

## Article

# A Means to Modernity: Nation-Building and the “Nativization” of English in Philippine Society

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Considering that the Philippines was a colony of Spain for over three hundred years (1565-1898), it is not surprising that Filipino society has absorbed many elements of Hispanic culture. Indeed, the very idea of the “Philippines” is a result of Spain’s conquest of the archipelago’s independent polities scattered across its islands, and their subsequent subjugation into one colony. Even today, remnants of Spanish rule are unmistakable. The country is predominantly Christian, as the latest government figures show that 79.5% of Filipinos identify as Roman Catholic.<sup>1</sup> Hispanic surnames such as *dela Cruz*, *Garcia*, or *Reyes* are common, as are Spanish names of places and authentic Filipino dishes like *adobo* (any kind of meat braised in vinegar) or *lechon* (roasted pig). And of course, the country remains named after King Philip II of Spain, despite clamor in the upper levels of government to rename the country during the 1970s and even more recently.<sup>2</sup> But for all the legacies of Spanish colonization that clearly remain today, it is also clear that the Spanish language itself was not actually spoken by most of the colony’s peoples. The language was mostly confined to members of the Church and State, as well as educated elites.<sup>3</sup> Unlike some of Spain’s former colonies across the Americas, Spanish had never been the archipelago’s *lingua franca*. Neither was there a “Filipino” language during colonial times as well, precisely because the archipelago was administered as a colony consisting of different peoples with their own native languages. Nationalists were only beginning to iron out the idea of the colony as one nation. By the end of Spain’s colonial rule, a mere 3% to 5% of the colony’s residents spoke Spanish.<sup>4</sup> Today, the Philippine Constitution assigns Filipino and English as the two official languages of the country.<sup>5</sup>

This change is remarkable, especially when one considers the low penetration rate of the Spanish language in the Philippines despite 300 years of colonial rule, and also how quickly and how widespread Filipinos adopted English within less than a century. Although some parts of the colony were briefly occupied by the British from 1762 to 1764,<sup>6</sup> it was only when the Philippines became a United States territory in 1898 that English was institutionalized into the social lexicon. Except for the Japanese occupation of the Philippines between 1942 to 1945, the United States’ rule over the country would last until it granted independence

to the Philippines in 1946. Yet despite this brief period of American dominion (relative to three centuries under the yoke of Spain) more than a fifth of the Filipino population would be able to speak English at some level by the mid-twentieth century.<sup>7</sup>

Hence this paper aims to explore how the English language quickly emerged and spread as a *lingua franca* of Philippine society in a span of less than a century. The general idea is that the exponential expansion of public schooling under twentieth-century American rule, coupled with the use of English as a medium of instruction, is the reason why English spread so quickly and rapidly. Granted that education did play a fundamental role, such a perspective does not necessarily explain why English has persisted as one of the country's *linguae francae* today alongside Filipino. Examining the endurance of English is significant, especially when considering that, parallel to the spread of English, the Filipino language was also being promulgated in the country. Clearly, education has not been the only factor in the indigenization of English. In fact, the Philippines observed a decline in English proficiency right before gaining independence. A U.S. government survey established to determine if the Philippines was ready for independence found that Filipino students still did not have sufficient English skills: "Out of 1,134 candidates in the tests in letter writing and English composition, 1,114 or 98 percent failed."<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the anti-neocolonial fervor that dominated intellectual circles and activist circles in the country during the first few decades after World War II would catalyze a "Filipinization" movement that sought to reassert national identity over a perceived "Americanization" of culture and dominance over the economy. This period saw an explosion of the Filipino language across government institutions and mass communications. From the 1950s to the late 1960s, the push for Filipino as a national language led to the renaming of government offices in Filipino, as well as the use of Filipino correspondence.<sup>9</sup> In a similar way, the post-war years saw an explosion of "OPM" (original Pilipino music), as well as the use of the language in shows and news programs broadcasted over radio and television. Moreover, the country would face a lack of English teachers by the late twentieth century, leading to a lack of organization in English class time allotments for students.<sup>10</sup>

Even over recent years, the country has experienced a decline in English proficiency. For instance, Philippine pollster Social Weather Stations (SWS) found that English skills including reading, writing, and speaking have dropped across the board at the turn of the twenty-first century. Between the years 2000 and 2006, the number of Filipinos who could read English dropped from 77% to 65%; those who could speak the language fell from 54% to 32%; while those who could write in English went from 54% to 48%.<sup>11</sup> In 2009, *The Economist* reported that call centers in the country had to "reject nine-tenths of otherwise qualified job applicants, mostly college graduates, because of their poor command of English."<sup>12</sup> The country has also plunged into international education company Education First's (EF's)

English Proficiency Index, which ranks countries based on their adults’ English skills. In 2016, the Philippines placed 13<sup>th</sup> (out of 72), while in 2022, it dropped to 22<sup>nd</sup> place (out of 111).<sup>13</sup>

Yet English has endured. To this day, major daily newspapers, such as the *Philippine Daily Inquirer*, the *Philippine Star*, and the *Manila Bulletin*, remain published in English, American/British movies are rarely subbed or dubbed into Filipino when shown in cinemas, most streaming sites and television channels; laws are promulgated in English, and the language remains a medium of instruction in the country’s educational system starting from the fourth grade. Indeed, the same 2006 poll revealing a drop in self-rated English proficiency also found that 68% agreed that developing good English communication skills open would better job opportunities for them, compared to a mere 6% who disagreed.<sup>14</sup>

What then explains why Philippine society never quite turned its back on English? Yes, proficiency may have dropped, but the point is that English is still practiced in everyday Filipino life. It has been absorbed into the social lexicon to the point that Philippine English is considered as one of the World Englishes. Hence this paper contends that one must also consider the socio-cultural variables (e.g., national values and globalization)—and not just educational factors—that influenced such an enduring bond. On a broader level, the growth of English notably coincided with the development of the Filipino nation and the emergence of modern globalization.

To that end, this paper argues that English endured in the country not simply because it was a medium of instruction. Rather, English eventually came to signify something more for Filipinos, namely: Modernity. English was a means to Modernity. More specifically, English was an instrument for an emergent postcolonial nation to navigate the globalizing modern world of the twentieth century. This paper, therefore, frames such phenomenon through Anderson’s theory of the “nation” as a social construct,<sup>15</sup> as well as Appadurai’s discourse on globalization and the flow of cultures.<sup>16</sup> Yes, English—when it was first institutionalized in the Philippines—was the language of its territorial sovereign the United States; but it eventually became the language of Modernity, in that Modernity was the globalizing world. English paved the way for the Philippines—a newly independent state that had yet to industrialize—to nevertheless modernize its society and rapidly join the community of other nation-states.

Moreover, this paper is significant precisely because it presents globalization as a force of indigenization rather than a force of socio-cultural assimilation. The institutionalization of English did not “Americanize” Filipinos. Indeed, Filipino nationalism remained vibrant throughout almost half a century of American rule, even more so after gaining independence. The expansion of English did not stymie the development of a Filipino national identity. Rather, the institutionalization of the language provided a path to modernity for the

Filipino nation. Ergo, Globalization influenced the indigenization of a language (i.e., the emergence of Philippine English) rather than the assimilation of a society (i.e., Filipinos becoming American). This article thus contributes to the side of the academic debate asserting that globalization has led to the cultural heterogenization.

The discussion in this paper is divided into three parts. First, it draws from Anderson's concept of a "nation" as a social construct to explain how the ardor for Modernity forms an intrinsic part of the Filipino national identity. This stems from the fact that Filipino nationalism is essentially a product of Europe's Age of Enlightenment. The same values and beliefs propagated by the great thinkers of that period influenced the colonial nationalists to conceive of a nation free of the antiquated and unjust structures of their sovereigns towards a modern enlightened society. The second part of this paper adopts Appadurai's framework on how culture (and for this paper's case, language) flows from one place to another in a globalized world. Appadurai does away with center-periphery models and instead posits that the global cultural economy can now be characterized as a "complex, overlapping, disjunctive order," where culture (and once again for this paper's case, language) moves across five different "scapes" or flows, namely: ethnoscaples, mediascaples, technoscaples, financscaples, and ideoscaples. The second part of this paper shall thus elaborate how the English language flowed into the Philippines through these different "scapes," thus explaining why education, by itself, is not the sole variable of the language's quick adoption and widespread use. Lastly, the third part of this paper discusses the decolonization of English in the Philippines and delves into a discussion of how the language operates in the country today. More specifically, the third part utilizes Schneider's Dynamic Model<sup>17</sup> to frame how English evolved in the Philippines from a language of its former sovereign (i.e., the United States), to becoming an official national language itself with its own orthography. Schneider specifically discusses how this evolution occurs over the course of five "phases," starting from, foundation, exonormative stabilization, nativization, endonormative stabilization, and lastly, differentiation.

### **Part 1: For the Sake of Modernity**

For as much as the Filipino Nation today refers to a group of people of the Philippines, it is often lost in the narrative that the very idea of a Filipino "nation" existed more as an idea back then. The notion of the colony's different peoples emerged during the late nineteenth century among the colony's rebels who pushed for outright independence, as well as educated liberals—many of whom were educated in Spain and in contrast advocated more for economic reforms and proper representation in the Cortes as a province of Spain.

Although rebels and educated liberals differed in their goals, they nevertheless found common ground in the idea that the colony's different peoples—should be considered a sin-

gular nation. This falls in line with Anderson’s definition of a nation as a social construct, or more specifically, “imagined as a community,” in the sense that nationalism emanates not solely from ideology, but also from a shared history and cultural roots that precede such beliefs.<sup>18</sup> Calhoun drives this point by explaining how nationalism is fundamentally a “way of talking, thinking, and acting”.<sup>19</sup> More than an “objective” or empirical category of social organization, it is also important to stress the “subjective” component of national consciousness, which Calhoun elaborates as “the way in which people understand how they belong together and should interact. This is clearly true of the idea of nation. Without the subjective component of self-understanding, nations could not exist.”<sup>20</sup>

What then constitutes the fundamental values of Filipino nationalism? This study argues that the desire for Modernity is what drives such identity. Other nations trace their origins to time immemorial and are predicated on the nostalgia of a sacred past and continuing long-held traditions. Conversely, the Filipino national identity is predicated on a break from the old world, in that the old world represented oppressive colonial regimes and the hypocrisy of corrupt religious groups. Indeed, the antagonists of late nineteenth-century novels *Noli Me Tángere* and *El filibusterismo* by foremost Filipino nationalist Jose Rizal came from these two institutions. Filipino nationalism is not “conservative” in the sense that there is no old order to conserve. There is only a Modernity to look forward to, free from the anti-intellectualism and injustice of the past. As Hedman and Sidel aptly describe it: “In contrast with the official nationalisms found elsewhere in the region, today’s popular nationalism in the Philippines does not involve reference to and reverence for mythologised Origins, Great Man History, essentialised Identity, ‘othering’ of The West, or the promotion of a narrowly, patriarchally gendered form of nationalist ‘brotherhood’.”<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, to understand why Modernity is the foundation of Filipino nationalism (and hence the eventual indigenization of English as a means to Modernity), it is important to discuss the idea that influences such ardor. To that end, the desire for modernity stems from the origins of Filipino nationalism as a product of Europe’s Age of Enlightenment. Much like postcolonial nations of the United States, and even republics like France, Filipino nationalism is a product of Enlightenment values. If anything, it was Spain itself that planted the seed of liberalism in the Philippines, especially during the “Glorious Revolution” of 1868 that deposed Queen Isabela II and gave liberals and republicans control of the government. Schumacher contends that “[t]he deportations consequent upon the various coups [in Spain] prior to 1868 had brought a certain number of Liberal and Republican exiles to the country, who were, one may suppose, not completely silent about their ideas.”<sup>22</sup> As described by his Austrian friend Ferdinand Blumentritt, Rizal found that:

[T]he Philippines was a land where hypocrisy had its seat; where the Spaniards, friars,

officials, military men, etc. enjoyed unlimited power over body and soul. In Madrid, he could see the opposite: free-thinkers and atheists speaking freely about one's religion and his Church without shedding his blood. He found minimal exercise of government authority... Observing all this, a feeling of bitterness overwhelmed him when he compared the difference existing between the untrammelled freedom in the motherland and the Theocratic absolutism in his land.<sup>23</sup>

The emergence of these values precisely coincided with the alignment of civil society towards Philippine independence from Spain. It was the country's native intelligentsia that spearheaded this movement. The privileged of this group took up higher education abroad and witnessed the structural changes in European societies at that time.

Anderson points out how liberalism and the Enlightenment have “a powerful impact, above all in providing an arsenal of ideological criticisms of imperial and ancient regimes.”<sup>24</sup> Even in the post-Second World War era, Modernity would remain the goal for the Philippines, as well as emerging postcolonial nation-states. These movements sought to break from the antiquated practices of the past toward an ideology's interpretation of modern society. In his study of Third World political movements during the Cold War era, Westad outlines this very co-dependence between modernity and ideology. Westad dismisses the notion that the period was simply a contest between the post-Second World War superpowers of the United States and the Soviet Union. More significantly, it was a clash between their ideology-driven modernities (i.e., liberalism vs communism).<sup>25</sup> And because of this, the most important events of the Cold War “were neither military nor strategic, nor Europe-centered, but connected to political and social development in the Third World.”<sup>26</sup> Hence Westad describes how postcolonial leaders—whether they be authoritarian, communist, or liberal—rationalize their regimes despite paying vast social costs or even pushing their countries to war:

Seeing the gulf that separated the lives of their populations from the lives led by those in the pan-European world, their agendas were fueled by the certainty that change was not just possible but necessary and that almost any price was reasonable for defeating hunger, disease, ignorance, and injustice. Moreover, the moral imperative of progress that they appealed to was one that both superpowers shared, while the specifics for how to implement it were often inspired by one of them. It was not difficult, in other words, to find confirmation for agendas of change.<sup>27</sup>

The postcolonial elites of newly independent states faced the daunting task of building their states and economies and hence were attracted to either the centralized planning offered by

communism or the capitalist opportunities of liberalism. In Central and South America, for example, we see how regime change was driven in large part by ideology. The communist revolutions (such as those in Cuba, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Nicaragua, and the Philippines) were driven in large part by the failures of a strong man or authoritarian modernities.

How then, does English fit into the Filipino identity and its ardor for modernity? Accordingly, Anderson’s discourse also ascribes language a crucial role in constructing a common social imagination, in that it provides a common layer for different strata of society to share their common beliefs. In many respects, the way language operates in nationalism is similar to the way it operates in religion. Anderson particularly points to the function of sacred languages and texts. Latin, for instance, provided a common language for the kingdoms of medieval Europe to exhort a shared identity as Christian polities. Anderson specifically mentions a shared consciousness provided by classical Arabic to pilgrims in the Islamic holy city of Mecca: “[I]f Maguindanao [an ethnic group of south-central Philippines] met Berbers [an ethnic group of Northern Africa] in Mecca, knowing nothing of each other’s languages, incapable of communicating orally, they nonetheless understood each other’s ideographs, because the sacred texts they shared existed only in classical Arabic.”<sup>28</sup> For Anderson, language serves not merely as a unifier of people, but also as a unifier of ideas. “Language is not an instrument of exclusion: in principle, anyone can learn any language. On the contrary, it is fundamentally inclusive, limited only by the fatality of Babel: no one lives long enough to learn *all* languages. Print-language is what invents nationalism, not a particular language per se.”<sup>29</sup> Anderson cites the Indonesian and Ukrainian national identities as examples of the power of language in providing such cohesion. For Indonesia, Anderson writes that only a few decades ago almost no Indonesian spoke the Indonesian language as their native tongue: “virtually everyone had their own ‘ethnic’ language and some, especially people in the nationalist movement, *Bahasa Indonesia/dienstmaleisch* as well. Today there are perhaps millions of young Indonesians, from dozens of ethnolinguistic backgrounds, who speak Indonesian as their mother-tongue.”<sup>30</sup> In the case of Ukraine, the author explains that the Ukrainian language was perceived in the eighteenth century as merely a language of “yokels.” But by 1804, the University of Kharkov was founded and would rapidly become “the center for a boom in Ukrainian literature.”<sup>31</sup> The first Ukrainian grammar would emerge by 1819, a mere 12 years after its official Russian counterpart.<sup>32</sup> Similarly, Seton-West contends that the works of Ukrainian nationalist poet-writer-artist Taras Shevchenko would further strengthen a Ukrainian national identity, as “the formation of an accepted Ukrainian literary language owes more to him than to any other individual. The use of this language was the decisive stage in the formation of a Ukrainian national consciousness.”<sup>33</sup>

Governor-General Cameron Forbes, head of the United States government in the Philippines from 1909 to 1913, noted how Spain “had not encouraged the general learning of



Spanish, perhaps from a fear that general education and a common language would give the Filipinos too much cohesion.”<sup>34</sup> Moreover, the early years of American rule saw the ruling government recognizing the need for English as the medium of instruction in schools, as it would function as a “common language with which they could communicate readily with each other. This was regarded as an essential step in making them capable of nationality.”<sup>35</sup> Indeed, over 180 languages are spoken in the Philippines, of which 170 are unintelligible from each other.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, the practice of English in the Philippines predates the formal Filipino language. It was only as the archipelago was transitioning towards full independence that the Philippine commonwealth government declared in 1937 that Tagalog (a native language predominantly spoken in the capital, Manila, and the regions surrounding it) would become the basis for a national language which would eventually be Filipino. Ironically, this very decree proclaiming a national language was written and promulgated entirely in English.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, the English language did what the Spanish language could not. For as much as the absence of Spanish literacy under Spain arguably stymied the proliferation of a Filipino national identity (because the archipelago’s different peoples had their own native languages), the institutionalization of English amid the rapid expansion of public schooling would provide a substrate for the deliberation of Filipino national identity, and eventually space for the nation to engage in a modern, globalized world. In many respects, English aided in this formation of collective identity and memory, similar to how Calhoun describes the way people read the news, in that it:

[N]ot only provides people with common information, and common images of ‘us’ and ‘them’ but helps to reproduce a collective narrative in which the manifold different events and activities reported fit together like narrative threads in a novel and interweaves them all with the life of the reader.<sup>38</sup>

## **Part 2: Thus Spoke the Nation**

Having established in the previous section the Filipino nation is a social construct predicated on the values of the Enlightenment and an ardor for Modernity, this paper now turns to Appadurai’s discourse to explain how English fits into the Filipino social imagination. The flow of English in the Philippines is interpreted through globalization scholar Appadurai’s theory on the flow of culture in a globalized world. In his book, *Modernity at Large*, Appadurai emphasizes the role of social imagination when cultures move from one place to another in a globalized world. It is because of this very social imagination that cultures are not directly transposed from their origin, because of how it molds into the social imagination of the receiving country. For example, Appadurai’s analysis of the indigenization of



cricket in India finds that cricket eventually became more than just a sport when it flowed into Indian society. Appadurai finds that India's social imagination, especially after gaining independence, shaped cricket into more than a symbol of sport, but more significantly as a symbol of their nation's modernity.<sup>39</sup>

Moreover, Appadurai contends that these "imagined worlds" are constructed around five "scapes" that serve as pathways for the transnational movement of culture (and subsequently for this paper, the English language). The use of "-scape" indicates that the disjunctures are "deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors."<sup>40</sup> For Appadurai, the rapid advancement of globalization over the past several decades has brought about "a world in which both points of departure and points of arrival are in cultural flux, and thus the search for steady points of reference... can be very difficult."<sup>41</sup> Appadurai's five "disjunctures," namely ethnoscape, financescape, technoscape, mediascape, and ideoscape, "stress different streams or flows along which cultural material may be seen to be moving across natural boundaries."<sup>42</sup> This movement stands in stark contrast to cultural interactions of the past, which for Appadurai happened mainly through warfare or the spread of religion. These different "scapes" suggest that the phenomenon of globalization is not simply within the limits of landscapes, i.e., physical territories, but also beyond them. In the author's words, cultural forms today do not take "Euclidean boundaries" or structures and are instead "fundamentally fractal" and overlapping. For Appadurai, it is not necessarily about the "great traditional questions of causality, contingency, and prediction" but one of "chaos" in a world of "disjunctive global flows." Appadurai defines the different "scapes" as the building blocks of "imagined worlds" (extending on Benedict Anderson) of different persons and groups around the world: The use of "scape" indicates that the disjunctures are "deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors."<sup>43</sup> This section specifically focuses on how English flowed to the Philippines through the interplay between the Filipino nations' technoscape, mediascape, and financescape. More specifically, this section examines the role of mass communications technology (i.e., print, radio, television and the internet for technoscape), mass media (i.e., foreign pop culture for mediascape), and the Filipino global workforce (for financescape). Moreover, it is important to note that all these "scapes" do not operate independently from each other. Rather, they overlap and amplify each other. All these support this paper's position that education is not the sole reason why the use of English persists in Philippine society today.

By technoscape, Appadurai refers to the way technology accelerates the flow of culture across "previously impervious" boundaries.<sup>44</sup> Granted that English education in the public schooling system laid the groundwork for Filipinos to understand English, mass communication technologies such as newspapers, radio, television, and eventually the internet would

serve to immerse Filipinos in the actual use of English in daily life. Indeed, English benefited from the fact that its growth in the country coincided with the growth of mass communications technologies. The best example of this is the inaugural address delivered by a new president right after being sworn in. Arguably no other event in the country gets as much attention from Filipinos. There have been 14 presidents of the Philippines since the country gained independence in 1946. Of that number, only two have delivered their respective inaugural addresses purely in Filipino: Joseph Estrada, who held office from 1998 until resigning in 2001; and Benigno Aquino, who finished a full term from 2010 to 2016.

The point is that such technologies allow English to be encountered in the here and now, i.e., a language of common usage. It is not something unreachable or a language of the elite (like Spanish of colonial times). Technology—and not just education—has made English accessible. It was a language that can be found in the commonplace and everyday minutiae of life: national newspapers, advertising jingles on the radio, and even in shows on television. For instance, television was introduced in the country in 1953, with locally made sets being available by 1960.<sup>45</sup> Interestingly, the early years of television already saw a dominance of English language content. In 1960, a mere 10% of television programs were local production, the rest were mostly recorded programs from the United States.<sup>46</sup> Importing these shows was cheaper than producing local programs.<sup>47</sup> In the current day, technology has exponentially expanded Filipinos' access to the English language. A countrywide poll found that between June 2021 to September 2021, about 63% of Filipino adults used the internet, with close to 60% of them logging on more than once a day.<sup>48</sup> In terms of their usage habits, virtually all (99%) of users went online to check their social media accounts, and a little over half (53%) access the internet to read or watch content on their interests such as movies, recipes, or entertainment news.<sup>49</sup> The last figure is significant, especially when one considers that most of the internet content in the Philippines is delivered in English. For example, major daily newspapers and online news sites publish most of their news stories in English on the web. Streaming sites in the country offer content mostly in English. It was only in 2022 when streaming site Netflix began offering Filipino subtitles but only for a very limited number of its original movies and shows.<sup>50</sup>

The technoscape overlaps with mediascape, which Appadurai defines as “images of the world created through media.”<sup>51</sup> Appadurai contends that the mediascape serves the purpose of offering “strips” of reality, out of which “scripts” of imagined lives can be formed.<sup>52</sup> One example of an English-centered mediascape in the Philippines is the consistent popularity of English songs. For instance, American musician Taylor Swift was the most streamed artist in the Philippines in the year 2022 among users of the music streaming platform Spotify in the country.<sup>53</sup> Similarly, Canadian pop star Justin Bieber placed fifth on the same list. Filipinos have long held an affinity for English songs. This fits with Iyer's account of the

popularity of American music in the Philippines, where nobody would think it strange to sing John Denver’s hit song about country roads taking them “home” to West Virginia.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, Iyer observes how it was also in the Philippines during the late 1980s when hear songs from the American 1960s duo *The Everly Brothers* more often “than ever before” as well as music of *Simon and Garfunkel*; *Peter, Paul and Mary*; and the *Eagles*.<sup>55</sup> But while American musicians have become popular in the country, Appadurai nevertheless points out that this does not necessarily mean that Filipinos have become “Americanized,” because “the rest of their lives is not in complete synchrony with the referential world that first gave birth to these songs.”<sup>56</sup> In terms of visual media, seven of the top 10 highest-grossing films in the Philippines of all time are English movies, five of which were produced by American comic book giant Marvel Studios.<sup>57</sup> The superhero movies in particular are neither dubbed nor subtitled in the Filipino language when released in the Philippines. Filipino audiences listen to the same English dialogue as audiences in English-speaking countries. The Walt Disney Company (the parent firm of Marvel Studios) has revealed that the Philippines has the highest Marvel fanbase per capita compared to the rest of Southeast Asia and India.<sup>58</sup>

English has also flowed into the country through Filipinos’ participation in the global economy’s financescape. Appadurai refers to the financescape as the accelerated flow of goods, services, and capital (such as electronic remittances) brought by a highly interconnected world. Hence in the case of the Philippines, industrialization was never a prerequisite for modernization. Indeed, the country today does not have a robust manufacturing base compared to its Southeast Asian neighbors. Yet English nevertheless enabled the country to arguably leapfrog the industrialization stage of economic development (notwithstanding the downsides of doing so) and proceed right to a predominantly services-based economy,<sup>59</sup> as evidenced by the country’s vibrant English-based business process outsourcing (BPO) and call center industries, as well as its export of workers in healthcare (such as nurses) and maritime industries (such as seafarers). Notwithstanding a shortage of healthcare staff within the country itself, the Philippines is one of the world’s biggest exporters of nurses.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, figures jointly published by The Baltic and International Maritime Council (BIMCO), and the International Chamber of Shipping (ICS), showed the Philippines supplied the second-highest number of seafarers in 2015, just below China.<sup>61</sup>

Indeed, a sufficient level of English literacy is one reason why employers are attracted to Filipino seafarers. Shigefuji’s ethnographic study of international labor migrants in Hawaii-based longline tuna fishing boats found that speaking the language not only enables these overseas workers to understand instructions from their captains, but also to bond with their superiors and the rest of the crew.<sup>62</sup> As one captain of a Hawaii-based longline tuna fishing boat told Shigefuji:

The language is not a big problem in terms of doing the work, but with a mix of nationalities, you know they don't talk [to one another], they don't make jokes, we are all bored. The Filipinos, they speak a little bit of English, so we talk about all kinds of stuff... like family and all kinds of stuff. From my experience, because we are out there a long time on a boat [four weeks], it can get very lonely fast.<sup>63</sup>

Thus, there has never been a need to be fluent. What only mattered was to be competent enough. It has also reached the point where the modern-day Philippines itself has become an alternative to Australia, the United Kingdom, or the United States as a destination for non-English speaking students to learn the language.<sup>64</sup> As Abinales aptly explains:

It was the English that an increasing number of Filipinos working abroad needed to communicate with their bosses and fellow expatriates... Basic errors in grammar and sentence structure were the least of its worries. Neither were complicated sentences, full of metaphors and qualifiers, thought to be necessary: all one needed to know was 'business English.' It was only the elite schools that worried about English; the second- and third-tier schools, concerned mainly with training a workforce for the global market, had not time for nuances.<sup>65</sup>

A BBC news report from 2012 found "a rapid increase in the number of foreigners applying for graduate and post-graduate courses in all kinds of fields."<sup>66</sup> Indeed, one Russian engineering student pursuing a degree back then in one of the country's top private universities asserted that although the price of her program in the Philippines was much cheaper than the courses she looked at in Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, she felt confident that the qualification she would get "is just the same."<sup>67</sup>

### **Part 3: Decolonizing English**

"Ex-president Rodrigo Duterte gifts kids with cancer," ran the title of a December 2022 article published on the website of no less than the state-run Philippine News Agency.<sup>68</sup> Western English speakers may point out a horrific error in syntax. The misuse of the preposition "with" makes the headline read like the former Filipino president has gifted cancer to kids. Yet this headline would nevertheless remain understandable and make sense for Filipinos precisely because of the way the society has developed its own orthography of the English language. The last section of this paper discusses how English persists because of its indigenization in Philippine society. The English headline mentioned at the start of this section still makes sense for Filipinos because the words are arranged according to native syntax. When translated directly to Filipino there is only one possible way to understand the

headline that the ex-president has given gifts to kids stricken with cancer: *Niregalo ni dating pangulong Duterte ang mga batang may kanser*. Although Filipino word “*may*” (pronounced similarly to the English “my”) can be translated to “with,” it does not necessarily function the same way. The Filipino “*may*” only functions as a participle connoting possession (hence the impossibility of confusion). On the other hand, the preposition “with” has a myriad of functions in English, such as signifying what is used to do something, e.g., “Jim entertained the audience with his jokes.”

The use of “with” within the context of Filipino syntax fits the contours of what Llamzon defines as “English expressions which are neither American nor British, which are acceptable in Filipino educated circles, and are similar to expression patterns in Tagalog.”<sup>69</sup> Another example is the word “salvage.” In American and British English, it is a verb that refers to the recovery of something lost in the sea. In the Philippines, “salvage” can be used as a verb or noun to refer to an extrajudicial killing — the act of summarily executing a suspected criminal or subversive figure without trial. Such was the way it was used in a 2016 headline: “Duterte: Suspected drug lord Odicta ‘salvaged’.”<sup>70</sup> The word can also be used as an adjective to describe victims of the act, e.g., “salvage victim.”

Studies agree that a unique variety of English has emerged over several decades of its practice in Philippine society. As Kirkpatrick explains, “The linguistic background and colonial history of the Philippines provide an illuminating example of the development of a new variety of English.”<sup>71</sup> Indeed, Malicsi points out that the English teaching tradition in the country still takes after a Philippine variety, despite international travel and technology exposing Filipinos to the English of countries like Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States.<sup>72</sup> Malicsi describes the evolution of Philippine English as a case of “language drift,” similar to genetic drift, in that random mutations in genes spread out in species over time. In the same way, “language drift refers to random changes in forms and rules throughout a community through cultural transmission, and have become regular and systematic, especially if the diffusers are considered as English.”<sup>73</sup> The author points out that Philippine English is spoken even among educated Filipinos, despite these people certainly being exposed to the Englishes of western countries. For example, the author’s analysis of several press releases from the country’s Department of Education (a Cabinet-level branch of the government in charge of basic education), finds the indigenization of the verb “enjoin.”<sup>74</sup> In standard English, the word means “require” if followed by the preposition “to” (e.g. Police are enjoined to respect the rights of suspects); or it can mean “prohibit” if followed by the preposition “from” (e.g. As part of the court order, the real estate firm was enjoined from further demolishing the historical house.). On the other hand, Malicsi points out that the government office’s press releases used the indigenized meaning of “enjoin,” which means “to request, encourage or invite,” e.g., “Education Secretary Jesli Lapus enjoins all

SPED [special education] centers, public private schools with special education programs to observe this day with appropriate activities.”<sup>75</sup> Malicsi’s comprehensive assessment lists a myriad of indigenization of English words and expressions, and is well worth a read.

The pervasiveness of English in Philippine Society thus leads Schneider to contend that the language is in the “nativization” level of his 5-tier model of “The evolutionary cycle of New Englishes.”<sup>76</sup> Schneider’s model is an attempt to present a unifying theory of the way the different “postcolonial Englishes” (PCEs) have evolved, from their introduction by colonizers or settlers, to their ubiquitous use by the region’s native populations. Schneider asserts that “despite all surface differences there is an underlying uniform process which has driven the individual historical instantiations of PCEs growing in different localities.”<sup>77</sup> This theory frames such evolution as an identity-driven process, particularly in the blurring over time of the “us” and “them” divide between indigenous peoples. The settlers eventually lose the bonds with their former homelands, while the native population gradually recognizes that the settlers are staying for good. This leads to a “new, regionally based construction of ‘us’.”<sup>78</sup> that incorporates both populations. Of course, this does not happen overnight—thus Schneider’s five stages.

Schneider lists nativization as phase three of the 5-stage model. This refers to the point when English develops “constructions peculiar to the respective country,”<sup>79</sup> in terms of the settler-indigenous dynamic, the nativization stage thus alludes to the gradual acceptance that English—despite beginning as a foreign language—has come to stay for good. Indeed, the nativization of the preposition “with” into local syntax, as well as the transformation of the verbs “salvage” and “enjoin” as discussed in the beginning of this section, clearly indicate that Filipinos are using English according to their own local parlance. Schneider cites two factors that have led the Philippines to this stage: a long-running bilingual education policy, as well as its wide use in urban domains and formal public contexts. For example, we see a reconstructed identity of English in the way it is the de facto language in math and science subjects, judicial court orders, laws, and government decrees, and even in wedding receptions or graduation ceremonies. As Espinosa points out, “It is also employed in religious affairs, print and broadcast media, and business. English For example, math and science subjects have been taught in English, which is highly believed to be able to increase the status of one who speaks it including respectability and marketability.”<sup>80</sup>

English has become so ubiquitous in everyday Filipino life that in many respects, it has become part of what Bourdieu calls the “habitus.” Bourdieu describes this as “durable, transposable” dispositions that influence and organize people’s beliefs and habits.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, Wacquant refers to the habitus as peoples’ “trained capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them.”<sup>82</sup> A critical part of this theory is its emphasis on how the habitus operates differently according to different

contexts. This accounts for the concept of fields, i.e., social networks or sets of relationships. For Gavena, this means that people behave differently based on the different fields or contexts at a given moment in their lives.<sup>83</sup> This emphasis on contexts thus helps reconcile how English has become part of the Filipino habitus—despite attempts over the past several decades to equate it with neocolonialism, a further push to include the mother tongue as a language of instruction in the educational system, as well as dropping proficiency levels among Filipinos themselves. Although many are not fluent, Filipinos continue to use English because it serves a purpose to modernize, in the context of a globalized world. As Tupas writes: “English for modernization and Pilipino for nationalism; English for pragmatism; Pilipino for national identity; English for the world, Pilipino for the nation.”<sup>84</sup>

### **From Foreign to Familiar**

This paper has shown that the use of English in the Philippines today is not a product of neocolonialism. As discussed in Part One, English is a legacy of the United States’ subjugation of the archipelago. However, its use in the country today stems from the Filipino national identity predicated on the values of the Enlightenment and the ardor for modernity. Thus, we see why the country never turned its back on the language even after gaining full independence in 1946. Indeed, the choice of government officials to continue using English as the language of laws, high-level speeches, and official documents (despite the institutionalization of a formal Filipino language) would further “nativize” the language among Filipinos. Although the Philippines is no longer a territory of the United States, English continued flowing into the country over the past several decades through the different “scapes” created by a rapidly globalizing world (as discussed in Part Two). Lastly, Part Three showed that English has been indigenized in the country because of the emergence of a unique Philippine English with its own unique orthography.

Moreover, it should also be stressed that the scope of this article focuses only on the case of the Philippines. Although it presents a connection between the English language and modernization, it certainly does not mean that the English language per se is a prerequisite for modernization. Indeed, countless other states today have undergone modernization (e.g., China, France, Germany, and Japan, to name a few) without adopting English in the first place. Moreover, this paper does not assert that English is the dominant language of the Philippines. More often than not, a person’s mother tongue (i.e., one of the country’s over 180 native languages) is spoken at home rather than English or Filipino. This essay merely shows that in the context of the Philippines—a postcolonial nation without an industrial base and a ravaged country especially after gaining independence right after the Second World War—the language enabled it to nevertheless modernize and join a globalizing world. English undoubtedly began as a foreign language in the Philippines, but it has now become a



familiar language for modern-day Filipinos.

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