

Malaysia's MBMMBI Policy as a Floating Signifier

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Beginning in 2009, the Malaysian government began implementing the MBMMBI language policy to replace the policy of teaching Mathematics and Science in English. MBMMBI is the Malay acronym for *Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia, Memperkukuhkan Bahasa Inggeris* which is translated "Upholding Bahasa Malaysia, Strengthening the English Language." This paper presents an interpretation of MBMMBI as a floating signifier. The floating signifier is a term used in semiotics (by Levi-Strauss, Lacan and others) to denote signifiers without specified signifieds. In other words, a floating signifier is susceptible to multiple meanings because it does not "emit meanings" but instead takes on meanings that are conferred upon it at different times by members of the community. In offering this interpretation of MBMMBI the paper examines three shifts in the meaning of MBMMBI: as a reaction to the Mathematics and Science in English policy; as an attempt at balancing the power differential between Malay and English in the school system; and as a statement of the linguistic ecology of the school. Data from official documents, official speeches and media reports will be analyzed to support these claims.