

Orthography and the Jejemon Phenomenon

Multilingual Philippines Nov10 2010

There have been well-intentioned attempts to simplify or standardize the orthography for Philippine languages, no less influenced by Lope K. Santos [who was born on September 25, 1879, as **Lope C. Santos** to Ladislao Santos and Victoria Canseco, both natives of Rizal province. He used *Kanseko* instead of *Canseco* for his middle name to show his nationalism] who was appointed as director of the *Surian ng Wikang Pambansa* (National Language Institute) by President Manuel L. Quezon. It was Santos who came up with the 20-letter ABAKADA (a, b, k, d, e, g, h, i, l, m, n, ng, o, p, r, s, t, u, w, y pronounced respectively as a, ba, ka, da, e, ga, ha, i, la, ma, na, nga, o, pa, ra, sa, ta, u, wa, ya) for Pilipino/Filipino, the national language supposed to be developed from among all ethnic languages with Tagalog as the basis. The ABAKADA of Santos is obviously one of the first such attempts to “standardize” what was then a somewhat archaic Spanish orthography as used in [Francisco Baltazar’s “Florante at Laura” published in 1861](#).

On account of the fact that certain local languages have sounds (phonemes) using Spanish orthography, the Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS) of the Philippines issued in 1976 a revised alphabet which added the letters c, ch, f, j, ll, ñ, q, rr, v, x, and z, later re-revised to just c, f, j, ñ, q, v, x, and z. The Filipino alphabet of 28 letters that is currently being taught in Philippine schools was instituted in 1987 during the Corazon Aquino presidency. But the use of these additional letters was restricted to the proper names of people, places, events, etc. Except for a few indigenous words or loaned foreign words, the old ABAKADA is to be used with regular words in Filipino. So there it was, a double standard — one standard for the use of any of the 28 or so letters for proper nouns, such as the old Spanish names, Anglicized names or what have you. And another standard for regular words which are to be spelled mostly using the old orthographically-challenged 20-letter ABAKADA of Lope K. Santos. That double standard caused my fellow Ilocanos to be genuinely confused as to whether they are Ilocanos or Ilokanos, as if spelling their ethnicity one way or the other made them more nationalistic. You think the Chavacanos would take Tsabakanos without a fight? The word “pista” is not any more festive than the original “fiesta”. “Tsinelas” in place of “chinelas”? — why, the latter conjures instant pain when slapped rather violently on someone’s butt! And chicharon tastes just uhm-uhm good and sounds even more crunchy vis-à-vis taking the joy and crackle out of sitsaron...

Then came the ubiquitous cell phone and texting and the use of certain spellings (which actually made the spelling more complex, most often appearing belabored for no rhyme or reason, than French!) married to the popular Pokemon [itself derived from the words ‘pocket monster’] craze centered around some colorful toy models of some Japanese cartoon characters. What came next was an all-out ORTHOGRAPHIC REVOLUTION. They aptly called it JEJEMON. They even have a dedicated website (www.jejemon.com), a [jejedance](#), a jejebet (alphabet: 4 b c D 3 f 6 h 1 j k 7 m N 0 p Q r 5 t u V w x Y z), a [Jejemon translator](#), and Jejenese, the language of jejemons. Wikipedia offers some insight into the [jejemon phenomenon](#). The [Urban Dictionary](#) has quite a number of jejemon-related entries.

[Check Global Voices for a related article, “Philippines: The jejemon craze”.](#)

Here’s a sample jejemon résumé:

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ReZsuMe Ng IsZaNg JEJE

Position desired:
...KaHeTt aNoW
Name:
...dhon. ZsuthiL
Address:
... SzA TaviH-TaVih LahRn PfOuH
Educational Background:
... BvIdYowHaNnZ TeKzS aNd DamPfa (elem)
... CauTtIng ClasZez, YoWsie, KupFet
ProjEctSz (HS)
... DoWtAhan, BiLyAhRahn, KtV, maLl (coll)
Special skills:

... Mak.TecKzs, maK.FS, Mak.inoM paK
WeAkDayZs, TamBhAy SzA ZtArVuCkzZ, EmBaH.
.... LiteRaTeZ ihN Ms OffIzXe... (Ms.
wOrDZz, Ms Ph0weRpHoiNtZz, ExCzeLsZ &
AdHoBeHh PhOtOwSzhOPfZs
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In May this year, former [DepEd Secretary Mona Valisno sought to purge schools of the “jejemon” mentality](#), saying “that communicating in jejemon might cause deterioration of young Filipino students’ language skills.” It’s a safe bet that that effort didn’t succeed. Like Ms. Valisno, I could see why the Prof. Henry Higgineses of the world, if confronted with jejemon, would have an acute myocardial infarction.

I just hope that the Jejenese won’t seek to include jejemon in our fledgling Multilingual Education (mu7t171N6u47 3Duc4t1oN) program for the simple reason that it is not mother-tongue-based!

Seriously, I want to remind the MLE folks who may be tempted to “prescribe” a certain orthography and similar restrictions for the use of c, ch, f, j, ll, ñ, q, rr, v, x, and z for certain local languages such as we now have for Tagalog or Filipino: the evolution of language is an addition game. Just take a look at English and how it keeps developing by adding words from other languages (it even has “boondocks” from the Tagalog ‘bundok’ for ‘mountain’). The more letters one has to represent every conceivable phoneme, the more tools one has to represent his ideas and the better and freer one feels — and that’s how I see the jejemon phenomenon. They may not admit it outright but they are out to liberate themselves from the restrictions (e.g., the ABAKADA and the restricted use of c, ch, f, j, ll, ñ, q, rr, v, x, and z) imposed by our educational system. The orthographic restrictions, to the Jejenese, are a dumbing down of the rich Roman alphabet/Arabic decimal system which they fully embrace. The Jejenese, like the French, repudiate simplifying or standardizing the spelling of words. I have this strong belief that when we stop imposing all the orthographic restrictions, the need for jejemon would start to dwindle and these Jejenese would eventually realize the folly that they commit — like they could save roughly 75%-95% on their cell phone load and/or dramatically reduce the incidence of arthritis in the finger bones (you really don’t want your fingers to shrivel or get bloated or rigid in odd or nondescript shapes or disgusting directions with all that frenzied jejemon typing or keying) by simply going un-jejemon.

And that’s why our MLE folks planning to tinker with the orthography of our languages have to think twice before tinkering: **let the actual and indigenous phonemes of the language and loaned/foreign words dictate the orthography**, *NOT* the other way around. As a corollary, the more letters to represent phonemes in the language and acquisitions from other languages — local or foreign, proper nouns or regular words — the more tools for the language to enrich itself and the less likely for those who have plenty of time in their hands to spell words in such round-about, “elaborate” manner as in jejemon as there won’t be “artificial” or double-standard orthographic restrictions or standards to rebel against. The idea is to be able to communicate without being encumbered by artificial orthographic and alphabet restrictions or standards.

Ref.: <https://mlephil.wordpress.com/2010/11/10/orthography-and-the-jejemon-phenomenon/> LOOK the video from ref.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=38wG5BX2auc>

Look more here:

<https://aboutphilippines.org/culture-languages-literature.html#Jejemon>