

Launching the IYIL 2019-Philippines : a move for inclusion of every Filipino

The celebration of the International Mother Language Day (IMLD) 2019 and launching of the International Year of Indigenous Languages (IYIL) at the University of the Philippines was held on February 20, 2019 at the College of Education, UP Diliman Campus, Quezon City. The event which was held after the the afternoon classes gathered 200 participants from various places. There were participants who traveled from the Pangasinan province. At the registration area, a display of mother tongue based multilingual big story books (Ayta Mag-antsi and Ayta Mag-indi languages) and MTB-MLE references was set-up. The latest book of the speaker, Dr. Clement Camposano on Jose Rizal was also on display.

Dr. Marie Therese Bustos, the dean of the UP College of Education gave the welcome remarks. She narrated how she and her colleagues in the Deaf Education and SPED Department struggled to promote the Filipino Sign Language (FSL) which led to the institutionalization of the FSL through a law passed in 2018. Dean Bustos also mentioned about the nationwide research project on Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education that was undertaken by ACTRC, a research center that she heads (<https://actrc.org/category/projects/mtb-mle/>).

Students from the Linguistics Department gave a backgrounder of IMLD and IYIL and explained to the audience how they can sign up for involvement in the IYIL website. This was followed by a presentation from learners from the Lumad Bakwit School (indigenous school) that was visiting the UP campus. They spoke about the struggles that they experience because they live in high-conflict communities in the Southern Philippines. They capped their presentation with an indigenous (Bagobo) song and a dance.

SIL Representative, Ms. Rynyj Gonzales presented the current state of Philippine languages in light of Fishman's EGIDS Scale (<https://www.ethnologue.com/about/language-status>). She described how certain languages in the Philippines are only spoken by the elders and are in the verge of extinction.

The main speaker of the evening, Dr. Clement Camposano, delivered a lecture based on his recent book “The Nation as Project”. He discussed the conflicting thoughts of Philippine heroes, Jose Rizal and Isabelo delos Reyes (who lived in the 19th century during the Spanish colonial period) about language, identity of indigenous groups in the Philippines. He underscored how the much revered national hero, Jose Rizal, saw

the nation from a distant land. Due to the influence of the German Herderian philosophy, his conceptualization of the Filipino identity was quite exclusionary (limited to lowland Christian converts). He along with other famous Filipino educated elite (ilustrados) wanted to show that Filipinos were as modern and sophisticated, worthy to be represented in the Spanish Cortes (parliament assembly). Isabelo delos Reyes, on the other hand, looked at the project of nationhood as a local (probinsiyano) located at the margins (Ilocos province in Northern Philippines). Though he was well educated and well versed in Spanish, he turned to local folklores (in local languages) to inform his views. Delos Reyes as a counterdiscourse declared that he was one with the indigenous mountain dwellers. The project of nationhood is an ongoing process according to Dr. Camposano. Filipinos today should take into account subgroups like indigenous people communities, the Muslim (Bangsa Moro) groups and the Filipinos in diaspora in re-imagining the Filipino nation today. Prof. Arnold Azurin, the author of "Reinventing the Filipino" responded with his own commentary on some points raised by Dr. Camposano. He mentioned that Rizal and delos Reyes were kin. He took note of the exclusionary view of Filipino identity as one of the roots of the prevailing conflict in the Southern Philippines.

Participants posted their suggestions through an online form about ways to promote, study and develop the indigenous languages. There were many who requested for more forums, training and conferences. They recommended that there should be workshops on the means to integrate indigenous language and cultures in the curriculum. There were also suggestions on popularizing indigenous languages through music, literature, films and other art forms. Both social and mainstream media should be utilized to create awareness about indigenous language concerns. And members of indigenous cultural communities should be involved in various endeavors.

Mr. Fernigil Colicol, a PhD student and a member of the Subanen community from Mindanao wrote his thoughts about the event:

As a Subanen coming from an Indigenous Community in Mindanao, it is empowering on my part that our language is now given importance with the celebration of the Indigenous Mother Language Day 2019. This is not only about preserving indigenous languages worldwide, but rather a recognition of every indigenous peoples' unique cultures and identities in the different parts of the world. The success of the lecture symposium held at the UP Diliman College of Education in response to the UNESCO's call is a show of the institution's strong advocacy for embracing diversity - a move for inclusion of every Filipino from different ethnolinguistic groups in the country.

<http://mothertongue-based.blogspot.com/2019/02/launching-iyil-2019-philippines-move.html>