

Recognition and Respect: Globalization Culture and Malaysian Education

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Abstract

Globalization and language reform is often presented as a set of practices and relationships to which educators must adapt in order to ‘compete’ or maintain ‘relevance’ in contemporary society. Presented in such a way neo-liberal versions of globalization and educational reform situate localized culture often as a kind of impediment, something we must overcome or ameliorate in order for progress to be sustained and maintained. In Malaysia, these kinds of discourses inform public policy debates. From debates over university competitiveness through to arguments over language and literacy in a global world, the pressures on Malaysian educators to change their practices and reform are often presented with an implicit assumption that local culture is somehow in deficit.

The argument of this paper challenges this framing and representation of globalization. I present an alternative theoretical framework through which educators can judge their practices within the discourse of globalization. I will demonstrate how respecting difference and culture is framing globalization as mutual respect and recognition rather than imposed change is critical to addressing the language and culture of globalization and education. In this sense, debates about language (understood here in the broadest sense as how we communicate and in what power discourse we communicate within) and culture are ultimately arguments about recognition and respect. Neo liberal politics as an expression of an increasingly authoritarian discourse of globalization needs to be challenged by a politics and practice of cultural recognition and respect.

Introduction

‘Then came to our eastern countries the Europeans from the north replete with the weapons to win the battle of life and equipped with knowledge of the ways and means to make profit.’ Syed Shaykh al-Hady 1907

Globalization is often presented to educational practitioners as a kind of *fait accompli* set of practices and relationships to which educators must adapt in order to ‘compete’ or maintain ‘relevance’ in contemporary society. Presented in such a way neo-liberal versions of globalization and educational reform situate localized culture often as a kind of impediment, something we must overcome or ameliorate in order for progress to be sustained and maintained. In the Malaysian example, these kinds of pressures manifest in diverse situations. From debates over university competitiveness through to arguments over language and literacy in a global world, the pressures on Malaysian educators to change their practices and reform are often presented with an implicit (though rarely stated) assumption that local culture is somehow in deficit. Language itself becomes identified with progress or stagnation and despite the best intentions of

those who would seek to engage the discourse of progress the identification of some languages with modern progress and other languages simply with tradition has cultural and political consequences. How a debate over language and education is framed is as important as the 'objective' nature of language.

History of Malaysian Language policy

Marxist inspired critics of Malaysian colonial history and education argue that the development of colonial Malaya followed the logic of capitalist development during the nineteenth century. According to this discourse, the expansion of the colonial economy necessitated the development of an educational system to support and reproduce the necessary social and cultural relations necessary for capitalist accumulation in a colonial framework. The expansion of the colonial economy necessitated the expansion of formal education to serve the growing demands of capitalist accumulation. The system of education in colonial Malaysia served to maintain preexisting social and economic inequalities as well as produce new ones(Ongkili 1985).

While British imperial administrators, educationalist and reformers confronted a complex terrain of languages, cultures and economic structures in pre-independence Malaya the expansion of modern education under the British followed and arguably heavily influenced the transformation of the colonial economy and the necessary expansion of British Imperial influence(Loh 1975). Of course, this kind of analysis of the connection between education and global economy in colonial Malaya is contentious.

Alis Puteh, for example, points out that there is a significant disagreement in the key literature on colonial education the extent to which education was essentially unplanned and not consciously subordinated to the needs of British imperialist capitalist development. A key question is the extent to which it was part of what Ongkili describes as a 'systematically through-out program and was geared to the maintenance of a capitalist society'(Puteh 2006). Pennycook for example argues that paternalism deeply defined colonial policy with regard to education in colonial Malaya(Pennycook 1994).

The first schools opened in the Straits Settlements in 1816. Initially missionary groups in both English and the vernacular languages established schools. In some instances the schools were set up to proselytize Christianity, in other instances they were founded by educationalists who sought to spread what they saw as Western enlightenment and culture; the culture of progress and reason. Education in the early Mission schools was relatively simple and acted to provide the necessary skills for the developing colonial capitalist economy. On top of basic literacy and numeracy vocational subjects were also included. The inclusion of these subjects dissipated though did not overcome criticism from local community that the schools were indoctrinating students with Christian and western ideals(O'Brien 1980).

Differences exist as to the extent of resistance and how it was articulated in the context of Imperial subjugation (Chelliah 1947). Keith Watson introduces the complex attitudes of the Imperial rulers of Malaya(Watson 1993). How this manifested in educational compromise, disadvantage and the perpetuation of Eurocentric imperial hegemony through the schooling system in the colonial period is a significant legacy in the current debate over the language of education in Malaysia. In other words the problems of colonialism, resistance and recognition and respect for

cultural life are to be found at the outset in early colonial history in Malaya(Watson 1993). The problems of language were all tied up with this complex of issues(Powell 2002).

One view of history with regards to the reaction of the indigenous inhabitants of Malaya to colonial education can be gleaned from the analysis of Chan and Tan. According to Chan and Tan there: ‘was little resistance towards the use of English’ and that this resistance was from ‘mainly Malay individuals who believed that, since English was the language of Christians (most English schools were run by missionaries), there would be an attempt to convert Muslim Malays to Christianity’ (Chan and Tan 2006). However, another view found in the work of Asmah points out the resistance to Anglicized education was more widespread than merely individual (Asmah 1996).

An interesting corollary during the colonial period was resistance to colonial rule, based upon a defense of the ‘moral economy’ of the indigenous peoples. (Scott 1976; Scott 1982; Scott 1986). This notion of ‘moral economy’ is often under utilized in discussion about development economics and cultural respect. The idea that economic resistance had an ethical or normative aspect is especially important in grasping the way imperial exploitation effected not merely financial aspects but the sense of moral and cultural identity as well(Phillipson 2009).

The conclusion I want to draw from the foregoing discussion of colonial education is the following. Firstly, that there was resistance to the Anglicized and Occidental curriculum of the early colonial period. This is interesting since it reveals the ongoing struggle throughout Malaysian history against colonial hegemony in all its forms. Secondly resistance is part of broader forms of resistance that occurred within colonial Malaya and have been characterized by writers such as, Scott, as in part an attempt to defend ‘moral economy’ and ‘moral culture’ from the encroaches of cultural Christianity Anglicization and economic turmoil(Scott 1976; Scott 1982). This connection of culture and economics and the resistance both to exploitation on an economic level and lack of respect a cultural level is an important touchstone in further analysis of language and education in Malaysia.

Finally, such forms of resistance presage the importance of how language education and economy interplay and interconnect in a politics of imperialism and resistance to colonialism. Resistance in other words closely correlated to a politics of demand for recognition and cultural respect. Such resistance in the history of colonial Malaya suggests interesting historical threads with respect to how progress economy and identity have framed the Malay Peninsula and educational discourse.

Post War reform

Contemporary language education in Malaysia can be divided into two essential paradigms. The post colonial independence period ranging from the 1950’s up to the 1980’s and the knowledge economy period from the 1990’s through to today(Gill 2005; Gill 2006; Gill 2007). In 1963, Malay was determined as the national language by the National Language Act. Tunku Abdul Rahman, stated that a nation without a national language is like ‘a nation, without a soul and without a life’(Hassan 2005) captured the significance of language to a nations meaning. The centrality of Malay as the national language drew upon this essential insight. The Razak Report in 1956 had given solid articulation to the direction that education and language would take in Malaysia’s development. This report was one of four proposals for developing and

building the Malaysian national education system. Other significant reports included the Barnes Report, the Ordinan Report and the Fenn-Wu Report(Asmah 1994; Bajunid 2007; Hassan 2005). The Razak Report followed by the National Language Act established the foundations for an integrated educational system in Malaysia. Chan and Tan provide us with a good general overview of the way educational reform developed in Malaysia during the postwar period showing how education subordinated to nation building(Chan and Tan 2006). Gill captures the essential logic of the shift to Malay as part of nation building and the development of national unity in the following quote:

‘One of the main functions of Bahasa Melayu was to provide a common means of communication across varying ethnic groups, thus contributing to the establishment of national identity. The thrust and focus of nationalism during this period was linguistic, with the language issue driving the development of national identity and serving as an important symbol of nationhood. Bahasa Melayu was thus established as the national language, language of administration and the language of education.’(Gill 2006)

The essential aim of public policy and language policy was nation building and the solidifying of cultural identity and respect for that identity. In other words, a politics of cultural recognition and respect tied closely to a program of nation building and national unity. Admittedly, this policy was not without its critics, and its articulation arguably led to other forms of cultural marginalization. Nonetheless, the correlation of language unity by the universalization of Malay through the education system and national economic and social development cohered in a successful strategy that combined nation building with development(Asmah 1996; Asmah 1994; Hassan 2005; Loh 1975; Ongkili 1985; Powell 2002).

In many respect this program of cultural identity and nation building combined both elite perceptions about the best way for national development and cultural integrity with grassroots need for cultural assertion and dignity. During this modern period of Malaysian development, the aims of cultural dignity and economic development correlated. In other words, the aims of unity and development correlated(Wong and . 1971). This does not mean that they correlated unproblematically, or that there were not significant tensions in the correlation. Gill writes:

‘In the heyday of post-colonial language planning, Malaysia was one of the countries that enthusiastically accepted the arguments of planners and set about to build up its national language. Once independent of British colonial rule, it chose to reduce the role and status of English and select one2 autochthonous language, Bahasa Melayu, as official medium of government and education. The changes in the role and status of the two languages over the next half century can be explained by politics and nationalism, economics and science and technology’(Gill 2005) .

Nonetheless, the essential political point is that a coherent politics of cultural assertion and economic development were in unison and provided a period of stable economic, educational and social growth. The problem ahead of us is to what extent that still holds. Some writers in the discourse of language and development use the distinction created by Fishman. Fishman refers to the difference between nationalism and nationism. Nationalism according to Fishman is ‘the process of transformation from fragmentary and tradition bound ethnicity to unifying and idealized nationality’, nationism is defined as a process where ‘the political boundaries are most salient and most efforts are directed towards maintaining and strengthening them regardless of

the immediate character of populations they embrace.’(Fishman 1968) The question that is now animating Malaysian public policy is what if national unity with Malay as the language of education is in tension with global development.

On one side of the debate scholars such as Asmah Haji Omar write, ‘nationalism, supported by proficiency in the English language, is essential in Malaysia’s rise to become a developing and industrial nation and to take its place in internationalism’(Asmah 1994). On the other side scholars such as Puteh argue that, ‘the nationalist-nationist dichotomy of language functions ... is irrelevant and confusing.’(Puteh 2006)The key to this conundrum may lie in how we define development and the extent to which development is in keeping with cultural self-respect and genuine recognition. The implicit argument of this paper is that while the framework of nationalism and nationism may provide some insight into the way language may operate according to divergent functional needs, it does not provide us with the necessary theoretical depth to grasp resistance to language reform.

Shift from language nationalism to developmental nationalism

One of the critical ways that this contemporary debate is framed is between arguments over ‘language nationalism’ and ‘developmental nationalism’(Gill 2006; Gill 2007). In other words, a critical issue with respects to language and education is the extent to which language unity and economic development are in tension or unison. This dichotomy manifested previously in Fishman’s distinction between nationalism and nationism. However, the articulation of the distinction between language nationalism and developmental nationalism provides a clearer lexicon in understanding the essential tensions in the Malaysian polity over language, modernity development and globalization. This issue drives public policy debate.

According to advocates of this distinction put above the conditions of globalization require a shift in how we correlate and see language and Malaysia’s national interest and development. To advocates of developmental nationalism recognition and respect for a nation and its culture comes through economic and development, which essentially provides power. In the knowledge economy, a prerequisite for this respect lies in acquiring English language competency especially in Science and Mathematics(Zakaria and Iksan 2007). However, the implications of this position for the broader educational system are clear(Ridge 2004; Thang and Kumarasamy 2006). If the achievement of national development and national strength correlates to how a nation competes in a globalized knowledge economy then language identity must be subordinated to development. Former PM Mahathir Mohammed captures the dilemma presciently:

‘We need to move from the extreme form of nationalism which concentrates on being a language nationalist only, not a knowledge nationalist, not a development oriented nationalist. I feel that we should be a development oriented nationalist.

We want our people to succeed, to be able to stand tall, to be respected by the rest of the world. Not to be people with no knowledge of science and technology, very poor, very backwards, working as servants to other people. If we have no knowledge we will be servants to those with knowledge.’(Gill 2006)

Essentially, the argument put by articulate advocates of English in Malaysian educational institutions is that the shift to a knowledge economy presages a shift in how we relate language to national development. Whereas linguistic policy in Malaysia has historically been aimed at engendering national unity, the process of

globalization the growth of the knowledge economy has according to advocates of English changed the argument concerning language and development. Gill makes the historical and theoretical issue point clearly:

‘One of the main functions of Bahasa Melayu was to provide a common means of communication across varying ethnic groups, thus contributing to the establishment of national identity. The thrust and focus of nationalism during this period was linguistic, with the language issue driving the development of national identity and serving as an important symbol of nationhood. Bahasa Melayu was thus established as the national language, language of administration and the language of education’ (Gill 2006).

However:

‘In 2003, a sudden shift in language policy has again been instituted, where Bahasa Melayu has given way to English, which has once again attained significant functional educational allocation as the medium of instruction for science and technology. In this context of globalisation and the knowledge economy, the definition of nationalism has shifted from that of linguistic nationalism... to that of ‘knowledge-driven nationalism’ and ‘development oriented nationalism’ as conceptualised by the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Dr Mahathir In these present times, linguistic nationalism is driven by national development forces – the acquisition, mastery and innovative use of knowledge and information in the fields of science and technology – forces essential for the development of the nation.’ (Gill 2006)

The argument of this paper is that we need to look very closely at how we articulate developmental nationalism within neo-liberal globalization. Developmental nationalism is driven by a desire to gain and maintain recognition and respect within the framework of globalization. However, the influence of neo-liberalism and a Eurocentric discourse of progress, which often inform the discourse of globalization tempers the extent to which developmental nationalism, can solicit and engender both recognition and respect. Respecting difference and culture requires us to critically interrogate the neo-liberal and Eurocentric interpellation of globalization, which can inform the developmental nationalist discourse (Canagarajah 1999; Cleary 1996; Elteren 2003; Fernández 2005; Ives 2006; Merrouche 2006; Rowe 2004; Tomlinson 1997).

Neo-liberal globalization discourse

Developmental nationalism as a basis for language reform exists within a broader discursive hegemony. The discourse of neo-liberalism must be understood if we are to grasp how developmental nationalism works or fails in contemporary globalised modernity. According to Gounari: ‘the term “neoliberalism” to refer to the economic, political, and cultural practices that give primacy to the market order where profit and consumption are the defining factors of reality’ (Gounari 2006). Theorists ranging from Peter Drucker and Michael Porter emphasise the ‘importance of the economics and productivity of knowledge as the basis for national competition within the international marketplace.’ (Peters 2001)

Much of what passes for globalization discourse is peppered with neo-liberal ideology. Instrumental reasoning, universalization of specific cultural styles, consumerist individualization and an equation of this with progress characterizes contemporary aspects of neo-liberal globalization (Grass 2002). Neo liberal reform which seeks to extend the power of the market through all aspects of life reduces

knowledge acquisition, production and use to the needs of a competitive and individually consumption oriented economy(Pennycook 1995; Pennycook 1994; Pennycook 1998; Pennycook 2000a; Pennycook 2000b). Identifying this as progress acts to place identities within a kind of cultural hierarchy that is implicitly disempowering. Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant argue concisely that:

‘cultural imperialism is a form of symbolic violence that relies on a relationship of constrained communication to extort submission. In the case at hand, its particularity consists in universalizing the particularisms bound up with a singular historical experience by making them misrecognized as such and recognized as universal.’(Bourdieu and Wacquant 2001)

Neo-liberalism is characterized by an almost messianic espousal of the market, a skeptical attitude towards the common good outside of its articulation as individual preference, and an instrumental rationality that pervades discussion of almost all issues(Peters 2001) . In short, neo-liberal philosophy establishes a troika of the market, possessive individualism and instrumental reason, which are the hallmarks of progress and modernity. These essential three characteristics of neo-liberal philosophy constitute its worldview and it is within this framework that the argument of globalization is usually presented. Such a worldview constitutes an active hegemony and is articulated in a series of contingent practices that inform, constitute and regulate contemporary discourse in regards to educational reform(Hui 2004). Apparent simplification of goals and objectives based on financial and efficiency criteria are key characteristics of the neo –liberal trend in education. In the realm of language, this simplification articulates itself as a reduction of English language to a simply an instrumental communicative medium.

Neo-liberalism overdetermines how development is understood. This constitutes a significant problem for arguments about developmental nationalism and language. The point of the analysis is to argue that neo-liberal globalization extends an instrumentalist and universalizing discourse that homogenises difference and negates cultural specificity. In other words, neo-liberal globalization manifests as a form of cultural imperialism, which claims universality but is in fact a universalization of particular ideologies and discourses that privilege and reproduce patterns of inequality and exclusion at a global level. Understood in this way language reform must be able to be articulated in a way that is not reducible to the needs of the market or ‘economics’ but is rather strongly tied to cultural respect. A good example of the kind of insight that exists with regards to these problems exists in Alatas’ recognition of the inequality and dependency that characterizes contemporary educational culture in the current neo-liberal environment is an important corrective and insight into the relationship between knowledge and cultural self respect (Alatas 2001).According to Alatas:

‘in the postcolonial period what we have is academic neo-imperialism or academic neo-colonialism as the West’s monopolistic control of and influence over the nature and flows of social scientific knowledge remain intact even though political independence has been achieved.’(Alatas 2003)

Progress

Implicit within the discourse of language reform in Malaysia and the global knowledge economy is a universalizing discourse of progress. For those of us who accept the liberal humanist and Eurocentric discourse of progress the idea that the

world is moving in the direction of reason and development is axiomatic. This axiomatic discourse flavors how the importance of English is articulated in the Malaysian debate. Consider for example, the paradigm outlined by Fishman, which informs certain contributors to the Malaysian debate. Arguably, the distinction between nationalism and nationism, which Fishman proposes, tends to justify a kind of tension between language as nation building and language as a way of engaging with broader development. Yet scholars such as Alis Puteh challenge this way of framing the alternatives. Puteh points out that the framing of language as a choice between instrumental or operational efficiency and nationalist symbolism and affective identity has a kind of neo-colonial aspect(Puteh 2006).

The dichotomy between language nationalism and developmental nationalism also mirrors this essential division. Simply put there is a tendency in these formulations to posit identity and development in tension. Identity is cultural and takes on a kind of reactive hue and development is universal and takes on a kind of progressive aspect. Such a discursive framing of the language debate runs deeply in the discursive architecture of how the language debate is framed. In other words, the discourse of *acultural* modernity frames how language discourse is understood in the dominant neo-liberal paradigm of knowledge and globalization(Comaroff 2001; Hill 2006; Sites 2000). Such an *acultural* framework to use Taylor's (Taylor 1992a) phrase fails to take seriously the problems of identity recognition and subordinates them to a reified and objectivist developmental discourse.

International bodies such as the World Bank argue that Malaysia needs to change and improve its teaching practice if it is to produce quality work in the new knowledge economy(Bank 2007). At almost every level, the language of reform in education is a language that pits progress against tradition, stagnation against movement. Framing arguments over globalization and the way we communicate within a globalized knowledge economy as arguments over progress implicitly situate affective cultural identity and linguistic identity within a totalizing and universalizing narrative that is, despite its pretensions undemocratic and oppressive. Within such a discourse, Western forms of development and languages are seen as encompassing modern progress(Mumford 1934) and non-western languages and cultures as representing the opposite.

This notion of modernist and western progress is tied up with the doctrines of neo-liberal globalization, the instrumentalization of reason and consumerist ethics(Robertson and Dale 2008; Venn 2006). Neo liberal politics expresses an increasingly authoritarian discourse and pollutes the positive articulation of pedagogic and language reform. Progress in this sense is a corollary of technological and economic advancement. English is according to this view the language of technological and scientific modernity and hence facility in it is an empowering act. English from such a vantage point is the lingua franca of scientific advancement and hence facility in it is by definition empowering and progressive.

The *discourse* of English as the language of progress may act as a kind of imperialist subtext which consistently privileges the cultural political and economic imperatives of what Joseph Stiglitz refers to as the 'Washington consensus' over the interests of developing nations(Stiglitz 2003a; Stiglitz 2005; Stiglitz 2003b). In other words, to what extent does the equation of English with advancement within the context of neo-liberal globalization in fact reinforce a kind of hegemonic subservience and marginalization, never stated, but sub-consciously understood by peoples whose first

language is not English? Here the important point is not that English *per se* is imperialist or implicitly oppressive but that the way it is framed as a vehicle for progress, modernity and advancement expresses a cultural framing that is disempowering, culturally oppressive and ultimately at odds with a politics of recognition and respect. In short, we have a discursive problem, a problem of representation and articulation that frames how English is received.

Human Capital

Consider for example the way language policy is discussed in the Malaysian context where the concept of human capital frames the ideological justification for language reform. The Malaysian government is actively engaging the problematic of the knowledge economy. The need to reform pedagogy as well as the need to expand English language competency are all related to international competitiveness and economic development. Educational language reform in Malaysia is articulated as a necessary aspect of engaging the needs and demands of a globalized knowledge economy. There is a need to compete to advance economically. As Wang Hui points out, neo-liberal 'globalization of Marketism cancels out the legitimacy of all political interference with the category of economy' (Hui 2004).

For government it is considered axiomatic that that pedagogical and linguistic reform must occur to help produce the necessary human capital for an efficient and competitive economy (Bank 2007; Economic Planning Unit 2006; Education 2007; ISIS 2002; Kent 2006; Malaysia 2006). Such an approach to pedagogical reform is articulated within a overarching global hegemonic that is largely neo-liberal, instrumental and in the main consumption oriented. What does this mean? Firstly, as I have argued above, the arguments with respect to globalization and the need for reform to education are framed within a neo-liberal discourse that privileges and drives economic and cultural inequality. Language reform is clearly articulated and subordinated to this discourse. The idea that some languages are progressive and others are not, that some languages are inevitable corollaries to global advancement because of their instrumental utility must be analyzed and critiqued. The reduction of educational goals to the needs of human capital is a key aspect of neo-liberal reform. Complex cultural and political issues, which have informed education, are reduced in such a framework to a language of economics. Such a narrow focus and economistic language justifies reforms but fails to grasp cultural resistance.

Hidden from view in such a neo-liberal approach are the cultural and particular interests that inform the economistic discourse. The reduction of problems in learning to a language of economic reductionism carries with it a flavor of universalism and certitude that is characteristic of the millennial certainty of neoliberalism. The corollary tendency or reductionism is homogenization of culture and a reduction of cultural forms to instrumental use value. In other words, there is tendency within neo-liberal capitalism towards the reduction of cultural complexity to instrumental values and the eradication of cultures that do not fit the instrumental needs of the neo-liberal order. This manifests for example in homogenization of discourse and eradication of linguistic and cultural diversity.

Of course, the processes are contradictory and dialectically complex. Globalization is also generating new diversities upon the ruins of the older ones yet the essential reduction of cultural worth to its use value and instrumental efficiency within globalized capitalism is a process that is relatively clear to see. For example, the

reduction of the mission of education to the production of human capital is a discursive shift that indicates and presages a deeper cultural and political shift in what we view as the proper role of education. The reduction of language to the needs of human capital evidences a similar logic.

In the argument over English in Malaysia, one of the dominant discourses in English language advocacy has been its instrumental use value in enabling Malaysian to compete in a global economy, and its importance as a necessary component of human capital for effective development in a globalized knowledge economy. English language is presented as the effective *lingua franca* of modernization, economic development and progress. Individuals without English are in this sense not properly ‘capitalized’ nor do they possess the necessary skills and capabilities to compete and grow in the current world order. Such a discourse of English presented as a kind of cultural *fait accompli*. This discourse reduces language to its economic use value against a set of criteria presented as universal norms. In fact, these norms are the expression of particular cultural forms and particular cultural and economic interests. The corollary reduction of individuals and in this paper of students to consumers also adds to this rearticulation of language as use value.

Recognition and respect

What then are the ways we can engage the problems and characteristics outlined above? One of the salient characteristics of contemporary social theory are arguments over the importance of identity and the recognition of identity to ideas of respect. The problems and issues of recognition and respect have animated Malaysian society in ways that compound and inform the redistributive framework of justice. Nancy Fraser (Fraser 1992) provides us with an interesting discussion of the distinction between redistributive justice and justice based on recognition of identity. The important point to note is that in Malaysia this distinction has always been interconnected. Fraser writes:

‘In today’s world, claims for social justice seem increasingly to divide into two types. First, and most familiar, are redistributive claims, which seek a more just distribution of resources and goods. ... Today, however, we increasingly encounter a second type of social-justice claim in the “politics of recognition.” Here the goal, in its most plausible form, is a difference-friendly world, where assimilation to majority or dominant cultural norms is no longer the price of equal respect.’ (Fraser 1996)

However, the important theoretical argument I am focussing upon centres on the issue of recognition of identity. This is critical because in part at least identity recognition also manifests in issues of language. Fraser clarifies the issue:

‘The second kind of injustice is cultural or symbolic. It is rooted in social patterns of representation, interpretation, and communication. Examples include cultural domination (being subjected to patterns of interpretation and communication that are associated with another culture and are alien and/or hostile to one’s own); nonrecognition (being rendered invisible via the authoritative representational, communicative, and interpretative practices of one’s culture); and disrespect (being routinely maligned or disparaged in stereotypic public cultural representations and/or in everyday life interactions).’ (Fraser 1995)

The key to Nancy Fraser’s formulation of the politics of recognition as it relates to this paper is the centrality of the idea that recognition and respect is a central demand

of citizens within contemporary society. Language reform in Malaysia must be articulated within a discourse that understands the centrality of the demand for recognition and respect. This demand is central to a peoples idea of what is just, and what provides them with dignity. This kind of politics, which locates identity within the rubric of justice, has characterized and informed debates within multicultural societies in significant ways. In the Malaysian example, the politics of cultural recognition is a key aspect of Malaysian national identity as well as social stability and justice.

Interesting research by Thang Siew Ming provides us with insight into the problems of resentment and resistance to English and the problems with analysing English language motivational issues simply with reference to instrumental career rewards that do not take into account the deeper cultural and emotional issues that structure attitudes to language acquisition. Her advocacy of the need to rethink how we go about 'redefining the position and identity of English' in the context of a multicultural post colonial polity such as Malaysia, is an excellent example of recognizing the cultural and affective aspects of language to identity and the limitations of framing language acquisition by reference to instrumental benefits(Thang 2004). The recognition of the significance of socio-cultural factors in how students engage education and language points to the importance of how identity and ideas of identity influence attitudes to education and language(Ming and Alias 2007).

Global modernity as cultural

The Canadian philosopher of multiculturalism and identity Charles Taylor also provides us with important insight into the theoretical issues at stake(Taylor 1991; Taylor 1992b; Taylor and Gutmann 1992). According to Taylor the dominant models or ways we understand modernity are largely '*acultural*' '*Acultural*' ways of interpreting modernity differ from 'cultural' ways in a critical respect. Taylor makes the point clearly:

'I want to distinguish - and start a debate - between two kinds of theories of modernity, I shall call them "cultural" and "acultural" respectively. I'm leaning on a use of the word "culture" here which is analogous to the sense it often has in anthropology. I am evoking the picture of a plurality of human cultures, each of which has a language and a set of practices which define specific understandings of personhood, social relations, states of mind/soul, goods and bads, virtues and vices, and the like. These languages are often mutually untranslatable. With this model in mind, a "cultural" theory of modernity is one that characterizes the transformations which have issued in the modern West mainly in terms of the rise of a new culture. The contemporary Atlantic world is seen as a culture (or group of closely related cultures) among others, with its own specific understandings (e.g., of person, nature, the good), to be contrasted to all others, including its own predecessor civilization (with which it obviously also has a lot in common). By contrast, an "acultural" theory is one that describes these transformations in terms of some culture-neutral operation. By this I mean an operation which is not defined in terms of the specific cultures it carries us from and to, but is rather seen as of a type which any traditional culture could undergo.'(Taylor 1992a)

The key point for Taylor is that the dominant '*acultural*' method of understanding modernity fails to grasp the salience of culture. Modernity within such a paradigm is conceived of as a process any culture can go through. In this theory, 'modernity in this kind of theory is understood as issuing from a rational or social operation which

is culture-neutral.’(Taylor 1992a) We can see aspects of this type of thinking in theories that posit universal instrumental motivations for language acquisition or reduce identity to ‘capital’. Such approaches are not culture free but rather products of a certain cultural ascendancy. According to Taylor, ‘the dominant theories of modernity over the last two centuries have been of the *acultural* sort. Many have explained its development at least partly by our “coming to see” something like the range of supposed “truths”’(Taylor 1992a)

When we investigate the way the English language debate is framed in the dominant discourse in Malaysia we spy the ‘*acultural*’ discourse framing it. In other words, the dominant neo-liberal discourse or interpretive framework within which the knowledge society is theorized is in a deculturalized fashion and issues of language are presented as a *fait accompli* of development and scientific rationality. Resistance to ‘development’ and growth are viewed as irrational or holding on to tradition at the expense of the growth of knowledge or economic development. This kind of discourse manifests in several ways.

Firstly, by deculturizing and objectifying the goals of a knowledge economy and by inference modernity it tends to reify particular cultural ways of being at the expense of others. The discourse tends to present the alternative to its instrumentalist and individualist framework as simply backward. This discourse manifest in several ways: as an articulation of one side of the debate as tied to progress; secondly a reduction of language issues to communicative instrumental problems rather than expressing deeper and more profound cultural and political issues and finally; a reduction of human possibility to the conceptual paradigm of human capital. All of these characteristics of language discourse are accentuated and compounded by how decisions about language are often made in Malaysia. Gill captures it clearly:

‘In the Malaysian case, the decisions made about language and the nation are “top-down” for they are “policies that come from people of power and authority to make decisions for a certain group, without consulting the end-users of the language”’(Gill 2005).

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to make the following argument. First that to understand education in Malaysia we need to understand it historically within a framework that recognises the tensions between forms of globalization characterized by colonialism and imperialism and an insistence on cultural recognition and respect. To a greater or lesser degree, this dialectical interplay has animated Malaysian discourse since British Imperial times. Second, that the shift toward nationalism and developmental nationalism as a discursive legitimation for language shift in Malaysia can run into significant political and cultural difficulties if it does not take seriously the needs in Malaysia for a sense of recognition and respect for language. An instrumentalist and deeply reified and *acultural* discourse that marginalises Bahasa Malaysia, or implicitly articulates it as a deficit in the current globalized world runs the risk of creating serious backlash and discontent. The way language policy is discussed by elites and how those who are uncomfortable with the direction of language policy are discursively framed is a critical contributor to the success or otherwise of language reform.

This essential issue is critical in how we frame and understand language and reform. Framing globalization as mutual respect and recognition rather than imposed change

is critical to addressing the language and culture of globalization and education. In this sense, debates about language (understood here in the broadest sense as how we communicate and in what power discourse we communicate within) and culture are ultimately arguments about recognition and respect (Gutmann and Taylor 1994; Taylor and Gutmann 1992). Another way of putting the argument above is to point out that we simply cannot disentangle development from a sense of cultural recognition and respect (Woolcock 1998). Theoretical reification of this debate will not transcend the real and felt issues of identity recognition, which are central to Malaysian social economic and political stability.

Arguments framed in a discourse of developmental modernism that implicitly disparages cultural and linguistic identity by comparing it in deficit against 'progress', 'development' or modern technological change run serious political risks. Arguments in language discourse that objectify and reify instrumental concepts of language development and fail to grasp the emotional and deep sense of injustice sense of exclusion from power that result from being subjected to such a discourse are deeply flawed. They not only fail to understand how language animates deep senses of identity but how a discourse of neo-liberal globalization and its instrumentalized discourse that is politically and culturally tone deaf. Such tone deafness, which is usually characterized by claims to universal reason and objectivity has to be addressed.

'*Acultural*' policy frameworks as theorized in Taylor's work that reify the problems of language to broadly defined 'scientific' frameworks and universally applicable theoretical distinctions risk forgetting that language is deeply connected to identity and that culture and identity and the respect for that culture and identity are key demands. The language of policy discussion and engagement should move from abstractions that posit development against stagnation, progress against stalling, and reason against 'sensitivity'. Rather in dealing with reform in a multicultural multi ethnic and multi religious society such as Malaysia, we need to restate a critical point. Culture identity and development are not in contradiction.

Many of the objectives of Malaysian reform are useful and important, but the discourse within which they are framed needs interrogation. The desire to transform pedagogical instruction technique to social constructivist pedagogy (Embi, Long, and Hamzah 2001; Zakaria and Iksan 2007) and the desire in some quarters to use English as the medium of this instruction needs to be understood culturally. The desire to shift pedagogical instruction to constructivist modes within an Anglicised linguistic framework finds support from a diverse range of sources (Campbell 2007; Kaur 2001; Mustapha 2001; Wong 2003). The critical point is not to argue that all of this is somehow negative. There is a need for pedagogical reform in Malaysia and English is an important language for Malaysians to grasp and be competent in (Ismail 2005; Kim 2003; Malairaja and Zawdie 2004; Neo 2002; Razak and Saad 2007; Saad, Zawdie, Derbal, and Lee 2005). Rather that the dominant discourse within which much of the reform agenda is articulated draws on a neo-liberal instrumentalist discourse that disempowers and marginalizes (Mandal 2000).

All development ought to be cognizant of the needs for recognition and cultural respect. Malaysia efforts to realize the goals of Vision 2020 are important. They must be met in a culturally informed way that maintains both 'the challenge of establishing a scientific and progressive society, a society that is innovative and forward looking, one that is not only a consumer of technology but also a contributor to the scientific

and technological civilization of the future.’(Bajunid 2007) As well as, ‘the challenge of creating a psychologically liberated, secure, and developed Malaysian society with faith and confidence in itself, justifiably proud of what it is, of what it has accomplished, robust enough to face all manner of adversity. This Malaysian society must be distinguished by the pursuit of excellence, fully aware of all its potentials, psychologically subservient to none, and respected by the peoples of other nations.’(Bajunid 2007) Making sure that development is combined with cultural self-respect is the key. The goals of Malaysian development and reform as outlined in government policy are laudable; the way they are articulated in a multicultural society where cultural respect is critical to social stability is of central importance.

A beginning is to establish a discourse that is seen by all participants as providing a challenge to the way neo-liberal globalization and Eurocentric notions of progress, development and reason frame the language debate. Developing a sustainable philosophy of educational reform that reconnects educational aims to culturally sustainable and culturally respectful aims is critical to Malaysian reform. There are moves in this direction within the broad Malaysian educational policy framework. For example, the policy direction for sustainable education from Universiti Sains Malaysia provides one very good example(Razak 2006; Salleh 2006; Zakri 2006). Finally, the problems of national development and language have to be engaged in through a genuine deliberative process that shows through the process of deliberation recognition and respect for the cultural identifies and aspirations of Malaysians. Without a politics of deliberative and democratic engagement the crash through top down approach to language change, may simply lead to a crash.

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