Sociolinguistics in the Philippines

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Introduction

A recent article (Sibayan 1984) summarizes sociolinguistic concerns and their investigation for the period 1967 to 1992, taking both a historical and a futuristic view.

Gonzalez (forthcoming) in a contribution to a commemorative volume of fifty years of Summer Institute of Linguistics work reviews the growth of linguistics in the Philippines especially in this century.

It is within these concerns and against the general background of this growth and development that I would like to locate sociolinguistic research in this country.

Sociolinguistics and Early Language Planning in the Philippines

Reflective itself of the development of linguistics outside the country, the study of the interface between sociology and language, now called the hyphenated discipline of sociolinguistics, came initially as a peripheral concern in the Philippines, which from the beginning was concerned with language teaching and language learning.

The early Spanish missionaries wrote their Latinate artes (grammars) and vocabularios (word-lists: Spanish-Philippine Language. Philippine Language-Spanish) not because of intrinsic interest in this group of Austronesian languages but as aids to other missionaries, especially of their own religious congregations, in learning the languages for evangelizing purposes. Even with a more contemporary group such as the Summer Institute of Linguistics, the purpose is ultimately directed towards the dissemination of the Christian Scriptures through translations. This has always been the primary concern of missionary linguists.

Only in the nineteenth century, based on earlier notes of travellers and anthropologists and explorers who compiled word lists, did an interest in the Philippine languages as members of a larger family (and hence, comparative and historical linguistics) become a concern of such linguists as Von Humboldt, Codrington (himself a missionary), Milner, Kern, and more formally comparative in his research, Brandstetter, and ultimately the founder and chief exponent of Austronesian comparative linguist pioneer Otto Dempwolff (see Salazar 1981).

Following the tradition set up by the German philologists and anthropologists of the nineteenth century, and under the stimulus of his friendship with Blumentritt, Jose P. Rizal began a work of Tagalog grammar and some anthropological notes on his beloved country in his annotations to Morga’s Sucesos de las Islas Filipinas. It is like-
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wise in Rizal, himself psychologically dominant in Spanish, where the question of a national language for the emerging nation Filipinas became a concern in the extended dialogues found in his pedagogical novels, the *Noli* and the *Fili*.

In the twentieth century, army scholars like Luther Parker and David Doherty and anthropologists like Alfred Kroeber, who began writing on Philippine ethnic groups and their languages, viewed the treatment of these languages as part of the information dissemination that had to be undertaken to acquaint the Americans, especially those against annexation, with the new colony. Bloomfield, working with one Filipino informant at the University of Illinois, authored the first extended and detailed study of Tagalog in English (with added texts and translations) using modern methods of elicitation and structural analysis. On his own, likewise without having visited the Philippines, based on secondary sources alone, Frank Ringgold Blake at Johns Hopkins published in 1925 a useful and comprehensible description of Tagalog in English using traditional grammar model.

On the islands themselves, the first Filipino to undertake a detailed dictionary of Tagalog was Pedro Serrano Laktaw, who compiled previous word lists of Spanish vocabularios before him and then added his own entries.

The first department of linguistics in the country was established by the planter-turned-German teacher and general linguist Otto Scheerer, who devoted two extended articles in 1914 and 1920 on the question of a national language for the Philippines (see Gonzalez 1980:40). On his return, as the first formally educated indigenous linguist trained by Dempwolff at Hamburg, Lopez began his articles introducing a more currently scientific view of the Philippine languages to the public at large, in the process educating members of the National Language Institute established to fulfill the mandate of the 1935 Constitution to the formation of a national language. Lopez, as the secretary-general, lectured on linguistics to the members of the Institute and although the Institute members chose Lope K. Santos’ (1940) Spanish arte-based *Balarila* as its official grammar (a matter of personality dominance as well as the fact that this balarila was written in Tagalog), Lopez himself published in 1941 his Manual of the Philippine National Language in English, which was based largely on Bloomfield’s 1917 work.

In terms of linguistic concerns, what is interesting about the Philippines is that from the beginning, language teaching (hence, one area of applied linguistics) was the primary concern. To be able to do applied linguistics, the missionary-grammarians did descriptive analyses of Philippine languages using a Latinate model. In turn, various types of word lists building on previous works were compiled, some eventually seeing print; among the Philippine languages the most detailed and extensive dictionary was compiled by a Filipino Philologist in the person of Pedro Serrano Laktaw in his monumental *Diccionario Tagalog-Hispano* published in 1914.

Local linguists, untrained initially, eventually educated in centers abroad, were preoccupied, as was the rest of the country, with the question of selecting the basis of a national language and with the principles of the development of a national language. If national language concerns are part of sociolinguistics, specifically, what now goes under the rubric of language planning, then indeed one might say that sociolinguistics (specifically language planning and development) dates back to the 1920s in this country with the pioneering work of Otto Scheerer, followed by the work of Cecilio Lopez