

English in 1Malaysia: A Paradox in Rural Pluri-Literacy Practices

Bahasa Inggeris dan 1Malaysia: Satu Paradoks dalam Amalan
Pelbagai Literasi di Luar Bandar

HAZITA AZMAN

ABSTRAK

Isu bahasa senantiasa diperdebatkan dengan penuh semangat dan kontroversi di kalangan warga Malaysia yang berbilang kaum dan berbagai bahasa. Antara bahasa yang terdapat di Malaysia, peranan dan penggunaan Bahasa Inggeris telah selalu dipertikaikan dan menerima pertentangan berlanjutan dari kalangan rakyat. Sejak sebelum kemerdekaan lagi bahasa penjajah ini telah diberi keutamaan berbanding dengan bahasa-bahasa tempatan. Walau bagaimanapun, dengan tercapainya kemerdekaan, Bahasa Melayu telah diutamakan sebagai Bahasa Kebangsaan, sementara Bahasa Inggeris diberikan status rasmi sebagai bahasa kedua dalam dasar bahasa negara. Era globalisasi masa kini telah membangkitkan semula sentimen protes dari kalangan para pendidik dan pejuang bahasa Melayu dan juga bahasa Cina menentang penekanan baru yang kerajaan diberikan kepada Bahasa Inggeris. Apa juapun tahap penerimaannya, kehadiran bahasa tersebut dalam repertoire penguasaan bahasa dalam kalangan masyarakat Malaysia tidak dapat dinafikan. Namun begitu, isu pengajaran dan pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris dalam sistem pendidikan Malaysia terus dipertikaikan tersirat dengan tekanan ideologi dan dogma politik yang diwarisi sejak zaman penjajahan, terlahir dari konflik dan jurang tatatingkat sosial yang wujud antara bandar dan desa, serta antara kaum etnik yang pelbagai budaya dan bahasa. Situasi ini berterusan dan menjadi lebih ketara dengan konsep 1Malaysia yang mempromosikan penerimaan yang menyeluruh, konsep negara bangsa dan keadilan sosial dalam negara yang berbilang kaum ini. Konsep yang bermatlamatkan perpaduan negara bangsa, bertujuan supaya semua kaum etnik saling menghormati budaya dan penggunaan bahasa masing-masing. Dalam pada itu peranan Bahasa Kebangsaan untuk perpaduan diberi penekanan semula sementara kewujudan Bahasa Inggeris dalam persekitaran tempatan disyorkan sebagai suatu keadaan yang biasa dan perlu diterima. Keadaan ini lah yang menjadi permasalahan dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran Bahasa Inggeris di luar bandar di Malaysia.

Kata kunci: literasi luar bandar, pendidikan Bahasa Inggeris, kepelbagaian bahasa, pendidikan luar bandar, polisi bahasa

ABSTRACT

The issue of language has always been rife with passion and dissension in multilingual and multiethnic Malaysia. Never has a language received more such reactions in this country as the English language. Before independence English as a colonial language was given prominence over vernacular languages. However, with independence, Bahasa Melayu, took on the role of the national language, while English was institutionalised as the official second language in the national language policy. Currently in this globalised era, its resurgence over the national language, Bahasa Melayu, has incited protests from Malay nationalists and Chinese educationists in particular. No matter the degree of acceptance, the English language inevitably remains situated in the language repertoire of Malaysians. However, the teaching and learning of English in the Malaysian education system continues to be inundated with ideological pressures and political dogmas, often emerging from colonial, urban/rural and even local ethnic conflicts and hierarchies. This situation remains volatile especially with the introduction of the 1Malaysia concept promoting comprehensive acceptance, nationhood and social justice of the country's multiracialism. With the objective of moulding a nation-state that is united, the concept seeks to have the ethnic identities of each ethnic group to be respected and their vernaculars to be recognised, while reaffirming the role of the national language for unity, and accepting the near naturalised presence of English in the local environment. Therein lie the inherent difficulties of teaching and learning English in rural communities in Malaysia.

Keywords: rural literacy, English Language education, multilingualism, rural education, language policy

INTRODUCTION

The tradition of English language education in Malaysia has generally been guided by what is generally considered to be 'state of the art' or 'progressive' ways of approaching learning and teaching the second language by national education developers and native-speaker Western educators. These apparently 'effective methods' or ways of language learning and teaching are simply and generally imposed and then expected to be successful in the prevailing varying local contexts of learning.

This approach characterises the autonomous model of literacy which perceives literacy as a unitary skill and context free, without acknowledging the role of other literacies. It ignores the value of vernacular literacy experiences,

knowledge, and attitudes of the learners shaped by their mother tongue environments (Street 1988, 1993, 1994a; Gee 1996; Hazita Azman 1999; Luke & Freebody 2002).

Alternatively, an ethnographic paradigm allows us to 'see' and locate meanings and uses of literacy practices in particular from the local perspectives. Being informed and knowledgeable of these local conceptions is vital and important for any literacy programme developers and implementers, especially in multilingual contexts such as Malaysia. This view is consistent with viewing literacy as a social process or what Street (1994b) refers to as an ideological model of literacy which takes into account the behaviour and the social and cultural conceptualisations that give meaning to the uses of reading and/or writing in the society. The model suggests that language related behaviours like listening, speaking, reading, writing and production of texts are expressions of social practices sanctioned by particular communities. Additionally, these literacy practices are most often socially and historically constituted aggregates of worldviews, ideologies, values, attitudes, behaviour and thinking of these communities in situated contexts (Koo 2005).

In essence, doing literacy in this context involves acquiring the complex participant roles, identities, languages, representations and artefacts of the community that the learners are socialised into (Gee 1996). At the most primary level, this socialisation or social process involves the acquisition of vernacular literacies necessary for social and cultural identity as well as meaning-making at the everyday level, those from the family and ethnic community for example (Highmore 2002).

Meanwhile at the secondary level, this social process constitutes institutionalised literacies involving schools, workplaces and government institutions as they envisioned and benchmarked. The learning and mastery of these institutionalised literacies are most often declared as prerequisites for development and progress of the larger community. In this context doing literacy is directly linked to development.

Differences between the imposed institutionalised literacy practices and the vernacular literacy practices may lead to conflicts of identities, participant roles and literacy practices, creating disparities in rates of literacy performances and ways of valuing literacies across communities.

ENGLISH LITERACY IN MALAYSIA: THE COLONIAL LEGACY

The issue of language has always been rife with passion and dissension in multilingual and multiethnic Malaysia. Never has a language received more such reactions in this country as the English language. The inclusion of teaching and learning of English in the Malaysian education system is inundated with ideological pressures and political dogmas, often emerging from colonial, urban/

rural and even local ethnic conflicts and hierarchies. Therein lie the inherent difficulties of teaching and learning English in pluri-lingual rural communities in Malaysia.

Even since before independence English as a colonial language was given prominence over vernacular languages. Currently in this globalised era, its resurgence over the national language, Bahasa Malaysia, has incited protests from Malay nationalists and Chinese educationists in particular. No matter the degree of acceptance, it is commonly accepted that the English language inevitably remains situated in the language repertoire of Malaysians.

In the tradition of viewing English literacy as a social process in a non-native context such as Malaysia, it is necessary to have an ethnographic understanding of how English language is viewed by the local communities and investigate the extent to which they are situated in the lives of these communities. This entails locating, observing and analysing the uses and meanings of English literacy practices in the local spaces in terms of its historical, political, economical and social representations. It is also necessary, at this onset, in order to understand this phenomenon, to first examine the initial historical and colonial archetypal infrastructure that was instrumental in situating the English language to create the divide between urban and rural Malaysia.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE INFRASTRUCTURES AND SPACES IN MALAYSIA: PRE AND POST INDEPENDENCE

English has taken on many faces since taking permanent residence in Malaysia; from that of the colonial masters to the local elites and the urbanites, and currently that of global citizens. The architecture for this situation was designed initially for colonial governance, and then turned into aspirations for nation building and now for global competitiveness. These architectural blueprints began as exclusive designs designated for select elites who controlled the administrative machinery (pre-independence), but later made inclusive in post independence to allow for an identifiable shared geo-politico space in the name of nation building.

It is amidst these developments that English is institutionalised as a second language in Malaysia, securing its place in the nation's linguistic landscape. Notwithstanding these developments which gave rise to its eminent presence in the country, English still remains a stranger in rural communities and is yet to be assimilated significantly into their ways of being, interacting and doing literacy.

ENGLISH IN PRE-INDEPENDENCE MALAYSIA (PRE-1957)

From the perspective of the colonised Malaya during the hey-day of colonialism, the mastery of English meant that natives could be brought closer

to the status of their reference group, the White colonials. At the same time, it meant they were advancing along the path of modernity, progress, internationalism and cosmopolitanism (Abdul Rahman Embong 2005).

In pre-independence Malaysia, a salient characteristic of English colonisation was the colonial master's desire to establish secular education in then Malaya. Education for the natives was divided between English education and the vernacular education systems. The former, mainly run by missionaries, schooled children of the royal families and affluent non-Malay families, although a very limited number was also allocated for high achievers from the vernacular school system. Infrastructure wise, the English medium schools were found in townships where mainly the local elites, British administration offices and their residential areas are situated.

Meanwhile, the vernacular schools were set up by the colonisers in the *kampungs* to teach reading and writing to the peasants in order to produce "more intelligent fisherman or farmers" and to make them understand how they fit into the scheme of life around him (Khoo & Mohd Fadzil 1980). These schools, located in the rural areas, created and initiated the dichotomy between rural and urban communities, and between the status of the English language and ethnic vernacular languages. It soon became apparent that the choice of the medium of instruction created inequality in opportunity. The rural child was excluded from participating in the mainstream of the community at large by his inability to read and write in English.

This dichotomous situation depicted in Figure 1. sets the tone for the social future of the rural child in terms of English language acquisition. Social mobilisation is only possible for the rural child if he masters the English language as depicted by the dotted arrow. Otherwise he remains confined in his micro-environment (depicted by the solid line) (Hazita Azman 2005). In 1903, for example, of the 2,900 boys who passed Malay schools in Perak, 24 became domestic or office servants, ten school teachers, one a clerk, and another a policeman. That pattern persisted throughout the entire British rule (Mahathir Mohamed 2005). Thus, the natives were made to feel that being illiterate in English is a deficit and places one in a specified level in the socio-economic strata.

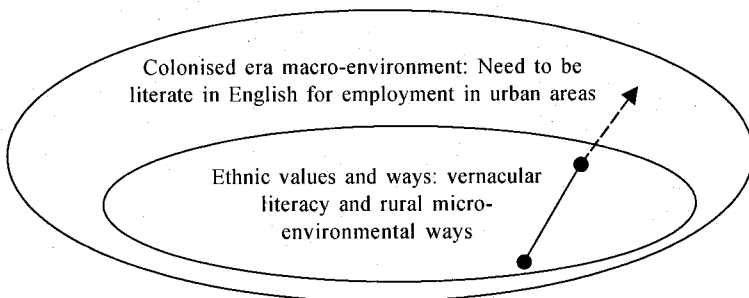


FIGURE 1. Dichotomous situation of English language acquisition

ENGLISH IN POST-INDEPENDENCE (1957-2001)

Independence paved the way for Bahasa Malaysia, the language of the colonised, to be elevated to the status of the national and official language of the new nation state. It was planned to be the language for nation-building, a medium for knowledge, a tool for scientific and technological advancement, and for economic progress. It is the language for the realisation of the country's nation-building and modernisation dream (Abdul Rahman Embong 2005; Mahathir Mohamed 2005).

The significant fact about Malaya then is that at independence 40% of its total population is already made up of Chinese and Indians who remain in their separateness speaking their respected vernacular languages. Thus the independent state is no more the land of the Malays (Tanah Melayu) but a land of plural society, that is multilingual, multicultural, and of course multi-religious. Nevertheless, characterised by such diversity and heterogeneity, the imagined Malaysian society envisaged by the founding fathers is one that is *united in its diversity* through the national language (Bahasa Malaysia) and a shared identity (Bangsa Malaysia).

Interestingly amidst this multilingual background English did not lose its prominence as it was given the status of a second language after the national language (Bahasa Malaysia) and above the other vernacular languages. It even became the language for inter-racial interaction, in early independence, as the local elites become the administrators of the new nation and the ethnic groups remain in their separateness (Asmah 1992, 1983). Meanwhile it remains separate and elusive to the citizens in the rural areas. In essence English in post independence although de-emphasised is still regarded as 'bahasa penjajah' or the colonisers lingua franca and therefore, spiritually resisted. However, the people of the new nation were implored to accept it as "a necessary evil" according to the 1957 Razak Report (Asmah 1983), as it, ironically, is 'necessary' for the country's economic development especially. English as a second language in this context "has nothing to do with the acquisition of the language in a temporal context visa vie a language acquired after the mother tongue, nor does it take into consideration the role it plays as a medium of instruction in the school and the university" (Asmah 1983:230).

Figure 2 depicts the privileged place English was given despite losing its prominence when the Malay language was institutionalised as the medium of instruction for all subjects (except English) at all government national schools (except vernacular schools). The figure also shows the education direction of a parallel vernacular education system at the primary level that was allowed through the Education Ordinance (1957) and Education Act (1961) as well as the National Language Act (1963 and revised 1971), from independence to 2001 before the re-introduction of English as the medium of instruction for Science and Mathematics in 2002.

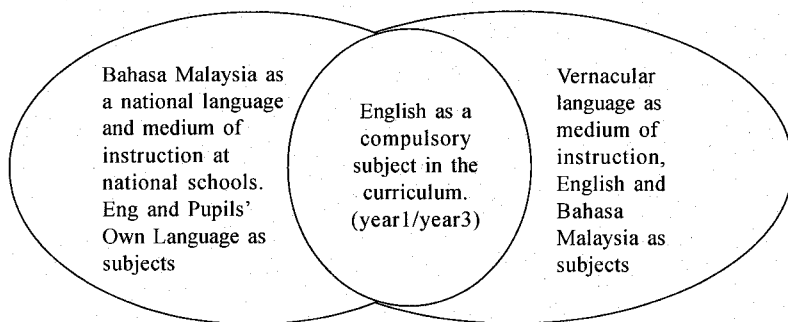


FIGURE 2. Position of English Language after independence

English was 'heard' in mainly urban or town areas, especially in the commercial and official domains as the language of communication. The volume is much louder and its use almost absolute in private sectors especially. Of course encounters of the foreign kind had a higher occurrence in the urban than in rural areas. Electronic media became another channel for English to prevail itself. Urbanites tuned in to the English language radio stations and sales of English songs by record shops were as popular in urban areas. At least 60% of the television shows were still in English as local productions was still low.

Screened based media provided an avenue for English to be seen, heard and experienced. The national television stations aired a select variation of English speaking shows with Bahasa Melayu subtitles. Other screen based media came in the shape of movie theatres, electronic video games, computers at workplace and computers in education especially with the introduction of SMART education, and eventually mobile communication tools such as the hand-phones towards the nineties. In keeping with its second language status, English is given cultural permission to be 'viewed' in print on public signage, daily newspapers, advertisements, and announcements. Until late seventies English medium schools were still found in the urban towns, whilst interaction between and within ethnic groups continued to be conducted in English especially among the elites and non-Malays.

However, as it becomes increasingly imperative that all Malaysians in the 21st century has to master English, the limited standard in English literacy that is currently experienced by rural school students becomes a major concern. As Malaysia embraces globalisation and the development of knowledge based society it has also become increasingly apparent that being literate in the 21st century entails skills beyond the basic ability to read and write in English.

THE ASSIMILATION OF ENGLISH IN 21ST CENTURY MALAYSIA (2002-ONWARDS)

Today mastery of English signifies the passage to 'competitiveness' of the individual and the nation from the perspective of the market thanks to the spread of neo-liberal globalisation powered by technological innovation. The government's decision to reinstitute English as a medium of instruction (MOI) for Science and Mathematics predictably brought on fears that the move will lead to a general drop in academic achievement in these subjects which were taught in Bahasa Melayu and Chinese or Tamil languages at national and vernacular schools respectively, for the past 30 years. This concern is especially profound for students from rural schools.

Education discourses emphatically portray English literacy as instrumental to development, internationalisation and globalization. The notion that with English, Malaysia will be progressive and competitive was recursively found in news report corpus from 2002-2003 to explicate the change in the medium of instruction for Mathematics and Science.

Lexical analysis of these reports (Hazita 2005; Tan 2005) revealed personalities representing official voices reiterating definitive roles for English. In nearly fifty percent of the texts analysed, English is described as ...

- ... the language of wider communication.
- ... necessary to tap into current knowledge.
- ... the lingua franca of business, science, technology and research.
- ... help job-seekers become employable.
- ... the language of globalization.

(NST, 8 April 2002; *Business Times* 23 May 2002; *Bernama* 6 July 2002)

On a higher level, the English revival is viewed as a betrayal to nationalism and the national language. To this sentiment Tun Mahathir, the man integral for this change in language of instruction reminds us that the whole concept of nationalism needs to be re-defined in this new millennium. He stresses that (*The Sun* 11 Sept. 1999) "True nationalism means doing everything possible for the country, even if it means learning the English language".

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. ... If we have no knowledge we will be servants to those with knowledge... (Mahathir Mohamed, Interviewed by Gill & Hazita, 16 June 2005)

In the same vein, the act of learning English is viewed as:

- ... pragmatic nationalism.
- ... reinforcing the spirit of nationalism when it is used to bring about development and progress for the country.
- ... giving the country a competitive edge.
- ... being multilingual and should be regarded as a national pride and virtue.

(NST, 11 April 2002; *Business Times* 10 April 2002; *Bernama* 4 July 2002)

Given these pretexts English in the 21st century reclaims its importance in Malaysia as the mandated second language, the prevailing language for the globalised and Digital Age, and has the instrumental function for leap frogging Malaysia onto the global arena. The underlying ideological difference in the approach adopted to promote the need for English which departs from that of the colonised and the national unity era, is that the citizens of the nation are encouraged to develop multilingual skills in respecting the inherent diversity of cultures and languages of the Malaysian society, whilst giving socio-cultural permission for English to be part of the Malaysian 'linguistic scenery' (Asmah 1992).

The assimilation of English in the Malaysian language environment may have come about through cultural permission, but it is evident that it has taken on a permanent role and will inevitably be naturalised into the language repertoire of all Malaysians, even if at different levels of acquired proficiency.

In this view, multilingualism including mastery of English is additive rather than subtractive and becomes another principal identity of *Bangsa Malaysia* (the Malaysian citizen). Herein lie the notion that English in Malaysia should then be accepted as another Malaysian language, natural to the socio-cultural environment. In essence it is part of the make up of being a Malaysian.

The Education Minister Hishammuddin Hussein (NST 25 August 2005), had strongly suggested that:

English may have been the language of the colonial masters but it was also the language which our founding fathers acquired, took to London, and returned as masters of their own land. Forty-eight years on we should not be shy to say English is a Malaysian language.

This pronouncement along with other similar statements made in the same vein by the Deputy Prime Minister and the Prime Minister himself in encouraging especially rural students to learn English more intensively give the all-important official cue for the drive to once again excel in a language that seems to have thrived globally rather than declined in the post-colonial phase.

No matter, what remains an eminent fact is the multilingual education system has produced multiliterate Malaysians of the 21st century who are literate to varying degrees of language proficiency and combinations, in Bahasa Melayu, English, Chinese and Tamil. Nevertheless, in Malaysia the perennial challenge facing rural communities is the rate of proficiency in English literacy as it remains the bane of rural development and the rural-urban divide. It is important to also

be reminded at this juncture that the problem in acquiring English literacy is only one of the challenges that the rural Malaysian child need to face in the new millennium. In the 21st century, for example literacy involves not just reading and comprehending text but engages the reader with acquiring, decoding, evaluating and organising information from mainly screen based information resources (International ICT Literacy Panel 2002).

ENGLISH IN PLURI-LITERATE RURAL MALAYSIA: A PARADOX

An examination of the ways in which English is located, valued and positioned in rural Malaysia has revealed the paradoxical relationship between national aspirations and the literacy practices of the locals. Given the limited spaces in which English prevails in the multilingual rural context, the government's ambitions for the uptake of English language in terms of use and practices, especially in the current IT era, among the rural communities, has resulted in hierarchies and conflicts.

Research on literacy practices in selected rural (defined as areas with population density of less than 1,000 persons per square mile)¹ Malaysia reveals to some extent the varied hierarchies in the stages of literacy development experienced by the multilingual and multicultural communities. The research by Hazita (1999) conducted among 400 residents of four rural communities most of whom are students, farmers, fishermen, plantation workers, railroad workers, army personnel, government officers, and small business owners, found the rural respondents speak, read and write "well" in 38 possible combinations of languages. The researcher had used questionnaires and interviews, made non-participant observations in schools, at homes and in the surrounding communities using field notes to record her observations. The multi-sourced data were triangulated to show relationships as well as to confirm and validate conclusions derived from the analysis and interpretation of data conducted.

Table 1 below depicts the most frequent combinations of languages used across ethnic groups in speaking, reading and writing. Further, the findings show that all ethnic groups reported that they can read and write well in at least three languages as a result of formal education. It is also interesting to note that among the three ethnic groups, the Indians are found to be the most multilingual, while some of the Malays and the Chinese revealed that they are still monolingual. These were found to be older relatives who did not receive formal education, with some who claimed to be illiterate.

TABLE 1. Multilingual Literacies Among Rural Malay, Chinese, Indian Groups

Speak	Read	Write
<i>Speak well in:</i>	<i>Read well in:</i>	<i>Write well in:</i>
Indian/Malay	Tamil/Malay	Tamil/Malay/Eng
Malay only	Malay/Eng/Arabic	Mandarin/Malay/Eng
Chinese/Malay	Tamil/Malay/Eng	Malay/Eng/Arabic
Chinese only	Malay/Arabic	Malay only
Malay/English	Mandarin/Malay/Eng	Malay/Arabic
Indian/Malay/Eng	Malay only	Malay/English
Chinese/Malay/Eng	Malay/English	Mandarin only
Malay/Arabic	Mandarin only	
	Malay/Mandarin	

It is necessary to view the position of English language when situated within the multilingual repertoire of the rural citizen, as depicted above, as manifestations of the ways it is valued, located and positioned by their homes, communities as well as the bilingual school system they have been educated in. Hence, it is interesting, though ironic to note that being multilingual in rural Malaysia now includes the English language, as revealed by the study. Its prevalence in the rural environment thus is an indication of the emerging naturalisation of English in rural Malaysia, which has made significant inroads through the education system especially, the main channel through which English is brought into the rural areas.

However, being multilingual with English in their repertoire does not mean that the rural Malaysians' level of competencies in these languages is of the proficiency standard required of the globalising world. While this varying degree in proficiency is natural and expected in any multilingual society, the need to acquire a target language and achieve its needed standards is prioritised, particularly when the future and potentials of the society and the country, as envisioned, greatly depends on the willingness of its people to acquire and to apply knowledge in the language it is communicated in, e.g. as in the case of the English language.

By and large, the research revealed and concluded that multilingual literacy is very much a part of the culturally diverse rural Malaysia as it is across the nation. However, unlike in urban areas, English language situated in rural communities is estranged in terms of cultural identity and instead is naturalised mainly as school related literacy practice. The study found that while the rural communities investigated have a high literacy rate in Bahasa Melayu, Mandarin, and Tamil, literacy in English language is still limited and confined to the physical compounds of the school and school work related practices and literacy events. Thus the school is the instrumental infrastructure through which ideologies of

English literacy practices are channelled and sustained in the rural communities. Rural schools in the study were found to have made it a point to designate spaces for English literacy events. These areas include reading corners or self access corners, reading gazebos or huts, and library or resource centres. The related literacy events schooled into the daily encounters with English are mainly school assigned work only.

Therefore, an important consideration emerging from these ethnographic depictions of rural encounters with the English language brings to bear the reality that English situated in rural circumstances takes on the qualities of a schooled language. Nevertheless, its assimilation into the rural environment, although at odds with the local ways of valuing, locating and positioning the language, is imminent. This is so, owing to the rural development plan for the 21st century which envisages a transformation involving both the mental development of the people themselves through literacy education programmes and a great improvement in the quality of their surroundings in terms of upgrades in infrastructure. Embedded in this plan is the aim of infusing IT use and e-literacy practices into the way of life of the rural folks.

It is known that nationwide Malaysia is embracing the IT era. Notwithstanding, it remains a fact that a total of 70 percent of primary school (5010) and 46 percent or 758 of secondary schools still do not have access to computer facilities; while a total of 6478 or 90 percent of primary and 1082 or 66 percent of secondary schools do not have internet access (International Labour Organization 1996-2000). Among these are 4,036 children from rural schools. The ILO report also estimated that the ratio of urban household to rural household owning personal computers (PCs) and having access to internet is 13:10. Income disparity between urban and rural household is the main factor. Additionally, even though telephone and electricity supply and coverage have been extensive in Malaysia, 7 percent of rural population is still without 24-hour electricity supply.

All the same, while the digital or e-ways of doing life in this 21st century is eventually becoming pervasive, it is not necessarily better than non-technological ways of doing things in particular for the rural context. It should also be emphatically pointed out that English literacy skills can as effectively be acquired and taught through non-technological methods. Literacy practices whether print-based or technology based is inherently embedded in one's social context.

CONCLUSION

Despite being in residence in Malaysia for more than sixty years, the assimilation of English in rural Malaysia has been limited and continues to be at odds with the way of doing life in the rural communities. Until social, economical and cultural environments in the rural communities transform to include increased reliance and use on the English language for meaning making and knowledge

building, English language in the rural areas will remain a stranger or awkward residence in the linguistic landscapes of the multilingual community. Creating a community of practice for English literacy in the rural community, characterised by mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire could possibly help provide the physical space and cognitive relationships between language and literacy development without stripping these practices of the sense of meaningfulness.

Therefore, when designing and planning for literacy development programmes and projects in rural education, it is pertinent for education developers and implementers to first be informed of the local cultures of learning, where roles of teachers and students and ways of learning should be understood and recognised politically, socially and culturally. Given the diversity of local cultures of learning, local teachers must be given the right and the responsibility to employ methods that are culturally sensitive and locally productive in their students' learning of English (Cortazzi & Jin 1996, 1999), so that they can make use of English to fulfil their specific purposes. As the education system is the mainstay through which English is infused into rural society, teachers and activists have an important classroom space where they can exercise some agency through choices taken in relation to the use of extant languages and source culture practices in the community. This subsequently minimizes the potential of marginalizing the values and lived experiences of the learners. And this should include doing life in the rural ways exclusive of the digital or e-ways of meaning making, when and where relevant.

Situating English language learning in the rural local practices is further effective when using source culture content in materials. For such a view is in keeping with the political motto "think globally, act locally" which translated into a language pedagogy might be "global thinking, local teaching". This source culture content can also encourage learners to gain a deeper understanding of their own culture and to learn the language needed to explain these cultural elements in English to individuals from different cultures, hence contextualising the acquisition of English as a social process. Thus, the naturalisation of English in rural Malaysia can only be successful if access such as aforesaid is provided for rural communities to reconcile the paradox of situating global literacies in local practices.

NOTE

Part of this paper has been published in Hazita Azman, English Language in Rural Malaysia: Situating global literacies in local practices, *3L*, Volume XI, 2006: 99-120.

REFERENCES

- Abdul Rahman Embong. 2005. Language, Nationhood and Globalisation: The Case of Malaysia. In *Language Policy and Practice for Nation Building*. Siti Hamin Stapa,

- Hazita Azman, Norizan Abdul Razak, Mohd Sallehuddin Abd Aziz (eds.). Bangi: Pusat Pengajian Bahasa dan Linguistik. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Asmah Haji Omar. 1992. *The Linguistic Scenery in Malaysia*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- _____. 1983. The Roles of English in Malaysia in the Context of National Language. In *Varieties of English in Southeast Asia*. Noss, R.B. ed, 27-30. Singapore: Singapore University Press.
- Cortazzi, M. & L. Jin. 1996. Cultures of Learning: Language Classrooms in China. In *Society and the Language Classroom*. Coleman H. (ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp169-206.
- _____. 1999. Cultural Mirrors: Materials and Methods in the EFL Classroom. In *Culture in Second Language Teaching*. Hinkel, E.: 196-219.
- Gee, J. 1996. *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideologies in Discourses*. London: Falmer Press.
- Hazita Azman. 1999. Multilingual Literacies in Rural Malaysia: National Goals and Local Practices. Unpublished PhD Thesis. Graduate School of Education: The University of Western Australia.
- _____. 2005. Knowledge-Based-Economy-as-Institutional-Learning Discourse in Malaysia: Change in the Language of Instruction Policy and Representations of Readiness Among the Role Players in Tertiary Education. Paper presented at International Conference on Worlds in Discourse: Representations of Realities, Solls.Intec 2005, 21-23 November 2005.
- Highmore, B. 2002. *The Everyday Life and Cultural Theory*. New York: Routledge
- International Information and Communication Technologies (ITC) Literacy Panel. 2002. *Digital Transformation: A framework for ICT Literacy*. Princeton, NJ: Educational Testing Service. Retrieved February 19, 2003, from <http://www.ets.org/research/icliteracy/ictreport.pdf>
- Khoo Kay Kim & Mohd Fazdil Othma. (eds.). 1980. *Pendidikan di Malaysia: Dahulu dan Sekarang*. Kuala Lumpur: Malaysian Historical Society.
- Koo Yew Lie. 2005. Pluriliteracy in Diverse Contexts: Literacy Practices around Pluralistic Texts. In edited by Ambigapathy Pandian, Muhammad Kabarul Kabilan, Sarjit Kaur. 226-236. *Teachers, Practices and Supportive Cultures*. Universiti Putra Malaysia Press: Serdang, Malaysia.
- Luke, A. & Freebody, P. 2002. *Literate Futures: Reading*. Department of Education, Queensland, Australia.
- Mahathir Mohamad 2005. Language and Nationhood: Confronting New Realities. In *Language Policy and Practice for Nation Building*. Siti Hamin Stapa, Hazita Azman, Norizan Abdul Razak, Mohd Sallehuddin Abd Aziz (eds.). vii-xiii. Pusat Pengajian Bahasa dan Linguistik. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- North Central Regional Education Laboratory (NCREL) and the Metiri Group. 2000. *enGauge 21st Century Skills: Literacy in the Digital Age*.
- Street, B. 1988. *Literacy in Theory and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. 1993. Introduction: The New Literacy Studies. In *Cross Cultural Approaches to Literacy*, Street, B. (ed.). 1-21. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge.
- _____. 1994a. Struggles Over the Meaning of Literacy. In *Worlds of Literacy*, Hamilton, M., Barton, D., Ivancic, R. (ed.). Ontario Institute of Studies in Education, Toronto.

- _____. 1994b. Cross Cultural Perspectives on Literacy'. In *Functional Literacy: Theoretical Issues and Educational Implications*, Verhoeven, L. (ed.). 95-111. Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Tan, P.K.W. 2005. The Medium of Instruction Debate in Malaysia. *Language Problems & Language Planning* 29(1): 47-66. John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Hazita Azman, PhD.
School of Language and Linguistic Studies
Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia
43600 UKM, Bangi, Selangor
MALAYSIA

