A Tale of Language Ownership and Identity in a Multilingual Society: Revisiting Functional Nativeness

Loy Lising
*Macquarie University*, loy.lising@mq.edu.au

Maria Lourdes S. Bautista
*De La Salle University, Manila*, tishbautista@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://animorepository.dlsu.edu.ph/jeal

**Recommended Citation**
DOI: https://doi.org/10.59588/2961-3094.1000
Available at: https://animorepository.dlsu.edu.ph/jeal/vol1/iss1/1

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the DLSU Publications at Animo Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of English and Applied Linguistics by an authorized editor of Animo Repository.
A Tale of Language Ownership and Identity in a Multilingual Society: Revisiting Functional Nativeness

Loy Lising¹ and Maria Lourdes S. Bautista²
¹Department of Linguistics, Macquarie University
²Department of English and Applied Linguistics, De La Salle University
*loy.lising@mq.edu.au
tishbautista@gmail.com

Abstract: The American occupation of the Philippines in 1898 saw the official installation of English into the nation’s linguistic ecology. Over a century since and through many socioeconomic developments and national language policies, English continues to thrive as the official second language. Given its privileged status as the medium of instruction alongside Filipino, it is often regarded as the language for upward social mobility and as a source of linguistic and social capital, which is instrumental in improving the socioeconomic plight of many Filipinos. Based on two data sets collected in 2017, this paper investigates Cebu- and Manila-based Filipino university students’ (N=60) attitudes toward and conceptualization of English relative to other (local) languages in their repertoire. Revisiting and employing Kachru’s functional nativeness framework, this paper employs a critical thematic analysis of students’ responses to a sociodemographic survey to investigate the range of domains the students assign their languages to, the attitudes they hold that engender such linguistic choice, and explore the depth of penetration of English in those domains. In doing so, the study shows that participants’ linguistic choices are largely motivated by a strong sense of ownership and identity associated with all the languages in their repertoire. In addition, and significantly important, there is hardly a view of English in rigid, binary terms. This study contributes to the broader discussion and understanding of the sociolinguistics of English language ownership in multilingual societies like the Philippines.

Keywords: Functional nativeness, Symbolic capital, Multilingualism, Language attitudes, Language and identity

This paper revisits the place of English within the linguistic repertoire of Cebu- and Manila-based Filipino university students. Given the presence of English in the Philippines for over a century now, and considering its transplantation into the archipelago through colonization, the social construction of “nativeness” (Kachru, 1998 p. 91) continues to propagate in discussions of language ideologies about English in
the Philippines especially relative to Filipino\(^1\) and other indigenous languages. As we will show, these language ideologies are not straightforward and monolithic. Sometimes, English is seen in a hegemonic light as a by-product of colonization which continues to endure in the Filipino psyche. At other times, it is remapped and reimagined and seen as a language of Asia, and by extension of the Philippines, and not just a language in Asia (Abad, 2004; Kachru, 1998).

This paper, based on ethnographic, multi-method data, investigates Filipino university students’ attitude towards the languages in their repertoire and how this attitude motivates the assignment of their languages to various everyday domains. This assignation indexes their sense of linguistic ownership and identity, both of which are variably motivated by the symbolic capital that languages bring.

On the bases of the participants’ responses in this study, this paper employs as an analytic tool Kachru’s (1998) notion of functional nativeness over three decades since its introduction. This paper argues that there are two distinct views of Philippine languages that exist. The first, which is consistent with and expressed in language policy, places English and Filipino on the same side and not necessarily mapped in opposition to each other. The second sees local languages other than Filipino being relegated to the periphery and sometimes positioned as the Other. In other words, in the Philippine context, based on the current findings, English language ideologies are constructed around a localized imaginative geography of Center along with Filipino, and sometimes Cebuano, as we will show later, positioned against the indigenous languages that become the peripheral Other. This new repositioning of English is more complex, however. Although positioning the other languages in the participants’ repertoires as the peripheral Other may suggest a clean-cut binary, it hides a complex and dynamic multilingual practice. This complexity is reflected in the two views where there is also a privileging of the other languages in the repertoire given certain sociocultural considerations, whereas the Center (English and Filipino) vs. Periphery binary remains more stable in the macro discourses as shown by Pietikainen and Kelly-Holmes (2013). This, we believe, speaks to the nature of multilingualism. Although institutional and
global structures often push us to imagine languages along binary hierarchical lines of power, at the local level, the importance and role of the multilingual speaker’s many languages persist as demanded by local practices, expectations, and conditions.

In Section 2, to provide context for our understanding of the multilingual ecology in the Philippines, we discuss the colonial legacy that facilitated the establishment of English in the country, the various language and socioeconomic policies that have steered the direction of language use since the establishment of the Commonwealth of the Philippines in 1935, and selected research on English language ideologies in Asia and the Philippines. Then in Section 3, we discuss the methodological approach employed in both data collection and data analysis to address the objectives of this study. Section 4 explores the functional and indexical importance participants ascribe to their languages as reflected in their assignation of languages to the various domains they engage with daily. Subsequently, Section 5 revisits Kachru’s functional nativeness in the Philippine context by highlighting multiple and complex language practices. The paper concludes in Section 6 with recommendations on ways to further extend our understanding of the complexity of the sociolinguistics of multilingualism in the country.

### National Language Policies and Research on Language Ideologies

To understand the social and institutional forces that have engendered the complex and multiple functional distributions by participants of languages in their repertoire, it is important to foreground the discussion of those findings with the history of national language policies, the socioeconomic decisions that have positioned languages in the Philippines today, and the research on English language ideologies in Asia and the Philippines.

The arrival of the Americans on the Philippine shores in 1898 after more than 300 years of Spanish colonization (Bernardo, 2004) marked the transplantation of the English language in the country (Schneider, 2014). That arrival of English, over a century ago, significantly restructured the linguistic ecology of the country. English became and has remained an official language in the country. Since

\(^1\) Filipino and Tagalog are arguably interchangeable terms. However, given that Filipino is the name referenced in the Constitution, for the purpose of this paper, we will use Filipino.
It is in this complex and rich linguistic context that this research is sited. It seeks to ask this question: How do multilingual speakers of Philippine languages conceive of their languages relative to ownership and identity?

On the research front, English in Asian contexts has tended to cluster into strands that position English as an outside, Western language, whether evaluating it positively or negatively. On the one hand, English is viewed positively as a linguistic tool that enriches local language contexts and serves to bridge the linguistic diversity in the region (see Bolton, 2000, 2008; Hung, 2002; Kirkpatrick, 2008, 2010, 2018; Wee et al., 2013). On the other hand, it is seen negatively as a hegemonic tool that undermines indigenous languages (see Park & Wee, 2008; Tupas, 2004, 2008, 2016). In the Philippines, some research on English has echoed this latter view, arguing for English’s colonial identity and insisting that English persists in its exercise in hegemony (Benton, 1996; Lorente, 2013, 2017; Lorente & Tupas, 2013; Tupas, 2004, 2008, 2016). However, other research in the Philippines has recognized English as a colonial import initially but now as part of the local linguistic ecology that Filipinos have colonized (Abad, 2004). This reimagining of English as local reflects Abad’s (2004, p.175) claim that “English in Filipino hands, under the pressure of their own circumstances and choices, becomes not English but Filipino.” In addition, other studies have also recognized that English serves various indexical and utilitarian goals (Bautista, 1996; Bernardo, 2005; Gonzalez, 1996a, 1996b).

On the other hand, the socioeconomic phenomenon that helped buttress the economic place of English in the nation was the Marcos regime’s Philippine Labor Code in 1974 (Tyner, 2004). This laid the foundation of labor migration (Lising, 2019), which mandated the country’s promotion of “the overseas employment of Filipino workers through a comprehensive market promotion and development program and, in the process […] secure the best possible terms and conditions of employment of Filipino contract workers on a government-to-government basis” (Tyner, 2004, p. 33). This fast-tracked Filipinos’ marketability as providers of labor overseas. The success of this effort rested on the back of Filipinos’ proficiency in English and their ability to learn the language for their specific job roles (Lorentè, 2012, 2017). These varied language policies with English as a constant fixture undeniably show the longevity of the presence of English and provides an argument for acknowledging that although English is a transplanted language, it has now taken root and can be considered as part of the local linguistic ecology. Such a rich and complex development of the language policies in the country is a crucial foregrounding that allows us to understand the complexity of linguistic diversity in this multilingual society.
The over a century-long presence of English in the Philippines certainly offers sufficient argument for examining whether English is functionally native to educated Filipino speakers.

In addition, we would also argue that the notion of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986, 1991)—the value attributed by powers in society—of languages has significantly influenced and strengthened Filipino speakers’ linguistic choices, particularly the adoption of English as something functionally native to them. Finally, Bourdieu’s (1986, p. 46; 1991) notion of capital, which he defines as “accumulated labor… which, when appropriated on a private … basis by agents or groups of agents, enables them to appropriate social energy in the form of reified or living labor” is helpful in interpreting and discussing the participants’ conception of their languages especially in relation to their economic access in this globalized world and how this has helped in facilitating the ownership of English. Bourdieu’s (1991) view that language can hold a symbolic capital, a position where it can regulate its speakers’ access to various resources, is a helpful construct in our interpretation of the participants’ conception of their languages, especially English.

As mentioned earlier, Abad’s (2004) reimagination of English as local and Kachru’s (1998) proposal that English should be viewed as an Asian language both offer a counterpoint to the other view of English purely as an artifact of colonization, but that English also now belongs to Filipinos. Although English is historically a product of the presence of colonial powers in the Philippines in the late 1800s and in the early 1900s, the Filipino people’s ownership of the language and the way they have made it their own (Bautista, 1997) are a testament to the new status of the language as something functionally native to the Filipino people.

**Data and Methodology**

In 2017, Lising conducted ethnographic fieldwork in the Philippines to investigate and document the language practices of multilingual students from two universities. In that fieldwork, we were interested in the way students deploy the languages in their repertoires across their different everyday domains. To capture such information, five data sets were collected from 60 university students in two cities, Manila (40 students) and Cebu (20 students). These five data sets included responses to an offline sociodemographic questionnaire, a four-part online forum discussion, a face-to-face group discussion with the researcher, an online post-survey discussion, and a Language Experience and Proficiency (LEAP) questionnaire (Marian et al., 2007). In the sociodemographic questionnaire, participants were given an opportunity to report the languages they have in their repertoire to account for the importance of these languages through ranking and to assign the languages in their repertoire to a range of functions in the social, transactional, institutional, and national domains. In addition, as they attributed their languages to these domains, they were asked to provide a rationale for such choices. Subsequently, once their responses were analyzed, some were followed up through an online post-survey discussion.

Manila and Cebu were selected as initial sites for data collection; additional data collection is planned for other cities. The Manila-based students were in the second year of their Bachelor of Arts in Legal Management, whereas the Cebu-based students were in their second year of Bachelor of Arts in Communication. This paper draws on two of the five data sets from that fieldwork: primarily on the offline sociodemographic data and tangentially on the online post-survey discussion. In the sociodemographic questionnaire, students were asked questions to establish their linguistic repertoires, the importance they ascribe to the languages in their repertoires, and the languages they assign to various language domains. The second data set used in this paper is the online post-survey discussion, which elicited further explanation of the responses to the questionnaire, and which was done via Facebook Messenger once their questionnaire responses were analyzed.

Analysis of the two data sets used for this paper involved a critical thematic investigation to establish patterns of the reasons they provided for their linguistic choices for various domains.

The majority of the Manila-based students reported being bilingual in Filipino and English, whereas the Cebu-based students were mostly trilingual in Cebuano, English, and Filipino. Overall, with both cohorts combined, the most common repertoire was bilingual (25/60), with 24 participants reporting being bilingual in English and Filipino and one Korean international student speaking Korean and English, and whose data have been excluded from the rest of
the analysis. The second largest group (20/60) reported being trilingual, and the remaining 15 (of the 60) participants were multilingual in four to six Philippine and foreign languages. Of the 20 trilingual participants, 60% (12/20) were trilingual in Filipino, English, and Cebuano, with 40% (8/20) being trilingual in Filipino, English, and an additional Philippine (Bicol, Ilocano, and Kapampangan) or foreign language (Mandarin and Spanish). For the 15 participants with four or more Philippine or foreign languages, their additional languages are either Pangasinan, Ilocano, Ybanag, Hiligaynon, Waray, Bicolano, Spanish, Korean, Mandarin, Japanese, or French.

Thus, all participants spoke more than one language, and all had English in their repertoires. The privileging of these languages within each student’s repertoire, however, varied depending on the values the participants assigned to them, as shown in Section 4.

Functional and Indexical Assignation of Language and Their Motivations

As explained above, in the sociodemographic questionnaire, participants were given an opportunity to report the languages they have in their repertoire to (a) account for the importance of these languages through ranking and (b) assign the languages in their repertoire to a range of functions in the social, transactional, institutional, and national domains. In addition, as they attributed their languages to these domains, they were asked to provide a rationale for such choices. Subsequently, once their responses were analyzed, some were followed up through an online post-survey discussion. Findings from these responses (to the questionnaire and to the post-survey discussion) are reported in this section and are presented relative to the various motivations and beliefs the participants hold about their languages and their contexts of use.

Most Important Language

When asked which language is most important to them, overall, 44% (26/59) of participants stipulated Filipino, 36% (21/59) declared English most important, 15% (9/59) designated Cebuano most important, with the remaining 5% (3/59) nominating another Philippine or foreign language.

To appreciate the distinctions in language choice between the participants in the two cohorts (40 Manila-based and 19 Cebu-based participants having excluded the Korean national), it is crucial to see the fine-grained difference in their responses. Given the slightly different composition of languages in their repertoire, with the Manila-based cohort bilingual in English and Filipino and the Cebu-based participants trilingual in Cebuano, Filipino, and English, Figures 1 and 2 further account for the distinctions participants made in terms of the language most important to them.

For the Manila-based participants, 65% (26/40) claimed Filipino as the most important for them, whereas 33% (13/40) reported English as the most important language in their repertoire, with the remaining 2% (1/40) reporting Chinese as the most

![Figure 1](image_url)

*Figure 1. Language Most Important to the Manila-Based Participants*
important to them. On the other hand, for the Cebu-based participants, 47% (9/19) claimed Cebuano as the most important for them, whereas 42% (8/19) reported English as the most important language in their repertoire, with the remaining 11% (2/19) identifying Waray and Japanese as most important to them.

What the overall trend in the above figures shows is that most of the participants regard their mother tongue (Filipino for the Manila cohort and Cebuano for the Cebu cohort) as the most important to them. The significance of these numbers lies in two important realities: (a) the fact that the Manila-based participants are equally proficient in Filipino and English, while the Cebu-based participants are proficient trilinguals in Cebuano, Filipino, and English, and (b) the motivations for these choices. These bi/multilingual speakers have not ascribed equal value or degree of importance to the languages in their repertoire even though they have comparable proficiency in those languages. As indicated above, participants were asked in the sociodemographic questionnaire to account for the reasons for the functional distribution of their various languages. These data and the post-survey discussions show some interesting motivations behind their linguistic choices. The reasons provided by the participants were analyzed, and the common keywords used in their explanation were coded; they are presented here to give a thematic account of the rationale for their linguistic choice.

The participants ascribed their choices to assign Filipino as most important to the following key reasons: functionality, familiarity, mother tongue status, national identity, and cultural preservation. *Functionality* is explained in terms of the utilitarian value of the language in one’s everyday activities, whereas *familiarity* speaks to the ease with which they know the nuances of the use of the language across different contexts. *Mother tongue status* attests to the participants’ recognition of the fact that Filipino is the language they first learned at their mother’s knees. And reasons for *national identity* and *cultural preservation* are a testament to their identification of a language that represents their racial identity.

Similarly, the same reasons were given by the Cebuano participants in nominating Cebuano as their most important language, particularly citing mother tongue status, familiarity, and preservation of culture and heritage. Where English was identified as most important (by 13/40 from Manila and 8/19 from Cebu), participants cited reasons of academic and professional significance, global and universal status, and international importance.

The other everyday domains participants assigned languages to included social, transactional, institutional, and national settings. Social domains included three sites: conversations with parents, siblings, and housemaids; with friends; and on social media. Transactional settings selected for the purpose of this study were shopping centers, banks, and public transportation, whereas institutional settings included schools (kindergarten, primary, secondary, university) and the courts. National setting pertains to two questions that directly asked participants their language of choice, which they deem represented their cultural and national identities.

In the next four sections, we discuss the range of domains of English in the Philippine setting, reinforcing the claim of the functional nativeness of English.
Language of Choice in Social Settings

The results on preferred languages in social settings echo the results on the most important language overall. In the social setting, for both cohorts, the identified mother tongues (Filipino and Cebuano) are the languages most preferred. In the social setting of conversation with friends, however, there was more preference for both English and the mother tongue in both cohorts—Filipino and English in Manila, while Cebuano and English in Cebu—with an occasional mention of codeswitching in Filipino-English or Cebuano-English. This is unsurprising given that the friends the participants identified they often conversed with are from their university, where instruction is in English and Filipino. University conversations are influenced by an institutional demand that requires the use of specific languages, a point we will return to later in this paper. When considering the languages they prefer to use in social media, there was an interesting shift in the participants’ responses. Both cohorts consider the audience of their social media platform as the factor determining their language choice. To them, if their Facebook post, blog, or Instagram post is intended for their local friends, then they use the dominant local language. However, if they anticipate or intend for their social media post to be read by a more international audience, such as friends overseas, then they claim they are most likely to use English, as example (1) shows. (In the examples below, we reproduce the statements of the respondents without correction or comment.)

Example (1)

*I use English as I know different people from different countries will read my post.*

(Sociodemographic Questionnaire Response_ CebuFemale12)

Language of Choice in Transactional Settings

In the transactional setting, participants appropriate their languages in the contexts of accessing public transportation, banks, and shopping centers. Before we present the functional distribution of languages of the participants in these sites, it is important to foreground the findings and make the point that, especially in third world countries like the Philippines where socioeconomic demarcation and stratification are stark, different types of professions are closely tied to one’s socioeconomic standing. This then engenders a hierarchy of professions, and access to various jobs is dependent on one’s educational attainment. Public transport drivers, such as bus, taxi, and jeepney drivers, are often people with limited education. However, shopping center sales clerks would often have a university degree to their name. One would need a more specialized university degree requirement to land employment in the banking industry, even as a teller. Given this background, it is interesting to note that participants in both cohorts identified the use of Filipino in Manila and Cebuano in Cebu as their language of use when accessing public transportation, with one or two exceptions. These two examples make these points, with example (3) highlighting the exception.

Example (2)

*I use Filipino: to be certain that the drivers can understand (me) by using the lingua franca.*

(Sociodemographic Questionnaire Response_ ManilaFemale04)

Example (3)

*English and Cebuano: Cebuano is mainly used in jeepneys and taxis since most drivers have Cebuano as their L1. On the other hand, if I ride Uber or Grab, I use English since some drivers belong in a higher SES.*

(Sociodemographic Questionnaire Response_ CF03)

Similarly, the results report that the participants’ language of preference when conversing with bank tellers and shopping center clerks is interlocutor-dependent; their linguistic choice is influenced by the language proficiency exhibited by (or anticipated of) the teller or clerk during transactions.

Language of Choice in Institutional Settings

For the questions to do with the institutional setting, participants were asked to identify the language they think should be used in both academic and legal settings. The academic setting includes the following levels of education: kindergarten, primary, secondary, and university. Across both cohorts, there is an interesting consistency in participants’ choice of language for instruction and communication at each level, and these choices vary from one level to the next. For the kindergarten level, for instance, the
choice of the local mother tongue (Filipino for Manila and Cebuano for Cebu) as the language of instruction and communication predominates, as these excerpts show.

**Example (4)**

Cebuano so that kids can have a strong foundation with their native language before learning other languages.
(Sociodemographic Questionnaire Response_ CebuFemale13)

**Example (5)**

Filipino, it is easier to explain to little kids using their language.
(Sociodemographic Questionnaire Response_ ManilaMale31)

At the primary and secondary levels, the participants in both cohorts view these levels as preparatory stages for university learning and even for employment (see example (7)). Participants consistently agreed that both English and Filipino should be used in primary and secondary schooling, which reflects their recognition of the institutional languages mandated by the country’s Bilingual Education Policy (Gonzalez, 2007). The following excerpts exemplify the similarity in responses in both cohorts; here, the difference in their mother tongues ceases to be relevant to their language preferences as Cebuano is put aside.

**Example (6)**

English and Filipino: At this point, we should learn languages to be use especially in preparation to college.
(Sociodemographic Questionnaire Response_ ManilaFemale14)

**Example (7)**

English and Filipino - Filipino is the national language of the Philippines and English is a very important language. Realistically, learning the English language is advantageous, especially in the workforce.
(Sociodemographic Questionnaire Response_ CebuFemale02)

The participants’ responses, however, slightly varied when asked what their language of choice for instruction and communication at the university was. For the Manila-based cohort, the choice of using both English and Filipino is given alongside the nomination of English as a privileged language of use at the university. The latter, as explained in their rationale, is motivated by the belief that university education should serve as a preparation for engagement in a global world, a reason that appears quite consistently in the participants’ responses. For the Cebu-based cohort, the singular choice of language for instruction and communication at the university is English, as example (9) shows.

**Example (8)**

English, because in college, language should be thought in such a way to cope with the demands of our globalized nation.
(Sociodemographic Questionnaire Response_ ManilaMale07)

**Example (9)**

English because this is already one of the highest educational attainment one can achieve. This is also a good preparation for their career as an employee in the future or in the business world.
(Sociodemographic Questionnaire Response_ CebuFemale11)

The final site in the institutional setting is the courts. In this context, participants in both cohorts come to a different yet similar conclusion. For the Manila-based cohort, an equal number of participants nominated a preference for English in courtrooms, on the one hand, and the use of the mother tongue, on the other. The same is true for the participants in the Cebu cohort: some prefer English in the courts, with others recognizing the need for the language of the court to be accessible and understandable by the stakeholders concerned, particularly the accused, who may not necessarily have the proficiency in English sufficient to follow and comprehend the legal proceedings. These recommendations by the participants are made against the current practice where Filipino-English codeswitching is allowed and practiced in courtrooms and, by extension, Cebuano-English codeswitching in Cebu courtrooms, but only English is to be used in record keeping (Martin 2012). Example (10) is taken from one of the Manila-based participants and showcases the logic behind the endorsement to preserve
the use of English in the courts, whereas example (11) is from one of the Cebu-based participants and reveals an understanding of the importance of accessibility of language in proceedings that impact on one’s future.

**Example (10)**

_English. Most of the court’s basis such as laws and jurisprudence were patterned on foreign grounds. And also, changing the language used in court would be unnecessary._  
(Sociodemographic Questionnaire Response_ ManilaMale22)

**Example (11)**

_Cebuano because it is the language widely used in my community. Also, most people belonging to the lower social class can’t even understand what’s going on inside the court due to the usage of other language aside from their first language._  
(Sociodemographic Questionnaire Response_ CebuFemale03)

Language Indexing Cultural and National Identities

Finally, participants were asked to propose their language of choice for both cultural identity and national language. The responses to the former are quite varied and reflect the complexity of straddling multiple linguistic identities in a multilingual ecology. Some nominated Filipino or Cebuano purely as an abstract representation of their imagined Filipino culture, as exemplified in example (12). Others recognize the plurality in their linguistic identity and nominate all languages in their repertoire, as in example (13). However, others conceive of their “cultural identity” as something closely tied to the language community into which they were born (example 14).

**Example (12)**

_I think the language that mirrors my cultural identity would definitely be Filipino, since our culture at home and the environment I move in is very Filipino. Though there is still a strong touch of English in every aspect._  
(Sociodemographic Questionnaire Response_ ManilaFemale29)

**Example (13)**

_Filipino, English, and Pangasinan. I consider them all equal and a part of me, their only difference to one another is how often I use them. I may speak mostly in Filipino but intrinsically it is just as important with English and Pangasinan for me. All those three languages have contributed greatly to my personal development and that I have been part of societies, organizations and groups who utilize those languages._  
(Sociodemographic Questionnaire Response_ ManilaMale03)

**Example (14)**

_Cebuano. Although I can speak fluent English and Filipino, I still see myself as a speaker of the Cebuano language. I am proud of my native tongue; it is my identity; in the way I speak and act. Although some would say I don’t look like one, I will always remain true to this race._  
(Sociodemographic Questionnaire Response_ CebuFemale06)

For the language that they considered best represented their national identity, most of the participants from both cohorts surprisingly nominated the maintenance of Filipino as the national language (see example 15). There are some Cebuano participants who have maintained the age-old argument that Cebuano had more speakers than Tagalog and should have been chosen as the national language in 1937 (Gonzalez, 2007). On the other hand, there are also participants from the Manila-based cohort who insist that both English and Filipino should be the national languages to position Filipinos better in the globalized world.

**Example (15)**

_Yes. Filipino should be the only national language in the Philippines because this language has already been long established and well-known to other countries. However, if we also add another national language, this will only add confusion to other countries, and they will think that Philippines is not united as a nation or country._  
(Sociodemographic Questionnaire Response_ CebuFemale09)
These varied and complex responses mirror the richness and complexity of a multilingual society and a multilingual identity. It is revealing of the tapestry of ideologies that engender language choices, on the one hand, and of the challenges posed by the view of languages as distinct constructs, on the other. In the next section, we will reflect on these findings from the two lenses of coloniality of power and functional nativeness. We will also comment on the role symbolic capital plays in arguing against the former and strengthening the latter. Furthermore, we will show how the participants’ attitudes to their languages and how they have assigned these languages to different functions contest and reconfigure the traditional East-West binary.

**Revisiting Functional Nativeness in the Philippine Context**

At the onset of this paper, we posed the following questions: How do multilingual speakers of Philippine languages conceive of their languages relative to ownership and identity? Additionally, how is functional nativeness reflected in this conceptualization?

This study has shown at the macro level that the participants’ linguistic choices are largely motivated by a strong sense of ownership and identity associated with all the languages in their repertoire. At a micro level, it has shown that (a) English is naturally seen as part of the participants’ local linguistic repertoires, (b) English is hardly viewed in rigid, binary terms, and (c) the mother tongue (Filipino for the Manila-based participants and Cebuano for the Cebuano-based participants) and English are now taking the place of central languages.

In the participants’ responses to questions presented to them relative to languages used in a social setting, transactional setting, institutional setting, and in indexing cultural and national identity, English is clearly regarded as part of the participants’ local linguistic repertoires and is negotiated as such. Findings reveal that the local mother tongue is reimagined and reconfigured alongside English as one of the Central languages occupying a privileged position of choice, particularly in the question of importance. Additionally, we see in the findings that there is a considerable departure from the traditional conceptualization of English as purely an artifact of colonization. For the participants in this study, English is predominantly viewed as one of the key languages in their repertoires that shapes and constructs their “Filipino” identity, not necessarily imbricated with the trappings of the implications of a colonial past. Rather, the acknowledgment of that colonial past translates into reverse colonization of the language of the colonizer.

It is also crucial to realize that in multilingual societies like the Philippines, the geographical locations of speakers of Philippine languages also affect the way in which they imagine the place of Filipino in their cultural identity. So, in considering the sociocultural considerations such as social settings, transactional settings, institutional settings, and cultural and national identities, as outlined above, the linguistic choice is negotiated not just based on the status of the language, whether one is central or periphery, nor with respect to the interlocutor and their language preference, but also of their location in the archipelago. In other words, insofar as the participants in this study are concerned, there is hardly a view of English in rigid, binary terms. At the same time, even though the geographical location of Cebu dictates the use and privileging of Cebuano, most of the Cebu-based participants nominated Filipino as their language for national identity, an outcome which contradicts Gonzalez’s (1996b, p. 238) findings which reported “perceived lack of connection … [with] the national language.” At the social and personal level, participants’ notions of ownership of languages in their repertoire are impacted by multiple factors of geography, education, and socioeconomic status. The Manila-based participants only must contend with Filipino and English, whereas the Cebu-based participants, and potentially any other student groups in the rest of the country, by virtue of their location, are at a minimum trilingual in Filipino, English, and their mother tongue. Hence, for the Cebu-based participants, the language imagined to represent their cultural identity is one that is tied to their geographical belonging.

In addition, as shown in the findings above, the participants’ view of their languages holds various capital (Bourdieu, 1986, 1991). Their respective mother tongue (Filipino for the Manila-based cohort and Cebuano for the Cebu-based cohort) is accorded social capital, which enables them to maintain their membership in and ties with their local community,
while Filipino as a national language is deemed to hold symbolic capital that allows participants from both Manila and Cebu to share a linguistic identity that is socially recognized as of national value. In the same manner and more, English is very much tied not just to the notion of linguistic capital but also to symbolic capital. As shown in Section 4, English is often associated with academic and professional significance, global and universal status, international importance, and access to the global economy. Moreover, proficiency in English is held of high importance and as one indicative of a symbolic capital where participants are confident of employability readiness with English in their repertoires.

At the institutional level, the participants’ recommendation of using both Filipino and English as media of instruction and communication is similarly motivated by the symbolic capital they believe they would gain, especially with English, as participants in the globalized economy, a point that partly echoes Gonzalez’s (1996b, p.239) claim over two decades ago which expressed that a preference for English is due to “perceived academic and social advantage.”

One may argue that students not being able to see English as an imposition is a characteristic of its hegemony. Moreover, the institutional requirements for English under the Bilingual Education Policy have undermined the utility of other Philippine languages, creating a new kind of hegemony. That is, the privileging of English alongside Filipino has created an internal hegemony akin to what Gonzalez (1996b, p.233) called internal colonization, or what Rosa and Flores (2017, p. 626) referred to as internal colonialism. However, English in the Philippines, despite occasionally being seen from this viewpoint (i.e., English as being an artifact of colonization and therefore misplaced in the Filipinos’ linguistic repertoire), is a view absent in our participants’ imaginings of their languages. To say that the continued use of English indexes an enduring dependence on the colonial power is to ignore one’s agency in linguistic choices and in one’s participation in the globalized economy.

In addition, in the specific domains participants engage in in everyday life, particularly in the social, transactional, and national domains, there is a blurring of the usual attribution of English as foreign and other Philippine languages as local. In addition to this blurring is the shifting of this functional distribution depending on the domains of language use. The functional distribution of languages is no longer dependent on the imagined hierarchical status of the languages but on their utilitarian and integrative purposes. This is visible in the findings where participants make linguistic choices in social interactions that are interlocutor-dependent; in transactional settings where participants recognize interlocutors’ (e.g., jeepney and bus drivers’) socioeconomic trajectories and adjust their language choice on that basis; and in the national domain where some nominate all languages in their repertoire (see example (13) above) as appropriate languages to represent their cultural identity.

Having discussed the range of functions of English in the students’ linguistic repertoire, we should spend a bit of time on the other pillar of functional nativeness, the depth of penetration of the language in society. Clearly, English has been acculturated in Philippine society. Just as Kamwangamalu (2019) made the case that English has been so acculturated in Anglophone Africa that he called it a naturalized African language, so also with English in the Philippines. In Sibayan’s (1991) view, English is used for all the controlling domains of language, defined by him as the domains that dictate what language to learn and aspire for because that language is the effective working language in the domain. He lists the following as the controlling domains: government administration, legislation, the judiciary and the law, business, commerce, industry, science and technology, the professions, media, and education (on all levels). His hope was that the national language would become intellectualized enough to be the working language for those domains.

Yet one more instance of the evident pervasiveness of English in Filipinos’ language use is the switching that takes place between English and local languages, what linguists have called code-switching, in the specific instance involving Tagalog, Taglish. The proficiency of Filipino speakers in English enables them to switch between English and Tagalog effortlessly. We do it, among other socio-pragmatic functions, for communicative efficiency, to achieve the fastest, easiest, most convenient way to say something with the least waste of time and effort (Bautista, 2004). The precise word, vivid idiom, or apt quotation might be very readily available in the other language.

Furthermore, the widespread borrowing of English words into Philippine languages attests to this depth of penetration. In fact, English has become so pervasive that many words have been introduced into English
by Filipino speakers using processes for building up a lexicon (Bautista, 1997; Lising et al., 2020).

The functional nativeness of English, then, is an intrinsic part of the pragmatic realities everywhere present in the linguistic ecology of Filipino students.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to investigate how Filipino university students appropriate the languages in their repertoire to various everyday domains, to investigate questions of ownership and identity using Kachru’s functional nativeness as a prism. What this paper has shown is the fluid way in which participants construct who they are relative to their languages as dictated by social, transactional, institutional, and national demands. We have shown that the conceptualization of language dominance is closely tied to the language of the place where the participants were born, Filipino for the Manila-based participants and Cebuano for the Cebu-based participants, which also automatically becomes the language of choice of their cultural identity. In addition, participants also strongly recognized the place of English in their repertoires, one which does not necessarily view the language as a remnant of the colonizers but one that, through over a century of ownership, is now also deemed a natural part of their local linguistic repertoires, evidencing the enduring adoption of the functional nativeness lens. As the rest of the findings show, there are also two views unfolding in the data. One shows the juxtaposition of the mother tongue language (Filipino or Cebuano) positioned alongside English as central languages against the rest of the languages in the participants’ repertoires. Another view sometimes echoes this macro central-periphery division. However, most of the time, the hierarchical binary view is diffused, and language choice becomes dependent on various sociolinguistic factors in each domain. The way in which the participants assign their languages in their social milieu is influenced by familiarity and awareness of the audience. On the other hand, their language choice in transactional settings is guided by their understanding of the way choice of profession, education, and socioeconomic status positions others relative to English, Filipino, Cebuano, and other relevant languages at play. The findings for the participants’ language choice in the institutional setting is an appropriate example of how institutions help condition the value and capital of a certain language. In the case of the education setting, there is much acceptance of the role of English and Filipino as media of communication and instruction, while the status quo of the predominant use of English in the courts is now slowly brought into question in recognition of the variable language abilities, particularly of the plaintiffs. In the national domain, two developments are at play. First, regarding the languages for cultural identity, participants recognize the importance of all the languages in their repertoire (as we have seen in Section 4) consistent with multilingual practices. Second, there seems to be an acceptance now of a need for a language that indexes symbolic unity and for that language to be Filipino—a notion that was highly contested two decades ago.

Overall, what is clear in the findings are two points. First, a little over 30 years ago, at the time of Kachru’s (1985) introduction of the world Englishes paradigm, Filipino speakers of English resisted the idea that they could be referred to as native speakers of English unless their proficiency was validated against the exonormative standard vis-à-vis American English. Three decades later, this linguistic insecurity has shifted, and there seems to be wider acceptance now of English as part of their linguistic identity. Second is that there is remapping and reconfiguring of the places of English and Filipino, both of which are repositioned as the new central languages within the Philippine multilingual ecology. As indicated above, this remapping and reconfiguration of English as now local reflects how “English in Filipino hands … becomes not English but Filipino” (Abad, 2004, p.175), not Western but Eastern.

To end, it is important to remember that these findings are drawn from participants who come from urban spaces and a specific socioeconomic status—one that can afford private education. Their experiences may not necessarily be shared by those other students who come from other cities in the country and of lower socioeconomic backgrounds whose language affordances might be different. Furthermore, they constitute a very small sample. Findings might be different if the participants were more numerous. Much more work, therefore, needs to be done on language ownership and identity in the Philippine milieu.
Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the student participants in this study who gave generously of their time: students who at the time of data collection were in their second year of Bachelor of Arts in Legal Management from the University of Santo Tomas and students enrolled in the Bachelor of Arts in Communication from the University of San Carlos, Talamban, Cebu.

Declaration of Possible Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest for this article.

References


