

Position, Status and Role of Malay Language in Malaysia

Kedudukan, Status, dan Peranan Bahasa Melayu di Malaysia

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Abstract

The position of Malay language in Malaysia is provided by the Malaysian Federal Constitution. Due to the fact that the Malay Language has been sidelined during the colonial era, it took some time for the language to be put in its rightful position. The presence of various ethnicities who try to preserve their language; as well as the reluctance of the political elites in affirming the status of Malay language throws doubt to its future. Constitutional provisions and several laws relating to national language shall be examined to see whether the policies formulated have been in tandem with current laws. This study concludes that the government should preserve the status quo of the Malay language as well as giving the national literary agency (Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka) enforcement powers in promoting the use of the national language.

Keywords constitutional law, national language, plural society

Abstrak

Kedudukan bahasa Melayu di Malaysia telah dinyatakan dengan jelas di dalam Perlembagaan Persekutuan. Oleh kerana bahasa Melayu telah dipinggirkan dalam zaman penjajahan, masa diperlukan bagi meletakkannya di tempat yang sewajarnya. Kewujudan pelbagai etnik yang cuba mengekalkan bahasa mereka ditambah pula dengan sikap elit politik Melayu yang tidak bersungguh-sungguh mendaulatkan status Bahasa Melayu boleh mengakibatkan masa depan bahasa ini menjadi kabur. Peruntukan-peruntukan dalam Perlembagaan dan beberapa undang-undang mengenai bahasa kebangsaan akan diteliti bagi memastikan sama ada polisi-polisi yang dibentuk selaras dengan undang-undang sedia ada. Kajian ini menyimpulkan bahawa kerajaan sepatutnya mengekalkan status quo bahasa Melayu dan memberikan kuasa penguatkuasaan kepada Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka dalam menggalakkan penggunaan bahasa kebangsaan.

Kata kunci undang-undang perlembagaan, bahasa kebangsaan, masyarakat majmuk

Introduction

Language, like religion, is one of the issues which could make or unmake a country. The question of language could arouse dire consequences if it was not handled properly. In 1957, pre-independence Malaya's inhabitants were comprised of various races where nearly half of the population were Malays, about one third Chinese and the rest were Indians and other races. During the colonial period, English was the language of administration. After independence, one autochthonous language, Malay language was chosen to be the medium of government and education. Nevertheless, several factors can be identified for changes of role and status over the next half century.

This paper is an attempt to look at the position, role and status of Malay language in Malaysia. The 'social contract' forged by the leaders of Alliance party before the independence in 1957 served as a

mould for the future position of Malay Language. The approach taken by them left great impacts on the country's socio-political landscape, which also includes the realm of language. The topic is seen from the constitutional and legal framework. In addition, historical perspective is also used in order to get a broad overview on how Malay language has progressed until the present.

As a result of deliberate policy by the British colonials, there was a complex sociolinguistic situation in Malaya prior to the country's independence. The society was divided according to one's race, and to some extent this division was created through different systems of education. English was the main medium of instruction in education. Mastery of spoken and written English acted as a 'door' to obtain better position. The Malay language was marginalized and it only played a minimum role in education. Malay language status was not important and of no consequence. Only primary education was available in Malay (Abdullah Hassan, 1981). Mandarin Chinese was more fortunate since primary, secondary and tertiary education was available in Mandarin.

Literature Review

The question of the position, role and status of Malay has been touched by several writers. *Language and Language Situation in Southeast Asia: With a Focus on Malaysia* gives an overview of the languages and language situation in Malaysia and other countries in the region. The author noted that in the early nineties the Malaysian government allowed the use of English in the public universities (Asmah Haji Omar, 2003). In *Manifesto Budaya: Pupus Bahasa Pupuslah Bangsa*, articles and memorandums written by the Malay language scholars and Malay language activists were compiled. Those writings were submitted to the country's leadership with regard to the position and status of Malay language. The collection of these articles by Malay Language scholars serves as a response to the Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamed's announcement in December 1993 to allow the usage of English as medium of instruction in Malaysian universities (Asraf, 1996). Both books are excellent in covering the language issue in the linguists' perspective but they do not contain much on the legal or constitutional position.

On the other hand, *Malaysia's National Language Policy and the Legal System* examined the implementation of Malay language in Malaysia's legal system. The author took note of the slow process for the Malay language to be used in judicial proceedings. It was pointed out that lack of legal literature, the loyalty of legal professionals to their mother tongue and English as well as the availability of interpreters were the reasons why English was still used in the Malaysian courts. Mead's analysis is helpful in comparing the usage of English in a field other than education (Richard Mead, 1988).

Pendidikan dan Politik di Malaysia meanwhile stresses the fact that education and politics have always been used as a tool for those who are in power. In the days of colonialism, the British administration used them as means to ensure their rule is entrenched in the country. The author elaborated that as a result of the British policies, it consequently reinforced the political and economic clout of the immigrants. After *Merdeka*, the government encouraged nation-building process by promoting the use of Malay Language. However, until 13th May tragedy struck, its position was not much better than the time when the colonials were still in the country (Ibrahim Saad, 1977). The impact of language policies on national identity, education, administration and communication was considered in *Language Planning in Southeast Asia*. The book assembled articles by linguists and educationists were assembled and it evaluated different language situations in Southeast Asia. It contains many informative articles about Malaysian experience in language planning (Abdullah Hassan, 1994). These books might have some aspects of law with regard to language policy but the emphasis was not on constitutional or legal view.

Constitutional Position and Status of Malay Language

The legal position of Malay is provided in Article 152 of the Malaysian Federal Constitution. This article provides that Malay shall be the National Language of the country. The article reads:

“The national language shall be the Malay language and shall be in such script as Parliament may by law provide: Provided that-

- a. No person shall be prohibited or prevented from using (otherwise than for official purposes), or from teaching or learning, any other language; and
- b. Nothing in this Clause shall prejudice the right of the Federal Government or of any State Government to preserve and sustain the use and study of the language of any other community in the Federation”.

Clause 2 of the Article 152 further provides “Notwithstanding the provisions of Clause (1), for a period of ten years after Merdeka Day, and thereafter until Parliament otherwise provides, the English language may be used in both Houses of Parliament, in the Legislative Assembly of every State, and for all other official purposes”. Clause 3 of the Article further states that the authoritative texts of all Bills to be introduced or amendments to be moved in either House of Parliament, all Acts of Parliament and all subsidiary legislation issued by the Federal Government, shall be in the English language.¹ In addition, Clause (4) and (5) of the Article 152 also allow the usage of English in the courts’ proceedings until the Parliament otherwise provides.²

During the drafting of the Federal Constitution, the status of the Malay Language was considered at length by the Reid Commission. They suggested that Malay be designated as National Language, while English was to remain in use for another ten years. The members of the commission thought that a transitional period was needed for the people to familiarize themselves with the National Language. This recommendation was affirmed by the Working Party that discussed the draft constitution and subsequently it was incorporated in the Federal Constitution of newly independent Malaya. The constitutional provision clearly put a ten-year period before Malay to be fully used in its capacity as an official language. It was suggested that if Malay was decreed to be the only official language on 31st August 1957 there would be chaos since the majority of people were not ready for such change yet. The non-Malay section of the population with the exception of a handful were not yet proficient in the language in the way that would enable them to communicate in the language at the official and governmental level. Such awareness of socio-political sensitivities of the time and inter-ethnic antagonism guided the drafters of the Malaysian Federal constitution to allow a ten-year period before the Malay language take its role as the official language of the nation. The time is needed for the country to learn the language as well as the language to accommodate itself to changing situations in becoming the official language of the nation (Asmah Haji Omar, 1979).

The term used in Article 152 (1) of the Federal Constitution is ‘national language’ not ‘official language’. Hashim Yeop Sani (1980) proposed that the drafters of the constitution intentionally chose to employ the word ‘national’ rather than ‘official’ as employed by in Article 343(1) of the Indian Constitution. The provision in the Indian Constitution read: “The official language of the Union shall be Hindi in Devanagari script. The form of numerals to be used for the official purposes of the Union shall be the international form of Indian numerals.” In reading the Article it was deduced the word ‘national’ was used instead of the word ‘official’ to purposely indicate the adjective ‘national’ would be understood with its moral rather than legal connotations. The word ‘national’ is to mean with its ordinary meaning which is: “pertaining to the nation as a whole” or “affecting or shared by the nation as a whole”. The word ‘nation’ means “a large body of people united by common descent, history, culture, or language, inhabiting a particular state or territory” (Soanes and Stevenson, 2005). Therefore as opposed to the concept of ‘official language’ the expression of national language should be taken to mean a language which should be used by individuals, groups, private and public bodies in a particular nation in every activity of life.

¹ (3)Not with standing the provisions of Clause (1), for a period of ten years after Merdeka Day, and there after until Parliament otherwise provides, the authoritative texts: (a) of all Bills to be introduced or amendments thereto to be moved in either House of Parliament, and (b) of all Acts of Parliament and all subsidiary legislation issued by the Federal Government, shall be in the English language.

² (4) Not withs tanding the provisions of Clause (1), for a period of ten years after Merdeka Day, and there after until Parliament otherwise provides, all proceedings in the Supreme Court or a High Court shall be in the English language: Provided that, it the Court and counsel on both sides agree, evidence taken in language spoken by the witness need not be translated into or recorded in English. (5) Not with standing the provisions of Clause (1), until Parliament otherwise provides, all proceedings in subordinate courts, other than the taking of evidence, shall be in the English language.

Article 152 (1) of the Federal Constitution, *inter alia*, provides Malay Language shall be national language but “no person shall be prohibited or prevented from using (otherwise than for official purposes), or from teaching or learning, any other languages...”. Three main points can be taken from Article 152, two are expressed by the text while the other one by implication. They are: (i) No person shall be prohibited or prevented from teaching or learning, any other languages; (ii) A person *can* be prohibited or prevented from using any other languages for official purposes; (iii) No person can be prohibited or prevented from teaching or learning, any other languages for non-official purposes (Hashim Yeop Sani, 1980). It is observed that apart from Malay, English has been given a preferential position in clauses (2), (3), (4) and (5) of the Article 152. In short, notwithstanding the fact that Malay has been made national language, the government may allow other language (in this case English) to be used. This could be the reason why Malay language activists were dissatisfied with this flexibility exercised by the government headed by Tunku Abdul Rahman at that time.

Asmah Haji Omar (1982) stated that many factors can be cited for the purpose of unified citizenry, such as religion, culture, and language. Of the three, language is and has proven to be the most feasible unifying factor. Each of the above factor has its role in society. Religion and culture are ways of life that is manifested in relationship between God and Man, and between Man and Man. Language on the other hand is mainly an instrument in basic human communications. A nation with various ethnic and linguistic groups cannot function well in managing its day to day affairs if its people are mutually intelligible. That requires a language which is common to everyone in the nation. A common language when given the status of national language becomes the symbol of unity for the nation. The citizens of the nation are given the chance to involve in its fullest participation in the country’s affairs. In contrast, the use of religion as a symbol of identity is possible if the country’s citizens are homogenous ethnically and religiously.

There were several factors that can be used to determine which language should be given the status of national language. The first factor is the majority of the people speak a particular language. Secondly, the language should be ‘indigenous’ to the soil so that it can give ‘identity’ to the nation. Thirdly, the language that is to be designed as the national language should have been used continuously to facilitate inter-racial communication. Fourthly, that particular language has been used previously as the language of administration before the intervention of colonial powers. In case of Malaya, Malay language fulfils all these requirements hence there was not much opposition on the move in making it as the national language prior to independence (Asmah Haji Omar, 1979).

National Language Act 1967

The National Language Act 1967, as stated in its Preamble is “An Act to consolidate the law relating to the use of national language”. The act itself is rather brief, containing only 11 sections altogether. The important provisions of the act are as follows:

Section 2 of the Act provides: “Save as provided in this Act and subject of the safeguards contained in Article 152(1) of the Constitution relating to any other language and the language of any other community in Malaysia the national language shall be used for official purposes”. Section 3 of the Act states: “Nothing in this Act shall affect the right to the Federal Government or the right of any State to use any of the translation of official documents or communication of any other language for such purposes as may be deemed necessary to the public interest”. Section 4 of the Act provides: “The Yang Dipertuan Agong may permit the continued use of the English language for such official purposes as may be deemed fit”.

Section 5 further provides that the use of English may be permitted in Parliament and in the State Legislative Assemblies. Section 6 meanwhile states that the authoritative texts of laws of all Bills in the Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies, Acts of Parliament, Enactments, subsidiary legislations (issued by the Federal and State Governments) and Ordinances promulgated by the Yang di-Pertuan Agong shall be in the national language and English unless the YDPA otherwise prescribes. Similarly, even though Section 8 of the Act provides that proceedings in the court shall be in the national language, the proviso to the section gives the liberty to the court either on its own motion or on the application of

any party to the proceedings to order for the proceedings to be partly in national language and partly in English.

There was wide latitude for the Federal Government in terms of language issue as could be seen from the provisions of the above Act. Such flexibility could not have gone unnoticed when the Language Bill was tabled at the end of February 1967, as the people were anxious to know how would the government took its position in the language issue. Furthermore, the 10-year timeframe as provided in the Federal Constitution ended in 1967. Roff (1967) noted that editorial comment in the press after the introduction of the Bill was generally favourable, as the non-Malay press in particular was seemed to heave a sigh of relief at the 'liberality' of the provisions. The opposition members of Parliament attacked the language bill when it was debated in the Dewan Rakyat on 2-3 March 1967. The first one to speak was Dato' Muhamad Asri Haji Muda, leader of Pan-Malayan Islamic Party (PMIP). He pointed out the fact that the bill has undermined the national language and eventually strengthened the position of English in national life. In his debate, he listed several occasions where he alleged how UMNO has sold out Malays to non-Malays; and to make matters worse the Bill disadvantaged the Malays in their own country. The rural Malays, he said would remain underprivileged since the only education available to their children were Malay schools. He maintained that if the bill is passed the national language would not have economic value. Another opposition Member of Parliament, D.R Seenivasagam accused the government had 'betrayed' the non-Malays in the country, and his point was also repeated by other legislative member from UDP and DAP. Roff observed that despite their criticisms, the non-Malay MPs' attacks were lacking fire and they were probably relieved at the liberality of the provisions of the Bill (Roff. M, 1967).

Demands of Chinese Educationists

On the other hand the Chinese educationists in Malaya demanded that Mandarin would be accorded official language status. Previously, the British colonial government through their divide and rule policy had allowed segregated vernacular education in Malaya. The Chinese community in particular had managed to build a comprehensive system of Chinese schools in their effort to preserve their language and culture. Efforts by the colonial government to establish national schools that used Malay and English as media of instruction were strongly contested by the Chinese educationists. They were grouped under two umbrella associations, the United Chinese School Teachers' Association (UCSTA or known as Jiao Zong) and the United Chinese School Committees Association (UCSCA or known as Dong Zong). The two associations took the role of non-governmental organization which functioned as a pressure group in safeguarding the rights of the Chinese to propagate their language and culture by way of promoting mother tongue education (Roff. M, 1967). Collectively these associations are known as Dong Jiao Zong.

The Chinese educationists initially had forwarded their demands before the first general election of Malaya in 1955, but the MCA under the leadership of Tan Cheng Lock sensed the danger that could affect Alliance's winning chances if their demands were met. MCA quickly held a roundtable meeting with the Chinese educationists that took place in Melaka on 12 January 1955. The Alliance managed to convince them to temporarily drop their demands while promising to amend the Education Ordinance 1952. The Alliance Manifesto specifically declared that the Alliance would allow vernacular schools to flourish and they would encourage the schools, languages or any culture of any race living in the country. Such a position was taken by the Alliance in contrast to Parti Negara which demanded Malay to be the sole official language. Parti Negara accused UMNO of betraying the interest of the Malays since it has co-operated with MCA. Under the leadership of Tan Cheng Lock, MCA had worked closely with the Chinese educationists in defence of Chinese education. Tan Yao Sua (2010) observed that MCA had not fully committed itself to the demands by the Chinese educationists to recognize Mandarin as an official language. Despite of that the Alliance managed to win a landslide victory in the 1955 General Election where it managed to wrest 51 seats out of 52 seats contested. Tunku Abdul Rahman was appointed the first Chief Minister of Malaya and a cabinet comprised of the Alliance members was formed (Tan Yao Sua, 2008).

When the Federal Constitution was being drafted by the Reid Commission, the Chinese educationists, through Dong Jiao Zong, tried to convince the members of the commission for Chinese language to be

recognized as one of the official languages of the country. They suggested that Malay, Chinese and Tamil to be the official languages of the new country. It was further argued to the commission that it would not be possible for Chinese and Indians to work with the Malays in nation building if their language and culture were not guaranteed a place in the constitution. The Reid Commission did not accept their demands and instead recommended Malay shall be used for all official purposes, though English was allowed continued use for official purposes for a period of ten years after independence. The Federal Constitution nonetheless did not prohibit the learning or teaching of Chinese language. Thus, even though the Chinese educationists promoted Chinese as an official language, they refrained from pursuing this agenda since the main objective at that time was to end the British rule as soon as possible (Lee Hock Guan, 2007).

The euphoria during independence however did not last long. The post independence political situation was heightened when the issue of language reared its head. The ambiguities in the Alliance compromise on language and education issues quickly caused heated controversies and growing opposition. On the one side Malay nationalists put more pressure to the government in making Malay as the sole national and official language. They objected the government's move in extending English as an official language for a period of ten years after independence. On the other hand, the Dong Jiao Zong increased its campaign in making Chinese an official language, as well as making Chinese schools had equal status like Malay and English schools (Lee Hock Guan, 2007). The Rahman Talib Report in 1960, while reiterated its support for the provision of native tongue education in primary level, it also stated that: "It would however, be incompatible with an educational policy designed to create national consciousness and having the intention of making the Malay language the national language of the country to extend and to perpetuate a language and racial differential throughout the publicly financed educational system" (Article 18 of the Report). The report also recommended that public-funded secondary schools "shall be conducted mainly in the medium of one of the official languages with the intention of ultimately using the national language as the main medium of instruction, except that other languages and literatures may be taught and learnt in their own media" (Article 19 of the Report). Further suggestion by the report includes that all public examinations at secondary level shall be "conducted in the country's official languages" (Article 175 of the Report). Article 187 of the Report recommended the gradual discontinuation of Chinese secondary schools and their examinations. These suggestions, when taken *in toto* were construed by the Dong Jiao Zong as the government strategy to end the Chinese education (Lee Hock Guan, 2009). It quickly managed to garner support from non-Malay opposition parties which agreed to advance their language and education objectives. They wanted Chinese language recognized as one of official languages and Chinese schools to be included in national secondary school system (Lee Hock Guan, 2007).

Malay Language Activists' Response

The challenge posed by the Chinese educationists spurred the Malay language activists into action and they formed National Language Action Front (NLAF) in July 1964. The formation of this front can be seen as their response to the activism showed by the Chinese community that was represented by Dong Jiao Zong and the support to it by Chinese guilds and associations. It was also a response to the government's apparent lack of firm resolve on the language issue. The NLAF was the primary driving force of Malay linguistic nationalism in the sixties. It was led by Syed Nasir Syed Ismail, who was the Director of *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* (DBP) from June 1957 to December 1968. DBP was established to promote the usage of Malay language and the development of Malay literature as well as to oversee the language corpus planning. The support to the front was very wide, and it was not a surprise that among the strongest supporters of NLAF were the Malay teachers who formed the biggest bloc in UMNO. Apart from that NLAF also worked closely with Malay opposition party like Pas and Malay student activists (Lee Hock Guan, 2009). Lee Hock Guan (2007) observed that NLAF made several demands such as: multilingual news broadcasts by radio and televisions be abolished by 1967 and after which, be broadcasted in Malay only; college and university students be promoted to second year only if they passed a Malay course; Form Five students would be eligible for college and university admissions only

if they pass a compulsory Malay subject; and university and college lecturers be given two years to learn Malay language and if they failed to master it by that time they would be sternly dealt with.

Despite of efforts in promoting Malay as the national language had been actively done by DBP, it did not escape attention of the Malay language activists in NLAF that the use of English did not appreciably reduced. They could notice such countervailing tendencies since they were quite apparent to see. Government forms were bilingual, members of Parliament, even Malays chose to debate in English, and the courts continued to use English. The laws were continued to be written in English, the language of businesses was English, while most Arts and Economics faculties in the university taught entirely in English. Therefore, the assurances of the government that from September 1967 onwards Malay would be the 'sole official language' was quite hollow since there were not enough attempts to translate all the claims in practical terms. In short, few people were convinced that social and economic value of English would be changed after ten year period as stipulated in Federal Constitution has lapsed (Roff, M, 1967).

In December 1965 NLAF had its National Assembly where it had passed several resolutions, among which it requested the government to stipulate clearly in the constitution that the sole national and official language shall be Malay. This resolution however, was not well received by Tunku Abdul Rahman. He initially supported NLAF, but later he distanced himself from the front as he thought them as extremists who were using the language issue to wrest national power. The collaboration by NLAF with Pas was something that Tunku was aware of, and he saw this as detrimental to UMNO's cause. Syed Nasir was also seen as someone who had grand ambitions and the language issue could be taken as a move to build his power base in UMNO. Moreover, the Tunku's decision not to support NLAF was due to the fact that the language issue had become contentious, as Sim Mow Yu of MCA participated in the Chinese language movement. It was clear that Tunku did not want himself to be dragged into the language issue maelstrom because he wanted to be seen as a leader who had interests of all races in his mind.

In October 1966, Syed Nasir submitted a confidential memorandum to the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister, all Cabinet members, all State Chief Ministers, and all members of UMNO Executive Council reminding them of the constitutional commitment on the issue of national language. He maintained that Malay becoming the national language was the logical fact and a right of the language. He questioned the motive of the Chinese educationists in making excessive demands in the language issue. This memorandum had some support among the UMNO young leaders like Dr. Mahathir Mohamed and Dato' Harun Hj. Idris. This line of argument found ready listeners among UMNO members, but they also questioned the wisdom of the timing and left it to UMNO leadership to decide (Syed Nasir Ismail, 2002). With regard to the language issue, Tunku Abdul Rahman was concerned of its effects to MCA as he saw that MCA could be in vulnerable position. It was apparent that MCA had struggled in dealing with the Chinese language movement. Tunku did not want the recognition of Malay as the sole official language be seen as MCA's weakness, and MCA had sold out to the Malays. He urged the Chinese to be considerate and rational in looking at this issue. In October 1966, Tunku while delivering a speech in Penang promised that if non-Malays adopted a reasonable stand on the official language issue, the government might allow for liberal use of other languages in official matters. The Prime Minister saw the continued use of English as very important to ensure high standards in education and administrative efficiency. Thus when the Language Bill was tabled it could be seen that the position of English remained, despite of constitutional promises with regard to the use of English for official purposes (Tan Yao Sua, 2010).

The provisions of the Bill were objected by various Malay groups including Malay Teachers Associations, the Malay Language Society of the University of Malaya, and the National Writers' Association (PENA). These groups had united under the leadership of NLAF and were critical to the extension of English in official capacity. The front was initially refused permission to held a rally in the premises of Dewan Bahasa on the night of 1st of March 1967, but was given permission to do so two days later. The atmosphere was tense and fiery speeches were delivered from various cultural, teacher and student groups. Syed Nasir wept publicly and said that he cried not because of fear, but of emotion in thinking of the fate of his race. He announced he could not do anything because he was bound by civil service regulations, failure of adhering to the rules would be to his detriment (Persatuan Linguistik Malaysia, 2002).

Zainal Abidin Wahid (2002) emphasized the fact that with the passing of the Bill, English gained greater strength as it was allowed continued use as an official language. Indirectly the legislation did not change anything even though the country had achieved independence for about 10 years, while the economic value of Malay could not be enhanced. The new legislation obviously did not encourage the country's citizens in learning and using the national language. He also pointed out the fact that previously the constitutional provisions stipulated the position of English shall be reviewed; the current legislation was worse because sections 3, 4 and 5 of the Act did not state any time limit in terms of usage of English in official capacity. Therefore, the resistance to the Language Bill led by NLF received widespread support of the Malay community including factions within UMNO. Indeed, the NLF considered the passing of the Bill as the betrayal of the Malay cause and accused Tunku Abdul Rahman of having sold the Malays down the drain. On the other hand, the Dong Jiao Zong were disillusioned with their failure to get the government to recognize Chinese as one of the official languages and reinstating the status of Chinese schools. They were particularly upset over the refusal by MCA to support their language and educational objectives (Lee Hock Guan, 2007).

The national language featured prominently in the campaigns in the 1969 General Election. The Chinese community was urged by the Dong Jiao Zong to support the non-Malay opposition parties who supported the efforts to make Chinese as an official language and the recognition of Chinese secondary schools. On the other side, Pas denounced these demands especially the move of extending the official usage of English after 1967. Apparently, language and education issues proved to be costly for the Alliance especially for MCA in the 1969 General Election. The May 13 riots led the proclamation of Emergency to be declared to the whole country. Drastic steps were taken after the riots which forever changed the political, economic, cultural landscape of the country including language and education policy.

Post May 13 Tragedy

The aftermath of the racial riots were used by the government to put a stop to the demands of making Chinese language an official language. The Parliament passed the Constitution (Amendment) Act 1971, which prohibits the questioning of Article 152 and makes it seditious, punishable under Sedition Act 1948, for anyone who questions the Article except in regard to the implementation thereof. Schools started the gradual change to Malay medium in stages from 1970-1982. The changes in the language policy also included the tertiary education sector whereby in 1970 Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) was established. The medium of instruction was Malay (Hassan Ahmad, 2004).

In 1971 an amendment to the National Language Act 1967 made Malay Language the sole official language. In Sabah and Sarawak the implementation of Malay Language as official language was much later than in Peninsular Malaysia. The same principle of familiarization over ten years was granted for the two states before Malay language could be made the sole official language. Sabah managed to meet the deadline of the implementation of Bahasa Malaysia as the only official language within the target date while Sarawak for some reasons or other only managed to do that in 1985 (Asmah Haji Omar, 1987). By early eighties, the conversion of English schools to be Malay medium was completed. All public universities in Malaysia used Malay as its medium of instruction in 1983 which was in line with the objectives of the National Education Policy (Hassan Ahmad, 2004).

To ensure that Malay language was keeping up with the relevant terms in many fields, corpus planning was quickly identified to be developed. The establishment of DBP and the attention given to its recommendations showed the commitment by the government. A team was set up which include Malaysian and Indonesian language scholars and planners in coining scientific and technological terms in Malay. Over a period of 16 years from 1972 to 1988 six joint meetings were held where nearly half a million new words had been developed by the middle of eighties. These efforts in developing the language corpus clearly had strong government support. The phase was a process that understandably not only limited to Malaysia, but that of many other post-colonial nations too. Other countries like Sri Lanka and the Philippines took the same path like Malaysia had done (Saran Kaur Gill, 2005). Nevertheless, after many years of the legislation and implementation of Malay in the national life the year 2002 would witness a drastic shift in the language policy.

Reverse of Language Policy

In the year 2002, the Prime Minister of Malaysia Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamed made startling announcement that science and mathematics subjects will be taught in English (popularly known as PPSMI- *Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik dalam Bahasa Inggeris*). The move covered the learning process not only in tertiary level but also during the first year of primary school (Saran Kaur Gill, 2005). The drastic reversal of policy caught many people by surprise, and was made without discussion with the universities. Nevertheless, if one has looked further, the move was a continuation of a trend that has been established since mid nineties. In 1995 the Education Act and Private Higher Education Act 1995 were passed and the provisions to use Malay in education were relaxed; English was allowed to be use a medium of instruction in private higher education centres. This move was thus seen as a challenge to the position of Malay as the prime medium of instruction in the education sector. It was argued that this move would affect negatively towards the implementation of the national language policy and the national education policy. Both policies have been drafted to unite the various races in the country and as far as the policies were concerned it have succeeded in doing so for many years (Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin, 2003). Scholars pointed out that the 'liberalization' in language policy would lead to dichotomy in society where two groups i.e the Malay-educated group and English-educated group would be created. The gap between the races could have also got bigger as well as between the haves and the have-nots. Subsequently it would weaken the role of Malay language as the tool to unify the various races in the country. The gradual marginalization of the national language would affect negatively the identity, image and thought which has been mould by the national language. The detractors of the move maintained that a language can only be acquired through vigorous process of teaching and learning the language. The pedagogy should be made up to date with the development in learning a particular language. They were also worried that by teaching science and mathematics in English, the position and role of Malay would be deteriorated. Malay language scholars feared that such move would lead to the decline of the language, which subsequently limits its usage as lower form of communication. Thus in the long run such move would be harmful to nation building (A.Aziz Deraman, 2004).

Sarah Kaur Gill (2005) on the other hand observed there were several reasons for the sudden change of language policy. The late 1980's and early 1990s there were emerging changes in developmental phases brought on by globalization. The world has moved to economy based on knowledge brought by the information age. Thus, the nation must be prepared so that its human resources are well-equipped since English is widely used in science and technology. Secondly, since the nation would like to achieve industrialized status in year 2020 it was pertinent that the workers have access to knowledge and information in the field of science and technology. The problem arises because years of the implementation of language policy based on the national language has produced graduates that are fluent in Malay but not equally competent in English. Moreover, the pace of translation of scientific publications and written books in Malay could not keep up with the proliferation of scientific and technological knowledge in English. Thirdly, English has been the dominant language in business and industry. The language policy was very effective in promoting Malay in the administration, education and even in the law courts, but business in the corporate sector is done primarily in English. Fourthly, the main drive of Malaysian economy was taken by the private sector since the nineties. This sector has also become the major employer choice for graduates. The private sector put much emphasis in English proficiency in conducting its business. In the same time, the country set its aspirations to be a centre of education thus the process of liberalizing its educational policies. Amendments were made to education related acts which resulted public universities were based on Malay medium while private universities used English. Over the years it was found that graduates from the private universities were more sought after by companies in the private sector due to their English competency. The situation became serious when a study found that thousands of graduates were unemployed, most of them Malays (Saran Kaur Gill, 2005).

Malay has been used extensively in the public sector i.e domain of administration and education since the government implemented the legislations in the 1970s. In contrast, the business and corporate sector on the other hand prefer English. With the liberalization of language policy the influence of English also

spread into other fields. English has always been seen as a language with prestige. Billboards and even advertisement using English are found everywhere. Even properties named in English fetch higher prices in the market. This has led to proliferation of foreign names in the new housing estates in the capital city and other major cities of the country. DBP however, does not have enforcement powers with regard to this matter as it falls under the authority of local councils. It has only the advisory power to encourage the use of Malay Language.

Conclusion

The position of the Malay language in Malaysia was provided by Article 152 of the Federal Constitution. The language was chosen as the national language since the majority of the people speak the language as well as it is 'indigenous' to the country. Its status is guaranteed in the constitution and it occupies a special place in country's legal framework. Malay has fulfilled its role as the language of choice among the various races of the country. Therefore, it was no wonder that Malay nationalists saw independence as the chance to restore Malay to its rightful position to be the sole official language in the country. Nevertheless the presence of immigrant community who had established schools using other language other than Malay or English, and in the same time demanding their languages were also accorded official status polarized the country into serious debates for many years especially during the elections. Before 1969, the political elites, while acknowledging the status and role of Malay, did not in show much efforts in lifting its usage in the national life. The racial riots after the 1969 General Election was the catalyst to major changes in the position, role and status of Malay language. Nevertheless, the globalization process forced the reversal of the established language policy. Perhaps the Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (DBP) should be given some enforcement powers to ensure that the extensive use of English would not be on the expense of national language. Malaysia needs to walk a tightrope between ensuring continued prosperity in global competitiveness by embracing English, while in the same time preserving its national identity, image and ideals of a nation state by holding fast to its national language.

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