PARANGAL CANG BROTHER ANDREW

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Some Language Planning Questions Facing
Brunei Darussalam, Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines

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This paper attempts to analyze some of the similarities and differences facing the four countries of Brunei, Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines as they wrestle with the need for at least two languages in their education systems: the national language and English. The differences between the four countries are obvious: Brunei is a small country with a very small population; Singapore is a wealthy city state; Malaysia is much larger than either while the Philippines is larger still and has a much greater variety of peoples and languages than the other three countries.

The similarities, though, are striking. All four countries are multilingual and all four have adopted English as either a Language of Wider Communication (LWC) or as a second language (L2). While all four countries have experienced some form of colonial control (whether British or American) the similarities do not end there. In each of the four countries the need for English is apparent, yet in each of the four the actual teaching and acquisition of English is a problem. It is these similarities and differences that are the focus of this paper.

In Section 1 each country is presented in turn while in Section 2 similarities, common problems, and concerns are considered. Brunei is presented first. Being the country with which I am most familiar it is discussed in some detail. Other than stating some of the more obvious developments and problems I believe it would be presumptuous to say too much about Singapore, Malaysia, or the Philippines. Nevertheless, it is possible to draw comparisons and realize common problems. Despite their differences, when it comes to bilingual education these four Southeast Asian countries have much in common.

1. The Countries

1.1. Brunei Darussalam

It might be assumed that education in Brunei must have mirrored developments in Malaysia and Singapore because of the close physical and historical ties linking the three countries. In fact, education in Brunei lagged behind developments in colonial Malaya and Singapore. It was not until oil revenue became plentiful in the 1950s that Brunei was able to create the infrastructure for a national education system. Thus it is only in the last forty years that Brunei has been able to benefit from universal education.

Brunei’s official language policy also dates from this time. In 1959 the Brunei State Constitution was prepared. Article 82(1) of the Constitution states:

The official language of the State shall be the Malay language and shall be in such script as may by written law be provided.

Also in 1959 two Malaysians, Aminuddin Baki and Paul Chang, presented an Education Report that became the National Educational Policy of 1962. This report makes the first mention of a national system of education and “an emphasis on the need to foster a common loyalty to all
the children of every race under a national education system and policies" (Report of the Education Commission of Brunei 1972:3).

The Baki-Chang report was based on the Malayan Tun Razak Education Report of 1956. Not surprisingly, the recommendations follow the Malaysian model's very closely. These included making Malay the sole medium of instruction in the country's schools. However, following political disturbances in Brunei and the resulting disruption, the recommendations of the 1962 policy were never acted upon and instead the pre-1959 educational policies were continued.

It was not until ten years later, following the Report of the Education Commission, Brunei, 1972, that attempts were made to implement the earlier report. This later report also stressed the need for national unity. Language is seen as important in this respect, as was a common curriculum. The English/Malay/Chinese split was seen as divisive and it was hoped to unite society through a common system of education. The division of teaching in various language mediums at that time was very apparent: The English medium textbooks were supplied mainly from Britain, the Chinese from Taiwan, and the Malay from Malaysia. Under a new National System, the Commissioners envisaged everybody using Malay with locally produced textbooks.

Just as the implementation of the 1959 Report had been thwarted by internal problems in Brunei, the 1972 Report seems to have suffered a similar fate, at least as far as implementation of the medium of instruction is concerned. In 1974 political and diplomatic relations between Brunei and Malaysia deteriorated. Bruneians studying in Malaysia were recalled and the option of adopting the Malaysian system of education was canceled. Further, Brunei had no diplomatic relations with Indonesia, the only other country with Malay-medium universities, so it could not send its students there. For English-medium students there were no problems; they had always gone to universities in the United Kingdom and other English-speaking Commonwealth countries. The solution for the Malay-medium Bruneian students was to send them to English-speaking universities, but having first provided them with crash courses in the English language (albeit, up to two years) at private language schools in Britain.

This experience seems to have had a decisive influence on the eventual choice of language medium for the National System of Education. Although the System was not announced until 1984, the experiences of 1974 and the indecision that followed clearly produced a radical shift in opinion within Brunei. There is no doubt that the Education Commission of 1972 wanted and expected the System to use Malay as the medium of instruction, just as the Report of 1962 had recommended. Instead, and through circumstance, a bilingual system was adopted.

1.1.1. The Bilingual Education System

The National Education System, introduced in 1984 and implemented in 1985, is a mainstream bilingual education system that uses both Malay and English as mediums of instruction. At the Lower Primary level, until children are approximately eight years old, teaching is in Malay with the English language being taught only as a subject. From Upper Primary onwards, however, the majority of school subjects are taught in English. The aim of the education system is to produce pupils who are qualified and able to work in either English-speaking or Malay-speaking environments. (Detailed discussion about the implementation of the system and its strengths and weaknesses can be found (G. M. Jones 1990, 1996a, 1996b, G.M. Jones et al. 1993, Larking 1996.)

1.1.2. Public Attitude to Bilingual Education

When it embarked on its bilingual education program in 1985, Brunei was, to a great extent, taking a step into the unknown. Public attitudes to the school languages, Malay and English, were unknown. There was anecdotal and circumstantial evidence suggesting both support and
reservations about these languages, especially English. However, what was missing was hard factual evidence lending support or otherwise, to the implementation of the bilingual program.

In 1993 a comprehensive national attitude survey was conducted by the University of Brunei Darussalam and the Ministry of Education. Details of the full survey are contained in G.M. Jones (forthcoming). What is presented here are extracts from that survey.

The attitude survey analyzed a representational cross-section of the Brunei people, across age, race, religion, and geography. It was answered by 1 in 375 of the population.

The first question analyzed sought to determine which languages, and to what degree of proficiency, are spoken in Brunei. As the results below suggest, Brunei is a multilingual country and the various races and their languages are all represented in the survey. (For a full description of the various races and languages used in Brunei, see Martin, Ozog, & Poedjosoedarmo 1996.)

1. I understand and speak the following languages/dialects very well, well, satisfactorily, poorly, badly.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Very Well</th>
<th>Well</th>
<th>Satisfactorily</th>
<th>Poorly</th>
<th>Badly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bru. Malay</td>
<td>337</td>
<td>263</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stan. Malay</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>205</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kedayan</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutong</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belait</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dusun</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murut</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iban</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 1 displays a fairly predictable pattern, with the majority of respondents claiming to understand Brunei Malay better than Standard Malay and both better than English. Ignoring the final two categories poorly and badly (which might suggest that one does not know the language at all), 678 (95%) of the respondents indicated that they understand Brunei Malay satisfactorily or better; the figure is 592 (83%) for Standard Malay and 356 (50%) for English.

For a bilingual measure, rather than measures of individual languages, the numbers and percentages of those who understand Brunei Malay or Standard Malay very well or well and English very well or well (the number of people who claim to be able to function well in both Malay and English) is 182 (25%). This figure increases to 287 (40%) if a satisfactory understanding of English is accepted. Of course, all measures are subjective, relying totally on each individual's assessment of their own language ability.
SOME LANGUAGE PLANNING QUESTIONS

2. With whom do you use English and how often?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All the time</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>241</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At work</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>122</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When the raw figures in the table above are analyzed for gender some definite trends emerge:

MALE (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All the time</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>29.7</td>
<td>35.7</td>
<td>30.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>41.5</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>18.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At work</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>38.5</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>14.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>21.5</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>24.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FEMALE (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>All the time</th>
<th>Often</th>
<th>Sometimes</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>19.0</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>31.5</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>13.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At work</td>
<td>16.3</td>
<td>29.3</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>11.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As can be seen from the above, a clear picture emerges that women are far more likely to be using English than men. They are three times as likely to use it often or all the time with the family; more than twice as likely to use it with friends; almost twice as likely to use it at work and half as likely again to use it for study. This supports other research that has been conducted into language attitude and gender (Burstall 1975; Gardner & Smythe 1975; W.R. Jones 1950, all cited in Gardner 1985) that has demonstrated that girls have significantly more positive attitudes to learning a second language than do boys. Given the major role that women play in bringing up children in a society like Brunei's, and thus the influence they have on children, this must assume that children are being exposed to much more English than was previously imagined.
3. Which of the following do you believe is correct?
A. 26 It is more important to learn Malay than English.
B. 630 It is important to learn both Malay and English.
C. 47 It is more important to learn English than Malay.

What the above suggests is a population that appears to be strongly in favor of a bilingual system of education, rather than a monolingual one in either Malay or English. The respondents also suggested that learning English will have little effect on either their culture, identity, or religion.

1.2. Singapore

After independence from Britain, Singapore’s brief inclusion in Malaysia ended in 1965. Under the leadership of Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore energetically marketed itself as a dynamic English-speaking hub. Its economic success is well known. The use of English in the country has been well documented (see Teng 1995, for example).

For the British, and therefore for the introduction of the English language, Singapore was far more central to their plans than Brunei. From its evolution as a Straits Settlement to its present role as an economic, commercial, and transport hub, the use of English in the country has always been widespread, at least among the business and diplomatic communities. Outside these communities, however, the use of English is much less used. With its population consisting of Chinese (77.4%), Malays (14.2%), Indians (7.2%), and others (1.2%) (Balachandran 1996: 35), the country, like Brunei, is truly multilingual.

A study on “Trends of English Use among Chinese Singaporeans” was conducted in 1996 by Xu Daming and Tan Pek Ling of Nanyang Technological University. Among its aims and objectives, the study sought to discover what attitudes the Chinese Singaporeans have towards English in comparison to Chinese. In many respects, therefore, this allows for a close comparison of attitudes towards the English language between Singaporeans and Bruneians. The Brunei attitude survey dealt with all sections of the community, while the Singaporean survey only studied the Chinese. Nevertheless, as noted above, the Chinese do make up over 77% of the Singaporean population.

Adopting a community-investigation approach (after Labov 1972 and Trudgill 1974), Xu and Tan received 2,778 completed questionnaires, meaning that they surveyed approximately one thousandth of the Chinese population in Singapore.

Perhaps not surprisingly, among the living generations of Chinese Singaporeans there has been a dramatic shift from Chinese to English: from the Grandparents’ generation of 90% using Chinese to only 53% of the Children’s generation using Chinese as the solely predominant language at home (Xu & Tan 1996: 10). Most notable is the shift to some form of Chinese/English bilingualism rather than one or other of the languages being dominant.

Use Rates by Domains

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domain</th>
<th>Family</th>
<th>Friendship</th>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Public</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English &amp; Chinese</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SOME LANGUAGE PLANNING QUESTIONS

A direct comparison can be made with Brunei regarding the use of English in different domains. As the table above shows, and as in Brunei, English is used mainly in the instrumental domains of work and in public, particularly in conjunction with Chinese. Chinese is clearly the most used language, with less than a third of the sample using both English and Chinese regularly.

The following table compares a number of epithets to describe language. It suggests a high community regard for Mandarin and an instrumental one for English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage of the answers chosen for attitude questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Easy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandarin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summing up their research, Xu and Tan came to the following conclusion:

In spite of a dramatic language shift from Chinese to English which has taken place in the two youngest generations of contemporary Chinese Singaporeans, the Chinese population in Singapore as a whole is still predominantly Chinese-speaking. To this population, English is important chiefly because it is the language of dealing with the authorities. At the same time Mandarin is also regarded as important as it is identified as the language of the community. Although at least half of the population is bilingual, the balanced bilinguals are a minority. At the same time, the majority of the population has a high regard for bilingualism, much higher than their bilingual abilities. The general trends for the population seem to be a movement towards bilingualism rather than a shift to monolingual English. (Xu & Tan 1996:20-21)

In other words, and matching the Bruneian results very closely, Singapore is looking to maintain two languages, to create a bilingual population.

1.3. Malaysia

As recently as 1993 Ozog noted that "there seems little likelihood of a bilingual education system being introduced" in Malaysia (1993:71). Ozog was writing at a time of change for language use in Malaysia. The country had inherited English as a result of its colonial heritage, and precisely because of this colonial heritage it was a vestige of its past that it wanted to discard on independence. However, the English language never went away. Despite introducing an education system that relegated the teaching of English, the language continued to be used in the country, especially in the influential urban districts in and around Kuala Lumpur.

Malaysia's inheritance of the English language and the country's ensuing language policies through the 1960s and 1970s has been documented by, among others, Ozog (1993). It is a story of accommodating English while at the same time promoting the national language, Malay. However, it is the very promotion of Malay that has led to problems for its native speakers. While the Chinese and Indian communities continued to learn their own languages as well as Malay, and often English, Malays tended to learn only Malay. As a result, measures that were intended to aid the native Malays and their language "may in the long term have hindered their development because bilingualism, or rather a knowledge of English, is still an important element for anyone wishing to develop his or her professional career" (Ozog 1993:68).
After independence, and as reflected in government policy, the use and teaching of English in Malaysia declined. However, throughout this period the worldwide use of English, and its importance in commerce and business, grew. Even in Malaysia, big businesses, including those owned by Malays, used English as their main working language (Asmah Omar 1996 refers to Mani Le Vasan 1996). Conflict between national ideology and the linguistic demands of a country aiming to achieve full industrial development by the year 2020 was inevitable.

The conflict that emerged revolved around the respective status and actual use of Malay and English. It was (and still is) feared in some quarters that promoting the use of English will be to the detriment of the Malay language. It is also a public debate, with senior politicians and academics airing their views on national television or in the country’s newspapers.

Increasingly, however, there is no debate about whether access to English is harmful to Malay or whether the language should be taught at all: its role in the development of Malaysia is now assumed and even considered essential. Given this, the question that remains is whether the language can be effectively taught while still adhering to the country’s National Language Policy, i.e. the promotion of Malay as the national language.

Recent developments in education have helped to promote the wider use of English. Many private institutions of higher education have opened while the country’s established universities have experienced a proliferation of twinning programs with overseas English-speaking universities. In December 1993 the Prime Minister announced a policy allowing for the use of English in universities and colleges. In fact, English had always been used as a medium of instruction for various academic disciplines, no matter what the official policy might have been. Asmah Omar notes that “in the University of Malaya English is used for the teaching of certain courses at the undergraduate level in various faculties, such as the Faculties of Medicine, Dentistry, Science, Engineering and Law. At the post graduate level, many of the faculties teach their courses in English” (Asmah Omar 1996:7). However, the Prime Minister’s announcement was seen to legitimize the use of English and to remove some of the misunderstanding surrounding the language and its use in education.

Other developments involving the use of English include its adoption as the language of common communication within ASEAN. Asmah Omar (1996:18) notes that Malaysian leaders were shaken when they realized that many local graduates could not communicate in English and were therefore unable to serve in many government ministries especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in which good English language skills are required. Exclusion from English also means exclusion from a number of career opportunities.

It may be assumed that language planning is a function of government, especially a ministry of education. However, as I have argued elsewhere (G.M. Jones 1997), government merely responds to the needs of industry and markets. In Malaysia it is the desire to achieve full industrialization by the year 2020 that is determining the needs of industry and at the moment industry needs employees who are competent in the English language, among other skills. However, to fulfill the needs of nationhood, Malaysia also wants to promote the national language.

1.4. The Philippines

The Philippines is different from Brunei, Singapore, and Malaysia in so far as it has so many languages, ten of which are considered major languages (Gonzalez 1998: 489). It is a polyglot society with a number of languages vying if not for national supremacy at least for regional supremacy. In this sense, therefore, the Philippines has more in common linguistically with parts of Africa and India than it does with other Southeast Asian countries. Gonzalez has argued for some time now (Gonzalez 1991, 1993) that the choice of a national language has been divisive rather than unitive. Unlike the other three countries discussed where there has been broad acceptance of the national language and English, in the Philippines, while English has a role as a language of wider communication, the role of the national language and vernacular languages has
caused some tension. This must give rise to greater language planning problems than are faced in the other countries.

The language question in the Philippines appears to be as much about the role of Filipino as it is about English. The fear seems to be that Filipino is not being supported and could become marginalized. Despite official support for Filipino, actual progress in its promotion seems to be lacking. As Gonzalez reports:

In the Philippines, there is unfortunately a tendency to make fine plans and projects for implementing, perhaps a subconscious belief that once paper plans are formulated, implementation eventually follows. The reality is different. (Gonzalez 1996:213)

Another notable difference between the Philippines and the other three countries is the role played by the Philippines Overseas Employment Agency and the official encouragement of Filipinos to take on employment abroad as Overseas Filipino Workers. Such workers, and they are employed in all manner of technical, professional, health and management work, are assumed to be familiar with English. Throughout the rest of Asia, where many of these workers are employed, Filipino workers can be found in English-speaking domains, thus giving the impression that all Filipinos must be good English speakers.

Like Brunei, Singapore, and Malaysia, there is an assured role for English in the Philippines together with the country's national and, to some extent, regional languages. Like the other Southeast Asian nations this need is principally an instrumental one. And like the other countries there is a wide range of ability in how well the language is understood and used. The following section examines some of the similarities.

2. Language Similarities among Brunei, Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines

2.1. Social Elite

Common to all four countries is that knowledge of English brings with it economic advantage. Elite groups have always realized this and in each of the four countries, often now for generations, the elite has ensured that their own children have a good command of English. Indeed, English may be the only language that their children know, especially if these children are sent overseas for their education in English-speaking countries.

Although there is a social disadvantage in not knowing the national language, many families obviously feel that this is of little consequence: Their social circle is English-speaking and they may not have a need, or a desire, to communicate outside this circle. While such families have to face the cultural loss of not knowing their own national language there is the economic advantage of not only knowing English, but knowing it well, using it regularly and being proficient in its use. Most Southeast Asian children only have exposure to English at school, especially those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. For such children English really is a foreign language and one, due to the lack of opportunity to practice using it, that often remains so.

The apparent disregard for national languages among some members of the elite is perhaps indicative of a wider skepticism of the use of national languages. Back in 1979 Gonzalez drew attention to “language welfare indicators”. What he discovered was a lack of significant correlation between the state of the national language and socio-economic development, but a significant correlation between literacy and socio-economic development (Gonzalez 1979). Clearly an individual would not be economically advantaged if this literacy was developed solely in the national language, thus assuming that it is becoming literate in the language of wider communication that matters as far as socio-economic development is concerned.
The comparative economic advantage that elite groups have enjoyed in the past through access to English is now, however, being eroded. In the not too distant past access to English was limited to a few. Today, however, through universal schooling, the language is available to virtually everyone (although obviously not on an equal footing). This universal teaching removes the language’s exclusivity. While in the past access to the language almost guaranteed material benefit, today this is no longer the case. It is still true that good communication skills, particularly in English, are in demand from employers, but it must also be realized that as more and more people become proficient in English so this particular skill will be assumed and on its own will not guarantee any sort of job security. In economic terms, the marginal benefit of knowing English is decreasing.

2.2. Planning

Deciding which languages should be taught in schools is both a political and economic question. Discussion of language inevitably involves the question of cultural and national identity and therefore a national language (regardless of whether it is nationally known and used) must for political reasons be included on any agenda. The language of wider communication, in this case English, is included for economic reasons and often only after overt pressure from industry (cf. Malaysia).

Although more than one language has been introduced in the education system of each of the four countries in question there is very little equality between the languages themselves. While Malay has many speakers and is widely used throughout Malaysia, Indonesia, and Brunei the same is not true of Filipino, which does not appear to have been completely accepted even by all Filipinos. These languages find themselves competing with English, a language that is truly global and one that has enormous clout in terms of its use, usefulness, and prestige. Although everything should be done to ensure a place for all of a nation’s languages at the table, the reality is that there is a lot of competition between languages and the battle between the various national languages and English is an unequal one.

In terms of their standardization, intellectualization, and, to a lesser extent, modernization, the national languages of Southeast Asia are in a permanent state of having to play catch-up with English. To a great extent the situation has been exacerbated by the revolution in communication. It is now just as easy to communicate with someone on the other side of the world as it is with someone in the next town. As a result the need and use for regional and national languages has diminished. As experience in the European community has shown, insistence on translating and interpreting a large number of languages is a huge and costly encumbrance: It is only national pride that prevents a wholesale switch to English for official transactions. (But of course, pride in one’s nation and language is an important part of statehood and is very difficult to quantify economically.)

There is no obvious solution to this problem of language inequality. Possibly there does not have to be. It may be sufficient for a language to play a symbolic rather than an actual role in the affairs of a nation. Malay is the national language of Singapore, but its actual use is largely restricted to the minority Malay community. Gonzalez has noted that Filipino is a symbol of unity and linguistic identity (Gonzalez 1998:520), which is not the same as saying that it should be used in the sciences or in technology. It can, but these are domains, and they are obviously not the only ones, in which it is probably always going to be at a disadvantage compared with English. I would not like to suggest that the drive to intellectualize the language be conceded, rather that there is little point in trying to compete head-on with a language that is already so well developed in this domain and whose dominance is likely to continue to be enhanced rather than diminished.
2.3. Classrooms

It is schools and the classroom teacher that bear the brunt of actually implementing language policy. The decision to implement such a policy may be determined by the needs of industry and made by politicians, but it is school teachers that actually have to implement policy. It is a huge responsibility and one faced every day by the teachers in Brunei, Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines. A perennial problem, and one regularly written about in the press, is that of perceived deteriorating educational standards, particularly English language standards. Even in Singapore the apparent erosion of English language standards has recently made headline news (Straits Times, October 29, 1999). There is particular concern in Singapore that while Singlish is increasingly understood and used Standard English is not. Certainly in Brunei there is concern about the quality and quantity of newly recruited teachers. As a small country it has always suffered a chronic shortage of local teachers and it is now trying to train as many of its own teachers as possible. The concern is that in trying to do this quickly quality might suffer. Malaysia’s English language teaching standards suffered as a result of the years when the language was little used in education, thus diminishing the pool from which potential teachers could be drawn. In the Philippines Gonzalez (1996:214) has noted that “the quality of recruits and teachers of certain age brackets leaves much to be desired”.

What is certainly happening in the classrooms is that pupils are behaving in a way that is perfectly natural for bilinguals. They are mixing their languages. In both the Philippines and Brunei it has been observed that it is something of a misnomer to describe lessons as “English-medium”. What actually takes place is code-switching. This has been observed by Baetens Beardsmore (1998) and Martin (1997) in Brunei and by Sibayan (1982) in the Philippines. It is only natural for bilinguals to code-switch, thus it could be argued that code-switching in class merely reflects what happens in the real world. However, with so few other occasions to actually use the target language classroom code-switching can be pernicious. Martin (1997) has estimated that Bruneian school children may actually speak only four hours of English in school over a whole year.

A further potential problem once code-switching becomes established is that a new non-standard variety of English might emerge, as has happened with Singlish. While there may be some pride in having a kind of English that is obviously a national variety such a language is clearly of little use when the avowed aim of education is to teach a language of wider communication. Educated speakers who know both the local and standard variety of English are in a privileged position; those who know only the local variety are almost as disadvantaged as those who know no variety at all. Gonzalez fears that a Philippine-English pidgin and subsequently a creole could emerge in the Philippines (Gonzalez 1998:519) in much the same way that Chabacano developed from a Philippine-Hispanic pidgin.

There has been discussion about Brunei English and Manglish (Malay and English). For the most part the examples of borrowings from Malay, together with Malay and Chinese structure used in English sentences, is a source of some amusement. An obvious local and simplified variety of English is present in both Brunei and Malaysia, but its presence has not yet caused any concern. Given that as in Singapore and the Philippines it is proficiency in standard English that the education systems of both countries wish to achieve, then perhaps more attention should be given to the emergence of local varieties of English in these two countries.

3. Conclusion

The Southeast Asian region has experienced two recent language revolutions: the swing away from the old colonial languages followed by the internationalism and re-emergence of English. Now a third change is underway, and this is the official sanctioning of bilingualism. There has to be room in all the countries of Southeast Asia for the national languages plus English
in its role as a language of wider communication. Failure to achieve competency in both seriously restricts career opportunities for the individual and ultimately the political, commercial, and industrial ambitions of the state. Throughout Southeast Asia, at both the national and international level, there is a growing awareness of the need to have access to two languages.

Assuming and prescribing a role for more than one language within a society, and then trying to introduce a school system that matches these requirements, does not necessarily mean that the languages will be properly acquired. Establishing the necessary school courses, preparing both teachers and textbooks takes time. Gonzalez (1996:215) suggests "... a decade time frame is too short ... The length differs from one sociolinguistic situation to another, but I am more and more convinced that a generation of 40 years is a minimum".

From my own comparatively limited experience in Brunei I would have to concur with Gonzalez. Unfortunately politicians and industrialists generally want instant results and in education these simply cannot be achieved. Thus complaints about standards, the efficiency of teachers and school systems continue. A danger lies in changing policies before sufficient time has been allowed to let a system settle and properly establish itself (as suggested, 40 years). Perseverance is needed. The benefits for doing so are neatly summarized by Gonzalez (1996: 217-218):

A creative bilingual scheme planner will exploit the full educational possibilities of the bilingual education scheme through the use of the first language for efficient basic and functional literacy especially in the field of survival science and civics and then building on the skills attained in the first language to aim for the highest cognitive and linguistic skills in the second language by challenging the learner to use his L1, transfer the well-learned skills from L1 to L2 in the scheme, and once having attained CALP skills in both languages, move from the first to the second language for mutual help through selective exploitation of the resources and possibilities of the two codes.

To attain the sort of skills described above will mean, in Brunei at least (although I think that Brunei’s experiences will be similar to the rest of ASEAN), a certain amount of fine tuning to teacher education and curriculum design. We are discovering a lot more about the interplay of language and how bilingualism and biliteracy can be achieved and it is clearly important that we continue to develop this knowledge for both the economic and cultural well-being of all the world’s nations. Today we communicate with each other and across the planet in ways that would have been unimaginable 100 years ago. We are far more familiar with each other’s cultures but I do not think that any of us want to be subsumed into one common culture. While being able to communicate across national boundaries we still wish to retain our own national identities and idiosyncracies. Bilingualism, if not multilingualism, should enable us to achieve this.

The immediate future for bilingual education is a particularly exciting one. For a collection such as this it seems only pertinent to conclude with a thought from Gonzalez:

Still waiting to be explored systematically and opening a new door of research into as yet unexamined realities are the classroom practices among bilinguals which can create synergy in learning and higher order skills through the systematic exploitation of their expanded use in tandem to effect better learning, so that the sum is greater than its parts. This is our agenda, it seems to me, not only among students in classrooms in the Philippines learning under a bilingual education scheme but among bilinguals everywhere in ASEAN and Asia. (Gonzalez 1996:218)
References


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