

2nd International Conference
FILIPINO AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE

Transformation Through Empowerment in Filipino Language and Culture

15-18 January 2010

Mission Valley Hilton Hotel – San Diego, California, U.S.A.

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A LOOK @ GLOBAL FILIPINO ORTHOGRAPHY:
Towards Modernization and Standardization

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A Look at GLOBAL FILIPINO ORTHOGRAPHY: Towards Modernization & Standardization

Abstract

ORTHOGRAPHY is the way words are spelled or should be spelled in writing. The etymology of orthography is briefly explained, showing the relationship between sounds and letters, or phonemes and graphemes in modern linguistics. It is in the process of modernization towards standardization. The Philippine national language is **Filipino**, now called **GLOBAL FILIPINO** as a language of Global Filipinos in this age of globalization.

This paper is a response to the Department of Education (DepEd) clarion call – urgently appealing to lexicographers, dictionary writers, linguistic practitioners and language enthusiasts to do something on Filipino Orthography Reform.

The Department of Education issued DepEd Order No. 42, s. 2006 on the 2001 Revision of the Alphabet and Guidelines on Spelling of the Filipino Orthography, after the issuance of the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS) Order No. 45, s. 2001 and DECS Order No. 81, s. 1987 on spelling reforms. The initial response of the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino (KWF) is discussed with its recommendations to resolve the orthography question.

For background information, this paper gives the historical development of the Filipino writing system through the years – from the **Alibata** or **Baybayin** of early times to the **ABAKADA** and the **Bagong Ortograpiyang Filipino** of modern times.

Towards a unified Filipino writing system and standardization, this paper proposes a Modern Global Filipino Orthography with spelling rules and guidelines in response to the needs of the times.

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A LOOK @ GLOBAL FILIPINO ORTHOGRAPHY: Towards Modernization & Standardization

0. Introduction

ORTHOGRAPHY comes from the Greek prefix *orthos-* meaning ‘right, correct’ and suffix *-graphia* meaning ‘writing.’ Orthography shows the relationship between the sounds of language and the letters of the alphabet. In modern linguistics, the significant sounds are called phonemes, and the letters are graphemes. Orthography is the way letters and diacritical symbols represent the sounds of language in spelling. It is the way words are spelled or should be spelled in writing. It is the art of writing words with correct spelling according to standard usage.

The Philippine National Language is Filipino, also called **Global Filipino** – the language or the lingua franca of Global Filipinos in the globalized world.

Why do Filipino lexicographers, dictionary makers, linguistic practitioners, multimedia writers, language enthusiasts and ordinary users of the national language – spell words differently in writing?

In a comparative study of existing monolingual, bilingual or trilingual dictionaries with Filipino as entry words, there are obvious variations in spelling. Each writer follows his/her own intuition and personalized style of writing words in dictionary entries, definitions and illustrations. It has been observed that even multimedia writers have their own way of spelling words as we read them in print media. Educators and writers of textbooks and instructional materials have difficulty in choosing the correct spelling for official communication, preparation of reading, teaching-learning materials, and publications in Filipino for the schools. There has been a crying need in education for an orthography reform to reconcile the differences in spelling and variant forms in writing.

The Commission on the Filipino Language, directly under the Office of the President – in accordance with the language provisions of the 1987 Philippine Constitution and the enabling law: RA 7104 with its Implementing Rules & Regulations (IRR), has the mandate “to formulate language policies and to propose guidelines and standards for linguistic forms and expressions in all official communications, publications, textbooks and other reading and teaching materials.” And this includes the preparation of guidelines and standards for Filipino orthography.

1. DepEd & DEC Orders on Orthography

In response to the Department of Education (DepEd) clarion call – urgently calling for Filipino Orthography Reforms, the Commission on the Filipino Language recommended to the DepEd the KWF proposed guidelines and standards for Filipino orthography reforms. These official policy recommendations were used as bases for the series of DepEd Orders to help the Commission as an authority on language – to develop and establish a unified writing system for the Filipino language, which would reconcile the differences in spelling and the variant forms of writing, for a wider dissemination in the field.

The Department of Education issued the following DepEd Orders on Filipino Orthography:

- *KAUTUSANG PANGKAGAWARAN BLG. 42, S. 2006*
09 Oktubre 2006
Pag-review ng “2001 Revisyon ng Alfabeto at Patnubay sa Ispeling ng Wikang Filipino”
Department Order: Review of the 2001 Revision of the Alphabet and Guidelines in Spelling of the Filipino Language.
- *JESLIE A. LAPUS, Kalihim*
Kagawaran ng Edukasyon (DepEd)
- *KAUTUSANG PANGKAGAWARAN BLG. 45, S. 2001*
17 Agosto 2001
Ang 2001 Revisyon ng Alfabeto at Patnubay sa Ispeling ng Wikang Filipino
Department Order: The 2001 Revision of the Alphabet and Guidelines in Spelling of the Filipino Language.
- *ISAGANI R. CRUZ, Pangalawang Kalihim*
Kagawaran ng Edukasyon, Kultura at Sports (DECS)
- *KAUTUSANG PANGKAGAWARAN BLG. 81, S. 1987*
06 Agosto 1987
Ang Alfabeto at Patnubay sa Ispeling ng Wikang Filipino
Department Order: The Alphabet and Guidelines in Spelling of the Filipino Language.
- *LOURDES R. QUISUMBING, Kalihim*
Kagawaran ng Edukasyon, Kultura at Sports (DECS)
- Department Memorandum No. 194, s. 1976: **Rules in Orthography of Pilipino** or *Mga Tuntunin sa Ortograpiyang Pilipino*, was issued by then Secretary of Education and Culture Juan L. Manuel. Before the promulgation of the 1987 Constitution, declaring **Filipino** as the Philippine National Language – **Pilipino** was used in compliance with Department Order No. 7, s. 1959, using “Pilipino” in referring to the National Language. This DEC Memorandum was widely disseminated in the field.

“In keeping with the rapid development and changes taking place in the Pilipino language as shown by the influx of linguistic elements from the different influencing languages, native as well as foreign, and in order to adjust it to the needs of modernization, the Institute of National Language has introduced some modifications in the orthographic rules of Pilipino”. The DEC Memorandum modified and modernized the rules of the ABAKADA in the 1940 *Balarila ng Wikang Pambansa*, the Grammar of the National Language.

The then **Institute of National Language** (INL-1937), popularly known as the **Surian ng Wikang Pambansa** (SWP), was renamed Institute of Philippine Languages (IPL-1987) or **Linangan ng mga Wika sa Pilipinas** (LWP). The INL, then IPL – is now the Commission on the Filipino Language (CFL-1991) known as the Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino (KWF).

2. A Comparison of the Sounds & Alphabets of Filipino & English

In the introduction, orthography explains the relationship between the sound and the alphabet of a language. The following article on “*Phonology – The Sound of Language*” presents the sound and the alphabet of Filipino compared with the sound and the alphabet of English, with the consonants, vowels and diphthongs of both languages illustrated in phonologic charts. A brief history and development of the Filipino Orthography, the ABAKADA Spelling System and the Orthography Reforms give an insight and further explanation on what has been done toward modernization and standardization of the Filipino Orthography through the years.*

THE SOUNDS OF FILIPINO

CONSONANTS:

<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>		<i>k</i>	'
<i>b</i>	<i>d</i>		<i>g</i>	
<i>f</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>sh</i>		<i>h</i>
<i>v</i>	<i>z</i>			
		<i>ch</i>		
		<i>j</i>		
<i>m</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>ñ</i>	<i>ng</i>	
	<i>l</i>			
	<i>r</i>			
<i>w</i>	<i>y</i>			

VOWELS:

	Front	Central	Back
High	<i>i</i>		<i>u</i>
Mid	<i>e</i>		<i>o</i>
Low		<i>α</i>	

DIPHTHONGS:

	Front	Central	Back
High	<i>iw</i>		<i>uy</i>
Mid	<i>ey</i>		<i>oy</i>
Low		<i>ay</i>	<i>aw</i>

THE SOUNDS OF ENGLISH

CONSONANTS:

<i>p</i>		<i>t</i>		<i>k</i>	
<i>b</i>		<i>d</i>		<i>g</i>	
<i>f</i>	<i>th</i>	<i>s</i>	<i>sh</i>		<i>h</i>
<i>v</i>	<i>dh</i>	<i>z</i>	<i>zh</i>		
			<i>ch</i>		
			<i>j</i>		
<i>m</i>		<i>n</i>		<i>ng</i>	
		<i>l</i>			
		<i>r</i>			
<i>w</i>		<i>y</i>			

VOWELS:

	Front	Central	Back
High	<i>i</i>		<i>u</i>
	<i>I</i>		<i>U</i>
Mid	<i>e</i>		<i>o</i>
		<i>ə</i>	
Low	<i>ε</i>		<i>O</i>
	<i>æ</i>	<i>α</i>	

DIPHTHONGS:

	Front	Central	Back
High	<i>iy</i>		<i>uw</i>
Mid	<i>ey</i>		<i>ow</i>
			<i>oy</i>
Low		<i>ay</i>	<i>aw</i>

THE FILIPINO ALPHABET

Aa	Bb	Cc	Dd
Ee	Ff	Gg	Hh
Ii	Jj	Kk	Ll
Mm	Nn	Ññ	Ngng
Oo	Pp	Qq	Rr
Ss	Tt	Uu	Vv
Ww	Xx	Yy	Zz

THE ENGLISH ALPHABET

Aa	Bb	Cc	Dd
Ee	Ff	Gg	Hh
Ii	Jj	Kk	Ll
Mm	Nn	Oo	Pp
Qq	Rr	Ss	Tt
Uu	Vv	Ww	Xx
Yy	Zz		

3. The Sound & Alphabet of Filipino/Global Filipino

FILIPINO has twenty-eight (28) significant sounds called phonemes: twenty-three (23) consonant sounds and five (5) vowel sounds – and six (6) diphthongs. The sound systems of other Tagalog Region languages and dialects have less significant sounds, as shown in the charts.

The twenty-eight (28) letters of the **Filipino Alphabet** are the following: **a b c d e f g h i j k l m n ñ ng o p q r s t u v w x y z**. This is an expansion of the twenty (20) original letters of the **Filipino Alphabet** called **ABAKADA**, with the addition of eight (8) letters: **c f j ñ q v x z**. The new Filipino Alphabet is no longer read the abakadized way. It is read the English way – a b c ... x y z.

English has twenty-six (26) letters of the alphabet. Filipino has 28, with the addition of **ñ** and **ng** pronounced as [enye] and [enji], two (2) letters more than the English alphabet.

Sounds are not letters. Sounds are represented by different linguistic symbols of language. The letters of the alphabet are based on the sound of language. Two letters of the alphabet like **ng ch sh** and **th** called **digraph**, may be represented by one sound or phonetic symbol **ŋ ĉ ʃ** and **θ** as in the International Phonetic Alphabet.

The Filipino Orthography in Brief

The Filipino orthography has gone through a natural process of evolution and development in the course of time. It started from the ancient syllabary called the **Baybayin** or **Alibata** of seventeen (17) symbolic characters in which each character represents a single syllable of the Tagalog sounds. Among the collections of rare books at the **Filipiniana Archives** of the University of Santo Tomas, are some works on the Philippine orthography, namely: “**El Baybayin**” (1938), **Antiguo Alfabetos Filipino** (1884 & 1895), **La Antigua Escritura Filipina** (1922), and other works on the Tagalog language using the ancient writing system.

This **Alibata** was followed by the romanized **Abecedario**, a system of Spanish alphabet used by our national hero, Dr. Jose Rizal and other Filipinos in their study of Español and Tagalog languages for over three centuries of Spanish colonization in the Philippines.

In 1937, before the outbreak of World War II, then President Manuel L. Quezon ordered the newly established Institute of National Language (INL) known as the Surian ng Wikang Pambansa (SWP) to make a study of the Philippine languages and dialects – and to come out with a grammar and a dictionary of the National Language.

In 1940, the first **Balarila ng Wikang Pambansa** (Grammar of the National Language) known as the **Balarila** of the INL Director Lope K. Santos, was off the press. **Balarila** was a linguistic coinage from two words: *balana* ‘whatever’ and *dila* ‘tongue’ (with letter **d** becoming **r** between two vowel sounds). **Balarila** means *balanang sabihin ng dila* (with *-ng* ligature) “whatever the tongue says.”

This new grammar included the Tagalog alphabet called **ABAKADA**, with 20 letters, and read as **ABaKaDa**. It was pronounced as V and CV syllables (vowel and consonant-vowel sounds) like the traditional **Alibata** and **Abecedario**.

The printing of the **Balarila** was authorized by Executive Order No. 263. And used in the schools beginning 1940, through Department Order No. 1, s. 1940, of the Department of Public Instruction.

Years after the publication and use of the new grammar with the National Language alphabet or ABAKADA, diehard critics dropped the “time bomb of purism.” An anti-purism movement aimed “to defuse the time bomb of linguistic explosions in the country by doing away with the atavistic abakada and orthography of Lope K. Santos...” (**Filipino versus Tagalog** – Abakada Tagalog, 1967).

The language controversy on purism with unbridled emotions and acrimonious debates in the halls of Congress, continued through the years. The INL Director baptized by critics as “the high priest of purism” denied the existence of purism saying: “It is impossible to have purists because there is no pure language in the whole wide world (Pilipino is the most impure) and therefore, the anti-purist is against nothing.” The war of words as printed in the popular press, has been unstoppable since then. “*The Anatomy of the Language War*” (**Philippines Free Press & Educators Journal**, 1970), and “*Filipino Goes to Court*” (**Solidarity**, 1990), written by Fe Aldave Yap, presented the issues on purism.

The ABAKADA Spelling System

Linguists, educators, students and language practitioners are agreed on the ABAKADA as a nearly perfect alphabet. For it is simple, easy to teach and easy to learn, especially among school children. The rule is simple: ***Kung ano ang bigkas siyang sulat*** or Write as you pronounce. There is a one-to-one correspondence between the sound and the letter of the alphabet. This spelling system has been considered linguistically and pedagogically sound.

A Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) linguist of international repute shared his observations on the INL spelling system as used in our schools. He said: “Filipinos are blessed with one of the most nearly perfect alphabets in the world. Don’t make the mistake of changing your alphabet. Don’t imitate the mistake of English with all the complexities of the spelling system.”

The Orthography Reform

The Sanggunian sa Wika or the INL Board (1971-1976) proposed and approved the 1976 Filipino Orthography Reform, with DECS Memorandum No. 194, s. 1976. Eleven (11) letters were added to the traditional ABAKADA of twenty (20) letters. The additional 11 letters: **c ch f j ll ñ q rr v x z**.

After ten years, on the celebration of the National language Week, the Surian ng Wikang Pambansa (SWP/INL) formally launched the “**1987 Alpabeto at Patnubay sa Ispeling ng Wikang Filipino**” or the “**1987 Alphabet and Guidelines on the Spelling of the Filipino Language**.” This was spelled out in the DECS Order No. 81, s. 1987. The 1976 alphabet with 31 letters was reduced to the present alphabet of 28 letters, as presented earlier.

The new 28-letter Filipino orthography was a radical departure from the so-called puristic Tagalog alphabet of 20 letters. The ABAKADA was expanded and modified – towards the intellectualization, modernization and standardization of Filipino. This was done in response to the need of the time.

Republic Act 7104 creating the Commission on the Filipino Language or Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino on 14 August 1991, has authorized the Board of Commissioners representing the different ethnolinguistic groups in the country – to formulate language policies and to “propose guidelines and standards for linguistic forms and expressions in all official communications, publications, textbooks and other reading and teaching materials.” And the alphabet is crucial in the present situation and in the future of Filipino as a national and official language of communication.

Following the mandate of the 1987 Philippine Constitution on further development and enrichment of the national language, in accordance with the language provisions of RA 7104 on the development, propagation and preservation of Filipino and other Philippine languages – some eight (8) common letters of other regional languages were incorporated in the 1987 Filipino Orthography. The spelling traditions of other regional languages, as well as the spelling systems or letters of Spanish and English, were considered and incorporated. These are reflected and spelled in the following native words or lexicon of the languages and dialects: *c f j ñ q v x z*.

Inibaloi	chila	Ibanag	vivig
Itawis & Atta	jila	Obo	bivig
Ibanag & Itawis	zila	Ivatan	vivi
Tagalog	dila	Tagalog	bibig
	for ‘tongue’		for ‘mouth’
Manobo	ngifin	Inibaloi	chingching
Tasaday	ngifan	Agta	zingzing
Tiruray	kifin	Ibanag & Itawis	zizzing
Bilaan	kifan	Ivatan	jinjin
Ivatan	ñipin	Itbayaten	riñdiñ
Tagalog	ngipin	Tagalog	dingding
	for ‘teeth’		for ‘wall’
Pampango	queni, queti	Mamanwa	babazi
Ilocano	quen, quet	Kinamigin	badzi
Tagalog	dito, sa, at	Ibanag	bavay
	for ‘here, at, and’	Tagalog	babae
			for ‘woman’
Inibaloi	bowaja	Ibanag	kanzing
Mamanwa	bowaza	Itawis	kazzing
Surigao	buaja	Atta	kajjing, kojjing
Manobo	buadza	Itbayaten	kaddiñ
Ibanag	vuwaya	Tagalog	kambing
Ivatan	vuaya		for ‘goat’
Tagalog	buwaya		
	for ‘crocodile’		

Spanish & Tagalog	English
xenofobia	'xenophobia'
xilofono	'xylophone'
xilografia	'xylography'
English & Tagalog	
car	quiz
card	tax
chacha	taxi
fax	visa
focus	xerox
forum	x-ray
jet	zaylofon
janitor	zero
pizza	zigzag

The incorporation of the additional eight letters as contributions of the regional languages and dialects, reflected in the spelling systems and lexicons, are extremely important in the development, enrichment and preservation of Philippine languages. But these contributions were not acknowledged and recognized in the 1987 Filipino Orthography Reform and in the 2001 Revision of the Alphabet and Guidelines on the Spelling of the Filipino Language. Only the Spanish and English orthography traditions were considered and given acknowledgment and recognition in the revisions of the Filipino orthography.

With the expansion, modification and revision of the 1940 ABAKADA, purism should no longer be the burning issue. Socio-political and socio-linguistic considerations were given importance in the enrichment and development of the evolving national language.

But more language problems cropped up. There has been a tradition and history of change and inconsistency in the Filipino writing system. The addition of the eight letters of the alphabet from Philippine languages, English and Spanish writing systems, facilitates the accommodation and incorporation of loanwords borrowed from the lending languages, to further enrich Filipino.

Some institutions, organizations, lexicographers and writers in the practice of dictionary making have followed their own intuition and personalized style of writing word entries with different alphabets. The Institute of National Language (INL-1937), renamed Institute of Philippine Languages (IPL-1987), and now Commission on the Filipino Language (CFL-1991), has to address this problem in Filipino Lexicography.

The 1999 Board of Commissioners, on the revision of the 1987 Filipino Alphabet, approved a Project Proposal: *“Developing a Unified Writing System for Filipino – Reconciling and Rationalizing Selected Written Symbols for Sounds.”*

Representatives of the academe, organizations and interested language enthusiasts were invited to share their inputs on different occasions in different places – on the **2001 Revisyon ng Alfabeto at Patnubay sa Ispeling ng Wikang Filipino** or **2001 Revision of the Alphabet and Guidelines on the Spelling of the Filipino Language**. A CFL Secretariat

and Technical Committees were assigned in the spelling revision project. A hefty amount was appropriated and spent for the completion of this project.

The Final Project Report was titled: **STANDARDIZATION OF THE FILIPINO WRITING SYSTEM: SPELLING RULES AND GUIDELINES ON THE USE OF THE EIGHT NEW LETTERS OF THE FILIPINO ALPHABET**. This finished project was presented to the CFL Chairman and Staff in the Commission.

It was important to note that this 2001 Filipino Alphabet Revision was not formally presented to the Board of Commissioners for deliberation, comments and suggestions. And therefore, not officially approved in a CFL Board Resolution as a matter of language policy in accordance with RA 7104.

The CFL official definition or description of **Filipino** as a national and official language, for instance, was approved by the Board of Commissioners en banc, as documented in **The Commission on the Filipino Language Resolution No. 1-92 in 1992**. Other CFL Board Resolutions on language policies, plans and programs have become official through Board Resolutions as printed in the Commission publications.

This Commission has circulated to the target users pamphlets on the **2001 Revision of the Filipino Alphabet and Guidelines on the Rules of Spelling**. Recognition and acceptance are important in language development and promotion. Groups of professionals in the academe, teachers, students, and individual writers of dictionaries have given their discouraging remarks on the 2001 Spelling Revision.

More variations in spelling have come out in print. Variant forms in orthography have not been reconciled. The goals of “Developing a Unified Writing System for Filipino” in 2001, have not as yet been achieved.

It is hoped that demonstration of benign reactions and strong objections to some unacceptable and confusing rules of spelling, would not be interpreted as a gesture of defiance against the sincere and noble efforts in the development, enrichment, propagation and preservation of the Filipino language.

In the linguistic life of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Pacific, is there a great possibility for a simplified and unified ASEAN Orthography? Will this lead to the intellectualization, modernization and standardization of the writing systems of the member nations of ASEAN and the Pacific, belonging to the Malayo-Polynesian family of languages?

This writer’s **concept proposal** was presented in a paper read in the **1992 First Asian International Lexicography Conference** in Manila – with the theme: “*Meeting the lexicography needs for the twenty-first century in the Pacific region.*”

This calls for a scientific study, research and development towards one ASEAN Orthography. To celebrate cultural diversity and create linguistic unity and peace in the Pacific Region.

4. *Gabay sa Ortograpiyang Filipino*

The Komisyon sa Wikang Filipino Linguistics Division, in response to the immediate need in the field of education and other domains of language, has prepared and distributed a Pre-Publication Edition: **GABAY SA ORTOGRAPIYANG FILIPINO**. This was approved by the KWF Board of Commissioners, with four invited consultants. For the improvement of this **Trial Edition**, Chairman Jose Laderas Santos in his Foreword, invites critics and readers of this pre-publication edition to give their corrections, comments and suggestions to be considered in the revision.

Sinabi ng Punong Komisyoner sa kanyang Paunang Salita: “Ang sipi na hawak ninyo ngayon ay imbitasyon sa pagbabago at kaunlaran. Kung ang sinuman, kasama ang mga dalubhasa at mga pantas ng wika ay may makikitang dapat baguhin at paunlarin, ito ay mga biyaya ng wika na dapat tanggapin.”

5. *Patnubay sa Ortograpiya ng Global Filipino*

Ang Patnubay sa Ortograpiya ng Global Filipino: Guidelines on Global Filipino Orthography in parallel presentation, is in the making for publication in 2010. This KWF Publication will incorporate the feedback: corrections, comments and suggestions based on a critical study, analysis, observations and reactions of educators, writers and readers of the distributed trial-edition copies for review and evaluation.

Hope and change are important ingredients of modernization and standardization. To modernize is to conform to modern taste, attitude and standard. To standardize is to conform to the level of quality accepted as norm, and regarded as correct and accepted by the majority of educated speakers or authorities on a language.

6. **Conclusion**

Looking at language, with hope for change and acceptance by the educated users of language as arbiters of standard usage, this paper has presented the **Global Filipino Orthography: Towards Modernization and Standardization** – to help achieve the goals of the International Conference on **Filipino as a Global Language**.

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