


Unified Language Project

DR. THEODORE S. RODGERS and YAAKUB B. KARIM
Unit Bahasa, Curriculum Development Centre, Ministry of Education,
Kuala Lumpur.

There are two main aims for the Unified Language Project (henceforth ULP). The first aim is to experiment with some radical departures from normal language teaching procedures in the hope that a solution can be found to the problem of maintaining the standard of English during the progressive Malayansisation of the medium of instruction in other subjects. In connection with this aim a new language course is being developed. The second aim of the ULP is to study the effects of home environment on the learning of English and Bahasa Malaysia. It is hoped that such a study will provide useful insights for teachers and materials writers as well as administrators.

The experiment will extend over two years. In 1974 children in Standard I only were involved. In 1975 the same children are following the ULP programme in

Standard 2. A fresh batch of children have begun in Standard 1. 

The basic approach of the ULP is to teach something first in Bahasa Malaysia and then the same content or a part of it in English. The theory behind this approach is that when the content, sequence, and instruction are familiar, the learning of English will be facilitated and made meaningful. The child will focus on the structure and vocabulary of the unfamiliar language without either being distracted by wondering what it all means or merely repeating meaningless sounds like a parrot.

An important component of the ULP is the use of songs and games to teach structures in both Bahasa Malaysia and English. New structures taught in a lesson are incorporated into songs composed by the ULP team and set to familiar Malay, English and other tunes. The

songs are recorded on tape so that teachers will have the music in class. The games are also devised to make the practice of new structures enjoyable. The ULP believes language learning should be fun.

The project is designing what is essentially a Bahasa Malaysia course for native speakers, using the present Malay syllabus as a guide. Dialogues, stories, drills, visual aids and situations are to appeal to children of the Standard 1 age-group as much as possible. Portions of this language course are then replicated directly in English. Extra pronunciation and grammar drills are added to the English portion of the language course where necessary. In so far as practicable the structural patterns follow the sequence in the present English syllabus, but the syllabus again is merely a guide.

The amount of time devoted to the ULP in the experimental classes is exactly the same as the total number of minutes devoted to English and Bahasa Malaysia in the control classes. However, instead of separate instruction in a Bahasa Malaysia class and in an English class, the ULP plans the day's allocation of two hours into two blocks of one hour each, during each of which English and Bahasa Malaysia alternate frequently. It is planned that about 6 Malay -- English matched components should comprise a day's lesson, an approximately 10 minute block in Malay is followed by a parallel 10 minute block in English, etc.

The test schools have been chosen to represent urban, rural and mixed environments so that a study may be made of the differential effects of environment on language learning. All the selected schools have populations which are predominantly Malay-speaking in Standard 1. In each school one Standard 1 class is the experimental class and another is the control. For this reason, it has been necessary to have children assigned randomly to the classes.

The nature of the project is such that the teachers teaching the experimental classes must be able to teach in *both* Malay and English and are given special bi-weekly briefings on the lessons they are preparing to teach. Data sheets on the previous two weeks teaching are also collected from teachers during these briefings. These data and the observation sheets are used as a basis for revising the lessons.

The children in both control and experimental classes are pre-tested on a picture vocabulary test. At the end of the year they take the school examinations plus other project tests designed to study general language mastery as well as the effect of particular teaching techniques on language learning.

In order to study the effects of environment on language learning, interviewers will be engaged to interview principals, teachers and parents of the children to get information on the home and its apparent effect on language learning.

The principal product of the project is a set of detailed, linguistically-structured, parallel-language lesson plans. These are produced by the writing staff in weekly units--each unit dealing with one to three grammatical structures in Bahasa Malaysia and English. A weekly lesson plan contains detailed instructions to the teacher as to teaching points, instructional objectives, materials needed, description of teaching aids to be made, and suggested teaching sequence. The teachers are briefed on these lesson plans a week or two before each unit is to be presented.

A typical daily lesson plan is represented by the following sequence of teaching events.

1. Conversational Introduction -- Bahasa Malaysia then English.
2. Revision of previous units of previous day -- Bahasa Malaysia then English.
3. Introduce new material through explanation, class repetition demonstration, etc. -- Bahasa Malaysia.
4. Whole class activity using the new material, using substitution tables, puppet, interchanges with children, etc. -- Bahasa Malaysia.
5. Repeat 3 & 4 in English.
6. Small group activity using the new material employing "guessing" game, relay games, group circles, pair activities, etc. -- Bahasa Malaysia then English.
7. Introducing and singing a pattern-built song -- Bahasa Malaysia then English.
8. Story or more complex work in Bahasa Malaysia.
9. Reading activity using new or related materials. Review of previous week's spelling or reading materials -- Bahasa Malaysia.
10. English spelling pattern and vocabulary building activities. English reading exercises.
11. Writing activity using new material (exercise book work or blackboard activities -- Bahasa Malaysia and English).
12. Review of day's work -- (Discussion, group game, blackboard review, guessing game, songs, etc.)

Results of the first year's experiment are most promising and suggest that ULP students perform at a level 50% higher than children in regular classes on the basis of end of year testing.