Language policy planning

The pace and intensity of change under globalisation in many countries has given rise to different responses. LoBianco (2001) points to a general destabilization affecting all advanced societies, of new kinds of hybridity of language and culture, the emergence of multicultural societies everywhere, vast population mobility, ever more diversifying codes of communication and ‘micro-cultures’ of Internet-mediated ‘identity’.

(Giddens, 1999) points out the contradictory tendencies in the world’s linguistic repertoire and that to understand these trends one has to be conscious of the co-occurring, and mutually producing processes of globalization, regionalization and localization. The following questions are raised: how does one reconcile the collapse of the world’s linguistic diversity with the acceleration of diversity & pluralism in many previously monolingual and monocultural parts of the world, and the emergence of hybrid kinds of culture, syncretic practices of belief and identity, a growth in creolized speech patterns, and multiple illiteracies?

It is said that globalisation is most forcefully advanced by a kind of market transnationalism of late capitalist modes of production, services and knowledge-based wealth in new economies. This new economic role of knowledge has to include and understand market trends in post-industrial economies, such as in the services sector, high-technology products, value-added processes, & mass tourism which then elevate the need for language and cultural capabilities or competencies.

LoBianco (2003) in Policy literacy refers to the use of OECD literacy surveys, where increased attention is paid to literacy competencies by developed country governments as this is directly associated with a revival of human capital asset thinking within economics driven by the emergence of the ‘knowledge economy’.

OECD reinforces that what constitutes ‘acceptable literacy performance’ will be debated within an established paradigm of description of tasks accomplished in measurable, discrete and recurring ways and a vocabulary of comparison of such results across cultural-national settings among countries that participate in such surveys.

Heller (2002) reviewing evidence on bilingualism in Canada asserts that old relationships are loosening and notes that globalisation has weakened the power of the nation state to prescribe, prohibit, privilege access to and use of languages among its citizens. Canada today there is a greater willingness to learn French amongst the dominant English-speaking population as new markets and new opportunities open up for bilingual speakers.


In Singapore, English the language of the British colonial masters, in spite of opposition at selecting English as the main working language and the language of administration, and in education, remains after 35 years in the same position with the same status. This is evidence of the link between language and the power of the
economic agenda. The considerable language and dialect complexity in Singapore has been reduced to a one national language, four official languages formula.

Such a formula reduces the linguistic heterogeneity that speakers establish in their networks (Purushotam, 1997). Byrnes, (2003) states that language planning is introduced, established and imposed as a way of creating order, managing and controlling the linguistic repertoire of the nation. LP is not neutral, but rather embedded in a whole set of political, ideological, social, and economic agendas. As languages express national identities that are often embedded in shared history and cultures: they are ideological because they are perceived as symbols of status, power, group identity, and belonging: and they are economic because knowledge of languages can be linked to different types of economic consequences, both positive and negative.

The nation-state has to respond to issues arising out of globalisation’s economic and cultural imperatives, the emergence of new economic centres such as China and India, the telecommunication and life sciences revolutions, among others.

The new growth areas are seen to be in biomedical sciences, health care services, nanotechnology, and digital media and in education.

Sifakis et al 2003 define globalisation to denote the interrelationship of economic & various financial crisis, for example the East Asia market crisis 1997. While the US market offers extensive opportunities, there is also periodic economic downturn. An adage that is often expressed is that ‘if the USA sneezes, Singapore catches a cold’. Singapore has responded with the need for new economic, social-cultural and educational strategies. In the current economic climate the changing nation-state has to develop regional and global entities. One example is the FTA signed by USA with Singapore.

These global trends are also to some extent changing old relationships between language, knowledge, and identity. The vast amounts of information available in English on the Internet and the changing economic landscape in countries like China have given a boost to both English and Chinese as languages of economic opportunity; thus, while the Chinese on the mainland are learning English to participate in the global economy, Singaporean Chinese are urged to master Mandarin to avail themselves of economic opportunities in China and to act as middlemen to business ventures/projects in China.

Globalisation & English language teaching

It is recognised that both high proficiency in English and in intercultural understanding is needed. In a paper on Facing the globalisation challenge in the realm of English language teaching Nicos C. Sifakis & Areti-Maria Sougari, (2003) provide a discussion of English as an international language and the ownership of such a language. Countries in the ‘outer circle’ recognise the need for raising learners’ intercultural awareness as a means of safeguarding against the effects of English as a global language. This leads them to the supposition of the native speaker as the ‘rightful’ owner’ of the language.

To what extent are local differences recognized by educators, teachers and examiners as concrete manifestations of new forms of globalisation or glocalization?

In English elsewhere: globalization, assessment and ethics, Jeanette Rhedding Jones explores the established practice of standardized English curriculum in a globalising world. It is still a commonplace requirement to expect native speaker models. Native speaker model leads to norm-based approaches to the teaching of languages.
Are varieties of English recognised and given contexts of difference arising from complex immigrations and diasporas. Pedagogically in the Singapore context, there is a tendency to uphold norms and ‘rules’ that map and underlie the mastery of native speakers’ linguistic competence and performance. This requirement or a set of target goals for reflected in the syllabus and in the curriculum materials. In Singapore, the Speak Good English movement, the setting of exonormative standards for both English (Received pronunciation for Spoken English) and mother languages of Malay (Riau-Johore Malay), Mandarin (Beijing Mandarin), Tamil (TamilNadu), school based evaluation and examinations linked to Cambridge Examinations Syndicate etc all have their reference to exonormative standards. Diaglossic varieties of Singapore Colloquial English and Singlish (a creolized variety with highly indigenised features with borrowings from contact languages in the Chinese communities such as Hokkien, Cantonese etc) are rejected and frowned upon in the school-based context. Similarly diaglossic varieties of Mandarin, Malay and Tamil are also rejected in the school context as they are considered as substandard.

One other effect of globalisation is its effect on culture, cultural homogenising and civilising ramifications that tend to erode the cultural make-up of smaller nations. The issue is that of different languages that appear to have different weights. English has been identified as the only truly international, or global language (Crystal, 1997) whiles the other lingua franca languages of the world are French, English, German, Spanish etc. All languages are assigned different weights that are directly related to the cultural, literary, social and communicative characteristics or values of languages. New considerations of a global command of language competencies are necessary in order to participate in a global world.

The other target to be achieved is that it is not just to making learners’ competent users of the language—ie English, and not just ‘culturally authenticate’ the foreign language being acquired. But as Sifakis et al, 2003, argue, it is to make speakers become ‘shameless owners’ of English as an international language, as a variety of language amongst other languages that speakers have in their repertoire.

Even within the Singapore model of bilingual education there is a need for cross-cultural awareness & cross-cultural understanding of languages/dialects in their own environment, in their national context, in their own community context.

Globalisation & economic development
What are some of the challenges to Singapore? The senior minister in a talk entitled (Singapre’ future—the best is yet to be facing up to global realities) St times August 16th 2003 observed that value added, knowledge-based activities are needed to make Singapore competitive against global competitors that Singapore needs better educated personnel. The competitive media domain was referred to as an example. Where twenty years ago the daily newspaper Straits Times was the only English newspaper, now we have International Tribune, Asian Wall Street Journal, and internet news. Singapore tv stations faces competition from cable channels BBC, CNN, CNBC, Discovery etc.

The local media in order to stay afloat has to develop niche markets to reverse the stagnant viewer-ship and readership. For example, Zaobao, the local Mandarin newspaper, Tamil Murasu, the Tamil daily, Berita Harian, the Malay newspaper face a stagnant readership as more switch to English.
Think out of the domestic box

In a report Chinese language – *Think out of the domestic box* – Cheng Shoong Tat Straits Times July 11th 2003 refers to China’s spectacular growth and that if Singapore wants a piece of the action, it cannot ignore a potential advantage of networking with those wanting to hook up with China’s language and cultural understanding.

The Singapore-China economy is fast changing with a two-way movement of capital and technology, but increasingly in favour of China. In this two way economic partnership, high level of competency in language and cultural understanding are distinct advantages, attested to by the growing number of Singaporean and regional investors, managers, professionals, corporate lawyers, bankers, and accountants flocking to China. Leveraging on this asset to engage China requires a very high level of competency in Mandarin.

To what extent can the government persuade non-Mandarin speaking Singaporeans to see the Chinese language as a national asset? It will have to be seen as the pursuit of a national economic strategy that will benefit all, not just the Chinese but all ethnic groups. Limiting the resources to just the Chinese will lead to suspicion and exclusion.

Sociological concerns

Ethnic relations and ethnic harmony remain centre stage in the nation’s agenda, along with language and ethnicity related domains. Issues of ethnicity and religion were discussed through interviews with sociologists & journalists in ‘How race is lived in Singapore’ beyond Sept 11th, the ‘tudung’ issue where Malay parents requested that their children in school be allowed to wear their headscarves. (In a special edition of Straits Times, national day supplement of August 9th 2002).

The juggling between Singapore’s national and cultural identities and that Singapore’s nationalism is not merely a historical burden, but a political and philosophical one observes Janadas Devan, a journalist (Straits Times, August 9th, 2002). Without a self-conscious dominant majority identity, a national identity defined by the state, which is not of any particular racial, religious or linguistic group takes its place. The state, a repository of the national dominant identity, based on a nationalism of mediated identity through the cultural nationalisms of the colony’s various racial groups.

The assertion of cultural identities, multiple identities, of transnational identities will remain with Singapore. The juggling is endless where sometimes cultural identities are acknowledged and sometimes they are not as in the wearing of the Moslem scarf – tudung’. A recent survey reported in (Sunday Times August 2003) Why turn spotlight on kids? Referred to the link between ethnicity, inter-racial mixing and language, that children in primary schools chose friends of their own race. Even though children come through the same pre-education system with a dominant English-Chinese curriculum, children tended to stick to their own kind. Schools tended no longer to have a common social language used by all students and there the survey committee recommended that they use English across schools as a common language. Hawazi Daipi, the parliamentary secretary for education on the other hand supported the use of various mother tongues which pupils in school use when they are interacting with their common friends. said that its only natural for children to be more comfortable using their mother tongue with friends. (Straits Times, August, 2003).

Other national education efforts tend to emphasise racial harmony, encourage inter-racial interaction, is getting children in school to experience different cultures where non-Malay pupils learn Malay dance, try batik art lessons, Malay music and song (‘Lessons in each other’s cultures pay off’ – Straits Times, July 31, 2003).
Global markets and global trends

What are Singapore’s responses to global trends and global markets? For the Chinese community it is the creation of linguistic-cultural elite. The government has selected 50 Singapore scholars to be attached to elite Chinese public institutions and universities in China. In exchange 50 top Chinese scholars will be attached to elite Singapore public institutions.

What are some of the community responses to the new challenges?

Malay Muslims have a role in remaking Singapore – St Times May 27th, 2003.

Appeal to common national goals – “Malay-Muslims have to be engaged in remaking Singapore. We’ve got to bring about a community of excellence – a better life and a better future for all Malay-Muslims. It is through an appeal to the fact that made it through their own efforts, succeeded and equalled their peers of any other race. The recent fight against SARS in April 2003 was labelled a multiracial virus – therefore a multiracial problem. The presence of Malay-Muslim doctors, nurses, hospital staff working with others sharing responsibility was seen as a way to contribute to the community, strengthen social cohesion because we face common threats and challenges. The Malay community wants a strong push to the learning and acquisition of Arabic knowledge, a strong push towards the Islamization of knowledge, Islamization of education & educational aspirations. Young Malays are keen to go to colleges and universities in Malaysia, Brunei, but especially to the Middle East to acquire Islamic knowledge and become teachers of Islamic knowledge.

Heidi Byrnes, (2003) refers to Israel where parents succeeded in introducing spoken Arabic at an early age in a large number of schools in Tel Aviv, in opposition to state policies.

The Malay elite and talent pool is being established by the new NTU/NIE BA programme, where out of 38 graduates 10 are men and 18 women. This is seen as adding to the pool of the elite Malays in the community. In most PCF kindergartens run by the ruling political part, People’s Action Party provide Malay language classes. Malay Muslim organisations, perdaus, madrasas, mosque kindergartens all teach Malay and Arabic. More Malay parents are sending their children to weekend madrasas where they teach jawi, the script for the acquisition of Arabic.

In an unpublished Berita Harian survey parents opted for English and Arabic as their choice, pointing the shift away from Malay. During Friday prayers at the mosques more are being held in English to accommodate non-Arabic speakers. At majlis alikhair, the mosque kindergarten which teaches mathematics, English & Malay is seen as a model kindergarten. It is run by a head whose qualifications in Early Childhood Education are seen as the means to organise a model curriculum.

With the shift to English by the middle class Malay families there is concern with the digital divide, as the lower middle class remains with Malay as the main language of communication. A number of Malay teachers are not ready to use IT for Malay language teaching.

Academics have raised concerns with the implementation of the standardisation of the Malay language or sebutan baku lead by majlis bahasa or the Malay Language Council by Malay academics. Dr Noridah (a specialist in Malay language acquisition, Ass Professor at the Malay Studies) states in an interview that this was agreed to by parliamentarians Sidek Sanif & Yatiman Yusoff when the standardisation of Spoken Malay in the region was promoted by Anwar Ibrahim, the now detained Malaysian political leader.
But Dr Noraidah other academic staff at the Malay Studies Division state that there has been inconsistent use of *sebutan baku*. It is required, for example, in news broadcasts, classroom & formal functions, but this standard variety is not used outside the classroom or by the community in the home domain. The emphasis on standardisation was observed in the following incident. At a television forum discussion Dr Noraidah was asked to re-record the programme as she was observed not speaking sebutan baku (personal communication).

There’s rapid shift currently to English on the request of Malay parents. Mr Aidil, an experienced Malay teacher and researcher said that most parents want a curriculum based on English. Malay they feel is a given and therefore classroom time should not be used for Malay. There is also a great demand for Arabic over Malay as Arabic commands higher status and a language with higher economic status. The Arabic language links one to the Middle East and therefore Arabic knowledge and Islamic language is seen to have higher status than Malay. (personal communication). A workshop held by MENDAKI (A Malay community organisation) for Malay parents, supported by a Malay community leader and parliamentarian Dr Yaacob Ibrahim, on ‘developing the foundations for mathematical and thinking skills in young children’ lead by an Israeli professor of cognitive psychology David Tzuiri on September 15-16th 2003 shows some of the shift taking place as the Malay-Moslem Community aspires to modernise and takes its place in the modern world.

It seems to be a similar trend to Byrnes (2003) who states that parents have succeeded in introducing spoken Arabic at an early age in a large number of schools in Tel Aviv, in opposition to language policies.

What’s in a name?

What is the link between language, culture, and geographical cultural locations?

Members of the Singapore Heritage Society sociologists at the Singapore Heritage Society (Liew Kai Khun, C.J. Wee Wan-Ling, Kwok Kian Woon) in a debate on language, culture and identity argue that that it is only appropriate that mass -rapid- train (mrt) stations reinforce the identities, through the locales richly owned with a sense of history, that invokes the deeper, historical significance. They question the naming of an mrt station as ‘Chinatown’. Such a label smacks of the CMIO label, a divisive tern coined by the British colonialists that led to the setting up of ethnic enclaves Of Chinese, Malays, Indians, & others (Eurasians) to manage the diversity of peoples. To continue to use ethicised and simplified descriptions such as ‘Chinatown’ and ‘Little India’ is a sort of self-exoticisation to make it attractive to tourists, but we end up in turn with a weak simulation of an “orientalised” tourist enclave.

There has already been a trend amongst Singaporeans to give anglizised names to children, to buildings, for example, Cavendish Park etc. what is needed is a cosmopolitan appeal as the cityscape is undergoing rapid change, the local will become part of our global identity.(Straits Times, MRT stations: ‘get names back on track’ – .

**But Singapore is always work-in-progress**

‘Work in progress’ St Times June 7th, 2003-

Deputy prime minister stated that “The dilemma for the government is that the more successfully we educate you, the more mobile you become. Many will be educated others less educated. These may be called Ah Bengs or Ah Lians. It is right to invest in our people. But we can only continue to do so if those who benefit the most from this system contribute back to their fair share and more.

Another report asks ‘Are we turning into Hotel Singapore’ – in a city where kiasuism, that is, being the first or best at the expense of others, in another article (August 2002). Dr Lai Ah Eng describes the need to be more sensitive to other cultures and go beyond the concerns of rituals and riots”. “Being cosmopolitan would give Singapore maximum advantage while
being Chinese would limit its potential' as we are not HK or Macau. states SM Lee Sept 12th 2002) 

Currently with some experimentation we see examples of hybridized literacies arising from languages in contact largely seen in the arts scene, in theatre, movie etc. Attempts at representing code mixing and code switching of Mandarin. Hokkien (Chinese dialect) in Jack Neo’s Mandarin-English movie ‘I not stupid’ which grossed 3.8 million, & Money no enough’ which grossed 5.8 million, Liang Pop Po which grossed 3.03 million (Hong Kong based interview ‘why is your government now so kai fang’ (Mandarin for liberal) ((‘Daring to change’; Straits Times August, 9, 2003). Other attempts at hybrid culture seen in the production of Ong Keng Sen’s ‘Lear’, ‘Desdemona’ – seeking to go beyond ethnic lines, ethnic folklore of the various ethnic communities in Singapore and instead attempted to convey hybrid culture through its philosophy, principles, Japanese techno artists, Indian kathakali dancers, Tibetan lamas, Beijing opera singers, Thai court dancers.

Footnote:
The Indian community and its response to the Asian expatriates August 2, 2003
Singaporeans including Indians are rarely invited by either the HDB or condo dwelling expatriate Indians. Expat Indians want to be with their own kind and there is tendency to congregate along caste lines or the language group they belong to. The Brahmins tend to move in the same circle; those from Andra Pradesh will not mix with those from Tamil Nadu.

3. more dialect shows will hit mandarin – Straits Times march 2003. – deputy director, corporate communication for PS, MiCA – info and arts – since 1979 0 speak mandarin campaign – uphill task to get Chinese Singaporeans who spoke in more than 12 dialects to make Mandarin their mother tongue- allowing dialect will create a backslide and undo all the progress we have made. We must be mindful not to undermine efforts to promote mandarin.

Newspaper clippings
St times July 15th 2003
NUS course to give grads a China edge
To study china’s culture, history as well its modern development in politics and economics-understanding the psyche, society and culture in the place you do business is key to your business.- by spotting trends and growth
St times august 22. 2003
In search of the lowest cost labour – work being outsourced – surgery, diagnosis, aircraft maintenance, financial services, back-office treasury operations, technical designs, documentary and film production, analysis of maps, satellite images, IT work, software development.
St times Friday august 2003
Waking up the old spirit in new Nantah

Late calligrapher – said in 1998 – reinstating Nantah name would quieten the hears of many. 10,000 graduates.
Founder tan lark sye0 donated 5 million – other Chinese trishaw riders, hawkers donated. . set up in 1982. 1991 became Nantah.
Spirits tied closely to multicultural setting – tied to Chinese roots.
References
LoBianco 2002 real world language politics and policy. Monterey Institute of International Studies
LoBianco-2002 Facing the globalisation challenge in the realm of English language teaching
Lai Ah Eng, 2002, the importance of cross-cultural exchange in the remaking of Singapore.
The institute of policy studies
What is PIRLS? Ho Wah Kam. SAAL Quarterly. No 63, August 2003
Comparison of Singapore’s high achievers in reading is compared to those who are native speakers of English. In the category of students who reportedly use English at home ‘always or almost always’ (43% of the sample) score a higher average than the same category of students in UK, USA.
Jacques Maurais & Michael A. Morris Eds. Languages in a globalising world.