



FALLING IN LOVE WITH VENICE

Gondolas ply Venice's world-famous canals, part of a romantic tradition that has remained unchanged for centuries. Venice ranks among the world's great tourist spots, alongside other top Italian cities such as Florence, Rome and Milan. The latter two attract a growing number of Filipino holidaymakers each year, but an even bigger number, mainly overseas workers, have come to call them home.

Speak fluent Pilipino? You must be French

It must be wonderful being fluent in foreign languages. I can only suppose this, because my own skills place me in that category of learning ability that experts and scholars would call, after consideration of the relevant socio-cultural contexts, "hopeless."

Were you to hear me launch into what French I know, you'd immediately be reminded of that cartoon of a couple seated at a restaurant: they are watching an approaching squad of waiters proudly wheeling out a huge banquet table on which there is a tremendous platter atop which lies a dead elephant garnished with herbs.

The wife is muttering to her husband, "I wish you'd stop ordering in French."

What's strange is that I have a brother who speaks and writes fluent Spanish, Portugese, French, German and Italian, another brother who teaches German, and a third who got a law degree in a Japanese university.

I can only conclude that in the cosmic scheme of things, I was shortchanged (in German, kurzgecheatend).

It isn't for lack of trying. I've spent years trying to iron out

LIGHTERSIDE view from home

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my differences with the German dative case, which as far as I can understand, requires modifying verbs and prepositions depending on motion, position and what the color of the moon is (in French, bloui).

If I were to somehow end up as an interpreter at some crucial world summit, it will probably end with everyone launching missiles – even the Philippines, which doesn't even have missiles.

I worry that my linguistic incapacity puts me in an evolutionary dead-end, subject to jokes like this: What do you call someone who speaks many languages? Polyglot. Someone who speaks two languages? Bilingual. Someone who speaks one language? American.

If you think I'm exaggerating, you should know that in the US, one Fil-American high school student

wrote a report commemorating the "discovery" of the Philippines by Magellan and identified one ship as the Concepcion, which he said was Spanish for "big-ass boat." He got it published in the school paper, not knowing the actual Spanish word he was thinking of was "Arroyo."

Anyway, I console myself with the fact that I'm a Filipino and time is on

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my side. It's like this: there are now millions of Filipinos scattered all over the world. Many are marrying, settling down and raising kids.

Already, an entire generation of hyphenated Filipinos can speak effortless Italian, French, German, Norwegian, Greek and other languages.

Soon, when I travel abroad all I'll do is look up my fellow Filipinos and communication will

be a snap. I might even work up enough confidence to try my foreign language skills:

Me (in restaurant): Kabayan, mon frere.

Pinoy chef: Isang sarsyadong elepante! Tout de suite!

Just as Filipinos are picking up languages, we're spreading ours as well. Arriving in Paris' Charles de Gaulle airport, I found myself facing a tall, blond and blue-eyed immigration officer.

After looking at my passport, he asked: "Saan ka pupunta?" Surprised, I replied: "Sa Berlin." Without batting an eyebrow, he inquired, "among gagawin mo doon?" I was amazed: I thought I'd ask him if he also played jueteng but I thought better of it.

Another time at Frankfurt Airport, I saw a blond and blue-eyed teenage German girl turn to the clearly Pinoy woman beside her and ask, "nanay saan tayo uupo?" And the mom said: "Dort, dort drueben."

Isn't that amazing? I know some of you probably find these stories implausible, and in fact you think I'm making them up. Well, all I can say is this: if you don't trust me, you can go take it to your Arroyo.

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Photos must be accompanied by a caption of not more than 100 words, describing the event or circumstances behind them.

Or tell us an interesting anecdote or observation in not more than 500 words and share them with the world.



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