

## A bridge across cultures

"I have often been asked, 'Are you for integration or for preservation?' To such a question I invariably answer, 'We are for neither. We are for choice—the people's choice, not ours.'"

Coming from Panaman Secretary Manuel Elizalde, Jr., the statement summarizes the government's policy toward Philippine ethnic groups: integrating into the mainstream of Philippine society ethnic groups who seek full integration into the larger community, and at the same time preserving the original lifeways of those who prefer to remain what they are, beside that larger community.

### Spreading the gospel of literacy

Linguistic researchers of the Ministry of Education and Culture, Panamin, the Institute of National Language and private groups like the Linguistic Society of the Philippines and the Summer Institute of Linguistics are helping achieve both goals—integration and preservation of the cultures of the ethnic groups.

Using the tools of linguistics (the science of language), these researchers are breaking down the barriers of illiteracy and building bridges to help bring



Secretary Manuel Elizalde Jr., of PANAMIN

minority people into awareness as Filipino citizens.

Spreading the gospel of the printed word among the ethnic groups is only one of the contributions

of the language researchers to the well-being of these cultural groups. Of equal importance is understanding these groups' non-verbal language, or what author Edward T. Hall calls "the silent language."

### Understanding the silent language

Doctor Hall describes the silent language as the "patterning of behavior which prescribes a man's handling of time, his spatial relationships, his attitudes toward work, play and learning."

In his book, *The Silent Language*, Dr. Hall notes: "Difficulties in intercultural communication are seldom seen for what they are. When it becomes apparent to people of different countries or among groups within each country that they are not understanding one another, each tends to blame it on the other's 'stupidity, deceit or craziness.'" This, he goes on to say, is hardly ever the case.

### Enriching Filipino Cultural Diet

With linguistic and other tools, the researchers are recording language and culture not only for the ethnic groups' immediate advantage. In a bigger way, the researchers are also helping lay the foundation which will allow the cultural minorities to continue their way of cultural evolution and, to quote the First Lady, Human Settlements Minister Imelda R. Marcos, "contribute to the particular cultural richness of the Philippines."

## Ethnic ABC

by Iluminado Varela, Jr.

Six million Filipinos speak languages which limit their participation in national activity. They are the cultural minorities, who, despite vigorous efforts to integrate them, remain isolated from the mainstream of national life and activity because of the language barrier.

Happily, there's now new hope for the 60-odd ethno-linguistic national cultural groups. The government's bilingual policy has opened to them the door to progress and development.

A special bilingual education program for adults and school-age children of the minority groups is being developed by the Ministry of Education and Culture in cooperation with the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), a language research institute which won the Ramon Magsaysay Award for international understanding in 1973.

The goal is to promote among the country's ethnic groups literacy both in their native languages and in the two official languages—Filipino and English.

It is believed that literacy in both languages would enrich their quality of life and help them participate more meaningfully in national life.

### Bilingual programs to begin

In other countries where a multiplicity of languages exists, bilingual programs have been successful in promoting literacy in the national language among the minorities.

In 1927, about 88 percent of the Soviet Union's population was illiterate. By 1939, or some 12 years later the figure was drastically reduced to 11 percent. Because of the multiplicity of languages (100 languages in the 15 republics), a bilingual program using the vernacular was necessary to achieve this result.

More recent is the Peruvian government's successful program. Says linguist Olive Shell: "The bilin-

gual schools have proved to be a source of change with ramifications far beyond that could have been expected. . . . Thousands of jungle Indians have become literate through their influence. By no means the latest of the ramifications is the improved morale of the Indians who are beginning to realize that they are part of the population in whom their country is interested and who need not be despised, but who can take their place as recognized citizens of their country."

The Ministry of Education and Culture is pushing four bilingual programs in cooperation with the SIL, the Asia Foundation and the Educational Development Projects Implementing Task Force (EDPITAF). These programs are being conducted in Western Bukidnon, Ivatan (Batanes Islands), Balangao (Mt. Province) and Botoian, Sambal.

For quite a number of years, the SIL has been helping the DEC (now MEC) to prepare and produce literacy and reading education materials in various tribal languages. With the implementation of bilingual education in the country, these materials are also being prepared in Filipino and English.

The bilingual projects involve technical training in bilingual textbook writing for teachers, in-service training for teachers in the preparation of supplement-

ary readings and texts, and production of reading textbooks for adult education. Typical of such books are Balangao Math I, Ivatan Primer, Sarangani Manobo, "Good Drinking Water," "Many Kinds of Diseases" and Manobo Primer.

### Natives as teachers

Because many minority groups have already been taught to read and write in the vernacular, teaching them to speak, read and write in Filipino and English has become relatively easier. The natives are trained in simple phonetics, phonemics, syntax, semantics, etymology and translation principles to help linguistic researchers evolve a written language.

For instance, in Western Bukidnon Manobo there are now some 250 adults who can read and write in the vernacular. These literate natives, having been awarded certificates by the MEC, are helping the government in the bilingual program for the 15,000 speakers of Western Bukidnon Manobo.

"We recognize that vernacular education is only one aspect of bilingual education, but ample evidence exists to show that teaching in the vernacular is highly effective and a useful bridge to bilingualism with all its resulting benefits," an SIL official said.



MEC official briefing media men on ethnic educational program.

## The silent language

by Edward T. Hall

A non-verbal language . . . exists in every country of the world and among the various groups within each country. Most people are only dimly aware of this silent language, even though they use it every day. They are not conscious of the elaborate patterning of behavior which prescribes our handling of time, our spatial relations, our attitudes toward work, play and learning. In addition to what we say with our verbal language, we are constantly communicating our real feelings in our silent language—the language of behavior. Sometimes this is correctly interpreted by other nationalities, but more often it is not.

Despite favorable auspices, an American mission in Greece was having great difficulty working out an agreement with local officials. Efforts to negotiate met with resistance and suspicion on the part of the Greeks and the Americans were unable to conclude the agreements needed to start the new projects.

Upon later examination of this exasperating situation, two unsuspected reasons were found for the stalemate: first, Americans pride themselves on being outspoken and forthright. Greeks regard these qualities as liabilities, they are taken to indicate a lack of finesse; second, when the Americans arranged meeting with the Greeks they tried to limit the length of the meetings, to reach agreements on general principles

first and then delegate the drafting of details to sub-committees. The Greeks regarded this practice as a device to pull the wool over their eyes. The Greek practice is to work out details in front of all concerned and continue meetings for as long as needed.

In the Middle East, Americans often have a difficult time with the Arabs. An American agriculturist who went to Egypt to teach modern agricultural methods to Egyptian farmers once asked his interpreter to ask a farmer how much he expected his field to yield that year. The farmer responded by becoming very excited and angry. The American realized something had gone wrong, but he had no way of knowing what. Later, he learned that the Arabs regard anyone who tries to look into the future as slightly insane. When the American asked the farmer about his future yield, the Egyptian was highly insulted since he thought the American considered him crazy. To the Arab only God knows the future.