

WELCOME ADDRESS BY THE PRESIDENT OF SANATA DHARMA UNIVERSITY

It is my joy and privilege to welcome all of you, distinguished speakers, presenters and participants, who hail from different countries, to the Language and Language Teaching Conference (LLTC), organized by the English Language Education Study Program of Sanata Dharma University. This is a truly international conference, and I find the theme to be particularly engaging, timely and insightful: “Rethinking English Language and Language Teaching in Post-Pandemic Asia.” As we know the Pandemic has served as a great disruption that helps transform our life, including the role of language and the dynamics of language teaching.

To begin with, the Pandemic has once again shown the importance of communication and connection. Humanity simply cannot live without communication and connection. We are “connected beings”, and would suffer and even “die” without meaningful and sustained connection with other human beings and from the world. So, from the Pandemic, we learn to be more creative in making connection and forging communication.

As Paul Ricoeur, the French philosopher has argued, human beings can only flourish through language. In his view, the farthest distance is the journey into one’s own self. Why? Because this journey has to be done through our exposure and immersion to the world of culture and civilizations, especially symbolism and language. In other words, we can only be ourselves, we can only understand who we are, through communication and connection to the larger reality of humanity and history. Ricoeur argues: “Existence becomes a self only by appropriating this meaning which first resides ‘outside’, in works, institutions and cultural monuments in which the life of the spirit is objectified.” (Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*; Kearney, *On Paul Ricoeur: The Owl of Minerva* [Routledge, 2004], 28). Again, language, interpretation and communication are indispensable in the formation of every human being.

In this respect, it is insightful to remember the classical dictum: “*Humanitas perfecta et eloquens*,” which means that human being’s perfection is deeply related to his or her ability of reflection, expression and communication. This ideal of human being needs to be renewed during the post-pandemic era. We are called once again to be more human, by being able to reflect on, formulate and express our experiences through various forms of communication. It is crucial for us today to tell each other’s stories of struggle and meaning.

For, clearly the Pandemic has served as a moment of humanity’s reckoning with itself. It reveals the resilience of humanity, its solidarity in the face of dangers and destructions, but also gives rise to existential angst and fear. It brings the best and the worst in people, it brings people together but also breaks the bonds of solidarity and gives rise to a sense of menacing otherness. It reveals the mystery and

complexity of being human, both on the individual and societal levels. Language and communication help us go deeper into this mystery and rich experience.

Furthermore, an important part of the complexities and serious problems during the Pandemic was the persistence of hoax and fake news in the framework of political populism and identity politics. In this regard, we are called to fight against this through the power of language as a form of logic. Language has served as a powerful means that facilitates and expresses logical and critical thinking. Proper use of language can unmask false and myopic ideologies and propaganda. This aspect of language, and language teaching, has become more important at the age of post-truth like ours.

Given our situation, we really need a lot of rethinking about language, language teaching and communication in the post-pandemic era. That is why we need to come together for this timely Conference. Since its foundation, Sanata Dharma University has been committed to the full flourishing of humanity, inspired by Christian values, universal humanism, the principle of inclusivity, and ethical commitment to the well-being of our nation. In this respect, the studies of humanities in general (*studia humanitatis*), as well as humanities as academic programs, have continued to play an important role in our mission today. Literature and language education are embedded in our education here at Sanata Dharma University.

On this note, I wish you all a very stimulating and engaging conversation on this crucial topic of our time. Our gratitude goes to the organizing committee who has worked hard to put together this Conference. God bless us all.



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