

Narrative report about the IYIL launching event held on February 20, 2019 at the University of the Philippines

The celebration of the International Mother Language Day 2019 and launching of the International Year of Indigenous Languages at the University of the Philippines was held on February 20, 2019 at the College of Education, UP Diliman Campus, Quezon City. The event started at 5:30 pm until 8:30 pm. There were about 200 participants who came. At the registration area, a display of mother tongue based multilingual big story books (Ayta Mag-antsi and Ayta Mag-indi languages) and MTB-MLE references was set-up. The latest book of the speaker, Dr. Clement Camposano on Rizal was also on display.

The dean of the College of Education, Dr. Marie Therese Bustos, gave the opening remarks. She mentioned about their efforts along with her colleagues and students in the Deaf Education to promote the Filipino Sign Language (FSL). And their efforts led to the institutionalization of the use of FSL into a law that was passed in 2018. Dean Bustos also mentioned about the nationwide research project on Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education undertaken by ACTRC, a research center that she heads (<https://actrc.org/category/projects/mtb-mle/>).

Students from the Linguistics Department gave a backgrounder of IMLD and IYIL and explained to the crowd how they can be involved and sign up in the IYIL website. SIL Representative, Ms. Rynyj Gonzales presented the current state of Philippine languages in light of Fishman's EGIDS Scale (<https://www.ethnologue.com/about/language-status>). This was followed by a presentation from the Lumad Bakwit School (indigenous school) that was visiting the University. They presented about the struggles that they experience because they live in high-conflict communities in the Southern Philippines. They capped their presentation with a song and a dance of their ethnolinguistic group (Bagobo).

The next presenter, Dr. Clement Camposano, gave a lecture based on his recent book "The Nation as Project". He focused on the thoughts of Philippine heroes, Jose Rizal and Isabelo delos Reyes (who lived in the 19th century during the Spanish colonial period) about language, identity of indigenous groups in the Philippines. He underscored how the much revered hero, Jose Rizal, was actually influenced by German Herderrian philosophy that made him take a centrist and exclusionary view of Filipino identity (limited to lowland Christian converts). Isabelo delos Reyes, on the other hand, looked at the project of nationhood as an insider. Delos Reyes posed a counterdiscourse by declaring his solidarity with the indigenous mountain dwellers. Prof. Arnold Azurin responded to the key points raised by Dr. Camposano. He mentioned that the prevailing conflict in the Southern Philippines can be due to the exclusionary view of Filipino identity.

Participants posted their suggestions through the online form about ways to promote and develop the indigenous languages of the Philippines. There were many who requested for more thoughtful meetings, including training and workshop on indigenous languages and how integrate their use in basic and higher education curriculum. There were also many suggestions about the need to popularize the indigenous languages through music, literature, films to be presented through various media.

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

As a Subanen coming from an Indigenous Community in Mindanao, it is empowering on my part that our language is now given importance with the celebration of the Indigenous Mother Language Day 2019. This is not only about preserving indigenous languages worldwide, but rather a recognition of every indigenous peoples' unique cultures and identities in the different parts of the world.

The success of the lecture symposium held at the UP Diliman College of Education in response to the UNESCO's call is a show of the institution's strong advocacy for embracing diversity - a move for inclusion of every Filipino from different ethnolinguistic groups in the country.