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## Inventing Postcolonial Elites: Race, Language, Mix, Excess

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*This article illustrates how semiotic processes that form and circulate ideologies about race, language, and the elite are central to questions of coloniality. Considering the historical and contemporary context of the Philippines, I examine how notions of linguistic and racial “mix” and “excess” get linked to elite social figures and how one elite figure in particular—the “conyo elite”—is reportedly heard and seen by a private school-educated listening subject that is constituted, in contrast, as “middle-class elite.” I consider how iconizations of mixedness and excessiveness invent distinctions among Philippine elite types, producing an “elite bifurcation” that recursively constitutes colonial hierarchies: positioning conyo elites as acting as colonists whose supposedly mixed and excessive qualities are regarded as immoral, overly modern, and a national betrayal. [race, register, elite, coloniality, Philippines]*

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If the term “postcolonial” suggests a linear, temporal movement from during to after colonialism, it risks obscuring the mechanisms through which colonial systems persist in the absence of formal colonial rule (McClintock 1992). Rejecting that the postcolonial represents a rupture from the colonial, theorists have examined colonialism “as a structure, not an event” (Wolfe 2006:388), by viewing the “colonial present” (Gregory 2004) less as continuity of a colonial past, and more as “recuperations, reactivations, and recombinations of familiar forms” (Stoler 2016:32). If the postcolony is organized by colonial structures, it is because elements of these structures have been reformulated—not simply replicated—in fractally recursive configurations (Gal and Irvine 1995). This article explores such colonial recursivity by focusing on evaluations of elite “mix” and “excess” that produce downward recursions of established colonial hierarchies within a formerly colonized nation-state-population.

To be sure, several concepts, such as “coloniality” and “decolonization,” acknowledge the recursive character of many postcolonial societies. Coloniality, a term most associated with Latin American subaltern studies, emphasizes the endurance of a range of colonial systems in the postcolony, including modes of control over the economy, subjectivity, and knowledge (Mignolo 2001; Quijano 2000). Coloniality also foregrounds the continued centrality of race: the remarkable durability of systems of human classification based on notions of natural, hierarchized difference that were established under colonialism. As Aníbal Quijano (2000:533) writes: “rac[e] has a colonial origin and character, but it has proven to be more durable and stable than the colonialism in whose matrix it was established.”

The ongoing project of decolonization “seeks to apprehend and, ultimately displace a ‘logic of coloniality’ that undergirds the experiment of Western modernity” (Allen and Jobson 2016:130).

An example of the recursive quality of a coloniality of race can be found in the movement from what Paul Kramer (2006) calls the “bifurcated racial state” to what Benedict Anderson (1988) calls “cacique democracy.” In the context of American empire in the Philippines (1898–1946), the bifurcated racial state describes how U.S. colonial discourses once organized Filipinos into two main types: the “civilized” *mestizo* (mixed-race) Christian, and the “wild” dark-skinned non-Christian (Rafael 2000). In justifications for colonial intervention, the “wild” were positioned as exemplars of incomplete civilization in need of American protection from the corrupt *mestizo* elite. Yet once U.S. rule was established, these very same elite became important collaborators in the colonial administration. By independence in 1946, *mestizo* elites, who acquired enormous wealth and power under both Spanish and American colonial rule, were firmly established in positions of authority and governance in the Philippines (Go 2008). Thus began a durable cacique democracy, which continues to structure the Philippine nation.<sup>1</sup> Here, colonialism is recursively reactivated—with reassembled parts and players, to be sure—in what has been described as “internal colonialism” (Mignolo 2007) or “internal empire” (Kramer 2006), where *mestizo* elites, not colonial officials, uphold the bifurcated racial state: lighter races on top; darker races on bottom.

Language also becomes central to these questions of coloniality, race, and the elite. Discussing the ambivalent role of language during Spanish colonialism in the Philippines (1565–1898), Monica Heller and Bonnie McElhinny (in press) discuss how:

Requiring the use of European languages could mean ensuring loyalty to the empire; however, denying access could guarantee certain intermediaries the powerful and often lucrative position of brokers between native communities and the State. [Filipinos] who learned the European languages too well could come to be seen as a threat to the regime. . . . Certain individuals embodied these tensions: bilingual *mestizos* . . . could be seen as both useful translators but also as dangerous threats if they moved into powerful positions.

Here, language becomes mapped onto race in a manner that depicts “bilingual *mestizos*”—literally in this phrasing—as straddling two languages and two races, pointing to the potential excesses of itself, and producing what Vicente Rafael (1995) calls “*mestiza* envy”: the envy both of and for light-skinned Filipinas whose bodily and linguistic doubleness “signifies the privilege associated with collaborating with and containing the workings of power” (105). This doubled position of the *mestizo* elite has been greeted with a range of evaluations, evaluations that certainly comment upon the evaluated—that is, the elite—but also comment upon the evaluator—that is, the “listening subject” (Inoue 2006). It is precisely this position of the listening subject—that which comments on the elite—whose evaluations of racial and linguistic “mix” and “excess” I interrogate.

This article illustrates how semiotic processes that form and circulate ideologies about race, language, and the elite are central to questions of coloniality. I consider how colonial distinctions in the postcolony do not disappear, nor simply continue or repeat. Rather, colonial hierarchies are reconfigured through reassemblages of social figures and linguistic registers across discursively connected events over time and space (Wortham and Reyes 2015). Considering the historical and contemporary context of the Philippines, I examine how notions of linguistic and racial “mix” and “excess” get linked to elite social figures and how one elite figure in particular—the “*conyo* elite”—is reportedly heard and seen by a private school-educated listening subject that is constituted, in contrast, as “middle-class elite.” I focus on how qualities of people and language become iconized (Gal and Irvine 1995; Peirce 1932)—that is, stand in a relationship of resemblance to one another—in a manner that makes mixed and excessive qualities seem to inhere naturally in the *conyo* elite. I consider how

these iconizations of mixedness and excessiveness invent distinctions among Philippine elite types, producing an “elite bifurcation” that recursively constitutes colonial hierarchies: positioning conyo elites (not middle-class elites) as acting as colonists whose supposedly mixed and excessive qualities are regarded as immoral, overly modern, and a national betrayal.

Through this exploration, I build two main arguments. First, I show how qualities are not inherent to entities or practices, but come to be regarded as such through semiotic formulations that link contrasting qualities of speech to contrasting figures of personhood. For the case I consider here, although mixed and excessive qualities may be construed as intrinsic, entangled properties of language and people, it is the differentiated elite figures to which linguistic and social characteristics are attached that drive this construal. Second, I highlight how the private school becomes a site for elite bifurcation whereby a desirable elite figure can only be constituted through the creation and containment of an undesirable elite figure. The private school is often regarded as an extension of the colonial project that produces the “wrong” kind of Filipino: the pretentious, vacuous conyo elite. Producing the “right” kind of private school-educated Filipino—the middle-class elite—requires the conyo elite upon which it comments. This middle-class elite figure is the product of a careful orchestration that positions it “beside that which it critiques,” but never outside of a recursively constituted coloniality.

### Philippine Elite, Mestizo, Taglish

I use the term “Philippine elite,” a subject of enormous scrutiny in scholarly writings (e.g., Go 2008; Rafael 2000), to refer not to a single, static social position or economic status, but to renderings of various, historically situated groups to which privileges have been attributed. Throughout colonial histories up to the contemporary moment, Philippine elites have been viewed as playing various roles in establishing, dismantling, and reinstalling Spanish and American colonial rule. In the Philippines, elites are still regarded with deep ambivalence and suspicion: both as revolutionary heroes rising up against colonial power, and as self-interested collaborators benefiting from colonial governance.

Philippine elites have been understood relative to racial categories developed under colonialisms, with “mestizeness” as almost a defining trait by the 1800s. Racial categories that were generated and reformulated under Spanish and American colonial rule functioned not only to justify colonial domination but also to establish separate statuses for the colonized elite. The Spanish caste system carved out distinct juridical statuses for people regarded as mestizo of different types, such as Filipino-Spanish *mestizo de español*, who, like the Spanish (or *blanco*), paid no tax, and Filipino-Chinese *mestizo de sangley*, who paid more tax than the native Filipino, but less tax than the Chinese. The U.S. colonial state, in contrast, proposed a different theory of mestizeness. While the *ilustrado* (enlightened ones)—the cosmopolitan, reformist faction of the Philippine mestizo elite—claimed that a history of racial mixing led to a superior race of mestizo elites who were capable of self-rule, the United States regarded racial mixing as leading to “weakness” (Rafael 2000:81). The U.S. Census of the Philippine Islands in 1905 noted how Filipino-European mestizos—whose blood admixture was thought to yield benefits that lasted only to the second generation (Baldoz 2008:93)—were rejected by both Europeans and Filipinos. Mestizos thus strove to, in the words of the U.S. Bureau of Insular Affairs in 1902, “attain the respect and consideration accorded to the superior class” and to “disown their affinity to the inferior races” (1902:51–52, cited in Baldoz 2008:85). Across Philippine colonial histories, then, mestizeness does not so much name the product of racial miscegenation, as much as point to a liminal, upward aspiring colonial subjectivity whose terms change under different imperial exigencies.

Philippine elites have been associated with different linguistic practices in different colonial periods, including a distinct style of what is commonly referred to as

“Taglish” (word blend of “Tagalog” and “English”). Under Spanish colonialism, the Spanish language was not widespread throughout the Philippines, “limited to an elite, mostly mestizo (Chinese and Spanish) minority with access to university education in Manila and Europe” (Rafael 1995:107). To speak Spanish remains an undisputed marker of both elite status and a claim to a venerated Spanish heritage. Unlike Spanish empire, the U.S. colonial state invested in colonial language instruction through the establishment of a public school system throughout the Philippines in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Speaking English, especially English-only, remains a clear sign of elite status, if not “cosmopolitan pretensions” (Besnier 2011:97) or a cause for moral panic that has given rise to Tagalog-as-a-second-language schools in Manila (Reyes 2013). By the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, Taglish was associated with elite linguistic practice, but not exclusively. Starting in the 1950s, Taglish became linked to a commercially driven popular culture, and thus became the object of scathing nationalist critique (Agoncillo 1961). But Taglish was also regarded as a language of public dissent in political cartoons (Rafael 1995). Types of Taglish have been attributed to *bakla* (gay men) (Manalansan 1995), cab drivers (Reyes 2017), *yaya* (nannies), and bar girls (Bautista 1996). Elites can also be described as speaking a Taglish comprised of a set of features that distinguishes it from other Taglish varieties. Elite efforts to differentiate types of Taglish signal elite investment in the “maintenance of a linguistic hierarchy as a way of regulating the social hierarchy” (Rafael 1995:108). Taglish, therefore, is less a “language,” and more a metadiscursive label for a set of socially recognized varieties whose usage signals relationships between social groups.

### Conyo Elite

Conyo is regarded as a contemporary iteration of the Taglish-speaking Philippine mestizo elite, one that enjoys the usual advantages of wealth, but one that is also youthful, consumerist, and vapid. In contemporary Philippines, the term “conyo” can be multivalent. Conyo (also spelled: konyo, coño, cono, or conio) is often recognized as deriving from the Spanish word *coño*, a term for female genitalia that is also a popular curse word. Particularly in urban areas like Manila and among private school-educated youth, conyo also refers to both a type of person and a type of speech: wealthy, status-conscious, empty-headed youth, who attend or recently attended private schools and who speak a supposedly distinct form of Taglish. In addition to these linguistic and class markers, conyo are often identified in racial terms: “mestizo” and “light-skinned.” Similar to other postcolonial elite figures—such as “Kong girl” in Hong Kong (Kang and Chen 2014), “Peter” in India (Nakassis 2016), “burger” in Pakistan (Durrani 2016), “Model C” in South Africa (Wale 2010), “D4” in Ireland (Moore 2011a), and “fresa” in Mexico (Chaparro 2016)—conyo, I will argue, is also about the creation of a striving internal other against which a sensible, moral, middle-class position can be constituted.

I conceptualize conyo not as a “real person” but as a “figure of personhood” formed through metadiscursive processes that assign it recognizable qualities and propel it into circulation within specifiable social domains (Agha 2005; Goffman 1981; Irvine 1996). I thus focus on conyo as an object of commentary. An example of such commentary can be found in the 2012 YouTube video, “How to Be a Conyo.”<sup>2</sup> This five-minute video features only one character, “Petra Mahalimuyak” (the online persona of 19-year-old Ashley Rivera), who alternates between describing conyo and acting as conyo. She wears large sunglasses, a strapless top, jewelry around her wrists, and poses with one hand on her hip, the other holding her purse (figure 1). In the video, Petra discusses “five steps” for how to be a conyo: “talk in Taglish”; “always buy overpriced stuff”; “have a *yaya* (nanny) and a driver”; “go to a conyotic environment”; and “always be in the V.I.P. section.” Excerpt 1 features a transcript of the beginning of the video.



Figure 1. "How to Be a Conyo" [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

### Excerpt 1. "Talk in Taglish"

Why hello there, my loves. This is Petra Mahalimuyak. And today's tutorial will be so very interesting. Did you know that the conyo population in the Philippines is becoming bigger and bigger? Well, don't get me wrong. Being a conyo doesn't make you a bitch. You're just so fucking rich. So, this is how to be a conyo. Step number one: talk in Taglish. Taglish is the official language of the conyos, or the rich kids. It's when you combine Tagalog and English. And you also have to have this *maarte* (dramatic) tone or accent. And then you emphasize on pronouncing some words. Or even make it slang. And you use the words "like," "*parang* (like)," "oh my god," "yuck," "ew," "*diba?* (right?)," "I know, right?" This is the perfect and overused example. "Girl, let's make *tusok-tusok* (skewer) the fishballs, over there in the *kantoh* (corner), where *Manong* (older male relative) is standing." Or, "my friend was *parang* (like), trying to make me *kain* (eat) the *isaw* (grilled intestines). And I was like, 'oh my god, no. It's like so *kadiri* (gross), *kaya* (you know).'"

In this excerpt, conyo is described as a growing population of "rich kids" that "talk in Taglish." According to Petra, "Taglish" is "when you combine Tagalog and English." But Petra clarifies that conyo speak a particular type of Taglish. For example, conyo Taglish speakers: "have this *maarte* tone or accent"; "emphasize on pronouncing some words"; "make it slang"; "use the words" (e.g., "like," "*parang*") and a particular verb construction: English "make" plus Tagalog verb (e.g., "make *tusok-tusok*"). Through the use of quoted speech, Petra depicts conyo as enjoying "fishballs" but complaining about "*isaw*," street foods commonly found outside of urban private schools. Thus conyo do not simply "talk in Taglish," but are understood as using the emotive capacity of a type of Taglish to express agreement (e.g., "I know, right?"), surprise (e.g., "oh my god"), disgust (e.g., "yuck"), and other affective stances.

Similar depictions of conyo as expressive, fussy, and high-class circulate widely in Philippine media: for example, a tongue-in-cheek "conyoproblems" Twitter account that posts upper-class concerns and complaints, such as needing a driver to avoid getting "sweaty and gross from walking" (figure 2),<sup>3</sup> and a recipe for the "sophisticated" "conyo crabby patty" created by a young Filipina interior designer (figure 3).<sup>4</sup>





Figure 2. @conyoproblems [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

Commentary on conyo language, people, and lifestyle is often generated by urban, elite private school-educated youth in or from the Philippines. In my ethnographic research at an elite private university in Manila, I found that the private school is often framed as either the “natural habitat” of conyo or the site for its duplication: where Filipinos *are* conyo, where Filipinos *become* conyo. Conyo is typically an epithet for others, not a label that is claimed for oneself. Thus at the private school, conyo is always near but also always “over there.” Indeed, conyo functions as a problematic youth category since it is tied to how the elite are educated in the private school to be the “wrong” kind of Filipino: materialistic, arrogant, and foolish. Conyo is often set in relation to other social figures: in contrast to *jolog* or *jejemon* (or *jej* [see figure 2]) (tacky urban masses) and in similarity to *sosyal* (high-class) and *colegiala* (Catholic school girl). Even though conyo can be a label applied to any gender, it often signals feminized affect: for example, using expressive language (excerpt 1), being overly concerned with one’s appearance (figures 1–2), or having a refined palate (figure 3). Thus males who are labeled conyo are sometimes viewed as “effeminate.”

In my research, I found that conyo as an elite label has circulated since at least the 1960s, but gained prominence beginning in the 1990s. Its increased circulation coincided with the rise of the “mega-mall” presidency of Corazon Aquino (Rafael 1995:118), where the intense commercialization and imagined prosperity in late-20<sup>th</sup>-century Philippines brought about rising middle-class anxieties over the display of modern emblems of privilege. Conyo often labels these pseudo-elites—the striving, middle-class “fake” elite—not the established, old money “real” elite, whose generational wealth is traced to colonial privilege. Conyo, then, can signal a new, upwardly mobile group that is separate from the long-standing mestizo caste, thus raising suspicions about who is a “real” or “fake” elite (Reyes 2017).

Several origin narratives about conyo circulate. Excerpt 2 features an iteration of one of the most widespread myths, which firmly embeds the emergence of conyo in colonial histories. The excerpt is taken from a 2008 article in a student publication of an elite, private university in Manila. The title of the article, “I know, right? Conyonalism and the Filipino,” includes the phrase, “I know, right?” (presented as an example of conyo language in excerpt 1), and directly links “conyo” to “colonialism” through a clever word blend: “conyo-nalism.” The article, which will be discussed at length in a later section, presents the conyo origin myth under the section heading, “A History of Conyo.”



Figure 3. Conyo Crabby Patty [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

## Excerpt 2. “A History of Conyo”

The usage of the term *Conyo*, in the country can be traced back to colonial 19<sup>th</sup> century Philippines, when the term referred to the more wealthy members of Filipino society. The word was most commonly used to describe Peninsular Spanish expatriates, who seemed to enjoy using the word *coño* as an all-around expletive. The passage of time saw the use of the word in portraying even the Insular Spanish, extending even to fair-skinned locals. The expression apparently stuck, and still lingers to this day, referring to the fashionable, socialite upper-class, regardless of race.

This origin myth tells of Spanish colonists in the 1800s favoring the curse word *coño*, which somehow caused them to be referred to as conyo. Then the conyo label expanded to envelop new groups based on incremental degrees of proximity to the sources of colonial power: from “Peninsular Spanish expatriates” (Spanish born in Spain, or *Peninsulares*), to “Insular Spanish” (Spanish born in the Philippines, or *Insulares* or Creole), to “fair-skinned locals,” which evokes the figure of the Filipino-Spanish mestizo, and finally to the contemporary “fashionable, socialite upper-class.” Such origin narratives describe how the term conyo was once a label for the Spanish, but then broadened to include other groups “regardless of race” as they became upwardly mobile.

### Middle-Class Elite: Modernity, Anxiety, Excess

Since elites are often viewed as “the default owners of modernity” (Besnier 2011:76), I explore how Philippine elite people and language are linked to notions of modern excess from an anxious, moral, middle-class perspective. Scholars have tied modernity to many things, most notably emergent capitalist structures, as well as

industrialization, surveillance, and military power (Giddens 1990). If Europe's "laboratories of modernity" were its colonies, not the metropole (Stoler and Cooper 1997), then modernity is also inseparable from colonialism (Quijano 2007). Indeed, modernity has been linked to Western provenance and the Western gaze, such that "modern" characterizes an image of the colonizing European world, always in relation to how colonized "non-modern" worlds are viewed from the supposed centers of modernity (Chakrabarty 1992). To understand one's relationship to modernity is to be aware of this purported provenance and gaze, and to aspire to the modern through "imagining" personal and social transformations (Appadurai 1996).

Shared across much scholarship on modernity is the centrality of "anxiety" (Besnier 2011; Park 2015). This anxiety is often produced from having glimpsed at a modernity that is out of reach to most (Trouillot 2001). Scholars have explored how anxieties about modernity can constitute a middle-class nationalist morality that monitors excess and appropriate consumption (Besnier 2009), what Laura Nelson (2000) calls "consumer nationalism." Consumer nationalism involves "a moral practice of cultural preservation from the corruption of luxury and modernization" (Nelson 2000:107). Here, ideas about excess are intimately linked to the nation and its internal social divisions, that is, to anxieties about who is and who is not appropriately modern. Thus, from a middle-class perspective, signs of excess can index not only elite arrogance but also fundamental moral shortcomings that require restraint (Liechty 2003; Nelson 2000).

In the Philippines, monitoring excesses of the mestizo elite has colonial origins. For example, in writings by American colonists in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: "upper-class Filipina women—for the most part . . . mestizas—were often depicted as excessively feminine, fond of ornaments, dresses, and social events" (Rafael 2005:143). But in this article, I am concerned with a different subject position that monitors excess: not the colonist, but a type of Philippine elite that constitutes itself as anxious, moral, and middle class, what I call "middle-class elite." By "middle-class," I do not name a rigid socioeconomic status but "a shared project of locating oneself in a new and legitimate space between two devalued social poles" (Liechty 2003:67), between the "provincial vulgarity of the urban poor" and the "corrupt elite lifestyles of foreignness and consumer excess" (Liechty 2003:61). In this sense, I argue that the elite can constitute itself as middle class. Below I demonstrate how this happens through the act of overhearing and commenting on the conyo elite.

### Register, Listening, Iconization

The formation of the conyo elite figure cannot be separated from the formation of the conyo elite register. To speak of a register is to speak not of a stable language variety but of an extracted moment within larger-scale processes of register formation, or enregisterment. According to Asif Agha (2005:38), enregisterment names the "processes whereby distinct forms of speech come to be socially recognized (or enregistered) as indexical of speaker attributes by a population of language users." Enregisterment is dynamic, unstable, and dependent upon actions of social persons that are linked together through discursive interactions and institutions.

Central to enregisterment is the concept of the "listening subject" (Inoue 2006) or "overhearer" (Rafael 1995; Moore 2011b). The listening subject is not so much a biographical person but a subject position from which the world is heard and reported upon. For example, in her work on so-called "schoolgirl speech" (*jogakusei kotoba*) in late-19<sup>th</sup>-century Japan, Miyako Inoue (2003:157) "explores the conditions of possibility for the schoolgirl to be heard and cited and thus to be acoustically recognized as a cultural being by Meiji intellectuals as listening subjects." She argues that male intellectuals purportedly overheard schoolgirl speech not because schoolgirls necessarily spoke that way, but because male listening subjects were wrestling with their own anxieties about modernity at the turn of the century.





Figure 4. Listening Subject of Conyo [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

Figure 4 is an example of the conyo figure emerging in contrast to its listening subject. This is a cartoon that appeared alongside the 2012 blog entry entitled, “Are conyo people funny, creative or just annoying?,” written by a college student.<sup>5</sup> On the right is the speaking subject. She represents the subject of this post, that is, “conyo.” She is youthful; she has braids, freckles, and wears a short dress. One of her hands is on her hip, the other holds her purse—an almost identical pose found in the “How to Be a Conyo” video above (figure 1). Her eyes are rolling, as she complains about waiting: “Like, this is so *nakakainis* (annoying). The jeeps are so *matagal* (slow). I’m so *inip* (bored) *na* (already)!” On the left is the listening subject. He is youthful too; he wears a backpack. He is looking at her. He is listening to her. He is cringing.

This cartoon was created by the listening subject, which has purportedly overheard conyo language and is now reporting it (to the readers of the blog). From an enregisterment perspective, I am less interested in this cartoon as an accurate portrayal of “real” conyo people and language, and more interested in how such representations reflexively constitute the figure of conyo and the figure of its listening subject.

In what follows, I consider commentary produced by the “private school-educated listening subject” of conyo. This listening subject claims affiliation to either one of two elite, private universities in Manila: De La Salle University or Ateneo de Manila University. In my ethnographic research, I found that La Salle and Ateneo are regarded as having more conyo students than any other university. Since the listening subject I consider here signals an intimacy with conyo through its affiliation with one of these two schools, it might also be at risk of being called conyo. I argue, however, that through the act of overhearing and evaluating conyo, the listening subject carves out an anxious, moral, middle-class elite position instead.

Indeed, this middle-class elite figure is produced through commentary that positions conyo as the “wrong” kind of elite Filipino (e.g., entitled, whiney), and itself as the “right” kind of elite Filipino (e.g., sensible, aware). Producing this desirable elite requires the undesirable elite that it comments upon. That is, the act of overhearing and evaluating conyo is necessary for establishing its moral contrast. Thus the listening subject can only be constituted by being “beside that which it critiques.” It must signal a proximity to conyo elites, display an awareness of their

sign-behavior, and exhibit the reflexive capacity to evaluate it. It must manage the delicate line between “being conyo” and “being near conyo.” In so doing, the listening subject both bifurcates and expands the elite category: creating a distinction between conyo elites and non-conyo elites—what I call “elite bifurcation”—and enabling non-conyo elites to take on a middle-class positionality. I show how the listening subject links conyo to historical iterations of the dubious, striving Philippine elite collaborators in colonialism, while it carves out a new elite subjectivity that is contrastively moral.

I elaborate on Inoue’s listening subject in two ways. First, unlike the “male intellectual” listening subject, which is purportedly dissimilar in gender, age, and other respects from the “schoolgirl” figure upon which it comments (cf. Flores and Rosa 2015 as well on the “white” listening subject), the listening subject I consider here evaluates a figure that appears to be from “the same group”—that is, students or recent graduates of private schools. The listening subject highlights this affiliation to claim an intimate familiarity that authorizes its commentary but also risks dangerous slippages into the conyo category. Second, I trace how the listening subject can frame commentary as emanating from itself or, when defending conyo, as emanating from an “outsider.” Outsider authority is challenged for lacking the familiarity with conyo that the private school-educated listening subject enjoys. Thus in sympathetic accounts of conyo, two listening subjects emerge: a private school-educated “insider” listening subject that embeds and critiques an “outsider” listening subject.

I will now turn to consider the conyo register in more depth. Since my project views register formation as chains of reflexive commentary, I am particularly interested in how the listening subject both describes the speech of conyo and quotes the speech of conyo. Here I focus on “iconizations” (Gal and Irvine 1995) of linguistic forms. Iconization is the process whereby a relationship of likeness or similarity is created between a linguistic characteristic and a person characteristic. For example, the quality of “gentle” can be attributed to the conyo register and conyo figure, such that conyo speech seems to sound soft and gentle, and conyo bodies seem to react sensitively and move gently (Reyes 2017). Here “gentle” does not merely index conyo, but appears to inhere naturally in its character, thus establishing a more stable, iconic link. I will now turn to consider two iconizations of conyo language and people, one centered on notions of “mix,” the other “excess.”

### Iconization of Mixedness: Conyo as Immoral Blend

The private school-educated listening subject often describes conyo language as combining Tagalog and English in immoral ways. In this section, I analyze three discourse excerpts—taken from a college publication, newspaper, and blog—to illustrate how such evaluations produce an iconization of mixedness. This iconization creates a relationship of likeness between “mixed” language and “mixed” race that is framed as inherently problematic.

Excerpt 3 is from a 2011 piece in *Chinoy* (Chinese Filipino), a student publication of Ateneo de Manila University.<sup>6</sup> The title of the article is “Retracing our verbal roots: Language as perceived by the youth,” written by two students. The article defends conyo language as “code switching” that is “commonplace” and “second nature” to “bilinguals,” and compares it to how Chinese Filipino youth mix Tagalog, English, and Hokkien as a valuable way to maintain Chinese language and identity in the Philippines.

#### Excerpt 3. “Unholy Mix”

Conyo speak— English teachers and grammarians everywhere cringe at the sound of it. Considered an ‘unholy’ mix of English and Tagalog, this phenomenon is commonly heard in (but not limited to) college campuses everywhere.

In this excerpt, the authors do several things of note. First, they assign a metapragmatic label (“conyo speak”) to a form of speech (a “mix of English and Tagalog”). Second, they describe this “conyo speak” as something that is “heard” “everywhere” by them, and not necessarily spoken by them. Third, by putting “unholy” in quotes, they present this evaluation of conyo language as authored not by them, but by “English teachers and grammarians,” who “cringe at the sound of it.” Thus two listening subjects emerge—the college student (who is reporting) and the English teacher (who is reported)—the former (the “insider” listening subject) aware and critical of the latter (the “outsider” listening subject). In this excerpt, the authors defend a denigrated conyo language, locating it “everywhere” but also “over there.”

Excerpt 4 is from a 2006 article in the *Philippine Daily Inquirer* called “Leaving Manila,” written by a recent graduate of Ateneo.<sup>7</sup> In it he recounts his journey from Cebu (an island province of the Philippines) to Manila, where he attended Ateneo, then to Cebu again. He is critical of conyo and contrasts them with “wealthy Cebuanos,” whom he describes as “laid back” and uninterested in status markers.

#### Excerpt 4. “Mangled Mish-Mash”

An amusing breed, known as “coños,” acted as if they didn’t know how to speak straight Tagalog, opting to communicate in a mangled mish-mash of Tagalog and English.

Unlike the previous excerpt, this excerpt contains evaluative language claimed by the author himself, revealing a contempt for conyo as “an amusing breed” that speaks a “mangled mish-mash of Tagalog and English.” Rather than draw a favorable comparison (e.g., between conyo and Chinese Filipinos), the author contrasts two types of elites: desirable “laid back Cebuano” elites and undesirable conyo elites. Moreover, the author claims that conyo is all an “act,” suggesting that conyo pretend they cannot “speak straight Tagalog,” thus producing an artificial image of themselves by “opting to” speak a “mangled mish-mash.”

Excerpt 5 is taken from a 2008 blog entry by a former student of Ateneo, who was reposting a piece about conyo language called “The Ten Conyomandments” (to be discussed at length below).<sup>8</sup> Here and in other blog entries, she begrudgingly admits to being called conyo though at times seems to accept it.

#### Excerpt 5. “Bastardize Both Languages”

[The Ten Conyomandments] is more about the usage of Tagalog and English and making them *pagsama* (deteriorate). I know there are some Tagalog words *talaga* (truly) without translations *kaya* (so) we end up combining English with Tagalog. But more and more, it’s like, we bastardize both languages ‘coz of our *paggamit* (use) of the *salitas* (words)!

In this excerpt, the author describes conyo language as “deteriorat[ing]” and “bastardiz[ing]” both Tagalog and English. Although she might attribute “deteriorate” to the authors of “The Ten Conyomandments,” she presents “bastardize” as her own characterization. I argue, however, that the author potentially identifies with conyo in two main ways. First, she uses “we” twice to locate herself as also engaging in the linguistic practices under evaluation: “we end up combining English with Tagalog” and “we bastardize both languages.” Second, she herself uses conyo language to talk about conyo language (e.g., “our *paggamit* of the *salitas*”), thus collapsing metadiscourse and object discourse. The author, then, is potentially positioned as conyo by speaking as conyo.

Although all of these excerpts are written by the private school-educated listening subject, the overt stances toward conyo vary: from defense (excerpt 3) to contempt (excerpt 4) to identification (excerpt 5). Yet they all produce similar reports about how

conyo is understood as a mixed language that is “unholy” and “mangled,” and that “deteriorates” and “bastardizes” its source languages. These are descriptions not only of language, but also of people. “Mixed” language gets linked to “mixed” race through reference to immoral sexual unions with characterizations like “unholy mix,” “bastardize,” and “an amusing breed.” Together these excerpts produce an iconization of mixed language and mixed people—Tagalog-English linguistic mixing and colonizer-colonized racial mixing—within evaluations that suggest “mixing” contaminates “pure” entities by creating perverse blends. Indeed, these characterizations of mixedness as “mish-mash” evoke both the sexual and racial frontiers within the boundaries of colonial rule (Stoler 2002), as well as a familiar panic over miscegenation as immoral (Bolton 2000). I argue that “mixedness”—felt here to be an inherent, problematic quality of conyo language and people—is instead a construal driven by negative evaluations of the conyo figure to which supposedly “mixed” features have been attached.

The private school-educated listening subject signals its reflexive capacity to critique from beside (excerpts 3–4) or inside (excerpt 5) the conyo category. Whether presenting evaluations as their own or as belonging to others, the listening subject carves out a contrastive middle-class elite position by voicing anxieties about the supposed, problematic mixedness of conyo language and people. This is the case for excerpt 5 as well. Even though the author of this excerpt might reluctantly identify as conyo, she does so with an awareness, which conyo are accused of concealing (e.g., “act[ing] as if” in excerpt 4), thus elevating her moral standing relative to “other conyos.” These excerpts collectively extend racialized historical iterations of mestizo elites as liminal, suspicious, and striving, thus producing a colonial recursivity that invents internal divisions of Philippine social types through elite bifurcation. Whereas “mixed” conyo language and people are positioned in rearticulated forms and structures of colonial governance, a middle-class elite contrastively emerges as its moral, less contaminated opposite: as more “fully” Filipino and less indelibly tainted by the bodily and linguistic traces of colonial histories.

### Iconization of Excessiveness: Conyo as Too Much

The private school-educated listening subject describes conyo language not only as problematically mixed, but also as problematically excessive. In this section, I analyze two “conyo grammars”—“The Ten Conyomandments” piece and “How to Speak Like a Teenage Conyo” videos—to illustrate how evaluations of conyo language produce an iconization of excessiveness. This iconization creates a relationship of similarity between “excessive” language and “excessive” people that is framed as inherently immoral.

By creating grammars, the listening subject in this section signals an even greater intimate familiarity and reflexive capacity than in the previous section. That is, not only can the listening subject comment on conyo language, it can also purportedly explain and illustrate its grammatical rules.

The two conyo grammars share the same structural organization: a “title”; a “prologue”; “rule explanations”; and “rule illustrations.” I explore the potential for this structure to produce a “multivocalic” text, whereby each structural element can be voiced from different social locations (Bakhtin 1981). I focus on the central mechanism of reported speech to argue that evaluations of conyo rely more on how they are quoted and less on how they are described. First I will introduce these two grammars, then I will illustrate how they produce an iconization of excessiveness.

#### *The Ten Conyomandments*

“The Ten Conyomandments,” which plays on the biblical “Ten Commandments,” is a sidebar appearing alongside a 2008 article in a student publication of De La Salle University. The article, “I know, right? Conyo-nalism and the Filipino,” whose



extract on the conyo origin myth appeared above (excerpt 2), was written by Gerry Avelino and Arik Abu.<sup>9</sup> As students of La Salle writing in a publication of La Salle, Avelino and Abu describe conyo as a “language” (e.g., “For most Lasallians, that curious mix of English and Filipino<sup>10</sup> labeled *Conyo* is nothing new”), a “people” (e.g., “the term *Conyo* refers to so-called ‘rich kids’ [also in excerpt 1]”), a “lifestyle” (e.g., “From partying in the hottest bars, or keeping an exotic sports car”), and a “culture” (e.g., “*Conyo* is a culture not alien to the typical Lasallian”) with which they and their readers are intimately familiar. The article thus interpellates the reader into the same privileged class consciousness of private school-educated subjectivity that is knowledgeable about the conyo elite.

Avelino and Abu describe how conyo has been misconstrued and ridiculed by the “prejudice[d],” “ignorant observer,” who views conyo as “irksome,” “flamboyant,” “conceit[ed],” “smug,” and “elitist[.]” They argue that conyo should be viewed instead as a “fascinating sociolect of Filipino,” and “a subculture that signifies diversity. Such a manifestation of diversity in our society is good, as it projects plurality and multiplicity.” They thus position themselves as the “insider” listening subject, who understands conyo, in contrast to an “outsider” listening subject, who does not.

On the whole, Avelino and Abu emerge as fierce defenders of the misunderstood conyo, though never explicitly identify as conyo themselves. This stance is similar to that of the authors of the article in *Chinoy* above (excerpt 3), also a college student publication. In both pieces, conyo is positioned as familiar to the private school student, but also “over there.” This requires a careful calibration of the various subject positions indexed in these two pieces: author, reader, conyo, and outsider. Unlike misinformed outsiders (i.e., “English teachers” and “ignorant observers”), knowledgeable authors and readers are placed together and beside (not as) conyo. Through this clever orchestration, the authors are able to not only describe and quote conyo with authority, but also minimize their risk of being called conyo.

“The Ten Conyomandments” presents ten grammatical rules of conyo language (figure 5). Table 1 presents the title and prologue. The prologue uses the label “conyospeak” (also found in excerpt 3) to describe “an unofficial school language” (“official” in excerpt 1) that many students either “know” or “maybe even master.”

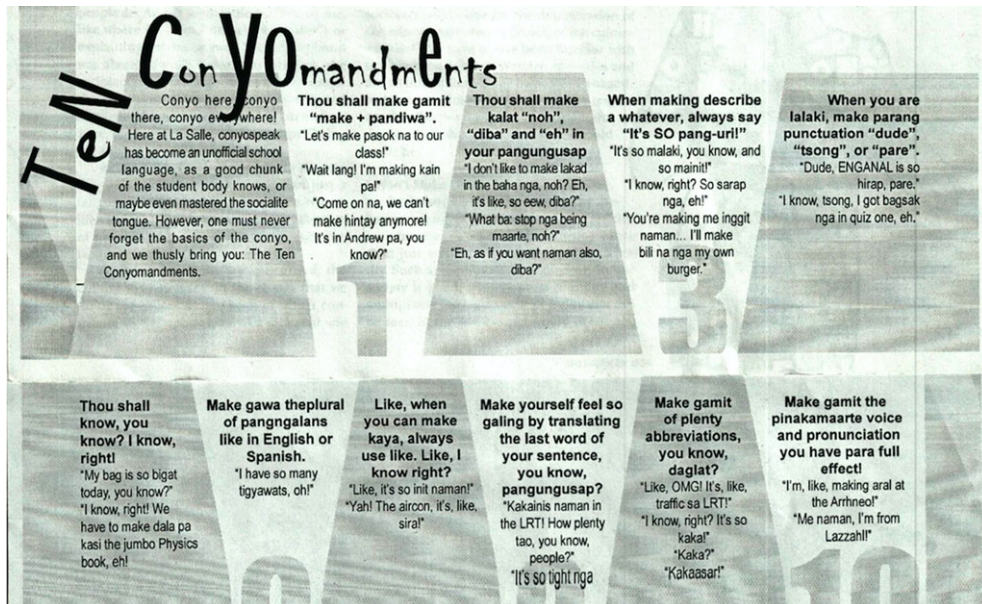


Figure 5. The Ten Conyomandments [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]



**Table 1**  
**Title and Prologue**

<i>Title</i>	Ten Conyomandments
<i>Prologue</i>	Conyo here, conyo there, conyo everywhere! Here at La Salle, conyospeak has become an unofficial school language, as a good chunk of the student body knows, or maybe even mastered the socialite tongue. However, one must never forget the basics of the conyo, and we thusly bring you: The Ten Conyomandments.

Conyo’s geographical proximity to the authors and their readers is solidified through deictic anchoring: conyo language is “here” and “everywhere” (also in excerpt 3) (e.g., “Conyo here, conyo there, conyo everywhere!”; “Here at La Salle”).

Each conyomandment has two parts: the grammatical rule appearing in bold type (the “rule explanation”), then 1–4 sentences in quoted speech that serve as examples of the rule (the “rule illustration”). For example, the first conyomandment is presented in table 2. In this (as in every) conyomandment, the grammatical rule of conyo language is stated in conyo language: “Thou shall make *gamit* ‘make + *pandiwa*’” (the same verb construction illustrated by Petra in excerpt 1). That is, the “rule explanation” and “rule illustration,” which have the potential to emanate from two distinct voices, are instead merged into one. There is no voice distinction between the “grammarian,” who explains the rules, and the “conyo,” who illustrates the rules; they are both “conyo.” By collapsing metadiscourse and object discourse (as was seen in excerpt 5), Avelino and Abu cleverly animate the “grammarian” as “conyo.” This signals a competence in conyo for the authors that is also presupposed for their readers—a “know[ledge]” or “master[y],” as the authors themselves suggest, that comes with affiliating with a university where conyo is “everywhere.”

Despite the overall celebratory view of conyo throughout the article, the use of reported speech in “The Ten Conyomandments” sidebar indexes conyo as privileged college students who often complain. For example, the quoted speech of conyo contains complaints about the heat (e.g., “Like it’s so *init naman* (very hot)!”), school (e.g., “Dude, *ENGANAL* (Engineering Analysis) is so *hirap* (difficult), *pare* (dude)”), crowds and traffic (e.g., “Like, *OMG!* It’s, like, traffic *sa* (at the) *LRT* (Light Rail System)”), other people’s behavior (e.g., “What *ba:* (please) stop *nga* being *maarte* (high maintenance), *noh* (no)?”), and heavy bags (e.g., “My bag is so *bigat* (heavy) today, you know?”). Thus there is a tension between how conyo are described (in mostly favorable terms) and how they are quoted (in mostly unfavorable terms).

*How to Speak Like a Teenage Conyo*

Next, I introduce the “How to Speak Like a Teenage Conyo” YouTube videos, which were created in 2012 by Kevin Vitug, who also attended La Salle. Vitug created two videos: the first one on May 26, the second one on June 4 (figure 6).<sup>11</sup> Table 3 displays the written titles and prologues of the two videos. In the first title and prologue, Vitug’s positioning relative to conyo is uncertain. The second title and prologue,

**Table 2**  
**The First Conyomandment**

<i>Rule Explanation</i>	Thou shall make <i>gamit</i> (use) “make + <i>pandiwa</i> (verb)”.
<i>Rule Illustration</i>	“Let’s make <i>pasok</i> (go to) <i>na</i> our class (already)!” “(Just) wait <i>lang!</i> I’m (still) making <i>kain pa</i> (eating)!” “Come on <i>na</i> (already), we can’t make <i>hintay</i> (wait) anymore! It’s in Andrew [Hall] <i>pa</i> (now), you know?”



Figure 6. How to Speak Like a Teenage Conyo [This figure appears in color in the online issue.]

Table 3  
Titles and Prologues

<i>Title</i>	How to Speak Like a Teenage Conyo	How to Speak Like a Teenage Conyo – Part 2: The Social Climbing Extravaganza
<i>Prologue</i>	Don't understand your conyotic friends? Here's a video on how to speak like them! ☺	Still don't understand your annoying conyotic friends? Here are 10 more ways of learning the basic ways of speaking like a true, freakishly annoying, son of a bitch. Enjoy!

however, contain clear evaluative language. The addition of the subtitle, “The Social Climbing Extravaganza,” evaluates either conyo as social climbers or those who want to learn to speak conyo as social climbers. In addition, the more neutral “conyotic friends” has become “annoying conyotic friends” and “true, freakishly annoying, son of a bitch.” With the second video, Vitug explicitly positions himself as someone who finds conyo irritating, and also as someone who is likely not conyo. Vitug’s blatant annoyance with conyo is not shared with Avelino and Abu, who mostly defend and celebrate conyo as “signifying diversity.” However, they do share two things: no explicit identification with conyo; and a proximity to conyo that enables them to overhear, comment on, and “master” conyo grammar.

Each four-minute video contains ten rules of conyo language. Both videos display each rule written on its own screen followed by a close-up of Vitug demonstrating the rule by speaking as conyo. For example, table 4 presents rule #4. In this (as in every) rule, Vitug states a grammatical feature of conyo language then uses quoted speech to demonstrate it. Although this structure is also found in “The Ten Conyomandments,” there is one crucial difference. Whereas “The Ten Conyomandments” states the grammatical rules of conyo language in conyo language, the “How to Speak Like a Teenage Conyo” videos do not. Instead, the rules are written in a style of English that does not contain any of the marked features that are assigned to conyo language. In the videos, then, the “rule explanation” and the “rule illustration” emanate from two distinct voices. This potentially signals a clear separation between Vitug as “grammarians” (in the titles, prologues, and rule explanations), and Vitug as “conyo” (in the rule illustrations). Thus, whereas Avelino and Abu blur the line between these two voices (i.e., the grammarian and conyo voices merge), Vitug separates the grammarian voice, which is also presented as “his” voice in the titles and prologues,

**Table 4**  
**Rule #4**

<i>Rule Explanation</i>	SPEAK IN TAGLISH BY MIXING ENGLISH AND TAGALOG TOGETHER
<i>Rule Illustration</i>	I was <i>sobrang</i> (so) tired after, so I was just making <i>hilata</i> (sprawling out) in my bed while making <i>panood</i> (watching) the TV. Then I made <i>ligo</i> (took a shower), then I went <i>labas</i> (out), then I dined at John and Yoko <i>sa may</i> (near) Greenbelt 5. Red Mango was still <i>bukas</i> (open) after we made <i>nood</i> (watched a movie) so I got myself a small plain yogurt with like mochi and like mango.

from the conyo voice. This structural difference seems to align neatly with authorial stances: negative evaluative stances (like that of Vitug) keep voices separate; positive evaluative stances (like that of Avelino and Abu) bring voices together.

Even though Avelino and Abu explicitly celebrate conyo and Vitug explicitly reviles them, all share the mechanism of quoted speech to implicitly evaluate conyo as privileged youth who complain and brag incessantly. For example, in the “How to Speak Like a Teenage Conyo” videos, conyo brag about their homes (e.g., “my house is so big”), their staff (e.g., “I can’t go out that much without my *yaya* (nanny) . . . and driver”), and leisure activities (e.g., “We also went parasailing”; “We rented two houses”). And conyo complain about bad service (e.g., “the waitress who was so stupid”), ex-girlfriends (e.g., “I was like so like *inis* (annoyed) when I saw who she like brought at the party”), and boredom (e.g., “I’m so bored already”).

Focusing on “The Ten Conyomandments” sidebar and the “How to Speak Like a Teenage Conyo” videos, I now examine how these conyomandments and rules identify the following three supposedly excessive features of conyo language: “redundancies,” “elongations,” and “fillers.”

**Redundancies**

The private school-educated listening subject accuses conyo language of containing redundancies. For example, table 5 presents the eighth conyomandment, which depicts conyo speakers as providing immediate translations of their own words. Here, conyo language is described as repeating words in both Tagalog and English not because it is necessary but because it makes the speaker “feel so good.” The conyo voice demonstrates this in both the rule explanation and the rule illustration. For example, the English word “sentence” is followed by its Tagalog translation: “*pangungusap*”; and the Tagalog word “*tao*” is followed by its English translation: “people.”

In the second conyomandment, another quoted speech example illustrates another supposedly redundant feature: “What *ba*?” Here, the question marker *ba* marks this sentence twice as a question, when the English grammatical structure alone would suffice (i.e., “What?”).

**Table 5**  
**The Eighth Conyomandment**

<i>Rule Explanation</i>	Make yourself feel so <i>galing</i> (good) by translating the last word of your sentence, you know, <i>pangungusap</i> (sentence)?
<i>Rule Illustration</i>	“ <i>Kakainis naman</i> (It’s so irritating) in the LRT! How plenty <i>tao</i> (people), you know, people?” “It’s (really) so tight <i>nga</i> there, eh, you know, <i>masikip</i> (tight)?”

### Elongations

The private school-educated listening subject also describes conyo language as elongating words in a “dramatic” manner. Sometimes this is stated explicitly, as in the tenth conyomandment in table 6. This written representation of the pronunciations of Ateneo and La Salle indicates consonant elongation and vowel breathiness. Ateneo is represented as “Arrhneo” and La Salle is represented as “Lazzahl.” This inventive orthography suggests two sound features. The first feature replaces voiceless consonants, “t” and “s,” with elongated voiced consonants, “rr” and “zz.”<sup>12</sup> The second feature inserts audible exhalation, “h,” either in place of vowels (the reduced “e” in “Ateneo”: “Arrhhneo”) or after vowels (after the second “a” in “La Salle”: “Lazzahl”).

These supposedly “dramatic” qualities of elongation are presented as specific instructions in two rules in the “How to Speak Like a Teenage Conyo” videos: rule #7 “Prolong saying basic words”; and rule #19 “Lengthen words by adding the inappropriate suffix, ‘-ah’.” Table 7 features rule #7.<sup>13</sup> Throughout this rule illustration, Vitug elongates over a third of all words uttered, demonstrating how conyo speakers “prolong” words to an excessive degree, both in terms of length of words and number of words.

### Fillers

The private school-educated listening subject dedicates several rules and conyomandments to fillers (table 8). Rule #9 is the only one to explicitly describe conyo language as containing “nonsense expressions as fillers.” Yet by listing examples of quoted speech, the other rule explanations also suggest conyo language is less about denotational content, and more about phatic expression. Phrases mentioned are: “like,” variants of “no” (“noh,” “diba,” “eh”) and “dude” (“dude,” “tsong,” “pare”), and tag endings (e.g., “you know?”; “I know, right!”; “and stuff”). Most rule explanations prescribe when and how to use particular fillers: either under any circumstances (e.g., “always” in the seventh conyomandment; “consistently” in rule #5); or under certain circumstances (e.g., “When you are *lalaki*” in the fourth conyomandment; “If you can’t think of anything else to say” in rule #11).

As in the previous section on mixedness, the private school-educated listening subject displays different overt stances toward conyo: from defense (“The Ten Conyomandments”) to contempt (“How to Speak Like a Teenage Conyo”). Yet through a similar structural organization that relies on the mechanism of reported speech, the two conyo grammars produce similar evaluations of conyo language as containing numerous “excessive” features: redundant “translati[ons]”; “prolong [ed]” and “lengthen[ed]” pronunciations; and “nonsense expressions as fillers.”

**Table 6**  
**The Tenth Conyomandment**

<i>Rule Explanation</i>	Make <i>gamit</i> (use) the <i>pinakamaarte</i> (most dramatic) voice and pronunciation you have <i>para</i> (for) full effect!
<i>Rule Illustration</i>	“I’m, like, making <i>aral</i> (studying) at the Arrhneo (Ateneo)!” “(As for) me <i>naman</i> , I’m from Lazzahl (La Salle)!”

**Table 7**  
**Rule #7**

<i>Rule Explanation</i>	PROLONG SAYING BASIC WORDS.
<i>Rule Illustration</i>	So, li:ke, I had a good ti:me? But then, li:ke, I had to lea:ve? When they, li:ke, started fighti:ng? ‘Cause, li:ke, it got awkwa:rd? Li:ke, for me:?

**Table 8**  
**Filler Rule Explanations**

<i>Second Conyomandment</i>	Thou shall make <i>kalat</i> (scatter) “ <i>noh</i> (no)”, “ <i>diba</i> (no, right)” and “ <i>eh</i> (no)” in your <i>pangungusap</i> (sentence)
<i>Fourth Conyomandment</i>	When you are <i>lalaki</i> (a guy), make <i>parang</i> (like) a punctuation “dude”, “ <i>tsong</i> (dude)”, or “ <i>pare</i> (dude)”.
<i>Fifth Conyomandment</i>	Thou shall know, you know? I know, right!
<i>Seventh Conyomandment</i>	Like, when you can make <i>kaya</i> (chance), always use like. Like, I know right?
<i>Rule #5</i>	Insert the word, “like” consistently.
<i>Rule #9</i>	Have nonsense expressions as fillers if you don’t know what to say.
<i>Rule #11</i>	If you can’t think of anything else to say, end it with “and stuff”.

Such “excessive” qualities of speech are mapped onto “excessive” qualities of people: conyo as fussy, boastful youth who speak and act in excessive ways, whose language and life are less about “content” and more about “expression.” As conyo language is regarded as exceeding its denotational function, conyo people are regarded as exceeding their Filipino substance. Indeed, the excessive conyo speaker is also excessively modern, excessively invested in class distinction, and excessively oriented to colonial models of language and race. As with “mixedness,” I argue that “excessiveness”—felt to be another inherent, problematic quality of conyo language and people—is instead a construal driven by negative evaluations of the conyo figure to which supposedly “excessive” features have been attached.

The private school-educated listening subject signals its reflexive capacity to critique from beside, but never clearly inside, the conyo category. Whether presenting evaluations as their own or others, the listening subject carves out a contrastive middle-class elite position by voicing anxieties about the supposed, problematic excessiveness of conyo language and people. This is the case even for “The Ten Conyomandments,” which explicitly defends conyo, though from an authoritative distance that claims an intimate knowledge with (not as) conyo. These conyo grammars collectively extend racialized historical iterations of mestizo elites as liminal, suspicious, and striving, thus producing a colonial recursivity that invents internal divisions of Philippine social types through elite bifurcation. Whereas an “excessive” conyo language and people are positioned in rearticulated forms and structures of colonial governance, a middle-class elite contrastively emerges as its moral, sensible, and moderate opposite: as appropriately modern, sufficiently loyal to the nation, and suitably representative of the postcolonial.

### Colonial Recursivity, Sub-typification, Elite Bifurcation

This article traced chains of reflexive commentary on the supposed mixedness and excessiveness of an elite social figure and linguistic register in the Philippines. Such commentary triggered the invention of two postcolonial elite types: conyo elite and middle-class elite. This elite bifurcation resulted from evaluations of conyo that were generated by the private school-educated listening subject, which claimed an intimate familiarity with (not as) conyo. Whether overtly celebrating or criticizing conyo, the listening subject circulated negative depictions of conyo, oftentimes through the mechanism of reported speech and sometimes through reanimations of outsider listening subjects. By assigning linguistic and racial mixedness and excessiveness to the conyo elite, the listening subject established itself as its moral opposite, as middle-class elite. Such qualities of “mix” and “excess” were not inherent to conyo, but came to be regarded as such through semiotic formulations that linked contrasting qualities of speech to contrasting figures of personhood.



These contrasts were created through elite bifurcation in the private school, where the desirable middle-class elite figure could only be constituted through the creation and containment of the undesirable conyo elite figure. Indeed, the middle-class elite figure was the product of a careful orchestration that positioned it “beside that which it critiques”: allowing it to claim authority through intimate familiarity with conyo, while also highlighting its distinction in order to minimize slippage into the conyo category.

This article illustrated how semiotic processes that form and circulate ideologies about race, language, and the elite are central to questions of coloniality. A key contribution is that contemporary categories of people and language can be understood as products of “colonial recursivity”: as rearticulations of long-standing colonial distinctions. In this particular case, what appeared to be a contrast between more and less desirable forms of Philippine eliteness, can in fact be recognized as the expression of anxieties surrounding race, language, class, and modernity in a postcolonial nation still ordered by colonial structures. I suggest that the elite bifurcation I explored here is an example not only of colonial recursivity, but also of the broad strategy of “sub-typification” that can be used to reproduce social differentiation in a wide range of contexts. Sub-typification splinters a presupposed category by typifying a set of sub-categories. Sub-typification is enabled by a downward fractal recursivity that reproduces an axis of differentiation (Gal 2012). Paying attention to sub-typification allows for an analysis of how systems of inequality persevere when they purportedly cease to matter: for example, when categories like “colonizer” are no longer inhabitable, but categories like “conyo,” which act in their place, are. For this case here, I argue that colonial recursivity is made visible through a specific kind of sub-typification that I call elite bifurcation.

Indeed, colonial hierarchies in the Philippines became reconfigured through reassemblages of elite social figures and linguistic registers across discursively connected events. Under Spanish and American colonial rule, the “colonizer—colonized” axis of differentiation was built and reformulated to position mestizo elites as collaborators in colonial governance, as acting as colonists. Thus, the “colonized” category underwent a downward fractal recursion to create sub-typifications of the colonized category, producing an “elite colonized—non-elite colonized” binary. In contemporary Philippines, the formerly “elite colonized” category underwent another downward fractal recursion to create sub-typifications of the elite category, producing a “conyo elite—middle-class elite” binary. Through this elite bifurcation, a middle-class elite was constituted in contrast to a conyo elite, the latter of which was positioned as another iteration of the dubious, mestizo elite: as problematically mixed and excessive. These notions of “mix” and “excess” were intimately linked: to be racially and linguistically mixed was to be racially and linguistically excessive, that is, mixed and excessive in body, speech, and aspiration. Through inventing elite figures and registers, conyo elites (not middle-class elites) were positioned as acting as colonists whose supposedly mixed and excessive qualities were regarded as immoral, overly modern, and a national betrayal. It was through the containment of this internal other—not just an elite fraction of the formerly colonized (e.g., mestizo elite), but a fraction of the elite fraction of the formerly colonized (e.g., conyo elite)—that the middle-class elite listening subject grappled with its own fragile modern subjectivity: as the “right” kind of elite who was contrastively sensible, critical, and properly representative of the postcolonial nation.

## Notes

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1. Numerous events disrupt, or at least trouble, a semblance of continuity of elite comfort, for example, the Japanese Occupation (1942–1945), the Hukbalahap Rebellion (1942–1954), and the presidencies of Ferdinand Marcos (1965–1986) and Rodrigo Duterte (2016–present).

2. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O7wTKUmJdr4>, accessed September 26, 2012.

3. <https://twitter.com/conyoproblems?lang=en>, accessed September 24, 2012.

4. <http://www.pepper.ph/barbys-crabcake-burger-with-lemon-miso-butter-probably-the-most-conyo-krabby-patty-youll-ever-eat/>, accessed October 16, 2013.

5. <http://www.immarkable.com/2012/01/conyo.html>, accessed September 19, 2012.

6. Arlene Chang and Janine Young, "Retracing our verbal roots: Language as perceived by the youth," *Chinoy* (2011–2012).

7. Ariel Llanto, "Leaving Manila," *Philippine Daily Inquirer* (April 27, 2006).

8. <http://fartlogic.blogspot.com/2008/09/ten-conyo-mandments.html>, accessed November 13, 2012.

9. Gerry Avelino and Arik Abu, "I know, right? Conyo-nalism and the Filipino," *The LaSallian* (August 17, 2008).

10. "Filipino" is the national language and an official language (alongside English) of the Philippines. In 1937, President Manuel Quezon approved the adoption of Tagalog to form the basis of a new standard national language, which was later called Pilipino in 1959, and Filipino in 1973. Since the 1970s, there have been efforts to develop Filipino as an amalgam of many Philippine languages, not just Tagalog. Yet the contemporary use of the label "Filipino" is still often synonymous with "Tagalog."

11. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s2XAX5EyYSA> and <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1ZjL1lj3Qg>, accessed September 27, 2012.

12. The doubling of consonants suggests an iconic sign relation between orthographic representation and acoustic production: continuous letters and continuous sounds.

13. Transcription conventions: a colon indicates sound lengthening; a question mark indicates rising intonation.

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