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**PERSPECTIVES ON LANGUAGE POLICIES
IN
MALAYSIA**

by
THANARAJ MARIASOOSAY

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED
FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION

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by Thanaraj Mariasoosay
for Master of Arts in Education

1996

ABSTRACT

Malaysia is a multi-cultural society with major ethnic divisions between Malays, Chinese and Indians, each group having associated linguistic and religious affiliations which intensify the divisions of Malaysian society. Cultural divisions have perhaps a greater significance in Malaysia than in neighbouring Singapore and Brunei Darussalam because of the relative size of the competing ethnic groups. The communal relations issue is central in Malaysian politics and education. It is almost a matter of definition that a study of a language policy in Malaysian education is simultaneously a study of an important part of the politics of a plural society.

This study examines the substance and various contexts of language policies in Malaysia, where the national integration of three large language communities is a political objective of long standing. At a time when a number of Western countries are beginning to favour a multi-cultural approach to the problem of integrating an ethnically plural society through education, Malaysia continues to promote monolingualism as its unchallengeable formula, for the supremacy of Malay is a principle strongly rooted in the history and political structure of Malaysia. The decline of the standard of English in Malaysia is also a lively current issue of great concern, even to the Government. The fundamental reason for its concern is not racial but pragmatic: the National Language is very far from being able to take the place of English as a key to international communication and modern technology. Yet measures to reverse the damage seem half-hearted and the political will to emulate the pragmatism of Singapore or Brunei Darussalam by substantially modifying the educational revolution, is lacking at present. This study identifies the major language problems that have surfaced as a result of the Government trying to deal with conflicting pressures whilst implementing policy objectives.

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DECLARATION

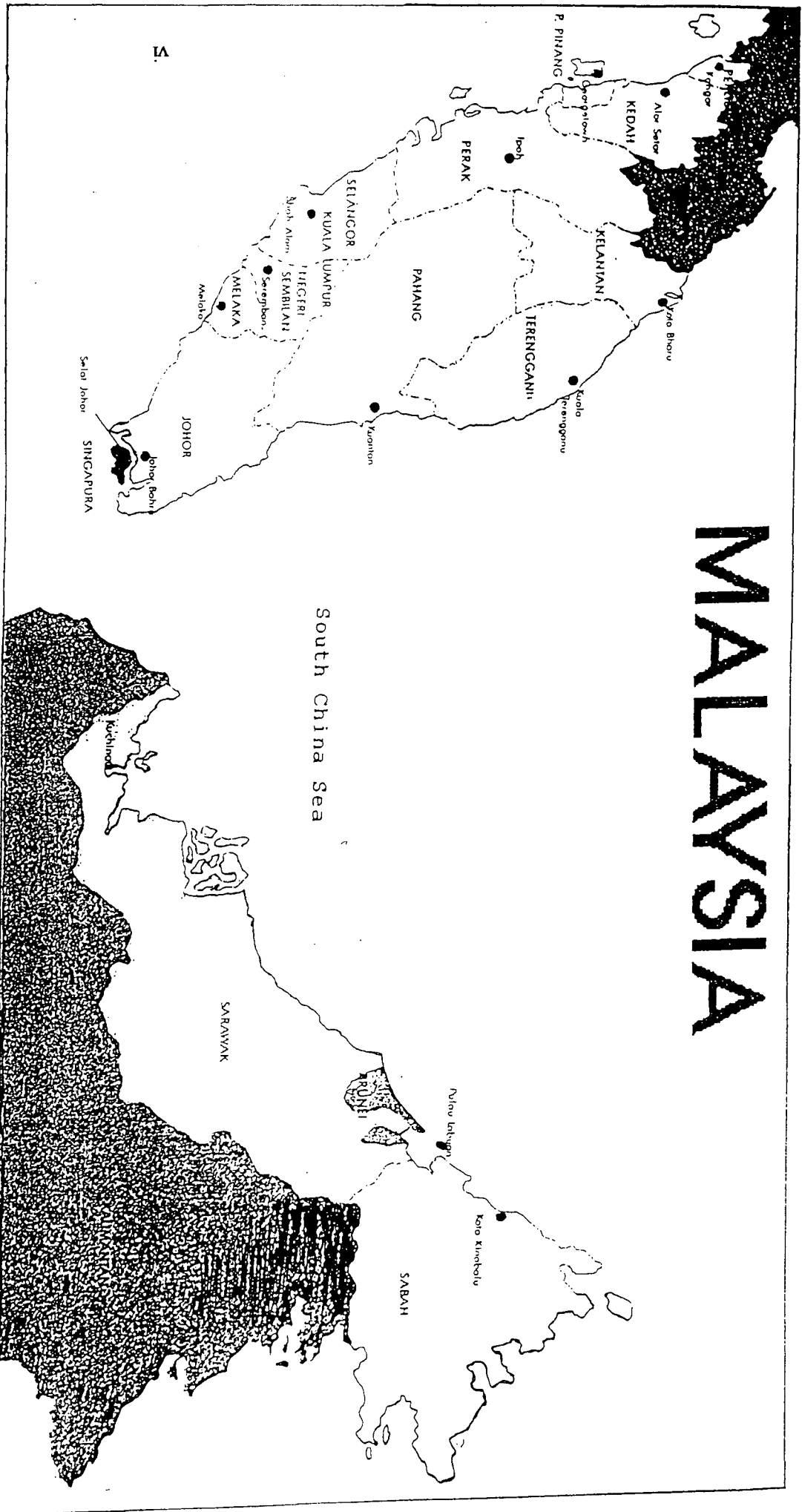
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MALAYSIA



AN INTRODUCTION

Malaysia achieved its independence from Britain in 1957. Like many other Southeast Asian countries, Malaysia has had to apply itself to the formidable task of forging out of a plural society, an integrated and progressive nation since independence. The Malaysian government has pinned much of its faith on education as the prime agent of social change. Malaysia hopes to restructure society by correcting the economic imbalances amongst the various races who inhabit the country and in the process to unify its people primarily through the means of education.

Malaysia was under British domination for more than a century. The plural society that evolved during the period resulted in settlements and occupations along ethnic lines. Education evolved along ethnic lines, too, in due course. The significance is that all these brought about concomitant problems which had far-reaching political, social and economic implications.

Of all the diverse elements, perhaps, language is the main conflicting issue which has posed a thorny problem to the newly independent nation. In Malaysia, the problem is further complicated because of the existence of diverse ethnic divisions between Malays, Chinese and Indians, each group having associated linguistic and religious affiliations which intensify the divisions of Malaysian society.

In such a situation, it is not surprising that most developing countries that are culturally plural are pre-occupied with problems of welding the ethnic components into a cohesive unit. The central demand for national unity and identity supersedes the primordial group loyalties in the name of national integration.

To implement this, the focus has been concentrated on education and, in particular, through the introduction of a national language. The idea of a common language unifying a nation has been applied by many developing countries. It is in the context of choosing a national language for a country that a particularly critical problem arises. Should a country with multi-ethnic and multi-lingual components in its

population choose one of the indigenous languages to be its national language? It is only after the emergence of nationalism when the political element is brought into language that it can become a source of division between people. It is that attempt by a dominant group in newly-independent countries to develop a national language that brings in the political factor.

This study is primarily concerned with the history, implementation and implication of language policies, with particular reference to education, in Malaysia whereby the usage of the English language declined in importance and was replaced by Malay as the national language in the country. The choice of Malay (Bahasa Malaysia) was made as a result of political consideration. Agitation for the Malay language to be the national and official language had already been apparent years before the achievement of independence in 1957. In effect, the English language has been relegated to the status of an important second language. As Chai Hon Chan in 'Education and Nation-Building in Plural Societies: The Malaysian Experience' (1977, p.37) points out:

The underlying rationale of Malaysia's educational policy is that education with a common content syllabus reinforced by a common language, would promote the growth of a nationally homogeneous outlook and the development of a core of shared values leading to the evolution of a common culture, which would then provide the basis for social cohesion and national unity.

It is almost a matter of definition that a study of language policies in Malaysian education is simultaneously a study of an important part of the politics of a plural society. The sphere of politics and education has inevitably overlapped in the context of Malaysian education. The politicisation of language intensified after independence.

In this study, an attempt is also made to compare the development of language policies in the neighbouring countries of Singapore and Brunei Darussalam, being chosen for comparison because they represent territories which have similar multi-cultural and multi-lingual peoples with shared common colonial and educational

experiences. In these countries, language policies after gaining independence have taken a different approach and the English language has been retained as the principal language of the countries' education system. Pedagogic and economic considerations appear to be the order of the day in both countries. This sharply contrasts with the Malaysian situation where the political influence is still foremost.

In the course of this study, I would like to explore the complexities involved in the implementation of language policies in Malaysia, especially with regards to the communal relations issue which is central in Malaysian politics and education. Communal and cultural divisions have perhaps a greater significance in Malaysia than in neighbouring Singapore and Brunei Darussalam because of the relative size of the competing ethnic groups.

This study is divided into five chapters. Chapter One will trace a history of language policies in Malaysian education, giving special importance to the significant landmark reports on education which have been expressly dominated by language policies. This chapter will attempt to show that: (a) current policies are an extension of developments in the past and (b) language and education policies in Malaysia have had to be formulated on the basis of racial, political and cultural factors.

Chapter Two will outline the strategies adopted and the problems facing the implementation of the Malay Language policy in schools and universities in the country. The government has made diverse provision for the development of the language and its teaching, with the objective of making it an effective medium of instruction not only in schools but in every specialised field of higher education, including science and technology. But, the potential of Malay, in comparison to English, remains to be realised in these respects.

Chapter Three will deal with the Malaysian government's policy on English - not only the emergent problems connected with the current emphasis on Malay, but the remedial or compensatory actions of the government to stem the continuing decline in English Language competency in schools and universities. In this context, a recent

Cabinet decision to allow universities and colleges in the country to teach science and technology in English is to be evaluated critically.

Chapter Four will survey government policies on minority Vernacular languages, describing in some detail the growing concern of Chinese and Tamil communities over the future of their mother-tongue education in the country and the explosive situation that prevails following unadmitted attempts to whittle away the language and cultural rights guaranteed by the Malaysian Constitution. The pressures on Chinese education seem more concerted than those which Tamil education has experienced, but both communities are in a state of political ferment or crisis.

Chapter Five will present the contrasting models provided by Singapore and Brunei Darussalam, where the motivations behind language policies in education have been more pedagogic and pragmatic than nationalistic and political in nature as in the case of the Malaysian context. The evolution of language policies in Singapore and Brunei Darussalam is the result of changed circumstances that have come to bear upon the respective governments, particularly the significant importance of English.

Finally, the Conclusion will emphasise the essentially political origins of the problem and suggest that trends towards alienation can only be solved by an exercise of political imagination as is envisioned by the policy switch on English as announced by the Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohammad during a Cabinet Meeting in January, 1994.

CHAPTER ONE

History of Language Policies in Malaysian Education

Introduction

Like many other Southeast Asian countries, Malaysia has had to apply itself to the task of forging out of a plural society, an integrated and progressive nation since the Second World War. To implement this, the focus has been concentrated on education, for, as Gopinathan (1979, p.280) declares 'it is probably the most manipulable of the major social institutions in a country'. Malaysia's education system has both inherited ethnic pluralism and also provided through the national language, Bahasa Malaysia, an opportunity for the breakdown of communal barriers. It is imperative to understand both the historical background against which language policies have been formulated, and the particular way in which Malaysia's education system has evolved. A consideration of language policies of a country cannot be divorced from general education policy.

The plural society that evolved in Malaya and Singapore during the beginning of the twentieth century resulted in settlements and occupations along ethnic lines. Official British policy sponsored both Malay and English education. The Chinese had to provide their own schools. Helped by their affluence and wealth, their numbers, a well-developed education system in China, interest by the mainland Chinese authorities in 'overseas Chinese' education, and a pride in the virtues of the Chinese system of education, they were able to evolve a system of primary and secondary schools mainly through private enterprise. The Indians were less successful, though estate authorities and Christian missions managed to set up Tamil primary schools. Thus, there evolved four school systems differentiated by language. The significance is that they developed unequally and brought about concomitant problems which had far-reaching political, social and economic implications.

The dual system of English and vernacular schools was characterised by differences in financial assistance, control and supervision and types of management; differences in types of curricula, quality of teaching staff and teaching method. The result of such a dual system was the creation of two distinct classes, each culturally, intellectually and economically divorced from the other, and each too steeped in its own language and culture to feel comfortable in accommodating and integrating with the other in the post-war era. It is here that the charges against the British for planning to divide and rule gain their strongest point. As occupational status and mobility depended upon competence in English, medium of instruction issues took on a political dimension. As Gopinathan (1979, p.281) argues:

Language policy was not a matter of pedagogy... but also of politics and cultural life.

Hence, this aspect of educational history, the politicisation of the schools and the hostilities between language groups has much significance, for it explains the difficulties faced by the Malaysian Government in the formulation and implementation of education, language and cultural policies up to the present day.

This chapter will begin with a description of the political and economic setting in early Malaya and the circumstances under which a plural school system came to be established. An attempt will be made to outline the development and growth of separate vernacular schools and the English schools, against a background of prevailing policies in education practised by the British. In addition, this chapter will highlight: (a) the progressive politicisation of language issues and official Government policy over languages in education, (b) the ways in which the Government sought to solve language problems, and (c) the evolution of a National Policy on Languages in education.

Political and Economic Setting in Early Malaya

The ports of Penang and Malacca secured by the British in 1786 and 1824 respectively, and that of Singapore, founded by Sir Stamford Raffles in 1819, were

all brought under one British administrative unit in Malaya called the Straits Settlements. These ports were acquired for the primary purpose of safeguarding British trade with China. The British, meanwhile, followed a policy on non-interference in the affairs of the Malay States until 1874, when the Sultan of Perak, unable to cope with factional fighting between Chinese in the tin mines of Larut (a rich mining district in Perak), sought the help of the British. Through the Treaty of Pangkor, the Sultan of Perak accepted a British Resident whose advice had to be asked and acted upon in all matters of administration other than Malay customs and religion. This set a pattern for British domination of the Peninsula which came to be known as 'indirect rule'. Similar agreements were signed with other states, and in 1896 the Federated Malay States (Perak, Pahang, Selangor and Negeri Sembilan) were formally constituted to receive British Residents. Johore, which remained outside the Federated Malay States later signed a treaty of protection with Britain. The remaining States (Perlis, Kedah, Kelantan and Trengganu) came under British rule in 1909 when they were ceded by Thailand to the British. In accepting British advisers, these States, along with Johore, came to be known as the Unfederated Malay States.

By the late nineteenth century, tin became a premier industry in Malaya. British involvement in tin mining increased after the Kinta Valley in Perak, the world's richest tin district, was opened up in the 1890's. The need for the establishment of a transportation system came about as the growth of tin mining accelerated and the British began to have a stake in it. The earliest railroads which began in 1895 linked the minefields to nearby ports and later were connected to a north-south mainline that stretched from Singapore to the Thai border. Development of the road network did not begin until the emergence of the rubber industry during the early 1900's when the growth of the American automobile industry created a boom market for natural rubber. By 1921, Malaya's export of rubber accounted for about 51 per cent of the total world's supply (Snodgrass 1980, p.18).

The rubber industry was a European venture from the very beginning, and once it became profitable, Chinese and Indian capitalists as well as peasant smallholders of

Malay, Chinese and Indian origin came to be associated with rubber planting. Malaya's dominance of world natural rubber production was made possible by vast stretches of land made available to European planters through British influence over the Sultans.

The rubber and transportation industries were labour intensive. The Malay population did not offer itself in significant numbers for work in the estates nor were Malays considered very suitable for such work by European planters. The planters wanted a group of workers who would be more disciplined, industrious and numerous than the Malays and more docile than the Chinese (Snodgrass 1980, p.18). As a solution to their problems, the planters turned to the Tamils of South India and recruited them first under an indenture system, and later through officially-subsidised migration of free labourers. The unrestricted and extensive arrival of Chinese and Indian immigrants led to the creation of a plural society and a phenomenal rise in population that changed the entire demographic pattern in Malaya. In a vivid description, Chang (1973, p.7) writes:

In 1874 the population of the entire peninsula was not more than 400,000. By 1911 it had increased almost seven fold and by 1941 more than ten fold.

The Malays who formed some 90 per cent of the population in 1800 were reduced to 51 per cent in 1911 (Gullick 1963, p.113).

So emerged Malaya's plural society. When the British administration encouraged the immigration of Chinese and Indians, their main objective was to obtain a continuous flow of cheap labour for the twin industries of tin mining and rubber planting. Little did they realise the problems of a society in which three racial groups of people would live side by side but separately within the same political unit.

The immigrant Chinese and Indians brought with them their own languages (and dialects), customs and religious beliefs which were different from those of the Malays. As Chai (1964, p.287) points out:

The lack of organic unity in a plural society meant the absence of a common standard of welfare and the tension between classes with conflicting economic interests was aggravated by a corresponding cleavage along racial lines. All these

were bound to react on political stability, and since such a plural society could be held together only by pressure exerted from outside, the British laid themselves upon to the familiar charge of divide and rule.

Development of a Plural School System

Malayan society was thus characterised by cultural pluralism and it is little wonder that a plural school system came into existence in the absence of a consistent policy in education which is not to be confused with a deliberate policy of 'divide and rule'. The development of a plural school system in Malaya between 1786 and 1942 was due in part to the efforts of voluntary agencies such as Christian missions in the case of education in English, and communal interests and efforts in the case of education in Chinese.

The British paid little attention to education. The Government felt an obligation to provide the indigenous Malays with rudiments of literacy in the vernacular and also to teach them 'habits of punctuality and good behaviour.' This view was reflected by Birch, the British Resident of Perak in his Annual Report of 1893 (quoted in Chang 1973, p.9):

Vernacular education is in my opinion useful in so far as it makes the Malay regular and cleanly in his habits, but where it exalts boys, as it often does, above the calling of their fathers, who for the most part will remain small agriculturists or fishermen, it does more harm than good.

While supporting secular education in the vernacular for the Malays, the British did not consider it their prerogative to provide education in the vernacular for the Chinese and Indians. A reflection of this policy is seen from the statement made by the Resident-General in the Annual Report, Federated Malay States 1901 (quoted in Chang 1973, p.10):

It is not the proper policy for the Government to undertake the education of the children of the alien temporary population in their own language. On the other

hand all Government and State-aided schools are open to children of all nationalities.

In the same year, however, the Conference of Residents reversed their policy on the Tamil vernacular and resolved that:

Facilities should be offered to the children of Tamil immigrants to acquire a knowledge of their vernacular language with the object of making the Federated Malay States, from the point of view of the Indian immigrant, an outlying portion of India like Ceylon (Annual Report of the British Resident of Perak, 1902 quoted in Chang 1973, p.11).

It is possible that this change in language policy by the Government may have been forced on them by an awareness of the increasing demand for Indian labour.

Where the Chinese were concerned, the Government did not provide any assistance to the development of Chinese vernacular schools. The initiative for setting up these schools was left to private individuals and organisations, and the Government offered no impediment for the growth of these schools. Chang (1973, p.11) is of the view that:

Such latitude could only be interpreted as a lack of desire on the part of the Government to establish a unified system of education aimed at breaking down barriers and encouraging the learning of the vernacular of the country of adoption.

Government and Government-assisted mission schools were English-medium schools and were often fee-paying. In providing financial support for these schools and establishing new ones, the Government became further inconsistent with its stated language policy of commencing instruction in the vernacular- the child's own language. Clearly, the Government's failure to formulate a consistent policy with explicit aims and objectives helped the emergence of a plural school system which later gave rise to numerous problems affecting the political, economic, and social life of the people.

The implications of such a plural school system for language policy may perhaps be better understood when an examination is made of the political, economic and social problems that surfaced from an unequal growth pattern of the different schools. It is therefore imperative to trace the development and growth of the vernacular and English schools and consider the language issues arising before advancing to a discussion of the various Education Committees that were appointed by the Government to solve language problems in education.

The Growth and Development of Vernacular Schools in Malaya

The Malay Vernacular Schools

The first Malay schools were Koranic schools where instruction in the Arabic language was conducted for young Malay boys who learnt to recite verses from the Koran. Such traditional schooling was given by village scholars or religious teachers who took in pupils as boarders. Snodgrass (1980, p.237) reports that teaching provided 'was narrowly circumscribed and of hardly any practical use - in a traditional, let alone a modernising society'. Attempts to introduce secular vernacular school were resisted by parents and religious teachers, who were sceptical of schools that did not teach the Islamic religion.

The first primary schools in Malay medium provided by the Government came about in the Straits Settlements when A.W. Skinner, the Acting Magistrate in Province Wellesley, planned to use the Koran classes as a basis for vernacular schools (Chelliah 1947, p.61). His plan, which won acceptance from the Malays, is best described in a letter he wrote to the governors in 1871:

I would aim at opening village schools of an entirely vernacular character in as many places as possible. Fortunately, the foundations of such schools are already prepared; for the boys who now assemble in most of the villages to read the Koran will be the pupils, the Hadjee or Khatib who teaches them would be the master, and the mosque or other reading place outside will serve for the school room. (Chelliah 1947, p.63).

Skinner's experimental school which kept religious instruction separate from the teaching of school subjects won acceptance from parents and religious teachers. This marked the beginning of a Malay vernacular school system. In time similar schools were set up in the Federated Malay States and the Unfederated Malay States. The education provided covered four years during which the pupils were taught to read and write in both the Rumi (Romanised) and Jawi (Arabic) scripts, to do simple arithmetic and to learn the fundamentals of a little geography. The introduction of the Rumi script in 1903 made it easier to teach and also possible to produce:

publications by the Government to maintain a consistency and uniformity for the whole Federated Malay States where important differences exist in regional dialects between the northern part of the peninsula (due perhaps to Thai influence) and the southern part where Minangkabau and Javanese influence was marked. (Chai Hon-Chan 1964, p.245).

The effort itself was of a modest scale judging from the length of the school day which was two hours during the first three years and four hours in the fourth year.

The year 1916 was marked by efforts to reform and improve Malay education. A precise aim for the Malay school was laid down, namely, the provision of a sound primary education and a curriculum that would adapt the pupils to their environment was proposed. Improvements made to the curriculum included drawing (a compulsory subject), gardening, basketry, mat-making and netting (for boys) and sewing, cooking and basketry (for girls). A new teachers' training college was established at Tanjong Malim which provided a three year full-time residential course. The college also became a centre for the translation of official documents as well as for the preparation of textbook material. Chang (1973, p.14) reports that British policy in promoting and developing Malay education achieved a large measure of success when seen from a quantitative viewpoint. The Malay vernacular schools had the highest enrolment compared with those of the Chinese, Tamil and English schools. The average attendance in the Malay schools of the Straits

Settlements and the Federated Malay States was well over 90 per cent (Cheeseman 1949, p.40). Qualitatively, the education provided in the predominantly rural Malay schools was woefully inadequate.

There were no opportunities for secondary education. Pupils intending to become teachers were required to remain in school for a further term of two years before being allowed to compete for places in the two teacher training colleges. English was not taught as a subject on the premise that the aim of Malay vernacular education was to provide the pupils with sound practical education to fit them for a living as farmers and fishermen. In its Annual Report for 1920, the Federated Malay States Government held the view that the aim of Malay education:

...is not to turn out a few well educated youths, nor yet numbers of less well educated boys; rather it is to improve the bulk of the people and to make the son of the fisherman or peasant a more intelligent fisherman or peasant than his father had been, and a man whose education will enable him to understand how his own lot in life fits in with the scheme of life around him (Quoted in Snodgrass 1980, p. 238).

The absence of English from the curriculum was also attributed to the accepted principle that a child should commence his education in his own mother tongue. Thus Malay boys wanting to avail themselves of an education in English had to enrol in English schools which were all located in the towns. Few Malay parents could afford to send their children to the urban English schools. Although the Malay vernacular school system made progressive improvements to the curriculum and an eventual secularisation of education, it failed to prepare the Malays to cope with rapid changes in the world around them. It was too restrictive in providing any opportunity for economic and social progress. According to Chang (1973, p.16) the narrowly prescribed four year schooling arrested the growth of the Malay language. Silcock (1964), however held the view that:

Education to the Chinese and Indians was chiefly a key to economic development and advancement or else a means of preserving their own culture, and Malay education did neither (Quoted in Snodgrass 1980, p.238).

The colonial administration in time realised that the Malay vernacular education which they supported held the Malays back while the other communities progressed. Most damaging was the failure of Malay primary education in providing a form of education that would lead to any form of secondary education, and the very low enrolment of Malays in English medium schools.

Tamil Vernacular Schools

Tamil vernacular schools in Malaya began as more and more indentured labourers, mostly Tamils, were drawn in to work in the rubber, coffee, sugar and coconut plantations during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Although the earliest Tamil schools began in the Straits Settlements, other small schools also came to be established later in the Federated Malay States. The Federated Malay States Labour Ordinance of 1923 which required all employers, especially in the rubber industry, to build schools for their employees' children (if there were ten or more), further encouraged the growth of these schools. These schools availed themselves of a small annual grant from the Government which was given on the basis of examinations and average attendance. In 1930, an officer from the Malayan Educational Service was appointed to inspect and supervise Tamil schools in the Straits Settlements and the Federated Malay States. By 1938, there were 13 Government Tamil schools, 511 estates, 23 missionary Tamil schools and 60 private Tamil schools throughout Peninsular Malaya (Education in Malaysia 1980, p.3).

These schools, which provided instruction in Tamil, were considered substandard. The education provided was itself of a relatively low social and economic value owing to the many problems they faced. The teachers, who were brought in from India, were largely untrained. Pupils in estate schools were strongly discouraged from studying English or enrolling in English medium schools. The absence of any possible link to facilitate the transfer to English schools (such as was provided for the Malays) compelled these children to attend Tamil schools in estates. Two-thirds of the Tamil schools were located in estates and the rest served Indian communities

in the towns. However, the urban Tamils had the opportunity of sending their children to English-medium schools if they could afford it.

Chinese Vernacular Schools

Perhaps the most important factor that contributed to the setting up and development of Chinese vernacular school system in Malaya before 1920 was the educational policy of the British Government. The British administration did not consider it their prerogative to provide education for the Chinese. Consequently, the Chinese took their own initiative to establish their own schools and as Cheeseman (1979, p.128) puts it:

The Chinese have always had a passion for education as far as their boys were concerned. As soon as there was any significant number of Chinese children, Chinese schools sprang up in every part of the country; and they were frequently maintained by a voluntary process upon the income or trade of the local Chinese residents.

These schools, set up in the early settlements before 1911 carried out a traditional form of education where pupils learnt in their own dialects the Chinese classics by rote and the mechanical skills and accuracy of the abacus. The teachers, in most cases, were untrained. However, the education reforms initiated by Kang Yu-Wei, a Mandarin scholar of high repute in China, improved and modernised Chinese education in Malaya. Kang gathered the support of prominent Chinese in Malaya to introduce his educational reforms into primary schools. As a result, several Chinese primary schools based on the new, progressive pattern came to be established throughout the Western Malay states. A salient feature of these schools was that they were financed and supported entirely by the Chinese community (Saunders 1977, p.33). Kang's contribution was invaluable as he was instrumental in drawing up constitutions and syllabi for the new schools, recruiting staff and establishing Chinese newspapers.

Thus left to fend for themselves and under the influence of Kang, Chinese schools began to develop on lines totally Chinese in form and content, divorced from the political and cultural context of Malaya (Chang 1973, pp. 17-18).

Meanwhile, political developments in China that culminated in the formation of the Republic of China in 1911 brought about constitutional reform wherein every person of Chinese origin was regarded as a Chinese citizen regardless of his place of domicile.

In keeping with the National Language Movement which started in Peking in 1917, the Chinese schools which had hitherto been dialect schools, adopted Kuo-Yu (Mandarin) as the medium of instruction (Saunders 1977, p.33). Text books were brought in from China and so were the teachers, some of whom brought with them anti-British sentiments. Before long it was clear to the British administration that :
Chinese schools were becoming instruments of propaganda for political parties outside Malaya whose objectives were often entirely opposed to the policy of the Malayan Government (Purcell 1967, p.229).

In a move to control this unhealthy trend, the British administration passed an Ordinance in 1920 to control the activities of these schools. The Ordinance called for the registration of all private schools, managers and teachers and stipulated that schools which agreed to government inspection could receive grants. The 1920 Ordinance angered the Chinese who resented it as:

unnecessary governmental interference with their liberty to run schools of their own... (Chang 1973, p.18).

To pacify the Chinese feelings, the government in 1924 appointed a Chinese-speaking Assistant Director of Education and an Inspector of Chinese Schools in the Straits Settlements, and again in 1931 for the Federated Malay States with the specific purpose of supervising Chinese education. The situation improved as the Chinese section of the Education Department and the Chinese School Management began to work more closely in educational matters. Discipline improved and so did

text books as those found containing seditious material were prohibited. Although local publishers undertook to publish text books that were free from subversive material, the focus of almost all content was China. *There was no mention in them of Malaya's history, geography, trade, commerce, its mixed population or interests (Purcell 1967, p.232).*

By 1938, there were some 305 fully assisted Chinese schools, 18 missionary Chinese schools and 331 independent schools supported by private Chinese organisations (Education in Malaysia 1980, p.2). The Chinese school system which consisted of six years of primary, three years of Junior Middle and three years of Senior Middle levels, like the Malay vernacular schools, failed to prepare pupils with a recognised qualification for employment in Government Service. Independent Chinese secondary schools, however, prepared students for clerical and managerial posts in Chinese businesses.

The English Schools

The earliest English schools in Malaya were the 'Free Schools' which owed their existence mainly to the efforts of the local colonial chaplains.

The Chaplains of the East India Company, forbidden to undertake missionary work, fortunately for Malaya interested themselves in English education (Cheeseman 1979, p.127).

However, the main thrust in providing English education came from the Christian missions who undertook to establish English-medium schools, in the vacuum created by British complacency. There were thus two types of schools: the 'Free Schools' set up by the local Colonial Chaplain and supported by private funds, and secondly, the Christian mission schools set up and supported by the Christian missions- the London Missionary Society, the Roman Catholic Mission, the Methodist Mission and the Church of England-all of which pioneered English education in the country. These schools which were open to all races, aimed to provide a general education and a better standard of moral life based on the teachings of Christianity. Their

contribution towards education was highly significant considering that about 75 percent of the children receiving English education in 1941 were in mission schools (Wong and Chang 1975, p.20).

Meanwhile, the Malay College in Kuala Kangsar was the first residential English school set up by the government in 1905. Popularly called the 'Malay Eton', the school was established on the suggestion of R.J. Wilkinson (an Inspector of Schools) with the primary aim of preparing the children of the Malay Royalty and elite for administrative and senior appointments in the Malayan Civil Service which required good knowledge of English.

The English schools were developed along the pattern of schools in England. The curriculum was highly academic with the students appearing for the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate Examination at the end of eleven years of education. The content of some subjects had an entirely British bias as seen from the example of History which was all British. In describing some of the laudable features of the English schools, Cheeseman (1979, p.133) says:

for some years prior to the Second World War, the results in the Cambridge School Certificate examination showed 70 per cent passes or over... it should also be mentioned that most schools enjoyed vigorous extra-mural activities, with an abundance of those school societies that play so important a part in the development of character and physique.

Despite their popularity, English schools registered lower enrolments than vernacular schools. One major reason was the deliberate attempt by the British Government to 'control rather than to stimulate demand' in English education (Chang 1973, p.25). This policy move was deliberate as evidenced by reflections of Frank Swettenham, a British Resident, who wrote:

The one danger to be guarded is to teach English indiscriminately. It could not be well taught except in a few schools and I do not think it is at all advisable to attempt to give to the children of an agricultural population an indifferent knowledge of a language that to all but the very few would only unfit them for the

duties of life and make them discontented with anything like manual labour. At present the large majority of Malay boys and girls have little or no opportunity of learning their own language, and if the Government undertakes to teach them this, the Koran, and something about figures and geography (especially of the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago), this knowledge and the habits of industry and punctuality and obedience that they will gain by regular attendance at school, will be of material advantage to them and assist them to earn a livelihood in any vocation, while they will be likely to prove better citizens and more useful to the community than if imbued with a smattering of English ideas which they would find could not be realised (Malaya: Annual Report on Perak for 1890, 6576 p. 18 quoted in Chai 1964, p.239).

The high cost of English education and the urban location of these schools thereby restricting access from rural areas further restricted growth in enrolments.

In a general analysis, three features of the English Schools distinguished them from the vernacular schools. First, they were largely heterogeneous as they were open to pupils from all races, while vernacular schools were homogeneously Malay, Chinese or Tamil. Secondly, the medium of instruction of English schools was a foreign language to all except the Eurasians. In vernacular schools, the pupils were taught in their mother tongue. Thirdly, the English schools were all urban and were consequently exclusive to children of largely ethnic Chinese and Indians who could afford to pay the fees.

An Overview of British Educational and Language Policy in Malaya

It is clear that four types of education were being fostered in British Malaya. The vernacular schools in Malay, Chinese and Tamil prepared the children of each community or race for life within the bounds of their own racial community. There was very little done to broaden the outlook of the communities in a multicultural direction so as to bring about any understanding of the other races. The majority of the Malays were expected to become literate in the Malay vernacular but were to

learn nothing more that would make them discontented with their lot as farmers and fishermen. The education provided in Tamil schools was of such a low standard and value that children were expected to be no more than estate labourers. The Chinese by their own efforts provided an education with very little relevance to life outside the Chinese community.

The British accepted this situation, though British officials were slow to realise the implications of the growing number of locally born Chinese and Indians and the increasing permanence of the Chinese and Indian populations (Saunders 1977, p. 34).

English schools provided the only common avenue for children of different racial origins to learn and grow up together. Even they served to divide the children between English educated elite and the non-English educated. Opportunities for higher education favoured the English educated.

Wong and Chang (1975, p.25) have described the vernacular schools as a :
cul-de-sac which led nowhere except to jobs that required little or no skill at all and no knowledge of English.

One important effect of language which was not anticipated was its intra-ethnic unifying function. This was less true of the Indians because Tamil education applied only to Tamils and not to other Indian ethnic groups. The effect was more marked among educated Chinese after the adoption of Kuo-Yu or Mandarin as the medium of instruction in Chinese schools. The Chinese written language (or characters) had always been unintelligible to educated Chinese no matter what dialect they spoke, but the introduction of Mandarin made intra-ethnic communication possible and fostered greater cultural and ethnic unity among the Chinese. Progress was also achieved in the simplification of the ideograms of written Chinese which helped spread the language more widely and made possible the publication of newspapers and popular literature among the Chinese.

Education had the same effect among the Malays. The British, faced with the problem of learning and writing Malay and of printing proclamations, regulations and instructions, encouraged the use of Romanised Malay, using the Latin alphabet in place of the Arabic script. A scholar in the Malay language, R. J. Wilkinson, who later became Federal Inspector of Schools between 1903 and 1906, systematised the rules and grammar of the Malay language and popularised the new Rumi (or Romanised) script by publishing many Malay classics in it. The effect was to provide literate Malays with a common written language which, in time, broke down divisions within the Malay community as a whole. According to Saunders (1977, pp.34-35), Malay journalists, poets and novelists were writing in Rumi and using a standardised Malay by the end of 1930. In this view, a sense of common Malay nationalism may never have appeared so soon without the revival of the language as a literary form and extension of literacy through the Malay primary schools.

Going back to the role of the English language, the impetus for inter-racial contact came from education in English. The English schools never lacked pupils as a growing number of people came to realise the advantages of an English education in a British-governed territory. The Chinese and the urban Indians benefited most when it came to an education in English, but nevertheless, the few English-educated Malays received preferential treatment for jobs in the civil service. Probably the most significant of all was that English education provided all who passed through it with a common experience, be they Malay, Chinese or Indian. The common experience of English education bridged the gap between the races and provided for a better inter-ethnic communication and understanding.

Saunders (1977, p.36) sums up the effect of British educational and language policy when he writes:

The educational policy of the British, then, perpetuated the plural society in that separate education was provided for each of the three major racial communities. To some extent this was remedied by the creation of an English-educated leadership which was able to co-operate across the boundaries of race, but the divisions still remained among the masses. No attempt had been made to inculcate a common

nationalism - it is not the task of a colonial power to foster nationalism anyway. That the masses were still caught in their own restricted racial boundaries was partly a result of the British educational policy.

Ee (1985, p.43) sums up the effects of the plural education system on the multicultural population:

The compartmentalised educational structure accentuated the inter-ethnic cleavages, despite the camaraderie of the English-educated. It also alienated the English educated from the vernacular- educated.

Post-War Policy in Education

The years following the Second World War were characterised by an upsurge of nationalism and rapid political changes in Malaya. After the liberation from the Japanese occupation forces, the British set up the Malayan Union in 1946 - the first civil government in Malaya comprising the Malay States and the two Straits Settlements excluding Singapore, and with the administrative authority centred in Kuala Lumpur. The Malayan Union which put the Malays on an equal footing with the other races was seen as a threat to Malay traditional privileges which had hitherto, been guaranteed to them by the British. The Malay elite led, through their political organisation United Malay National Organisation (UMNO), fierce opposition to the Malayan Union and finally agreed to a new constitution in 1948, thereby setting up the Federation of Malaya. The new constitution recognised the special position of the Malays while providing for Malayan citizenship for those of the immigrant races. As Cheeseman (1949, p.545) reports:

Thus the new constitution restored to the Malays the privileged position they had previously enjoyed, and removed the strongest objections the Malays had to the Malayan Union, namely, that it put the Malays and immigrant races on an equal footing.

Post-war education policy was set out in the Cheeseman Plan of the New Educational Policy, details of which were outlined in Council Paper No. 53 of 1946

(Cheeseman 1949, p.545). The short-term objective of this policy was to restore schools as quickly as possible to their former condition and to make provision for universal education in the country. The long-term objective of the Cheeseman Plan was the reconstruction of the educational system so as to ensure the fullest educational development for every section of the community. The language-related issues recommended in the Cheeseman Plan were:

- (a) free primary education through the mother-tongue in Malay, Chinese, Tamil and in the English languages
- (b) the extension of English Language instruction to all primary schools
- (c) secondary education in English as the mother-tongue
- (d) provision for the transfer of pupils from the vernacular school to English schools.

In proposing free primary education for all girls and boys in a minimum of six years with the mother-tongue as the medium of instruction the Cheeseman Plan envisaged the inclusion of English language in schools where the mother-tongue was not English.

The principle of convergence of the various sections of the Primary School System was stressed in effect for the creation of a sense of common citizenship.

The transfer of free and fee-paying pupils from the Malay, Chinese and Tamil sections to English schools would take place when pupils had completed three years in their primary schools. Subject to places being available and if parents desired it, children whose mother-tongue was not English were not required to go first to a vernacular school, but were allowed to go direct into the primary class of an English school as fee-paying pupils.

The most significant post-war language policy was the inclusion of English in the vernacular school curriculum. Cheeseman (1949, p.548) regarded this as having a two-fold advantage:

First, the key to Western knowledge is provided, and in itself will involve a broadening of the vernacular school curriculum. Secondly, English will form an important unifying factor among the diversity of races and tongues.

Commenting on the inclusion of English language in the vernacular school curriculum, Cheeseman (1949, pp.549-550) clarified:

It has never been suggested that English should be imposed on Malaya to create a common citizenship. On racial and national grounds, the Malays wish Malay education to continue and to improve. They agree to the introduction of English into the Malay School curriculum, and they press for scholarships to enable Malay school pupils to transfer to the English schools because of the educational advancement that will result. They know that educational progress is inextricably linked with political and economic progress. The policy adopted by the Federation of Malaya will give them this progress without engendering the disappearance of the Malay Languages.

The Cheeseman Plan of the new Educational Policy as contained in Council Paper No. 53 of 1946 (Malayan Union) never had the chance of implementation. The Department of Education was at that time too preoccupied with restoring schools damaged during the Japanese Occupation. Before it could get down to implementing the policy, the Malayan Union with its constitution came to an end.

Towards a National Education Policy

The War brought about fundamental political changes that had significant effects on education. The most important change was that an eventual democratic self-government had been conceded by the British and education now had to be altered so as to foster unity and common citizenship among the diverse Malayan peoples (Snodgrass 1980, p.243).

Working in this direction, representatives of the Malay, Chinese and Indian communities began to take an active part in educational policy-making. In this role

they found themselves faced with conflicting pressures from within and outside their political organisations. In this politicised atmosphere, education became the focus of much controversy. The changed political situation prompted discussions on the possibility of a unified national system of education. Although sentiments were expressed in favour of English as the basis of a unified system, it was too late, as such a choice would have been regarded by Malay nationalists as being colonial and anti-Malay. As Silcock (1964) reports:

The English-educated Malays could capture power only by coming to terms with the Chinese. Having a majority of the electorate, as well as a greater participation in the British system of government, they had superior bargaining power and they realised that emphasis on English education would favour the urban non-Malays. They could not, however, press for a completely Malay system of education without alienating the essential minimum of Chinese support. As a result, a mixed system with gradual pressure toward Malay as a national language was introduced (Quoted in Snodgrass 1980, p.243).

The development of that 'mixed system with gradual pressure toward Malay as a national language' may best be traced by a consideration of a series of landmark committee reports.

The Barnes Report 1951

The period following the Second World War saw the emergence of Malay nationalism and a growing political awareness among the Malays of the gross inadequacies in Malay education. Malay leaders began to attribute the economic and social backwardness of the Malays to the poor state of Malay education which provided for six years of primary education (Chai 1977, p.18). Secondary education was possible only by transferring at the fourth standard to the Special Malay Classes in Government English Schools (Cheeseman 1979, p.130). Here they joined the mainstream of secondary English education after two years of immersion courses in English language. Entry into these schools posed new problems for the Malay pupils. The majority of Malay schools which were in rural areas gave an education that was

qualitatively poor and had in fact not shown any improvement from what it had been before the war. It was found that wastage from these schools was relatively high with less than 25 per cent making it to even fourth standard.

Following the success in regaining their special privileges as evidenced by the demise of the Malayan Union and the establishment of a new Constitution under the Federation of Malaya, the Malays pressed for investigation into the problems of Malay education. The outcome of their agitation was the formation of the Barnes Committee under L.J. Barnes to inquire into the inadequacy of the educational facilities available for Malays (Federation of Malaya: Report of the Committee on Malay Education 1951, p. 4). The Barnes Committee, however, felt compelled to look into broader issues of the entire education system. It was imperative that a national system of education should generate a Malayan outlook among the diverse races, especially in a country that was about to achieve self-government (Barnes Report 1951, p.20).

The Barnes Committee recommended a comprehensive reform of primary education by proposing a single multi-racial and bilingual national school which would provide free primary education for all children of all races aged between six and twelve years in Malay and English.

They were confident that the national schools would 'produce pupils who were... effectively literate in Malay and English' by the end of the primary course and that the best of them would be fitted to proceed to English-medium secondary schools (Barnes Report 1951, p.20). Chinese and Tamil languages would be relegated to the status of ordinary subjects. The underlying principle behind this proposal was that this would foster social integration and national unity, which would otherwise be impossible if children of the different communities were educated in separate schools. A policy of bilingualism in English and Malay seemed to be the most logical solution to the language problem in a multi-racial society with provision for the learning of other languages (Barnes Report 1951, p.21). Stressing the importance of Malay and English, the Committee had visions that one day these languages would become home languages for everyone. In proposing that equal

status be given to Malay and English in the national schools, the Barnes Committee hoped to discontinue the system of vernacular schools including the Malay schools, and instead concentrate on the national school as a preparatory school for the English secondary schools (Barnes Report 1951, p.21).

The Barnes Committee's proposals were laudable in what they set out to do at the time i.e. creating a national school based on Malay-English bilingualism, but as Dartford (1957, pp.36-37) remarked:

This idea was proposed twenty years too late. The rise of nationalism in Malaya had the effect of making all communities very sensitive to anything which could be interpreted as an attack on their language and culture. The National School idea was so interpreted by the Chinese and Indians and the scheme was modified to allow the teaching of Chinese and Tamil to the children of those races, who would thus be faced with the task of making themselves trilingual...

The Penn-Wu Report, 1951

The Barnes Report provoked strong feelings among the Chinese who interpreted the proposal of setting up National Schools and the gradual elimination of Chinese vernacular schools as a threat to their language and culture. The validity of a Committee that comprised Malay and British members and without any Chinese representation was bitterly questioned. In any case such a Committee would not be in a position to decide the future of Chinese and Indian education. Wong and Chang (1975, p.36) write:

Even if many of the recommendations of the Barnes Committee were sound, they were looked upon with suspicion and distrust by the non-Malays. It was unrealistic to expect the Chinese to agree voluntarily to eliminate the schools they had built in order to prove their loyalty to Malaya.

To pacify Chinese feelings, the Government in 1951 invited Dr. William P. Penn (an American) and Dr. Wu-Teh-Yao (a United Nations official) to make a study of Chinese education in Malaya. The Penn-Wu mission was given the task of making

recommendations that would lead to a greater contribution by Chinese schools in Malaya to the goal of an independent Malayan nation composed of people of many races but having a common loyalty (Federation of Malaya: Chinese Schools and the Education of Chinese Malaysians 1951, p.1).

The Penn-Wu Committee argued for multi-culturalism and the use of the major languages in the schools on the basis that 'the answer to the problems of linguistic diversity had to be sought in the collective wisdom and consent of the diverse peoples of Malaya' (Ee 1985, p.176). They took the view that most Chinese Malaysians would be prepared to learn three languages.

This means trilingualism for most Chinese Malaysians, and bilingualism for all. We believe that they not only are prepared to accept this heavy load but actually welcome the advantages which command of several languages will give them. They are more likely to resent any effort to restrict them to one or two languages than the necessity which required them to study three (Penn-Wu Report 1951, p.6).

Writing on the relative status and importance of the Malay, English and Chinese languages, the Committee expressed a very positive and realistic view. They recognised that Malay was an official language, a required language of instruction in Malaya and as the indigenous language of the country spoken extensively throughout the Malayan archipelago, it deserved study by all the peoples of Malaya. Such common knowledge could contribute to inter-ethnic understanding and co-operation among the various races. They wrote that the practical wisdom of the Chinese had enabled them to foresee the advantages, and had accepted Malay as a required subject in the last two years of Chinese primary schools.

On the subject of English, they wrote that English was to a great extent a common business language for all races in Malaya. It was also a world language. The social, academic, scientific, cultural, economic and political advantages it could give a child needed no amplification. They reaffirmed that the practical wisdom of the Chinese had prompted them to pay more attention to the teaching of English in Chinese schools.

Touching on the Chinese language, the Penn-Wu Committee Report (1950, p.61) stressed:

... we must remember that Chinese is one of the great languages of the world, key to one of the world's great cultures. Its beauty and richness are unquestioned. Nothing is to be gained by trying to deprive any section of the population of what a knowledge of Chinese has to give. Just as many Europeans study Latin, other races in Malaya might well profit from a study of Chinese. However, because of its difficulty and the time involved in mastering it, the study of Chinese is likely to be undertaken largely by Chinese. They should be helped and encouraged in their concern for the Chinese background of the future.

The reactions of Indians to the Barnes and Penn-Wu reports were ones of annoyance and disappointment (Ee 1985, p.85). Disappointment that the Government had ignored an investigation into the problems of Tamil education; the Indians formed their own committee. The Indian Education Committee proposed that education should begin in the mother-tongue and continue for three years. The proposal also stipulated that English and Malay could be introduced in the fourth year, with English as the medium of instruction and Malay as a compulsory subject.

The Education Ordinance of 1952

The differing views expressed in the Barnes Report and the Penn-Wu Report showed clearly that the critical problem was the relative status of Malay, English and Chinese as languages in the education system. Although Chai (1977, p.22) sees the Penn-Wu recommendations as a futile exercise, he has expressed the view that it served a useful purpose in bringing out the grievances of the Chinese educators and those championing the continuation of Chinese schools.

The divergent views contained in both reports presented a dilemma for the Government which was intent on paving the way for national unity among the races before self-government. Consequently, the Government set up the Central Advisory

Committee on Education to consider the recommendations and the Government responded with the Education Ordinance 1952. As Ee (1985, p.176) observes:

The Ordinance was significant as an expression of official determination to use education as a means to achieve political and cultural ends.

Meanwhile, implementation of the Education Ordinance of 1952 met with several obstacles. A critical shortage of language teachers in Malay and English threatened the immediate conversion of vernacular schools into bilingual 'national schools' (Wong and Chang 1975, p.38). A much more serious problem was finance, as the Government just did not have the means to undertake a comprehensive training programme for teachers. Chai (1977, p.23) has observed that the rapidly changing political scene in Malaya contributed to the failure to implement the recommendations of the Education Ordinance 1952.

The Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and United Malay National Organisation (UMNO) were then moving towards an alliance to present a united front in contesting local elections and in preparing the groundwork for negotiations with Britain for independence. It was imperative that the delicate ethnic balance should not be upset by the educational issue which could plunge the country into greater turmoil than it was already, bearing in mind the full-scale prosecution of the war against the guerrilla insurgency.

The Razak Report, 1956

The prevailing conditions under which the Razak Committee was formed is best described by Ee (1985, p.96) who writes:

The heated reactions to both the Barnes and the Penn-Wu Reports were clear indications that a more comprehensive study of educational policy and provision ought to be undertaken from a national rather than a communal or a colonial perspective. With the imminence of independence, inter-racial unity became a prime consideration in the deliberations of the political leaders representing the various races, and this was reflected in the composition of the Razak Committee, and in its main recommendations.

The fifteen-member committee of nine Malays, five Chinese and one Indian made several proposals affecting a broad spectrum of the education system. The Committee rejected the concept of bilingual national school advanced by the Barnes Committee, and instead proposed that primary education be given under two categories of schools: (a) Standard Primary schools in which the main medium of instruction would be Malay, and (b) Standard-Type Primary Schools in which the medium of instruction might be Kuo-Yu (Mandarin) or Tamil or English. In addition, instruction in Kuo-Yu or Tamil was to be provided in all primary schools where parents of fifteen children from any one school requested it.

The importance given to the Malay language in the education system was evident in the following recommendations (Razak Report 1956, pp.4-5):

- (a) *Malay should be compulsory in all schools as a condition of government support*
- (b) *a Language Institute should be established to train Malay language teachers and to conduct research into languages and language teaching, with priority given to the teaching of Malay*
- (c) *a certain level of achievement in Malay should be required for admission to secondary schools*
- (d) *Malay should be a compulsory subject in the Lower Certificate and the Malayan Certificate of Education examinations*
- (e) *incentives should be offered for reaching a certain competency level in Malay by making the language a qualification for entry into government service, a compulsory subject in all government examinations, a part of teacher training courses and examinations*
- (f) *a Language and Literature Agency should be set up to promote better understanding of the Malay language*
- (g) *standards of Malay teaching in secondary schools should be raised, and Malay should be included as a 'principal subject' in the Higher School Certificate examination*

- (h) *special bursaries should be provided for the study of Malay at the University of Malaya*
- (i) *specialised courses in Malay should be provided in teacher training colleges.*

The Committee stated that the aim of secondary education was 'to train employable and loyal Malayan citizens' and one of its primary functions was 'to foster and encourage the cultures and languages of the Malayan community' (Razak Report 1956, p.12). This implied that there should be greater flexibility in the curriculum to allow schools to give particular attention to various languages and cultures. The rationale for the greater emphasis on Malay and English as compulsory subjects was that Malay was to become the national language in the country while the study of English would be beneficial for employment and higher education. The Committee also expressed the view that one of the fundamental requirements of educational policy was to orientate all schools to a Malayan outlook through common content syllabuses (Razak Report 1956, p.18).

The recommendations of the Report which were adopted by the Government formed the basis of the national education policy promulgated in the Education Ordinance of 1957. The reactions of the various communities and other organisations to the Razak recommendations were varied. As Ee (1985, p.100) observes:

The central position of the Malay language in the policy was commended by Malay school teachers, who depended on the language for their livelihood. The wave of opposition among the Chinese which the Razak Report had generated centred on the pro-Malay features of the Plan as a whole rather than on the role of Malay as a unifying language, which was hardly a bone of contention among the major racial groups.

Simandjuntak (1969, p.201) has expressed the view that the Razak recommendations won the goodwill of the non-Malay communities because they did not seek to change the practice of Chinese schools concerning their language of instruction. The imposition of Malay as the national language in the curriculum of

the Chinese and Tamil vernacular schools implied that the language was only a compulsory subject and not the teaching medium of these schools. The Report thus skirted the explosive language conflicts of the past and allayed non-Malay fears of the ultimate extinction of their education, language and culture .

A small group of elected councillors who expressed their dissatisfaction that Malay was not made the sole official language in all schools were sharply reprimanded by the Minister for Home Affairs, Dr. Ismail Abdul Rahman, who warned that such an ambition was characteristic of 'imperialists with no considerations for the Chinese and Indians who are already in this country' (Simandjuntak 1969, p.201).

Ee (1985, p.101) reports:

... opposition from the militant United Chinese School Teachers Association and the All-Malaya Chinese School Management Association concerning the paramount status of Malay and the imposition of age limits for students, abated when UMNO promised that the basic structure on which the educational system was to be built would be reviewed after the 1959 general elections.

The above promise was in line with the Razak Committee's recommendations that the Report was intended to be the basis of policy for the immediate future only. It was thus subject to review in the near future.

The Rahman Talib Report, 1960

The Educational Review Committee of 1960, under the chairmanship of Abdul Rahman Talib, was set up in fulfilment of an election pledge that responded to 'calls by Chinese political and educational organisations for a fair and equitable deal in the treatment of Chinese Schools' (Ee 1985, p.179). The multiracial committee comprising five Malays, three Chinese and one Indian was given the following terms of reference:

To review the Education Policy set out in Federal Legislative Council Paper No. 21 of 1956 (the Report of the Education Committee 1956) ..., and in particular its implementation so far and for the future; to consider the national and financial implications of this policy...; and to make recommendations (Report of the Education Review Committee, 1960).

The Rahman Talib Committee observed that the Razak Report had been successful in recommending an education policy that was national in scope and purpose and yet preserved and sustained the various cultures of the country: 'The Rahman Talib Report is significant in that it differed from the Razak Report on the 'fundamental issues of language and culture' (Ee 1985, p.129). The Committee concluded that the clause relating to 'a policy acceptable to the people as a whole had been met by the provision of free primary education in the mother-tongue. The Committee recommended that only Malay and English were to be used for instruction in secondary schools and for public examinations, and that the long-term objective was to make Malay the main medium of instruction in the schools. As Ee (1985, p. 179) points out:

These recommendations were significant departures from the Razak Report which had recommended a flexible policy in connection with the use of languages as the medium of instruction, and by implication, as the language of examinations. Furthermore, the Razak Report had recommended making Malay the national language but this was not tantamount to making it the main medium of instruction as the Rahman Talib Report now recommended.

In keeping with the terms of reference that required it 'to review existing education policy and its implementation so far and for the future', the Committee recommended not only how the policy might be implemented, but also 'improved for the future, bearing always in mind that education can be the chief instrument of national unity and prosperity' (Ratnam 1965, p.60). As Ee (1985, p.129) contends, it is debatable whether the proposed changes were aimed at mere improvements in the implementation of the existing policy or were fundamental shifts from previously accepted policy. Be that as it might, the recommendations of the Rahman Talib

Report became the basis for the policy re-formulated in the Educational Act of 1961 which is, in actual fact, in force to this day.

Formation of Malaysia, 1963

The formation of Malaysia in September 1963 brought together the multicultural and multilingual communities of the Federation of Malaya, Singapore and the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak. Brunei did not join the Federation although there were wide speculation that she would join the group. The political union of the member states also brought together their different language and education policies which would need to be articulated, if there was to be a uniform system in the new policy.

Although the education policies in the Federation of Malaya and Singapore during the pre-independence years were based on the assumption that both territories were integral parts of a larger political entity with a similar cultural configuration, post-independence policies in both countries were steered on divergent courses (Ee 1985, p. 173). Malaya's education policy had been modified to make the Malay language and culture a dominant feature of the national identity being developed, whereas Singapore aimed at developing a multicultural society giving parity of status to all four languages -English, Malay, Chinese and Tamil.

The education policies of Sabah and Sarawak at that time reflected colonial policy and practice that gave pre-eminence to English. The merger also brought about a situation that changed the demographic structure of the country. The Malays formed just over half the population of the Federation of Malaya, whereas in Singapore they were a minority with the Chinese forming a significant majority. The Malays were a minority group in both Sabah and Sarawak where the indigenous groups of people (who formed the majority) had a culture alien to the Malays of Malaya. The demographic figures posed some problems in the formulation of education policy in the newly established State of Malaysia, but Singapore's secession from the grouping in 1965 paved the way for the imposition of Malaya's

education policy upon Sabah and Sarawak. The Education Act of 1961, with subsequent amendments, was extended to these states. (Malaysia: Education Act 1961, Extension to Sabah Order 1976 and Extension to Sarawak Order 1975).

An Assesment of Pre-War and Post-War Language Policies

The foregoing sections of this chapter have outlined the major developments in language policy during the pre-war and post-war periods. In the beginning, the British exercised a policy of 'laissez-faire' in the affairs of the indigenous people i.e. non-interference over religion, traditional patterns of living and education. They did this to protect their commercial interests in the territories administered. Although they took a paternalistic attitude towards Malay education which was confined to primary level, English was not imposed on the curriculum of these schools. An English education was best left for the Malay aristocracy and for those who could afford it.

In Malaya, the preoccupation of the British was with turning out only a select, English educated Malay aristocracy, in the Eton-style Malay College, who were readily absorbed into the Malayan Administrative Service and other prominent positions in the Government. A second aspect which ought to be considered in explaining the restriction of English relates to the practical problem of who would do the teaching. It was left to the missions who in their secondary role of providing the Christian message, could be relied on to produce a trickle of docile personnel for use in the clerical grade of the government service.

The rise of Malay nationalism in Malaya and its concomitant demands for the provision of an education in English for the Malay masses, further motivated the British in spreading English more widely. British post-war policy in education was set out in the Cheeseman Plan of 1946 which expanded the teaching of English. It would thus seem clear that language policy has always been a political rather than an educational issue.

The politicisation of language intensified after the war when language issues became culturally sensitive and socially divisive. Apart from taking on the role of piecemeal attempts to satisfy Malay and Chinese demands for recognition of their respective languages as media of instruction in schools, the government-sponsored Barnes and Fenn-Wu Reports only served to create racial tensions which consequently made the language issue even more contentious and politically explosive.

The post-war era also recorded the political dominance of the Malays following their success in regaining their special privileges and political hegemony as seen from the demise of the Malayan Union being replaced by the Federation of Malaya, 1948. While the multiracial Razak Committee established a reasonable compromise on the language issue when it envisaged bilingualism in Malay and English and concomitantly supported Chinese and Tamil vernacular education that would continue unimpeded, the subsequent Rahman Talib Committee, 1960 recommended significant departures from accepted language policy when they advocated a more Malay oriented policy. The long term objective of the Rahman Talib Report was to make Malay the main medium of instruction in the schools. The pro-Malay features of their recommendations form the basis of the Education Act of 1961 which is in force to this day. It took a few more years and a major political upheaval, however, to bring about its implementation.

CHAPTER TWO

The Bahasa Malaysia (Malay) Policy

Introduction

The Malay language or Bahasa Malaysia as it is now known in Malaysia has become the object of intensive development. It is an official language in four out of the ASEAN membership of six countries - Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia and Brunei. And even in Thailand and the Philippines, sizeable Malay speaking minorities force reluctant acknowledgement of the language's status. The contemporary Indonesian variant of Malay (Bahasa Indonesia) results from a political declaration, the Sumpah Pemuda (Oath of Youth), which holds a special place in the country's nationalist history. The day in 1928 when a group of students resolved that Indonesia was 'one people one language and one homeland' receives annual honour. The independence struggle itself spawned poets who self-consciously used Malay as a symbol of nationalism. Already a 'market language', it had the inestimable advantage of being a lingua franca in a multilingual archipelago without being the colonial tongue.

Bahasa Malaysia has also been developed as a consciously nationalist unifying tool in Malaysia. In this multicultural State, Bahasa Malaysia is advancing by Government design and direction into higher education, technical conceptualisation and the specialised language of the professions. How one feels about this depends, in Malaysia, on the community in which one lives. From some non-Malay perspectives, Government insistence upon Bahasa Malaysia at best is irritating and at worst seems devised to reinforce the political position of the Malays. Much of the heat in Malaysia's educational debates results from policy decisions to develop Malay as the sole language of instruction at all state-supported secondary schools. The process has made the language the main medium of instruction in the universities since 1983 (Mid-term Review of the Fourth Malaysia Plan 1981-85, para: 842).

The Malay language in Malaysia has wider ambitions than merely a replacement function. Scarcely a week passes without admonishments and exhortations from

officials to use Bahasa Malaysia more wisely, more creatively and more frequently. Specialist vocabularies for lawyers, scientific workers, economists and other professional groups carry the imprimatur of committees of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP) or Language and Literature Agency, one of the two bodies charged with developing the language.

Bahasa Malaysia has become a kind of symbolic by-word for the direction of government educational policy since the Razak Report of 1956. The drive to establish Bahasa Malaysia as the national language was accelerated after the race riots of 1969, and in 1970 the Government began phasing out English as a medium of instruction in national schools, replacing it with Bahasa Malaysia. It took 12 years to achieve this: at the end of 1982 all students sitting examinations for university admission had had their education in Bahasa Malaysia (Malaysia: Mid Term Review of the Fourth Malaysia Plan 1981-85, para: 842). Dr. Asmah Omar of the University of Malaya, one of the country's foremost language scholars, accepts the long period as necessary, given the 'nostalgia' for and confidence in the already established colonial language - English. But there she draws the line, arguing that a second language, even English, is useful for 'only a third of the educated population from the top downward' (Asmah 1982, p.57). She adds that 'defiance of the language policy can mean defiance of the language ideology', a remark that reveals how closely entwined Bahasa Malaysia has become with the wider national objectives of the Government.

It would be a mistake to make an assumption that the Chinese and Indian communities obstruct the development of Bahasa Malaysia: at the street level, many know and use the language in dealings with non-Chinese (or non-Indian), and at the educational level increasing numbers of Chinese seem to have decided to become proficient in the tongue, though there is still Chinese and Tamil education in Malaysia.

Apart from the degree of acceptance inside Malaysia's various communities, Bahasa Malaysia faces other, more intangible obstacles before it can become a truly national

language. Datuk Ismail Hussein, head of the University of Malaya's Malay Studies Department has expressed the view that while the use of Bahasa Malaysia has indeed increased from a quantitative aspect, the trend as seen from a qualitative perspective is depressing (Malaysian Business, 16 January 1985). According to him there is little feeling among Malay intellectuals for the language. Usually they use Bahasa Malaysia because they feel forced to do so. In the university, to write for a Malay-language paper almost suggests a derogation of status as there is a general sentiment that to write or be published in Bahasa Malaysia is not really academic. Also prompting a reluctance among university staff, regardless of ethnic background, to develop their Bahasa Malaysia writing, is a desire to publish in international journals using English to establish a professional reputation (Voon, Zahara and Khoo 1981, p.261). Despite the many obstacles, the Government presses ahead with efforts to expand the use of the national language, seeking ways to reinforce the official primacy of the tongue.

The National Language Policy - A Historical Perspective

Language and education have long been regarded in Malaysia as important instruments for promoting a Malaysian identity. The original provision for language in the Constitution stated that unless Parliament decided otherwise, only the National Language (Bahasa Malaysia) could be used in Parliament and State legislatures after 1967 (Malaysia: Article 152 of the Malaysian Constitution). This was to allow non-Malays time to learn the national language. But it was also intended to allow the national language to develop and standardise its vocabulary in preparation for its new role in the country. This function was performed by the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka which also printed, published and translated books, developed literary talent, and held campaigns to spread the use of the language.

During the first half of 1966, countervailing political pressures intensified to a dangerous level with many Malays insisting upon the immediate restriction of all official business to Malay, and non-Malays championing the continued use of

English or one of the other non-Malay languages (Roff 1967, pp.319-320). As Chai (1977, p.17) describes it:

That the national language question became one of the most divisive issues was no surprise, given the fact that the problem of language was, and remains, the primary formative influence in the group identities of the Malays, Chinese and Indians.

Fully realising the sensitivity of the issue, the Alliance Government, as early as 1965, sought to make clear its intention to implement a compromise solution by which the status of Malay as the sole official language would be affirmed, and simultaneously assure the continued development and use of the various non-Malay languages, particularly English. In a series of statements, the then Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, speaking particularly to the Malays, hammered away at the need for a pragmatic compromise. At the same time he chided those non-Malays who wished to delay the implementation of the National Language Bill (the compromise) which was soon to be tabled in Parliament. The Bill provided for the sole use of Malay for all official purposes with certain listed exceptions. The list included 'court proceedings, federal and state parliamentary debates with the Speaker's consent, published texts of federal and state legislation, and any translation of official documents or communications...deemed necessary in the public interest' (Ott 1968, p.128).

The King - a constitutional monarch - was further empowered to permit the continued use of the English language for such official purposes as was deemed necessary. Passage of the Bill, which later gained legal status as the National Language Act 1967, and publication of its provisions sparked off isolated but angry protests by Malay nationalists, who viewed the concessions to English as a betrayal. Despite such disturbances, public reaction to the Bill was generally milder than expected.

The National Language Act 1967, however, left uncertain the exact degree to which the national language would be used and said nothing at all about education. Communal politicking over the issues of citizenship, the special position of the Malays and language, during the 1969 election campaign led to the worst ever race

riots just after the elections and brought the Government to the verge of collapse. The Government was forced to act by passing the Constitution (Amendment) Act 1971 which:

removed from public debate, even in Parliament, the Constitutional provisions under Article 152 (pertaining to the national language...) (Chai 1977, p.17).

It was made quite clear that any direct or even indirect attack on the National Language as the sole official language would be punishable under the Sedition Act of 1948. The Constitution (Amendment) Act 1971, however, sharply reduced the ambiguity by defining the term 'official purposes' in more specific terms.

Following the implementation of the Constitution (Amendment) Act 1971, the national language has been increasingly used for official purposes, in Parliament and in all government departments. It continues by Government design and direction as the cardinal language of administration in the country. The sophistication of the language for scientific purposes has undergone improvement. Bahasa Malaysia has been modified over the years by virtue of consultations with Indonesia to ensure standardisation of spelling and terminology. By 1976, the spelling system had been standardised and the formulation of terminology in the sciences and other disciplines was still being developed.

National Language Policy - Implementation In Sabah and Sarawak

Constitutional provisions were provided for the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak to use English for official purposes until 1973. Sabah, which under Tun Mustapha had been most energetic in promoting Bahasa Malaysia, made it the sole official language in September 1973 (Milne and Mauzy 1980, p. 370). In Sarawak, where Malay was less extensively known, and the Malays make up a small proportion of the population, the Government was more cautious. The Barisan Nasional (National Front) coalition government passed a resolution in the State Assembly on 26 March 1974 making Bahasa Malaysia the sole official language with English, however, continuing to be used as an official language for a further five years until 1980.

Following this, the State Government sought to promote the use of Bahasa Malaysia in Sarawak. However, the limited resources available in the State forced the Government to introduce another resolution on 23 June 1980 which extended the use of English as an official language until June 1985 and a further amendment resulted in the usage of English until 1990.

Bahasa Malaysia Policy in Education

(a) The Rise of a New Policy

A special and vital aspect of Bahasa Malaysia concerns its role in education. Soon after independence, and after a number of reports on education - notably the Razak Report 1956 and the Rahman Talib Report 1960 - the principle was proclaimed that Malay would be the main medium of instruction in all Government schools, except for the teaching of other languages. It was made a compulsory subject of study in all Government schools, as was English. In practice, the medium of instruction in primary schools could be any one of the four languages - Malay, English, Chinese or Tamil. In secondary schools, it was limited to Malay or English. The Chinese stream was non-existent from 1962 onwards since Chinese schools were no longer classified as government schools.

As outlined earlier, the policy of switching the medium of instruction to Malay made only limited progress up to 1969. The system of education was ambiguous in that it was not clear when and how the principle of making Malay the medium of instruction would be carried out and the National Language Act had had no bearing on education. Since the Government, up to 1969 allowed freedom of choice in selecting the medium of instruction in primary school, parental choice invariably favoured the English school. Where secondary schools were concerned, the English-medium schools registered a rapid growth from 64 per cent to 90 per cent (Lee 1972, p.17), having benefited from the closure of secondary Chinese schools. The growth of the primary and secondary English schools appeared paradoxical in view

of the Government's policy on the Malay language. The change, however, came soon after the civil disturbances of May 1969 when the Education Minister made a sudden announcement on 11 July that English-medium schools would be converted to the Malay medium, one standard at a time, beginning with Standard One in 1970. *Implementation of the language policy would no longer hope for a gradual voluntary switch-over but would remove the option of English-medium education from the 'education menu' available to parents and students.* (Lee 1972, p.19).

The Government announced that it had been 'soft' in carrying out its educational policy (Straits Times, 18 July 1969) and, as in language policy generally, had chosen to take a tougher line.

The Education Minister's announcement marked the culmination of the mounting pressure by Malay nationalists to consummate the Government's language policy. It also marked the beginning of a unified system of education based on the Malay medium. Although the policy permitted the continuation of primary education in Chinese and Tamil as well as privately financed independent secondary Chinese schools, these were essentially 'dead-ends' as they failed to prepare students for any major form of employment or higher education recognised by the Government. The major avenue which non-Malays had been taking to achieve higher socio-economic status - the English medium schools - was shut off.

The new policy that spelt out the use of Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction in schools posed new challenges and a colossal task for the Malaysian Government as it came to grips with the situation. A massive programme of training and retraining of teachers had to be undertaken through the Language Institute and other teacher training colleges. The Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka was faced with the onerous task of providing adequate text books in Bahasa Malaysia. Other problems arose from non-Malay reactions against the new language policy. A bitter source of complaint in the early 1970's was the high rate of failure in the Bahasa Malaysia paper in the Malaysian Certificate of Education (MCE) examination. Over half the candidates who failed the examination in 1970 did so because they failed this paper

(Chai, 1977, p.44). In 1972 the corresponding figure was two-thirds, nearly all of whom were non-Malays (Straits Times, 4 April 1973). There was also a high failure rate in science among Malay pupils in 1972. However, adverse reactions to this did not have the same ethnic edge as did reactions to Bahasa Malaysia failures. Despite these emotional responses, the failure rate was attributable mainly to the low quality of teaching and not to Government policy. As Chai (1977, p.44) points out:

The large number of failures served to warn the public that failure to obtain the minimum of a pass in the Bahasa Malaysia paper would have far-reaching consequences for a person's educational mobility at the post-secondary level, at least within the country, as well as his occupational mobility.

(b) Implementation of Bahasa Malaysia Policy in Schools

The Malaysian Government's plan to implement the Bahasa Malaysia policy in schools and the adoption of implementation strategies are reflected in a policy document - the Second Malaysia Plan 1971 -75 (para: 752) - which reads:

A plan has already been adopted for the introduction of Bahasa Malaysia in stages as the main medium of instruction in West Malaysia. This plan, which spells out the phasing of implementation, also establishes English as a second language in all schools. This phased programme, already in operation, envisages that by 1975 all subjects, except English and other languages will be taught in Bahasa Malaysia at the primary level in all English medium primary schools and by 1982 secondary education, including Form Six, will be in that medium. Consequently by 1983, all courses, other than languages, for new admission to Universities will be conducted in Bahasa Malaysia. Plans for the greater use of Bahasa Malaysia in schools have also been drawn up in Sabah and Sarawak.

As expected, the impact of such a policy on teacher training was tremendous, and every caution had to be exercised to ensure a smooth switch in language medium. In accordance with projected demands, a total of 9,274 primary and secondary school teachers were given in-service training during the period 1971-73, and a plan to provide an additional 4,540 teachers with intensive training in Bahasa Malaysia

during 1974-75 was envisaged (Malaysia: Mid Term Review of the Second Malaysia Plan 1971-75, para: 585). The Bahasa Malaysia policy for schools - stated in no uncertain terms in subsequent policy documents such as the Third Malaysia Plan 1976-80 (para: 1310, 1364), and the Fourth Malaysia Plan 1981-1985 (para: 970,998) - has since been fully implemented in Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah (Malaysia: Mid Term Review of the Fourth Malaysia Plan 1981-85, para: 842).

(c) Policy Implementation in Sabah and Sarawak

In Sabah, the pace of switching from English to Malay as the medium of instruction was faster than expected. The policy decision was made in 1969 when the Director of Education (Sabah) announced that the State Board of Education and the Chief Minister had agreed to follow the education policy of West Malaysia, and that the State was ready to implement and standardise its education policy regarding Bahasa Malaysia with that of West Malaysia (Wong and Ee 1975, p.111). Beginning with Standard One in 1970, and going up the educational ladder by one grade every year, Bahasa Malaysia replaced English as the medium of instruction. By 1982, all schools up to Form Six were using the national language as the teaching medium. The switch in medium thus conformed with the objectives of the national education policy as outlined in the Fourth Malaysia Plan 1981-85 (para: 969).

In Sarawak, the switch in language medium to Bahasa Malaysia was accomplished only in 1990. It is thus obvious that Sarawak has fallen behind in its implementation of the Bahasa Malaysia Policy because the switch in language medium in schools for Standard One only began in 1977.

(d) Policy Implementation In Universities

The moment Bahasa Malaysia was enshrined in the Constitution in 1957 as the country's official language, it became a mechanism for cumulative educational change. As Chai (1977, p.55) reports:

It forced open the doors to secondary education in the Malay medium, long denied under a restricted colonial education policy...

The impact of the introduction of the first secondary classes in Malay in 1957 was felt in higher education when the first generation of Malay-medium students entered the University of Malaya in 1965. It should be remembered that courses conducted by the University of Malaya were predominantly in English.

The pre-eminence of English in the University was seen by Malay-medium students not only as an impediment to their personal academic progress but also as symbolic of the consummation of the national language policy (Chai 1977, p.55).

When a rapid increase of students from the Malay-medium secondary schools reached proportionate levels, political pressure was brought to bear on the Government to take the final step in consolidating the position of the national language, and to hasten the implementation of Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction in universities. Concomitant with the Education Minister's pre-emptive announcement on hastening the implementation of Bahasa Malaysia in schools came the Education Ministry's directive calling on the universities to formulate their own policies and implementation strategies on Bahasa Malaysia (Malaysia: Ministry of Education Professional Circular No. 8, 1969 dated 10 July 1969).

The Faculty of Arts of the University of Malaya was the first to act and formulate policies on the use of Bahasa Malaysia in the teaching of undergraduate courses. Actual implementation was deferred to the academic session 1975-76 when all departments in the Faculty of Arts were required to offer a minimum of three courses in Bahasa Malaysia in the first year and a minimum of five courses in the second and third years (Shamsul Bahrin 1981, p.167). In addition, the various departments were required to make available a sufficient number of electives in Bahasa Malaysia. In a preparatory move, intensive courses in Bahasa Malaysia were held for academic, administrative and general staff. From late 1970 it was decreed that all official correspondence and meetings of the Senate should be carried out in Bahasa Malaysia (Chai 1977, p.54). Nationalist aspirations to set up a Malay-

medium university had already led to the establishment of the National University (Universiti Kebangsaan) in 1970. Two more Malay-medium universities were added in quick succession - the University of Agriculture in 1972 and the University of Technology in 1974.

Abdullah Hassan (1981, p.181) identifies two types of universities in Malaysia:

(a) bilingual universities such as the University of Malaya and the Science University which use varying amounts of Bahasa Malaysia and English in their undergraduate and post-graduate courses and (b) monolingual universities such as the National University, the University of Agriculture, the University of Technology and the recently established Northern University, all of which use only Bahasa Malaysia. The International Islamic University is an exception in that it uses English as a teaching medium and Bahasa Malaysia for all administrative purposes. Commenting in Parliament on the implementation of Bahasa Malaysia in the universities so far, the then Education Minister, Dato Abdullah Ahmad Badawi said that over 90 percent of the courses taught are now conducted in Bahasa Malaysia (New Straits Times, 14 December 1984).

Instruments of Bahasa Malaysia Policy

(a) The Language and Literature Agency (DBP)

It would be pertinent at this juncture to examine briefly the role and functions of the organisations formed by the Government to implement the Bahasa Malaysia policy. In view of the neglect of the Malay language during the colonial past and the need to meet the challenges of the newly independent nation, the Government felt an urgent need for an agency

to develop and modernise the language and to help the government in the implementation of its national language policy. (Baharuddin 1972, p.230).

Consequently, the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka or Language and Literature agency was set up in 1957 with the following objectives:

(a) to develop and enrich the national language

(b) to develop literary talent, particularly in the national language

(c) to print or publish or assist in the printing or publication of books, magazines, pamphlets and other forms of literature in the national language

(d) to standardise spelling and pronunciation, and devise appropriate technical terms in the national language

(e) to prepare and publish a national language dictionary.

(Federation of Malaya: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Ordinance 1959, Kuala Lumpur).

Since its inception the agency has published several series of books and has now become the major supplier of reference textbooks in the national language for primary and secondary schools. Baharuddin (1972, p.231) estimates that by 1971 some 900 titles had been published. In the same period, terminology committees set up to coin new words and improve on existing ones had produced about 13,000 terms. In its translation work the agency has translated several books on the humanities, social and natural sciences for higher education. In the literary field, research on traditional and modern literature has been carried out and some of the research works have been published. To sum up it can be said that the agency's work is to develop and modernise the national language so as to become a language of modern administration, economy, science and technology, and to supply printed reading materials in Bahasa Malaysia (Malaysia: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka in Ten Years: A General Outline of its First Ten Year Progress and Achievement, 1967).

(b) The Language Institute

The Language Institute owes its origin to the Razak Committee of 1956 whose recommendations formed the basis of the country's National Education Policy. It may be recalled that the report, among other things, called for the setting up of a language institute to train teachers in Bahasa Malaysia, and also to look into the teaching of other languages in the country. As a result, the Language Institute was set up in January 1958 on a modest scale at Bukit Senyum, Johor Baru, with 172

students and 11 staff members (New Straits Times, 15 January 1983). In December the same year, the Institute moved to its present site at Pantai Valley, Kuala Lumpur, with 294 students.

There is no doubt that the Institute has played an important role in the promotion of Bahasa Malaysia. In the late 1950s and the 1960s, almost every Bahasa Malaysia teacher in secondary schools received training at the Language Institute. The need for such teachers was significant as there were few graduate teachers in Bahasa Malaysia at the time.

The primary aim of the Institute was to prepare the national language teachers for National-type secondary schools. At present, the Institute is a part of a network of teacher training colleges under the Teacher Training Division of the Education Ministry. It is different from the other colleges in the sense that it specialises in the training of language specialist teachers and in retraining general teachers who must teach in a new language medium (Noss 1984, p.60).

(c) The Curriculum Development Centre

The Pusat Perkembangan Kurikulum or Curriculum Development (CDC) through its Language Section deals with all language matters in the curriculum sphere. Organised into the Primary Division (Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil Units), and the Secondary Division (Malay and English Units), the CDC is responsible for the development of a curriculum in these languages. It conducts in-service courses, does experimental research (including pilot programmes in schools), and is a primary source of information on language matters. Although it is indirectly involved in policy formulation (Noss 1984, p.62), the CDC has, in recent years, played a greater role in the implementation of language policy throughout the country. The New Curriculum for Primary and Secondary Schools is a case in point. The new curriculum is part of an overall review of the total curriculum at the primary and secondary levels. The new curriculum places greater emphasis on language acquisition, particularly Bahasa Malaysia.

(d) The Indonesian - Malaysian Language Council (IMLC)

The Malay language in Indonesia is popularly known as Bahasa Indonesia but has been radically modified over the years. For political and formal reasons, Indonesian nationalists have insisted that Bahasa Indonesia is no longer synonymous with Malay although they recognise that it is based on Malay (Hussein 1972, p.81). Bahasa Malaysia is also based on Malay but not so radically modified.

The success of Malay in becoming the effective national language of a large part of the heterogeneous Malay archipelago has no comparison or precedent in Asia. There are some 400 regional languages in the area, some having had literature superior to Malay (Hussein 1972, p.81), and yet Malay has been able to supersede them all. In an area where the spirit of regionalism is traditionally very strong i.e. each linguistic community developing its own autonomous culture, this demands a lot of compromises. The success of Malay has been its flexibility, but this in itself has created many problems. In the face of a sudden need for a new and modern medium of communication, there developed a spontaneous and simultaneous surge of linguistic creation and innovation from various individuals and groups.

After some twenty five years of uncoordinated growth, the problem of standardisation and co-ordination thus became acute (Hussein 1972, p.90). Consequently, the governments of Indonesia and Malaysia indicated their determination not only to standardise the common language within their own territories, but also to co-ordinate the standardisation and planning for further development between the two countries. The two governments formed the Indonesian-Malaysian Language Council (Majlis Bahasa Indonesia-Malaysia) in 1972. A new romanised Malay spelling was launched on 16 August 1972 as Sistem Ejaan Rumi Baharu Bahasa Malaysia, and in Indonesia as Ejaan Yang Disempurnakan.

Singapore implemented the new Malay spelling system in mid 1975 and for examination purposes in 1978 (Straits Times, 29 September 1983). Brunei

implemented the new spelling system in July 1983 (Brunei: Panduan SEBR Bahasa Melayu, DBP 1983).

Some Problems Affecting The Implementation of Bahasa Malaysia Policy

(a) West Malaysian Schools

The dearth of teachers capable of teaching various subjects in Bahasa Malaysia in primary and secondary schools in West Malaysia is an established fact. The problem became so pronounced that the Education Ministry announced several steps to remedy the situation. In an unprecedented move, the then Education Minister Datuk Abdullah Ahmad Badawi outlined a plan that entailed the training of teachers to fill some 20,000 current vacancies. The blueprint for expansion called for a 50 per cent increase in teacher trainees from 1985 onwards.

Besides changing the present term system to the semester system to enable the training of more teachers in a shorter period and issuing an order to the training colleges to make maximum use of available facilities, the Ministry was also reported to be thinking of holding classes from 'dawn to dusk', and even at night (New Straits Times , 13 November 1984).

While concerned parents and headmasters, and overworked teachers will welcome the extra help they can now expect to receive from the additional teachers in due course, the fact that existing facilities will have to be stretched to desired aims means that a certain amount of deterioration in standards is inevitable, and may even be acceptable. But great care must be exercised by all concerned to see that there is no slide in the quality of training. For this, there must be a commensurate increase in the number of trainers.

(b) Problems In Sabah and Sarawak

In recent years it has become evident that the quality of education provided in Sabah schools is woefully inadequate. While admitting this to be true, official circles have identified the chief causes to be an acute shortage of teachers and poor academic qualifications among most of them. The teacher shortage has been found to be particularly acute in the upper and lower secondary schools.

The poor quality of education in Sabah has featured prominently as a hot political issue when the opposition Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) charged that the priority given to Bahasa Malaysia was the cause of educational retardation in the State.

The opposition political parties drummed up sentiment that the National Education Policy had not benefited the people of Sabah; moreover it was claimed that the recruitment of teachers from Peninsular Malaysia and the payment of special allowances to them is resented by the predominant ethnic group of Sabah - the Kadazans. In another related move, the Education Minister reassured the people of Sabah by outlining some of the steps that would be taken by the Federal Government to raise the standard of education there. These were to include:

- (a) overcoming the shortage of qualified teachers in the State
- (b) introducing a special expertise programme for training teachers
- (c) recruiting more teachers in specific areas
- (d) retraining existing teachers.

Thus Federal policy-makers can no longer hope to isolate the Borneo states in policy decisions affecting them (Sabah and Sarawak). Several Kadazan intellectuals in Sabah have, in the past, called on the State Government to be actively involved in examining and scrutinising federal policies before implementing them in Sabah .

The introduction of Bahasa Malaysia as the sole teaching medium in Sarawak schools had proved to be more difficult than was expected. For one, the multiplicity of schools not supported by State funds contributed to the slow implementation of

the Bahasa Malaysia Policy. According to the Triennial Report 1978-80 of the Sarawak Education Department (p.2), the multiplicity of schools in the State which comprised (a) secondary schools established by private committees to cater for pupils who failed to gain admission to Government and Government-aided secondary schools, (b) Chinese medium secondary schools, (c) schools, both primary and secondary run by Christian missions which preferred to remain outside the aided-school system, used either English or Chinese as the medium of instruction. In line with policy requirements, as embodied in the Education Act 1961 (Extension to Sarawak Order 1975), schools which used English as their medium of instruction were asked to conform with the National Education Policy of switching to Bahasa Malaysia beginning in 1983.

One problem that has persistently troubled the education authorities in the State concerns the availability of teachers capable of teaching in Bahasa Malaysia. Anticipating the extension of the Education Act 1961 to Sarawak, the State Education Department established a Bahasa Malaysia Unit in 1975 at its headquarters to pave the way for the smooth implementation of the switch in language from English to Bahasa Malaysia (Malaysia: Sarawak Education Department Triennial Report 1978-80, p.5). The unit, charged with the task of training teachers to teach in Bahasa Malaysia, has retrained serving teachers at in-service courses. This programme, which has come to be known as 'Kursus Intensif Bahasa Malaysia', has barely been able to provide the number of teachers required. A Federal Government plan to provide sufficient teachers for the State has concerned itself with posting freshly qualified teachers from Peninsular Malaysia to various schools in Sarawak. This has resulted in much resentment among the predominant ethnic group of Sarawak- the Ibans.

Problems affecting Universities

Whilst presenting papers at the Fourth Conference of the Asian Association on National Languages held in Kuala Lumpur, several participants (Nik Abdul Rashid 1981, pp.295-305; Abdullah Hassan 1981. pp.178-204; Voon, Zaharah and Khoo

1981, pp.255-271; Ariffin Suhaimi 1981. pp.272-277 and Soepadmo 1981, pp.278-286) expressed concern over some of the unresolved issues affecting the implementation of Bahasa Malaysia in Malaysian universities. These problems ranged from a lack of adequate and suitable terminology texts and reference materials, to inadequate language proficiency among academic staff and students.

(a) Terminology

One problem affecting most Malaysian universities is terminology in Bahasa Malaysia. The terminology needs at primary and secondary levels of schools have been solved to a large extent through the efforts of Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka. The agency has managed to coin and disseminate sufficient terminology as well as text books required by schools (Abdullah 1981, p.192). There is little problem here, but in universities, however, the problem of terminology has become quite serious. The Science University (USM) has had to depend on the DBP and other institutions for new scientific terms. A Terminology Service Unit, established to collate and disseminate new terms, collected some 85,000 scientific and technical terms by 1977, of which 35,000 came from the DBP, 15,000 from other universities, and 35,000 through its own efforts (Abdullah 1981, p.193). Referring to the need for more suitable terminology, (Abdullah 1981, p.193) points out that most of the existing terms are either obsolete or irrelevant:

...not all the terms obtained from the Agency and other institutions are relevant to the curriculum taught in USM. In the first place, most of the terms obtained from the Agency were found to be inadequate for more advanced and difficult concepts that are dealt with at University level as opposed to those taught at schools. Secondly, some of the terms obtained from other institutions are also found to be not applicable because the courses or disciplines taught in the various universities may not be totally the same. USM has also established a few courses that are different from those taught in other universities.

In describing the lack of uniform and standardised scientific terms at the national level, Soepadmo (1981, p.282) has taken the committees to task for their failure to

co-ordinate their work:

There is a great deal of dissimilarity and discrepancy between those terms used at schools and universities and between those used by one university and another. This case of diversity occurs because the terminology committees, both at the schools and the universities follow different principles and guidelines in coining terms, and there is hardly any dialogue or communication between these different committees.

Bahasa Malaysia still needs about 6,000,000 new terms in various disciplines to meet the requirements of higher education in the country. In expressing this view, the Education Minister indicated that the DBP had so far successfully developed and compiled 250,000 new terms and that steps were being taken to streamline common terms between Malaysia and Indonesia. It would appear from the above that no quick solution can be found in expediting the coining of new terms as even terminology committees are uncoordinated in their efforts in an era characterised by a technical and technological revolution.

(b) Texts and Reference Books

The dearth of texts and other reference books in Bahasa Malaysia may seem subjectively even more appalling when it is realised that a large proportion of books in the language are mere translations from English. The Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka has failed to meet the barest demand for reading materials in Bahasa Malaysia in the universities and other institutions of higher learning. The lack of co-ordination among the universities with regard to the choice of books for translation has further lessened the impact these translated books might have. In general, out-dated texts have been translated which are hardly referred to any longer (Voon, Zaharah and Khoo 1981, p.261). Additionally, the change in the spelling system introduced from time to time has aggravated the problem, for, in some cases, the translated books are published in the old spelling system (Soepadmo 1981, p.282).

Voon, Zaharah and Khoo (1981, p.261) have advanced one other explanation which accounts in part for the short supply of books in Bahasa Malaysia.

...local authors invariably publish for a wider, international readership and, therefore, prefer to write in English rather than in Bahasa Malaysia. This is a common practice among scholars whose mother-tongue is not one of the international languages. The opportunities for publishing in Bahasa Malaysia are also limited as reputable publishers, with the exception of Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and the University of Malaya Press, prefer manuscripts in English in order to maximise sales. Additionally, geographical journals produced in the country are predominantly in English.

In consideration of the problems outlined above, the University of Malaya and the Science University have chosen to emphasise bilingualism i.e. proficiency in both Bahasa Malaysia and in English. The rationale for such a move is to enable students to use Bahasa Malaysia for the purpose of following their lectures and at the same time learn sufficient English to gain access to the text and reference materials in English. In citing the Law Faculty as an example, Nik Abdul Rashid (1981, p.305) gives the reasons for the policy on bilingualism:

The future of the Law Faculty in the next quarter century until the year 2000 will depend on bilingualism. Bahasa Malaysia cannot be used as the sole language in the study of law. It must be supplemented with English. To train the law teachers to be competent in both languages is an easy task, but to translate the 50,000 volumes of Law Reports into Malay is a 'mission impossible'. It would take centuries to have them translated.

While supporting such a policy as a very logical one, Abdullah (1981, p.196-197) is a bit more cautious when he says:

It is hoped that such a policy shall not be interpreted as contradicting the National Language policy, but rather be taken as a sensible step towards establishing Bahasa Malaysia as a medium of instruction where English plays an important supporting role.

Problems affecting Development

(a) Parochialism in Language Development

One aspect that is likely to have some impact on the development of Bahasa Malaysia, and steadily gaining recognition in the country, is parochialism among fundamentalists who do not want the incorporation of foreign words into Bahasa Malaysia. Pressure is being brought to bear on the Government by various groups to stem the 'anglicisation' of the national language. Some had even called on the Government to stop the teaching of foreign languages which are perceived as a threat to Bahasa Malaysia. The West Malaysia Malay Teachers Union called on the Government to amend the National Language Act 1967 with a view to including the Arabic (Jawi) script in the teaching of Bahasa Malaysia (New Straits Times 24 October 1984). Realising the need for a moderate approach in this issue, the Government has made its policy clear that it will not allow parochialism or excessive pride in the language to hinder its projected plans for developing the national language. The Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr. Mahathir Mohamad had reiterated that a good command of foreign languages will contribute towards an enhanced Bahasa Malaysia. In a rational manner, the Prime Minister added :

If we aspire to enrich Bahasa Malaysia, every single educated Malaysian should master at least two foreign languages. This does not mean betraying the national language.

(b) The Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka

How fares the DBP as the country's supreme authority on the national language - Bahasa Malaysia? The answer is it is still doing the best it can in an ongoing task which has grown bigger each year ever since its inception. The DBP continues to plough on through the swollen morass of backlogged titles for translation and manuscripts for appraisal and publication, in accordance with its objectives of meeting the nation's need for a national language maturing in tandem with the demands made on it by a rapidly developing society.

It is probably due to the impossibility of achieving its ultimate goal that much is made of those areas in which the DBP has charted substantial progress in the maturation of Bahasa Malaysia. Of these, the productive Indonesian-Malaysian Language Council has borne good fruit in the development of terminologies and the strengthening of the linguistic bonds of the region. There have also been very real advances in the technical and scientific fields over the past decade, with valuable new terminologies and lexicons already finding wide application in those areas previously most hampered by the language's immaturity. Given all the pluses, however, it has to be admitted that the DBP can no longer be expected to do this task alone. The evolution of Bahasa Malaysia is a process fuelled with major inputs from a plethora of different sources - scholastic institutions, the media, the bureaucracy. It is a process that must be recognised as being far too vast to be guided by a single agency, no matter how hardworking. The DBP is being diverted from its greater goals by the need to function as the publishing arm of the Education Ministry ; it is continually hamstrung by the costly and time-consuming matters of book promotion and manuscript translation.

And, as if these were not enough inherent and logistical obstacles, the promotion of the national language, be it by the DBP or any other agency of government, is overshadowed or potentially distracted by the world-wide prestige of English, which is not without its impact on Malaysian popular perceptions and policy-making. This will be the focus of the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

English as a Global Language and Malaysia's Policy Dilemmas

Introduction

English is the closest thing to a lingua franca around the world today. It has replaced French in the world of diplomacy, and German in the field of science. English has now become the dominant language of medicine, electronics and space technology, of international business and advertising, of radio, television and film. It is a world language; a language of global currency.

In countries where English has no traditional base, interest in the language is increasing rapidly. In many cases, those who do not know English are trying to learn it. In countries, however, with a traditional base of English - a legacy of American and British colonialism, thousands are flocking to Britain each year to learn English at various levels.

Private English language schools are big business in Britain. Teaching of English as a Second Language (TESL) has become a multi-million dollar business all over the world. The need for competent English teachers has created a boom industry 'teaching teachers'. Several colleges and universities in the United States offer master's degree programmes in what is known as TOEFL (the teaching of English as a Foreign Language). In Britain, universities offer degree courses in TESL (the Teaching of English Second Language). TESL has now come to be an important option available for several diploma and degree courses in teaching by universities and institutes of education in Britain, Australia and New Zealand.

Of particular significance to this study is the current interest shown by several countries in the ASEAN region in TESL courses for their teachers. The Malaysian Government has initiated joint programmes with some British universities on new degrees that will lead to a major in TESL, especially tailored for the needs of Malaysia. It is understood that no university in Britain has ever offered a degree

where students could major in TESL, and that it took the Malaysian Government to initiate the programme with British universities makes it even more significant as it implies the tremendous need for teachers trained in TESL in Malaysia. The RELC (Regional Language Centre) in Singapore, set up for the specific purpose of training English language teachers in the ASEAN region and of producing relevant teaching material for TESL, can be said to be playing only a minimal role, as the bulk of TESL teachers still have to be recruited from abroad.

The CFBT (Centre for British Teachers), an independent organisation with its headquarters in London, has consistently recruited teachers with TESL qualifications from Britain, Australia and New Zealand in recent years. CFBT has successfully established short-term and long-term contracts with a few governments in the ASEAN region. The Centre's role in these countries is specific to teaching English in primary and secondary schools, and in pre-university classes with the one aim of improving significantly the standard of English among pupils. In the case of matriculating students in Malaysia, the CFBT has been given the additional task of enabling students to obtain a satisfactory score in the American TOEFL Test and to help them develop their study skills in the medium of English (Centre for British Teachers Circular, 1994).

An upsurge of interest in English among many developing Southeast Asian nations has occurred concomitant with growing concern about falling standards of English. The apparent decline of English in Malaysia and the Philippines becomes all the more alarming because of the traditional strength of the language in these regions previously. Sadly, Malaysia's initiation in English proficiency appears to have been frittered away when one considers that it once led the British Empire for outstanding results in the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate examinations (Cheeseman 1949, p.545).

In nearly all cases, the driving force behind all this is seen to be nationalism - the one force that helped win many countries their independence from their colonial masters. Recognising that language can be an effective nation-building tool, regional leaders

have placed new emphases on national languages - unfortunately, often at the expense of English. Language experts have identified Malaysia and the Philippines (once traditional bastions of English) as two areas experiencing a sharp fall in the standard of English. Both countries have emphasised the national language, Bahasa Malaysia and Filipino; with a consequent decline in the standard of English.

In reaction to the intellectual colonialism implied by the use of English, the teaching of subjects in this language was progressively abandoned in Malaysian schools from the late 1960s. Understandable as this policy was as an expression of nationalist aspirations, its implications for Malaysia have been inimical in the long run. A generation of Malaysian youth has been isolated from an adequate proficiency in the language which has undoubtedly become the pre-eminent means of global communication in diplomacy, science and technology. Thus, the Government of Malaysia has become faced with the thorny problem of reconciling conflicting persuasions. On the one hand is the undisputed and urgent need for English to be taught as much as possible. Accordingly, the teaching of various subjects in the English language is being strongly advocated by the intellectual and non-Malay communities as the key to the future of Malaysia as a modern technological state. On the other hand, however, powerful opinion has argued in favour of traditionalist and Islamic values in education (Husin Ali 1984, p.95). This persuasion sees English not as a technological key, but as a cultural counter force; an intellectual fifth-column, which in mining from within, as Shakespeare said, would 'corrupt unseen'. Thus the Government's dilemma is to bring about a revival of English language proficiency as the official policy of Malaysia while pacifying the fears and aspirations of the Malay electorate who perceive English as a threat to their cultural heritage and Bahasa Malaysia, and the progress of the Malays. As Alastair Pennycook, 1994 says:

An irony for the Malaysian Government is that despite the need to oppose English in order to promote the national language, they have also had to promote the widespread teaching of English as the 'second most important language' (p. 201).

Policy on English - Historical Perspective

When the Alliance Government came into office in 1957 the first task it set out to perform was to establish a national system of education that aimed at controlling and standardising the fragmented school system, and at implementing the Government's language policies. The main recommendations of the Razak Report (1956) received legal status when they were incorporated into the Education Ordinance of 1957. The basic outlines of the language policy were, however, laid out in the original Constitution of the Federation of Malaya (1957) in Article 152. The article, among other things, made a provision authorising the use of English as an official second language for a minimum of ten years after independence (i.e. until 1967). English was prescribed, not merely authorised, as the written language of bills in Parliament, and hence as the official language of the Courts of Law as well.

Contrary to what many expected, there was no guarantee in this original Constitution that English would continue to maintain its status as an official second language of Malaysia. The educational part of the policy, for example, appears to have been very carefully and thoughtfully worded. In this context Noss (1984, p.19) explains:

The right to pursue education in languages other than Malay is somewhat abrogated by the consideration that all formal education is, to some extent, 'for official purposes' because even a privately-funded school or university must subject itself to governmental supervision as soon as it is chartered.

Between 1957 and 1965, there was no doubt that all the language provisions in the Constitution were being meticulously honoured. Malay and English enjoyed almost equal status as official languages during this time - Malay supported, English permitted. The official trend was what was seen by many to be a gradual phasing out of support for the other languages in favour of Malay and English; but what many did not foresee was that the future trend was already set towards the eventual elimination of English as a medium of instruction as well.

As we have seen in Chapter I, the two important documents that had significant effects on language policy during this period were the Razak Report (1956) and the Rahman Talib Report (1960). These were essentially reports of educational review committees which had the effect of a sequence of legislative and executive actions such as the establishment in 1957 of the Language and Literature Agency, special programmes for the training of teachers of the Malay language and the retraining of other teachers to give instruction in Malay, the setting of compulsory language courses, admission requirements, government service qualifications, bursaries and scholarships - all of which gave pre-eminence to Malay over English.

All the above developments in educational policy meant that Malaysia maintained a pattern of education for another ten years until 1967, which was very similar to the one that existed before independence. At the primary school level there were four language streams: Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil. Parents could choose the medium of instruction for their children. When children from non-English-medium primary schools wanted to change over to English-medium secondary schools, they spent an extra year in a Remove class to increase their proficiency in English. English-medium secondary schools which still received government support, were thought by the general public (including many members of the Malay-speaking public) to be superior to Malay-medium schools in almost every way.

The Government had, at the time of the Rahman Talib Report 1960 indicated its intention of phasing out English-medium primary schools by 1967, with an extension only for Sabah and Sarawak, where educational conditions were conceded to be quite different from those in Peninsular Malaysia. As Noss (1984, p.20) puts it:

The shutting off of the tap of English-medium entrants to secondary level would of course eventually lead to the closing down or conversion of English-medium schools to the Malay-medium at the secondary level as well.

These implications apparently escaped many who furthermore succumbed to a false sense of security through the notion that university education, at least, would have to continue to be offered in English for many years to come, and that the

Government would, therefore surely not allow the standard of English to deteriorate by shutting off secondary education in English. However, everything pointed the other way: towards a slow but steady replacement of English by Malay as the latter become developed, through deliberate policy, to take over one English function after another.

It may be recalled that the Government passed the National Language Act in 1967 which affirmed Malay as the national language. Where schools were concerned it was clear that the national language would become increasingly important. Already, it was necessary to have the minimum of a pass in Malay at the Lower Certificate of Education (taken at Form 3) for entry into upper secondary schools. From January 1968 all English-medium primary schools were required to teach physical education, art and craft, local studies (social studies), and music in Malay in Standards 1, 2 and 3 (Chai 1977, p.321).

However, the most important development in language policy came in July 1969, just after the worst race riots in the country, when the then Minister of Education announced that from 1 January 1970 the final step would be taken toward the 'full conversion' of the English schools to Malay-medium, beginning with Standard 1, and Standards 1 and 2 in 1971, and so on until 1983 when all English-medium instructed up to the University would be converted to Malay-medium.

There was widespread consternation among the English educated elite. Education policy had stressed that the ultimate aim was to make Malay the main medium of instruction, and this was generally interpreted to mean that English would remain as one of the media of instruction in what might be a bilingual system of education, i.e. using Malay and English. To compensate for the 'loss' the Government stressed that English would be taught as a 'second language' and, if necessary the time allotted to English as a subject in schools would be increased.

It would appear from the above that the status of English was depressed in relation to Malay by the authorities. It was no longer the medium of instruction in the entire education system. Though English was a compulsory second language for every pupil, a pass in it was no longer a condition for obtaining the SPM or School Leaving Certificate. While the spirit of nationalism and national pride calls for use of the National Language, the need for English as the language of commerce, international communication, science and technology cannot be denied. Hence, while the authorities and the media espouse the use of the National Language as a sign of the peoples' loyalty and as a tool to forge national unity, the importance of learning English and of maintaining a high standard of English is emphasised from time to time by officials from the Education Ministry and government leaders.

Status and Functions of English in Malaysia

(a) Social Functions

English was the language of the rulers and thus enjoyed a position of prestige in the country during the pre-independence years. The presence of native speakers of English in positions of authority, influence and prestige further consolidated the position of the language politically and socially. All subjects were taught in English in the prestigious English-medium schools. These were more popular with the urban elite who could afford the fees. An English education guaranteed entry to positions in government offices, European business houses and banks, and admission to professional training.

The implementation of the national language policy in 1967 prescribed a gradual phasing out of English as one of the media of instruction in secondary and tertiary education in the country.

There has been a considerable change in the status and functions of English as a result of the national language policy. English does not any longer play a role in enhancing the chances of higher paid employment in the government service or

education as was, hitherto, the case. However, the important role of English in science and technology and in international trade and commerce is recognised, and as a result it is prescribed as a second language in primary and secondary schools to ensure that Malaysians are able to communicate in the language for these purposes.

(b) English In Employment

Proficiency in English is not a necessary qualification for entry into the government service. This implies that a candidate with little or no knowledge of English is eligible to apply for a position in any government department. However, English is a necessary pre-qualification for one to serve in the Ministry of External Affairs and in the UNESCO Division of the Ministry of Education. The legal profession requires a high level of proficiency in English, particularly among the lawyers and the judges. Needless to say, the government-owned national carrier, Malaysia Airlines System (MAS) not only requires English-speaking pilots but also stewards, stewardesses and receptionists who possess a good command of English.

The private sector is perhaps the last stronghold of the English language in Malaysia. Almost all commercial business houses and banks carry out their transactions in English. Hotels, banks, foreign and multinational firms normally employ executives who are able to speak English with good fluency. It may thus be implied that while English is recognised as being of particular importance for certain occupations in the government sector, the private sector is almost completely dependent on English for its daily business transactions.

(c) Official Status

The Malaysian Constitution did not provide any official status for English after 1967 in Peninsular Malaysia. However, the Courts of Law are permitted to phase out their use of English at a much slower rate, and consequently, English is still used as an official language in the Law Courts.

In Sabah and Sarawak which became independent from British rule on entering Malaysia in 1963, the grace period originally given to them for phasing out the use of English as an official language was ten years after independence. While Sabah has managed to implement this, Sarawak extended this grace period in 1985. The decision to do so was made in July 1985 when the Sarawak State Legislative Council voted to extend the period of English as an official language for a further five years (New Straits Times, 28 July 1985).

(d) English as a second Language

In view of the diverse roles and functions that English plays in the various countries throughout the world, it may be necessary at this stage to distinguish between English as a first or native language, as a second language and as a foreign language. English is considered as a first or native language when it is acquired as a first language. It is then sometimes called the mother tongue and is normally the language of the home (Macnamara 1973, p.57).

English is a second language when it is acquired after the mother tongue of any group within the country which is usually multilingual. The scale and variety of its uses differ enormously - part or all of government administration, politics, law, medicine, industry, internal trade, newspapers and education (Wilkins 1972, p.150-151). English is a foreign language when it is not the mother tongue of any group in the country where it is being learned and has no internal communication function, like the first or second language. The aim of teaching and learning the language is to increase ease of contact with foreign language speakers outside the country (Wilkins 1972, pp.153-154).

The Government of Malaysia has reiterated that English would be taught as a strong second language in the education system.

While the Government will implement vigorously the teaching of Bahasa Malaysia, measures will be taken to ensure that English is taught as a strong second language. This is important if Malaysia is to keep abreast of scientific and

technological developments in the world and participate meaningfully in international trade and commerce (Third Malaysia Plan 1976 - 80, para: 1364).

The Mid Term Review of the Third Malaysia Plan of 1976-80 (para: 561) reads :

The teaching of English as a second language in all schools will be further strengthened.

The policy on English has thus been stated in official government documents - that it is a second language. What does 'strong second language' mean in the Malaysian context? Noss (1984, p.21) has expressed the view that the term 'second language' as stated in the Malaysian official documents is a vague one which has not even been defined by the authorities. Asmah (1983) has, however, attempted to explain that English is the second most important language in the National Education Policy. She writes (p.230):

it is to be taught as an effective second language in Malaysian schools.

She adds that it is a second language in terms of importance in the educational system and international relations, and it is second only to Bahasa Malaysia. Here however, the term 'second language' has:

nothing to do with acquisition of the language by the speakers in a temporal context, viz. a language acquired after the mother tongue, nor does it take into consideration the role it plays as a medium of instruction in the school and the university where one would expect a second language to have a fair allocation of the school subjects which will use it as a medium vis-a-vis the national language (Asmah 1983, p.230).

(e) English as a Tool for Wider Communication

With the increased use of Bahasa Malaysia in education and in wider communication within Malaysia, the role of English as a medium for inter-ethnic communication may appear to be diminishing. Although the use of English is restricted to the urban elite of various ethnic backgrounds (Platt and Weber 1980, p. 155), it has been found that

the use of English for communication will, contrary to expectations, increase in the near future. This has become obvious as more and more English-educated 'anglophilic' Malay scholars (who have returned from their studies in English-speaking countries) have sharply criticised government policies and advocated a greater use of English. Speaking at the Malay Language and Literary Congress at Kuala Lumpur in December 1994, Professor Ismail declared :

Now we have a multi-racial English educated elite versus the multi-racial vernacular educated masses. Things are moving towards a class struggle or new feudalism. Even more surprising, the English-educated elite is re-emerging from the shock of the New Education Policy even stronger than ever. The Malay middle class - or more correctly, English-educated Malay elite - is giving new impetus to the increased use of English... (Straits Times, 10 January 1995).

(f) English in Education

Meanwhile, the principles as outlined in the National Education Policy which prescribed a gradual phasing out of English as the medium of instruction in English-medium schools and the universities have been scrupulously honoured.

The universities entered a new phase when English was replaced as the medium of instruction. The year 1983 marked the beginning of this new phase as the national primary, secondary and pre-university levels in Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah offer instruction in Bahasa Malaysia. Although English has been retained as an 'important second language' to 'enable students to communicate in the language' (Asmah 1983, p. 231), compulsory English language instruction is given only up to the end of secondary school education; and at the pre-university level, i.e. the two-year period before the student enters tertiary education, no English language instruction is given. Hence, a student from the national school, where the medium of instruction is Malay, finds himself cut off from formal English language lessons until he enters the university where English becomes compulsory once more.

In spite of this, Malaysian universities have adopted a policy which makes it compulsory for their students who have come through the national schools, to take English as a compulsory language at the undergraduate level (Asmah 1983, p. 233). At the University of Malaya, certain faculties have made English compulsory, giving it equal weight with academic courses. In other faculties, a pass in English is compulsory in order to get a degree. As Asmah (1983, p.234) puts it:

...it means that however good the grades are for the academic courses, a student cannot be awarded his degree unless he passes his English language examination.

It is striking that this is in direct contrast with the situation in secondary schools where a pass in English is not compulsory for the School Leaving Certificate (SPM). However, the objectives in English Language teaching at the university level vary from one university to another. While certain universities aim at a general language proficiency for their students, others aim at proficiency in reading and comprehension.

Effects of National Education Policy on English

The accelerated implementation of the National Education Policy beginning from 1970 gave Bahasa Malaysia a position of pre-eminence in the education system, thus displacing English. English was replaced as the medium of instruction in stages, but was retained as a compulsory second language. A pass in the language was no longer necessary for the award of a school leaving certificate at the end of secondary education which had, hitherto, been the case. These changes in the status and functions of English began to have a resultant cumulative but significant effect on English language teaching and learning in schools and tertiary institutions throughout the country.

(a) Establishment of the CDC

One such effect was the urgent need felt to revise the primary and secondary school curricula in English. With this in mind the Government accorded a priority status to

the country's newly established Curriculum Development Centre (Pusat Kurikulum) at Kuala Lumpur for the development of suitable syllabuses in English for all levels of primary and secondary education. In the words of Noss (1984, p. 62):

...the Curriculum Development Centre, through the Language Unit, is very influential in the implementation of language policy throughout the country, and also plays a small role in policy formulation. As members of national committees, its principal officers also play some role in language planning as such.

(b) The Language Centres at Universities

It was observed that the English language proficiency attained by students at the secondary school level was not sufficient to make them effective readers which is basic to the acquisition of knowledge and skills using English (Asmah 1983, p. 239). This led to the creation of the Language Centres at the various universities and the MARA Institute of Technology which have, among other things, adopted measures for 'providing intensive or remedial instruction in English' (Noss 1984, p. 61). The University of Malaya and the MARA Institute have also been responsible for planning and implementing an ambitious 'English for Special Purposes Project' (code named ESPP) that aims at teaching English using the 'reading comprehension approach' (Platt and Weber 1980, p. 204). This has been found to be especially necessary to compensate and equip the university students with the necessary skills to enable them to take references from the vast collection of reading material available only in English, in the absence of books in Bahasa Malaysia.

(c) Declining Standards

As stated earlier the problem that emerged as a result of the National Educational Policy was the steep decline in the standard of English language proficiency. Although official circles have been tight-lipped about this, the general consensus of opinion seems to indicate that this is so. Asmah (1983, p.338) has described the decline as a natural process. She states:

It is unrealistic to aim for a level of proficiency equivalent to that attained by students in English schools when learning and teaching is being done in Malay at the present.

The problem of declining standards and the factors contributing towards this will be dealt with at length in a later portion of this chapter.

(d) English Syllabus For Primary Schools

The National Education Policy has described English as the second most important language, and prescribes that it should be taught as an effective second language in Malaysian schools (Asmah 1983, p.230). While the Malaysian Government is vigorously pursuing the policy of nationalising the education system through the means of Bahasa Malaysia., it is also committed, as a matter of policy, to retaining and fostering English as a 'strong second language' (Third Malaysia Plan 1976-80, para: 397). In the words of the then Deputy Prime Minister :

The standard of English in the country should be raised to the highest level possible (quoted in Asmah 1983, p.196).

The post 1970 primary school syllabus for English language which was revised accordingly has aimed at making the student equally proficient in speech, reading, and writing. The planners of the above syllabus have stated that:

the ultimate aim of teaching English in the country is to help children to become effective readers so that they may read for knowledge and pleasure. The need for efficient silent reading of English increases as the pupils reach higher classes and it will be an asset in tertiary education (1970 Primary School English Syllabus, p. 17).

(e) English Syllabus for Secondary Schools

At the end of secondary school education, a pupil from a Malaysian school is expected to:

i) communicate effectively and be intelligible in his speech

ii) understand any form of recreational or instructional material relevant to his stage of learning

iii) be able to write effectively and with precision for different purposes.

(English Language Syllabus in Malaysian Schools 1975, p. 1).

The aims outlined above have let the syllabus writers promote the communicative approach in the teaching of the language (English Language Syllabus in Malaysian Schools, Forms IV - V, 1975), the rationale being that:

the communicational syllabus design is a logical extension of the whole English language curriculum(Asmah 1983, p.233).

The syllabus does not indicate the maximum or minimum levels of proficiency that should be achieved, but rather that for all practical purposes:

the minimum level is simply where the communicational intent is successfully conveyed, while the maximum level is the native speaker's ability (Asmah 1983, p. 233).

Prior to the introduction of the communicative syllabus, there were two English programmes in operation in upper secondary schools in Malaysia:

(a) An advanced programme to meet the requirements of the Cambridge Syllabus 121 for English-medium schools.

(b) A less advanced programme to meet the needs of Syllabus Y for Malay-medium schools.

In terms of expected proficiency level, Syllabus 121 and Syllabus Y were 'miles apart'. With the change in medium of instruction at the upper secondary level in 1979, as well as the desire to upgrade the level of attainment of the Malay-medium schools to beyond that of Syllabus Y, an alternative syllabus had to be drawn up.

Prior to 1976, when English was the medium of instruction in national-type secondary schools, a certain degree of proficiency and fluency was maintained and

fostered through the study of English as a subject, and through the study of the other subjects of the school curriculum in the medium of English. The grammar based 'structural approach' fared well in these English-medium schools as English was extensively used in the teaching and learning of other subjects in the school curriculum. But with the change in medium, the bulk of the study of English was to be placed on one subject only - English Language. In terms of operational English study time, this meant a reduction from 1780 minutes to merely 240 minutes per week. With such a reduced study time for the subject as well as the almost paradoxical wish to retain, if not improve the competency level as of pre-1979, it was imperative that a new syllabus, as well as a more effective pedagogical strategy for teaching English was found. As Asmah (1983, p.196) who is also the head of the Curriculum Development Centre puts it:

The situation being what it was then it was only natural and logical that the syllabus planners entrusted with designing and planning a new English programme for upper secondary schools should adopt the communicational model in 1975.

Declining Standards - The Chief Causes

As outlined in the foregoing sections of this chapter, Malaysia's National Education Policy has had a significant impact on the standard of English in the education system. Perhaps the most important factor that has contributed to the fall in English language proficiency is the sharply decreased exposure given to English in the school curriculum.

In the pre-1970 years when English was used extensively as a medium of instruction a certain degree of proficiency and fluency was maintained and fostered through a curriculum where all subjects (except Malay language) were taught in English. In terms of operational study time, a maximum of 1780 minutes per week were available for instruction using the English language (Asmah 1983, p.194). This figure has now fallen to only 240 minutes - the total time allocated for English as a subject. All other subjects are taught in Bahasa Malaysia.

In the case of primary schools the time given to English during the pre-1970 period was between 180-240 minutes. This time does not include the time spent in teaching other subjects in the English medium. Although the time allocated for English language instruction was increased to 300 minutes per week during the post 1970 period all the other subjects were taught in Bahasa Malaysia. This represented a drop to approximately one-fifth of the time that was previously available for English. Under the New Primary School Curriculum (KBSR) implemented in 1983, the time allowed for English language as a subject has been further reduced to between 240-270 minutes per week as compared with 300 minutes previously. Then again, formal instruction in the English language is only commenced in July during the first year (Primary One).

It thus follows that a sharply reduced exposure to English as is now the experience of pupils in Malaysian schools will entail a much reduced opportunity for pupils to communicate in the language. Further, the status of English as a non-compulsory subject at the School Leaving level has been inimical to the achievement of a favourable attitude and motivation among students to take up the subject more seriously.

An equally important factor that has been responsible for the downward trend in English language proficiency is a matter related to teaching method. As discussed earlier, the 'grammar-based structural approach' which fared well in the English-medium schools was abandoned in favour of the 'communicative approach' as a result of the change in medium of instruction and the new role of English as a result of this change, as well as shifts in pedagogical emphasis (Asmah 1983, p.196).

Platt and Weber (1980, pp.201-202) have attempted to provide the conceptual background under which a teaching method may be chosen for Malaysian secondary schools.

With Bahasa Malaysia as the main medium of instruction, the number of parents who had an English-medium education and used English in the house would

gradually diminish and English spoken by the Malay-medium educated Malays, is on the threshold between EFL and ESL.

Pritchard and Chamberlain (1974, p.48) go even further and say :

It is not over-contentious to state as a self-evident fact that the two approaches to English will necessarily be very different, and it is just as obvious, given the National Language Policy, that the latter situation of EFL is the one most likely to concern most teachers of English in Malaysia in the future.

In the light of such considerations, the language experts in Malaysia have chosen the highly acclaimed but also violently criticised approach of 'teaching communicative competence', i.e. creating situations that come close to real life situations and where communication exchange takes place as closely resembling 'real life' communication as is possible in an artificial setting. In fact,

Many applied linguists have been rather hazy about how to teach communicative competence at the school level and have not been able to offer an overall convincing proposal (Platt and Weber 1980, p.202).

In spite of these criticisms, the Malaysian Curriculum Development Centre has made good progress in providing students and teachers with a framework for creating situations as close to everyday communication as possible:

The opponents of the communicative approach say that there is no chance of communication in English outside the classroom and that now an entirely different approach to teaching English is needed in Malaysia. As Asmah (1978, p.15) puts it: *...the reality of present day Malaysia indicates that English is just a subject (not a medium of instruction in the classroom). With a maximum of four hours a week of English language class it is impossible to teach students to acquire communicative competence. This problem is compounded by the fact that communicative competence in the language will fall into disuse the moment the make believe classroom situation ends at the completion of the allocated hour.*

In all fairness, it must be stated that the choice of a 'communicative approach' is perhaps the best thing the Curriculum Development Centre did under the circumstances as most language experts would agree, but there remains just one more thorny problem that balks the Ministry of Education - that is, the question of an availability of trained teachers in TESL to teach the communicative syllabus.

Ideally, the task of teaching English has to be carried out by teachers who have appropriate training and good experience, but does the practice match the rhetoric? A significant number of the teachers in the country who have been entrusted with the task of teaching English have so little knowledge of the real techniques in TESL that they have preferred to opt for optional retirement rather than attend in-service training in TESL which would interrupt their family life. Government authorities have themselves admitted that there is such an acute shortage of TESL teachers in the country that short-term measures such as the recruitment of teachers from overseas especially trained in TESL have had to be resorted to, from as far back as 1978.

Remedial Programmes

Against all odds, the Malaysian Government declared its official intention to improve the standard of English in the country. The Fourth Malaysia Plan 1981-85 (para: 561) outlined some of the steps that were to be undertaken by the Government:

The upgrading of teachers' proficiency in the teaching of English as a second language will be intensified through in-service courses at the Maktab Perguruan Bahasa and Faculty of Education and Language Centre of Universiti Malaya. English language teachers recruited from the United Kingdom will be assigned to various schools to supplement local efforts. In addition, research into aspects of the teaching of English as a second language will be conducted. To ensure effective implementation, this programme will be co-ordinated and supervised by English language officers at state and district levels.

The Ministry of Education in 1994 announced several long-term measures to help raise the standard of English (New Straits Times, 2 February 1994). These included

1. Enabling more local teachers to learn TESL techniques through a gradual transfer of experience by observing the CFBT teachers
2. Sending teachers for TESL courses to Britain, Australia, New Zealand and the Regional Language Centre (RELC) in Singapore
3. Sending teachers to local universities such as the University of Malaya and Universiti Pertanian Malaysia, and also to the Language Institute for degree and diploma courses in TESL
4. Holding in-service TESL courses at State and District levels and
5. Carrying out supplementary programmes such as the English Language Reading Programme.

Among some of the short-term measures taken so far, the one that has received considerable attention is the recruitment of TESL teachers from the Centre for British Teachers (CFBT). The CFBT Ltd. is an independent and private organisation not funded by the British Government. Receiving its income from services to clients (usually developing countries) its main aim is to promote the teaching of the English language overseas. Its Malaysian project has been described as the largest it has undertaken. The Malaysian project, which began in 1979, includes :

- (a) teaching English in rural lower secondary schools
- (b) teaching English in residential schools in an effort to prepare pre-university students for the American and Australian TOEFL examinations
- (c) assisting the Language Unit of the Malaysian International Islamic University in drawing up remedial programmes.

The best example of Malaysia's long-term remedial programmes in English is the TESL programme that aims at training local teachers in TESL at various institutions like the Language Institute in Kuala Lumpur, the Malaysian Universities, the RELC in Singapore, and universities in Commonwealth countries like Australia, New Zealand and Britain. These programmes have been going on for some years now but an acute shortage of TESL teachers is still being experienced in the country.

These programmes should not be regarded as steps being taken to raise the standard of English, but rather as last-ditch remedial measures to stem the deterioration of English in the country's education system. In almost all cases the beneficiaries of these remedial programmes in English are the Malays who make up the population of students in rural schools, government residential schools and the Mara Junior Colleges. This policy is in line with the Malaysian Government's avowed aim to correct racial imbalances.

The English-educated elite from the other communities, apprehensive of the situation, has tried to seek alternatives. A growing number of affluent parents have sought to 'Look South' -to Singapore for an English-medium primary or secondary education for their children.

In addition, the upper classes, professionals and other wealthy people have sought to place their children in schools and higher education institutions in Australia, Britain, New Zealand and the United States. Even middle-class families practise 'cheese-paring economy' in their lifestyles to educate a child or two in an overseas university where the medium of instruction is preferably English. It would be safe to assume that a very high proportion of these students represent local ethnic Chinese and Indians who are not Malaysian Government-sponsored scholars. The less fortunate ones who are not in a position to afford an overseas education have had to be satisfied with private tuition provided by individuals and tutorial centres. It is not surprising to find that a significant number of private English language centres and institutions are mushrooming all over the country. While the British Council has

taken a rather prominent role in promoting the learning of English in Malaysia, only the urban communities are able to benefit from its English programmes.

It may be reasonable to conclude that while some palliation exists for those groups which feel disadvantaged by the national language policy, economic level and residence have a considerable bearing on who is able to gain relief among the non-Malay communities. The fact that the Government itself now advertises the shortcomings of the earlier abolition of English-medium education, and provides compensatory and restorative facilities for selected Malays, is scarcely calculated to reconcile the disadvantaged to their allotted position in the equation of multiethnic politics.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Policy on Vernacular Languages

Introduction

At the time of Malaya's independence in 1957, one of the subjects of bargaining was the national language, and, to a lesser extent, education. It was agreed that Malay should be the sole national language but that the study of other languages should be allowed. This provision was later incorporated in Article 152 of the Constitution of the Federation of Malaya. Over the years, the use of the National Language, later termed Bahasa Malaysia, has been pursued with greater vigour in education and in administration.

Education, the medium of instruction and the medium of examination, had all been the subject of controversy and inter-ethnic dissension well before independence. The educational scene was characterised at the time by a multiplicity of schools. At the top were the English schools, located mainly in the urban areas. Then, there were the Malay schools, located in the rural areas, and for the purposes of imperial policy, not allowed to go beyond the primary stage. The Chinese and Indians had to fend for themselves. As discussed in an earlier Chapter, the Chinese did not look to the British to provide them with a Chinese education. In practically every Chinese village they built their own primary schools, and provided their own teachers. They also built a few secondary schools in urban areas. That the certificates awarded by these schools were not recognised by the Government did not worry the Chinese in the least as they were recognised by the Chinese in the private sector, and that was good enough. The Tamils were not so fortunate. Their primary schools, located in the rubber estates were few and far between. Their standard, too, suffered from a lack of funds and a lack of qualified teachers. This was the situation just before World War II and in the immediate post-war years.

With independence, this state of affairs could not be allowed to continue. As we saw in the previous chapters, the Razak Report of 1956, the Rahman Talib Report of

1960 and then the amendment of Section 21(2) of the Education Act 1961 changed the whole face of education in the country. In keeping with the recommendations of the Razak Report 1956 and the Education Ordinance 1957, the Chinese and Tamil primary schools were 'persuaded' to convert into standard-type schools which would be government supported. The Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) had to do a good deal of 'arm-twisting' to persuade the Chinese and Tamil primary schools to convert into standard type primary schools where they would use their language medium but follow the same ministry-prescribed curriculum as in national schools. Malay and English would become compulsory subjects. When this was done, the next step was to incorporate the independent Chinese secondary schools into the mainstream of education in the country. Once again the MCA stepped in to persuade the Chinese secondary schools to convert into national schools where the medium of instruction and of examination would be Bahasa Malaysia or English. Mandarin could be taken as an extra language. This time, the arm-twisting was more difficult as the independent Chinese secondary schools resisted conversion and preferred to have their freedom. Although most of them gave in to government pressure and became national-type schools, some did not and remained independent. There are currently 60 independent Chinese secondary schools in existence that have resisted conversion to national-type schools.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Education had to make provision for the study of the pupils' own language or POL as it is popularly known. Thus emerged the POL which, it is generally agreed, has never been seriously taken up by the education authorities. Under the provision, if 15 parents indicate that they want their children to study Mandarin or Tamil, the Ministry of Education has to take steps for these classes to be started. POL has hence been indifferently taught ever since it was started, and has been grossly neglected by the Malaysian education authorities. In a move to rejuvenate the POL programme, various teacher associations and unions have consistently called on the Government to improve facilities for holding such classes. In one such move, the National Union of the Teaching Profession recently urged the Education Ministry to introduce a syllabus and proper teaching guides for

Chinese and Tamil languages so that they may be used by teachers conducting POL classes (The Star, 28 February 1995).

Chinese and Tamil primary schools have faced many problems during the post-independence years. These range from sharply reduced enrolments (especially during the 1960s), inadequate facilities (such as shortages of trained teachers) to the several restriction that have generally been perceived by the Chinese community as deliberate attempts to change the character of Chinese and Tamil schools. Although Chinese education has survived the threat of English schools during the 1960s when enrolments fell sharply, Chinese schools have, in recent years, registered a boom in enrolments and become popular with the non-Chinese as well. The year 1993 registered an enrolment of 14,246 Malay pupils in Chinese primary schools (New Straits Times, 21 March 1994). Tamil schools, on the other hand, have been plagued with too many problems and unless appropriate measures are taken, may be doomed as a failure. Their failure to produce successful school leavers, and the refusal by the Tamil community to co-operate with the MIC's attempts to improve facilities such as grouping scattered schools, has put Tamil school education in a state of indecision.

Chinese Primary Schools

Government-assisted Chinese primary schools may not possess good facilities and qualified staff, but they are certainly not lacking in enrolments. These schools have registered a steady increase in enrolments throughout the 1970s and this has spilled over into the 1980s - mostly at the expense of the former English medium schools. To see the trend, it is pertinent to trace the enrolment statistics in the various Government primary schools.

Average annual rate of increase/decrease in enrolments in assisted primary schools.

Year/Period	Malay medium	Chinese medium	Tamil medium	English medium
*1947-57	11.2+	10.2+	8.4+	4.1+
*1957-67	8.3+	3.0+	1.4+	4.6+
*1967-77	5.4+	1.0+	3.8+	0.03+
**1977-87	10.9-	17.95+	20.58+	0.97-

* Source : Educational Planning and Research Division (EPRD), Educational Ministry, as contained in 'Education and Nation Building in Plural Societies' by Chai Hon-Chan, 1981.

** Source : Percentages as worked from statistics obtained from the Cabinet Committee Report on Education, 1989.

In the period 1947-57, English schools registered the highest annual rate of increase with 11.2 per cent per year, Malay medium schools 10.2 per cent, Chinese schools 8.4 per cent and Tamil schools 4.1 per cent (Chai Hon-Chan 1981). In the decade after independence, however, English schools still showed an average of 8.3 per cent in enrolment, followed by Tamil schools with 4.6 per cent. The most remarkable changes were in Chinese and Malay schools where enrolments were up by only 1.4 per cent and 3.0 per cent respectively. The conclusion: the vast majority of Chinese were moving into English schools.

A second phenomenon was that experienced between 1967 and 1977. The annual average rates' of increase for English, Malay and Tamil schools declined, the sharpest fall being recorded by Tamil schools (only 0.03 per cent rise), followed by Malay schools with 1.0 per cent, while English schools still showed the highest rate of 5.4 per cent. But in Chinese schools there was an upswing from an average of 1.4 per cent per year in the decade up to 1967 to 3.8 per cent between 1967 and 1977. The figures show that there was a back flow among the Chinese to the Chinese schools, while the trend appeared to be for the Tamils and Malays to move to English schools. How are these shifts in the demographic structure of the schools,

especially in English and Chinese schools, to be explained? Again it is pertinent to look backwards in time.

The year 1967 saw the passing of the National Language Act, and where schools were concerned, it was clear that the National Language would become increasingly important. From January 1968, all English-medium primary schools were required to teach Physical Education, Art and Craft, and Music in Bahasa Malaysia in Standard One, Two and Three. Already, it was necessary to have a minimum pass in Bahasa Malaysia in the Lower Certificate of Education (LCE) for entry into upper secondary schools. Then came the major development in language policy, when it was announced that, from January 1970, the final step would be taken towards the full conversion of the English schools to those with Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction. The conversion was a gradual one, beginning from Standard One and continuing to the higher stages until 1983 when all English medium instruction up to university level would be replaced by Bahasa Malaysia.

A third phenomenon was chalked up for the period 1977 and 1987. Chinese schools experienced an approximately 21 per cent upsurge in enrolment, followed by national Malay schools with about 18 per cent, while for the first time the former English schools suffered a drop in enrolment by 10.9 per cent. The statistics for the period 1988 onwards are not available but educationists have indicated that the trend is continuing.

The movement back into the vernacular schools has apparently been triggered by the toppling of English from its former pedestal. In the immediate pre-independence and post-independence period, an 'English education' was seen by many, especially the more socially ambitious, as the primary recruitment agency for upward social mobility. The fact that English was the medium of instruction in such schools meant that their children would have the opportunity to be proficient in the language. They would have an advantage over the vernacular schools where English was only taught as a subject. Hence the scramble for enrolment in English schools during those periods. The relegation of English from a medium of instruction to a second

language in the former English medium schools took away the 'eliteness' of such schools. Why should one, for example, learn English in a national school when one could learn the same things in a Chinese school, which offered English as a subject?

All things being equal, one element among Chinese parents which would tip the scale in favour of a 'Chinese education' is loyalty, the urge to expose their children to Chinese culture, and the preservation of their mother tongue. Chinese-educated parents prefer to send their children to Chinese schools. But of greater significance is the fact that more and more English-educated parents are also sending their children to Chinese schools. (Chai 1964, p. 265). Having themselves gone through the English education system, such parents feel their cultural heritage has, to a large extent, been blurred by westernisation, and would not like to see the trend repeated in their children. Hence, the element of loyalty towards Chinese schools.

Perhaps another key factor is that most Chinese primary schools, having accepted the fact that the public examinations are conducted in Bahasa Malaysia, have geared their teaching accordingly, with greater attention paid to raising their pupils' competency in Bahasa Malaysia. Previously, one 'deterrent' which caused no small measure of anxiety among parents was that discontinuity in the medium of instruction at the secondary school level would place their children very much under handicap and would impede their children's ability to cope with their lessons. But examples abound of Chinese-educated students succeeding at secondary and tertiary levels, and educators point out that Chinese-educated students now generally do not have much of a problem in the language areas and that they can cope with the curriculum when they join the mainstream at the secondary level. As far as proficiency in English is concerned, with the falling standard of English in national schools, many feel that there is no great difference anyway between the standard of English of the national school graduate and that of the Chinese vernacular school.

Pro-national school educators have often argued that it is chauvinistic of parents to keep sending their children to Chinese schools (Asmah 1983, p. 201). If parents want their children to learn their mother-tongue, why not enrol their children in POL

classes offered by the national schools? At the same time, these children would enjoy the benefit of attending national schools, which, being multi-ethnic schools, would be able to provide the institutional framework for the social and cultural integration of all those who attend them. Vernacular schools, on the other hand, would manifestly serve only to reinforce the group identity of the particular race. (Asmah 1983, p.215). They note that, as it stands, social differences have appeared between the English-educated Chinese and the Chinese-educated Chinese, as they did between the English educated and the vernacular-educated among the Malays and Tamils. The possibility must not be discounted that the younger generations, especially 'Chinese educated,' may be withdrawing into a world of their own. With concurrent emergence of a new generation of Malay educated Chinese, there may be a widening social distance between the two groups.

The other school of thought, however, scoffs at the very idea of POL being any kind of substitute for Chinese education. On the one hand the POL programme is in a 'shambles' - and on the other learning Mandarin in POL classes is never the same. They (pupils in POL classes) may show little interest in learning the language. Perhaps they may adopt these attitudes in the national school atmosphere or find great difficulty coping with the lessons. It is not just a matter of learning the language in Chinese medium schools. It is the essence of Chinese education which can never be acquired elsewhere. And rebutting the claim that the socialisation process in vernacular schools may reinforce more than ever their group identity as Chinese, they point out that the non-Chinese enrolment in Chinese vernacular schools has shown an upward trend. The number of Malays in Chinese medium schools rose by 280 per cent from 2,530 in 1977 to 9,617 in 1988, while the number of Tamil students was up 204 per cent from 522 to 1,586 (New Straits Times, 6 October 1993). Therefore, it is contended, there is no fear of a segregationist complex developing.

While cultural ideals may influence some parents to send their children to Chinese schools, others advocate the system on the basis of economic consideration. Knowledge of a third language, especially in the business sector, is a bonus. An

increasing number of Chinese school leavers are becoming trilingual, an accomplishment which puts them in good stead in the private sector employment market. The brightest ones are not disadvantaged either. The United Examinations (UE) Certificate issued by Chinese independent secondary schools is recognised by the Chinese business sector as a high school diploma. It is accepted for direct entrance to Taiwanese universities. It is also accepted by some universities in the United Kingdom, Canada, the United States, Australia and New Zealand.

Tamil Primary Schools

No problem has sapped the emotional and political energy of the Malaysian Tamil community more than the apparently irreversible decline of the country's 566 Tamil-language primary schools (Asiaweek, 15 June 1991). Long regarded as the national school system's poor relation and afflicted by poor facilities, morale and student achievement, Tamil schools have become the victims of prevarication, in and outside the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC) which represents the Indian community in politics. Most Indians have a gnawing sense that Tamil schools in the long run are doomed, but the MIC is understandably reluctant to antagonise one of its major sources of support : an estimated 7,000 Tamil school teachers.

Many parents are aware of the contradiction in MIC policy : Tamil children must receive a good education in the Tamil medium and at the same time must be prepared well enough to continue into secondary, technical and university education in the medium of Bahasa Malaysia. But results from recent Standard Five examinations do not look promising: in 1990 for example, in no case did more than half of those Tamil-language stream students sitting the yearly examinations pass them except in the Tamil language itself, and even then only 56.65 per cent passed. Of those sitting for Bahasa Malaysia and those taking the General Science tests, 84.7 per cent and 68 per cent respectively failed. On the MIC's own admission, up to 90 per cent of Tamil-language primary school children drop out of school by Standard Six (i.e. at about the age of 12) - an alarming wastage by any measure (Asiaweek, 15 June 1991).

In 1991, a study of plantation estates by a social and economic research unit in the Prime Minister's Department (Far Eastern Economic Review, 26 July 1993) revealed discouraging results from 28 estates of varying size where a large majority were Indians. The report revealed a cycle of educational deprivation passed on by each generation. Indian estate families generally have much larger families than the national average. The study showed that 20 per cent of estate workers had no formal education at all and, of the remainder, more than half had received Tamil-language schooling only. Almost 90 per cent of those educated in the language never made it beyond primary level.

Of estate workers surveyed, only 20 percent had children who had reached the Lower Certificate of Education level (about 15 years of age). Of these-less than half passed. Only 5.5 per cent of respondents' children had reached the Malaysia Certificate of Education level (usually sat at about age 17) and of these, less than a quarter passed. Only a minute 0.3 per cent of estate workers' children had ever started, let alone completed, university level studies.

For more than a decade, the MIC has tried to get the Government to amalgamate or group Tamil schools to improve teacher/ student ratios, facilities and transportation to school. The MIC wants the existing 566 Tamil schools regrouped into 405 units, to help overcome what it describes as an 'acute shortage of trained teachers' (Far Eastern Economic Review, 26 July 1993).

Only two colleges train Tamil teachers, taking in just 60 students a year. As a measure of the demand for teachers, however, more than 800 temporary teachers (untrained stand-ins for qualified staff) now work in Tamil schools, and this number increases as more than 200 teachers retire each year or resign in frustration.

Given this state of affairs, another in-house MIC report doubts whether the Government's announced intention to increase the number of Government school teachers to three for every-two classrooms can never be achieved in Tamil-medium

schools with the present training programme for Tamil teachers (Far Eastern Economic Review, 26 July 1993). The neglect of Tamil schools, if not arrested, will result in the creation of more estate workers than skilled workers' said the Deputy Education Minister (New Straits Times, 18 July 1993).

The real problem lies not in a lack of Tamil school facilities (though, this is a pressing problem) but rather in the increasing irrelevance of Tamil-language schooling to changing job-market demands in Malaysia (Far Eastern Economic Review, 26 July 1993). Even in POL classes - where qualified Tamil teachers should instruct - a widespread feeling in the Indian community is that they are being conducted in a haphazard manner. Worse, under a new primary school syllabus introduced in 1993, POL classes will no longer be given during normal school hours - a further blow to the Tamil language.

These educational issues have been lingering on the MIC's agenda for a long time - too long, say some critics. In 1991 the MIC prepared a major submission to the Cabinet Committee on education, calling for upgraded Tamil syllabuses, better school buildings, school amalgamation, improved teacher training (including the use of Tamil, not Bahasa Malaysia, at training colleges), teacher/student ratios of 1:20 and special residential schools to enable students to overcome the debilitating effects of their socio-economic environment. It also urged special allocation in the form of quota for rural Indian children to bring more of them into science and technical classes, more 'compensatory education' (i.e. pre-schooling facilities), more grants to compensate for the estate background, and demands that Tamil be taught in all national secondary schools during normal hours if more than 10 students wish to study the language. Almost none of the points in this MIC paper have been implemented (Far Eastern Economic Review, 26 July 1993).

Let us now look into some of the controversial issues relating to vernacular schools.

The 3Rs Issue

Never in Malaysia has an issue been so blown out of proportion as the 3Rs controversy that erupted in January 1982. What was essentially an education reform to make the learning process easier for all Malaysian students turned into a hot political issue because of the sensitivity of education in a multi-racial society. The Malaysian Education Ministry had since 8 December 1980 been carrying out a carefully drawn up plan to formulate a new primary school curriculum (KBSR) which would emphasise the teaching and learning of the 3Rs. The main objectives of the new curriculum were based on the recommendations of the Cabinet Committee that made public its findings in 1979. Set up in 1974, the Committee set out to look into the causes of the high failure rate among students and the implementation of the National Education Policy. The implementation of the New Curriculum for Primary Schools (KBSR) began in 1982 with a pilot scheme of 302 primary schools adopting the new 3Rs (the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic) curriculum. Among those selected were 62 Chinese and 29 Tamil schools. The rest were national primary schools where Bahasa Malaysia is the medium of instruction. Based on their experiences, the system would be revised and implemented in 1983 from Standard One in all the 6,250 primary schools in the country, irrespective of the medium of instruction. It was thought that a return to the 3R basics and emphasis on the 3Rs at the primary level would overcome the problem of large numbers of primary school leavers who could neither read nor write properly, much less do simple arithmetical calculations. Although there were initial misgivings, there was little opposition to the proposed changes in the curriculum as it was considered to be beneficial to the slower students.

Hardly a week after the beginning of the new term in January 1982, Chinese teachers backed by community and political leaders were up in arms against the new learning system (New Straits Times, 10 January 1982). The outcry by the teachers was triggered by a deliberate 'oversight' by the Education Ministry in providing

instructional materials in the vernacular languages. Pupils were required to have textbooks and other teaching materials (except for arithmetic) in Bahasa Malaysia. Under the 3Rs system announced, only books for Chinese language (or Tamil) and arithmetic would be in the vernacular, while teaching materials and textbooks for all other subjects would be in the national language, Bahasa Malaysia. Materials for music and moral education were mostly drawn from non-Chinese (or non-Tamil) traditions. The Government prescribed 36 songs for Chinese and Tamil schools, half of which were Malay. Additionally, English was to be taught only in Standard 3 for an hour a week (New Straits Times, 22 January 1982).

The new policy drew angry protests from all quarters of the Chinese and Tamil communities, and even left the Malaysian Chinese Association (MCA) in a state of shock and confusion. The Government was accused of trying to make use of the 3Rs system to change the character of Chinese and Tamil primary schools. Chinese educators protested that it would mean the end of Chinese education and called on the Government to give clear-cut clarifications on the use of textbooks, teaching of music, and supply of teaching materials in Chinese (Straits Times, 23 January 1982). They also demanded that English be taught from Standard One, and that more time be given to the subject. The fear was also expressed that Chinese primary schools would eventually be converted into national (Malay) schools. While MCA, the largest Chinese partner in the ruling National Front coalition, had been put on the defensive, the opposition Democratic Action Party (DAP) demanded the immediate suspension of the 3Rs system in vernacular schools.

At the heart of the concerns of the Chinese community is the fear over the continued survival of Chinese primary schools in the country. The Government has reserve powers under the 1961 Education Act to convert the estimated 1,000 Chinese schools into national schools, but the ruling National Front government leaders have given repeated assurances that there will be no change in their status. As this is an emotive issue in the Chinese community, the MCA has gone as far as staking its future in the Front on the schools' continued existence as essentially Chinese-medium schools.

The Merdeka University Controversy

Less than six months after the controversial 3Rs issue blew up, the Chinese community suffered a crushing blow when the Malaysian Federal Court, after reserving judgement for four months, rejected attempts by Chinese educationists to set up the private Chinese-language Merdeka University. In a four-to-one decision made public on 6 July 1982, the court held the view that the proposal to use Chinese as a medium of instruction would conflict with the Malaysian Constitution (New Straits Times; 7 July 1982). Soon after the decision was announced, the Attorney-General Tan Sri Abu Talib Othman successfully applied to the court for a certificate to the effect that there can be no further appeal to the Privy Council. The Merdeka University issue was, therefore, closed permanently after being active for about four years.

It would be pertinent at this point to look briefly into how the Merdeka University issue came into being, the arguments presented by the sponsors to defend it and the Malaysian Government's stand on the matter. The Merdeka University Berhad (a private limited company) sponsored by a group of Chinese educators and businessmen in 1978 and which received unanimous support from Malaysian Chinese guilds and associations, was set up with the primary aim of meeting the demands of those students who had no opportunity to pursue higher education in Malaysian universities. According to the sponsors, the establishment of the Merdeka University was the wish and aspiration of Malaysian citizens of Chinese origin, and would actually serve to help the Government shoulder its responsibilities in higher education. The sponsors pointed out the present universities had not been able to cater for the needs of an increasing number of applicants seeking enrolment in local universities, thus forcing a large number to seek university education overseas. More important, the present University student recruitment procedure based upon ethnic quotas hardly reflects the racial structure of the country. The Merdeka University would therefore solve the problem of enrolment of non-Malay students. Secondly, the sponsors argued that in a multi-ethnic society, various languages should be used freely, allowing students to gain knowledge and culture through their mother-

tongue. The Merdeka University would thus give the Chinese an equal right in education which should be seen purely as an educational issue with no political implications or racial connotations (Summarised from Universiti Merdeka : Kenyataan-Kenyataan dan Kritikan - Kritikan, Universiti Merdeka Berhad 1978).

The proponents of the Merdeka University argued that since there were Chinese primary schools run by the Government and some 60 independent Chinese secondary schools by the private sector, it was only logical to allow a Chinese language university. As a private institution the State would not have to bear the financial constraints in supporting it. Besides, as Article 152 of the Constitution guarantees the use and study of languages other than Malay, it would, therefore, be constitutional to seek the establishment of a Chinese medium university where Malay and English would also be taught.

The Merdeka University issue generated strong reactions from the Malay community (through press reports) which saw this issue as being fraught with political overtones. The sponsors were accused of using the size of the Chinese community to demonstrate their strength as a political force to be reckoned with (Aliran 1979, p.7). Moderate critics however, pointed out that a Chinese-medium university would mean that its students would be almost completely Chinese - and Chinese speaking too. It would be difficult to conceive how such a university could help reduce ethnic polarisation. It was more likely than not that the institution would, in a relatively short while, assume a mono-ethnic character.

However, to cut the long story short, the Malaysian Government, after careful deliberation and debate in Parliament, rejected the petition to establish the Merdeka University in 1979. The sponsors of the university then took the matter to the Court which dismissed the suit against the Government for rejecting the petition by Merdeka University Berhad. An appeal by the sponsors to the Privy Council was heard in the Federal Court in Kuala Lumpur, but was rejected again on 6 July 1982 (New Straits Times, 7 July 1982). During the proceedings, Queen's Counsel Michael Beloff (Counsel for the appellants) submitted that the Government's

rejection of the petition (based on the premise that Chinese was to be the language of instruction) was racial discrimination. He told the Federal Court that this form of discrimination fell within the ambit of Article 8 (2) of the Federal Constitution. The Article provides, among other things, that there shall be no discrimination against citizens on the grounds of race in the administration of any law relating to the setting up of any business, profession or vocation. Queen's Counsel Beloff reiterated that it was essential that a Constitutional guarantee of minority rights should be immune from the vagaries of politics and whims of government. Speaking on behalf of the Government, the then Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Musa Hitam made his point clear that the establishment of the university would be against the National Education Policy and against national interests for three reasons - the university was to be established by the private sector, it was to cater for students from Chinese independent schools, and Chinese was to be the medium of instruction. If the Government was to approve the setting up of the university in the form asked in the petition, it would make the education policy meaningless (New Straits Times, 5 October 1981).

The POL Controversy 1983

Article 152 of the Constitution, which endorses the right of every Malaysian to be given an opportunity to study his or her own mother-tongue, also serves as the basis for Pupils' Own Language instruction in the Malaysian education system. The Razak Committee, in recommending that vernacular schools be converted into national-type schools, incorporated a provision for mother-tongue instruction in national and national-type schools. Under the provision, the Education Ministry has to initiate steps to have POL classes if the parents of 15 or more children request it. Unfortunately, the POL programme has been indifferently conducted by the Education Ministry. There has always been an acute shortage of POL teachers based on the Education Ministry's complete dependence on vernacular schools for Chinese and Tamil teachers (New Straits Times, 19 March 1984). The classes are normally conducted after school hours in compliance with the Education Ministry's directive. Consequently, truancy cases have been on the rise in a system that does

not provide for control over attendance and disciplinary action (New Straits Times, 2 January 1984). Additionally, parents have found it inconvenient to send their children to these classes after the normal school hours because of transport problems after school. In the absence of a syllabus and guidelines, teachers have often been unable to teach the languages (Chinese and Tamil) effectively. Several appeals by various agencies and political groups - the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC), the National Union of Plantation Workers (NUPW), the National Union of the Teaching Profession (NUTP) and MIC leaders - calling on the Government to look into all these problems have not been resolved.

There are obviously several far reaching implications that underlie the controversies just described - the 3Rs issue, the rejection of Merdeka University and the POL issue. All these and the banning of folk songs and school magazines have deeply concerned members of the Chinese community who perceive them as a gradual whittling away of ethnic rights to mother-tongue education. The future of Chinese primary schools in the country, it has been claimed, is at stake as attempts are being made to change the very character of these schools. The fear stems partly from a clause in the Education Act 1961 Section 21 (2) which reads :

Where at any time the Minister is satisfied that a national type primary school may suitably be converted into a national primary school he may by order direct that the school shall become a national primary school.

The clause implies that the Government reserves the right to convert vernacular schools into national schools when it wishes to do so. It is this particular section of the Education Act of 1961 that the Chinese Educationists (Dong Jiao Zhong) have been fighting hard to have revoked and which the Chinese community at present wishes to be reviewed. It is pertinent to point out at this stage that the Education Act of 1961 under the ambit of clause 21 (2) and the provisions for other languages as contained in Article 152 of the Malaysian Constitution are in conflict with one another. While Article 152 of the Constitution states that no person will be prohibited from using (other than for official purposes), teaching or learning any other language, and nothing would discourage the Federal and State governments

from preserving and sustaining the use and study of the languages of the other communities, the Education Act of 1961 Clause 21 (2) has given the Education Minister full discretionary powers to abolish vernacular education in national-type schools when he deems it fit.

Experience has shown that all language provisions in the Malaysian Constitution and national education policy documents have so far been scrupulously honoured by the Government. This situation is in direct contrast with the many instances in the past where verbal assurances and reassurances from ministers and ministry officials have so far not been documented, let alone honoured (Noss 1984, p.21). This perhaps explains why the Chinese community is so anxious about the risk involved in basing the future of Chinese vernacular education on verbal assurances given by Government ministers and ministry officials.

The subject of vernacular education may be perceived as being tied up with the political alliance of the UMNO-MCA-MIC-Gerakan within the National Front Government. While the MIC has championed the cause of Tamil primary schools, the MCA has gone as far as staking its future in the National Front on the Chinese schools' continued existence as essentially Chinese-medium schools. The Gerakan, it should be remembered is also predominantly Chinese. Although the UMNO leadership has not made any move to exercise its discretionary powers in implementing section 21 (2) of the Education Act 1961, it should be remembered that there were pressures from dissenting members within the group to see this done (Asiaweek, 15 June 1985). On the other hand, any action by the Government to convert vernacular primary schools into national schools or to change the character of these schools will only provide the opposition political parties with greater opportunities to gain support from the electorate and arouse social unrest among the different communities.

Tamil School problems

The failure of Tamil schools to produce a group of successful achievers and school leavers has received widespread publicity in the Malaysian press and government circles. The level of attainment by pupils in Tamil schools as a whole is the lowest compared with other media primary schools. Statistics from the Curriculum Development Centre of the Education Ministry show that after six years of primary education, at least 90 per cent of its students are unable to write, and 40 per cent read, in Bahasa Malaysia - the main medium of instruction in secondary schools and tertiary education in the country (New Straits Times, 10 November 1993). Moreover, in fundamental subjects such as arithmetic and science, only 37.63 per cent and 29.35 per cent respectively of Tamil school pupils passed in these subjects in the 1992 Standard Five Assessment Examination held in Kuala Lumpur. At the national level, only 28.7 per cent passed in arithmetic compared with 54.4 per cent of pupils in Chinese schools and 36.2 per cent in national schools. The staggering dropout rate is highest at the end of primary education at 90 per cent. Only one or two out of a hundred can be expected to reach the SPM or secondary school leaving level. The Deputy Education Minister Dr. Tan Tiong Hong has gone so far as to say there is no future for children in these schools. (The Star, 10 May 1993).

Students' poor understanding of Bahasa Malaysia is a matter of deep concern for parents at present. It may be argued that the low level of proficiency in Tamil schools can be remedied in the Remove Class. But, this is educationally unsound because education deficiencies should not be allowed to accumulate for six years, to be remedied only in the seventh year. Under such circumstances, even the element of loyalty towards their mother-tongue, a factor which has led to an upsurge of enrolment in Chinese primary schools, has failed to convince parents to continue sending their children to Tamil schools. Parents, especially the more socially and economically conscious, remain unconvinced that Tamil schools can provide the avenue for educational and social mobility. The classes then, are getting smaller and smaller. It has been pointed out that the actual enrolment of Tamil schools at the Standard One level declined by 10 per cent between 1979 and 1989. This explains

why these schools are unable to get more financial aid from the Government as capital grants are based on the size of the school.

A significantly larger proportion of the enrolments in Tamil schools are females. Parents, faced with loyalty towards Tamil schools (which are still acknowledged as the bastion of Tamil language and culture), on the one hand, and economic sense on the other, have resolved the tussle this way: the boys attend national schools while the girls go to the Tamil schools. But educationists point out that girls are in school only as long as they are not needed in the home or the field, i.e. depending on the economic circumstances of the family.

The very location of Tamil schools itself has important implications too. About 88 per cent of Tamil schools are isolated in plantations, and tend to be enmeshed in the culture of the plantations. As Associate Professor Dr. T. Marimuthu, one of the country's foremost authorities on the subject of Tamil education in Malaysia, says (New Straits Times, 10 November 1993):

Schools being the microcosm of society, they mirror the values, aspirations and hopes of the community in which they are located.

From the viewpoint of the community, the school is often seen as an extension of the crèche. Dr. Marimuthu continues:

Parents, teachers and pupils view the function of the school in this manner - a sojourn in the life cycle of the plantation worker. And the son of the plantation worker becomes a better plantation worker.

Dr. Marimuthu's research has shown that there is an absence of the environmental stimulus or 'push'. Parental interest in education is low; there is an absence of a proper place to study; the home is overcrowded, dimly lit and noisy; there are constant quarrels at to Tamil disorganisation and discord; there is an absence of intellectual stimulus in the form of newspapers, books or magazines. This 'culture of poverty' is not only confined to children from the estate community. Even in urban areas, the majority of the children come from the 'urban ghettos'. Besides, estate

schools, acknowledged by many as the poorest and smallest schools, are lacking in all sorts of basic physical facilities. The dilapidated condition of many of these estate schools is a sore point.

There have been more calls for the grouping of Tamil schools on the premise that a bigger school would mean higher enrolments which, in turn, would entail higher inputs of teachers and allocations for the upgrading of school facilities. The Education Ministry has indicated it will group schools on request (New Straits Times, 18 July 1993) and a few schools have already acted on this initiative. But the move towards grouping of schools has met with several obstacles. Tamil school educators are not prepared to give their wholehearted support. Headmasters are reluctant to give up their status as heads of existing schools and do not relish the prospect of becoming ordinary teachers in centralised (or grouped) schools. In some cases teachers have been found to be responsible for inciting the parents of Tamil school pupils to reject centralised schools (New Straits Times, 10 November 1993).

There have been persistent calls on the Education Ministry to convert capital-grant schools into fully-aided Government schools by acquiring the land on which capital-grant schools are located. But the Ministry is 'at a loss' as far as these schools are concerned, for it is politically so sensitive. Politicians might believe that the Government is closing down Tamil schools. Unions would protest while parents might not want to send their children to the bigger school because of the distance involved. Politically, the MIC is faced with the dilemma of forcing the issue of regrouping Tamil schools and losing the support of a large electorate of Tamil school headmasters and teachers.

Tamil education has stalled at a cross-roads and it needs a push to get it going :
sums up Dr. Marimuthu (New Straits Times, 10 November 1993).

Who will do the pushing is a difficult question as the Tamil school problem is too complex, being enmeshed within various dimensions -education, social, cultural and political.



Vernacular Schooling and National Integration

In the wake of the announcement by the Government of its intended National Culture Policy in late 1989, various eminent educationists used the 'Starmail' section of the daily 'The Star' as a forum to express their views on education and culture, and in particular, the controversial notion that vernacular schooling is segregationist and is, in the general analysis, incompatible with the evolution of a national culture. The participants - Dr. Kua Kia Soong, Dr. Tan Chee Beng, Maznah and J. Saravanamuthu, Dr. J.S. Jomo and C.J. Chiu all provided much illumination on the topic of vernacular education and national integration. While they disagreed over the long-term role of vernacular education in Malaysia, it was clear that each and every one of them upheld the principle that the only acceptable and just way forward in the development of a national culture lay in cultural tolerance, mutual cultural interaction and a genuine respect for minority rights.

Similarly, there was agreement that the national language should be enriched and developed, and its use made more widespread. Even though C.J. Chiu (The Star, 21 June 1989) and Dr. Kua (The Star, 11 July 1989), sharply differed over the role of minority languages, neither they nor the others in the debate denied that there was indeed an enduring role for vernacular languages and dialects - of which there are literally dozens in this country. All welcomed moves on the part of the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka to begin translating literature in minority languages into the national language which accorded such literature its rightful place in Malaysia's national heritage.

It needs pointing out at this juncture that largely absent from this debate was one party with the power to influence or force its eventual outcome - the Malaysian Government. No government spokesman has said, or dared to say, a word. Over the years, various governments have effectively dictated choices to minorities concerned about their culture and language by consistently making a mockery of the implicit guarantees in the Constitution. Many otherwise open-minded non-Malays have therefore been faced with little choice but to render some degree of support for

education in their mother-tongue. This is not to deny that there are chauvinists among such supporters, but anyway, no one ethnic community has a monopoly on chauvinism.

Yet, in so far as it possesses the power to do so, it is up to the Malaysian Government to start promoting a desire for racial integration and create the conditions in which real choices can be made and cultural interaction fostered in an environment of tolerance, understanding, knowledge and mutual respect. By contrast, there can be little cultural interaction or progress towards national integration in the present state of acrimony and mutual distrust. That is one reason why a sustained and genuine commitment to the teaching of pupils' own languages in the national schools is a prerequisite. Additionally, the teaching and learning of the cultural and historical traditions of the various ethnic groups in the country is an increasingly urgent necessity and must be part and parcel of the national school curriculum. Only thus can the national school system hope to serve the needs and aspirations of all, and be seen to be doing so - no unimportant a matter in a multi-ethnic society.

CHAPTER FIVE

Language Policies of Singapore and Brunei Darussalam

Introduction

The Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) discussed in the context of this chapter share some common characteristics in the treatment of languages in education. Both countries, which have multilingual populations and stress English in their school and University curricula, besides placing varying emphasis on their national languages in education, have adopted the bilingual system of education. Although language policies have, in general, been shaped largely by political rather than pedagogic considerations, recent modifications made to existing policies seem to indicate that this is no longer so. Pedagogic considerations appear to be the order of the day while education policy makers determine strategies for the implementation of policy. This sharply contrasts with the Malaysian situation where the political influence is still foremost. The ensuing sections of this chapter will tell, largely through Singapore's experience, the many problems that policy makers face in working out appropriate strategies for the implementation of Singapore's bilingual policy. In a shift in policy, Brunei Darussalam has abandoned the model provided by Malaysia which places greater emphasis on the national language (Malay) as the main medium of instruction. In adopting a bilingual system that is similar to Singapore in some respects, Brunei has shown that it can no longer be dependent on Malaysia for a 'model system', a practice which had hitherto been the case. The evolution of language policies in Singapore and Brunei is the result of changed circumstances that have come to bear on the respective governments, particularly the burgeoning importance of English or as Alistair Pennycook puts it as 'the worldliness of English'.

Singapore's Language Policies

A significant watershed in the evolution of language policies in Singapore's education system was the All Party Report on Chinese Education of 1956. Although the 'Ten-Year Education Programme' of 1947 had proposed funds for vernacular schools, advocated non-racial schools and increased periods for language teaching, the liberal language policy adopted by the Government towards English gave cause for dissatisfaction especially amongst the Chinese educated. Government policy was seen as discriminatory and demands for equal treatment in government education expenditure were made on the basis that as the Chinese community bore the major burden of taxation, the Government had a duty to support Chinese vernacular schools. A priority considered by the first elected government of 1955 was the appointment of an all-party committee of the Singapore Legislative Assembly to make a comprehensive review of Chinese medium education.

The committee took a strong stand on the value of vernacular languages, the cultures they represented and the way they could contribute to the unity of Singapore as a nation. It proposed the teaching of all languages; that at least two languages from English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil should be the media of instruction in schools; that language teaching should be of the best standards, so that the future education system of Singapore would produce students equally conversant in two, if not, in three of those languages; that primary education should be bilingual and secondary education trilingual; and

that through furthering the interests of Education, Bilingual and Trilingual, everyone can assist in the overall aim to build a Nation out of racial groups with different cultural backgrounds and languages, whilst ensuring that full educational opportunities will be given to all our children, and progress towards Self-government and Independence achieved' (Report of the All Party Committee 1956, p. 50).

The Government responded with the White Paper on Education policy and in 1957 introduced its Education Bill to implement the proposals of the White Paper

(Gopinathan 1974, p.23). This marked an important phase in the development of a national education system based on the principle of equality of treatment for all streams and integration which was to be achieved through the use of a common content syllabus and the encouragement of multilingualism.

With the elections in 1959, Singapore attained internal self-government and with it came new responsibilities in nation building. Being acutely aware of the consequences that contentious language policies would produce in the fabric of society and the integrative potential of a well-defined and acceptable language policy, the People Action Party (PAP) Government saw as its main objectives the creation of national identity, the elimination of communal divisions and attitudes, and the propagation of democratic values conducive to the ultimate creation of a united nation. The Government's thinking on this matter was reflected by Mr. Lee Kuan Yew when he said:

If in the four different languages of instruction we teach our children four different standards of right and wrong, four different patterns of behaviour, then we will produce four different groups of people and there will be no integrated coherent society... For if we are not to perish in chaos caused by antagonisms and prejudices between watertight cultural and linguistic compartments, then you have to educate the right responses amongst our young people in schools (quoted in Gopinathan 1974, p.32).

Features of Language Policy

The main features of Singapore's language policy may be studied under three main categories.

(i) The four languages - English, Chinese, Malay and Tamil - are available as media of instruction and are designated as official languages. A legacy of the 1956 All Party Report, the rationale for such a policy is that:

in a multiethnic community with major languages, anything less than equal treatment for major languages would be tantamount to discrimination (Gopinathan 1979, p. 284).

(ii) A central idea that shapes the educational policy of Singapore is bilingualism. This means that all pupils and students in the school system from primary to pre-university level learn two languages; the mother tongue (i.e. one of the official languages - Chinese, Malay, Tamil) and English. In explaining the rationale for such a policy, the Prime Minister Mr. Lee Kuan Yew said:

I am convinced that this effort (bilingualism) has to be made if we are to survive as a distinctive society, worth preserving. Or we will become completely deculturalised and lost ... If we fail to resolve effectively our problem of languages and preserve what is best in our respective cultural values, we could become an even more feeble version of the deculturalised Caribbean calypso-type society... Please note that when I speak of bilingualism I do not mean just the facility of speaking two languages. It is more basic than that, first, we understand ourselves what we are, where we come from, what life is or should be about and what we want to do. Then the facility of the English Language gives us access to the science and technology of the West. It also provides a convenient ground on which the Chinese, Indians, Ceylonese, Malays, Eurasians, everybody competes in a neutral medium (quoted in Ying 1991, p.5).

In supporting the principle of bilingualism, Gopinathan (1979, p. 284) outlines the advantages :

... it enhances national integration by making inter-ethnic communication possible; it enables the continuance of the multicultural polity; it gives the individual a more balanced view of the world, and his ethnic group, a sense of identity and community and, finally, it makes possible wider employment opportunities.

(iii) A third feature of the language policy is Singapore's choice of Malay as the national language, guaranteed by the Constitution. The rationale for such a policy is that Malay has been endowed with considerable political prestige and as De Souza (1980, p. 209) explains:

...decision-makers were thinking in terms of Malay as a comprehensive link

language and a working language. This increase in status was largely due to external political considerations, that is, the need for a merger with the Federation since, at that time, the PAP saw a viable economic and political survival for Singapore only within the larger frame work of a union with the Federation.

Implementation Strategies

A brief summary of the major strategies adopted will show that implementation of the bilingual policy has been rapid during the last two decades.

(a) The learning of a second language became compulsory at primary and secondary levels in 1960 and 1966 respectively.

(b) From the beginning of 1968 Science and Mathematics was taught in English in a number of non-English-medium primary schools. Concurrently, Civics and History had to be taught in the mother tongue of the pupils in some English-medium schools. Thus the primary school curriculum became characterised by the use of the two languages as media of instruction.

(c) The weight given to the second language in the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE) was increased to first language level in 1973. As a consequence of this, each of the two languages carried twice as much weight as Mathematics or Science.

(d) Second language papers were introduced into pre-university and tertiary levels.

(e) Progressive increases were made to time allocations for learning the second language from 1972 on the assumption that increased exposure time was an essential element in the attainment of bilingual competence. Such exposure time increases were attained by increased subject teaching in the second language.

(f) In 1994 'Education for Living' (a new subject having the components Civics, History and Geography) was introduced into schools with a requirement that it was to be taught only in the pupil mother tongue.

Problems and Modifications

As many aspects of Singapore's language policies came to be criticised - often over strategies at implementation level rather than ultimate goals or rationales - moves to reshape and make language policy more relevant to changed circumstances were initiated by the Government. In an apparent move to develop linguistic competencies that would hasten Singapore's development as a major industrial and financial centre, the Education Ministry extended the number of languages pupils might study. A third language was introduced in secondary schools for those pupils who were strong in their English and mother tongue (Gopinathan 1979, p. 287).

A change in the language criteria for admission to pre-university classes was introduced in 1979. Students were now required to have at least a good grade in their first and second languages. In a related policy move, priority of admission to pre-university classes was given to students with distinction passes in first and second languages. As Gopinathan (1979, p. 287) writes, this was:

...presumably based on the belief that those capable of pre-university studies are intelligent enough to master two languages and that, if such mastery is made a condition of entry, students will accept the challenge and master the languages.

By the late seventies it was apparent that pre-university and tertiary education were quickly becoming levels in which, paradoxically, competence in English was an essential prerequisite to educational success. This was a significant change in emphasis considering that what was hitherto encouraged was pre-university education in Chinese as well as Malay, symbolising equality of opportunity and equal treatment. The change in emphasis was a deliberate policy aimed at facilitating and ensuring the success of changes being implemented in tertiary education. As Gopinathan (1979, p. 187) reports:

Ngee Ann Technical College had in the late sixties quietly undergone the transformation into an institution using English as the only medium of instruction. Since it prepared students specifically for occupations in Commerce and industry the economic value of English competence was apparent and easily accepted. Nanyang University was a different case altogether for, founded in the mid fifties by the Chinese education sections of the community at a time when the strength and value of Chinese education has to be asserted, it was a symbol of the vitality of Chinese medium education and culture. But by the mid seventies it was a symbol threatened by a barren future.

By 1978, the Singapore Government was probably ready to admit that the bilingual education policy was a failure (Noss 1984. p. 24). The Goh Report of 1978 outlined many reasons for the failure of students to master either of the two languages to be learned, but failed to mention that the educational system was rapidly becoming a monolingual one. In dealing with the problem presented by the Nanyang University, the Singapore Government reinforced this monolingual tendency by another policy action: it transformed the only remaining Chinese medium tertiary institution, Nanyang University, from Mandarin to the English Medium and merged it with the University of Singapore into the National University of Singapore (Noss 1984, p. 24).

A related problem that surfaced during the sixties and has progressively continued into the eighties and nineties is the sharp decline of Chinese school enrolments. It was reported that pupils registering for Chinese language schools have fallen from 45.9 per cent in 1959 to an all-time low of less than 1 per cent in 1995 (Sunday Times, 19 February 1995).

In coming to grips with the problem of declining enrolments in Chinese-medium schools and the consequent threat of deculturalisation, the Singapore Government announced in 1988 the selection of nine Chinese-medium secondary schools which were to be equipped with extra facilities to improve the teaching of English and to enable the children to absorb, in a Chinese school environment, social discipline and

other desirable values in the tradition of the best of the Chinese schools (Gopinathan 1979, p.288). These are the Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools which are open to the top 8 per cent of PSLE pupils from Chinese and English Schools. Although the SAP schools allow their pupils to attend immersion classes in English secondary schools, there is equal emphasis on English and Mandarin. With a high level of language competence in the two languages expected of pupils in these elite schools, the general assumption is that among them will be found Singapore's future leaders.

Recent Innovations - Strategies for the Future

The implementation of strategies for Singapore's bilingual policy has been varied with frequent adjustments and readjustments. As stated earlier, these adjustments have become necessary to make language policy more relevant to changed circumstances.

(a) National University of Singapore Relaxes Rule on Second Language

One very recent adjustment concerns the change in criteria for admission to the NUS. (Straits Times, 15 August 1993). In an apparent move to redress the imbalance between male and female students, admission to the NUS was no longer based on a pass in the second language, but instead on the number of points a student gets for his 'A' level subjects. Second-language failures must, however, pass in their second language subject before they complete the course.

(b) Double Weight Scrapped

The double emphasis on language in the PSLE was scrapped in July 1995. The policy of giving double weight to languages which was aimed at promoting bilingualism, had been the scourge of students trying to make it within the competitive education environment although it has provided a much-needed impetus for Singapore's bilingual policy. The de-emphasis on languages met with criticism. In an editorial, the Straits Times (16 July 1995) stated:

Although policy can hardly be immutable and would require adjustment whenever the need arises, frequent changes can be rather disconcerting to those affected ... Given the importance of language in the curriculum of students, this is one area of policy which should not be tampered with too often.

(c) End of the Chinese Stream

In an unprecedented shift in policy, the Singapore Government announced in December 1993 that all pupils in the country will be taught English as their first language by 1997 (Straits Times, 22 December 1993). In the new 'national streams', mother tongues will be the second languages. A progressive conversion to English began in 1994 for pupils in non-English medium classes.

The move to standardise the medium of language instruction in schools came after many years of declining enrolment in non-English medium classes. When the Government announced that it could no longer retain Chinese-medium classes in all Chinese schools, less than 1 per cent of Primary One pupils enrolled for Chinese-medium classes in 1994.

The move towards teaching English as a first language in all Singapore Schools by 1997 produced a flurry of reactions in the Chinese press. Judging by the number and tone of editorials, commentaries and letters from readers it was clear that the language issue remains sensitive in Singapore. The reactions focused on three main issues:

- (i) The disintegration of Chinese traditional cultural and moral values as a result of declining interest in the Chinese mother tongue.
- (ii) A possible decline in the standard of the Chinese language in schools.
- (iii) The uncertain future faced by the Chinese language teachers.

'The end of the Chinese-stream schools does not mean the end of the Chinese languages in Singapore' said Mr. Lee Kuan Yew (Sunday Monitor, 19 February

1994). Singaporean Chinese were told that the threat to their culture comes from fundamental social and economic changes, not from the fact that Chinese is not taught as the first language in schools. The Senior Minister made this point in response to the editorials and articles in the Chinese Press after the Government announced the phasing out of Chinese-stream schools by 1997. He emphasised that language is related to but not synonymous with culture. He noted that although English is also the language of America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Jamaica and Barbados, and the English speaking Caribbean countries, their cultures are all different from that of Britain, especially those of the Caribbean. Referring to the great fears expressed in the Chinese Press for the future of the Chinese language and culture, Mr. Lee added that this is a natural reaction of the Chinese-educated intelligentsia.

(d) ML3 for-Non-Malay Students

Bright non-Malay students will be able to study Malay as a third language (ML3) in future (Straits Times, 18 February 1994). The Education ministry has announced that this option will be available for the top 10 per cent of PSLE pupils. Under the scheme, students would take English as a first language; their mother tongue either as another first language together with English, or as a second language; and in addition Malay as a third language (ML3) would be pitched at a level on par with Japanese, French and German, which are now offered to good students under the foreign language programme. The move recognises the importance of Malay Language in the ASEAN region.

(e) Tamil and Malay as First Languages

Top pupils will be allowed to study Malay and Tamil as first languages if they want to do so. At the moment, only the best 10 per cent of PSLE pupils can study Chinese as a first language in addition to English at the nine Special Assistance Plan (SAP) schools. Since these schools were picked in 1989, the Singapore Government had been pressured by Malay leaders and members of Parliament to implement a

similar scheme for children taking Malay and Tamil. In announcing the scheme (Straits Times, 29 November 1994), the Education Minister has stressed that the proposal does not change the Ministry's top priority accorded to the study of English. This means that if a pupil is good in his mother tongue and weaker in English, he will have to concentrate on improving his English whilst learning his mother tongue as a second language only.

Clearly, the main problems facing Singapore in the context of languages policy is how to keep the emphasis on English while maintaining the bilingual concept. As Pennycook (1994, p. 294) says :

The presence and power of English can be felt throughout the society, from the difficulties faced by, for example, taxi drivers, who have to pass a test of English for their licence, to the resentment felt by those who have been educated in the Chinese stream and now find themselves at the bottom of the employment ladder.

Brunei Darussalam's Language Policies

The Malay Islamic Monarchy of Brunei Darussalam is located on the Borneo island between the east Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak. Like its ASEAN neighbours, Brunei Darussalam is multiethnic and multilingual. Malay is the lingua franca and is spoken by nearly all the people including the ethnic minorities - Chinese and Indians. The official and national language is Malay which has only very recently been standardised and modernised, bringing its spelling system in line with its neighbours, Malaysia and Singapore. The new spelling system, adopted by the country's Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, the country's language authority, came into effect in July 1983 (Brunei: Panduan SEBR Bahasa Melayu; DBP 1983, p.5). English is also widely used in both government administration and the private sector. The recent choice of English as the principal language of the country's education system, is a consequence of Brunei's colonial past and the language's present status as an international language of science and technology, commerce and diplomacy (Abdul Razak, Occasional Paper 1991, p.5).

Plural School System - Early Development & Subsequent Policy Decisions

The early growth and development of schools in Brunei followed a similar pattern to those of Malaysia and Singapore. By the 1950s Brunei had inherited a plural school system reminiscent of those in the ASEAN neighbouring countries. The Brunei Annual Report of 1951 (p. 20) reported the following schools:

Plural School System

<u>Type of Schools</u>	<u>Number</u>
Malay vernacular school	29
Government English School	1
Senior Staff School (English)	1
Mission Schools	3
Trade School (English)	1
Chinese vernacular schools	6
TOTAL:	41

There were thus three types of schools differentiated by medium of instruction. All schools were State controlled under the Registration of Schools Enactment No: 4 of 1939 (Brunei Annual Report 1951. p.20).

Owing to a lack of adequate facilities and resources, Brunei maintained close links with the Federation of Malaya (now Malaysia) and Singapore for determining syllabus content and the conduct of examinations and teacher training. It is therefore, not surprising that developments in education policy in Brunei have always kept pace with those in Malaysia and Singapore. The 1972 Education Commission emphasised this fact when it declared (Brunei: Report of the Education Commission 1972, para: 2.4 (i) e, p.6):

...education in this country is subject to educational developments in other countries. Hence whatever changes that are made to the education system in those countries would also affect the development of education in this country...

A case in point are the Razak Report of 1956 and the All-Party Report of 1956 - both of which were significant watersheds in the development of language policies in Malaysia and Singapore respectively. Brunei's equivalent was the Aminuddin Baki/Paul Chang Report of 1959.

Given the task of examining and evaluating the progress of education in the State, the Aminuddin Baki/Paul Chang Report 'envisaged the bringing up of all children of every race under a national education system which would be free and compulsory and use the national language (Malay) as the main medium of teaching' (Brunei: Report of the Education Commission 1972, p.3). Their recommendations were, however, not published or made public, but the proposals were significant in that, for the first time in Brunei, a national system of education bringing all the language streams together was proposed. It should be remembered that the Razak Report of Malaysia made similar proposals and is still regarded as the first successful attempt to establish a national education system in Malaysia. The All Party Report of Singapore marked the beginning of Singapore's national system of education.

The Aminuddin Baki/Paul Chang Report of 1959 was subsequently reviewed by the 1962 Education Policy Review Committee - a parallel to Malaysia's Education Review Committee of 1960 which reviewed the implementation of the Razak proposals. The Education Policy Review Committee of 1962 recommended the following:

- (i) The setting up of National Primary Schools that would provide a six year course in the Malay medium for all races. English would be a compulsory subject during the six years.

(ii) The setting up of National-type schools. These would be the designated titles of those Chinese schools that opted to be incorporated into the National system. The medium of instruction would be Chinese for the first three years and Malay thereafter. Instruction in Malay would be compulsory for the full six years of primary education while English would be taught after primary three.

(iii) Lower secondary schools would prepare pupils for three years after which they would sit for the Malaysian Lower Certificate of Education. The medium of instruction would eventually be Malay.

(iv) Upper secondary schools would prepare students for a duration of two years for the Malaysian Certificate of Education and the Cambridge School Certificate (Brunei: Report of the Education Commission 1972, p.4).

The recommendations of the Education Policy Review Committee are significant in that they called for an eventual switch in language medium from English (or Chinese) to Malay, thus bringing the education system in line with the Malaysian education system. The committee's enthusiasm to switch the language medium to Malay was probably spawned by the spirit of Malay nationalism and the Education Review Committee of Malaysia - both of which championed the dominance of Malay in the Malaysian education system. Although the Brunei Government accepted in principle the recommendations of the Education Policy Review Committee in 1962, the implementation of the proposals suffered a setback. The armed rebellion of 1962 had a crippling effect on the schools in the State's capital (Brunei: Annual Report 1963, p. 91). It may be recalled that Malaysia had given herself ten years until 1967 before trying out the teaching of some subjects in Malay, and it is clear enough why Brunei could not introduce Malay-medium teaching in its schools. Brunei's need for resources such as qualified teachers to teach in Malay, textbooks in Malay, and adequate terminology, all of which are totally dependent on Malaysia, came at a time when Malaysia was grappling with the very same problem. However, the teaching of Malay was introduced in Chinese and Mission schools 'in

an endeavour to encourage the use of the National language (Malay)' (Brunei: Annual Report 1961-62, p.80).

The next milestone in the development of language policy in Brunei came with the appointment of the Education Commission in 1971. The commission noted that Brunei education system was still characterised by a diversity in the medium of instruction (Brunei: Education Commission 1972, p.2). It also took note that the Education Policy of 1962 had not been implemented.

The Commission reiterated (para: 2.4 (i) a, p.5):

...it would appear that the Education policy of 1962 is valid and what is needed is the immediate implementation of the said policy...

The Commission recommended that (para: 2.5, p.8):

(i) more emphasis should be given to the Malay language as the medium of instruction.

(ii) Malay be made the main medium of instruction in national primary and secondary schools.

(iii) the standard of English be raised in primary and secondary schools.

(iv) necessary legislation should be enacted and adequate steps taken to ensure the transformation of Chinese and Mission schools into National-type schools.

The recommendations of the Education Commission had far-reaching implications for teacher training, curriculum content for schools, and the entire organisation of schools. It meant that existing teachers, a large proportion of whom were expatriate, had to be retrained and sufficiently equipped to teach in Malay. Even then, a large number of the local teachers in the Malay-medium schools did not possess the relevant qualification and experience to teach in the higher grades. Although the mission and Chinese schools would in the end have conformed to the general rule of converting to the national-type school model using Malay as the main medium of instruction, there were many other problems.

As Abdul Razak (Occasional Paper 1991, p.2) observes:

(i) Competent teachers, both local and expatriate, to teach Science, Mathematics and other subjects in Malay were not readily available.

(ii) Malay-medium teachers who were recruited from primary schools to teach in secondary schools were inadequately prepared to teach General Certificate of Education (G.C.E.) 'O' level pupils in Malay.

(iii) Placement of Malay-medium students in overseas universities, where the teaching medium is English, became a problem as they lacked sufficient skills in the English language.

(iv) The annual intake of students into universities overseas was insignificant to make sufficient impact on the manpower needs of the country.

(v) Malay-medium candidates with good G.C.E. 'A' level passes failed to make satisfactory progress in overseas universities.

(vi) Recruitment preferences of public and private agencies for English-medium school-leavers invariably boosted the status of an education in English. This inevitably encouraged parents to send their children to English-medium primary and secondary schools.

Though all the recommendations were not implemented by the Brunei Government, they were nevertheless significant in that the Commission recognised the importance of English in the education system and called for measures to improve the quality of English language teaching in schools. It is pertinent to note that the Commission was guided by developments in Malaysia in what it set out to do. Significant changes to education policy had taken place in Malaysia following the racial riots of 1969. The sudden decision in July 1970, by the Malaysian Government, to phase

out English-medium schools and replace them with Malay-medium national schools in the entire education system probably had an impact on education policy in Brunei.

However, a phenomenon that began in the early 1970s, but went relatively unnoticed by the Education Commission of 1972, was the decline in enrolments in Malay-medium schools. The Annual Report for 1975 (State of Brunei: Annual Report 1975, p.113) reported:

The gradual decline in the number of Malay-medium pupils and the increase in the number of English-medium pupils continued this year.

Between 1981 and 1992 enrolments in Malay-medium schools declined from 21,138 to 18,205 - a fall of 14 per cent. For the same period, English-medium schools registered an increase from 15,713 to 29,209 pupils - an increase of 87 per cent (Brunei Statistical Yearbook 1992/1993). The increasing demand for an education in English went unabated until 1994. Like Singapore, the changed circumstances pressured the Brunei Government to initiate steps to reshape and make language policy more relevant to present time.

It was, therefore, not surprising when Brunei's Education Minister Pehin Dato Haji Abdul Aziz announced a major policy change on 9 April, 1994 involving the Government's decision to switch to bilingualism in State schools (Annual Report: Brunei CDC 1994, p.3). Under the new policy, equal emphasis was to be given to both English and Malay, and the two language streams gradually merged into one national stream beginning in 1995 (Borneo Bulletin, 14 April 1994). The emphasis on English reflects the priority given by the State to the pursuit of knowledge and skills. As one official put it (Straits Times, 17 February 1995):

English is the key to the outside world. It is the language of progress and development.

The goal of Brunei's education policy is to produce useful and productive citizens well versed in both English and Malay, and equipped with the skills to manage a modern society (Brunei : The Education System of Negara Brunei Darussalam 1994

p.2). Another reason for the emphasis on bilingualism is that it will widen the opportunities for Bruneians who want to pursue higher studies at the tertiary level. The existing avenues for university education for Malay-medium students are Indonesia and Malaysia but for political reasons, Brunei does not want to be dependant on these countries. Additionally, Malaysia has a quota limiting the number of Bruneians who can be enrolled in its institutions of higher learning. But, the change does not affect the few schools where Arabic is the medium of instruction. The official explanation is that students from these schools can pursue further studies in that language in the middle East countries (Straits Times, 17 February 1995).

Strategies for Implementation of the Bilingual Policy

The task of working out details for the implementation of the policy was given to the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), Brunei. In a working paper the Curriculum Development Centre outlined a comprehensive plan to implement the bilingual system in schools in stages beginning in 1995 (Brunei: The Education System of Negara Brunei Darussalam 1994). Under the proposed system, primary education during the first three years will be conducted in Malay but English will be taught as a subject. The allocation of 10 periods per week for English (Brunei: The Education System of Negara Brunei Darussalam 1994, para: 4.5 p.11) is generous, considering that it represents 22.2 per cent of the total teaching time in a week. From Primary Four onwards the teaching will be done predominantly in English, depending on what the subjects are. Subjects not heavily dependent on English for specialisation (e.g. Physical Education, Music, Art) will be taught in Malay (Brunei: C.D.C. Working Paper 1994, para 3.3.1 p.2). The rest of the subjects will be taught in English. The number of subjects to be taught in English and consequently, the exposure to English gets progressively greater at the higher levels of schooling as seen from the following table:

Exposure to English (By Levels of Schooling)

<u>Levels of Schooling</u>	<u>Exposure to English</u>
Lower Primary	22.2%
Upper Primary	60.0%
Lower Secondary	76.3%
Upper Secondary - Science	87.5%
Upper Secondary - Arts	90.0%

(Source: Brunei : The Education System of Negara Brunei Darussalam 1994, pp.12, 21-22, 24-26)

Under the proposed scheme (para: 13.5.1 & 13.5.2) it is possible for students at the post secondary level to receive instruction completely in English. The emphasis on English, the C.D.C. Working Paper observes (para: 3.2, p.2) is based on its importance for academic study in universities overseas.

The implementation of the strategies proposed by the C.D.C. has just been started, and the country has many years ahead of it before the bilingual programme is fully implemented at all levels of the education system. It is not very likely that there will be shortage of competent bilingual teachers in the foreseeable future as the Institute of Education and the University of Brunei Darussalam will take on the additional role of preparing primary and secondary school teachers respectively. The Institute of Education which normally conducts certificate level teacher-training programme in English for primary and lower secondary schools has recently added Bachelor of Education and Bachelor of Arts (Primary) degree programmes for those aspiring to be primary school teachers. The degree programmes offered by the University of Brunei Darussalam are generally tailored for secondary school teaching.

It is clear that Singapore and Brunei are at present consolidating their language policies in education, the groundwork having been done by the All-Party Committee and the Aminuddin Baki/Paul Chan Committee respectively. However, the mother tongue orientation of both these reports have now been abandoned. Committed to

the principle of bilingualism in their schools, both countries have adopted widely differing strategies for implementation. Singapore aims to maintain a high level of competency in English whilst providing for the vernacular language needs of the various communities. This is understandable for Singapore's survival in a world of modern technology and commerce depends to a large degree on English. On the other hand, the language needs of communities have to be acknowledged for the preservation of culture and traditional values depends on an adequate knowledge of the mother tongue. In Brunei, competency in English is combined, in national policy objectives, with the honouring of Malay as the national language, in keeping with long-standing nationalist aspirations.

The dominant features that have emerged in Singapore and Brunei education are: innovation and adoption in response to changing popular perspectives on education, as well as assessment of national needs by educational planners. Concomitantly, the early Education Reports now have more historical interest in the context of independence than current relevance in terms of nation building. This is not to say politics plays no part in language planning for education, but pragmatism is more dominant and both countries seem to have avoided, on the whole, the degree of political crisis which politicised language policy making has brought upon Malaysia.

CONCLUSIONS

The multi-ethnic states of the modern world - including states which have only recently become multi-ethnic or recognised themselves as such - are each in their own way seeking paths to national integration through language policy in education. In each case the goal is political and there are, not surprisingly, political consequences as well as educational ones.

This review has suggested that an incipient movement towards limited pluralism as a strategy for integration is now under way in parts of the world where integration was previously taken for granted as a fact or assumed to be a natural consequence of social mixing. However, in recently independent countries of the Third World, including Southeast Asia, it seems to be generally the case that ethnic and linguistic divisions, so far from being accommodated on a basis of tolerance and the hope of long-term assimilation, have been seen as a threat to the very survival of the state, which only policies of rapid linguistic unification can forestall. Singapore is an important exception to this rule. There, a policy of equal treatment for all languages is seen as a way of reducing racial tension; by such an indirect pluralist route the goal of national integration is thought to be more surely realisable. Brunei constitutes perhaps an intermediate case where the adoption of English as the medium of instruction for the whole country for reasons of educational pragmatism (access to technical learning), does bring with it the welcome side-effect that Malay is not 'imposed' on any minority group, nor equal access to English denied to any group on grounds of race. Malaysia, on the other hand, has developed virtually into an archetype of a state where racial pride - combined with fears of extinction - on the part of a bare-majority community has led to the imposition of Malay, in education, even in the face of evidence that English had been acting as a more effective solvent of ethnic division.

The recent adoption of pragmatic policies for the revival of English language skills after the 'iconoclasm' of the 1970s has occurred side-by-side with a continuing practical and symbolic emphasis on Malay as the national language and approved

medium of instruction and a steady whittling away of mother-tongue educational provision for Chinese and Tamil Indians. The coincidence of the latter trends with the Islamic revival, in particular, has helped to increase ethnic polarisation - as evidenced in the 1995 general election results in West Malaysia in particular. The goal of national integration through language policy may have retreated into a more distant future, instead of being brought closer as Malaysian leaders originally hoped. But then, radical policies have been adopted and imposed in response to radical Malay pressure. In some ways Malaysia has been turning into a more plural society than it was before, not in spite of government efforts but largely because of them.

To express it in another way, the Malaysian educational system has too rapidly taken on a Malay character in what could have been a 'melting pot' situation - a multicultural population participating in a process of willing convergence. The imposition of Bahasa Malaysia as the country's national language and as the main medium of instruction in the country's education system has been geared towards the achievement of the essentially political objective of integrating a plural society. The bare tolerance of mother-tongue education in Chinese and Tamil, and that merely on grounds of political prudence - concomitant with the disapproval of Chinese and Tamil cultural items in vernacular schools, confirms the basically assimilationist policy adopted. Current pressures from the politicians of all communities and disadvantages - including sheer inefficiency - that arise from nationalistic language policies have thrown the Malaysian education system into disarray and engendered a crisis which is not contained within education itself but has a much broader context and ramifications - in short, a chronic political crisis. Moreover, the crisis has not only merged with other simultaneous crisis in West Malaysian society (such as the religious crisis and the New Economic Policy designed to transfer wealth and economic power towards the Malays) but has become an important ingredient in the general crisis of confidence between the territories of East Malaysia and the Federal Government in Kuala Lumpur. There is little consolation in the fact that much non-Malay resentment arises from the decline of educational standards rather than the fact that the new medium of instruction is Malay. The perception of pressure and discrimination is the same either way.

A study which has concerned itself with a real-life problem and has not devoted much thought to theory might appropriately end with a set of 'proposals'. Since the crisis is fundamentally political, and was indeed brought about by political action, it can only begin to be solved by political insight, leadership and action. The Malay elite who in their private behaviour bear ample witness to the importance of English in maintaining a leading position in society, should consent to reopen the doors of social and international mobility that the fine English medium secondary schools of Malaysia once offered to non-Malays of humble origin. This is not an argument for turning back the clock to the days when the rural Malay community was largely excluded from modern secondary education, but for allowing all races of Malaysia to have access to the best, even if the New Economic Policy continues to dictate quotas in employment. At least under equal educational opportunity through the medium of English, qualified non-Malays will have the option of emigration if they cannot be employed in their country of birth.

The revival of English-medium education for the more capable students could be effected at a lower level with the help of native speakers from abroad. This is in effect what is done for gifted, Government-sponsored Bumiputeras (native Malays) either in Malaysia or abroad, as well as the children of the elite sent abroad at private expense. Only if the Malays embrace the national language wholeheartedly (and by their dedicated commitment serve to make it truly viable) is it reasonable to deny English-medium education to non-Malays.

In the event of a transformation of elite Malay attitudes, Malay-medium education would of course become far more acceptable to non-Malays because it would become the language of mobility and achievement at least within the country itself. It would become the language of mobility and achievement not simply through its identification with those who had achieved top positions but because this identification would predictably lead to a greater government commitment to raising standards and boosting translation which in turn would open the doors of mobility to those passing through the system. But, failing such a transformation of Malay attitudes - increasingly improbable in the 'shrinking' world of the late 20th century

where English continues its inexorable progress as the number one international language - the best solution would surely be the 'compromise position' based on a mixture of Malay and English, English being reserved, however, for a fairly large multi-racial elite. Such a choice would not in itself slow down the development of Malay as a language, or of Malay-medium education as the main stream of Malaysian education - certainly not more than is now the case. But the offer of bilingualism to those capable of benefiting from it would do much to remove the resentment of non-Malays that has built up, across the years, to levels which seriously threaten national cohesion. In this connection, the examples of Singapore and Brunei (though not exactly equivalent to what is proposed here) do offer food for thought. With specific reference to the Singaporean example, it is possible to predict that, if the mainstream of secondary education in Malaysia offered credible avenues of mobility, then ethnic preoccupation of Chinese and Tamil primary education would decline spontaneously.

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