

“When You Won’t Miss the Country na Nagluwal Sayo”: Translanguaging as Literary and Linguistic Emancipation in Portraying Migrant Experiences in Romalyn Ante’s *Antiemetic for Homesickness*

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Abstract

Alfred Yuson¹ writes that one of the distinguishing characteristics of Filipino diasporic literature is that it is written in the English language, implying that English dominates narratives of diaspora and, by extension, subjugates the diasporic identity into succumbing to the language and sociocultural conditions that have constructed its power. This study surfaces the thematic affordances of translanguaging in the practice of depicting the OFW (Overseas Filipino Worker) experience in Philippine diasporic poetry. In a thematic analysis of selected poems from Romalyn Ante’s collection *Antiemetic for Homesickness*, this paper examines how translanguaging frames the role of language in themes relevant to migrant experiences. In Ante’s poems, migrant personas negotiate meanings in foreign experiences through their native language, and embrace the hybridity of their identity as they anchor themselves to their linguistic and cultural roots. Glossing and inserting Filipino words into parts that highlight the migrant’s ethnic culture and native memory alludes to a deliberate negotiation of identity in the liminal space of

¹Alfred A. Yuson, “Filipino Diasporic Literature,” in *Philippine English: Linguistic and Literary Perspectives*, ed. Ma. Lourdes S. Bautista and Kingsley Bolton (Hong Kong University Press, 2008), 338.

migration. Translanguaging in this regard becomes a way to articulate the identities and culture formed through what Homi Bhabha calls the “Third Space.”² Ultimately, this paper argues that translanguaging in Filipino migrant literature holds emancipatory potential against linguistic and subsequently, identity subjugation experienced in diaspora.

Keywords: migrant literature, third space, translanguaging, English, thematic analysis

²Homi K. Bhabha, “The Commitment to Theory,” in *The Location of Culture* (Routledge, 2004), 53.

Introduction

Filipino diasporic literature, Alfred Yuson writes, is made distinct by two things: being penned in the English language, and its potential to compete with, if not overpower, the literature “back home.”³ While these two characteristics are closely linked, the language aspect explains how the power dynamics between languages can affect how literature is created and perceived by writers and readers alike. An implication emerges—that the English language dominates in narratives of diaspora and, by extension, subjugates the diasporic identity into complicity with the language and sociocultural conditions that have constructed its power.

Within the Philippine context, the widespread pervasion of the English language into all aspects of society and culture could be traced back to the country’s colonial history with the United States. The wounds of colonization throb through the “cultural hegemony” that penetrates into the sociocultural reality of the colony.⁴ As proof of this hegemonic grasp, the colonial masters’ language not only becomes a means of communication that the subjugated population are forced to acculturate to, for it has also become a weapon utilized by the oppressors in order to control the voices and thought processes of the colonized with how they perceive the world around them. Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* argues for the compartmentalization of a colonial world that is “inhabited by two different species.”⁵ the dominating settler who pillages and conquers on behalf of their mother country, and the native who is exploited, plundered, and rendered no more than a replaceable cog in the colonial machine of oppressive progress, with their ancestral land ravaged into an endless bank of resources for “colonial mercantilism.”⁶ Because of such dynamics, Fanon writes that the native, who dreams of one day taking the place of the settler, is “envious.”⁷ The stratification of

³Alfred A. Yuson, “Filipino Diasporic Literature,” 338.

⁴Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 249.

⁵Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 40.

⁶Fanon, 50-52.

⁷Fanon, 39.

the colonial world is enabled by language, an icon of symbolic violence which determines the worth of a speaker based on their language use;⁸ the language of the settler is valorized and empowering, whereas the language of the native deems its speakers disenfranchised so as to assert the cultural supremacy of the colonizer in an attempt to justify their pillaging as attempts to impart their civilization upon the natives of a land they desire to claim as their own.

Renato Constantino famously writes about this social division in his critical essay “The Mis-education of the Filipino”; the English language has become a socially divisive and intellectualized medium of instruction, due to it being accessible only to a small group of privileged individuals.⁹ In turn, this mis-education, a product of colonial education valorizing English over native languages, reproduces diglossia, a phenomenon where there are at least two languages being spoken in a speech community that are used on a situational basis.¹⁰ This entails linguistic prestige, a notion of superiority attached to one language, while the others are associated with low social status.¹¹ Ruanni Tupas argues that the natives left in the wake of colonization have become complicit in replicating the same “colonial practices and ideologies”¹² that the Americans used in order to establish that using the English language is a signification of being elite, educated, and privileged. It is as though they have never actually left, for the oppressive language ideology that enabled acts of symbolic violence was inherited by the current elites who sit in power in the post-colonial society.

⁸Pierre Bourdieu, “The Economics of Linguistic Exchanges,” *Information (International Social Science Council)* 16, no. 6 (1977): 652.

⁹Renato Constantino, “The Mis-education of the Filipino,” *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 1, no. 1 (1970): 24-31.

¹⁰Charles A. Ferguson, “Diglossia,” *WORD* 15, no. 2 (1959): 325.

¹¹Ferguson, 329-330.

¹²Ruanni Tupas, “Entanglements of Colonialism, Social Class, and Unequal Englishes,” *Journal of Sociolinguistics* 23, no. 5 (2019): 534.

With all this discussion on how Filipino consciousness suffers in the wake of colonialism, one might then itch to ask, if these oppressive circumstances could be escaped by absconding the geographical configurations of the once subjugated motherland. Perhaps the answer lies in migrant literature writing. There, English claims the power to define experiences of overseas Filipino labor and subsequently, identity. It thus becomes imperative to examine where this power comes from, how it manifests, and what practices could be enacted in order to subvert the dynamics that further burgeon the dominating position of the English language in Philippine literature. Translanguaging, as this paper will ultimately argue, is one such practice that can play an important role in the emancipatory efforts of Philippine literature to decentralize the position of English in the craft of migrant poetry through highlighting the liminality of identity through hybridized language.

Negotiating Language Politics of the Philippine “Third Space”

In “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” a chapter of her book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, Chicana-Tejana author Gloria Anzaldúa asserts that language and identity are intertwined. She writes, “Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself.”¹³ The language a person speaks reveals their culture, history, and consciousness. However, if language and identity therefore are linked, what does that say about the bilingual individual who is displaced from their motherland, and forced to speak, write, and think in the dominant language of a foreign country? They are forced to choose between one over another—negotiate their position amidst the political configurations that govern the dynamics between their languages. With the connection of language and identification, it can also be inferred that language use is a concrete manifestation of the outcome of an attempt to bridge multiple identities for bilingual people. Anzaldúa foregrounds a poignant issue that diasporic bilinguals like her face: being accused of “speaking the oppressor’s language” and therefore throwing their heritage

¹³Gloria Anzaldúa, “How to Tame a Wild Tongue,” in *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1994), 39.

language (Spanish) under the bus whenever they use English.¹⁴ Beyond sociohistorical positionality, an individual's language use reveals the way in which they navigate the power relations and political configurations that are entangled with the different languages of their repertoire.

Those who live in the borderlands for as long as they can remember, configured by the history that they have inherited, both in terms of geographical configuration and consciousness, straddle different cultures and languages as a result of colonialism.¹⁵ The sociopolitical pressures have always attempted to pressure such residents of the borders to choose between Mexico and the United States, two societies that both hold prejudice against them, no matter what culture or language they acculturate to.¹⁶ Although this ambivalent positionality of such an area in the colonized consciousness is often treated as a transitory phase wherein the individual's negotiation ends up with choosing a culture or language over another, the Chicanos have been continuing to establish Chicano Spanish as a "border tongue" as part of their identity.¹⁷ In this sense, legitimizing the cultural identities of being a resident of the borderlands through language could be perceived as a way of resisting the pressures of having to acculturate to a society that cannot completely accept them. Anzaldúa phrases this as an attempt to "overcome the tradition of silence."¹⁸

The "borderlands" that Anzaldúa discusses could be considered as an example of the "Third Space" which Homi Bhabha describes.¹⁹ This Third Space of enunciation ensures that meaning-making is ambivalent in the sense that cultural knowledge is an "integrated, open, expanding

¹⁴Anzaldúa, 35.

¹⁵Anzaldúa, 42.

¹⁶Anzaldúa, 43.

¹⁷Anzaldúa, 35.

¹⁸Anzaldúa, 40.

¹⁹Bhabha, "The Commitment to Theory," 53.

code.”²⁰ It is conducive to the “formation of hybrid cultural identity of colonized people in their cultural encounter in colonial domination and inequality.”²¹ This in-between space is more than an area wherein two opposing cultural identities coexist; it is a place of flexible and creative meaning-making,²² wherein an individual negotiates both repulsion and desire in the midst of a world of inequalities during what Bhabha calls the “ongoing colonial present.”²³

Both the Third Space and the borderlands are in-between areas wherein the individual, who is burdened with a history of colonialism, reckons with their own identity and experiences in the wake of colonialism and its persisting aches. Another way through which such liminal spaces are concretized is through migration, as conceived by globalization and its promise of socioeconomic mobility for the price of displacement and alienation, is a way in which the colonial encounter persists in present day.²⁴ This falls in line with Ronald Esguerra’s claim that migration could be framed as “a product of colonial industrialization.”²⁵ In spaces of migration, it becomes apparent that the individual in diaspora is also subjected to pressures of linguistic acculturation due to circumstances granting a worker access to more job opportunities.

Filipinos, bearing the brunt of a history of colonization, also

²⁰Bhabha, 54.

²¹Nagendra Bhandari, “Homi K. Bhabha’s Third Space Theory and Cultural Identity Today: A Review,” *Prithvi Academic Journal*, (2022): 172, <https://www.nepjol.info/index.php/paj/article/view/45049>.

²²Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford, 2005): 355.

²³Bhabha, “Articulating the Archaic: Cultural Difference and Colonial Nonsense,” in *The Location of Culture*, (Routledge, 2004): 183.

²⁴Bhandari, “Homi K. Bhabha’s Third Space Theory and Cultural Identity Today: A Review,” 172.

²⁵Ronald Henessy C. Esguerra, “Linguistic Resistance and Counter-colonization in the Narratives of Philippine Short Stories in English,” *Asian Journal of English Language Studies* 9, (2021): 117.

endure a linguistic dilemma that is not very far removed from what Anzaldúa has been dreading. In the Philippines, English has proven and continues to be perceived as an asset in securing career opportunities, all the while being the language of the American colonizers and the socioeconomically privileged.²⁶ The data from a study conducted by Jason Chavez on the narratives of bilingual parents with regard to the importance of their children learning English, finds that many parents share the outlook that “learning English is necessary to create good career directions for their children.”²⁷ In line with such findings, Nicanor Guinto writes how English bestows upon a “guarantee of ease in the migration process despite cultural difference” to Filipino migrants.²⁸ This foreign language that the Americans has seemingly gifted the Filipinos has now become a prized feature that makes migrant workers *mabenta* or “sell well” in the international labor market and cater to the needs or demands of globalization. The utilitarian framing of language in terms of educational, career, and financial opportunity in the global market surfaces inequalities among English speakers across pluralities of the language, as well as those among speakers and non-speakers.

The bilingual OFW (Overseas Filipino Worker) is therefore inclined to privilege the colonial language in order to market themselves as desirable commodities. Constantino presents the bleak reality of how Filipinos have come to assimilate the English language: “In exchange for a smattering of English, we yielded our souls.”²⁹ Filipinos do not only desire the supposedly empowering Americanization promised by learning the English language, as caused by their previous relationship

²⁶Allan B. I. Bernardo, “McKinley’s Questionable Bequest: Over 100 Years of English in Philippine Education,” *World Englishes* 23, no. 1 (2004): 26.

²⁷Jason V. Chavez, “Narratives of Bilingual Parents on the Real-life Use of English Language: Materials for English Language Teaching Curriculum,” *Arab World English Journal* 13, no. 3 (2022): 335, <https://awej.org/narratives-of-bilingual-parents-on-the-real-life-use-of-english-language-materials-for-english-language-teaching-curriculum>.

²⁸Nicanor Guinto, “Lived Experiences of Unequal Englishes of Filipino Domestic Workers in Hong Kong,” *International Journal for Research in Education* 47, no. 2 (2023): 18, <http://doi.org/10.36771/ijre.47.7.23>.

²⁹Renato Constantino, “The Mis-education of the Filipino,” 23.

as native and settler. The imperative to assimilate it is also motivated by socioeconomic mobility afforded by the machinations of globalization. Not only does migration demand the physical, bodily sacrifices of Filipinos who wish for career opportunities that the Philippines cannot grant them, for part of the price to pay for such opportunities is the soul—the mutation, if not loss, of the Filipino identity, as they traverse the alienating, foreign environment of their work.

Migrants were born, raised, and have grown up within the sociopolitical configurations of the Philippines when they heeded the call for job opportunities abroad. It is one thing to sow Philippine mango seeds in foreign soil, but uprooting a grown tree and planting it in unfamiliar grounds tells a wholly different story of acculturation.

Mapping the Philippine Third Space through Translanguaging in Diasporic Literature

Usually framed as the loss of identity as one succumbs to the circumstances of the new landscapes that they are exposed to, the brutal process of acculturation has become a theme in literary works that revolve around the experiences of OFWs, such as Fatima Lim-Wilson's *Crossing the Snow Bridge* (1995). However, a withstanding concern here is that Filipino diasporic literature, which covers the experiences of migrants, is predominantly written in English.³⁰ Even in literature, Filipino thought processes are still dictated by the colonial language, which might now be more aptly dubbed as the coveted language of globalization.

However, Esguerra posits that literature penned by Filipino migrant writers that exhibit a high proficiency in a foreign language, English predominantly, leads to the birth of transnationalism and transculturalism³¹. After all, there is a cultural baggage that migrants carry with them wherever they are displaced; thus, the presence of this

³⁰Yuson, "Filipino Diasporic Literature," 338.

³¹Esguerra, "Linguistic Resistance and Counter-colonization in the Narratives of Philippine Short Stories in English," 117.

baggage, the “sociolinguistic histories and realities from the origin”³² to which they are always tethered to, becomes apparent whenever they write with or speak the English language. This syncretization of cultural and linguistic practices, as observed in the craft of migrant writing, conceives a new culture that is neither aboriginally pure nor foreign. Such conception, Esguerra writes, offers resistance to and emancipation from the hegemonic grasp of colonial culture and language.³³ Engaging in such new cultural practices is a way in which migrants, alongside others who traverse a Third Space (or the borderlands, in the context of Anzaldúa’s autoethnographic writings on the Chicana-Tejana experience), emancipate themselves from the long, withstanding colonial hegemony that to this day attempts to control their voices. In the context of migrant literature produced in the Philippines, a hybrid language practice decentralizes the position of English as the dominant language in the craft.

Here is where this paper proposes translanguaging as an intervention in Philippine diasporic literature. Translanguaging pertains to the bilingual practice of utilizing their linguistic repertoires in order to construct meanings most effectively;³⁴ moreover, it is also a way in which multilinguals negotiate their sociocultural identities as they explore the liminality of “culture, linguistic, and political repertoires.”³⁵ The practice of translanguaging transcends “conventional linguistic imaginaries,” for it offers “alternative modes of signification” that do not force the speaker to strictly conform to one verbal-linguistic convention.³⁶

³²Guinto, “Lived Experiences of Unequal Englishes of Filipino Domestic Workers in Hong Kong,” 18.

³³Esguerra, “Linguistic Resistance and Counter-colonization in the Narratives of Philippine Short Stories in English,” 117.

³⁴Ofelia García, *Bilingual Education in the 21st Century: A Global Perspective*, (Wiley-Blackwell, 2009): 45.

³⁵Seongryeong Yu, “Translanguaging, Multiliteracy, and Sociocultural Dynamics: Exploring Diasporic Identity and Belonging,” *Journal of Education, Language, and Ideology* 1, no. 2 (2023): 245, 10.5281/zenodo.10677264.

³⁶Li Wei and Tong King Lee, “Transpositioning: Translanguaging and the Liquidity of Identity,” *Applied Linguistics* 45, no. 5 (2024): 875, <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amad065>.

Unlike code-switching, with which one must be cautious so as not to use the two terms interchangeably, translanguaging goes beyond the practice of a back-and-forth between linguistic systems;³⁷ rather, García insists that it pertains to “the use of complex discursive practices that cannot be assigned to one or another code and that gives voice to oppressed and minoritized language practices.”³⁸ In a study conducted by Huayu Liu on translanguaging and code-switching practices in classrooms, one of the participants, a Japanese professor, differentiated code-switching and translanguaging by indicating that the former pertains to a practice that is performed when “a situation forces someone to limit their linguistic repertoire,” while the latter refers to a complete access to an individual’s repertoire³⁹ without the pressure of having to use or conform to just one language. Instead of treating different linguistic systems as separate, translanguaging renders the existing languages within a bilingual’s repertoire as different parts of a whole that exist without boundaries between each other. Through translanguaging, there is no longer any border that the bilingual has to traverse. Their linguistic repertoire is no longer compartmentalized; it is now construed by hybridization and liminality. Just like the Anzaldúa’s “border tongue,” translanguaging could then be a way to articulate, map out, and legitimize the Philippine Third Space.

Given the problems in migrant linguistic acculturation, translanguaging in literature which reflects their narratives affords a myriad of possibilities on presenting themes of ambivalence associated with migrant identity. The latter is construed from the liminality of exile—an alienation from both the motherland and the foreign soil on

³⁷Osmer Balam, “Beyond Differences and Similarities in Code-switching and Translanguaging Research,” *Belgian Journal of Linguistics* 35, (2021): 77, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/354797023_Beyond_Differences_and_Similarities_in_Code-switching_and_Translanguaging_Research

³⁸Ofelia García, “Spanish and Education” Global and Local Intersections,” *Review of Research in Education* 38, no. 1 (2014): 74.

³⁹Huayu Liu, “*Translanguaging or Code-switching?: A Case Study of Multilingual Activities in College-level Mandarin and Japanese Classrooms*” (Thesis, Bryn Mawr College, 2023), 30, <https://works.swarthmore.edu/theses/312/>.

which one toils. Translanguaging recognizes, if not legitimizes, these experiences and, by extension, identities. It liberates the writer from having to decide on using one language over the other. As a literary writing practice, translanguaging encourages these authors at the crossroads of identity to embrace the in-betweenness conceived by their experiences of migration.

In positing that translanguaging is a hybrid linguistic practice which could play a crucial role in the liberation of Philippine diasporic literature, this paper ultimately aims to contribute to the ongoing discourses that surround the dominance of English in literary practices that depict the liminality of the migrant experience and the brutality of acculturation. To anchor such argument on translanguaging, this study uncovers thematic affordances of translanguaging to Philippine poetry that depicts OFW experiences front and center. The corpus of text that will be examined will be coming from Romalyn Ante's collection *Antiemetic for Homesickness*, which makes use of translanguaging in articulating the experiences and constructed identities in the Third Space that is migration.

Research Questions

This study is anchored to the main research question, "How does translanguaging in Philippine diasporic literature that depicts OFW experiences serve as linguistic and literary emancipation?" In answering the main inquiry, this paper aims to address the following sub-questions as well:

What emerging themes of the OFW experience are afforded by poetry that employs translanguaging, as shown in Romalyn Ante's collection of poems titled *Antiemetic for Homesickness*?

How does translanguaging depict the Filipino migrant worker experience and identity formation?

Methodology: Thematic Analysis as an Inquiry into Translanguaging in Migrant Poetry

Through thematic analysis, this paper aims to uncover emerging

themes in using translinguaging to depict the experiences of the OFW in Ante's *Antiemetic for Homesickness*. Not only will this analysis probe prominent themes in Ante's poetry in depicting the lived struggles of Filipino migrant workers, it will also specifically focus on how the author uses language in order to frame such experiences from the perspective of the bilingual laborer in diaspora.

Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke describe thematic analysis as a "method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data."⁴⁰ While Braun and Clarke's discussions on thematic analysis as a methodology usually concern it with decoding recurring patterns in interviews or other qualitative data sets, this paper shall conduct such method on a literary analysis of *Antiemetic for Homesickness*, wherein selected poems from the collection are treated as data to be examined. The patterns that this analysis aims to surface are the literary themes which emerge from depicting migrant experiences through the hybridized linguistic practice of translinguaging.

The thematic analysis that this paper engages in will focus on surfacing literary themes, the same way that Wafa Salim Mahmood used it in his "Thematic Analysis in Two Poems Written by Dylan Thomas" (2021) and Ahmed Tahseen in his "The Thematic Analysis of Selected Poems by Ted Hughes" (2017). Instead of conducting Braun and Clarke's step-by-step analysis that consists of six phases ("familiarizing yourself with your data," "generating initial codes," "searching for themes," "reviewing themes," "defining and naming themes," and "producing the report"),⁴¹ this study only focuses on unearthing the themes of migrant poetry as framed through translinguaging.

However, it must be clarified that this analysis, by no means, offers a definitive reading of Ante's poems. Studies that employ thematic analysis always have to acknowledge the positionality and bias of the

⁴⁰Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, (2006): 79, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1191/1478088706qp0630a>.

⁴¹Braun and Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology," 87

researcher, as well as the idea that “meaning is not fixed within data.”⁴² At this point, the researcher’s position has already been established through the lens of translanguaging in Philippine diasporic literature as emancipatory in both the linguistic and literary lens. Instead of insisting that the following analysis is the correct way of reading the poems, this study mainly focuses on contributing to the ongoing linguistic discourse on Philippine literature that delves into experiences of migration by reading into the themes that emerge from Ante’s translingual poetry that characterizes the in-betweenness of Filipino displacement.

Thematic Affordances of Translanguaging to Migrant Poetry

In analyzing poems from *Antiemetic for Homesickness*, this study draws on how Ante deploys the bilingual practices of glossing and inserting. While glossing pertains to the author inserting lexical terms outside of the work’s dominant language and attempting to explain the meaning of such words to the reader who may not understand, inserting refers to the “author’s deliberate insertion of words or sentences” which construe their background.⁴³ Here, I find two prominent themes which emerge from translanguaging in Ante’s works: negotiating meaning through reminiscing experiences in one’s language and embracing the hybridization of one’s identity as construed by their native language(s) and English. Both themes show resistance to linguistic and identity subjugation by embracing the hybridization of their linguistic repertoires.

To Negotiate Meaning is to Reminisce Experiences through One’s Native Language

Translanguaging creates opportunities to draw from one’s sociolinguistic repertoire in meaning-making. Ante’s poetry depicts how

⁴² Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, “Toward Good Practice in Thematic Analysis: Avoiding Common Problems and Be(com)ing a *Knowing* Researcher,” *International Journal of Transgender Health* 24, no. 1 (2023): 2, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/26895269.2022.2129597>.

⁴³ Mohamed A. H. Ahmed, “Codes Across Languages: On the Translation of Literary Code-switching,” *Multilingua* 37, no. 5 (2018): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2017-0060>.

Filipino migrant workers make sense of their experiences in foreign soil by alluding to memories rooted in native language and culture. In the poem “Respecting the Nunò,”⁴⁴ the nurse persona recounts an experience with their patient who reminds them of their grandfather. Here, it can be observed how the speaker seemingly makes meaning of this interaction through something that their grandfather used to tell them whenever he wanted to spend time together. Ante writes,

He called to me, *Kape tayo*. Come,
sit with me. I sit
by my patient’s bedside and find
a fraction of what I’ve lost⁴⁵

Here, Ante performs an insertion through the Filipino invitation “*kape tayo*”, which translates into English as “let’s have coffee together.” This was noticeably left untranslated in the poem, and was rather followed by “Come, sit with me,” or a prompt to spend time with each other. The persona expresses their attempt to make sense of their experience though reminiscing something that their grandfather says in Filipino, their native language. “*Kape tayo*” would obviously not be something that an old British person would typically say as an invitation; yet, the persona projects the image of their *lolo*, a family member, to a stranger.

In the Philippines, according to a study conducted by Bryan Kim C. Dajero et al., spending time with each other over coffee serves an intimate meaning in the sense of social interactions which foster human connection.⁴⁶ Dajero et al.’s research finds that the caffeinated beverage is consumed for reasons beyond relaxation and stress management, for “coffee-centered interactions contribute to a sense of belonging” as well;

⁴⁴Romalyn Ante, “Respecting the Nunò,” in *Antiemetic for Homesickness* (Vintage, 2020), 60.

⁴⁵Ante, 60.

⁴⁶Bryan Kim C. Dajero, et al., “Coffee Culture and Mental Health: A Qualitative Exploration of Perceptions and Experiences of Coffee Enthusiast,” *Asia Pacific Journal of Educational Technologies, Psychology, and Social Sciences* 1, no. 1 (2025): 14, <https://ijmshe.com/index.php/apjetps/article/view/100>.

it builds a community of support.⁴⁷ This is to say that coffee, as well as the act of bonding over such beverage, taps into social dimensions of both bridging and bolstering relationships. This adds another layer of understanding to Ante deliberately using the Filipino invitation “*Kape tayo*” in making meaning out of the interaction with a patient. This shows how the migrant persona seeks out human connections and makes meaning in such attempts through culturally and linguistically familiar imageries such as sharing coffee with each other. Despite the fact that they are in a foreign land, the way in which they actively seek out social interactions is still very much tethered to Filipino culture. Showing that the migrant’s way of processing the interaction through the native language could be perceived as an assertion of the speaker’s identity despite pressures of acculturation abroad.

Ante’s “Ode to a Pot Noodle”⁴⁸ also reflects a recollection of, and even longing for, home. Here, the persona, a nurse working a long shift, recalls the *bulalo* their family shares while they look at the pot noodle, a convenient instant-cook meal that is readily available during breaktime, which could be cut short at any time the emergency bell calls for their service. While looking at the instant noodles, they recall a rather contrasting memory by thinking of the *bulalo*, a meal that they associate not only with an intricate cooking process, but also with the family of the persona gathering together to share a meal. Ante writes,

Garlics are chopped, peppercorns are cracked
and the shadows of my *pamilya* ripple at the *mesa*.

I smile at their unflavored conversations,
how they slurp marrow from shanks of *bulalo* bones,⁴⁹

Yet again, Ante makes use of insertion in order to depict

⁴⁷Dajero, et al., 15-16.

⁴⁸Ante, “Ode to a Pot Noodle,” in *Antiemetic for Homesickness* (Vintage, 2020), 69.

⁴⁹Ante, 69.

culturally significant details of the speaker's background: their family (*pamilya*), where they eat (*mesa*), as well as what food they partake in (*bulalo*). Ante's choice to use "*pamilya*", "*mesa*", and "*bulalo*" instead of translating such words into English (or in the case of *bulalo*, explaining what it is) reads to be a staunch assertion of both the linguistic and cultural tethering of such memories: whom they are spent with, as well as the site for such experiences.

In the Filipino familial culture, meal times are not only perceived as designated parts of the day in which a person eats. It is a sacred ritual wherein the family, despite each member being busy with their own work or chore, can come together and socialize with each other over food⁵⁰. Similar to how human connections and relationships are built and maintained over coffee, meal times also encourage familial interactions at the dining table. The conversations might be "unflavored," as the persona describes, but it is those interactions that ultimately matter—the fact that family members have put aside whatever they had been doing, and are gathering together in sharing a meal in each other's company.

In the case of Ante's poem "Ode to a Pot Noodle," the speaker's reality poses a different image: instead of enjoying the company of family through a leisurely enjoyed meal, they are stuck alone in an alienating labor condition where her job micromanages her routine. The instant pot noodle appears to be a poor imitation of the carefully prepared *bulalo* that the persona used to enjoy with their *pamilya*. The migrant worker eating the instant meal alone also portrays a parallel against how they used to enjoy their meals back at home, with the comforting presence of their family. Ultimately, the speaker creates meaning out of an instance of isolation by contrasting it with a memory tied to their family and cultural values back at home.

In both "Respecting the Nunò" and "Ode to a Pot Noodle," the migrant persona's recollections are not only instances of looking back on

⁵⁰Aaron Negrillo, "Kumain Na Tayo! Exploring the Role of Food in Communicating Tradition and Instilling Familial Values," (Thesis, Southern Adventist University, 2019), 16, https://knowledge.e.southern.edu/jour_studentresearch/1.

familiar experiences in order to make meaning out of foreign ones, they are also indicators of homesickness. The idea of home in diaspora brings up two conflicting notions with Filipinos and English speakers; in an English proverb, home is “where you hang your hat,” meaning that home could refer to a physical space.⁵¹ For the migrant worker who might be a domestic helper, their home would pertain to the house of their employer. On the other hand, home could also refer to the place “where your heart is,” which is associated with affect and emotion relating to a person’s loved ones.⁵² These ideas of home are entangled with the realities of migration and diaspora. Homesickness in Ante’s poetry is characterized by the speakers’ reminiscing of fond memories from their native land in order to come to terms with their experienced alienation in a state of exile. This longing for home and familiarity then suggests that Ante’s perception of home is anchored to the geographical configuration of the migrant worker’s motherland, the Philippines.

However, there is also the argument, as proposed by Kenneth Parker, that writers in exile are more at home within the liminality of displacement because home for the writer is where one “finds a refuge, a space in which to find satisfaction with the task of writing.”⁵³ For Parker, the notion of home for the individual in diaspora is neither defined by the physical space where one works nor tied to the native land in which they were born. Home is an area of in-betweenness where the displaced writer finds enough satisfaction in, to articulate their experiences. In line with this, the position from which Ante writes, in displacement, could still be considered a home. It is a place that could be mapped out not only by negotiating foreign encounters through memories tethered to one’s native land and culture, but also by doing so through translanguaging when articulating such recollections. Perhaps, there is where the satisfaction that Parker is talking about—coming to terms with one’s displacement by writing about such experiences. Ante’s poetry could also be interpreted

⁵¹Nicole Constable, “At Home but Not at Home: Filipina Narratives of Ambivalent Returns,” *Cultural Anthropology* 14, no. 2 (1999): 206.

⁵²Constable, 206.

⁵³Kenneth Parker, “Home is Where the Heart... Lies,” *Transition*, no. 59 (1993): 67.

through the idea that they construct this notion of a new home in exile, all the while refusing to acculturate to foreign, alienating circumstances by insisting on using both Filipino and English in her writing to effectively articulate the in-betweenness of the migrant consciousness.

That said, translanguaging goes beyond concretizing these tensions in liminality. As shown in Ante's poems, the insistence on using Filipino terms in moments of recollection could be read as reminders of one's culture—an active resistance against forgetting one's roots through language. The persona reminds themselves, as well as the imagined bilingual Filipino reader, to look back on their culturally tethered experiences and how such memories will always influence and shape the way in which they construct meaning even in displacement.

The Migrant's Identity is Construed by English and their Native Language(s)

As it prioritizes the effectiveness of communicating ideas using the individual's linguistic repertoire,⁵⁴ translanguaging embraces the untranslatability of words closely bound to the diasporic individual's culture. Instead of making one choose an identity over the other, translanguaging in Ante's poetry ultimately allows the poems themselves to become a transitional space that concretizes the hybrid identity built on the diasporic narrative being expressed.

The collection's titular poem "Antiemetic for Homesickness" tackles the migrant experience of coming to terms with the idea of coping with missing their homeland. The persona reprimands the addressee, which could also be inferred as the speaker themselves—about doing everything they can to find traces of their homeland in a different country. Moreover, it also touches upon the concept of an individual looking back on their ethnic roots through their native language. In the first stanza of the poem, Ante writes:

⁵⁴Yu, "Translanguaging, Multiliteracy, and Sociocultural Dynamics: Exploring Diasporic Identity and Belonging," 245.

A day will come when you won't miss
 the country *na nagluwal sa 'yo*.
 You'll walk on gritted streets, light snow
 shawling you like a mother's warmth.⁵⁵

One of the noticeable things in the excerpt is the imagery of the country as a mother, someone who gives birth (as indicated by the part “*na nagluwal sayo*” which translates into English as “that gave birth to you”). On one hand, there is the Filipino migrant’s “biological” mother country that gave birth to them, given that they are likely born and raised in the Philippines. Meanwhile, there is also another foreign country, where it snows, that will take in the displaced Filipino migrant worker as a stepmother or foster mother would.

The tone of the first two lines can come off as reprimanding, as though it were coming from a person comforting someone by saying that they will get over whatever it is that they are lamenting over. In the case of this poem, the persona gives the impression of someone who is trying to console another, or perhaps themselves, over their longing for their native land by saying that the feelings of lamentation will come to pass. However, attention must be drawn to the way in which translanguaging is employed in that stanza as a way to contrast the ways in which countries can be akin to mothers. Refusing to translate the phrase “*na nagluwal sayo*” from Filipino, Ante alludes to the Philippines as the country that the migrant in diaspora will always have as a biological, ethnically-related mother. On the other hand, the country where snow falls from the sky can only be *like* a mother—it can only attempt to replicate a mother’s warmth, Ante reminding the addressee of the poem that the new country will never become the mother of the migrant Filipino in the way that their homeland is.

The ethnic configuration of one’s identity is portrayed in Ante’s poem as something that one cannot completely deny, despite living in displacement. The Philippines will always be where Filipino migrant workers are *iniluwal* and perhaps one day, the persona reassures, that

⁵⁵Ante, “Antiemetic for Homesickness,” in *Antiemetic for Homesickness* (Vintage, 2020), 73.

they will no longer lament their diaspora in hopes that they can find a mother's warmth in their new country. This is in no way, an urge to turn back on one's motherland. In fact, Ante once again uses translanguaging as a reminder of one's cultural and linguistic roots so as to subvert the possibility of forgetfulness and loss of identity.

In another poem, "*Gunita*,"⁵⁶ Ante writes, "Someone once said: the best way to convince others of your truth is to wipe away their *Gunita* (stylized in *Baybayin*), their memory/ No matter how far I've travelled, I can't recall the path back to my village". Ante's "*Gunita*" makes use of glossing instead of insertion, making the word "*gunita*" or memory read as though the persona is not only explaining what it means, but is also trying to remind themselves of what it is. This poem highlights the epistemic privilege afforded by the colonial language; wiping out one's *gunita* is framed as a violent colonial strategy in erasing one's history and culture anchored to the individual's identity.

In this regard, the colonized migrant, who travels far from their "village," or motherland, becomes prone to forgetting their way back, for whatever grounds them back to their roots has been erased from their memory through language. Yet, Ante still asserts that *gunita* be written not only in Filipino, but in *Baybayin*. The persona, despite everything, still holds onto their history, culture, and language that they have left from their native roots. As Ante writes from this perspective,

"Once, an explorer set foot on our land and clothed the *patik* patterns tattooed on my ancestors' torsos...

Suppose our memory has not been as hollow as bamboo.

My grandfather once said: anyone who tells a story is robbed.

I navigate a blank page with my pen. I will retrieve our *gunita* (stylized in *Baybayin*)"⁵⁷

⁵⁶Romalyn Ante, "Gunita," in *Antiemetic for Homesickness* (Vintage, 2020), 45.

⁵⁷Ante, 45.

Alongside the stylized *gunita*, the passage exhibits an insertion of the word *patik*, a culturally specific term which pertains to particular patterns in precolonial Filipino clothing. This exhibits the refusal to overwrite the cultural significance of such terms through translation. Writing affords the victim of colonization an opportunity to reclaim their memory and subsequently, identity. Recording these experiences through literature, however, also acknowledges that colonization has become part of one's history and identity. Rizwan Akhtar argues that colonial and postcolonial discourses of remembering and refusing to forget empower the indigenous individual by preserving "their ways of remembrance."⁵⁸

Ultimately, for the diasporic individual, acknowledging their own longing for home through negotiating foreign experiences with familiar, culturally and linguistically rooted memories present efforts against the subjugation of their identities. Migrant literature therefore becomes a site of resistance to the pressures of acculturation. These depict migrant workers as people who rest in a position of unease in between two identities—one rooted in their native background, and the other, construed by need. These sensibilities of in-betweenness within the migrant experiences, as shown in Ante's poetry, could be articulated through translanguaging.

Conclusion

Resisting the dominance of the English language in Filipinos' diasporic writing, translanguaging takes into account the intersectionality and pluralities of meanings through languages and culture. It veers away from the false dichotomy that forces the migrant narratives, experiences, and identity to be framed by either English or their native language. By incorporating the translanguaging practice in writing migrant literature, writers such as Romalyn Ante afford not only the recognition, but an assertion and legitimization of the OFW's hybrid identity as construed in the liminal space of migration. The use of Filipino words and phrases in referring to culturally specific terms, as well as sentiments of looking back on one's native roots could be interpreted as a defiant stance against

⁵⁸Rizwan Akhtar, "Counteractive Strategies in Colonial and Postcolonial Narratives of Memory: Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Anita Desai's *Clear Light of Day*," *Social Transformations Journal of the Global South* 1, no. 1 (2013): 66, <https://doi.org/10.13185/2799-015X.1030>.

the pressures to conform to a single cultural and linguistic identity.

In the depiction of diasporic experiences, translanguaging decentralizes English in the craft of migrant literature—it is emancipatory both in the linguistic and literary sense. For the individual in diaspora, meaning is no longer restricted to the limits of one language, for it extends to a myriad of social circumstances that have configured their positionality in a globalized world.⁵⁹ Translanguaging legitimizes and gives shape to the struggles of migration, what is gained and what is lost in liminality, and embraces how meaning cannot be confined within the parameters of a dominating colonial language.

Analyzing how translanguaging resists such linguistic dominance in Filipino diasporic literature also brings up further questions with the intended audiences or readership of such works. On the one hand, refusing to translate or even explain Filipino terms into English could be perceived as a manifestation of the author's assumption that the reader is someone who does not need such terms to be translated. However, in an interview with Alice Hiller where she talks about her collection *Antiemetic for Homesickness*, Ante proclaims:

Migrant nurses exist. We do exist in this world. But somehow we are not known and what puzzles me is why is the United Kingdom or the West so dependent on a sector of people that has so little voice, and that has never been heard of. And this is the reason why I wrote this [*Antiemetic for Homesickness*]. To really show them not only the physical place where we came from, but also to show them our narrative, what propels us to do this.⁶⁰

⁵⁹Yu, "Translanguaging, Multiliteracy, and Sociocultural Dynamics: Exploring Diasporic Identity and Belonging," 245.

⁶⁰Romalyn Ante, "'Unfamiliarity, the State of Being Unknown, is Not the Same as Non-existence. Migrant Nurses Exist. We Do Exist in This World. But Somehow We Are Not Known.'"—Romalyn Ante and Pascale Petite Perform and Speak With Alice Hiller about the Work Witness in Their New Collections, *Antiemetic for Homesickness* and *Tiger Girl*," interviewed by Alice Hiller, *Alice Hiller*, January 22, 2021, <https://alicehiller.info/2021/01/22/unfamiliarity-the-state-of-being-unknown-is-not-the-same-as-non-existence-migrant-nurses-exist-we-do-exist-in-this-world-but-somehow-we-are-not-known-romalyn-ante-and/>.

Beyond the Filipino readership of her works, Ante also dares to open a dialogue with foreign audiences of her work. In doing so, she amplifies the voices of migrant workers like herself to the world, all the while refusing to compromise the cultural integrity ingrained in the Filipino words that she refuses to translate. Similar to Anzaldúa, Ante's assertion of her positionality through a hybridized linguistic practice, is an attempt to "overcome the tradition of silence"⁶¹ in the borderlands of the migrant experience in Filipino diasporic literature.

⁶¹Anzaldúa, "How to Tame a Wild Tongue," 40.

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