

## Language Policy and Planning: Understanding UKM's Past, Present and Future Concerns and Responses

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### ABSTRAK

*Baru-baru ini Malaysia melaksanakan satu perubahan yang drastik berkaitan dasar bahasanya. Dalam system pendidikan terdapat satu anjakan dari segi penggunaan bahasa pengantar daripada bahasa Melayu kepada bahasa Inggeris dalam bidang sains dan teknologi. Dalam tempoh 30 tahun yang lepas tidak sedikit sumber yang telah ditumpukan kepada perancangan korpus dan status bahasa Melayu supaya bahasa tersebut dapat berkembang dan digunakan sebagai bahasa saintifik dan teknologi. Berdasarkan situasi ini, perubahan yang berlaku baru-baru ini dari segi dasar berkaitan bahasa Inggeris telah membangkitkan pelbagai respons dan reaksi, terutama di Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), yang telah memainkan peranan utama dalam pengembangan dan pemodenan bahasa Melayu sebagai bahasa sains. Perubahan yang berlaku ini telah digerakkan oleh faktor-faktor ekonomi dan sains dan teknologi. Faktor-faktor ini telah menimbulkan satu keperluan yang mendesak untuk sumber manusia yang memiliki keupayaan untuk terus memperolehi pengetahuan terkini dalam bidang sains dan teknologi, yang sebahagian besarnya terdapat dalam bahasa Inggeris. Dalam konteks ini tumpuan makalah ini ialah memahami respons dan kekhawatiran UKM berkaitan perubahan besar ini. Hal ini akan pula diatur seiring (juxtaposed) dengan sejarah universiti dan faktor-faktor sosial, ekonomi dan politik yang lebih luas dan yang telah memulakan anjakan yang berlaku dari segi bahasa pengantar yang digunakan untuk disiplin sains dan teknologi itu.*

### ABSTRACT

*Malaysia has recently faced a drastic change in language policy. This has been a shift from Bahasa Melayu to English for the fields of science and technology in the educational system. Over the past period of thirty years, huge resources have been devoted to both status and corpus planning for Bahasa Melayu to develop and be used as a scientific and technological language. Given this situation, the recent change in policy to English has been evoked varying responses and reactions, especially at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), which has played a major role in the development and modernization of Bahasa Melayu as a language of science. The present change has been driven by economic factors and the science and technology. This has resulted in an urgent*

*need for human resource with the ability to keep up with knowledge acquisition in the field of science and technology, which is predominantly in English. Given this context, the concern of this paper will be to understand UKM's responses and concerns regarding this major change. This will be juxtaposed against the history of the university and the wider social, economic and political factors that have spearheaded the recent shift in the medium of instruction for the disciplines of science and technology.*

## INTRODUCTION

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia's (henceforth referred to as UKM in this paper) history and relationship with language policy and planning over the years provides a relevant case study of the dichotomy that exists between the needs of nationalism and tradition, and the demands of change stimulated by internationalization that many nations all over the world are facing. Of all the public universities that have been set up in Malaysia, UKM because of its history and the *raison d'être* for its existence, is the one university more than any other that has worked tirelessly towards the use, development and modernization of Bahasa Melayu as a language of knowledge and education.

Presently, forces of internationalization have led to a drastic change in the medium of instruction, from Bahasa Melayu to English, for the disciplines of science and technology. This has been a top-down directive and various public universities have approached it differently. The concern of this paper will be to understand UKM's responses and concerns regarding: this major change. This will be juxtaposed against the history of the university and the wider social, economic and political factors that have spearheaded the recent shift in the medium of instruction for the disciplines of science and technology.

At this early stage, it will be important to clarify the approach of the use of the terms language policy and planning. The approach taken in this paper adopts one taken by Ho and Wong (2000) where language policy making and language-in-education planning are dealt with as two interrelated activities. In explaining these terms, they quote Halliday (1990) who defines the terms as, "formulating policies, getting them adopted and making provision – primarily educational provision – for ensuring that they are carried out (Ho & Wong, 2000:1). There are other definitions that stipulate that language policy refers to laws pertaining to the use of languages which are drafted and implemented in a language community (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997:3). Given this, it needs to be clarified that in this Malaysian case, even though no laws have been drafted for the change in the Education Act to incorporate this change in medium of instruction in the education system, it is still language policy planning and language in education in action. This is because in terms of planning and implementation of change in language policy, the Government has played an integral role and the process

has begun in the education system even though there has been no change in legislation.

Before I continue, allow me at this stage to interject a personal message. I am a proud Malaysian of Punjabi-Sikh ancestry. I have worked at UKM for over thirty years, and I am presently a professor specializing in sociolinguistics and international communication. I hold this university very dear to my heart and all issues and concerns that affect the dominant ethnic group that make up the majority of the academic personnel in this university are also issues that concern me. I write this paper with an awareness of the need for sensitivity and neutrality required in examining language policy in the challenging context of the interplay between nationalism, modernization and internationalization.

### THE HISTORY LEADING TO THE BIRTH OF UNIVERSITI KEBANGSAAN MALAYSIA

The seed and germination of the idea to have a national university that uses Bahasa Melayu as the language of education was sown as far back as the 1920's and 1930's. In 1923, Abdul Kadir Abadi, a famous writer from Kelantan, wrote a memorandum to the then royal ruler requesting for the set up of a university that uses Bahasa Melayu as the medium of instruction. This was to provide an opportunity to improve the level of education of the Malays, the majority of who were educated in the Malay medium schools. Unfortunately because of political and administrative priorities, "this proposed plan drowned in the colonial British educational policy. This was not followed up by any concrete measures to implement this dream (translated from Mohd. Ali Kamarudin, 1981:80). The lack of support at the administrative level did not dampen the spirit of the Malays in wanting to develop a national university. In fact, if anything it kindled the fire even more as the Malays realized the importance of education as a tool to develop their own race (translated from Mohd. Ali Kamarudin, 1981:82).

In the subsequent years, Mohd Ali Kamarudin traces the continuing struggles of the Malay community represented largely by members of the Kesatuan Persekutuan Guru-Guru Melayu Semenanjung (KPGMS) or National Association of Malay Teachers in pushing for the establishment of the national university. The following expresses the outpouring of their frustrations over inaction of this strong national desire:

Why should the date for the set up of the national university be classified? Why should they be secretive about it? Why should they not reveal the exact date if the national university is really what they want? Isn't it better to inform the public who have been waiting eagerly for the decision and for action from the government?

(Fadzil Hamzah cited in Mohd Ali Kamarudin 1981:157 & 158)

The frustrations are more clearly understood when juxtaposed against the fact that English was already then the language of economic opportunity and social mobility. As Asmah explained, ... the introduction of English created two classes of people based on education - those educated in English (i.e., predominantly Chinese, urban Indians and Malay elites) with the connotation of high education, high office and socioeconomic power and those educated only in the vernacular languages (i.e. commoner Malays and labouring Chinese and Indians) with the connotation of peasantry, cheap labour and petty trading. (Asmah Haji Omar, 1995:159 cited in Kaplan and Baldauf, 1997: 197).

To rectify this social and economic imbalance, the Malays felt strongly that the institution of Bahasa Melayu as the national language, its legislation as official language and its development as language of knowledge was necessary to provide it with educational and administrative capital that would lead to its development as a language of higher status. Therefore, having mastery of this language would provide the Malays with linguistic capital with greater value for economic opportunity which would then lead to social and professional mobility. Through the landmark recommendation of the Razak Education Commission in 1956, the Government implemented the National Education Policy, which stipulated Bahasa Melayu as the medium of instruction in schools (Report of the Education Committee, 1956: 4). The aim of this policy was to remove the identification of a particular ethnic group with school achievement and reduce the inequality of opportunity among ethnic groups.

Having legislated Bahasa as the national and official language for the domains of education and administration, over time, the Malays started to feel frustrated to see their language, which was such a strong symbol of national and ethnic identity, progressing at a very slow pace with regards its implementation in the education sector, particularly in the field of higher education. This was reflected in the conversion of the oldest university in Malaysia – the University of Malaya. The conversion began in 1965 and as an interim measure a bilingual system was adopted – Bahasa Melayu for the Arts subjects and the English-medium for the science and technology subjects. Gradually, the bilingual system became a completely monolingual system, using only Bahasa Melayu. It was only in 1983, after eighteen years, were all subjects including the sciences conducted in Bahasa Melayu in all public universities (Gill, 2004: 142).

During the early period of these eighteen years of the slow implementation of Bahasa Melayu as language of education, the language issue became an explosive one in this multilingual society. This, together with the socio-economic inequity felt most strongly by the dominant ethnic group, culminated in a black mark in Malaysia's history on May 13, 1969, the one and only time when racial riots took place (A Report by The National Operations Council, 1969). Tengku Abdul Rahman, the father and first Prime Minister of Malaysia, expressed the shock felt by the nation when he said,

The whole nation suffered a profound shock, shaken to its very core, to such an extent that we can still quiver at the thought of what happened. ... May 13<sup>th</sup>, 1969, was certainly a social and political eruption of the first magnitude.

(Tengku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj 1969:7)

After the racial riots in 1969, ... there was a strict and rapid implementation of a national language policy, based on the belief that, if the status of the Malay language was not upgraded, the political and economic status of Malays would never improve and national cohesion would not be achieved (Gaudart, Omar & Ozog cited in Kaplan & Baldauff 1997: 197). One of the main outcomes of this frustration, post 1969, was a memorandum that was sent to the government regarding the establishment of a public university that solely uses Bahasa Melayu as the medium of instruction. This led to the birth of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia in 1970. The name of the university translates as the “National University of Malaysia.” Of the numerous public universities in Malaysia, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia has a history steeped in political and nationalistic concerns. This is reflected in their mission which expresses its aim:

To be a premier university that affirms and promotes the value of the Malay language while globalising knowledge within the framework of the national culture.

(<http://www.ukm.my/english/info.htm#Vision>)

In these present turbulent times, UKM spearheaded by the Centre for Academic Advancement saw it essential to draw up a Strategic Plan for future direction for the period 2000 – 2020 – the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The mission statement still holds steadfast to its original mission stated above. The main agenda remains faithful to the generation of knowledge in the context of a global economy as well as the nurturing of Bahasa Melayu as an intellectual language at the national and international level (*Pelan Strategik 2000-2020*, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia 2000).

An analysis of the semantics of the mission statement reveals the nationalistic strength with which the linguistic aspirations were held by the Malay intellectuals. The verb associated with Bahasa Melayu is “mendaulatkan Bahasa Melayu.” The verb “mendaulatkan” is normally only used in relation to royalty. In Malay culture, and in the nation, the King is held with the highest regard. In the hierarchy, at the pinnacle of the highest order is God, followed by the Prophet and then followed by the King. Therefore, the use of the verb “mendaulatkan” which is usually only associated with the king, has been used to regalise and stress the sacredness with which the language is viewed. This portrays the strength of the feelings the Malay intellectuals had towards the language and the mission of the university.

A crucial element in the success factor of the implementation of the language as language of knowledge was the need for published / translated materials in the native language. Gonzalez depicts this by arguing in the Philippines context that until a language has been intellectualized or cultivated, which is best done

at the tertiary level in universities, school based programmes can only reach a limited plateau. (Gonzalez cited in Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997: 200) Therefore, in the same light, for Bahasa Melayu to be taken seriously as an intellectual language and to truly gain educational capital, it needed to be modernised as well as academics needed to be encouraged to write / translate specialized knowledge in the native language. Therefore, given the various challenges, the first thing that needed to be done was to modernise the language.

### THE MODERNISATION OF BAHASA MELAYU: PROCESS AND RESOURCES

To appreciate the challenges Bahasa Melayu faced in this process of modernisation, it will be appropriate to refer to the history of the language to assess the spheres in which it most commonly developed and grew. Like so many other languages in Asia, it had up to the nineteenth century, a ... cognitive system ... associated with a traditional culture, substantially agrarian based, resting on feudal foundations (Tham, 1990: xvi). Therefore, for language development to progress, in 1959, two years after independence was achieved, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (henceforth referred to as DBP) was developed as a statutory body vested with the authority to carry out the following functions:

1. to develop and enrich the national language
2. to promote literary growth and creative talents
3. to publish books in the national language

(Hassan Ahmad 1988: 33)

In line with linguistic modernisation, two major language development activities were carried out by DBP: corpus planning and promotion of the social status or role of Bahasa Melayu (Hassan Ahmad 1988: 32&33). One of the more well known activities was "The General Formula for the Coining of Terminology in Bahasa Malaysia." The authorities responsible for the development of the national language had to come up with the difficult task of forming scientific and technological terms in Malay because such terms were non-existent in the Malay language. The government appointed a team of Malaysian and Indonesian language planners and academicians, including scientists who held a total of 6 joint meetings over a period of 16 years from 1972 to 1988 to pursue this activity (Hassan Ahmad 1988: 38). This was considered one of the most significant achievements in language planning in the region.

This provides a picture of the strength of government support in modernising the language in the post-independence period. This was a phase, which not only Malaysia experienced, but that many other post-colonial nations went through. It was very much more challenging for nations which did not have a scientific tradition. In Asia, these incorporate countries that have had a post-

colonial history like Sri Lanka, which used Sinhalese and the Philippines which used Tagalog.

For these countries to attempt to begin with the process of modernisation and to maintain it required crucial political support because it required tremendous resources for the various measures to be implemented. To provide you with an idea of the resources that were used in Malaysia, the following figures were taken from the Malaysian Educational Statistics 2000. What were available from the statistics were figures from the years 1991-2000. In these nine years, RM38 million was spent on Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka to modernize and enhance the role and status of Bahasa Melayu, and we do not have the budget figures for the other 34 years of its existence, from 1959 to 1990 and 2001-2003 (Gill 2004).

I shall now fast forward the scenario to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. After forty years of the legislation and implementation of Bahasa Melayu in the education system, and all the efforts at modernizing it, in stark contrast, the year 2002, signals a drastic shift in the medium of instruction from Bahasa Melayu to English for the fields of science and technology.

#### DRASTIC CHANGE IN MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

Before we discuss this change made in the year 2002, attention should be drawn to the fact that this was not the first attempt at change. Almost ten years ago, in 1993, the first attempt to re-institute English as the medium of instruction, for science and technology, was made by the former Prime Minister, Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamed. As a result of the strong nationalistic feelings that existed and still do unabated within the context of UKM, the subsequent reaction of the academic intellectuals in the university to the attempt in 1993 was ferocious. They did not support the attempt at language policy change and openly expressed their opposition to it. At that period of time, Malay intellectuals possessed strong political clout and as a result, the policy change was not instituted. This episode and the reactions and responses to it are traced and discussed in detail in Gill (2002: 110-113).

Since that episode in 1993, education in Bahasa at the tertiary levels continued in an uninterrupted secure fashion in the subsequent years. It was almost ten years later, on the 11<sup>th</sup> May 2002, that again a drastic and sudden change in the medium of instruction was announced in the mass media. This was the “tsunami” of destruction where language policy was concerned in the eyes of Malay intellectuals – where English replaced Bahasa Melayu as the language of education in the field of science and technology.

It was a top-down decision and the Government had gone ahead and implemented the policy change at school level in a staggered fashion. It began with the Primary One, (which is the first year at primary level), Secondary

Form One (which is the first year at secondary level) and Lower Six (which is equivalent to the first year of the 'O-levels') (Chok Suat Ling 2002, July 21:1). This took place within a swift period of six months from the timing of the announcement to its implementation in the school system. This meant that public universities which have developed and used Bahasa Melayu as the language of knowledge all these years will now have to prepare themselves for 2005 when the first cohort of students who would have studied in the English medium for science and mathematics subjects in the school system would enter the public universities as undergraduates.

Given that it is now 2005, a good ten years after the first attempt at language shift, it will be valuable to find out what the attitudes and responses are of the lecturers in UKM to this drastic change in the medium of instruction for science and technology at the tertiary level. This is being investigated as part of an ongoing two year (October 2003 – October 2005) IRPA research project funded by the Malaysian Government. The title of the research project is Language Policy and Planning in Higher Education in Malaysia: Responding to the Needs of the Knowledge Economy (Gill, Hazita, Norizan and Fadhil: 2003-2005).

The second phase of this research focuses on giving the lecturers, of all the nine public universities, a voice as to their attitudes and feelings re: this drastic change in medium of instruction. This was important because lecturers are the crucial agents on the ground and their attitudes and what they do and do not do in their pedagogical practices can either make or break the success of the implementation of change in medium of instruction. At UKM, 127 lecturers responded to the questionnaire. As this paper is being written, we are awaiting the responses from the other public universities.

#### ATTITUDE TO CHANGE IN MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION: THE UKM RESPONSE

The focus for this paper will be on one of the main questions which deals with obtaining their views on the change in the medium of instruction for science and mathematics:

In 2003, the Ministry of Education, Malaysia, reintroduced the English language as the medium of instruction for science and mathematics in the education system. Do you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree with this change?

71.8 % - Disagreed 28.2% - Agreed

This finding depicts the dichotomy that exists between governmental and national aspirations and that of the implementers on the ground. Given the history of UKM, this is not surprising and is revealing in that it depicts the strength of



emotions felt by academics regarding the change in language policy (Gill, et al. 2004).

This then raised questions which have concerned many of us: Why after all these efforts all these years where Bahasa Melayu has been used as the medium of instruction has there been such a drastic change in language policy? Why has there been a top-down decision made with no discussions with the universities at large?

As was discussed earlier, the first attempt at change was in 1993, but because the political climate did not really provide support for this attempt, it was not sustained. Almost ten years later, in January 2002, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia had approximately one and a half years left of his tenure in office. In contrast to the earlier attempt, during this latter period, the main Malay political party (UMNO) had greater strength and was more united. The past political divide amongst the Malays had been overcome and the majority of them supported the ruling Malay political party.

This provided the much-needed support to institute a change as important and politically charged as this. However, there must have been reasons for the Prime Minister to have made such a drastic change in such a short span of time. For a man who had led this country for the past 22 years and taken it to such high levels of development, Tun Dr. Mahathir was not about to make decisions that would jeopardize its future. He must have had strong reasons to initiate and implement such a change. This therefore takes us to the second half of the paper that aims to unravel the factors that have influenced this language policy change.

As we pursue this, it must be borne in mind that any examination of language policy should be discussed via the complex macro issues of political, science and technology ideology and economic considerations (Schiffman 1996; Kaplan & Baldauf 1997; Martel 2001; Spolsky 2004; Gill 2004). Language is always a central factor in this equation but “linguicism alone” (a term coined by Spolsky to mean language-centred) imposes limited vision. Therefore, this area, ... needs to be looked at in the widest context and not treated as a closed universe (Spolsky 2004: x).

It is becoming increasingly difficult for any institution of higher learning to ignore the winds of change that are blowing all around us. The quote by Albert Einstein, widely regarded as the greatest scientist of the 20th century, expresses in essence the flexibility and adaptability that we need to adopt to face the varying challenges of this century ... There is only one constant in this universe, and that constant is ... change (cited from “Why Change” [http://www.synco.com/why\\_chng.html](http://www.synco.com/why_chng.html)) This has now become the mantra in various contexts ranging from business and industry to education.

## UNRAVELING FACTORS IMPACTING THE CHANGE IN LANGUAGE POLICY

The focus on the second part of the paper will be on the socioeconomic factors and the science and technology ideology that underlie Malaysia's aspirations to be an industrialized nation by 2020. What are the implications of these factors for human resource development? How does this impact on institutions of higher learning? Whilst all of these concerns are taking place, the winds of change blow the need to be aware of the challenges of the internationalization of education, and its impact on higher education. All of these aspects will provide the context for unraveling the factors that have led to this drastic change in language policy and planning.

### INDUSTRIALIZATION AND THE KNOWLEDGE-BASED ECONOMY: IMPACT ON TERTIARY EDUCATION AND HUMAN RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

In the master plan for the knowledge-based economy, it is expressed in no uncertain terms that ... The battle for a shrinking pool of FDI (foreign direct investment) world-wide is intensifying and Malaysia's competitiveness and low labour costs are eroding fast (Knowledge-Based Economy: Master Plan 2002:iii). FDIs are crucial for a country's economy because they are an important source of capital for developing countries. Given this situation, one of the ways in which Malaysia needs to compete to remain one of the most dynamic, productive and fastest growing economies in the world is by undertaking a strategic initiative to develop into a knowledge-based economy or K- economy (Knowledge-Based Economy: Master Plan 2002:iii).

In the Malaysian context this is defined as ... an economy in which knowledge, creativity and innovation play an ever-increasing and important role in generating and sustaining growth. In a K-economy, educated and skilled human resources, or human capital is the most valuable asset (Knowledge-Based Economy: Master Plan, 2002: iii). Therefore, ... the shift from a poor K-economy workforce to a world-class K-economy workforce has to be rapid and dramatic. There is little time to lose ... (Report on the National Brains Trust on Education, 2002:1).

Therefore, in this environment it is crucial to have human resource that can contribute to innovation and creativity in the field of science and technology because it is this field that will fuel the economy of the nation. Universities, as the powerhouses of intellectual knowledge, are integral for the development of human resource that are both educated and skilled. As such, in our nation's aspirations to meet the challenges of the new millennium tertiary institutions play a crucial role.

In the year 2000, only 14 percent of the labour force in Malaysia possessed tertiary education qualifications and this will have to be significantly increased

in order to meet the needs of a knowledge-based economy. To help achieve this, the Ministry of Education has targeted 40 percent of the 17-23 age cohort in tertiary education by 2010 (8<sup>th</sup> *Malaysia Plan* 2001a:23).

While public universities have been doing an excellent job of contributing to the human resource development of the nation, they will find it difficult to drastically increase the number of students without over-extending their existing services and facilities. Therefore, this has led to a consideration of encouraging the private industry to provide for tertiary education to meet with national human resource needs. Apart from the need to increase the number of Malaysian students, there were a number of other factors that have resulted in the opening of the doors to the private sector to participate in the tertiary educational sector.

The next reason was spurred by the Asian economic crisis in 1997 and 1998. ... The rapid movement of speculative funds across borders paralysed a number of economies and caused untold harm ... (Hng 2004: 145). This crisis resulted in a tremendous increase in the outflow of funds from the country to which the educational sector contributed significantly. ... Up to RM2 billion flows out of the country annually when Malaysian students study abroad (June Ramli 2004:9). Therefore, there was a need to encourage Malaysian students to study locally and to save on foreign exchange. To encourage local students to study in Malaysia and thus save on foreign exchange meant that more tertiary seats would have to be made available and again for this the private sector had the means to provide the opportunities.

## ATTRACTING FOREIGN STUDENTS

The internationalization of education and the increasing importance of strengthening the economy via the higher education sector also led to the doors being opened for entry of the private sector. These challenges are not exclusive to Malaysia, but extend to many other countries. These concerns are also being examined in the European context as well. The publication, *Internationalisation of Higher Education*, edited by Bernd Wachter and which was spurred by a request from the International Association of University Presidents (IAUP) signals the seriousness with which Europe is viewing the internationalizing of education and the impact on tertiary education. The opening chapter of the publication, *Internationalisation in Higher Education* explains clearly the European concerns. It says,

Compared to most other institutions of society, and in some countries more than in others, higher education institutions have long enjoyed a privileged status of self-sufficiency. .... In recent years, however, the trend towards a genuine higher education market, with strong elements of competition, has started to affect more and more higher education systems. Given limited and in many cases reduced state funding for higher

education, and given the need to find alternative sources of income, this trend towards a higher education market is likely to ... move economic considerations still higher up the agenda and challenge academic aims and traditions.

(Wachter, Ollikainen & Hasewend 1999:18)

As a result of the above trend, universities in Europe are working towards increasing their income base. One of the main ways in which this is being carried out is by attracting foreign students to study in their universities. The following figures from the Organisation for European Cooperation and Development (OECD) provide an idea of the extent of the economic pie that we are dealing with globally. OECD had estimated the value of the international student market at US\$30 billion (RM14 billion) in 2000. The US accounted for 40 percent of this pie, with the UK claiming 25 percent.

Therefore, it was also necessary to attract foreign students to tertiary institutions in Malaysia. Given that the public universities serve a strong social function in providing educational opportunities to Malaysians at rates heavily subsidized by the government, public universities are only allowed to take in only five percent of foreign students for the science and technology streams and 25 percent for the social sciences and humanities. Therefore, the government needed to allow for the set up of private tertiary education to be able to attract foreign students who would contribute not only economically to the respective private institutions, but also the nation. As the Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Datuk Fu Ah Kiow said, ... Malaysia, even with 50,000 students will be nibbling at the crust with just one percent (2004:15). This is a small amount compared to other more advanced countries, but this is the target for the year 2005 and it will still be a start. Both these moves of attracting and convincing local students as well as foreign students to study in Malaysia would assist in dramatically reducing the country's annual current deficit (See Tan Ai Mei 2002; Yahya Ibrahim 2001). The government wants to stop the flow by getting top-notch universities to establish campuses here (Effendi Norwawi cited in June Ramli 2004:9). This is all part of the plan to establish Malaysia as the regional centre of education.

It must be emphasized here that the benefits of the liberalization of education are not only economic. The internationalization of human resource is an added-on advantage. With the subsequent exposure and interaction of the quilt of cultures from various lands, Malaysian human resource would be enriched not only nationally but even more important internationally. To be able to do this, that is to establish the transnational mode of education with institutions of higher learning from other countries and establishing twinning arrangements with local partners, has led to urgent moves by the Government to reactivate educational reforms in order to provide the flexibility needed for the private sector to participate in tertiary education. The Ministry of Education pushed through six pieces of legislation to provide for this flexibility and to position Malaysia as a regional education hub. This meant that foreign universities could set up offshore

branches in Malaysia and local colleges could develop educational partnerships with foreign universities. At the same time, corporations were given the mandate to establish private universities (*New Straits Times* 23<sup>rd</sup> Aug, 2004: 2, cited in Tan 2002).

There are now a total of ten private universities established after the 1997-98 economic crisis. These range from engineering universities set up by the three public utility corporations, Telekom (the National Telecommunications Company), Tenaga Nasional (the National Electricity Board) and Petronas (the National Petroleum Company) to three branch campuses of foreign universities, Monash University and Curtin University from Australia and Nottingham University from the United Kingdom (see Tan 2002).

#### MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN PRIVATE INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

With educational reforms having to be drawn up to facilitate the set up of private universities, an important consideration in all of this was the medium of instruction to be used. This has been extensively discussed in Gill (2004:146) and will be summarized here. In order to provide private institutions of higher learning with the freedom to use English as the medium of instruction, the government had to ensure that it was implemented via educational legislation. Therefore, the 1996 Private Higher Education Institutions Act was introduced to allow for the use of English in courses that were provided through twinning arrangements with overseas institutions as well as offshore campuses. To ensure that Bahasa Melayu is not sidelined by the English language, the legislation stipulates that the national language is a compulsory subject in the private educational institutions.

After approximately fifteen years, the private sector education industry has developed extensively and now has a student population of 203,391 for the period 1999-2000, increasing to 232,069 by May 2001. Enrolment at public universities was 167,507 in 1999-2000. These numbers reflect the increasing demand for places in private higher education institutions as opposed to public universities (MAPCO 2001, November). Although this development might be healthy for the nation and its need of an increase in the tertiary educated human resource, it has had a major impact on the public universities.

#### IMPACT OF PRIVATE TERTIARY EDUCATION ON PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES

The first challenge resulted from the fact that the two systems of education in the country – the private and the public – use different languages as the medium

of instruction. The former uses English as the medium of instruction whilst the latter uses Bahasa Melayu. This bifurcation of higher education has serious social and political consequences, as explained below:

First, private universities are more expensive than public universities, which are heavily subsidized by the government. This means that students enrolled in private universities are usually from middle-class families, whereas those from working-class families can only afford to enroll in public universities. Second, the majority of the students in the public universities are Malays, whereas the majority of the students in the private universities are Chinese. As a result, undergraduates are divided not only along socioeconomic lines but also among ethnic lines (Gill 2004: 147).

Compared with their counterparts in the private universities, graduates of public universities are disadvantaged when seeking employment in the private sector because of their weaker English competence, although they are doing well in the government sector where Bahasa Melayu is largely used. The linguistic disadvantage facing graduates from public universities manifests itself in the large numbers (approximately 44,000) who are not able to obtain jobs in the private sector. Datuk Mustapha Mohamed, the executive director of the government sponsored National Economic Action Council, articulates the reasons for this problem when he says:

This is basically a Malay problem as 94% of those registered with the Government are (Malays) (Chinese constitute 3.7% and Indians 1.6%). It has to do with the courses taken, and ... also their poor performances in, and command of the English language (Mohamed 2002c, March 14:1 & 12)

The above highlights the fact that in the context of establishing the knowledge economy and the resultant impact on human resource development, it is because the dominant ethnic group has been impacted by the various factors discussed above that the change in medium of instruction has been instituted. No change would have been instituted otherwise.

We move now to another area that is crucial to fulfill our nation's aspirations and that has led to a change in medium of instruction. For the nation to achieve industrialized status and for it to develop knowledge workers who are able to innovate in the field of science and technology, access to knowledge and information in the field of science and technology is crucial. ... It is an established fact that the progress in science depends on the accumulation of a written record of all previous science; that is, science requires great information storage and retrieval systems (Kaplan 2001:11). It is these storage and information retrieval systems that we need to access and therein lies one of our major challenges.

## KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION EXPLOSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR LANGUAGE POLICY

This has become one of our major present challenges because of the successful implementation of a nationalistic language policy over a period of two decades. As a result of this nationalistic policy, we have a generation of human resource educated and fluent in the national language. The converse side of this equation is that we have also developed a generation who are not equally competent in the English language. Therefore, it was imperative during this period for information to be accessed in a language that was their strength and that the nation's human resource understood, which is Bahasa Melayu.

What has the nation been doing all these years, especially in the 80's & 90's, to provide access to information in English? Translation and publications in Bahasa Melayu were two activities that were carried out. This then raises the next question, which is, why was this not sufficient for the nation to be able to access information and knowledge in the field of science and technology?

To answer this question, we need to go back a little in Malaysian history. Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and later the National Translation Agency (ITNM) were actively involved in these activities of translation and publication of original works in Bahasa. Unfortunately, the translation process progressed at a slow pace. According to Hj. Hamidah Baba, executive officer of the National Translation Agency (ITNM), a full time translator can only translate 5-8 pages a day, while a part-time translator can manage to translate a maximum of 3 pages a day (Hj. Hamidah Baba 2001:7). Despite the efforts taken to develop translation methods and to speed up the translation process, we still cannot keep up with the number of books that needed to be translated.

## CRUCIAL ACCESS TO INFORMATION IN THE FIELD OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY: THE SLOW PACE OF PUBLICATIONS/ TRANSLATIONS IN BAHASA MELAYU

Despite the fact that there were tremendous efforts made by a number of academics to publish in Bahasa Melayu, it was a slow process and the number of books published in Bahasa and those translated from Bahasa to English were challenging.

Sharir, an established professor of mathematics, explicates cogently the various reasons for the slow rate of publications in Bahasa Melayu. These range from lack of recognition of publications in Bahasa Melayu in the promotion schemes of academics, to the lengthy process of publication which demoralises the efforts of the academic writers (Sharir 2001:107-119). These reasons together with the knowledge explosion in English, concretely depicted by the fact that, ... there are over 100,000 scientific journals in the world and this number is

increasing at the rate of 5000 articles per day adding to the 30 million existing ... (Bilan cited in Martel 2001:51) paints an increasingly challenging situation for access to knowledge and information in English.

However, it is not only Malaysia that faces this challenge. Kaplan captures the gargantuan divide between efforts in translating into other languages and the proliferation of knowledge in English when he says,

... If every possible resource were put to translation this moment, and were continued uninterrupted for 10 years, at the end of that period there would still be an enormous gap because the bulk of text in English is already vast and because the additional text that would have been written in English during that 10-year period would have increased that bulk by several magnitudes. ... Translating everything from English into Filipino (Pilipino/Tagalog) or into any other language for that matter, is an overwhelming task as translating everything into Esperanto (Kaplan 1993:371).

#### THE CONTRAST IN THE JAPANESE CONTEXT

In Malaysia, many Malay intellectuals often look to Japan as a nation which has managed very successfully with the process of industrialization via its own national and dominant ethnic language – Japanese. Japan is often referred to as an example of success achieved without needing the English language and therefore along parallel lines, the Malay intellectuals exhort for the maintenance of the national language, Bahasa Melayu, in Malaysia's own aspirations towards industrialized status (Sharir 2004:7). This is done without realizing that Japan had a massive headstart, as far back as the postwar period, (whilst Malaysia was still in the throes of colonial power) in its plans for accessing and advancing information in the field of science and technology. Kaplan (1997:246) delineates the various reasons for Japan's success in accessing knowledge and information in Japanese. He begins with Japan's strong advantage of ... a strong industrial tradition; after all, Japan had waged successful modern war against the major industrialized nations (Kaplan 1997:246). In addition to its industrial tradition, Kaplan explains the aggressive planning and processes that Japan undertook that gave it the early competitive global edge. In the post-war period, it ... created the Japanese Institute for Science and Technology (JIST). This Institute bought the first computers from the West. It sent bibliographic specialists to the West to learn how to access and use the information systems. It created a remarkable translation facility to make technical information readily available in Japanese. It developed university-industrial links, defining research projects and assuring the emergence of research communities to work on those projects the government deemed vital. This latter exercise culminated ultimately in the building of Tsukuba Science City ... (Kaplan 1997:246). The pace and extent of the achievements of the Japanese in accessing knowledge and information in English are incomparable to the efforts of many other Asian countries.



## CONCLUSION

Therefore, if we examine the history of UKM and all that it has done over these years to develop and promote Bahasa Melayu as a language of science, the responses of the UKM lecturers of the science and technology disciplines can be understood. Their responses are a reflection of the frustration and disappointment over the work done for the promotion of the language and the fact that it has succeeded as the language of education all these years – at least in terms of being used as a medium of instruction – the transmitting the information to students via lectures and tutorials as well as the language of research.

The Malaysian government is firm with its top-down directives on language policy underpinned by the science and technology ideology. Due to the various reasons explicated previously and which are underpinned by the science and technology ideology and the knowledge economy, it is clear why the government had to institute the changes to the language policy. However, it is essential for Malaysians to be able to adopt a pragmatic approach to the needs of the nation. As we work through these potentially contentious issues, we should be reminded of the critical need to frame the concerns within a symbiotic context – to examine how these issues could co-exist and enrich each other so that there is strengthening of space for concerns of both national identity as well as global competitiveness in the context of education and the nation.

Nordic universities are also struggling with the dilemma of the hard realities, and demands of internationalization and its impact on language use in academia. Malaysia can balance between the diverse demands of internationalization and nationalization by considering the following recommendation made in the Nordic context:

English is both essential and welcomed in Nordic universities. Students, lecturers and researchers must be able to understand academic English and use it regularly. However, this use of English must not be allowed to result in the Nordic languages disappearing from universities. We should aim for parallel use rather than monolingualism. (Hoglin 2002:28) (own translation) (cited in Airey 2004:104)

It would be good for Malaysia to bear this recommendation in mind. This can be practically implemented through measures taken to ensure that Bahasa Melayu still has a dominant role to play in other disciplines to ensure its continued development and growth as a language of knowledge. As our Minister of Culture, Arts and Heritage, Dato' Seri Utama Dr. Rais Yatim, emphasized at a recent lecture at UKM that, ... There are many ways to fight for the Malay language ... We should not feel weak and unable to face the unleashing heat of globalisation ... Most important is to encourage the use of the language we have now and to enrich it through constant guidance, goal-setting and appreciation ... (translated) (Rais Yatim 2004:13).

After all, the linguistic value and the power and strength of a language largely hinges on the breadth of domains in which it is used, and ensuring this is what universities and academia need to work towards sincerely and determinedly to ensure a continued strong role for Bahasa Melayu. The Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, UKM can take a lead role in these efforts. Presently, Bahasa Melayu is being researched and taught at two different schools at the Faculty – the School of Language Studies and Linguistics, and the School of Malay Language, Literature and Culture Studies. In addition, the Institute of Malay World and Civilization plays an important scholarly role regarding Bahasa Melayu.

This diverse situation dilutes efforts to provide a concerted stand for the language. Instead what needs to be done at UKM is to set up a school of excellence, where all those knowledgeable and passionate about the language will devote their energies to the researching, teaching and learning of Bahasa Melayu (this will enable UKM to still adhere to its original mission and vision). This, capped by dynamic and visionary leadership, could plan, create and provide ideas for future exciting developments for Bahasa Melayu in the face of globalisation.

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