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Kapampangan — a dying language, a serious threat to culture and identity

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Ten years ago, articles have already been written about the alarming issue on Kapampangan and Pangasinan as dying languages. Experts say that soon these languages will become extinct.

The Philippines has more than a hundred languages. Eight are considered major languages: Ilocano, Pangasinan, Kapampangan, Tagalog, Bicol, Cebuano, Hiligaynon and Waray-Samaron. According to George Molina of Ethnic Groups of the Philippines, there will be a high death toll of languages unless urgent measures are adopted to preserve them. The past few decades have witnessed the extinction of such languages as Agta Villa Viciosa, Agta Dicamay, Ayta Tayabas, and Ermitaño; many Filipino languages are now on the endangered list.

How and why does a language die? A language dies when it is only used for oral expression and not as written language. The oral use of the language whether legislated or not is more often used for easier communication.

Take the case of Pampanga — those living in Arayat, Lubao and other relatively undeveloped areas in the province speak Kapampangan. But those in urbanized centers like San Fernando and Angeles particularly the younger generation who are affected by other cultures such as the center which is Manila don't speak the language. The

conscious and unconscious decision of families in not passing on their language and culture is considered the biggest threat to Philippine languages. These families opted to have their children learn and become fluent in the national language to have a better place in society. In the process these children lose their identity.

The Manila language which is the De Facto Lingua Franca is the language used by two people with different languages. In the Philippines our Lingua Franca is Tagalog. This is the second if not the first language of the Filipinos. It is the base of the Filipino language as stated in the Constitution. Lingua Franca is not a product of legislation but a natural response and result for the need for communication. This is the language that unites us.

The assumption now is, do we really have the control to preserve a language? Section 6 of Article XIV of the 1987 Philippine Constitution states: The national language of the Philippines is Filipino. As it evolves, it shall further be developed and enriched on the basis of existing Philippine and other languages. Changes in language whether dying or living is not just for anybody to do. It is a collective decision.

The state plays an important role in the preservation of language. The Commission on the Filipino Language was established by Republic Act No. 7104 and signed on August 14, 1991 by then President Corazon Aquino. The Commission is the official regulating body of the Filipino language and the official government institution tasked with developing, preserving, and promoting the various local Philippine languages. This was established in con-

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currence with the 1987 Constitution of the Philippines.

Angeles City in Pampanga addressed this dying language concern by passing Ordinance No. 424, Series of 2017 - an ordinance establishing Kapampangan as an official language of Angeles City and institutionalizing its use in all sectors, alongside existing national and official languages. This ordinance was sponsored by Councilors Amos B. Rivera, Edgardo D. Pamintuan, Jr. and Jae Vincent T. Flores.

Currently, Kapampangan is the official medium of communication used by all local government agencies in Angeles City and across Pampanga. The Sangguniang Panglungsod of Angeles City has made an intensive drive to help preserve, revitalize, safeguard, promote and develop Kapampangan, being the indigenous language of Angeles City.

Chapter 2, Section 3, No. 3.12 on the Legal Bases of the Ordinance refers to R.A. 10533, otherwise known as the K-12 Law, particularly section 5-F thereof; Chapter 8 of the Ordinance on Education, Section 17 on Inclusion of Local Language in Basic Education; Grade level standards to include Kapampangan in its curriculum from Kindergarten to Grade 3.

Up to what point do we preserve the language? As a medium of instruction, for daily use or for nationalistic sentiment? It is important for families to use the native language at home so that their children will naturally speak it. If one parent consistently speaks the native language from birth onward to the child and another parent speaks Tagalog while the grandparents or teachers in school speak English, the child can easily learn and absorb three languages.

In 2009, the DepEd passed DO 74, s. 2009 or Institutionalizing Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education. Findings from local and international studies in basic education validated the superiority of the use of the learner's mother tongue or first language in improving learning outcomes

and promoting education for all (EFA). Students learn to read more quickly when in their first language; pupils who have learned to read and write in their first language learn to speak, read, and write in a second language and third language more quickly than those who are taught in a second or third language first.

Preservation of the native language requires a strong culture. Language is culture, culture is language. When a language dies, so does the culture it nurtures. For a language not to become extinct, it must have writing systems and adequate historical records intact. A strong culture can be brought about by literature. If we really want to preserve regional languages, we must develop and preserve regional literature. Let the students read. Then we need to promote regional culture. Like for example Pampanga uses *Crisotan*. It is part of their culture and history. And lastly, every region must be able to write down and formulate the grammar of each regional language. To impose a rule requiring students to use the language without literature will be detrimental to learning.

According to Dr. Sarah Grey Thomason of the University of Michigan, "every loss of a language deprives us of a window into the human mind and the human spirit" and the "unique repository of human experience and thought."

Preservation of national sentiment, the oneness of our nation must take primacy at all times because we are one country. It is important that we develop and protect regional culture but that must be seen on the concept that we are one nation.

Language must not divide the country. It must unite us. We must recognize the use and value of the regional lingua franca but it is important that we have to develop and use the national lingua franca to unite us as a people, and as one country.