



10.15446/fyf.v34n2.88549

Artículos

## PROMOTING SPANISH LANGUAGE IN THE PHILIPPINES: POLITICS, REPRESENTATIONS, AND DISCOURSES<sup>1</sup>

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## LA PROMOCIÓN DE LA LENGUA ESPAÑOLA EN FILIPINAS: POLÍTICAS, REPRESENTACIONES Y DISCURSOS

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### **Cómo citar este artículo:**

Díaz Rodríguez, J. M. (2021). Promoting Spanish language in the Philippines: Politics, Representations, and Discourses. *Forma y Función*, 34(2). <https://doi.org/10.15446/fyf.v34n2.88549>

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Recibido: 2020-06-23, aceptado: 2021-02-05

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<sup>1</sup> This article is part of a wide research project that I started in 2009 about official Spanish representations of the Philippines and the politics at play in cultural relationships between Spain and the Philippines. Related articles and a monograph about this topic can be found in the References Section under my surname.

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## Abstract

Over 150 languages are spoken in the Philippines. Considering that only English and Filipino are the official national languages, this is a contentious arena in the Philippines. In this context, the Spanish government has been promoting the Spanish language, adding another layer of political meaning, bringing to the present some of the old colonial discourses. This article explores Spain's promotion of the Spanish language in the Philippines. Following a semiotic approach, it analyses Spanish official discourses on language and the way that they are represented in several Spanish official exhibitions about the Philippines. This work argues that the Spanish language is portrayed in terms of symbolic power. Furthermore, focusing on Pierre Bourdieu's concepts, the politics of the Spanish language promotion are analysed in the midst of those language policies at play in the Philippines.

**Keywords:** *Language and culture; Philippines; Spain; Cultural policy; Politics and culture; Cultural diplomacy.*

## Resumen

En Filipinas se hablan más de 150 idiomas. Si consideramos que solamente el inglés y el filipino son los idiomas oficiales de la nación, estamos ante un tema polémico en Filipinas. En este contexto, el gobierno de España ha estado promocionando el idioma español, lo que añade otra capa de significado político, trayendo al presente, algunos de los anticuados discursos coloniales. Este artículo explora la promoción del idioma español en Filipinas por parte de España. A través de un enfoque semiótico, se analizan los discursos oficiales españoles sobre la lengua y la forma en que están representados en varias exposiciones oficiales sobre Filipinas. Se argumenta que el idioma español se representa en términos del poder simbólico. Asimismo, centrándose en conceptos de Pierre Bourdieu, se analizan las políticas de promoción del idioma español, en el contexto de las políticas lingüísticas de Filipinas.

**Palabras clave:** *Lengua y cultura; Filipinas; España; Política cultural; Política y cultura; Diplomacia cultural.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In 2008, a news item headline in Spain stated that *El español reconquista Filipinas* (Spanish re-conquers the Philippines) (El Imparcial, 2008). The story related to the announcement by former Philippine Secretary of Education, Jesli A. Lapus, about the restoration of the Spanish language in Philippine schools, was a decision that had been brought to public attention by former Philippine President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo in an official visit to Spain in 2007. This headline was criticised by Spanish academic Rafael Rodríguez-Ponga (2009) as unfortunate and controversial, as it brings memories of a colonial relationship to the present.

The headline can be read in different ways. One of the meanings of *El español* is Spanish, referring to the language, but it can also be interpreted as *the Spaniard*, conveying a stronger colonial meaning of the *Spaniards re-conquering the Philippines*. If we accept the former meaning (*el español* is the Spanish language) as the most likely connotation, it is still polemical as it has a direct connection to a past colonial relationship. The headline, though, is particularly interesting because it offers some initial insights about some of the issues pertinent to perceptions about the Spanish language in Spain, and the Spanish Empire in relation to the Philippines. In the headline, the Spanish language is connected to the idea of Empire. As the Spaniards who colonised the Philippines spoke Spanish, it is assumed that Spanish is a tool that was used in the conquest. If, as the headline says, Spanish has re-conquered the Philippines, it is implied that the language had already «conquered» the Asian country during the Empire. This statement can be understood as a stereotype, as it naturalises the idea that Spanish was spoken in colonial times, without taking into account the variety of indigenous languages spoken in the Philippines prior to the arrival of the Spaniards, some of them still alive. The reality is that Spanish has never been the language of the majority of the population in the Philippines. A paper published by scholar Benedict Anderson in 2004 stated that the Spanish-speaking population in Manila was just 3% (Anderson, 2004). However, in a recent article, the former Director of the Manila branch *Instituto Cervantes*, Historian Carlos Madrid explained that in the 1890s Spanish speakers peaked to 10%, a percentage that decreased 7.5% in 1918, and just 2.6% in 1939, which can be explained by the US promotion of English in the islands (Madrid Álvarez-Piñer, 2019).

Another idea about the Spanish language in the headline is that it is meant to have the power to «conquer». The perception of language as a conquering tool can be interpreted as an acknowledgement of the symbolic power of language and its legitimising features (Bourdieu, 1998). This power is present in much of Spanish official discourses

about the international promotion of the Spanish language in general and in the Philippines in particular (Díaz Rodríguez, 2018). Despite the absence of a systematic analysis of a large corpus of data from mass media, for this introduction it is still interesting to consider the ways that the Philippines is portrayed in the Spanish media. But, more importantly, these initial reflections pinpoint the main themes discussed in this article, where several discourses are explored on the Spanish language in the Philippines as perceived by Spanish institutions, as well as the way that these discourses are represented in various exhibitions funded by the Spanish government since the late nineties. The turn of the century was an important time for Spanish international relationships, as it marked the launch of a new set of foreign affairs policies towards Asia, which led to the implementation of three major political plans (2000, 2005, and 2009) for Spain to increase its visibility in Asia, and in the Philippines in particular. The plans on the promotion of Spanish language in the Philippines were included in the three political strategies, and several exhibitions about the Philippines have been organised since 1998. These exhibitions make some statements about language in the Philippines. In this respect, this article argues that the narratives in these exhibitions focus on «Hispanic traces» in the Philippines from the viewpoint of the Spanish organisers. Furthermore, the article argues that the Spanish language is portrayed in the exhibitions in terms of symbolic power, with a potential to make statements that define categories and relationships between Spain and the Philippines from the point of view of the Spanish curators and organisers of the cultural activities.

## 2. RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The topics discussed in this article are part of a wider research project that the author started in 2009 about cultural relationships between Spain and the Philippines. More specifically, the project studied the different ways that Spanish cultural institutions, such as the *Instituto Cervantes* in Manila, are promoting the Spanish language and culture in the Philippines, as well as the way that the Philippines is represented in Spanish cultural events. This project followed a mixed-methods approach that encompassed semi-structured interviews with Filipino and Spanish artists and arts managers, the analysis of cultural events, and legal documents regarding Spanish cultural policies.

Under this general framework, this article focuses on exploring two specific areas. First, the linguistic (and political) context where the Spanish institutions are promoting the Spanish language in the Philippines; and second, the analysis of the various Spanish narratives regarding language in the Philippines, as represented in several exhibitions. Following this, one of the main objectives is to explore the politics of the

Spanish language promotion in the Philippines in the context of the local languages, which is a contested arena, as discussed in the next section. The term *politics* in this article refers to the idea that when analysing culture, «everything is a matter of contested power relations» (Baldwin, Bagnall, Smith, Crawford, & Ogborn, 2004, p. 221). A useful model to discuss the politics of culture and language is Pierre Bourdieu's theory of action (Bourdieu, 1998). This model stresses the relational aspects of society, and the way the different agents at stake play specific roles (or positions) in building that society. Institutions such as the government are described as occupying a special kind of position since, as Bourdieu points out, «In our societies, the state makes a decisive contribution to the production and reproduction of the instruments of construction of social reality» (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 58). One of the most important elements in this equation is the reproduction of language. Within a given society, regulated by the nation-state, language is also produced, reproduced, and legitimised by many institutions, and the government plays a crucial role for this purpose. This idea will be further explored in Section 4 in relation to the Philippines.

Power relations have been studied in the field of cultural studies through the concept of representation. Stuart Hall describes representation as «one of the central practices which produce culture» (Hall, 1997, p. 1). In this way, the Philippine-themed exhibitions that have been organised by official Spanish institutions produce specific narratives and meanings. Following this, the analysis that the author conducted focused on two aspects as discussed by Hall. Firstly, a semiotic approach describes how language, and cultural products generate meaning; and secondly, a discursive approach, that enquires further into the consequences, or politics of those representations. This opens up another line of inquiry concerning the connections between cultural representation and power. In Section 4, I analysed meaningful elements of the Spanish exhibitions such as images and textual objects on display. Through focusing on the «discursive» approach I identify what knowledge is displayed in those materials. In summary, this article aims to answer the following research questions: (1) What are the main narratives embedded in exhibitions organised by the Spanish institutions regarding Spanish language in the Philippines? (2) In which linguistic context do these representations occur?

As a starting point, it is important to examine policies, as well as the politics of language in the Philippines. Language is a controversial topic, due to persistent debates that the issue of national and regional languages has raised in the Philippines since its independence. This discussion offers the grounds to understand the society's relationship to the Spanish language, which also helps describing the context where the politics in Philippine-Spanish cultural relationships unfold.

### 3. LANGUAGES IN THE PHILIPPINES

The Philippines is a country that comprises more than 7000 islands where more than 150 languages are spoken. According to linguist Lawrence Reid (2005), at least 10% of the major languages are spoken by more than a million people. Languages such as Tagalog, Cebuano, Kapampangan, Bikol, Ilokano, Pangasinan, Ilonggo, Samar-Leyte, Magindanao, and Maranao have been referred to as major languages due to the high number of native speakers (Reid, 2005, p. 1). Apart from this, many other languages have a relatively low number of native speakers and 15 of them are endangered, according to UNESCO (2017). Furthermore, the many years of colonial rule in the country, first (and longest) by Spain, and later by the US, meant the expansion of English and the influence of the Spanish language in many of the local languages, as well as the existence of a Spanish-based creole (Chabacano or Chavacano). It can be concluded, then, that the Philippines is a multilingual society, and in this context, it is no surprise that language policies are a contentious arena, as some Filipino scholars have indicated (Tan, 2007, back cover).

The 1987 constitution establishes Filipino and English as the official languages. Filipino is also named the national language (Cruz, 2008, p. 479). The different regional languages are described as «auxiliary official languages in the regions and shall serve as auxiliary media of instruction» (Republic of the Philippines, 1987, Art. XIV, Sec. 7), and there is a specific mention of Spanish and Arabic, as languages for voluntary promotion (Rodríguez-Ponga, 2009)<sup>1</sup>. This categorisation of languages has been a topic for discussion in the Philippines for decades, mostly in relation to the search for a national language.

In 1937, «President Quezon proclaimed the language based on Tagalog [currently known as Filipino] as the National Language of the Philippines» (Aspillera, 1985, p. iv). In 1949, three years after the independence from the United States, the language was renamed Pilipino, but this term was abolished by the Aquino government in 1987 (Cruz, 2008). According to scholar Ruanni Tupas, Tagalog «became the national language mainly through the workings of a Tagalog-speaking national leadership» (Tupas, 2007, p. 61). However, this was not an easy step to make, as there were bitter debates during the writing of the Constitution in the 70s (Tupas, 2007). The solution for the constitutional convention was the agreement on Filipino as the national language. The problem, though, is that this language has been described as a «linguistic fiction» (Tupas, 2007, p. 62), a «nonexistent, imagined language [...] defined as a future, utopian conglomeration of most, if not all, Philippine languages» (Cruz, 2008, p. 477). In practical terms, this is very much of a «utopian» compromise, the reality is that non-Tagalog speakers have

a «poignant resistance to Filipino as the national language, which they claim is 99.9% Tagalog» (Tupas, 2007, p. 69). Clearly, we can equate the terms Tagalog, Pilipino and Filipino when describing this language.

Furthermore, there was another debate on language in the education system, when former president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo announced in 2009 the return of English as the primary medium of instruction in the Philippines. This decision was made on the basis that English proficiency was declining among Filipino students. For Ruanni Tupas, the language issue should be studied in terms of its connections to class (Tupas, 2007, p. 74), an issue that he believes is absent from recent debates. He affirms that

the socioeconomic structure of the country created to a large extent by an export-driven economy and a system of class relations which date back to colonial times [...] yields conditions where the poor, like everyone else, clamour for English with the hope that it will save them from their wretchedness. But it is precisely because they are poor and are unable to afford good education that they only get the kind of English that perpetuates the present conditions (Tupas, 2007, p. 74).

This problematic view of language issues in the educational system is linked to the persistence of some class structures in today's Philippines. This postcolonial criticism is very much in tune with a wider discussion on general politics in the Philippines, where issues as poverty are perceived to be linked to colonialism<sup>2</sup>. Regardless of these discussions, there is a general consent that English is worth keeping and improving despite being a colonial language. It was the Americans who introduced education in English in the early twentieth century allowing the language to spread for subsequent years<sup>3</sup>. The situation for Spanish, once also a colonial language in the Philippines, is very different, and there has been a constant decrease in the number of Spanish speakers in the islands (Galván Guijo, 2006, p. 163).

Although Spanish was introduced in the archipelago with the arrival of the Spaniards in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it was never fully assimilated by the natives. The situation was very different from that of the Americas (Anderson, 2004, p. 227). One of the reasons for this relates to the fact that few Spaniards stayed on the archipelago. According to Vicente Rafael, «Geographical distance and the relative absence of precious metals in the country dissuaded Spaniards from settling there in great numbers» (Rafael, 1988, p.18). Even after 1850, the period when Spanish presence in the islands was at its highest peak, «the number of Spaniards was less than six thousand» (Munteanu, 2006, p. 170).

Another reason why the Spanish language was not thoroughly disseminated was the absence of a lingua franca among the indigenous population (Rafael, 1988, p. 20). The existence of a large number of different languages that were spoken in the islands made it difficult for the colonizers to spread their language. Moreover, the conquest was closely linked to the spread of the Catholic faith, meaning that Spanish friars learned the local languages to indoctrinate, rather than focusing their efforts on the propagation of the Spanish language. This exceptional situation meant that the priests held a position of primary importance in colonial authority, up the point that the colonial system is sometimes referred to as a *Frailocracia*, meaning that it was really the friars that controlled the colonial government in the islands, and that they depended on «evangelization to establish and validate their power» (Rafael, 1988, p. 18). The Spanish language, its translation into the local languages, and conversion to Catholicism were interrelated and essential to the way that the Spanish colonial system used to operate, becoming an arena for the exercise of power by the colonizers as well as resistance from the colonized, as Rafael (1988) has demonstrated:

Christian conversion and colonial rule emerged through what appeared to be a series of mistranslations. But in fact [...] such mistranslations were ways to render the other understandable. [...] For the Spaniards, translation was always a matter of reducing the native language and culture to accessible objects for and subject of divine and imperial intervention. For the Tagalogs, translation was a process less of internalizing colonial-Christian conventions than of evading their totalizing grip by repeatedly marking differences between their language and interests and those of the Spaniards (p. 211).

Language became a contested arena between the Spanish colonizers and the indigenous population of the Philippines. It also became a marker of class, wealth, and power, as it was spoken by a powerful minority. It was the language of the ruling class and the language of Spaniards and Spanish *mestizos* that constituted one of the wealthiest and most influential elites during the Spanish period in the islands. The fact that Spanish *mestizos* were a minority in the Philippines during Spanish colonization is seen by some scholars as another reason why Spanish language did not expand further (Quilis, 2002, p. 306). In spite of this, Spanish is also considered to have had an important role as a means of resistance against the colonizers, as Benedict Anderson (2004) explains, «In the 1890s barely 3 per cent of the population knew “Castilian”, but it was Spanish-readers and writers who managed to turn movements of resistance to colonial rule from hopeless peasant uprisings into a revolution» (p. 227).



In this context, it is worth mentioning Filipino national hero José Rizal and his writings in Spanish. His novels *Noli Me Tangere* (1887), considered as the best example of Philippine literature in Spanish, and *El Filibusterismo* (1891), are regarded as important triggers of Philippine independence as they inspired the first nationalist revolution in 1896, and were partly the reason why Rizal was executed in 1896 (Ordaz, 1992). This idea is revisited in the different Spanish representations of the Philippines, such as the *Filipiniana* exhibition in 2006 or some of the activities organised by the *Instituto Cervantes* in Manila that relate to Philippine literature in Spanish.

Spanish became an official language of the new Republic of the Philippines from 1898 to 1976 and it was a compulsory subject in schools until 1987, being relegated after that to a language for «voluntary promotion» together with Arabic (Rodríguez-Ponga, 2009). In terms of the number of speakers, a study claims that there were 439.000 native speakers of Spanish in 2007 (Rodríguez-Ponga, 2009, p. 3), which comprises about 0.5% of the population. However, according to the 1990 census, there were just 2.657 native speakers, not counting those speakers of Chabacano, a Spanish-based creole that emerged from the contact with several substrate languages from the Visayan islands. Today the Chabacano language is spoken by around 400.000 people, mostly in the city of Zamboanga, in the island of Mindanao, as well as in Davao and Cotabato (Madrid Álvarez-Piñer, 2019).

Antonio Quilis (2002) has stressed the influence of the Spanish language on some of the vernaculars, estimating that there are about 20% of Spanish words in Tagalog and that there is a strong influence on Visayan as well. Spanish words are also present in the names of places, cities, villages, and suburbs. Furthermore, most Filipinos have Spanish-sounding names. This dates back to the mid-nineteenth century, when, as Dan Munteanu explains in a Spanish publication, the Spanish governor decreed that everyone should have a surname and «offered the population the possibility of selecting a Spanish surname out of a list of 60.662» (Munteanu, 2006, p. 171). This idea is perceived slightly differently by Filipino writer Jessica Zafra (2005), who in an ironic article about the history of the Philippines states that

The colonial government also decreed that everyone should have a proper Spanish-sounding surname, so the natives had to report to their offices and pick a name out of a list. My own seemingly Spanish surname may indicate a Spanish ancestor; more likely it means my forefathers got to the office late, and had to pick a name from the bottom of the roster (p. 67).

This sarcastic comment is an example of contemporary attitudes to the Spanish language in the Philippines, trying to detach Hispanic traces from those of an indigenous or native origin. There is a clear link between the Spanish language and colonialism, and, according to Javier Galván, this is one of the reasons why the number of students of Spanish has decreased after 1987<sup>4</sup>; the language was «discarded because of its connotation as a colonial language» (Galván Guijo, 2006, p. 1). Nevertheless, there is an ambivalent perception of the Spanish language and culture in the Philippines, as

Virtually no Filipinos today speak Spanish, but a certain sham-aristocratic aura still surrounds the *idea* of Iberian Culture. Older members of the oligarchy prefer to be addressed as Don and Doña [...] and children are still overwhelmingly baptized with Spanish names, even if they acquire American or local nicknames later (Anderson, 2004, p. 211).

Following this ambivalent perception, the promotion of the Spanish language in the Philippines by Spanish institutions acquires another layer of signification, rooted in power relationships dating back to the colonial period.

#### **4. THE PROMOTION OF THE SPANISH LANGUAGE IN THE PHILIPPINES**

When examining the promotion of the Spanish language carried out by Spanish institutions since the late nineties, a useful concept to consider is that of symbolic capital. Bourdieu defines it as «any property (any form of capital whether physical, economic, cultural or social) when it is perceived by social agents endowed with categories of perception which cause them to know it and to recognize it, to give it value» (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 47).

Following this, it can be argued that the Spanish government perceives the Spanish language as symbolic capital, a valuable «asset» worthy of international promotion and part of their strategic policies in foreign affairs. Considering that official institutions and governments play an essential role in the construction of reality (Bourdieu, 1998), language is also part of this construction. In relation to this idea, the promotion of the Spanish language in the Philippines acquires a double connotation.

First, it was the language of the Spanish colonizers and, therefore, a language that was once connected to power. It was a language that was brought in from Spain and, as postcolonial scholars have demonstrated, supported, and legitimised the imperial project (Patajo-Legasto, 2004). In contemporary relationships, the Spanish Government

has the resources to keep promoting the Spanish language in the Philippines, a venture that was never completed during the Spanish rule in the islands. The Spanish Government has decided to keep a relationship with the Philippines through a linguistic bond. The Spanish Central Government is reproducing and legitimising a particular linguistic model beyond its boundaries as a nation.

Secondly, the promotion of the Spanish language is reproducing some characteristics about Spain as a nation-state. The focus on Castilian language, rather than other languages spoken in Spain, such as Catalan, Galician or Basque, also serves a function of self-definition. Spain is making a statement about its position in terms of language: the Spanish language is worth studying, speaking, promoting, and keeping in Spain as much as overseas, and in this case, in the Philippines. Following Bourdieu, language has become symbolic capital, as it is perceived as valuable and worthwhile by those who have the power to legitimise it. This idea was stressed in the 2002 International Congress on Spanish Language, where Spanish was described as «our petrol» by Latin American economists and business people (Noya, 2003, p. 1). It was also formulated in the Framework Plan towards Asia, projected by the Aznar government in 2000, which states as a concrete objective to open a Spanish School in Manila (MAE, 2000, p. 11). The 2005 Plan Asia also stresses the importance for the Spanish Government to keep promoting and disseminating the Spanish language. The plan follows a framework where cultural cooperation is an important focus, and so many of the proposed objectives for language promotion have to do with the reinforcement of relationships with local universities as well as establishing scholarships for students of Spanish and training programmes for Spanish teachers in Asia (MAEC, 2005, pp. 141, 288, 290).

In the Philippines, the *Instituto Cervantes* is the Spanish official centre for the promotion of Spanish language and culture. However, the *Instituto*'s mission statement also includes Latin American countries: «Instituto Cervantes is a worldwide non-profit organization created by the Spanish government in 1991. It is the largest organization in the world dedicated to the teaching of the Spanish language and increasing knowledge of Spanish and Latin-American culture» (Instituto Cervantes, 2020).

Promoting the Spanish language is an essential part of the *Instituto Cervantes*' activities, but the institution presents itself as the link between Spain and other countries that were once part of the Spanish Empire (Díaz Rodríguez, 2019). The *Instituto* disseminates and promotes «Hispanic culture» by organising periodic cultural events such as film screenings, exhibitions, book launches, and other literary events. These events feature artists and writers from Spain and the Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America. Therefore, in this context, the *Instituto Cervantes* promotes cultural

works from many Spanish-speaking countries, and not only from Spain. In relation to the Philippines, the situation is different. Even though the Spanish cultural institutions in Manila have been searching for cultural commonalities between Spain and the Philippines, by emphasising Hispanic traces in the Philippines (Díaz Rodríguez, 2018), it is not the *Instituto Cervantes'* mission to promote Philippine culture. The Philippines, is not perceived to be «Hispanic enough» to be promoted by the Spanish institutions, unlike Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America.

For the *Instituto Cervantes*, the Spanish language is the crucial factor when deciding on what cultural events, and what artists and writers to promote. This is the reason why Spanish-speaking countries in the Americas (but not the Philippines) have been included in the mission statement. In this regard, we can conclude that there is an ambivalent perception of the Philippines by the Spanish officials as it is both perceived «as closely linked to Spain through its Hispanic traces and, at the same time, as a complete “other” which is not worth including in the promotion of Hispanic culture» (Díaz Rodríguez, 2019, p. 62). An explanation for this perception is the fact that there is a small number of Spanish speakers in the Philippines. However, from a postcolonial point of view, it is worth noting that this type of ambivalent discourse can be linked with a process of «othering», which was a common feature of the colonizer's view of the colonized subjects (Bhabha, 1994).

Despite this ambivalent perception, the *Instituto Cervantes* in Manila has been promoting Philippine-Hispanic traces in the Philippines as a means of strengthening cultural and diplomatic relationships between both countries. Since 2000, the *Instituto* has organised a large number of activities related to the Spanish language in the Philippines. Those activities can be roughly divided into two blocks: those that are brought to the Philippines from Spain, and those with a local content. Examples of the former are book launches of Spanish books about the Philippines (November 2004) or an international touring exhibition about Don Quixote (August 2005). Cultural activities related to language with a local flavour are more plentiful, ranging from a series of discussions on Don Quixote by Filipino writers (2005) to the promotion of Philippine literature in Spanish through discussions and lectures (2004-2009), reading sessions of José Rizal's novel *Noli Me Tangere* in 2006, among others.

In an interview the author conducted with José Rodríguez, former Director of *Instituto Cervantes* in Manila (2010), the latter emphasised two events related to language: The celebration of international book day and the campaign for the promotion of reading, *Berso sa Metro* (*Verses in the Subway*). When referring to the latter, the Director explained that Spanish poems were translated into Filipino and vice versa and then these

translations were displayed on public transport in Manila. He mentions that the campaign had been very successful, reaching one million people who travel in by train every day. He thinks that the importance of this campaign resides in its innovative approach to the promotion of reading and, in the debate that it generated in the capital, where those who read it questioned: «What is our identity? Which one is the original?» (J. Rodríguez Rodríguez personal communication, January 2010). He concludes that this campaign fulfils the *Instituto Cervantes*' objectives by «promoting a culture that equally belongs to Spanish and Filipinos» (J. Rodríguez Rodríguez personal communication, January 2010). Through this cultural activity, the *Instituto* has utilised the Spanish language as a mean to reach Filipinos. As the influence of the Spanish language on Filipino is quite strong, the debate was bound to happen and the *Instituto* has successfully created an impact in Manila about the awareness of the Spanish language, its connections with Filipino language, and promoting the Spanish courses at the *Instituto* at the same time. This activity is an example of the *Instituto Cervantes* as a holder of symbolic power in the Philippines. This institution has the resources to promote its cultural capital (Spanish language in this case) in the Philippines. Moreover, this cultural capital is invested in local culture as per its connections to the national language, fulfilling the strategic requirements of the Spanish Government in its attempts to reach the Philippines through a series of historical and cultural commonalities with Spain.

Another useful way to discuss issues concerning cultural promotion and language in this highly politicised context is through Homi Bhabha's ideas around ambivalence and hybridity. Bhabha explains that «colonial discourse produces the colonized as a social reality which is at once an "other" and yet entirely knowable and visible» (Bhabha, 1994, p. 101). As I hinted previously, the ambivalence of Spanish discourses about the Philippines come from the differential position of the Philippines in contrast to that of other countries that share a colonial past with Spain. As I explained earlier, this differential position has to do with the fact that Spanish is not widely spoken in the Philippines. However, despite this differential situation, we must not forget that the language is not «endangered» in the Philippines and that, in fact, it has evolved in different ways through mixing with the local languages, and even creating a Spanish-based creole. This can be understood as processes of hybridity. Bhabha (1994) celebrates this cultural mixing as it creates something new, which can even subvert some of the old colonial discourses. Following this reasoning, revisiting and reviving the Spanish language in the Philippines can also be perceived as moving from what was once a colonial language to something that belongs entirely to Filipinos. Examples of this include the variety of Spanish still spoken in the Philippines, the creole Chabacano language, the many words that have

mixed with local languages and, of course, the many Filipino literary works written in Spanish, amongst many others.

The concept of hybridity has also been revisited in several exhibitions organised by the Spanish government since the late 90s. Some of these exhibitions present narratives about *mestizaje*, as well as the figure of the *Ilustrados*, such as Filipino national hero, José Rizal (Díaz Rodríguez, 2018). In the next section, I look at the different narratives produced in these exhibitions as to offer another useful perspective into the politics of language.

## **5. REPRESENTING LANGUAGE IN SPANISH EXHIBITIONS ABOUT THE PHILIPPINES**

Following the Spanish political plans to reach Asia since 2000, the Spanish government has organised a series of exhibitions about the Philippines, some of which are the following:

- *Manila 1571-1898: Occidente en Oriente* (San Agustin Convent in Manila, in 1998)
- *Filipinas hace un siglo* (Metropolitan Museum of Manila, in 2000)
- *Filipinas, puerta de Oriente: De Legázpi a Malaspina* (National Museum of the Philippines, Manila, and San Telmo Museum of San Sebastian, Spain in 2003-04)
- *Filipiniana* (Conde Duque Cultural Centre, Madrid, in 2006)
- *El imaginario colonial* (National Museum of the Philippines, Manila, in 2006)
- *Fascinados por Oriente* (National Museum of Decorative Arts, Madrid, 2009-10)
- *Entre España y Filipinas: José Rizal, escritor* (National Library, Madrid, in 2011-12)

These exhibitions can be understood as specific Spanish representations of the Philippines, which encompass several discourses about different topics<sup>5</sup>. This section focuses on the analysis of narratives related to language, as to examine what is represented, and what statements these specific representations make.

Despite the increasing efforts that the Spanish Government has made towards the promotion of the Spanish language in the Philippines (Madrid Álvarez-Piñer, 2019), language is one of the elements that is not widely discussed in the exhibitions analysed. However, this does not necessarily mean that this area is not perceived as important by the organizers. On the contrary, it can be argued that the shift of focus from language to other areas of the historical relationships between Spain and the Philippines, on the one hand, follows specific objectives of Spanish cultural policies and, on the other hand, constructs a narrative of the Spanish language in the Philippines.

Although there are similarities in the representation of language in the different exhibitions examined, a major division can be established between two particular

ways of portraying this issue. On one side, we have the exhibitions *Manila 1571-1898, Occidente en Oriente* (1998) and *Filipinas, puerta de Oriente: De Legázpi a Malaspina* (2004) and, on the other, *Filipiniana* and *El Imaginario colonial* (2006)<sup>6</sup>.

In an introductory statement to the 1998 exhibition, Manuel Gala Muñoz, the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Alcalá explains that the Spaniards arrived in Asia «building their path with the argument of the Word» (Gala Muñoz, 1998, p. XII). This account of the arrival of Spanish in Asia summarises the way that language is portrayed in the 1998 and 2004 exhibitions. Through several metaphors, language has been connected and subscribed to religion and, at the same time, the colonising enterprise has been described as persuasive, rather than enforced and conflictive. The denotative aspect of *the Word* is *what is said*, the word of the Castilians, therefore, Castilian language; but *The Word* in capital letters, has the connotation of *The Word of God*. Through this metaphor, Castilian language is «the language of God». Furthermore, that word is said to have an «argument», to be persuasive and, hence, Spaniards did not have to fight to achieve their mission as they were only «building their path» persuasively through the use of their language.

The statement by Gala Muñoz naturalises the problematic brutal enforcement that a colonial conquest entails, reinforcing the narrative of colonialism as a civilising mission. On the other hand, there is a belief that what is understood as *The Word of God* is unproblematic and universal and, therefore, powerful. Language is then connected to power, but to a power that is beyond humans; the Spaniards are represented as those messengers of God in their evangelising mission, which is portrayed in both, the 1998 and the 2004 exhibitions, as one of the (if not the) most important aspect of Spanish colonization.

A similar portrayal of the links between language and religion can be found in the 2004 exhibition where an eighteenth-century painting is shown. The following is an excerpt from a text that appears on the painting:

The Saint is depicted preaching to men of different races and regions and in just one language, achieving through this miracle, conversion of many infidels, specified in the caption that appears on the upper side of the frame: «San Francisco Xavier is preaching in the Orient to various nations with different languages and, speaking to them in just one language, he is understood by Moors, Jews, Japanese, Chinese, and with this miracle, he achieves great conversions» (Morales, 2003, p. 253)

As the caption on the frame is not visible, the curator has decided to fix the meaning that the viewers might convey to the painting by emphasising and connecting the ideas

of Spanish language («speaking in one language»), divine power (it is a «miracle») and conversion. Furthermore, by explaining the caption and then quoting it straight after, he considered that repetition was necessary so no more interpretation from the viewer was needed. Meaning was fixed once and reinforced once more time.

Apart from the examples previously mentioned, language is not explicitly discussed in either the 1998 or the 2004 exhibitions. There are two specific comments on language in the 2004 that are, again, related to religion. Curator Alfredo J. Morales (2003) states that «The efficacy of the mission by the members of the different religious orders destined for the overseas provinces should be supported, compulsorily, in the precise knowledge of the language of the peoples to which its evangelising mission was directed» (p. 238).

Conversion is, then, represented as the main mission of colonialism and, the acquisition of local languages by the Spanish priests as necessary means to that end. Similarly, when describing the contents of the section entitled: *Governing, Administering, Evangelising*, the curator explains that Christian conversion was propagated by several orders, such as Augustinians, Franciscans, Jesuits, and Dominicans.

All of them were interested in learning native languages and in using them in their mission, which limited the spreading of Castilian. It was just in Manila and in other places inhabited by the Spanish that it was common to speak this language (Morales, 2003, p. 24).

In this short statement about language, there is not much information about the Spanish language and its connections to colonialism. The focus has been shifted from the spread of language as a defining characteristic of Spanish colonialism (as it is the case in the Americas) to the idea that the friars were «interested» in learning local languages.

Spanish language has been represented as a minor aspect of the colonial relationship, and the propagation of Christianity has received most attention. The one sentence about the way that Spanish did not spread thoroughly in the Philippines is significant. This statement conveys the idea that the relationships between language and colonialism are not worth remembering. The fact that the spread of Christianity and the colonial enterprise were linked to a problematic relationship between the colonizers and the natives through a series of translations and mistranslations (Rafael, 1988) is not discussed. On the other hand, by silencing the discussion on language in the colonial relationship, the narrative of Spanish language in the Philippines has been replicated. A Spanish visitor to the exhibition could assume that the colonial relationship with the Philippines was similar to that of other cultures in the Americas, where Spanish became a distinctive



feature of those societies, even after independence. This narrative is reinforced in the exhibitions by showing several objects that contain texts in Spanish. In the exhibitions, the following are displayed:

- Several manuscripts on sailing ranging from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries such as those by Jorge Juan (Aguilera Rojas, 1998, p. 23), Andrés García de Céspedes (Aguilera Rojas, 1998, p. 23; Morales, 2003, p. 151), Pedro de Medina (Aguilera, 1998, p. 27), Miguel López de Legázpi (Morales, 2003, p. 149), Antonio de Gaztañeta Yturrialzaga (Morales, 2003, p. 152) or Antonio Messia (Morales, 2003, p. 165).
- A book on geography by Martín Fernández Enciso from 1519 (Aguilera Rojas, 1998, p. 27).
- Several maps of Manila (Aguilera Rojas, 1998, pp. 83, 84).
- A description of the Cathedral in Manila from 1757 by Fray Miguel Lino de Ezpetela (Aguilera Rojas, 1998, p. 92).
- A manuscript on botany from 1792 (Morales, 2003, p. 179).
- Several manuscripts on chronicles by Spaniards such as those by Antonio de Morga from 1609 (Morales, 2003, p. 188), Fray Juan de Torquemada from 1615 (Morales, 2003, p. 231), Juan Francisco de San Antonio from 1738 (Morales, 2003, p. 232), Pedro Chirino from 1604 (Morales, 2003, p. 235) or José Álvarez de Breu from 1736 (Morales, 2003, p. 269).
- A manuscript containing the Funeral Oration for Charles the Second (1702) by José Altamirano y Cervantes (Morales, 2003, p. 226)
- Several treaties on languages such as Tagalog by Fray Francisco de San Joseph from 1610 and Pampango by Fray Diego Bergaño from 1729 (Morales, 2003, p. 239).

In conclusion, the discourse on language in these early exhibitions is connected to Christian conversion. Moreover, the display of Spanish texts, as well as the lack of an in-depth discussion on language and the Empire reinforces contemporary Spanish narratives about today's Philippines. However, there was a shift in the discourses on language in the exhibitions organised after 2005, which was related to a political change in the government.

In 2005, the publication of the new plan for Asia and the Pacific (MAEC, 2005, 2008) by the newly elected Zapatero government in 2004 marked a shift in the way that the cultural relationships with Asia were to develop during the following four-year period. The increase in general funding towards achieving the ambitious goals proposed in the plan, meant that there were more resources to organise cultural activities. The various exhibitions organised before 2005 can be described as single units, since there was no

specific thread that connected them. After 2005, on the contrary, *Casa Asia* organised a series of themed years about several Asian countries, which followed a precise cultural strategy as stated in the plan. The first themed year, 2006, was dedicated to the Philippines, and contained a whole programme of events in both Spain and in the Philippines, which was thought out as a coherent unit. Therefore, the two major exhibitions about the Philippines in 2006, *Filipiniana* and *El imaginario Colonial*, contain similar themes and a similar approach to representation.

One of the main differences between these, and the exhibitions prior to 2005 is the inclusion of issues and themes on contemporary Philippines. The conquest and the early colonial period in the islands is also represented, but there is a clear focus on the nineteenth century, and in *Filipiniana*, an effort was made to offer an overview of Philippine history up until 2006. This is also evident in the complementary activities that were organised around the exhibition. In May 2006, there were a series of seminars by Filipino and Spanish academics, entitled *Art, History and Social Reality in the Philippines*. An attempt was also made by *Casa Asia* to get a glimpse of contemporary Philippine culture by organising two Filipino language courses (24 and 30 hours) in Barcelona in 2006. The *Filipiniana* exhibition was organised in Madrid, though, and therefore somehow disconnected from the language event.

The representation of language in the 2006 exhibitions is slightly different to that of the exhibitions organised before this year, but there are some similarities. The main one is the partial silence concerning the important issue of language in the Philippines. This is even more significant in *Filipiniana*, since the exhibition covered the whole history of the Philippines up until the present. There are only two direct references to language in the lengthy text that accompanies the objects exhibited in *Filipiniana*. One of them connects the ideas of language, culture and race by expressing that, in the Philippines, there are «80 million people who form some 111 different linguistic, cultural and racial groups» (Guardiola, 2006a, p. 24). The other one relates to the publication of José Rizal's novel *Noli Me Tangere* and states that the novel was «written in Spanish and therefore [...] incomprehensible to most Filipinos» (Guardiola, 2006a, p. 92). The exhibition entitled *El imaginario Colonial* discusses the issue of language and the Empire very briefly, «Unlike Latin America, where missionaries imposed the Spanish language as a unifying element, evangelisation in the Philippines encouraged the use of different languages» (Guardiola, 2006b, p. 217).

This approach to the representation of language shows how this issue is not perceived as crucial in discussions about the Philippines. Visually, language is also represented in a small number of objects that contain inscriptions in Spanish. These objects include the following:

- *El Oriente* magazine (1876), (Guardiola, 2006a, p. 35)
- Original captions (1847) written on illustrations by José Honorato Lozano (Guardiola, 2006a, p. 39), on photographs (1893) of lighthouses (Guardiola, 2006a, p. 47) and damaged buildings after the 1863 earthquake (Guardiola, 2006a, pp. 60-61).
- Two manuscripts from the nineteenth century with explanations on local languages (Guardiola, 2006a, p. 64).
- Several Catalogue covers of the 1887 Philippine exhibition in Madrid (Guardiola, 2006a, pp. 72-73) and of the 1895 regional exhibition in Manila (Guardiola, 2006a, p. 71).
- Cover of *La Solidaridad* newspaper from 1889, published in Barcelona (Guardiola, 2006a, p. 87)
- Book cover of the 1886 edition of Rizal's novel *Noli Me Tangere* (Guardiola, 2006a, p. 93) and of a 1896 notebook about the works on a port in Manila (Guardiola, 2006a, p. 46).

The exhibition entitled *El imaginario colonial* contains even fewer inscriptions, since it mostly displays photographs. Some of them contain captions in Spanish. The catalogue also includes some of the same objects that were used in *Filipiniana*, such as the book cover of the 1886 edition of Rizal's novel *Noli Me Tangere* (Guardiola, 2006a, p. 174) and some of the same magazine covers from the late nineteenth century (Guardiola, 2006b, pp. 145, 174).

In *Filipiniana*, a small number of objects contain some inscriptions in other languages such as English (propaganda posters from the 1940s) and Tagalog (contemporary Philippine art works). English is also represented in *El imaginario colonial*, where the curator establishes a difference between the Spanish and the American colonial periods in the country, explaining that the US established an education system «which involved the imposition of English over and above Spanish and local languages» (Guardiola, 2006b, p. 224).

Following this statement, the representation of the Spanish and American periods in the islands follows a differential strategy. In this case, the English language has been portrayed as an «imposition» from the colonizer, and therefore, a difference has been established between the Spanish period, which is portrayed as less imposing by expressing that «evangelization encouraged the use of other languages», as shown above. In this case, the religious aspect of colonization has also been given a different connotation. Evangelization is not connected to imposition, but encouragement, and therefore it has become aseptic, and then any kind of colonial enforcement has been softened. In these chains of signification, different narratives are at work, whose meaning «postulates a

kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions» (Barthes, 2009, pp. 140-141).

Firstly, by not discussing this issue in depth and by showing several objects that contain Spanish texts, the narrative of Spanish language in the Philippines has been replicated. Secondly, by semantically softening the enforcement aspects of Spanish colonialism (mostly in its contrast to the American period), the *Spanish period*, as a concept, loses some signification (following Barthes); «the meaning leaves its contingency behind; it empties itself, it becomes impoverished, history evaporates» (Barthes, 2009, p. 141). A new meaning is then acquired in this narrative; the Spanish period is represented by focusing on specific topics, such as religion, which is perceived as a positive value. The narratives about language in these recent exhibitions tend to focus on what it is perceived as some of the «positive aspects» of Spanish colonialism, although trying to offer a balanced approach by contrasting this with the American colonial period, as well as mentioning the linguistic diversity of the archipelago before the arrival of the colonisers. When moving to the idea of the politics of representation, we can conclude that the narratives about language in the exhibitions are part of a discourse that looks at commonalities between both countries. This discourse is also present in the 2005 *Plan Asia*, which aims at strengthening cultural ties between Spain and the Philippines. This strategy seemed to have worked, since the General Director of Foreign Affairs for Asia and the Pacific at the time, José Eugenio Salarich, stated in 2007 that, thanks to the achievements of the 2005-08 Plan Asia, «The Philippines has become the closest country to Spain and our most solid ally in Southeast Asia» (Salarich, 2007, p. 72).

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article has offered a significant reflection on Spain's promotion of the Spanish language in the Philippines in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as well as the different perceptions and representations of language in several Spanish official exhibitions about the Philippines. This way of describing the Philippines was linked to a political strategy in foreign affairs, which aimed to establish closer ties with Asia, and perceived the Spanish-Philippine historical connections as a strategic advantage for Spain.

The search for Hispanic traces in the Philippines was articulated in the promotion of the Spanish language in the country. The international promotion of the Spanish language has been a general objective of the Spanish Central Government since the opening of the *Instituto Cervantes* in 1991. Even though the *Instituto Cervantes* poses a strong focus on the promotion cultural products, the Spanish language has been the crucial factor when deciding on what «Hispanic culture» means. The *Instituto Cervantes*

aims to promote cultural products in Spanish. Due to this approach, cultural products from Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America have been included in its cultural programmes. The Philippines, on the other hand, has been left out as it is not perceived «Hispanic» enough to be included (Díaz Rodríguez, 2019).

Despite the importance of language in Spanish international cultural policy, and considering the diversity of languages in the Philippines, the exhibitions analysed do not focus on this issue. The conclusion is that the narratives in the exhibitions focus on aspects that bring Spain and the Philippines closer together and they also help making the Spanish period in the Philippines better known in both countries. However, the production of knowledge in exhibitions can also be understood as immersed in politics (Hall, 1997) and, therefore, from the discourses and representation of language in the Spanish exhibitions to the promotion of Spanish language in the Philippines, it can be argued that politics are at the core of these activities. Language has become part of Spain's cultural capital and endowed with symbolic power. It is not just a system of communication, but a political issue and, hence, it is contentious.

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## NOTAS

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- 1 While regional languages are more frequently spoken than English (including daily communication, television, and radio), English is the preferred language in academia, written works, and printed media. In addition to this, there are also television newscasts in English, and television shows in the hybrid language known as Taglish (a mix of Tagalog and English), which is mostly used in Manila and its surrounding areas.
- 2 On this topic, Filipino scholar Sionil José (2005, p. 313) expresses that: «We [Filipinos] are poor because our elite from way back had no sense of nation (they collaborated with whoever ruled) the Spaniards, the Japanese, the Americans and, in recent times, Marcos. Our elite imbibed the values of the colonisers».
- 3 Anderson explains how «the [American] colonial regime effortlessly extruded Spanish and so expanded an English-language school system that by 1940 the Philippines had the highest literacy rate in Southeast Asia» (Anderson, 2004, p. 211).
- 4 From 1973 to 1987, Spanish language was still one of the designated official Philippine languages. The 1987 Constitution decreed that Spanish had to be relegated to a language of «voluntary promotion», losing its status of official language.
- 5 In 2018, I published a monograph in which I analysed in depth several aspects of these exhibitions in terms of its poetics and politics (Díaz Rodríguez, 2018).
- 6 In the exhibition *Filipinas, hace un siglo* (2000) the issue of language is completely absent.