

NOTES ON CEBUANO-BISAYAN ETHNIC IDENTITY

IN THE PHILIPPINE MULTILINGUALISM

Yoshihiro Kobari

*Japan Information Cultural Center,
Embassy of Japan in the Philippines*

1. Introduction

It is very obvious for those who are interested in the relationship between language and identity that language sometimes plays a crucial role for the formation of one's identity, but it is also pointed out that language is not an indispensable deciding factor for one's identity all the time.

As to the establishment of identity, one's mother tongue is often discussed and analyzed as the most fundamental element in relation to other deciding factors. But under the multilingual situations where speakers possess linguistic commands in several languages, the definition of "a mother tongue" suggests several interpretations. Therefore, although there is a claim that a mother tongue is one of the fundamental markers for one's ethnic identity", it is not always a decisive factor all the time.

Skutnabb-Kangas (1984 and 1988) points out that there are several ways of defining a mother tongue as follows; 1) the language(s) one learned first (origin), 2) the language(s) one knows best (competence), 3) the language(s) one uses most, 4-a) the language(s) one identifies with (internal) and 4-b) the language(s) one is identified as a native speaker of by others(external). An individual can have different mother tongues, depending on which definition is used. Under the Philippine multilingual situations, Filipinos can have several mother tongues accordingly, following the above definitions of what a mother tongue is.

The above multiple meanings of the term, "mother tongue" are clearly observed and applied to each Filipino with their own ethnic and social background in the Philippine multilingual society. Therefore, it is practically possible for a Filipino to have several mother tongues based on the above interpretations of the term. The Census 1990 cites 988 mother tongues, using the definitions of mother tongue as the language or dialect spoken at home or at birth of the child or the language of the child if had the power of speech that early and the language or dialect spoken most of the time by members of the household.

Some linguistic typological studies reveal the number of existing languages is

120 (it is estimated that there exist more than Philippine languages and dialects). This indicates the fact that the number of Philippine languages identified by Filipino respondents in The 1990 Census greatly exceeded the number revealed by linguists on Philippine languages. The ethnic name for a group does not always correspond to the name of their language and the same language based on the linguistic inquiry can have several different names according to the other ethnic icons of their group. Thus, there exists a commonly used term, an ethnolinguistic community, the relation between an ethnic group and their language is not straightforward as we usually experience in linguistic fieldwork.

In addition to the differences in the names of an ethnic group and their language, these different names connote various notions of an ethnic identity constructed arbitrarily in a wider local, regional (sometimes national and international) context. First of all, a sense of belongingness to a certain ethnic group is fundamentally realized by the outsiders who do not share “similarities” among the members of the group in their locality or in some cases, a wider comprehensive community such as the nation defines boundaries among different groups. The process of building self-awareness requires objective judgments by others and once the existence of these objective judgments is recognized among people, a name is given to grant its existence. Through this process, the awareness for “we”-“others” dichotomy is built. Then, this process requires names for differentiation and these differences come to be conceived as well as perceived with ethnic ideological implications in contexts. This process of self-awareness is complex in multilingual contexts where multilingual individuals use several languages simultaneously to meet their communicative needs. The relationship of “we”-“others” dichotomy is intertwined and blurred in multilingual discourses. On this point, as the definition of a mother tongue suggests, the relationship between an ethnic identity and a multilingual speaker can be interpreted in several ways in relation to his/her linguistic abilities and language use. Therefore, the multiplicity of one’s identity in relation to language(s) can be obviously observed.

Based on the points cited above, I would like to examine the relationship between one’s language(s) and ethnic identity further, taking the case of Cebuano-Bisayan multilingual speakers in the central and southern multilingual Philippine context.

2. Ethnic Identity (Foundation and Complexity of Ethnic Awareness)

What factors decides an ethnic group? Off course, there are numerous factors (such as linguistic, cultural, economic, and political factors) and these factors have different roles with varying degrees of weight in deciding what an ethnic group is and who the members are. How hard we try to explain what an ethnic group is, it is always inadequate to get the comprehensive and explanatory view though we accumulate all the

available icons for the group. Logically speaking, it is a fundamental fact that one could be a member of the ethnic group if he has a sense of belongingness to a certain ethnic community even with the lack of some recognized deciding factors for the identification of ethnic identity. Levinson (1998) briefly defines the construction of ethnic identity and the awareness of ethnic solidarity as follows;

The basis of ethnic relation is the presence of and interaction of members of different ethnic groups. Ethnic identity refers to the reality and the process through which people identify themselves and are identified by others as members of a specific ethnic group. Ethnic solidarity refers to the sense and degree of cohesion felt by members of an ethnic group.

The ethnic boundary is not felt when one is with members of a certain ethnic group which shares more similarities than differences. There are numerous physical and ideological factors (i.e. the color of skin, the color of hair, customs, language, religion, etc.) which serve as icons to differentiate one from another. These icons can be overtly and covertly recognized when people face each other, but physical as well as linguistic features play as obvious symbols. When we engage in conversations, we notice that one has peculiar accents which we are not accustomed to in our everyday environment. These linguistic differences serve as markers for the separation of ethnic groups and lead us to some ideological implications behind these ethnic differences. It is fundamentally described that language has two distinctive roles, communicative and symbolic functions. This symbolic perspective of language plays important roles in the formation of ethnic identity with its arbitrary relationship between ethnic symbols and their connotations in local contexts.

Then, this paper attempts to elaborate on the formation of “we”-“others” dichotomy among people under Philippine historical, social, and cultural conditions.

3. The “We”-“Others” Dichotomy in Philippine Contexts

There are many books published on the Philippine history by leading scholars, but the brief summary of major Philippine historical events serves as a good guiding hand to comprehend the flows of “we”-“others” awareness among Filipinos through history. The key terms, societal plurality and multiplicity are often used to describe common features of Southeast Asian communities and these terms depict the nature of Philippine society as well. Historically, local communities were bound with relatively loose ties and formed allies when necessary. Each local community fostered regional distinctiveness as observed and documented by friars, traders, travelers, colonial bureaucrats, historians and others. Accordingly, the distinction between “we” and “others” was established within

their regional networks and ethnic differences were interpreted in their locality. Then, the country faced the periods of colonization by Spaniards, Americans, and Japanese for hundreds of years. Finally the Philippines became independent after WWII with some stains of these colonial experiences in modern Philippine society.

Under the societal structure of colonization, the bipolar relation, “colonizer”-“colonized”, was constructed among people’s consciousness with “we” as the “colonized” and “others” as the “colonizer”. With the growth of a national consciousness, the term, Filipino¹, gained the recognition of what it means today. As to the process of collection of ethnic tribes in Philippine history, Gonzalez (1991) briefly explains as follows;

In the nineteenth century, it was the Spaniards; in the twentieth, opposition was effectively dispersed through the political process in the lobby for the independence under the American colonial government; between 1941-45, it was against the Japanese; in the brief moment of EDSA on February 22-25, 1986, it was against twenty years of misrule and dictatorship under Marcos.

As in the case above, it is noted that the “we”-“others” dichotomy is strongly felt especially in moments of crisis. A sense of nationalism among the people of the Philippines in the late nineteenth century gave rise to their massive movements for freedom and the Americans supported them for independence from the Spanish colonial rule. As a result, the United States took over the control of the Philippines through mass education whereas the Spaniards mainly used religion (Christianity) as the channel for the management of colony.

The primary purpose of mass education was to “civilize” Filipinos with English as a medium of instruction. It is clear that the use of English was one of the strategies of American colonial ruling system, but Filipinos in a sense accepted this mass educational system positively, because they felt that they could have an access to one of the advanced modern educational opportunities even in barrios. Therefore the system came to create subtle self-consciousness among Filipinos that “we” (Filipinos) were behind and “they” (Americans) were advanced. But a sense of self-awareness for being Filipinos in relation the dichotomy of “we” (colonized) and “others” (colonizer) arose once again and led Filipinos to centripetal forces to unite themselves under the American colonial rule. After the similar movements of Filipino’s unification during the Japanese occupation period and WWII, the Philippines finally became an independent nation state in 1946.

However, once these crises were over, Filipinos lost the overt presence of “others” (colonizers) to which they obtained a sense of self-awareness as Filipinos in contrast. Tagalogs in Manila took over the colonial predominance in every social,

economic, and political aspect over a newly-born modern nation state.

The centralized administrative framework was strongly reinforced again under the Marcos regime and Manila as the capital city has been growing vastly with no comparable existing cities in the country. The overconcentration of various functions and roles in Manila has been criticized by those outside Manila (non-Tagalogs) and they share a feeling of unfairness mixed with fierce envy towards Manila. Even though the policy for decentralization and devolution (i.e. Local Government Code) accomplished some achievement in balancing political power relations in Philippine contexts, but the overdependence on Manila still exists today. Filipinos recognize somehow that everything is decided in Manila through the power play of center-peripheral political negotiation and with a sequence of corruptions in pursuit of national as well as local politicians' personal interests.

The centripetal force for being Filipinos was weakened after the moments of crises and converted into the centrifugal force for the formation of regional (ethnic) awareness. Self-awareness of regional ethnic identity has been formulated and characterized with local characteristics and the claim for ethnic identity was closely associated with political and economic interests of each ethnic group within the nation state set-up. Accordingly, the ethnic tension of "center" (Tagalogs) - "peripheral" (non-Tagalogs) relation was highlighted in the state. With a sense of ethnic identity, the "we"- "others" dichotomy was constructed on the center-peripheral relation as well as the recognition of different local ethnic groups. This oblique relations among ethnic groups reinforced a sense of inequality among Filipinos with severe critics like "Manila colonialism" (Pensar, 1988) especially against Tagalogs. On Philippine ethnocentrism, Levinson (1998) points out some prevailing ethnocentric judgments that "Catholic regional cultures of the Philippines, who all regard themselves as Filipinos, the members describe one another in ethnocentric, stereotypical terms - Tagalogs are proud and boastful, Pampangans are materialistic and self-centered, Ilocanos are hard-working and aggressive, and Bisayans are fun-loving and passionate."

Steinberg (2000) summarizes the fundamental nature of modern Philippine society and it would be useful for all of us to seize pieces of the whole picture

The discrepancies and contradictions of the plural society of the colonial era not only have survived through the postindependence period but are still growing. As education and the mass media work on people's values, nationalism – that binding belief in the centrality of the Filipino people – brings people together in a sense of unity. But inequalities of wealth and questions of access exacerbate traditional divisions, distorting the vision of national harmony. This tension is at the core of twentieth-century Philippine society. (p.52)

The changes of political and economic structure in society brought self-awareness, “we”-“others” dichotomy, among Filipinos constructed not only on concepts of nation state and regional ethnic distinctiveness but also on the class stratification of modern society. Steinberg (ibid.:51) describes that “(T)he Philippine has, in effect, an aristocracy based on economic and educational criteria – a privileged upper class and a gap between the entitled few and masses that is comparable to that in eighteenth-century France.” The “we”-“others” dichotomy among Filipinos is anchored in these tensions in the process of nation-state building and the emergence of regional ethnic awareness.

4. The Case of Cebuano-Bisayan Multilingual Speakers

The brief summary of Philippine history was indicated in relation to the formation of self-awareness among Filipinos in the previous section. In Philippine multilingual contexts, Gonzalez (1985) characterizes the verbal repertoires of Filipinos as follows;

... as a minimum, every Filipino as at least bilingual in his mother tongue (a vernacular) and the regional lingua franca; in addition he learns Pilipino and English in school, thus making him quadrolingual if he stays in school long enough to learn English (because he can learn Pilipino outside the school). And if he goes to college, he takes two years of Spanish, which provides hardly enough exposure to gain even a conversational mastery.

Then, questions arise on how the notion of self-awareness is constructed among multilingual speakers and what roles language plays in the process of formulating ethnic identity in Philippine contexts. There are many ethnic labels for Philippine ethnic groups, but I would like to take up the terms of “Filipino”, “Bsiaya”, and “Cebuano” and focus on the analysis of regional ethnic identity, “Cebuano-Bisayan” below.

4-1. Who are Bisayans (Visayans)²?

How was the ethnic awareness of “Visayans” formed in Philippine society? Zorc (1977) explains that “the term *biyayáq*(Bisaya) has come to mean local, indigenous, native, often with the implied warmth and pride of a phrase like ‘home-grown’ or ‘home-made’ in American English.” He further elaborates its meaning that the name also has been applied to dances and recipes and the dialects are numerous, yet all (except Kuyunon, Sorsogon Gubat and Tausug) are commonly identified by the name *bisayaq* (Bsiaya). The root of the term Bisaya has been explained differently with a Sanskrit origin or an indigenous vernacular, but it is not entirely explored with some possible interpretations. In addition, the Tausug language has a meaning of Bisaya with its meaning as “slaves”, but it is assumed that the term obtained its secondary meaning in

contact with Bisayans³. In general, Bisayans share some cultural similarities of Christian lowland Filipinos, such as Christianity, regional customs, and so on.

In relation to language and ethnic identity, the term Bisaya implies a group of people who speak different Bisayan dialects which are unintelligible to each other with some linguistic similarities. There is not a straightforward one-on-one relation between the name of language and that of an ethnic group. Linguistically, as the title of Zorc's work (*ibid.*) indicates, it is appropriate to differentiate "Bisayan dialects" with 36 distinctive local linguistic communities.

Historically, Philippine regional cultural traits have been described with the dichotomy of "Tagalog" in the north and "Bisaya" in the south from the Spanish colonial period⁴. For the efficient colonial management, friars and colonial bureaucrats conducted research and surveys to grasp regional characteristics and some ethnographic descriptions at that time revealed the cultural supremacy of Tagalogs over Bisayans. Its supremacy was enhanced by the controlling power of a capital city, Manila, as the center of colonial domestic networks in the state. As a result, the north-south ethnic dichotomy was slowly printed on the minds of people with images of Tagalog's cultural superiority and Bisaya's backwardness.

Now, there are many Bisayan migrants in Manila and a stereotypical image toward them is not generally positive. In the Tagalog language, there is a term, "probinsyano" (a person who is from a province), and the word is commonly used in a sentence like "Probinsyano siya." (He/she is a person who comes from a province). The same connotation could be expressed in a different expression using a word Bisaya as in "Parang Bisaya siya." (He/she is like a Bisaya.), but the phrase does not necessarily refer to one's ethnic origin or place of birth. The phrase "like a Bisaya" simply expresses the idea to be "a person from a province" and anyone could be metaphorically described as a Bisaya. In fact, there are numerous migrant-workers from the south, who reside in several densely populated communities of Bisayas in Manila. There are stereotypical images on Bisayas that male Bisayans usually work as taxi-drivers and construction workers and female Bisayans generally as domestic helpers (maids), sales ladies at shopping malls, GROs at night clubs, and so on. These ethnic stereotypes were created reinforced among people in Manila by the two facts of Bisaya's economic backwardness compared to and numerous Bisayan migrant-workers in Manila.

4-2. Who are Cebuanos?

Cebuanos reside in the central Philippines, with Cebu as the center, including eastern Negros, Siquijor, Bohol, Cebu, western Leyte and waves of Cebuano migrants to Mindanao have been quite noticeable. The Cebuano language has been de fact regional lingua franca in the central and southern Philippines.

Mojares (2001) depicts Cebuano (Sugbanon) ethnic category as a historical artifact as below:

There was a time when it effectively subsumed under the more general category of “Visayan” and, in many contexts today, it may be less meaningful than the label “Filipino.” Moreover, the territorial dispersion of Cebuanos is such that Cebuano who have relocated to, say, Mindanao or Metro Manila may have assumed under newer cultural identities. Within Cebu itself, there are distinctions to be made along lines of social class, occupational groupings, or location.

Yet the idea of a “Cebuano identity” remains persuasive. Its obvious hallmarks are language (Sugubanon), local residence, or orientation of Cebu province as a cultural or sentimental “homeland.” It is nourished in shared cultural memories – history, music, literature, rituals, popular arts – and draws its typicality from such formative facts as environment, subsistence patterns, social organization, and political experience. (p.30)

Manila now has its status as the capital city and the center of politics and economics whereas Cebu is characterized as the seat of Christianity and a symbolic place of opposition to foreign domination with the name of King Lapu-Lapu. In addition, Cebu currently holds the 2nd biggest city next to Manila with high socio-economic growth as the trading center as well as higher education in the central and southern Philippines. The international port and airport accelerate its economic growth in trading and attract foreign tourists as well. The surge of Cebu as an industrializing trade and service center created a compound word, “Ceboom”, and gave the city another label, “Queen City of the South.”

Sometimes, the awareness of “we”-“others” dichotomy is directly reflected on linguistic issues. Since independence of the Philippines, there were language problems in the selection and formation of a national language (Tagalog, Pilipino and Filipino⁵) and regional ethnic conflicts in pursuit of balancing economic and political relations within the state. Cebuanos do not oppose to the idea of “being Filipinos”, but to the decision that Tagalog, one of the vernacular languages, serves as a national language or the basis of a national language in large part. Behind these movements, people in the provinces recognize some implied possibilities that a national language ideology does not allow non-Tagalogs to retain linguistic diversities under hegemonic power of Manila and react aggressively to the idea of a Tagalog(-based) national language with great political and economic dominance of Tagalog ethnic group. Emergence of Tagalog(-based) national language with higher hegemonic power as the standard created a sense of feeling that non-Tagalogs are “second class citizens” and Cebuanos gave severe critics to this phenomenon as a “forth colonization” (Tiempo, 1981) by Tagalogs (followed by Spaniards, Americans and Japanese).

There are ethnic tensions among regional communities behind their reaction to the issues of a national language. Cebuano politicians regarded the national language

policy as a crisis to Cebuano ethnic group. They sought for the uplifting of political status and influence of Cebuano ethnic group to the decision making process of national government and intentionally utilized an ethnic symbol, Cebuano language, as a centripetal force to unite Cebuanos by strengthening a sense of ethnic solidarity⁶. The “Cebuano revolt” to the Filipino language, especially to the Constitutional declaration of Filipino as the national language and the 1987 Bilingual Education Policy, is the most obvious case in point.

The 1986 Constitution defines that “the national language of the Philippines is Filipino.” It elaborates on the content that “(A)s it (Filipino) further evolves, it shall be further developed and enriched on the basis of existing Philippine and other languages” with some emotional considerations to non-Tagalog ethnic groups.

But in fact, the definition of Filipino seems valid only to those in the government, Academe, and the education sector whereas people recognize that (Manila-) Tagalog and Filipino are more or less the same languages with different labels.

4-3. Another “We” and “Others” Dichotomy in Education

American colonial rule was mainly administered to gain economic control over the country and the mass education was adopted as the most efficient method of ruling. The foundation of mass education system with English as a medium of instruction made it possible for the American colonial government to control not only the higher-class privileged, but also the general public nation wide. The educational system as a part of colonial ruling strategies over the country was sometimes fiercely criticized like “Mis-education” (Constantino, 1966) for the Filipino people. Gradually, the educational system was introduced and established as the basis for civilization of Filipinos in every corner of the country and the colonial legacy of the English language has been re-interpreted as a tool for wider knowledge on the globe and international competitiveness in every field⁷. Then, one’s better educational background promises higher socio-economic success in the future and plays selective roles between the “educated” and the “less-educated” in society.

Under the current educational system, English and Filipino are taught from Grade 1 in elementary education with a vernacular language as an auxiliary medium of instruction. As educational levels go higher, the shift of a medium of instruction to English is gradually achieved at secondary and tertiary educational institutions. As one proceeds to higher levels of learning, he/she has more opportunities to use English and gains better linguistic skills. Differences in educational backgrounds are reflected in English linguistic abilities⁸. There are commonly heard labels for the educated, “educado” (especially, those attained a tertiary level of education) and for the less-educated “ignorante” (those who are ignorant because of the lack of higher educational opportunities) with their differences in English abilities. Filipinos perceives English as an

intranational language which is a prerequisite for the access to education as well as international language for global use. It is not overemphasized that they now recognize English not as a colonial/foreign language, but as one of their languages⁹.

With inequality in access to education in urban and rural areas and differences in quality of public-private education, most of parents prefer to send their children to prestigious schools and wish them to acquire higher English abilities. Then, education is regarded as the most promising key to future socio-economic success in society where majority of people have to face poverty and differences in their educational attainment create another “we”-“others” dichotomy.

4-4. Language Use of Cebuano-Bisayan Multilingual Speakers

In the previous sections, the formation of “we”-“others” dichotomies in Philippine society was briefly examined. Then, how do Cebuano-Bisayan multilingual speakers use their languages in particular contexts? There are some examples of their language use below.

As to actual language use, people follow certain linguistic norms which best suit various social contexts. For example, English is required in educational domains and Cebuano is used among peers. The set of perceived linguistic norms give influences on their choice of languages (to some extent) and they voluntarily choose the most appropriate language of their choice. But the linguistic norms vary from one communicative situation to another and guide them to follow without definite compelling power (except the educational, technological and international business domains).

Off course depending on their linguistic abilities in languages, Cebuano-Bisayan speakers select Filipino (Tagalog), English and Cebuano in response to social linguistic norms in a communicative context. The use of Cebuano refers to a sense of belongingness that “we” are the members of the same regional ethnic community, the use of Filipino (Tagalog) appeals to pride of being Filipinos with a sense of nationalism or some implications to the center of the state, Manila. The eloquent use of English serves as an indicator of being the “educado” or hints that the person has a relatively higher socio-economic status.

Cebuano-Bisayan speakers use Cebuano as a medium of daily conversation, but some college students prefer to communicate in English to indicate that they are learning in higher educational institutions through the language use. They often mix Cebuano and English and switch the use of one language to another (code-switching, sometimes with Tagalog and other vernaculars) in the middle of conversation. But when a high school student with relatively higher English command speaks English to their classmates, they tease the student for his act of showing off the mastery of English and irrelevance of language use in relation to social linguistic norms in the context. If one uses English

among those who completed elementary education in a rural area or in an urban poor area, he might be regarded as a wisecracker. In “fiesta”, locals get together for reunion after a long interval and speak a local vernacular to each other. In ceremonial occasions, Cebuanos sing the national anthem in Filipino. When they hang out in karaoke, they sing English or Tagalog popular songs. When they are drunk, English is the outstanding language to swear in. In elections, local politicians appeal to Cebuano ethnic pride by making speeches in Cebuano and speak of the necessity for devolution and decentralization of the national government functions and local development projects.

These are just tips of language use incidents observed among Cebuano speakers in their daily lives, but they reveal that Cebuanos select a language in relation to social linguistic norms and language ideologies which the use of a language implies.

5. Conflicts between Ideologies behind Language Issues¹⁰

Cebuano-Bisayans are practically multilingual speakers of Filipino (Tagalog), Cebuano and English, the “we”-“others” dichotomy is sharply reflected on language issues in relation to formative roles of ethnic as well as social self-awareness. Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) characterize language planning as “a body of ideas, laws and regulations (language policy), change rules, beliefs, and practices intended to achieve a planned change (or to stop change from happening) in the language use in one or more communities” and simplify it as “an attempt by someone to modify the linguistic behavior of some community for some reason.” It is clearly observable that there exist three ideological conflicts in the language planning processes in the Philippines; 1) vernacular languages and foreign language(s), 2) vernaculars and a national language, and 3) foreign language(s) and a national language (Filipino, Pilipino and Tagalog).

Ideological conflicts in the use of these languages in certain domains have repeatedly arisen in reference to respective language ideologies. For example, when a certain favorable ideology which dominates current situations interferes with another and creates contrasting points between these two ideologies, these ideological conflicts are expressed in language issues. Thus since this process examines and discusses the recognition of language problems in language policy and the reaction to ideological consideration of the current policy, language issues could be treated as a focal point of two contradicting ideologies. Following the above, the interpretation of “we”-“others” dichotomy in the contexts of these ideological conflicts is comprehensively summarized in relation to language issues in the Philippines below.

It seems that there are three kinds of ideological orientations toward the formation of “we”-“others” dichotomy in Philippine multilingual society; 1) the orientation to the nation state, 2) the orientation to Cebuano regional ethnic culture, and 3) the orientation to modernization/westernization. The orientation to the nation-state

means that people assume the ideal nation-state status as “one nation, one people and one language.” Through the experiences of colonial period and as a member of international community, people come to obtain self-awareness of being Filipinos and an imaginary sphere of the nation-state, the Philippines and the national culture gains its centripetal force for the unification of different regional ethnic groups. Orientation to regional ethnic cultures implies that inequality of socio-political power balance among regional ethnic groups under the highly centralized system which is rooted in Spanish colonization is to be criticized and socio-political benefit for regional ethnic groups should be protected within a nation state framework of center-peripheral power balance. Orientation to modernization/westernization leads to the idea that Filipino indigenous culture is behind in terms of scientific and technological progresses and acquisition of modern/western knowledge and skills is a key for the attainment of higher socio-economic status with support of better educational backgrounds.

These orientations to different ideologies in relation to languages used by Cebuano-Bisayan speakers could be schematized in the following diagram.

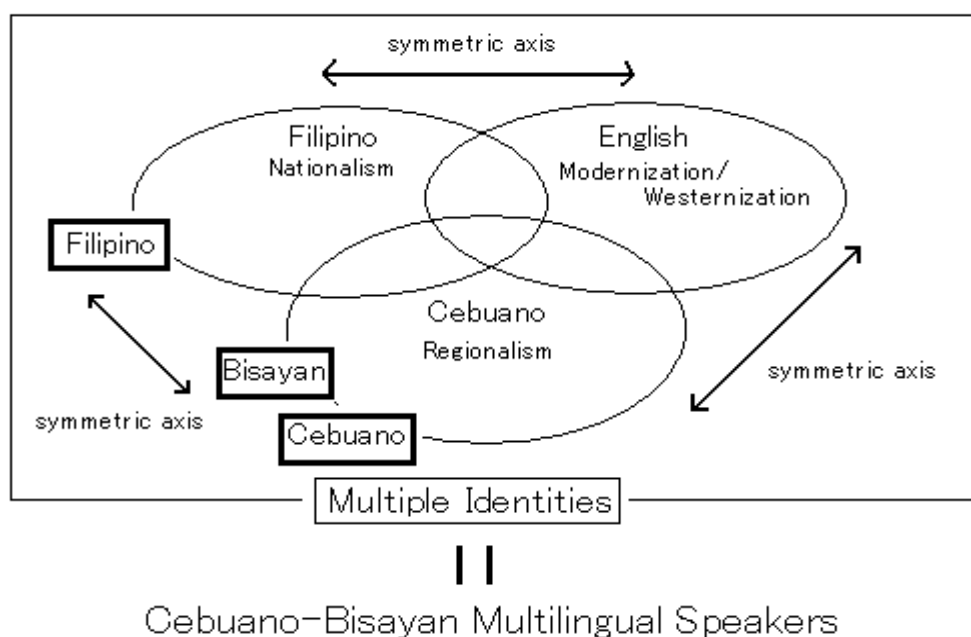


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of Multiple Identities of Cebuano-Bisayan Speakers

There are ethnic labels, Filipino, Bisayan and Cebuano, from broader nationalistic concept to narrower ethnic one in locality applicable to Cebuano-Bisayan speakers, but the “we”-“others” dichotomy is formed around concepts of “national culture versus regional indigenous culture”, “nation-state versus foreign countries(international community”, and “higher versus lower status in educational attainment and social class.”

Ideologies, such as “nationalism”, “regionalism”, and “modernization/westernization” are emphasized through symmetric axes of bipolar structure with centripetal forces of its ends. Then speakers choose their position and the most suitable language along a certain axis in tension depending on their orientation to these ideologies and voluntarily use a language as a marker.

When a symmetric axis of two contradicting ideologies is realized, people conditionally change their positions closer to the center of a certain ideology of their preference which best suits their belief and draw a boundary between “us” and “others”¹¹. Filipino symbolizes “nationalism”, English “modernization/westernization”, and Cebuano “regionalism”. Therefore, views and interpretations of these ideologies differ depending on one’s gravity point in ideological grounds.

For example, when we discuss the relation between language and ethnic identity in terms of an ideological symmetric axis with its ends of “nationalism” and “colonization”, we tend to locate ourselves in arguments on the most preferred language for our people in the nation-state. We definitely lack viewpoints from existing regional indigenous cultures and neglect the linguistic dynamism of multilingual society. It can be said, to some extent, that English education has historically given an inferiority complex of being the colonized (colonial mentality) and been provided as one of the most efficient mechanisms of colonial management to foster pro-American views among Filipinos, but the above interpretation is considerably biased by nationalist fervor.

The dichotomy between the two is the most effective way to revise biased views in the context of adding insiders’ views to predominant historical interpretations of western-oriented Philippine history. In fact, Cebuano-Bisayan multilingual speakers interpret “nationalism” and “modernization/westernization” in the context of their indigenous culture. In this regional context, reactions of Cebuano-Bisayan speakers to an ethnic group (namely, Tagalogs) which takes hold of the nation-state are sometimes expressed in their preference in the use of English which forms the “we”-“others” dichotomy along a social class axis. Therefore, ethnic tensions between Tagalogs and Cebuanos along the symmetric axis between “nationalism” and “regionalism” are counterbalanced by situating Cebuanos along another symmetric axis between “nationalism” and “modernization/westernization” by their use of English as a marker of higher social status. The excessive emphasis on the use of English leads Cebuanos to disregard for their ethnic indigenous culture and their reactions to the ethnic group in the center of the nation-state turns Cebuanos to obstinate persistence in their ethnic indigenous culture.

Multilingual speakers change their positions¹² closer to the center of a preferred ideology and voluntarily select a linguistic marker which implies ideological grounds in a certain socio-historical context. Then, the choice of a language is heavily dependent on

speakers' position of gravity point along a symmetric axis of two contradicting ideologies in tension.

6. Concluding Remarks

The process of identity formation in Philippine multilingual society were briefly examined through the case of Cebuano-Bisayans, who have three different ethnic labels (“Filipino”, “Bisayan”, and “Cebuano”) and possess linguistic commands in three languages (“Filipino (Tagalog)”, “Cabuano” and “English”). Although there is a need for more elaborated analyses on its process, it is indispensable for us to examine the relationship between language and ethnic identity not only from anthropological (such as specific ethnic properties), but also from wider multi (social, economic and historical) - perspectives. The dichotomy between the two is the most reliable method for clarification of differences in contrasting values, but also determines relative merits in value among the two. The method never reveals the full picture of “multiplicity¹³” in multilingual speakers.

The case of Cebuano-Bisayan multilingual speakers gives us an opportunity to explore the invisible ties between language and identity formation along contrasting axes with their ideological ends of “nationalism”, “regionalism” and “social class”. These relations between language and identity formation are more complicated in the case of speakers who possess adequate linguistic skills in four or five languages. The Cebuano-Bisayan case supports that following Padilla’ statement (2000);

Ethnicity can be more meaningful than in certain intergroup contexts than in any other situations. Moreover, the ethnic label that an individual chooses to wear may differ according to social context.

The post-structural approaches to negotiation of identities which consider “language choices in multilingual contexts as embedded in larger social, political, economic, and cultural systems” (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2005) are indispensable and encouraged for further descriptions and comprehensive understanding on relations between language and ethnic identity in the Philippines settings.

Notes:

1. As to the historical transitions of the term in meaning, William Henry Scott’s *Baranagy* (1994. Quezon City: Ateneo de Manila University Press) and Domingo Abella’s “*From Indio to Filipino*” (1971. Philippine Historical Review Vol.IV, Manila: Philippine Center of International Association of Historians of Asia) explain the processes of transition in detail.
2. Zorc (1977) explains that Bisaya is the local term used to describe a region and a

group of people in the central Philippines. ‘Visaya’ is an English, adopted from Spanish, denoting a region and while ‘Visayan’ refers to a person from that region. In this paper, the terms of “Bisaya” and “Bisayan(s)” are intentionally used in accordance with descriptions in other reference materials. The compound term Cebuano-Bisaya(n) includes the notions of the two, “Cebuano” and “Bisayan”.

3. Tausug-English Dictionary (Hassan, et al. 1994) cites the heading, Bisaya, with its meanings, 1) Filipino Christian and 2) The Cebuano language.
4. For more details, see Eric C. Casino’s *The Filipino Nation, The Philippines: Lands, and Peoples, A Cultural Geography* (1982, Manila: Grolier International).
5. See Isagani Cruz’s “A Nation Searching for a Name.” in *Philippine Journal of Linguistics* Vol.21, No.1 (p.p.62-66, Manila: Linguistic Society of the Philippines).
6. Mojares (2002) mentions that “(I)n many ways, however, “Cebuano autonomy” is less a given in the culture as a sign deployed for practical purposes, whether the promotion of the political careers of leaders, or a site for investment and tourism, or the mobilization of a community for civic goals. As to political perspectives, he further describes that “Cebuano political leaders have used appeals to a “Cebuano/Southern” constituency to assume positions of national influence.”
7. Martin (1999) states changes of Filipinos’ recognition on English as follows; We no longer talk of English as the language of colonizer, but the language we have colonized. We no longer identify English as the language of access to civilization, rather we attribute to English access to knowledge, which is a precondition of power. (p.135)
8. Gonzalez (1985) cites Bautista’s study (1982) on varieties of English spoken by Filipinos that “it is better to speak of edulects than to use the sociolectal terms such as basilects, mesolects, and acrolects.”
9. As to processes of “nativization” of English, see Braj. B. Kachru’ pioneering work (1990), “The alchemy of English: The Spread, Functions and Models of Non-native Englishes.” As to the history of English in the Philippines, refer to Gonzalez’s article (1996), “The History of English in the Philippines.”
10. There are not so many descriptive studies on the use of Cebuano, but some can be found in works of Kaplan and Baldauf Jr. and Jean-Paul Dumont (1991).
11. Admitting that language first learned is the crucial factor in ethnic identification, Gonzalez and Bautista (1986) state that “we eventually have to admit that there are complex interrelationships between and language and ethnicity.” They further point out that “(A)lthough clearly interrelated, language and ethnicity do not enjoy one-to-one relation; that is, as the situation shifts, a person can shift his ethnicity especially he is multilingual.”
12. Davis and Harré (1990) defines “positioning” as the process by which selves are located in conversation as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced story lines, informed by particular discourses” (See also Harré and von Langenhove, 1999). Based on this idea, Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) introduce the expand meaning of the term and apply to “all discursive practices which may position individuals in particular ways or allow individuals to position themselves.”
13. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) cite different works on this multiplicity with

other terms such as “fragmentation” and “hybridity.”

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