Language education policy among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

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Abstract

This article first traces the development of English in ASEAN to its current role as the sole working language of the organisation and then briefly compares certain of the EU's language polices with ASEAN's. The article points out that English has become the major 'foreign' language taught in ASEAN, often at the expense of local languages. The article argues that, as the major role of English in ASEAN is as a lingua franca, English should be taught as a lingua franca. This would have the added advantage of delaying the teaching of English, thereby allowing primary schools to focus more on local languages. The article concludes with a case study of Myanmar, for which a language education policy is suggested.

Keywords: Language policy; English as a lingua franca; Association of Southeast Asian Nations

Introduction

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) currently comprises ten nations, namely, in the order of their joining: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand and Singapore (all 1967), Brunei (1984), Vietnam (1995), Laos and Burma [Myanmar] (1997) and Cambodia (1999). The original Bangkok declaration of 1967 made no reference at all to language or language policy. According to delegates who attend the official founding of ASEAN, English was accepted without debate as the *de facto* working language. "The idea of English as the common language came out automatically" and "There has been no actual regulation for the use of English but it has been used in all the actual situations" (Okudaira 1996[AQ1]: 95–6). This *de facto* privileging of English as

ASEAN's working language became *de jure* with the signing of the ASEAN Charter in 2009. Article 34 of the Charter reads "The working language of ASEAN shall be English". That English should be adopted as the sole working language of ASEAN will no doubt come as a surprise to European readers. Possible reasons for its universal acceptance as the sole working language include its apparently relatively "neutral" status and the perception of English being crucial in the drive for modernisation and participation in globalisation. Its so-called "neutral" status needs to be questioned, however, as English continues to play institutional roles in those ASEAN nations which were once colonies of Britain or the United States, namely Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines. Myanmar was also a colony of Britain but the role and status of English there is markedly different as will be exemplified later in the article.

The ASEAN Charter also lists, as one of the 14 principles listed in Article 2, the need for the member states to show "respect for the different cultures, languages and religions of the peoples of ASEAN … in the spirit of unity in diversity". The creation of an ASEAN identity is also integral to the three ASEAN pillars, which are political security, economic and socio-cultural) (Hashim, Kaur and Tan 2016). English is seen as having an important role to play in all this. In the words of the ASEAN Secretary General, Le Luong Ming: "with the diversity in ASEAN reflected in our diverse races, histories, cultures and belief systems, English is an indispensable tool to bring our community closer together" (ASEAN 2013).

Given the special role that English is being asked to play across ASEAN, together with its perceived role as the gateway to modernisation and globalisation, it is not surprising that the member nations all promote English as the first language of education, after the respective national languages. The table (updated from Kirkpatrick 2010: 63; see also Hamid and Kirkpatrick 2016: 29) shows the year of introduction of English in the school system and as the medium of instruction across ASEAN.

It will be noted from the table that Indonesia is the only ASEAN nation that does not make English a compulsory subject in primary school. But even in Indonesia, English is the first language (after the national language Bahasa Indonesia) to be taught in primary schools, although some regional languages, such as Javanese and Sundanese, are also taught.

A key question, given the background outlined above, is how can the promotion of English as the sole working language of ASEAN and as the first language of education, after the respective national languages, be married with or complementary to the need to respect the diversity of the languages, cultures and belief systems of the region?

Table 1. MOI and introduction of English in ASEAN

Country	Medium of instruction	Year of introduction of English
Brunei	Malay and English	Primary 1 (Primary 4 MOI)
Cambodia	Khmer	Primary 5
Indonesia	Bahasa Indonesia	Secondary 1
Laos	Lao	Primary 3
Malaysia	Malay and English	Primary 1 as MOI[a]
Myanmar	Burmese	Primary 1
Philippines	Filipino and English	Primary 1 as MOI[b]
Singapore	English	Primary 1 as MOI
Thailand	Thai	Primary 1
Vietnam	Vietnamese	Primary 3

Source: Kirkpatrick 2010: 63 adapted.

[a] In 2012, Malaysia reintroduced Malay as the medium of instruction for the teaching of maths and science from primary 1.

[b] In 2013 the Philippines introduced a system of mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTBMLE) whereby 19 languages are to be used as medium of instruction in the first three years of primary school.

English and the national language

As noted above, the ASEAN Charter officially recognises English as the sole working language of the group. At the same time, the countries of ASEAN with their colonial history are keen to establish a national language as a symbol of independent nationhood. With the notable exception of the Philippines where, as mentioned earlier, the government has introduced mother tongue-based multilingual education, the nations of ASEAN thus focus on the promotion of their respective national languages and English. The wisdom of this top-down policy is thought to be self-evident. First, the ideology of one nation one language (Wright 2012) means that each state promotes the national language above all others. This is hardly surprising as, with the exception of Thailand, the other nine member states were, until relatively recently, colonies or dependencies of European colonial powers. These nations are comparatively young, therefore. And it is considered essential that a nation have a national language in order to give it identity and to unite it. This promotion of the national language, however, is often at the expense of regional and local languages. Only the Philippines teaches local languages as media of instruction in the school system in a systematic way. But even there, only 19 of the more than the 170 languages of the Philippines is taught and then only in the first three

years of primary school. English and the national language, Filipino, remain by far the largest languages of education. In other nations, such as Cambodia, for example, some local languages are taught but only in certain minority areas (Thomas 2002; Kosonen 2013). Second, in addition to the promotion of the national language, the need for the promotion of English is considered to be ~~self evident~~. English is perceived as the language of modernisation and the discourses of English and globalisation in these countries include the notion that English proficiency will not only ensure the economic success of the individual but also accelerate the nation's economic development (Hamid and Kirkpatrick 2016). The national language is taught as an integral part of nation building. English is taught as an essential tool to allow the people and nation to modernise and successfully participate in globalisation. Local languages are, generally speaking, not taught in the school system. Nor does the school system of one ASEAN country teach the national language of another ASEAN country in any systematic way. As a result the number of people in ASEAN who are multilingual in Asian languages is reducing. Instead there is an increase – among the elite – of people who are bilingual in their respective national language and English. The future of many of the one thousand or so languages of ASEAN looks bleak, if current language education policies continue to place the priority on the national language and English. The same trend can also be discerned in the so-called "plus three" countries of ASEAN: China, Japan and Korea (Kirkpatrick and Liddicoat forthcoming). The top-down language policies in place in ASEAN countries differ markedly from those seen in Europe and a comparison between the two is instructive. And while the policies differ markedly, there are similarities, especially in places where English is becoming increasingly used as a medium of instruction in higher education

ASEAN's policies compared with the EU's

The language policy of the European Union is well-established and the goal is for a Europe where everyone is taught at least two languages in addition to their first language. This is the "mother tongue + 2" objective (Kelly 2014: 128). The new Erasmus+ programme which runs from 2014 to 2020 has a total budget €14.7 billion and one objective of Erasmus+ is to "improve the teaching and learning of languages and to promote the EU's broad linguistic diversity and intercultural awareness" (cited in Kelly 2014: 121). The programme's commitment to multilingualism is worded as follows:

> Multilingualism is one of the cornerstones of the European project and a powerful symbol of the EU's aspiration to be united in diversity. Foreign languages have a prominent role among the skills that will help equip people better for the labour market and make the most of available opportunities. The EU has set the goal that every citizen should have the opportunity to acquire at least two foreign languages, from an early age. (121)

In addition to this utilitarian goal of equipping people to have better access to the job market, a further goal is to protect linguistic diversity and promote knowledge of languages for reasons of cultural identity, social integration (Kelly 2014: 128). There is explicit recognition therefore of the humanitarian and cultural aspects of multilingualism in these policies in addition to the utilitarian one of economic benefit. Although it would be naive to think that these policies have been universally and successfully implemented across Europe, the policies at least specify humanitarian goals. It is these humanitarian, cultural and promotion of linguistic and diversity goals that are notably lacking from any ASEAN language policies, which, as noted above, are aimed at national unity on the one hand through the promotion of a one nation one language ideology and at economic advancement and modernisation on the other through the promotion of English as the major language of education after each member state's respective national language. Despite the rhetoric of the principles outlined in Article 2 of the ASEAN Charter stressing the need for the respect for the diversity of ASEAN's languages, cultures and religions, no specific language policy has been developed to help ensure this. In contrast, the closest the Charter comes to a language policy is the requirement that English be the sole working language. I later address this issue further when considering how English might be adapted and taught to help encourage respect for the linguistic and cultural diversity of ASEAN.

One similarity between the EU and ASEAN can be seen in the rapidly increasing use of English as a medium of instruction in higher education (see Dearborn 2016[AQ2]; Wachter and Maiworm 2014, Kirkpatrick 2014) and how this has created "an unfortunate dichotomy between multilingualism and English Medium Instruction" (ELC Memorandum 2015: 121). In view of this "unfortunate dichotomy" the ELC Memorandum raises the question of "How Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) can embrace the concept of multilingualism as well as the unique position of English" (2015: 122). Ways of doing this have been considered in, for example, the work of Schaller-Schwaner at the University of Fribourg (2015) and in a recent edited volume by Haberland, Lonsmann and Preisler (2016). However, it is probably true to say that few universities and HEIs have explicit language policies that adequately address this issue. This is certainly also the case across ASEAN –even where policies exist, they are top-down and often not known about by the staff who are

supposed to implement them. For example, in a study into how English as a medium of instruction was introduced at a well-known government university in Malaysia, Ali (2013) found that no explicit mention or knowledge of any policy was made at any level, whether at national policy level, within university documents or among the relevant stakeholders, such as staff and students. This situation would appear to be typical.

In short, the EU's language policies are far more developed than those of ASEAN and they include the objective of promoting multilingualism across Europe with the aim of everyone being able to learn their first language +2. In contrast, the language policies in ASEAN are implicit but promote the respective national languages of each member state and English. While the language policies of Europe recognise the cultural and humanitarian values of languages in addition to their potential economic benefit, it is only the utilitarian values of languages that are recognised in ASEAN, which is a major reason why each member state focuses on the their respective national language and English. The call in the ASEAN Charter to respect cultural and linguistic diversity is, with the exception of the Philippines, not reflected in language policy or practice across the region. In the next section I consider the implications of the privileging of English upon local languages and the cultural and linguistic diversity of ASEAN and suggest principles through which a new lingua franca approach to English teaching might be able to help preserve some linguistic and cultural diversity.

ASEAN and a lingua franca approach to the teaching of English

The major use of English in ASEAN is as a lingua franca: that is to say, it is used as a common language by people who speak a variety of first languages. A simple and effective definition of English as a lingua franca (ELF) has been provided by Seidlhofer as, "any use of English among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option" (2011: 7). In the ASEAN context, English is primarily used by ASEAN multilinguals; native speakers are very much in the minority. In the ASEAN context, English is also used to represent the speakers' cultures and their interests. Two quotes from a senior Cambodian government minister make this clear.

> We need to know English so that we can defend our interests … ASEAN is not some kissy-kissy brotherhood. The countries are fiercely competitive, and a strong knowledge of English will help us protect Cambodian interests.

When we use English we don't think about the United States or England. We think only about the need to communicate. (Clayton 2006: 230–3)

The fact that the primary use of English across ASEAN is as a lingua franca, and the great majority of users of English in the region have learned English as an additional language and are not native speakers of the language, has important implications for English language teaching. I have discussed these in more detail elsewhere (Kirkpatrick 2012, 2015a, forthcoming a and b) and here just briefly summarise five principles for a lingua franca approach to English. I argue that adopting such an approach would have at least three advantages over the current approach, including:

(i) It will improve the chances of English being more successfully taught and learned than at present.

(ii) A new ELF curriculum would include material about the linguistic, religious and cultural diversity of the region.

(iii) The suggested delay in introducing English into the curriculum would free up the primary curriculum so that local languages could be taught and learned. An example of how this might work is provided in the section on Myanmar below.

The five principles are:

1. The native speaker is not the linguistic target. The goal is mutual intelligibility and the ability to use English successfully in multilingual contexts.
2. The native speaker's culture is not the cultural target. The goal is (ASEAN-focused) intercultural competence.
3. Well-trained local multilinguals provide the most appropriate English language teachers.
4. Lingua franca environments provide excellent English language learning environments for lingua franca speakers.
5. Assessment must be relevant to and appropriate for the lingua franca approach and curriculum.

Principle 1: The native speaker is not the linguistic target. The goal is mutual intelligibility and the ability to use English successfully in multilingual contexts

Adopting these targets has important implications. The first is that, as the target is not to develop native-like proficiency, the perceived importance of the so-called critical period can be discounted, especially as the critical period is said to be particularly important for the development of a native-speaker

accent. When English is being used as a lingua franca, the accent people use will represent their identity. Singaporeans will sound like Singaporeans, Filipinos like Filipinos and Vietnamese like Vietnamese. In any event, the importance of the notion that a language learner needs to start early in order to be a successful language learner has been seriously questioned in much recent research (e.g. Benson 2008; De Houwer 2014; Lambelet and Berthele 2016).

Rather than introducing English earlier and earlier, as is currently the practice, English can be delayed until the learners are at least 11. This means that the primary school can now focus on teaching the local language as well as the national language. Where practical, the children's first language can be adopted as the medium of instruction. This will allow children to develop a sense of identity and allow them to develop full literacy in the local and national languages. This will not only help them learn English later, but also help preserve at least some of ASEAN's linguistic diversity.

Principle 2: The native speaker's culture is not the cultural target. The goal is (ASEAN-focused) intercultural competence

Adopting a goal that aims to provide learners with an ASEAN-centred intercultural competence allows the English language curriculum to introduce a range of ASEAN-related cultural materials. Of course, one could not expect a single teacher to be able to teach all these cultural aspects, but the focus of the materials to be used could be on developing intercultural competence among the learners. These materials can include extracts from local literatures in English (of which there is an abundance), information about the various religions of ASEAN and topics of interest and importance to ASEAN multilinguals. For example, a study on the topics discussed in the Asian Corpus of English (ACE)[1] (Kirkpatrick, Patkin and Wu 2012) showed that the topics discussed by ASEAN ELF users included the pros and cons of Islamic finance, Thai–Myanmar border issues, the treatment of national minorities in Hong Kong, whether North Malaysia or Southern Thailand produced the best quality of rice and the relationship between a person's first language and his or her identity. It would appear sensible, therefore, to include topics such as these in the EL curriculum.

It is also worth stressing that no ASEAN country teaches the languages of its neighbours in any systematic way in the school system. Students will

1. The Asian Corpus of English is a million+ word corpus of naturally occurring spoken English used as a lingua franca by ASEAN multilinguals. The author was the project director. ACE was conceived to offer a complementary 'Asian-based' corpus of ELF to the more European-based Vienna Oxford International Corpus of English (VOICE). Both corpora are freely accessible. VOICE is at https://www.univie.ac.at/voice/and ACE is at http://corpus.ied.edu.hk/ace/.

not learn about the cultures of fellow ASEAN members through learning the respective language of their neighbours. The proposed ELF curriculum is one way of ensuring that students are introduced to the cultures of their ASEAN neighbours and thus help establish some form of ASEAN identity so strongly promoted by the ASEAN Secretary General.

The ELF curriculum also provides an opportunity for offering a course in developing intercultural competence, with the focus on relevant Asian cultures.

Principle 3: Well-trained local multilinguals provide the most appropriate English language teachers

I have dealt with this in some detail elsewhere (2012, 2014) so here simply underline that local multilingual teachers not only provide good role models for their students, they also provide the most appropriate *linguistic* models. Sharing the same or similar linguistic backgrounds to their students, theirs is the accent which will be acquired by their students and this accent will give them their identity as speakers of English. Teachers need to be able to let their students understand that they are not learning English to become pseudo-native speakers of the language but so that they can use English successfully as multilinguals. One aim of such a course would be for students to agree, proudly, with the following statement. "When I speak English, I want the world to know I am (insert nationality)". For example, "When I speak English I want the world to know I am Cambodian". Multilingual teachers can also exploit a bilingual pedagogy in which the students' first language can be used in *systematic* ways to help them learn English (e.g. Littlewood and Yu 2009; Swain, Kirkpatrick and Cummins 2011).

Principle 4: Lingua franca environments provide excellent English language learning environments for lingua franca speakers

This is not so much directed at the normal government school system but is more directed at exchange programmes by which most schools and universities in the region tend to send their students to native-speaking countries such as Australia, Britain and the United States. I suggest here that such exchange programmes might be more successful if students were sent to lingua franca environments. For example, sending Indonesian students to the Philippines to improve their English might be more successful (and certainly much cheaper) than sending them to Britain. One reason for this is precisely because there are no so-called native speaker experts around. Instead, their Filipino interlocutors will be fellow multilinguals with high proficiency in English and with whom communicating in English as a lingua franca will seem natural. In addition,

of course, the Indonesian students will learn a great deal about the culture(s) of a fellow ASEAN member state and the Filipinos will also learn from their Indonesian visitors.

Principle 5: Assessment must be relevant to and appropriate for the lingua franca approach and curriculum

Given the notorious effect of washback from assessment to teaching methods and curriculum, it is essential that assessment tools which are relevant to and appropriate for the lingua franca approach be developed. These tools need to be able to measure how successfully people are able to engage in ELF in multilingual contexts. It would appear to be an ideal initiative for ASEAN – or perhaps the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education organisation (SEAMEO, which is essentially ASEAN with the inclusion of Timor Leste) – to set up a working party to establish assessment tools for both English language teachers and learners. At present, individual countries are working alone on this task. Vietnam, for example, is looking at ways in which the CEFR scales might be adapted (Dudzik and Nguyen 2015). Vietnam's goal is to ensure that all its English teachers are at either B2 level (primary and lower secondary) and at C1 level (upper secondary and university). But as Dudzik and Nguyen point out, this is an overly ambitious goal at the moment for Vietnam as levels of English language proficiency remain low. For example, in 2011 testing of English language teachers, 97% of primary teachers and 93% of lower secondary teachers fell below the B2 level. 96% of upper secondary school teachers fell below the C1 level (Dudzik and Nguyen 2015: 48).

In further tests in 2013 testing 83% of primary school English teachers fell below the B1 level, 87% of lower secondary ELTs were below the B2 level and 92% of upper secondary ELTs fell below the C1 level (Dudzik and Nguyen 2015: 48).

Care must also be taken when trying to adapt scales and benchmarks established for one context to another (see e.g. Japan's experience in adapting the CEFR scales: Uni and Nishiyama 2013). What is crucial is that any new assessment scales or tools take as their guiding principle the measurement of multilinguals using English as a lingua franca and do not adopt any criteria based on native speaker models or proficiency. As has been consistently argued by many scholars over recent years, "reliance on a native speaker model as the pedagogical target must be set aside" (McKay 2009[AQ3]: 238) and the inequities in measuring multilingual children against monolingual benchmarks must be avoided (Garcia 2009: 386). The multilingual should be measured against fellow multilinguals. It should be noted that suitable

linguistic norms for an ELF approach have yet to be defined and will prove no easy task (but see Sifakis and Tsantila forthcoming).

To date, I have provided an overview of language education policy in ASEAN and suggested principles for a lingua franca approach to the teaching of English in these contexts. In the next section, I turn to a specific context – that of Myanmar. I first give a brief introduction to the Myanmar context and then describe the current language education policy. Like many of the countries of ASEAN, this currently privileges the national language, Burmese, and English at the expense of local languages. I conclude with a suggested new language education policy based on the points made above about preserving linguistic and cultural diversity and adopting the lingua franca approach to the teaching of English.

A sample case: Myanmar

Background

While Myanmar was a British colony, unlike the other ASEAN countries which were colonies of Britain or the United States, Myanmar's long-term "closed door" policy has meant that English has long since ceased to have any institutional role. This section provides a brief review of past language policies.[2]

Myanmar is mainland Southeast Asia's largest country (Callahan 2003) and is an ethnically and linguistically diverse country, with a population of about 50 million. Estimates of the number of languages spoken vary from 70 to more than 100 (Watkins 2007). The 1931 census identified 135 ethnic groups, "in most cases identified by and with the language spoken by each group, although not always accurately" (Sercombe and Tupas 2014: 148). This categorisation of 135 ethnic groups was reintroduced by General Saw Maung at the time of the State Law and Order Council (SLORC) (Callahan 2003). It is generally agreed that there are eight major ethnic groups (Bamar, Chin, Kachin, Kayah, Kayin, Mon, Rakkhine and Shan (Djite 2011). The three main language families represented are Tibeto-Burman, Tai-Kadai and Mon-Khmer. About 70% of the population are L1 speakers of Burmese. Mon has 8 million speakers and Shan has 6 million (Sercombe and Tupas 2014). Arakanese, Chin, Jingpho and Karen also have more than half a million speakers each (Callahan 2003). There are scripts for several of the indigenous languages including Mon, Shan, Karen, Kachin, Chin and Llahu (Djitte, 2011: 8; Hlaing 2007[AQ4]).

2. For further information see Kirkpatrick 2010: 43–63.

After a series of Anglo-Burmese wars, the first of which ended in 1826, the British finally annexed Burma as a whole in 1886. English was the language of government and administration during the colonial period. Use of English was welcomed by many, including the many Indian and Chinese residents. At the same time, Burmese was promoted and local people were permitted to study in their respective languages. Christian missionaries developed orthographies for several indigenous languages (Hlaing 2007: 151).

The war years of 1942–5 saw the Japanese Occupation. Independence came in 1948 under the leadership of Burma's first Prime Minister U Nu. Aung San, the founder of the Burmese independence movement and the one person seen as able to unite the disparate Burmese tribes (and the father of Aung San Su Kyi), had been assassinated by political opponents in 1947. U Nu, a Buddhist scholar and literary figure, became his reluctant replacement when the time came to appoint the Prime Minister.

From independence in 1948, the language policy has promoted Burmese and the 1947 Constitution states that "the official language of the Union shall be Burmese" (Djite 2011: 45). The use of English was permitted – and taught as a subject from Grade 6 and as a medium of instruction for maths and science in Grades 10 and 11, but there was no specific mention of indigenous languages (Sercombe and Tupas 2014). The 1974 Constitution reiterated the place of Burmese as the official language, and Article 152 reads: "Every citizen shall have the right to education. Burmese is the common language. Languages of the other national races may also be taught" (Sercombe and Tupas 2014: 156). The 1974 Constitution therefore gave ethnic minorities the right to teach their own languages, but this was later removed and Burmese again became the sole language of education. In 1992 Burmese was again mandated as the language of instruction in schools at all levels (Djite 2011: 47).

The 2008 Constitution proclaims that every citizen "has the right to freely develop the literature, culture, customs and tradition they cherish", although Burmese remains the sole medium of instruction (MOI) in schools, with the exception of the teaching of maths and science at Grades 10 and 11, where English is the MOI (Djite 2011: 49). English was also made the MOI for higher education (Djite 2011).

The years 1962–88 were dominated by U Ne Win, the army and the "Burmese road to socialism" under the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP). During this period, Burmese remained the official language and the role of English was significantly weakened, as Burmese was made the medium of instruction in all university subjects. The government attitude to minority languages was initially liberal, however, and the 1966 Education Act required

the teaching of minority languages up to Grade 2. Textbooks were published in some of the minority languages, including Mon, Shan, Karen China and Kachin (Hlaing 2007: 162).

U Ne Win was ousted from power in a military coup in 1988. The coup was led by General Saw Maung, who then allowed democratic elections to take place in 1990. However, when the results showed that the National League of Democracy (NLD) had triumphed, with more than 80% of the vote, the results were declared null and void.

It took the failure of one of U Ne Win's daughters to be accepted into university in England because of her poor English to lead to a rethink of the Burmese-only language policy and the revival of English. Despite the government's apparent wish to revive English, however, this has proved to be a difficult task for a number of reasons. First, at least one generation of Burmese has not studied English. Second, the 1988 coup saw the schools and universities closed for several months and the removal of all foreign teachers. Third, the period from 1988 State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) (later renamed the State Peace and Development Council or SPDC) has also seen frequent disruptions to schools and universities, including their regular closure for significant periods of time. These disruptions have meant that education as a whole has suffered under the SLORC regime. Fourth, many educated Burmese who speak English have left the country. There are thus very few qualified and proficient English teachers left in the country. Finally, resources and materials are poor. The role of English in Myanmar is thus restricted to the elite and to a small number of domains, mostly involving NGOs and aid programmes. The recent opening of Myanmar to foreign businesses has increased the need for English and this need is also reflected internationally with Myanmar's recent more active involvement with ASEAN.

Myanmar: current english language education policy

The current policy under the new government ~~with Aung San Suu Kyi as Minister of Education (one of four ministerial portfolios that she holds)~~ is that English is introduced as a subject from Primary 1. It is the medium of instruction for maths and science subjects in the final two years of high school and it is the medium of instruction across all universities and higher education institutions (HEIs). The current policy is clearly not working. As a report compiled on behalf of the British Council noted concerning the use of English as the medium of instruction in the final two years of high school:

> this is fundamentally not working for teaching Maths and Science as few teachers can use English, let alone, teach another subject in English. Students are not learning

or understanding important concepts in Maths and Science. They merely remember the technical terms in English for the tests. Most teachers use a mix of Myanmar (for explanation) and English (for technical terms). (Drinan 2013: 8)

Drinan also reported that the impact (of a weak EL curriculum) on language proficiency for both teachers and students is very serious. Teachers' language is fossilised, meaning they seldom develop further than the grade they are teaching. More worrying is that teachers are not even at that level, as many have just memorised the textbooks they are "teaching".

A further report into the use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in a selection of HEIs across Myanmar concluded that EMI was a contrived endeavor, not least because teachers and learners reported that engaging in even very basic communication in English an proved insurmountable barrier to many. Over 95% of surveyed staff and students reported that EMI had to be used bilingually along with Burmese (Myanmar language) for it to have any chance of success (Khaing 2016).

Given that the current language education policy with regard to English appears to be failing, the next section presents a suggested language education policy.[3]

Myanmar: suggested language education policy

The overarching aim of this policy is to encourage, where practical, the use of the child's mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the early years of primary school. The primary school curriculum focus therefore is on the national language and, where practical, the respective mother tongues of the learners. English is delayed to free up curriculum space and is taught using the lingua franca approach described above. While the policy suggested here is for Myanmar, the principles behind it could be applied to the language education policies of other ASEAN member states.

BASIC EDUCATION

1. Where the children are L1 speakers of the Myanmar language (i.e. Burmese), the early years of primary school should focus on the teaching of the language and the use of the Myanmar language as the language of instruction across the curriculum.
2. Where the children are L1 speakers of the Myanmar language, a course in the diversity of cultures, religions and languages of Myanmar should be offered.

3. For a full description see Kirkpatrick 2015b.

3. Where the majority of children are L1 speakers of an ethnic language other than the Myanmar language, the first four years of primary school should be taught in the children's home language, provided certain criteria (e.g. trained teachers, appropriate teaching materials, community support) are met.
4. Where the majority of children are L1 speakers of an ethnic language other than the Myanmar language, this language should be taught as a subject after the fourth grade, when it becomes the language of instruction.
5. English should be introduced only when children are 11 years old, after five or six years of learning ML and/or the respective mother tongue.
6. The target for English learners should be to become functional multilinguals, able to use English successfully in international contexts (as outlined in the six principles above).

HIGHER EDUCATION

1. The Myanmar language and English need to be seen as complementary languages of education and scholarship.
2. EMI must only be introduced within a framework of multilingualism so that:
    * EMI does not mean English only.
    * The use of the linguistic resources of staff and students should be encouraged.
    * Materials and sources and reading lists/classroom language/working on assessments (processes vs products).[AQ5]
    * The 'E" of EMI needs to be understood as English as a lingua franca not a native speaker variety.

Conclusion

In this article I first gave a brief account into the developing roles of English in ASEAN and argued that its major role is as a lingua franca among fellow multilinguals of the region. I described how and when English is currently introduced into the curriculum in each of the member states and argued that the trend to introduce English earlier and earlier into the curriculum was not only unnecessary but also had a serious effect on the cultural and linguistic

diversity of ASEAN, as English has become the second language of education in each of the member states after their respective national languages. This means that fewer and fewer local languages are being taught. I then presented five principles of what I have called the lingua franca approach to the teaching of English in ASEAN, in the hope that such an approach would not only allow students to learn English more successfully than at present, as the learning targets would be based on the performance of fellow multilinguals rather than on monolingual native speaker benchmarks, but could also, by freeing up the primary curriculum so that local languages could be (re)introduced, help preserve at least some of the cultural and linguistic diversity of ASEAN. I then briefly described the situation in Myanmar as a special case, laid out Myanmar's current English language education policy and pointed out that it was failing and thus suggested an alternative language education policy taking into account the points and principles raised in the article. Clearly such a policy can never be implemented without long-term discussion with and support from the local communities, as, to be successful, language education needs to be bottom-up and have the support of the relevant people concerned. So the suggested policy is presented for discussion (see Kirkpatrick 2015b for a fuller version). But what is clear is that the current top-down policies being implemented in Myanmar (and in the other member states of ASEAN) are having a deleterious effect on the linguistic and cultural diversity of the region, a diversity that, as noted above, the ASEAN Charter urges all member states to respect. By adopting a lingua franca approach to the teaching of English and the associated delay in introducing English into the classroom, I hope that at least some of the linguistic and cultural diversity of ASEAN might be preserved, while, at the same time, ensuring that English is actually taught and learned more successfully than at present.

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Resumé

Cet article décrit d'abord le développement de l'anglais dans l'ANASE (Association des nations de l'Asie du Sud-Est – ASEAN), qui aboutit à son rôle actuel de langue de travail unique de l'organisation. Il compare brièvement certaines des politiques linguistiques de l'UE avec celles de l'ANASE. L'article souligne que l'anglais est devenu la principale langue "étrangère" enseignée dans l'ANASE, souvent au détriment des langues locales. L'article soutient que, comme le rôle majeur de l'anglais dans l'ANASE est celui de lingua franca, l'anglais doit donc être enseigné comme lingua franca. Cela aurait l'avantage supplémentaire de retarder l'enseignement de l'anglais, ce qui permettrait aux écoles primaires de se concentrer davantage sur les langues locales. L'article se termine par une étude de cas du Myanmar (Birmanie), et propose une politique d'éducation linguistique pour ce pays.

Mots clés: Politique linguistique; Anglais lingua franca; Association des nations de l'Asie du Sud-Est – ASEAN/ANASE; Myanmar