

## *Language Education Policy and English in Multilingual Countries*

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### **Introduction**

Language policies are articulated in most multilingual postcolonial countries: they establish or affirm the national language(s), often including any ex-colonial language(s) embedded in the country's institutions, and selected regional or local languages that are spoken as regional lingua francas and/or mother tongues. Thus South Africa in 1994 established 11 official languages, including English, Afrikaans and 9 African languages of the region. For legislative and administrative purposes, governments tend to foreground the national languages ahead of regional and local languages, though the latter are essential in managing the education and health sectors. Much less attention may be given to the importance of the mother tongues, although their role in the education of young children has recently been recognized as crucial. They therefore need to be built into national education policies, apart from whatever languages are necessary for official or auxiliary purposes.

The challenges of accommodating multiple languages are evident in large post-colonial countries with far-flung communities, as in the Philippines with its thousands of islands where minority languages align with strong regional and/or ethnic identity. With limited resources, it makes sense to endorse the languages of those used by the larger regional communities, yet doing so disadvantages speakers of minority languages and smaller speech communities. It can be seen as a form of "linguicism" that disregards "linguistic human rights" (Philippson & Skutnabb-Kangas 1995:455). Measures to protect and promote minority languages and ensure their usability in education, courts, administration, media, culture, economic and social life, are enshrined in the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (1992).<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere in the world, the continuing presence of minority languages and widespread societal multilingualism do not attract attention, for example in the Cameroon (Anchimbe 2013), and Ghana (Ameka 2016). In northern Australia they are underrecognized in important administrative instruments such as the national census (Angelo & Macintosh 2015). Even when minority languages are recognized, the governments may be unable to develop policies or resources to address the social disadvantages of their speakers (see Lo Bianco 2007; Pauwels 2007).

The resource implications of mandating multiple languages in language policy and especially language education policy are inescapable. They include the need to train thousands of multilingual teachers for primary and secondary levels, to develop strongly grounded bodies of education, and help those growing up in multilingual postcolonial environments to use their language repertoires to access local and world knowledge. Dynamic approaches are needed to build multilingual educational content to meet the needs of students in developing countries. These will be discussed below with particular reference to the Philippines and South Africa, as well as the social and economic issues that are interconnected with them.

### ***National language policy and mother tongue education***

UNESCO has encouraged mother tongue-based instruction in primary education since 1953, and since 1980s studies have corroborated the wide-ranging advantages of conducting early education in children's mother tongues.<sup>ii</sup> The Finnish experience outlined by Skutnabb-Kangas (1984) has since been confirmed by a large body of independent research on children's cognitive development in multilingual contexts (e.g. Bialystok, 2001; King & Mackey, 2007; Siegel 2010).<sup>iii</sup> Accessing early education in his/her first language is fundamental for developing the child's powers of reasoning and use of symbolic systems which are the basis for higher learning and knowledge acquisition. Without such language grounding in a familiar language, their education may be fundamentally compromised, and their multilingual resources reduced to a form of "subtractive bilingualism", where the second language is added at the expense of the first language (Cummins 2000), and students typically struggle to gain competence in the nonlocal/foreign language of education. In the process their first language and its culture is devalued, leaving them doubly disadvantaged, without good prospects of being able to participate in societal transformation.

Yet the push to introduce English earlier and earlier in education can be seen in language education policies in many Asian countries, including China, Japan, Korea, Malaysia and Vietnam. In China, where English was previously introduced from year 6, the Ministry of Education is now mandating English from year 3 (Kirkpatrick 2012). Indonesian language policy has seen English being adopted in the curriculum of most primary schools (*English for Young Learners*). In Korea, where well-endowed parents are sending children to private schools to ensure they are educated in English from the start — a symptom of a well-documented nationwide English learning obsession known as "English fever" (Park 2009). In each case the policy is economically driven, but challenged by problems of resourcing its implementation. The teaching of English at the early level frequently comes at the expense of local languages and literary practices. Tsui (2004:22) describes it as a balancing act "between gaining access to English and the preservation of indigenous languages, and a balance between being open to foreign cultures and values and retaining one's own".

The clearest illustration of such issues comes from the Philippines, where English was introduced along with a universal education policy by the American regime after 1898. To its credit, the American colonial government recruited hundreds of school teachers (the so called Thomasite teachers, the first of whom arrived in 1901 on the SS Thomas), to develop a primary school curriculum and teaching materials where none had existed through centuries of Spanish colonialism. The fact that it was in English meant that it could be used throughout the Philippines, i.e. in Tagalog speaking areas in the north as well as the Visayan and Mindanao areas in the south. It provided an alternative medium for administration in non-Tagalog speaking parts of the country, and underpinned the national bilingual policy (Filipino-English) from the 1930s that was enshrined in Philippines Independence in 1946, and reaffirmed in the new constitution of 1973 and through the Marcos regime until 1988. But with educational resources dwindling and haphazard training of language teachers, language education has been unevenly distributed (Thompson 2003). During the 1990s, many Filipinos felt locked out of economic opportunities through their lack of English, and anti-elitist sentiment about the privilege associated with English was exploited by President Estrada, by his practice of using Filipino only in national statements. This and other scandals associated with the President prompted the 2001 "language riot" by English-educated urban Filipinos, seeking to affirm status of English. A more inclusive trilingual education policy (Filipino-English-MTL/Mother

Tongue Language) was promulgated in 2009, and implemented as MTB-MLE (= mother tongue-based – multilingual education) from 2012 on. Through an Education Order (2013), mother tongue education was enshrined for the first four years of schooling (in Tagalog and 18 other regional languages for which there are established orthographies); transitioning to the national languages Filipino and English in years 4-6. This newly forged language education policy aligns is well motivated pedagogically and well grounded in the Philippines experience, to be socially and regionally inclusive. However the issues of resourcing it remain.

Language education policy in South Africa is similarly challenged by number of nationally endorsed languages following reconciliation and the new 1994 constitution. Here again there is much need for mother-tongue-trained teachers for the 9 African languages (Granville et al. 1998:2610); and upgrading of the general level of teaching English from the low-investment levels of the Apartheid period when its principle applications was in the Black “homelands” like Soweto. The legacy of the “hegemony” of English (Heugh 2002: 461) remains as an obstacle, where English might otherwise be built on as a lingua franca for speakers of Black African languages and as an inter-ethnic language of social integration. Ongoing political tension between government bodies representing different ethnic interests, difficulty of advancing language education policy (Reagan 2002). Pedagogic strategies include the need to train teachers to work in mixed-language classrooms; approval of translanguaging in classroom (offering children the opportunity to use their home languages in the classrooms, or to collaborate at school with students who speak the same language); acceptance of a multilingualism that values all languages (Meierkord 2012); the replacement of “subtractive bilingualism” with an “additive bilingualism” environment, where the language resources of children are used to support both learning and social integration.

In South Africa as in the Philippines, there is great need to address the shortage of multilingual and multicultural teaching materials (Reagan 2002:420). Multilingual glossaries published for South African schools are a useful start: the *Oxford South African Multilingual Primary Dictionary Grades 4 – 7* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 2006) present English in parallel with Afrikaans and four South African languages. But the educational publications presently available are mostly in English or Afrikaans, underscoring the need for materials in African languages from different regions and ethnic groups, which might ground the education of young children especially in rural areas in their mother tongues and stories from their own cultures. Instead, school texts are typically translated from European languages with an external culture inescapably embedded in it (Kruger 2012). There are similar needs in Australia, with some initiatives to develop reading materials with Aboriginal subject matter for indigenous literacy programs, as a way of valorizing the students’ own socio-cultural experience.<sup>iv</sup> Ways of integrating Aboriginal English and creole into school texts for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are being developed by Australian linguists (Malcolm 2004; Moses & Wigglesworth 2008).

The lack of indigenized educational materials is even more acute at secondary level. For higher levels of knowledge and subject development, educators in Africa and in other post-colonial countries are still obliged to go to English-language textbooks whose content has yet to be adapted to the local environment. In Vietnam the *National Foreign Language Education Project 2020* (NFLEP 2020) explicitly acknowledges the need for more appropriate English language curriculum and textbooks (Nguyen 2012). Working with local teachers would bring fresh inspiration, as with the East African biology teacher, who substituted dissecting cockroaches for the unavailable frogs enshrined in the

curriculum! The scope for using English as a medium for religious instruction in Arabic schools in Pakistan has been demonstrated by Mahboob (2014), using Islamified English text. Opportunities for varying the language and adapting the content need to be fully exploited in multilingual education and in language education policies (Lo Bianco 2003).

### ***English in societal transformation***

English is included in various post-colonial national language policies as a medium for government communication over geographically or ethnically diverse communities, and as an instrument for extending national integration. In many it facilitates access to government services and institutions, such as the law courts in the Philippines, which remained a preserve of Spanish even in the later C20. In facilitating such access to more of the population, English in principle serves an egalitarian purpose. Yet when English is not equally distributed in society, it becomes an institutional problem, perpetuating the “subtractive” disadvantage conferred by the takeup of a colonial language in postcolonial society. Those lacking English see their country as linguistically and psychologically “in the grip of English” (Lorente 2013). Those with a command of English are able to work for international companies in the Philippines and overseas, but are often then committed to long-term separation from their families, especially parents from their children and generational disruption, with grandparents shouldering parental responsibility during the children’s formative years.

A different kind of impact on social structure can be seen among young educated middle-class Black South Africa, who are first-language users of English. Evidence from sociophonetic research shows that their pronunciation of the /u/ vowel has become fronted like that of white South African speakers, and aligns with the “deracialization” of speech among young educated people of all ethnic backgrounds in that class (Mesthrie 2010:26). This “cross-over” phenomenon suggests a level of integration among these new elites, although it also creates new sociophonetic distinctions between privileged and non-privileged speakers of English in each South African ethnic group, and between the younger privileged speakers and their older generations.

The use of English by younger multilingual speakers as in the Philippines and South Africa has profound consequences for the language itself in those contexts. In everyday Philippine usage, English is continually mixed with elements of the other national language (Filipino—Tagalog)<sup>9</sup>, resulting in a hybrid language, commonly known as “Taglish”. It consists of variable proportions of two languages, each providing the grammatical as the matrix for incorporating elements of the other. This “code-switched” language is continually used in private conversations as well as public dialogue and spontaneous commentary in broadcasting (Thompson 2003). The widespread use of Taglish is significant as the most culturally and socially endorsed form of English (rather than the “international” English taught in schools), and it is increasingly seen in written form online and through social media. Similar code-switched forms of English are widely used among young Black South African speakers as an expression of their multilingual solidarity, using English as the matrix for multiple other shared languages (Meierkord 2012), in what she refers to as “interactions across English”. Code-switched Englishes reflect the different language repertoires of the interlocutors and variables of the regional context, and the ability to engage in spontaneous multilingual dialogues becomes part of the speakers’ social identity. Their cultural significance as innovative forms of English should not be underestimated.

### ***English and economic development***

In its 1990s bid to internationalize the economy, the Philippines government endorsed the use of English as way of equipping Filipinos for overseas employment in the service or construction industries. English was thus an “economic resource” (Kachru 2005:91), contributing to personal income as well as ensuring the flow of overseas currency into the Philippines to stimulate the economy. From 1990 on, it resulted in major outflows of Philippine men and women to work in multinational companies, making the Philippines the third largest source of imported labor to OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries, after China and India (Asian Development Bank Institute 2014). In some cases this has resulted in Filipinos being bound by contracts from unscrupulous agencies into inferior conditions of employment. To address such problems, the Philippines government established (2007) the *Language Skills Institute* (LSI) to prepare Filipinos for overseas work. It provides training courses in multiple OECD languages including English, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Arabic, and Spanish” (TESDA 2015), to ensure they have language skills and cultural knowledge sufficient to negotiate their terms of employment and understand their rights as foreign workers (Lorente 2017). In fact, few of the OECD host countries (Australia and Canada) require foreign workers to be competent in the national language(s) – although English is seen as the default language requirement in others (Lising 2017: 301), such as Japan and South Korea. The dominant language policy in international workplaces is monolingual, which tends to privilege English.

English is also usually an element in “grassroots multilingualism” (extending Blommaert’s 2008 phrase), which is commonly associated with trade migrations across the globe. Traders moving goods overseas necessarily develop a repertoire of working languages, including English, to negotiate sales with their various customers. In Guangzhou’s “Africa Town”, traders originating from West Africa exercise large personal language repertoires, including several varieties of African languages and Chinese, as well as French, Arabic, and lingua franca English (Han 2013). Likewise global tourism fosters grassroots multilingualism and lingua franca English, as entrepreneurial traders do business in their home contexts with ever-increasing numbers of European tourists (Schneider 2016).

One other significant use of English in extending economic resources is its role as the reference language for multilingual terminologies to be developed to support technological innovation in multinational countries such as South Africa. With its 11 official languages and multilingual workforce, parallel terminologies are needed to promote technical knowledge within the community, and the participation of all citizens in growing the economy. The Pan South African Language Board includes a set of technical committees tasked with terminology development and liaising with translators for the various languages, as well as disciplinary specialists and urban and rural communities for pre-existing terminologies (Alberts 2010). But research on the takeup of newly translated terms in natural science and chemistry has shown that indigenous users prefer or accept transliterations of the English terminology, rather than the translator’s attempts to coin new terms out of indigenous language material (Mojapela & Mojela 2009; Taljard & Nchabeleng 2011). Similarly in the field of law, Alberts & Mollema (2013) conclude that it makes sense to take advantage of international terminology (and any pre-existing local terms), rather than insist on

coining new legal terminology from multiple indigenous languages. Wide-spread borrowings and phonetic transliterations of English terms are thus a concomitant of the explosion of new terminology in many specialized and technical field in twenty-first century South Africa.

### **Conclusions**

In this brief essay on the interplay of languages in multilingual countries, we see how English takes its place in national language policies and language education policies in line with economic priorities and individual social needs. Yet whatever its contribution to modernization and preparing citizens to work in the globalized economy, English should not be prioritized over the local languages/mother-tongue in early education. There are strong linguistic and sociocultural reasons for grounding students' knowledge in mother tongues, not the least being that children are more likely to participate and to succeed in school (Kosonen, 2005). This would pre-empt the problem of subtractive bilingualism, and support a later, productive transition to English-medium education and access to the wider universe of knowledge. Valorizing the use of multiple languages will also secure the vitality of "grassroots multilingualism" that can be seen in entrepreneurial individuals participating in tourism at home, and in global economy overseas.

The difficulties of developing multilingual resources for education in post-colonial societies have been discussed above. But with dynamic language education policies in place, there would be national framework for coordinating resource development, and identifying the language and curriculum gaps to be filled, i.e. "corpus planning" (Reagan 2002:420). Such educational goals are interdependent with up-to-date research studies on the status and usage of languages in C21 societies. An international research project on multilingualism and the role of English in the Indo-Pacific region is currently being conducted, titled *Varieties of English in the Indo-Pacific – English in Contact* (VEIP-EIC).<sup>vi</sup> It focuses on indigenized forms of English, and their integration with other languages within the regional habitat, and their status as enshrined in national language education policies. Through the VEIP-EIC research program, we will be able to contribute to the study of "developmental Englishes" (Bolton et al. 2011) in multilingual contexts, to build multilingual curricula and resources materials to underpin inclusive language education policies, embrace code-switching in the classroom, and support teachers in engaging fully with the language repertoires of their students.

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<sup>i</sup> The Charter applies generally to regional and minority languages, non-territorial languages and less widely used official languages. For a full list (since January 2016) of those languages to which the Charter applies, and the level of commitment and protection under the Charter, see: <http://www.coe.int/en/web/european-charter-regional-or-minority-languages>.

<sup>ii</sup> UNESCO Report (2008): *Mother tongue matters: Local language as a key to effective learning?* <<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0016/001611/161121e.pdf>>

<sup>iii</sup> Siegel (2010) specifically addresses the education of speakers of nonstandard dialects who are expected to acquire the standard dialect, and in particular the problems faced by these students whose first dialect is valued at home but is marginalized by society.

<sup>iv</sup> Small reading books focusing on Aboriginal experience and using Aboriginal English have been written for young Aborigines by the Adult Literacy Program and the *ABC of Two-way Literacy and Learning Project*, and published by the Western Australian Department of Training and Workforce Development (2011)

<sup>v</sup> The national language *Filipino* is largely based on Tagalog, the regional language of the northern island of Luzon, and of the capital Manila.

<sup>vi</sup> The VEIP-EIC project is endorsed by the General Assembly of the Union Académique Internationale and the Conseil International de Philosophie et des Sciences Humaines.