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Can theories of 'linguistic imperialism' be falsified? Attitudes to English in a Malaysian university

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'A language belongs to those who speak it. It's as simple as that.'
(Salleh ben Joned 1994:65)

Abstract

Phillipson's 1992 claims concerning the hidden agendas of the world-wide spread of English and English language teaching have been criticised for a lack of empirical testing. This paper raises the question of how Phillipson's arguments can be operationalised into testable hypotheses, and seeks to locate them within an empirical analysis of a language contact situation in which English plays a continuing ambiguous role, that of Malaysia. It is suggested that one method of operationalising Phillipson's arguments is to measure the degree to which students feel obliged to learn a language for instrumental purposes, but exhibit no evidence of affective orientation towards it. Working on the hypothesis that English in Malaysia represents two quite distinct phenomena, the instrument of international communication and the nativised domestic variety, a survey into language use and attitudes among Malay-L1 university students (N=153) was carried out. The survey results will be presented, related to a previous attitude study, and examined for the light they cast upon the extent to which English is perceived as threatening to, or forming an integral part of, Malaysian culture.

1 Phillipson's *Linguistic Imperialism*

Robert Phillipson and Tove Skuttnab-Kangas have now promoted their proposed definitions of 'linguicism' and 'linguistic imperialism', and their collateral call for a declaration of linguistic human rights, widely through a range of publications and journals (Phillipson 1992, for the definitive statement, and e.g. Phillipson & Skuttnab-Kangas 1995, for these definitions, which due to their already multiple publication do not need to be further reproduced here). They have been greatly successful in bringing in to the mainstream the debate over the supposed neutrality of the world-wide spread of English, and consideration of the global ELT industry that is its engine, and have had indeed considerable success in setting the terms of that debate. However, Phillipson's interpretation of the spread of English has also invited attack from several quarters, on such grounds as a concentration on the linguicism of *English* to the detriment of a full examination of linguistic imperialism as a theoretical construct (Canagarajah 1995); for a 'dated structuralist perspective' (Canagarajah 1995), and economic determinism (Pennycook 1994:56); misunderstanding the true nature of educational aid (Görlach 1993); and for a shortage of empirical data that could test his hypotheses (see suggestions of Spolsky 1995).

The aim of this paper is not to join the attacks on Phillipson's theory, but to address the last of these concerns, namely the lack of empirical testing of his claims. The main thrust of Phillipson's research is into documentary materials from which the development of ELT policy formation in the post-colonial period can be reconstructed, making his work an historical rather than an applied social scientific piece of analysis. However, it has laid him open to the accusation that he has investigated the issue only through the remit of the very educational *Centre* that he purports to attack. The sole language contact situation analysed in any detail was that of post-independence Namibia, again analysed from afar via printed sources, and predictably claiming the selection of English to be its official language as evidence of the bias of Western advisers. The likelihood of the initiative in this case coming from the SWAPO-led government itself, as a solution to the intense regional concentration of all Namibia's native tongues, is not considered. However, even the most widespread of them, Oshiwambo spoken by 46% of the population, is concentrated in the northern part of the country and so would be unlikely to provide a cohesive force within the new state. Phillipson denies that English can ever be neutral. Not in an absolute sense, to be sure: but neutrality is a relative and context-bound concept, and it is only against the background of the state's linguistic polarisation that, to SWAPO at least, English can be judged as a neutral selection. It becomes neutral only because every other alternative is markedly more unacceptable to at least one interested party.

This paper proceeds from the position that Phillipson has raised interesting questions that warrant investigation, even if his own treatment of them is wanting. The question is how to proceed? Canagarajah has suggested that such macro-sociolinguistic hypotheses require testing by a micro-sociolinguistic approach which investigates the workings of linguistic dominance over individuals and communities in the peripheries (1995:592), and his own research employs ethnographic analyses of classroom interaction in such societies. I suggest that this important approach need also be supplemented by quantitative studies of language use in situations where English is in contact, and in potential conflict, with other formerly dominated colonial languages now struggling to become established as national languages. To this end I returned to a university in Malaysia where I was formerly a staff member to conduct a pilot study on its students, and in the next section I will discuss why Malaysia seems suitable as a testing ground for theories of linguistic imperialism.

One of the largest problems in attempting to 'falsify' *Linguistic Imperialism* lies in forming it into testable hypotheses. The author could justifiably argue that as a work within historical research methodology, it is not intended to be 'tested' in such positivistic style. Nevertheless, from the point of view of language planning, his arguments are no more than assertions if they cannot be operationalised into hypotheses that can be examined for their strength, or their inapplicability. This major task will be side- stepped for now, but in Section 3 an account can be found of an earlier study carried out at the same Malaysian university as mine several years earlier. The author of this study used the results to make claims about the sociolinguistic situation there that foreshadow Phillipson's, and so suggest candidate hypotheses for re-testing that also question indirectly Phillipson's stance. Then, following discussion of some results from my own pilot survey, the final section will relate these to the changing politics and economics of Malaysia, which can inform a more dynamic view of the nuances of language use in the state than would be suggested by 'linguistic imperialism'.

2 The yet developing sociolinguistic role of English in Malaysia

Though Bahasa Malaysia (BM), a standardised variety of Malay, is the sole official language of Malaysia, English continues to be used as a major language in many domains, including Law and Finance. The main battleground of language planning in Malaysia has been the public education system, which from the National Education Policy (NEdP) of the early 1970s to the middle 1980s underwent the long process of making BM the sole permitted medium of instruction. This process and its implications have been much written about (e.g. by Watson 1983; Singh & Mukerjee 1993; Pennycook 1994), but what has received less attention is the recent resurgent role of English as medium of instruction in *private* tertiary institutions, that has renewed pressure on the state universities to allow some instruction in English, and which has placed further pressure in turn on language education in secondary institutions. In December 1994 the government announced that the law would be amended to permit some subjects in state universities to be taught in English; this was denounced in some quarters as a betrayal of Malaysian nation and identity building.

> The slow but sure attempt to bring English as one of the media of instruction in Malaysian universities is a sad reflection of how highly inconsistent is the government's education policy. While English will certainly enhance Malaysia's integration into the global, it is not clear it will help Malaysians build up a strong sense of identity. The greatest irony is the fact that those who were the greatest advocates of Bahasa Malaysia are now promoting English.
>
> (P. Ramasami, letter to *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 10.1.95)[1]

However, despite such regrets, the government's decision represented a reaction to a decade-long process during which private colleges have proliferated and expanded massively in the greater Kuala Lumpur area, often by offering a route to an overseas university degree via 'twinning programmes' with overseas institutions that minimise the amount of time needed to be actually spent abroad. As the overseas twin institutions are overwhelmingly British, Australasian and North American, these colleges offer their instruction in English. The colleges have also become increasingly considered as superior to state institutions for

[1] Ramasami is a political scientist at the National University of Malaysia.

technical and business training, whether at degree, diploma or certificate level, and again such education is English dominated. An exhaustive study of who is selecting this form of education, of the degree to which the instructional language is a factor in that selection, and of the effect it is having on language education requirements in secondary schools is sorely needed. However, it seems fair to say that the continuing role of the English language in Malaysia is an internal demand-led phenomenon, rather than a consequence of pressure from an English using élite, or from the kind of Centre interests suggested by Phillipson. The political élite of 1990s Malaysia, in fact, are more likely to echo P. Ramasamy's sentiments than to call for a rolling back of the national language policy.

Demonstrating that this is not a 'supply-led' process, created by a dominant Anglo-American Centre, and sustained in Malaysian society by external neo-colonialist pressures is somewhat trickier, since a supporter of the linguistic imperialist position could claim that the above students are being obliged to study through a disliked alien language by economic circumstance, and that the English language is selected by neither individuals nor institutions for positive reasons. However, this takes to a reductionist extreme the view that the best language in which to study is the mother tongue, reductionist in the sense that it makes no allowance for the ability of members of multilingual societies to allocate domains of use to the different codes they have at their disposal. In short, urban Malaysian society is *poly*glossic (Platt 1978), and the Malaysian variety of English still performs a major function within several domains and social situations, existing in a continuum of varieties from the spoken vernacular of daily discourse, to the formal language of the legal profession. It is only in relatively few domains, such as the latter, that the influence of Anglo-American standards remains strong. In most cases where English is spoken in Malaysia, rather than read or written, it blends in with other languages in discourse marked by code-mixing.

These are the kind of nuances of language use that a reductionist attitude to the survival of colonial languages in former colonies misses. This is not to suggest that the Malaysian situation is typical of anywhere other than Malaysia, nor that in some cases the continuation of the colonial language in the education system operates to the disadvantage of the majority. But the Malaysian situation indicates that the global phenomenon of English as an international language (EIL) cannot be assumed *a priori* to be sinister, as the Phillipsonian view inclines to do. Indeed, in Malaysia, one of the most pressing issues concerns how to get adequate English education to more students, especially those in rural areas (Lee 1985), and the government had created — long before the December 1994 announcement — programmes at secondary and tertiary level that target some English medium education at disadvantaged, rural Malay students. The International Islamic University (IIU), where the following studies were carried out, was founded in 1983 as the state's only English-medium university because of its aim to attract overseas students, but has functioned largely to provide an English medium degree level education to Malay students, both urban and rural, for whom the private sector equivalent would have been unaffordable. In turn, this maintains a supply of English-using Malay graduates to work in the state sector, the impetus for such demand stemming ultimately from the Malaysian government itself.

This is not to suggest that there is no sense in which English is unwelcome in some circumstances in Malaysia — P. Ramasamy's comments above testify to that. However, it is necessary to examine how Malaysians use and respond to English, before it can be simplistically dismissed as an alien artefact. For every P. Ramasamy, there is a Salleh ben Joned (bilingual poet, essayist and critic), who has argued:

> ... language communicates experience and is capable of transcending the boundaries of the culture of its origin — given all this, then the English we speak in Malaysia today belongs to us. It's *our* English; along with BM it expresses our 'soul', with all its contradictions and confusions, as much as our social and material needs. (1994:65)

Therefore, the rationale behind the study in the IIU concerned analysing exactly how English-using students used, and felt about using, English. The study was framed by another with similar aims, but a different rationale, carried out in the same institution in 1987, and this will be discussed first.

3 IIU study, 1987

The lack of success in English by rural students, and the increasing Islamic identity of Malays, especially from rural areas, prompted Ozóg's study of students at IIU (1989; 1990). He argued that the Malays, like some other Islamic peoples, were undergoing a rejection of 'Western ideas and practices':

> English has been perceived by the rural Malays to be a Western language with little or no place in their lives. The Islamic movement has reinforced this view. A view expressed by many, although not yet publicly by a politician, is that English is a *kafir* (non-Islamic) language. This is the extreme view, but one which gives some comfort to those rural students struggling with an alien tongue. (1990:314)

He carried out face-to-face interviews with 50 students of IIU, asking them to discuss what 'English meant to them and what place it should have' in Malaysia (1989:398; 1990:314). All the respondents believed that English was the conduit for Western ('that is non-Islamic, or even anti-Islamic') culture to enter the country; 22 wanted Arabic to be raised to equal status with English as a compulsory foreign language, while the other 28 wanted Arabic to completely take over the role of English in Malaysia. The students recognised the importance of English, but this was apparently outweighed by its danger to their culture.

Staff members at the IIU vouch that such sentiments were certainly recognisable among some sections of the student body, but it is necessary to take Ozóg's findings with a substantial pinch of salt. He supplies regrettably few details about his research procedure: the 1989 article briefly summarised his findings and promised more details in the forthcoming

Baldauf & Lukes (1990) collection; but the 1990 article did no more than repeat the earlier one almost word for word. There are no details of the steps he took to protect his study from the risk of bias inherent in face-to-face interviewing, especially within a university culture in which students, to a high degree, consciously aim to please their interrogators by seeking to supply the "right" answers (i.e. what they discern the questioner to require). Ozóg, then a lecturer at the University of Brunei, would have appeared to the students as a high status interviewer toward whom they may have felt considerable pressure to accommodate. There are no details supplied of randomisation of the sample, if any, or of whether it was representative of all relevant social divisions within the student body (department, region of origin, urban or rural background, gender, age etc.). Students in the Arabic or Islamic Studies programmes receive their instruction in Arabic; they have often come to IIU after attending Arabic-medium secondary schools, and consequently their ability in English is usually less than their ability in Arabic. Had these programmes been over-represented in the sample, the results could have been considerably distorted.

Ozóg's own inclinations regarding the relationship of Islam and TESL may have had an effect on his results, no matter how unintentional. His work was centred around a critique of TESL practice for teaching Islamic students, presenting the argument that common teaching materials covertly taught Western values, and constituted a 'colonialism of the mind' (1989:399). Furthermore, it would not be sufficient to replace such textbooks with culturally sensitive material that avoided offence: he called for materials that overtly taught Islamic values to be employed in English classes.

> This [i.e. use of neutral materials] is eminently sensible but is it enough? Is it not necessary to take this a step further away from the negative 'it does not offend' towards the positive 'it does conform'? (1989:400)

Non-Muslim teachers should educate themselves into the principles of the Islamic world-view, which must ultimately be the basis that informs all teaching. Hence, only by exploiting Islamic values can the students come to see English as not being something 'difficult and alien':

> The teacher from the West may not agree with the point of view presented but that is surely irrelevant. These ideas are exploitable teaching resources and are culturally suited to the students. (1989:401)

From the point of view of language acquisition policy in Malaysia, many aspects of which have grown within the outlines of a liberal, *multi*-cultural and non-communal approach, such notions are extreme to say the least. Ozóg's argument stems from a juxtaposition of quite reasonable observations (e.g. alienation of rural students from English language learning, the privileged place granted to Anglo-American culture in much international TESL material, or that non- Muslim teachers ought to understand Islamic thought better) with more dubious assertions (such as that English must be re-constructed to be a conduit of Islamic values, or that the teacher's attitude to the subject matter of teaching is irrelevant) that gain credibility from their association with the former. However, many questions are begged. Islamic writings, such as the Hadiths, are not texts to be analysed in the style of a TEFL class. Muslim students are unlikely to appreciate non-Muslim teachers lecturing them on their view of the Islamic world. To suggest that teachers' views on the subject matter of teaching is 'irrelevant' is hardly defensible: a language teacher is not a cypher merely for revealing knowledge on grammar or lexis. And, ultimately, it is hard to see how English could ever play a role as a means of transmitting Islamic values when Malay and Arabic already fully cover that domain.

Most of all, Ozóg misunderstands the culturally pluralist aims of the Malaysian education system, which aims to recognise the state's diversity. There is a growing bank of locally produced TESL texts and materials that draw on Malaysian source material, but specifically avoid privileging one religion over any other. It is quite fair to say that language teaching material should be culturally appropriate to the target learners, rather than merely culturally sensitive. However, in Malaysia this can be achieved by drawing upon a wealth of authentic materials produced within the domains of media, government, law, business and academia — all indisputably products of the learners' home culture, whatever reservations some writers may have about the political correctness of the continuing use of English within those domains.

As with Phillipson's 'linguistic imperialism', Ozóg's view of TESL as a transmitter for a 'colonialism of the mind' is asserted but not shown. No credit is given to learners for why they may positively wish to acquire the English language, which is assumed *a priori* to be alien and harmful by dint of its presumed cultural baggage. Nevertheless, Ozóg's work at least provides hypotheses that are testable: the claim that IIU students are universally hostile, or at least negatively oriented, towards English; and that that the majority of IIU students would wish to see Arabic take the place of English as the language of instruction in the University, and, by implication, the students' second language. These hypotheses became the basis for my own attitude study at IIU in 1995.

4 IIU study, 1995

The study took the form of a written questionnaire, distributed to 153 *bumiputra*[2] students in seven classes of the Matriculation Centre of IIU, where students aged mostly 17-20 undertake intensive instruction in English and Arabic, as well as other pre-university courses. Most of the nine Malaysian universities have such matriculation centres, which were established in the wake of the NEdP as a means of securing entry for *bumiputras* without the need to take the final school leaving examinations. The IIUMC was chosen because of its predominance of home students (in comparison with the IIU Main Campus), which made it possible to issue the questionnaire to whole classes; this made simple filtering out the few overseas students, without distorting the nature of the composition of the student body. My own personal familiarity with the IIUMC from my time there as a staff member also facilitated the necessary speedy administration of this survey.

[2]Malay and other 'original' inhabitants of what is now the Federation of Malaysia

Although the principal aim of the survey was to examine some of Ozóg's claims, these facts may mean, however, that the two studies are not directly comparable: Ozóg does not state at which campus he conducted his interviews, though his silence on this matter implies that it was the Main Campus. His subjects therefore may differ significantly in age and experience, in particular the fact that language education is downgraded at Main Campus as students begin to concentrate more on their degree programmes. He does not specify either whether his sample was restricted to *bumiputras*, or to home students — though in the context of his discussion it would make little sense if it had not been.

4.1 The research design

The study sought to explore the students' attitudes towards the English language, and the degree to which they use it in their social, non-academic life. The main data collection instrument was a questionnaire modelled upon that produced by Baker (1992), organised in three sections: language use in a number of social and domestic situations; items seeking to measure attitudes to the English language; and items seeking to measure attitudes to Malay-English bilingualism, and societal multilingualism. A full rationale for adopting Baker's design, and the adaptations made to it, as well as a full analysis of the aims, findings and shortcomings of the three sections, can be found in Cleary 1995. The discussion in this paper will be restricted to findings from the first two sections that have a bearing upon the results previously reported by Ozóg (see Section 3).

An attempt was made to stratify the sample in order to make it representative of the IIUMC student body. However, relevant details on the background of the students were not readily available, and so the surveyed class groups were selected at random, but sampling continued until components A and B in Table 1 were represented as closely as possible to the actual constitution of the student body (based upon staff 'know-how').[3] The final size of the sample was 153, and the composition of the sample along other key dimensions is given in Table 1. Though there was no way of confirming that this accurately reflected the structure of the student body, it ensured that all these sub-groups were adequately represented.

4.2 Results and discussion

4.2.1 Use of English

Census figures detected an increase in the number of Malaysians claiming to be able to *speak* English up to 1980 (in contrast to those just literate in the language, which has hardly changed at all) as shown in Table 2. This series of figures was not continued, for unclear reasons, by the 1991 Census. It will be noted that proportionately larger increases have been made by speakers of Chinese or Indian identification, and those of Malay identification lag considerably behind. This may reflect the greater tendency of these groups to seek

[3]There should be approximately equal numbers in each year group, and staff estimates would accept a 60:40 female:male ratio as a reasonable representation of the actual ratio.

A.	Gender	Female: 89; Male: 60; blank: 4
B.	Year Group (usual stay at IIUMC = 2 yrs.)	1st Year: 78; 2nd & subsequent year: 75
C.	Region	West Coast: 95; East Coast: 39; Borneo states: 16; blank: 3
D.	Urban or rural	City: 79; Town/rural: 71; blank: 3
E.	Social class (on basis of father's occupation)	Professional/white collar: 72; clerical/skilled working class: 41; semi- & unskilled working class: 32; blank: 8

Table 1: *Composition of survey sample ($N = 153$).*

	All	Malay	Chinese	Indian	Other
Literate in English	30 *30*	17 *19*	37 *38*	17 *48*	70 *70*
Able to speak English	14 *23*	7 *15*	19 *31*	26 *40*	no data

Table 2: *Malaysians' self-declared ability in English, figures from Census of 1970 (upper line) & 1980 (lower line).*

English medium education. Nevertheless, the aggregate increase among Malays is larger than within the two other groups, crucial evidence of the increasing availability of English as a resource to each ethnic group. The first section of the survey sought to ascertain any evidence of shift towards English-using by the Malay students of IIU. Predictions based upon the Ozóg study would imply that English would be only a foreign language to these students, and used only in university discourse.

The respondents were asked what language they used with both parents, their siblings, neighbours, Kuala Lumpur residents (which would be the same as neighbours for several students, depriving this item of independence), classmates and lecturers both in and out of class. Responses were placed on a five point scale from 'Always Malay' to 'Always English'. Though respondents were slightly less likely to mark 'Always Malay' with fathers than mothers, there was no significant difference between the two. At the other end of the scale, almost all interaction with teachers was mainly or wholly through English, not surprising given IIU's language policy. The interesting results, illustrated in Table 3, concerned a progression of significantly greater use of the English language when comparing siblings with parents, and both with fellow students in social, non-study, situations.

What is interesting here is not that some respondents are conducting their interactions "in English" (almost no-one is, as can be seen by the negligible responses in the fourth

	Always BM	Mostly BM	BM and English equally	Mostly English	Always English	Other language
1. Father	97	33	12	2	3	5
2. Siblings	58	74	14	2	2	3
3. Friends (Hostel)	23	96	28	4	1	1

$1-2: \chi^2 = 25.278, df = 5, p = 0.0001; 2-3: \chi^2 = 22.623, df = 5, p = 0.0004$

Table 3: *Subjects' choice of language with given persons (number selecting each category).*

Score range	Class	Count
3.51-5.00	positive to English	106
2.51-3.50	neither positive nor negative to English	45
1.00-2.50	not positive to English	1

Table 4: *Numbers of respondents by attitude to English.*

and fifth columns), but that as one moves through the generations from parent to children, and then from domestic to friendship domains, social interaction becomes increasingly less monolingual, and marked by mixed discourse. It is through extensive code- mixing that English is employed by its users in Malaysia, not as a single choice between different options for monolingual discourse. In this sense English should be viewed not as a Phillipsonian threat to Malaysian language and therefore culture, but as one of the multiple sources of the rich code of Malaysian spoken interaction, and hence a contributor (via its local varieties) to that culture. That code-mixing is widespread in Malaysia is not a new idea. But it has yet to be quantified or described in detail — and the above study suggests that it needs to be analysed as a growing phenomenon, perhaps associated strongly with the urbanisation process Malaysia is currently undergoing, and probably strongly correlated with the age and generation of the speaker.

4.2.2 Attitudes to English

Table 4 indicates the respondents' general attitude to the English language, using the items in Section 2 as a Likert scale (as described in Cleary 1995, and following the procedure employed by Lee 1985). The mean attitude of the respondents is heavily skewed towards a positive orientation, which is in sharp contrast to the results reported by Ozóg. It has to be pointed out that this was a pilot survey, and these preliminary results need to be deeper probed by more sensitive methods. But then this is surely just as relevant a comment upon Ozóg's earlier results.

A start at probing the respondents' attitudes was made by Part B of Section 2, which

'Yes' categories (n=109):	Freq.	%
1. Want to improve English	49	44.95
2. English is an international (universal etc.) language	44	40.37
3. Get a better job / Have a good future	25	22.94
4. Can communicate with foreigners / Get foreign friends	21	19.27
5. Like English / Is interesting	13	11.93
'No' categories (n=37):		
1. To gain Islamic knowledge / For the Islamic rules & environment	15	40.54
2. Best university (for subject)	10	27.03
3. Good Malaysian university	5	13.51
4. No choice	5	13.51
5. To learn Arabic	5	13.51
6. International university environment	4	10.81

Table 5: *Reasons respondents gave for selecting IIU (open questions, broadly categorised).*

asked them why they had chosen the IIU. In response to the question 'Did you choose to study at the IIU because it is an English medium university?', 71.24% replied 'yes', and 24.18% 'no'. Though they were not asked whether this was the main, or exclusive, reason, rather than one among several, the contrast with Ozóg's findings could not be more stark. The responses were explored by a follow-up question: 'Why do you want to study in English?' for the Ayes, and 'Why did you come to IIU?' for the Nays. These were open response questions with no prompts, but they have been broadly categorised for preliminary analysis, and the most popular categories are as in Table 5. In particular, there appear to be three main strands within the Yes categories: a general desire to acquire English (1 & 5); an orientation towards its international possibilities (2 & 4); and a focus on the career possibilities it could provide (3). The No categories reveal that students citing other reasons are not necessarily negatively orientated by the English medium: they simply had other stronger motives for selecting IIU.

In combination with the positive attitudes revealed by the survey, there is no evidence to suggest that these students are reluctant learners of an alien tongue, motivated only by the fear of what would happen if they did not acquire it. Indeed, the emerging picture is one of students positively motivated by the opportunities the international language could bring, and this, too, is a question needing deeper exploration.

The internal consistency of the survey is supported by the response to the item 'English should be the medium of instruction in Malaysian universities', which achieved the proportions, shown in Table 6, on a scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". The total agreeing and agreeing strongly adds up to 71.71%, which is very close to the number that cited the English medium as their reason for selecting IIU.

SA	A	+/-	D	SD
25.00	46.71	17.76	6.58	3.95

Table 6: *Percentage responses to the item* 'English should be the medium of instruction in Malaysian universities'*, on a scale from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree".*

5 Squaring the circle: attitude shift

The effect of the above is not to challenge Ozóg's findings (though leaving important questions concerning his methodology on the table), but to raise rather more interesting issues about whether the 'circle' of the two surveys can be at all 'squared'. The social and economic context of Malaysia in 1995 is quite different to that of eight years earlier: these differences could have influenced Malay learners of English to consider the language in significantly different ways. In 1987 the Malaysian economy was in recession, unemployment was high, and protectionist measures may have militated against an internationalist orientation from its students. Political tensions were high during the year, sparked in part by differences between the authorities and Chinese community groups over the status of Chinese vernacular schools, and the establishment of BM as the sole educational medium lay still within recent memory.

By 1995, the economy was growing rapidly and faced a shortage of skilled and unskilled labour; pragmatic concerns for the future skill base of the economy undoubtedly motivated the government's decision to reintroduce English as a medium for technical subjects. It is possible that the position of the Malay language as the pre-eminent language of Malaysia has stabilised to the extent that its speakers feel secure enough to focus their energies on acquiring the state's second language, without feeling that this may be disloyal to their own culture. Though this is rather speculative, there is no doubt that political and economic conditions have substantively changed in the period between the two surveys. Consequently, the surveys could provide compelling evidence of a shift in attitudes over the time span, related to the changing context. Classical studies of language attitudes have not usually considered change over time, perhaps because most have been ultimately concerned with an analysis of motivation for language learning, but it is an essential dimension for any exploration of the socio- political context of attitudes to language use. How language attitudes are formed, and how they change, are major questions that underlie the fate of language planning decisions such as those detailed in Section 2 above. Such processes also underline the weakness of static theories of language spread, a criticism which must apply to any blanket dismissal of the spread of English as imperialistic. At times it may well be, but allowance must be made for those cases where people 'vote with their tongues' to acquire an international language, and find for it zones of use within which it is complementary to their own existing languages.

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