DISCOURSE & LANGUAGE POLICY: PROSPECTS FOR NATION BUILDING

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I. INTRODUCTION

As history would confirm, language has played a major role in the creation and development of social and political structures. Throughout history, "social order" was largely dictated by the small elite and was maintained by policies that considered their interests. The same elite had excluded the greater majority of the population in the formation of policies, both social and political. This gave the elite enormous power over the majority. A major tactic pointed out by *de Beaugrande* was the coding of laws and regulations into a special language inaccessible to the general or larger population.

In his paper, *de Beaugrande* cited three socio-political structures in history that illustrate how language was used to divide society into classes: between the so-called *learned* and the *ignorant* general population. The said social structures effected the language situations, which even up to the present need to be changed or modified.

II. HISTORICAL BASES

A. Feudalism. In feudal Europe, we have seen how language was used to create an elite minority and control a greater majority. Education and schooling was flatly denied to the general populace (1) and Latin was used as the medium of administration and 'culture,' which the unschooled did not understand. Latin, being the exclusive language that it was, continued as an artificial language since it had no national population of native speakers. It was an advantage to the feudal lords, then, who shared it with the elite few.

Feudalism soon declined, but the elite remained and there was still a majority that controlled. Administration and education then relied on a living language shared by a dominant population, or a segment of it, but was not shared by the dominated ones. A new tactic was introduced this time, that is, the borrowing or use of a foreign language with a living population base. In this case, it was French which was used for administration and 'culture.'

Later, a special brand of the native language was used, which improved efficiency and intelligibility between the elite and the controlled population. But it was still limited to the areas that served the purpose of the elite or ruling class, such as commerce.

B. Colonialism. Europe raised feudalism into the international plane when she started to colonize. The social structure, was basically the same; the colonized being the serfs, and the colonizers, the feudal lords. At this point, the language used for administration and 'culture' was the colonizers' native language. The same language that might have been despised by the ruling class of the colonizers, as was the case of Spanish for 400 years; and of English as used by the Americans. The colonizers' language held in contempt by

the ruling elite became the same language of control for the colonized. So we see that the language used is not of importance; but the one using it, and how. For the colonized, the colonizers' language remains inaccessible whatever it may be.

As what happened in the Philippines, both the Spaniards and the Americans thought or made us believe that they were doing us a favor by bringing civilization to the country (Bernabe 1987); it being a "charitable enterprise." Later, the Japanese gave us the 'Principles of Education' and inspired us to love labor, sadly as their laborers (28.72) while, at all accounts, they just denied us to explore our own indigenous culture, much so, our language, and our ability to understand each other, by forcing *their* culture on us.

C. Multinationalism. The Philippines may no longer be any other country's colony but it still suffers from a class division, in administration and culture, largely seen in education and language. Colonialism is still evident in the Filipinos' preference for that which is foreign and contempt for things 'Filipino.' People favor items which are branded and imported, while many Filipinas want their skin be 'white' rather than 'kayumanggi' – thus explaining the prevalence of skin whitening beauty and fashion items for both male and female skin.

Whereas in feudalism and colonialism - the power structures were transparent and intentions, clear; albeit cloaked in the myths of bringing civilization to the uncivilized; the picture now; it seems, is lacking in clarity and is more complex. At present, it is no longer a class or a country dominating over another, but business and organizations controlling the society. But still, the 'elite-dominated' pattern is discernible. So the country continues to produce graduates for white-collar jobs whose target employers are the multinationals. It cannot be denied that these multinational organizations and companies dictate the curricula of our colleges and universities. Thus we have produced countless accountants, IT professionals, nurses and medical practitioners – all aiming for the prestigious job in a big multinational company. And a basic requirement for success is the acquisition of a former colonial language, such as English or Spanish/French (especially for those wanting employment and/or settlement in Canada. A diploma certifying a degree in Nursing, engineering, and accountancy; among others, is not a guarantee for foreign employment, unless it is coupled with a certificate signifying a passing mark in IELTS or International English Language Testing System.

Further, De Beaugrande describes three (3) typical post-colonial patterns that can be associated with the multinational structures:

1. **Nativization -** The language of the colonizer has become so firmly entrenched in education and society such that those of the indigenous population, have been pushed and marginalized, if not totally exterminated.

2. **Pluralization -** Both the colonizer's language and the indigenous ones are used in schooling and by society in varying degrees of independence. Thus in most exclusive schools English is strictly used

as the medium of instruction, and in others a mixture of English and the indigenous language; like Visayan, used interchangeably with English or what has been called as "Cebilish" for Cebuano-English.

3. **Indigenization** - The language and schooling of the colonizer have been replaced by the indigenous ones.

The Philippines is still an emerging nation that has yet to achieve its status as a truly free and independent country ready for the world. One thing that may have greatly stifled us in reaching such goal resides in the matter of language. Having gone through three major colonizers and countless other racial and cultural interactions, the unity we Filipinos are hoping for, is still far from reality. De Beaugrande believes that a clear language policy is the key to reach such goal. But there is the need to confront first the social contradictions inherited from our colonial past. That instead, since the purpose of language is communication, **let there be communication with sharing, and education with emancipation.**

III. THE PROSPECTS FOR RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

According to de Beaugrande the 'full extent to which language interacts with social order is still far from established.' Even in language research, elitism exists that has somehow neglected or concealed the social relevance of discourse participation. More focus was given to grammar rules or forms rather than full contexts of communication. Thus, he presents three scenarios for language research:

1. Language research should provide formal models of abstract systems. This thesis by passes the issue being addressed by de Beaugrande and is dismissed. Fact is, its adherents are also dwindling.

2. Language research should document the status quo. This thesis opposes traditional grammar school, which Bloomfield (1933) claimed to be based largely on dogmas, logical hair-splitting, and wishful thinking.

3. Language research should provide means of transforming the status quo. This thesis, though held by the minorities, has its implications in dispute. Accordingly, there are three versions of how this can be achieved.

   a. Compensations of deficits: Language research should enable the formulation of policies which compensate for "deficits" arising from language and its various uses.

   b. Acceptance of differences: Language research should reveal that differences exist but do not imply that one brand is deficient and its speakers automatically needing remedial compensation.

c. Compromise and combination: Language research should take an active part in recording or even creating language resources from the entire pool of available languages and varieties.

IV. THE PHILIPPINE SETTING

De Beaugrande perceives the contemporary situation in the Philippines as complex and unprecedented that the scenarios he sketched in his paper should be applied with great caution and flexibility (12). Such conditions not only require, the acceptance of differences leading to compromise and combination, but also, a deeper understanding of the required overhauling or change of systems, over and beyond, these mere inadequacies for: a) lack of textbooks, b) limitation of teachers, in terms of resources and manpower retraining, and c) shifting of the medium of instruction to Filipino.

The lack of textbooks, hopefully, has been adequately addressed. But for the last two inadequacies, and/or deficiencies; much is to be desired. Unless Philippine society undergoes genuine change of social systems, the social stratification, signaled and reinforced by language, will grow worse (Gonzales, 1987:214)

Bernabe (1987) remarked that whereas Spain subjugated the Filipino through religion, the United States pacified them through education, specifically, the public school system. Until now, English-speaking Filipinos are regarded highly and the facility of such taken as a symbol among the middle and upper classes.

The efforts to create a national language have been done in the past. Sadly, instead of using a Philippine language as a medium of instruction, Pilipino, was instead taught as a subject as embodied in a DECS Order in 1959. The basis of Pilipino is tagalog, a vernacular of Central Luzon & Metro Manila.

A dichotomy arose when the Bilingual Education Program was introduced. Science, Technology, Language and Mathematics were taught in English and Social Studies, Work Education, Health Education, Physical Education, and Art in Pilipino.

De Beaugrande found it interesting that subjects with social relevance were taught in Pilipino and the specialized subjects were taught in English.

He also observed that Filipinos expressed themselves in the vernacular when they are angry, afraid, surprised, as well as, when swearing, cursing, and dreaming. But English is used for counting, adding, and often praying (based on studies by Bautista). The last one, he related as addressing to someone of high stature or the 'official head.'

Given the foregoing discussions, the need to change the way language is used and applied in discourse is recognized. "Intellectualization," a term defined by Bro. Andrew Gonzales as, 'a conceptualization and logical process involving principles and methods'

(1984;56) should be carried on in parallel to the other Philippine languages for widespread and creative participation (de Beaugrande 20)

Finally, according to de Beaugrande, for education to be effective, it must establish and maintain a genuinely populist base which respects the learners' first language, in their social context and their national identity.