

Chapter One

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This research reports how opinion editorials, published by *Sin Chew Daily*, a Chinese newspaper in Malaysia, represented the debate on the issue of using English to teach mathematics and science in Malaysian schools. It is widely believed that the use of language/ discourse by a social group or institution may reflect the social power of the group or institution. Social power is defined as a form of control or dominates by the more powerful group over the less powerful group (Fairclough, 2001). The power of the dominant groups may be integrated in laws, rules, norms, habits and even *taken-for-granted actions* of everyday life (van Dijk 1998). The manifestation of power may not be considered *simply* coincidental rather pre-designed. Since discourse structure are believed to be used by choice and not by chance, writers and speakers may use certain language features to serve their own interests (Kress, 1990). For the recipients, they might simply accept or follow the knowledge and opinions given to them. Controlling people's minds and actions through discourse may thus be a practice of indirectly maintaining power and authority that sustains, uphold and disseminate certain ideology (Fairclough, 1995; 2001).

1.1 Media in Malaysia

The printing industry in Malaysia may be seen playing a major role shaping ideas regarding education, communication, knowledge-formation while disseminating 'ideal' information. Most mainstream newspapers have separate sections on education that includes various issues on pedagogy concerning the nation. Given the multiracial construct of the country, Malaysia has newspapers which are published in Malay,

Chinese and Tamil besides English. It may not be unusual that the views of different ethnic groups will be published in different languages and ethnic-based newspapers.

Looking at the history of newspaper industry in Malaysia, English language newspapers had the highest circulation during the colonial period; while, after independence, *Utusan Malaysia*, the Malay-language newspaper had the highest circulation (Nik Safiah Karim, 1994: 140). On the other hand, Chinese newspapers like *Sin Chew Daily*, *Nanyang Siang Pau*, and *China Press* are read by a wide population among the Chinese. Media in Malaysia, like any other countries, take active participation in shaping and re-shaping national policies, especially education policy. In relation to Chinese press, Jeff Ooi suggests

The Chinese-Malaysian community used to take pride in the ethnic trinity: the Chinese Society; the Chinese Education; and the Chinese Press. They are intertwined, with one enriching the other. Conversely, they also degenerate one another. Should one wither, the other wilts in tow, albeit silently yet organically (Jeff Ooi, 2007).

In a multi-ethnic polity the press may assume responsibilities serving the role of a custodian of customs and interests distinctive to particular ethnic groups. Hence, in order to understand the nature of the Chinese press in Malaysia, it is prudent that we understand the nature of the Chinese society.

1.2 The Chinese Society and Chinese Education in Malaya

The Chinese immigration in Malaya began in the 19th century under the patronage of British (Purcell, 1948). Beginning towards the early 20th Century as the Chinese found Malaya as ‘new home’, there was often moments of ideological conflict due to alternative perspectives; one such issue of contestation was education policy. In 1920 when the colonial government of Malaya implemented Chinese school Registration Act there were protests against it; however, protest in a wider scale was manifested after the publication of Barnes Report in 1951. The Barnes report was seen aimed at Malay-nization; while, another report, namely, Fenn-Wu report also published

in 1951, at Malaya-nization. Chinese press published a number of articles critiquing the colonial education policies (Malaya, 1951b). To some extent, the platform aimed at critiquing education policies served a means to express issues related to identity and political aspirations in pre-independent Malaya that comprised a complex demography.

The population in Malaysia is 28 million with the Chinese, 26% (Census Malaysia, 2000). The majority of Chinese came from the Fujian and Guangdong provinces in Southern China and most of them speak Mandarin, Hokkien, Cantonese and Hakka; furthermore, English is spoken by a number of Chinese people as a first language. About the education in Malaysia, the treatment of Chinese as immigrants during the colonial time, the British did not feel obliged to provide the educational needs to the Chinese; therefore, the Chinese established, financed and administered Chinese schools by themselves (Tan, 1997). Chinese schools became an important instrument to preserve, transmit and propagate their language, culture and identity. On the other hand, Malay schools were managed and financed as “government schools” while English schools consisted of both “government schools” and aided schools (Lee Hock Guan, 2009). Although Chinese schools were administered and funded mostly by the community, around 1930, some schools have been controlled by colonial state through grant-in-aid assistance.

After the war, decolonization prepared to integrate different ethnic people into a common national citizenship through a common system of education, in which *Bahasa Melayu* (BM) was considered as the sole national language. Malay nationalists also wanted BM as the only language of governance. The Chinese supported the national language move, but advocated a multilingual official language policy. However, the authority passed Malay as the sole national and official language supported by the British.

In 1951, Barnes report supported the bilingual move for using Malay and English in the national education system to facilitate the development of a common nationality (Malaya, 1951a). The Chinese rejected the national education system as devised by Barnes. Fenn-Wu report concluded that the proposed 'Barnes report' bilingual policy would eliminate the Chinese schools; hence, a "trilingual" for the Chinese and "bilingual" for all can be a suitable alternative to handle the issue of Chinese language and culture in Malaya (Malaya, 1951b). Fenn-Wu suggested that Malay and English would be compulsory subjects in the Chinese schools – the reason of Malay was the national and official language, and English, as a world language.

The last education report under the colonial patronage in Malaya was Razak Report published in 1956, which is often seen converged the ideals of Barnes and Fenn-Wu reports. Razak Report disapproved to continue the use of Mandarin as a medium of instruction; which resulted in the Chinese schools' refusal to accept government funding.

Against this backdrop, in 1961, the Dong Jiao Zong (DJZ), an organization meant to be the main vehicle for upholding Chinese concerns over education and culture, promoted three main appeals to the non-Malay opposition political parties for

- 1) The recognition of Chinese as an official language;
- 2) The inclusion of Chinese secondary schools in the national secondary school system; and
- 3) The continuation of national-type Chinese primary schools in the future.

In 1967, National Language Bill rejected DJZ's demands, but supported the continuation of Chinese primary schools. In 1971 the government determined Malay as the sole national and official language and made an attempt to build ethnic cohesion through a largely Malay medium education system. BM was made to be the only language used in all public institutions, documents and communications. It

'traumatized' Malaysia's Chinese community as the community anticipated less and less use of Chinese language (i.e., Mandarin) in official and educational context. The Community also feared Chinese students' opportunities for tertiary education affected (Lee Hock Guan, 2009: 217).

Since 1990, several shifts took place in language and educational policies. The government has expanded cultural flows between China and Malaysia. The value of Chinese primary schools and the tertiary degrees from selected Chinese countries including Taiwanese universities are acknowledged. Furthermore, China is a major tourist source for Malaysia; hence, it has allowed more freedom in the use of Chinese language in public notices and signboards.

1.3 Concerns over Education Policy in Malaysia

It is widely believed that policies are changed with the change of political organizations, context and time. Other variables that contribute to the changes are: cost effectiveness, population trends and also the concept of what a good education is. As for political leaders, the dominant class maintains its position not only by force, but also by consent; hence, the policy makers need to conform to the expectations of the people so that they can follow each other and work together. Following this, during decolonization, language in Malaysia became an arena of ethnic conflict, with the question of nationhood and national identity. Before the World War II, language policy and educational development were not entrusted with the task of nation-building or to facilitate interaction and cohesion between ethnic groups. Rather, immediate factors, like condition of school and a very narrow definition of curriculum shaped the nature, growth and structure of language and education policy in the country (Lee Hock Guan, 2009: 208).

1.3.1 Education Policy before Independence

Malaysia has been controlled by the British from the middle of the 18th century until 1957. Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country, basically with three ethnic groups: Malays, Chinese, and Indians. These three ethnic groups differ significantly in language, religion, and culture. As a multi-ethnic society, maintaining equality among the different ethnic groups has been of concern since the independence of Malaysia. Especially, in education, this has been viewed as a tool for providing social mobility. Before the independence of Malaysia the Chinese were the educationally and economically advanced group; the Chinese have been excluded from participation in the Malaysian government (Lee Hock Guan, 2009). Furthermore, the colonial government approved bilingualism teaching in Malay schools (Malay and English) and three language in Tamil and Chinese schools (either Tamil-Malay-English or Chinese-Malay-English).

1.3.2 Education Policy after Independence

After the independence, under the new education policy, The Razak Report (1956) helped the Malays to become an advanced group in education, as a whole, it satisfied their needs and promoted their cultural, social, economic and political development.

The government declared that BM was the national language for purpose of administration and education, an effort to promote national integration. The Razak Report recommended two types of secondary schools: those using Malay as the medium of instruction to be called “national schools” while those using Chinese, Tamil or English were to be designated “national-type” schools. At the same time, the people had an option to use their mother tongue and other languages. Moreover, all the national schools were tuition free. A feature to be noted is, every other ethnic group had to pass

BM test to get certification for their advance education. In addition, after independence English still played a crucial role in the country.

1.3.3 Changes in the Education Policy in 2003

The language policy in relation to the teaching of mathematics and sciences was changed from Malay to English in 2003, which many a people do think is an effect of the power of the language at a global level, that is, English being the lingua franca for business and technology in most contexts.

1.3.4 Changes in the Education Policy in 2009

In 2009, the government changed the educational policy again. With the new educational policy announced that in primary level, mother tongue was allowed to teach mathematics and sciences but in secondary level all the school's medium of instruction has to be changed to the national language, i.e., BM.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Taking the political aspect of educational policy into consideration, it shows that the education policy can be used as an instrument to gain hegemonic supports from the citizens, even though it goes against the national unity in a multi-national country (Lin Wei Li, 2005: 104). In Malaysian context, the Malay community felt that if the policy adopts a multilingual stand it would dilute the status of Malay as official and national language; on the other hand, the Chinese community feared that if Malay is the sole language of instruction, it would dilute the use of Chinese as the medium of instruction in the Chinese schools. Hence, the issue of community-specific identity is at the heart of the debate. On the other hand, medium of instruction in English may generate other

problems, for instance, the shortage of school teachers who are proficient in English, and the unsuitability of the curriculum used.

When the debate concerning a policy is articulated by the media it may construct the issue depending on the media house's biases. Certain concepts and values can be prioritized over the others. This is because, mass media discourse is not only a presentation of knowledge and information; there are some messages as well (Fowler, 1991). It is also believed that the media's construction of a problem in a 'specific' direction can be rooted in the ideals of the newspaper or the media house. Hence, this study offers a discourse analysis of the issue of medium of instruction as an interdiscursive phenomenon, involving the discourses on education, policy making and cultural identity; by looking at micro and macro structure of the discourse used in opinion editorials by *Sin Chew Daily*.

1.5 Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to look at the depiction of the issue of teaching science and mathematics in English by *Sin Chew Daily*, a Chinese newspaper published in Malaysia.

1.6 Research Question

The research question posed in this study is:
How do the *Sin Chew Daily* opinion editorials construct the issue of teaching of science and mathematics in English?

1.7 Limitations of the Study

This study uses *Sin Chew Daily*, as its only source of data. The analysis focuses on Malaysian Chinese community's perception(s) articulated by *Sin Chew Daily*

opinion editorials on the medium of instruction policy, 2009. Opinions by other ethnic groups on the issue are not discussed, at the same time being a Chinese daily the ideal readers of the newspaper are those Chinese who are well-versed in Mandarin. It should be noted that in Malaysia there are many Chinese who do not speak Mandarin or any of the Chinese dialects. Hence, the depiction of the issue published in the Chinese daily may not reflect the views upheld by the non-Chinese speaking Chinese community. The duration of collection of data may also have consequences on the findings as the data collected were from only three months, from June to August 2009, when the debate was at its height of discussion at the national level. To note that, the decision to revert the policy, was declared in July.