RUNNING HEAD: LANGUAGE, LITERACY, POLICY

Language, Literacy, and Policy

in the Philippine Context

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It is said that language is the faculty that is most uniquely human. So much of our selves and our identities are tied to the language we speak; the way we see and understand the world is strongly shaped by it. Perhaps this is the reason why issues of language are often so contentious. This is especially so in states that are not nation-states; that is, countries that are made up of more than one ethno-linguistic group. In such states, language is often pressed into service as a means to unite people, as a basis for their "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991). The selection of one language for that purpose, however, means that some other language is not selected, and so the source of strife.

Some states have adopted the solution of allowing for more than one language in the polity, a situation where one maintains allegiance to the larger entity, while also retaining affiliation with one's own smaller group. Keeping such in balance, however, is not always easy; where one ends and the other begins is not always clear. Such ambiguities become apparent in institutions and domains where language must be used and where literacy is a must, such as government, education, and commerce. The last introduces a further complication. In a globalized world, there is no way to escape doing commerce with other nations, and such commerce must necessarily be done in the global lingua franca, which happens to be English. As such, in some states, there are not just two, but three or more languages in the mix.

The Philippines is one such state. An estimated 160 languages are spoken throughout the country. Of these, seven languages have more than one million speakers, and two of these – Tagalog and Cebuano – have more than ten million native speakers each (World Bank, 1995).

And there is a strong regionalism that often falls along these linguistic lines. Indeed, while weather is the standard topic for strangers in other parts of the world, Filipinos who meet for the first time, especially when overseas, ask each other what region or province they come from, which answer becomes the basis for their conversation. This regionalism might have to do with the country being a developing nation where three-fourths of the population lives near or below the poverty threshold (National Statistics Office, 2003). It has been noted that "in hard times, people will cling to their language and ethnic group; in times of plenty, they pay little attention to resources like ethnic languages" (Paulston, 1988, p.7). Language can determine opportunity, and opportunity is crucial for those who depend on it for survival.

This sociolinguistic situation presents challenges for Philippine education and public policy. On the one hand, the educational system needs to deal with the diversity of languages in which that education will be delivered and in which literacy skills must be developed. On the other hand, it must do this while working with limited financial resources. This scarcity of resources dictates that education be delivered efficiently and effectively, according to what is known about language and learning. As such, there are several questions that research and policy need to answer, and which this paper will discuss:

(1) In what language(s) will education be delivered? This question is purely a policy question, and not a research question. However, it is a question that needs to be asked and answered at the outset, as it is the outcome variable of interest in the research.

(2) In what manner will those languages be delivered in education? That is, is there an appropriate order, combination or succession in which those languages must be introduced? Here is where research can contribute to the policy discussion. Media of instruction has been one of the perennial topics in Philippine education policy (De

Guzman, 2003), no doubt because research hasn't conclusively given an answer to the above questions.

(3) How does the Philippine sociolinguistic context limit, qualify, or modify the answers to the second question? Where the second question is concerned more with cognitive processes and psychological factors, the social surround needs to be considered as well as affecting learning. Answering this third question will give a more complete picture of how language learning can be effectively taught in Philippine education. Like the second question above, this one has both research and policy dimensions.

The paper will address each of the questions above in turn. From those discussions, I will then draw a few conclusions on next steps to take for Philippine educational research and public policy.

Which Language(s)?

While the large number of languages spoken in the Philippines is part of the reason why media of instruction in schools is so contentious, it is by no means the only reason. The problem also certainly has to do with the country's colonial history, and its conflicted relationship with that history. This uncertainty is reflected in the many constitutions that the country has adopted in its century-old existence.

The Political Preference

In the 1899 Malolos Constitution, written by patriots while Spain negotiated handing over the country to the United States, it says that "the use of the languages spoken in the Philippines is optional…. [For] public authorities and judicial affairs, the Spanish language shall

be used for the present" (Art. 93). Spanish was then the only language of government the country knew, even if most people were not schooled in it; the Spanish thought that keeping the natives ignorant was the best way to maintain their rule. Americans, on the other hand, saw it as part of the "white man's burden" to educate the people and propagate democracy. And so, among the first things established under American rule was a system of public education in English. Famous are the Thomasites, missionary teachers collectively named after the ship that took them to Philippine shores (U.S. Embassy Manila, 2001). The Commonwealth Constitution of 1935, drafted as America prepared to grant independence, declares that

> The Congress shall take steps toward the development and adoption of a common national language based on one of the existing native languages. Until otherwise provided by law, English and Spanish shall continue as official languages (Art. 14, Sec. 3).

The Marcos Constitution of 1973 was promulgated in English and Pilipino – which were also designated official languages – and translated "into each dialect spoken by over fifty thousand people, and into Spanish and Arabic. In case of conflict, the English text shall prevail." The national legislature was also charged with taking steps toward "the development and adoption of a common national language to be known as Pilipino" (Art. 15, Sec. 3).

The present Constitution, adopted in 1987, formally asked Congress to create a national language commission to develop and propagate a national language. It also has the most detailed provision on language to date. It states 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. Subject to provisions of law and as the Congress may deem appropriate, the Government shall

> take steps to initiate and sustain the use of Filipino as a medium of official communication and as language of instruction in the educational system (Art. 14, Sec. 6).
>
> For purposes of communication and instruction, the official languages of the Philippines are Filipino and, until otherwise provided by law, English. The regional languages are the auxiliary official languages in the regions and shall serve as auxiliary media of instruction therein. Spanish and Arabic shall be promoted on a voluntary and optional basis (Art. 14, Sec 7).

From the foregoing constitutions, one sees the gradual diminution and eclipse of Spanish, and the progressive rise and ascent of a national language. This national language, Filipino, is a curiosity though. The proceedings of the constitutional commission make clear the commissioners were not convinced that such a language existed. Filipino was "a term with a sense but without a reference" (Gonzalez & Villacorta, 2001, p. 8). The language was declared into being by Constitutional fiat.

The Practical Reality

The clause "until otherwise provided by law" in the present Constitution indicates that English is to have a diminished place in Philippine life in the future. But the clause is also a tacit admission that English cannot be done without at present. The 1973 Constitution says that "in case of conflict, the English text [of the Constitution] shall prevail. The 1987 Constitution did away with that provision, and placed Filipino higher than English. However, because the deliberations of the constitutional commission were in English, points of law in the future will continue to depend more on the English than the Filipino version of the text. More recently, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo invoked the need to be globally competitive in declaring that "until Congress enacts a law mandating Filipino as the language of instruction, I am directing the

Department of Education to return English as the primary medium of instruction, provided some subjects still be taught in Filipino" (Martin, 2003, p. 1).

The country, in other words, remains conflicted about the language to be used in the land. There is the language which reflects aspirations for national unity, and there is the language which paves the way for financial gain. It is difficult to say which is more important, and it remains to be seen whether English will indeed have a lesser place in the polity, given global realities. The linguist and former education secretary Andrew Gonzalez (1999) writes that "in choosing between symbolic value and socio-economic value, the latter usually takes priority" (p. xiii). Any which way, the Constitution states the present status quo: Filipino and English as official languages, with regional languages as auxiliary media of instruction.

The Pedagogical Choice

It is not enough to say that there will be up to three languages in any particular place the educational system appears. With English, for example, it needs to be determined which variety of English is to be learned. There are conceivably two main places where English will be used. One group needs English for commerce in urban centers such as Manila and Cebu. As such, the variety of English to use would be that variety of English as used and understood in the Philippines, i.e. Philippine English. This variety of English might have features that are considered non-standard, but these examples of "transfer" or "interference" are shared by members of the speech community, and so, far from impeding communication, actually facilitates it (Siegel, 2003).

But beyond use in the Philippines, there are a large number who need facility in English to gain employment in other countries. There are currently more than a million Filipinos overseas who work as nurses, IT professionals, and engineers, and their numbers are growing.

There are also those who work in call centers, who remain in the Philippines but whose primary use of English is with native speakers of the language. Thus, there is the need for a Philippine English that is not too far removed from standard varieties of English. A name given to this compromise variety is *phonemic English*, that is, "English that does not reveal the local Philippine region or native language of the speaker, but understood by educated speakers of English" (Sibayan, 1999, p. 413).

Then, there is Filipino, a language that possibly exists and possibly does not exist. The language is primarily based on Tagalog grammar, admitting contributions of lexis from other Philippine and world languages that it comes in contact with (Gonzalez & Villacorta, 2001). The question is how well a new language such as this can serve as a medium of instruction. The opinion is that while it can presently be used for primary and secondary education, it will take at least another century before Filipino becomes sufficiently "intellectualized" for use in higher education and research (Sibayan, 1999). It should be kept in mind as well that Filipino is equally a second language as English for a great number of Filipinos.

It has also been pointed out by Cummins (1983) that languages proficiency can be of two kinds, what he calls basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS) and cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP). The Filipino that Filipinos use in day-to-day interactions is different than the Filipino found in textbooks and used in classrooms. There is a need to reflect on the reasons why language is acquired and taught in classrooms. If it is primarily to teach communication, then BICS Filipino must be taught. If the purpose is to prepare Filipinos for higher education in the language, then CALP should be it. What should be kept in mind is that a choice for CALP means choosing a very different language than what most people know. As

well, it means leaving untapped and not taking advantage of the BICS knowledge that people already come knowing.

The regional languages present a challenge of their own. Those with a large number of speakers probably have a literacy tradition to some extent, but other languages are mostly oral, possessing little prestige even among their speakers, and perhaps not suited for education. The absence of textbooks and instructional material in these languages is another important consideration. As well, it is the reality that "the higher one moves in education and the more one aspires to professional excellence, the smaller is the number of languages employed as the medium of instruction" (Srivastava, 1988, p. 264). On the whole, the Constitution appears to be on the mark; major regional languages can be used as auxiliary media of instruction where it is the L1, with Filipino and English as the main media of instruction more generally throughout the country. The question now is how several languages can be taught together effectively.

Which Languages When?

Research on second language acquisition is generally agreed that "older is faster, but younger is better" (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). That is, That is, the *rate* of acquisition older learners tends to be quicker, but that the *eventual attainment* of younger learners tends to be higher (Krashen, Long, & Scarcella, 1979). However, reviews of the research (Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2003; Birdsong, 1999; Ellis, 1994) indicate that the research on age and second language acquisition has not done a good enough job of controlling for possible confounding variables. For example, at the time a learner is learning an L2, what is the status of his L1? How proficient was he in the L1? Is he able to read and write in the L1? The relationship between the

learner's L1 and L2 is a crucial one that cannot be omitted or overlooked. For theoretical and research work on this, one has to turn to the work of those in reading and bilingualism, who have given a little more thought to it.

Linguistic Interdependence Theory

The concern of some people is that giving time to teaching an L2 will take away from time learning the more desirable language (i.e. in the Philippine context, English). They are afraid that the deterioration of skills in the English language is caused by the bilingual education policy that the country has had in place since 1974. Research has shown that this fear is unfounded, that the decline in English was not caused by the bilingual education policy, as amount of time schools implemented the program was not related to student achievement (Gonzalez & Sibayan, 1988). Similar results have also been found for Latino children in the Carpenteria Preschool Program (Campos, 1995).

An explanation offered for this is the linguistic interdependence theory, which is formally stated in the following way:

> To the extent that instruction in Lx is effective in promoting proficiency in Lx, transfer of this proficiency to Ly will occur provided there is adequate exposure to Ly (either in school or environment) and adequate motivation to learn Ly (Cummins, 1988, p. 156).

This theory is certainly related to the Chomskyian notion that languages are different only in terms of surface features, and that there is a universal grammar that underlies all languages. As such, developing knowledge in one language is in some way developing knowledge about other languages. The implication of this for policy, Cummins (1988) writes, is that "for language minority students, L1 academic skills can be strongly promoted at no cost to the development of English academic skills" (p. 157). There are implications for pedagogy as well. Teachers need

not and should not cover the same ground twice. They also need to determine what the student already knows, and then adjust instruction accordingly.

Language Threshold Hypothesis

The theory of a common underlying proficiency has to be qualified, however. In the above quoted definition, the most ambiguous term has to be "adequate," which appears twice. What actually constitutes "adequate exposure" to a language? This is the question behind the language threshold hypothesis. Learners, it is claimed, need to reach a certain level of proficiency in the L2 before reading skills from the L1 will transfer (Carrell & Grabe, 2002).

Empirical studies have supported this position, showing that reading ability in L1 and proficiency in L2 together explains a large proportion of the variance in L2 reading. The relative effect of each separately, however, is not consistent. For example, L1 reading ability is a better predictor of success in L2 reading among Hispanic children learning English, whereas for English-speaking children learning Spanish, L2 proficiency is the better predictor. The conclusion that can be come up with at this point, then, is that while the threshold exists, there seems to be "a continuously changing relationship as L2 proficiency increases, not necessarily in terms of the existence of a specific 'threshold'" (Carrell & Grabe, 2002, p. 244).

Language in the Brain

Work on the brain and neuro-cognition also falsifies the notion that learning two languages is an impediment or somehow undesirable, as was the belief in the past (Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994). Genesee (2001) shows that children are able to distinguish two languages from the one-word stage on; the two languages are not confused. Bilingual children are also either equal to or advantaged over monolingual children in terms of metalinguistic skills. For example, they are better able to separate a word from the thing it represents. In other words, they

understand better the arbitrary nature of language, and so are more facile at manipulating it (Bialystok, 2001). Among the manifestations of this is code-switching, the ability to move between two languages with ease according to norms of appropriateness and communicative need. Gonzalez (1999) writes that Filipinos who speak "Taglish", the combination of Tagalog and English "do so for sociolinguistic reasons and not out of ignorance of the two systems; in fact, I daresay that only those who have really mastered the two codes are able to use Taglish effectively" (p. 546).

In general, there is ample research supporting the notion of bilingual education. Or, at the very least, indicates that bilingualism poses no inherent problems in itself. The linguistic interdependence theory and the linguistic threshold hypothesis are complementary and related, and help illuminate the relationship between a person's L1 and L2. However, that the threshold is not known, or that it might be moveable, presents a practical problem for policy. Indeed, skills in one language can support skills in another, and well and good if the threshold is not only reached but far exceeded; strength can build upon strength. But the converse can also be true; it is possible that the unknown threshold is *not* reached, in which case the putative transfer will not occur, leaving a child weak in both languages, and thus become even more disadvantaged (Cummins, 1981).

The threshold being "movable" might simply mean that we haven't accounted for the factors that affect this threshold. Indeed, the factors that have been accounted for so far are all cognitive in nature. The studies showing differences between Spanish learners of English and English learners of Spanish point to difference in backgrounds, contexts, and demographics as important variables that need to be taken into consideration.

Which Languages Where and for Whom

Most research on bilingualism has assumed a dominant L2 setting, (i.e. where the L2 is the dominant language, and where the typical learners are minorities), no doubt because most of the research has been done in the United States (Siegel, 2003). The Philippines, on the other hand, is an example of an institutional L2 setting, otherwise known as "official language context (Ellis, 1994), where the L2 is an official language even as it is an additional language and not a native language for a large majority of the population. There are actually more learners of English in institutional L2 settings—India and Pakistan being other examples—than in any other kind of setting in the world (Kachru, 1985). Yet, ironically, this sociolinguistic setting is "virtually ignored by second language acquisition research…. [leading to a rather skewed view of the nature of the L2 and its speakers" (Siegel, 2003, p. 180-181).

Naturalistic and Instructed Language Learning

One difference between a dominant L2 setting and an institutional L2 setting is that in the former, standard versions of the L2 are spoken and widely available in the environment. Thus, L2 learners in such settings can learn the language not only from school, but also from hearing it used by people around him outside of schools. That is not the case in institutional L2 settings. Since the L2 is not the dominant language, children are not as likely to encounter it in the environment, and so the full burden of learning the language rests in the instructional context of the classroom. Research has shown, in fact, that different parts of the brain are used depending on this particular distinction of the manner in which the language is learned (Genesee, 1988). This might have to do as well with the distinction between BICS and CALP previously mentioned (Cummins, 1983), as language learned in the environment is more likely to be BICS language, and those learned in the classroom being of the latter variety.

Whatever is taught in the classroom, there is also the fact that there are few avenues outside for practicing what has been learned, and the viability of such an enterprise can certainly be questioned. A study done among marginalized communities in the Philippines shows, for example, that literacy programs are beneficial only insofar as literate practices are integrated into the life of the communities. Otherwise, literacy skills and training have no effect on people's thought processes and no practical relevance in their lives (Bernardo, 1998). This echoes the work of Shirley Brice-Heath (1983), and suggests that together with education, government needs to move other policy levers to introduce literate practices where they do not exist, as a way to ensure that learning takes place effectively.

L2 Valued and Not

Another factor that needs to be considered is whether the L2 is valued or not. In the United States, for example, the value of an L2 is conflicted. Sociolinguist Joshua Fishman notes that "many Americans have long been of the opinion that bilingualism is 'a good thing' if it was acquired via travel (preferably to Paris) or via formal education (preferably at Harvard) but that it is a 'bad thing' if it was acquired from one's immigrant parents or grandparents" (qtd. in Bialystok & Hakuta, 1994, p. 215-216). In American schools, the aim is for English to eventually replace the home languages of minority children, what is known as "subtractive bilingualism" (Lambert, 1974).

On the policy level. In institutional L2 settings, on the other hand, policy leans toward "additive bilingualism," as English is the borrowed language and not the native language of the majority. This has implications on the relative amount of time that will be given to each language within the educational system. How many subjects will be taught in which language, and for how many years?

These policy decisions certainly need to be informed by research. They also need to be informed by history, as language planning and policy is attended by unseen pitfalls and unintended consequences. The example of India is instructive, as it is a country with a setting very much identical to the Philippines; both are densely populated countries with high incidence of poverty, both have trilingual education systems, and more recently, both have many citizens who use English to work in the call center industry and as expatriates. Starting in the mid-1950s, and over the period of a decade, India changed the boundaries of states according to linguistic lines. The idea was to enable people to learn and be governed in their own languages.

The result, however, has been increased rivalry between states, and led to bitterness and violence within. Analysis shows the reason behind it: whereas a language used to be a tool for different speech communities to get things done, making it official turned it into an instrument of power, investing opportunity in native speakers of it, and marginalizing other groups in the state (Srivastava, 1988). One language became valued over another, and what was intended to promote efficiency and education ended up creating conflict and strife. Thus, while language policy might want to value and respect indigenous languages, it should also make sure that it not result in separate ethnic enclaves that would not have anything to do with other members of the larger polity.

On the individual level. The value that a state gives to an L2 does not give the whole picture, as policy is not always what is practiced. Individuals can choose not to agree with government actions, and this is no less the case where language is concerned. Distinction has been made between elite and folk bilingualism. Again, in the case of India, people in the upper classes learn English and a CALP version of Hindi because they represent being educated and being part of elite society. Such elite bilingualism is learned of their own volition, and so

motivation does not present a problem. On the other hand, folk bilingualism refers to people who learn an L2 because they have to, for reasons of survival. In India, this would be those who speak a smaller language, who need to learn a functional BICS version of Hindi for employment and economic reasons (Srivastava, 1988). And students in school who are years away from seeking employment and miles away from where that language is used might simply not value the language at all, nor desire becoming part of the community that speaking that language represents (Paulston, 1988).

Teaching this group of learners is very different from teaching those in the former group. Indeed, teaching them in a language they care nothing for might increase the likelihood of them dropping out, pushing them further into the cycle of poverty. On the other hand, younger children might not have well-formed impressions about the L2 yet, and if the L2 is appropriately presented to them, might be the beginning of great educational gains for them (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Ellis, 1994). In other words, there is greater chances of failure and less room for error in teaching these groups, one reason why policy must be made with them firmly in mind. Studies clearly show that social class is related to achievement in an L2 (World Bank, 1995; Ellis, 1994), and more thought and attention needs to be given to finding out what works for these who are most disadvantaged.

It is quite clear that sociolinguistic and socioeconomic factors are important predictors of successful or unsuccessful L2 learning. Yet, these factors have not been systematically considered in most of the research. The different ways these factors combine to influence language learning need to be teased out. Appropriate ways for teaching different people who are differently placed and differently motivated to learn need to be developed. In 1997, the American National Research Council Committee on the Education Limited-English Proficient and

Bilingual Students published a research agenda on next steps for the field to take (August & Hakuta, 1997). They noted that a common-use corpus of spontaneous speech data existed for L1 learners. Collecting a similar corpus for L2 learners would be an invaluable help for second language acquisition research. Among the biggest problems faced by the field at present are inauthentic language production, inadequate sample sizes, and inability to control for contextual variables. A large common-use corpus as proposed above would take care of all three problems. Having a corpus of L1 and L2 speech will also allow for cross-comparisons, and greater insight into how people learn language, whether one at a time, or several at once.

Conclusion

There is no reason that says two languages cannot be taught together effectively. Indeed, in many European countries and elsewhere, societal and educational bilingualism is the norm (Beardsmore, 1995). One difference, though, is that European education systems are better funded than are Philippine public schools. This social reality is precisely why sociolinguistic variables need to be factored into research if research is to be relevant to the Philippine context.

Important as language is, it is but one goal of education, and education is but one component of public expenditure. For developing countries, that is always the dilemma; there are needs in one area, but there are always equal demands in another area, and choices have to be made. Policy is the effort to "balance between different goods, all of which must be pursued, but [which] cannot be jointly maximized" (Green, 1994, ¶ 3). It stands to reason, and is especially critical if resources are scarce, that public policy be coordinated so that one aspect supports another, and vice versa. Smith and O'Day (1991) suggest that educational improvement is best achieved when all parts are commonly conceived and put together. All the levers available to

government; indeed, all levers available to a society; should be made to work together for common benefit and the common good. In the Philippines, English is an important part of this effort. It is both means and condition for economic improvement, and it is this circle that policy and research must get to the heart of.

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Questions:

Which languages?

Which languages when?

Which languages where and for whom?

1899 Constitution

"The Spanish language shall be used for the present."

1935 Constitution

"Until otherwise provided by law, English and Spanish shall continue as official languages."

1973 Constitution

"This Constitution shall be promulgated in English and in Pilipino, and translated into each dialect spoken by over fifty thousand people, and into Spanish and Arabic. In case of conflict, the English text shall prevail.

"Until otherwise provided by law, English and Pilipino shall be the official languages."

1987 Constitution

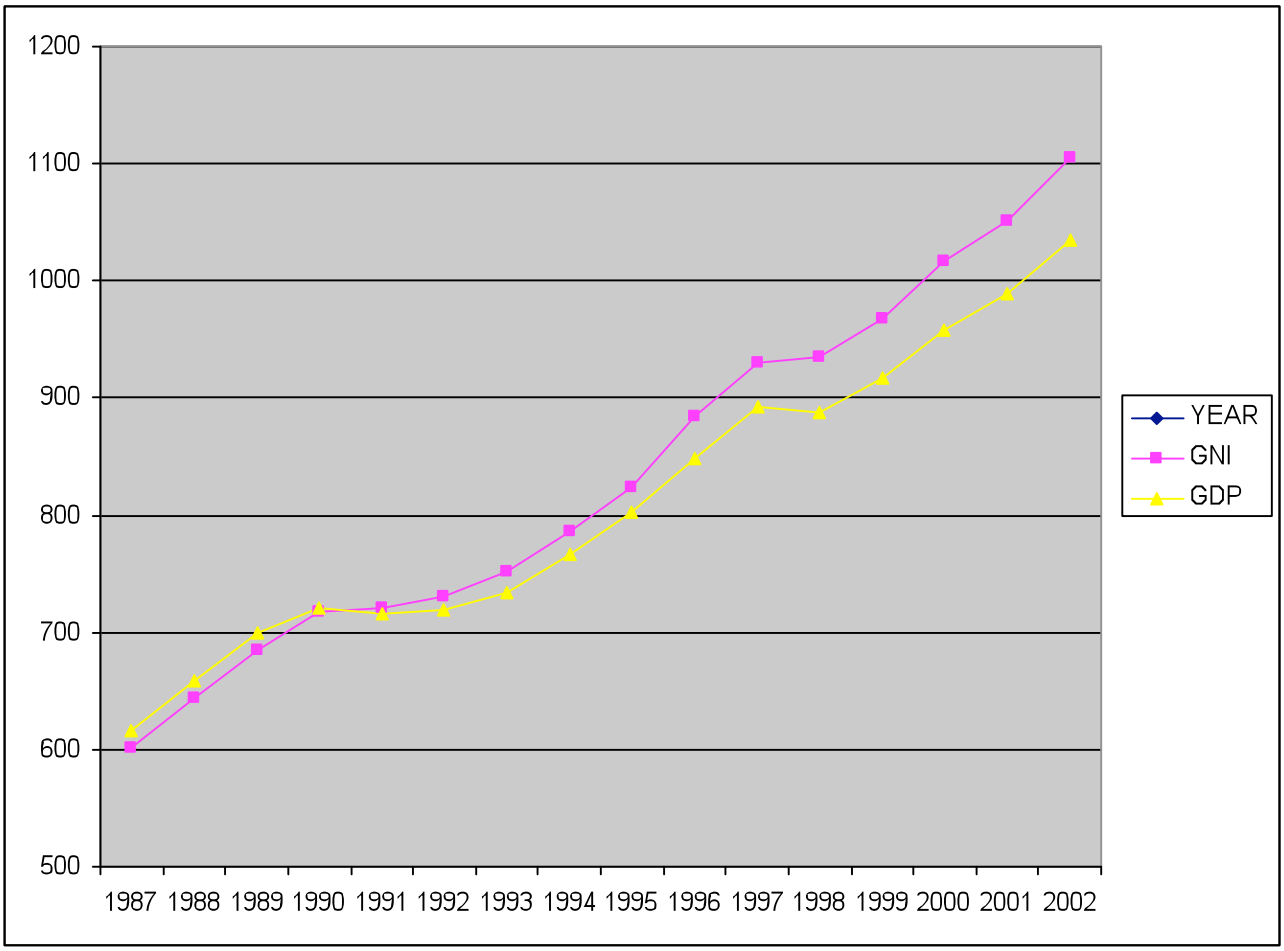
"The national language of the Philippines is Filipino. As it evolves, it shall be further developed and enriched on the basis of existing Philippine and other languages…. The Government shall take steps to initiate and sustain the use of Filipino as a medium of official communication and as language of instruction in the educational system.

"For purposes of communication and instruction, the official languages of the Philippines are Filipino and, until otherwise provided by law, English. The regional languages are the auxiliary official languages in the regions and shall serve as auxiliary media of instruction therein. Spanish and Arabic shall be promoted on a voluntary and optional basis."

Labor force participation and unemployment rate by level of schooling (1997):

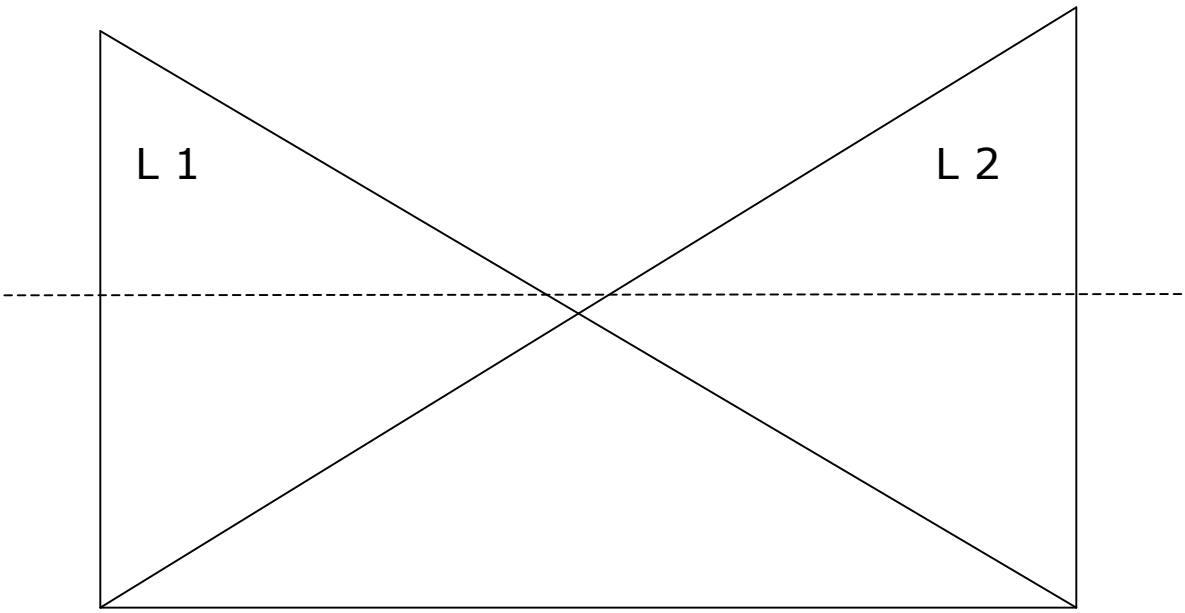
	Labor force participation	Unemployment rate
No schooling	**99.1%**	**2.5%**
Primary	**89.3%**	**3.5%**
Lower secondary	**70.5%**	**5.8%**
Upper secondary	**67.1%**	**6.5%**
Tertiary/University	**63.6%**	**8.9%**

Source: OECD, 2000.



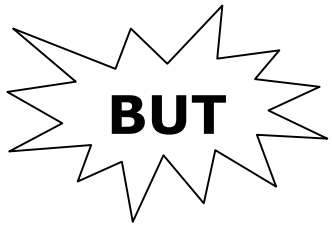
2003 President Macapagal-Arroyo

"Our English literacy, our aptitude and skills give us a competitive edge in information and communications technology…. Therefore, until Congress enacts a law mandating Filipino as the language of instruction, I am directing the Department of Education to return English as the primary medium of instruction, provided some subjects still be taught in Filipino."



"Linguistic Interdependence Theory"

Policy Implication: "L1 academic skills can be promoted at no cost to the development of English academic skills."



"Language Threshold Hypothesis"

Policy Implication:

	L2 +	L2 -
L1 +	+	=
L1 -	=	-

Differences Depending On...

. setting naturalistic or instructed

. bilingualism additive or subtractive

. L2 valued or not valued

. social class high or low