Babel or Behemoth: Language Trends in Asia
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READING THE CENSUS: LANGUAGE USE IN ASIA

~ Tan Ying Ying

Abstract

Using census information on language use in Asia, this article aims to see how the census determines the languages used by the people in Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia and India, and how the use of these languages has changed over the past two or three decades. At the same time, this article ponders how the census data presented is inextricably linked to historical baggage and political agendas.

The Census Problem

The heterogeneity of the people in Asia makes for particularly interesting linguistic ecologies. Multilingualism, both for individuals and the states, has become, and perhaps has always been, an inevitable consequence of this, despite the rigorous language planning and management policies set by the governing bodies in Asia.

Using census information on language use in the Asian countries, this article aims to see how the census determines the languages used by the people in Asia, and how the use of these languages has changed over the past two or three decades. One would expect, rather easily, to gather factual information about language use in Asia. One would also expect the questions asked to be largely similar. The reality however is not so.

Language information for some countries, China for example, is not available because language questions are simply not asked. For some countries, language questions were dropped out of the census, even though

they were there for some years previously. Malaysia's census data contained language use information for the years 1970 and 1980, but not in 1990 and 2000. This is a pity, because it would be particularly interesting, if not crucial, to observe and note the patterns of language change in Malaysia, especially for indigenous languages like Kadazan and Dusun in East Malaysia; and in West Malaysia, to observe the use of English with the changes in the Malaysian education system and the rapid 'cosmopolitanisation' of the city. In the 1980 and 1990 census of Indonesia, the top nine languages according to the number of speakers in Indonesia were surveyed, presenting information on the extent to which these languages were used in the home. In the 2000 census, the language question was dropped completely and in its place was the ethnicity question, reflecting the current political concerns of the country.

The language questions asked for each country's census were different, and they were different because the language concerns for each country reflect to a very large extent, questions about the dynamics of historical baggage and political agendas. The languages that the people in India claimed as their "mother tongues" were important questions in the Indian census. The language question was particularly important for the Indian central government, especially for the status of Hindi as the official language and the complex political issues posed by the different states which are essentially drawn by linguistic boundaries. So important was this information that the 1981 census spared no effort in detailing the entries of more than 3000 languages the people claimed as their "mother tongues". (See further Singh in this volume). Singapore's census covered large amounts of language information, especially for the use of the four official languages, and the languages conversed at home. This would reflect the success of the numerous language policies and campaigns carried out by the Singapore government. Malaysia's census stopped asking language questions from 1990 perhaps because it would show an increasing trend in the usage of English – a trend the Malaysian government perhaps does not want to acknowledge.

In what follows, language use based on selected census data will be presented for: (1) Singapore, 1980, 1990 and 2000; (2) Malaysia, 1970 and 1980; (3) Indonesia, 1980 and 1990; and (4) India, 1970, 1980 and 1990. For each country, a brief account of the linguistic situation will be outlined, which is intended to provide an understanding of the sociolinguistic situation behind the census data.

I. SINGAPORE

Singapore's People and Languages

Singapore presents one with a unique ethnic and linguistic situation. Singapore has a population of 4 million, 76.8% of whom are ethnically classified as Chinese, 13.9% as Malay, 7.9% as Indian and 1.4% as "Others" (2000 Singapore Census of Population). According to the official Singaporean definition, the 'Chinese' category includes all Chinese with ancestors who were migrants from China, and the Straits-born Chinese (also known as the *Peranakan*), and people of mixed parentage whose paternal ancestry is 'Chinese'. Similarly, Singaporeans of Pakistani origin, Sri Lankan origin, or Indian ancestry are all "Indian". The 'Malay' group includes Javanese, Boyanese, and Buginese. Singaporeans who cannot be "categorised" under these three groups are labelled "Others", typically including the Arabs and Eurasians.

These ethnic classifications do not reflect the linguistic situation. Chinese languages (known as 'dialects' in Singapore) like Hokkien, Teochew, Hakka, Hainanese, Foochow and Cantonese are spoken within the Chinese community, though Mandarin is increasingly used as a dominant Chinese language, at home as well as within the community. While Malay is the predominant language spoken within the Malay community, languages like Javanese, Buginese and Boyanese are still spoken. Within the Indian community, the Indian languages used include Tamil, Malayalam, Punjabi, Bengali, Telugu, Gujarati and Hindi.

English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil are the four official languages in Singapore, with English as the language of administration and government. In 1965, English was made an official language in Singapore. The role of English as an official language was based on the twin ideologies of "pragmatism" and "neutrality" (Ho and Alsagoff, 1998). The first is the belief that Singapore depends on English for survival in the global marketplace, giving Singapore access to scientific, technological and economic information, facilitating development and modernisation. The ideology of neutrality resides in the belief that English is not an Asian language and is not the mother tongue of any of the ethnic groups, and therefore is an appropriate common language for inter-ethnic communication. It also serves to express the "supra-ethnic national identity" (Kuo and Jernudd, in this volume) and national consciousness in one unified tongue. Due to its importance

in serving Singapore's economic concerns as well as forging a national identity that transcends ethnic boundaries, English is institutionalised as a compulsory language in schools. English is also delegated the important role as the language of government, law, legislation, science and technology, education, international communication and diplomacy. English is the primary working language in Singapore, the *de facto* national language (Llamzon, 1977).

Corresponding to each of the three ethnic classifications are their 'Mother Tongues'[1]. Mandarin, Malay and Tamil – the other three official languages – are the designated 'mother tongues' of the three ethnic groups, Chinese, Malay and Indian respectively. In Singapore, the Mother Tongue is the "superordinate language" (Gupta, 1998: 117) of one's official ethnic group. The official languages of Mandarin, Malay and Tamil are assigned to the official ethnic groups correspondingly. Therefore, if one is ethnically classified as 'Chinese', then one's Mother Tongue is deemed to be Mandarin; that of a 'Malay', Malay; and that of an Indian, 'Tamil' (1998: 117). The term 'Mother Tongue' in Singapore therefore does not reflect the linguistic reality. Very often, especially for the Chinese and Indian speakers, the assigned 'Mother Tongue' is not one's actual 'mother tongue'. Mandarin, for example, while not the mother tongue for a large majority of the Chinese population, is the language chosen to represent the Chinese community, owing to historical and political reasons. The 'Speak Mandarin' Campaign, launched in 1979, is an effort on the part of the government to promote the use of Mandarin in place of the other Chinese languages like Hokkien and Cantonese, the two most widely spoken Chinese languages in Singapore. One of the key rationales for the campaign is to unify the Chinese, as Chinese Singaporeans "should be a single people, speaking the same primary language" (Goh Chok Tong, 1991 on the 'Speak Mandarin Campaign'). Similarly for the Indians, Tamil is the language chosen to represent the Indian community, though at best only half of the Indian population speak the language, for the sole purpose of providing a common link between the different Indian groups. Language in Singapore, as observed by Gupta, is "highly politicised" (1998: 117). The post-independence language and education policies, described as a policy of "pragmatic multilingualism" (Kuo and Jernudd, in this volume) have a huge impact in promoting the use of languages in various domains.

English and one's Mother Tongue are compulsory languages to be learnt in school. Mother Tongues are believed to be capable of giving the pupils "an anchor in their ethnic and cultural traditions" (Gopinathan, 1998: 67), preserving one's Asian heritage, beliefs and traditions. They also act as a shield against undesirable Western influences that come with the use of English. Most Singaporeans born after 1965 are therefore bilinguals of English and their 'designated' Mother Tongues.

Multi-Language Literacy

There was a general rise in multi-language literacy from 1980 to 2000, as can be seen in Figure 1. Figure 1 (adapted from the 1980, 1990 and 2000 census) shows the proportion of the population and the languages in which they were literate, in 1980, 1990 and 2000. The proportion of the population who was bi-literate increased, and this was true across all three ethnic groups. This was a result of Singapore's successful bilingual education policy.

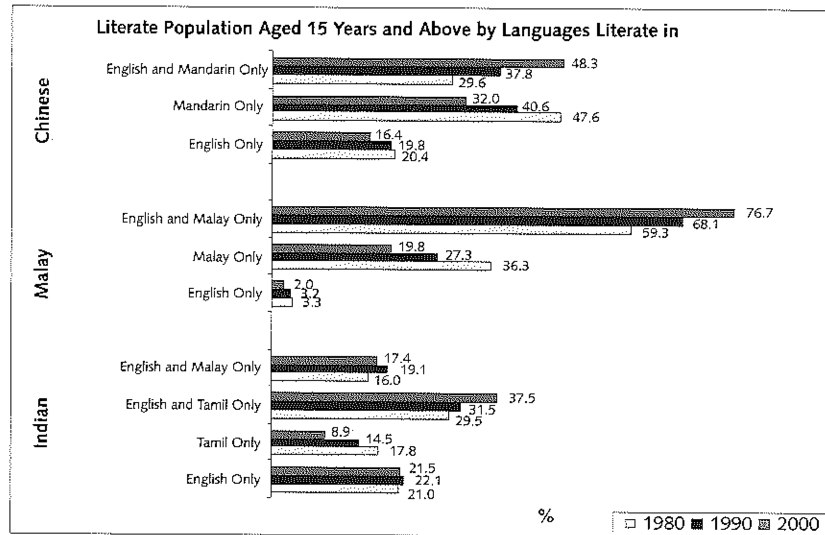

Figure 1: Literate population in Singapore, in the three ethnic groups, aged 15 years and above and the languages they were literate in 1980, 1990 and 2000. (Adapted from the 1980, 1990 and 2000 census)

From Figure 1, it can be observed that the proportion of Chinese Singaporeans literate in both English and Mandarin increased steadily, from 29.6% in 1980 to 37.8% in 1990 and 48.3% in 2000. Single language literacy, in both English and Mandarin, saw a general decline across the years, literacy in Chinese showing the most marked decrease, from 47.6% in 1980 to 40.6% in 1990, and dropping another 8% to 32.0% in 2000.

The Malay and Indian population showed similar trends. Compared to the Chinese, the Malays had a higher bilingual literacy rate. 76.7% of Malay Singaporeans were literate in both English and Malay in 2000, an increase from 59.3% in 1980 and 68.1% in 1990. Similarly, the percentage of Malays literate in only Malay decreased from 36.3% in 1980 to 27.3% in 1990 to 19.8% in 2000.

Among the Indian population, the rate of increase in bilingual literacy, in English and either Tamil or Malay, saw only a 10% increase across the two decades, from 45.5% in 1980 to 54.9% in 2000. The percentage of Indian Singaporeans literate in both English and Tamil increased steadily, from 29.5% in 1980 to 37.5% in 2000. For literacy in both Malay and English however, the percentage dropped from 19.1% in 1990 to 17.4% in 2000.

English: The Lingua Franca

English has become established as the lingua franca of the Singapore population. Figure 2, adapted from the 1980, 1990 and 2000 census, shows the literacy in the four official languages of English, Mandarin, Malay and Tamil in 1980, 1990 and 2000.

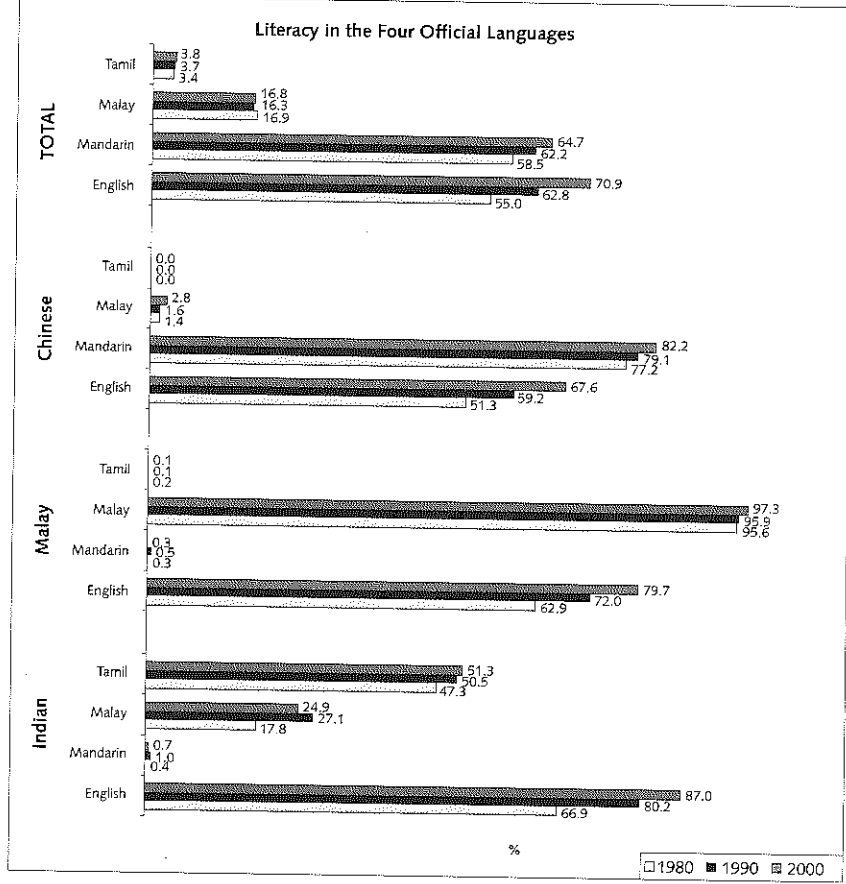

Figure 2: Literacy in the four official languages. (Adapted from the 1980, 1990 and 2000 census)

70.9% of the literate population aged 15 years and over was literate in English in 2000. This was an increase from 62.8% in 1990, and 55.0% in 1980. The increased literacy in English was due to the adoption of English as the medium of instruction in schools and the use of English as the working language of administration and business. More importantly, the pro-English policies of the Singapore government made English into the language of prestige and its perception of the tool to better educational and economic advancement.

Literacy in Mandarin also increased, albeit more slowly in comparison to literacy in English, from 58.5% in 1980 to 62.2% in 1990 to 70.9% in 2000. This increase reflects the success of the 'Speak Mandarin Campaign' launched in 1979 and carried out in two distinct phases. From 1979 to 1982, the target audience of the campaign was Chinese Singaporeans and specific groups, e.g. hawkers and public transport workers. The primary message to Chinese Singaporeans was to speak Mandarin in place of dialects to help them better understand and appreciate their culture and heritage. 79.1% of Chinese Singaporeans were literate in Mandarin in 1990, an increase from 77.2% in 1980. While the Campaign has succeeded in making dialect-speaking Chinese Singaporeans speak Mandarin, it was felt that Mandarin was losing ground among English-educated Chinese Singaporeans. From 1991 onwards, the new phase of the campaign started targeting English-educated Chinese Singaporeans to encourage them to speak Mandarin, which explains the rise of Chinese literacy to 82.2% in 2000. The literacy in Mandarin is expected to increase, with the rise of China and the constant encouragement by the government to learn Chinese in the bid for economic gain.

For the Chinese population, literacy in Mandarin was on the whole higher than literacy in English, with only two thirds of the Chinese population literate in English in 2000.

The overall literacy in Malay and Tamil has remained unchanged over the past two decades, ranging at an average of 16.5% for Malay and 3.5% for Tamil. For the Malay population, literacy in Malay remained at a high average of 96% from 1980 to 2000. Similar to the Chinese population, the Malay population's literacy in English was lower than that of Malay, at 79.7% in 2000, though the increase in English literacy was rapid, from 62.9% in 1980, increasing about 17% in twenty years.

For the Indian population however, literacy in English was higher than literacy in Tamil. In 2000, 87% of Indian Singaporeans were literate in English, but only 51.3% were literate in Tamil. The literacy rate for Tamil among the Indian population was also constant at an average of 50% from 1980 to 2000. For literacy in English however, there was an increase of 20%, from 66.9% in 1980 to 87.0% in 2000. The Indians had the highest literacy in English among the three ethnic groups.

What Do Singaporeans Speak at Home?

The impact of Singapore's language policies was most evident in the languages Singaporeans chose to speak at home. Figure 3, adapted from the 1980, 1990 and 2000 census, shows the languages that Singaporeans claimed to use most frequently at home. The 1980 and 1990 census asked which languages were spoken most frequently to the following family members: parents; spouse, siblings and grandparents. The percentages presented in Figure 3 are based on a composite of these different categories.

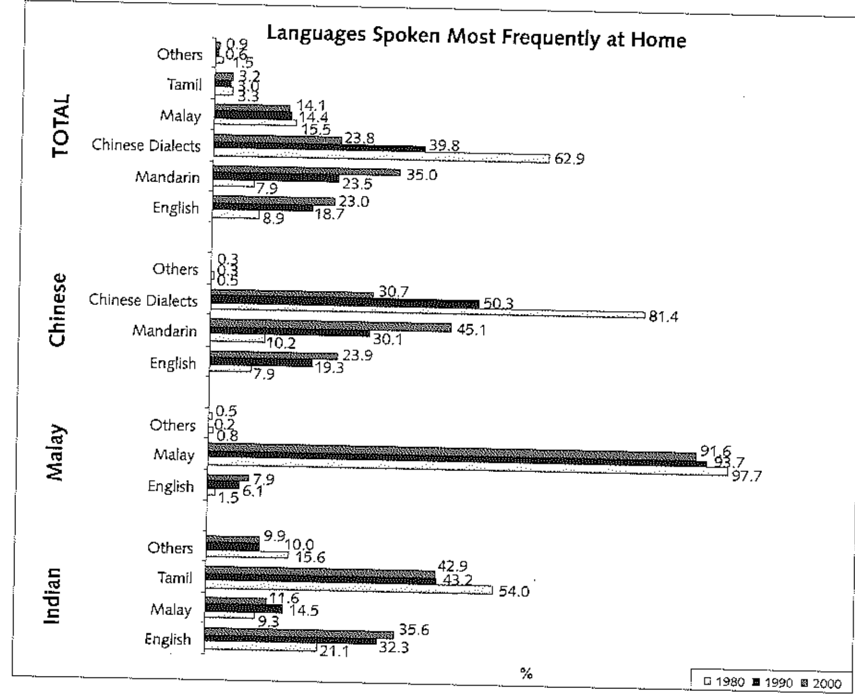

Figure 3: Languages spoken most frequently at home in 1980, 1990 and 2000. (Adapted from the 1980, 1990 and 2000 census)

As can be observed in Figure 3, the usage of English at home became more prevalent in the last twenty years. Only 8.9% of Singaporeans claimed to speak English at home in 1980. In 2000, 23% of Singaporeans claimed to speak English in the home. There was a general increase in the use of

English at home across all three ethnic groups, with the Chinese and Indians having the largest increase. 23.9% of Chinese Singaporeans claimed to speak English at home in 2000, compared to only 7.9% in 1980. Similarly for the Indians, there was a 15% increase in the use of English at home, from 21.1% in 1980 to 35.6% in 2000. English in Singapore has gone beyond the six characteristic uses as described by Tay (1978), namely, as an official language, a language of education, a working language, a language of inter- and intra-ethnic communication, a language for the expression of national identity, and an international language. English is also increasingly, in recent years, used as a home language. As can be seen, English is not only used in the public domains of education and administration, but also in the private domains of family and friendship. It is no surprise therefore, that, as Newbrook states, "Singapore is, in fact, well on the way towards becoming a largely English-speaking society" (1987:12). The percentage of Malay Singaporeans using English in the home however remained small, at only 7.9%.

Mandarin is rapidly taking the place of Chinese dialects as the language of the home for Chinese Singaporeans. The percentage of Chinese Singaporeans who reported speaking Mandarin in the home environment jumped from 10.2% in 1980 to 45.1% in 2000. As expected, the use of Chinese dialects at home dropped drastically, from 81.4% in 1980 to only 30.7% in 2000, a drop of almost 50% in only twenty years. It is evident that the 'Speak Mandarin Campaign' is achieving its desired outcome.

Malay was still very much the language used in the home of Malay households, with more than 90% of Malay Singaporeans reporting its use at home, and the figure did not change much in from 1980 to 2000. In 2000, 42.9% of Indian Singaporeans claimed to speak Tamil at home, a slight drop from 54% in 1980. The percentage of Indian Singaporeans reporting the use of Tamil at home was however higher than the percentage of Indian Singaporeans reporting the use English at home. Mandarin, Malay and Tamil were still used in higher frequency in the homes, compared to English.

II. MALAYSIA

The Sociolinguistic Background

Malaysia is divided into two distinct parts: West Malaysia and East Malaysia, comprising Sarawak and Sabah. Malaysia, like its neighbour, Singapore, is a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society with a population of 17 million (General Report of the Population Census, 1995). In West Malaysia, the population is categorised into three main groups – the Malays, who form the majority, with 55.25%; the Chinese, who make up 33.9% of the West's population; and the Indians, who stand at 10.2%. In East Malaysia, the population is made up of Dayak and Kadazan peoples, and other indigenous groups, and a Chinese population that exceeds the Malay population.

The language situation is diverse in Malaysia, with no fewer than 80 languages spoken in the country (Asmah, 1992:1). In 1957, Malay, named *Bahasa Melayu* (The Malay Language), was made the national language of Malaysia with Article 152 of the Constitution of the Federation of Malaya. It was felt that Malay was the "language of the soil" (Wong and James, 2000: 216), and was also the language of the majority population. In 1969, *Bahasa Melayu* was renamed *Bahasa Malaysia* (The Malaysian Language) to allow for identification of the Malaysian population to the national language which was not a solely Malay one. The Federal government believed that *Bahasa Malaysia* would be a language that the country, regardless of ethnic group, could identify with and be emotionally attached to.

Bahasa Malaysia, which is the national language, is the main medium of communication between the different ethnic groups. English is also widely used in Malaysia, with a steadily rising literacy rate in the language, both in West Malaysia and East Malaysia. Chinese languages like Cantonese and Hokkien are used among the Chinese community. For the Indians, Tamil and other Indian languages are also used, but are largely confined to the private domains of friends and family (Wong and James, 2000: 210).

Article 152 of the Constitution of the Federation of Malaya also stipulated that English would be the 'second' language of Malaysia. For official purposes, English could also be used alongside Malay, but only from 1957 to 1967. Between 1957 and 1967, *Bahasa Malaysia* and English enjoyed almost equal status. Chinese and Indian languages were also taught in

government schools. In 1967, however, *Bahasa Malaysia* became the sole language for official purposes in West Malaysia. In Sabah, both English and *Bahasa Malaysia* continued to be the official languages until 1973. In Sarawak, English was the official language until 1985 (Asmah, 1992:10).

With the Revised National Language Act of 1957, English ceased to be the medium of instruction in schools and institutions of higher learning. *Bahasa Malaysia* became the language of education as well as the language of administration. By 1982, all government schools and universities had to use *Bahasa Malaysia* as the medium of instruction. All subjects, except English were to be taught in Malay. Other schools became "National Type Schools" e.g. National Type Chinese School, with the main medium of instruction in Mandarin, but it was compulsory for the students to learn *Bahasa Malaysia* and English. In 1983, all English-medium instruction was officially ceased. All students from the Chinese and Indian primary schools were made to go through an extra year, called the 'Remove Class' to strengthen their proficiency in Malay before they were allowed to go on further to secondary schools.

In 1997, private local universities were allowed to use English as the medium of instruction for all courses as long as *Bahasa Malaysia* was taught as a subject. This change in policy led to an increased use of English, in addition to the popularity of private universities. There were also measures to use English as the language of instruction for subjects like mathematics and science, though this was not compulsory for all schools. In January 2003 however, this policy became formalised, with the government legislation stating that mathematics and science are to be taught in English for all schools. With this landmark change of education policy, one could expect therefore that the literacy rate of English would see a rapid increase in the next few years.[2]

Literacy in Bahasa Malaysia and English

As can be seen in Figure 4, the majority of the population in Malaysia was literate in *Bahasa Malaysia* in 1970 and 1980. Figure 4 shows the literacy rate in *Bahasa Malaysia* and English in Malaysia's urban and rural areas in 1970 and 1980 (Adapted from Khoo, 1983: 106).

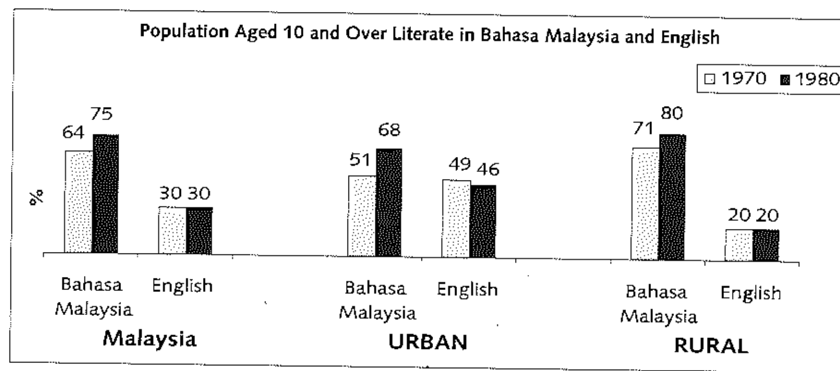

Figure 4: Population aged 10 and over literate in *Bahasa Malaysia* and English in the rural and urban areas, 1970 and 1980. (Adapted from Khoo, 1983: 106)

As can be observed from Figure 4, there was a substantial increase in the proportion of Malaysians literate in *Bahasa Malaysia*, from 64% in 1970 to 75% in 1980. The increase was even more marked in the urban areas, with 68% of Malaysians literate in *Bahasa Malaysia* in 1980, an increase of 17% from the 51% in 1970. This increase was a reflection of the change in the medium of instruction from English to Bahasa Malaysia in schools in West Malaysia and Sabah. The literacy rate in *Bahasa Malaysia* was in general higher in the rural areas, compared to the urban areas. 80% of Malaysians were literate in *Bahasa Malaysia* in 1980, compared to only 68% in the rural areas in the same year.

The proportion of Malaysians literate in English was 30% in both 1970 and 1980. Almost half of the Malaysian population in the urban areas were literate in English in 1970, dropping 3% in 1980 to 46%. In comparison, the Malaysian population in the rural areas had a low English literacy rate, at 20% in both 1970 and 1980.

Literacy in *Bahasa Malaysia* and English differed not only between the urban and rural areas. More differences could be observed between the different ethnic groups in the different regions in Malaysia in 1970 and 1980. Figure 5 shows the literacy in *Bahasa Malaysia* and English in West Malaysia in 1970 and 1980 (Adapted from Khoo, 1983: 107).

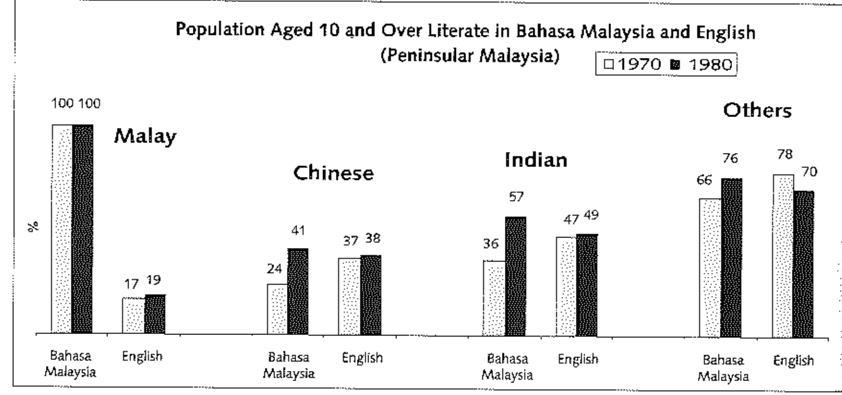

Figure 5: Population aged 10 and over literate in *Bahasa Malaysia* and English in West Malaysia in 1970 and 1980. (Adapted from Khoo, 1983: 107)

In West Malaysia, the Indians, in 1970 and 1980, were notably the most literate in English, compared to the Malays and Chinese. About 50% of the Indian Malaysians were literate in English in 1980. 38% of the Chinese Malaysians were literate in English in 1980, but less than 20% of the Malays were literate in English in the same year.

Literacy in *Bahasa Malaysia* presented a different scenario. In both 1970 and 1980, 100% of the Malays in West Malaysia were literate in *Bahasa Malaysia*. The Indians showed a sharp increase of 20% in the literacy of *Bahasa Malaysia*, increasing from 36% in 1970 to 57% in 1980. The situation was similar for the Chinese, with the literacy rate for *Bahasa Malaysia* increasing from 24% in 1970 to 41% in 1980. This was a consequence of the school curriculum changing to *Bahasa Malaysia*.

The situation was different in Sabah in 1970 and 1980. Figure 6 shows the literacy in *Bahasa Malaysia* and English in Sabah in 1970 and 1980 (adapted from Khoo, 1983: 107).

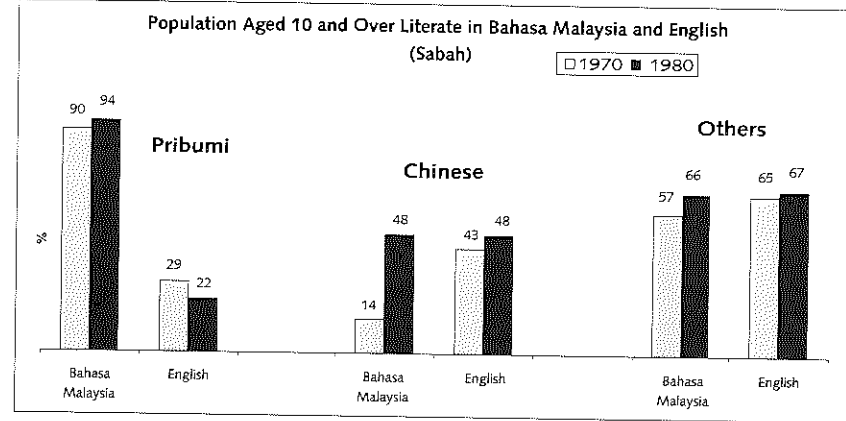

Figure 6: Population aged 10 and over literate in Bahasa Malaysia and English in Sabah in 1970 and 1980. (Adapted from Khoo, 1983: 107)

In Sabah, levels of literacy in *Bahasa Malaysia* saw a sharp rise, especially for the Chinese population, from 14% in 1970 to 48% in 1980. 48% of the Chinese in Sabah in 1980 were literate in English, and this literacy rate in English was higher than that of the Chinese population in West Malaysia.

The *Pribumi*[3] (indigenous or native people) in Sabah had a high literacy rate in *Bahasa Malaysia*, with 90% in 1970 and 94% in 1980[4]. Their literacy in English, in comparison, was low, at 29% in 1970, and dropping further to 22% in 1980.

Much higher levels of literacy in English were found in Sarawak in 1970 and 1980, compared to West Malaysia and Sabah. Figure 7 shows the literacy in *Bahasa Malaysia* and English in Sarawak in 1970 and 1980 (adapted from Khoo, 1983: 107). This high level of literacy in English could be due to the fact that English was the medium of instruction in Sarawak until the mid-1970s.

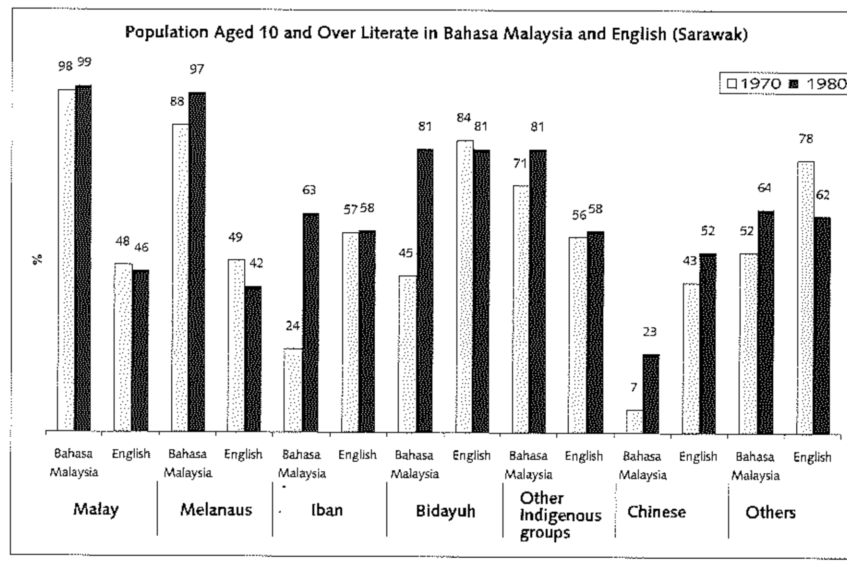

Figure 7: Population aged 10 and over literate in Bahasa Malaysia and English in Sarawak in 1970 and 1980. (Adapted from Khoo, 1983:107).

The Bidayuhs had the highest English literacy rate, with more than 80% of this group literate in English in 1970 and 1980. 48% of Malays and 49% of Melanaus were literate in English in 1970, but in 1980, the literacy rate dropped slightly for both groups. The Ibans, and other indigenous groups showed high literacy rates in English of about 60% for each group, and remained relatively unchanged from 1970 to 1980. The Chinese showed a 10% increase in literacy rate in English, from 43% in 1970 to 52% in 1980.

Literacy in *Bahasa Malaysia* showed diverse differences across the different ethnic groups in Sarawak, with the Malays and Melanaus showing high literacy rates in 1970 and 1980. Almost 100% of the Malays were literate in *Bahasa Malaysia* in 1970 and 1980. 88% of the Melanaus were literate in *Bahasa Malaysia* in 1970, but this literacy increased to 97% in 1980. Other groups also exhibited similar sharp increases in literacy in *Bahasa Malaysia* from 1970 to 1980. Only 24% of the Ibans were literate in *Bahasa Malaysia* in 1970, but this figure increased almost threefold to 63% in 1980. The situation was similar for the Bidayuhs, with 45% literate

in *Bahasa Malaysia* in 1970 and increasing to 81% in 1980. The Chinese and other indigenous groups also saw similar increases in those two decades. The Chinese population's literacy in *Bahasa Malaysia* increased from 7% in 1970 to 23% in 1980. For the other indigenous groups, literacy in *Bahasa Malaysia* increased 10%, from 71% in 1970 to 81% in 1980.

Languages in Conversation

The language situation in 1970 and 1980 was best reflected in the languages the Malaysian population claimed to use for conversation. Figure 8 shows the languages that the people said they were able to could use in conversation in West Malaysia in 1970 and 1980 (adapted from Khoo, 1983: 109).

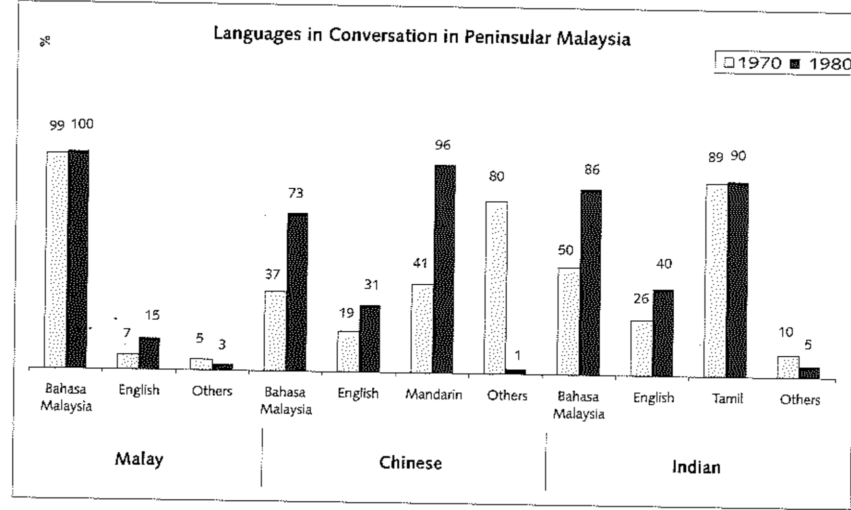

Figure 8: Languages the people could use in conversation in West Malaysia in 1970 and 1980. (Adapted from Khoo, 1983:109).

As can be seen in Figure 8, in West Malaysia, 100% of the Malay community claimed to be able to use *Bahasa Malaysia* in conversation in 1980. 15% of the Malays could use English in conversation in 1980, an increase from 7% in 1970.

In 1980, 96% of the Chinese population in West Malaysia claimed that they could converse in Mandarin, more than double the figure in 1970. This could be due to the establishment of Chinese schools. More Chinese also used *Bahasa Malaysia* and English in conversations in 1980, with 73% using *Bahasa Malaysia* and 31% using English, an increase from 37% and 19% respectively in 1970.

90% of the Indian community claimed they could use Tamil in 1980. But the ability to use *Bahasa Malaysia* also saw an increase, from 50% in 1970 to 86% in 1980. Similarly, the ability to use English in conversations increased from 26% in 1970 to 40% in 1980.

Figure 9 shows the languages the people were able to use in conversation in Sabah in 1970 and 1980 (adapted from Khoo, 1983: 109).

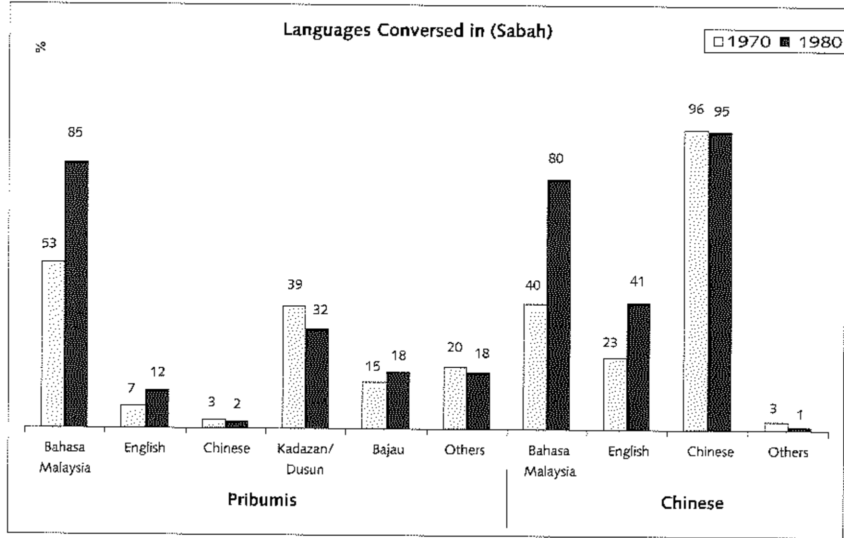

Figure 9: Languages used in conversation in Sabah in 1970 and 1980. (Adapted from Khoo, 1983: 109).

In Sabah, both Pribumi and Chinese claimed to use *Bahasa Malaysia* as a communication tool in 1970 and 1980. In 1980, 85% of *Pribumi* claimed that they could converse in *Bahasa Malaysia*, an increase from 53% in 1970. Similarly for the Chinese, in 1980, 80% of them claimed that they could converse in *Bahasa Malaysia*, compared to only 40% in 1970.

The Chinese in Sabah, in 1970 and 1980, were more conversant in English, compared to *Pribumi*. 41% of the Chinese community claimed to be able to converse in English, compared to only 12% for *Pribumi* in 1980. Nevertheless, both communities saw an increase in the use of English from 1970, with only 7% of *Pribumi* able to converse in English and 23% of the Chinese having the ability to use English in conversations.

Indigenous languages were very much the languages used by each group as the main medium of conversation in 1970 and 1980. In 1980, 32% of *Pribumi* claimed to be able to use Kadazan or Duzun in conversations, though 39% of them were able to use these languages in 1970. 18% of *Pribumi* were also able to use Bajau in conversations, an increase from 15% in 1970.

More than 95% of the Chinese community were able to use Chinese languages in conversations, and this was the same in both 1970 and 1980.

Figure 10 shows the languages that the people were able to use in conversation in Sarawak in 1970 and 1980 (adapted from Khoo, 1983: 109).

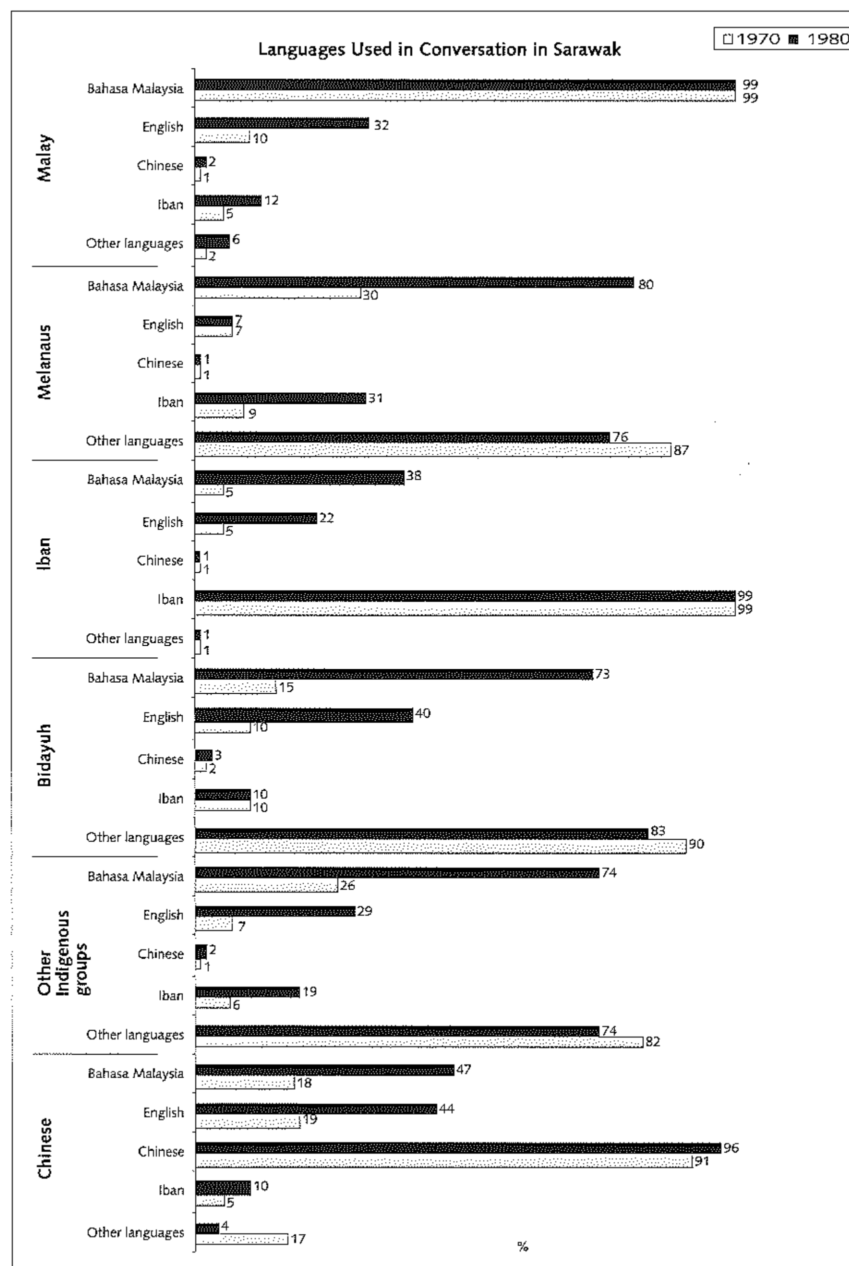

Figure 10: Languages used in conversation in Sarawak in 1970 and 1980. (Adapted from Khoo, 1983: 109).

In Sarawak, all the ethnic communities claimed some usage of *Bahasa Malaysia* in conversation in 1970 and 1980, and the proportion of the population able to use *Bahasa Malaysia* increased drastically from 1970 to 1980.

In 1970 and 1980, the Melanaus, Bidayuhs and other indigenous groups saw the largest increase in the ability to use *Bahasa Malaysia* in conversations. 80% of Melanaus were able to use *Bahasa Malaysia* in conversation, an increase of 50% from 30% in 1970. Only 15% of the Bidayuhs could use *Bahasa Malaysia* in 1970, but in 1980, the figure increased to 73%. 74% of other indigenous groups were able to converse in *Bahasa Malaysia* in 1980, when in 1970, only 26% of them could use the language.

The Iban and Chinese also saw an increase in their ability to use *Bahasa Malaysia* in 1970 and 1980. In 1970, only 5% of the Iban were able to converse in *Bahasa Malaysia*, but the figure increased to 38% in 1980. Similarly, while only 18% of the Chinese could use *Bahasa Malaysia* in conversations in 1970, 47% of the Chinese in Sarawak could converse in *Bahasa Malaysia* in 1980.

The use of English in conversation also saw an increase across some ethnic groups, though the increase was not as large as that observed in *Bahasa Malaysia*. 32% of the Malay community could use English in conversation in 1980, a 20% increase from the 10% in 1970. The Iban, Bidayuh, Chinese and other indigenous groups also showed an increased ability to use English in conversation, with 22% for the Iban in 1980, 40% for the Bidayuh, 44% for the Chinese and 29% for the other indigenous groups, while in 1970, the ability to use English in conversation was 5%, 10%, 19% and 7% respectively for each group. For the Melanau, the ability to use English in conversations remained at 7% in both 1970 and 1980.

Like the situation in Sabah, the communities in Sarawak also showed an inclination toward using their own indigenous languages in conversation in 1970 and 1980. More than 90% of the Chinese population in Sarawak was able to converse in Chinese languages in both 1970 and 1980. This could be seen also for the Iban, with almost 100% of them having the ability to converse in Iban in 1970 and 1980.

The Melanau, Bidayuh and other indigenous groups were also able to converse in other indigenous languages (other than *Bahasa Malaysia*,

Chinese languages and Iban). 76% of the Melanau, 83% of the Bidayuh and 74% of the other indigenous groups were able to converse in other indigenous languages in 1980. Even though the percentage remained high, the figures in 1980 were a drop from the 87% for the Melanau, 90% for the Bidayuh and 82% for the other indigenous groups in 1970.

III. INDONESIA

Indonesia's Language

Indonesia has a population of about 206 million (Census of Population 2000), with about 731 languages spoken by its people (Ethnologue report on languages in Indonesia, 2003). In 1945, Malay, renamed *Bahasa Indonesia* "the Indonesian language", was formally proclaimed as Indonesia's national language. As Dardjowidjojo claimed, "Indonesian is perhaps the only language that has achieved the status of a national language in its true sense" (1998: 36), fostering feelings of nationalism and unity (Nababan, 1982). *Bahasa Indonesia* enjoys great prestige, and "every Indonesian citizen aspires to know the language" (Renandya, 2000:114). The language is also seen as "the vehicle for upward socioeconomic mobility" (Asher, 1994:1668). *Bahasa Indonesia* is "a product of language planning … *par excellence*" (Heryanto, 1995: 5).

Bahasa Indonesia is used as medium of instruction in all schools, from primary to tertiary levels. In districts where the national language is not widely used, the local vernaculars may be used as the medium of instruction for the first three years of education, as a transition, while *Bahasa Indonesia* is learned as a second language. English is the most important foreign language in Indonesia. It is the only compulsory foreign language to be taught in the public school curriculum, and is formally delegated as the first foreign language. In 1990, it was decreed that English should be taught from the fourth grade of elementary school and continued until senior high school. However, despite this decree, the majority of Indonesians, including the highly educated, do not master English well enough to read, write and converse (Dardjowidjojo, 1998: 45).

As a result of Indonesia's remarkable national language policy, the number of Indonesians who can who can speak, understand and communicate in the language is increasing rapidly. Table 1 shows the proportion of the Indonesian population five years and above who can use *Bahasa Indonesia*, in 1980 and 1990.

Category	1980	1990
I	17505000 (11.93%)	24042000 (15.19%)
II	71758000 (48.89%)	107066000 (67.65%)
III	57512000(39.18%)	27154000 (17.16%)

Notes:
Category I: Those who use *Bahasa Indonesia* in the home.
Category II: Those who speak and understand *Bahasa Indonesia* but do not use it for daily communication.
Category III: Those who neither speak nor understand *Bahasa Indonesia*.

Table 1: Population in Indonesia aged 5 years and over who can use Bahasa Indonesia. (Adapted from Renandya, 2000: 117)

As can be seen from Table 1, there is a marked increase in the percentage of the population who can speak and understand *Bahasa Indonesia*, though not necessarily using the language for daily communication in the home (Category II); from 48.89% in 1980 to 67.65% in 1990. There is also a marked decrease in the number of people who can neither speak nor understand *Bahasa Indonesia* (Category III), from 39.18% in 1980 to 17.16% in 1990. From the table, it can also be noted that there has been an increased usage of *Bahasa Indonesia* in the home, with 15.19% of the population using the national language as a home language in 1990, from 11.93% observed in 1980.

The Vernaculars

While *Bahasa Indonesia* is the national language of the fourth largest populated country in the world, 85% of the population claim they do not speak the language at home (Table 1, 1990 census). The greatest part of the population speaks 'regional' or 'local' languages. For example, Javanese has a large number of speakers, found mainly in Central and East Java (62.4 million); Sundanese is used in West Java (25.0 million); Madurese in Madura and East Java (6.8 million); Batak in North Central Sumatra (3.5 million); Minang in West Sumatra (3.7 million); Balinese in Bali (2.6 million) (1990 census). These languages, used by the larger numbers of speakers, are found in the economically more developed islands. The vast majority of indigenous languages, however, are found on the other islands, some sparsely populated, and the lives of many of these languages are possibly endangered by the imposition of the national language (Poedjosoedarmo, 1981 in Renandya, 2000:118). Many 'local' languages are in fact even seen as "threats to the national language" (Heryanto, 1995:5).

Yet, the census, which shows the top nine of the most widely used languages in the home, does not present evidence that *Bahasa Indonesia* has replaced or weakened the use of vernacular languages. The census shows that the usage of these vernacular languages remained stable from 1980 to 1990.

Table 2 shows the top 8 of the most widely used vernacular languages in the home in both 1980 and 1990 (adapted from the 1980 and 1990 census).

	1980	1990
Javanese	40.44%	38.08%
Sundanese	15.06%	15.26%
Madurese	4.71%	4.29%
Batak	2.12%	1.97%
Minang	2.42%	2.23%
Balinese	1.69%	1.64%
Buginese	2.26%	2.04%
Banjarese	1.13%	1.74%
Others	17.48%	17.11%

Table 2: Most widely used vernacular languages in the home, 1980 and 1990. (Adapted from the 1980 and 1990 census).

As can be seen from Table 2, the proportion of speakers for vernacular languages like Javanese, Sundanese, Madurese, Batak, Minang, Balinese, Buginese and Banjarese did not vary much from 1980 to 1990. Javanese had the highest percentage of speakers, 40.44% in 1980 and 38.08% in 1990.

Differences can however be noted in the use of these vernacular languages, especially Javanese, between the urban and rural areas. Table 3 shows the differences in language use between the rural and urban population.

	URBAN		RURAL	
	1980	1990	1980	1990
Indonesian	35.77%	36.91%	5.05%	5.28%
Javanese	32.81%	32.10%	42.64%	40.81%
Sundanese	13.29%	12.90%	15.57%	16.34%
Madurese	2.31%	1.91%	5.40%	5.38%
Batak	1.03%	0.88%	2.43%	2.47%
Minang	1.87%	1.87%	2.57%	2.39%
Balinese	0.95%	1.10%	1.90%	1.88%
Buginese	1.17%	1.04%	2.58%	2.50%
Banjarese	1.15%	1.51%	1.13%	1.84%
Others	9.47%	9.35%	19.79%	20.64%

Table 3: Most widely used languages in the home, in urban and rural areas, in 1980 and 1990. (Adapted from the 1980 and 1990 census).

36.91% of the population living in urban areas claimed to use *Bahasa Indonesia* at home in 1990, a slight increase from 35.77% in 1980. About a third of urban dwellers claimed to use Javanese at home, and this figure remained unchanged between 1980 and 1990. Sundanese was the third most commonly used language in the home in the urban areas, with about 13% of the population using it in 1980 and 1990. Other languages like Madurese, Batak, Minang, Balinese, Buginese and Banjarese were also used in the urban areas, though the percentage remained small.

Javanese was the most widely spoken language in the homes in the rural areas, with almost half of the Javanese-speaking rural population claiming to use the language in 1980 and 1990. Sundanese came in a distant second, with 15.57% of the population in the Sundanese-speaking rural areas using it as the home language in 1980, increasing 1% to 16.34% in 1990. *Bahasa Indonesia,* on the other hand, was used at home only by 5% of the rural population, though it was the most widely used language in urban areas. This figure did not change much over the decade. Similarly, other languages like Madurese, Batak, Minang, Balinese, Buginese and Banjarese were also used by a small percentage of rural populations.

According to Dardjowidjojo, it is precisely Indonesia's ability to promote the national language without reducing that of the vernacular languages that makes the language policy in Indonesia successful (1998: 44). In the 1945 Constitution, it was stated that the vernaculars are guaranteed the

right to exist and develop, and are considered cultural assets. In fact, for the major ethnic groups such as Javanese, Balinese, and Sundanese, the vernacular languages were often the only languages used in the performing arts until the 1980s when Indonesia saw an imposition of the national language to areas such as traditional arts and ritual practices (Heryanto, 1995) – areas supposedly culturally individualistic.

While the census does present a picture of relative stability in the use of the vernacular languages, the implications and impact of how *Bahasa Indonesia* has infiltrated into every realm of the society are precisely things that the census did not show, could not show, or perhaps, was afraid to show.

IV. INDIA

India's 'Language Problem'

India's population of 936.5 million (Heitzman and Worden, 1995) is highly diverse, with more than 3000 languages recorded in its 1961, 1971 and 1991 census. The languages of India belong to four major families: Indo-Aryan (a branch of the Indo-European family), Dravidian, Austroasiatic, and Sino-Tibetan, with the majority of the population speaking languages belonging to the first two families. According to the 1991 census, about 65 million people in India speak what is known as the 18 Scheduled or official Languages. These 18 languages are Assamese, Bengali, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Malayalam, Manipuri, Marathi, Nepali, Oriya, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu. (See further Singh in this volume)

After being under British colonial rule for 200 years, India achieved independence in 1947. Since then, language issues in India have been a perennial political problem. In 1947, Hindi was designated as the official language of India, even though it was not the most commonly spoken language, with the majority of Hindi native speakers situated in northern India.

For the Hindi speakers, there were constant debates as to which 'Hindi' was the 'correct' Hindi, for the language has at least 13 different dialects, some of them completely different from each other. A far bigger and constant problem was however the majority of non-Hindi speakers in

India. The decision to have Hindi as the official language was seen by them as an attempt to eradicate their individual cultures and languages, which resulted in various political struggles, both violent and passive.

The problem was not resolved with the recognition of the 18 Scheduled Languages as official languages in India. The Constitution recognises the use of these 18 Languages for official purposes, at both state and local levels. Given the myriad linguistic regions and highly diverse communities, different states in India have different official languages, and not all of them belong to the 18 Scheduled Languages. Sikkim, in East India, for example, has four official languages, of which only Nepali is one of the 18 Scheduled Languages, and the other three are not recognised by the central government. The struggles continue as different states fight for their languages to become recognised by the central government.

Information on languages and mother tongues in India was collected from as early as 1881. It is important to distinguish between 'mother tongue' and 'Mother Tongue' in the Indian censuses. In the 1951 census, 'Mother Tongue' was defined as the "language first spoken from cradle" (Census of India, Ministry of Home Affairs). In the 1961 census, 'Mother Tongue' was defined as the "language spoken in childhood by the person's mother to the person or mainly spoken in the household" (Census of India, Ministry of Home Affairs). From 1971 onwards, the general understanding of 'Mother Tongue' is that which is "language mainly spoken in the household", or "language most ordinarily used" (Singh, in this volume). The concept 'mother tongue' is synonymous to 'Mother Tongue', but it is to be understood with respect to concepts, 'Language' and 'language'. 'Language' (with the capital L) refers only to the 18 Scheduled Languages. Each *Language* encompasses *languages* and dialects. These languages and dialects are the *mother tongues*, in which case the *Language* will be returned as the *Mother Tongue*. In the 1991 census for example, 337 million people returned Hindi as their Mother Tongue. This figure of 337 million was made up of the population returning 48 different languages and dialects, including Hindi, Awadhi, Banjari, Churahi, Khairari and Sugali as their *mother tongues*.

Table 4 shows the percentage of the population reporting the 18 Scheduled Languages as their Mother Tongues, in 1971, 1981 and 1991 (Source: Prime Minister's Office, India).

	Persons who returned the Language as their Mother Tongue			Percentage to total population		
	1971	1981	1991	1971	1981[5]	1991
Hindi	208514005	264514117	337272114	38.04	38.71	39.85
Bengali	44792312	51298319	69595738	8.17	7.51	8.22
Telugu	44756923	50624611	66017615	8.16	7.41	7.80
Marathi	41765190	49452922	62481681	7.62	7.24	7.38
Tamil	37690106	--[6]	53006368	6.88	--	6.26
Urdu	28620895	34941435	43406932	5.22	5.11	5.13
Gujarati	25865012	33063267	40673814	4.72	4.84	4.81
Kannada	21710649	25697146	32753676	3.96	3.76	3.87
Malayalam	21938760	25700705	30377176	4.00	3.76	3.59
Oriya	19863198	23021528	28061313	3.62	3.37	3.32
Punjabi	14108443	19611199	23378744	2.57	2.87	2.76
Assamese	8959558	--[7]	13079696	1.63	--	1.55
Sindhi	1676875	2044389	2122848	0.31	0.30	0.25
Nepali	1419835	1360636	2076645	0.26	0.20	0.25
Konkani	1508432	1570108	1760607	0.28	0.23	0.21
Manipuri	791714	901407	1270216	0.14	0.13	0.15
Kashmiri	2495487	3176975	--[8]	0.46	0.46	--
Sanskrit	2212	6106	49736	negligible	negligible	0.01

Table 4: Comparative strengths of the 18 Scheduled Languages in India in 1971, 1981 and 1991. (Source: Prime Minister's Office, India).

Hindi saw a slight increase in the proportion of the population reporting the language as their Mother Tongue from 1971 to 1991, from 38.04% in 1971 to 39.85% in 1991. This percentage, as mentioned earlier, is a composite of languages and dialects grouped under Hindi – the Scheduled Language. The actual number of Hindi speakers stood at 233 million in 1991, which was only about 27% of the population.

The fact that the figures for these languages did not change much from 1971 to 1991 could be due to the multilingual education system. The official language of a particular state is very often the first language learnt at school. Hindi and English are often learnt as second or third languages. In Andhra Pradesh, for example, Telugu is learnt as a first language, followed by Hindi and then English (Krishnamurti, 1998). In Karnataka, Kannada, the official language of the state, is learnt as the first language, followed by English as the second language, and Hindi as the third language.

English in India

English is not listed as one of the 18 Scheduled languages in India. However, English, being the language of the colonial master for 200 years, is an important equation in the whole language issue in India. In terms of the actual number of English speakers in the world, India ranks third, after the United States and United Kingdom. In 1994, there were an estimated 35 million people using English in the Indian subcontinent (Crystal, 1995:101).

The Constitution in 1947 provided for Hindi and English to be the official languages until 1965, when the switch to Hindi was mandated. The Official Languages Act of 1963 proclaimed that Hindi, from 1965, would become the sole official language. English, however, would continue to be an 'assistant' or 'associate' additional official language. Despite the reduction of the role of English in its official capacity, English continues to be the choice language used by many educated Indians (Heitzman and Worden, 1995), many of whom, because of the education system, are bi- or multilingual speakers of English and other Indian languages. English is often used as the language of communication between different Indian communities. English continues to serve as the language of prestige, and is seen by many as a means of upward mobility. English, being the international language of science, technology and commerce, have many in India today hold firmly to the belief that the knowledge and use of English is a necessary tool for technological and economic progress for the country.

English, being the "link" language, the medium of communication between the different communities, has been controversial since independence. The central issue has been and remains whether Hindi should replace English, as mandated by the Official Languages Act in 1963. Indian nationalists intended that Hindi would replace English – a foreign language and a relic from the colonial past – as the medium of communication. Proponents of Hindi as the "link" language assert English is elitist, and is used only by a small, privileged segment of the population, thus is unsuited to be the official language of India. They claim that the role of English hinders social mobility and the process of democratisation.

Hindi, on the other hand is already spoken by the majority of Northern Indians, and would certainly be a closer and more congenial language to the culture and habits of the Indian people.

Proponents of English as the official language argue, in contrast, that the use of Hindi is restricted only to a small minority concentrated in the North, and is a liability for the majority of Indians who do not speak it as their native tongue. The use of English, as a foreign tongue, is at least an equal handicap for all Indians in every region, with no one state having an unfair advantage over the others.

English is perceived as a prestige language, and is seen by many, even in the rural areas, as the tool for advancement. It even adds an advantage for a young woman's chance at marriage. Private schools and elite schools use English as the medium of instruction, and schools of this sort are a "growth industry" (Heitzman and Worden, 1995).

Despite the importance of English in India, the statistics in the census reports seem to reflect a different 'reality', especially for the 1981 census. In the 1981 census, only 0.3% of the population reported English to be their first language, and less than 1% of the population gave English as their second language. The 1981 census reported 14% of the population to be bilingual in two of India's languages, with no allowance for recording more than one second language. The 1981 census, Heitzman and Worden (1995) claimed, is suspected of having significantly underrepresented bilingualism or multilingualism in English and other Indian languages. In 1991, in contrast, 27.5% of the population reported to be bilingual in English and another Indian language, with 8% of the population claiming to know English as the second language, and 3.15% knowing English as the third language.

The Census: What Does it Say?

The Singapore census tells us that English has become the lingua franca in Singapore. "English-knowing bilingualism" (Pakir, 1991), for Singaporeans, is a way of life, and a desired outcome of our successful education system. Chinese Singaporeans are, on the whole, using Mandarin to replace the use of Chinese 'dialects' at home, showing the success of the 'Speak Mandarin Campaign'. The Singapore census is, in essence, the success story of the government's language and education policies.

Malaysia's census stopped asking language questions after 1980. Even in the 1980 census, there were signs that *Bahasa Malaysia* was not as deeply-set as a lingua franca as the government would have liked it to be. The Chinese community in West Malaysia, and the indigenous people in Sabah and Sarawak were certainly not as receptive to *Bahasa Malaysia* as the medium of daily communication as were the Malays. English, on the other hand, was gaining ground as an important foreign language, much to the dismay of the government. If the 1990 and 2000 census asked language questions, one could possibly see a downward trend for the use of *Bahasa Malaysia* for non-Malays, and an alarming rising trend for the use of English. *Bahasa Malaysia* could well become *Bahasa Melayu* (the language of Malays). For an ethnically-diverse country like Malaysia, such information that could threaten the very fabric holding the society together is perhaps better left unquestioned and unanswered.

Indonesia's 1980 and 1990 census showed a linguistic ecology that was left undamaged by the imposition of the national language. Many indigenous languages like Javanese and Sundanese were still widely spoken at home. The census seemingly reassured people that indigenous languages were thriving, doing well, and their use not undermined by *Bahasa Indonesia*. Yet one wonders if the situation would look different if questions about language use in daily communication outside the home were asked. With newspapers, media, education, government and administration inexorably Indonesian, can other vernaculars survive? It is not a coincidence that only the top 8 largest language groups in Indonesia were covered in the census. How many of the other 722 languages are at the brink of extinction or are already extinct?

India's censuses detailed all the languages and dialects that were entered as 'mother tongues', for the complex political issues posed by the different states are essentially drawn by linguistic boundaries. At the same time, 'Hindi' had to be presented as a dignified national language, which explains why 48 different languages and dialects were classified as 'Hindi'. This classification was impressive, showing almost half of the population in India acknowledging 'Hindi' as the mother tongue. The actual number of people in India who use Hindi (or other languages, for that matter) on a daily basis is however not available. It remains questionable as to how widely used the national language is.

Changing linguistic habits and practices are often shaped by the requirements of the nation, the political agendas of the governing body, the diversity of its people and the demands imposed on a heterogeneous sociocultural base. Census reports are, in the very same way, a visualisation of these exact political and historical requirements. Determining language use and linguistic change, does the census tell the real story, or the story the state wants to tell?

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Notes

[1] The definition of 'Mother Tongue' in Singapore is not a linguistic one. According to Skutnabb Kangas and Phillipson (1989: 452-453), 'mother tongue' is defined by (1) origin, which is the language(s) one learned first; (2) competence, i.e., the language(s) one knows best; (3) function, which is the language(s) one uses most; and (4) identification, which is the language(s) one identifies with as well as the language(s) one is identified as a native speaker by others. By these criteria, Skutnabb-Kangas and Phillipson further state that one can have several mother tongues. The same person can also have different mother tongues, depending on which definition is used. A person's mother tongue can also change during one's life- time, according to the definition of competence, function and identification. In Singapore's case, the concept, 'Mother Tongue' does not follow the criteria of origin, competence, function and identification.

[2] See Hashim in this volume for languages in education in Malaysia.

[3] The term 'Pribumis' was used only in the 1980 census. In 1990, the census registered the Pribumis as two peoples, 'Kadazan' and 'Dusun', though in 1970, they were all called Kadazans, and in 1960 and all previous censuses, they were registered as 'Dusuns'. (Reid, 1997: 120)

[4] In the 1980 census, those who were not Chinese or Indian were listed as 'Pribumi'. (Reid, 1997: 124).

[5] The percentage was worked out based on an estimated population of Assam.

[6] Full figures for Tamil in 1981 are not available as the census records for Tamil Nadu were lost due to floods.

[7] Full figures for Assamese in 1981 are not available as the 1981 Census could not be conducted in Assam due to disturbed conditions then prevailing there.

[8] Full figures for Kashmiri for 1991 are available as the 1991 Census was not conducted in Jammu and Kashmir due to disturbed conditions then prevailing there.

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