


■  
LEARNING  
OBJECTIVE:  
FIRST  
PERSON  
PLURAL  
ORGANISING

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When I started training as a teacher of *French as a Foreign Language*, the first lessons focused on didactics. The topic emerged as an important question in colonial schools that needed to instruct colonised people and solidify the French cultural and economic reach beyond its territory. With the formation of the European Union, language learning marked a turn from the traditional academic subject to a community-building activity. Today, the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* defines the student as a ‘user/learner’ and a ‘social agent.’ Learning should lead to autonomy. The field of knowledge is not limited to the classroom anymore, but it is as wide as the Schengen Area. A European liberal utopia is formalised into a continent-wide educational mission. This mission was of little interest to my mother, who had learned French as a child in Madagascar, where it is still an official language, eighty-six years after its independence. I would learn only years later about the clusivity feature in the Malagasy language.

Clusivity is a grammatical feature in most Austronesian languages. The first-person pronoun ‘we’ separates into two forms: inclusive and exclusive. In Tagalog, ‘kami’ refers to the speaker and others but

not the addressee, while ‘tayo’ includes the addressee and everyone present. As you speak, you draw and redraw borders encircling different groups of people: family and friends, employees or colleagues, roommates, commuters, comrades. Those porous and often temporary borders are marked more by participation in an action rather than affinity or social relationships. When the speaker uses one or the other, they trace a dividing line that can be as much a mark of agency or a feeling of belonging. When the addressee hears that ‘we,’ they are made aware of their own position.

Organising plays a great role in uncovering artificial borders between groups of people. Linguistic knowledge, level of employment, and labour conditions can determine whose company you find yourself in. Migrant communities often go to the same church, get recruited on the same webpages, and are organised in dormitories that are separate from local workers’ housing. If Filipino workers are present in so many countries around the world, it is because, by design, the economy of the Philippines depends on a labour export policy that encourages its own people to leave rather than for their government to create jobs and promote local industries.






Remittances, money sent back home by Overseas Filipino Workers, amounted to \$38.38 billion in 2024<sup>1</sup>. Remittances represent roughly 8% of the Philippines' GDP. The reality of this situation is that OFW becomes a role endorsed by Filipinos out of necessity in order to care for family members often living in poverty back home. Migrant workers' issues are kept separate from the local workers' struggle, while they are exploited by the same companies and capitalist states. And yet, it is the government of the United States that has turned the Philippines into a military base or its government into a political lackey, asking NATO countries to reserve 5% of their GDP for militarization, fragilising Europeans' welfare today.

These exercises are the result of an informal conversation held at the start of 2026. I was joined by two organisers from the Filipino movement to explore organising strategies and how to build and reveal threads of international solidarity across countries. In the Netherlands, Dewi Laurente from Balik/bayan works on uniting the Filipino diaspora

around political issues through cultural activities and demonstrations. In Taiwan, Julia Mariano from Migrante Taiwan advocates for the rights and welfare of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW), the official term designating Filipinos temporarily working and residing abroad on contracts ranging from several months to years. In Belgium, I joined SOL Circle and the International Coalition for Human Rights in the Philippines to organise non-Filipinos around Filipino issues and uplift their call for justice. These three organisations work with different audiences but regularly unite around global campaigns, woven into a larger international network found in almost every country where Filipinos work, reside, and struggle together.

1 Migrante International. "Zero Remittances for the Corrupt and Rotten Marcos Regime." Migrante International, December 18, 2025. <https://migranteinternational.org/zero-remittances-for-marcos-regime/>.





étude de cas n°1

In 2025, Filipina women workers formed a union in one of the most important pharmatech industries in Taiwan. Julia from Migrante recalls<sup>2</sup>: 'TAIDOC is a company that manufactures medical devices and COVID test kits. They hire a lot of migrant workers, but the Filipina women were particularly restricted in their dormitories. Taiwanese workers or Filipino male workers do not have to face the same living conditions. The women have to check in every night by sending a picture of themselves to prove they were back in their dorms by 11pm, even on a weekend. They have to clock in every single day. If you miss clocking in, you have to do a 'punishment'; cleaning for 10 to 30 days, outside of regular work hours, which is basically unpaid labour. A woman got sent home after falling pregnant. That is another threat, although workers are supposed to have maternity rights in Taiwan. And when they want to go home to the Philippines, they're asked for a down payment so the company can make sure they will


<sup>2</sup> Taiwanese branch of the international organisation Migrante that advocates for the rights and welfare of Overseas Filipino Workers and migrant workers.

come back. When they want to leave the company, they also have to pay a fee. It's a lot of things piling on top of each other. All those circumstances have made the dormitory into a prison. So they started a union in 2025 with very simple demands.'

*Translate to your target language.*

- *Our dormitory's curfew is at 11pm.*
- *We are getting home on time.*
- *We have work in the morning.*
- *Violation of the rules will lead to punishment.*

*Translate back into Mandarin Chinese then compare to original text. All four examples are from english.mol.gov.tw, the website of the Ministry of Labour, Republic of China (Taiwan).*

- *Employers shall not treat job applicants or employees discriminatorily because of their gender.*
  - *When employees marry, become pregnant, or engage in childbirth, employers shall not use the above-mentioned factors as excuses for termination.*
  - *Acts of unfair treatment include intent to prevent laborers from participating in labor union activities, reducing the influence of labor unions, or affecting the development of labor unions.*
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– *Employers filing an inappropriate civil lawsuit against laborers who participate in or support the resolution of labor unions is also a form of discrimination.*

#### étude de cas n°2

In 2025, in the Netherlands, another legal case involved Filipino and Indonesian cleaning personnel employed by the luxury gym Saints & Stars. Dewi, from the organisation balik/bayan, participated in organising rallies and solidarity activities for the migrant workers who faced defamation and pressure from the start of the active court case; 'Eleven Filipinos and twelve Indonesian cleaners, in the summer of last year, had reported to the Labour Department of the Netherlands, that they were going through alarming work conditions. The story came out in a mainstream Dutch newspaper. It was a sensational story because the Saints & Stars gym is a well-known company. Workers were drawn to Saints & Stars through Facebook groups, where someone would advertise the company as a way to get into the Netherlands. The workers had arrived in Europe through Eastern European countries, but a Dutch work permit would mean higher pay and better housing for those who were willing to travel again. It was a complete lie on the side of the gym. There were no contracts signed, no payslips, and everything was paid in cash. They were working 17 hours per day and



asked to do tasks beyond what they were hired for, such as cleaning the S&S owner's villa after his Koningsdag's party.<sup>3</sup> They had no training or safety briefing. Refusing to do a task could also put the worker at risk of physical abuse. Even more so, they did not have dignified housing, and I think that's the case for many Filipino workers around the world. They were crammed into rooms in the owners' villa itself. Four or five people sharing a room that should be for one or two, to go back to after 17-hour work days.'

*Translate to your target language (from English to Dutch or Tagalog):*


- *We live in the villa of our employer.*
- *We share a room with a stranger.*
- *We share a room with four strangers.*
- *We were made to surrender our passports.*

*Translate back to Dutch and compare with the original text. All four examples are from [business.gov.nl](https://business.gov.nl), a Dutch website for resident and foreign entrepreneurs that provide information on labour laws and regulations.*

<sup>3</sup> Koningsdag or Kingsday is a national holiday in the Netherlands on the day of the current King's birthday, April 27.

- *Your employees may not exceed a specific number of working hours per day and per week.*
- *You must record the hours worked.*
- *When determining the work schedule you must take into account the personal circumstances of your employees.*
- *If you provide migrant workers with housing, the accommodation has to meet several criteria.*

The classroom is a job that traps you in a gym for most hours of your day. The classroom is a dormitory shared with strangers, with whom your only commonality is your country of origin. The classroom is a factory you go back to after working hours to clean designated areas because you were late one night. The classroom regulates your schedule and free time, your employer asks for additional work on the basis of rules not agreed upon, your colleague leaves one night because she's pregnant, your colleague has his fingers broken, your colleague who spoke out is terminated the next day. The classroom is a field that limits knowledge to contractual obligations and as your command of a new language takes the shape of a missing contract—of a creaky bunk bed, of thinly veiled threats over your residency




status—your lexicon refuses to expand the world you inhabit. Until you are able to hear new words. Over dinner, from the circle of your gathering bodies, someone talks about unionising. There is a precedent, a legal basis, solidarity groups to support your cause. The circle starts loosening. Both Migrant and Balik/bayan, open up this circle by redrawing inclusive borders around workers who seem isolated and by advocating for their welfare. One with workers, the other with the diaspora. Advocating does not last only until the end of a rally. It's an open conversation that organises people across time and space. Organising leads to new language.

Julia: 'It's an icebreaker for them, to break from the world that their boss convinced them is a reality.' Smashing a papier-mâché effigy during a protest rally, organising a dinner with allies, letter writing for political prisoners, singing a well-known song. Cultural activities get the body involved and translate theory into practice. The people's choir stands on a stage and sings in Tagalog in front of an audience that considers it a foreign language. The circle opens up to include both performer and audience in the same collective experience beyond linguistic capabilities.

Dewi: 'A lot of songs we know were written because they help clarify a political line that maybe people were struggling to understand because it was too abstract. Creative and cultural means are essential to help people imagine a world where their struggle and their victories are possible.'

*The balikbayan box is a package full of products from the country where Filipino migrants have emigrated and sent to their families back home. It usually contains snacks and everyday necessities such as soap, that will showcase the 'better life' they are living abroad. More than a tradition, it's felt like an*





*obligation to use earned wages to send these boxes as a token of success.*

➤ *With the help of the two following lists, create sentences using the future tense.*

*Example: I will buy chocolate in the United States.  
I will study in Taiwan next year.*

*Dewi's balikbayan box from the USA*

perfume, soap, kirkland trail mix,  
toothpaste, imported chocolates,  
hawaiian host chocolate covered  
macadamias, and Abercrombie & Fitch t-shirts

*Julia's balikbayan box from Taiwan*

school supplies, really cute stationery,  
clothes, fake barbie dolls, big bottles  
of liquid bath soap, shampoo, pistachio, tobleron

➤ *Classroom Activity: Ask a flatmate or a coworker what objects and snacks are representative of their childhood.*





Event organised by Balik/bayan and Migrante NL on migration and solidarity, followed by a letter-writing activity in support of Saints & Stars workers.



Demonstration by Migrante TW and TAIDOC union workers in front of the Ministry of Labor in Taipei on Lunar New Year's Eve.