

TOWARD AN EFFECTIVE MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION FOR THE FILIPINO MASSES

GLORIA D. FELICIANO

IN THE RECENT PAST, NO ISSUE OF NATIONAL CONCERN HAS SO ENGAGED the minds of our leaders in the various disciplines than the problem of a national medium of expression which would serve as a unifying linguistic force in our country. Linguists, semanticists, journalists, educators, legislators and executive officials have, by their researches, writings and pronouncements, contributed to the growing body of knowledge on the subject.

This report, written from the viewpoint of a mass communication practitioner, will attempt, against a backdrop of research information, to discuss some problems attendant to the increasing penetration of the mass media in our rural sector. It will also attempt to analyze the need for a mass communication medium in our country and the role that the mass media can play toward the fulfillment of this goal.

Rural Communication in the Early Fifties

About 20 years ago, mass communication channels were practically unheard of by the great majority of the barrio folk. Radios, according to de Young's survey, were owned by a privileged few—less than one out of 20 rural households (1). Newspapers, magazines and comics were read for news and leisure by a very small minority—less than 50 percent of the literates which at this time comprised four out of 10 of the people in the barrios. News got spread around by word of mouth when the barrio folk gathered at the *sari-sari* store, the artesian well, the *tininti's* place and by the roadside.

The Picture Today

Communication in the rural areas which in the past has been mainly interpersonal in character, is slowly giving way to mass communication as the mass media have come within the reach of the great majority of the rural folk. Studies in the last two years have established that more than six out of 10 of the barrio households own radios, mostly transistorized. A similar proportion which now compose the literates, read informational materials available in their homes such as

comics, vernacular magazines and newspapers. More than five out of 10 now reportedly see a Tagalog movie at least once a month as compared to only two in the very early fifties (2).

SOME PROBLEMS

The increasing penetration of the mass media in the barrios has brought with it concomitant problems which deserve study by the men behind our mass communications industry—the radio-TV station owner-managers, the newspaper-magazine-comics publishers and editors, the film company owner-producers and the advertising-public information executives. These problems were brought to fore in studies designed to evaluate development effort in the country in the last 10 years (3). Some of the most significant ones are: (1) ineffective communication messages due to an inadequate knowledge of rural audiences, (2) lack of instructional and educational-type programs, and (3) our multi-language set-up and lack of a popular, functional and practical medium (language) of communication to and for the rural masses.

Ineffective Communication Messages

Communication messages were considered ineffective (1) if they did not fall within the level of understanding of the intended readers or listeners; (2) if they did not bring about a greater understanding of rural development goals or objectives; and (3) if they did not effect change in the intended audiences—a change either in attitudes or in behavior.

All too often, mass media fare was couched in too technical language, used lengthy sentences, abstract and complex words. At other times, the setting—locale and characters—was too foreign and sophisticated for rural taste. Not to mention plots which did not and do not usually come within the realm of experience of the rural folk (4).

Lack of Change-Inducing Programs/Messages

Rural development programs and projects did not find adequate support from mass communication. Instead of being change-oriented, mass media presentations were mostly “escapist” in nature. They were intended more to entertain rather than to instruct and to educate. Often, the focus was on sex and violence rather than on the essentials and accelerators of say, civic consciousness with its components such as the wise use of leisure, concern for public safety (peace and order), health and sanitation, proper nutrition and the like, which can set the stage for development (5).

Our Multi-language Set-up

The existence of many local linguistic groups has compounded the mass communication problem in the rural areas. Change agents have found that in order to reach the barrio people, they must talk their language. This creates a problem in a country where there are eight main dialects spoken in various geographical regions. The 1960 Census of the Philippines listed these dialects and the proportion of Filipinos composing the eight linguistic groups, as follows: Tagalog, 21%; Ilocano, 11.7%; Pampango, 3.2%; Bicol, 7.8%; Cebuano, 24.1%; Waray, 5.5%; Pangasinan, 2.5%; and Hiligaynon, 10.4%. History books of local vintage report that, in addition to these main dialects, there are about 80 minor dialects spoken by the rest of the Christian Filipinos and the national cultural minorities.

Tagalog: Basis of our National Language

Of the eight main dialects, Tagalog, now called Pilipino, and one of two official languages of the country, poses the biggest problem. It has been reported that although the 1960 Census placed the Tagalog-speaking Filipinos at 21%, more than 50% of the Filipinos can now speak and understand Tagalog. This is perhaps due to three factors: (1) studies showed that by actual vocabulary count and estimate, the Tagalog-based national language is 59.5% related to Pampango, 42.2% related to Cebuano, 46.6% related to Hiligaynon, 39.5% related to Bicol, and 31.1% related to Ilocano (6); (2) since the forties, Tagalog has been taught as a subject in schools; and (3) there have been more Tagalog radio programs listened to and more publications read in Tagalog by the masses than any of the other seven main dialects. The latter seems to find support in an exploratory study of non-Tagalogs and in a survey on the exposure of the rural folk to print media (7).

The exploratory study revealed that more than nine out of 10 of 108 non-Tagalog interviewees representing the seven main linguistic groups, read Tagalog publications such as the *Liwayway*, *Bulaklak*, and *Taliba*. On the other hand, the survey on print media exposure indicated that the respondents read the following Tagalog magazines and newspapers: *Bagong Buhay* (now *Taliba*), *Mabuhay*, *Bulaklak*, *Liwayway*, *Tiktik*, *Aliwan*, *Bantayan-Gumising*, *Silahis* and *Barangay*. The Tagalog comics mentioned were: *Pilipino*, *Hiwaga*, *Romansa*, and *Espesyal* whereas the Tagalog radio programs listened to included *Sa Bawa't Patak ng Luha*, *Order ni Misis*, *Alam ba Ninyo?*, *Kahapon Lamang*, *Lolo Hugo*, *Dear Kuya Cesar*, *Pamana ng Kahapon*, *Bomba!*, *Oras ng Mamamayan* and *Bolang Kristal*.

The growth of Tagalog has been two-pronged: one, through the natural process of use and disuse by the people speaking it which

reinforces and is reinforced by the mass media particularly movie, radio, comics, magazines and newspapers and, two, through the addition of "loan" words mostly English and Spanish and of "coined" words by language specialists.

Need for a Mass Communication Medium

In order to communicate to the great bulk of the Filipino masses in the rural sector which make up four-fifths of our people, which of the two kinds of Tagalog would bring home the message(s) to them—the *popular* type developed by natural processes or the *artificial* type containing loan and coined words? This needs the attention of everybody—everyone who is concerned with and is affected by the problem: the language officials and language scholars in the government and in the schools, the mass media owners and managers, mass media practitioners (editors, writers, newscasters, script writers and so forth), students and researchers of language, the social sciences and mass communication, and users of the language—people in all levels, from the policy makers, lawmakers, program planners to the men who till the soil and the men in the streets. The statement sounds sweeping but it need not be. Like the rat problem and the problem of peace and order, our communication problem needs concerted action. Even the *tao*, by means of his feed-back—his expressed reactions to the language as well as his preferences, can be of help in providing a possible solution to the problem.

Food for Thought from Studies

Some studies, experimental but applied in nature, done by mass communication researchers, offer food for thought in attempting to find a possible answer to the above question. One of these studies dealt with the comparative comprehension of Tagalog and Bicol extension-type publications by 352 Bicol farmers in the six provinces of the Bicol Region (8). The researchers worked on the assumption that although Bicolanos speak different dialects, there are strong indications that many of them can read and understand Tagalog. The indicators include the fact that Tagalog publications were found in their homes in an earlier study on the impact of informational materials distributed by a local agency (9), the observation that many interviewees in the same study replied in both Bicol and Tagalog when interviewed in Bicol, and, their publication preferences which were characterized by partiality to both English-Tagalog and English-Bicol informational materials.

The findings showed that Bicol and Tagalog publications were equally understandable to the Bicol test subjects. A summary of the average scores of each publication type tested follows:

	Set I		Set II	
	Bicol	Tagalog	Bicol	Tagalog
Average score	8.59	8.41	8.28	8.27
Number of persons tested	180	180	180	180
Perfect Score	10	10	10	10

Another study sought to establish the relative understandability of four types of Tagalog informational materials to Laguna farmers. These materials were classified as technical, semi-technical, popular, non-illustrated and popular, semi-illustrated (10).

Statistically, no significant differences were found among the four types of materials in terms of the scores of the test subjects. However, percentage-wise, the results tended to show that the technical and the semi-technical types which were written in long-winded sentences and which used not only many technical terms but also "flowery" Tagalog phrases were more easily understood by the respondents in the more traditional barrios, that is, barrios where the respondents had been exposed to the mass media, especially Tagalog periodicals and radio programs.

A third study, cited earlier in this paper, established the fact that nine out of 10 of the interviewees learned their Tagalog from Tagalog periodicals and radio programs. A similar proportion described the Tagalog that they learned as "popular and conversational" (11).

Three observations might be drawn from these studies, as follows: (1) Tagalog, of the popular type, could be used for mass media fare in the Bicol provinces; (2) Tagalog of the popular type developed by the mass media would seem to be understandable in Tagalog barrios exposed to these media; (3) Non-Tagalogs from the other seven major language groups apparently learn their Tagalog from the mass media, specifically, the print media. One wonders whether similar findings would result if the Bicol experiment were replicated on the seven other major language groups of the country and if the latter two studies were conducted on a national scale.

Role of Mass Media

From the research information presented in this paper, it seems safe to assume that the mass media, and this includes *Taliba*, have a role to play in developing Tagalog as the medium of mass communication in the country. This role has, in fact, been the subject of public discussion, speculation and debate in recent months in the mass media, particularly the newspapers and other periodicals (12). It has likewise been mulled over in seminars, symposia and conferences held by interested groups. This role has been described as a unifying force which would provide a means of inter-regional and inter-class communication on a national level (13).

How would this role be discharged?

Suggestions from noted authorities have run the gamut from giving importance to popularising non-Tagalog dialects rather than to purely English and Spanish words (14), increasing the use of colloquial, idiomatic Tagalog (15), keeping in touch with linguistic reality and traditional practice in adopting loan words (16), enriching Tagalog with the other Philippine tongues (17), to assuring that our national language will develop with our experience and will be attuned to our needs and aspirations (18).

These suggestions were echoed by students in a pilot study on Tagalog publications with particular emphasis on the *Taliba* (19). In addition, they offered other recommendations such as (1) simplifying and shortening terms that are too complex and too lengthy for non-Tagalog readers such as *ninombrahan*, *sumusubaybay*, *naninindigan*, *kinalululanan* and so forth; (2) using Tagalog words rather than English or Spanish whenever possible, for instance, using *laban sa* instead of *kontra* or *versus*, *tagapagsalita* instead of *spokesman*, *artista* instead of *actress*, *babala* instead of *warning*, *malubha* instead of *grabe*; and (3) avoiding the indiscriminate use of unreadable foreign terms, for example, *ad hoc*, *tariff*, *customs code*, *fiscal policy* and the like and of *Tagalized* foreign terms such as *isyu* (issue), *anomalya* (anomaly), *okay* (alright), *sinurender* (surrendered) and so on.

On the whole, it would seem that the men behind *Taliba* and the other popular-type Tagalog periodicals merit a salute considering the fact that nine out of 10 of the student-respondents said that the Tagalog in these publications is understandable to them. However, there seems to be much room for improvement through continued study since the majority of these respondents (51.2%) believed that these periodicals are not understandable to other levels of Philippine society, especially the rural masses.

REFERENCES CITED

- (1) John de Young, "A Study of Communications Problems on the Barrio Level," Social Science Research Center, U.P., Diliman, Q.C., 1955, 109 p.
- (2) Gloria D. Feliciano, and Cesar M. Mercado, "A Communication Factbook, Philippines: 1966", Institute of Mass Communication, U.P., Diliman, Q.C., 1967.
- (3) ———, "The Communication Variable in Community Development" In Villanueva, B (ed.), *Readings in Community Development*, U.P. College of Agriculture, College, Laguna, 1964.
- (4) ———, "A Note on Change in the Philippine Barrio" In Lerner, D. and Schramm, W. (eds.), *Communication and Change in Developing Countries*, Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1967.
- (5) ———, "A Socio-Economic Survey of Selected Barrios in the Land Reform Area, Bulacan", U.P. College of Agriculture, College, Laguna, 1964.

- (6) Ban Alsaybar, "Spaniards Prepared Tagalog as National Language Basis", *The Manila Daily Bulletin*, August 13, 1966.
- (7) Gloria D. Feliciano, "An Exploratory Survey of Selected Communication Characteristics Among Non-Tagalogs", Institute of Mass Communication, U.P., Diliman, Q.C., 1968; A Communication Factbook (See No. 2).
- (8) Cesar M. Mercado and Gloria D. Feliciano, "The Relative Effectiveness of Tagalog and Bicol Publication," Institute of Mass Communication, U.P., Diliman, Q.C., May, 1968.
- (9) _____ and _____, *The Impact of Informational Materials Distributed by the Agricultural Development Council in the Bicol Region*, Institute of Mass Communication, U.P., Diliman, Q.C., August, 1967.
- (10) Ely D. Gomez, "The Relative Effectiveness of Four Types of Informational Materials to PACD Adult Classes in some Laguna Barrios", Cited in G.D. Feliciano and C.J. Ichan (eds.) *Philippine Mass Media in Perspective*, U.P., Diliman, Q.C., 1967.
- (11) An Exploratory Survey of Selected Communication Characteristics Among Non-Tagalogs", (See No. 7).
- (12) Leopoldo Yabes, "Natural language development. . . , *The Manila Times*, Jan. 27, 1968, p. 15A; Alfredo Roces, "Forming Language", *The Manila Times*, Nov. 16, 1965, p. 2; "House Hearing on Taliba Work Ends", *The Manila Times*, April 19, 1967; "Ople Clarifies Stand on Language", *The Manila Times*, April 6, 1968, p. 24A; "SSS Official endorses new Taliba style", *The Manila Times*, April 14, 1967, p. 1.
- (13) Geruncio Lacuesta, "Purism is still the issue", *The Sunday Times Magazine*, August 6, 1967.
- (14) Leopoldo Yabes, "SSS official endorses new Taliba style", *The Manila Times*, April 14, 1967, p. 1.
- (15) Alfredo Roces, "Forming Language", *The Manila Times*, Nov. 16, 1965, p. 2.
- (16) Teodosio Lansang, "On Pilipino: A Call for Realism", *The Sunday Times Magazine*, June 25, 1967.
- (17) Leopoldo Y. Yabes, "Natural language development. . . , *The Manila Times*, January 27, 1968, p. 15A.
- (18) Alejandro Roces on O. D. Corpuz, "Corpuz's Observations on National Language", *The Manila Chronicle*, July 10, 1968, p. 5.
- (19) Gloria D. Feliciano, "An Exploratory Study on Taliba Tagalog", Institute of Mass Communication, U.P., Diliman, Q.C., 1968.