Multilingualism and Bilingual Education in Brunei Darussalam

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Abstract The official language of Brunei Darussalam is Bahasa Melayu (Malay) yet the country is diverse both linguistically and culturally. The country has a long tradition of selective English medium education and since 1984 English has been available to all. This paper looks at three facets of language and language education in Brunei. Firstly it examines the relationship between Malay and the minority languages. Secondly the relationship between English and Malay in the unplanned environment is analysed. The last section looks at the place of bilingual education in the community and suggests future directions for the country’s education policy.

Introduction

Brunei was for centuries the centre of a large thalassic empire which, in theory, extended from the Philippines in the north to Java in the south, although there is some debate about how much control was actually exerted from the centre. While the exact chronology of the arrival of Islam in Brunei is a matter of some dispute (Nicholl, 1989; Chen, 1992), it is certain that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the empire was a positive element in both the diffusion of the Malay language and Islam throughout what is now the Malay archipelago. In the eighteenth century, the power of Brunei began to decline and by the mid-nineteenth century Brunei was under the influence of Britain. By the end of the nineteenth century much of Brunei territory had been ceded to or acquired by the neighbouring state of Sarawak and North Borneo, leaving a relatively small land area of 5,765 sq km.

Although Brunei is a small country, it is ethnically and linguistically diverse. Out of a total population of one quarter of a million, approximately 60% have a variety of Malay as their first language (Nothofler, 1991). A
number of other groups are designated 'Malay' for census and legal purposes, but their languages are clearly distinct from Malay. Of the seven groups which make up the 'indigenous peoples of the Malay race' (Government of Brunei, 1961), Brunei, Kedayan and Tutong groups are Muslims. Of the other groups, the Belait are predominantly Islamic, and members of the Dusun, Bisaya and Murut groups are either Islamic, pagan or Christian. The largest minority group is Chinese, numbering 41,000 (Niew, 1990:6).

The linguistic and cultural diversity of the country is not immediately apparent, as Malay is such a dominant code, especially along the coast and in urban centres. The official language of the country is Bahasa Melayu and a dialect of it, Brunei Malay, has the largest number of speakers and acts as an effective lingua franca in all but remote areas where Iban or Dusun may fulfil this role. With the exception of the majority of expatriate workers, everyone in Brunei has access to at least one variety of Malay, usually a form of Brunei Malay.

Brunei became a British Protectorate in 1888 and remained so until 1983. Although the royal court functioned in Malay, English was the language of British administration and a knowledge of the language become essential for career advancement. The rulers and the leading families recognised the importance of the language and their sons were either given private tuition or sent to English medium institutions such as Malay College, Kuala Kangsar in Malaya. As in other Southeast Asian countries, knowledge and use of English was a way of showing that one was a member of the elite.

Following the discovery of oil in the 1920s, and the subsequent development of the oil field, the number of schools around the country increased. In 1952, the government opened the first English-medium secondary school. Education through the medium of English was only available to those deemed to have future academic potential (Ahmad, 1989). The development of English-medium schools perpetuated the notion of English carrying a high status in the country.

However, it should be stated that English is perceived as having purely a functional role in modern-day Brunei, with there being little emotional attachment to the language. Malay, on the other hand, was and is seen as the language of national culture and spiritual identity, the language of the soul.

The remainder of the paper is divided into three parts, all related to the concept of bilingualism and national development in Brunei Darussalam (henceforth Brunei). The first part looks at the position of the minor indigenous languages in Brunei and the convergence of speakers of these languages towards Brunei Malay, the local vernacular. The second part examines the unplanned use of language outside the classroom, especially the relationship between English and Malay. While recognising the importance of societal bilingualism in Brunei, this paper would be incomplete without an analysis and an appraisal of the bilingual education system.
Thus, the final part describes this system and analyses it in relation to bilingual education systems implemented elsewhere, and current theories of bilingualism.

**Malay and the Other Indigenous Languages in Brunei Darussalam**

In any treatise on bilingualism and national development in Brunei Darussalam the major discussion inevitably focuses on the roles of Malay, in its many varieties, and English. However, to preclude from the discussion any reference to the role of other languages spoken in Brunei, albeit a diminishing role, obscures the fact that Brunei is a multilingual country with a rich, though little-researched, linguistic history.

Prior to the discussion on the roles of English and Malay within the community, and the bilingual educational system of the country which revolves around these two languages, this section gives some emphasis to the other languages in Brunei Darussalam and, in particular, their declining role in modern-day Brunei. In order to do this, a brief look at the language situation in Brunei from an historical perspective is necessary. Consequently, reference is made to the historical circumstances giving rise to the contact between the minor groups in the country and the Brunei Malays and, especially, the hegemony of this group over the minor groups. By providing an historical framework to this part of the paper, it should be possible to see and understand more clearly the complex interplay between languages, speakers and environments in the Bruneian context (cf. Edwards, 1990).

In the nineteenth century, the number of ethnic groups under Brunei’s sphere of influence was large. Twenty groups, not including the Brunei Malays and the Kedays, are enumerated in ‘Notices of the City of Borneo and its Inhabitants’, many of them living close to Brunei Bay (1838, cited in Pringle, 1970:44, n.4). Today, the number of ethnic groups is somewhat smaller, although there are at least seven indigenous language groups represented in the country.

The most important language group is Malay. This not only includes the official language, *Bahasa Melayu*, but the variety of the dominant group and the lingua franca of the country, Brunei Malay, as well as Kedayan. A number of other varieties of Malay are used in Brunei (Kampong Ayer, royal Malay and bazaar Malay). A discussion of all these varieties, and their roles in the Bruneian speech community, can be found in Martin (1990b).

It is necessary, in the context of this paper, to emphasise the pivotal role of Brunei Malay in the country. It carries a very important social function and acts as a marker of Brunei identity. It is not only used in informal discourse, but encroaches on a number of formal domains. It functions as the vehicle for interethnic communication in Brunei and is increasingly becoming the first language of children whose parents have a different linguistic background (Martin, 1992).
Apart from the Malay varieties, there are at least seven other indigenous languages spoken in Brunei. These include Tutong, Belait, Dusun, Bisaya and Murut\(^2\) whose speakers, along with the Brunei Malay and Kedayan, are referred to as ‘Malay’ in the constitution (Government of Brunei, 1961)\(^3\), and their languages are usually referred to as ‘Malay dialects’. Two additional indigenous languages spoken in Brunei are Iban and Penan. There are also a number of Chinese languages spoken in the country.

Of central significance to this discussion is the numerical, cultural and political dominance of the Brunei Malays over the other groups in the country. The hegemony of the Brunei Malays depended, to a large extent, on control of the coastal area (and thus trade), and a system of taxation based on a number of forms of tenure\(^4\). The minor ethnic groups, on the other hand, did not have any centralised governing institutions through which the affairs of their individual societies could be monitored (Brown, 1970:6).

Space does not allow a detailed account of the contact between the various minor ethnic groups and the Brunei Malays. Besides, although a number of administrators (for example, McArthur, 1904) and travellers (for example, St John, 1862) left important records of life in and around Brunei, our knowledge of the relations between the various groups in Brunei is still rather sketchy. Obviously, those groups living close to Brunei Bay had more frequent contact with the Brunei Malays, who lived mainly in and around the Water Village on the Brunei River, than groups who lived in the more isolated parts of the country. Two groups which had close contact with the Brunei Malays were the Murut and Bisaya. The history of contact between the Murut and the Brunei Malays, for example, has been described as one of feuding and warfare, interspersed by periods of trading (Edwards & Stevens, 1971:6–8).

Contact between the Brunei Malays and the minor ethnic groups living in outlying areas, such as the relatively large Belait and Tutong districts to the west of Brunei Bay, was less frequent. The populations of these districts were small and were made up of a number of different ethnic groups. The first contacts were established through visits by Brunei officials and tax collectors, as well as traders, into the area. According to Horton (1987), taxation was disproportionately high and this was one of the factors which led to the 1899–1901 disturbances in these districts.

The discussion below concentrates on the Belait community in order to illustrate the historical process of language contact in the country. This group provides a good example of the phenomenon of language contact in Brunei. It was in the area inhabited by the Belait community that an important discovery was made which drastically changed the fortunes of the country. This refers, of course, to the discovery of oil in the Belait district in 1926. This discovery revolutionised the economic situation in the country and led to rapid and large-scale demographic changes, not just in the Belait district but in the country as a whole. Large numbers of people
flocked into the district, including many from the neighbouring territory of Sarawak, in order to seek employment in the fast-emerging oil industry. In 1929, the headquarters of the British Malayan Petroleum Company was transferred from the interior, to the coastal settlement of Kuala Belait. In the following year Kuala Belait became the administrative headquarters of the district. Roads were built (see Harper, 1975), and the beginnings of an infrastructure, which up to that time, had been severely lacking, were laid down.

In the space of a few years a number of communities from the interior came to be in constant contact with the coastal population, and the whole human ecology of the area changed dramatically. The results of this contact have had important consequences for the development of the modern-day Brunei state. Those people who found employment in the oil fields, or who worked in government administration, gave up many of their cultural practices and agricultural activities. At the same time, they adopted a number of facets of lifestyle associated with the Malay community on the coast, eventually becoming assimilated into what Florey (1990) has called 'coastal culture'.

Undoubtedly, the two most easily identified factors in this cultural assimilation have been the large amount of intermarriage and the adoption of the Islamic faith. With the adoption of Islam came a shift away from identity associated with a pagan group towards Malay identity. Conversion to Islam resulted in a 'steady flow of individuals out of the non-Islamic ethnic groups . . . into the Malay ethnic category' (Maxwell, 1980:170). According to Brown (1970), the policies of the Brunei Malays actually promoted the merging of the ethnic groups and cultural assimilation under the 'Malay' umbrella by 'draining off potential leaders . . . , through the simple expediency of converting such leaders to Islam' (Brown, 1970:4).

It is evident that for many of the small groups over the last half century there has been a convergence towards coastal Malay culture. Even in situations where cultural practices of these groups still exist, they are becoming unrecognisable from those of earlier generations. The mutable nature of cultures of minority groups is well-exemplified by a number of indigenous groups in the neighbouring Malaysian state of Sarawak whose cultures and identities have become totally submerged in the hotch-potch category 'Malay' over the last century (see Hasan, 1979).

**Linguistic results of contact**

But what of the linguistic results of the contact with the coastal Malays? How has the shift in cultural orientation away from minority cultures and towards the culture associated with the coastal population affected the use of the minor languages? According to Edwards (1985:85) 'a decline in the existence and attraction of traditional life styles also inexorably entails a decline in languages associated with them'. This statement would certainly
appear to be true for those members of the minor groups in Brunei whose life styles have changed.

A number of macrosociological changes beginning with the move from the interior to the coast, the improvement in communication networks and economic status, and an increase in educational opportunities have motivated individuals to alter their choice of language and, in many cases, to completely abandon their mother tongue. As far as education is concerned, the new economic status has led to a proliferation of Malay vernacular schools in the last 50 years. In 1955 alone, eight Malay vernacular schools were opened. Such schools represented the first educational opportunity for many young people from the interior, and provided them with their first access to a written language. The language of the school system was Malay and, as such, the Malay language became powerful symbolically, giving students the key to a new economic market. This role of the school (and other institutions) as important agents in the 'reproduction of linguistic capital' (Bourdieu, 1977:651–2) is of considerable significance.

To date, no large-scale studies of age-related variation in language use among the minor language groups in Brunei have been reported in the literature. However, preliminary findings for two on-going studies, Kershaw (1992) on the Dusun, and Martin (1991, 1992) on the Belait are available. Both studies reach similar conclusions, viz., the language most often used by the younger generations, and the language transmitted to offspring in modern day Brunei is a form of Brunei Malay. Furthermore, both code-switching and 'unreciprocal' use of language (cf. Gal, 1979:110) are common. Increasingly within the family, networks are coming to include members who do not know the group language. This factor, along with the demise of the older generation (some of whom were monolingual in the minor language) has reduced the amount of the minority language spoken in the family group.

The discussion so far has considered the economic or pragmatic factors behind the impetus to shift to the use of Brunei Malay. Edwards (1985:93) is of the opinion that most historical changes in language use are, indeed, due to economic factors such as social access and material advancement, and that these are of central importance. The new language is simply seen as having a greater value. Trudgill (1991) points out, however, that although people might acquire a majority language for sound instrumental reasons, failure to retain their own language is frequently due to attitudinal reasons. He suggests that such people are 'ashamed of their tribal, marginal, minority or unofficial language'. It is clear that the values associated with minority languages are important in any assessment of language shift among speakers of these languages.
The position of the minor languages today

To date, there appears to have been neither any official policy statement nor any concerted effort to develop the minor languages. At the same time there has been no overt attempt to discourage the use of the languages. Basically, the minor languages have been left to fend for themselves, albeit in an environment with the odds stacked against them. The minor languages have become languages of limited range, potential and vitality due to the socioeconomic environment and the 'power' attributed to Malay.

The premise that language contact dynamics 'centre upon power, practicality ... and considerations of solidarity, ethnicity and nationalism' (Edwards, this volume) is, I feel, a useful one. The 'linguistic market place' notion of Bourdieu (1977), that is the notion that language will persist as long as it is useful socioeconomically, is appropriate too. Bourdieu's model emphasises the importance of the symbolic power of language which can receive different values depending on the market. Malay has a 'good market', Brunei Malay more so than Bahasa Melayu. In other words, Malay is in high demand and is valued highly. The minor languages, on the other hand, are devalued, having little vitality. Malay, or English, is the language which speakers perceive will give them a better opportunity for upward mobility. The above discussion is echoed in Tollefson's (1991:75) statement that 'the survival of minority languages is not simply a function of the internal vitality of minority groups, but rather the strength of the dominant group and the historical consequences of hegemony' (original emphasis).

To some extent, there has been no need to divert resources into developing the minor languages, as they are officially deemed to be Malay dialects, and Malay is the official language of the country. Furthermore, Brunei has never been beset by the sort of language or ethnic problems that other, neighbouring nations have faced. According to Mahmud Baky (1967:173), in 'no instance in Brunei history did the language issue play a prominent part in any public debate of nationalistic character'. Malay has been totally accepted by the vast majority of the population and was, indeed, the only candidate for the official language.

Oladejo (this volume), in identifying one of the major problems in the Nigerian bilingual policy as 'its lack of sensitivity to the feelings of speakers of minority languages', makes the point that 'Brunei's language policy stands a better chance of success if the minor languages are not totally ignored'. He goes on to suggest that corpus planning activities should aim to develop these languages as this 'will ensure positive attitudes from the speakers of these languages towards the national language'. I think this is a little wide of the mark in the Bruneian context. There is nothing to suggest that speakers of the minor languages in Brunei have anything but a positive attitude to Malay, especially the local vernacular, Brunei Malay. It is this code, after all, which many of the speakers of minor languages are transmitting to their offspring.
Concluding remarks

It is clear, then, that there is an ongoing shift in language allegiance away from the minor languages towards Brunei Malay. This very brief analysis attempts to suggest why this shift is taking place. The shift away from the minor languages can be seen as the result of an adaptation process to the new ecological niche, that is, the coastal strip of the country. The assimilation of the minor groups into this coastal environment depended on successful interaction with other cultural and linguistic entities which share the same environment. Among the pragmatic reasons for the shift to Brunei Malay are the need for a language of wider communication, the desire to provide a firm language base prior to entry into the educational arena, as well as for social access. Above all, it is the symbolic power associated with Brunei Malay that is hastening the decline of the minor languages.

While Brunei Malay has increasingly become the dominant indigenous language in recent years English has extended the linguistic equation. It is pertinent to examine the role of English within the community and to see how the language coexists with Malay.

English and Malay in the Community

This section examines the unplanned use of language outside the classroom and analyses the relationship between English and Malay. Data for the study comes from a language use survey conducted in 1989 and 1990. Five hundred and seventy randomly selected Brunei citizens were asked a series of questions on their language background and on their use of language in certain domains.

English and Malay in the unplanned environment

English is recognised by all sectors of the population as being important and, in the survey 30.5% of the 570 participants saw it as being the most important language of the country. Only Brunei Malay is rated higher. English is ranked higher than the official language, Bahasa Melayu, showing that Bruneians are very loyal to their national dialect even although it is not taught in the schools or used on formal occasions. It also shows that English rather than Malay is perceived as being the language of communication with the outside world.

In many ways English in Brunei performs a role which runs counter to that of Bahasa Melayu. Apart from education, its one official domain is that of law where it is maintained both as a language of the written statutes and as the language of the courts. The language also has a place in the government-controlled mass media. About 40% of television broadcast time is in English. Apart from a news broadcast of about 20 minutes, most English language programmes are imported and are usually transmitted in
weight to Western culture (Government of Brunei, 1985:35–39). Cath (1991) deals with the cultural issue at length, arguing that despite efforts by the government to promote Malay culture and values, students in Brunei are often as familiar with Western pop songs as their Singaporean, or even British and American peers. In Cath’s survey of school students 74% of respondents recorded positive attitudes to English language songs and music.

The role of English as a vehicle for dissemination of Western cultures has only been obliquely referred to by language planners in Brunei. In Singapore however the subject has been discussed at length. The former Prime Minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, spoke about it at a gathering in the National University in August 1988 (see Pakir, this volume), claiming that the influence of Western culture would become a major problem in the future. However, he also noted—and this must be good news for the planners in Brunei—that Malays were less influenced by Western values than others because of their attachment to Islam.

While English is of some importance in the home environment, it is outside the home that it is used the most. In the friendship domain English is used by 61% of the English speaking respondents. About half of these claim to use English with friends of the same ethnic group. At first glance this is surprising but a deeper analysis reveals that, as in the family domain, intra-ethnic communication in English is concerned with professional topics and items related to non-Bruneian culture.

Inter-ethnic communication is somewhat different. Here English functions as a neutral language. While there is no resistance, either culturally or politically, to Brunei Malay (Martin; 1990a:178) many educated speakers who do not have a variety of Malay as a first language seem to prefer to use English in certain situations. English is used to discuss all topics and informants say that it is used for topics related to family and friends as well as those of the workplace.

The transactional domain can be conveniently divided into the three sub domains—the traditional market, the small shop and the supermarket. As one would expect, the traditional market is one area almost totally resistant to the intrusion of English. The small market is the most traditional form of commerce in Brunei. Most of the sellers are from the older generation with little formal education and are thus unfamiliar with English. Informants point out that there is no need to use English. Indeed, any attempt to do so would be completely inappropriate and would be met with incredulity or even hostility, especially if the person was of the same ethnic group.

In small shops or mini-markets, 158 respondents (28%) claim to use English for some or all of their transactions. Many of the small shops are owned by people who are ethnically Chinese and therefore much of the transactional discourse is across ethnic boundaries. Some informants have said they make a point of using Malay because Brunei is a Malay speaking country, but others are equally adamant that they would use English or at
least a form of mixed language in such a setting. Observation confirms the latter view that codeswitching is a very common linguistic event in these small shops.

The supermarkets tell a different linguistic story. Here English plays a very important role. Of the 393 respondents who said they used English in their daily lives, 84% said they would use it in a supermarket. However, the pattern is not quite that simple. In the prestige stores, English is very dominant. Malay customers can be observed talking to Malay sales assistants in English, and Malay sales assistants often use English when talking to one another, especially about aspects of their work. There may be many reasons for this. Undoubtedly one is that many workers in the store are Filipino expatriates who may not speak Malay. The use of English has thus become habitual when talking to sales personnel. However, perhaps a truer reason is that these stores are prestigious and that shopping or working in them confers more status on the person than those working in less prestigious stores. As we have seen, English is a language carrying status and speakers feel obliged to use it in this setting.

In the less prestigious supermarkets and department stores there is less pressure to use English. Even though many of the sales assistants are non-Malay and/or foreign, Malay is the dominant code between customers and sales personnel. Observation suggests, and informants confirm, that age and sex play a crucial role here in language choice. Obviously, further research needs to be undertaken.

Malay is the official language of government and all government business is, in theory, conducted in that language. However, 33% of informants say they use English when conducting business in government offices. Again there is a good reason for this. English is the language of status and its use suggests that the Bruneian using it has high status. Informants say they command more respect, and therefore may get their business done more efficiently, if they use English or at least let the government officer know that he can use English.

Although Malay is the official organ of government, career advancement is very difficult unless the officer can use English. A glance at advertisements for government posts shows that those posts commanding salaries of Scale D and above either require an ability to use English or require a professional qualification that can only be obtained in English. It should be stressed that the same advertisements specify a General Certificate Ordinary level pass in Malay language for Brunei citizens. However, the point is that a Bruneian without access to English is likely to be denied career advancement even although he or she may use it only infrequently in his or her job.

In the private sector, the use of English is more common than in the government with 75.6% of speakers of English claiming to use the language in this domain. The private sector is dominated by Chinese and, as in Malaysia and Singapore, a great deal of English is used in interethnic business communication. Observation has shown that the English used in
this domain covers the entire lect spectrum, with many clerks using a basilectal variety of English for both intra-and inter-ethnic discourse.

One area of the private sector where Malays enjoy a considerable presence is in the area of banking. Yet despite this fact, more people (over 90% of English using informants) say they use English more often in this sub-domain than any other. Like the supermarket, the setting is conducive to discourse in English. Informants have suggested that one reason for this is the fact that banks are big, unfriendly places where the atmosphere of formality does not encourage the feelings of solidarity common to discourse in Brunei Malay. Another reason is probably that banking is seen as an international business with English being the appropriate code. A similar situation can be found in travel agents and airline offices. English dominates at work although outside the workers may converse almost entirely in Malay. (Ozog, 1990).

In the employment domain, English is quite extensively used. Of the 393 respondents who use English, 62% said they used English at work either as part of their job or in casual discourse with colleagues. Less English is used by workers in Government offices than in the private sector, probably because of the dominance of Malay speakers in government employment. Government regulations stipulate that Malay is the language of government. There is no such rule in the private sector and so there is much more flexibility in language use. Also, more interethnic communication takes place in the private sector with Bruneians of Chinese origin using English extensively in communication with people from other ethnic groups.

This then has been a rather brief view of language relationships in the six domains examined. We have seen that the boundaries are not fixed and that a language continuum exists between domains. Different individuals have different linguistic responses to different situations. However, it is clear that English does compete with Malay in certain domains. This occurs almost by definition in any country where English is the second language. (see Jernudd, this volume). However, as Fishman points out (1982:14) it is often the threat of English that provides a raison d'etre and gives momentum to national language movements. There is no question that in Brunei the Malay lobby is stronger now than previously. There are many non-linguistic reasons for this including the upsurge of Islamic consciousness, the nationalism usually associated with a newly independent country and the diffusion and acceptance of the national ideology. However, English and the culture associated with English is perhaps a welcome scapegoat and so its strength and its domain promiscuity boosts rather than hinders the development of Malay in the community.

**Bilingual Education in Brunei Darussalam**

The question of whether the country's new education system (introduced in 1984), *Dwibahasa* (two languages), will be a success is of great concern
MULTILINGUALISM IN BRUNEI

in Brunei. Unfortunately, it is not a question that can be answered easily or particularly satisfactorily. Having embarked along a bilingual road, a country's education authorities must be prepared to commit a great deal of their resources without any assurance that the returns will justify the commitment. However, trying to forecast the result of an education system is not entirely a matter of chance. Baetens Beardsmore (1986:116) has observed the following:

What does appear clearly from the literature is that successful bilingualism appears in contexts where the environment allows for the full and harmonious development of the individual and where tension and conflict are not exacerbated by linguistic oppositions. Also, most, though not all, the evidence on successful bilingual education arises in cases where the bilingual element is introduced early in the child's development and continuously promoted in an uninterrupted and coherent programme.

Almost without exception, what Professor Baetens Beardsmore has described above is, in fact, the situation in Brunei, which would suggest that it is possible to adopt a positive attitude to the future of bilingual education in the country. Nevertheless, we should remain aware that every country is different and that as a result not too much should be assumed, especially that conditions are transferable—including the conditions necessary for the successful adoption of a bilingual education policy. Most importantly, we should be aware that many factors have a part to play, and possibly a decisive part, in the successful implementation of a bilingual education system.

Although many of the factors involved may be beyond our immediate control, Swain (1983) has identified what she believes are three common denominators of successful bilingual education. These denominators and their relation to Brunei have been summarised elsewhere (Jones, in press), but it is pertinent to reiterate them here:

(i) That in addition to acquisition of the second language the child's first language is psychologically, linguistically and cognitively maintained.

(ii) That teachers use separate languages in the classroom rather than the concurrent use of both.

(iii) That the community recognises bilingualism as a valuable bonus having political, economic, cultural, psychological, linguistic and cognitive advantages.

As far as the first of these denominators is concerned, that stating 'the child's first language is psychologically, linguistically and cognitively maintained', some difficulty arises in as much that a Bruncian child's first language is unlikely to be the school language, Standard Malay. It is more likely to be Brunei Malay or one of its close associates, or one of the other indigenous languages of the country. Such linguistic diversity creates problems for the schools inasmuch that while the majority of children use
a variety of Malay, it is not the same as the variety taught in schools. In effect, if dialectal differences warrant describing Brunei Malay as a separate language from Standard Malay then the first second language that many Bruneian children have to learn is actually Standard Malay.

The concern about maintenance of a learner’s first language involves the Threshold Hypothesis (Cummins, 1976, Toukama & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1977). This proposes that the cognitive advantages of being bilingual can only be attained once a certain level of linguistic competence, or ‘threshold’, has been achieved in both languages. However, the theory assumes that this threshold will normally be achieved in the L1 and then the L2, rather than concurrently. Therefore, in the case of Brunei, development of cognitively advantageous bilingualism is dependent upon acquiring satisfactory linguistic competence in Standard Malay and then English, and until research into this area has been conducted we cannot assume that this is actually the case.

The second denominator for successful bilingual education programming requires that teachers use separate languages of instruction in the classroom rather than the concurrent use of both. One reason for this is that the pupils have such little exposure to the L2 outside the classroom that the maximum time possible should be spent using it in lessons. There are other more empirically based reasons for avoiding mixed language classes. The observations of Wong Fillmore (1980) and Legaretta-Marcaida (1981) are summarised in Cummins & Swain (1986). These suggest the following results:

- a lack of motivation to learn the L2 if the pupils know they will receive a translation in the L1;
- a need for both teachers and pupils to work harder when using the L2, thus ensuring greater cognitive reasoning;
- teachers, out of necessity, having to be more creative in the classroom, while at the same time being excused the exhausting task of simultaneous translation;
- codeswitching is avoided.

An important point to include here is that, ideally, even if the teacher does not actually use the L1 in class, she should nevertheless be able to understand the L1 or at least give the impression that she understands it, especially in the early stages and with young children. These learners are in both a linguistically and psychologically demanding situation and, as Dodson (1985) has observed, at times need the natural support of their L1. Without it the language class becomes an unnecessarily traumatic and potentially educationally damaging experience. This is certainly the case in Brunei at the primary level: the dilemma facing the teachers is just how much language mixing should be tolerated and for how long.

The third denominator states that the community should recognise bilingualism as a valuable bonus having political, economic, cultural, psycho-
logical, linguistic and cognitive advantages. While research supports these claims for bilingual communities it should be borne in mind that the claims are for successful programmes. Nevertheless, the point is that the advantages of becoming bilingual go beyond immediate educational and economic considerations, and this message needs to be properly spread to the whole community. Thought should be given about how best to promote the attributes of bilingualism: a positive attitude towards a bilingual education system among the population will in itself help to ensure the successful implementation of that system.

The forms of bilingualism that exist in Brunei

The principles and denominators so far identified have to be assigned to a linguistic situation which is complex for such a small country. Multi, and not bilingualism, is the norm rather than the exception. A number of typologies are applicable to Brunei Darussalam:

1. We have a situation of mostly Malay-speaking children from an homogeneous (albeit multi-dialectal) language background entering school and being taught through two separate mediums. This has been described as bi-monolingualism by Dodson (1985:325).

2. We have children from similar linguistic and cultural backgrounds who have had no prior formal contact with the English language who are put together in a classroom setting in which this language is used as the medium of instruction, which is a description of immersion teaching. Some clarification of this description is necessary as the term can be interpreted in a number of ways. In a recent article on the subject, Harley (1991), working in Canada, described immersion education as occurring when 50% of the day’s schooling takes place in the second language. In Brunei, English is introduced in stages, assuming greater importance at the secondary school stage. By the time they reach secondary school Bruneian pupils receive a lot more than 50% of their education in the L2. In many ways the Brunei model is the inverse of the Canadian models, which tend to have a higher input of the L2 at primary school than at secondary school. The system in Brunei should allow for the development of language and literacy skills in the L1 before the L2, a natural situation for secondary bilingualism and one supported by a number of researchers (Swain, 1974; Cziko, 1976; Barik, Swain & Nwanunobi, 1977; and by Baetens Beardsmore, in this volume).

3. A realistic objective of Dwibahasa is to maintain the first language, Malay, while trying to achieve a satisfactory level of competence in English, the second language. This can be described as secondary bilingualism (i.e. where a second language has been added to a first via instruction). (I think that it would be wrong for anyone in Brunei to assume that Dwibahasa will produce equi or balanced bilinguals—this
would be unrealistic given the nature in which the second language is acquired.

(4) Brunei Darussalam’s L1 (Malay) is established and is perceived to have as much prestige, though often in different domains, as the L2 (English). Positive results tend to be associated with situations where both the L1 and L2 are highly regarded, resulting in additive bilingualism.

From here to eternity?

Brunei Darussalam’s bilingual education system will only endure so long as it produces pupils competent in both English and Malay. This competency will most likely be measured by the general public and government by the rate of success in the General Certificate of Education public examinations. If pass rates in either language decline then the system will be in jeopardy.

Although this is the situation today, it would be irresponsible to assume that such stability will continue (see Edwards’ paper in this volume for further discussion). The system needs to be monitored, with changes implemented when necessary. As a result of ongoing research that is sponsored by the Bruneian Ministry of Education and being conducted in the country at the moment we believe that some action is necessary immediately, before problems develop.

Dwibahasa today: Some recommendations

Teachers

While it would be impracticable to suggest that all teachers in Brunei should be bilingual, it is not unreasonable of the Ministry of Education to expect them to be sympathetic to the place of two languages in the classroom. This is particularly so of primary teachers, whose pupils suffer particular linguistic stress during the transition period.

Teacher training

At present, trainee ESL teachers at the Universiti Brunei Darussalam receive courses on societal bilingualism and education which cover theories of language acquisition as well as analysing the advantages and disadvantages relating to societal and individual bilingualism. They prepare students for work in a bilingual environment and are thus relevant to everyone involved in education in Brunei. They could be offered as an in-service course to both school teaching staff, expatriate as well as local, and to school administrators.
School language syllabus

The syllabus should be less rigid and structure based, particularly at the primary level, and instead provide greater opportunity for language use in meaningful contexts. Such a recommendation, if implemented, would necessitate an evaluation of the present examination system as well as require a tolerant and open-minded attitude from school administrators.

Public awareness

The misconceptions about Dwibahasa and bilingualism that some sectors of the public hold need to be removed. The positive attributes associated with bilingualism should be disseminated to as wide an audience as possible while at the same time clarifying the likely limits of a bilingual education. It would be wrong to promise parents that all pupils will achieve native-like competence in the second language because the reality will only bring disillusionment.

Future research

Research on Dwibahasa has been instigated by the current Minister of Education. This research is long term, over a 15 year period, and includes observation and analysis of selected school groups throughout their school careers. During this period other related research will be included. For instance, there is an immediate need to clarify attitudes towards Dwibahasa (among all sections of Brunei's population) so as to distinguish prejudices and misconceptions and then to use this information as a focus for future planning (Edwards in this volume expands on the subject of an attitude survey for Brunei). In addition to attitudes, some research needs to be instigated in the following areas:

1. Determine the level of motivation that exists in Brunei to learn languages other than Malay, including: which languages; whether motivation needs to be improved and, if it does, how this might be realised.
2. Clarification of what are acceptable language standards, for both Malay and English, and whether these are being achieved.
3. Determine whether standards in the use of language, for both Malay and English, are improving or deteriorating.
4. Involve other countries in the research. It should be possible to conduct parallel research in Brunei and other countries as well as to test whether research conclusions can be duplicated in different centres, thus validating or invalidating certain theories.
Conclusion

While there is reason to be optimistic about the future of bilingual education in Brunei, it would be wrong to be complacent. Attitudes and circumstances can change very easily and what is acceptable today may be condemned tomorrow. Dwibahasa is now being monitored as part of a long-term longitudinal study and while data obtained from the classroom is relatively easily quantified, the external factors influencing attitude and motivation of pupils and teachers are not. In Brunei, prominent among these external factors are language domain, language shift and perceived language status together with cultural and religious influences. Culture and religion are particularly sensitive areas because of their emotional and often zealous appeal.

Although initial research has been concerned with attitude, there is the immediate tandem requirement to educate the public about the purpose and likely outcome of pursuing a bilingual education policy. The positive attributes associated with bilingualism need to be disseminated to all members of the community along with a realistic acknowledgement of the policy’s limitations: maintenance of Malay and satisfactory competence in English, however this is defined, must be the realistic objectives.

Notes
1. This paper is an abbreviated version of the following papers presented at the International conference on Bilingualism and National Development in Brunei Darussalam, 9–12 December 1991: ‘Language shift and language solidarity in Brunei: The ecology of a minority language’ by Peter W. Martin; ‘Bilingualism in Brunei: English and Malay in the community’ by Conrad K. Ozóg; and ‘From here to eternity: Bilingual education in Brunei Darussalam’ by Gary Jones.
2. Tutong, Belait, Dusun Bisaya and Murut are Austronesian languages, all less than 40% cognate with Malay (Noothof, 1991). Tutong and Belait are categorised as languages of the ‘Lower Baram’ sub-group of a group of languages termed ‘North Sarawak’ (Blust, 1972). Dusun and Bisaya are Dusunic languages belonging to the Ida’an group (Prentice, 1970). Murut is included in the ‘Apo Duat’ group along with Lun Bawang, Lun Dayeh, Kelabit and Tring (Hudson, 1978).
3. A discussion of the term ‘Malay’ in the Brunei context is provided by Maxwell (1980: 149–58). Suffice to say here that the term ‘Malay’ was not much in use in north-west Borneo up to the beginning of the present century (Pringle, 1970: xvii–xix).
4. Two forms of land tenure were common. In the kuripan form of tenure, the land was held by ministers or wazirs; the tulin form, on the other hand, consisted of private hereditary domains.
5. This is to cater for the Gurkha soldiers serving in the country.

References
MULTILINGUALISM IN BRUNEI


Our Brunei (Radio Programme), 10 February, 1992.


