

# Linguistic Schoolscape: Studying the Place of English and Philippine Languages of Irosin Secondary School

**Susan Fresnido Astillero**

Sorsogon State College, Castilla Campus, Sorsogon, Philippines  
susane317@yahoo.com

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**Abstract** –*This paper investigates the linguistic landscape of one public secondary school in Irosin, Sorsogon, Philippines. In particular, it identifies what language/s are displayed in the signs, who produced the signs, what materials are used, and who the intended audience is. It also determines how the languages are used, displayed and regulated in the school premise. Based on the 90 signs collected, the paper shows that English dominates in the linguistic schoolscape followed by Filipino while Bikol is scantily visible. English used in bottom-up signages is used for formal communication while it is used as the language of youth, language of fashion and language of fetishization in the bottom-up signages. On the other hand, Filipino, Bikol languages and mixed languages are mostly observed in bottom-up signs which are mostly used informally such as to impose particular order, to express transgressive personal feelings and emotions, political choices, or individual and group identity. The high preference of English in the school top-down signs is shown by capitalizing, highlighting and using vivid inks or paints as well as using durable materials for long lasting presence of English in the LL. Though there are spaces for bilingual and mixed languages in the schoolscape, the findings show that the general institutional infrastructure and the stakeholders through their language practices do not fully support and strengthen the multilingual speakers of the area as well as the general goal of language policy on multilingualism promoted by the Department of Education.*

**Keywords:** *Bikol language, linguistic schoolscape, multilingualism, Philippine languages*

## INTRODUCTION

Considering the quest for the study of Linguistic Landscape (LL), Gorter [1] and Shibliyev [2] say

that it is still considered as a relatively new developed and young field Shibliyev [2] further says that urban places and spaces have usually been focused on due to: 1) most cities are bilingual or multilingual, 2) multilingual cities are commoditized, 3) language policy can be better seen in metropolitan areas. While the focus is on the ‘center’ or ‘cities’, rural/ local areas are less established in the study of LL.

Therefore, this paper focuses on the rural area where stakeholders reveal different language practices regarding the place of English and Philippine languages in linguistic schoolscape. It would also be interesting to find out the evolution of LL in schoolscape (if there is any) as the language policy in education moves from global (English) to local (mother tongue) languages. Through the investigation of languages in schoolscape (e.g. Bikol, Filipino, English), this may portray the inclusion/vitality of multilingualism in school domain on one hand or this may show exclusion/ invisibility of any of these languages and may show hidden struggle of other local languages in schoolscape on the other.

The paper provides first a brief discussion of the position of English in the history of language in education in the country followed by the contextualization of the challenges in the implementation of multilingual language policy in the country. Lastly, the discussion of the historical, demographic and sociolinguistic situation in Sorsogon to specifically anchor the paper on its contribution by representing the multilingual situation in the local context which may shed light on what is the real situation in the micro-level setting such as the school domain.

## Position of English in the language-in-education policy in the Philippines

For decades, English is already deeply entrenched in the psyche of the Filipinos and adding other local

languages in the school curriculum have been topics of debates in the Philippine education system. The reality in the Philippines as a post-colonial nation is this: a change in government administration propels change in language policy. And one thing interesting in the language shifts in the country is its recursive implementation of English as the dominant language by the powerful government officials who have the privilege to alter or revive the policy.

Revisiting the history of language policies in the Philippines tells two opposing views: 1) the recursive adherence to the English language as a 'civilizing tool' according to Martin [3] and the language to promote economic stability, and 2) language policy tries to break the history of dominance of English as the only 'standard' language and put forward the notion that since the Philippines is a multilingual country such claim of only one language or the notion of "one size fits all" that can dominate the society is being rejected.

It is interesting to note that E.O No. 335 was the only one in the history of language policy in the Philippines which explicitly stipulated the use of Filipino and English in the signs of all offices signed in 1988 in consonance with the Bilingual Education Policy (BEP). Clearly, E.O. No. 335 [4] was concerned about the promotion of Filipino as the national language side by side with English as an international language. This seemed promising since it pointed out to the equal visibility of two languages on signs.

Other related policy about the use of signs particularly in school domain is the issuance of Regional Memorandum No. 215, s. 2015 (Policy in Establishing Standardized Schools' Signages and Reiteration Guidelines in Revitalizing Classroom Structuring Cum Child-Friendly School System (CFSS) [5]. While the institutionalization of mother tongue in the country is very promising, one thing that is missing in this memorandum is the discussion and inclusion of local languages in the linguistic schoolscape. Consideration of what language to write was not given much attention despite the fact that the school domain houses multilingual speakers who can speak and knowledgeable of different Philippine languages.

### **Contextualizing challenges in the implementation of MTBMLE policy**

Philippines has an estimated current population of 102, 668, 409 as of October 10, 2016) [6]. Also, the

country is said to have 183 living languages (Ethnologue, 2016). From these data, the Philippines is not only rich in population but also rich in linguistic diversity. Thus, positioning language policy in the country seems complicated, on one side, claiming for local and national identity, on the other, meeting the challenges of ASEAN integration 2015 and the globalized world in general.

Since the implementation of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTBMLE) policy in 2009, there have been several challenges which hindered its effective implementation. Tupas [7] argues this is because of the existence of 'inequalities of multilingualism'. According to him, MTBMLE is shackled by 'ideological' and 'structural' challenges that is why despite its positive role in education the policy is still struggling to be implemented successfully. The ideological and structural constructs are clear manifestations that resistance is ongoing phenomena in the Philippines.

The ideological challenges in the Philippines are actually very strong as reflected in the attitudes and beliefs of the stakeholders (e.g. teachers, students, administrators, politicians) towards the policy. Mahboob and Cruz [8], Burton [9], Mwabaleka [10] assert that while the language attitudes of these people position the English language as only key to economic asset and stability, global competitiveness and worldwide opportunities, local languages are being devalued and placed at the periphery.

Structural challenge is also experienced in the country. One example is the expulsion of three 13 years old students who speak Ilocano inside the school premise in Saviour's Christian Academy in Ilocos Norte. This report is one of the concrete manifestations of how 'linguistic imperialism' according to Philipson [11] comes out from the 'ground' (e. g. the school). Ironically, the school which should be considered the bridge for promoting proper education and balance treatment was the one that created inequality, discrimination and gap. From this point, this is very alarming considering that the issue came out after a month when President Benigno Aquino signed R. A. 10533 [12] otherwise known as 'Enhance Basic Education of 2013' which clearly stated the use of mother tongue in basic education.

Another issue that is being confronted by the policy until now is the debate on number of local languages that were not considered. For instance, there were only 19 languages out of 183 living languages which were considered and recognized by

the policy. Martin [13] also says that the inclusion of only few languages in the education curriculum led to resistance on the part of some groups who moaned that their languages were excluded in the policy while others are afraid that 'Tagalog Imperialism' will be heightened through the implementation of the MTBMLE policy.

An additional challenge is the number of varieties spoken by the people in a specific town or province. For instance, Gonzales [14] mentions that Tagalog has many varieties with distinct features in 'intonation and morphophonemic, lexicon and grammatical morphology'. Similar situation also apparent in other languages in the country specifically the varieties of Bikol languages which are discussed in the succeeding section. On this basis, there are instances when unintelligibility of certain variety of language will happen because of its distinct feature from other variety.

Hence, the ideological and structural challenges in education discussed above are few of the many other bigger challenges that continuously mutilate the effectiveness of MTBMLE policy in the country. Thus, this paper forwards the argument of Tupas that 'MTB-MLE in this sense is ultimately about transforming social and educational infrastructures (*emphasis added*) which tolerate and breed harmful language attitudes and ideologies'. While MTBMLE is basically for classroom utilization, the real and bigger classroom is the 'spaces' and 'places' where these students and other speakers of other languages are exposed to. This paper believes that the need for the study of the language practices in school where languages are displayed to students are as important as the pedagogical approaches being used in the classrooms.

### **Tracing the Historical, Demographic and Sociolinguistic situation of Sorsogon**

Though 'Bikol' is the term used by the 'Sorsogueños', there are different Bikol languages used in different provinces. Cunanan [15] in her study found that the different language varieties may be associated with the mountain ranges surrounding the areas which divided the Bikol provinces into isolated towns and this is probably the reason why there are languages called 'Standard Bikol' and 'Timog Bikol'. Also, migration of different groups of people from the south of the island thousands of years ago is another factor of the development of varieties of Bikol languages.

Dery [16] says that both Bikol- Albay and Waray have great influence on the language varieties of Sorsogon province. Yet, there are language varieties in Bikol region particularly in Sorsogon which are very distinct in different ways. Thus, linguists such as Cunanan; Lobel and Tria [17] categorize the Bikol languages using several criteria and show that there are similarities and differences in their groupings which connote that indeed, Sorsogueños are multilinguals. Yet, despite these language varieties in the Sorsogon province, Bikol Naga is considered the *lingua franca* of the region and used as referent of 'Bikol' term. Zubiri [18] states that Naga City and other towns in Camarines Sur are the provinces wherein Bikol Naga is spoken. There are also other varieties namely Bikol Legaspi, Bikol Daet, Bikol Sorsogon but the status of Bikol Naga is dominant compared with other Bikol varieties mentioned. This may be associated with 'Bikol Naga Imperialism' both oral and written which is apparent in Bikol Catholic religious mass and bible translations, dictionaries, formal documents, local newspaper, teaching materials used in elementary education (e.g. books and other teaching aids) and in linguistic landscape to name a few.

Having considered the discussion of the diversity of language (and culture) in Sorsogon, together with the shifting of language policies, and the importance given to the mother tongue in education today, it is essential to consider the landscape of Philippine public school to determine if the general goal of language policy on multilingualism especially on the promotion of mother tongue imposed by the Department of Education is being supported or strengthened by the institutional infrastructure and its stakeholders as revealed in their language practices.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The present study aimed to examine the place of English and Philippine languages in the linguistic landscape in one secondary school in Irosin, Sorsogon. It examined the language practices of local stakeholders in schoolscape, In particular, it identified what language/s were displayed in the signs, who produced the signs, what materials were used, and who the intended audience was. It also determined how the languages are used, displayed and regulated in the school premise.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study utilizes the quantitative and qualitative method in schoolscape research based on Cenoz and Gorter [19] and Scollon and Scollon [20].

The data of this study were gathered in one secondary school in Irosin, Sorsogon. The importance of choosing this area as site of the study for the place was composed of varieties of local languages (different variations of *bikol* because of some enclaves within the barangays and towns) alongside the use of Filipino as national language and English as international language.

The photographs of signs were collected inside and outside the classroom as well as inside and outside the buildings, corridors and other areas of the schools. The number of photographs collected vary depending on the number of signs which have direct relevance to the present study. Observation from the site visit was also used to supplement the analysis of the data. This also provided a more complete picture of the nature of signage in the multilingual school and allowed to further classify the signs according to who are responsible for the posting of the signs, the functions of the signs they made, the intended audience and the materiality of the signs. Supplementary interview with the sign makers (which include the principal, teachers, students and parents who owned canteen inside the school premise) to corroborate the interpretation of the researcher.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Language Practices in LL of one secondary school in Irosin, Sorsogon

#### a. Languages Displayed

Based on the 90 signs gathered, the results in table 1 show that English is highly visible in the school investigated. These findings indicate that most signs are top-down English-only which outnumber the Filipino-only, Bikol-only, bilingual or multilingual signs combined. In other words, there are numerous signs displayed which are produced in English than in Filipino and Bikol languages. However, interestingly, the findings show that in bottom-up signs, mixed languages (Bikol, Filipino, English) appear in about 12 (19.28%) of the LL items.

According to the participants, a number of reasons are behind their preference to the English language. First, English is considered the 'more formal language' than Bikol and Filipino. Second, English is associated with the 'language of professionals'. Third, English is associated with 'quality services'. Fourth,

English portrays 'trendiness and more appealing to the readers. Lastly, English is much felt by the sign makers. These results suggest that despite the promotion of multilingual education in the Philippines, the school stakeholders have clearly shown high preference to the English language and resistance to the local language/s especially the Bikol language.

**Table 1. Percentage of the languages displayed**

Languages on Signs		Category					
		Top - down	%	Bottom-up	%	TD & BU	Total %
<b>monolingual</b>	English	26	76.47	18	32.14	44	49%
	Filipino	1	2.94	8	14.28	9	10%
	Bikol	0	0	1	1.78	1	1%
<b>Total</b>		<b>79.41</b>		<b>48.2</b>		<b>60%</b>	
<b>bilingual</b>	Bikol & Filipino	0	0	1	1.78	1	1%
	Bikol & English	0	0	2	3.57	2	2%
	Filipino & English	7	20.58	13	23.21	20	22%
<b>Total</b>		<b>20.58</b>		<b>28.56</b>		<b>25%</b>	
<b>Mixed languages</b>	Bikol, Filipino & English	0	0	12	19.28	12	13%
	Bisaya, Filipino & English	0	0	1	1.78	1	1%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>21.06</b>		<b>14%</b>	
<b>Total Signs: 90</b>		<b>34</b>		<b>56</b>			<b>100%</b>

While there are visibilities of bilingual and mixed languages in the linguistic schoolscape, it is to be noted that if the corpus of signs is considered, the visibility of the use and display of mixed languages in the secondary school LL cannot be at par with English language.

#### b) Producer of signs, materials used and intended audience/reader

##### Producers of signs

Of the 90 signs examined, Figure 1 shows that 56 (62%) of all signs are bottom-up and 34 (38%) of the total signs are top-down. Interestingly, the figure indicates that there are more signs which are made by the teachers, students and parents combined as compared to the signs made by the administrator and the administrative staff. This figure may indicate that bottom-up sign makers have places and spaces in the school LLs. This may be an indication of displaying the 'hidden voices' of the stakeholders (parents, teachers and students) if corpus of signs is considered.

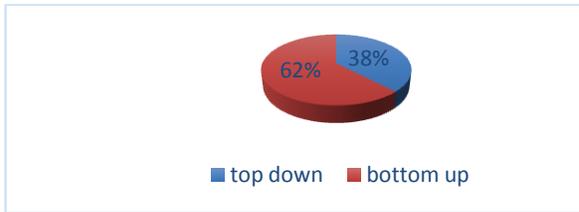


Figure 1: A pie chart showing the percentage of top-down and bottom-up signs.

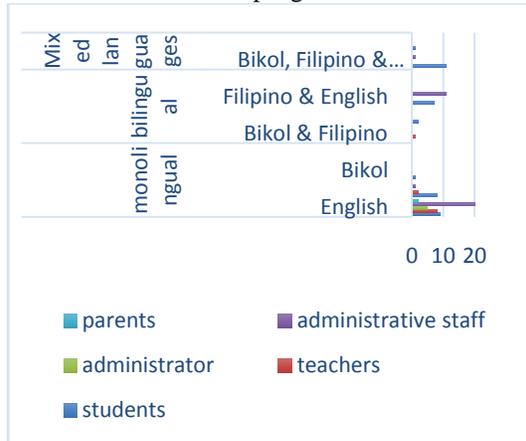


Figure 2: Graph showing the number of sign makers of monolingual, bilingual and mixed Languages

As shown in figure 2, the bottom-up sign producers show contesting language ideology against the top-down sign makers. In other words, while the top-down sign makers prefer English-only in their signs, the bottom-up sign makers utilize and appreciate mixed languages.

Considering that the number of the bottom-up sign makers is almost the same as the top-down sign makers they seem to be showing their subversive power using different languages on their signs. According to the sign makers, there are three explanations for these. A first explanation is found in the reason that since the school investigated is a government/public institution which is composed of more than 5000 students enrolled, the students' behaviors could hardly be controlled by the school authorities. A second reason is the lack of top-down supervisors who are going to monitor the actions of the bottom-up sign makers that is why they are free to write anywhere in the school property. Last reason is that, the school administrators have limited support, understanding and guidance on the sentiments/views of the bottom-up sign makers particularly the students that is why they tend to become more dominant in manipulating the school LL.

### Materials used in Top-Down and Bottom-Up signs

When it comes to materials used by the sign makers in their respective signs, Figure 3 illustrates different kinds of materials used in top-down signs. As shown in this figure, the paper is the highest material used followed by the concrete, which may indicate two things: the writing on the bond paper may show an aspect of impermanence, temporality and changeability depending on its purpose and the use of concrete may illustrate permanence or stability of the signs and power of the sign makers in claiming the school spaces.



Figure 3: Materials used in top-down signs

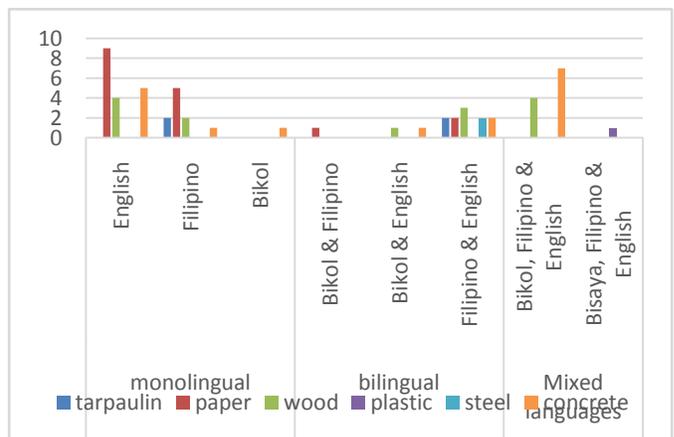


Figure 4: Materials used in bottom-up signs

In contrast, figure 4 indicates that the bottom-up signs are mostly written on the concrete (as manifested by the graffiti) and followed by the utilization of paper materials. Hence, these indicate that bottom-up signs are more eager to achieve permanence, stability and power over school spaces. This is probably because the bottom-up sign makers especially the students nowadays are more expressive and possessive or to some extent becoming aggressive

in expressing themselves despite the formality of the school institution.

However, it cannot be denied the fact that top-down signs still hold most of the power of the school spaces even when they are just temporal (such as paper) because they are continuously occupying the same spaces in the school. Also, even though the concrete only ranked second in the materials used in top-down signs, still its power is highly seen as the main concrete buildings are mostly utilized. Hence, these findings suggest that both top-down and bottom-up signs are struggling to claim the school spaces for permanence and power.

### Intended Audience/Readers

About the intended audience/readers of the signs, figure 5 shows that 63 of the signs are made for students followed by the 17 signs which are intended for all the stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, administrative staff) and 10 are for teachers. These findings indicate that signs are projected towards different audiences through the employment of language/s on signs.

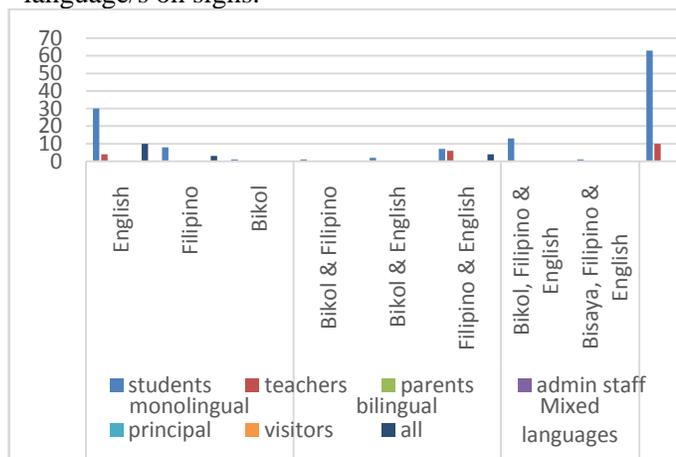


Figure 5: The intended audience of the signs made and displayed by the sign makers.

The findings show that English language used to address the students are straightforward and formal while Filipino is more informal and usually appeal to emotions. When it comes to bilingual languages used in the signs intended for the students, they are used to deliver information in the most comprehensible way and at the same time help regulate students' behaviors. Similarly, mixed languages are also used by the student-writers for understandability. Student-readers can also easily relate and respond to the messages of the signs. As for the language intended for all the stakeholders, students and parents, and

teachers, English is dominantly used to deliver specific official information, notification and transaction. These findings suggest that the use of different languages intended for the students may be sound interesting since these may manifest that the school signs at some point recognized the multilinguals in the school community. Since English is used mostly in school LL for decades already to address different audience, possibly, it is already considered accepted as the *lingua franca* of education.

### c) How languages are used, displayed and regulated

In determining how the languages are used, displayed and regulated in linguistic schoolscape, this study utilizes the 'place semiotics' of Scollon and Scollon [20] which constitutes *code preference*, *inscription*, and *emplacement* in bilingual and mixed language signs.

#### Code Preference in school LL signs

Shown in table 3 are the different code preferences in top-down and bottom-up bilingual signs. The table illustrates that the seven top-down bilingual signs (Filipino-English) reveal that English is highly preferred than Filipino. On the other hand, as can be seen in bottom-up signs, of the 13 bilingual signs collected, 6 signs prefer English than Filipino language. Then, only two Bikol-English signs found in the school site which reveal that English is preferred that Bikol language.

Table 3. Code Preferences in Bilingual signs in School LL

Languages on signs		Top - down	code preference	Bottom-up	code preference
<b>bilingual</b>	Bikol & English	0	-	2	English
	Filipino & English	7	English	4	English
				9	Filipino
				<b>13</b>	

The results demonstrate that English is the preferred code in top-down bilingual signs. On the other hand, when bottom-up bilingual Filipino-English signs are observed, the findings show that Filipino is preferred than English language while in bottom-up mixed language signs, the data reveal that there is no clear language preference on either Bikol, Filipino or English language.

### **Inscription in bilingual and mixed-language signs**

Further observation using the second element of place semiotics is the *inscription*. Based on the result of the inscriptions in school LL, two different results are revealed. Firstly, the top-down Filipino-English signs show that they seem to index appreciation of both English and Filipino. Secondly, the results in bottom-up Filipino-English signs show that Filipino is highly preferred/valued than English. This is an interesting finding since bilingualism seems valued in the school LL.

On the other hand, Filipino is inscribed more prominently than English in bottom-up signs which may index preference toward the former. Further, the findings show that the font style and irregular font sizes inscribed in bottom-up Filipino-English signs help the readers to focus on important words which is best delivered in Filipino language. Hence, the different inscriptions applied in the top-down and bottom-up signs as revealed by this study reflect the different intentions of the sign makers. This is possibly because these depend on the speakers and their languages as well as their contexts where the signs are displayed.

### **Emplacement in school LL signs**

In terms of *emplacement* in 34 top down signs, they all show *situated emplacement*. In other words, these top-down signs in the school site show that they are strategically emplaced for they are considered essential aspects of the semiotics of educational atmosphere of the school spaces.

Concerning the 56- collected bottom-up signs, 53 monolingual signs (Filipino and English) and 16 bilingual signs (Bikol-Filipino, Bikol-English and Filipino English) are considered *situatedly emplaced* while 1 monolingual Bikol and 13 mixed-language signs are seen to be *transgressively emplaced*.

To sum up the emplacement of LL signs in the school investigated, the findings show that situated emplacement of signs are all observable in top-down signs. On the other hand, in bottom-up signs both situated and transgressive emplacements are observed. These findings may be interesting since the school appears to be accepting or in some way already tolerating the transgressive acts of the bottom-up sign makers particularly the graffiti made by the students. Four possible explanations may be offered based on the findings. First, this may be related to the poor academic performance of students especially those who already belongs to the lowest sections. They tend

to commit transgressive acts for they probably seek attention since they are not anymore being taught properly. Second, this is probably due to peer pressure since there are groups of students or 'fraternity' who tend to destroy the school property including the writing on the building walls, destroying the chairs, windows, doors, toilet bowls, and so on. Third, this may be related to the students' lack of discipline despite the values inculcated to them by the school. Lastly, since the students are protected by the child protection law, they can only reprimand the students if they are caught doing such transgressive act.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The language practices in the linguistic landscape of one secondary school in Irosin, Sorsogon preferred English highly in top-down signs and some bottom-up signs which are guided by the sign makers' educational, social, political and personal convictions that mark the languages displayed. The finding shows that the school as formal institution maybe considered to have been infiltrated by historical colonialism and international prestige attached to the English language. Considering the multilingual speakers of Irosin, the languages on display in school environment may show that local languages have very limited space in formal education especially in secondary level.

Though it may sound promising that there are few spaces for bilingual and mixed languages in the linguistic landscape of the school, still, the findings show that the general institutional infrastructure and language practices of the stakeholders do not fully support and strengthen the multilingual speakers of the area and the general goal of language policy on multilingualism especially on the promotion of mother tongue imposed by the Department of Education. If these challenges are not addressed properly, local/languages and local identity of its people will always be relegated at the periphery.

In the present era of globalization, it is hoped that the school which houses multilingual speakers should consider that globalization means productively presenting, preserving and protecting the local languages which mirror the local identity and culture of the Bikolanos. At the same time, fruitfully integrating and combining these local languages with the 'global' English as a sign of their co-existence which is also the general goal of Association of Asian Nations (ASEAN) integration in 2015 and beyond.

It is recommended that LL study focusing on local spaces and local practices be expanded to understand more what is happening in the micro-level as well as its subsequent implication on the language policy in education in the Philippines. Also, teachers, administrator and administrative staff may consider the languages on display in the school environment for these are important as the languages being taught in the classroom. Finally, the learners may draw more attention to the written communication in the schoolscape to help them amplify their meaning-making process and integrate the different semiotic and linguistic resources as they use different linguistic repertoires in and outside the school spaces.

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