THE CURRENT NATION-BUILDING PROCESS IN MALAYSIA

A Critical Look at the English-medium of Instruction Policy

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Abstract

This study focuses on the dominant political discourses concerning the controversial Malaysian language policy that suggests English as the medium of instruction in mathematics and science courses at the primary level of education. On one hand, the Malaysian government perceives the policy as needed to strengthen its developmental path, on the other hand, the Chinese educationalist community argues that the policy aims to undermine the multicultural structure of Malaysia. In this study, I analyze selected speeches from former and current prime ministers of Malaysia and texts from the Ministry of Education's Official Portal by using the Critical Discourse Analysis. I will argue that the discourses which dominate the public sphere show that language policy serves for the Malaysian nation-building project in the name of the development. The Critical Discourse Analysis is a type of discourse analysis which studies the way dominance or social inequality reproduced by texts and talks in the political context.

Key words: Nation-building, medium of instruction policy, CDA, dominance.

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INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian policy of the English-medium of instruction has become a controversial issue since it was implemented in 2003. According to the policy, Mathematics and Science are to be taught in English in the pre-university level in order to improve the students' skills as English speakers. The government claims that, this policy is a continuation of the developmental path of Malaysia in the name of 'catching up' with the technology as well as the demands of market and international standards. However, the Chinese educationalist community is criticizing the policy by arguing that it is an outcome of ethnicized politics of education which aim to erode the other languages that exist in the multicultural structure of Malaysia. To put it specifically; the Chinese community believes there is a 'hidden agenda' behind this language policy.

This study examines the 'nationalist' discourses on language policy that are maintained by the Malaysian ministry of education as well as former and current prime ministers who have had dominant spaces in the public sphere by expressing their opinions and framing discussions. This research argues that those discourses are articulated through a Malay-dominant nation-building project which undermines the multicultural society and it aims at understanding the Chinese opposition towards English-medium instruction policy on mathematics and science courses on these grounds.

1.1 Aim of the Study

In this study I explore the nation-building process in Malaysia by analyzing discourses on language policy and more broadly on the educational system. In multicultural societies, language policies are very significant in terms of shaping the nation because they determine which social and linguistic groups have access to political and economic opportunities. In other words; the medium of instruction policy has a key role in power (re)distribution and social (re)construction.(Tollefson 2004: 2) Accordingly, in Malaysia, the policy of English instruction in Mathematics and Science has become a key arena of conflict between the Chinese community and the Malaysian government.

There are two goals in this study. In the first place, my aim is to bring attention to the roles played by the dominant discourses on Malaysian education in creating a homogeneous understanding of a society instead of a multicultural one. By doing so, I will consequently change the common understanding of the debate about English-medium of instruction policy. My other goal, to be reached by using critical discourse analysis, is to explain the controversy from the perspective of the Chinese minority.In order to pursue these two aims, the following questions can serve as the inquisitive starting point, and thus;

1- How is dominance reproduced through discourses on education especially concerning the language policy in Malaysia?
2-Why has the English medium instruction policy become so controversial for Chinese communities in Malaysia?

1.2 Why Malaysia?

It is necessary to explain the main reasons that Malaysia is chosen for this study. Firstly, Malaysia is an appropriate country for a contemporary study of nation-building in the context of a pluralist society. It is a multicultural country with three sizeable and distinctive ethnic communities, namely, Malay 65.1%, Chinese 26.0% and Indians 7.7%. (Statistics Malaysia 2000) The Malays and the indigeneous constitute 'the bumiputera' (sons of soil) and enjoy certain constitutionally given 'special rights' which are justified in part as a counter-balance to the local economic dominance of the Chinese community, a balance which has been labelled "Politics for the Malays, Economy for the Chinese". (Brown 2005: 4) The Malaysian education system is designed for the necessities of each ethnic group. Regarding the pre-university level which is the main focus of this study, national schools are designed as Malay- medium education but there are also state-funded schools which provides Chinese or Tamil- medium education.[1] However, in 2003, Malaysian government implemented the English-medium of instruction policy which directs to teaching maths and science courses in English in the pre-university level

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[1] This education is called vernacular education in Malaysia. It refers to the Chinese-medium and Tamil-medium pre-university school education.

education. After the implementation of the policy, Chinese and Tamils schools have begun to conduct maths and science classes both in English and their mother language.

Secondly, the impact of globalization is significant in Malaysia in terms of the growing market economy or its rapid liberalization[2]. Therefore, the Malaysian government follows a more pragmatic way in the education policies, which aims to bring up qualified students for the labor-market needed by its growing economy. Other than that, since education is in the hands of the Malay–dominated government, it is also a political tool to promote national ideology through public schools. As Micheaux (1994:3) also argues that "The Malaysian government's nation building goals are highly linked with developmental objectives that are crucial to compete in the age of globalization".

That is why Malaysia is a very special and interesting country for a study of nation-building through educational policy. And it is also important to discuss nationalism in a multicultural system with three big ethnic minorities in order to adress the applicability of nation-building theories.

1.3 The Outline of the Study

This study consists of three different but interrelated parts. In the first part, I will explain the methodology namely Critical Discourse Analysis. Due to the fact that Critical Discourse Analysis can be regarded both as theory and as method, a seperate chapter for introducing and developing this methodology is needed. Later, in the second chapter I will conceptualize the nationalism and nation-building theories which are deemed suitable for the object of the research. Through presenting modernist and primordialist understandings of nationalism, this study will use nation-building theory as well as Anderson's concept of imagined communities to explain the issue of Malaysian language policy. The third chapter will be the analysis part of this study and I will apply the critical

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[2] Globalization will be understood in economic terms such as the economic expansion, international trade. In this paper, I will not discuss globalization more thouroughly outside the context of Malaysian language policy.

discourse analysis on selected discourses which will be examined both as discursive practices and later discussed in the context of nation-building.

Furthermore, the research questions will be answered by deconstructing the written materials on education in order to understand the underlying meanings. The primary source of data will be the writings on 'philosophy and objectives on education' by the Malaysian Ministry of Education. Moreover, politicians speeches selected from news articles are going to be used in order to put forward ideas about national identity construction. A second source of data I will rely on is previous research and books on the issue of Malay nationalism and debates on language policy. Especially "Ethnonationalism" by Connor (1994) is used as an opponent to the nation-building theory while "Language Policies in Education" by Tollefson (2002) and Shamsul's (2004) article about the construction of Chineseness are going to be used to carry this study further. The methodology Critical Discourse Analysis will be applied by the assistance of Ruth Wodak , Michael Meyer (2001) and Teun A. Van Dijk (1993) in the next chapter.

1.4 Limitations:

Due to the methodology chosen, this study intends to understand the problems rather than solving them. Therefore, it analyzes them from the researcher's perspective which is not neutral but necessarily subjective. According to this, its intent is not to develop a new theory or make 'scientific' conclusions.

Other limitations can be shaped by its content. This study is not examining the previous education or language policies and education system in Malaysia, however, to some extent, it does explain the relationship between education or language policy and the nation-building project. What it really does is to emphasize the role of nationalist discourses on education and analyzes how these dominant discourses promote national-identity and lead to conflicts about issues such as language policy.

Moreover, the language of the data material may be another limitation. Mostly, English translations of the speeches and English written news articles from Malaysian newspapers are used. Therefore, I might have missed some details specific to Malaysian culture or some important news which only appeared in Malay or Chinese. However, the English written material seems sufficient for the purposes of this paper to understand the changes and the nationalistic reasoning in Malay politics.

METHODOLOGY

In the following section, I will explain the research methods used in this study as well as the reasons for chosing them as well as their advantages and disadvantages. Following the postpositivist thought, Critical Discourse Analysis is going to be the method of this study. As Fairclough (2001: 121) describes, Critical Discourse Analysis is as much theory as it is method and requires an analysis of language or discourse within broader analyses of the social processes.

2.1 The Critical Theory and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

In this study, the important things are not answered by providing a list of the most powerful actors and relationships. Instead they are answered by inquiring into the causes of inequalities of power and opportunities between human beings and identifying the political movements that are not as powerful as states but more important because of the values they are trying to realize.(Burchill and Linklater 2005: 14) Therefore, along the same line of thought, Critical Theory is the main point of departure regarding the approach and methodology of this study.

The Critical Theory is designed " not simply to eliminate one or other abuse, but to analyse the underlying social structures which result in these abuses with the intention of overcoming them" (Horkheimer 1972: 206, Devetak 2005: 138) Moreover, Horkheimer distinguishes the traditional and critical theories. Traditional theories, on the one hand, claim that subject and object should be seperate from eachother in order to analyze properly, their concepts assume that there is an external world 'out there' and it is only possible to measure that in an objective and balanced manner if beliefs, values and opinions are left behind. On the other hand, critical theory aims at 'emancipation' from existing social structures more than it seeks to justify them. It challenges traditional theories and 'problematizes forms of social life that constrain human freedom'.(Devetak 2005: 139-140) Furthermore, Critical Theory "doesn't take institutions and social and power relations for granted but calls them into question concerning itself with their

origins and how and whether they might be in the process of changing." (Cox 1981: 129) Different than positivist theories, it rejects the idea that theoretical knowledge is neutral and non-political. (Devetak 2005:141)

After this short introduction of the Critical Theory, I will now focus more on the methodological aspects of the research. As earlier mentioned, Critical Theory is the departure point for chosen methodology which is Critical Discourse Analysis (hereafter referred to as CDA) This approach leads to questions such as 'What constitutes knowledge? How are discourses constructed? How do people obtain and maintain power within a given community? Who benefits from such discourse?' . These questions show the kinship of CDA to Critical Theory. (Wodak 2001:11) Therefore, it is illustrated by Habermas' claim that "language is a medium of domination and social force"[3], therefore, this study is going to analyze the dominant developmental-nationalist discourses over education in Malaysia through the interpretation of written texts and speeches. (Wodak 2001: 2) It is argued in this study that these dominant nationalist discourses gradually contribute to the Chinese dissatisfaction in the issue of language policy in Malaysia.

According to that, CDA is "a study of the relations between discourse, power, dominance, social inequality and the position of discourse analyst in such social relationships" and one might call it a "sociopolitical discourse analysis". (Van Dijk 1993: 249) It specifically deals with institutional, political, gender and media discourses which testify to more or less obvious relations of struggle and conflict. (Wodak 2001: 2) Van Dijk (1993) distinguishes CDA from other methods by three reasons.

The first reason is that CDA chooses the perspective of those suffering the most and critically analyzes those in power who are responsible and have the means and opportunity to solve the problems.(Wodak 2001: 1) Van Dijk further explains that the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenge of domination is the main focus of CDA. The domination mentioned here is the exercise of social power by elites, institutions or groups that results in social inequality in terms of political, cultural,class,

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[3] Habermas quoted from Wodak (2001:2)

ethnic, racial and gender social inequality. (Van Dijk 1993: 250) To exemplify, the speech of a prime minister can determine the public opinion with the help of powerful supporters such as his political party or the media because of his position. However, those who may suffer because of his policies, do not have the same access or opportunity to represent themselves. By focusing on dominant discourses, CDA aims to deal with power abuse, conflicts and inequality that are derived from such discourses.

The second reason is that the position of critical discourse analyst is not neutral. Van Dijk (1993) emphasizes that the researcher should take an explicit sociopolitical stance by spelling out their point of view, perspective, principles and aims, both within their discipline and within society at large. "Their work is admittely and ultimately political" (p:252) CDA rejects the path that textual strategies have adopted where analysis are made in apolitical perspectives although both the problems and solutions have political implications. Furthermore, the critical targets in CDA are the power elites that enact, sustain, legitimate and ignore problems. Therefore, the critique of discourse implies a political critique of those responsible for the distortion in the reproduction of power relations. (Ibid: 253)

The third and last reason is that CDA doesn't primarily contribute to a specific discipline, paradigm, school or a discourse theory. It is interdisciplinary because it believes that problems are not homogenous and have to be analyzed from different perspectives. Its primary aim is to have a better understanding of social issues rather than finding out what is right or wrong. (Wodak 2001: 65) According to that, there are various theoretical levels that can be used in CDA range from grand theories to linguistic theories.

2.2 Critics of Critical Discourse Analysis

Due to the fact that CDA is not derived from problem-solving theories, several critiques have been launched regarding its objectivity, definitions and interpretation method. Widdowson (1995:158-169) claims that CDA is not an analysis, but only an ideological interpretation and therefore a biased interpretation. He accuses CDA of selecting texts in order to support its preferred interpretation which is then based on some ideologies.

However, one should then question whether there exists a method which is free from such a priori value judgements? How can one be sure that so-called objective researchers do not include their own values in their study and perception? How can one be certain, in other words, that any researcher is totally independent of the context he lives in? This is why, CDA follows the line that denies the possibility of 'pure' cognition. (Meyer 2001: 17) As mentioned earlier, the analyst of CDA is critical and political and therefore not neutral. Following that, my position in this study is also critical, interpretative and political.

This chapter introduces nationalism as the broader topic of the study as well as the ground of the analysis and it is going to be conceptualised in order to explain why and how it is the central theme of this study. Nationalism has a strong impact on societies although some claim that it has been increasingly threathened by the extensive communication and the emergence of global markets. National identity continues to define and secure individuals due to the fact that "globalization tends to break down the protective framework of the small community" and create a lost sense of security. (Kinnvall 2004: 744) However, in the Malaysian context, exactly the creation and imposition of one type of national identity through government policies has contributed to the lost sense of security and self-understanding among minority communities.[4]

3.1 Nation-building introduced

Following the modernist perspective, Eric Hobsbawn defines a nation as an invented tradition and argues that " ..the modern nation consists of constructs and is associated with appropriate and, in general, fairly recent symbols or suitably tailored discourse such as national history.."(Hobsbawn & Ranger 1983: 1) Such invented tradition are used to legitimize the standardization of administration and law, and in particular, state education so that these measures transformed people into citizens of a specific country. It was expected that industrialization would diminish the differences between citizens and create a homogeneous, equalized society. Karl Deutsch 's explanation of nationality reflects such an homogeneous understanding, he assumes that groups of people, linked to social groups by channels of social communication and economic discourse, turned into nations when they acquired power. In order to prevent the rise of other nationalist movements, they promote their own members into privileged or controlling positions in society. According to his argument, this social mobilization and mass communication

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[4] In this study, minority communities in Malaysia refers to Chinese and Tamil groups although I am aware that there are various ethnic groups.

tend to absorb different linguistic groups into co-cultural participant of nations, with the culture of the dominant group assimilating those of smaller ethnic groups. (Deutsch 1994: 96-98)

In this study, the definition of nation-building is a "state-building type of nationalism that aims to assimilate or incorporate culturally distinctive territories in a given state."(Hechter 2000: 15) In the analysis below, this understanding of nationalism will be used in framing and interpreting the dominant discourses in Malaysia on language policy. However, in order to understand the Chinese reaction to the government policy, I will now give place to the critics of nation-building.

3.2 Nation-building or Nation- Destroying?[5]

Is it possible to create homogeneous societies? Walker Connor is one of the major opponents to the nation-building theories mentioned above. His critique is also very useful to understand Malay nationalism because of his emphasis on ethnicity[6]. Firstly Connor criticizes the nation-building theory of Deutsch, by arguing that nation-building theory ignores the increasing ethnic consciousness driven by globalization and increased communication scale by assuming that homogeneous societies are possible. Connor emphasizes that only 9 % of the states of the world can be regarded as homogeneous. (Connor 1972: 320) Therefore, such homogeneous approach can not be applied to a multiethnic society.

Secondly, Connor argues that nation-building theory legitimizes assimilation through public education and state institutions. However, since the project of nation-building is insensitive to the ethnic differences and subjectivities, it necessarily also implies a

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[5] This formulation is taken from Connor's article in 1972
[6] The concept of ethnonationalism, is shaped by Connor's definition of nation "as a self differentiating ethnic group". (Connor 1994: 42)The root of nations is the psychological bond that unites people and can be found by making distinction between state and nation, patriotism and nationalism. (Smith 2004: 55, Connor 1994:212) According to Connor, there is nothing like civic nationalism, there is patriotism which is same with loyalty to the state. Departure from the Weber 's (1968) affiliation of nations to ethnic communities, Connor argues that both ethnic group and nation refer to a group characterized by common descent, difference is 'ethnic' derives from 'Greek verb ethos', 'nation' from Latin verb 'nasci'. In a way he claims that every nationalism is ethnonationalism which can be described as a loyalty to the nation.

parallel process of nation-destroying among minority groups. In other words, Connor opposes 'nation-building' in which dominant nationality uses the power of the state to back its claims of constituting a nation. In order to create such 'dominant' nations, it was necessary to assimilate or destroy the ethnic bases of nationhood of minority group. (Smith 2005: 25-26 , see Connor 1972) In a multicultural context, in other words, the multicultural states face a dual threat consisting of national awareness coming from below and govermental programs of assimilation from above. (Connor 1994: 22-24)

Since the focus in this study is Malaysia with its three main ethnic groups, Connor's perspective is applicable as a means of explaining the ethnic tensions in the country because ethnicity in Asia plays an extremely significant part in communities. Thus, Gungwu (2004: 9-11) argues that Europe and Asia are different in terms of plurality and national consciousness. He argues that in Europe, the process of nation-building went hand in hand with democracy because people were self-conscious to participate in what their government had done. However, in the complex religious, linguistic and cultural mix of Southeast Asia, the nation-building process differs from the Western European since people face a much more pervasive change in the sudden adjustment from culture-based community to nation-based one.

3.3 The importance of language in Imagined Communities

Benedict Anderson's "Imagined Communities" offers a significant theoretical concept in understanding the importance of language issues in the emergence of nation. He argues that "nations are imagined" rather than invented. Thus, he says, "nation is an imagined political community" because members of a nation may not know and meet eachother but still the idea of communion lives in their mind. (Anderson 2005: 51-52) The emergence of print capitalism contributed to the national consciousness by creating unified markets of exchange and communication where many people comprehended eachother through Latin languages. By doing so, languages-of-power were created and dominated other languages. (Ibid:56-57) Today, we can talk about a similarly large scale of communication enriched by the use of Internet that creates language-of-power : English.

And many languages have been facing to disappear in the dominant English-language world of today.

Language is important for one to imagine a common community. The language of a nation is often an indicator of its identity and allegiance, manifestation of its values, culture and traditions.(Tsui and Tollefson 2004: 2) Therefore the spread of English is often perceived as a threat to their cultural and national identity. However, in the Malaysian context, English has two different roles. On one hand, English serves for the interests of capitalist goals of the Malay government and is consequently promoted through language policy. On the other hand, English-dominated language policies undermines the multicultural structure of Malaysia and disturb the minority groups of the country. Unlike many other cases, the spread of English is not an obstacle but a facilitator of the nation-building project in Malaysia. In this manner, the current Malaysian nationalism is very special.

THE CURRENT NATION-BUILDING PROCESS

Critical Analysis of Discourses on Malaysian Language Policy

"*The battle for hegemony, which accompanies the creation of states, is reflected in the power to define language*" *(Billig 1995: 32)*

In the present chapter, I will introduce the history of language debates in Malaysia in order to provide an understanding of the issue. After that, I will frame the analysis by explaining critical concepts, selected texts and strategies which are used in analyzing the texts. Moreover, the analysis part is divided into three in order to facilitate the understanding of the reader. Lastly, I will close this chapter by explaining the possible reasons of the Chinese opposition to the policy of teaching mathematics and science in English.

4.1 Brief history of Language debates in Malaysia

In order to have a comprehensive understanding, it is crucial to explain the context in which language policies has shaped in Malaysia. It has always been a dilemma in Malaysia how to juxtapose the promotion of Malay as the medium of instruction while still quaranteeing the Chinese and Indian rights to be instructed in their mother tongue. (Guan 2006: 230)

In the aftermath of independence, the new government's first concern was the centrality of education and the nation-building project which were seen as crucial to set the country apart from the colonial powers. According to that, the Barnes Report in 1951 was published and proposed to create a national public school system based on bilingual education with the promotion of a national lingua franca-either Malay of English. On the other hand, another report called Fenn-Wu was published on Chinese education. Contrary to the Barnes Report, it suggested that own-language schools (vernacular schools) had to continue with Malay and English to be taught alongside. It was then agreed that vernacular education had to be allowed in both primary and secondary level, but with a

common curriculum. However, Malay and English language dominated the education system when the language of education were restricted only to these two languages. (Brown 2005: 4-5) These reports indicate that the Malaysian nation-building went hand in hand with language debates even dating back to the emergence of country.

Due to the multicultural character of Malaysia, ethnic disputes have taken place from time to time. The 1969-riots were really significant in terms of the turn from multicultural understanding of nation-building to a Malay-dominated nation-building. The New Economic Policy (hereafter NEP) was introduced in 1971 as a solution to the ethnic conflicts- the 1969 riots were derived from economic inequalities between Chinese and Malays. As argued by the government, the main reason for this conflict was the economic backwardness of the Malay community therefore the economic structure was subsequently redesigned with an affirmative action programme towards Malays. (D.Brown 1994: 244) Following that, education was given a central role in the development strategy and favored the Malay students by introducing Malay as a medium of instruction and putting quotas for Malay students on having up to 75% of all local university places (Micheaux 1997: 4) Although the New Economic Policy provided opportunities for Malays by facilitating their participation into for instance the business sector, it also created inequality between races, decreased the quality of education and caused growing frustration of non-Malays. Therefore, the NEP can be regarded as the starting point in imposing Malay-dominating structures rather than a policy of promoting multicultural unity.

After this brief presentation of language issues in Malaysian history, I will now give place to the Chinese reaction to the policy of teaching maths and science in English. As Suryadinata (2004: 234) formulated it, this policy is " a change of medium of instruction for science and maths in all primary schools from vernacular languages to English".The Chinese educationalist community is concerned about this policy because they fear that the use of English will erode the multicultural basis of Malaysia. Furthermore, they argue that using English in primary level maths and science is not the most effective method to improve students' level of English. Hing (2004: 102-103) claims that it could be

particularly disadvantageous to students from Chinese schools who were already doing well in science and maths.

On the other hand, Chinese schools attract many students because of their quality of education. Guan (2006: 250) argues that more Chinese participate in Chinese schools because of the following reasons; (1) Economic and educational advantages in learning Mandarin with the rise of China (2) Declining quality of education in the national primary schools (3) Ethnic discrimination (4) Learning Mandarin as an identity marker which preserves Chineseness. According to Guan, these reasons show that Chinese schools are preserving their importance for Chinese people in Malaysia.

4.2 Framework

Most of the studies that have been using CDA as a method in the context of nationalism are European-oriented. The studies of racism, orientalism and contemporarily immigration have used CDA in order to show how discourses on politics and media help to promote the image of the 'Other'. For my study, I have chosen to use the model of analysis developed by Van Dijk. In the following, I will therefore summarize the discursive strategies and ways of interpretation proposed by his model.

4.2.1 Power, Discourse, Context and Dominance

The model borrowed from Teun Van Dijk's article called 'Critical Discourse Analysis' (1993) frames this analysis with the assistance of important concepts that needs to be explained. Thus, *Power* refers to the social power of groups and institutions. In other words, groups are regarded as powerful if they are able to control the acts and minds of other groups as well as within their own group. This kind of power can ensure a privileged access to social resources such as force, money, information, status etc. Moreover, *discourse* is understood as a form of social action. In my study, political discourse takes place as political texts and speeches. Finally, *context* is defined as the "mentally represented structure of those properties of the social situation that are relevant for the production or comprehension of discourse" (Van Dijk 2001: 356) To put it in

other words, the definition of the situation, the settings in terms of time and place, the various social and institutional roles of the participants and their mental representations such as goals, attitudes or ideologies are all parts of the context. Finally, *dominance* is in this study defined as "the exercise of social power by elites, institutions or groups, that results in social inequality, including political, cultural, class, ethnic, racial and gender inequality." (Van Dijk 1993: 249)

4.2.2 The Level of Analysis

The strength of CDA is its attempt to fill the gap between the micro and macro levels of analysis. According to this distinction, language, discourse and communication are situated at the micro-level of analysis while power, dominance or inequality belongs to the macro-level of analysis. However, in everyday interaction, the micro and macro level are most often unified. (Van Dijk 2001: 354) As Van Dijk exemplifies, racist speech in the parliament can be regarded as discourse at the micro level but it can also function as part of legislation at the macro level.

CDA can be exercised in different ways in order to link the micro level of analysis to the macro level. Following Van Dijk´s (2001: 354) perspective on CDA, such ways[7] can be summarized as follows;

1.*Members–Groups:* Language users-engage in discourse *as* members of (several) social groups, organizations, or institutions; and conversely, groups thus may act "by" their members.

2.*Actions–Process:* Social acts of individual actors are thus constituent parts of group actions and social processes, such as legislation, newsmaking, or the reproduction of racism.

3.*Context–Social Structure:* Situations of discursive interaction are similarly part or constitutive of social structure; for example, a press conference may be a typical practice

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[7] The ways mentioned here indirectly take place in the analysis part by helping to understand the selected texts and their interpretation.

of organizations and media institutions. That is, "local" and more "global"contexts are closely related, and both exercise constraints on discourse.

4.*Personal and Social Cognition:* Language users as social actors have both personal and social cognition: Personal memories, knowledge and opinions, as well as those shared with members of the group or culture as a whole. Both types of cognition influence the interaction and discourses of individual members, whereas shared "social representations" govern the collective actions of a group.

4.2.3 Selected Texts

For CDA, "language is not powerful on its own, it gains power by the use of powerful people". (Wodak 2001: 10) Therefore in this study, selected texts are chosen from the Malaysian politicians and institutions deemed to have an influential role in the issues of education. The texts and the speeches of the Malaysian Ministry of Education as well as those by the Minister of Education Mr. Hussein, former Prime minister (henceforth PM) Mr. Mahathir and current PM Mr. Badawi, all compose the discursive practices. These texts are chosen because they are appropriate for an analysis in the ways mentioned in section 4.2.2. To clarify, the Ministry of Education as an institution takes part in the discourse by creating educational policies and rules or standards for the nation's education. In this way, institutions have power over the acts and minds of the people. Also, the speeches of PMs and the Minister of Education take part in the political discourse as given by political actors who can access to the social resources like status, information and media.

The Philosophy and Objectives by Ministry of Education have been declared in English and are chosen as a representative discourse in understanding the educational system in Malaysia. Moreover, speeches from influential politicians in Malaysia are chosen according to their relevance to the English medium of instruction policy. All texts are found in English so that no further translation was needed.

This is a study of 'nation-building' and it seeks to show that politicians play an important role in constructing and reproducing dominant nationalist ideology of Malaysia through the discourses on education. As mentioned above, dominance will be the macro-level of analysis while discourses will be the micro-level of analysis. In between, nation-building theory with its dominance through language is going to help to bridge the gap between micro and macro level. In other words, analyzing dominant discourses in Malaysia will provide 'a great potential for interpreting how nationalists articulate their ideologies to the other.' (Sutherland 2005: 190)

4.2.4 Strategies in Understanding Dominance

How can we understand relationships of dominance? Borrowing from Van Dijk`s (1993:262-264) article called 'Principles of Critical Discourse Analysis', three basic strategies will contribute to this analysis by facilitating the recognition of the reproduction of dominance in discourses ;

1- One way of dominating through discourse is by *justification and legitimization*. By saying for instance that this social relation is 'natural' or 'necessary' dominating groups seek to legitimize their actions.

2- Another strategy of reproduction of dominance is that of *denial*: There is no dominance, everyone is equal in our society and have equal access to resources.

3- The most popular strategy is a positive representation of the dominant group and a negative representation of the 'Other'. *Polarized models* have been articulated by attributing on one hand tolerance and sympathy to one's own group which helps to support generalizations like that the current model is 'typical', 'is always like that'. On the other hand, polarized models attribute deviance, threats or cultural differences to the 'Other' group and generalize its character with these negative properties. In this manner, "social conflict is thus cognitively represented and enhanced by polarization, and discursively sustained and reproduced by derogating, demonizing,

and excluding the others from the community of Us, the Civilized." (Van Dijk 2001: 362)

The texts for the analysis are also selected in order to use the strategies that are mentioned above. Legitimization, denial and polarized models are applied to the selected texts.

4.3 Analysis I – Discourses on the Malaysian Education and Language Policy Issue: Dominating the 'Others'

The main point in Critical Discourse Analysis is that the researcher should take a position. In this case, I will take a position that tries to analyze the texts or speeches on Malaysian Education or language policy from the point of view of the Chinese minority groups, thereby criticizing the dominant Malay groups and institutions. Accordingly, Guan (2006: 231) explains how non-Malay communities have perceived education with the following words;

> "The prevalent view regarded education as a means to preserve, transmit, and develop each ethnic group's language and culture. This view influenced the non-Malay communities to regard the policy to built a predominantly Malay-medium education system as a move that would curb mother tongue education and lead to gradual demise of their values, languages and cultures"

After introducing my position, I will start the first part of the analysis. Keeping in mind the strategies of dominance, the philosophy and mission of the Ministry of Education and speeches of former PMs on the issue of language policy will be introduced.

As earlier mentioned, a common strategy of reproducing dominance is to present 'us' with positive traits while introducing the 'other' with negative traits. Such examples of *positive representation* of an 'imagined community'[8] could be:

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[8] Borrowed from Benedict Anderson's definition of a nation. (Anderson 2005:51)

> "Education in Malaysia is an on-going efforts towards further developing the potential of individuals in a holistic and integrated manner, so as to produce individuals who are intelectually, spiritually, emotionally and physically balanced and harmonic, based on a firm belief in and devotion to God. Such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens who are knowledgeable and competent, who possess high moral standards and who are responsible and capable of achieving high level of personal well-being as well as being able to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large." (Malaysian Education Ministry, Philosophy of Education)[9]

- To produce loyal and united Malaysian.
- To produce happy, well mannered individuals who have faith, knowledge and vision.
- To prepare the nation´s human resource for development needs.
- To provide educational opportunities for all Malaysians. (Mission of Malaysian Education Ministry)

Such discourses are given to illustrate the homogeneous nation that the Malaysian government anticipates. The focus is given to the features of a 'desired' nation not the actual nation. It is homogeneous and the belief in God is significant. Moreover, harmony, family and contribution to the society implies Asian values. These positive representation of the 'produced' citizens prepare a ground for the *'negative' representation of others*. Such examples are given below on the discourses of English-medium of instruction policy;

> "It is unfortunate perhaps for the language nationalists but that is the reality today. They must not blight the future generations by objecting to the mastery and usage of the English language. They must not obstruct Malaysia's progress and development." (Mahathir, Muhammed, New Straits Times 09/09/2005, There is a need to master English)

> "Former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad, who spearheaded the move to re-introduce the teaching of Science and Mathematics in English, today questioned whether Penang Chief Minister Tan Sri Dr Koh Tsu Koon's call for a review in vernacular schools was made in the interest of education or whether there was an element of chauvinism. "I do not know whether it was made in the interest of education or due to a little

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[9] See www.moe.gov.my

bit of a chauvinistic attitude," said the former prime minister who is attending the Southern Africa International Dialogue." (Dr. Mahathir questions the Kohn's motives, 13/11/2005, Mahathir)

Dr. Mahathir's speeches on the issue were published in the newspapers due to the fact that he is a former PM and an influential character in Malaysian politics. His speech can be considered as a negative representation of the 'Other' .

4.3.1 The Analysis of Discursive Practice

In the first two examples, the philosophy and mission of the education system in Malaysia is given. They are borrowed from the official web-page of the education ministry. As a state institution which has dominance and influence, the Ministry of Education frames the discourse on the education system. These examples represent a constructed national identity around a 'homogeneous' Malaysness which is highly related to religious and developmental goals. As can be seen, spirituality and belief in God, high moral standards and Asian values with a specific interest in family and harmony is emphasized more than individuality. This approach is excluding the minorities like Chinese and Indians because of religious issues that is constructed by the words like "firm belief in God". In this discourse, one can say that the loyalty to Malayness is defined by the dominant group and their dominant religion. The objectives of education in Malaysia have been articulated around the following words "such an effort is designed to produce Malaysian citizens". According to that, education and nation-building process go hand in hand in Malaysia. In a way, the Malaysian state does not hesitate to show that students are tailored according to the manners of the culture, faith and the government ideals on free market economy. Such discourses are good examples that the philosophy and mission of education do not only fail to emphasize individuality and independent thinking but also fail to stress plurality in the Malaysian society.

In the second part of examples, the quote from Mahathir is shaped by a common discoursive strategy in reproducing dominance that is the negative representation of others which can be exercised by using expressions that contrasts us with 'them'.

According to that, Mahathir presents language policy as a developmental goal of Malaysia, providing more opportunities. By doing so, he has used one of the most effective discursive strategies to legitimize his policy by associating it with a discourse of 'opportunity'. (Tollefson and Tsui 2004: 285) When it is presented as a national project which Malays are supposed to devote themselves to, Mahathir categorizes the opponents of this policy as the 'Other'. In other words, he is not only justifying his policy but also labelling those opposing to it as 'chauvinist' or threats to the Malaysian progress.

4.4 Analysis II - Press Conference of Education Minister on the issue of language policy[10]: Dominating the Public Discourse

In this section, I will analyze the speech that Hishammuddin Tun Hussein has given in 2004 on the language project. The analysis begins with discussing the properties of the context such as access patterns, setting and participants and examines these in the discursive practice. To clarify, following Van Dijk (1993: 269-270), access patterns, setting and participants are crucial in order to analyze parlimantary or public speeches. Since I provided the whole speech of Minister of Education, I would like to apply some of these properties. Before that, however, it is necessary to introduce them briefly. The *access* is an indicator of the social power of the speaker; in order to have access to media organs, parliament and public discourses, one has to have a power. The *setting* is also considered as the indicator of power since it shows the importance of the speech. To exemplify, parliament is the location of political acts and influential policies. The *participant* positions and roles are also significant as a signal of power of the speaker.[11]

Access : Mr. Hussein's power is derived from his position as an minister of education. He has more or less controlled access to the parliament, political debates and conferences as well as media organs.

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[10] The whole speech is given in Appendix II.
[11] Other than that, I am aware that my analysis is lacking rhetoric aspects of the speech due to the fact that I am not a linguist

Setting : The power and authority of this speech can be estimated by the elements of setting such as location. According to that, this speech took part in PWTC-Putra World Trade Center which is a meeting place for the business sectors in Kualalumpur. Despite the minister's political role, his power coincides with business environment .

Participants : The education minister gave his speech to the director of the British Council, the editor in chief of News Straits Times, the chairman of UEM group (conglomerate in infrastructure, logistics, health care and manifacture), headmasters of schools and other media members. According to that, education minister presented this language policy in a conference where powerful figures was attending. Among the participants, however, there was no representative from the minority educationalist groups which objected to his policies.

As mentioned earlier, I use certain strategies in order to understand the macro level dominance. In the first place, one indicator of dominance is the *legitimization* of this policy by presenting it as a 'natural' or a 'need'. An example of this is the following:

> "....As a trading nation, and a nation open to the world, our children's' competence in English is a survival skill. It will enable them to exchange ideas, collaborate, make friends and trade internationally. It will enable them to stay connected with the vast engine of knowledge that is modern science. English is now a global language, and its use is no longer identified with any race or nation. While we have a National Language and our vernacular languages, Malaysians are also proud to have had a tradition of competence in the English language...."

In that conference, the Minister of Education further talks about the development of the policy of teaching mathematics and science in English. He tries to get support or legitimize this policy by saying something that eveybody already agrees on, such as 'there is no doubt that English is very important in today's world'. However, the opponents of this policy are not against learning English or improving their language skills. Instead, they disagree to teach maths and science in English in the primary level because – as the Chinese community claims their time in teaching Chinese become limited if they also are to teach mathematics and science in English.

Here in this speech, the Minister of Education does not make positive or negative representations of different groups. However, like the other examples, he also equates the policy with the nation. By doing so, he is constructing an idea of a homogeneous entity. Two examples can be given:

> "Therefore strengthening the education system is a national effort that requires participation by all Malaysians."

> " Today's initiative shows that what the Prime Minister called for can happen, and has begun to happen. We are responding to the needs and opportunities of Education as a nation."

The policy of teaching English in mathematics and science is once again associated with Malayness by requiring all Malays to participate. However, one can question the role of the Minister of Education as a representative of a dominant group, in that he is imposing the idea of a 'homogeneous' nation which is assumed to believe in and support the same line of thought. By assuming that Malaysian nation is a homogeneous entity, he denies differences and therefore reproduces the dominance through *denial*.

In the following examples, the Minister of Education needs to acknowledge the ones that supports this policy to bring conformity:

> "...UEM and Time have taken the initiative to convert the course materials into interactive presentations. Language learning can be fun if students are stimulated and encouraged to participate in activities meaningful to them."

> "I am also pleased to note that the New Straits Time's "Newspaper in Education" weekly supplement for primary schools will also be supplied to participating schools under the Primary Literature project."

This national project has been supported by powerful entities which have dominant roles in society. UEM is as mentioned leading conglomerate and it has identified itself as a

'Preferred Nation-Building Partner' and often works with the state.[12] Moreover, the Ministry of Education has also got the support of media in this project . As can be seen, the Malaysian government which is the dominant power in this case has promoted the project of English Education by utilizing the dominant business and media channels, in effect creating a dominant alliance.

4.4.1 The Analysis of Discursive Practice

The discursive strategies in reproducing dominance have been manifested by the speech of the Minister of Education on the issue of English instruction. After analyzing some parts of this speech, one can say that there is an on-going nation-building process in Malaysia where the dominant group links its assimilating goals with developmental strategies. The lack of representatives from the minority groups in this conference is also an indication of the fact that the ministry of education fails to embrace all of the population. Instead, the supporters of this policy like business groups, the media and the British Council have been welcomed by Malaysian Ministry of Education. This shows that the policy of teaching English in maths and science is higly linked with business related matters. As mentioned, also the position of the minister allows him to dominate the public course by using media channels and dominant business groups. Taking everything into consideration, this speech promotes Malay-dominated nation-building project. As Tollefson and Tsui (2004: 7) point out: "by equipping the nation with the languages of modernization and technological advancement, developing countries are better able to keep abreast of development in developing countries but this nevertheless raises the question: What effect does this kind of assimlation have on national and ethnocultural identity?". To clarify, globalization in terms of economic development also bring about assimilation of the powerless by the powerful and this might be harmful for the stability of the country in the long term.

4.5 Analysis III: Nation-Building and Islam

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[12] For further information see http://www.uem.com.my/about_ident.php

Islam is the majority religion in Malaysia. Although this study cannot focus on the role of Islam in the nation-building process for spatial reasons, it is necessary to mention in order to understand some of the underlying reasons why the Chinese minority opposes the policy of English in mathematics and science. The following example is from the current prime minister Ahmet Badawi's words on science:

> " The Malay society must be a society that embraces knowledge, skills and expertise in order to build capacity. Islam makes it compulsory for Muslims to embrace knowledge in all fields. The misconception that there exists a difference between so-called secular knowledge and religious knowledge must be corrected. Islam demands the mastery of science and technology and the enhancement of skills and expertise. Many verses in the Quran that touch on the need to master science and technology should be studied"(June 2004, at UMNO's 55th assembly, Beng Kee, Ooi 2006: 66-67)

Once again, our imagined community-the Malay society- is being linked with progress or development. However, this time, it is legitimized through Islam's demands about science and technology.

4.5.1 The Analysis of Discursive Practice

This speech is not about the language policy directly. However, it indicates that the nation-building project is grounded on the ideals of the majority and the majority 's religion. If a prime minister legitimizes knowledge-based education by giving examples from the demands of Islam, how can minority-non-Muslim groups then be certain that they are adequately included in this education system? Moreover, the prime minister implies that secular knowledge and religious knowledge is complementing eachother. As Beng Kee (2006:67) points out;"the change in the mindset that is sought here seems to be a ' mental revolution' where religion seeks the same things as the nation-building project does." Accordingly, one can claim that the Malaysian education doesn't only promote dominant political ideology but also promotes a conception of knowledge inspired by the dominant religion.

4.6 From Text to Context: Chinese opposition as a challenge to Malay-dominated nation-building[13]

My analysis of texts showed that the public sphere is dominated by Malay-promoting political speeches. The language policy is legitimized by being presented as a need and natural action on the path of development. Moreover, the Malaysian nation is portrayed as a homogeneous entity. However, Malaysia is not consisted of one single homogeneous group and there are socio-economic and ethnic differences. Therefore, CDA facilitates understanding the Chinese opposition to the language policy. Now, I will conclude this chapter by focusing on the Chinese opposition.

So far, I have analyzed the dominant nationalist discourses of Malaysian politicians about language policy. As I mentioned in the theoretical part, in this study nation-building refers to a process where the state uses its power to promote the culture of the dominant group in order to assimilate less dominant minority groups. The analysis of certain discourses showed that this dominance is articulated through development-related projects. In a way, the nation-building project of the Malay-dominant government is highly related with development goals. Growth, progress, knowledge, English language, science and technology are often used in order to legitimize the government's policies. Following the growth-oriented trend of Asia, development is portrayed as a national matter and the only solution for all Malaysians. However, the brief history of language issues indicated that there is race-based uneven relationships in Malaysia concerning the education system. Beside the symbolic importance of education to one's identity in terms of socialization and cultural promotion, education is also a means for providing material benefits.(Schleider 1993: 23-24) Taking all into account, it is not surprising that the Chinese minority opposes the government policy that proposes a change in the medium of instruction.

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[13] Chinese opposition shouldn't be confused with the term minority nationalism. According to Kymlicka's definition, minority nationalism requires a mobilization in order to demand a state of their own.(Kymlicka 2001: 222) Moreover this study focuses only on language policy debate.

Shamsul (2004: 124) approaches the issue from a different perspective by assuming that the Chinese opposition is related with the identification of Chineseness. Following that, Chinese and Malays construct their identity in different levels, Chineseness is constructed according to language, family system, culture and ties with Mainland China whereas Malayness is constructed through the concept of kingship, language, custom and Islam. Therefore, majority –minority discourses have always taken place between the Malays and Chinese. (Shamsul 1998: 148) For both communities, "language is a marker of ethnic identity; a vehicle for expressing a distinct culture; source of national cohesion; and an instrument for building political community." (Safran 2004: 1) Hence, language defines the Malay and Chinese communities with the 'ethnic' sense of belonging. One cannot expect then that the Malaysian nation-building project based on a created homogeneous identity will succeed when three ethnically-conscious communities exist in Malaysia.

To conclude, the reasons for Chinese opposition to the policy of 'Teaching maths and science in English" can be summarized as following;

1- Chinese distrust in the Malaysian government derived from the historical inequality of education (especially on language issues after the implementation of NEP which favors Malay students)

2- The symbolic meaning of language as an identity-signifier for Chineseness.

3- The instrumental meaning of Chinese schools as a place to learn Chinese customs, beliefs, language and morals.

4- Chinese opposition as a challenge to the nation-building project that promotes Malaysian interests and culture.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of selected discourses clearly showed that the language policy has been constructed as a national project in order to pursue the developmental goals of Malaysia. On one hand, political figures legitimize this policy assuming that learning maths and science in English is the only and ultimate need of Malaysians.On the other hand, discourses on the philosophy and objectives of the education system in Malaysia, reflected the Malay identity pillars like language, religion and custom. Moreover, the speech of Ahmet Badawi can be considered as a sign of the increasing role of Islam as a tool to justify certain government policies. An interesting issue would be to study nation-building in Malaysia in the context of the revivalism of Islam and politics of Islam which Chong (2006: 26) considers as means to construct Malaysia as a model Muslim society.

In this paper, I wanted to show the Malay dominance in the political and public sphere. The dominance was reproduced through the speeches and attitudes of the political actors and the Ministry of Education by promoting the homogeneous idea of a nation rather than a multicultural society. Moreover, the strategies of understanding the dominance such as positive or negative representation, denial of differences and legitimization have been exercised in these discourses about education. CDA showed that the policy of teaching mathematic and science in English has been used both as a tool for nation-building project and a goal for development in Malaysia. After analyzing the discourses, I also consider the Chinese opposition as a challenge to the Malay dominant political project or nation-building process. The brief history on language debates and discourse analysis showed that there is race-biased education system and on-going majority-minority discourses regarding the Malaysian education. Therefore, the Chinese minority wants to preserve their language and culture by protecting Chinese schools. An interesting topic for further study would also be to look at Chinese schools in Malaysia, examine their symbolic meaning for Chinese culture and observe the challenges that they face in Malay-dominant culture.

By applying CDA, the controversial policy of teaching mathematics and science in English has been examined through the articulation of dominant political discourses in Malaysia. CDA was the appropriate method for this study since it facilitated an understanding of the selected texts in the social context. Different strategies have been used to recognize the dominance so that the Malaysian nation-building project has been seen clearly. The largest complication of this method is the multidimensional nature of its framework. Different concepts can be applied to different texts and each analysis should be done both as discursive and social levels. This makes the analysis part more complicated than a traditional way of analysis. Another complication is that CDA does not aim to solve problems and therefore, further studies are needed in order to provide solutions. In this study, CDA has been used to understand the situation over the issue of language policy rather than suggesting certain solutions. For that reason, one cannot make generalizations without pursuing a more extensive study.

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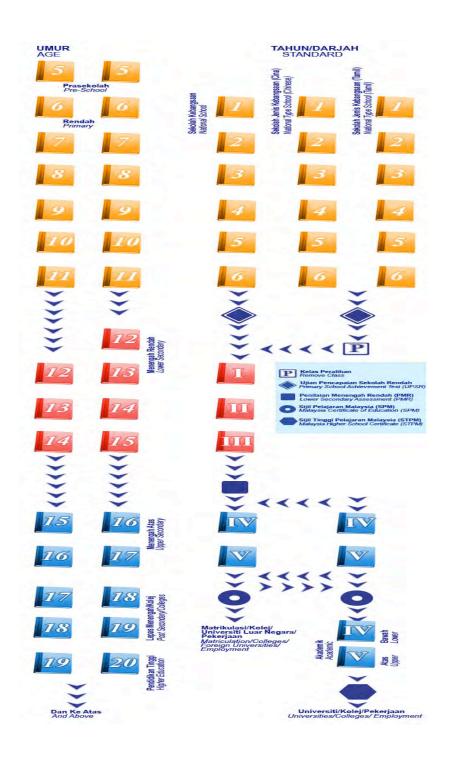
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APPENDIX I- MALAYSIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM CHART

SPEECH BY
YB. DATO' HISHAMMUDDIN TUN HUSSEIN
MINISTER OF EDUCATION, MALAYSIA

LAUNCH OF PRIMARY LITERATURE PROJECT

DATE : MONDAY, 28 JUNE 2004

TIME : 2.00P.M.

VENUE : TUN HUSSEIN ONN HALL, PWTC

Bismillahirrahmanirrahim

Yang Berbahagia Datuk Abu Hassan Kendut

Chairman, UEM Group

Mr Gerry Liston

Director, British Council, Malaysia

Yang Berbahagia, Dato' Kalimullah Mahseerul Hassan

Group Editor In Chief, New Straits Times Press (Malaysia) Berhad

Dr Sharifah Maimunah Syed Zain

Director, Curriculum Development Centre

Ministry of Education

Distinguished Guests

Representatives from the Ministry of Education and State Education Departments,

Headmasters of Participating Schools and Participating Teachers

Members of the Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

Assalamualaikum warrahmatullahi wabarakatuh

Salam Sejahtera and Good Afternoon

It is a great pleasure for me to be here with you today. As Minister of Education, it is indeed a pleasure for me to take part in the launch of another effort to enhance the quality of the Education we are able to provide the children of Malaysia. That part of our Educational curriculum that brings us all together today is the English language.

We are concerned about improving our children's mastery of English because we want to prepare our children to thrive in an increasingly interconnected and fast changing world. In this environment English is the medium for the exchange of information. It has become the lingua franca of international business, diplomacy and the exchange of scientific and technical information. About 85% of the nearly unimaginable quantity of text on the World Wide Web is in English. About the same proportion of Internet traffic is generated from English language using sources.

As a trading nation, and a nation open to the world, our children's' competence in English is a survival skill. It will enable them to exchange ideas, collaborate, make friends and trade internationally. It will enable them to stay connected with the vast engine of knowledge that is modern science. English is now a global language, and its use is no longer identified with any race or nation. While we have a National Language and our vernacular languages, Malaysians are also proud to have had a tradition of competence in the English language. Nevertheless, we recognize that the level of English language proficiency among our students is not what we would hope.

Acknowledging that we have a responsibility to do something and gathering the consensus and will to do something about it were important first steps. It is now time to take action, not just at the level of the Ministry and the Schools but together, as a society. Today's initiative is an example of the kind of action I am talking about. Not only are we rising to the challenge of improving our students' mastery of the English language but, importantly, we are doing it together. The Prime Minister YAB Dato' Abdullah Ahmad Badawi has called for alls sectors and levels of society – individuals, corporations, NGO's and the government, to make education a passion. He has said that "our education systems includes the roles of parents, the support the local community provides, the

synergies, that the private sector is willing to forge, and the awareness the media is willing to create. Therefore strengthening the education system is a national effort that requires participation by all Malaysians."

Today's initiative shows that what the Prime Minister called for can happen, and has begun to happen. We are responding to the needs and opportunities of Education as a nation. Naturally, as Minister of Education, I am happy to have as many collaborators as I can!

While we are all excited about today's efforts let us remember we are in the early stages of our work on a new approach and emphasis on our English language policy. It is only last year that the Ministry of Education took the bold step of having Science and Mathematics taught in English in all our schools. That commitment was backed by a substantial budget to train teachers to teach Science and Mathematics in English and to provide them with the resources to do so. Those resources will in large part be delivered via information and communications technologies. The Ministry's Curriculum Development Centre has coordinated a number of programs to provide additional professional training for teachers. So we have just started down this policy avenue, but already much is in the pipeline:

The Ministry has been busy doing its part. To come to grips with why our students are not attaining an acceptable level of competence in English we have been studying the contributing factors. We have looked at the issue from the perspective of teachers, students, resources and management. We have asked ourselves how can improve the quality and availability of good teaching. We have looked at ways to better motivate our students, give them an early foundation in English and give them opportunities to practice using the language. We are setting aside a substantial budget to improve the resources available to students and teachers of English. We are sending the message down the line to all school administrators and heads: You must take the English language attainment of your students seriously. I do not care to listen to excuses for not doing our best to give our children the key competencies, among which is fluency in English.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Our efforts to improve the teaching and learning of English are an integral part of my Ministry's commitment to the four areas of policy focus that I have outlined on other occasions:

1. The quality of teaching

2. The improvement of education in rural areas

3. The strengthening of National Schools as Schools of Choice

4. Education for the global economy.

You will notice that improving English language skills is integral to each of these priorities. We will be recruiting and training so as to improve the teaching of English. We will lay great emphasis on English language instruction in the rural schools, where we often have the lowest attainments. I want a key feature of our national schools to be that they provide excellent instruction in English. Our programmes in English will be delivered with the aid of ICT, and in tandem with instruction in ICT, much of which will be in English. We do this not to fulfill some short term desire to just say the right things but to open our children's' minds to the world and to equip them to one day compete and thrive in an increasingly networked world.

Therefore, I am very happy today that the UEM Group and its ICT arm, Time Engineering Berhad, have come forward to play their part in this national endeavour. I understand that RM 1.5 million has been allocated to the Primary Literature Project, to be delivered over the course of five years. Teachers would be introduced to new teaching techniques through Primary Literature training workshops. This will help teachers to find novel and interesting ways to help their students learn.

As YB Datuk Abu Hassan has mentioned, four modules of the course material have been digitized and will be given to participating teachers. This gives teachers the option to share the material they have received electronically.

UEM and Time have taken the initiative to convert the course materials into interactive presentations. Language learning can be fun if students are stimulated and encouraged to participate in activities meaningful to them. Interactive presentations, if done properly, can use animation, sound, colour and interactivity to get students excited about learning. They can encourage students to be active, exploratory learners rather than passive recipients of information.

I am also pleased to note that the New Straits Time's "Newspaper in Education" weekly supplement for primary schools will also be supplied to participating schools under the Primary Literature project. Teachers will also be given training in how to use these newspapers in class to enhance students' critical thinking skills. Therefore I want to encourage all participating teachers to share what you have learnt to day with your colleagues and students. Whatever information or techniques you have gained from today's workshop or on subsequent training events, use and pass on at your schools.

I hope that all parties involved in this Primary Literature Project will also give due attention to evaluating the project. Excellence is not a destination but a journey. There must be a proper mechanism for evaluating how you are doing and taking account of those evaluations so that you can act on them, adjust your methods and keep improving. The important thing, I think, is not so much to start with the perfect programme but to make sure that the programme itself keeps learning and getting better. I myself hope to lead a "learning ministry, and not just, you might say, a ministry of learning, "so I will be reading your programme evaluations and following what you do with interest.

Ladies and Gentlemen
As I said at the beginning, improving our education system is a national effort. I thank our private sector collaborators today for playing their part in contributing to a key element of our children's' education.
I hope more companies and organizations will follow your example in coming forward. You know where to reach me, and I wait to hear of your ideas and proposals. I look

forward to the successful implementation of the Primary Literature Project. It is with great pleasure that I launch this project officially.