commercial interests, and the practitioners were diverse. N.G.O.s, businesses, and institutes of higher learning have become a significant power in promoting English. However, there is a

monolingual ideology behind their English promotion, and the expansion often brings disastrous consequences to the development of the indigenous language.

Linguistic imperialism or voluntary choice? Evolution of English in the Philippines

Although the authors reveal the prevalence of linguistic imperialism and its influence in the Philippine context, it is also essential to understand the evolution of English in this country to gain a complete picture of Filipino attitudes towards English to figure out whether the spread of English is caused by linguistic imperialism or the voluntary choice of Filipinos.

Through colonialism, English was introduced and transported to the Philippines with the American colonial expansion since 1898. In terms of the stages of evolution of English in the Philippines, Sibayan and Gonzalez (1996, 139) divide the history of English in the Philippines into two stages: imperial English (1898-1946) and post-imperial English (1946-1995), mainly by the time when the Philippines achieved independence. Schneider (2003, 2007) put forward a dynamic model of the evolution of postcolonial English and divides the evolution of new Englishes into five stages: foundation, exonormative stabilization, nativization, endonormative stabilization, and differentiation. He asserts that Philippine English (PhE) has reached stage 3, or nativization, and maybe is approaching stage 4, or endonormative stabilization because signs foreshadowing codification in stage 4 can be spotted through the language policies promoting a national language seemed to be limiting it (Schneider, 2007, 143). Martin (2014, 70) reinforces Schneider's stand that PhE is fossilized in stage 3 by noting the Filipinos' disregard for PhE as a means of identification compared to Singapore English, and PhE has not progressed past nativization.

Borlongan (2016, 232) firstly proposes that PhE be relocated in the dynamic model. He argues that PhE has already entered phase 4, namely endonormative stabilization (2016, 238), now widely accepted. He also claims that event X occurs and that the Philippines has already established its English language policies without external control (Gonzales, 2017, 80). He describes the evolution of English in the Philippines according to Schneider's dynamic model and divides it into five stages: foundation (1898-1901), exonormative stabilization (1901-1935), nativization (1935-1946?), endonormative stabilization (1946?-present?/1987?), differentiation (1986?-present?) (Borlongan, 2019, 2-12). Borlongan (2019, 11) claims that with the ongoing development of PhE, the Philippines has become one of the most prominent and influential English-using societies with the nativized English, which it can embrace as really its own.

In a further study of PhE under Schneider's dynamic model framework, Gonzales (2017, 82-92) summarizes the subvarieties of English in the Philippines and proposes the notion of Philippine "Englishes." He claims that the emergence of the Philippine Englishes model suggests that PhE is approaching stage 5, or differentiation, and the dialect birth would bring PhE to the final stage of Schneider's dynamic model (Gonzales, 2017, 92). He also mentions another main parameter of stage 5 -the formation of ethnic identities in communities and an attitude survey conducted by Borlongan in 2009 and concludes that all the arguments propel PhE beyond stage 4. Meanwhile, Gonzales admits the notion of Philippine "Englishes" is a theory that needs to be testified in further studies to get it validated (Gonzales, 2017, 93).

Martin (2020, 479) further studies the dialect birth in PhE and claims that the spread of English is promoted by a public education system composed of young American teachers. However, these teachers' American English varieties collided with a variety of Philippine languages, resulting in the Philippines' nativization and indigenization of English. She refers to the varieties as "Pinoylish"-Philippine Englishes in constant flux, which echoes Gonzales's Philippine Englishes theory. She also points out that most studies and policies focus on the nativized variety, namely "standard" or "educated" PhE while neglecting other varieties used by multilingual Filipinos in various contexts. She also points out that local languages and their speakers are marginalized due to the overemphasis on English policies and practices (Martin, 2020, 496).

Whether Schneider's dynamic model is used to describe the evolution of English in the Philippines, or Gonzales's theory is used to describe the various varieties of PhE, one fact that cannot be ignored is that use of the English language for over 120 years has resulted in a scenario of dynamic, energetic, and everyday use of English in the multilingual and linguistically varied Philippines (Martin, 2020, 495). Gemino Abad (1997, 170) says, "English is now ours. We have colonized it too." The prominent poet's bold statement may shed light on Filipino's current attitude towards English. Up to now, We may be able to answer the previous question: Is English widespread in the Philippines due to linguistic imperialism or the voluntary choice of Filipinos? The latter may hold more weight.

Conclusion

So far, the influence of English linguistic imperialism on the Philippines has been enormous and profound. The era of explicit colonization may be over, but the impact has not entirely disappeared. Phillipson warns that (2012b, 13) "linguistic imperialism is alive and kicking." Compared with the linguistic imperialism carried by coercive language policies in the past, the present English imperialism is more recessive in its influence in the former colonial countries and maintains the superior position of the Anglo-American language. As American colonial power has retreated from the Philippines, scholars have debated whether English linguistic imperialism remains in the Philippines; they even questioned Phillipson's linguistic imperialism framework (Lai, 2019, 398). The more implicit linguistic neo-imperialism still prevails in periphery-English countries, including the Philippines, while it exerts enormous influence no longer as a colonial language but as a form of the world's lingua franca. An unequal hierarchical order between languages still seems to exist.

However, the widespread English in the Philippines and the emergence of Philippine Englishes also remind us to think about the Filipinos' ownership of English and whether English linguistic imperialism is entirely applicable to the Philippine situation. The attitude of Filipinos to English linguistic imperialism has changed dramatically in this century. When it comes to neo-imperial English in the Philippines, it is no longer possible for the language to dominate Filipinos' life, and its dominance was solely due to supply and demand. Filipinos are also using English to study and work to achieve scientific and technological progress, cultural prosperity, and social development by enjoying the benefits of English. Throughout history, prosperity and openness mutually influenced one another. Filipinos are proficient in English and better understand Western

civilization, but it does not mean they will accept everything from inner circles. Filipinos use English to express their cultural charm rather than trying to imitate American cultural features. On the contrary, through understanding and communication, they have broadened their horizons, absorbed the essence of English-speaking civilization, and sublated the elements of traditional culture that are not suitable for modern society. These measures will surely be more conducive to the progress and inheritance of the Philippine civilization.

Whether or not we should regard the expansion of English in the world as linguistic imperialism, overemphasis on learning English and overstating the role of English in globalization and business should not be advocated. For peripheral countries like the Philippines, English--the love-hate "hydra"(Bunce et al., 2016, 1) that can provide people powerful magic to communicate with the world and erode the rights of their languages. While using and benefiting from English, periphery-English countries should equally prioritize safeguarding native language rights, and a wise choice is to note the delicate relationship and keep a good balance between the two. Thus, preserving the diversity of national languages is of paramount importance, while acknowledging that English weighs heavily in establishing connections with other cultures.

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