

Language Planning 'In Action': The Singapore Experience

Esther F. Boucher

(Nanyang Technological University, Singapore)

Boucher, Esther F. 2002. Language Planning 'In Action': The Singapore Experience. *The Linguistic Association of Korea Journal*, 10(1), 1-27. This paper draws on Singapore's experience in language and policy planning as the country's linguistic legacy and rapidly changing linguistic directions raises an interesting set of complexities. Although there are considerable differences in the 'linguistic' and 'societal' approaches to language planning, they are not mutually exclusive of each other. The distinction between the two approaches will be discussed and examined. This paper shows how both the macro and micro-linguistics approaches to language planning are practiced in Singapore. I will show that the macro-level language planning is motivated primarily by tasks of national consolidation and economic development. Following a policy of multi-lingualism and bilingualism the Singapore government intervenes proactively in solving language-related problems. One such perceived language problem that has been of great concern is the increasing use of Singapore colloquial English amongst the populace. My argument is that the *Speak Good English* campaign launched recently illustrates a micro-linguistically driven approach to language planning. Thus, the macro and micro-linguistics approaches are seen operating simultaneously. In my discussion I will demonstrate that they are both equally driven by social, political and ideological factors.

Key words: language planning, language policy, Singapore

1. Introduction

This paper has largely been motivated by the recent debate and discussions over a language campaign in Singapore. The launch of a

'movement' meant to promote better spoken English among Singaporeans and to minimise the colloquial variety, better known as Singlish, seem an interesting issue to investigate. From a personal point of view, it is difficult to assess the way the growth of that variety of English has complicated the analysis of the reported declining standards of English. Nonetheless, the Singapore government has shown concern with the emergence of Singapore colloquial English. The anxiety about the growth of this variety is understandable as the government sees English as a prerequisite for modernization and economic development. In this paper I will consider if language can be planned and if so, how is it accomplished? The answer to this twofold question is not easily found in the literature on language planning. What are found in the literature are descriptions and approaches to language planning. What would perhaps be more relevant to look at is an instance of language planning in action. Thus, this paper draws on the Singapore experience in language planning and policy making in a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual setting. The principal focus would be an examination of the language planning approaches as described in the literature.

1.1. In Search of a Definition

Haugen first introduced the term 'language planning' to the literature. He defined language planning as 'the activity of preparing a normative orthography, grammar and dictionary for the guidance of writers and speakers in a non-homogeneous speech community' (Haugen, 1966, p. 27). He later came to view these activities as outcomes of language planning, a part of the implementation of decisions made by language planners, rather than language planning as a whole. Since Haugen's early work on language planning several other definitions have emerged with differing perspectives to the term. An analysis of these definitions would throw some light on how the early literature described language planning.

Generally, language planning is described in three ways. Firstly, some

definitions restrict language planning to activities undertaken by government, government-authorised agencies or other authoritative bodies. For example, Rubin and Jernudd (1971) suggest that language planning is *deliberate* language change. They argue that the term describes changes in the systems of language code or speaking, or both, that are planned by organizations that are established for such purposes or given a mandate to fulfill such purposes. In a similar vein, Weinstein (1980) suggests that language planning be defined as 'a government authorised, long term sustained and *conscious* effort to alter a language itself or to change a language's function in a society for the purpose of solving communication problems'. It would seem, however, that to restrict language planning to the work of authoritative institutions would exclude language planning efforts of individuals. Cooper (1989) argues that the work of Ben Yahuda in Palestine (see Fellman, 1974), Samuel Johnson in England (see Bate, 1975) and others should be recognised as contributory to language planning. Indeed, both authorised bodies and individuals contribute significantly in a planning process.

Secondly, there are definitions that state the focus of language planning as simply 'language behaviour'. For example, Thorburn (1971) sees language planning occurring when one tries to apply the amalgamated knowledge of language to change the language behaviour of a group of people. However, I find the focus of language planning from other definitions to be more specific (Rubin and Jernudd, 1971; Das Gupta, 1973; Weinstein, 1980). They mention or imply one or both of the two language planning focuses distinguished by Kloss (1969), corpus planning and status planning. According to Kloss, corpus planning refers to activities that contribute to the creation of new forms, the modification of old ones or the selection from alternative forms in a spoken or written code. He viewed the object of status planning as the recognition by the national government of the importance or position of one language in relation to others. So far, the focus of language planning as derived from definitions quoted from the literature made references to 'changes to the systems of ... speaking' (Rubin and Jernudd, 1971), changes in a language's functions (Weinstein, 1980) and

organization of a community's language resources (Das Gupta, 1973) which seem to refer to what Kloss argues as status planning.

Thirdly, there are definitions that are framed in terms of efforts to solve language or communication problems. This is clear in Fishman's definition which refers to 'the organized pursuit of solutions to language problems, typically at the national level' (1974, p. 79). Jernudd and Das Gupta (1971) do not see planning as an idealistic and exclusively linguistic activity but as a political and administrative activity for solving language problems in society. However, these examples assume that language planning can be carried out solely for the sake of improving communication where problems of communication are the only problem to be solved. Cooper (1989) points out a fundamental point about language planning. He argues that language planning is directed ultimately towards nonlinguistic ends such as national integration, political control and economic development. I agree with Karam (1974) who points out that, regardless of the type of language planning, in nearly all cases the language problem to be solved is not a problem in isolation within the region or nation. It is, however, directly associated with the political, economic, scientific, social, cultural and religious situation. These considerations, which I will discuss later, serve as the primary motivation for language planning in many countries in this region especially in the case of Singapore.

Although some of the definitions I have drawn from the literature do not refer to the people whose behaviour is to be influenced, there are references to community (Das Gupta, 1973), society (Jernudd and Das Gupta, 1971) and nation (Fishman, 1974). Targets of language planning indicate or imply that language planning is typically carried out for large aggregates. However, this view seems to exclude small groups such as school, classroom, religious congregations and others. Examples of communicative behaviour abound in such small groups and are often objects of explicit attention. The language planning activity would seem more likely to operate successfully through such smaller communicative networks (Cooper, 1989).

Having examined the relative merits and demerits of earlier

definitions, I find that Cooper's (1989) definition provides a useful framework in our understanding of language planning. Cooper suggests that the actions of language planning refer to *deliberate* efforts to influence the behaviour of others with respect to the acquisition, structure or functional allocation of their language codes. This definition clearly neither restricts the planner to authoritative agencies nor restrict the type of the target group, nor specifies an ideal form of planning. Cooper's definition is couched in behavioural rather problem-solving terms. He also employs the term 'influence' rather than 'change'. Although Cooper implies that the maintenance and preservation of current behaviour is important in some circumstances, a more plausible goal, in my opinion, is to seek to change or alter language behaviour. Measurability should be a consideration in any type of successful planning.

A word on terminology is useful at this point. Those involved in the discipline of language planning have not always been clear or consistent in their use of terminology. In particular, the key terms 'language planning' and 'language policy' are frequently used either interchangeably or in tandem. The term 'language management' is used only in recent literature. Although Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) argue that they actually represent two distinct aspects of the systemised language change process. They assert that the exercise of language planning leads to or is directed by the promulgation of a language policy by government or other authoritative body or person. Language policy in this sense appears to refer more to the goals of language planning.

1.2. Two Approaches to Language Planning

There are generally two approaches to language planning according to Fishman (1989). One points "in societal directions" and deals with the authoritative allocation of resources to the attainment of the language status and language corpus goals. The other approach is "more linguistically oriented". Fishman feels it would be instructive to determine whether the distinction between the two approaches are

"really etic or emic". However, Kuo and Jernudd (1993) suggest that the 'societal' approach is indicative of a macro-sociological perspective of language planning whereby the acts of planning and management are also mainly macrolinguistic. They constitute highly organised systemic correction of an entire language (Neustupný, 1987) for both actual and potential users of the language in a national society. This perspective also favours study of the kind of language ideology that is held by language planners involved in institutions charged with language planning. Jernudd (1982) believes that this is the ideology of planning through which the language and policy makers reach for some ideal in the future.

The 'linguistic' approach, on the other hand, is indicative of a micro-linguistic perspective on language management (Kuo and Jernudd, 1993) whereby the acts of the planning and management are micro-linguistic. They constitute correction of inadequacies that are noted by individuals in spoken discourse. Kuo and Jernudd argue that because this approach explores the link between individual conduct in discourse and group behaviour in communication, this perspective is also micro-sociologically oriented. They also point out that in cooperation with the macro-sociological concern and method, the micro-sociological perspective led to research that identifies the demand for intervention in language in discourse. It also asks for investigation on the consequences of authoritatively imposed action, and reaction, not just in the generation of discourse but also in the evaluation of its inadequacies (Kuo and Jernudd, 1993). This, then, provides an apparatus to explore the details of noting, evaluation, and correcting consequential communication problems in policy and planning action (Fishman, 1989).

Although in theory it would appear that the two approaches to language planning are complementary, Fishman does not discuss whether the choice of one or the other approach could or would affect the planning outcomes in actual practice. Thus in this paper, I would explore the issue of the nature of the relationship between the two approaches in practical language planning. I will also discuss if the complementarity of the two approaches contribute to the resolution of

language problems. My discussion will be based and illustrated by the case of language planning and policy in Singapore. In order to understand the language situation in Singapore and the issues that have arisen as a result, it is necessary to first to look at some of the major language policies in Singapore.

2. The Language Situation in Singapore

The language situation in Singapore is richly diversified. With a pluralistic citizenry of nearly 3.2 million in the year 2000, 77 percent are ethnically Chinese, 15 percent Malays, 6 percent Indians and 2 percent of other ethnic definition. Given this multiethnic make up, language has long been a sensitive political issue in the short history of Singapore. It has been, and in some ways still is, regarded as an obstacle to nation building. The issues the government faced after gaining independence were chiefly the problems of communicative integration and developing a national identity (Kuo and Jernudd, 1993). In seeking to solve these problems, the government adopted a clearly interventionist stance in language planning. The basic strategy used by the government for dealing with pluralism and consequent multilingualism has been a policy of equal treatment.

2.1. Multilingual Policy

The Singapore society has been able to sustain a high level of communicative integration through its adoption of a multilingual model (Tan, 1999). Singapore's model neatly fits the nation's population into four major ethnic groups with Mandarin, Malay, Tamil and English as the official linguistic representation. Tan believes that this model is seen to grant linguistic and cultural recognition to associated languages equal official status and legitimacy. It is through such a policy that the government believes communicative integration can be achieved and maintained.

The other issue that concerned the government was developing a

national identity. The development of this Singaporean identity for a population who speaks different languages and from divergent traditions was a problematic issue. The government's desire was to develop a national identity which was above and beyond the identity and loyalty at the ethnic level. The new identity would serve the nation's vision of economic, social and cultural development. Kuo and Jernudd (1993) agree that the policy of multi lingualism does serve the country's goals. However, it is not possible in practice to prescribe total equality to the use of all four languages in all public domains. Tan (1999) argues that the policy has allowed for the dominance of English and Mandarin over Malay and Tamil. This is perhaps clearly manifested through a bilingual educational system.

2.2. Bilingual Policy

Under the policy of bilingual education, all students in Singapore are required to take lessons in English (the first language) and one other official language or 'mother tongue' (the second language). The student is expected to select as the second language the language associated with the student's ethnic classification, although there are cases where Malay and Indian students take Chinese as a second language. The requirement of this school biligualism is implemented by a series of detailed guidelines involving exposure time, subject-language matching, examination and attainment requirements (Gopinathan, 1985). A statement from the Ministry of Education in the press recently in response to criticisms of the bilingual policy, emphasised the fact that 'the bilingual policy ... is a cornerstone of [our] education system' (*The Straits Times*, 29 August 2001). The rationale offered by the Ministry for learning the 'mother tongue' was that it would give Singaporeans an anchor in their ethnic and cultural traditions, '... requiring [our] students to offer their mother tongue'. This is regarded to be '... in line with the objectives of the bilingual policy to impart moral values and cultural tradition to [our] students'. In the same statement to the press, the Ministry stressed that 'English, as [our] common working language,

gives [our] students access to the world of commerce, science and technology, while the mother tongue gives them direct access to their cultural heritage and helps them retain their cultural roots and identity'.

Bilingualism in Singapore has taken on a meaning peculiar to the needs of the nation. Pakir (1998) believes that 'bilingualism' in Singapore is uniquely defined as 'proficiency in English and one other official language' (p. 43). What Pakir means is an 'English-knowing' bilingual policy, a term first used by Kachru (1983, p. 42) in his discussion of non-native Englishes. James (1999) also believes that the bilingual policy practiced in Singapore is, in effect, a form of 'selective bilingualism', operating under a multilingual model which presumes to be built upon a foundation of equality. It suffices here to point out that Singapore's official policies of multilingualism and bilingualism were aimed at specifically producing the goals and intentions of what Kuo and Jernudd (1993) defined as 'pragmatism' in the case of Singapore. These policies I believe have brought about significant results. The growth in literacy and bilingual literacy rates as evidenced by census data is impressive. The general literacy rate has gone up from 90 percent in 1990 to 93 percent in 2000. Those biliterate made up 46 percent of the population (Census Report, 2001). What is interesting to note is that 71 percent of the population is literate in English.

2.3. English in Singapore

As the language of colonial government, English has been retained as the administrative language in independent Singapore. In official terminology, English is a 'working language'. It is the only language that is not Asian in origin and hence, regarded as 'neutral' for inter-group relations in the country. The government deems an expansion of the proficient use of English is necessary for the continued growth of the economy. Kuo (1985) argues that it is obvious that English is of instrumental value both for the societal perspective of economic growth and from the individual perspectives of social mobility and economic gains. The use of English has been defended as a

necessity from the early years of Singapore independence. Singapore's Prime Minister then, Lee Kuan Yew, had argued that,

.... the deliberate stifling of a language which gives access to superior technology can be damaging beyond repair. Sometimes this is done, not to elevate the status of the indigenous language, so much as to take away a supposed advantage a minority in the society is deemed to have, because that minority has already gained a greater competence in the foreign language. This can be most damaging. It is tantamount to blinding the next generation to the knowledge of the advanced countries. (1970, p. 8)

Thus, Singapore's 'English-knowing' bilingual policy, as suggested by Pakir (1998), finds its rationale on this account. As a result of this policy, evidenced by the census data, English is widely used and the level of literacy in the language is high enough to enhance the economic development of the country. The government is confident that as long as economic development and political stability is sustained, the use of English will serve to express a new national identity that is above and beyond ethnic identity.

However, there is the inevitable concern about the relationship between language and culture. Pakir (1992) describes the tension and paradox regarding English. She argues that although English is deemed necessary for the access to cutting-edge technology and the world market, it is not considered a worthy vehicle to carry the cultural and social content of the main ethnic groups. In other words, Singapore wants English as a tool rather than a tie. It wants English to serve a utilitarian but not an emotional purpose.

2.4. Development of Singapore Colloquial English

A considerable amount of research has been done on the place, role and spread of English in Singapore. Many studies (Tay and Gupta, 1983; Gupta 1986; Pakir 1992, 1996; Kuo and Jernudd, 1996) have

revealed that the discourse for the new Singapore identity is taking shape through English language songs, literature and local television programming. They are marked linguistically by the use of words taken from local vernaculars. This emergence and growth of nativised or colloquial English in Singapore has received much publicity recently and it is of no surprise that it has caught the policy maker's attention.

Singapore colloquial English or popularly known as Singlish has been criticised by the Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, as a 'corrupted' form of English by Singaporeans,

Singlish is not English. It is English corrupted by Singaporeans and has become a Singapore dialect. Singlish is broken, ungrammatical English sprinkled with words and phrases from local dialects and Malay which English speakers outside Singapore have difficulties in understanding. (*The Straits Times*, 29 August 1999)

The type of English tacitly assumed as the 'standard' in Singapore is the Standard English of the United Kingdom. However, it is not easy to find a universally accepted definition of 'standard' English. One definition suggested by Trudgill (1983) describes that,

Standard English is that variety of English which is usually used in print, and which is normally taught in schools and to non-native speakers learning the language. It is also the variety that is normally spoken by educated people and used in news broadcasts and other similar situations. The difference between standard and non-standard, it should be noted, has nothing in principle to do with differences between formal and colloquial language, or with concepts such as 'bad language'. Standard English has colloquial as well as formal variants, and standard English speaker swear as much as others. (1983, p. 102)

To ensure that a colloquial form does not develop and that 'standards'

are maintained, the Ministry of Education in the early years recruited 'native speaker' teachers from abroad to teach in Singapore schools. At the same time, new teaching materials and methodologies were adopted to increase the fluency of students in standard English. In-service courses for teachers were also introduced. The concern is clearly for the increase in competence and maintenance of the standard in the language with exornormative standards as the reference points. Tay (1982) identifies six main functions of English in Singapore— as official language, language of education, 'lingua franca', international language and language for the expression of a new Singapore identity. In spite of the government's efforts to use standard English as a tool to forge a new identity, in reality what has developed is the inevitable nativised form.

In his argument Kuo (1993) points out that the language has to 'nativise' to carry the identity of the speakers especially in a multi ethnic setting. He introduces the concept of 'functional nativeness' which essentially explains that nativised English may be accepted as one that can represent different national identities. According to Gupta (1994) the origin of Singlish and its grammar has been influenced by its contact with other languages. English in Singapore began to nativised as early as the 1930s. Gupta believes that Singlish is used to express solidarity functions which gives it a particular role in inter-ethnic contacts. Singlish is also a means of expressing national, rather than ethnic identity. This is true as Singlish is now a major inter-ethnic link language and not standard English as intended by the government language policies. Thus, despite deliberate efforts directed at the implementation of the strict standardization according to an external model, standard English of the UK, a subtle and long term corpus change in a different direction seem to be underway.

3. A Nation of Campaigns

Since independence in 1965, the Singapore government has often relied on broad public campaigns to put across its goals and aspirations

to the populace. Campaigns on the subject of spitting, littering, flushing toilets, courtesy, keeping fit, chewing gum and speaking Mandarin instead of dialects have been seen to serve the purpose of 'behaviour control' and policy enforcement. The 'alarming' widespread use of Singlish in recent years especially in the public domain like local television programmes and commercials prompted the government into action.

The government's crusade to expand the use of standard English and discourage the use of Singlish amongst Singaporeans is currently promoted through a language campaign aptly named *Speak Good English*. When it was launched last year, one critic was quick to point out that a missing 'ingredient' in many of these public campaigns in Singapore is the major role of an ordinary Singaporean in initiating them. It is the government that usually takes the lead. Stung somewhat by this criticism the government responded by branding the campaign a 'movement'. The emphasis was made that the *Speak Good English* is not another campaign but an ongoing movement led by a committee of fourteen individuals from both the private and public sectors.

Since the movement was launched two years ago, there has been much public debate on the use of Singlish in Singapore especially in the press. The majority of the views published in the state-owned newspaper, *The Straits Times*, were in line with the government official stand against Singlish. However, a new paper called *Project Eyeball*, which had both print and electronic versions, published views that were unbiased and revealed the ordinary Singaporean attitude towards Singlish. It must be noted that this new newspaper *Project Eyeball*, which had put a critical spin on the issue, had its publication and circulation suspended after a few months in the market.

3.1. The Speak Good English Movement: How It All Began

The increasing acceptance and use of Singlish became an issue and was thrust into the limelight recently by the Senior Minister. Mr Lee Kuan Yew, in his inimitable style described Singlish as 'a handicap we

must not wish on Singaporeans' and urged the people to use standard English. As there does not exist a separate and permanent language agency to deal with the language problems, most often general goals and guidelines of the language-related policies are expressed in policy speeches by political leaders. Thus, it was of no surprise when the Prime Minister picked the same theme and raised the same issue in the National Day Rally speech in the same year,

The ability to speak good English is a distinct advantage in terms of communication with the world. This is especially important for the economy like ours. If we speak a corrupted form of English, we will lose a key competitive advantage. My concern is that by speaking Singlish, it will over time become a Singapore common language. (*The Straits Times*, 29 August, 1999)

Mr. Goh also emphasised that the government's primary target is the younger generation, especially those who have studied English in school. He added that the government would ensure that the next generation would not speak Singlish. He reminded the people that for Singapore to go global and become first-world economy, it is essential that Singaporeans speak good English. This loud and clear call from the head of state reflects the government's serious concern over the nativization of English. Singlish is and will remain socially and officially unacceptable.

As was to be expected, measures were taken immediately following the Prime Minister's criticism. Through its Encouraging The Use of Standard English (ENTHUSE) committee, the Ministry of Education took the lead to improve the standard of English of both teachers and students. The Ministry revised the English syllabi and made them more rigorous and strengthened the teaching of grammar. Schools organised programmes and activities to encourage the use of 'proper' English and courses were conducted to update teacher's skills. In order to ensure that the promotion of using standard English is an ongoing effort, the

Speak Good English Movement (SGEM) was established. The SGEM was launched amidst much publicity and fanfare. The chairman of the movement, Colonel David Wong, reiterated that SGEM is not a campaign but a movement led by passionate Singaporeans to encourage fellow citizens to speak better English. The public responses made through live-telecast forums and letters to the press revealed some interesting observations. Two fundamental questions were raised and they would be the basis of my discussion in the next section.

3.2. What Does Singlish Mean to Singaporeans?

A war of words erupted in the media over the use of Singlish in local television programmes and commercials. One reader declared that 'Singlish is a perversion of the English language' (*Project Eyeball*, 6 March 2001) and said that its widespread use in the media gave Westerners and tourists a poor impression of Singapore. Another reader wrote '... it is a shame that Singaporeans must resort to Singlish to express themselves especially when they speak to foreigners' (*Project Eyeball*, 6 March 2001). Following the banning of Singlish in commercials, a *Straits Times* editorial warned '... if Singaporeans only use Singlish, they might end up miscommunicating in the global market-place' (*The Straits Times*, 30 August 1999). However, others responded that those who opposed the use of Singlish suffered from a cultural inferiority complex. 'As a young nation, it is imperative that we progressively move towards developing an identity which we can call our own one of the most accessible ways of which is the use of language', wrote a popular actress (*The Straits Times*, 7 September 1999). Catherine Lim, a prominent Singaporean novelist, who said, 'I need Singlish to express a Singaporean feeling', expressed a similar sentiment (*The Straits Times*, 7 September 1999).

Critics say Singlish gives poor impression of Singaporeans but proponents say that Singlish helps create a national identity in a multi-ethnic society and makes 'a Singaporean truly Singaporean'. However, such comments were ignored. Instead, the state-owned

company which runs several TV channels and radio stations responded by banning Singlish in commercials and suspended a highly popular local English comedy sitcom, *Phua Chu Kang*.

Proponents of Singlish say that Singlish creates a national identity in a multiethnic society. It is a mark of a true Singaporean argued the journalist Asad Latif, 'Singlish is a medium of spontaneity for many Singaporeans. It's ungrammatical mix of English Malay and Chinese not understood by foreigners, understandably-reflect the ad hoc, unstructured and eclectic realities of multi racial and multilingual living in Singapore' (*The Straits Times*, 3 Sept 1999). Such views and sentiments reveal the increasing use of Singlish and its growing status as an icon of national identity. As Kuo and Jernudd (1993) point out, Singlish is afterall the result if multi culturalism. The people's views reflect that Singlish has become a solidarity 'tool' promoting communicative integration in multi-ethnic Singapore.

3.3. What is Singlish Allowed to Mean to Singaporeans?

Proficiency and not national pride is the point the government is trying to make. The government's worry is that Singlish will begin to supersede the standard variety as the national norm is generations grow up without first mastering the latter. If that happens, the government warns, Singapore will become more isolated from the rest of the world even if it becomes internally united through a common language such as Singlish. A compromise that the language movement wants to strike is that Singlish be restricted to informal usage. The more neutral international standard type should be adopted for formal written purposes where communication is vital.

When launching the second SGEM recently, Deputy Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong acknowledged that 'mother tongues' carried with them a set of values, ancient cultural heritage and a sense of identity. However, as some form of English must be adopted, he wondered if the adoption of Singlish did not cheapen the "sacrifice",

... it does not make sense to replace our mother tongues by a Singapore English dialect, which is unintelligible to the rest of the world. We want to strengthen our common Singaporean identity, but let's do so in other ways, not by using Singlish. (*The Straits Times*, 28 April 2001)

The government's utilitarian arguments would appear irrefutable. The pragmatic official stance is that Singlish is not the way to strengthen the Singaporean identity. However, the government has yet to reveal what other ways they hope to achieve that in multi ethnic Singapore.

I believe that the SGEM has a relevant role to play. If not for linguistic ends then surely it has caused a healthy debate of what being Singaporean means and to what extent government policies dictate language behaviour in the society. At the very least, the two year old movement has so far created an awareness and encouraged more middle class English educated Singaporeans to invest more time to continue reading standard English if not speak standard English.

4. Language Planning or Just Another Campaign?

One characteristic of language planning, drawn from my earlier discussion, is 'deliberate attempt at social change in language behaviour by a decision-making administrative structure' (Rubin and Jernudd, 1971). Although language planning and policies are taken seriously in Singapore, as I have demonstrated, even deliberate intervention by an efficient administrative structure does not always lead to predicted outcomes. Having said that, an earlier language campaign is worth analyzing at this point as the strategy the government has adopted in SGEM is similar to that used in the *Speak Mandarin Campaign*.

The *Speak Mandarin* campaign first started in 1979 had put to test the notion that linguistic habits are slow to change and that entrenched habits cannot be changed (Pakir, 1996). The promotion of Mandarin has lead to the increasing use of the language among the Chinese dialect

speakers both at home and in public. The campaign was strongly supported by the media. Television programmes in Chinese dialects were replaced by Mandarin ones. This was done to shape home language use and to better reflect official policy requirements. Even counter service at government departments was used to promote Mandarin usage amongst the Chinese community. As a result, a survey by the Research and Information Department (2000) showed that more Chinese understand and speak Mandarin today in Singapore than ever before. The lead established by the government in spelling out the workings of the campaign and ensuring the implementation goes on smoothly were the major factors in the success of the campaign. Although it has proven difficult to eliminate the use of Chinese dialects, the ongoing annual event reflects the government's optimism. This optimism is reflected in the aims of SGEM. When the government called for a national effort in promoting standard English, television and radio stations responded accordingly by banning Singlish on air. A popular local television comedy was suspended temporarily until scripts were rewritten.

It is difficult to decide if SGEM is just another campaign or part of the government's effort in language planning. If we take Cooper's (1989) argument that language planning can be typically carried out for the attainment of nonlinguistic ends, like for national integration and economic ends, then SGEM meets that criteria. On the other hand, is the SGEM an instance in which language planning is carried out for the sake of improving communication or is it more for political control? No matter how hard the policy makers strive for 'perfection', there is a limit as to how far a government can be successful in altering language behaviour in the society. It is the people who will ultimately decide how they wish to speak. Pakir (1996) believes that the language policy would have little success if it is out of step with developing patterns within the society. While language planning in Singapore has generally taken a top-down approach she argues that this approach causes a discrepancy between practice and precept. Pakir proposes an opposite approach that involves 'invisible' planners.

5. Invisible Language Planning

Invisible language planning is believed to be in progress when individuals interfere non-deliberately with planned changes to the system of the language code or to speaking or to both (Pakir, 1996). These individuals Pakir identifies are the parents, children and teachers. She believes that the home-school interface is the 'invisible' component of the language planning, especially with regards to corpus planning.

The data from Pakir's study confirms the popularity of the indigenised form of English in the community. Her study of the discourse at home and the school reveals that there is a discrepancy between practice and precept. Children from homes where English is used as a principal language may run up against different accents, norms and expectations in the school. Children from homes where English is hardly used have to make the adjustment from a non-English knowing bilingual home community to several kinds of English knowing bilingual situations in school (Pakir, 1996). For all these children adaptation to speech styles occur constantly as the child moves from home to school. The point Pakir makes in her findings is that the call for standards in English 'will fall on deaf ears' unless and until planners wake up to the realization that something else is happening on the ground, in the children's two main worlds of home and school.

This discrepancy between the official plans and sociolinguistic reality leads Pakir to claim that in multilingual situations like Singapore, 'real planning can only take place in the invisible manner' (1992, p. 165). This runs counter to the ideal of an exornormative standard English pursued through deliberate planned initiatives taken by visible and recognised policy makers driven by goals defined at, what Kuo and Jernudd regard, macro-linguistic level. The micro-linguistic perspective requires that all language planning start at the level of observation of the language problems in actual discourse. Although the home and family constitute an important arena out of which are exerted pressures that necessitate changes in official policy, Pakir's argument of 'invisible

planning' undermines a basic principle of language planning. It calls into question the very generally accepted view that 'language planning is deliberate language change'. Pakir advocates that language planning is not to shape social change but to be shaped by social forces. In other words language planning should start at the level of observation of the language problems in actual discourse.

Pakir's claims are irrefutable as official reports show that more children are speaking English at home. According to the census report (2001), the proportion of children aged between 5-14 years who spoke English most frequently at home increased from 23 percent in 1990 to 36 percent in 2000 for the Chinese, from 8.3 percent to 9.4 percent for the Malays and from 40 percent to 44 percent for the Indians. However, what is not recorded is the type of English used in the homes.

6. Balancing Two Approaches: Singapore Style

It does seem indeed that Fishman's (1989) concepts of the two approaches to language planning are practiced in Singapore. It is worth mentioning here again that the 'linguistic' approach is to take a microlinguistic perspective of language planning. Kuo and Jernudd, (1993) stressed that some language planning starts at the level of observation of language problems in actual discourse. The 'societal' approach, however, does not require that language problems have already occurred in discourse to create a demand for language planning and engages purposively with future-oriented matters.

Kandiah (1996) argues that the concrete historical and other realities of present-day Singapore favour the future-oriented discourse of proactive planning and its associated macro-linguistic perspective over the micro-linguistic perspective involving the 'noting and evaluation of language use' (p. 24). It is, therefore, decisions made on the basis of the former that are most immediately salient, allowing 'relative insensitivity to the emergence of indigenous norms at micro-sociolinguistic interactional levels' (p. 25). The bilingual policy reinforces English and Mandarin in the educational institutions and in

the mass media. At the community level, the use of English because of its neutrality has become the dominant language in Singapore. This approach does not require that the language problems have already occurred in discourse to create a demand for the language plan and engages purposively with future-oriented matters.

The linguistic approach, on the other hand, is to take a micro-linguistic perspective of language planning. Jernudd and Neustupsý (1987) believe that it constitutes correction of inadequacies that are noted by individuals in their own discourses. This approach explores the link between individual conduct in discourse and group behaviour in communication. However, the micro-linguistic perspective requires that all language planning start at the level of observation of the language problem in actual discourse. Pakir's proposal emerges out of this micro-linguistic level of change in local English usage. Her argument is that the language policies need changing to come to terms with the changes at the 'grass root' level. In other words, it is this micro-level based perspective that can reveal the reality of communicative life in Singapore, but not the macro-level planning perspective. The aspects of the micro-sociolinguistics communicative life in Singapore are salient at present. The evaluation of the variation in English usage, for instance, is perceived a 'problem'. In response to such perceived problems language campaigns have been implemented. In the case of the *Speak Mandarin Campaign* significant results were achieved, but time will only tell of the success of the *Speak Good English Movement*. Contrary to Pakir's argument, I believe that the two language-related campaigns illustrate how the government intervenes proactively to support both linguistic and non-linguistic ends. Thus, the micro-level language planning in actual practice pertains to individual's adjustments of language in discourse, including language acquisition and use, in response to institutional and other changes brought about by the macro-level planning.

Kuo and Jernudd (1993) see the planning developments that have taken place in Singapore as deriving from the application of the macro-linguistic level perspective. English in Singapore represents a

successful case of centralised and proactive planning in pursuit of the explicit governmental goals of nation-building and socio-economic development. They do recognise that the micro-linguistic level concern with 'the home grown spoken variety of English' (p. 48) is now gaining ground. This does not indicate that the operation of invisible processes subverts the prevalent proactive planning approach in Singapore. The reason is that the concrete realities of present-day Singapore favour the future-oriented discourse of proactive planning. Its associated macro-linguistic perspective over the micro-linguistic perspective involves the 'noting and evaluation of language use'. It is, as described earlier, decisions made on the basis of the macro-linguistic perspective that are most immediately salient in the case of Singapore. Nonetheless, both macro-linguistic as well as micro-linguistic level considerations are operating simultaneously in Singapore. They are both equally driven by social, political and ideological factors. I believe that the two approaches to language planning as proposed by Fishman are complementary to each other in Singapore and will contribute to the country's goals of nation-building.

7. Conclusion

It is reasonable to conclude that the Singapore experience of language planning shows that no language planning and policy decision are made in a social and political vacuum. These conditioning factors constructed and defined will have an impact directly on decision-making in the language used in the society at the micro and macro levels (Kuo and Jernudd, 1993). In this paper, I demonstrated an example of language planning in action in Singapore which takes on both macro-linguistic and micro-linguistic approaches. Singapore's experience shows how such macro conditions can be acknowledged and worked with by the involved participants to explain and motivate particular micro language planning and policy decision. Singapore's policy of pragmatic multi-lingualism has allowed for flexible responses to changing social, economic and political conditions. However, the underlying consideration

has consistently been that language planning and, hence, language policy at the national level must always serve the needs of nation-building. I also argued that language planning should satisfy the speakers of all languages involved. While language planning solutions must be 'sold' to the public through conventional 'campaign' techniques, the basic plan must serve the interests of the community or it will not meet the conditions just enunciated for that language plan to survive.

References

- Bate, R. (1975). Sociolinguistic and language planning. In R. Cooper (Ed.), *Language planning and policy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Baetens, H. B. (1994). Language shift and cultural implications in Singapore. In S. Gopinathan, A. Pakir, W. H. Ho & V. Pavanan (Ed.), *Language, society and education in Singapore*. Singapore: Times Academic Press.
- Cooper, R. (1989). *Language planning and social change*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Census Report. (2001). *Language spoken at home*. Retrieved July 28, 2001 from <http://www.singstat.gov.sg/languages/>
- Das Gupta, J. (1973). Toward a definition of language planning. In J. A. Fishman (Ed.), *Advances in language planning*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Fellman, T. (1974). Education and planning. In R. Cooper (Ed.), *Language planning and policy*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Fishman, J. A. (1972). *Language and nationalism*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Fishman, J. A. (1974). *Advances in language planning*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Fishman, J. A. (1989). *Language and ethnicity in minority sociolinguistic perspective*. Clevedon-Philadelphia: Multilingual Matters.

- Foley, J. A. (1988). *New Englishes. The case of Singapore*. Singapore: National University of Singapore.
- Gupta, A. (1986). A standard for written Singapore English? In J. Foley (Ed.), *New Englishes: The case of Singapore*. Singapore: Singapore University Press.
- Gupta, A. F. (1994). *The Step-tongue: Children's English in Singapore*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Gupta, A. F. (1994). A framework for the analysis of Singapore English. In Gopinathan et al. (Eds.), *Language society and education in Singapore: Issues and trends*. Singapore: Times Academic Press.
- Gopinathan, S. (1985). Language policy in education: A Singapore perspective. In A. Afendras & E. Kuo (Eds.), *Language and society in Singapore*. Singapore: Singapore University Press.
- Haugen, E. (1966). *Language planning and language conflict: The case of modern Norwegian*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Haugen, E. (1983). The implementation of corpus planning: Theory and practice. In J. Cobarrubias, & J. Fishman (Eds.), *Progress in language planning: International perspectives*. Berlin: Mouton.
- Ho, C. L., & Alsagoff, L (1998). English as the common language in multicultural Singapore. In J. Foley (Ed.), *English in new cultural contexts. Reflections from Singapore*. Singapore: Singapore Institute of Management and Oxford University Press.
- James, J. (1999). Linguistic realities and pedagogical practices in Singapore : Another perspective. In S. Gopinathan, A. Pakir, W. K. Ho & V. Saravanan (Eds.), *Language, society and education in Singapore: Issues and trends*. Singapore: Times Academic Press.
- Jernudd, B. (1982). Language planning as a focus of language correction. *Language Planning Newsletter*, 8(4), 1-4.
- Jernudd, B., & Das, G. (1971). Toward a definition of language planning. In J. A. Fishman (Ed.), *Advances in language planning*. The Hague: Mouton.

- Kachru, B. B. (1983). Models for non-native Englishes. In J. A. Kachru (Ed.), *The other tongue: English across cultures*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Kandiah, T. (1996). English and southeast asian language planning practice: Extracting regional patterns and theoretical principles. In T. Kandiah & J. Kwan-Terry (Eds.), *English and language planning: A Southeast Asian contribution*. Singapore: Times Academic Press.
- Kandiah, T., & Kwan-Terry, J. (Eds.) (1994). *English language planning: A Southeast Asian contribution*. Singapore: Times Academic Press.
- Kaplan, R., & Baldauf, R. (1997). *Language planning from practice to theory*. Multilingual Matters Ltd: UK
- Karam, F. X. (1974). Toward a definition of language planning. In J. A. Fishman (Ed.), *Advances in language planning*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Kloss, H. (1969). *Explorations in sociolinguistics*. Bloomington: Indiana University.
- Kuo, E. C. Y. (1985). Language in the family domain in Singapore: An analysis of the 1980 census statistics. *Singapore Journal of Education*, 7(1), 27-39.
- Kuo, E. C. Y. (1994). Balancing macro-and micro-sociolinguistic perspectives in language management: The case of Singapore. *Language problems and language planning*, 17(1), 1-12. Reprinted in T. Kandiah & J. Kwan-Terry (Eds), *English and language planning: A Southeast Asian contribution*. Singapore: Times Academic Press.
- Kuo, E., & Jernudd, B. (1993). Balancing macro-and micro-sociolinguistic. Perspectives in language management: The case of Singapore. *Language problems and language planning*, 17(1), 81-97.
- Lee, K. Y. (1970). *The Twain Have Met. The Dillingham Lecture, Prime Minister's Speeches, Press Conferences, Interviews and Statement*. Singapore: Prime Minister's Office.

- Neustupný, J. V. (1987). Towards a paradigm in language planning. *Language Planning Newsletter*, 9(4), 1-4.
- Pakir, A. (1992). Education and invisible language planning: The case of English in Singapore. In K. Kandiah & J. Kwan-Terry (Eds.), *English and language planning: A Southeast Asian contribution*. Singapore: Times Academic Press.
- Pakir, A. (1996). English in Singapore: The codification of competing norms. In S. Sopinathan, A. Pakir, W. K. Ho & V. Saravanan (Eds.), *Language, society and education in Singapore: Issues and trends*. Singapore: Times Academic Press.
- Pakir, A. (1998). English in Singapore: The codification of competing norms. In S. Gopinathan et al. (Eds.), *Language, society and education in Singapore*. Singapore: Times Academic Press.
- Project Eyeball*, (6 March, 2001). Eyeball Views Singlish. Retrieved July 17, 2001 from <http://eyeball.asia1.com.sg/Eyeball/>
- Rubin, J., & Jernudd, B. (Eds.). (1971). *Can language be planned? Sociolinguistic theory and practice for developing nations*. Hawaii: The University of Hawaii Press.
- Tan, S. H. (1999). Theoretical ideals and ideologized reality in language planning. In S. Gopinathan, A. Pakir, W. K. Ho & V. Saravanan (Eds.), *Language, society and education in Singapore: Issues and trends*. Singapore: Times Academic Press.
- Tay, M. (1993). *The English language in Singapore: Issues and developments*. Singapore: University Press.
- Tay, M. W. J. (1982). The use, users and features of English in Singapore. In J. B. Pride (Ed.), *New Englishes*. London: Newbury House.
- Tay, M. W. J., & Gupta, A. F. (1983). Towards a description of standard Singapore English. In R. B. Noss (Ed.), *Varieties of English in Southeast Asia*. Singapore: RELC.
- The Straits Times* (29 August, 1999). Singaporeans must seek to speak standard English.
- The Straits Times* (7 September, 1999). Singlish is part of a bonding process.

- The Straits Times* (28 April, 2001). DPM launches second speak good English campaign.
- The Straits Times* (29 August, 2001). MOE has fine-tuned policy on mother tongue.
- Tickoo, M. L. (Ed.). (1991). *Language and standards: Issues, attitudes, case studies*. Singapore: SEAMEO/RELC.
- Trudgill, P. (1983). *Sociolinguistic: An Introduction to language and society*. Penguin: New York.
- Weinstein, B. (1980). Francophonie: Purism at the international level. In B. H. Jernudd & M. J. Shapiro (Eds), *Language planning processes*. The Hague: Mouton.

Esther F. Boucher
SME, Nanyang Technological University
50 Nanyang Avenue Singapore 639798
Phone: +65-7904381
E-mail: boucher@ntu.edu.sg

Received in December, 2001

Accepted in February, 2002