

# Opening the Gates

## A Case for Philippine Englishes

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*28 September 2024 | 1:00 PM – 4:00 PM*  
*Online via Zoom*



UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINES  
CENTER FOR  
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STUDIES

A black and white photograph of a classroom. In the foreground, several young students are seated at their desks, looking towards the camera. In the background, a male teacher stands near a chalkboard. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent dark grey rectangle containing the event title and details.

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"Filipino students and American teacher Mary Scott Cole, Palo, Leyte, Philippines, 1902"

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## Exploring Methods to Decolonize English Studies



*Janice Roman-Tamesis and Marie Aubrey Villaceran*

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Exploring Methods to Decolonize English Studies



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Policy Brief  
2024-03

■ DECOLONIAL STUDIES PROGRAM

## Integrating Multiliteracies into Philippine Education for a More Informed Society<sup>1</sup>

*Janice Roman-Tamesis<sup>2</sup> and Prof. Frances Antoinette C. Cruz<sup>3</sup>*

The digital age, marked by the dominance of social media and technological advancements like immersive and interactive artificial intelligence (AI) tools, necessitates a paradigm shift in education. Equipping students with multiliteracies, including visual, digital, and critical skills, extends beyond traditional reading and writing proficiency without abandoning these foundational elements. This approach fosters adaptable communication in the digital landscape. It empowers students to analyze, create, and communicate effectively in a self-directed learning environment through diverse forms like images, videos, and online content. It acknowledges the spectrum of texts we encounter, each requiring specific literacy skills for comprehension: written texts, visual texts (photos, infographics), digital texts (websites, social media), multimedia texts (combined elements), and oral texts (speeches, podcasts).

In researching materials and reading texts, integrating multiliteracies provides individuals with a broader competency set critical for navigating the complexities of the interconnected world through effective communication and critical thinking (Tsalan 2023, 354-63). This approach, when applied in digital media use, facilitates responsible online behavior, combats misinformation, and fosters meaningful participation in the globalized world.

However, the Philippines faces challenges in achieving this goal. Consistent low reading comprehension scores in the Program for International Student Assessment

<sup>1</sup> This policy brief is derived from an online workshop conducted by the Decolonial Studies Program (DSP) of the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (CIDS) on October 23 and 24, 2023, with the theme "Literacies and Digital Humanities." This policy brief also cites discussions from the forthcoming discussion paper titled "Philippine Identities and Digital Humanities in the Age of Machines, Social Media, and Artificial Intelligence."

<sup>2</sup> Janice Roman-Tamesis ([jroman@up.edu.ph](mailto:jroman@up.edu.ph)) is a full-time faculty member of the Broadcasting, Communication, Journalism, and Multimedia Arts (BCJMA) Department at Lyceum of the Philippines University, Manila. She is presently a Ph.D. in Communication student at the University of the Philippines Diliman.

<sup>3</sup> Prof. Frances Antoinette C. Cruz ([fcruz@up.edu.ph](mailto:fcruz@up.edu.ph)) is an Assistant Professor in the Department of European Languages at the University of the Philippines Diliman. She also serves as Co-Chairman of the Decolonial Studies Program.

Integrating Multiliteracies into Philippine Education for a More Informed Society

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## About the Proceedings

The University of the Philippines Center of Integrative and Development Studies (UP CIDS) Decolonial Studies Program (DSP) organized a roundtable discussion, “Opening the Gates: A Case for Philippine Englishes,” on 28 September 2024 via Zoom.

This event is the third roundtable discussion in a series of conversations under the Decolonizing English Studies Program of the DSP. So far, there have been two roundtable discussions under the Decolonizing English Studies Program: “Exploring Methods for Decolonizing English Studies” (2019) and “Decolonizing English Studies through Affect” (2023).

## A Concept Note

This roundtable discussion seeks to expand the conversation on English as it is used, interpreted, taught, and imagined in the Philippines. Using the field of English Studies as a frame of reference, it explores the pluralities and multiplicities of English, moving from English’ to ‘Englishes’. As such, Englishes are practiced, performed, and studied across the country. It also situates the different Englishes in their own complex and layered contexts along broader structures of power, current language policies, and the country’s colonial history.

The roundtable aims to decenter discussion by focusing on the state of English Studies in the regions from the perspectives of the regions. Moving the roundtable away from the center allows for a more on-the-ground and nuanced investigation of English Studies and opens the gates for alternative, and hopefully decolonized and decolonizing, understandings, framings, and practices of English/es and English Studies.





# Opening Remarks

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*Aileen O. Salonga, Ph.D.*

*Professor, Department of English and Comparative Literature  
UP Diliman*

Dr. Aileen O. Salonga delivered the opening remarks for the roundtable discussion (RTD), which is part of a series of conversations under the Decolonizing English Studies Program of the Decolonial Studies Program (DSP) of the UP CIDS. Dr. Salonga noted the past two RTDs in 2018<sup>1</sup> and 2023.

She explained that the current roundtable titled “Opening the Gates: A Case For Philippine Englishes” “seeks to expand the conversation on English as it is used, interpreted, thought, and imagined in the Philippines.” With English studies as a frame of reference, the discussion explores the pluralities and multiplicities of moving from “English” to “Englishes”. Dr. Salonga further noted that the roundtable aims to decenter the discussion, focusing on the state of English studies in the regions from the perspectives of the regions. Moving away from the center—Manila—allows for a more nuanced investigation of English studies and opens the gates for alternative and, hopefully, decolonized and decolonizing understandings, framings, and practices of Englishes and English studies.

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<sup>1</sup> The first roundtable discussion by the Decolonizing English Studies program entitled “Exploring Methods for Decolonizing English Studies” was in 2019.



# The Speakers

Asst. Prof. Grace M. Saqueton of the Department of English and Comparative Literature, UP Diliman introduced the five speakers. The speakers included:

1. **Dr. Jocelyn Bartolata** graduated from the University of the Philippines with a degree in MA in English Studies: Language in 2020. Prior to this, she did research on institutional programs and policies on curriculum, industry, and blended learning. During the pandemic, she continued her work on technology, enhanced teaching and learning. She is presently working on industry profiling and communication skills from the employers' perspective, which is an effort for preparing future-ready graduates. Currently, she is also the Chair of the English Language Department of Bicol University Philippines.
2. **Dr. Venus Papilota Diaz** finished her PhD in English Studies: Language at the University of the Philippines – Diliman and published research in Forensic Linguistics and Language and Gender studies. In collaboration with the West Visayas State University Gender and Development Program, the URDC, and Chameleon Association, she published a primer and spearheaded a regional conference in addressing rape and advocating [for] Women's and Children's rights. She co-authored *Purposive Communication* in 2020, a widely used textbook in the WVSU System. She now serves as a panel chair in the Socio-Behavioral Science Research Ethics Review Committee and a member of the WVSU Alohe for Asia Team, with a project funded by the European Union – Erasmus Mules.
3. **Dr. Nicanor L. Guinto** is a Professor III of Social Linguistics and Discourse Analysis and the Director of the Office of Research Services at Southern Luzon State University in Quezon Province. He earned his PhD in Language, Discourse, and Communication from the Joint Doctorate Program of the University of Hong Kong and King's College London. His work has appeared in journals such as *Linguistic Landscapes*, *Language in Society*, *Isla Review*, and the *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*. His advocacy, research interest, and publication center

on social linguistics and transnational labor, migration, linguistic ethnography, geo-semiotics, critical pedagogy, and media discourse.

4. **Dr. Ruth M. Tindaan** is an Associate Professor of English at the Department of Language, Literature, and the Arts, simultaneously serving as a faculty member of the PhD in Indigenous Studies Program of UP Baguio, lodged at the College of Social Sciences. She earned her PhD in Cultural Studies from Goldsmith University of London. Her research interests include representation of the Indigenous in media and literature, Indigenous Peoples in the diaspora, Indigenous language, documentation, and spatial analysis in the urban built environment. She served as Chairperson of the BLLA College, Secretary of the College of Arts and Communications, and Director of the Cordillera Studies Center.
5. **Farah Amy S. Virador** from Davao City teaches comparative literature and Philippine arts and culture at the University of the Philippines – Mindanao.

# Panelists' Responses

## Dr. Jocelyn Bartolata

*Chair, English Department, College of Arts and Letters,  
Bicol University*

### FIRST DISCUSSION QUESTION

*What is the state of the English Studies program in your university, and where do you want to go from there? What are your hopes and dreams for your English Studies Program? Why?*

Dr. Jocelyn Bartolata began her response by saying that, as she was new in the position of Chair of the English Department at Bicol University, the AB English Language program was also equally new, having been instituted and implemented in 2017 by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum No. 24. She then shared how, as a State University, Bicol University complies with the CHED Memorandum Order, thereby following its standards. What this means is that the curriculum is basically made for the English Department of Bicol University. However, she highlighted how there is ample space to innovate when it comes to the curriculum, despite the limitations of the CHED Memorandum Order. However, this leniency is only extended to adapting the curriculum to the institution's context as well as its vision and mission statement. She concluded that they have some kind of latitude when it comes to design. However, at the end of the day, it must be understood that their Certificate of Program Compliance and their accreditations largely depend on how well they complied with the standards set by the CHED Memorandum Order.

## *Curriculum Development*

Moving forward, Dr. Bartolata shared that, while others may say that their new curriculum is but a renaming of the AB English Program to AB English Language, the new curriculum is actually a total revamp of the old curriculum that started in 1987. She said this with conviction as a product of that old curriculum. Going back, she clarified that the old curriculum underwent revisions and enhancements throughout the 38 years. Even then, the old curriculum in all its versions was highly generalist in nature. This means that it focused more on a diverse skill set or wide range of knowledge, such as adaptability and flexibility. She then emphasized how this generalist nature is something that we have to take note of and that the curriculum highly stressed the importance of the so-called “Standard English” because that was the persistent demand of the industry. According to her, graduates, as specified in the old curriculum, got a better chance at employment, especially when their English is impeccable, acting as if it is a gauge of their intelligence or of their future performance in the workplace.

Having touched on the old curriculum, Dr. Bartolata then moved on to share her insights on the new curriculum. According to her, the new curriculum was a departure from the generalist nature of its predecessor. She stated that the new curriculum is reimagined, since the field has already started to talk more about multilingualism in depth, particularly the power dynamics of multiculturalism in Filipino societies. She observed that the different ways of knowing were absent in the old curriculum. Likewise, this new curriculum, according to her, also made recommendations on how best it is to be delivered. Regarding its contents, she noted that there was a heavier emphasis on creative thinking, critical thinking, and creative expression. She contended that, in a way, this is to liberate students for them to think for themselves and construct their own learning. In other words, she opined that they are now done with the rote memorization of the prescriptive and the a priori rules of the so-called “Standard English.” She claimed that, with the new curriculum, they have shifted instead to a more active process of learning.

Whether the new curriculum is succeeding or not, Dr. Bartolata could not really tell. She admitted that she only has a vague idea of the success of the new curriculum, as she and her colleagues are yet to have solid research to back up whatever evaluation they have. She shared how, at the moment,

she was struggling as Chair of the English Department, since, out of the 23 faculty members (regular, part-time, and affiliates), only two (including herself) graduated with what is said to be the most appropriate preparation, which is an MA in English Studies: Language. Because of this, she highlighted how these two faculty members have limited teaching loads on top of their other mandated functions. She shared how people who are in State Universities would understand that faculty members are also asked to do research extension apart from their teaching duties. So, for her, she only has six teaching loads, which is equivalent to one subject. She pointed out that she had gained an MA in English Studies but can only teach one subject in one semester. This, according to her, is the predicament that the English Department of Bicol University is facing at the moment.

Despite these, however, Dr. Bartolata reported that the English Department has been producing graduates, year in and year out. For example, they have produced around 70 graduates per year for the past three years, totaling 210 graduates. She trusted that the teachers gave their best despite their lack of appropriate educational preparation, reading materials, and learning resources, all of which are enjoyed by bigger universities. She observed how, as of the moment, none of their 210 graduates has come back in order to complain or rant about the performance of the English Department. According to her, this is a good sign of their progress.

### *Envisioning the Future of the English Department*

Pondering on the question “Where do we go from here?” Dr. Bartolata articulated her vision for the English Department of Bicol University:

The AB English Language Department, as a leader in fostering global perspective on language committed to inclusivity and diversity, adapting to evolving language trends and technology, and with access to state of the art requirement.

She described this vision as lofty, but that, in her department, they understand that when they say, “global perspective”, they all agree that language is both a cultural and an identity marker. In a way, they all talk about multilingualism as a social reality, and they all advocate for linguistic diversity. According to her, this is their agreement as a department, at least in principle.



Dr. Bartolata added that she was also quite aware that the part of the vision where it says “adapting to evolving language trends and technology” may, in a way, be inconsistent with the ideas of decolonization. According to her, this may even accelerate the growth of the more dominant language and overshadow the marginalized ones.

### *Decolonizing the Academe Takes Small Steps*

Dr. Bartolata reiterated, however, that she always practiced balance and considered the importance of taking small steps. According to her, decolonizing the academe, at least in the context of a small department like the English Department of Bicol University, is a radical change that cannot be done overnight. She mentioned that, from her current position, she cannot do this objective alone and right away. So, as a compromise, she only implements actionable plans, such as slowly changing the mindsets of stakeholders towards the development of the “global perspective” that the department envisions. To take as an example, the faculty members of the English Department try, as much as possible, to attend forums and discussions. Moreover, the department also invites people from other universities for the multiplicity of voices. The department, according to Dr. Bartolata, has been doing these small things, hoping to, when the time is right, be able to advocate for language policies that support the call for decolonization, both at the departmental and the university level.

### *Faculty Improvement*

Aside from this, Dr. Bartolata also shared how their department has also started to build a strong faculty complement. She noted that there are already three faculty members with strong credentials: The first two faculty members, including herself, graduated with the appropriate degree, while the third one is still in UP finishing their Ph.D. She shared that they are hoping to hire more teachers trained in the discipline or who would be willing to be more dynamic by reimagining their classrooms, i.e., to be more open in fostering open communication between students and teachers. She noted how one of their goals was to provide an anxiety-free environment where everybody feels accepted and supported. According to her, gone are the days when they would fine students for even speaking in Filipino or their mother tongue, because they cannot do much when it comes to changing the curriculum. She

mentioned that the Dean of the College of Arts and Letters has promised to help the department go over the course syllabi to ensure that the contents incorporate different voices and perspectives and that the course delivery allows students to be able to construct their own understanding of topics. She then emphasized how it is also crucial to ensure that the assessments found in the curriculum really measure the intended competencies that the department intends to measure. She opined that this was all about constructive alignment.

### ***Student Development***

Dr. Bartolata also shared that they are trying hard to be able to develop students who are self-regulated, able to police themselves, and able to enjoy learning independently. She pointed out that students are of the opinion that teachers are not teaching per se when they are not in front of the classroom and lecturing in a traditional fashion. She admitted that this was a particular challenge that their department is facing, i.e., the challenge to come up with strategies that would not only weaponize student evaluation but also prompt students to evaluate teachers based on their ability to deliver the lecture. The challenge, according to her, was coming up with activities that would not spoon feed students with information. She noted that even though it is a difficult task that can be done if they lobbied for access not only to materials and resources but also books by scholars and authors from their place and the Global South.

### ***Lack of Materials and Resources***

Dr. Bartolata concluded by saying that although it is a shame to admit that, as a department, they do not have much when it comes to materials and resources, they nevertheless had to make do with whatever is available to them. This is where the creativity of teachers and their resourcefulness comes in. For her, she is quite fortunate to have been provided with resources by former professors and to still have access to the UP Library. For most, however, the situation is not ideal, and she would like to believe that teachers are inching their way to get there in time.

## SECOND DISCUSSION QUESTION

*How can your English Studies program truly respond to the needs of your students (both majors and non-majors), institution, and community?*

Answering the second discussion question, Dr. Bartolata began by sharing her thoughts on the state of the English department at Bicol University and the efforts of the department to respond to the needs of its students, institution, and community.

### *An Undesirable Program at Its Current State*

She expressed that she genuinely believed the intention of the department to address these needs was sincere. However, she emphasized the importance of truly understanding what these needs were to effectively respond to them. She noted that the new AB English Language program of Bicol University was difficult to promote. She argued that if prospective students were fully aware of what the program entailed, they might not choose it. She admitted that this was a somewhat unpopular opinion, but one she firmly held onto. She felt the English Studies program, in its current form, lacked appeal for many applicants.

Dr. Bartolata also opined that the course was highly cognitive, requiring both students and teachers to confront unconscious biases, reveal their language attitudes, and address uncomfortable issues. She acknowledged that this could be distressing, not only for the students but also for the teachers themselves. According to Dr. Bartolata, in her interactions with students, they often shared that before entering the course, they had expected to be taught how to speak and write using "correct" English grammar. They anticipated learning prescriptive rules, similar to what they had been taught in high school, but with a more advanced focus on standard English. For many students, Dr. Bartolata noted, they saw this pathway as the key to greater advancement, better opportunities, and perhaps even a guarantee of a good job, high income, and survival in a world that subscribes to Western hustle culture.

## ***Locating the Economic Value and Practicality of the English Studies Program***

Dr. Bartolata therefore believed that students sought something practical with economic value attached, which she felt was not fully addressed in the current curriculum of the English Studies program. She reflected that when students look at the English Studies program, it likely did not meet their practical needs. She acknowledged that this was a realistic expectation and emphasized that students could not be blamed for these aspirations. She further explained that students have been "hardwired" to believe that competence in the so-called "Standard English" was valued across professions. She pointed out, for example, that the industry did not question or dismantle this assumption. She questioned who had even positioned "Standard English" as the norm, reflecting on how such a standard was established in the first place.

She also noted that most of their students have been influenced by this bias for such a long time and recognized that it was not something that could be changed drastically. She also noted Dr. Nicanor Guinto's aspiration to move away from this position, calling it admirable. However, Dr. Bartolata admitted that she found it difficult to move in that direction, knowing the specific needs of their students, such as the desire for gainful employment in the future.

## ***Reorienting English Studies to Be More Industry-focused***

In response to the issue, Dr. Bartolata explained that their department collectively decided to adopt Track B of the prescribed English Studies curriculum, similar to Dr. Papilota Diaz's decision to focus on AB English language across the professions, as opposed to English Studies as a discipline. This choice, she noted, made their curriculum more industry-focused. According to her, they designed their content to equip students with skills that would be readily usable after graduation. In addition to providing students with multiple ways of understanding, the department also prioritized the development of career-oriented skills, staying updated on the evolving needs of the job market based on feedback from employers.

She further shared that because her research focused on the needs of the industry, one of her main goals was to maintain alignment between academia and the job market. She noted that the industry frequently emphasized the

so-called "mismatch" between what educational institutions produced and what was actually needed in the workforce. She acknowledged that despite these concerns, it was remarkable that their students still managed to secure employment. However, she expressed that sometimes, their students' employment did not align directly with what they had been prepared for in their academic programs.

Regarding the general education curriculum (GEC), Dr. Bartolata discussed that they offered *Purposive Communication*, a GEC course prescribed by CHED. According to her, their approach always began with aligning the course to the vision of the university—a university for humanity, characterized by productive scholarship, transformative leadership, collaborative service, and distinctive character for sustainable development. She noted that, in addition to anchoring the syllabus on this vision, they also ensured it was aligned with the specific learning programs prescribed by CHED. With approximately 40 GEC classes offered across different university programs, Dr. Bartolata remarked that it was not easy to tailor one syllabus to meet all the varied program learning outcomes.

As such, Dr. Bartolata shared that their approach to this challenge was to adopt the principle of "different strokes for different folks." Faculty members took the time to contextualize one syllabus according to the assigned program. While the content remained similar across all programs, the teaching methods, examples, and contextualization varied based on the program's specific needs. She emphasized that it was not easy to be assigned one course while catering to three different programs, as it required a lot of effort and adaptation from the instructors.

### ***Addressing the Needs of the University and the Community***

Dr. Bartolata explained that addressing student needs remained their primary focus, but she also emphasized how they worked to meet the needs of the university and the community. This was where their other mandated functions come into play. The department, for example, conducted research aimed at improving the English Studies curriculum and instructional delivery. While a key priority, it did not prevent faculty members from pursuing other research areas that aligned with their individual interests or niches. However, she noted that only two or three faculty members were particularly interested in research outside the curriculum-focused work.

Dr. Bartolata concluded her second response by saying that, in addition to research, the faculty members of the English department also engaged in extension service activities aimed at addressing the needs and desires of their community. One such activity was their radio program, *The Branch*, where they discussed various subjects related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as well as national and international celebrations, all contextualized for their local area. Another initiative was *The Brilique*, a reading intervention program that aimed to address literacy issues in their community. While these activities might not have been directly aligned with their department's primary focus, Dr. Bartolata emphasized that these were still necessary and were provided to meet the needs of the community.

### THIRD DISCUSSION QUESTION

*What are possible ways of decolonizing English Studies in the country given your assessment of your program and where you want to take it?*

*The third (and final) roundtable discussion question was asked alongside two equally related questions:*

- 1. How do we decolonize the (English Studies) curriculum when academics themselves are still in the grip of English as a monolithic entity?*
- 2. How will the discourses on decolonizing English affect teacher education, particularly English education courses, such as BSE, English, MAELP, etc.?*

Dr. Bartolata began her response by adding that decolonizing English Studies in the Philippines, as Dr. Guinto described, is difficult, but not impossible. In fact, it has already started. According to her, the curriculum design by CHED, as cascaded to them, is already a good start. While limiting Dr. Bartolata noted that they can start from there since it is already a good foundation. Once again, she reiterated that this is going to be a huge challenge. In the first place, decolonization is quite alien to most or, if not alien, then it is something the academic community in this part of the Philippines refuses to subscribe to, simply because they may not know much about it.

## ***“Decolonization is something that not all teachers can teach”***

She continued by acknowledging that decolonization is something that not all teachers can teach, and something that students may not like. These are realities they face. However, it is already present. According to Dr. Bartolata, if the educational sector persists in advancing the call for decolonization, it just might happen. She stressed that decolonization requires time and commitment to make it a priority. She opined that, in her view, starting small is key—small steps, big dreams. She believes, among other things, that they can begin with small actions, but first, they need to clarify if this is truly what they want, and poses the question: “Is this the direction they want to take?” Dr. Bartolata felt that this must be clear. Once they decide, they can always start small.

## ***English Studies Curriculum: There is Limited Space for Innovation***

Dr. Bartolata noted that there is not much they can do about the curriculum as it currently stands, since it is imposed on them with limited space for innovation. However, she suggested that they could re-evaluate the syllabi to ensure that a wider range of perspectives and knowledge systems—especially those from local authors and the community—are incorporated. She also emphasized the importance of contextualizing content by using local examples. While this will require a lot of creativity from the teacher, Dr. Bartolata pointed out that although they cannot give what they do not have, they must at least try and improvise where possible.

She recalled an occasion where one of their co-speakers in an event talked about senior teachers and how paramount it is to change mindsets, particularly among senior teachers. She suggested inviting senior teachers to roundtable discussions like the current one to offer fresh perspectives and motivation. While she acknowledged that this would be a challenge, she expressed optimism, stating that it is always worth trying. Additionally, she highlighted the potential of younger teachers, noting that they often possess the drive and motivation necessary for change. Dr. Bartolata recommended supporting these younger teachers in pursuing advanced education, especially

in schools with students from diverse backgrounds, so they can hear voices and perspectives beyond their own community.

### ***An Appeal to the Academic Community: Share Resources***

Dr. Bartolata made an appeal to share resources, acknowledging the desire to fight for change but recognizing the lack of necessary tools, i.e., the necessary weapons. She further highlighted the role can play educators in basic education in bridging the gap by helping students appreciate not only the variety of English spoken in the country but also the local languages. She emphasized the importance of understanding concepts like language domains and linguistic repertoires. If these concepts are unfamiliar, she stressed that it is the responsibility of teachers to educate themselves, as it is essential for advancing the decolonization of language in the classroom.

### ***Moving away from the English-Only Policy and Linguistic Anxieties***

On a different note, Dr. Bartolata shared her immediate concern about the continued implementation of the English-only policy in some schools, a policy often emphasized to her by her graduate students. She believed that it was time to move away from intimidating students when they struggle with speaking in "straight" English, as this anxiety inhibits their learning. She further advocated for an anxiety-free language classroom, one that fosters an environment where students feel empowered to question existing knowledge without the fear of judgment. This approach, she believed, is essential in encouraging critical thinking and facilitating meaningful language development.

### ***Organizing More Avenues for Research Dissemination***

As her final point, Dr. Bartolata acknowledged the importance of organizing conferences, forums, and discussions that bring in diverse experts, not only from different parts of the country but also from around the world. She highlighted the value of hearing a variety of voices to avoid confining discussions to a single perspective. While she advocates for starting small she also stressed the importance of laying a solid foundation for change. In her view, it would be beneficial to establish language policies that support decolonization, ideally through a top-down approach. She believes that such



policies, when adapted to the varying contexts of institutions offering English Studies, would be easier to implement and comply with.

### ***Involving Marginalized Institutions in Larger Conversations***

She concluded her response by acknowledging the aspirations and constraints of lesser-known institutions, which are often marginalized in broader discussions. She pointed out that there is a collective and subconscious tendency to defer to more prominent institutions, believing they "know better." However, she also expressed the desire of smaller institutions to be included in these conversations, especially when it comes to crafting policies that impact them. She finally concluded her response by expressing her earnest hope that she had shared something of value in the discussion, reinforcing the importance of inclusive dialogue for institutions of all shapes and sizes.

# Dr. Venus Papilota Diaz

*Associate Professor V, College of Arts and Sciences,  
West Visayas State University*

## FIRST DISCUSSION QUESTION

*What is the state of the English Studies program in your university, and where do you want to go from there? What are your hopes and dreams for your English Studies Program? Why?*

Dr. Venus Papilota Diaz began her response to the first discussion question by sharing that in her university, West Visayas State University (WVSU), they have undergraduate- and graduate-level programs in English Language Studies. She then went on to share a brief history of the English Studies program of the university, noting that WVSU had offered a Bachelor of Arts in English when the university started in the 1900s and that this program was eventually renamed to Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts in the 1970s. Around two decades later in the 1990s, this program was subsequently regulated by CHED and renamed as the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Studies (ABELS). The Master of Arts in English Language Studies, according to her, started in the 2000s.

After touching on the brief development of the English Studies program of WVSU, Dr. Papilota Diaz discussed how the program, throughout its various iterations, combined English Studies with literature while also being supplemented with some subjects on teaching and teacher education. Eventually, this led WVSU to revisit its graduate program on English Language Studies and make a lot of revisions. Moreover, according to Dr. Papilota Diaz, they are now in the process of having CHED approve their proposed PhD in English Language Studies program. She also added that the proposed program has already been approved by the Board of Regents of WVSU and that they are still waiting for the go-signal from CHED.

Having touched on the development of the English Studies program of WVSU, Dr. Papilota Diaz provided a quick review of the current state of the program,

specifically its legal framework. For the undergraduate level, for example, the English Studies program follows CHED Memorandum Order No. 27 [24], series of 2017. Meanwhile, for the MA level, the program follows CHED Memorandum Order No. 15, series of 2019. She then emphasized how her department follows an outcomes-based education, saying that state universities are probably also using this particular framework. Additionally, she shared that her department integrates student workload and authentic assessment in teacher instruction, delivery of instruction, and, most particularly, in teacher assessment. Like all state universities and colleges (SUCs), according to her, their department also undergoes curriculum reviews under the local college first, then the university.

According to Dr. Papilota Diaz, they regularly review their curriculum, even if it only entails transferring one subject from the fourth year to the second year. And these things are done regularly, according to her, even just within their department, especially if they hear from students saying that reading visual art should not be offered in the fourth year. She stressed how student feedback like these are appreciated by her department because these are means to improve their curriculum.

### ***Faculty Roster and Composition***

Moving forward, Dr. Papilota Diaz also discussed the faculty composition of her department. She noted that they have 11 full-time tenured faculty, consisting of three professors, five associate professors, two assistant professors, and one instructor. Looking at the roster of their faculty in the department, she highlighted how most of their associate professors and full professors are vertically aligned, which means that they have already earned their MA and PhD degrees. She also observed that she was the only one who finished her PhD outside of the Visayas region and commented that most of the faculty took their PhDs in Cebu City.

### ***Student-to-Faculty Ratio***

Dr. Papilota Diaz then revealed that the current student-to-faculty ratio of the English Studies program ranges from one faculty member to 30-40 students. Specifically, for the undergraduate and graduate levels, she noted that one faculty member handles around 15 students. If the number of students reach

30, they then split the section in half to make it manageable. Moreover, she also discussed how they conduct college admission tests every December and how applicants undergo further selection through interviews and other admission requirements.

### ***Extracurricular Activities***

When it comes to extracurricular activities, Dr. Papilota Diaz shared how undergraduate students under the English Studies program engage in organizations. Meanwhile, in the graduate school, graduate students have the student council.

### ***English Studies Curriculum and Accreditation***

Dr. Papilota Diaz also discussed their curricular program. The ABELS program comprises 152 units, compared to the 134 units required by CHED. She claimed that the department added six additional subjects from the major courses in the track, deciding to include a focus on "English across the Professions" rather than treating English solely as a discipline and thereby aligning with the subjects outlined in the CHED Memorandum Orders. She then shared that the ABELS program has achieved the second cycle of Level 4 accreditation, Phases 1 and 2. This indicates that all four levels were completed in 2014, with a follow-up visit after five years, and that the program is likely due for another review next year.

Meanwhile, the MA in English Language Studies consists of 42 units, including thesis work, and currently holds an AACUP accreditation at Level 3, Phase 1, which was granted in November 2022. According to her, this November 2024, after two years, the program is set to undergo assessment for Level 3, Phase 2.

### ***Blended Learning and Mode of Delivery***

In terms of delivery modes, Dr. Papilota Diaz highlighted how the English Studies program utilizes blended learning and operates through the BrightSpace learning management system (LMS) provided by the university. While BrightSpace is relatively costly, according to Dr. Papilota Diaz, its funding was reallocated from other budget items to support it. After three years of adaptation during the pandemic, the need for a stable and effective LMS has become well-established.

## ***Instructional Materials***

In terms of teaching aids, Dr. Papilota Diaz shared that instructional materials primarily include PDF versions of textbooks, often sourced from platforms like pdf.com and pdf.drive, along with other online educational resources. However, she emphasized that the main reference materials of the faculty are typically PowerPoint presentations.

## ***Students' Careers after Graduation***

Graduates of the English Studies program, according to Dr. Papilota Diaz, frequently pursue teaching positions, locally and internationally. Those who enter the Department of Education (DepEd) often work in senior or junior high schools. Others, according to her, opt for administrative roles in office settings, with only a very small number going on to study law.

## ***Best Practices in the Department***

Dr. Papilota Diaz then emphasized the importance of moving forward by sustaining best practices, particularly in terms of curriculum development. She believes that one key approach is through regular curriculum revisions. Ideally, according to her, this process would involve inviting external experts from universities recognized as Centers of Excellence and even from international institutions to provide an objective evaluation of their curriculum. Currently, however, Dr. Papilota Diaz shared that the evaluators are often selected from nearby areas, such as Iloilo or Panay Island. She believed that expanding the pool of evaluators to include national or international experts could bring fresh perspectives and elevate the standards of the English Studies program.

Additionally, Dr. Papilota Diaz recognized the need to decongest the program's course offerings, as it currently includes 18 units beyond the standard 134 required units. She advocated for a "less is more" approach, where quality takes precedence over quantity. She emphasized that carefully selecting and refining courses within the curriculum will lead to a more impactful and rigorous educational experience for students.

Moving forward, Dr. Papilota Diaz also highlighted the need to improve the student-to-faculty ratio by reducing the number of students per classroom.

She pointed out that managing a large class of around 40-45 students poses significant challenges, especially when it comes to providing individualized feedback. With limited classroom time, offering one-on-one guidance becomes difficult, particularly in tasks like assessing 40-45 essays. She strongly argued that smaller class sizes would allow for more personalized attention, enabling a higher quality of instruction and more meaningful learning experiences for each student.

For Dr. Papilota Diaz, student and faculty mobility programs are also essential for the department. Although still in the planning phase, she envisions strong support from the entire faculty, the college, and the university as critical for bringing initiatives to fruition. Currently, departmental ideas remain informal, discussed casually among colleagues in the faculty room without yet reaching formal documentation or implementation. According to her, mobility programs are potential ways of moving forward for both faculty and students, helping them to broaden their perspectives and foster academic growth.

### *Decolonizing the Classroom*

On a different note, Dr. Papilota Diaz also highlighted the importance of incorporating decolonization into the curriculum of the department and teaching practices. She expressed a desire to localize course content, learning outcomes, and assessments to better reflect the local context and flavor of Philippine English. By integrating materials from local publications in places like Iloilo and Manila, rather than solely relying on Western texts and magazines, she believes the curriculum could better embrace Philippine English and the idea of “Philippine Englishes,” enriching students' understanding of their linguistic and cultural identity as well as moving away from Western linguistic canons.

Dr. Papilota Diaz saw the possibility of introducing decolonization in the English Studies classroom and in their department. The concept of decolonization, while still somewhat new to her, was introduced to her in part by Dr. Ruanni Tupas during their 2019 graduate colloquium, where topics like Unequal Englishes were discussed with studies by Mr. Nicanor Guinto. While these ideas resonated with her, Dr. Papilota Diaz recognized that they are not yet fully embedded in their department's practices. For many faculty members, day-to-day teaching is still based on familiar Westernized textbooks and

traditional lecture slides. She acknowledged that introducing decolonization as a formal concept within the department could mark an important step forward in rethinking traditional approaches and adopting an English Studies curriculum that reflects the diversity of Englishes and linguistic experiences unique to the Philippines.

### ***Alumni Roles and Support***

Dr. Papilota Diaz also expressed a strong desire for the graduates of the English Studies program to take on leadership roles, not merely settle into routine positions. She hoped that they, i.e., alumni, will actively contribute to shaping policies by making a positive impact in their communities. She envisioned them becoming leaders who can influence change and actively participate in societal development.

She also touched on the challenges the department currently faces, particularly in terms of alumni support. Dr. Papilota Diaz noted that their department lacks access to lobbying channels or resources for such initiatives. At present, Dr. Papilota Diaz admitted that the department is struggling with limited classroom spaces, as many of the buildings in their college are undergoing renovations. This situation, according to her, has led to the increased reliance on online classes, making it clear that the infrastructure challenges remain a significant hurdle for their department.

### ***Hopes and Dreams: An Optimistic Outlook for the English Studies Program***

Dr. Papilota Diaz optimistically shared her aspirations for the English Studies program, expressing a desire to "shoot for the stars" and elevate the relevance of the English Studies program both within WVSU and the broader research community. She highlighted that while WVSU's research thrusts and priorities focus on areas like poverty alleviation, disease management, environmental sustainability, and teaching initiatives, the department sometimes feels disconnected from these broader priorities. According to Dr. Papilota Diaz, this misalignment was especially evident when they submitted their COP for the MA in English Language Studies program, as Dr. Laurel, the Chair of the Technical Working Group (TWG), questioned how their research aligns with WVSU's research priorities.

As such, Dr. Papilota Diaz conveyed a deep sense of frustration, feeling that their department's research thrusts, which are primarily centered around teaching initiatives, are often overlooked in comparison to WVSU's more externally focused priorities. While she acknowledged that their current focus is on teaching, she still expressed a deep hope that their department could expand its research agenda.

### *Hopes and Dreams for Curriculum Development*

Dr. Papilota Diaz was also optimistic with curriculum development. She discussed the need for a more open and flexible curriculum, expressing concern that the current curriculum of the English Studies program is too rigid and limited. She, for example, referenced how CHED had presented a set framework that the department followed with little room for innovation or the inclusion of other outcomes. The department, according to her, has adhered to the five outcomes outlined in the CHED Memorandum Order, but she believes that the English Studies curriculum could be more adaptable to better suit students' needs and interests.

An example she gave was the restriction on foreign language courses. At their university, for instance, students do not have the freedom to choose which foreign language they want to study; instead, it depends on the availability of teachers. This contrasts with institutions like UP, where students have the flexibility to enroll in any foreign language of their choice. Dr. Diaz wishes that WVSU could adopt a similar approach, where electives are genuinely flexible, allowing students to choose courses across different colleges. Unfortunately, the current system imposes electives strictly within the College of Arts and Sciences, limiting students' opportunities to explore other areas of interest, such as those in the College of Communication or the College of Education. Because of these issues and constraints, Dr. Papilota Diaz expressed hope that the curriculum on English Studies could become more open and flexible, enabling students to have more control over their academic choices and fostering a more dynamic and student-centered learning environment.

Dr. Papilota Diaz then continued to share her vision for student and faculty mobility by establishing agreements with other Asian universities or even with UP. She envisioned a system where students could take subjects at these partner institutions, while faculty members could visit each other's campuses, with UP's faculty also teaching at their university.



## *Lack of Research Funding and Faculty Mobility*

Dr. Papilota Diaz also discussed the challenges surrounding faculty mobility and research funding, expressing a strong desire for more opportunities in these areas. She pointed out that while faculty members aspire to attend conferences and pursue research projects, the funding tends to prioritize fields like the sciences and technology, which are currently seen as booming or more in demand. She shared a personal experience of attending a conference where organizers, upon learning that her area of expertise was in English Studies, quickly moved on to the next person, as they were primarily interested in projects related to science and technology.

She expressed frustration with this lack of prioritization for the humanities, specifically English Studies, which generally struggles to secure funding in comparison to fields deemed more "strategic" by the government. She described this imbalance as a reflection of power dynamics, where certain fields—especially those linked to technology and agriculture—are given more support and attention, leaving other disciplines like hers underfunded and marginalized.

For her penultimate point, Dr. Papilota Diaz shared her desire for more opportunities for continuing training in educational technology and contextualization, emphasizing that their department has not yet fully engaged in such professional development. She noted that while accreditation tasks are important, their department would appreciate fewer administrative burdens related to accreditation so they could focus more on strengthening their core programs. She is proud of her department's progress, having successfully gone through two cycles of accreditation and anticipating the third cycle next year. She concluded by reflecting on the key points shared, acknowledging that while there is still much to work toward.

## SECOND DISCUSSION QUESTION

*How can your English Studies program truly respond to the needs of your students (both majors and non-majors), institution, and community?*

Dr. Papilota Diaz responded to the second discussion question by explaining that, when discussing their ABELS program, they made sure that all the macro skills—speaking, listening, reading, and writing—were being addressed in a way that allowed students to develop these skills effectively. They also went further by integrating higher-order thinking skills, such as critical thinking and the ability to evaluate. For instance, they emphasized how messages are handled through multimodal and multidisciplinary texts and research, encouraging students to engage with a variety of formats and approaches.

Moreover, she shared that in their English discourse class, students were introduced to materials like abstracts or short articles on topics such as speech acts and multimodal texts. These resources provided valuable information, helping students develop their skills. She also shared that she had conducted a quick survey with her students, who reported that they felt their abilities had improved and that their career paths were becoming clearer as they progressed through the English Studies program. Some students even expressed an interest in pursuing careers in law, which Dr. Papilota Diaz was particularly pleased about, especially since she taught a subject related to the language of law.

On a different note, Dr. Papilota Diaz emphasized that, in addition to the core subjects, their English Studies program also includes courses focused on teaching, instructional materials, and English language testing and assessment. These courses, according to her, help students understand what they are being prepared for and give them a clearer sense of their professional roles. Although it is difficult to quantify, Dr. Diaz noted that students often express an intangible sense of purpose and desire to find their place, both within the university and in the broader world beyond it.

Dr. Papilota Diaz further noted that the courses offered in the program are diverse and span various professional fields. Students initially choose from a range of options, and as they progress, new courses are introduced to them, which helps shape their learning trajectory. She emphasized that the program

has a significant impact on students, as they feel the influence of these courses in their academic and professional development.

### ***Accessing the University's Materials and Resources***

Dr. Papilota Diaz also added that, while some students noted limited resources, others recognized that the university provides access to valuable tools, such as the library and online resources. The university, according to Dr. Papilota Diaz, subscribes to research engines like ProQuest, which allow students and faculty alike to access a wide range of academic articles. Overall, she observed that the English Studies program greatly influences students, helping them navigate both their educational and career paths.

### ***Professional Development among English Studies Majors***

In terms of the professional development of English Studies students, Dr. Papilota Diaz shared that in the graduate-level English Studies program, particularly the MAELS program, students typically enroll with specific professional goals in mind, such as seeking promotion or aiming for leadership roles. Many students aspire to become Master Teachers in the Department of Education or to advance to higher levels in their careers. She further noted that the MAELS program of her university supports these aspirations by offering courses that focus on topics like institutional discourse and introducing students to research methods in English linguistics.

Dr. Papilota Diaz also explained that, as part of the emphasis of the program on research, students are encouraged to engage with writing papers, from concept papers to more developed full papers. Faculty members, for example, require students to submit final papers at the end of each semester, ensuring that the English Studies program is firmly rooted in research output. She concluded that the design of the program helps students not only grow professionally but also develop essential research skills that align with their career goals and research outputs.

### ***Research Collaborations and Extension Work***

Aside from professional development, Dr. Papilota Diaz also clarified that the department also strives to foster collaborations in areas such as instruction, research, extension, and various initiatives and innovations. However, she was

candid about the fact that while there is a strong desire to move forward with these goals, they are still in the early stages of planning. She acknowledged, for instance, that the department is taking small steps toward realizing these aspirations, indicating that they are in the process of strategizing and laying the groundwork for future collaborations.

### ***Using Technology in the English Studies Program***

Dr. Papilota Diaz also pointed out that there is a noticeable divide in the department when it comes to the use of technology. She acknowledged that some faculty members, particularly those who are more seasoned, find it challenging to integrate technology into their teaching and assessment practices. She also noted that not all faculty members come from an Education background, which means they may not have formal training in teaching methodologies or assessment practices. However, she emphasized that their university has been making efforts to address this divide by providing faculty with training and workshops on various methodologies, helping to equip them with the necessary tools to improve their teaching practices.

### ***Research, the “Publish or Perish” Culture, and Internationalization***

Dr. Papilota Diaz opined that the university was also striving to become a research-rich institution, with a strong emphasis on publication. Faculty members are often encouraged, even pressured, to publish and focus on their research. This push for research output is reflected in the English Studies curriculum, particularly in the MAELS program, where students are encouraged to publish their papers before graduation. She highlighted that this focus on research is closely tied to the journey of the program towards internationalization, aiming to elevate the visibility and impact of their academic work on a global scale.

Additionally, Dr. Papilota Diaz further emphasized that one of the grand goals of their university was to enhance student and faculty mobility, which is part of its broader vision of achieving recognition. Their university, for example, is currently classified as an SUC level 4, the highest in Region VI, and has made significant strides in securing various collaborations and Memorandums of Agreement (MOAs) with other institutions. Additionally, the university has

earned ISO certification, further emphasizing its commitment to quality standards.

She additionally noted that, while their university has attempted to pursue QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) ratings, which are distinct from rankings, the effort has been challenging due to the complexities of sustaining such initiatives. Despite receiving funding from CHED for this purpose, their university has struggled to maintain the resources necessary for QS ratings. Dr. Papilota Diaz acknowledged the difficulty of implementing various quality assurance mechanisms introduced within the SUC system but emphasized the ongoing effort of their university to achieve recognition and progress.

### ***Community and Extension Work outside the Program***

Dr. Papilota Diaz concluded her response to the second discussion question by emphasizing their department's commitment to serving the community in preparing graduates who contribute to various sectors, especially government agencies. She noted that graduates are often positioned as leaders in their respective fields, with a particular focus on research and advocacy campaigns that benefit the community. She highlighted that student organizations are active in organizing literacy programs and advocacy campaigns, often reaching out to local barangays, especially those facing financial challenges. These initiatives include distributing essential items like bags, slippers, and ballpens, demonstrating their collaborative efforts in community outreach.

Furthermore, their university also extends its impact by offering programs for out-of-school youth and collaborating with DepEd to provide training for teachers. These extension programs are university-approved and funded, further cementing the institution's role in supporting both local and educational communities. Dr. Papilota Diaz concluded by expressing pride in their university's efforts to address the needs of students, the institution, and the broader community, emphasizing that they are continuously striving to meet these challenges.

## THIRD DISCUSSION QUESTION

*What are possible ways of decolonizing English Studies in the country given your assessment of your program and where you want to take it?*

*The third (and final) roundtable discussion question was asked alongside two equally related questions:*

- 1. How do we decolonize the (English Studies) curriculum when academics themselves are still in the grip of English as a monolithic entity?*
- 2. How will the discourses on decolonizing English affect teacher education, particularly English education courses, such as BSE, English, MAELP, etc.?*

Adding to the discussion, Dr. Papilota Diaz shared that she had three ways of decolonizing English Studies. She expressed some hesitation about specifying them too rigidly, as, as mentioned earlier in the forum, there was a very limited understanding of what the concept of decolonization truly meant. First, noted the need for expertise in both knowledge and implementation. In her humble sharing, she began by suggesting a review of the descriptions and contents of programs like ABELS and MAELS, including their course offerings, orientations, and instructional resources.

Furthermore, she firmly believed that in decolonizing English Studies, it was also crucial to look at local references, particularly the significant experiences of the locals themselves. She expressed uncertainty about whether there were already available materials or references to help in the decolonization of English Studies programs but wished that such resources could be made available.

Dr. Papilota Diaz reiterated the importance of moving away from excessive foreign influences in the orientations and instructional resources used in English Studies programs. She advocated for a shift towards more contextualized instruction and the generation of research outputs that reflect local realities. She noted that Dr. Bartolata had already discussed the concept of contextualization in instruction thoroughly.

## ***Decolonizing English Studies Programs through Collaboration***

For her third point, Dr. Papilota Diaz suggested disseminating information on decolonizing English Studies programs, particularly in her own university. She recommended organizing training and workshops, as well as collaborating with the academic circle of Dr. Aileen Salonga, to take as an example, and other SUCs. She thereby believed that these groups were well-informed on the subject and hoped that the outputs from such gatherings could be shared with her university, and potentially with other SUCs managing English Studies programs.

Moreover, she also expressed her strong desire for her department to be introduced to the decolonization process, especially in terms of revising their English Studies curriculum. She shared that they were flexible when it came to reviewing their curriculum, which reflected their openness to incorporating ideas and suggestions related to decolonization. Dr. Papilota Diaz expressed that they were keen on improving both their undergraduate and graduate programs with valuable input on decolonization from other academic circles.

## ***A Call to Better Understand Students' Academic and Practical Needs***

Addressing an earlier question, Dr. Papilota Diaz reiterated the importance of gaining a better understanding of students. She argued that teachers should better understand their challenges, needs, and coping mechanisms. For example, some students, particularly those from the College of Information and Technology, might find learning the English language irrelevant or less significant compared to their technical subjects. She stressed that in order to address this, educators must understand their learners better and be open to varied perspectives, ensuring that the curriculum meets the diverse needs of the students.

She also shared her thoughts on how English should not merely be viewed as a standardized form of communication. She highlighted the importance of recognizing that English, like any language, is shaped by society and, in turn, can also influence society. From the perspective of the DepEd and teaching in basic education, she pointed out the need to shift focus from strictly

evaluating the correctness of English. She reiterated that it is imperative to appreciate the effort students make to speak the language, acknowledging the value in their attempts rather than solely focusing on grammatical perfection, a point that had also been highlighted by Dr. Guinto in an earlier response of his.

### ***Applying Other Theoretical Frameworks to Address Language Challenges***

Dr. Papilota Diaz also spoke about the theoretical frameworks that can be applied to studying language challenges, such as those found in Second Language Acquisition (SLA). She mentioned the concept of interlanguage pragmatics, which suggests that challenges students face in speaking English should not be seen as mistakes needing correction, but rather as part of a natural progression in language learning. She further reiterated the responsibility of educators to carefully study these challenges and understand them within a continuum, where students are gradually moving from one language level to the next, ultimately reaching the target language.

In this regard, she shared a research project she had worked on with some of her students in the MAEd program, who were involved in distance education in Thailand. According to her, the students became interested in trans-langauging, particularly how the Thai language influenced their use of English. She explained that this approach does not label such influences as errors, but rather as a necessary transitional phase in the language learning process.

### ***Languages Should Not Be Viewed as Monolithic***

Dr. Papilota Diaz concluded by reinforcing the idea that language, particularly English, should not be viewed as monolithic and strongly argued that the variations in English usage, even those that may not conform to standard norms, should not be seen as incorrect. Instead, these variations represent different stages in the process of language learning. She shared that the progression from one stage to another, as students learn and use English, is part of a natural linguistic development, and it is noteworthy to understand this dynamic when teaching and studying language. This perspective encourages a more inclusive and flexible approach to language learning, where mistakes are viewed as part of the learning journey rather than failures.



# Dr. Nicanor L. Guinto

*Director, Office of Research Services  
Southern Luzon State University*

## FIRST DISCUSSION QUESTION

*What is the state of the English Studies program in your university, and where do you want to go from there? What are your hopes and dreams for your English Studies Program? Why?*

Dr. Guinto opened by sharing how there is currently no AB English or MA English program at Southern Luzon State University (SLSU). He mentioned, however, that at one point, AB English was offered as one of the flagship programs in the College of Arts and Sciences. However, when the BS English program was introduced, it was paired with AB English to optimize resources, which, from his understanding, ultimately led to the discontinuation of the AB English program at SLSU.

### *English Studies Programs at Southern Luzon State University*

Having touched on the origins of the English Studies program of SLSU, Dr. Guinto then shared that at SLSU, three key programs closely aligned with English Studies are currently being offered, namely, Bachelor of Secondary Education with a Major in English, Master of Arts in English Language Education (which was recently renamed from the Master of Arts in Teaching English), and Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics. These programs, according to him, are housed in the College of Arts and Sciences, where Dr. Guinto primarily teaches. However, he also said that he teaches some courses in the College of Teacher Education, specifically under the Master of Arts in English Language Education program.

## ***Accreditation Status of the English Studies Program at SLSU***

Regarding the accreditation status of the English Studies program at SLSU, Dr. Guinto proudly noted that the BS English program is accredited at AACCUP Level 4, while both the MA in English Language Education and the MA in Applied Linguistics have been re-accredited at AACCUP Level 2. Each of these programs is recognized by CHED and has received a Certificate of Program Compliance.

According to Dr. Guinto, much like their colleagues from Bicol and Iloilo, the BS English program at SLSU follows the same policies and standards prescribed by CHED, particularly those outlined in CHED Memorandum Order No. 75, series of 2017, which governs teacher education. The curriculum of the English Studies program is designed to align with core competencies for future educators in English. While this framework ensures that graduates are well-prepared to teach, he believes that it also limits opportunities for critical examination and innovation within the field. He noted that since the courses are CHED-mandated, the English Studies program often adheres to a standardized approach, leaving little space for incorporating alternative or localized perspectives that could enrich students' learning experiences.

## ***Shifting Away from Traditional Models of English Studies***

Moving forward, Dr. Guinto contrasted the flexibility offered by their graduate programs with the more standardized approach of the undergraduate BS English program. He explained that both the MA in English Language Education and MA in Applied Linguistics programs at SLSU comply with CHED Memorandum Order No. 15, series of 2019, which provides more leeway to shape programs according to the specific needs of students and their communities. This enables them to move beyond traditional models of English Studies that often center on Western canons and linguistic hierarchies.

As an example, he highlighted the recent approval of their MA in Applied Linguistics program. Unlike other applied linguistics programs that are often teacher-centric, this program takes a more expansive approach. It emphasizes language in communication, focusing on how language functions within various social contexts. This approach allows students to explore

broader applications of linguistics, such as in media, politics, community language practices, and intercultural communication, thus offering a more comprehensive and contextually relevant study of language.

Furthermore, Dr. Guinto emphasized that in their English Studies programs, language is viewed holistically, extending beyond just English or Filipino to encompass all forms of human communication—whether verbal, nonverbal, digital, or analog. This broad approach challenges the traditional view of English as a neutral, all-encompassing medium of communication. Instead, the program explores how English interacts with other languages, cultures, and modes of communication, highlighting the complexity and diversity of language use.

He explained that this repositioning reflects a modest contribution to questioning and deconstructing lingering colonial frameworks in the field of English Studies. By moving away from an exclusive focus on English, the English Studies program at SLSU seeks to promote a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of language, which recognizes the rich interplay between different linguistic and cultural systems.

Dr. Guinto then expressed gratitude to CHED, particularly to the technical panel for English, including Dr. Mila Laurel and Dr. Marilu Madrunio, for giving them flexibility to craft their curriculum. He acknowledged their invaluable assistance during the revision process for the curriculum of the MA in Applied Linguistics, noting that they were hands-on in approving the curriculum. He appreciated how the panel listened attentively to their vision for the program, which allowed them to make important adjustments that aligned with their goals and the unique needs of their students.

### ***Reshaping the English Studies Program at SLSU***

Among other things, Dr. Guinto also outlined their goal of continuing to reshape English studies programs to better reflect the realities of their students and the communities they serve. He intends to move forward by offering more courses that critically examine the relationship between language, power, and identity. A key objective is to increase enrollment in their programs, as non-STEM programs at SLSU often face under-enrollment. He shared the aspiration of eventually launching a PhD program as well, but emphasized

that the focus on enrollment is not just about increasing numbers. Rather, it is about ensuring that more students, particularly those from underserved communities, have access to a curriculum that is relevant to their needs, experiences, and cultural realities.

Dr. Guinto then highlighted the socio-economic challenges faced by their region, noting that while Quezon Province is part of the Calabarzon region—one of the key contributors to the national economy—his province has the highest poverty incidence in the region due to the presence of geographically isolated and disadvantaged areas. Many of their students come from rural and semi-urban communities, where English is not just seen as a global language but also as a marker of economic mobility and social status. Proficiency in English, according to him, is viewed as a means to access opportunities elsewhere, rather than as a tool for creating opportunities within the community itself.

As his concluding point, he shared their vision for moving beyond the traditional view of teaching English merely as a tool for employment, international communication, or migration. Instead, they aim to position English within local cultural contexts, emphasizing the importance of challenging Western norms in their teaching practices. This approach reflects a broader goal of making English Studies more relevant and grounded in the experiences of their students and communities. This, according to Dr. Guinto, is the vision they hold at Southern Luzon State University.

## SECOND DISCUSSION QUESTION

*How can your English Studies program truly respond to the needs of your students (both majors and non-majors), institution, and community?*

In Dr. Guinto's response to the question, he began by explaining that many of their students come from rural and semi-urban areas, where English is often viewed as a way to leave their communities rather than stay, particularly at the undergraduate level. However, he observed a shift in mindset at the graduate level, where most of the students are local teachers. He expressed hope that, through these teachers, a change in perspective could occur, encouraging a more localized and grounded approach to the use of English.

Dr. Guinto noted that this trend is also evident in their nine satellite campuses, which are spread across Quezon Province. He noted the challenge of convincing students to enroll in English Studies programs at these campuses, citing a specific example from their Alaba Campus, which offers a fisheries program. He explained that many students hesitate to enroll in fisheries, as they come from families of fisherfolk and are already familiar with the challenging realities of that profession. As a result, students often seek opportunities elsewhere. Dr. Guinto acknowledged this as a systematic issue, noting that while they can only do so much to change people's perspectives, it remains pertinent to continue addressing the issue.

### ***Addressing Local and Regional Needs in the English Studies Curriculum***

Dr. Guinto emphasized that addressing local and regional needs begins with the curriculum. He noted that while they had already made strides in this direction with the Applied Linguistics Program, they hoped to extend this flexibility to their undergraduate programs in the future. Although CHED's policies provide a strong foundation, he pointed out that they can be limiting, especially when it comes to addressing specific local and regional needs. For instance, he highlighted the growing need to strengthen courses that focus on the Filipino experience as expressed in English, particularly that of the Tagalog people, rather than continuing to rely predominantly on the traditional Western canon.

As a result, one of the long-term goals for the Office of Research Services, which Dr. Guinto currently heads, is establishing a Tagalog Culture and Art Study Center. He expressed his hope that the center would serve as a repository for local knowledge, preserving and showcasing the rich cultural heritage of the Southern Tagalog people. However, he acknowledged that to make this vision a reality, they would need ample support from well-established institutions, such as UP. Through partnership agreements, Dr. Guinto believes they could convince the Board that SLSU needs and must have a research and development center focusing on Tagalog culture and arts.

### ***Sharing Research Opportunities between the Sciences and the Humanities***

Dr. Guinto then reflected on the sentiments shared earlier by Dr. Papilota Diaz and acknowledged that before he took on the role of heading the Office of Research Services, those sentiments were shared by many in the field. He expressed a sense of luck in being given the opportunity to lead the office. Since taking on this role, he has begun opening discussions about research opportunities, publication avenues, and conference participation. Additionally, the office has also been providing support to faculty members not only in the hard sciences but also in the humanities and social sciences. Despite SLSU being primarily an agricultural university, Dr. Guinto expressed gratitude for the current administration's openness to expanding the university's reach beyond the hard sciences, welcoming the change.

### ***Developing a Tagalog Culture and Arts Study Center***

Dr. Guinto also expressed that their ultimate vision for the Tagalog Culture and Art Study Center is for it to evolve into a dedicated Tagalog Studies course, which they plan to integrate into the general education curriculum. The course aims to engage students with texts and materials reflecting their own lived experiences, including their unique ways of speaking English, their histories, and cultural contexts. He emphasized that this approach would allow students to see themselves represented in their literature and provide them with a voice in academic studies. He believed that this shift is essential for fostering a deeper connection between students and their education, empowering them to take pride in their identity. This, in turn, could help them become rooted in their local culture while also being globally competitive, which Dr. Guinto

hoped would help curb some of the challenges faced by the current generation of students.

### ***Preventing the Exodus of Students through Multilingualism and Linguistic Inclusivity***

Dr. Guinto also shared his belief that one of the key problems facing their community is the large-scale exodus of people seeking opportunities elsewhere. He hoped that by fostering a stronger sense of identity and pride in local culture, they could help curb this trend. The goal is to create opportunities within their communities that allow individuals to grow without needing to leave. While Dr. Guinto emphasized that he had nothing against those who choose to leave, he wanted to provide an alternative choice for those who might feel their only option is to migrate. He recognized the role English could play in this process. By shifting focus from the traditional outward-looking perspective of English studies, which may inadvertently promote leaving for better prospects, he advocated for a future where growth and success are achievable right at home, alongside other local languages.

Moreover, Dr. Guinto also expressed desire to include courses that delve into multilingualism in the future. While not yet part of the current English Studies curriculum, he hopes to introduce such courses, allowing students to critically reflect on how language policies have historically marginalized certain linguistic groups.

On a similar note, Dr. Guinto further expressed that he envies fellow Filipinos who can speak languages other than English and Filipino. Unfortunately, curricular priorities often focus on offering foreign languages locally. The direction he hoped to explore means creating space for voices and languages that have been silenced or overlooked, and empowering students to become advocates for a more equitable and inclusive language policy in the future, no matter their career path.

### ***World Englishes and Philippine English in a General Education Course***

Additionally, he was grateful that linguistic empowerment is already part of World Englishes and that Philippine English is included in Purposive

Communication, a general education course. However, he believes that this is not enough, as it is only one lesson within the course. Still, he acknowledges that at least it is there. Dr. Guinto believes that by shaping the curriculum to reflect these priorities, especially the flexibility he hopes to establish within undergraduate programs, the department can help shift the perception of English from merely a foreign language to a tool for local empowerment, cultural expression, and social change.

### *Dreaming for a Decolonized English Studies Program*

Dr. Guinto concluded his response by sharing that their dream is to foster an English Studies program, one that deconstructs colonial legacies, promotes critical thinking, and encourages students to use language as a means for advocating social change within their respective communities. He further emphasized that achieving this vision would be possible if they had more flexibility in crafting or designing the curriculum. For now, however, that is the direction they in SLSU aspire to take.



## THIRD DISCUSSION QUESTION

*What are possible ways of decolonizing English Studies in the country given your assessment of your program and where you want to take it?*

*The third (and final) roundtable discussion question was asked alongside two equally related questions:*

- 1. How do we decolonize the (English Studies) curriculum when academics themselves are still in the grip of English as a monolithic entity?*
- 2. How will the discourses on decolonizing English affect teacher education, particularly English education courses, such as BSE, English, MAELP, etc.?*

Dr. Guinto noted that he had already touched upon some of the issues in his earlier responses. He then expanded on his thoughts about decolonizing English Studies in the Philippine context.

### ***Decolonizing English Studies by Reshaping the Discipline***

According to Dr. Guinto, decolonizing English Studies involves fundamentally rethinking and reshaping the way English is approached as an academic discipline. Reflecting on the current state of English Studies-related programs at SLSU, particularly the MA in English Language Education program and MA in Applied Linguistics program, he pointed out that while the university adheres to the standards of CHED, there are still opportunities to break away from traditional practices. He further emphasized the need to introduce more local relevance to the curricula, especially at the graduate level, to better address the unique needs of Filipino students and their communities.

### ***Recentering and Adding the Filipino Experience in the English Studies Program***

Considering CHED Memorandum Order No. 15, series of 2019, which Dr. Guinto and his colleagues are very grateful for, he further emphasized that the first step in decolonizing English Studies involves recentering the Filipino experience, specifically the Tagalog people's experience. He pointed out that a key element in this process is shifting the focus away from the traditional

Western canon. While many professors in English Studies programs in the country are already moving in this direction, there is still much room to incorporate the Filipino experience into English Studies curricula. This should include reflecting the diverse cultures of the Philippines, allowing for the integration of Filipino works alongside Western texts. By doing so, Dr. Guinto believed, students can engage critically with both, fostering a dialogue that highlights the importance of multiple Filipino voices while still acknowledging Western literature as part of a broader, more inclusive curriculum.

Dr. Guinto also further reiterated the importance of engaging with local communities as a crucial step in decolonizing English Studies. He emphasized that the program must respond to the needs and aspirations of the communities it serves, rather than adhering strictly to a one-size-fits-all approach shaped by global or Western trends. While he acknowledged the inherent global aspirations of universities, he argued that it is possible to design courses and curricula that better reflect the realities of the local communities. Citing the initiatives of SLSU towards establishing a Tagalog Culture and Arts Studies Center and developing a Tagalog Studies course to be included in the general education curriculum, Dr. Guinto stressed that the university can better serve its local community and move beyond the traditional, globally-driven educational models.

### *English as a Tool for Identity and Cultural Expression*

In terms of the practical usage of English, Dr. Guinto discussed that by focusing on the local context, students could come to view English not as an alien, imposed language, but as a tool for expressing their own identity, culture, and experiences alongside their native languages. He acknowledged that many students are still hesitant to use English as a medium of expression in the classroom, but believed that by integrating English with other local languages, it could foster a sense of pride in their heritage. This, he argued, would empower students to be both globally aware and locally grounded. Moreover, he expressed hope that such an approach would encourage students to see opportunities for growth within their own communities, rather than feeling compelled to leave for better prospects elsewhere. He remained steadfast in his advocacy in creating opportunities that would allow students to stay and contribute to the development of their communities and eventually help their kabayans (neighbors) in their own localities

Dr. Guinto's next point revolved around the idea of diversifying their understanding of communication, a concept already being explored in the MA in Applied Linguistics program at SLSU. He further explained that the said program already emphasized language in communication, acknowledging that communication is not restricted to formal structures of English or even Filipino, but also includes other languages, visual media, digital platforms, and nonverbal communication. This broader perspective challenges the colonial mindset that places English at the pinnacle of communication and instead recognizes the multiplicity of languages and communication methods that reflect the diverse, multilingual realities of Filipinos. He reiterated that by embracing this diversity, it may be possible to create a space where English is no longer regarded as the only "correct" or prestigious mode of communication, but as one of many tools to be used based on context and necessity. He further highlighted that this shift could be particularly effective in the regions of the country, especially if they were given greater autonomy in curriculum design for the undergraduate program.

### ***There Is a Need to Innovate on the CHED Framework for English Studies Programs***

Building off his previous point, Dr. Guinto pointed out that there should be room within CHED's provided framework to innovate and introduce courses that cater to specific local and regional needs. He highlighted that in their graduate programs at SLSU, they have already shifted away from a teacher-centric, skills-based approach to applied linguistics, opting instead for a broader focus on communication. He expressed the desire to extend this flexibility to other levels of the English Studies program, where they could offer elective courses or modules that tackle issues such as English for community development, English in digital media, or even English for local governance. He emphasized that by diversifying the content and approach of their courses, they could create an English Studies curriculum that is more adaptable and responsive to the evolving needs of students and society. This flexibility, he noted, is particularly critical for the teacher education curriculum for BSE English students.

## ***A Call to Cultivate Critical Thinking and Self-Reflection about English***

Dr. Guinto concluded by underscoring that a crucial part of decolonizing English Studies in the Philippines is cultivating critical thinking and self-reflection about English, while acknowledging the past, present, and potential futures of Englishes in the country. He recognized the challenge of fostering a critical mindset in students, especially when teachers themselves might not be open to or aware of the need for decolonization. However, Dr. Guinto believed that opportunities such as discussions and forums like the current one were an important starting point. He suggested that such conversations could help initiate change, alongside the curriculum reforms they hope to implement, ultimately fostering a more reflective and inclusive approach to English Studies. According to Dr. Guinto:

Our students should be encouraged to question the power dynamics inherent in language, including the historical and cultural forces that have made English dominant in the first place. By understanding the colonial history behind the spread of English, I believe students can better appreciate the complexities of language use in the Philippines today, and I hope that's something that could translate when they start working in the future. So, what we want for our students is to see English and other languages not just as means of communication, but also as sites of negotiation—of our issues, of identity, of power, and culture.

In summary, Dr. Guinto strongly argued that decolonizing English Studies involves several key actions: 1) recentring the Filipino experience, 2) engaging with local communities, diversifying the understanding of linguistic communication, 3) promoting curriculum flexibility, and 4) fostering critical thinking. He stressed the importance of not forgetting the history of English, acknowledging its current role, and considering the future trajectory of Englishes in the Philippines. Through these efforts, he believes that the English Studies program can better respond to the needs of students and communities, ensuring a more inclusive and contextually relevant approach to English Studies.

# Dr. Ruth M. Tindaan

*Associate Professor, College of Arts and Communication,  
University of the Philippines Baguio*

## FIRST DISCUSSION QUESTION

*What is the state of the English Studies program in your university, and where do you want to go from there? What are your hopes and dreams for your English Studies Program? Why?*

Dr. Ruth Tindaan began her response to the first discussion question by explaining that the Department of Language, Literature, and the Arts at UP Baguio (UPB), where she teaches, offers a Bachelor of Arts in Language and Literature. While this program is not strictly an English Studies program, the department aims for a balanced training in both language and literature, with a focus on English and Filipino as intersecting fields. The goal of the program, according to her, is to connect language and literature, integrating their relevance into everyday life through core courses, relevant theories, approaches, research methods, and pedagogy.

### *Localizing the BA Language and Literature Program at UPB*

Dr. Tindaan shared that one of the key objectives of their program is promoting awareness and understanding of the diverse cultures of the Philippines, particularly on the linguistic and literary traditions of Northern Luzon. She emphasized that this focus is especially relevant to their community's cultural context, given the location of UP Baguio and its connection to the Cordillera region. This seeks to highlight the unique cultural heritage of the area, ensuring that students engage with local traditions and their significance within broader national and global conversations.

### *Course Offerings*

With regard to the courses offered under the BA Language and Literature program at UP Baguio, Dr. Tindaan explained that in their program, they offer

courses on the structure and development of English, varieties of English, and literary forms and traditions. While these are standard courses typically found in an English Studies program, she clarified that the degree is not strictly an English Studies program per se, despite retaining elements of the traditional structure often associated with such programs. In addition to English-focused courses, the said program strives for balance by also offering courses that focus on Filipino language and literature as well, such as *Struktura at Pag-unlad ng Filipino*, Lexicography, and *Malikhaing Pagsulat*. These courses ensure that students receive comprehensive training across both languages, fostering a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of English and Filipino in the cultural and literary landscape.

### ***Strengthening the Focus on Northern Luzon and the Cordillera Region***

When it comes to operationalizing their focus on Northern Luzon and the Cordillera region, Dr. Tindaan discussed that they offer specific regional courses, such as *Hilagang Luzon* (Northern Luzon) Studies, which often includes Ilocano Studies due to the prominence of Ilocano-speaking areas in Northern Luzon, such as Ilocos and Cagayan. The program also offers *Panitikan ng Cordillera* at *Kulturang Popular* (Literature and Popular Culture of the Cordillera Region), which covers topics like Cordilleran popular culture, including country music influenced by Western traditions, vernacular films, and social media trends relevant to the area.

Additionally, to support local literature, Dr. Tindaan also shared that they organized the Cordillera Creative Writing Workshops, which have been running for six or seven years. These workshops, according to her, provide a regional platform like UP's larger writing workshops, to foster literary production in the region. The workshops bring together local writers for a week-long event where they receive guidance and mentorship, helping to cultivate and showcase the rich literary traditions of the area.

### ***Language Requirements and Its Relevance to Localized Research***

On a different note, Dr. Tindaan also mentioned that their program includes a six-unit language requirement, similar to regular English Studies programs. According to her, students have two options: they can either choose a foreign

language (excluding English) or a local language. In the past, the program has offered foreign language options such as French, Spanish, and Japanese. The local language option, however, depends on the linguistic expertise of the faculty, enabling them to teach languages like Ifugao, as needed.

She further highlighted that learning a local language is particularly beneficial for students planning to conduct research in specific communities. For instance, if a Tagalog-speaking student needs to do fieldwork in a Benguet community, they may need to learn Ilocano, Kankanaey, or Ibaloy. The program, according to Dr. Tindaan, helps students acquire these local languages, thus facilitating their entry into these communities and enhancing their research opportunities.

### ***Infusing Local Perspectives in the Conventional English Studies Program***

Similarly, Dr. Tindaan also explained that through this configuration, the program aims to diversify the conventional English Studies curriculum by infusing local perspectives and responding to the cultural needs of the region. Being situated in the Cordillera region, the program is particularly encouraged to contribute to the development of local languages and literatures. By integrating local language instruction and focusing on regional literary traditions, the program seeks to bridge the gap between English Studies and the unique cultural context of Northern Luzon and the Cordillera region, providing students with a more holistic and regionally relevant education.

### ***English Studies as Interdisciplinary, Cultural, and Decolonial***

She further expressed that while the program already supports local languages and literatures, she aims to reconfigure the program, incorporating more expansive and critical approaches from cultural studies, which is her area of expertise. As she explained, cultural studies is an interdisciplinary field that draws from both the humanities and social sciences. It aims to understand how culture shapes and distributes power both locally and globally, viewing culture as a critical site where power relations are established and potentially challenged. She believed that this approach aligns with the program's

decolonial goals, as it provides a framework to critically examine and challenge existing power structures, further enriching the program's perspective.

To take as an example, Dr. Tindaan proposed that the program could continue to offer courses like *Structure and Development of the English Language*, *Varieties of English*, or *Western Literature*, but with a more critical lens on the power structures embedded within these fields. For instance, according to her, when discussing literary forms and traditions, the program could explore the social and political contexts that shaped them and examine how these forms have contributed to Western nations' discourse of cultural superiority. In discussing varieties of English, she further suggested going beyond linguistic features to consider the motivations behind local adaptations, emphasizing how these innovations often serve to assert cultural identity or resist dominant norms. This shift would align with the program's decolonial goals, allowing students to critically engage with how language and literature both reflect and challenge power relations.

Dr. Tindaan concluded by highlighting that in the context of the Cordillera region, where aspirations for regional autonomy and self-determination are often expressed in English, there is a noticeable use of local concepts such as *bodong* (a peace pact or treaty) or *binadang* (a form of mutual or communal aid). These terms are used to articulate community aspirations and reflect how English can be reconfigured to accommodate local perspectives. This process exemplifies how language, even when it is a global or dominant medium, can be adapted to reflect and amplify local identities, needs, and aspirations, further supporting the goal of the program to integrate local cultural contexts into its curriculum.

## SECOND DISCUSSION QUESTION

*How can your English Studies program truly respond to the needs of your students (both majors and non-majors), institution, and community?*

In her response to the second roundtable question, Dr. Tindaan believed that to truly respond to the needs of their students, the program should continually develop students' communicative competence. She agreed with Dr.



Nicanor Guinto, particularly regarding the importance of students' strategic competence for navigating increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous conditions. She also felt that it was no longer enough for students to focus solely on linguistic competence, such as mastery of grammar or an emphasis on native speaker-like pronunciation—skills that conventional English Studies programs traditionally aimed to develop. Instead, she emphasized the need to equip students with adaptive, strategic skills to communicate effectively across diverse contexts.

### ***Developing the Communication Skills of English Studies Majors and Non-Majors***

Dr. Tindaan further emphasized the importance of training students to use their English language knowledge and skills effectively across a variety of situations. Noting that many English Studies majors went on to become teachers, she highlighted the need to prepare them for diverse teaching environments, whether in basic education in rural areas, private high schools, large state universities, review centers for health workers aiming to go abroad, or outer circle countries like China. She also stressed that students should be able to adapt their English language teaching to meet the demands of these varied contexts. She believed it was essential to make students aware of the diversity of teaching scenarios they might encounter and to equip them with the strategies necessary to respond appropriately.

By the same token, Dr. Tindaan also noted that this need for strategic competence extended beyond English Studies majors to include non-majors as well. For example, she highlighted students from natural sciences programs, such as BS Physics, Chemistry, and Biology, who were enrolled in English writing and speaking courses. She underscored the importance of preparing future scientists to be strategic in their communication, whether speaking to policymakers without scientific training who make key decisions or communicating with rural communities to promote behavioral changes. She explained that, as scientists, they might eventually engage in discussions on critical issues like disaster risk reduction management and would need to tailor their explanations to different audiences. , She advocated for the focus from structural mastery or grammatical accuracy toward strategic negotiation and diversification, ensuring students were prepared to communicate effectively in varied real-world contexts.

## ***Advancing UP Baguio's Niche in Cordillera and Indigenous Studies***

On a different note, Dr. Tindaan also responded to concerns about English being perceived as a monolithic formation by emphasizing that their English Studies program should also play a stronger role in advancing UP Baguio's unique niche in Cordillera and Indigenous studies. She highlighted that, given UP Baguio's location in a region with a predominantly Indigenous population, there was an essential need for critical engagement with the ways English and American cultural influences had shaped the Cordillera community. She pointed out the complex history of American colonial administration in the Cordillera region, where American culture left a lasting impact, evident in the local preference for country music, cowboy fashion, line dancing, and the use of English. She argued that the English Studies program should foster a more critical perspective on these colonial legacies, not only in the Cordillera but also across Northern Luzon, equipping students with the tools to understand and navigate the cultural intersections and historical influences present in the region.

She further noted a tendency to oversimplify the American colonial legacy in the Cordillera region, often influenced by the favorable portrayal of America's role in advancing civilization, a perspective she observed in both popular understanding and some academic scholarship. She emphasized the need for more spaces within the English Studies program that encourage a deeper critical examination of the region's colonial past. One potential approach, she suggested, is to create opportunities for a more intensive revaluation of local languages, literatures, and knowledge systems. According to her, integrating these areas into the English Studies curriculum could foster a more nuanced understanding of colonial influence and support a stronger recognition of Cordilleran cultural identity and heritage.

## ***The Prestige and Economic Advantages Associated with English***

Dr. Tindaan concluded her response by noting that many parents place significant value on the prestige and economic advantages associated with English, often to the point that Indigenous languages are no longer encouraged at home. This shift, she noted, results in fewer linguistic resources for children and, in some cases, creates a generation of Egro children who speak

English as their first language—a mark of their parents' social mobility. While she acknowledged that this trend is not inherently negative, she expressed concern that if it continues, the number of Indigenous language speakers will decrease, leading to language decline rather than coexistence with English. She further suggested that the English Studies program should play a role in reconfiguring these colonial attitudes, particularly among parents and the broader community, to encourage a more inclusive linguistic perspective and foster the preservation of Indigenous languages alongside English.

Lastly, she shared that she had noticed a question asking if academics themselves were perhaps "colonially minded." She recognized this as a parallel issue, highlighting that similar efforts are needed to decolonize the perspectives of parents and the entire community.

Additionally, Dr. Aileen Salonga acknowledged the point Dr. Tindaan made about how students often expect to learn English in a certain way because it is seen as a gateway to good jobs and social mobility, a belief rooted in the values instilled by parents. Dr. Salonga found this observation interesting and connected it to the idea that English, as a concept, is often talked about in abstract terms. However, she emphasized the importance of grounding it in real-world use. She pointed out that English is not a monolithic entity but varies greatly depending on the context. Dr. Salonga concluded her comment in agreement with Dr. Tindaan, emphasizing the need to guide students in understanding the different ways English is used across various domains and contexts and noting the importance of teaching them about the diverse repertoires of English spoken around the world.

## THIRD DISCUSSION QUESTION

*What are possible ways of decolonizing English Studies in the country given your assessment of your program and where you want to take it?*

*The third (and final) roundtable discussion question was asked alongside two equally related questions:*

- 1. How do we decolonize the (English Studies) curriculum when academics themselves are still in the grip of English as a monolithic entity?*
- 2. How will the discourses on decolonizing English affect teacher education, particularly English education courses, such as BSE, English, MAELP, etc.?*

Dr. Tindaan addressed the last set of roundtable questions by highlighting four key points for decolonizing English Studies.

### ***Engaging with the Colonial Legacy of English and English Teaching***

Her first point was the critical need to acknowledge and engage with the colonial legacy of English and English teaching. She further emphasized the importance of recognizing the colonial history of English language teaching and its impact on local languages, literatures, and cultures. She pointed out that English played a significant role in disenfranchising local or indigenous knowledge systems, contributing to epistemological violence. By critically examining these historical realities, she argued, it would be possible to open spaces for reconfiguring power dynamics, particularly in terms of the dominance of English, especially in its Anglo-American form, as the sole marker of achievement and social mobility. She further discussed the importance of challenging the power imbalances inherent in dominant Western pedagogies and redesigning teaching practices to promote social justice, equity, and ultimately, the decolonization of English language teaching and pedagogy.

### ***Engaging in Critical Reflection***

Meanwhile, Dr. Tindaan's second point underscored the importance of engaging in critical reflection. She mentioned that teachers should continuously reflect on their own beliefs, biases, prejudices, and practices as English language educators. This ongoing self-reflection, she explained, is crucial for fostering a change in attitude and improving one's ability to create inclusive and equitable learning environments. Dr. Tindaan also recommended that educators look into the extensive literature available in Indigenous studies, which advocates for self-determination, agency, and community empowerment. She pointed out that this body of work could offer valuable insights and guidance in reshaping teaching practices and developing a more inclusive approach to education.

### ***Embracing Multilingualism as an Asset***

In her third point, Dr. Tindaan opined that English majors and teachers should embrace multilingualism. She noted that all the speakers in the roundtable discussion had pointed this idea out, emphasizing the need to recognize and embrace the multilingualism of learners. She further stressed the significance of promoting the use of the mother tongue alongside English, as well as encouraging the entire linguistic repertoire of students. This approach, she argued, could help decolonize English language teaching by acknowledging that these are legitimate languages that can be utilized to advance student learning. She advocated, among other things, for creating opportunities in the classroom for students to use their home languages and for viewing multilingualism as an asset, rather than a deficit.

### ***Promoting Cultural Diversity and Inclusivity***

Dr. Tindaan's fourth point revolved around the promotion of cultural diversity and inclusivity. She continued by discussing that this is essential for decolonizing English language teaching, as it encourages respect for students' diverse backgrounds and fosters a more equitable learning space. She also advocated for incorporating varied pedagogies, particularly those rooted in local cultures and languages, to create a culturally responsive and inclusive environment. She highlighted the use of learner-centered approaches. These methods, according to her, prioritize the needs, interests, experiences, and contexts of the learners. This could involve using interactive and collaborative

activities, offering opportunities for self-reflection and self-evaluation, and adapting teaching materials to better suit the learners' levels and contexts.

As her concluding point, Dr. Tindaan seconded what Dr. Bartolata had said earlier about fostering low-anxiety classrooms. She underscored the importance of not policing students' accents or labeling them as regional defects. Dr. Tindaan recalled her own experience in DSEL, where teachers would point out regional defects, which left a lasting impact. She argued that such practices only serve to reject students' identities, which are inherently diverse and multifaceted in the Philippines. Dr. Tindaan believed that we must accept and honor the multiple identities of students to truly decolonize English teaching.

# Farah Aimee S. Virador

*Faculty, Department of Humanities,  
University of the Philippines Mindanao*

## FIRST DISCUSSION QUESTION

*What is the state of the English Studies program in your university, and where do you want to go from there? What are your hopes and dreams for your English Studies Program? Why?*

Ms. Virador began her response to the first discussion question by sharing that as part of a recent quality assurance process, her department was given the opportunity to reconfigure their existing English Studies program. According to her, their English Studies program at UP Mindanao (UPM) primarily focuses on English, with a specific concentration on creative writing, offering students a chance to engage deeply in both the craft and the theory of writing in English.

She further shared that curriculum changes aligned with the K-12 transition brought significant updates to the English Creative Writing Program at UPM in 2018. One of the main changes, according to Ms. Virador, was the restructuring of courses. Some of the notable modifications included updating the core curriculum, adding new electives, and offering more specialized courses. The English Language Study course, for example, which was previously a core subject, was reclassified as a qualified elective. This reclassification aligns with the program's focus on creative writing as the primary concentration. The changes reflect the shift of the program towards a more specialized and focused curriculum.

### *Faculty and Student Composition*

Additionally, Ms. Virador further explained that faculty and student profiles play a significant role in determining the electives offered in the program, such as the Eng 100 course and other English elective courses, based on what they believe would benefit students the most. The program, for instance,

offers courses like *Writing for the Professions* for senior students, as well as surveys of English, British, and American literature. Moreover, individual faculty members have also integrated post-colonial fiction into these courses, allowing for a broader perspective within English Studies. This reflects the effort of the department to introduce more diverse, critical viewpoints that challenge traditional Western literary canons and promote a more inclusive approach to the curriculum.

### ***Incorporating Philippine Englishes such as Mindanaoan English and Davao English***

Ms. Virador further discussed that currently, students in their program are expected to write their thesis projects in English, which has sparked some ongoing debate. During workshops, for instance, the faculty often discuss whether it is acceptable for students to use local idioms without translating them, particularly since their target readers are from the Philippines, specifically from Mindanao and surrounding areas. According to her, the program aims to represent local forms of English, such as Mindanaoan English or Davao English, as authentic and meaningful. By doing so, they seek to create space for English as it is shaped by local contexts, promoting the idea that these localized forms are valuable expressions of identity and culture.

### ***Developing the Critical Skills of Students***

Regarding the development of students' critical skills, Ms. Virador highlighted that their program offers several courses designed to build such skills in their students. For example, they have *Arts 1: Critical Perspectives in the Arts*, which is taught by faculty members and includes content that has recently been approved from other UP campuses. Additionally, courses like *Speech, Authority, and Public Speaking* and *Writing as Thinking* are aimed at strengthening the students' academic writing skills, thereby equipping them to approach research and analytical writing more effectively.

### ***Steps towards Improving the English Studies Curriculum***

On a different note, Ms. Virador also noted that while the 2018 curriculum has already made strides in decolonizing English Studies by incorporating more creative writing, there is still room for further progress. She envisioned a program, for example, that highlights more non-Western, Indigenous, and



marginalized voices, particularly in the context of Mindanao, which is rich in diversity but often underrepresented in mainstream discourse. To achieve this, Ms. Virador and her colleagues are working to introduce new courses and programs that would make the curriculum more relevant to the current generation of learners, as well as to the local community they serve. This direction, she believes, would help better reflect the voices and experiences of students and their surrounding environments.

For example, instead of traditional courses in English literature, Ms. Virador emphasized that the department should consider offering courses in Global Anglophone Literature, Digital Humanities, and Environmental Literature. Additionally, she reiterated the need to adopt a more interdisciplinary approach by incorporating media studies. This evolution, according to her, would allow the study and practice of literature to better align with contemporary interests and the societal needs of the present, enabling students to engage with literature in ways that reflect current global and local concerns.

To conclude, Ms. Virador also shared that she was personally invested in the future of the program and has proposed establishing a Master of Arts in Writing and Literature. This proposed MA program, she believes, would focus on producing creative outputs that resonate with the cultural context of Mindanao, providing a platform for regional voices. She hoped that this graduate program will not only enrich the current BA in English program but also offer students greater opportunities to explore diverse perspectives within English Studies, further deepening the connection between academic study and regional realities.

## **SECOND DISCUSSION QUESTION**

*How can your English Studies program truly respond to the needs of your students (both majors and non-majors), institution, and community?*

Ms. Virador responded to the second discussion question by highlighting the importance of moving beyond traditional grammatical accuracy in the English Studies program, particularly for English majors concentrated in creative writing. She suggested that offering more interdisciplinary courses could

enhance students' application of language across various contexts. She saw the potential for English to connect with other fields, highlighting the need for translation workshops to help bridge the gap between local languages and English. These workshops, she argued, would allow students to foster connections within their immediate communities and beyond. Ultimately, Ms. Virador envisioned a more supportive and inclusive learning environment through these interdisciplinary approaches and translation initiatives.

### ***Acknowledging Pluralities as the Goal of the English Studies Program***

Ms. Virador stated that the goal of the English Studies program is to acknowledge the pluralities of languages and cultures, emphasizing that language can serve as a form of resistance against the dominance of English in current educational systems. Similarly, she further suggested that for non-majors, courses relevant to their field of study should be offered to encourage creativity and self-expression. She mentioned that senior standing students have the option to take elective courses that allow them to explore topics outside their core subjects, such as music or other interdisciplinary fields, regardless of their major. This approach, she argued, would foster a more holistic and creative environment for all students.

In terms of the institution, Ms. Virador reiterated the need to reconfigure or update the curriculum to better meet the needs of students and the community. She emphasized the importance of acknowledging diversity and inclusion, particularly by focusing on local and regional literature. She pointed out that incorporating indigenous, minority, or historically underrepresented voices into the English Studies curriculum is necessary for providing context and ensuring that these voices are heard.

### ***Reiterating the Need for Interdisciplinarity in English Studies***

Ms. Virador restated the need for the English Studies program to offer more focused interdisciplinary courses and greater emphasis on translation to bridge the demand for English. However, she also stressed the importance of valuing cultural identity and local languages, aiming for a healthy coexistence between English and these local languages. She acknowledged, though, that

structural inequalities will always be present and must be confronted in the process of creating a more inclusive and balanced educational environment.

## THIRD DISCUSSION QUESTION

*What are possible ways of decolonizing English Studies in the country given your assessment of your program and where you want to take it?*

*The third (and final) roundtable discussion question was asked alongside two equally related questions:*

- 1. How do we decolonize the (English Studies) curriculum when academics themselves are still in the grip of English as a monolithic entity?*
- 2. How will the discourses on decolonizing English affect teacher education, particularly English education courses, such as BSE, English, MAELP, etc.?*

Ms. Virador's response to the last set of discussion questions cited an experience during one of their writing workshops when students were accused of inter-writing without a full translation. She pointed out that it is salient to acknowledge the context in which these students are writing. From their perspective, the goal of writing is always mutual intelligibility, rather than strict correctness. Ms. Virador explained that, when considering the target readers, such as those from the Philippines or other local contexts, it is perfectly acceptable to approach writing this way. She emphasized that this is something that needs to be acknowledged in the decolonization of English Studies.

### *Promoting Translingualism in the English Studies Classroom*

As such, Ms. Virador discussed the importance of moving away from the idea of a single, standard way of using English. She emphasized that English, like any language, has many varieties. She shared her approach when delivering lectures, where she introduces the concept of translingualism to her students. She explained that languages are no longer confined to strict boundaries;

instead, they transition fluidly from one to another. Ms. Virador also suggested that students should not be too concerned with accuracy, correctness, or speaking error-free when presenting in class. Instead, the focus should be on how well they can convey their ideas, promoting a more anxiety-free language classroom.

### ***The Rise of Artificial Intelligence and Its Threat to Linguistic Authenticity***

To conclude her response, Ms. Virador further repeated the significance of acknowledging the diverse ways in which students express themselves, especially now in the context of artificial intelligence (AI). She noted that many students are increasingly concerned with the correctness of their expression and, as a result, resort to AI for assistance. However, in doing so, they risk losing their authentic voice, which reflects their own lives, realities, and cultural context. She emphasized that decolonizing English Studies involves recognizing the pluralities of students' experiences and contexts and foregrounding these in language and literature teaching. Ms. Virador argued against the dominant paradigm that suppresses local cultures and voices, advocating for a more inclusive approach that celebrates diverse expressions and perspectives.



# Synthesis

At this juncture, Dr. Aileen Salonga synthesized the panelists' responses to the first discussion question and commented that, based on the current responses, talking about English Studies necessitates talking about external factors and variables as well. Material and institutional constraints, for example, are prevalent, and there is also the question of what kinds of research tracks institutions and universities envision for themselves. According to Dr. Salonga, there is also the desire to do more, but that academics and teachers are held back by external forces which prevent them from doing everything that they want to do for their program, department, and students.



# Open Forum

The following questions were taken from the Q&A forum of the roundtable discussion.

1. *Is there a possibility of Philippine Englishes becoming another mishandling of linguistic variety similar to what happened to the mother tongue, i.e., a certain Philippine English variety becoming the main English in a region, despite the differences of linguistic backgrounds?*

Dr. Guinto responded by saying that Philippine Englishes becoming another mishandling of linguistic variety is not a possibility. According to him, “It’s not really a matter of imposing among our students that there are some certain Englishes [that are] better than others, or more valued than others.” For Dr. Guinto, it is “a matter of letting them know” the different Englishes “that we should recognize, welcome, and appreciate.”

Dr. Papilota Diaz added that promoting one English variety over another “will defeat the purpose of promoting varied Englishes or Philippine Englishes.” For Dr. Papilota Diaz, promoting Englishes and Philippine Englishes is not imposing one language, as in the case of mother tongue. She further stated that:

In our community, however, the available reading materials published or photocopied reproduced are those which were done by, you know, our academics, which is more on Hiligaynon. So, I think the mention[ing] of having only like, or having several, or even just in the region or in our region, having, like one specific version of Philippine English may not necessarily really work, and it will take so much time to really standardize it. But the concept, I think, is like, we’ll just be open to varieties and will not consider one as inferior over another. I guess that is how it is.

2. *When we say, “Opening the Gates for Philippine Englishes,” does it mean that there are certain gates that need to be closed entirely, so that the “gate” for the Philippine Englishes would flourish if yes, what are those for?*



Dr. Tindaan argues the need to close some gates such as the English-only Policy and the policing of accents.

Dr. Bartolata, in agreement with Dr. Tindaan, thinks “that we have to continue accepting others for who they are.” She further speaks of the need to “...reframe our mindsets” and “move on” from “language attitudes... that are conventional.”

3. *Do you think that it would be easier if English Studies were to be decolonized earlier in the formative years of education, as opposed to talking about it only at the university level?*

Dr. Tindaan, in her response says that “The parents are already the cost of the subtractive education, other linguistic resources of your children, just because you look at English as the [...] more economically viable sort of a pathway for your children to get ahead. So, what they discourage [is] the formation of other linguistic resources in the children. And I think that's a disservice to the children themselves [particularly the] linguistic resources of children.” Dr. Tindaan explains that parents must reconfigure their attitudes towards English. She mentions that English education is only “one among many pathways for social mobility.” Dr. Tindaan further emphasizes not to “discourage the development of other linguistic resources” of children.

Dr. Salonga further added that “parents are ... following certain ideologies about English, [and] not just English in the country, but [also] the role of English in the world,” highlighting the systemic nature of the problem.

Ms. Virador also added that, in decolonizing the classroom, it is also important to “incorporate reading materials... from local authors.” Furthermore, Ms. Virador also advocated for introducing materials from “the national or regional context as early as kindergarten or grade school.”

Dr. Guinto further mentions “that it's never too late to introduce these notions in college either, because in my experience these moments, when introduced to students [is also] entirely new to them.” This enables students to share the idea that in English, one “shouldn't be afraid or

shamed” by the way they talk, even describing it as a revolutionary moment.

Dr. Bartolata reiterated her point of “starting small by doing something in the formative years of students.” She underscored the need to train teachers and to “know strategies, pedagogical methodologies, as to how to do these things.”

Dr. Salonga agreed with Dr. Bartolata in beginning with small steps. She further noted debates on “what it means to decolonize exactly, and how that experience also changes, depending on where we are in the world.” Dr. Salonga further opined that “there’s also that kind of [challenges] that we have to reflect on, [like] what we mean by decolonial, decoloniality, or decolonizing as well.”



# Closing Remarks

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*Aileen O. Salonga, Ph.D.*

*Professor, Department of English and Comparative Literature  
UP Diliman*

Dr. Aileen Salonga, Professor, Department of English and Comparative Literature at UP Diliman delivered the closing remarks. She mentioned the need “to reframe the way that we relate to each other.” She noted that, while there has to be someone who tells us where to begin, there should also be mutual respect among partners “in this process of trying to make things better.” Thanking the speakers, Dr. Salonga expressed hope to continue the conversation. She highlighted how, despite “a lot of common concerns, common problems, common enemies,” there is also optimism “about the future, that there are things that we can do and that we can do them together” through collaboration.

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