Interpretation

Globalization and the Teaching and Learning of English in Malaysia

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Keywords: globalization, English language teaching and learning, English in Malaysia

1 Introduction

According to Held and McGrew (2003), globalization refers to "those spatio-temporal processes of change which underpin a transformation to an organization or to everyday life by linking and expanding human activities across regions and continents." (as cited in Lam, 2010). It is, as defined in Knight (1999, p.14), "... the flow of technology, economy, knowledge, people, value, ideas... across borders." (as cited in Anantha Raj A. Arokiasamy, 2010). It occurs in various ways and influences nations, languages, cultures, and methods in different positive and negative manners (Masoomeh Shadbazi Moghadam, 2012).

In the massive progress of globalization, there are increasing intimate relations being formed among countries. As such, a "global language" is needed to allow cross-cultural and cross-national boundaries communication and to promote inter-cultural communication, especially for international trade and business. While striving to become a fully developed nation in 2020, it is vital for Malaysians to improve the English language competency to survive the massive waves of globalization.

Being the second most important language in Malaysia, English language has been used extensively in various areas, especially in the private sectors and mass media. Over the years, although the Malaysian government has implemented changes in the English curriculum and policy, hoping to bring up the standard of English among Malaysians, are these changes sufficient to meet the current demand? Concerning this matter, effective move in the change of language curriculum and teaching pedagogy that go well with the contemporary educational context in Malaysia should be explored and implemented in an organized manner.

In order to prepare readers to understand the English language curriculum and policy in Malaysia, the historical background, the current status of English language in Malaysia and changes in policy to address issues concerning the English education in Malaysia are explored and discussed in this paper. Focus is drawn largely on the recommendations to improve the English curriculum and English teaching methodology in Malaysia.

2 English as the Global Language

Today, English is being used worldwide in almost every aspects of human life. The widespread of English today is mainly caused by the expansion of power of the United Kingdom and later the emergence of United States of America as a superpower, as stressed by Crystal (1997), whether a language achieves a global status is attributable to the political and economic power of the people using it (ascited in Kumaran Rajandran, 2011).

The value of English as a global language or as an international language needs no further elaboration. According to Crystal (1997), back in 1990's, English has already been extensively used as the official language in transnational communication for about 85% of the world's international organiza-
tions and 90% of academic publications in various academic fields was written in English (as cited in Wu & Ben-Canaan, 2006\textsuperscript{9}). Currently, English is the mother language for over ten countries, such as the UK, the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand & Ireland, just to name a few, and it is also used as the second language in more than 70 countries, including Malaysia. It is also the most widely taught foreign language in over 100 countries (Song, 2009\textsuperscript{9}). There is about a quarter of world’s population is competent in English and this figure is steadily growing every year (Crystal, 2003\textsuperscript{7}). It is predicted that by 2050, half the world will be proficient in communicating using English (The Economist, 2001\textsuperscript{4}). As the importance of English is beyond doubt, a heavier duty lies on today’s English educators to produce students with high English language competency to survive the influential wave of globalization and to compete with the global community.

3 Historical Backgrounds of English in Malaysia

The widespread of English Language in Malaysia can be traced through history when the British expanded power and influence to the South East Asia, including Malaya (Malaysia before independence) in the nineteenth century. According to Venugopal (2000), English language was “a tool of socio-economic mobility and education enhancement” during the colonial times (as cited in Nor-mazla Ahmad Mahir & Mariatul Kibtiyah Sia-lahudin Jarjis, 2007, p.2\textsuperscript{9}) which was mainly used by the British and the educated elite (Asmah Haji Omar, 1993\textsuperscript{10}). Commerce and trading activities in town areas which were under the control of the British colonists have also increased the use of English language as the presence of the British power changed the lingua franca from Malay language to English (Mohd Faizal Hanapiah, 2004\textsuperscript{11}). English language also spread through primary and secondary schools which were set up and funded by the British government, in which English was made the medium of instruction (Foo & Richards, 2004\textsuperscript{22}).

As Malaya was moving towards independence, although Malay language has replaced English to be the official language, English was still being given important status. It was taught as a subject in school to ensure employment opportunities and for higher education (Foo & Richards, 2004\textsuperscript{22}) and it can still be jointly used with Malay language until 1967 (Kumaran Rajandran, 2011\textsuperscript{4}). In 1967, a huge reduction can be seen in the roles of English when the Malaysia government declared Malay language as the sole national language that replaced English in most formal and public domains. Subsequently, the medium of instruction was changed to Malay language under the implementation of National Language and National Educational Policies for all primary and secondary schools (Saadiyah Darus, 2010\textsuperscript{12}). Despite the decision of having Malay language as the medium of instruction, the government has maintained English as a strong second language (Pillay, 1998\textsuperscript{4}) which is taught as a compulsory subject in primary and secondary levels of education.

In 1971, due to the increasing concern of the needs to have a common content syllabus, the Primary English Syllabus that employed a common content, instructional methodology, teaching materials that led to a common testing system was introduced to all primary schools in Malaysia. (Saadiyah Darus, 2010\textsuperscript{12}). It was the first common content syllabus for the English language teaching in Malaysia (Foo & Richards, 2004\textsuperscript{22}). It advocated the use of the structural-situational approach (Ambigapathy Pandian, 2002\textsuperscript{13}) that adopted grammar translation method and situational approach in the early years (Asmah Haji Omar, 1984\textsuperscript{10}). Grammar rules are being emphasized in grammar translation method where drilling activities were used to help students to memorize grammar rules. As for situational approach, English is taught based on real situation or imagined real situation (Bawani Selvaraj, 2010\textsuperscript{17}). Learning is
purposeful as the meaning of words and sentences is learned through its connections with the real life situations. It enables learners to use the target language naturally by speaking, listening to, reading and writing it.

To ensure continuity, the lower secondary English syllabus was developed as an extension of the primary English syllabus. Thus, the structural-situational syllabus was also adopted. As for English syllabus of upper secondary level which was implemented in 1979, the syllabus adopted was task-oriented situational approach (Saadiyah Darus, 201013; Foo & Richards, 200412), also known as Malaysian communicational syllabus (Richards & Rodgers, 200118). The focus of this approach is on effective communication. In other words, it emphasizes on the development of the communicative competence of learners rather than the development of linguistic competence. Learners will not be corrected constantly when they make errors especially in oral exercises because errors are considered natural in the learning process (Bawani Selvaraj, 201017).

In 1979, a committee was set up under the Chairmanship of Tun Mahathir Mohamad, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, to reassess the English syllabi and this has led to the major revamp of national school curriculum (Foo & Richards, 200412). As a result, the New Primary Schools Curriculum and the Integrated Secondary Schools Curriculum were implemented in 1983 and 1989 respectively. The main focus of the New Primary Schools Curriculum for English language teaching was the attainment of 3 R's, namely the basic reading, writing and arithmetic skills. As for the Integrated Secondary Schools Curriculum, the integration of moral and spiritual values into English teaching through listening, speaking, reading and writing activities was also being emphasized. Apart from that, the development of higher order thinking skills and active participation in learning activities were stressed. It was a skill-based syllabus advocating Communicative Language Teaching and the four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing are inter-connected together with the language components of grammar and vocabulary. (Saadiyah Darus, 201013)

4 English Language in Today’s Malaysia

About half a century after Malaysia has achieved its independence, the competing roles of the national language and English in the educational system has always been an issue of concern by many. Some regard the Malay language as the symbol of national unity and view English as the language of colonial education that might deprive the development of the Malay language if emphasis is given, while others see English as a language for global communication which is necessary to produce competent human capital in the global market.

On this issue, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Mahathir Mohammad has once said “Nationalism means doing everything possible for the nation, even if it means learning English. By learning English, Malaysians do not dilute their sense of identity but enhance the nation’s image”. (as cited in Saran Kaur Gill, 200219). His statements have redefined nationalism and urged a reposition of English in the education system in Malaysia.

With the advent of globalization and the massive development in the field of information technology, the leaders realized competency in English is essential in a globalized world, especially when more intimate relations are being formed between Malaysia and other countries. The role of English language in Malaysia has expanded to “not only a tool of international socio-political correspondence and involvement, but also as a global medium of interaction and knowledge exchange” (Normazla Ahmad Mahir & Mariatul Kitiyyah Sihahudin Jarjis, 2007, p. 29). In Malaysia, English is used extensively in the private sector as a language of local and international business. Socially, English is
widely used among people in the urban areas, especially those who were English educated. The use of English in the mass media is evident. Large numbers of programmes are broadcasted in English and currently, there are three English national newspapers in Malaysia – The Star, The Sun, and The New Straits Times (Pillay, 1998). Also, the mastery of English language is encouraged at all levels of education, especially at the tertiary level (Nakayama, Pek, Tan, Taguchi & Fukushima, 2013). In line with the efforts of the government to promote the mastery of English language, the educational institutions in Malaysia have been focusing on promoting the quality of English language programmes for students to improve student’s competency in English (Juliana Othman, 2005). In the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 which was launched by Deputy Prime Minister Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin recently, from year 2016, English is made a compulsory subject to pass for the Malaysian Certificate of Education (SPM) (The Star Online, 2013, September 6). In other words, it is compulsory for students to pass their English in SPM to obtain their school-leaving certificates which is important for their further studies or job-seeking.

5 The Falling Standard of English in Malaysia: Strategies Implemented to Address the Issue

In Malaysia, the main concern of English education is always the decline in the standard of English. Some blame the shift of education policy that emphasizes the development of national language for this “drop” in competency level. According to Normazidah Che Musa, Koo and Hazita Azman (2012), some of the major causes of this phenomenon are as follows: (a) English is considered a difficult subject, (b) Learners’ overdependence on English teachers, (c) English is used only in English class to communicate with teachers, (d) Learners depend heavily on translation or dictionary, (e) Lack of support at home or in community in using English, (f) Lack of motivation in learning as learners do not see the immediate need.

Lately, due to the unsatisfactory results of the Cambridge Placement Test sat by 70,000 English teachers in Malaysia (The Star Online, 2013, September 11), some also castigated the English teachers for their lack of competency in English as the English teachers today are the product of the Malay-medium education. Apart from that, due to the serious shortage of English teachers in schools, some teachers whose major is not English were given in-service training to be converted as English teachers (New Straits Times, 2013, October 4). As a result, this big group of “converted” English teachers might not be having sufficient knowledge regarding effective language teaching methodology. This may have affected the effectiveness of their teaching in class.

While people are still debating on the root cause of this distressing phenomenon, the poor performance in national English language examination and the high unemployment rate among university graduates due to poor command of English (Dumanig, David & Symaco, 2012) were alarming and acute enough to call for transformation in English curriculum in Malaysia to meet the demands of globalization.

To address this issue, more challenging public English examination for SPM students was introduced in 1995. The SPM English examination paper was upgraded to be based on O’Level syllabus set by the Cambridge Examination Syndicate in England (Lee, 2002 as cited in Bawani Selvaraj, 2010). Subsequently, in 2001, the literature component was introduced, aiming to promote reading habits among students. Students have started to be exposed to poems, short stories and novels written by local and foreign writers. In 1998, Malaysian University English Test (MUET) was introduced to prepare the pre-university students for their further studies in tertiary level. To further promote the learning of English, English for Science
and Technology was also introduced as an optional paper at upper secondary level in year 2003 (Bawani Selvaraj, 2010).  

6 Globalization and the English Curriculum: Some Recommendations  

An increasingly globalized and challenging world has demanded a revolutionary change in English curriculum and pedagogy. It is therefore necessary to explore the strategies that could improve the English curriculum in Malaysia to meet the demand in the 21st century.  

6.1 Exposing students to different foreign civilization and culture through English teaching materials  

With the expediting globalization, increasing intimate relationships are being formed between countries. It is, thus, necessary for us to increase our understanding on the customs and traditions of other civilization to avoid culture shock and misunderstanding that might jeopardize the good relationship. One way to achieve this is to expose the nation to a variety of cultures through the incorporation of cultural elements of other English speaking countries into the teaching materials of English language. In other words, the teaching materials of English language should not be only teemed with British or American cultures, values, beliefs, customs or systems. Introductions on other English using countries, such as Singapore, the Philippines, India and also the home nation of the learners can also be included (Song, 2009).  

According to the schema theory of learning, prior knowledge and concept are essential in learning as it helps learners to form schemata that make their learning meaningful (Ahmad Al-Issa, 2006). In reading for instance, readers' cultural background and other life experiences might affect the interpretation and understanding of the content of a reading text. To illustrate, in Europe, for instance, the concept of "full moon" is tied to horror stories and madness but the same subject is linked to beauty and moon-viewing parties in Japan (Stott, 2001). Such discrepancy may confuse the Japanese students who are reading a text written by a European writer and lead to misinterpretation subsequently. This explains the significance of local culture elements in the reading materials for second language learners. Another benefit of using reading materials rich in local culture elements is that it allows learners to develop English vocabularies that could be used to describe things that exist in their unique learning context and it is believed to be able to activate learners' interest in learning.  

6.2 Eradicating conventional method of teaching grammar in isolation  

As English is changing in the globalized world, language users could communicate using a plethora of world Englishes (A. Suresh Canagarajah, 2006), which may differ according to the culture or nation in which they are spoken. Besides, technology that revolutionized communication has increased the complexity of English. To illustrate, with up-and-coming technology, new writing practices are created for quicker and more efficient communication using electronic communication devices. While the teaching of Standard English remains indisputably important, language learners also have to be more flexible in adapting to the rapidly discourses. Isolated and drill-oriented grammar lessons will not be able to produce language users with high adaptability to cope with this change.  

Indeed, teaching approaches that focus on the use of authentic, real-life communication, instead of pseudo-communication, are believed to be able to blend in to the globalized context to produce learners who can communicate meaningfully using the language. One of such teaching approaches is communicative language teaching which has long been adopted and emphasized in the Malaysia English curriculum. Thus, it is important for all English educators to eradicate the conventional method of teaching grammar in isolation as it no
longer fits in to the globalized context. (Weaver, 1996).

6.3 Transforming English Curriculum to suit the integration of technology into language classroom

The rapid growth in the use of computer-mediated communication (CMC) as a result of globalization is changing and revolutionizing several aspects of human life, but nowhere is more prevailing than the English curriculum (Wu & Cao, 2007). As internet has become an important medium of communication, computer-mediated language learning has become an essential feature of language classrooms and this has altered the teaching of the basic language skills, especially reading and writing skills. For instance, there is, according to Reinking (1998) and Snyder (1998), "a shift in reading practices from the (paper) page to the screen" (as cited in Wu & Ben-Canaan, 2006). Reading from screen involved more complex reading skills to deal with the graphics, images, audio-visual, internal and external links available and the conventional ways of teaching skimming, scanning, guessing meaning based on contextual clues etc can no longer fulfill the requirement. A major transformation is, therefore, needed in the English curriculum to include the necessary skills to cope with the shift. For example, Shetzer and Warshawer (2000) have identified new reading skills needed by students to gain ability to read from screen, which include: finding the information through the internet, evaluating the source, credibility, and timeliness of information, making navigational decisions to pursue internal and external links or to revert to further searching, making immediate decisions to save or catalogue part of or a complete page, and organizing and keeping track of information in the electronic form (as cited in Wu & Ben-Canaan, 2006). These skills should be emphasized in the English curriculum today to produce competent learners.

7 Conclusion

It is apparent that the British rule in the 19th century is one of the key factors that determine the status of English as second language in Malaysia after independence but it is the awareness of the people on the important roles that English is playing in the increasingly globalized world that maintain its usage and status in today’s Malaysia. To improve the English language competency amongst Malaysians, it is important for the policy makers and the educators to carefully examine the English curriculum and make necessary changes to advocate better English language learning that suit the current educational context. The need for a long term plan that could address all the issues and challenges is immediate.

References
on Sept. 20, 2013)

Appendix

要旨：「グローバリゼーションとマレーシアにおける英語教育と教育課程」

グローバリゼーションがますます進行する世界の中で、特に国際貿易やビジネスにおいて、英語は異文化間のコミュニケーションを促進する国際的な言語となった。マレーシアは2000年までに完全な先進国になるために尽力している一方、国際化という荒波の中で生き残るため、マレーシア人の英語能力を向上させることが不可欠である。多民族国家として、英語はマレーシアにおいて二番目に

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重要な言語となっており、英語力の向上はあらゆる教育レベルにて奨励されている。数十年の間、マレーシア政府は国民の英語水準を改善するため、英語教育のカリキュラムや政策において、いくつかの改革を行ってきた。

たとえば、高難易度の公的英語試験を導入したり、中学教育の英語のカリキュラムに英文学を導入したり、予備課程の大学生たちにMUET（マレーシアの大学レベルの英語能力試験）を導入したり、高等教育に選択科目として英語で学ぶ科学技術科目を導入したりしている。英語能力を高めるための努力は見て分かることであるが、これらは取り組みだけでなく、現代社会の要求に十分対応できていると考えて言えるだろうか。筆者らは、今までのマレーシアにおける言語政策や英語教育過程の変遷を振り返り、マレーシアにおける英語教育と教育課程をさらに改善するための案を検討した。英語の学習教材を通じて学生たちを異文化に触れさせ、文法にだけ注目するという従来の教授法を見直し、英語教室と科学技術が融合した新たな英語教育カリキュラムを開発する必要があると筆者らは考える。政策立案者や教育家に現在の英語カリキュラムを細部まで検討し、現在のマレーシアにおける教育に適合した英語教育課程を築くために必要とされる変更を行うよう、筆者らは主張する。

キーワード：グローバリゼーション、英語教育と学習課程、マレーシアの英語

Received on Oct. 30, 2013 and accepted on Dec. 20, 2013.