

Language as a Site of Hegemonic Negotiation, Identity, and Resistance in the Filipino Diaspora

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Abstract

This study investigates language as a centre of hegemonic negotiation, colonial influence, and resistance as diasporic Filipinos navigate identity, belonging, and power in all levels of life. Using an interdisciplinary approach, this study utilises concepts from linguistic anthropology and social work to understand the impacts of colonialism and hegemonic language ideologies on Filipino diasporas in English-speaking countries. This study analyses existing literature and discussions on language in the r/FilipinoAmerican Subreddit to investigate how Filipinos experience epistemicide, claim identity, and navigate social structures in the space of language hegemony. The results demonstrate that many Filipino Americans feel pressure to know Tagalog despite growing up in the diaspora, many not knowing their ancestral language due to language ideologies rooted in colonial history that place Filipino languages as inferior to English. This study positions language shift and loss experienced by second-generation diasporic Filipinos as a structural issue shaped both by Spanish colonisation and American occupation, reinforced by Anglo-centric structures within the diaspora. Filipinos face continued colonial pressures in the diaspora as language ideologies call into question the value of their ancestral languages and their claim to their Filipino identity. This study discusses the role of social workers in re-constructing language ideologies, social work practice, and social structures to support the reclamation of Filipino identity, languages, and resist neo-colonial systems that attempt to marginalise diasporic Filipinos.

Keywords

Language ideology, language shift, social work, linguistic anthropology, decolonisation

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Introduction

Language links people to culture, history, and identity. For many Filipinos living outside of the homeland, this connection is still subject to the impacts of colonialism and ongoing neo-colonial systems which shape language use and ideologies. A disconnection from language is far more than speaking slowly to *titas* and *titos*¹ on video chat or only knowing how to say bad words taught by giggling cousins. A loss of language is a disconnection from culture, from family, from history, and the identity that weaves it all together. As a second-generation and mixed-race Filipina Canadian, I have struggled to define my identity within my community and sought to discover why language shift occurs in diasporic Filipinos. Language shift, when a language is not passed down to the next generation (Odango, 2015), can occur for many reasons. Part of this study explores the impacts of power and dominant languages on language shift and how it impacts diasporic Filipinos in Anglo-centric countries.

This research combines approaches from social work and linguistic anthropology to investigate the relationship between language shift, identity, and colonialism, and how diasporic Filipinos must negotiate these power structures at every level of life. Additionally, this research explores how language hegemony impacts Filipino service users and how social structures are implicated in reinforcing colonial language ideologies and systemic oppression. This paper aims to explore how language currently intersects with the lives of diasporic Filipino communities, and pathways to resistance and redefining Filipino identity.

Historical Context

The lived experiences of diasporic Filipino communities cannot be separated from Philippine colonial history, as this collective history lives within each person, shaping how transnational lives and identities are navigated. The Philippines endured more than four hundred years of colonial and imperial occupation, causing long-lasting hegemonic influences on both languages and language

¹ *Tita* and *tito* are terms similar to *aunt* and *uncle*. It can be used to address others who are not kin, as a sign of respect to those who are older. It is used as a term for both fictive kin and actual kin.

ideologies in the Philippines and its diasporas. This history is complex and not easily defined within the confines of a few paragraphs; as such I will focus on the linguistic context of this history. The Philippines is home to more than 100 languages (McFarland, 2004). During Spanish colonisation, missionaries attempted to standardise Tagalog in attempts to unify the different groups in the archipelago, creating tensions between different language communities (Rafael, 1992; McFarland, 2004; Osborne, 2024). Spanish missionaries used language to dominate local populations and spread the “authority of God and king” (Rafael, 1992 p. 26). While several major Philippines languages were studied to facilitate the Catholicisation of the Philippines, Tagalog was studied in more depth, leading to the development of *Arte y reglas de la lengua tagala* in 1601 (Rafael, 1992). This work codified Tagalog into a standard version, including rules and guidelines for language use and grammar (Rafael, 1992). This provided missionaries with a uniform language to communicate and impose Catholicism across the archipelago, therefore elevating Tagalog while marginalising other minority languages (Rafael, 1992). This implicit language hierarchy set the stage for the arrival of American occupation, which similarly used language as a tool for colonial domination. The introduction of English in Filipino Education systems further heightened these existing tensions (Osborne, 2024). English became a sign of modernity, and speaking English became a pathway to achieving higher social status and capital (Osborne, 2024). A lot of these tensions lie in which languages are categorised as legitimate, and which are categorised as dialects. Many would classify minority languages as dialects, viewing Tagalog/Filipino and English as the only official languages. However, McFarland (2004) argues that many of these languages are mutually unintelligible, and while they may be related or share some words or sounds, some even have different grammatical systems. Language ideologies in the Philippines, then, are heavily influenced by colonial processes and power. As such, a hierarchical standard has been created, situating Tagalog and English as highly valued while minority languages are undervalued as dialects.

La Torre et al., (2024) also explore how epistemicide is a result of both American and Spanish colonisation, the former effectively contributing to the loss of knowledge through the Americanisation of academia in the Philippines, implemented through English language

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instruction. However, it is important to note that epistemicide is not an absolute issue but an ongoing one, formed by the continued marginalisation of Indigenous Filipino epistemologies through institutionalised language hegemony. La Torre et al. (2024) also discuss the various ways in which Filipinos in the diaspora resist epistemicide and colonialism by continuing to share lived experiences, aspects of Filipino cultures, and a variety of languages, as well as reframing assimilation itself as an act of resistance; allowing Filipinos to stealthily preserve and pass on their cultural knowledge (La Torre et al., 2024).

The transnational experiences of diasporic Filipinos are deeply rooted and connected to Philippine colonial history. Investigating its impacts on language in the diaspora is vital in understanding the ways in which Filipinos continue to navigate and resist colonisation amid language shift and colonial language ideology in the diaspora.

Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

There is very little research which acknowledges the colonial history of the Philippines in the space of language in the diaspora in the field of social work. However, there are some works which mention language as part of larger studies investigating topics such as immigration, identity, belonging, and institutional barriers. Moreover, language tensions in the Philippines itself and its links to colonialism are much more explored in fields such as linguistic anthropology. This literature review takes an interdisciplinary approach, drawing from both social work and linguistic anthropology to analyze current research on the Filipino diaspora as it pertains to language, identity, and systemic oppression. This paper draws on Bourdieu's (1991) theory on linguistic capital, which situates language use and certain ways of speaking as being more valued, acting as a form of capital or even commodity. Building on this, Foucault's (1980) concept of power and knowledge can be applied to a linguistic context, where knowledge is not only built but projected as truth by dominant institutions, thereby making the act of knowing one that is political. Lastly, Heller's (1999) work provides a lens to analyze how language can be both a marker for authenticity and a form of capital. She argues that linguistic practices which were once tied to belonging then become commodified, leaving speakers to negotiate their legitimacy, belonging, and value in the

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linguistic space (Heller, 1999). Together, Bourdieu (1991), Foucault (1980), and Heller (1999) provide a framework through which we can understand how colonial and institutional structures impact languages, and through this how identities are legitimised or marginalised. This illustrates language as something beyond a tool for communication but as a medium where power, identity, and authenticity are in constant negotiation within the lived experiences of diasporic Filipinos.

Language Ideology

One of the most important concepts from linguistic anthropology that is necessary to understand in this study is language ideology. Ahearn (2017) defines language ideology as the beliefs, attitudes, and assumptions that people have about language. This includes how language should be used, understood, what it says about the person using it, and more (Ahearn, 2017). Osborne (2021) explains that current language ideologies in the Philippines stem from colonial ideas about language in the early 1900s, with U.S. occupation determining which languages were legitimate and which were not. They believed that the Philippines, on its own, was incapable of forming a unified country and their failure to unify under one language reflected their character and incapability to work together (Osborne, 2021). Those who resisted learning or speaking English were seen as lazy or holding onto old ways, creating further division between those living in more rural areas and those in the metropole, Manila, who seemed more open to accepting America's "'gift' of English and other forms of American-style 'benevolence'" (Osborne, 2021, p. 591). As such, 'minority' languages or dialects were seen to be holding back the country, which supported the dominant ideology that English education was needed to unite and establish the Philippines independently, and as such situating America as a 'benevolent' actor at the time (Osborne, 2021).

McFarland's (2004) work further expands on this idea of division between language communities, stating that what makes a dominant language dominant is not the language itself, but the power given to the speakers of that language. While Tagalog is not necessarily at risk of extinction, it is still seen as a lesser language in comparison to English (McFarland, 2004). McFarland (2004) suggests that English is needed to navigate many aspects of Philippine life, such as education and even news outlets, and provides the capital to engage with business, tourism, and more. On the

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other hand, Tagalog is only used in more casual capacity such as for tabloids or entertainment (McFarland). The key takeaway from both works is that, caused by American occupation, the Philippines possesses language ideologies which divide speaking communities. Speaking English in this case is equated to having a higher status as well as access to more opportunities. Even less acknowledged are minority languages and dialects spoken outside of Manila, whose speakers are regarded as regressive. These language ideologies, rooted in colonialism and language hegemony, are important to keep in mind when analysing the dynamics of language and power in the Philippine diaspora.

Language Shift

Part of analysing the research presented in this paper will be to examine language ideology and its role in language shift, more specifically the implications of dominant language(s) and their impact on whether a language is transferred to the next generation. In Odango's (2015) work calling for more youth perspectives in discourse on language shift, loss, and identity, they define language shift as occurring in two dimensions. According to Odango (2015), language shift can be both intragenerational and intergenerational. Intragenerational language shift occurs when moving to a new place where the L1 is not the dominant language, and where interracial or interlingual marriages make the dominant language more suitable to practice than the L1 (Odango, 2015). Intergenerational language shift occurs when first generation migrants' use of the dominant language, which is not their L1, becomes the taught L1 for the following generations, either forcibly or voluntarily (Odango, 2015). Forced intergenerational language shift refers to when power structures make the dominant language the primary mode of communication, and while not overtly oppressive in policy it is oppressive by making community resources accessible only through the dominant language (Odango, 2015). Voluntary language shift refers to when a person chooses to speak the dominant language over their L1 due to the perceived benefits (Odango, 2015). This work also looks at how language is often linked to cultural identity and calls for more open discussion on the use of language as a marker for authenticity, suggesting that youth can participate in their cultures authentically without necessarily knowing their ancestral language

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(Odango, 2015). In this way, we can view that language shift is not only influenced by but also influences language ideologies, and in its midst can leave diasporic Filipinos searching for reconciliation with their cultural identities. While language shift is influenced by dominant ideologies, it is important to acknowledge the adaptability of language groups as diasporic Filipinos develop mechanisms to preserve language even in the face of potential language shift and hegemony. This can be seen in the development of Creoles and language varieties in diasporic communities which occur because of speaker agency and active resistance. A good example is Umbal & Nagy's (2021) study on Toronto Heritage Tagalog, which demonstrates that heritage speakers are active in pushing linguistic boundaries and exhibit language variation. In this way, diasporic Filipinos are also agentive and can adapt language use while maintaining connection to cultural identity.

Identity & Belonging

There are works in multiple disciplines, such as anthropology, social work, and even psychology, that explore how identity is constructed in the diaspora. Much like how Odango (2015) calls for more discourse on youth perspectives on identity and language shift in the diaspora, these works explore the liminal space in which the diasporic Filipino lives and the negotiations they make when claiming membership in their communities. These negotiations demonstrate that language hegemony does not impact diasporic Filipinos only on the meso or macro levels, but that it infiltrates the micro level itself as identity and belonging must then be constructed while simultaneously navigating marginalisation. In this way, diasporic Filipinos construct identity and belonging in relation to language while responding to dominant linguistic and cultural norms and expectations. As such, diasporic Filipinos are also redefining notions of authenticity and national belonging.

One of these works is that of Nadal & Sue (2011), who highlight the challenges faced by Filipino Americans as they battle acculturative stress in attempts to identify with both Filipino and American culture. Acculturative stress refers to the conflict that arises from opposing values and cultures (Nadal & Sue, 2011). Filipino Americans must navigate this acculturative stress as they

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negotiate which values they follow to please their family and community, while at the same time adhering to values that align with the current or dominant values in the environment (Nadal & Sue, 2011). In Anglo-centric countries, English as the first language is valued more predominantly than speaking other languages. In this way we can see that as language shift may also occur to accommodate or assimilate to a local dominant language such as English. This contributes to acculturative stress as Filipino Americans construct their identities and claim membership in their communities.

Similarly, Pratt (2004) investigates the ways in which second-generation Filipino Canadian youth find themselves displaced, even when born in Canada. Part of this study reveals some of the language ideologies amongst Filipino youth, where language is seen as a marker of authenticity within the community by some, and not necessarily by others (Pratt, 2004). Moreover, this study brings to attention the ways in which Filipino Canadians navigate multiculturalism in Canada, and how their encounters with racism pushed them closer to their identity as Filipinos (Pratt, 2004). Drawing on Mitchell (2001) and Taylor (1994), Pratt (2004) describes multiculturalism as a project promoting nationalism and liberal individualism, reinforcing Anglo-Canadian norms as the standard. This provides context to how Filipino Canadians are negotiating their identities in the diaspora, who are active participants in reshaping their narratives on Filipino authenticity (Pratt, 2004). In grounding multiculturalism in lived experience and refusing to confine the identity of 'Canadian' to white or Anglo-centric, second-generation Filipino Canadians claim space and belonging in both Filipino and Canadian groups as a resistance to assimilation. In doing so, they re-define what it means to be Canadian, and as such what it means to be a Filipino in Canada (Pratt, 2004).

Lastly, Batac's (2022) autoethnographic essay explores how they navigated their identity as they pursued a PhD in Social Work, as a Filipino Canadian who could not speak Tagalog fluently. Their lack of Filipino language capability caused them to question their identity as an authentic Filipino person, feeling shame for not learning or knowing it (Batac, 2022). The important takeaway from Batac's (2022) experience with language and identity is how they highlight the way in which diasporic Filipinos blame themselves for not knowing their language, that they should have put

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more effort or time into knowing it. However, they also explore the economic barriers that prevented their family from visiting the Philippines, rather their efforts in Canada were focused on survival (Batac, 2022).

Together, these works and lived experiences demonstrate how diasporic Filipinos continuously negotiate identity and nationalism at the center of language as they reimagine authenticity in transnational spaces. In this way, language and identity are interlinked. Finding belonging is not a simple feat as diasporic Filipinos navigate language ideologies, acculturative stress, and racism, while they search for new ways to define themselves in the liminal space between homes.

Institutional Impacts

At the institutional level, language then is a site where colonial power and inequality are continuously reinforced. Filipinos in the diaspora encounter systems which continue to uphold English language hegemony, leading to systemic inequality in areas such as education and healthcare. These systemic inequalities demonstrate how language ideologies become institutional barriers; in this way the diasporic Filipino must now also navigate language and power even as they seek to access essential services, situating language hegemony as an issue of social justice and in turn, concerns social workers.

While language in the Filipino diaspora is not extensively researched as it appears in social institutions, it is mentioned as part of various social studies that examine the ways in which they interact with each other. One major intersection in which language and power are explored in an institutional context is in English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, which have been found to act as a barrier to academic success amongst Filipino students (Farralles, 2017). While investigating the cause of low academic performance amongst Filipino Canadian high school students, Farralles (2017) brings to attention the impacts of ESL classes, where students are being placed in these classrooms while still being fluent in English. As discussed earlier, English is embedded into the educational system in the Philippines itself, many are already fluent in English when arriving in Canada. Because of this, students in this study report loss of motivation or feeling targeted in ESL

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class, leading to lower attendance (Farralles, 2017). Farralles (2017) calls for a re-examination of the way the academic performance of Filipino students is approached, questioning the systems in place that prevent academic success rather than placing blame on the students themselves.

Another area in which language intersects with social services is in health care, where many elderly Filipino Australian migrants expressed difficulty communicating with health professionals (Maneze et al., 2016). In exploring language anxiety amongst Filipino migrants in Australia, Maneze et al., (2016) identifies that a lack of confidence and fear prevented them from speaking directly to or asserting themselves with health professionals from different cultural backgrounds. Taking into context the history of the Philippines and existing language tensions within the country itself, we can better understand these experiences of language anxiety in health care systems. Both cases re-enforce language ideologies on English speaking capability, equating it to a measure of perceived intelligence and status. Accents, lack of fluency, or even just appearing as a non-native English speaker can lead to a perceived lower proficiency in English, and as such puts the Filipino in a space which constricts their ability to exercise power within social institutions.

Methods

This is a qualitative exploratory study that seeks to investigate discourse and discussions on language in the Filipino American diaspora. This research uses data taken from the r/FilipinoAmericans Subreddit, looking at threads, posts, and comments which discuss the use, or lack thereof, of Filipino languages in the diaspora. Reddit is a forum social media platform where users can post and reply to 'threads'. Threads and posts can be organised into 'Subreddits', which are subforums or groups created by users where they can discuss shared interests.

This data sample was chosen because it is a public source of personal accounts in the diaspora and there is a wide range of data available (4.3 thousand members). Approximately eighty (80) original posts and comments posted between 2017 and April 2025 were reviewed. While the Subreddit has over 4.3K members, not all members are active and engaged in conversations about language. While all diasporas have their own transnational experiences, the Anglo-centered environment in

America may allow these narratives to reflect similar experiences in other Anglo-centered countries such as Canada or Australia. This study is a qualitative exploratory analysis which seeks to discover patterns and common themes around language and identity as they are discussed in the r/FilipinoAmericans Subreddit, not to present a statistical account of all attitudes towards language use in the Filipino American diaspora. As such, this Subreddit was chosen for its larger user base and potential to be applied to other diasporas where the dominant language is English.

The table below briefly summarizes the frequency of key themes emerging in discussion within the subreddit. This data is analyzed using applied thematic analysis as defined by Guest et al. (2014). Possible themes were identified based on the data sample and compared against each other and then ensuring that interpretation is grounded on data collected (Guest et al., 2014).

While this data provides valuable insight on the discussions occurring amongst Filipino Americans on Reddit, it also has several limitations. The sample size is small and reflects only a small group of Reddit users who are technologically literate and comfortable with having discussions about language and identity online. Moreover, users posting in this space are likely to be more engaged and have stronger opinions on the issue of language use in the diaspora, which leads the sample to be subject to participation bias. Interpretation of the data itself and categorization of major themes are also subject to misinterpretation. While data is manually collected, it leaves interpretation to the researcher and allows for selection bias. This research is limited in that accounts were taken by a social media source without the ability to ask direct questions to study participants, which may provide more insight and information on the linguistic and emotional landscape as it pertains to language in Filipino diasporas. A more active role may allow study participants to share in greater detail their experiences with language, identity, and social institutions.

Ethical Disclosure

While this data is publicly available, it is still important to consider the Reddit users' agency and privacy. When posts are published in research, users are no longer able to remove data as they would on the platform (Reddit). They may no longer want certain messages associated with their

account or themselves, archiving these posts in a research study, even if meeting ethical guidelines, takes away the user's power in managing how their data is used and preserved online (Adams, 2022). To protect users' privacy, direct quotes, names, and any other identifying information are not used or kept in this study. Data was collected manually, not using an automated scraping tool, allowing data to be interpreted within its larger context in discussion. This study adheres to both Reddit's user agreement (Reddit, 2025) and the Canada Research Ethics Board guidelines (Panel on Research Ethics, 2023) on using social media platforms for research purposes.

Results

Table 1

Frequency of Key Themes Emerging in the r/FilipinoAmerican Subreddit in Threads Discussing Filipino Language Use in the Diaspora.

Theme	Sub-theme	Frequency	Example Quote
Language Use and Expectations	Feeling expected to know a Filipino language as a second generation plus Filipino American	4	“She always says I need to learn Tagalog”
	Self-identifying as not being able to speak any Filipino languages	7	“I don’t know how to speak Tagalog”
	Self-identifying as being able to speak Tagalog	8	“I can speak, write, read, and understand Tagalog”
	Self-identifying as being able to speak a minority Filipino language	8	“When they ask why I don’t speak Tagalog, I want to say it’s because I speak Ilonggo.”
	Learned or attempting to learn a Filipino language in adulthood	11	“I am in my late 30s and trying to learn Tagalog on my own.”
	Views learning a Filipino language as having no value in an English dominated environment	2	“There’s no point in learning Tagalog in the US”.

Language and Cultural Identity	Talk about cultural practice despite lack of Filipino language use	4	“We were still immersed in Filipino culture, we ate rice and Filipino food every day, we went to Filipino church, we watched Filipino movies, we sang Karaoke...”
	Shame & ridicule for perceived lower proficiency in a Filipino language	9	“I was made fun of instead of encouraged when I tried to learn Tagalog”
Multi-Racial and Multi-Lingual Families	Filipino language and culture as forbidden	4	“My mother was not allowed to teach us any Filipino language or culture.”
Influence of English as the Dominant Language	English as a second language (ESL) courses	2	“When I was placed in ESL class, even though my first language was English, my parents stopped teaching my siblings and I Cebuano”.
	English as social capital	4	“Filipinos see English as better or that it provides some kind of status when you are English-speaking only”
	Belief that teaching a Filipino language will hinder English language capabilities	13	“My parents didn’t teach me Tagalog, they thought it would impact my ability to speak English without an accent”

Note. Table frequency data is not to be used as statistical evidence, instead it is to be interpreted qualitatively to investigate the discourses being had on the r/FilipinoAmerican Subreddit surrounding language.

Applied Thematic Analysis

This analysis utilises applied thematic analysis, identifying themes emerging in discussion and interpreting them with theoretical frameworks (Guest et al., 2014). All quotes used in this analysis are paraphrased and presented with pseudonyms to preserve anonymity.

Theme #1: Language Use and Expectations

One of the emerging themes when searching for discussion on Filipino language in the subreddit was that of language use and its attached expectations. Many users described varying degrees of language use, some not speaking any Tagalog or any other Filipino language, while some expressed, they were still able to speak their ancestral language. While these experiences were similar in numbers, what is interesting is the higher number of users sharing that they are learning or have learned a Filipino language in adulthood. Some users also shared that they felt pressure to know how to speak Tagalog, and judgement if they did not know how to speak it. One of the users shared that they feel they are expected to know Tagalog, despite their proficiency in a minority Filipino language: “When they ask why I don’t speak Tagalog, I want to say it’s because I speak Ilonggo.”.

What we can glean from these accounts is that many of the users feel a lot of pressure to speak Tagalog, and that there is either a sense of pride or shame for knowing or not knowing the language. Many credit their parents for not teaching them their ancestral language. Nadal & Sue’s (2011) analysis on acculturative stress comes to mind here, where acculturative stress arises from opposing values and cultures. As Filipino-Americans are taught English, they must navigate the acculturation process and negotiate which language is valued, to please their family and maintain cultural identity while at the same time valuing the language of the dominant environment (Nadal & Sue, 2011). In this way, elders and earlier generations in migrant families hold onto the value of speaking Tagalog by imposing this expectation on younger generations, while at the same time refusing to teach younger generations the language due to the proposed benefits of the local language, in this case English. The latter could be categorized as voluntary intergenerational

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language shift (Odango, 2015). Additionally, the expectation of speaking Tagalog rather than other Filipino languages is indicative of some of the language tensions within the Philippines itself, dating back to colonial influence which determined Tagalog as the standard language of the Philippines (McFarland, 2004). It appears this acts as a secondary barrier which prevents migrants from passing down their L1, a voluntary language shift in which the minority Filipino language is seen as even less valuable than Tagalog (Odango, 2015). Therefore, the minority language becomes even less likely to be passed down to the next generation, as the only ‘viable’ option left is the instruction of English language to provide social capital and opportunities in the western diaspora.

Theme #2: Language and Cultural Identity

Another major theme is language and its connections with cultural identity and authenticity. One of the users, Anthony, was only taught how to speak English, explaining that while he lacks the ability to speak a Filipino language, his childhood experiences were immersed in Filipino culture; “We were still immersed in Filipino culture, we ate rice and Filipino food every day, we went to Filipino church, we watched Filipino movies, we sang Karaoke...”. Anthony’s claim to Filipino culture is a practice of his own agency, resisting the dominating ideology that language capability is equal to cultural authenticity. In fact, many others have stated that they often feel less Filipino for not knowing a language and are often ridiculed when attempting to learn Tagalog later in life. As a second generation Filipino American, Anna states; “I was made fun of instead of encouraged when I tried to learn Tagalog”. This is indicative of the Filipino American experience of acculturative stress, where both Anna and Anthony are trying to reconcile for their perceived disconnections in their cultures, while struggling with aspects of assimilation to western culture (Nadal & Sue, 2011). Moreover, both accounts demonstrate how Filipino Americans are trying to re-define their identities within their spaces, taking claim to their communities despite not being fluent in their ancestral language. These accounts coincide with those explored by Odango (2015), Pratt (2004), and Batac (2022), who all discuss the search for identity as a Filipino living in the North American diasporas. Diasporic Filipinos must negotiate hegemonic language hierarchies

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and ideologies every time they attempt to learn their ancestral language and participate in their cultures.

Theme #3: Multi-Racial and Multi-Lingual Families

Another theme which reoccurs in the Subreddit is the banning or discouragement of teaching or speaking Filipino languages within a multi-racial or multi-lingual family. Stella shares her story living in rural America, describing her father as a conservative authoritarian. In discussion about why she did not learn how to speak Tagalog, she explains; “My mother was not allowed to teach us any Filipino language or culture.” This account is indicative of the underlying internalised racism which contributes to language transfer amongst immigrants in the west. One of the ways in which America “civilised” Filipino people was with the implementation of standardised English in education and in institutions, which created a dynamic in which English language ability was a direct measure of social value and capital (Osborne, 2024). With American narratives that all Filipinos needed to be civilised with the use of English, and the commodification of the English language in the Philippines, it is possible that colonial mentality plays a large role in the intragenerational language shift which occurs in Stella’s story. In this event, intragenerational language shift is occurring not only because the dominant language and culture is more convenient to practice in the current environment, but voluntary intergenerational language shift is also occurring as the value of Stella’s mother’s L1 is perceived as less than that of her fathers, emphasizing the language transfer of only English (Odango, 2015). In this way, colonial mentality appears in the internalization of one's own culture as inferior, leading to the disconnection or dissociation with parts or all of a person's culture (Nadal & Sue, 2011). For many mixed Filipinos, this seems to heighten with proximity to whiteness and assimilation to western culture.

While colonial mentality acknowledges the colonial impacts on the behaviours, ideologies, and experiences of Filipino people, it also problematises the Filipino person rather than the systems which continue to marginalise them. As discussed by Odango (2015), it is harmful to hold the belief that Filipinos are responsible for the loss of their own language and culture, as there are many factors that contribute to language shift. It is important to take away that diasporic Filipinos

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are not experiencing language shift because there is no desire to pass down their language and cultures, but because of the extenuating negotiations they must make as they navigate language ideologies which deem Filipino languages as inferior, giving way to less access to opportunities.

Theme #4: Influence of English as the Dominant Language

English as the dominant language practiced in America has many influences on the way in which Filipino languages appear in the diaspora. In one of the discussions, Jamie shares that English as a Second Language (ESL) courses have a significant impact on Filipino language use in her family; “When I was placed in ESL class, even though my first language was English, my parents stopped teaching my siblings and I Cebuano.”. Jamie felt targeted as someone who was a second-generation immigrant and found that this experience further pushed her parents away from passing down Cebuano to her and her sister. Her experience is also compounded by language ideologies which situate English as superior, and that learning a Filipino language would tarnish or hinder a person's ability to speak ‘proper’ English. Another user adds on to this discussion and says, “My parents didn’t teach me Tagalog; they thought it would impact my ability to speak English without an accent.”. When discussing why Filipino parents tend to avoid teaching their children English, another user states; “I know that Filipinos seem to see English as superior or that it gives them some sort of status when you are English-speaking only.”.

There are many elements to these shared experiences, including the commodification of English-speaking capabilities, forced and voluntary intergenerational language shift, and systemic injustice. This is an overt example of hegemonic power in the process of language shift, as the institution of education further compounds on the hierarchical value of proper English speaking and how it should sound, effectively influencing Jamie’s family to forgo language transfer to future generations. Hegemony in this case is not a power which comes only from excessive force but also from the social and cultural environment which shape and place language in hierarchies of power (Ahearn, 2017). These accounts are similar to Farrales’ (2017) investigation of ESL classes as a barrier to academic success. In conjunction, it brings in question the use of ESL classes and their

role in reinforcing language ideologies which continue to marginalise diasporic Filipinos, as well as its role in language shift and loss.

Implications for Social Work Practice, Policy, & Research

In combining approaches from both linguistic anthropology and social work, this study investigates the role of power and colonial institutions in language shift, identity, and systemic oppression as they intersect within the Filipino diaspora. Linguistic anthropology provides the theoretical framework to understand how language ideologies are constructed and influenced by power (Ahearn, 2017), providing the context needed to understand how the experiences of diasporic Filipinos in the space of language is heavily rooted in colonial history. As Americans utilise the education system in the Philippines, diasporic Filipinos now experience a form of epistemicide through the loss of language and knowledge systems as newer generations become disconnected from their heritage (La Torre et al., 2024).

This issue is a concern for social workers, as the field of social work centres on promoting self-determination, decolonisation, and systemic change. As such, it becomes the social worker's responsibility in practice to support diasporic Filipinos in actively dismantling the colonial systems that maintain hegemonic language shift and ideologies. As seen in this study, language is a centre of continued colonial oppression and epistemicide, operating at all levels in the lives of diasporic Filipinos. From navigating cultural identity and belonging, to connection with family and community, to experiencing structural oppression, social workers must recognise the colonial connection to language shift in the Filipino diaspora. Decolonising language in the Filipino diaspora then, means to support diasporic Filipinos in re-constructing language ideologies. This includes recognising that language shift is a form of epistemicide and a product of systemic and colonial oppression (Odango, 2017; La Torre et al., 2024). Additionally, language is not the only marker of authenticity within a community. In fact, language can serve as a pathway to resistance for diasporic Filipinos as they choose to learn their language(s) in adulthood and claim membership in their community despite their speaking capabilities.

This study also brings forward systemic barriers that intersect with language, where education and health care not only continue to reinforce oppressive language ideologies but systemically put diasporic Filipinos at a disadvantage. In the case of ESL classes, these programs become a barrier to academic success (Farralles, 2017), and as seen in this study, they also play a role in language shift as families move away from passing down their language in fear of hindering English speaking-capabilities. This concern becomes a policy issue, presenting a need to re-evaluate the ESL criteria and the risk of marginalising students. Moreover, these hegemonic language ideologies that place English as a superior language impacts access to health care, as seen in the work of Meneze et al., (2016). In this way, language in the Filipino diaspora transcends the bounds of individual practice and into the realm of social policy and institutional change.

Lastly, this study illustrates the importance of interdisciplinary research, in this case linguistic anthropology serves as a tool to understand not only how colonial history shapes behaviour, but how power is navigated and negotiated in the everyday lives of diasporic Filipinos. Building on this framework, social workers are then able to apply this context to social work practice, policy, and research, taking a decolonial approach which encompasses all implications of language shift and ideology in the Filipino diaspora.

Conclusion

The attitudes emerging from the r/FilipinoAmerican Subreddit demonstrate the hegemonic influences on language shift, language ideology, and language use in the Filipino American diaspora. In these accounts, we come to see language emerge as something beyond a tool for communication but as a link to culture and identity, and its suppression as a product of historical colonial influence. For diasporic Filipino's, language creates a landscape of cultural loss and disconnection, hegemonic negotiation, systemic oppression, but also for agency and reconnection. The creation of language hierarchy categorising English as superior, the internalisation of minority languages and in some cases even Tagalog as inferior, voluntary and involuntary language shift, and even the experience of acculturative stress all impacts the relationship between Filipinos in the diaspora and their heritage. Despite this, there are moments of resistance found in the

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experiences shared in this discussion, where Filipino Americans are redefining what it means to be Filipino. Diasporic Filipinos are claiming membership in their cultures without the need to speak the language, at the same time resisting language hegemony as they make efforts to learn Filipino languages on their own.

This study investigates language as a site of hegemonic negotiation in the Filipino diaspora and calls attention to its implications for social work practice, policy, and research. For diasporic Filipino's, language shift and loss occur not from the undervaluing of one's own culture or language but is systemically designed, where English is not only seen as superior but also provides Filipino people with opportunities necessary to survive or succeed both in the Philippines and abroad. As Odango (2015) suggests, language shift is a product of colonialism, and even a form of epistemicide as the knowledge attached to ancestral languages are more difficult to pass down to second generation Filipinos in various diasporas. When it comes to social work practice, knowing the intersections of colonial trauma and the negotiations which must be performed daily in the space of language is important when working with Filipino service users. Language loss and shift impact the diasporic Filipino on multiple levels, risking disconnection from cultural identity, reinforcing oppressive language ideologies, and marginalisation in access to services.

There is a need for further research on how language intersects with social institutions and plays a role in the continued oppression and colonisation of Filipino people in their diaspora's, specifically centered in the lived experiences of those situated in Anglo-dominated countries. Additionally, this research calls attention to the need to reform current institutions and practices that systemically contribute to language shift and hegemonic language ideologies, calling on social workers to challenge institutional practices and policies which marginalise minority languages and continue to uphold language hegemony.

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