

English Hegemony within the Language Ecology of Western Visayas (WV): Evidence from the Multilingual Communication Practices of the Health Department in the Region

John Mark C. Montefalcon

Abstract

During the COVID-19 pandemic, comprehensible communication had never been more important. However, some individuals experienced communicative gaps due to language use and choice of the controlling domains that privilege English over local languages. In a 2023 report by the Social Weather Stations (SWS), it was found that a sizable minority of 14 percent of Filipinos—or approximately 15.8 million—almost do not use English at all.¹ In response, I conducted a thematic analysis of the public health communication (PHC) and public health information (PHI) of the Department of Health – Western Visayas Center for Health Development (DOH-WVCHD) on its Facebook posts from March to September 2021. I argue that the predominance of English in their PHI disadvantages non-English-speaking individuals and sustains language ideologies that prevent the sociological growth of marginalized languages in Western Visayas (WV). Based on a total of 18 Facebook posts, I critiqued DOH-WVCHD’s multilingual practices using Haugen’s Language Ecology as “sociological”² and Gramsci’s

¹Social Weather Stations, “Social Weather Report: At least 75% of adult Filipinos are competent with the Filipino language, while at least 47% are competent with the English language,” *Social Weather Stations*, August 16, 2023, <https://www.sws.org.ph/swsmain/artcldispage/?artcsyscode=ART-20230816034841>.

²Einer Haugen, *The Ecology of Language* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972).

Cultural Hegemony, particularly the concept of “common sense.”³ Based on the study’s findings, the ecological and ideological dimensions of the DOH-WVCHD’s communication practices are hegemonic, which consequently sustain English hegemony in Western Visayan linguistic healthscapes and contribute to linguistic inequalities experienced by marginalized individuals.

Keywords

Public health communication and information, language ecology, cultural hegemony, linguistic inequalities, COVID-19 pandemic

³Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, ed. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971).

Introduction

Language and society are mutually reinforcing constructs whose relationship can reproduce power imbalances and structural inequalities. In postcolonial states like the Philippines, English has been institutionalized in the “majority of controlling domains in the country,”⁴ and that includes the government, education, science, and technology. Prior to its constitutional recognition in 1987, English had already occupied the language ecology of the country due to the enduring influence of the American colonial period since the 1900s. Nonetheless, a 2023 report by the SWS has found that a sizable minority of 14 percent—or approximately 15.8 million Filipinos—almost do not use English at all.⁵ Since humans are dependent on communication, the report suggests that these individuals experience marginalization from accessing crucial information from the country’s controlling domains.

The issue of privileging English has become more evident during the onslaught of the COVID-19 pandemic from late 2019⁶ to mid-2023,⁷ as the situation highlighted the need for comprehensible PHI to protect the health and financial resources of the public. However, as evidenced by the abovementioned report, inequalities in PHC posed a major challenge for non-English-speaking communities. Tsuda reinforced this by asserting that “in a situation where English dominates communication, non-English-speaking people are inevitably disadvantaged.”⁸ In WV, a

⁴ Allan B.I. Bernardo, “English in Philippine education: Solution or problem?,” in *Philippine English: Linguistic and Literary*, ed. M.A. Lourdes Bautista and Kingsley Bolton (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Scholarship Online, 2008): 34, <https://doi.org/10.5790/hongkong/9789622099470.003.0003>.

⁵ Social Weather Stations, “Social Weather Report.”

⁶ Karen Kaplan, “A Timeline of COVID-19’s First Weeks in Wuhan,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 18, 2021, <https://www.latimes.com/science/story/2021-11-18/a-timeline-of-covid-19s-first-weeks-in-wuhan>.

⁷ United Nations, “WHO Chief Declares End to COVID-19 as a Global Health Emergency,” *UN News*, May 5, 2023, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2023/05/1136367>.

⁸ Yukio Tsuda, “The Hegemony of English and Strategies for Linguistic Pluralism,”

multilingual region with eight local languages—specifically Ati, Aklanon, Capiznon, Caluyanon, Hiligaynon, Kinaray-a, Malaynon, and Sulod,⁹ and two official languages, namely Filipino and English—the privileging of English is reflected in the PHI published and disseminated by the Department of Health - Western Visayas Center for Health Development (DOH-WVCHD). Related studies by Alburo, Legarde, Quinto et al., Villanueva, and Elaga and Valdez call attention to the dearth of scholarly studies conducted about PHI and English hegemony in the Philippines that are concerned with health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. There is a need, therefore, to investigate the linguistic inequalities that are perpetuated via the multilingual communication practices of the DOH-WVCHD and to reveal the language ideologies embedded in its language use and choice to devise a socially grounded solution, especially in a multilingual but understudied region like WV.

In this study, I seek to answer the questions, “What are the languages utilized by the DOH-WVCHD in its COVID-19 communication materials on Facebook from March to September 2021?” and “How does English hegemony manifest in these texts?” Following these questions, I analyze the qualitative aspect of the DOH-WVCHD’s language use and choice in its Facebook posts. I argue that the DOH-WVCHD’s multilingual communication practices disadvantage non-English-speaking individuals in WV despite the seemingly translingual practice in its PHI that uses English, Filipino, and Hiligaynon, as English predominates in their Facebook posts. The qualitative breakdown speaks of and suggests larger macro inequalities that are embedded in the DOH-WVCHD’s multilingual communication practices. Specifically, the utilization of English, Filipino, and Hiligaynon in the DOH-WVCHD’s PHC materials points to more profound analyses about the privileging and marginalization of languages in the country. In the language ecology of WV, evidence of unequal treatment of languages

in *The Global Intercultural Communication Reader*, ed. Molefi K. Asante, Yoshitaka Miike, and Jing Yin (New York: Routledge, 2008), 168.

⁹David M. Eberhard, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig, eds. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, 27th ed. (Texas: SIL International, 2024). Accessed December 7, 2024, <https://www.ethnologue.com/>.

is apparent, especially with the lack of use of local languages other than Hiligaynon. Such language use and choice, although unconsciously practiced, is influenced by language ideologies that have been sustained by the country's controlling domains since the American colonial period. Applying Haugen's Language Ecology as "sociological," this study seeks to understand the language use and choice of the DOH-WVCHD in its PHC and PHI by contextualizing the ecological context of languages in WV and highlighting the extralinguistic factors that motivate the use of dominant languages as MOC. In addition, using Gramsci's Cultural Hegemony, specifically the concept of "common sense," this study attempts to unpack the ideological processes that maintain the dominance of institutionalized languages in controlling domains and to explain the linguistic inequalities that influence the public's access or non-access to crucial PHI. Together, the conceptual contribution of the aforementioned frameworks allows my discussion to describe and examine how hegemony is both ecological and ideological in the multilingual communication practices of the DOH-WVCHD. This study thus extends previous works on linguistic imperialism and public health through its methodological lens and its regional focus on an understudied region like WV.

Sociolinguistics of English and COVID-19 Pandemic

English and Postcolonial Governance in the Philippines

The Philippines is an archipelagic country located in the Asia Pacific region with a population of more than a hundred million. With the presence of various ethnolinguistic groups, the country is recognized for its linguistic diversity. According to Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig, the Philippines has 186 languages, of which two are extinct, two are official languages, and 28 are utilized as media of instruction.¹⁰ Despite the country's multilingual characterization, English remains the most used language in its controlling domains. During the American colonial period, the American policy of institutionalizing English as the representative language of democracy initiated changes in language use in the country,

¹⁰Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig., *Ethnologue*.

particularly in the domain of language governance.¹¹ Such changes have been so extensive that the pluralistic orientation of Philippine languages is overshadowed by the continued hegemony of English in Philippine society, especially since its already evident prestige and status are reinforced and bolstered by constitutional recognition.

Language Ideologies and Access to Health Information

Languages do not exist in a vacuum, and some languages are attached to certain language ideologies that are expressed by their users in justifying or rationalizing perceived language structure and use.¹² Language ideologies pervasively influence language policy and language planning across the globe, where institutions favor the languages with perceived benefits. Often, this is the context by which English prevails. In domains like healthcare, language ideologies manifest in PHC, and these affect the effective delivery of PHI. During the COVID-19 pandemic, millions of individuals with marginalized positions had limited to no access to crucial information that was integral to keeping themselves safe from the harmful effects of the COVID-19 disease,¹³ highlighting the global scale of linguistic inequalities on top of welfare issues caused by the health crisis. The position is extended by Piller, Zhang, and Li, who observed that global PHC is characterized by the large-scale exclusion of linguistic minorities from timely, high-quality information.¹⁴ Such a reality thus

¹¹Christopher J. Dawe, "Language Governmentality in Philippine Education," *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics* (2014): 66, <https://repository.upenn.edu/wpel/vol29/iss1/4>.

¹²Michael Silverstein, "Language Structure and Linguistic Ideology," in *The Elements: A Parasession on Linguistic Units and Levels*, ed. Paul R. Clyne, William F. Hanks, Carol L. Hofbauer (Chicago: Chicago Linguistic Society, 1979), 193.

¹³United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, "OCHA and COVID-19," 2020, cited in Edward Jay M. Quinto et al., "Language Choice in Official Information Materials on COVID-19 in the Philippines: A Language Justice Perspective," *International Journal of Multilingualism* 21, no. 3 (2022): 1257, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2022.2159030>.

¹⁴Ingrid Piller, Jie Zhang, and Jia Li, "Linguistic Diversity in a Time of Crisis: Language Challenges of the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Multilingua* 39, no. 5 (2020): 503, <https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2020-0136>.

describes how social institutions across the globe overlooked the need to espouse a genuine multilingual approach to PHC due to extralinguistic factors that led to the prioritization of institutionalized languages as MOC. In the Philippine context, the case of linguistic inequalities is seen in how regional offices of the DOH influence linguistic healthscapes, especially in extraordinary situations. Quinto et al. claim that people who do not speak the dominant languages, who have low literacy levels, and who have limited to no access to various forms of communication are the most vulnerable during crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁵ Likewise, the corresponding reality of the Philippines is reflected in other postcolonial states with bilingual policies like South Africa, India, Bangladesh, Brazil, and Australia, where people of different minority languages face marginalization because of the difficulties in accessing information and education in the language they speak.¹⁶ Overall, the cited studies provide evidence for the ubiquity of linguistic inequalities across developed and developing nations. This situation stems from social structures that position certain languages as more legitimate MOC for PHI and other official correspondence of the controlling domains. As a consequence, such a situation reshapes the ecology of multilingual spaces and exacerbates unequal access to resources that are mediated by clear communication.

Public Health Communication and Multilingualism during COVID-19 Pandemic

Very few sociolinguistic studies focusing on the Filipino experience with PHC and PHI are available. Ellaga and Valdez, who claim that “linguistic landscape research in the area of health literacy remains underrepresented in the literature, specifically in developing countries,”¹⁷

¹⁵Quinto et al., “Language Choice in Official Information Materials.”

¹⁶Papia Sengupta, “Language, Communication, and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Criticality of Multilingual Education,” *International Journal of Multilingualism* 21, no. 1 (2024): 348, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2021.2021918>.

¹⁷Heshell Ellaga and Paolo Nino Valdez, “Healthscapes in the Philippines: A Linguistic Landscape Analysis,” *DLSU Research Congress* (2020): 1, <https://www.dlsu.edu.ph/wp-content/uploads/pdf/conferences/research-congress-proceedings/2020/FNH-08.pdf>.

suggest the need for additional research on language use and choice and health literacy in multilingual contexts. Despite the dearth of scholarly works in this area, a few studies have been made from 2020 to 2022 that respond to the growing need for investigating COVID-19 linguistic healthscapes.

Given the extraordinariness of the situation in the Philippines, Villanueva found that linguistic challenges such as confusion and misunderstanding arise due to the language use of the controlling domains during calamities and crises.¹⁸ This finding points to the need for localizing crisis communication to ensure that the public is informed about institutional details necessary for safety. He added that in view of the COVID-19 pandemic, comprehensive health communication can help flatten the curve of infected cases.¹⁹ Its achievement, however, hinges upon the need for utilizing languages that are spoken in specific areas. Contrastingly, the concrete conditions of PHC remain concentrated on the use of official languages. Quinto et al. assert that most of the online health information from the different regional offices of the country's health department predominantly uses Filipino and English and infrequently uses local languages.²⁰ One probable reason stems from the lack of language policies within the DOH and the government as a whole. Although the 1987 Philippine Constitution recognizes Filipino and English as official languages, the controlling domains have no explicit language policies that provide a clear framework for language use in official communication. Such a situation is especially evident in Legarde's research on English use as an administrative language in the Zamboanga Peninsula Region, showing how the frontliners faced the following challenges: "language barriers, language preference,

¹⁸ Joey Villanueva, "Eliminating Language Barriers in Public Health Communication via Machine-Aided Translation (MAT) and Sociolinguistic Analysis," *International Journal of Linguistics and Translation Studies* 3, no. 1 (2022): 42, <https://doi.org/10.36892/ijlts.v3i1.205>.

¹⁹Villanueva, "Eliminating Language Barriers," 43.

²⁰Quinto et al., "Language Choice in Official Information Materials."

lack of proficiency, and cultural differences.”²¹ The research argues that the continued dominance of English stems from unclear language policies in local government agencies and that the languages to use must correspond to the linguistic and cultural demands of their work on the ground. Parallel to the previous study within the Mindanaoan context, the research by Alburo on the linguistic landscape of PHI in Valencia City, Bukidnon, reveals the same issue of the lack of language policies used during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was found that top-down actors favored monolingual English, bilingual English-Filipino, and bilingual English-Cebuano, whereas the bottom-up actors preferred English, monolingual Cebuano, bilingual English-Filipino, bilingual English-Cebuano, and trilingual English-Cebuano-Filipino.²² Notwithstanding the multilinguality of the used languages, it is also imperative to examine the ideological processes that influence the motivations behind the language use and choice of both the top-down and bottom-up actors and to contextualize how PHI is accessed by the public. Overall, the multilingual communication practices of the controlling domains during the COVID-19 pandemic need further contextualization to unpack extralinguistic factors that shape communication practices of the controlling domains, as evidenced in the cited studies.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs qualitative research as its method, where “qualitative research in applied linguistics aims to understand and interpret language, language learning, or use in specific contexts, as well as social phenomena, within natural settings like social and school environments.”²³ Through its utilization, this study uncovers both

²¹Lean Monique Legarde, “Ethno-linguistic Struggles in Using English as Medium of Administrative Communication in Government Agencies’ Frontline Services (Focus on Zamboanga Peninsula Region, Philippines),” *SSRN* (2023): 1, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4522209.

²²Doveen Mark Mendoza Alburo, “Societal Language Dominance of COVID-19 Related Signs in the Linguistic Landscape of a Southern Philippine City,” *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 27, no. 2 (2022): 73, <https://doi.org/10.22452/jati.vol27no2.4>.

²³Gopal Prasad Pandey, “The Transformative Role of Qualitative Research in ELT and Applied Linguistics,” *Journal of Effective Teaching Methods (JETM)* 3, no. 1 (2025): 87. <https://doi.org/10.59652/jetm.v3i1.429>.

linguistic and extralinguistic factors that surround the publication and dissemination of PHI by the DOH-WVCHD. Such factors include, but are not limited to, linguistic attitudes and ideologies, reproduction of power imbalances via language use and choice, and accessibility of health information.

Data Collection

I obtained the data of this study from the Facebook page of the DOH-WVCHD, which featured COVID-19 details from March to September 2021. The criteria I set explicitly included PHI that was originally produced by the DOH-WVCHD and excluded Regional COVID-19 Bulletin Posts that are primarily numerical and reposted PHI from the Department of Health’s (DOH) Facebook page. The inclusion and exclusion criteria seek to concentrate the analyses on whether the DOH-WVCHD followed the bilingual communication practices of the DOH or devised its own. Using purposive sampling, I gathered data that: (1) were published within March to September 2021; (2) featured any COVID-19 information about precautionary measures, memoranda, and events, among others; and (3) contained textual elements in the post’s captions, infographic materials, and scanned documents. With these criteria, I categorized the posts using these categories: (1) Recognition, Encouragement, and Appreciation Posts; (2) Health Advisories and Alerts, Clarificatory Statements, and Public Service Announcements; (3) Policy and Administrative Information; and (4) Advocacy and Event Campaigns. Each post was then classified according to its linguistic subcategories of English, Filipino, and Hiligaynon, or the languages in DOH-WVCHD’s PHI. A final filtering was also employed to select the top three posts with the highest engagements (reactions, comments, and shares). The details are shown below:

Type of Post	Language		
	English	Filipino	Hiligaynon
Recognition, Encouragement, and Appreciation Posts	3	1	2
Health Advisories and Alerts, Clarificatory Statements, and Public Service Announcements	3	1	2
Policy and Administrative Information	2	0	0
Advocacy and Event Campaigns	3	0	1
Total	11	2	5
Grand Total	18		

Table 1. Type of Post and Total Number of Posts included in the Qualitative Analyses

Following these methodological steps, only 18 posts have satisfied the criteria and the final filtering. The study ensures that saturation is still achieved—notwithstanding the seemingly modest scope—due to its narrow focus and defined objectives for analyses. Biber reinforces this idea by claiming that while sample size is important for achieving representativeness, literature on sampling theory has noted that sample size is not the priority consideration but the detailed definition of the target population and decisions for sampling method.²⁴

In doing the thematic analysis, I drew inspiration from Braun and Clark's "Six Phases of Thematic Analysis" and extended some processes within those phases to align with linguistic methodologies, which I elaborated on in the succeeding discussions: (1) Familiarizing the data, (2) Generating initial codes, (3) Searching for themes, (4) Reviewing themes, (5) Defining and naming themes, and (6) Producing the report.²⁵ For phase one, I extracted the textual elements of the Facebook posts using optical character recognition and ran them via Taguette²⁶ software to code grammatical items. Subsequently, the data files were run using a large language model interface for data management assistance. To ensure accuracy and reproducibility, I performed all succeeding steps of the research that start with familiarizing the linguistic functions of English, Filipino, and Hiligaynon in the DOH-WVCHD's PHI by reading and rereading the 18 Facebook posts. For phase two, I generated initial codes and assigned them to the grammatical items. I also observed their morphological, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic, and discursive details for more nuanced code assignments. The example excerpts and initial codes are illustrated below:

²⁴Douglas Biber, "Representativeness in Corpus Design," *Literary and Linguistic Computing* 8, no. 4 (1993): 243, https://jan.ucc.nau.edu/~biber/Biber/Biber_1993.pdf.

²⁵Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no. 2 (January 2006): 87, <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>.

²⁶Rémi Rampin and Vicky Rampin, "Taguette: Open-Source Qualitative Data Analysis," *Journal of Open Source Software* 6, no. 68 (December 10, 2021): 3522, <https://doi.org/10.21105/joss.03522>.

Excerpt	Initial Code Example
"CAN PREGNANT WOMEN GET THE COVID-19 VACCINE?"	Introductory Statement (English), Medical (English), Clarificatory (English)
"wear your mask and face shield, wash your hands or use alcohol and sanitizer, practice physical distancing and submit yourselves for COVID-19 Vaccination"	Encouragement (English), Health Protocols (English), Authority (English), Appeal (English)
"wear your mask and face shield, wash your hands or use alcohol and sanitizer, practice physical distancing and submit yourselves for COVID-19 Vaccination"	Encouragement (English), Health Protocols (English), Authority (English), Appeal (English)
"Manatili sa bahay"	Authority (Filipino)
"Palagiang maghugas ng kamay at panatilihin malinis and sarili at kapaligiran"	Instruction (Filipino), Health Information (Filipino), Authority (Filipino), Recommendation (Filipino), Health Protocols (Filipino)
"Siguraduhin na maayos ang daloy ng hangin kahit nasa loob ng bahay. Buksan ang mga bintana at pinto para tuloy-tuloy ang pagdaloy ng hangin sa loob ng tahanan."	Instruction (Filipino), Authority (Filipino), Recommendation (Filipino), Health Protocols (Filipino)
"Si lola Perpetua ang nag daig sang 1000 pesos worth sang cell cards!"	Achievement (Hiligaynon)
"Mag bulig tapna sang kagaw!"	Motivation (Hiligaynon), Invitation (Hiligaynon), Appeal (Hiligaynon)
"Mag sunod sa mga health protocols nga gina pagwa, kung indi man lang importante MAG PABILIN KAG MAG TINIR SA INYO NGA PANIMALAY."	Authority (Hiligaynon)

Table 2. Examples of Excerpts from the Data and the Initial Codes

For phase three, I did the following in order: examined the emerging thematic patterns, merged the codes with similar meaning, refined the codes, reviewed the coded items, and conceptualized the themes by grouping the codes according to their potential themes. For phase four, I verified the themes and prepared individual tables for finalized codes and their frequency counts based on linguistic subcategories. For phase five, I defined the themes according to their general meaning. From the coded data, I identified one meta-theme and three themes: Translingual Practice, and Affective Communication, Directive Communication, and Informative Communication, with two sub-themes named Technical Communication and General Health Communication. Finally, for phase six, I produced the report for the discussion and analysis using the study’s theoretical frameworks. To provide grounded discussions and analyses, I included example excerpts in the succeeding paragraphs. Such inclusion of example excerpts comes with a note that the orthography of some lexical items was standardized by inserting a hyphen or deleting the space in between prefixes and roots or bases. Nevertheless, all example excerpts are verbatim and have not been altered.

Analysis and Discussion: The Ontology of and the Ideologies Embedded in English Hegemony

Translingual Practice, as a meta-theme, overarches all three themes, as evidenced by how words and/or phrases from a different language are integrated into the linguistic environment of another language. The

observable pattern from the data is the use of common English words in predominantly Filipino and Hiligaynon clauses. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the increase in usage of medical terms like “face mask,” “face shield,” “COVID-19 test,” and “health protocol” became normative in communicating health-related information. Alongside this practice is morphological borrowing that occurs between English and Filipino as well as English and Hiligaynon. Such a morphological process intends to *Filipinize* or *Hiligaynize* familiar English lexical items, specifically verbs, such as “*ma-feature*” (to be featured) and “*mag-isolate*” (to isolate). Other examples include the inclusion of English items within the syntactic environments of Filipino and Hiligaynon, such as the respective clauses “*Kumuha ng totoong impormasyon mula sa* (get real information from) valid sources” and “*ipasa ang inyo entries*” (submit your entries). From the 18 posts, the frequency of translingual practice in English-Filipino and English-Hiligaynon is illustrated below:

Table 3. Frequency of Translingual Practice per Language Subset

Language	Translingual Practice			
	Function			
	Common Word	Morphological Borrowing	Slogan	<i>f</i>
English-Hiligaynon	18	1	0	19
English-Filipino	13	4	4	21
			Total	40

Following English-Hiligaynon with 19 frequencies and English-Filipino with 21, the translingual practice occurring between these languages demonstrates the significant role of English in PHC. Notwithstanding the evidence of language accommodation through translingual practice, English hegemony in DOH-WVCHD’s multilingual communication practices is glaring and unavoidable. Here, English has an active relationship in the morphological and syntactic environments of predominantly Filipino and Hiligaynon statements. In multilingual contexts, translinguaging is celebrated because “[it] flattens the power hierarchies.”²⁷ However, Mendoza claims that “translinguaging has as much potential to exclude as well as include languages.”²⁸ Interrogating

²⁷Ofelia García, “Translanguaged TESOL in Transit,” *NYS TESOL Journal* 10, no. 1 (July 2023): 13, https://ofeliagarciaadotorg.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/tesol-trlng-garcia_v10_1.pdf.

²⁸Anna Mendoza, *Translinguaging and English as a Lingua Franca in*

the active relationship of English with Filipino and Hiligaynon, the meta-theme provides evidence to the concept called “selective translanguaging.” Drawing on Sah and Li’s work, selective translanguaging refers to the activation of English and another dominant language or official language in a communicative environment like English-medium instruction (EMI) classrooms.²⁹ Although the work focuses on EMI classrooms, the concept is also relevant in PHC as it examines how certain languages are activated or deactivated in communicative systems. In Translingual Practice, hegemony manifests in the morphological borrowing of the Hiligaynon word “*ma-feature*” and the Filipino word “*mag-isolate*,” as well as the mixing of codes in the Filipino clause “*Kumuha ng totoong impormasyon mula sa* (get real information from) valid sources” and the Hiligaynon clause “*ipasa ang inyo entries*” (submit your entries). In the context of the example words, the Hiligaynon inflectional morpheme “*ma-*,” meaning “to be,” and the Filipino inflectional morpheme “*mag-*,” meaning “to,” play a role in expressing the aspects of the roots “feature” and “isolate.” Whereas, in the context of the example clauses, English items are activated “naturally” as objects of the statements. Although the practice has been naturalized due to language ideologies, the embeddedness of English within the morphological and syntactic structures of Filipino and Hiligaynon is a symptom of English hegemony that stems from the communication practices promoted by the controlling domains as something normal. In contrast, Filipino and Hiligaynon show no evidence of code-mixing due to inactive interaction among Philippine languages.

Extending the discussion, Directive Communication deals with the implementation of policies and issuance of health protocols during the COVID-19 pandemic. The semantic and pragmatic dimensions of directive communication are often serious, straightforward, and urgent. Some of the examples are “Follow health protocols to avoid COVID-19”

the Plurilingual Classroom (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2023), 6, <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781800413443>.

²⁹Pramod K. Sah and Guofang Li, “Toward Linguistic Justice and Inclusion for Multilingual Learners: Implications of Selective Translanguaging in English-Medium Instruction Classrooms,” *Learning and Instruction* 92 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2024.101904>.

and “The public should not be complacent and also continuously adhere to the minimum public health standards to prevent the transmission of COVID-19.” The characteristics pointing to this type of communication are an ideological consequence of institutionalizing English as the language of governance in the Philippines. As such, Hiligaynon has four frequencies, Filipino has 13, and English has 30, as illustrated below:

Language	Directive Communication					<i>f</i>
	Advisory	Directive	Guidance	Interagency Communication	Recommendation	
Hiligaynon	0	1	3	0	0	4
Filipino	4	5	1	0	3	13
English	5	16	4	3	2	30
					Total	47

Table 4. Frequency of Directive Communication per Language Subset

The observable gap in frequency among these languages is correlational with the symbolic power they possess. Undeniably, English, Filipino, and Hiligaynon are stratifiable according to the functions they serve in controlling domains even though each language is equipped with linguistic elements necessary for expressing authority. If hierarchized, Hiligaynon occupies the lowest position, Filipino occupies the middle, and English occupies the highest. The evident language situation here proves that “language policies [are] continued [to be] largely unchanged into the postcolonial age.”³⁰

Likewise, Informative Communication is a type of communication that focuses on health updates about the COVID-19 pandemic and is divided into two subthemes: Technical Communication and General Health Communication. The first subtheme, Technical Communication, is concerned with scientific and institutional jargon that is sociolinguistically inaccessible to individuals with limited backgrounds in specialized fields. In the Philippines, English is deemed as intellectual and prestigious due to its primary role in teaching applied sciences, natural sciences, social sciences, and humanities. The DOH-WVCHD, as a medical and scientific institution in WV, utilizes the same language for technical communication. Examples for this subtheme include “genomic

³⁰Robert Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism Continued* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 57.

surveillance” and “genome sequencing.”

Language	Informative Communication (Technical Communication)				<i>f</i>
	Administrative	Epidemiological	Medical	Scientific	
Filipino	0	0	0	0	0
Hiligaynon	0	0	0	0	0
English	11	30	17	6	64
	Total				64

Table 5. Frequency of Informative Communication (Technical Communication) per Language Subset

As shown in the table above, Filipino and Hiligaynon have zero frequencies, while English has 64. At a surface level, the use of English in technical communication is a practical choice given that the majority of available knowledge on scientific and administrative affairs is spoken, written, and taught using the said language. Linguistically speaking, English has more lexical items that could easily describe observable phenomena or issue administrative details. Nonetheless, a possible explanation for this language reality stems from the marketed identity of English as the “language of development, modernity and scientific and technological advance.”³¹

In connection with Directive Communication (see Table 4) and Technical Communication (see Table 5), English hegemony is evident in the treatment of English as the language of intellect, power, and prestige, and this ideology corresponds to the notion of “common sense.” According to Gramsci, “‘common sense’... [is] the traditional popular conception of the world—what is unimaginatively called ‘instinct,’ although it too is in fact a primitive and elementary historical acquisition.”³² The controlling domains in postcolonial states have

³¹Robert Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 11.

³²Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 199.

accepted the commonsensical characterization of English as the superior language in education, science, and technology due to anecdotal and empirical evidence that supports the role of English in the social affairs of Outer Circle Countries (see Kachru's Three Concentric Circles).

Following the findings in both the Directive Communication and Technical Communication, the commonsensical characterization of English hegemony is observable in the example clause "Follow health protocols to avoid COVID-19" and the example word "genomic surveillance," respectively. The clause, which is an imperative statement, contains a verbal nucleus, "follow," that means "to accept as authority [or] obey,"³³ and the word refers to "the use of high-throughput sequencing tools to look at the genetic material of a pathogen."³⁴ With the frequent use of English in statements under Directive Communication and Technical Communication, it is arguable that considerable implications for public discourse may arise because the symbolic power possessed by English may prevent non-English-speaking individuals from participating in discourses that concern their welfare due to communicative gaps. The DOH-WVCHD positioned itself as an authoritative figure in WV that published and disseminated PHI to the public and other governing bodies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given that English dominates the multilingual communication practices of the DOH-WVCHD in both Directive Communication and Technical Communication, its dominance within the context of both the theme and subtheme discursively implies that English hegemony is evident and that its continued use reinforces its symbolic power that sustains power imbalances and hierarchies. Such a communication practice indirectly reinforces that English, as hypothesized earlier, is indeed positioned and treated as "the language of development, modernity, and scientific and technological advance,"³⁵

³³Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "follow." Accessed November 15, 2025, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/follow>.

³⁴Daniel M. Mami, Mariam Romba, and Mami Patrick, "The Surveillance in Infectious Disease Control Role of Genomic," *International Journal of Advanced Multidisciplinary Research and Studies* 5, no. 4 (2025): 1608, <https://www.multiresearchjournal.com/admin/uploads/archives/archive-1755929811.pdf>.

³⁵Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*, 11.

at least in the context of the data. This statement by Phillipson hence provides an explanation for the high frequency of English in Directive Communication and Technical Communication. Although English is capable of producing PHI that exhibits qualities of being advanced, the foundation of such an idea stems from capitalist and neoliberal institutions that use the language to advance their interests.

Moreover, Affective Communication is a type of communication that both informs the public and simultaneously creates emotional connections with them for a more effective delivery of PHI. This manifests in the lexical choice and syntactic framing of the DOH-WVCHD in transmitting information that evokes affect-induced messages, some of which are “Kudos to RHU Bingawan and to our fully vaccinated Mommy” and “Be the strength of our frontliners.” In these functions, however, there is an observable variation in frequency of use of the identified languages, as evidenced by the findings below.

Affective Communication									
Language	Function								
	Appeal	Assurance	Congratulation	Encouragement	Expression of Appreciation	Greeting	Invitation	Motivation	f
Hiligaynon	2	0	1	1	1	0	2	0	7
Filipino	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	3	7
English	3	9	4	4	1	2	5	1	29
								Total	43

Table 6. Frequency of Affective Communication per Language Subset

The strategy of communicating affectively is linked to local languages.^{36 37} In WV, Hiligaynon is deemed the closest language to the public as the regional lingua franca, and it is seconded by Filipino as the national lingua franca. At least in the context of the coded data, Hiligaynon and Filipino have equally low frequencies of seven, as opposed to 29 of English. The deliberate or inadvertent use of these languages shows compelling evidence of English hegemony, as well as a potential disconnect from using native languages to encourage

³⁶Qiang Shen, “Commentary: Directions in Language Planning from the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Multilingua* 39, no. 5 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2020-0133>.

³⁷Villanueva, “Eliminating Language Barriers.”

active participation and community engagement during the COVID-19 pandemic. This functional shift shows a sociological case of linguistic hierarchization. Here, English hegemony in supposed affect-based communication practices is reinforced by the cultural dimension—encompassing affective association with language—of Phillipson’s argument, saying, “English intrudes on all languages that it comes into contact with.”³⁸

Finally, the second subtheme, General Health Communication, as presented earlier, touches on COVID-19 health updates that are not as affective, directive, and technical as the previous themes but have equal importance to examine qualitatively. Examples include “As of date, 63,176 doses of Sinovac and 21,440 doses of Astrazeneca were allocated to Iloilo City” and “The WV-CHD has been in receipt of some of these complaints and is now coordinating with concerned medical center chiefs and heads of offices for clarification and the necessary course of action.” In the context of this subtheme, the specific languages are not readily apparent due to its general scope, unlike other themes with discernible characteristics.

Informative Communication (General Health Communication)				
Language	Function			
	Contest Updates	Health Updates	Institutional Updates	<i>f</i>
Filipino	1	0	0	1
Hiligaynon	5	0	0	5
English	9	2	3	14
			Total	20

Table 7. Frequency of Informative Communication (General Health Communication) per Language Subset

The findings above, where Filipino has one frequency, Hiligaynon has five, and English has 14, illustrate a similar gap in frequency count between English and Philippine languages. Such evidence reinforces English hegemony even in casual and descriptive manners of multilingual communication, proving that English prevails even in nonofficial domains. This may or may not indicate the notion of “English localization,”³⁹ as described by Pennycook. Nevertheless, the glaring details from the findings show that Affective Communication (see Table

³⁸Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*, 7.

³⁹Pennycook, *Language as a Local Practice*, 74.

6) and General Health Communication (see Table 7) exhibit signs of English hegemony. For the former, the example phrase “Kudos to RHU Bingawan and to our fully vaccinated Mommy” expresses warmth to the objects of the statement, whereas for the latter, the example clause “As of date, 63,176 doses of Sinovac and 21,440 doses of Astrazeneca were allocated to Iloilo City” describes an important update about vaccine allocation. In these examples, English hegemony manifests due to the primary use of English over local languages and its naturalized function in expressing affect-induced statements and general information about the COVID-19 pandemic.

Owing to the presented themes, the discussions exhibit *prima facie* evidence that English has largely occupied the linguistic space where English and Philippine languages actively interact with one another, which is especially reinforced by Translingual Practice. Introspectively, the use of English in Directive Communication and Informative Communication is normative due to its institutionalized status as one of the official languages. However, it is unforeseen that even in Affective Communication and General Health Communication, English remains the most used. Haugen asserts that language ecology is sociological, which refers to the “interaction [of a language] with the society in which it functions as an a medium of communication.”⁴⁰ The sociological dimension of language lies in how languages function as MOC. The findings agree with the position that local languages are integral for health communication, with some limitations due to the absence of Aklanon, Ati, Capiznon, Caluyanon, Kinaray-a, Malaynon, and Sulod. It is irrefutable, however, that English predominates the posts of the DOH-WVCHD, which is a consequence of its repetitive use for official communication. Like any other controlling domain, English hegemony has prevented the intellectualization of other languages to make them more functional in institutional affairs. In association with the communication practices of the controlling domains, Phillipson asserts that “the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and

⁴⁰Haugen, *The Ecology of Language*, 325.

other languages.”⁴¹

On this account, the DOH-WVCHD’s communication practices prompt a question on the sociolinguistic accessibility of PHI during the COVID-19 pandemic. Partida asserts that “the marker of healthcare quality lies in effective communication between patients and healthcare providers.”⁴² With the continued privileging of English, how could communication then be effective if there are linguistic barriers that hamper the delivery of crucial information, especially to non-English-speaking communities? Notwithstanding, this study recognizes the context behind the DOH-WVCHD’s language use and choice. An alternative perspective on the high occurrence of English originates from the unprecedented situations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Considering the speed of health developments in 2021, the DOH-WVCHD probably relied on English, which was the most available linguistic resource. Given that English is used regularly in official communication, this must have prompted the DOH-WVCHD to use the language in creating templates for different institutional correspondences. Supposing that this is the case, the dominance of English still necessitates scrutiny as to why the controlling domains utilize English in most of their communication practices. As for Filipino and Hiligaynon, their specific functions, in reference to the findings, are unclear due to the absence of explicit language policies that provide a framework as to how and when they will be used. This reality has been consistent with the studies of Legarde⁴³ in Zamboanga Peninsula Region and Alburo⁴⁴ in Valencia City, Bukidnon.

Following the study’s findings, where English is positioned by the controlling domains as “‘the language of God’..., ‘the language of reason, logic, and human rights’..., ‘the language of the superior ethno-national group’..., ‘the language of progress, modernity, and

⁴¹Phillipson, *Linguistic Imperialism*, 47.

⁴²Yolanda Partida, “Language and Health Care,” *Diabetes Spectrum* 25, no. 1 (2012): 19, <https://doi.org/10.2337/diaspect.25.1.19>.

⁴³Legarde, “Ethno-linguistic Struggles in Using English.”

⁴⁴Alburo, “Societal Language Dominance of COVID-19 Related Signs.”

national unity’..., or ‘simply as the language of wider currency in the country concerned’..., or in the world”⁴⁵ engenders a situation where official communications are automatically associated with English. For Irvine and Gal, associating English with intellect, power, and prestige is a case of iconization. Iconization is defined as the “transformation of the sign relationship between linguistic features (or varieties) and social images with which they are linked.”⁴⁶ In the findings, iconization manifests in the dominance of English lexicon, grammar, and register in the DOH-WVCHD’s posts. These linguistic features are consistent with the perception of English as an icon of national progress and global competitiveness. Accordingly, “Linguistic features that index social groups or activities appear to be iconic representations of them, as if a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group’s inherent nature or essence.”⁴⁷ That being said, the primary use of English by the DOH-WVCHD is a positioning of authority, especially during health crises. As a result, however, “English [substantially] pushes away other languages without necessarily killing them but curtails their usage qualitatively and quantitatively”⁴⁸ as English occupies the communicative functions that are ideally fulfilled by local languages. In this regard, the preference for utilizing languages in specific domains is systemic and institutional. Granted that English and Filipino are both the country’s official languages, English remains the *de facto* language utilized in the communication practices of the controlling domains due to the enduring influence of the American colonial period on language governance. Its results become more pronounced in the present, as seen in how the McDonaldization of English becomes ubiquitous in many countries,

⁴⁵Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, *Linguistic Genocide in Education—or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights?* (London: Routledge, 2000), 196, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410605191>.

⁴⁶Judith T. Irvine and Susan Gal, “Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation,” in *Regimes of Language: Ideologies, Politics, and Identities*, ed. Paul V. Kroskrity (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2000), 37.

⁴⁷Irvine and Gal, “Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation,” 37.

⁴⁸Alastair Pennycook, *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language* (London: Routledge, 2017), 14.

especially developing ones like the Philippines, to keep pace with rapid economic growth. McDonaldization refers to “the principles of the fast-food restaurant [that] are coming to dominate more and more sectors of American society as well as of the rest of the world.”⁴⁹ In relation to English, its rapid spread is not just as a means of communication but also as a means of capital accumulation. This explains why the Philippines continues to develop the already institutionalized role of English, especially by post-EDSA administrations. With minimal intervention through local languages, non-English-speaking communities are compelled by circumstance to learn English to access crucial PHI communicated in the said language.

Furthermore, in view of the controlling domains’ privileging of dominant languages, it is arguable that their communication practices indirectly shape the dichotomy between dominant and subordinate languages. This recurrent belief of dichotomizing languages demonstrates the semiotic process of fractal recursivity, which refers to “the projection of an opposition, salient at some level of relationship, onto some other level.”⁵⁰ Fractal recursivity occurs when social institutions create distinctions to maintain social hierarchies and legitimize the influence of the ruling class. Such a situation is facilitated by the influences of neoliberal market policies, which affect the economic base and cyclically shape the patterns of language use and choice of ideological superstructures. With all the discussions on English hegemony, the apparent consequence emerges in the erosion of the cultural fabric of disadvantaged communities. Non-English-speaking individuals, who account for 15.8 million Filipinos⁵¹ and who do not have direct access to the dominant languages, experience erasure, as their linguistic needs and representation are ignored. Irvine and Gal assert that “Erasure is the process in which ideology, in simplifying the sociolinguistic field, renders some persons or activities (or sociolinguistic phenomena) invisible.”⁵²

⁴⁹George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society: Into the Digital Age*, 9th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2019), 19.

⁵⁰Irvine and Gal, “Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation,” 38.

⁵¹Social Weather Stations, “Social Weather Report.”

⁵²Irvine and Gal, “Language Ideology and Linguistic Differentiation,” 38.

Over time, speakers of marginalized languages—that have not been specified in the findings—will struggle in protecting, preserving, and promoting their diverse and unique identities due to the intrusion of such languages in their cultures. It is integral for these communities to be educated in and through the language of governance to avoid abuses from the system that capitalizes on such languages. However, it is important to strike a balance to not disrupt the distinctiveness of the cultural contexts of these minority groups.

Conclusion

This study explored the ecological and ideological context of English hegemony in WV by examining the multilingual communication practices of the DOH-WVCHD. Specifically, it answers the questions, “What are the languages utilized by the DOH-WVCHD in its COVID-19 communication materials on Facebook from March to September 2021?” and “How does English hegemony manifest in these texts?” Following the results, it was found that the DOH-WVCHD utilized English, Filipino, and Hiligaynon in its PHI. This means that other languages in WV’s language ecology are absent, specifically Aklanon, Ati, Capiznon, Caluyanon, Kinaray-a, Malaynon, and Sulod. Across all themes, evidence of English hegemony is evident but unchallenged due to its naturalized appearance in the communication practices of the DOH-WVCHD. Despite the attempt to produce and disseminate translingual PHI using English, Filipino, and Hiligaynon, English remains the *de facto* language for official communication, which in turn perpetuates its dominant position in Western Visayan linguistic healthscape. As such, this situation speaks of unequal treatment of the abovementioned Philippine languages and illustrates the concealment of language ideologies—under the guise of institutionalized status—that sustains the dominance of English. Furthermore, the discussions align with the ongoing situation even in economically advantaged countries, like China, as evidenced by the study of Piller, Zhang, and Li.⁵³ With the detrimental effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, Shen recommends that language planners must approach the situation from the lens of language rights to ensure the recognition of the linguistic needs of minority

⁵³Piller, Zhang, and Li, “Linguistic Diversity in a Time of Crisis.”

populations.⁵⁴ While the DOH-WVCHD subscribes to a multilingual approach based on the study's findings, the context that drives the use and nonuse of languages in its public health materials points to a question of the politics of language. The Philippines, with its language policies and the lack thereof, shows an uncritical adoption of policies that are more favorable to the ruling class. Such an uncritical adoption stems from the idea of universalizing the use of dominant languages in delivering PHI. Moreover, the study's findings highlight linguistic issues that extend beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, where it catalyzed the revelation of longstanding problems that are continually neglected by the controlling domains seen in their continued privileging of English even in nonformal spheres of communication. Therefore, this study is a response to the lack of studies on the multilinguality of PHC during health crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, especially in regions like WV. By focusing on an understudied language ecology and combining the affordances of Haugen's Language Ecology as "sociological" and Gramsci's Cultural Hegemony, especially its concept of "common sense," this study expands the conversation on English hegemony in society, provides context to the privileging of English by the Philippines' controlling domains by tracing colonial roots, examines the dominance of English in the DOH-WVCHD's Facebook posts during pandemic months, and reveals how language and society are mutually influencing each other. Finally, in consideration of the study's narrow focus, it is recommended that further studies be conducted about the on-the-ground communication practices of the DOH-WVCHD due to its complex nature and the PHC and PHI of other regional offices of the DOH for more nuanced analyses of the country's linguistic healthscapes.

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⁵⁴Shen, "Commentary."

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