

LANGUAGE PROBLEM

We still have a language problem in this country; one which requires direction in our usage and in our educational system. Conflict of Filipino and English should be faced squarely. We recall that about a year ago, an American teacher who had taught some years in this country stated that he observed a decline in the mastery of the English language among Filipino pupils over the years. He sought answers to the question of language in this country, particularly with writers, and inquired about the fate of English in this country in the near future. The conference discussion was filled with slogans and witticisms but no one seemed to want to tackle the problem squarely. What is the future of the English language here and what is the future of the Filipino?

Says George M. Guthrie in a published research report, "The Filipino Child and Philippine Society": "The

effect of the multi-lingual situation on the child is unknown. We can speculate, with some supporting evidence, that it leaves him with no well developed vocabulary in any language. This is a severe impediment to intellectual growth in all spheres... Switching from one language to another means that the child will have great difficulty reading more than the most elementary materials in each of the languages to which he is exposed. Although he may be quite fluent in the vernacular the dearth of reading materials in his own tongue stunts his vocabulary growth. Even more important may be the effect of switching back and forth from English to a Philippine language such as Tagalog. These two languages have different words and have also different linguistic structures..."

"Recent studies on the use of the vernacular in the early grades have indicated that

children progress more rapidly when taught in the vernacular. Much more work needs to be done in this area. We may speculate that the more the vernacular is used in elementary school instruction, the higher will be the performance of the pupil. This would be enhanced by an increasing volume of children's literature in the vernacular. At the same time children's literature in English would also increase intellectual stimulation."

What we often forget is that any solution to the language problem will take time. The element of time will be the only vindication or death of Pilipino. At present most of our writers were trained in English; this explains the dearth of both Pilipino writers and Pilipino readers.

Perhaps the coming generations will slowly master Pilipino and begin to write in this language. It took an intensive 48 years for English to subdue Spanish as the language of the literate Filipino, and this was with the accompaniment of material and social attractions for the English-speaking generation. It will take time for a substantial Pilipino literature to appear.

The one key point is in the educational system and in children's books. With a healthy group of Pilipino readers, there will arise the writers. However, it seems in this modern era impossible to conceive of our ever abandoning English or the little Spanish we have, for that matter. — *by A. R. Roces*