

The Issue of Bahasa Melayu from Colonial to Decolonial Era¹

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Abstract

This paper illustrates a general picture of development of Bahasa Melayu in terms of its socialization throughout the colonial and de-colonial periods. Colonialism ought to be regarded to a larger extent, a reconstruction of the languages of the natives in their homeland. On the other hand, de-colonialism has witnessed the process of de-construction of existing language policies and practices in newly established nation-states. This is a process that cannot be alienated from the efforts of the colonial scholarly rulers, since they played a paramount role and functioned well pertaining to the use of Bahasa Melayu, though they did not plan for what appeared during the de-colonial era.

To map the position of Bahasa Melayu during the different colonial periods, the investigation has been narrowed to certain fields focusing on the use of the language in an education system. Henceforth, it would be naïve to expect that the language issue would be settled in a short time after the independence. When all steps and phases are traced, it would become clear that how the process was stressful and is still inevitably, at least to some extent, a national issue.

It was during the British era and most of the post-independence era, that various types of policies were designed to rediscover the phenomenon of Bahasa Melayu in terms of history, sociology, culture and civilization. All the policies have played paramount roles and functioned as tools in the construction of cultural unity and nation-state formation in a successive manner. These transformations have led Bahasa Melayu to be brought into full existence normatively from a mere position of vernacular system which was described as a malfunction during the colonial era.

The attempts to design a national and official language are claimed as the cement of socio-political unity in the newly established nation-state. The language transformation process was smooth, instead, it included extremely challenging situations and contradictory encounters. The nation-state building during the decolonization has witnessed the growing competitiveness between languages, not only the English and Bahasa Melayu but also Bahasa Melayu and minority languages as an expression of *exoglossic* policy and *endoglossic* policies.

Key Words: Bahasa Melayu, Colonialism, de-colonialism, national language.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is a part of a research aiming to sketch the general picture of development of Malay language in terms of its socialization throughout the modern era. However, due to the some necessities, taking into consideration of pre-independence developments has a pivotal importance. Otherwise, it would be difficult to conceive the modern era without the impact of language which has a direct and organic relation with “knowledge construction” in the pre-independence era.² In terms of this short research, the attempt is to map out the place of Bahasa Melayu (BM)³ which is considerably larger impact on the Malay modernity, and highlight the issue in the form of record of events.

It is salient to address that the BM has become a subject of various transformations from the colonial era to the decolonial one. At the very outset it ought to be stressed that these both eras have their own features due to the nature of colonialism and decolonialism. While the former was a direct influence of the outsiders into native cultures, the latter one, a process witnessed the direct involving of the native intelligensia into all aspects of social institutions including language. Of course, there can be some objections the implimentation of socialization of BM throughout the colonial era, such as vernacular schools, translaton and publication initiatives of a large variety of texts from religious, historical and literary domains, played a manipulative role basically for the Malay stock of population. All the abovementioned areas played paramount roles as will be discussed below considering the socialisation of BM. However, if modernization of language in terms of socialization is taken into consideration, it appears that the colonial era cannot be belittled or overcome since it had strong stimulation to highlight the nation’s language so as to be socialized to some extent.

The role and function of the schooling had inevitably a direct link with the configuration of BM formally and its socialization. In regard to this, the education policy of the British authorities was paramount. Notwithstanding, it ought to be emphasized that the initial efforts to establish schools were under the consideration of private sector. That is why “the first schools were stated by private individuals, publicly inspired or as religious missions”.⁴

This treatise is a try to construe the socialization of BM on the course of time initiating from the early decades of the British rule until the years of independence. Throughout this relatively long history, BM has been transformed and become socialized from one phase to another which is the necessity of the sociological factors explicitly exist in the Peninsula in almost the last two

²Shamsul A. B., 2003, “The Malay World: The Concept of Malay Studies and National Identity Formation”, In *Islam, Society and Politics*, (ed.) Virginia Hooker, Norani Othman, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, p. 102.

³Hereafter “BM” for short.

⁴Ernest Lau, *From Mission to Church: The Evolution of the Methodist Church in Singapore and Malaysia: 1885-1976*, Genesis, Singapore, 2008, p. 91.

hundred years. What a striking fact overall is that BM, a communication medium of a race, before independence became a national language to some extent.

Thomas Raffles, a practical and progressive administrator, thought education in line with economic achievement since the very beginning, argued the substantiality of native languages to conduct basic education for the native children. In regard to this, he was the initiator of educational opportunities, particularly for the sons of the ruling elites, even though he did not materialize universal education in Malay world.⁵ In fact, this was not a decision simply taken, instead it proves that since the very early eras of the colonialism, BM was regarded as not only the core and substantial medium of communication but also medium of instruction at schools established by the Westerners, exemplified the initiatives conducted by the Dutch.⁶ It is not deniable that the way of Raffles' thought and practice in terms of educating the natives was seminal for the future foreign and native administrators and intellectuals. Due to this reason, it is safe enough to call him as the founding father of the development of Malay education including Malay language.⁷

2.Literature Review

Language issue has always been a core point of discussions and disputes in the domain of education, though the differentiation of the language policies between the colonial and decolonial eras reveals itself in the idea of change of cultural and political environment. During the long colonial history, language was established as a radical and racial subject. And it continued before and after the independence years. There are substantial body of research and publication about the education policies during the colonial era, but it is difficult to argue the same thing in terms of BM. Though some sources have been produced in terms of the language aspect which is taken into consideration overall in education policy, it is also a fact that the place of BM particularly during the colonial era is neglected.

At the very outset it should be reminded that the educational policy in Malaya is analytically taken into consideration by various researchers. For instance, Frederic Mason convincingly argues that there have been four phases and he talks about these phases in order, the period of Raffles, creation of Education Department in 1872, universalization of education after post-war, and developments in the independence years.⁸

⁵G. G. Hough, "Notes on The Educational Policy of Sir Stamford Raffles", *JMBRAS*, Vol.XI, Part I-2, March 1933, Singapore, p. 168;

⁶S. Takdir Alisjahbana, *Language Planning for Modernization: The Case of Indonesian and Malaysian*, Mouton, The Hague, 1976, p. 35; Bobby E. K., *In His Good Time: The Story of the Church in Singapore 1819-1978*, Graduates' Christian Fellowship, Singapore, 1980, p. 26.

⁷Lembaga Biasiswa Kenangan Maulud (Prophet Muhammad's Birthday Commemoration Scholarship Fund Board), "Socio-Economy", *Intisari*, The Research Quarterly of Malaysia, Vol. III, No. 3, Malaysian Sociological Research Institute, Singapore, 1968, p. 81.

⁸Frederic Mason, *The Schools of Malaya*, Eastern Universities Press, Singapore, 1959, p. 24.

Language issue which was given priority since the beginning and materialized relatively late phases during the colonial era by the British authorities played salient role for the establishing the basis of the nation-state after the independence. As mentioned by Carol Lynn, colonial administration “provided the mould for its successor the nation state”.⁹ This employs the idea of how the British constructed the national issue in terms of opening Malay vernacular schools which ought to be considered as the fundamentals of modern Malaysian education system. And the former’s unique indigenous language became both the sole official, national language and also the medium of instruction at schools from bottom to up in a constructive manner of the nation-building process.

It is conceived from the argument of Tham Seong Chee that there was a dichotomic institutionalization rooted on the nature of the education system during the colonial era. On the one side, there were secular institutions such as government, business and modern education under the strict control of the British. On the other hand, the institutions pertaining to religio-cultural affairs which remained prerogative of the ruler in each state. This dichotomy reflected itself in the usage and function of the languages, say, English and BM. While the British “favoured the use of English” through the secular “institutional structure”, BM had a function in the literary, cultural and religious domains. In this context, BM was a strong tool for literary and religious elite who had pioneering in religio-cultural life.¹⁰ Perhaps, it is not easy to talk about the hegemony of the BM during this process, since BM had a function only in the traditional institutional structure, not accepted formally or in terms of medium of instruction by the other racial groups in Malaya.

Besides, Kok Loy Fatt argues that the language policy of the British colonial administration was “*laisse faire* in nature”. In fact, like abovementioned from the quotations from Tham Seong Chee, Fatt also is convinced to claim that the British preferred a distinct policy of language among the Malay society in Malay Peninsula. Though the British considered much to educate the Malay stock in their own native language, the former opined educating the sons of the Malay elite in English.¹¹

3.Colonial Era And Development of Malay Language

It is possible to map the development of BM during the colonial era pertaining to critical implimentation of various policies. In regard to this, the present writer offers some crucial steps as follow: Vernacular Schools and Romanised Malay; Translations, Dictionaries and Preaches in BM; Publications.

⁹Tony Stokcwell, “Forging Malaysia and Singapore: Colonialism, Decolonization and Nation-Building, In *Nation-Building: Five Southeast Asian Histories*, ISEAS, Singapore, 2005, p. 192.

¹⁰Tham Seong Chee (1990), *A Study of the Evolution of the Malay Language: Social Change and Cognitive Deveypment*, Singapore University Press, Singapore, p. xvi.

¹¹Kok Loy Fatt, *Colonial Office Policy Towards Education in Malaya: 1920-1940*, Master Thesis, Faculty of Education, University of Malaya, 1978, pp. 69-70.

The era of colonialism is regarded as a reconstruction of the Malay land not only in terms of tangible, but also intangible manner. The cultural determination of Malay race, as the owner of the Malay land, seems to be degraded by reconstructing the society designed on the basis of the priority of the English language. For instance, since the era commenced by the ideas of Sir Thomas Raffles to educate the ruling elite for some mid and high positions in colonial offices, English was recognized on the course of time as the language of privileged circle of the Malay community. On the other hand, a)BM was admittedly claimed to continue its influence as lingua franca which was a tool of communication among various races including the British. More than this, formally, b)BM was commenced to be socialized at vernacular schools initiated by some very distinguished individual British authorities.

Here the present writer is trying to systematize the position of BM in a general context during the colonial era as taking into consideration how it became utilized by various circles for their specific aims. And this specific aims were functional enough for the development of BM throughout the phases which will be discussed below.

3.1. Vernacular Schools and Romanised Malay

The first phase was initiated by the ideas of Thomas Raffles in terms of institutionalization of teaching in BM in vernacular schools. Regarding the periodization of these activities it can be claimed conditionally that the years between 1819-1867 were paramount, though, due to the nature of the above-mentioned attempts this type of schools were also continued to be materialized and functioned well even after 1867.

This phase was very initial and salient enough due to the dissemination of the idea of the importance of native language in education institutions. In particular, this era ought to be taken into consideration due to first initiatives of establishment of Malay vernacular school in Malaya. In addition to this, the thought of Thomas Raffles became so influential on his political descendants followed his ideas of language education. This phase was initiated by Raffles who first expressed a desire to establish Malay schools after he discovered that reading and teaching was concentrated around the reading of the Koran in Arabic.¹²

It should be highlighted that before the colonial administration commenced its educational policy formally for the establishment of Malay vernacular schools, some very zealous missionaries such as Claudius H. Thomsen (1822), an LSM methodist took the initiative and Benjamin Keasberry (1839) was “with special assignment to work among the Malays”. Though the former’s aim was to missionize the Malay youth, after he himself and his wife acquired enough BM, they educated

¹²Ven. D. D. Chelliah, *A History of The Educational Policy of The Straits Settlements with Recommendations for a New system Based on Vernaculars*, G. H. Kiat, Singapore, 1960, p. 13; S. Takdir Alisjahbana, *Language Planning for Modernization: The Case of Indonesian and Malaysian*, Mouton, The Hague, 1976, p. 43.

Malay boys and girls in BM.¹³ Later on, comprehensive schooling of Malay vernacular had a specific role of development of BM not only allowing more Malay stocks could communicate in a formal dialect, but also the standartization of administration language, media etc. In particular, commencing from the early decades missionary groups had a special attention to schooling facilitating first initiatives in Penang and Malacca, due to both their own religious mission policy and the grants from the colonial regime.¹⁴ In regard to institutionalization of education, there were initial steps to establish the Malay schools first Bayan Lepas on the Island of Penang in 1821. Later on, the similar institutions were materialized in Telok Belanga and Kampong Gelam, reown districts of Malay settlements in Singapore in 1856.¹⁵

When the British established the vernacular schools in Malaya starting from the early 1870s, even though it was limited to teach to Muslim Malay children, the policy of teaching BM in a formal way in the schools started to be materialized. The Anglicanisation of education through “the introduction of Romanised Malay” argued by Ven D. D. Chelliah ought to be admitted as a second step to promote BM as the medium of instruction to teach English not only to Malay students, but also Chinese and Indian ones.¹⁶

It can be recalled that some efforts of the British such as founding and making compulsory Malay vernacular schools in which the medium of instruction was BM. These efforts originally did not intend to create a national awareness, but probable to some extent became a medium of establishing a national feeling among the seperated groups of the Malay population in the 19th century. One of the arguments regarding the importance of this fundamental education for Malay youths was to preserve the young Malay generations close to their own socio-cultural environment. This implimentation functioned, as generally quoted, “to avoid alienating rural Malay youth from peasant life”.¹⁷

¹³Bobby E. K., *In His Good Time: The Story of the Church in Singapore 1819-1978*, Graduates' Christian Fellowship, Singapore, 1980, pp. 31-32, 51; Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, Roland J. Braddell, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Vol II, John Murray, London, 1921, p. 236.

¹⁴E.C. Hull, Annual Educational Report, 1894, In *Straits Settlements Annual Reports For the Years 1894*, Singapore, Printed At the Government Printing Office, 1895, p. 173,

The Educational Planning and Research Division Ministry of Education Malaya, (New Edition), Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1970, p. 7; Ven. D. D. Chelliah, *A History of The Educational Policy of The Straits Settlements with Recommendations for a New system Based on Vernaculars*, G. H. Kiat, Singapore, 1960, p. 58-9; Teo Eng Liang, *Malay Encounter During Benjamin Peach Keasberry's Time in Singapore 1835 to 1875*, A Center for the Study of Christianity in Asia Monograph, 2009, p. 13.

¹⁵Ven. D. D. Chelliah, *A History of The Educational Policy of The Straits Settlements with Recommendations for a New system Based on Vernaculars*, G. H. Kiat, Singapore, 1960, p. 59; Asiah Abu Samah, *The Development of English Language Policy in Malaysia: The New Policy on Science and Mathematics in the Medium of English*, PhD Dissertation, University of Sussex, 2008, p. 84; Amat Juhari Moain, “Bahasa Melayu Johor-Riau: Lingua Franca dan Ketamadunan Melayu”, In *Warisan Persuratan Johor*, (eds) Zainal Abidin Borhan, Othman Puteh et. al., Yayasan Warisan Johor, 1997, p. 261.

¹⁶Ven. D. D. Chelliah, *A History of The Educational Policy of The Straits Settlements with Recommendations for a New system Based on Vernaculars*, G. H. Kiat, Singapore, 1960, p. 69.

¹⁷R. S. Milne; Diane K. Mauzy, *Malaysia: Tradition, Modernity and Islam*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1986, p. 91.

3.2. Translations, Dictionaries and Preaches in BM

For the missionary works, translation, preparation dictionaries and preaches were compulsory due to the nature of their existence among the indigenous societies. And all these attempts, at the same time, very functional in order to reach the native masses since the very early ages of the colonialism. Though these types of literate activities commenced in early decades, taking into consideration of the density, periodically the years between 1867-1900 relatively can be accepted. In addition to all above-mentioned reasons, this second phase is differentiated from the first phase in terms of institutionalization of the language policy after the administrative rearrangement of Malay Peninsula under the Colonial Office, independent from the East Indian Company, in 1867.

In regard to this, the attempts from various missionary groups in Malaya during the 19th century were not surprising. In particular, some very aggressive mission groups, such as ‘The London Missionary Society’ (LMS), as one of the early established groups in Malaya in 1817, prioritized translation of the Christian texts. In fact, this was a two-way activity. First, they had to learn BM and then either themselves or as seen in the contribution of Munshi Abdullah, using local literate individuals to translate in co-partnership and print the Bible and other religious treaties into vernacular languages.¹⁸ Abdullah being a translator and having friendships with the various British circles both secular administrators and religious bodies, such as Stamford Raffles, Priest Thomsen, Priest Limne and Benjamin Keasberry etc. contributed to some extent, due to the intercourse of BM and the English.¹⁹ In particular, Abdullah is regarded as the father of contemporary Malay literature by writing in his unique style differing from the conventional way of writing and produced various types of genre.²⁰ Abdullah’s literature works denote the way of change and improving of Malay language and literature, and at the same time ought to be seen as the result of the interactions with European circles and translation attempts.

Among the missionary figures, William G. Shellabear, as one of the distinguished members of the Methodist Mission, ought to be remembered as a significant contributor, since he worked consistently hard to involve in his mission work throughout various types of literary work. Initially, he offered to Bishop Thoburn from India 1885 to translate some Christian tracts into BM by his own initiative and sang “half-a-dozen hymns” in BM during street meetings.²¹ In

¹⁸A. H. Hill, *The Hikayat Abdullah*, (Tr.), Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, Reprint No. 29, Kuala Lumpur, 2009, pp. 11-12; Teo Eng Liang, *Malay Encounter During Benjamin Peach Keasberry’s Time in Singapore 1835 to 1875*, A Center for the Study of Christianity in Asia Monograph, 2009, p. 12; Bobby E. K., *In His Good Time: The Story of the Church in Singapore 1819-1978*, Graduates’ Christian Fellowship, Singapore, 1980, p. 31.

¹⁹S. Takdir Alisjahbana, *Language Planning for Modernization: The Case of Indonesian and Malaysian*, Mouton, The Hague, 1976, p. 48; Amat Juhari Moain, “BahasaMelayu Johor-Riau: Lingua Franca dan Ketamadunan Melayu”, In *Warisan Persuratan Johor*, (eds) Zainal Abidin Borhan, Othman Puteh et. al., Yayasan Warisan Johor, 1997, p. 260.

²⁰Taib Osman, *An Introduction to the Development of Modern Malay Language and Literature*, Eastern University Press, Singapore, 1961, pp. 1-2.

²¹Bobby E. K., *In His Good Time: The Story of the Church in Singapore 1819-1978*, Graduates’ Christian Fellowship, Singapore, 1980, p. 118.

addition, he also “embraced the Malay literary genre of the *syair*” (verse form) for the translations of the Bible to reach to the hearts of the Malay folks. In addition to his attempt to functionalize BM as the medium of mission work he also challenged to write a new ‘Malay-English Vocabulary’.²²

In particular, throughout the translations of some secular and religious texts of the Western cultural sources into BM caused highly possible some transmissions of vocabulary. Since the language transaction was the very basic and “gateway to the customs and culture of people” missionaries were prone to learn the BM.²³ In addition to these missionary inquiries, the Malay medium service in the Chapels was conducted, though it was rare, for example the initiatives of Benjamin Keasberry, who and Charles Phillips translated “the Malay hymn-book” and were also introducing the language throughout preaching face to face interactions with the community in a very active manner.²⁴ These efforts were successively continued by variety of missionary groups. For instance, William Gomes from St. Andrew’s mission aligned to Anglican Ministry, conducted his mission work through the vernacular languages including BM between the years 1872-1890.²⁵

Besides, the dictionary works, which allowed inevitably to improve the number of vocabulary particularly in technical subjects, were also paramount medium for the development of BM. For instance, R. J. Wilkinson, Mathew Swettenham and William Shellabear renown British officials and intellectuals exercised some efforts in this field.²⁶ During this phase some more circles including both British and the natives, materialised their initiative to promote BM in order to match its linguistics power with English. For instance, some authorities such as Abdul Rahman Andak, charged in administration of the Sultanate of Johor educated either in Singapore or in England contributed translation of some administrative terminology into BM.²⁷

3.3. Publications

In regard to publication, the attempts of the British circles including particularly missionary groups inevitably played strategic roles. The publication work took steps more in last decades of the 19th century and improved in the first part of the 20th century. In particular, the developments in this field occurred particularly between the years 1900-1941. Notwithstanding, *Bustan Arifin*,

²²Robert Hunt, *William Shellabear: A Biography*, University of Malaya Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1996, pp. 9, 119.

²³Theodore R. Doraisamy (eds.), *Sophia Blackmore in Singapore: Educational and Missionary Pioneer 1887-1927*, General Conference Women’s Society of Christian Service, The Methodist Church in Singapore, Singapore, 1987, p. 16.

²⁴Teo Eng Liang, *Malay Encounter During Benjamin Peach Keasberry’s Time in Singapore 1835 to 1875*, A Center for the Study of Christianity in Asia Monograph, 2009, p. 25; Walter Makepeace, Gilbert E. Brooke, Roland J. Braddell, *One Hundred Years of Singapore*, Vol II, John Murray, London, 1921, p. 266.

²⁵National Council of Churches of Singapore, *A Guide to Churches and Christian Organizations in Singapore 2005-2006*, Singapore, 2005, pp. 2, 3.

²⁶H. S. Barlow, *Swettenham*, Southdene, Kuala Lumpur, 1995, p. 396.

²⁷Amat Juhari Moain, “Sejarah Perancangan Korpus Bahasa Melayu: Suatu Tinjauan Ringkas”, *Persidangan Antarabangsa Bahasa, Sastra dan Kebudayaan Melayu*, Ke-2, Jilid 1, 1-3 September, Singapore, 2002, p. 8.

as the first initiative of Malay journal, though it was a Christian content, appeared in both Arabic script (Jawi) and Rumi in 1821, Singapore.²⁸ In addition, the missionary groups inevitably directly involved in publication to be able to reach the native groups or to use Malay language for academic concerns as seen in the establishment of the Malay section of the Anglo-Chinese College in the first decades of the 19th century.²⁹

This phase witnessed some drastic changes in the education institutions and publication environments, both supported and caused each sector to develop in a mutual way. On the one side, the number of Malay students and village libraries were increasing in line with the establishing vernacular schools.³⁰ On the other hand, realization of technology transfer improved the publication facilities as well. And there were more demands for Jawi and Romanized reading materials both in translation from English and republication of some very authentic Malay texts as course materials at schools. The Malay Press, as one of the early publication institutions, performed properly during this era.³¹

Besides, there were some implementations such as opening Night Classes for the Malay adults which also included civil servant institutions as seen in the example of police department on the basis of the colonial education policy aiming to create an “opportunity of learning to read and write their own language”.³² Not only teaching BM but also by this opportunity, the language was supposed to be standardized. The increasing number of Malay vernacular schools and the improving the curriculum prove that there were some very sound developments during this period. For instance, based on the curriculum, in Standard 1 and Standard 2, both Jawi and Romanised Malay subjects were accompanied arithmetic, writing, dictation, geography (*ilmu alam Melayu*) etc.³³ Among these materials Malay History (Hikayat Tanah Melayu), Geographical reader (Hikayat Dunia) Robinson Cruose in Romanized Malay and new editions of Pelayaran Abdullah and Malay Reader, Malay Book No. 1, 2, 3; Malay Arithmetic, Malay Geography, Malay Table Book.³⁴ As proved in abovementioned subjects, the last decade of the 19th century witnessed the increasing number of books published and introduced in Romanized Malay.³⁵ These publications as teaching-learning materials are proof that neither British nor the Malay contributors did not dabble in development of education system.

²⁸Amat Juhari Moain, “BahasaMelayu Johor-Riau: Lingua Franca dan Ketamadunan Melayu”, In *Warisan Persuratan Johor*, (eds) Zainal Abidin Borhan, Othman Puteh et. al., Yayasan Warisan Johor, 1997, p. 261.

²⁹A. H. Hill, *The Hikayat Abdullah*, (Tr.), Abdullah bin Abdul Kadir, Reprint No. 29, Kuala Lumpur, 2009, p. 16.

³⁰Ibrahim Saad, *Pendidikan dan Politik di Malaysia*, Dewan Bahasa Dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1981, p. 12.

³¹E. C. Hill, Annual Education Report, For the Year 1893, In *Straits Settlements Annual Reports For the Years 1894*, Singapore, Printed At the Government Printing Office, 1895, p. 322.

³²Martin Lister, The Administration Report of the States of Snugei Ujong and Jelebu, For the Year 1893, p. 545; E. C. Hill, Annual Education Report, For the Year 1892, p. 167.

³³Regulations for the Malay Vernacular Schools in the Straits Settlements and Federated Malay States and for the Sultan Idris Training College 1927, Education Code V, Singapore, 1928, p. 6.

³⁴E. C. Hill, Annual Education Report, For the Year 1892, p. 177.

³⁵C. W. Sneyd Kynnersly, Administration Report, Malacca, For the Year 1893, p. 109.

All the processes mentioned above were supported by the salient efforts of the British individuals such as, William Shellabear, R. J. Wilkinson who had impact on the development on the course of time until the Japanese invasion. William Shellabear was a supporter of BM to become a *lingua franca* for all circles living in Malaya. he also influenced some other missionaries in his mission movement of methodist. His sympathy to the Malays is witnessed in his ideas. The second aspect is related to his own interest of evangelistic works. His interest was so high that he improved Bahasa Melayu until he could write down the Christian stories to tell in the literature form of *syair* due to evangelistic missionary work.³⁶

R. J. Wilkinson, in spite of his short term, played an influential role in education and publication in Malaya. He had a great vision for Malayan youths to communicate in their own language, and for them to be exposed to contemporary issues via Malay journals.³⁷ In order to reach the before-mentioned aim, he worked hard to produce grammatical and literary works. In terms of this, it should be considered that he was one of the strenuous attempter to foster and spread the usage of BM not only in formal schools but also village libraries.³⁸ By these efforts, he focused on the improvement of education in BM as a common language and to introduce it into the modern era which was needed for national unity at the very beginning of the 20th century in Malaya.

4. Decolonial Period and the Role of BM in Nation State Establishment

The independence process witnessed the replacement of power elites from the outsiders to insiders who commenced playing their role to establish a culturally united nation. This process also was a continuity of the politicization of language, but this time on the reverse of the current in terms of the determination of the Malay political elites to build “a single identity within a multi-ethnic society”.³⁹

This era proves strikingly that the all attempts took the colonial initiatives first and then improved on the basis of the conditions in new nation-state establishment. In terms of this, the significance of Wilkinson’s reformist initiative was proven when the education program was “geared to the maintenance of a plural society in Malaya” in the second part of 1940. The revitalisation of the idea of a national language was congruent with Wilkinson’s attempts at bringing the peoples of Malaya together with the unity of language. All these endeavours resulted in Malay being accepted as the national language (*bahasa kebangsaan*) in the 1950s.⁴⁰

³⁶Robert Hunt, *William Shellabear: A Biography*, University of Malaya Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1996, p. 9.

³⁷Rex Stevenson, *Cultivators and Administrators: British Educational Policy Towards the Malays 1875-1906*, Oxford University Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1975, p. 110; William R. Roff, *The Origins of Malay Nationalism*, University Malaya Press, Kuala Lumpur, 1967, pp. 133-4; H. R. Cheeseman, “Education in Malaya 1900-1941”, *Malaysia in History*, Special Issue, (Journal of the Malaysian Historical Society), 22, May 1979, Kuala Lumpur, 1979, p. 129.

³⁸S. Takdir Alisjahbana, *Language Planning for Modernization: The Case of Indonesian and Malaysian*, Mouton, The Hague, 1976, p. 45.

³⁹Carol Lynn Mitchell, *Language as an Instrument of National Policy: The Dewan dan Pustaka of Malaysia*, PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1993, p. 5.

⁴⁰Francis Wong Hoy Kee, Ef Tiang Hong, *Education in Malaysia*, Heinemann, Kuala Lumpur, 1971, pp. 107-8; Henk Maier, pp. 24-5.

Though there were some various attempts throughout the British rule, it is admittedly claimed that “the true emergence of the Malay language, was not until independence came in sight in the fifties”.⁴¹ This novel development was not a monopoly in the hands of the Malay politicians, more than this all intellectual circles particularly the Malays living in Singapore played some paramount roles and initiated the language and literature movement by being organized under the Angkatan Sasterawan and Lembaga Bahasa Melayu, 1950.⁴²

But the process took speed during the preparation for independency and BM was regarded as a benchmark of the drafting of the Constitution. The founding fathers of the modern Malay state were inevitably questioning the legitimacy of the ‘colonial language’ and attempted to replace it through a time space after properly prepared for the infrastructure of socio-cultural establishment. As addressed by Tunku Abdul Rahman “It is only right that as a developing nation we should want to have a language of our own. If the national language is not introduced our country will be devoid of a unified character and personality – as I could put it, a nation without a soul and without a life.”⁴³

As mentioned by various writers, the founding fathers “believed that the national and official language of the country should be Malay.” As assumed that BM would entail to be prominent in the newly establishing nation-state in spite of the Malay land became a settlement for various races and language groups. In terms of the near future plannings of BM, “the National Language is supposed to perform its full-fledged role, replacing English as the official Language of the government.” This intention and attempt to substitute English for BM is also regarded as Malay identity construction and additionally, “to achieve harmony between the communities living in Malay Peninsula”.⁴⁴ This process witnessed institutional construction and establishing of a shared identity by the determination of BM as the national language after various Reports such as Barnes, Fenn-Wu and Razak successively.⁴⁵ The policy was also congenial with the report of both The Barnes Committee (1951) and The Razak Committee (1956). The reports, bearing past historical imprints, recommended the establishment of a national education system, selecting Malay language as the national language in order to overcome the socio-cultural gaps between the peoples of Malaya in the eve of independency.

⁴¹S. Takdir Alisjahbana, *Language Planning for Modernization: The Case of Indonesian and Malaysian*, Mouton, The Hague, 1976, p. 47.

⁴²S. Takdir Alisjahbana, *Language Planning for Modernization: The Case of Indonesian and Malaysian*, Mouton, The Hague, 1976, p. 49.

⁴³Francis Wong Hoy Kee, Gee Tiang Hong, *Education in Malaysia*, Heinemann Educational Books, Second Edition, Kuala Lumpur, 1975, p. 79.

⁴⁴Syed Hussein bin Ali, *Malay as the National Language*, Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Kuala Lumpur, 1959, pp. 1-2.

⁴⁵Frederic Mason, *The Schools of Malaya*, Eastern Universities Press, Singapore, 1959, pp. 30, 33.

National authorities in various governmental structures attempted to establish Bahasa Melayu as national language as “sovereign language and as a media of instruction, not only at the level of the primary and the secondary schools, but also at the level of higher learning”.⁴⁶

5. CONCLUSION

This is a story of how BM has been brought into existence normatively from almost left to vernacular system of education and alienated due to its malfunction -which was the fate of the other vernaculars as well- for the social mobility of almost all races in Malaya during the colonial rule.

It might be argued that the design of vernacular Malay schools served for the idea of Malayization of education to some limited extent due to its scope covering just the Malay stock of the population in Malaya or in another saying, this design excluded the other races in their own cleavages. This is the reason which differentiated this design from the other one implemented during the modern Malaysia and it was described by J.K. Watson as “Malaysianization of the education system”.⁴⁷

Even though the British colonial officers commenced and took the initiative to transform the native education system in Peninsula, it cannot be said that they could succeed provided that their insistence and comprehensive planning about the education system, the crucial years appeared in 1920s for the development of native education. The Malay school system began in the 1920s under colonial auspices. It produced an indigenous cultural elite that contributed greatly to the development of the Malay language. The members of this elite have been innovative from time to time but by and large their main concern have been to preserve the linguistic and cognitive characteristics of Malay. And this group of intellectuals later on were raised to the administrative level of the state and found opportunities to implement their language policies.

Henceforth, it would be naïve to expect that the language issue was settled in a short time after the independence. As mentioned by C. E. Beeby, the nature of multi-lingualism left little doubt that there has been “intense conflicts over the medium of instruction” in Malaya.⁴⁸ When the all steps and phases are traced it would become clear that how the process was stressful and is still inevitably a subject of discussion, at least to some extent, as a national issue.

⁴⁶Mahathir Mohamad, “Opening Address of the Fourth Conference of the Asian Association on National Languages”, In *National Language as Medium of Instruction*, (ed), Asmah Haji Omar, Noor Ein Mohd. Noor, 25-30 April 1977, p. 1.

⁴⁷J.K.P.Watson, “Cultural Pluralism Nation-Building and Educational Policies in Peninsular Malaysia, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1980, pp. 163.

⁴⁸C.E. Beeby, *Assessment of Indonesian Education: A Guide in Planning*, New Zealand Council for Educational Research, Wellington, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1979, p. 277.

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