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Subversive (post)colonial discourse

The thousands of languages that interweave themselves into disparate, yet constellating cultural identities have had a long history with various assertions of power and authority. Yet, there are repeating instances when the language of “authority” is undermined by the language of the subjugated, akin to work contributed by theorist Homi Bhabha. In some circumstances the two languages may be in fact the same language, but have created different meanings to the oppressed and the oppressor. In my paper, I will specifically be looking at two instances in history: the colonial configurations of language in late-nineteenth century India, and the current postcolonial configurations of language in present-day Philippines. In both instances, the multiplicity of languages and translation of these languages (English-Hindi, Spanish-Tagalog) reflect moments of cultural exchange, but also become sources of anxiety. An example of a complicating linguistic exchange can be found in the word *sahib* as a mode of distinguishing the British imperialists with the native Indians of colonial India. While seemingly a title given to western authority, the categorizing language is that of Hindi, Urdu, and Arabic, all languages sharing that title to address the colonial European. The very fact that a native word is allocated to a foreign authority obscures the nature of language and its relationship with power and control. Another example is found in Tagalog, a Malay-based language that has been permanently infiltrated with Spanish vernacular. The Spanish word *delicado*, meaning delicate, has been translated into the Tagalog *delikado*, meaning dangerous or unsafe. Through misappropriation of colonial language, postcolonial language becomes a disparate and empowering tool for the postcolonized population. Language and control are crucial to understand when considering the socio-linguistics of colonial India and the postcolonial Philippines.