



THE LANGUAGE THAT CONFOUNDS US

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In my country, it's not uncommon for people to alternate between English and Filipino to express themselves. Although it can be perplexing to hear people using words in two different languages within the same sentence (which had originally been attributed to college girls studying in exclusive schools in Manila), many people nowadays have become quite comfortable in the practice of doing just that. Yes, many of us have learned to express ourselves in multiple languages, sometimes even in out-of-this-world languages of communication we call "swardspeak" or "textspeak". Frankly speaking, such unusual languages of communication are still Greek to me despite the fact that they can be very amusing at specific points.

I myself have found a certain fascination with the way texting has changed the way we communicate. We shorten our text messages using acronyms. There's even a website dedicated to internet slang, for goodness' sake. There was a time when LOL was considered rude and fresh in my country, but nowadays it just signifies extreme mirth. WKYP looks like the call sign of a radio station to me, but it has meant "Will Keep You Posted" to many people nowadays.

Why can't our languages be short enough as they are? What many of us have overlooked is the fact that we seldom use verbal language nowadays to communicate our thoughts. Instead of exchanging snail mail letters, we exchange emails. We no longer find it comfortable to speak on the phone unless it's for an emergency. We just send text messages, and goodness knows how chock full they can be with abbreviations and stuff like that. I reprimand my children when they just nod their heads in assent to what I say. I tell them that they were given tongues to say Yes or No. What's even more exasperating in some cases is how they nod or shake their heads even when we are beyond seeing distance of each other. Then I have to repeat myself to check if they're still where I think they are and whether they have been listening to me at all.

I use language to inject certain feelings in the way I want to be understood. For instance, my children know that I am happy when I add "...my child" to punctuate my sentences. But when they hear their names at the end of my sentences, they know I am either displeased or angry about something they did. In our day-to-day interactions, let us not forget the essential things that language needs to do: to communicate as well as make people aware of our thoughts and feelings about things in general. Once language fails to make others see what we want them to see, all it becomes is a jumbled mash-up of letters and sounds that don't really mean a thing.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. What are the purposes of language to you?
2. When can language become confusing? Elaborate on your answer/s.
3. Why is language important?
4. Why do people learn a second language?
5. How can we become effective language users? Be as specific as needed.