MALAYSIAN LANGUAGE POLICY EXCHANGE

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Abstract- The Malaysian educational system has undergone a substantial complexity and challenges in its language policy and planning (LPP) after the post-independence period. Decisions and implementation involved in LPP require detailed analysis and consideration of the socio-cultural, historical and political factors during this period. This paper discussed the developments and changes in language policy that happened in Malaysia, from Bahasa Melayu to English. These include the issue on linguistic nationalism during the post-independence phase; the extensive codification in the corpus planning during the second half of the post-independence period; and a renewed definition on the conception on nationalism and the issue concerning the use of English as medium of instruction during the phase of internationalization. This paper also presents the definition of corpus and status planning and whether these three periods reflects corpus or status planning.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language policy is "the set of positions, principles and decisions reflecting community's relationships to its verbal repertoire and communicative potential. These positions and principles can be either overt and explicitly stated in a formal document or laws, or covert, not written down or formalized but reflected in popular attitudes nonetheless" (Schiffman, 1996: 3). Language planning on the other handrefers to "activities carried out by governmental, official or other influential bodies that are aimed at establishing which language varieties are used in a particular community, and subsequently at directing or influencing which language varieties are to be used for which purposes in that particular community, and what the linguistic characteristics of those varieties are to be" (Trudgill 2003: 77).

II. STATUS PLANNING AND CORPUS PLANNING

1.1. Status Planning:Status planning is closely related to "expansion of the functional range of a language" (Meyer 2005: 232). In the expansion process it involves the promotion and the use of the language in various domains of daily life, including the educational, religions, knowledge dissemination, and economy sectors. The status of languages is one of the policy issues and concerns for government in multiethnic and multilingual nation-state. The political facet is evident in the maintenance of multilingualism, for e.g. via the regional or national promotion of the prestige of a minority language above the minorities languages of a country, which are also some of the instances of status planning (ibid).

1.2. Corpus Planning:Corpus planning is "an aspect of language planning and codification in which decisions are taken about the linguistic characteristics of the variety of language in question" (Trudgill 2003: 29). Some of the typical issues in corpus planning involve questions on which pronunciation to use and should be standardized of those available; which syntactic structure and morphological forms are to be permitted; and which of a number of regionally based words of identical meaning is to be favored (Trudgill2003: 29).

III. LINGUISTIC NATIONALISM (1957-1969)

The concept of nationalism is an inescapable component in nation-building when issues of language policy are concerned.The attitude of the citizens towards nationalism which underscores the complex relation between language and identity has played a central role during this period. After Independence in 1957, the Malays during the pre-independence period of history felt insecure and threatened, they reinforced legitimization through symbolic categories like language, religion and the national hymn. So thatthe government of Malaysia set out on a program to establish Bahasa Melayu as official language, to be used in all government functions and as the medium of instruction at all levels. Malay refers to group of languages closely related to each other to the point of mutual intelligibility (Mauzy 2005).They chose Bahasa Malay as national language because of "its indignity, its role as a lingua franca, its position as a major language, its possession of high literature, and the fact that it once had been an important language of administration and diplomacy in the Malay archipelago" (Asmah 1997: 15).

In the post-colonial period the feeling of nationalization were high, after gaining independence Malaysian people tried to build up their own national identity and one of the manifestations of national identity was a language policy. As Malaysia was and still a multi-ethnic country, they need one language to unify them and the most important role in establishing and enhancing the feeling of nationalism

was the national language and also it's emphasize the culture and ethnic identity, "language, together with culture, religion and history, is a major component of nationalism" (Fasold 1987: 3).

After attaining independence Malaysia as most colonized countries reacted against the language of the colonial power, which in this situation was English and chose another language to be the national language which in this case was Bahasa Malay(Gill 2002:37).In the primary school English became as a second language, it became a subject compulsory to take but not to pass for all students in the school system and was described as a second language but in that way its lose itssignificant and relegated to a less dominant role, that is important for Malay to secure prominent status. "Making their language official would provide the Malays with linguistic capital and economic opportunity which would lead to social and professional mobility"(Gill 2005: 246).

During this stage of the status planning in the LPP, the fact that the country had recognized the need for a national language after the post-independence period is "not only to affirm their (the Malays) legitimacy as the dominant group in the country but also as a tool to unify the multi-ethnic citizenry of the nation—to provide a strong sense of cultural identity at the national level" (Gill 2007). In relation to that, the government established Dewan Bahasa danPustaka (Institute of Language and Literature) in 1959 to promote the use of the Malay language in the country. We know that an independence nation must have its own national language which can be used as a tool to express and develop its unique cultural heritage and to make its people's voice heard in the world. Malaysia has achieved this during the first half of the post-independence phase.

IV. MODRENIZATION (1970-1990)

The Modernization period saw the progressive need for both status and corpus planning in the LPP development. Language policy and planning during the second half of the post-independence period (1970-1990) aims to secure, strengthen, and enrich the Malay language as the official lingua franca and national language. Bahasa Malay did not however attempt to control language use in the private sector, including business and industry, where globalization pressure led to anincreasingstipulate for English. The subsequent new economic policy from 1971 to 1990 language policy was change; the government supported a major program for language cultivation and modernization. "There was a strict and rapid implementation of a national language policy, based on the belief that, if the status of the Malay language was not upgraded, the political and economic status of Malay would never improve and national cohesion would not be achieved" (Gaudart, Omar and Ozog cited in Kaplan and Baldauf1997: 197). The process includes implementation of national strategies and development plans to ensure that the Malay language is used in modern, influential sphere (e.g. computers, Internet, television, radio, advertising, newspapers and magazines) in Malaysia's socio-cultural, educational, technological and economic domains, in order to keep abreast of global progress.

In 1965 there was the conversion in oldest university in Malaysia, the University of Malaya, and as an provisionalgauge a bilingual system was adopted – Bahasa Melayu for the Arts subjects and the English-medium for the science and technology subjects. But slowly, the bilingual system became a completely monolingual system, using only Bahasa Melayu. It was only in 1983, after eighteen years, were all subjects including the sciences conducted in Bahasa Melayu in all public universities (Gill, 2004: 142). . These strategies and plans have made considerable impact on the national language in which they seek: (a) to promote and maintain a standardized norm over time, and (b) to provide a point of reference for the future study of language change" (Gill 2005). This is carried out with the help of Dewan Bahasa danPustaka, which functions as "a statutory body vested with the authority and charged to develop and enrich the national language, to promote literacy growth and creative talents, and to publish books in the national language" (Hassan Ahmad 1988: 33 as cited in Gill 2005: 248). The status planning and promotion of the social status or role of the national language during this phase has given our history a common language, as a symbol of national identity and prestige of an independent state. The national language shapes and represents our shared uniqueness as Malaysians, simultaneously strives to realize its potential to become a language of access to global knowledge.

The development in language policy on the status of the national language can be seen in terms of the modernization and reinforcement of the language through progressive stages, both involve status planning and corpus planning which aim to strengthen the status of the Malay language as well as its expansion into new domains of the daily life of Malaysians.

V. INTERNATIONALIZATION (1990 – 21ST CENTURY):

During the internationalization period (1990-21st century), the development of LPP in Malaysia has become more complicated. The process involves the change of medium of instruction in the teaching of science and mathematics, which is attributable to the growing global appetite for English language, where it is considered important both for work and education. Furthermore, the development also involves increased funding to lift up the status of the Malay language from the government. After

relegated as a secondary language during post-independence time, English was elevated again as the medium of instruction for the teaching of science and mathematics when Tun Dr. Mahathir, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia announced the drastic change of the language policy in 2002 that the two subjects would be taught in English, in which the decision and its implementation would involve tertiary institutions as well as at the primary schools level (Mahathir 2002: 1 in Gill 2005: 249). In this period there is a need to be a redefinition of the concept of nationalism. The prime minster articulates this as follows:

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.

The problem arises because of the successful implementation of a nationalistic language policy over a period of two decades. As a result of this nationalistic policy, there is a generation of school and university graduates educated and fluent in the national language. The converse side of this equation is that it is a generation who are not equally competent in the English language. Therefore it was imperative during this period for information to be anaccessed in Bahasa Melayu, requiring a major program of translation from English into the national language (Gill 2005: 251). Nevertheless, the maintenance for the national language is also essential as it is the common language that connects all Malaysians and also a cultural symbol of being a Malaysian. LPP on both languages must be on equilibrium so that neither of the languages is sacrificed in facing the changes of the global environments in this new world.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, keeping an open-mindedness, positive mindset and attitude towards English learning is very important to achieve competency in order to access the source of knowledge. Malaysians must have the knowledge from the leading knowledge producers in this global age before it becomes capable in contributing to the local knowledge production where the national language can be used to produce knowledge for the nation. Malaysian government is aspired with greater responsibility to devise strategies for making language learning continuous, cumulative and more articulated to better serve the purpose of language learning among Malaysians in the education institutions and schools. The questions and concerns on the change of medium of instruction in Malaysia remains to be what ideologies should be the most ideal and encompassing for those at the centre of the public and institutional discussion of the language policy in the face of global changes.

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