

The Impact of English Language in the Context of Development: A Deep Sociolinguistic Study on Country of Malaysia

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Abstract

English is a standout amongst the most essential and vital languages on the earth. It can even be said to be the absolute most essential language. Of course, different languages are critical as well, however not for the same reasons as English are vital. English is critical since it is, perhaps, the main language that really connects the entire world together. If there was not English Language, the entire world may not be as united as it is today. Alternate languages might be vital for their indigenous values and culture.

However, this study aims to investigate whether there is any relationship between English language and the development of Malaysia, and if so, what the relationship between English language and the development of this country is. To achieve the aims of this study, some of the main topics and points which can be related to the goal of the paper are introduced and explained. Then, it is followed by a precise discussion. The results of the article indicate that there is a very close relationship between English language and the development of Malaysia. That is, English language has been and is still very effective in the development of Malaysia in any field.

Keywords: English Language, World Language, Development, Sociolinguistic, Malaysia.

Introduction

English is the bequest and inheritance of more than a century's wealth of British royal empire in Malaysia. It is the most imperative and the most significant foreign language in Malaysia or better to say, the main foreign language in this country and is used broadly in virtually all facets of everyday life, from conducting commerce dealings or trade communications to tagging products to scripting clinks for television ads. On the other hand, English and the official language of Malaysia, Bahasa Malaysia, both play a crucial part in binding together a multiracial or multiethnic population comprised chiefly of three distinct, dissimilar, as well as different races which are: the Malay, the Chinese and the Indians. The mentioned clusters are at variance or vary in both appearance and mother tongue and count on one or both of these public languages to communicate when they are out of their ethnic groups. To sum up, English and Bahasa Malaysia cause people to be unite and generate a sole national population in country of Malaysia.

The main objective of this study is to investigate the impact of English language on the development of country of Malaysia. In other words, this article highlights the importance of English language in the development of Malaysia.

Background Information about Languages in Malaysia

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual country with residents (2013) of more than 29 million populaces (<https://www.ethnologue.com/country/MY>) and more than hundred languages (Ibid; Khoo, 1991). Malaysia includes two areas; Peninsular Malaysia (antecedently recognized as Malaya) and Sabah and Sarawak. The British dispensation in Malaysia start in Malaya in the late 18th century and freedom was given to the Federation of Malaya in 1957. In September 1963, Malaya, Singapore, Sabah and Sarawak made Malaysia. Singapore left the union in a while after that (Ibids).

There are, as Khoo (1991, p. 40) asserts, three main ethnic groups in Malaysia; they are: Malays (61%), Chinese (28%), and Indians (8%). In fact, according to Sun (14/1/2001) in the year 1991 there were 8.79 million Malays, and another 1.85 million non-Malay *bumiputras* (called sons of the soil), 4.94 million Chinese and 1.39 million Indians. Moreover, in each racial group there are various languages and dialects (Ibid).

The official language of Malaysia is known as Bahasa Malaysia. It is a standardized form of the Malay language (Constitution of Malaysia: Article 152, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constitution_of_Malaysia). There are 10 dialects of Malay used throughout Malaysia (Ghazali, 2013). In reality, Malay, as Andaya and Andaya (1984) put, became predominant after the 1969 race riots.

The renovation or better to say, transfiguration of the English medium schools to Malay medium originated and instigated in 1968 at a gradual step and on a fragmentary foundation (Solomon 1988, p. 47). In the beginning, as Omar (1982) states, those issues, themes, and matters that could adopt the Malay language as a medium of tuition without problem were the first touched by the transformation or conversion process (p.15). From January 1968 all English medium primary schools were required to instruct physical training, craftsmanship and art, local studies and Music in Malay in Standards 1, 2 and 3. A greater amount of the Arts subjects were taught in Malay before the modification to Malay happened for the Science subjects. In reality, for a brief timeframe amid this provisional or temporary stage some schools ran the same course in science subjects in two languages of Malay and English. By 1976, all English language primary schools were entirely rehabilitated or changed into schools where Malay was utilized as the medium of tuition and by 1982 all the prior English medium secondary schools were changed to National Schools in Peninsular Malaysia (Ibid, p. 46).

In all such schools Malay was considered as the medium of coaching and tutoring, however; English was not overlooked or disregarded. English remains to be taught as a noteworthy and in addition vital second language in all schools where Malay is the medium of tutoring. Indeed starting 2002/3 scholastic session a policy assessment or an arrangement evaluation was made to practice English and not Malay as a medium of tuition in Mathematics and Science classes in Standard 1 which is the first year of tutoring and education.

The Third Malaysia Plan 1976-80 states that "Bahasa Malaysia (Malay) is the basis for national integration" nonetheless the Plan as well states rather insistently that "measures will be taken to ensure that English is taught as a strong second language." (Government of Malaysia 1976, p. 386). The motives specified for the conservation of English was "to keep abreast of scientific and technological developments in the world and to participate meaningfully in international trade and commerce." (Ibid)

Consequently, English was the principal and dominating language in administration and regime until 1969 (Ibid). According to The Star Online 8 July 2009, English was the medium of coaching and tutoring for Maths and Sciences in all public schools per the PPSMI policy, but relapsed to Bahasa Malaysia in national schools and mother-tongue languages in 2012

(<http://www.thestar.com.my/story/?file=%2f2009%2f7%2f8%2fnation%2f20090708144354>). The Parent Action Group for Edification and former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad has called for science and math to be edified or instructed in English all over again (Darwis, 2013; Ghazali, 2013; The Star Online 9 July 2010, <http://www.thestar.com.my/story/?file=%2f2010%2f7%2f9%2fnation%2f6630852&sec=nation>).

English Language

According to Crystal (2003 a, b, 1997) English is a West Germanic language that was first enunciated in early middle age England and is currently a global lingua franca (Crystal, 1997, 2003a, Wardhaugh, 2010). It is, indeed, a formal language or better to say, an official language of practically 60 potentate states, the most ordinarily oral language in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, Ireland, and New Zealand, and an extensively oral language in countries in the Caribbean, Africa, and southeast Asia (Ethnologue: Languages of the World, <https://www.ethnologue.com/country/MY>).

English as a World Language

A world language, according to Baker and Jones (1998), is a language articulated internationally and which is erudite by numerous individuals as a second language. In this case, they (Ibid), are of the idea that a world language is sorted not just by the overall number of speakers (local and second language speakers), yet in addition by its geological or topographical spreading, and practice in global associations just as strategic relations. Based on these principles, the chief world languages are of Western European origin. The historical motive for this is the retro of expansionist European imperialism and colonialism (Ibid).

The world's most extensively and most broadly utilized language is English, which has over 1.8 billion clients worldwide (Crystal, 2003a; McCrum, et al., 2003). In other words, when joining native and non-native speakers, English is the most extensively and most broadly verbalized or the most generally communicated language around the world (Ibids). Since English is so extensively spoken, it has often been denoted to as a "world language", the lingua franca of the modern age (Graddol, 1997) and while it is not an official language in most countries, it is currently the language most frequently taught as a foreign language (Crystal, 2003a). It is, by international contract and agreement, the official language for many issues and organizations.

English Language Setting in Malaysia

The New Englishes or non-native assortments have their individual and specific distinguishing linguistic characteristics as a result of the course of nativization. In actual fact, English is a crucial as well as central language in these countries; in the sense that, in such countries, English is not used just for communication but as well for further determinations or purposes. As Baskaran (1985) declares, English is denoted and considered as a link language in Kenya and Nigeria, a subordinate official language in India, a supplementary or an additional language in Ghana, a bridge language in Singapore, a coordinate language in the Philippines and a strong second language in Malaysia (p. 69).

In effect, in country of Malaysia, as Asmah (1977) puts, English was first as an official language and subsequently it was converted to a second language. She further states that the languages in Malaysia such as, the Chinese dialects and Indian languages are not foreign languages but are contemplated as the languages of Malaysia. On the other hand, as she believes, English had under no circumstances been considered as one of the Malaysian languages. That is to say, English is simply acknowledged, approved, and recognized as a second language, having secondary prominence and significance in the ranking and classification of languages of Malaysia (Ibid).

Malaysia, according to Platt and Weber (1980), was under the British regulation from the late eighteenth century until the mid-twentieth. In reality, the colonization contained within both Peninsular Malaysia and East Malaysia (Sabah and Sarawak). The British management policies (economic and politics) fashioned a “network of multi-ethnic, multilingual speech communities via immigration of Chinese and Indian” (Ibid, pp. 1-2).

As a result of the intensification in business, market, exchange, occupation, employment, manufacturing and industry, the British prognosticated or forecasted the exigency for “English educated non-Europeans” (Lowenberg, 1986, p. 73). These local people of Malaysia performed or better to say, worked as assistances in the government organization in some jobs such as office workers, interpreters, representatives and junior or low-ranking majors. At that time, the colonial government put up the institution of private and mission schools where the medium of tuition was English. At the outset these schools had British instructors and teacher employing the Standard British English. When after some period of time the number of these schools augmented, the teachers came to be local teachers employing nativized English.

Step by step and Progressively, English turned out to be the cipher of unofficial communication amongst the indigenous students of Malaysia. This incident happened, indeed, as a consequence of the prestige of English and its ethnically neutral status (Lowenberg, 1986). It was unceasingly employed by local people specifically Malays, Chinese, and Indians, working in the government organization of the British Empire in ‘Malaya’. Correspondingly, English was the principal language for transportation, conveyance, trade, and business (marine agents, insurance, banks, etc.) along with the mass media and movies imported for amusement (Ibid).

After that time, when, the Federation of Malaya acquired its liberation or freedom in 1957, Malay turned out to be the domestic language. Although Malay language was considered as “politically and constitutionally” the national language, English was not cast-off (Platt and Weber, 1980). In effect, the prominence and significance of English in Malaya as a bequest or inheritance of the colonial epoch was on account of the following two main factors:

- 1) Its status as the only language in post-World War II Malaya that had apposite records for the innumerable language spheres of a novel nation.
- 2) The accessibility in Malaya of the English educated inter-ethnic influential as the only non-Europeans who had the training, knowledge, and involvement to govern the novel nation (Ibid).

Afterwards, it was settled as a new decision by government and policy makers, that Malay and English would be employed for a ten year transition period (Platt and Weber, 1980). In the course of these ten years Malay was to augment and carry out eminent in the major spheres of language use (Ibid).

However, in current years English language has been regarded as an advantage to accomplish and reach progress and to obtain knowledge. In this sense, there is more strict or emphatic recommendation on how to generate awareness as well as alertness to take English severely. Accordingly, more English tutors are educated and qualified locally along with abroad. In addition, the standard of the SPM English paper has been promoted to match with 1119 GCE English paper. In a few words, as Lowenberg (1991) accepts as true, the existing position of English in Malaysia is “constantly developing and changing in terms of adapting the norms of English to the political, economic and socio-cultural contexts of contemporary Malaysia” (p. 367).

Discussion: English Language and the Development of Malaysia

Throughout the world, 6.9 billion people utilise thousands of languages to communicate. As Baskaran (2002) puts it “in essence, the most traditional and impalpable medium of communication whereby man has maintained and will continue to use is; language”.

However, one language has risen and now is referred as the chief of international language which is the English language (Ibid).

As Baskaran (2002) declares, English was omnipresent in Malaysia after independence, particularly in education. However, in the 1960s and 1970s, it turned to Malay. Much of this was to do with the dogma or plan of “Malaysianisation”, which tempted to compel and cause all ethnicities to recognize much more with Malaysia (Kirkpatrick, 2007). Nevertheless, English is still the language of business, and to some extent the language of government (Ibid). In the interim, there has been a modification towards “Manglish” or the assortment and combination of Malay, Chinese, Tamil and English. In reality, Baskaran defines Malaysian English as to this point deceased, but so connected with the original form of English, that it can be labeled as the “Daughter-lect” (Ibid).

Hanapiah (2002, p. 3) puts forward the functions of English language in Malaysia and talks over these functions in line with eight domains which are:

1. The Business Domain
2. The Employment Domain
3. The Education Domain
4. The Domain of Politics
5. The Domain of Tourism
6. The Domain of Law
7. The Media Domain
8. The Domain of Translation

The above eight domains demand a far-reaching as well as a comprehensive application of English language and consequently, its contribution and involvement to the development of the country. He further claims that “the functions of English need to be closely identified, analyzed, acknowledged and further developed to accelerate achieving the vision (2020)” (Ibid).

What's more, Hanapiah (2002, p. 11) introduces six roles of English language for the development of Malaysia which are as follows:

1. As a mode of communication
2. As input for human resource development
3. To accelerate development
4. To decrease social and economical inequality
5. To develop knowledge society
6. To increase standard of living

He (Ibid) further believes that there are a number of various difficulties, challenges, and restrictions obstructing the operative and effective of employment of English in Malaysia. These deviances should be plenteously addressed that people in Malaysia would achieve profit as much as they suppose from using English. He accomplishes with the idea that, Malaysian should better understand the decisive and significant roles of English language from the standpoint or perspective of development (Ibid).

Likewise, Baskaran (2002) shares very similar idea with Hanapiah (2002), in the sense that he states in government administration, even though Malay is the authorized language, English does have its part in numerous international dealings, communications, documents, and memos. The Ministry of Education, the Public Services Department and the Trade Division are just infinitesimal or minute instances of interaction with international associations where the usage of English is authoritative, crucial, and severe (Ibid).

Baskaran (Ibid) further believes:

when students and officers are sent for study and training abroad, when scholarships are offered from foreign bodies to Malaysians for study overseas, when trade transactions and agreements are established between countries, what language is used? The - plethora of documents signed and exchanged between Malaysia and other countries via MOU's and bilateral agreements are in no other language but the English language. In other Governmental as well as private transactions and interactions, alongside Trade and Industry, Science and Technology, Engineering and Architecture, Meteorological and Environmental collaborations, Medical dealings, Transportation and International Air Travel arrangements (such as radar control) International Sports and Recreation meets, and the Hospitality Services – all these are just some of the avenues where English usage is so substantial and necessary (p. 2).

Accordingly, it is not astonishing that English language is fundamental and momentous in the advancement and development of Malaysia. Without a shred of doubt, Malay language will permanently be the national lingua franca; nonetheless, nearly all of the Malaysians entirely understood that “knowing one language is not the same as knowing two languages” (Baskaran, 2002, p. 5). “Thus there are different uses and purposes for which a monolingual system may help but the bilingual speaker definitely has the added advantage of being ambidextrous” (Ibid, p. 5) and indeed, being ambidextrous is the way that Malaysian people have always tried to achieve.

The prominence of the English language as a global lingua franca has at all times been a foremost inspiring issue in the learning and use of the language in Malaysia, particularly as a means to achieve knowledge and data in science and technology (Murugesan, 2003). Similarly, as a member of the world order progressively implying globalization through the Internet and the Information Age, Malaysia is alert of the crucial necessity to be knowledgeable in English with the intention of achieving the wealth of accessible information and reaching a rational measure of achievement and success in commerce and industry (Ibid).

The significant part of English can also be seen in the media system of this country in some ways as follows:

Local television channels screen a wide variety of English cartoons, serials, dramas and films in the original language, often subtitled in Bahasa Malaysia, while cinemas usually add Chinese and Tamil subtitles to English movie releases as well. A few English language films and sitcoms have also been written and produced locally, featuring local actors, and these have been quite successful (Murugesan, 2003, p. 1).

White (1988) states that English has risen as an imperative worldwide language because of the linguistic legacy of the British domain and the rise of the USA as an English speaking superpower and the relationship of English with the industrial and technological development and briefly put, with the innovative advancement in the nineteenth and twentieth century. Today, English is viewed as a global language; “a language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognised in every country” (Crystal, 2003, p. 3). Malaysia perceived the unique part or better to say, Malaysia recognised the special role and had this relationship and interdependence with English language owing to its colonization history.

In view of that, English language had and still has a dominant effect and a very important and effective role on the context of development in general and as was discussed in detail, on the development of country of Malaysia in any field and area in particular.

Conclusion

From the mentioned points and discussion, it can be inferred and concluded that there is a very close relationship between English language and the criteria of development in general, and English language and the development of country of Malaysia in particular. That is, English language had and still has a direct effect on the development phenomenon in Malaysia. Truth be told, the two issues are closely correlated and interrelated.

Since the significance of English language as the worldwide language was discussed exhaustively and thoroughly in this article, it can be unequivocally concluded that English language is the presentation of development process in any field relating to a specific community. All things considered, English language is the representation of development of Malaysia.

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