

# BALANGHAY

The  
Philippine  
Factsheet

A publication of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts



## The Filipino Language

The national language of the Philippines is called Filipino. It is based on Manila Tagalog.

The Philippines is made up of many ethnic groups and has many indigenous languages, all belonging to the Austronesian family of languages. The Philippine government wished for one language to be the basis of the country's official and national language, which can unite the whole country. And it chose Tagalog, one of the major languages of the country and the language of the capital city. It also has the most extensively written literature in 1935, when this language was made the basis for Filipino, the name of the national language. Filipino is expected to evolve with contributions from other Philippine and foreign languages.

The renaming of Tagalog to Filipino is for national and international use and intent, just like how Castilian, one of the languages of Spain, became known as Spanish all over the world as the national language of Spain.

Filipino serves as the current lingua franca for the entire country. A lingua franca is the language used by two persons who use different languages to understand and communicate with each other. Particular Philippine regions have their own lingua franca. In northern Luzon, for example, it is Ilocano; while in Central Visayas and certain parts of Mindanao, it is Cebuano.

Typically, a Filipino, particularly if he's from the regions, can speak the language of his ethnic group as well as the regional lingua franca. If he is well exposed, he can speak as well the national lingua franca and English. For example, an Ifugao in the Cordillera Region of northern Luzon can speak an Ifugao language.

He may be able to speak Ilocano, the regional lingua franca, which he uses to communicate with people outside his ethnic group. He will be able to speak Filipino, the national lingua franca and may also understand and speak English.

English and Filipino are widely used in mass media, commerce and education in

the Philippines, resulting in their being understood almost everywhere in the country.

### History

Efforts in formulating a national language started in 1935. When the Philippines was a colony of Spain for 333 years, Spanish was the official language. Then Spanish was replaced by English when the Americans came.

Wenceslao Vinzons, a young representative from Camarines Norte in the 1935 Constitutional Convention, officially proposed to include an article on developing a national language. Thus, the 1935 Constitution Article XIV, Section 3, states that the Congress "shall make necessary steps towards the development of a national language which will be based on one of the existing native languages."

The following year, the National Assembly passed Commonwealth Act No. 184, establishing the Institute of National Language on November 13, 1936, that decided which among the existing native languages will be the basis for the national language. Jaime C. de Veyra from Leyte was the first director. Eminent linguists, representing different linguistic groups, were the other members of the institute. After studying the case, the institute recommended Tagalog to be the basis of the national language.

In 1937, Executive Order No. 134 was passed stating that the national language will be based on Tagalog. It was intended that the national language will be purified as well as enriched through borrowings from other native languages and from foreign languages such as Spanish and English. Lope K. Santos, who later became a director of the Institute of National Language, prepared the grammar book *Balarila ng Wikang Pambansa* in 1939. A Tagalog-English dictionary was also published by the institute.

After three years, the Tagalog-based national language was taught as a subject in the teacher education courses and in the elementary and secondary schools throughout the country. Yet, English was still the medium of instruction as well as the official language for communications, the Philippines being under the American rule at that time.

In 1959, the Department of Education called the Tagalog-based national language Pilipino.



## THE FILIPINO LANGUAGE...From page 1

In 1970, the Board of National Education furthered the use of Pilipino as language of instruction in schools together with English, a bilingual approach to teaching. It also encouraged the use of regional languages in Grades 1 and 2. And to develop Filipino further, it was promoted as a language for intellectual discourses.

In 1973, during the Constitutional Convention, the Committee on National Language (CNL) was created. It recommended replacing Pilipino with a fusion of the different native languages to be called Filipino. The recommendation was met with much opposition, pointing out that such an artificial language is not feasible since it lacked both native speakers and a literary tradition to help propagate it.

The matter was settled in 1987, when the Constitution stated, in Article XIV, Section 6, that "the national language of the Philippines is Filipino. As it evolves, it shall be further developed and enriched on the basis of existing Philippine and other languages."

Filipino was modernized with the inclusion in its alphabet the letters C, F, J, Ñ, Q, V, X, and Z in addition to the letters of the old Tagalog alphabet. The current Filipino alphabet has 28 letters. This is for the development of the language nationally, to include words from the other native languages, and make it adaptable to the modern environment and to accommodate borrowed words from foreign languages. The sounds of letters F, J, V and Z, for example, cannot be found in the Tagalog and Cebuano languages. However, it can be found in the Ivatan, Mëranaw, Tausug, Blaan, Tboli, Cordilleran and other native languages.

The Filipino language continues to evolve as Filipinos have widely used it as lingua franca in most parts of the country — in oral and written communications, education and mass media.

The present Komisyon ng Wikang Pambansa is in fact, propagating a new Ortograpiyang Pambansa which explains not only the functions of the 28 letters of the new alphabet but also recognizes other peculiarities of our native languages. An example of these peculiarities is the schwa sound in Ilocano, Cordillera, Mëranaw and other Mindanao languages.

### References

Entry on Filipino by Virgilio S. Almario, *Sagisag Kultura ng Filipinas* CD-ROM, National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 2011

"Nationalization of a Language: Filipino" by C.J. Paz

"Development of Filipino, the National Language of the Philippines" by Paz M. Belvez, NCCA Web site.

## Manuel Luis Quezon

Manuel Luis Quezon is the first president of the Philippine Commonwealth and is widely regarded as "*Ama ng Wikang Pambansa*" or the "Father of the National Language" because he spearheaded the formation of a national language, based on Tagalog.

Quezon was born on August 19, 1878, in Baler, Tayabas (now in the province of Aurora). During the Filipino-American War, he joined and became a major in the army of General Tomas Mascardo. After the war, he returned to school and finished studying law. He was appointed fiscal and then became governor of the province of Tayabas. He resigned as governor to run for elections in the Philippine Assembly. He won and became majority floor leader. He then worked as a resident commissioner at the United States Congress, where he successfully lobbied for the passage of the Jones Law, containing the first formal and official declaration of the United States Federal Government's commitment to grant independence to the Philippine. He continued working for Philippine independence, securing the passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Law, which provided for self-government of the Philippines and for Filipino independence from the United States after a period of ten years.

He was elected president of the Philippine Commonwealth in 1935. When the Japanese army invaded the Philippines during World War II, he served in exile in the United States, where he died on August 1, 1944.

Quezon is also called "*Ama ng Katarungang Panlipunan*," or "Father of Social Justice," because of his efforts in helping the poor. He is more known for leading the establishment of a national language based on a native language. The celebration of the National Language Month coincides with the month of his birthday.

### Reference

Entry on Manuel Luis Quezon by Virgilio S. Almario, *Sagisag Kultura ng Filipinas* CD-ROM, National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 2011



## BALANGHAY The Philippine Factsheet Issue No. 4 January-February 2013

The *balanghay* is an ancient Philippine plank boat adjoined by carved-out planks edged through pins or dowels. More than a mere boat, it was more like a vessel bearing a social unit, thus the term came to mean the smallest political unit in the Philippines. In the late 1970s, *balanghays* were excavated in Butuan City, Agusan del Norte, then considered the first wooden watercraft ever excavated in Southeast Asia. They are a testament to early Filipino craftsmanship and seamanship skills.



*Balanghay: The Philippine Factsheet* is a bimonthly publication of the National Commission for Culture and the Arts. It comes with *Agung*, the NCCA newsletter, and is also given to educational institutions, libraries and the general public. *Balanghay: The Philippine Factsheet* aims to be a vessel and conveyor of knowledge on Philippine culture. It also aims to broaden cultural literacy among our people and enhance their understanding of Philippine arts and culture.

**PROF. FELIPE M. DE LEON, JR.**  
Chairman

**EMELITA V. ALMOSARA, CESO IV**  
Executive Director

**MARLENE RUTH S. SANCHEZ, MNSA**  
Deputy Executive Director

**Rene Sanchez Napeñas**  
Head, NCCA-PAIO

**Leonor Petra Elepaño**  
Executive Assistant to the Chairman

**Roel Hoang Manipon**  
Writer

**Mervin Concepcion Vergara**  
Art Director

**Ryan C. Arengo**  
Graphic Artist/Illustrator

**Dr. Jesus T. Peralta**  
Consultant





## Lope K. Santos

Lópe K. Santos was a prominent writer, linguist and labor leader. He was born on September 25, 1879, in Pasig, Rizal. At an early age, he learned printing from his father, who worked as a printer. Santos studied at the Escuela Normal Superior de Maestros and Escuela de Derecho in Manila, and earned a degree in Bachelor in Arts from Colegio Filipino.

In 1900, Santos became a journalist for different newspapers. He then became editor of *Muling Pagsilang*, *Lipang Kalabaw* and other newspapers. Santos wrote ten



volumes of poetry in Tagalog including *Puso at Diwa* (1908), *Mga Hamak na Dakila* (1945), *Ang Diwa ng mga Salawikain* (1953), and *Ang Pangginggera* (1912). He is most known for *Banaag at Sikat* (1906), one of his six novels. He also wrote literary criticism.

Santos was also active in politics, becoming a governor in Rizal, the first governor of Nueva Vizcaya and a senator of the 12<sup>th</sup> district of Nueva Vizcaya. As senator, he was responsible for laws that enable us to celebrate Bonifacio Day as well as uplift the conditions of workers. With Isabelo de los Reyes, he established Union Obrera Democratica in 1902. He was also the president of Union del Trabajo de Filipinas, and the founder and president of Congreso Obrero.

Santos was also known for his contributions in the establishment of a national language. He was director of the Institute for National Language and authored *Balarila ng Wikang Pambansa*, which became the official textbook in the teaching of Tagalog.

He died on May 1, 1963.

### Reference

Entry on Lópe K. Santos by Galileo S. Zafra, *Sagisag Kultura ng Filipinas* CD-ROM, National Commission for Culture and the Arts, 2011

# Politics of Language

By Randy David

**CAPE TOWN, South Africa.** For the last four days, I've been listening to a group of scholars from nine African nations talk about the language situation in their respective countries. One immediately realizes that this continent has been robbed not only of its past but also of its soul.

In country after country, the official language is invariably that of the former colonial master. The people have kept their mother tongues, but these languages, if they are not dying, have not grown. To be an educated African today means going through a painful process of cutting oneself off from the culture of one's ancestors in exchange for a chance at personal success.

Freshly emancipated from Apartheid rule in 1994, South Africa, the continent's richest nation authorized 11 languages to serve as the official languages of the country. Yet, English and Afrikaans have remained the language of government. The post-Apartheid government had a bias for English because it was after all the language of the African National Congress. Afrikaans was the language that the Dutch settlers brought with them into the country in the 17th century. In the 1960s, it was refined into a racialized language of the white minority. But, as history would have it, the oppressed colored people also quickly acquired it.

Among the so-called "colored" people—who were neither black nor white—were the Cape Malays. These were the descendants of the slaves that the Dutch took from the islands comprising present-day Indonesia. They didn't quite speak like their masters, but they spawned their own versions of the oppressor's language. The latest census reveals the startling fact that in South Africa today, there are more non-whites who speak Afrikaans than whites. To banish Afrikaans would have meant burying the language of these equally oppressed people.

English is very much the language of power, wealth and social mobility in the African continent today. Of the nine countries represented in the meeting, only Benin, the former French colony, has not adopted English as the principal medium of instruction and of government. Not only is English very much regarded as the language of modernity, it is also ironically made to work as a language of national unification in societies deeply fragmented by tribal and ethnic differences.

The most striking example of this linguistic chaos is Cameroon. This nation of 16 million people has 268 languages. Within a 20-kilometer radius live people who literally do not understand one another. The colonizers attempted to bring them under the dominion of one language. The Germans who first colonized the country made German the official language. Then the French and the British took over and created French Cameroon and British Cameroon. When the country was reunified, it became politically expedient to adopt English and French as the official languages instead of choosing one from any of the native languages.

In Zimbabwe, the people speak any of 18 indigenous languages. The most dominant of these is Shona, which is spoken by 80 percent of the population. Yet, the official language is English. It is also the sole medium of instruction from Grade 4 to college. The mother tongue, used in the early grades, is taught as a subject in a curriculum dominated by English.

The teaching of the early grades in the mother tongue is a policy that was adopted in many of the former colonies after it was conclusively shown that children learned basic concepts faster when they were taught in the home language. But many African countries are rethinking this policy. Ghana decided to completely junk it after the government was told that students from private schools who were taught exclusively in English fared better in the higher grades. Wherever one goes in Africa, parents demand to know why they should continue sending their children to school if all the education they got was in the language of the illiterate.

The disparagement of local languages is very common in societies that have not recovered from the colonial syndrome. In Malawi, the crazy United States-educated dictator who ruled the country for more than 30 years, Dr. Hastings Banda, never spoke in any of the languages of his country. He was obsessed with English and loved to mesmerize his people by his command of what he clearly regarded as a superior language.

In Uganda, a nation of 24 million people encompassing 56 tribes, there are three major native languages, but, again, no

single unifying language. English, spoken by about 30 percent of the people, is the official language. It is the medium of instruction from nursery till university. The native language Luganda is taught as a subject at all levels.

The African scholars who came to the meeting believed that this situation should not be allowed to continue. They would not suffer seeing African children belittle their own mother tongues. Such a generation would grow without any commitment to the nation. On graduation, they would be aspiring to leave their country as quickly as possible.

Tanzania was the object of envy of everybody. Because of the foresight of the late Julius Nyerere, Swahili has become a sophisticated language. He ordered the preparation of dictionaries and word lists, realizing its potential as a pan-African language. After Tanzania acquired its independence in 1961, Swahili replaced English as official and national language. Today, it is the Americans who are learning Swahili.

Tanzania remains poor, but its soul is intact. It is a stable country that has overcome its internal conflicts.

*Randy David is a journalist, television host and sociologist. This article was reprinted from The Philippine Daily Inquirer, July 12, 2003.*

## What is a dialect?

A dialect is a variety of a language characteristic of a particular group of speakers. It is distinguished by pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary, differing from the standard literary language or speech pattern of the culture in which it exists. A dialect can exist in a particular region, ethnic group and even social class.

For example, Boholano Cebuano, spoken in Bohol, is a dialect of the language Cebuano. The Tagalog language has also a number of dialects such as Batangas Tagalog and Bulacan Tagalog.

## What is a vernacular?

A vernacular is the native language spoken by the ordinary people in a particular country or region, as opposed to a language of wider communication that is a second language or foreign language to the population, such as a national language, standard language, or lingua franca.

# Some Major Languages of the Philippines

## Tagalog

Tagalog is spoken in the Tagalog region of Luzon including the capital Manila as well as neighboring provinces. It is also spoken in parts of the islands of Marinduque, Mindoro and Palawan. There are about 28,000,000 speakers.

## Cebuano

Cebuano is the language of the province of Cebu in the Visayas and its capital, Cebu City, the most important city in the region. It is also widely spoken and serves as the lingua franca in many parts of the Visayas as well as in Mindanao, including Bohol, Negros Oriental, Southern Leyte, Misamis Oriental, Misamis Occidental, the Zamboanga Peninsula and Davao City. That is why it is sometimes called Visayan, Bisayan or Binisaya. It is estimated that there are about 20 million people who speak Cebuano as their first language and about 11 million as their secondary language. It is also known as Sugbuhanon, Sugbuanon and Sebuano. Its dialects include Boholano, Leyte Cebuano and Mindanao Visayan. Many great Filipino writers wrote in Cebuano. Cebuano has a prolific literary tradition that remains lively.

## Ilocano

Ilocano is the language of the Ilocos Region in northern Luzon. It is also spoken in Cagayan, Isabela, Pangasinan, Babuyan Islands, Tarlac, Abra and some parts of Mindanao. The Ilocano is the third largest ethnic group of the Philippines. Its dialects include a pidginized form used in the northern Luzon highlands. There are around 9,100,000 Ilocano speakers in the Philippines. It is also called Iloko or Iluko. The epic *Biag ni Lam-ang* is narrated in this language.

## Pampangan

Pampangan is the language of the province of Pampanga in central Luzon. It is also spoken in the southern part of Tarlac, particularly in Bamban, Capas, Concepcion, San Jose, Gerona, La Paz and Tarlac City as well as in Bataan, Nueva Ecija, Bulacan and Metro Manila. Pampangan has about 1,900,000 speakers. It is also called Kapampangan, Pampango and Pampangueño.

## Hiligaynon

Hiligaynon is the language of the provinces of Iloilo and Negros Occidental in Western Visayas. It is also spoken in Capiz and some parts of Mindanao. There are around 5,770,000 Hiligaynon speakers in the Philippines (2000), about less than 10 percent of the population. It is popularly called Ilonggo. Filipino novelists Magdalena Jalandoni and Ramon Muzones wrote in Hiligaynon.

## Bikol

The Bikol group of the Bicol Region in southern Luzon has eight languages: Buhinon Bikol, Central Bikol, Libon Bikol, Miraya Bikol, Northern Catanduanes Bikol, Rinconada Bikol, Southern Catanduanes Bikol and West Albay Bikol. Aside from these, the region also speaks Northern Sorsoganon, Southern Sorsoganon, Masbatenyo and Agta languages. What many people regard as simply Bikol or Bikolano is Central Bikol, which is the language of Naga and Legaspi, the two most important cities of the region. It is also spoken in Camarines Norte, Camarines Sur, southern Catanduanes, northern Sorsogon, and Albay. There are about 2,500,000 Central Bicolano speakers, about seven percent of the population (1990). For all the Bikol languages, there are 4,580,000 (2000).

## Tausug

Tausug is spoken in the Sulu Archipelago, Palawan, Basilan, Zamboanga City and environs. It is also spoken in Indonesia and Malaysia. There are about 1,100,000 speakers.

## Pangasinan

The Pangasinan language is spoken by about two million people in the province of Pangasinan.

## Mëranaw

The Mëranaw language is spoken in the provinces of Lanao del Norte and Lanao del Sur in Mindanao. There are about 7,800,000 speakers.

## Waray

The Waray language is spoken in north and east Samar-Leyte islands and Biliran of Eastern Visayas. It is also called Waray-Waray, Samarnon, Samareño, Samarenyo and Samar-Leyte. There are 2,560,000 speakers (2000).

## Chavacano

The Chavacano language is spoken in Zamboanga and Basilan provinces, particularly in Kabasalan, Siay, Margosatubig, Ipil, Malangas, Lapuyan, Buug, Tungawan, Alicia, Isabela, Lamitan, Maluso, Malamawi, as well as in Cotabato City, and Ternate in Cavite and Ermita in Manila. It is a creole with predominantly Spanish vocabulary and Philippine-type grammatical structure.

## Maguindanaoan

The Maguindanaoan language is spoken in Maguindanao, Cotabato, South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, and Zamboanga del Sur provinces. There are 1,100,000 speakers (2010).

## Reference

*Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 17th edition, edited by M. Paul Lewis, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig, 2013, SIL International, Dallas, Texas.