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Language Policy, Culture and Identity in the era of Globalization [T1]
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It is a great honor for me to have been invited to address such a distinguished audience. I want to thank IATEFL, particularly the President, Peter Grundy, for his personal invitation, and the conference organizers, particularly Alison Medland, for making it possible for me to be here, and for all the thoughtful arrangements.

Introduction

In the March issue of Newsweek, the cover page says "Who owns English?" and there is feature article which cites figures from David Crystal's book English as a Global Language (2003). It highlight the fact the NS of English are outnumbered by NNS by 3 to 1, that the number of NNS of English in Asia roughly equals the total in America, Canada and Britain.

This reminds me of the questions that Fishman (1996) raised almost a decade ago regarding the spread of English. The questions are:

- Is English still spreading?
- Is the spread of English orchestrated or fostered and to whose benefit? This question has been heatedly debated and the controversies relate to three sub-questions:
    - Is the spread of English cultural-linguistic imperialism / neo-colonialism or is it a democratization of an elitist resource?
    - Is English a tool for economic exploitation or a multinational tool that enables former colonized regions to participate in the world capitalist system?
    - Does the spread of English necessarily lead to the displacement of local languages and cultures?
- Are there forces and processes transcending the English mother-tongue world which may also be contributing to the continued spread of English?

Fishman calls for research on regional differences or clusters of countries where the processes of change in the status of English have turned out in one way and those which have turned out in another way instead of trying to apply catch-all theories to complex situations which could be vastly different.

This paper is a partial response to Fishman's call by focusing on Asian countries[1].

Fishman's first question has already been answered by David Crystal's figures. These figures show that English is not only *still* spreading but it is spreading at an unprecedented rate.

Instead of dealing with the second and third question in sequence, as suggested by Fishman, I will deal with them together. Since the nineties, it has become clear that

"globalization" has led to profound changes in all aspects of our lives. It involves very complex processes in which a number of factors interact, producing changes which seem to be out of human control. It would be difficult for us to address the second question and its related questions without addressing the third question, that is, without seeing language policy issues as constitutive of the developing political and economical dimensions of globalization (see also Wright, 2004).

Conceptions of Globalization

Globalization is a highly contested concept. The complexity of the issues involved in the concept can be gleaned from the multiple ways in which globablization has been defined and characterized. At the risk of gross simplification, one could say that there are two diametrically opposed views about globalization.

At one end is the conception of globalization as a process which has led to the emergence of a new world order with an open and integrated global economy. Nation-states are considered to have an increasingly diminishing role in economic and social processes. Instead, multinational corporations and inter-governmental organizations such as IMF, WB and WTO play a central role in economic and political decisions (Baker, Epstein, and Pollin, 1998 on globalization and economic policy; Cox, 1994). We are said to have entered a "denationalized" or a "postnational era" (Wright, 2004).

At the other end are those who are skeptical about the new world order just described. They argue that the present world economy has always existed and that the state is as powerful as ever. They see globalization as a perpetuation of colonization which continues to exploit third world countries and undermines their national and cultural identities. It is a process of cultural homogenization typified by western hegemony, or rather by Americanization (Barber, 1995; Tomlinson, 1999).

In between these two ends are those who see globalization as essentially a process of interaction between global and local forces which is characterized by hybridization rather than homogenization. Roland Robertson (1995) coined the term "glocalization" to capture this characteristic. Globalization is considered not singular condition or a linear process but rather a multidimensional phenomenon involving economic, political, technological, cultural, environmental domains which are inextricably intertwined (Held, 1998).

Globalization and Language Policy

No matter which interpretation of globalization one subscribes to, one cannot deny that we are experiencing a phase of intensive time-space compression which is embodied in the concept of "global village" (Giddens, 1990, 2000; Albrow, 1990; 1996). This has an unsettling impact on multiple dimensions, including political and economic practices, the balance of class power as well as on our cultural and social life (see David Harvey, 1990, p. 284). I would summarize the essential features of globalization as *interconnectivity* (which transcends time and geographical barriers as well political, social, ethnic and cultural boundaries), *intensity*, *immediacy* and *multidimensionality* of knowledge generation, transmission, and interaction.

The *intensity* and *immediacy* of interaction and *interconnectivity* of globalization have been brought about by two mediational tools , informational technology and language, which are inseparable. They have been referred to as "global literacy skills". As Vygotsky (1978) points out, mediational tools not only shape but are also shaped by human mental functions, human interaction, human relationship and the relationship between humans and these tools. Therefore, in responding to changes brought about by globalization, countries inevitably need to re-examine the mediational tools with which they are equipped. The last decade has witnessed the ways in which countries have joined the global race in interconnectivity measured by the penetration rate of computers, mobile phones and so on in households, schools and business corporations. Countries also need to revisit their language policies to ensure that their people have adequate linguistic resources to participate in the various processes. This involves decisions regarding which language(s) that should be given official status, which should be adopted as working language(s), how much resources should be put into learning which languages by whom, for what purposes, and how.

Language is not a purely technical tool; it is a cultural artifact. It is created in specific sociocultural and historical contexts and as such it carries with it the characteristics of these contexts, as Vygotsky (1978) reminds us. Embodied in a language is the history, the beliefs, the cultures and the values of its speakers. As Pennycook (2002c, p. 93-94) observes,

> … language policies are fundamentally linked with political governance, educational curricula and system of morality; in short they are about cultural opportunities and preferences. Thus arguments in favor of one language or another are part of broader moral and political visions. … Language policies are cultural policies, addressing questions of language within a far broader cultural field.

Characteristics of Asian Countries

I would like to explain briefly why I wish to focus on Asian countries, apart from the fact that it has the highest number of NNS of English, and apart from the fact that I am Asian. It has been pointed out by a number of researchers that the defining feature of Asia is heterogeneity rather than homogeneity and that the existence of the so-called "Asian values" is a myth rather than a reality (S. Kim 2000, p. 13). There is some truth in this observation. For example, South-East Asian countries such as Singapore, Malaysia, and Indonesia are typically multi-ethnic and multi-lingual whereas countries like Japan and South Korea are *largely* monolingual and mono-ethnic until recently. Asian countries also have different cultural traditions. Countries like Japan, Korea, Vietnam, Singapore, and China (including HK and Taiwan) are heavily influenced by Confucian tradition. They have been referred to as "Confucian-heritage cultures" by (Biggs, 1996) whereas countries like India, Malaysia, and Indonesia have different cultural traditions and religious beliefs.

However, Asian countries do have common characteristics which are pertinent to language policy decisions. First, many of them gained political independence or were freed from the threat of foreign invasion only in the last half century or so after having suffered foreign domination for centuries. Many are confronted with the task of nation building by re-establishing their national and cultural identities after gaining political independence, and many want to play a role on the international stage, as the

Chinese saying goes. These countries all see the need to strengthen the state's role in meeting the challenges of globalization. There is no question of the demise of the nation-state.

Second, globalization has posed dire challenges to Asian countries because English, one of the two mediational tools, is not their native tongue. The intensity and immediacy of interaction and information exchange have rendered obsolete the reliance on translation, and a "lingua franca" is needed. English, being the de facto lingua franca of international exchange, has become a much sought-after commodity (see for example, Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas, 1999; Crystal, 2003). Therefore, Asian countries, including those which are most protective of their own languages and cultures have to revise their language and educational policies so that they will not be disadvantaged in the global economic competition.

Third, the recognition of the important role of English, sometimes even over and above their own national languages, has profound implications for their national and cultural identities which they all strive to protect.

To limit the scope of the discussion, I shall only focus on a selected number of East Asian countries on the basis of the important similarities and differences that they have regarding the status of English in these countries, their cultural heritage, the history of their language policies and their responses to globalization. Japan, South Korea, China and Vietnam are at different stages of economic development, and have very different political systems, but English is a foreign language in these countries. They also share the same Confucian cultural heritage. Malaysia and Singapore are both former British colonies, and multilingual and multi-ethnic but have implemented very different language policies after independence and globalization has impacted on them in very different ways.

Globalization and the Spread of English in Asia

Taking the various characterizations of globalization and Fishman's questions, we can now the following questions in relation to Asian countries:

- Is the spread of English in Asia a result of globalization or glocalization?
- Is English perceived by Asian countries as a multinational tool from which they can benefit or an imperialistic tool which subject them to economic and political exploitation?
- Is it an empowering tool or is it a disempowering tool?
- In what ways have Asian countries responded to globalization, and what roles have their language policies played?
- Do these policies lead to the democratization of English, hence fostering multilingualism and multiculturalism, internationally and intra-nationally?
- Or do these policies legitimate the hegemony of English, hence (ironically) exacerbating the linguistic domination of English over other languages, including their own national languages, and the cultural domination of the West over the rest?
- How do governments in Asian countries resolve the paradox between promoting national and cultural identities of their own countries and mobilizing their nationals to learn a language with very different values, cultures and traditions?

Language Policy Responses to Globalization

My discussion of the language policy responses to globalization will encompass three components of language policy: language planning or management, language practices and language beliefs (Spolsky, 2004). Language management is a form of intervention, which could be at supra-national, national or subnational levels to decide on linguistic preferences. By language practices, I refer to not only language varieties and language use but also language pedagogy. Language beliefs or ideology refer to the underlying assumptions about the nature of language and communicative practices, including cultural assumptions about communicative practices. These three components are intertwined. Language practices and beliefs are mutually constitutive, and language management shapes and is also shaped by these practices and beliefs. In the course of the discussion, I shall be citing examples from official policy documents, textbooks, curriculum guides and journalistic reports in these countries for illustration.

Language Management

Learning English as a National Mission

In all E Asian countries, except for Singapore, English is still very much a language of the educated elite to varying extents and is not used for daily interaction. However, since the turn of the century, learning English has been proposed in a number of countries as a national mission.

In Japan, the cultivation of "Japanese with English abilities" is part of the "Basic Policies for Economic and Fiscal Management and Structural Reforms 2002" released in June 2002. In the same year, the Ministry of Education, Sports, Science and Technology (hereafter MEXT) also launched a strategic plan called "National Strategy Design for Raising the Level of English Communication of the Japanese People" to improve the teaching of English in Japan (MEXT 2002 White Paper, July 12). An action plan was drawn up in the following year which laid down two goals: One was *all Japanese nationals* should be able to engage in social interaction in English and the other was *all professionals* should be able to use English in the workplace.

In China, since its Open Door Policy in the late seventies, English has become increasingly important. However, it was China's accession to the WTO in 2001 and its hosting the Olympics in 2008 which gave the strongest impetus to the learning of English. Shortly after the successful bid for the Olympics in 2008, the government pronounced that "learning English is for the whole nation" (Guo, 2001, cited in Jin and Cortazzi, 2004, p. 121). In particular, workers in the service industry have been called upon to learn English. The College English Test (CET), a benchmark test set up some ten years ago for university students and increasingly used by employers for recruitment purpose, grew rapidly from a mere ten thousand to 9.5 million in 2004.

In S. Korea, the hosting of the Olympic Games in 1988 marks a turning point in the status of English in the country as an international language rather than just one of the foreign languages amongst many (Shim, 1994). In 1995, the then-Prime

Minister Kim Young Sam declared "an era of globalization" for Korea and listed six priority areas, amongst which were education (to prepare Koreans to be world leaders), and Korean culture and Korean way of thinking (i.e., consciousness) (Kim, E. M., 2000, p. 107). English language education has been the foci of educational reform.

In both China, and S. Korea, the same metaphor has been used to describe the enthusiasm for learning English at national level. It has been described as "yingyu re" (English fever or English heat) in China and "English study fervour" in S. Korea (Yim, 2003, p. 42).

In Vietnam, the adoption of the "doi moi" policy by the Vietnamese government in 1986 (which reflects reform not only economically but also other aspects) brought English-speaking foreign investment and visitors, and brought jobs where English is needed. In the early 90s there was an explosive growth of students choosing English as *the* foreign language to study. In 1993, the Ministry of Education and Technology (MOET) formulated "A National Strategy for Foreign Language Teaching and Learning throughout All Levels of Education" (MOET 1994) based on a survey of language needs. Among the foreign languages surveyed, English ranked top. This led to a series of measures to boost the English competence of its nationals. (Do, 1999)

Status of English: Official Language and a Medium of Instruction

The recognition of a language as a national language and / or as an official language is the strongest form of language intervention. In Asia, the extent of the impact of globalization can be seen from the re-emergence of the debate on the recognition of English as an official language and its adoption a language as a medium of instruction.

Japan is well-known for the importance that it attaches to the preservation and promotion of its own language and culture, both internationally and intra-nationally. However, in 2000, a proposal was put forward by the then-Prime Minister Keizo Obuchi's advisors to recognize English a second official language on the ground that not only the elite but also ordinary citizens should be equipped with "global literacy" skills (see Matsuura, Fujieda and Mahoney, 2004). While this was welcomed by businessmen and politicians, the community at large reacted emotionally against it. The objection was raising the status of English would undermine the Japanese culture and identity and compromise Japanese proficiency. It is significant that when the idea was initiated informally a year ago by a senior writer of a newspaper, the rationale he provided was that this would strengthen Japan's international presence and the Japanese language because people's thought processes will be sharpened through using English (Asahi Evening News, August 29, 1999, cited in Honna and Taketshita, 2004, p. 213). In the face of strong objections, instead of adopting it as an official language, MEXT decided to establish 100 super English language high schools which use English as the medium of instruction by 2005.

Similar to Japan, a proposal was made in Korea to make English the second official language. In 1999, a Korean novelist even went as far as to propose that English be made the new mother tongue and that Korean together with other national

languages should go to the museum (The Korean Herald, 17 May 2001). The proposal was denounced by the media and academics. The proposal was described by Yim (2003, p. 43) as a second crisis after Japanese colonization during which Japanese was made the sole official language and the Korean language was liquated.

In Vietnam, the survey conducted in 1994 by the MOET led to an official acknowledgement of the role and status of English as the most important foreign language and increasingly as a second language, though not as an official language. What is significant is that in 1994, by an Order signed by the Prime Minister, Vietnamese government officials are required to study foreign languages, especially English (Do, 2000)

In Malaysia and China, the recognition of the status of English is realized not so much in officialization but its adoption as a medium of instruction, Malaysia to a much greater extent than China.

The language intervention by the Malaysian government since the nineties is an excellent example how the spread of English is part and parcel of the globalization process. The significance of the intervention can only be fully appreciated in historical context of the medium of instruction of Malaysia since independence. Amongst the post-colonial Asian countries, Malaysia went through the most drastic language policy changes upon gaining independence. It removed English as one of the official languages in ten years' time (1967 in West Malaysia; in East Malaysia, English was kept as an official language till 1985) and as a medium of instruction at all levels of education in 26 years (i.e., 1958-1983). However, Malaysia soon found that the reliance on a dedicated translation agency (Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka) to access up-to-date information about science and technological advancements was no longer viable. In 1993, the government started to reverse its MOI policy and allowed the use of English as a medium of instruction for science, engineering and medical courses at tertiary level. Despite the strong objections from Malay intellectuals, eventually in 1996, an Education Act was passed which approved the use of English as a MOI for science and technological subjects, and the Private Higher Education Institutions Act was passed to approve the use of MOI in universities with twinning programs with overseas universities. After the Asian Financial Crisis in 1997, the need to improve the English competence of the students became even more pressing. Finally, in 2003, the Malaysian government took another drastic move to re-introduce English as a medium of instruction for science and mathematics in basic education, starting with primary one (grade 1), secondary one (grade 7) and secondary 6 to be phased into entire school system (see Wong and James, 2004). As Gill (2004), points out, the status of English in Malaysia has come full circle, back to the status that it previously enjoyed.

In China, the issue of using English as a medium of instruction is still heatedly debated. The former Premier Zhu Rongi made public his views in 2001 that he hoped that all classes (at university) will be taught in English so that China could exchange ideas with the rest of the world. In some private schools, the use of English a medium of instruction is advertised as way to attract students (*South China Morning Post*, cited in Gill, 2004).

Curriculum Time and Resources

Finally, increasing curriculum time and resources is one of the commonly adopted intervention measures. This is achieved by either starting learning at a younger age or by increasing the number of class hours. In Asian countries where English is a foreign and not a second language, English used to be taught at secondary one as a subject, even though English has become increasing important. However, since the turn of the century, English learning has been pushed to an earlier age from secondary one to primary three in China, Japan, S. Korea. In China, some private schools start English as early as kindergarten or primary one. Even rural primary schools in remote areas which are very poorly equipped are contemplating the possibility of teaching English even though there is a serious shortage of teachers with adequate English skills.

We can see from the above discussion that in all Asian countries under discussion, there is strong intervention by the state to "promote" the importance of English by making the learning of English a national mission, by making English an official language, a medium of instruction or a second language or a working language. One could argue that these strategies democratize English by liberating the linguistic resource from a handful of elites to the masses. The very fact that in countries like China, Japan and Korea, taxi drivers, shop attendants and hotel workers are learning English is a case in point. However, democratization also means equal rights in decision-making regarding language practices and language ideology. Let us therefore turn to language practices and language beliefs in this "democractization" process.

Language Practices and Language Beliefs

Varieties and Models of English

In all Asian countries under discussion in this paper, the variety of English, as mentioned above, that is put forward as the model is the English spoken by British and American white middle class, or what has been referred to as "Standard English". In Singapore, a Speak Good English Movement, which was first initiated in the late 70s, was re-launched in 2000. The "Standard English" model was clearly English spoken by British and American white middle class.

In Hong Kong, English language benchmarks measured by a number of testing instruments designed in the US and in UK, including the IELTS, are set for recruitment purposes in the business sector and for schools. Practising English teachers are required to pass English benchmark assessments within a period of five years in order to stay in the profession. Although the test designers took care to specify that the model of English required is that of educated English speaker, it is the native-speaker variety that is accepted.

In China, students' written and spoken English performance in the College English Test (CET) mentioned earlier and the speaking component of CET are being extensively researched and the native-speaker corpora, such as the *British National Corpus*, have been used as the norm for diagnostic purposes (Yang, 2003, cited in Tsui, 2004).

In all Asian countries under discussion, native-speakers of English, British and American, and more recently Australian as well, have been recruited to teach in schools and universities. Singapore probably had the earliest start and introduced such a recruitment scheme for schools in the late seventies. In Japan, the JET program started in 1987, and new strategic plan in 2002 expands the program to the recruitment of full-time English teachers and not just teaching assistants. In Korea, native-speakers of English have been recruited based on the belief that NS teachers are "more effective" (Yim, 2003). The University of Seoul announced its intention to internationalize the campus and to hire 100 foreign professors starting from 2003 until they reach 20% of the total number of academic staff.

In Japan, American English is taken as the model. According to Honna, Tajima and Minamoto (2004), learners do not see non-native varieties of English positively. They are ashamed if they do not speak the way native-speakers of English do and they are reluctant to use English until they have developed "complete proficiency in the language" (p. 154). Moreover, "behavioral acculturation is also a presupposed necessity." (ibid.)

Similarly, in S. Korea, to enable Korean nationals to adopt a cosmopolitan outlook, the revised national curriculum emphasizes an awareness of Korean's international relations and cross-cultural understanding. The understanding of the customs and cultures of other countries comes under the English language curriculum. In the revised English textbooks, there is a separate section called "cultural learning" which introduces foreign cultures. However, most of the texts relating to foreign cultures are about British and American cultures.

Communication Skills and Cultural Values

Globalization has brought about in an influx of migrant workers, overseas students and foreign enterprises in a number of countries. This created a great demand for oral interaction in English. In Asian countries, English curricula have been revised to shift the focus from reading, grammar and translation skills to the four language skills, particularly listening and speaking. This curriculum shift has important implications for Confucian-heritage countries because it poses a serious challenge to their traditional values and cultures.

For example, reticence is highly valued in CHC. In Chinese culture, it is put together with mental strength and perseverance as the essential qualities of a good person in the Chinese culture. In the Japanese, reticence is also valued. For example, Honna et al. (2004) point out that the emphasis on oral participation goes against the Japanese culture of *sasshi* (tacit understanding). There are proverbs such as "make one point and get 10 points across" (*ichi wo ieba juu ga wakaru*) and "You have to say nothing to communicate what you are thinking" (*iwanakutemo wakaru*) which value reticence. Japanese often get things done without using words. Speech is considered to obstruct harmonious human relationships. Therefore Japanese people often get things done without using words.

Indirectness is also another characteristic of Confucian heritage culture. Objections are not put forward directly. Interlocutors look for clues such as facial expressions and tones, and read between the lines to get the real intention of the

speaker and the writer. According to Honna, Tajima and Minamoto (2004, p. 146), such culture has a great deal to do with the closely knit communities in Japan where members share a great of deal of common ground. "The function of language as a means of social communication," they point out, "is not to state facts and opinions, but to maintain the feeling of homogeneity." (Honna et al., ibid.). Such culture, they point out, is a "major problem" in learning English. Honna et al. (2004) make an appeal not to be forced to abandon their native culture in order to acquire English proficiency.

Cultural differences have also been highlighted by Pham (2000) and Phan and Faulkner (2000) in his analysis of why tertiary English language training programs did not work in Vietnam. Vietnamese and Chinese educational philosophies are very similar, both being influenced by Confucian educational values which view learning as a transmission of knowledge and an analysis of ideas. Memorizing is an important learning strategy (and I will come back to this point later). In English language learning, students in both countries pay meticulous attention to linguistic details rather than communicative skills, and translation is an essential learning strategy. Like Japanese students, they are reluctant to speak unless they feel that they have an adequate command of the language. According to Pham (2000), Vietnamese students believe that they cannot say anything before acquiring enough grammar rules and vocabulary.

Learning a language is not just a process of acquiring a technical code. It involves changing the way one relates to other people; it challenges one's perception of the "self" and the essential qualities of being a good person. All of this could be psychologically unsettling.

Language Pedagogy

In the discourse on English language pedagogy, the hegemony of English is realized in the way pedagogical practices has been discussed, by both Asian and non-Asian researchers and practitioners. Asian students have been invariably described as passive, engaging in rote learning and low-level cognitive strategies, reluctant to participate in discussions and uncritical (see Biggs, 1996). The pedagogy of Asian teachers has been described as traditional, teacher-centred, and drill-oriented. These views are Anglo-centric and are formed by imposing conceptual frameworks which have been developed largely on the basis of analyzing data without situating them in the sociocultural contexts in which they were generated. As Cortazzi and Jin's recent study of Chinese, British and Malaysian students shows, Chinese students are not passive learners. They do ask questions, but after class rather than during class, and more interestingly, they ask questions and try to find out the answers themselves. They also believe more strongly than their British and Malaysian counterparts that they are capable of doing that themselves (see Cortazzi and Jin, 2002).

The Anglo-centric views, which dominate the discourse in the EFL literature, have a detrimental, if not devastating, effect on the self-esteem of NNS teachers and learners of English. For example, Brogan and Nguyen (2000) point out that many Vietnamese teachers and students believe that imported materials are ideal for all teachers and students and for all situations. If students cannot understand the materials, it is because they "lazy or even stupid". Teachers and students do not

believe that teachers who are non-native speakers of English can produce useful and meaningful activities and tasks. This undermines the confidence the teachers so that although they know that the teaching materials are inappropriate, they are not confident enough to make adaptations. Instead, they simply abandon the materials. Consequently, the same set of materials was used for different types of learners for different purposes, including materials to help government officials to interact with government officials from other ASEAN countries, courses for engineers, and course for students studying abroad.

In recent years, the consistent outstanding performance of Asian students in the International Education Assessment studies and the equally consistent discourse about the low quality of learning of Asian students in the research literature have led to a number research studies to try to solve this paradox. Two ground-breaking studies have been conducted, one by Harold Stevenson and James Stigler (1992) on Chinese, Japanese and American children learning mathematics, and a subsequent study by James Stigler and James Hierbert (1999) comparing mathematics teaching in German, US and Japanese classrooms. These two studies show that Japanese students learnt more effectively compared to their US and German counterparts precisely because the classroom was not a "student-centred classroom" where students were engaged in a lot of activity but it is not clear what the object of learning was, but because the classroom was clearly focused on the object of learning – a specific mathematical concept. Similarly, Ma Li Ping's comparative study on mathematics learning in the US and China showed that the quality of mathematics teaching in China was high because it was a "teacher-centred classroom" in which the teachers interrogated the mathematical concept amongst themselves first, organized the teaching steps meticulously, and carefully enacted them in the classroom (Ma, 1999).

My former colleagues John Biggs and David Watkins have published a collection of studies on the Chinese learner and a sequel called Teaching the Chinese Learner (Watkins and Biggs, 1996; Watkins and Biggs, 2001). One dimension these studies investigated is the Western conception of memorization which sees memorization and understanding as mutually exclusive. The findings show that in Chinese conceptions of learning, "memorization" and understanding are intertwined. While memorization can be simply mechanical rote learning, it can also contribute to understanding in various ways (see Marton, Alba and Tse, 1996). One of the studies that my colleagues at HKU conducted found that in highly teacher-controlled classroom teaching, the way the teacher structured the learning experience by systematically varying the critical features of the object of learning that contributed to high quality learning (Mok and Runneson, 2004). It is therefore not surprising that in surveys conducted on Japanese learners' beliefs about ELT in Japan indicated that learners actually preferred teacher-centred approach and the focus on accuracy (see Matsuura, Chiba and Hilderbrant, 2001; Matsurra, Fujieda and Mahoney, 2004).

The discourse on good practices in English language teaching and learning seem to have been dominated by western ideologies. Pedagogical approaches which do not converge with the received Western practices are, in many cases, dismissed as traditional and ineffective. Such sweeping criticisms ignore a wealth of knowledge about teaching and learning which is embedded in diverse cultural practices. If essence of "democratization" is to assign equal rights to participate in decision-

making about what is traditional and what is innovative, what is appropriate and what is inappropriate, then it is doubtful that English is indeed being "democratized".

Resolving the Paradox : the (re)construction of national cultural identities

The situation is paradoxical. On the one hand, Asian countries are still in the process of nation building; strengthening their national and cultural identities, and their national cohesiveness, and yet on the other hand they seem to be legitimating the hegemony of English.

How do they resolve the paradox? In the following, I shall discuss how some of them have been reconstructing national cultural identities through the very discourse that promotes English. Such reconstruction, I would argue, is a form of resistance to the hegemony of English.

The discussion of identity here is confined to collective identities of which national identity is a form. Following Stuart Hall, I adopt a constructivist perspective of identity and I see national identity as a form of national cultural identity.

According to Hall, "A national culture is a *discourse* – a way of constructing meaning which influences and organizes both our actions and our conceptions of ourselves … National cultures construct identities by producing meanings about 'the nation' with which we can *identify*; these are contained in the stories which are told about it, memories which connect its present with its past, images which are constructed of it." (Stuart Hall, 1996b, p. 613, original emphasis)

The characterization made by Stuart Hall captures largely three common elements involved in the discursive construction national identities outlined by a number of social scientists (see for example, Smith, 1990; Wodak et al., 1999).
First, an appeal is made to the idea of a national spirit which expresses itself in cultural forms of life and particular manners of behavior. A means of achieving this is to emphasize the uniqueness of a nation or a national culture.
Second, historical memory which is shared by the nation is invoked, no matter whether the memory is true or partly true or legendary.
Third, the future developments and orientation of the nation is anticipated, for example, worries about what may become of the nation, preparation for potential adversities such as loss of political autonomy and losing out in global competition.
In addition to these three elements, an appeal is made to origin, continuity, tradition and timelessness which aim at an image of national character which is unchanging and continuous.
These four elements are intertwined (see also Wodak et al.'s comment on Stuart Hall's framework). For example, national uniqueness is often characterized in relation to its history, continuity and tradition. The future orientation of the nation is often discussed in relation to the long-standing tradition that it must strive to continue. This framework serves a useful starting point for making sense of the discourses of globalization and language policy found in these countries.

China: Learning English is not "worshipping" English

In China, national identity has always been constructed by appealing to past history of foreign invasion, exploitation and humiliation. Political independence and economic self-reliance were celebrated as characteristic of national greatness. Since the Open Door policy in the eighties, national greatness has been re-defined. However, the same history of western invasion, such as the Opium War, has been invoked to emphasize the importance of opening up to the outside world. The former Chinese President, Jiang Zemin, on the ceremony celebrating China's resumption of sovereignty over Hong Kong, pointed out that "a major cause for the backwardness that China suffered was the unwise closed-door policy" which has led to "many records of national betrayal and humiliation." (*Xinhua News Agency*, July 1, 1997, cited in Moore, 2000, p. 124). On another occasion, Jiang warned about the impending adversities in face of global competition. He said, "Only by constantly improving our economic strength, national defense strength, and national cohesiveness, can we remain invincible amidst increasingly intensive international competition and truly safeguard our national sovereignty and national pride." (Cited in Moore, 2000, p.122) As Moore observes, reform and opening up the economy is constructed as a challenge to China's evolving nationhood posed by globalization. To win in this global economic competition is constructed as a matter of national pride. The mission of the English curriculum, as stated in the most recent draft of *New English Curriculum for Schools*, March 2005, is to "understand the difference between *Chinese and Western cultures*, and *enhance patriotic education*, healthy view of life and life-long learning" (my emphasis)

Press commentaries used the metaphor of "war" was used to describe global competition, such as "economic wars", "commodity wars", "technology wars", and warnings like "inferior states and nations will be eliminated" were issued (Ta Kung Pao, January 25, 1999; cited in Moore 2000, p. 114). The choice of words, together with the invocation of past history of foreign invasion, suggests that China is trying to instill a sense of national crisis by constructing the hostility of "Other", and to upkeep the national spirit characterized by "cohesiveness".

Therefore, while on the one hand, the educational policy and curriculum statements emphasize Chinese-Western cultural exchange, on the other hand, the nation is reminded of the hostility of the outside world and the importance of safeguarding the sovereignty of the nation. The tension is well-captured by the following statement made by the former Premier Zhu Rongji in 2001 at a premier business school in Qinghua University : "I hope all the classes will be taught in English. *I don't worship foreign languages*, but we need to exchange our ideas with the rest of the world." (China varsities to teach in English, 2001, September 20, cited in Gill, 2004). The very fact that he carefully distinguished "worshipping foreign languages" from learning foreign languages shows the tension that China is trying to resolve.

Japan: Japaneseness in speaking "meaningful English"

Similarly, in Japan, the potential adversities that Japan faces have been used to reconstruct national identity although its socioeconomic context is very different from China. Since the nineties, the Japanese economy has been adversely affected by the adoption of global standards (mainly American) and practices. It undermined the Japanese economic structure and completely shattered the unique Japanese corporate

system based on mutual trust between employers and employees and corporate loyalty in the form of life-long employment. While the Japanese government recognizes the need for drastic changes in the domestic economic structure and different types of competence than in the past, globalization (*garobaruka*) has been seen as a malevolent force which is out of control. The outside world has been portrayed as hostile, unfriendly and untrusting (Hashimoto, 2000). The impact of foreign forces on Japan effected by the unprecedented number of students going overseas, the large number of immigrant workers and foreign acquisition of Japanese firms has been considered as more pervasive than any other time since US occupation (Grimes, 2000).

The policy document of the MEXT in 1994 stated that earning the *trust* of the international community was a national priority. It further pointed out that over the years Japan has given top priority to the assimilation of foreign culture and that the process must be reversed. In the 1998 MEXT policy document, the cultivation of a Japanese identity was explicitly stated as one of the aims of the national curriculum (Monbusho 1998d, cited in Gottlieb, 2001, p. 44).

In the 2003 MEXT policy document, the learning of the Japanese language was stated as a prerequisite for learning English skills. It says, "The acquisition of English is greatly related to students' abilities in their mother tongue, Japanese. It is necessary to foster in students the ability to express appropriately and understand accurately the Japanese language and to enhance communication abilities in Japanese *in order to cultivate communication abilities in English*." In other words, the language policy measures to boost the English competence of Japan nationals were proposed within the framework of strengthening the further development of Japan as nation and enhancing their Japanese language abilities.

Similar to China, a sense of national crisis was constructed. In a MEXT policy document in November 2004 entitled "Born again Japan!" the country was presented as facing a crisis. It says, "If we allow the current situation to remain, [we; Japan] will become an old small country in the East!" Education reform is presented as the top priority which is tied to the nation's fate.

Understanding the uniqueness of Japanese culture, or "Japaneseness", has been an underlying theme that runs through the discourse on mastering English. This uniqueness is being constructed by differentiating it from Western cultures. For example, Hashimoto (2000) observes that it has been emphasized that in order to learn English well and to speak "meaningful" English, students must improve their Japanese language and develop a sense of Japanese "self" which requires full enculturation in the Japanese society. The Japanese "self" is distinguished from the western concept of "individualism" which is understood negatively as "self-centredness" and "egotism" and which emphasizes the importance of the individual as opposed to the group. By contrast, individuality in the Japanese culture emphasizes the role of the individual in relation to the group (see also Mouer and Sugimoto, 1986). The attempt by the language policy makers to resolve the tension has been described as "deconstructing English" which is a process of "removing English from the core identity of Japan without excluding the English language from the Japanese society (Hashimoto, 2000, p. 49).

Korea: "In order to win, know your enemy better"

In Korea, national competitiveness is constructed as hinging on the nation's English competence because the economic structure of Korea is highly dependent on foreign trade. The lack of English communication skills is considered a major handicap when negotiating with trade partners. In order to motivate its nationals to learn English, the old Korean proverb, "In order to win, know your enemy better." has been cited in an English textbook as the rationale for mastering English. Yim's analysis of several English textbook series shows that understanding Korean history, cultures and values, fostering national identity and national pride are the fundamental motivation for understanding other cultures (Yim 2003). For example, the Korean language is introduced as the most beautiful language in the world. Korean customs and cultural values such as respect for seniority of age, filial love, scholastic achievement and importance of education are presented as more desirable than American traditions. Passages like "We are proud of our culture." take up about nearly 18% of all the passages. English is presented as an international language which benefits Korea and Koreans. English is therefore appropriated as a vehicle for putting Korea on the global map and for articulating Korean views of the world.

Malaysia: Reinforcing the spirit of nationalism through learning English

When Malaysia gained independence, the first Prime Minister pronounced that a nation without a national language would be devoid of "a unified character and personality" and that it would be nation "with a soul and without a life" (Gill, 2004, p. 137). The re-adoption of English as an MOI therefore posed a particularly dire challenge to Malaysian government as it means retracting a policy which it has painstakingly implemented. It also represents breaking away from the history and tradition of independent Malaysia and re-adopting educational practices in colonial Malaysia.

To address the problem, the Malaysia government gave top priority to the economic success of nation in the global competition, and argued that the status of the national language hinges on it. The former Prime Minister, Mahathir, said, "… once we have become a successful race, our language by itself will gain the respect of others. On the other hand, a race, which is not successful, will not be able to gain respect for its language even though they hold strongly to it." (Mahathir Mohammad, 1993, Dec 28, cited in Gill, 2004, p. 144) The then-Deputy Prime Minister, Anwar, even put forward the argument that re-introducing English as the medium of instruction will fact enhance the status of Bahasa Malaysia as the language of communication and knowledge.

In the 90s, before the Asian Financial Crisis, globalization was embraced by Malaysian leaders as something which has brought about greater integration between Malaysia with the rest of world and has boosted the national economy. The reversal of medium of instruction policy was supported even by opposition parties as essential for Malaysia to remain competitive internationally and to achieve the status of a developed nation for Malaysia (Gill, 2004). An appeal to national pride and national interest was made by the Democractic Action Party, one of the major opposition parties.

> Bahasa Malaysia has been given pride of place as the national language. The time has come to give English significant priority. It will be in the national interest to do so. In fact, the national interest demands it. (Singh, 1993, Dec 29, p.3, cited in Gill, 22004, p. 144)

The adverse effect of the AFC on the economy of Malaysia which subsequent led to a political crisis marked a drastic change in the attitude of the government towards globalization (Bridget Welsh, 2000). Globalization was re-interpreted as a hostile force to Malaysia and to the Third World. However, this did not diminish important role of English. Instead, it changed the way in which national identity is constructed in relation to English. This can be seen from the following quotation from Mahathir's speech:

> Learning the English language will reinforce the spirit of nationalism when it is used to bring about development and progress for the country. … True nationalism means doing everything possible for the country, *even if it means learning the English language*" (Mahathir Mohamad, *The Sun*, Sept 11, 1999, my emphasis).

> We believe that a nationalist is someone who has acquired all the knowledge and mastered all the skills and is capable of contesting against the rest of the world. But they (some Malaysians) think that just being able to speak Malay makes you a nationalist, and that is wrong. (Mahathir Mohamad, *New Straits Times*, December 29, 2000)

The rich discourse in the above citations reveal a number of interesting points. The first point is the appeal to nationalism by drawing a direct relationship between learning English and strengthening the national spirit. The second point is the re-definition of nationalism in the context of language competence. The national language, which formerly unified the whole nation, is now constructed as deficient and inadequate. Third, the presupposition carried by the phrase "even if" echoed the strong negative sentiment against English of the Malay intellectuals, thereby establishing the government's common ground with them. Finally, "the rest of the world" is constructed as harsh and aggressive, and English is constructed as a weapon which would help Malaysians to defend the country. Learning English is thereby constructed as a patriotic act.

Singapore: mutual accommodation between "cosmopolitans" and "heartlanders"

The linguistic and political situation in Singapore is a bit different from the countries discussed so far. As mentioned earlier, in Singapore, English is a working language and has become a household language for a quarter of the nation.

Ann Pakir (2004) describes the situation as "A uniquely Singaporean identity … being crafted in English, but with Asian imagery and imagination." (p. 124) The situation is a complex one. English is *the* language on which national identity is being constructed, and yet the traditional values and cultures are carried in the ethnic languages which have been relegated to secondary importance. The tension between national identity and ethnic identity has been of great concern to the country and is well-captured in following description presented in Pakir (2004):

A major paradox is that English has emerged as the only contender for the supra link language to express a uniquely Singaporean identity, yet it is at the same time perceived to be the channel for avant garde, pseudo-westernised behaviours as opposed to conservative beliefs and practices grounded in and transmitted via the ethnic languages. There thus arises the tension of ethnic identity … versus a national identity. (Pakir, 2004, p. 125)

This tension has generated debates in Singapore on how to balance the needs of the English educated "Cosmopolitans" and the working class vernacular-speaking working class, the "Heartlanders".

The former Prime Minister Goh Chok-Tong made the following appeal for mutual accommodation, "The challenge is for us to get the heartlanders to understand what the cosmopolitans contribute to Singapore's and their own well-being, [and] to get the cosmopolitans to feel an obligation and sense of duty to the heartlanders … if the cosmopolitans and the heartlanders cease to identify with each other, our society will fall apart" (cited in Rubdy, 2001, p. 352).

Similar to the other Asian countries under discussion, there is a warning of the impending danger of not resolving the tension. However, different from them, English is the national language. To preserve the multicultural heritage of the country and to arrest the homogenizing process, the Singapore government encourages students to develop biliteracy and bilingualism in English and their ethnic mother tongue. The dilemma, according to Pakir, is how to maintain high standards of proficiency in English for international competitiveness without undermining their ethnic identities and values.

The above discussion has briefly outlined the ways in which Asian countries have tried to resolve the paradox. They have each appropriated English in different ways in order to maintain their national cohesiveness and to preserve their national cultures and identities. Such appropriation, I would suggest, is a form of resistance to the domination of English which these countries have no choice but to legitimize.

Concluding Remarks

I would like to come back to the questions that I raised at the beginning of my paper. The answers to these questions are not straightforward.

On the one hand, Asian countries have as much, if not more, a part to play as English mother tongue countries in the spread of English. Otherwise, English would not have spread at such an unprecedented rate. English is perceived by language policy makers in Asian countries as a multinational tool which they need to participate in global economy and politics, to access the latest technological and scientific advancements, to negotiate with their international counterparts and to promote their national interests. They benefit from such participation. In this sense, it is an empowering tool.

Globalization has forced Asian countries which had been closed to the outside world to open up. This has brought about greater integration with the rest of the world

and more intercultural exchange. It affords opportunities for the development of multilingualism and multiculturalism in countries which were hitherto monolingual and mono-cultural. The spread of English, fuelled by globalization, has enabled people in these countries to access not just science and technology, but western cultures and values, such as equality, freedom and democracy. For example, in China access to English coupled with access to the internet is has become a very powerful tool for gaining and disseminating information within China and between China and the rest of the world. In this sense, the spread of English is a democratization of an elitist resource. Information which is held by a small number of people is now made available to the masses.

On the other hand, from the lived experience of Asian countries, we can see that English is still far from being democratized. The ownership of English is still largely in the hands of the English mother-tongue speakers. We have seen from the dominant discourses in language practices and language pedagogy how the personal and professional self-esteem of "non-native speakers" of English, learners and teachers alike, have been undermined by this asymmetrical power relationship. We have also seen that the supremacy of English over other languages, and the cultural assimilation, whether real, half-real, or imagined, that it brings about, has been a source of great tension and anxiety to Asian countries. In this sense, English is a disempowering tool.

While the spread of English has exacerbated the hegemony of English over other languages and the domination of the West over the rest, it has also generated resistance from the very agents which seem to willingly and actively legitimate its hegemony. The relationship between these two forces is dynamic. It could lead to the genuine democratization of English so that the question of ownership does not even arise, or it could deepen the linguistic and cultural divide between those who "own" the language and those who do not. The future direction of the spread of English is shaped by all those who contribute to the process. It is important for us, as EFL practitioners and researchers, to be mindful of the fact that when we engage in what appears to be mundane classroom practices, we are in fact contributing to the push and pull between these two forces. It is also important for us to be aware of the fact that when we promote a certain approach to teaching and learning, we could be challenging some deeply rooted cultural values of our teachers and students, and we could be generating psychological conflicts which are not easy to reconcile.

Finally, I would like to share with you an excerpt from a grade 9 Korean textbook.

> There are so many different languages in the world. Korean is the language of Korea, and Japanese is the language of Japan. … Is English especially important because it is spoken by so many different countries? What about Chinese which is spoken by the large number of people? … One language can be more important than another. Think of English, which has become an international language. However, the most important language to anyone is the language he uses in his everyday life. To us Korean, the mother tongue is Korea. (The history of Korean language continues. …) Many Koreans think that it is better than any other alphabet in the world. It is right for us to love our own language. (Ji Hak Sa, cited in Yim, 2003, p. 17)

Perhaps it is more important for us to appreciate the dilemma and the tension that underlie the text than to discuss whether it is written in good "Standard English".

<center>END</center>

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[1] What constitutes Asia depends on whether one is using geographical or geopolitical criterion. The discussion in this paper refers to countries in East Asia.