

PILIPINO AS SCHOOL IDIOM

Only a few days ago, the policy-making body of the Department of Education, after years of experimenting with the use of the local vernaculars in the first two or three grades of the primary schools, switching to English in the third or fourth grade, came out with the following categorical conclusion:

"It is very clear that the policy of changing mediums of instruction is not a sound educational policy and that the higher the grade where this change takes place the greater the damage."

Subsequent reports on the further studies of the policy-makers on the subject of which medium or media of instruction to use state that they are apparently inclined to recommend the use of Pilipino in place of the local languages. It appears that we want to continue our very old game of hastily adopting educational reforms only to discard them. As shown in this column recently, every "major educational

reform" we have adopted since the establishment of the Commonwealth has boomeranged. Each has been found wanting and discarded at the sacrifice of our educational standards.

Now, if the reports are true, the policy-makers are about to contradict their own finding that changing media of instruction "is not a sound educational policy." For it does not take more than plain common sense to know that the use of Pilipino, like the use of the other dialects, will entail a switch to English in the third or fourth grade.

Unless, of course, the present plan is intended to open a wedge for Pilipino so that, instead of changing to English in the third or fourth grade, Pilipino will then be used throughout the educational system up to the university. This would not be surprising, given the fact that there are those who believe that their sense of nationalism and patriotism will never

be satisfied until they can kick out English from our schools.

If there is an intent to do this, let us say so openly and give the educators, students and their parents the opportunity to have their say. The intent involves a basic educational reform and, instead of Pilipino being sneaked or smuggled in, should be thoroughly discussed and debated. If we still live in a democracy, let us act openly instead of surreptitiously.

For there are many reasons to believe that the premature use of Pilipino instead of English in the schools will be completely disastrous to an already wobbling educational system. In spite of the attempt to expand its vocabulary, Pilipino is far from being a complete language. Its literature is very limited. Our only way of keeping up with world progress, once we have intellectually isolated ourselves from the rest of the world, particularly with its most progressive sector, will be to wait for translations of articles and books written in English which, as now, includes translations of the major works in French,

German, Spanish, Russian and other languages. The translation and waiting will in no time place us about a century behind the leader nations, whereas today we learn everything almost instantly through publications in English.

Language is for communicating thoughts and ideas orally or in writing. Because he found Spanish more adequate for communication, Rizal used Spanish in virtually all his writings. There is no such thing as being more fluent, more eloquent, or better understood in one's native tongue. There is no reason to assume that one instinctively becomes a master of his native language. The Americans, the British, the French, the Spaniards and all others have to devote years studying their own languages before they can master them. And Pilipino being a conglomeration of words unknown to most Filipinos including Tagalogs, cannot be as native to the Filipinos as Chinese is to the Chinese, Japanese to the Japanese, etc.

Arbitrary decisions on languages are dangerous.

Such decisions have resulted in language wars and death in India, Belgium, Canada and other countries. Unless we make our decisions openly and with the support of public opinion, we are planting the seeds of future resentments, dissensions and perhaps riots and killings.

If it is desirable to act fast on most matters, the question of Pilipino is one that counsels caution, deliberation and reflexion. Let us make haste slowly. — *By Vicente Albano Pacis in Manila Chronicle, June 20, 1968*

EXAGGERATION

Many a young man starts in life with a natural gift for exaggeration, which if nurtured in congenial and sympathetic surroundings, or by the imitation of the best models, might grow into something really great and wonderful. But, as a rule, he comes to nothing. He either falls into careless habits of accuracy, or takes to frequenting the society of the aged and the well-informed. Both things are equally fatal to his imagination, and in a short time he develops a morbid and unhealthy faculty of truth-telling, begins to verify all statements, made in his presence, has no hesitation in contradicting people who are much younger than himself, and often ends by writing novels that are so like life no one can possibly believe in their probability. — *Oscar Wilde.*