

THE LANGUAGE PROBLEM IN PHILIPPINE SCHOOLS

Three days ago, a front page item in the Bulletin said.

"The Department of Education's policy-making body is having serious doubts over the use of the vernacular as the medium of instruction in the lower grades of the public elementary schools."

On this score we wish to reiterate our observations on this problem last year. Before discussing any future plans for our national language, it would be wise to check first on the actual status of that idiom today. What is the status of Pilipino today? To begin with, it must be made clear that Pilipino which is what the national language is called and Tagalog are not one and the same. Tagalog is merely the basis of our national language. Too, contrary to what most people believe, Tagalog is not the official medium of instruc-

tion in the first two grades in the primary school. This is true only in the Tagalog-speaking provinces. In the non-Tagalog provinces, the vernacular of the particular province is used. And this holds true only in public schools. Almost all private institutions employ English as the medium of all levels. In short as of now, Pilipino is not used as the medium of instruction in any level of our school system.

To have guides in the solution of the language problem in the Philippines the Philippine Center for Language Study, in cooperation with the Bureau of Public Schools, conducted a carefully controlled experiment from 1960 in the elementary schools of Rizal province. The test was conducted on three representative groups of children entering Grade 1 in 1960. Each group consisted of 300 children.

Group I began using English from the very first day at school. Group II started with Tagalog as their medium of instruction in Grades 1 and 2 and shifted to English in Grade 3-6. Group III employed Tagalog in Grades 1-4 then changed to English in Grades 5-6. The teaching was exactly the same — except for the difference in medium of instruction.

After six years, the average scores on a test of English proficiency were the following: Group I — 114 points; Group II — 94 points; Group III — 90 points. In reading comprehension in English given by the Bureau of Public Schools, these were the results: Group I — 68; Group II — 48; Group III — 45. The differences between the pupils in the first group and the third group is so great that the average student in Group III would find that 85 per cent of the Group I pupils were better trained than to study the English textbooks that he would have to use in high school.

These three groups were also tested for reading comprehension and sentence

writing in Tagalog. These were the results: Group I — 86; Group II — 84; Group III — 85. The difference among the three is negligible, which means that the proficiency of the pupils in Tagalog was about the same whether Tagalog had been used as the medium of instruction or not.

Judging from the Rizal Experiment 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.

The third question involves the publication of the needed textbooks in Pilipino. Here we have to cope with both the population explosion and the information explosion. Can we afford to finance the publication of Pilipino books in the secondary and collegiate level? Any one who is familiar with the state of developmental book activity in our republic will tell you that this just isn't possible. Since the war, we have never produced enough books for our schoolchildren. We have one

tattered book for every five or ten pupils. If we were to translate the medical and technological books into Pilipino, the cost of the books would be way beyond the reach of our students. Translation is a tedious and expensive process, and the small market volume for technical books in Pilipino would automatically raise the price for such books beyond any reasonable proportion. To make matters worse, new knowledge is going to come in at an ever accelerating rate. Books may be obsolete even before our translators have begun. Collegiate books are going to be so expensive that only the very, very rich will be able to afford a secondary and collegiate education. Let us be realistic. We can't even produce enough rice — let alone books.

We want to make it a matter of record that we are not against the development of our national language. It was our daily column that first suggested that Pilipino be used in our postage stamps. As Secretary of Education, we ordered that all diplomas be worded in Pili-

pino. We were also the first to recommend that the wordings in our monetary system be in Pilipino. These are functions that Pilipino can fill. But we are convinced that Pilipino cannot be used as the medium of instruction in our educational system without greatly damaging the educational process. Chauvinism is a very poor substitute for knowledge.

What is the future of Pilipino? It will be like Gaelic in Ireland. The Irish hate the English. They tried very hard to eradicate English from Ireland. They even had signs that read, "speak Gaelic. Don't Use English." But the signs were in English! And today the Irish reputedly are the best English writers. This does not mean that the Irish have not preserved Gaelic. But English had succeeded where Gaelic had failed.

The thoughts and ideas contained in this column may on the surface run counter to the spirit of the nationalism of our time. But in the ultimate analysis the true nationalist is the man who points to the right road. —
By Alejandro R. Roces