

ENGLISH AS A LINGUA FRANCA IN ASEAN

A MULTILINGUAL MODEL

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The origins of ASEAN and the role of English

This chapter will give a brief summary of the context in which the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established with the signing of the Bangkok Declaration in August 1967 by the five founding member countries. The circumstances surrounding the joining of the remaining five countries will also be reviewed. The main principles of the original 1967 Bangkok Declaration will be compared with those of the recently signed ASEAN Charter. An introduction to the role that English plays within the Association and the place and role of other languages underpins the chapter.

Background

The Bangkok Declaration of 8 August 1967 heralded the formation of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). While today all ten nations of Southeast Asia are members, the number of founder member states was only five: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. Brunei joined in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, Laos and Burma (Myanmar) in 1997 and finally, Cambodia, in 1999.

ASEAN was born at a time of political uncertainty and ‘in the most unpromising circumstances’ (Severino 2008: 3). Previous regional alliances or groupings had been tried but failed for various political reasons (Curley and Thomas 2007). These included the Association of South Asia (ASA) of 1961, the 1963 grouping of Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines (MAPHILINDO) and the Asia and Pacific Council (ASPAC). In 1967, the regional political situation was one of conflict. The Vietnam war was raging and the Chinese Cultural Revolution was in full swing, both of which threatened to spill over into Southeast Asia and threaten the stability of the region (Severino 2008). Rajaratnam, the foreign minister of Singapore at the time and one of the signatories to the Bangkok Declaration, has recently

recalled that ASEAN was born out of a common fear. 'Regional countries were faced with managing the effects of de-colonisation, confrontation with the forces of communism, and separatism. These newly independent countries were also pre-occupied with building their economies and national identities' (Kesavapany 2005: vii). It was this combination of common interests expressed primarily through an anti-communist position and fear of regional instability that was the major motivating force for the foundation of ASEAN (Hagiwara 1992).

The countries of ASEAN are characterized by 'political, cultural and historical diversity' (Severino 2005: 15). All the world's great religions have significant numbers of adherents in countries throughout the region; there is extraordinary ethnic diversity, with more than 300 ethnic groups in Indonesia alone, and the region is home to more than 1,000 languages including Sinitic, Tai, Malayo-Polynesian, Mon-Khmer, Viet-Muong and Papuan, not to mention the languages of the earlier colonizers, of which English is now the most important, and whose role in ASEAN is the major topic of this book.

Given the political uncertainty of the times and the range of diversity within and between the five founding countries of ASEAN, one might have expected the Bangkok Declaration to be a highly detailed and juridical document. In fact, the opposite was true, as the Bangkok Declaration contains only five Articles and covers only two pages of text (<http://www.aseansec.org/1212.htm>). The seven aims and purposes of ASEAN, as expressed in the original declaration, were:

1. To accelerate the economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region through joint endeavours in the spirit of equality and partnership in order to strengthen the foundation for a prosperous and peaceful community of South-East Asian Nations;
2. To promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries of the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter;
3. To promote active collaboration and mutual assistance on matters of common interest in the economic, social, cultural, technical, scientific and administrative fields;
4. To provide assistance to each other in the form of training and research facilities in the educational, professional, technical and administrative spheres;
5. To collaborate more effectively for the greater utilization of their agriculture and industries, the expansion of their trade, including the study of the problems of international commodity trade, the improvement of their transportation and communications facilities and the raising of the living standards of their peoples;
6. To promote South-East Asian studies;

7. To maintain close and beneficial co-operation with existing international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes, and explore all avenues for even closer co-operation among themselves.

There is no mention here of a working language or languages for the Association; nor is there any mention of the languages of the region as a whole, points which will be further considered later.

As Severino has noted (2005: 4), and as signalled by the tone of the original Declaration, the Bangkok Declaration heralded an 'ASEAN' way of doing things, which relied not on juridical documents but on consensus building in a loose and informal way. The ASEAN way is based on two Malay concepts, namely *musyawarah* (dialogue) and *muafakat* (consensus) (Curley and Thomas 2007: 9). In its original formulation, therefore, ASEAN had no central authority, no juridical personality or legal standing under international law (Severino 2005: 6).

After more than forty years of this loose structure and consensual approach to decision making, however, politicians from the region recognized the need for a more formal and legal organization and structure. This resulted in the ASEAN Charter, a document of fifty-five articles and some thirty-five pages of text, (<http://www.aseansec.org/21069.pdf>) and which is, in effect, the group's constitution. The Charter was adopted at the 13th ASEAN summit in November 2007, but in order to become legally binding, all ten member countries needed to ratify it. The charter attempts to define 'a more cohesive structure with specific rules of engagement for member countries', including 'enforceable obligations' (Kumar and Siddique 2008: 75), while, at the same time, maintaining the sanctity of the sovereign state through the principle of non-supra-nationality, a balancing act which is likely to prove difficult. As Kumar and Siddique point out, the 'one word that is anathema to ASEAN ... is integration' (2008: 86). It is not clear how such a diverse and disparate group of nations can work together in any significant way. The principles listed under Article 2 of the new Charter specify the policy of unity in diversity. How nations so intent on guarding their own sovereign rights will work together to implement a policy of unity in diversity also remains unclear.

The Charter was finally signed into law in February 2009 at the ASEAN summit held in Hua Hin, Thailand, after an unscheduled delay of some two months. Rather embarrassingly, given the circumstances, the delay was caused by the closure of Thailand's international airport by anti-government supporters of the ousted Thai prime minister, Thaksin Sinawatra, an issue about which ASEAN members kept characteristically silent.

Article 1 of the new Charter lists fifteen purposes of ASEAN, up from the seven of the original Declaration. They are:

1. To maintain and enhance peace, security and stability and to further strengthen peace-oriented values in the region;
2. To enhance regional resilience by promoting greater political, security, economic and socio-cultural co-operation;
3. To preserve Southeast Asia as a Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone and free of all other weapons of mass destruction;
4. To ensure that the peoples and Member States of ASEAN live in peace with the world at large in a just, democratic and harmonious environment;
5. To create a single market and production base which is stable, prosperous, highly competitive and economically integrated with effective facilitation for trade and investment in which there is free flow of goods, services and investment; facilitated movement of business persons, professionals, talents and labour; and freer flow of capital;
6. To alleviate poverty and narrow the development gap within ASEAN through mutual assistance and co-operation;
7. To strengthen democracy, enhance good governance and the rule of law, and to promote and protect human rights and fundamental freedoms, with due regard to the rights and responsibilities of the Member States of ASEAN;
8. To respond effectively, in accordance with the principle of comprehensive security, to all forms of threats, transnational crimes and transboundary challenges;
9. To promote sustainable development so as to ensure the protection of the region's environment, the sustainability of its natural resources, the preservation of its cultural heritage and the high quality of life of its peoples;
10. To develop human resources through closer co-operation in education and life-long learning, and in science and technology, for the empowerment of the peoples of ASEAN and for the strengthening of the ASEAN Community;
11. To enhance the well-being and livelihood of the peoples of ASEAN by providing them with equitable access to opportunities for human development, social welfare and justice;
12. To strengthen co-operation in building a safe, secure and drug-free environment for the peoples of ASEAN;
13. To promote a people-oriented ASEAN in which all sectors of society are encouraged to participate in, and benefit from, the process of ASEAN integration and community building;
14. To promote an ASEAN identity through the fostering of greater awareness of the diverse culture and heritage of the region; and
15. To maintain the centrality and proactive role of ASEAN as the primary driving force in its relations and co-operation with its external partners in a regional architecture that is open, transparent and inclusive.

There are a number of interesting points of difference between the fifteen purposes listed in the Charter when compared with the original seven of the Declaration. The Charter is more specific — it mentions the creation of a single market (#5) and the determination to make Southeast Asia a Nuclear Weapon-free zone (#3), for example. The Charter is also politically bolder and makes direct reference to democracy (#4 and #7) and to Human Rights (#7). One area where the original Declaration was specific concerned the promotion of Southeast Asian studies as one of its seven purposes. The new Charter makes no reference to this, but rather seeks to promote an ASEAN identity ‘through the fostering of greater awareness of the diverse culture and heritage of the region’ (#14).

Article 2 of the Charter lists fourteen ‘principles’ which member states are expected to follow and promote. As noted earlier, these include ‘respect for the different cultures, languages and religions of the peoples of ASEAN while emphasizing their common values in the spirit of unity in diversity’. It is interesting to note that ‘unity in diversity’ is also the slogan of Indonesia (*bhinneka tunggal ita*), where Bahasa Indonesia, the national lingua franca, provides the ‘glue’ to bind the diversity together. ‘Unity in diversity’ slogans may actually be signalling unity at some cost to diversity.

Although Article 2 lists ‘respect for the different languages of the peoples of ASEAN’ as one of the principles, this does not translate into any official commitment into the study, teaching or learning of these languages by member states, a position which, as will be shown below, stands in stark contrast to that taken by member states of the European Union (EU). Unlike the original Declaration, however, language is mentioned in the Charter, albeit only once. Article 34, the ‘Working Language of ASEAN’, states that ‘the working language of ASEAN shall be English’. There are, however, no other references to language or languages in the Charter.

The adoption of English

The lack of mention of languages and the decision to adopt English as the sole working language of ASEAN will no doubt strike many readers as remarkable, given, for example, the language policies of the other successful regional organization, the European Union and the intense debate which surround these (cf. Wright 2007a, Phillipson 2003, Tosi 2003). In striking contrast to ASEAN, the European Union has twenty-three official and working languages.¹ Important documents are translated into every official language. The European Parliament provides translation into all languages for documents for its plenary sessions. However, these are usually first translated into the so-called major languages. As a result, many who do not read these major languages are disadvantaged as ‘the translation of essential

documents and amendments may take longer to appear in the “small” languages than the “big”, and may sometimes arrive too late to be studied properly before the meeting’ (Wright 2007b: 157). Interpreting also follows a similar ‘relay’ pattern by which a speech of, for example, an Estonian delegate, is first interpreted from Estonian into English or French before then being translated from English or French into the other languages.

The Council of Europe has established the European Centre for Modern Languages whose task is to promote the teaching and learning of European languages. To quote from its website, ‘Europe needs citizens who can all communicate in some of the many languages spoken within its borders’. It promotes policies which aim to maintain linguistic diversity and plurilingualism, by which is meant the ability of Europeans to achieve functional levels of proficiency in European languages according to their needs (Beacco and Byram 2003). These aims are further strengthened by the European Cultural Convention, which commits the states party to the Convention to promote the reciprocal teaching and learning of their languages. Each Contracting Party shall, insofar as may be possible:

- a. encourage the study by its own nationals of the languages, history and civilisation of the other Contracting Parties and grant facilities to those Parties to promote such studies in its territory,
 - b. endeavour to promote the study of its languages, history and civilisation in the territory of the other Contracting Parties and grant facilities to the nationals of those Parties to pursue such studies in its territory.
- (<http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/Commun/QueVoulezVous.asp?NT=018&CM=2&DF=13/12/2005&CL=ENG>)

The Council of Europe and the European Commission both promote the importance of Europeans learning languages other than their first language. The European Commission’s Action Plan for Language Learning hopes to see people learning their mother tongue and two other European languages, and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages has the protection of these languages as its goal (Baetens Beardsmore 2009). While it is true that English is becoming the increasingly dominant language, there are policies in place to encourage the learning of other European languages.

While no one would argue that the language policy of the EU was perfect, especially with regard to the increasing dominance of English, the contrast between the official EU and ASEAN policies is remarkable. Indeed, as has been noted above, language was not mentioned in the original Bangkok Declaration of 1967. There was no mention even of which language(s) was (were) to be used as working languages. In the event, English immediately became the one and only de facto working language.

In her study of the process behind this de facto adoption of English as the only working and official language for the original members of ASEAN, Okudaira interviewed a number of key ASEAN figures. The three answers listed below are representative of their replies:

‘the idea of English as the common language came out automatically’,

‘there has been no regulation for the use of English but it has been used in all the actual situations’, and

‘we took it for granted’ (1999: 95–96)

Further evidence that the use of English as the sole working language was quietly accepted by the founding member states comes from an article on ASEAN negotiating styles. Although the author describes in detail the negotiating styles of speakers from different countries, no reference is made to the language in which the negotiations are conducted (Thambipillai 1992). It is automatically assumed that this is English. This lack of a mention of the language is particularly interesting as the author makes reference to national negotiating styles, and says that the Singaporeans seem ‘to be the most articulate with well substantiated arguments and facts to support claims’ (1992: 74). The fact that the negotiations were being conducted through English and that this might have given the Singaporeans an advantage is not considered, even though the negotiations were ‘direct and forthright’ (75), which would suggest a strong influence from an ‘Anglo’ negotiating style. In contrast, Philippine negotiators are classified as ‘less specific’ and ‘not too clear of their wants’, while the Malaysians are ‘less open and more rigid’ (75). Differences in national negotiating styles are also discussed by Ahmad (1992), but again there is no mention of the language used in decision making.

These articles come from *The ASEAN Reader* (Sandhu 1992). There is a companion volume, *The Second ASEAN Reader* (Siddique 2003), which provides a fount of information about ASEAN on a whole host of topics but does not discuss language at all. That there is not one chapter out of the total of the almost two hundred chapters in these volumes which discusses language issues in any form is surprising. It also underlines, however, how uncontroversial the notion of using English as the sole working language of ASEAN has been and how unconcerned regional politicians appear to be about local languages. The attitude has been well captured by Okudaira (1999: 96), ‘There was a shared mutual understanding among the member countries regarding the use of English’. And in a volume in which those involved in the writing of the ASEAN Charter give their thoughts on the process, only one person mentions any issues connected with the use of English during the process. Ong Keng Yong, an ambassador-at-large in the Singaporean Ministry of Foreign Affairs recalls:

The use of the English language as the working language of ASEAN produced an unintended outcome! There is a multiplicity of grammatical and spelling preferences originating from the peculiar usage of English in each member state. At the Charter drafting sessions, such differences delayed a quick consensus on wording and many formulations had to be put in square brackets (to be revisited later) (Ong 2009: 111).

It is therefore worth recalling ASEAN's founding membership to see if this provides any possible explanation for the lack of concern about which languages might be working languages. The five founding member states were Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand. The roles and status of English were quite different in these countries and a detailed account of the development and roles of English in the ASEAN countries will be provided in Chapters 2 and 3. Here, therefore, only a brief review of the situation in selected countries will be provided.

Following Kachru (1992c), countries can be classified into one of three circles depending on the history, role and status of English within them. Countries where English has been traditionally spoken as the major language are classified as 'inner circle countries'. These include countries such as Britain, the United States and Australia. Countries which were British or American colonies and where English plays an institutional role are classified as 'outer circle' countries. ASEAN member states which fall into this category include Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore, where, because of their colonial past, English continues to play major institutional roles, and where it is possible to talk about local varieties of English, such as Singaporean and Filipino English. While Burma seems to fit this category in the sense that it was once a British colony and where English played a major role, the inward-looking xenophobic policies initiated by U Ne Win and the Burmese Socialist Programme Party (BSPP) from 1962 led to the marginalization of English. There has been some attempt to reverse such marginalization in recent years, but with little success. Kachru's third group of countries are classified as expanding circle countries. In such countries, English traditionally played no internal role and was taught only as a foreign language. Indonesia presents such an example. Not only was it a colony of a non-English-speaking colonizer, the Dutch, but it is also a land with a hugely diverse range of languages and cultures. After freedom from, first the Dutch, and then the Japanese, Indonesia has sought to promote a local language, a variety of Malay, to become the national lingua franca. In this, it has been remarkably successful, so that the great majority of Indonesians are now able to communicate through what is called Bahasa Indonesia. English is the second language of the educated urban elite and is also the first foreign language taught in schools, but often with only limited success (Dardjowidjojo 2000). Thailand, another expanding circle country, is the only country within ASEAN that has never been colonized. As in

Indonesia, English is now the first second language but, as in Indonesia, it is not being taught or learned very successfully.

Finally, there are the expanding circle countries which are made up of the former French colony of Indo-China, namely Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. While these countries have seen a dramatic increase in the number of English learners, largely at the expense of French, levels of English even among the elite — particularly in Laos and Cambodia — remain comparatively low, and this disadvantages them in ASEAN seminars and meetings.

To return to the original five founding member states, English operated as an institutional language in the outer circle countries of Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore to the extent that specific local varieties of English had developed. This could not be said of Indonesia, where English really only existed as a school language and where the real language planning focus was on the adoption of Bahasa Indonesia as the national lingua franca. In Thailand, English also only occupied the position of a school language. Thai language policy centred on the national adoption of Standard Thai.

Despite the comparable history of English as a colonial language in Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore, however, the role of and attitudes to English were quite different in these three countries. For example, in the very year of the Bangkok Declaration, Malaysia introduced the National Language Act which decreed that the medium of instruction in education, from primary through to tertiary, would gradually switch from English to Malay, a process that was given some twenty years to complete. This was the start of the period of Malaysianization, brought to its culmination with the policies of Dr Mahathir, who became prime minister in 1981, a position he held until 2003. It is only relatively recently, from 2002, that Malaysia has seen a change in policy, with, for example, the revival of English as the medium of instruction for science and maths subjects in primary and secondary schools. Recent developments, however, have led to the abandonment of this policy and a reversal to Malay as the medium of instruction for maths and science in primary schools. This will be reviewed in more detail in Chapter 2.

Malaysia's policies of Malaysianization were at least partly responsible for the split between Singapore and Malaysia in 1965. Language policies played a significant part. Malaysia was keen to promote the status of Malay and used language policy to help in this. In contrast, the prime minister of the newly independent Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, was adamant that English would play a major role in the education of Singaporeans. This campaign has been so successful that Singapore can now be classified as a country where English is spoken as the first language by a significant and increasing proportion of its citizens. The recent census showed that 60% of children

in Primary 1 reported using English as their first home language. Whether the campaign has been as successful in developing bilingualism among Singaporeans is another question, and one which will be revisited later.

While English may have held important institutional roles in three of the five founder member states, the same and more could be said about Malay. Malay is the national language of both Malaysia and Singapore. And Bahasa Indonesia, which is a variety of Malay, is the national lingua franca of Indonesia. In addition, many people in the Southern Philippines and some in Southern Thailand speak varieties of Malay, or languages related to Malay. And, as we have seen, Malaysia was embarking on a policy to promote the use of Malay. Despite all this, there was no call at this stage for Malay to be at least one of the working languages of ASEAN.

Possible explanations for the 'natural' adoption of English as the working language include the view that it represented the language of modernization and advancement on the one hand (Rappa and Wee 2006), and the language of democratically supported power on the other, a particularly important motivation, given the Vietnam war and the anti-communist stance of the ASEAN states.

There have, however, been periodic, if infrequent, calls for other languages to be adopted as working languages in ASEAN and these will be considered below.

Calls for other languages

As new states joined ASEAN, one might have expected some debate over the use of English only, and indeed there was some. Brunei was the next country to join, in 1984, the year it achieved independence from Britain. Hardly surprisingly, however, given its small size on the one hand and the institutional role of English on the other, its membership occasioned no radical re-thinking of the language policy. It was not until Vietnam's membership in 1995 that the role of English only was questioned. It is not difficult to see why Vietnam did so, given its history of being a French colony and then under Russian influence during the communist period. Ironically, however, in the discussions leading to their membership, Vietnam asked for consideration to be given to adopting a second 'colonial' language, French, as ASEAN's second official language, but this request was rebuffed with the curt, 'No, English only' (Okudaira 1999: 101).

As outlined above, it was surprising, given the passing of the National Language Act in Malaysia in 1967 and the relatively widespread role of Malay within the founder member countries of ASEAN that there was no call for the adoption of Malay in the early years of ASEAN's existence. An official request for Malay to be adopted had to wait until 1997 to be tabled.

At a meeting of the ASEAN Committee on Culture and Information, the Malaysian minister of information suggested the adoption of Malay as ASEAN's second official language. Even though, as we have seen, there was some justification for this — Malay is also the official language of Brunei, so has national language status in four of the ten countries of the ASEAN nations — no one was prepared to take up the suggestion (Okudaira 1999: 101). When I raised this with the then director of the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) in Bangkok in December 2007, he replied that accepting Malay as an official language would be 'opening Pandora's box'.

Since then there has been no official request for a language other than English to be adopted as an official or working language of ASEAN. That is not to say, however, that there are no moves being made to have other languages considered. The main candidate remains Malay. Concerned Malay linguists from Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei continue to lobby for its adoption. In addition to the practical reasons for adopting Malay, these scholars also present historical reasons for its adoption. For example, Abas (2000) argues that a language known as Kw'enlun, operated as a Malay lingua franca two thousand years ago through the islands of the Nusantara Archipelago (an area encompassing most of present-day Indonesia, and the Philippine and Malaysian archipelagos), and that its position as a regional lingua franca is thus well-established. Abas also points out that one of the reasons why Malay was adopted as a regional lingua franca is that it posed no threat to others. Its original speakers were seafarers and represented a minority. This minority-speaker status was also a major reason for its later adoption as the national language of Indonesia (Alisjahbana 1976). However, Abas' claim that Malay is about 'to become the official language of wider communication in the region of Southeast Asia and beyond' (2000: 245) appears wildly optimistic, especially given that the new ASEAN Charter lists only English as the working language of ASEAN.

There have also been rather more strident calls for the acceptance of Malay, based on the notion of Malay becoming the working language of the 'East Asian Community', an idea long held by a minority of Malay politicians (Rashid 1993). Some argue that 'Malay must become the official language of ASEAN and an international language' (Makarenko and Pogadaev 2000: 218), but these calls remain largely unheeded. In fact, and in Malaysia itself, English remains important. While the policy to teach maths and science in English caused considerable controversy and has recently been rescinded, Dr Mahathir's current view demonstrates a significant shift from the early Malaysianization policy with which he was so closely associated. He now believes that English is the primary conduit of knowledge creation and dissemination (Gill 2007), arguing that those without knowledge will be 'slaves to those who have knowledge'. This view appears to be accepted

by the majority (Rappa and Wee 2006). All this seriously weakens the case of those who are calling for Malay to be adopted as the second working language of ASEAN. The perception that English is *the* language of science and modernity means that it is becoming increasingly adopted in the regional school curricula, often at the expense of local languages. This theme is developed in greater depth in later chapters.

Is there another language that might be adopted as a working language of ASEAN? The membership of Laos in 1997 and Cambodia in 1999 means that there are now three countries with a French colonial past. Given Vietnam's earlier request for French to be considered, a renewed request for French might have been expected. In fact, however, Vietnam has been successful in fast-tracking the learning of English and the United Nations' (UN) presence in Cambodia with UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia) has also heightened the need and motivation for English in that country, as has membership of ASEAN itself (Keuk 2007). This leaves Laos, where English has also replaced French as the first foreign language. The fact that Vietnam has moved so successfully and quickly to adopting English as the second language and that Cambodia's reliance on the UN has suddenly prioritized the need for English may explain why no official request for French has been reiterated. A further reason for this may be the general decline of the role of French as an international language (Phillipson 2008), although, as will be shown in Chapter 3, the French francophone agency, AUPELF, is now teaching French to more Vietnamese than during the time when Vietnam was a French colony. Nevertheless, it remains highly unlikely that ASEAN would accept French as a working language, which no doubt disadvantages some, especially Laotian and Cambodian delegates. Anecdotal evidence indicates that many Laotian and Cambodian delegates remain silent in various ASEAN fora because of their relatively low proficiency in English.

The likelihood of ASEAN moving towards the EU model and accepting all member languages as official languages, is also highly unlikely. ASEAN officials are only too aware of the complexity associated with the need for the translation and interpretation service in the EU to say nothing of the cost. Tagliabue (2006) has estimated the annual EU translation and interpreting bill to be US\$1.3 billion. Thus ASEAN bureaucrats identify the use of English as the sole official and working language of ASEAN as offering great advantages. It saves enormously on costs and labour, it allows direct dialogue between member states (although, as we have seen, some member states are more equal than others here), it allows easy dialogue internationally and it facilitates technology and knowledge transfer (Okudaira 1999). The assistant to the secretary general of ASEAN at the time of the drafting of the ASEAN Charter, Termsak Chalermphanupap, sees the adoption of English as the sole working language as representing

a great advantage which ASEAN has over the European Union (2009: 132). The ASEAN Charter is unequivocal: 'The working language of ASEAN shall be English.'

What about Putonghua?

One language which might come to work alongside English as a working language of ASEAN is Mandarin Chinese (Putonghua). While the only ASEAN country where it is an official language is Singapore, there is a significant ethnic Chinese presence throughout the countries of ASEAN. Chinese languages are spoken in all the countries of ASEAN and Putonghua is becoming increasingly spoken as the lingua franca among overseas Chinese communities. The establishment of the ASEAN + 3 grouping, where the '+3' are Korea, Japan and China, simply adds to the outreach of Putonghua with the realization that Southeast and Northeast Asia are interdependent (Curley and Thomas 2007: 12).

The Chinese government is also actively promoting the teaching and learning of Chinese internationally. For example, an increasing number of Confucius Institutes are being established around the world — some five hundred are planned by 2010 — with several in the ASEAN region. The aims of the Confucius Institutes are similar to those of the British Council, namely, they aim to spread language and culture in such a way to make people sympathetic towards the culture and make them want to learn the language. At the same time, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of other Putonghua training centres throughout the ASEAN region and Putonghua is also becoming an increasingly common school subject. Finally, it represents one of the world's great civilizations and the fastest growing economic and political power. On the face of it, then, it would seem a strong candidate for a working language of ASEAN.

The major — perhaps the only — disadvantage that Chinese has is a linguistic one, namely the complexity of its script. This complexity is well understood by the Chinese themselves. Indeed, the low levels of literacy occasioned by the complexity of script is often cited as one of the major reasons for China's backwardness at the beginning of the twentieth century, where scholars at the then Beijing Imperial University seriously argued for the development of an alphabetic script, if not the complete abolition of the language itself (Ramsey 1987: 3).

Literacy in Chinese is usually measured by the number of characters a learner has acquired (Chen 1999: 136*ff*). Primary school leavers are expected to know about 2,500. The actual figure in Hong Kong is 2,600 compared with 2,834 in China itself (Taylor and Taylor 1995: 136). University graduates are expected to know at least 3,500, while the highly educated may know up to 10,000 characters.

Learning to read and write Chinese takes time. It has been estimated that the Chinese spend two years more on learning to write Chinese than people who use alphabetic systems (Chen 1999). To this, however, must be added the extra curriculum (and homework) time devoted to learning how to read and write. For example, 30% of class time is spent on learning the language — most of it in learning to read and write (Chen 1999; Taylor and Taylor 1995).

Recognizing the inherent difficulty associated with learning to write Chinese, the post-1949 government of China introduced a series of language reforms designed to make the language easier to learn. Two such initiatives, the use of an alphabetic language, *pinyin*, as an aid in primary schools, coupled with the development of simplified characters, have significantly increased the national literacy rate in China (Taylor and Taylor 1995). Attempts to make Chinese an alphabetic language have been abandoned, however, as the huge number of homophones in Chinese means that these cannot be adequately distinguished in an alphabetic script. For example, the Putonghua sound *ji* in the first tone can have some thirty-five different meanings. Another major reason why the Chinese government will resist moves to alphabetization is that they understand this will inevitably lead to a significant undermining of what it means to be Chinese. The written script has been the primary tool in giving the Chinese people a sense of common inheritance and kinship. It has for millennia acted as a bridge between the mutually unintelligible Chinese dialects, as, with certain exceptions, the written form is common to all. 'Ethnolinguistic cohesion would have been impossible if somewhere in the linguistic history of China, written Chinese had gone down the road of alphabetisation' (Li 2006: 152).

Despite the recent reforms introduced by the Chinese government, learning to read and write Chinese remains a time-consuming process. This raises questions concerning whether children would have enough time to learn how to read and write Chinese. Would there be enough time in the school curriculum for children to acquire Chinese literacy? As will be illustrated in later sections of the book, the school language curriculum in ASEAN countries is already under significant strain, and part of this is indeed due to the increasing popularity of Putonghua.

In any event, there is, in my view, little likelihood that Putonghua will join English as a working language of ASEAN in the near future.

English and other languages

In closing this first chapter, I shall briefly foreshadow some of the issues concerning the relationship between English and other languages in the context of education and the school curriculum which will be dealt with in detail in later chapters.

Without exception, the amount of English in the school curriculum has increased over the past decade in each of the ten ASEAN countries. All countries now teach English as part of the primary curriculum, with Brunei and the Philippines also teaching content subjects — typically maths and science subjects — through English. In Singapore, English is *the* medium of instruction. The other languages associated with the Singaporean government's bilingual policy — Chinese, Malay and Tamil — are taught only as subjects. In Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos, where schools used to teach French, Russian and German along with English, English has now become the major second language. As one commentator reports for Vietnam:

when Vietnam embarked on economic reforms in 1986 ... it prompted a nation wide rush to learn English ... English classes were crammed with not just students but also professionals such as doctors and engineers as well as retired government officials, senior police, army officers and diplomats (cited in Ho and Wong 2004: 1)

English has been introduced into the primary curriculum in Indonesia and Thailand, although only as an optional subject in the case of Indonesia. As will be argued in Part III, it is hard to see how this policy can lead to successful language learning, given the shortage of qualified language teachers and suitable teaching materials. In the bleak assessment of the situation in Indonesia, Dardjowidjojo lists a whole catalogue of linguistic and non-linguistic reasons for the 'failure' of English language teaching there (2000: 28). In an attempt to solve the problems of the acute shortage of qualified and proficient teachers of English, the Thai government recently went on a mass recruitment campaign for 10,000 native speakers of English to teach in primary and secondary schools throughout the country. Perhaps fortunately, as these teachers required no qualifications or vetting, this was extremely unsuccessful. Yet this blanket-like employment of unqualified and unvetted native speakers in itself gives rise to serious ethical and professional issues. It is impossible to estimate how many of these native speakers of English are teaching English through East and Southeast Asia at the moment, but China alone hires some 150,000 'foreign experts' a year, many of whom fall into this category (Jeon and Lee 2006).

The shortage of qualified English teachers is mirrored in other East Asian countries. China has introduced English as a primary school subject and the number of teachers required for this alone is incalculable. And a recent policy announcement from South Korea includes a five-year plan for all subjects to be taught in English (Card 2008). Although this plan has since been considerably watered-down, English remains a priority in Korean primary schools. In Part III, the privileging of the native speaker over local

multilingual teachers is discussed in depth, where it will be argued that local governments need to place their resources in the training of local multilinguals rather than in the employment of native speakers, especially monolinguals with no relevant qualifications.

This rush towards English also comes at the expense of local languages. Where people can afford it, it is not uncommon for them to send their children to private English-medium schools. They are therefore prepared to sacrifice fluency or literacy in their child's first or national language for proficiency in English. This is common even in Hong Kong. 'To actually forsake the public school system that teaches in your own language for the private one that teaches in English is an increasingly common phenomenon' (Wang 2007: xiv).

At the same time, despite the principle enshrined in Article 2 of the new ASEAN Charter 'to respect the different cultures and languages of the region', there is little evidence that ASEAN countries are teaching each other's languages. With the exception of Putonghua, which, as reported above, is becoming increasingly popular and taught in more and more schools, no Asian languages (other than the first language) are taught as part of the core curriculum. A recent study of the Vietnamese curriculum helps bring this home (Baker and Giacchino-Baker 2003). They report that while some 98% and 95% of children at primary and upper secondary schools respectively study a foreign language, English accounts for a staggering 97.9% while French accounts for 1.69%, Russian 0.32% and Chinese 0.03% (2003: 8). What this suggests is that it is the linguistic capital of languages that is being bought and sold in the linguistic marketplace. The political impetus for promoting the teaching and learning of specific languages is almost entirely instrumental (cf. Rappa and Wee 2006). Signs of integrative or humanistic motivations are absent, despite Article 2. These issues and their implications for language education are discussed in much greater detail in the final part of the book. In the next two chapters, more detailed accounts of the historical development and current roles of English in each of the member states of ASEAN is provided. The development of the respective national language is also considered. The focus of Chapter 2 is on the so-called 'outer circle' countries, namely, Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines. Chapter 3 focuses on the so-called 'expanding circle' countries of Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam and it will be argued that the increasing role of English within these countries suggests that 'expanding circle' may not be an appropriate classification for these countries any more. Burma is also included here.



Notes

Preface

1. The origin of the term ‘lingua franca’ stems from when Germanic Franks moved into Gaul in the fifth century and adopted the local language, which became known as the language of the Franks, *lingua franca* (Phillipson 2008: 261). Ostler (2005: 407) says the term was first used in the Levant. It has a number of possible plural forms, including *lingue franche*, *linguae francae* and *linguas franca*, but ‘lingua francas’ is now the most common.
2. While the official name of the country is now Myanmar, I refer to it as Burma, as this remains the name most people are familiar with.

Chapter 1

1. As of May 2009 they were: Bulgarian, Czech, Danish, Dutch, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Italian, Irish, Latvian, Lithuanian, Maltese, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Slovak, Slovenian, Spanish, and Swedish. As more nations join with national languages other than these, so will the number of official and working languages increase.

Introduction to Part II

1. A list of these is provided in Appendix 2.

Chapter 4

1. Wells’ lexical sets are: KIT, DRESS, TRAP, LOT, STRUT, FOOT, BATH, CLOTH, NURSE, FLEECE, FACE, PALM, THOUGHT, GOAT, GOOSE, PRICE, CHOICE, MOUTH, NEAR, SQUARE, START, NORTH, FORCE, CURE (Wells 1982: xviii).
2. Unless otherwise indicated, the examples of ASEAN ELF all come from Deterding and Kirkpatrick (2006: 391–409).

Chapter 6

1. This chapter draws on Kirkpatrick (2007b), 'The communicative strategies of ASEAN speakers of English as a lingua franca', in D. Prescott (ed.), *English in Southeast Asia: Literacies, Literatures and Varieties* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing), pp. 121–139.

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