

## Chapter 7

### The Internet and Indigenous Language Use: A Filipino Case Study

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#### Introduction

The Internet is a world-wide, distributed information system which is based around a set of simple client-server protocols to facilitate the exchange of data between geographically remote computers. Many different kinds of data can be exchanged, including text-based electronic mail messages, as well as digital video and audio feeds (hence the term “multimedia”). Internet technology is often used to improve upon services which already exist in the communications and media industries, such as radio and television, by providing digitally sampled and technically superior equivalents. However, there are several key differences between an information provider on the Internet, and a traditional media entity, such as a television station, in the role that they can play in enhancing existing information services. The greatest challenge to traditional views of what constitutes “the media” is that Internet-based information services can be provided by any individual or group that has access to the Internet, independently of where they are physically located in the world. Becoming an electronic provider of information is now simply a question of gaining access to a networked personal computer, and leasing an “account” from an Internet Service Provider (ISP).

Since the restrictions on transmission of locally-relevant and “culturally-appropriate” discourse (e.g., Carr, 1996) can be easily removed by “surfing the ‘net”, the Internet is the closest thing to a non-coercive technology to ever have been developed. This contrasts greatly with television and radio, for example, which often imposes cultural or social norms of the provider to the client. For example, the Asia-Pacific region receives much foreign (predominantly American) television and radio programming, although some countries, such as Australia, have acted to restrict the percentage of foreign content which can be broadcast locally. The Internet has no such restrictions, and therefore has the potential to enable individual and local communities to create content and transmit communications along any lines that they wish (see Watters & Watters, 1997, for a review). This is in stark contrast to the traditional introduction of other forms of technology and media, such as television, which enforce a single medium, often a single world-view, and which may be seen by local communities as an imposition rather than development (Gergen & Gergen, 1971). For example, the introduction of mainstream television and radio services into remote parts of the Northern Territory through the Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme (BRACS) was not greeted with enthusiasm by local Aboriginal people who saw it as invasive rather than informing (“the second invasion”; Scott, unpublished).

In addition, the dissemination of information through the Internet allows publishers of information (such as this journal) to evaluate the kinds of information (in this case papers) that people download, in order to understand whether the journal is meeting its aims. Watters, Watters and Carr (1998) demonstrated, through the analysis of server log files, that the most frequently accessed articles were those concerned with cultural and indigenous issues. This allayed the fears expressed by some commentators that since these kinds of articles were not always in the majority (Marai, 1997), they were clearly quantitatively the most read. In this way, the great potential of the Internet to cater specifically for the broadcasting of indigenous issues and concerns was verified.

Many countries have also utilised the Internet’s information dissemination capacity as the major resource for expressing and revitalising their own national languages. For example, France has established a ministry of communication and culture (Le Ministère de la culture et de la

communication, <http://www.culture.fr/>) which provides on-line French language information about all aspects of French culture. This information is accessible not only by French people in France, but by expatriates and other French-speaking peoples world-wide. In addition, current French language policy dictates the replacement of English words and phrases with approved French substitutes in the media (Machill, 1997). This has been a successful strategy in the face of the globalisation of language usage with almost the *de facto* adoption of English as the lingua franca of international communication (McArthur, 1997). However, globalisation can also impact on local dialects of English causing concern amongst speakers: Gleeson (1995), for example, demonstrated shifts in phonological processes of speakers in Australian soap operas which were associated with a type of emerging International English, rather than a distinctly “Australian” dialect.

The aim of this paper is to examine whether the Internet might have facilitated a renaissance of indigenous language use in the post-colonial Asia-Pacific region. Many countries in the region, for example The Philippines, have had languages imposed from outside (e.g., Spanish and American English) and to some extent from within (e.g., the decision to adopt Tagalog as the national language, when Bisaya/Cebuano was spoken by a majority of the population, predominantly in the South). There is quite strong evidence that non-colonised countries in the Asia-Pacific region have embraced the Internet as a means of preserving their language - in this special issue, for example, Gottlieb (1998) reviews the case of Japan, where the Japanese language is the second most widely used language other than English on the Internet. The question that we wish to answer is whether the Internet has in fact enhanced the provision of indigenous language information services, in addition to its established capacity to facilitate the transmission and development of local content, in post-colonial Asian countries.

### **The Philippines**

The Philippines is an appropriate case study in this context, as it celebrates the centenary of the end of Spanish colonialism this year. One hundred years on, Spanish continues to exert a strong influence on indigenous language use in the Philippines, with approximately 20% of the vocabulary of both Pilipino/Tagalog and Bisaya/Cebuano now based on originally Spanish words (Quilis, 1995). However, a strong American influence during the early half of this century ensured the rise of English as officially the “second” language of the Philippines, with few Filipinos now speaking fluent Spanish. Although the Philippines has been an independent republic for well over 50 years, the central position of English over native languages has not changed. For example, as recently as 1974, the Department of Education, Culture, and Sports mandated the use of English as the language of instruction in both primary and secondary schools.

Although Pilipino/Tagalog is the official, national language as designated by the Filipino constitution, English is the language often associated with high social status and high socio-economic class in the Philippines (Social Weather Station Survey, 1994). It is also an enduring symbol of power which appears not to have been affected by the transition from military rule under Ferdinand Marcos to democracy under Corazon Aquino (Tollefson, 1993). The elite status of the English language has not changed, even though the distribution of power within Filipino society has changed dramatically. The status of English as maximally desirable can also be demonstrated by examining how some Filipinos, who speak a creole of English and Tagalog known as “Taglish”, are often stigmatised as “bakya” (lower class) by the English errors in their language use (Rafael, 1995).

The hegemonic status of English in Filipino society is also reflected in the structure of the legal system. Gonzalez (1996a) discusses a number of practical problems associated with the use of both English and Pilipino/Tagalog in court proceedings, which are often conducted in English. Potentially, defendants wish to express their arguments in a rhetorical way which is characteristic of their native languages. However, they are forced to use English, which has a different (and often unfamiliar) rhetorical structure. This policy clearly disadvantages people who do not speak English, but who are innocent, whilst assisting English-speakers who might be guilty.

This kind of dilemma is one of the many reasons that indigenous language use should be encouraged - often, concepts and ideas which can be expressed and conceived of in Filipino may not be adequately expressed in English (and vice-versa). A study by Bernardo (1996), for example, suggested that Filipino students might solve problems differently in mathematics when using either their native language or English. This view is supported more generally by evidence that reading materials in one language, and expressing views based on that material, can have great within-subject variation depending on which language you use. Taylor and Yavalanavanua (1997), for example, found that judgements made about a moral fable presented in Fijian resulted in more group-oriented responses, whereas the same fable presented in English gave rise to more individualistic responses. Forcing Filipinos to think only in English at school, for example, might deprive them of the opportunity to experience specifically Filipino ways of thinking conferred by language use (whilst not denying that English use might be appropriate for communicating with non-Filipinos). The essence of bonding linguistically with the Filipino community can be described by the term *kababayan*, literally, “belonging”. Recent research (Montanano, 1993) indicates that Filipino students have a strong tendency not to use the Filipino language for higher cognitive thinking, but to switch to English, partly because schools have not encouraged the use of Filipino (i.e., they have learned to “think” in English and now find it difficult to “think” in Filipino). This deprives these students of the opportunity not only to “belong” to the Filipino community, but to experience authentically Filipino ways of thinking.

#### **Language use and the internet**

As Gonzalez (1996b) has pointed out, there is often a wide separation between formal language use policy and practice in formal settings in the Philippines (e.g., planning for language use in the classroom). However, the lack of formal policies and “rules” on the Internet is one of the medium’s main attractions for many users. Even the way in which users communicate is often reminiscent of conversation, rather than formal composition. Malone (1995), for example, discusses language use on the Internet in the context of timing and compositional issues, such as the tendency not to correct, review, or edit discourse. However, not much work has been done on language preferences and the potential for the Internet to be a “virtual” exchange for particular languages whose speakers are now geographically dispersed.

This study proposes to examine the extent to which the lack of a formal on-line language policy for indigenous language use in the Philippines has actually given rise to writing in Filipino on-line. This excludes international forums, such as the USENET discussion group *soc.culture.filipino*, which have played a pivotal role (mainly within the United States) of providing a forum for issues which are almost exclusively associated with U.S.-Philippines social relations. There are also many “chat rooms”, such as vdo-fx.com 7000, which provide interactive discussion forums for speakers of indigenous languages. We are primarily concerned in this study with the provision of on-line information services within the Philippines, whether they be provided by institutions (e.g., government departments) or individuals.

#### **Methods and results**

The source of data for this study was provided from the AltaVista Internet search engine (<http://www.altavista.yellowpages.com.au>). Four second-level domains were explored within the Philippines top-level domain “ph”: “edu” (university sites), with 3,843 hits; “com” (commercial sites), with 2,317 sites; “gov” (government sites) with 1,448 hits; and “org” (non-profit organisations), with 129 hits. A 1% sample was obtained from the search engine on 13.4.98, with the samples composed of the first sites returned after each query was performed. The sites comprising the study sample are listed in Appendix A.

The educational sites in this sample were composed of university, college and departmental home pages, personal home pages for students and staff, class schedules, course descriptions and job descriptions. Every educational site visited was written in English, with the only Filipino exceptions being surnames (but not job titles), and titles of cultural performances (e.g., “Buhay, Pag-ibig at

Kamatayan: Mga Kwentong Mindanao” or “Life Love and Death: Tales from Mindanao”). Suburbs with Spanish names also cropped up frequently (e.g., “Los Baños”). Surprisingly, even the “Office of the President: National Centennial Commission”, with a page describing the importance of celebrating Filipino independence from Spain was written in English, as was the school anthem of the Central Visayas Polytechnic College.

The commercial sites visited included home pages of corporations and local businesses, private hospitals and medical centres, personal home pages provided by commercial servers and Internet Service Providers, advertisements for resorts and tourist attractions, and information about subscribing to an Internet service. Again, every commercial site reviewed in this sample was written in English, with the only exceptions being trademarks (e.g., “Silangan”), names of computer networks (e.g., “Bayan.net”), and names of individuals or businesses (e.g., “Ayala”). There were also some examples of Spanish influence still present in the commercial sample as with the educational sample: the Spanish names for suburbs of Manila (e.g., “Magallanes”), and descriptions of goods and services which are identified with Spanish heritage (e.g., “cabañas” Spanish-style bungalows).

Government sites were quite diverse in the information they offered: biographies of government officials and scientists, foreign currency exchange rates, government contacts for business, geographical profiles of different regions, and government policy papers. As with commercial and educational sites, each government site was also written in English, with the exceptions of “barangay” (the title given to all local village administrations, which is a pre-Spanish form of local government), and names of places (e.g., “Makati”). This was also the case for non-profit organisations.

Given these disappointing results, a more general search was conducted of all Filipino sites, by searching for the word “mabuhay”, which is the traditional Filipino greeting. 20 government and 33 commercial sites contained this word, however, they contained no other Filipino language text. 24 educational sites also reported instances of “mabuhay”, with only three of these sites containing more Filipino text. One case was the home page of the University of the Philippines (Manila) with a full welcome: “Mabuhay! Nagagalak kami na kayo ay bumisita sa UP Manila!” or “Welcome! We are glad that you visited UP Manila!”. The other two exceptions were poems written in Tagalog residing on student or faculty home pages: “Pag-ibig sa Tinubuang Lupa” or “Love for the Motherland” by Andres Bonifacio, and “Pasko” or “Christmas” by Leonardo M. Dionela. It is very interesting that the only substantial Filipino language sources were located in the Philippines in this study’s sample were creative works with strong emotional content and of personal significance.

### **Discussion**

The results of this study demonstrate that, as yet, the Internet has not had a great impact in facilitating on-line language use in the Philippines, a post-colonial nation, even though it is a non-coercive technology which has the potential to broadcast indigenous language content around the world. In the sample examined, the occurrence of Filipino language words was approximately equal to the occurrence of Spanish words, with English text being dominant throughout educational, commercial, government and non-profit organisation sites. The only sites which contained substantial Filipino language text were two creative works at a university home page. This pattern of results is quite distinct from those found for European colonial nations (e.g., France), and for non-colonised Asia-Pacific nations (e.g., Japan), which have both acted to utilise the Internet for promoting indigenous language use.

The reasons for the failure of the Internet to (thus far) succeed in facilitating on-line language use clearly go beyond any technical limitations. One possible explanation is that Filipinos prefer to use English because it has more prestige and is seen as being more “intelligent” and “high class”, rather than the dreaded “bakya” label discussed earlier. This is related to a well-known observation that the cultural humiliation of colonial and neo-colonial rule often results in a devalued sense of socio-cultural identity, which Carr et al. (1998, pp.157) call an “internalised inferiority complex”. Thus, speaking Filipino is seen to have less social value than speaking English, with the language of the

coloniser being preferred. This kind of cultural devaluation has also been observed in non-linguistic behaviour: children from disadvantaged groups who are old enough to develop a sense of identity prefer to play with dolls that are visibly from an ethnic majority, rather than an ethnic minority (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995).

Perhaps the fact that the Philippines has lost most of its traditional orthographies is a real problem in the sense that all Tagalog is now written using the Latin alphabet, rather than colonisation per se being the problem. This is one of the proposals suggested by Santos (1998) in this special issue, who has suggested that the ease with which Filipinos learned to use the Latin alphabet ensured its success (independently of the status which using the language conferred, although prestige was almost certainly a strong motivating factor). In addition, since instruction is now given in English in schools, perhaps this is the over-riding consideration. This reflects a belief that speaking in the language of the Coloniser gives more authority to the speaker (more so than if information is presented in indigenous language). Learning English is often upper-most in the minds of language minorities because of the perceived social benefits and authority which it gives them (McKay, 1997). An alternative example for examining the impact of colonialism would be to examine relative Internet use in China versus the newly decolonised Hong Kong. If people in Hong Kong continue to use English in spite of belonging now to the Chinese state, then perhaps colonisation has had a deep impact in the same way as the Philippines. However, if Hong Kong residents begin to write once again in Chinese, it might support the idea that the impact of European colonialism is not persistent in determining language preferences.

This paper does not advocate linguistic protectionism, or a return to speaking only indigenous languages. It is not only a question of embarking on a romantic quest to re-instate Filipino language for Filipino language's sake: there may be concepts which can be expressed in Filipino, which are unique to Philippine culture, which can never be re-expressed adequately in the language of the coloniser (or any other language). This is the kind of motivation behind Dixon's (1997) recent call for linguists everywhere to record as much as they can from the culturally "endangered" parts of the world. Perhaps developing integrated pluralistic curricula which uses both English and indigenous languages (e.g., Lo Bianco, 1996), is the best strategy for ensuring the survival of these languages and their culture.

Of course, this study is limited by the size of our sample (1%), the use of only one search engine, and the strategy of sampling rather than targeting particular institutions for close examination. Further studies using the latter strategy will be performed by examining all pages in universities, for example, and computing the percentage containing any Filipino language.

### **Summary**

The Internet is a potentially non-coercive technology which has the capacity to facilitate the development and dissemination of locally-relevant and culturally-appropriate discourse. Many countries, especially those in Europe, have moved to utilise the Internet as a resource for expressing and revitalising their autochthonous languages, in response to cultural pressures from globalisation. However, there has been little evaluation of whether the Internet might give rise to a renaissance of indigenous language use in the post-colonial Asia-Pacific region. In this paper, we examine the case of the Philippines, which this year celebrates a centenary of independence from Spain, to determine whether introduction of the Internet has in fact enhanced the provision of indigenous language information services. We sampled 1% of the Internet sites listed in a popular search engine, in each second-level domain (educational, commercial, government and non-government organisations), and found very little evidence of indigenous language use in any of the sites in these categories. This suggests that the Internet has not yet realised its potential as a medium for indigenous language use in the Philippines, but that greater awareness of its capabilities in this arena might change the situation in the future.

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### Appendix A: Internet sites comprising study sample

#### *Educational Sites (\*.edu.ph)*

[http://www.uplb.edu.ph/ca/cas\\_c11.html](http://www.uplb.edu.ph/ca/cas_c11.html)  
<http://ics.uplb.edu.ph/>  
<http://www.usc.edu.ph/usc/table.htm>  
<http://www.uplb.edu.ph/dtri/dtri1.html>  
<http://www.uplb.edu.ph/grad/dagro.html>  
<http://ics.uplb.edu.ph/foodsci/ifs2.html>  
[http://www.uplb.edu.ph/catalog/ca/ca\\_bsft.html](http://www.uplb.edu.ph/catalog/ca/ca_bsft.html)  
<http://www.msuiit.edu.ph/ipag/major.html>  
<http://ics.uplb.edu.ph/~icsweb/ICS/ics-dcs.html>  
<http://netserve.aim.edu.ph/bong/hotels.htm>  
<http://netserve.aim.edu.ph/adsgm/RTABLE.HTM>  
<http://netserve.aim.edu.ph/adsgm/SPEECHES.HTM>  
[http://ics.uplb.edu.ph/ceat/land\\_water\\_ma.html](http://ics.uplb.edu.ph/ceat/land_water_ma.html)  
<http://netserve.aim.edu.ph/homepage/resprog/restaff/restaff.htm>  
<http://www.uplb.edu.ph/biotech/aims.html>  
<http://www.uplb.edu.ph/fssri/fssri2.html>  
<http://netserve.aim.edu.ph/homepage/resprog/library/llis.htm>  
<http://ics.uplb.edu.ph/~icsweb/ICS/mscs-curr.html>  
[http://www.uplb.edu.ph/ca/ca\\_bsa.html](http://www.uplb.edu.ph/ca/ca_bsa.html)  
<http://netserve.aim.edu.ph/fboih/er/er.htm>  
<http://netserve.aim.edu.ph/adsgmboard/bulletin.html>  
[http://www.uplb.edu.ph/catalog/ca/ca\\_c1.html](http://www.uplb.edu.ph/catalog/ca/ca_c1.html)  
[http://www.uplb.edu.ph/catalog/ceat/ceat\\_bsa.html](http://www.uplb.edu.ph/catalog/ceat/ceat_bsa.html)  
<http://netserve.aim.edu.ph/homepage/action/amca/csked.htm>  
<http://www.uplb.edu.ph/cf/dfrm.html>  
<http://www.usc.edu.ph/usc/cnms/lanwan/lanwan.htm>  
<http://www.msuiit.edu.ph/ipag/workshops.html>  
<http://www.msuiit.edu.ph/typhoon.html>  
<http://ics.uplb.edu.ph/~icsweb/ICS/ics-grad.html>  
[http://www.uplb.edu.ph/cas/cas\\_bsap.html](http://www.uplb.edu.ph/cas/cas_bsap.html)  
<http://apollo.cvpc.edu.ph/>  
<http://www.uplb.edu.ph/biotech/stand4a.html>  
<http://www.uplb.edu.ph/catalog/che/dhfds.html>  
<http://www.msuiit.edu.ph/ipag/spjcf2.html>

#### *Commercial Sites (\*.com.ph)*

<http://www.stluke.com.ph/perez.htm>  
<http://www.stluke.com.ph/exec.htm>  
<http://globe.com.ph/~century/banquet.htm>  
<http://www.philonline.com.ph/>  
<http://www.bayantel.com.ph/rockwell/rizal.html>  
<http://g-net.globe.com.ph/~astechi/views.htm>  
<http://globe.com.ph/~zaldygs/faqcfc.htm>  
<http://g-net.globe.com.ph/~m13131/mag.htm>  
<http://www.info.com.ph/news/nohookup.html>  
<http://www.dpsi-filipinas.com.ph/sports.html>  
<http://www.clubnoah.com.ph/home.htm>  
[http://www.globe.com.ph/~fguinsce/fgu\\_ayla.htm](http://www.globe.com.ph/~fguinsce/fgu_ayla.htm)  
[http://g-net.globe.com.ph/~tronix/beta\\_epsilon/bena/0000002.html](http://g-net.globe.com.ph/~tronix/beta_epsilon/bena/0000002.html)

<http://www.stluke.com.ph/surgery.htm>  
<http://www2.philonline.com.ph/scripts/webrun.exe/wantads/wantads>  
<http://www.globe.com.ph/~bocglp/exp10.htm>  
<http://www.scubaworld.com.ph/>  
<http://www.wtouch.com.ph/faq.html>  
<http://www.stluke.com.ph/redntor.htm>  
<http://www.sysads.com.ph/>  
[http://g-net.globe.com.ph/~reinsure/urc\\_glos.htm](http://g-net.globe.com.ph/~reinsure/urc_glos.htm)  
<http://www.executive.com.ph/>

*Non-Profit Organisation Sites (\*.org.ph)*

<http://www.piso.org.ph/message.html>  
[http://www.sws.org.ph/sws\\_opns.htm](http://www.sws.org.ph/sws_opns.htm)

*Government Sites (\*.gov.ph)*

<http://www.stii.dost.gov.ph/nast/escuro.htm>  
<http://www.stii.dost.gov.ph/nast/santos2.htm>  
<http://www.makati.gov.ph/>  
<http://www.pids.gov.ph/mimap/proj/v120694/v120694a.htm>  
<http://www.pids.gov.ph/mimap/ind/eind/eindinf.htm>  
<http://www.dti.gov.ph/message.htm>  
<http://www.pids.gov.ph/edsman.html>  
<http://www.pids.gov.ph/mimap/work/workp003.htm>  
<http://www.asti.dost.gov.ph/services/med/guest.htm>  
<http://www.pids.gov.ph/mimap/ind/eind/eindexr.htm>  
<http://www.stii.dost.gov.ph/nast/zara.htm>  
<http://www.pids.gov.ph/~dirp/ofs.html>  
<http://www.pids.gov.ph/mimap/phase3/real.htm>  
<http://www.stii.dost.gov.ph/nast/velasc2.htm>