



## PLANNING FOR A NATIONAL MALAY LANGUAGE

Utkurova Gulzoda Kahramonovna

*2nd year student,*

*Faculty of Oriental Philology and Translation Studies,*

*Tashkent State University of Oriental Studies*

*Scientific adviser: Ph.D. Ismatullayeva N.R.*

*Email: guliutkurova@gmail.com*

*Phone number: +998974779117*

### Abstract

This article examines information on how language policy is implemented in Malaysia. The main issue to be considered is the reforms made by linguists.

**Key words:** Non-malays, national language, Tamil, Chinese

Language policies are often intended “to influence the behaviour of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of their language codes” (Cooper 1989: 45); i.e., language policies are intended to influence language use. The reasons for language choices in language policies could be social, educational, political or economic. Education has always been an important variable in language planning initiatives, for it is one of the sectors where the implementation of language policy normally starts. Students in schools, colleges and universities are taught using the national language as the medium of instruction, and people are encouraged to use the language in different do-mains of communication. Implementing a language policy requires certain processes, starting from selection, codification and elaboration, and ending with securing acceptance of the language (Holmes 2001). A language policy needs to be overt and to be known to the public and must not be controlled or manipulated by a few groups of people. Introducing the language policy without the awareness of those who are affected by them sends a message to the public that they are not seen as legitimate equal partners (Shohamy 2005). In Malaysia, language policies have changed over time due to political and economic developments in the country and also due to globalisation. Malaysia is a multiethnic, multilingual country with a population of 26.64 million (as of 2006; Department of Statistics, Malaysia, web-site). The population of Malaysia comprises three major ethnic groups: 1) Bumiputera (Malays and other indigenous groups) 65.1%, 2) Chinese 26.0%, and 3) Indians 7.7% (Census 2002, Department of Statistics). The three major ethnic groups speak different languages and practice different cultures. Because the country is so culturally and linguistically diverse, language policies have been formulated to promote national unity among people through the use of a common language. At least a hundred languages are spoken in Malaysia. While the Malays who form the majority of the population are indigenous, the non-Malays (i.e.,



the Chinese and the Indians) are considered immigrant communities since many of their ancestors were encouraged by the British colonial regime to move to Malaysia. Within each of the three main ethnic groups, a variety of languages and dialects are spoken. Furthermore, it is not unusual for speakers of a specific ethnic community to know and use another language better than they do their mother tongue (David 2001). During the British colonial era, vernacular schools provided substandard education (Gaudart 1992: 73-74; Omar 1992) and was separatist, with Malay schools having 6 years of elementary education and focusing on grooming Malay women to become efficient housewives and Malay men efficient farmers and fishermen. Tamil schools had also 6 years of elementary education where Indian (mainly Tamil) students were assumed to stay on as tappers in the rubber industry, and Chinese schools followed the Chinese educational system and trained the children for business (David 2007; Abdullah Hassan 2004). The curriculum in both the Tamil and Chinese schools was adapted from the school systems in their respective motherlands (Omar 1992). English schools, mainly initiated by missionaries, were considered elite institutions, as they were located in urban areas, and groomed individuals mainly for government and administrative purposes (Ridge 2004, 408). Graduates of English schools were prepared for tertiary education in Malaya, Singapore or the United Kingdom (ibid.). It is clear that linguistic and racial divisions were prevalent during the colonial era; however, geography also played a role. Malay schools, with a largely homogenous Malay student population, were mainly found in rural Malaya. Chinese medium schools were mostly located in urban centres and Tamil medium schools were essentially in rubber estates (David & Govinda samy 2003). Omar (1992) explains that as nation-building was of no great concern to the colonial administration, both Chinese and Tamil schools oriented their curriculum towards China and India respectively. English medium schools, on the other hand, were located in urban centres and were an attractive alternative to the vernacular schools. English school education was considered prestigious and elitist. Segregated schooling was therefore the norm during British rule, as schools were set up along ethnic lines and conducted in different languages (see Santhiram 1999: 35, who says '...the colonial power tolerated an ethnically inspired and financed vernacular education for the Chinese; and an employer-initiated Tamil vernacular primary education for the Indians'). After independence, the choice of Malay as the national language has been successful to some extent. Most non-Malays are today fluent in Malay, as it is the language of instruction and public examinations and also the language of administration. Even with independence and with Malay as a national language, English has always been introduced in the first year of the school system. To cater to the needs of the non-Malays, the government has permitted the existence of primary schools that use the vernacular languages of the major ethnic groups, Mandarin and Tamil, as the medium of instruction. At age 13, during the first year of their secondary school, all Malaysians are expected to converge to government schools with Malay as the national language. However, there are some 60 private secondary Chinese schools with Mandarin as the medium of instruction. With privatisation and globalisation, English has become the language for teaching science and mathematics since 2003. This has recently faced fierce resentment by nationalists who argue that the use of English for the teaching of science and mathematics in primary schools is unfair to the large majority of rural children who are mainly Malays. In 2009, after much discussion among various vested parties,



the decided to revert to the national language, Malay, for the teaching of these two subjects as from 2012. However, due to the existence of different languages and the use of vernaculars in schools during the students' formative years, the reality is that actual language use among Malaysians appears to run counter to the intentions behind the language policies. Polarization among the three ethnic groups (Malay, Chinese and Indians) has become more evident particularly in schools, colleges and universities. This volume examines what happens at the grassroots level. Policies may be imposed from above, but it is the people who have the final choice. Whilst Malay is used in public domains, the writers of this volume were keen to examine the actual choice of language used by Malaysians at the level of social interaction, especially outside the classroom. The findings of the study will provide an insight as to the possible consequences of language policy in a multilingual society such as Malaysia.

## Bibliography

1. Abdullah H. (2004), One hundred years of language planning in Malaysia: Looking ahead to the future. *Language in India* 4.  
<http://www.languageinindia.com/nov2004/abdulla1.html>
2. Cooper, M. (1984), 'Linguistic competence of practised and unpractised non-native readers of English', in J.C. Alderson and A.H. Urquhart (eds.), *Reading in a foreign language*, 122-35. Harlow: Longman Group Ltd. Crismore
3. David, M.K. (1996), *Language shift among the Sindhis in Malaysia*. Ph.D Thesis. Kuala Lumpur. University of Malaya.
  - a. (1998), 'Language shift, cultural maintenance and ethnic identity: a study of a minority community: The Sindhis of Malaysia', *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 130:67-76.
  - b. (2003), 'Language policy in Malaysia – Empowerment or disenfranchisement? Focus on the Malaysian Indian community', in P.M. Ryan and R. Terborg (eds.), *Language Issues of Inequality*, 157-170. Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico
  - c. (2007), 'Changing language policies in Malaysia: Ramifications and implications', paper presented at 'Language, Education and Diversity Conference' in the University of Waikato, Hamilton, New Zealand, Nov. 2007.
4. Govindasamy S., and M. Nambiar. (2003), 'Social networks: applicability to minority communities in multilingual settings', in M.K. David (ed.), *International Journal of the Sociology of Language* 161:33-60
5. Omar, A.H. (1992), *The linguistic scenery in Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
6. Holmes, J. (2008), *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. London: Longman.
7. Gaudart, H. (1992), *Bilingual education*. Townsville: James Cook University of North Queensland.
8. Santhiram, R. (1999), *Education of minorities: the case of Indians in Malaysia*. Penang: CHILD.