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Gaining Acceptance of Task-Based Teaching during Malaysian Rural In-Service Teacher Training

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Summary

The limited adoption of task-based teaching in Malaysia can be attributed to constraints common to other settings in which English is but one of the many language choices. Challenges include teacher-fronted teaching and little community support for English, particularly in rural environments. Adoption of task-based approaches is rarely effective when prescribed by the syllabus, as once the teacher closes the classroom door she will do what she is comfortable with. This is especially so when numerous curriculum changes are centrally implanted (Kabilan, 2007). In some cases teachers adopt new approaches to classroom tasks. It is therefore useful to describe a case study in which there was acceptance of tasks as primary and secondary teachers experienced the loop input approach (Woodward, 2003) during teacher education courses. This chapter will therefore draw on data from the early interaction of in-service courses to suggest approaches to building positive responses to tasks for rural classrooms. Data and participant reflections suggest that deconstructing transmission teaching can occur when tasks are productive and relevant. It is suggested that task-based approaches may need to work with the realities which Canagarajah (2011) and others describe as 'plurilingual' classrooms. This chapter argues that transferable tasks and an awareness of methodologies beyond monolingualism may build acceptance of change.

Introduction

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) has had a multiplicity of propagators and interpretations while the practicality of implementing TBLT and learning has had a

number of challenges. The challenges within an in-service project to develop many of the classroom features central to TBLT will be described. The Malaysian Schools English Language Project (henceforth called the Project) was within the Malaysian primary and secondary public education system in which the use of more than one language is an everyday occurrence (Azirah, 2012; Pillay, 1998). Specifically, this description will be drawn from research into teacher and teacher educator interaction during in-service education courses. The challenges of introducing some of the core features of TBLT will be linked to the needs analysis and the early phases of in-service teacher education interaction. The chapter will begin by defining key aspects of task-based approaches before describing the background of early task-based teaching initiatives within Malaysia and related pedagogic challenges.

Task-based features: Communication versus form

A broadly defined dichotomy that informs much of the debate about defining and implementing task-based teaching is that of communication and meaning based tasks versus form-based pedagogy. In widely known work, Skehan (1998) describes the characteristics of a task as learning in which meaning is the primary concern with a relationship to real-world activities. The assessment of tasks is in his view, in terms of an outcome rather than strictly in terms of reproduction of pre-determined forms. Malaysia reacted to international changes away from form-focused syllabuses in the 1980s and 1990s with a skills-based, communicative syllabus. This syllabus introduced many TBLT features with Ministry directives which supported communicative and meaningful tasks (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 1989). There were over fifteen years of communicative language teaching advocacy with an emphasis on tasks, especially through the Secondary Schools Curriculum or Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah (KBSM) (Kementerian Pendidikan Malaysia, 1989). This process was driven through a highly prescriptive centralized national system and reactions towards it informs much of the present day positioning of pedagogy. Firstly, we turn to definitions of task-based pedagogy which align to defining features of the earlier syllabus, parts of which remain in contemporary syllabuses. These influences will then be linked to aspects of the case study which follows. Definitions of TBLT can be very broad including interaction in which ‘the target language is used by the learner for a communicative purpose (goal) in order to achieve an outcome’ (Willis, 1996, p. 234). This definition has been elaborated on as:

... a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. (Nunan, 2006, p. 14)

Further definitions have been outlined throughout this volume and this terminology of TBLT can be found in the English language syllabuses of Malaysia. Such terms informed nearly fifteen years of syllabus use, although research suggests that ‘chalk and talk’ grammar transition methods still held a dominant position as Implementing

features of the task-based approach has had many challenges (Ambigathy, 2002; Musa et al., 2012). These will be outlined and linked to the case study.

Background to in-service research

Much effort and finance has been spent over decades for teacher training as a tool of Malaysian national development and this includes task-based approaches (Rajaretnam & Nalliah, 1998). A summary of contemporary ambitions and directions can be seen in the recent Malaysia Education Blueprint (2013). Yet there are many concerns regarding how effective English language teacher training is when transferred to classrooms with varied models of skills transfer (Hayes, 2000; Johnson, 2006; O'Sullivan, 2002).

Malaysia has also undergone frequent national syllabus changes and as at this time of writing, during 2014, is undergoing another round of text, teaching and resource alignment; the ninth since Independence in 1957. Experienced English language teachers have therefore seen many English language approaches delivered through textbook and multi-media provision, mass training sessions and examination specifications (Selvaraj, 2010). As described by Pandian (2004) all the trends have impacted to varying degrees through centrally driven syllabuses and prescribed national textbooks with changes from situational/structural approaches, communicative task-based approaches, hybridized functionalism to reading literacy-based specifications.

It is possible that teachers working in large class primary and secondary level classrooms may be resistant to what is often delivered as another syllabus change from a centralized agency. The question therefore remains as to how much teachers adapt to changes in a particular setting such as an in-service Project which aimed to foster meaningful tasks. It may be useful to see whether pedagogic change occurs with teacher education projects or whether teachers choose to remain entrenched with reproducing the ways in which they themselves were taught.

Analysing the early phases of in-service interaction

Although recent studies have begun to focus on specific settings and models of teacher education in developing nations, there has been little work on linking the introductory phases in pedagogic approaches of teacher education with critically evaluating the acceptance of pedagogic changes during teacher training (Singh & Richards, 2006). One can set up a pedagogic model incorporating good practice based on regionally specific experience and research, but as Malachi (201) observes many questions still remain as to what happens when Malaysian teacher educators and teachers interact with text, tasks and varied topics. Primacy Theory (Hogg & Vaughan, 1998) would suggest that the links between tasks, interaction in teacher development and acceptance of the process are especially evident in the 'early phases' of courses. The 'early phases' in this research are the beginning of courses in which a teacher educator is introducing the teacher development process with in-service teachers in classrooms.

Whether in the early or later phases, research has shown that much of the work on teacher development projects in rural settings is riddled with problems related to transference of expertise (O'Sullivan, 2002). Visiting expertise is also extremely limited in effectiveness and the area of cross-cultural acceptance is problematic as described elsewhere (Hall, 2007; Holliday, 2006). This research was with teacher educators living in the communities where the teachers lived within rural districts and focuses on tasks, techniques and talk during teacher educator and teacher interaction. Four teacher educators who were so called 'native speakers' and sixteen Malaysian rural classroom teachers at four diverse sites were part of a wider project with thirty rural sites. The interaction was within the Malaysian Schools English Language Project which will now be outlined. The Centre for British Teachers (C/BT), an international non-profit educational trust with its headquarters in Reading, United Kingdom and its Malaysian arm were asked by the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) of the Malaysian Ministry of Education to provide English Language Coordinators (ELCs) or teacher educators for selected districts throughout Malaysia. C/BT Education Services Malaysia Sdn. Bhd. has been in Malaysia since the early 1970s. The organization took up the contract in May 2002 at the same time that the Prime Minister announced the start of changes in the medium of instruction for mathematics and science from Bahasa Malaysia (Malay) to English. Significantly, the Project came at a time of quantum changes in the country's English language policy, since reversed in a highly contentious change (Goh, 2013).

The aim of the Project was to raise the standards of English in the country, particularly in rural areas, through in-service English language teacher training and to foster teaching which was providing for learners' use of English language. The Project began in June 2002 with a needs analysis which informed the context for the research, namely the courses, workshops and supportive observations for teacher development. This needs analysis, while not the most recent, remains relevant given along with the unusual access provided to a wide range of primary and secondary teachers. Recent press reports (New Straits Times, 2013) and the Ministry's 2013 Education Blueprint suggest continuity of the challenges and describe the bilingual or multilingual nature of many English language classrooms.

A needs analysis and the context of teacher education

The purpose of the Project needs analysis was to describe teacher needs in a non-urban Malaysian District, the kind of districts in which the ELCs, henceforth called teacher educators worked. The needs analysis, comprising a written form and interviews, provided a basis for focusing collaboration with teachers in Education Districts and provided information for C/BT's partner, the CDC of the Ministry of Education (Hall & Dodson, 2004). It informed the subsequent five years of teacher education. Numerous instances of anecdotal evidence and small-scale research (Costelloe, 2006) confirm the validity of the needs analysis findings during the Project and it has been suggested to this author by numerous parties that little has changed in subsequent teacher education initiatives. The following sections describe the needs

analysis findings which underpin the teacher education Project, aspects of which are part of the study and which impact on the implementation of TBLT approaches.

The needs analysis for the Project was co-authored and implemented by this author with the cooperation of the Ministry of Education. This involved 168 primary and secondary teachers from one district, an 86 per cent sample and this was augmented by bilingual interviews with fifty teachers. It remains one of the few Malaysian surveys undertaken which addressed classroom teachers' perceptions of their needs. Along with a smaller localized analysis, the data formed the basis for the principles of course design which was later applied to thirty of eighty-seven Education Districts throughout Malaysia. The data from the pilot district needs analysis is derived from a written interview conducted en masse and fifty bilingual individual oral interviews. The use of two modes provided a means of verifying information as questions contained built-in contradictions. The aim of the analysis was to gather data of the perceptions, approaches, techniques and needs of English language teachers in rural Malaysia. The survey therefore examined second order perspectives of needs, in that it asked the teachers about their perceptions of classroom tasks and training needs. As such, the survey describes teachers' perspectives, views of their own practices and perceived needs.

This needs analysis then informed the situation in which later research was conducted; namely the in-service work of teacher educators living and educating within rural multicultural Malaysia. It was also used to frame the anticipated role of the teacher educators. The teacher educators were asked to devise strategies to improve English teaching and learning and motivation. In order for such activities to be successful it was necessary to see what expectations and needs teachers would bring into the process, especially as the client, the Ministry of Education, was very specific in wanting a collaborative co-constructed process in which learners were led to the productive use of English in tasks relevant to their lives. The use of meaningful communicative English language tasks was advocated. This posed challenges within 'plurilingual situations' (Piccardo, 2013) in which English is one of many languages. The client asked for an English-only approach to learning and target tasks and this was subsequently supported by a Ministry directive. The situation is however one in which English is as much a foreign language as a second or third language and so there were challenges in the objective which was to minimize form based, transmission mode teaching in rural Malaysia. Teachers are often given tasks in syllabuses for which there are no community situations in which to use the English and this has been proven to be demotivating (Mohamed et al., 2006). Classroom interaction is often one of code switching and this aspect is a dynamic which influences how teachers and learners approach tasks (Costelloe, 2006). The Ministry then brought experienced native speaker teacher educators into this situation, a controversial process that continues with more recent initiatives (New Straits Times, 2013).

Many of the teacher educators employed to work in the Project interactive classrooms were 'native speaker' teacher educators with a background in communicative language teaching and in many cases task-based approaches. Most of them had extensive teaching or teacher training experience and so were familiar with the wave of task-based approaches popularized during the 1990s. These facilitators worked directly with Malaysian teachers, the more senior of whom had been trained in communicative language teaching methodology and its related national syllabus

and examination structures. This syllabus and the approach shared many task types and techniques with those espoused by task-based proponents such as those which were influential in Hong Kong during the 1990s (See Lin, 2013) for a summary of this and bilingual issues). This was therefore a situation in which teacher educators with a background in communicative methodology and or task approaches worked with teachers many of whom had been exposed to the rhetoric and task types of TBLT. The Project therefore aimed to deconstruct the large amount of still form-focused methods with participants familiar with TBLT and may therefore provide insights into the challenges of TBLT implementation at the classroom level. We will first begin with Malaysian teachers and a description of their needs, before turning to insights from the data which describes acceptance of pedagogic change.

Contextualising pedagogic change in Malaysian rural teachers' needs

Needs analysis often reveals a gap between what teachers say they do, the syllabus and actual practice as Waters and Vilches (2008) have pointed out. The needs analysis to prepare for the in-service teacher education revealed that teachers stated that they are aware of important pedagogical principles such as using pair work or group activities and creating meaningful language use. These were techniques that the client wished to see develop further through techniques often linked to TBLT, such as negotiating meaning and linking to real-life needs (Skehan, 1998). The more experienced Malaysian teachers would have attended many workshops on these approaches due to the earlier communicative syllabus implementation (Pandian, 2004). However item discrimination questions in the needs analysis about practice revealed discrepancies between what was said to be done and actual practice. Such findings are supported by more recent research in which the gap between espoused methods such as discovery learning and communicative tasks contrasted with teachers verbally describing themselves as providing rote learning and input to be copied from the board. Mohamed et al., (2006) quote classroom teachers who say that the most important consideration that influenced their choice of approach was the pupils' level of proficiency:

TA: Discovery learning? Baah . . . forget it . . . they don't have the vocabulary.

TB: As usual, teachers deliver . . . pupils do . . . some would do . . . some would copy . . . some were not interested at all . . . a lot not interested.

(Mohamed et al., 2006, p. 57)

Within the classrooms as researched by the needs analysis, the dynamics of learning were closely tied to the use of the first language, Malaysian English and students' levels of English language proficiency. The written data and interviews both revealed the frequent and widespread usage of the national language to the extent that Bahasa Malaysia was the norm and at times the dominant mode of instruction. Tasks then often were accomplished with what has come to be called 'codemeshing' in a 'translingual setting' (Canagarajah, 2011). We shall return to this central point as much of TBLT has been developed in English as a Second Language settings rather

than in a situation where ‘codemeshing’ or code switching, sometimes within one sentence, is the norm. Many within the Malaysian community, such as this writer, actively code switch in a plurilingual setting, a linguistic hybridity shared with Singapore (Silver & Bokhorst-Heng, 2013). This linguistic hybridity is often ignored by language planners and syllabus designers in both Singapore and Malaysia and in other contexts (Lin, 2013). TBLT has yet to fully address this complexity and to move beyond a monolingual approach to learning environments in which monolingualism is rare. To add to the complexity, the use of English is often driven not by teacher task facilitation, but by the high stakes demanded by national examinations and educational administrators.

The role of national examinations and choosing tasks

In Malaysian classrooms, an important choice in classroom text, task and interactional choices is product-based success in the gatekeeping national examinations: *Penilaian Menengah Rendah* (commonly abbreviated as PMR); the Lower Secondary Assessment and the *Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia* (SPM), or the Malaysian Certificate of Education, a national examination taken by all fifth-year secondary school students. The emphasis on these high stake examinations leads to classroom practice in which teachers organize learning so that students get high scores, which are more easily attained in closed tasks such as multiple-choice questions or cloze passages (Ambigathy, 2002)

The dominance of examinations which Koo (2008, p. 56) terms ‘the discourse of privileging examination’ was reported on numerous occasions during the Project as teachers would choose tasks on the basis of how successful students could be in reproducing discrete point accurate answers (Costelloe, 2006). One could hypothesize that task choices may be driven by staffroom examination displays in which the school pass rates in all subjects feature prominently in graphs comparing school with local, state and national result percentages. This quantitative drive informs much of educational rhetoric and management but the links between this highly centralized and empowered dynamic and teachers’ task choices remains under-researched for a number of reasons.

The data in the needs analysis and later research suggests a predominance of translation and the wide use of copying coupled with the need to produce an accurate product: a practice which is still continuing (Hughes, 2014 personal correspondence). This dependence of translation and form-based reproduction may translate into frequent use of closed structured tasks and blackboard copying. In the needs analysis and research questions of the study, teachers also rated a quiet classroom based on textbook input as a frequent norm while reading comprehension tasks, copying from the board and answering worksheets were widely used. The data showed that classroom practices are based on teachers’ claims to acknowledge important aspects of language learning such as encouraging English in and outside the classroom, but this rarely happened according to counter indicative questions on actual practice. The needs analysis also revealed a need for training in general methodology, motivational approaches, grammar tools and reading and writing skills development. Both secondary and primary teachers agreed that there were training

needs for pedagogy and that there were also needs related to teachers' own language. The needs analysis then informed the Project design with teacher suggestions for their own skills development. According to the more articulate teachers, only by developing skills and use of varied techniques could there be alternatives to grammar translation and examination-based rote learning.

Change through experiencing transferable tasks

The teachers spoke and wrote of wanting to know and use alternative learning arrangements other than a teacher-centred delivery of content. There was therefore a need for both teacher development and teacher training, namely for teachers to develop their own awareness and confidence through professional development and also a training need to gain practical methods and techniques. There were several expressions of the opinion that there was a need to 'do what we could do in our classrooms and learn in that same way' (Participant 26, Hall and Dodson, 2004). This needs analysis finding was supported by the later research project in which teachers reported that their main concern was to acquire transferable tasks which could be applied in classrooms in a 'plug and play' manner.

The Project was therefore based on experiential learning with pedagogy driving content and task choice. This choice of a teacher education approach then followed from data, as described above, as well as client requests for teachers to experience the kinds of tasks that the students would themselves experience. The approach was therefore one of learning by doing or experiential learning with a loop input approach (Woodward, 2003). The context for the research and the data that follows in this chapter is therefore a setting for a conscious attempt to create a 'culture of learning' (Cortazzi, 2000) in which the Project team and the client wanted to incorporate transferable experiences for classroom use. As the pedagogic director of the Project, this writer was then tasked with seeing that Project materials were task-based with learning of direct relevance to rural classrooms in a loop input approach. This meant that teachers would go through a process of learning which they could then apply to their own teaching. The client made it very clear that they had assessed earlier cascade models of training and did not see the returns in classroom change. As such there would be challenges, as much of the other training which teachers may have experienced before was teacher-fronted and less interactive than the loop input approach. The Project then had set itself the task of working with the teaching and learning culture in order to develop more effective English language learning and teaching in rural Malaysia.

Researching the acceptance of novel classroom techniques

The focus of the research study was on early phases of teacher educator teacher interaction during in-service teacher development courses. Through lesson transcripts, field notes, semi-structured interviews over two time frames and teacher education reflective interviews, description was built up and analysed for the early phases of

introducing an in-service course. The study of four out of thirty teacher educators in four rural sites in the early phases of nation-wide in-service courses used qualitative methods.

Two main groups of participants are involved: teacher educators, known locally as ELCs, and Malaysian school teachers. I will first describe the teacher educator participants and then the teachers. The project involved thirty teacher educators working with teachers in thirty rural sites or districts of which there are eighty-seven in the nation. The teacher educators lived and worked in rural Malaysian districts in which English language teaching methodology was and still is seen as an area in need of development. All the teacher educators were post-graduate English language specialists with teaching and teacher education experience. Of the sixteen teacher participants, twelve are primary teachers and four are secondary teachers. This reflects the Project direction which the client requested with a two-thirds emphasis on primary teacher development. Including secondary teachers added breadth and depth to the data as graduate secondary teachers have greater English language proficiency and content knowledge (Hall & Dodson, 2004). If one is to look at the experience level of teachers the range was from two to twenty-eight years.

Data included discourse analysis with field notes of the first hour of opening a long course, teacher and teacher educator questionnaires, pre- and post-interviews as well as reflective notes. The data was also used to gain teacher educator reflection. The in-service setting was one in which teacher educators were tasked to foster a new 'culture of learning' (Cortazzi, 2000) with greater learner-to-learner interaction and less dependence on grammar translation and teacher-fronted interaction. The following sections will describe some of the approaches which teachers reported as effective and approaches which teacher educators described as useful for fostering classroom change. What was clear from teacher responses was that they saw their learning as related to how students could learn.

Accepting tasks by doing: The loop input approach

There were many comments about the teacher educators' modelling pedagogy with tasks which could be applied to classroom practice. After commenting that she had not experienced an interactive approach in earlier training, one teacher noted that the start was very different, 'a good approach. I think and we can use it to show our students in our class, different approach' (T 10 1 L 23-24). This difference between past teacher training experiences and the methods described in this study was elaborated on in that teachers experienced and applied techniques they could use. When describing the experiential nature of the courses, a young primary teacher spoke of the links to classrooms through tasks which paralleled children's learning:

... very *interesting* because all of us sing the song, it's very *fun*, because the *children* like songs, usually children *like* songs. It's the *first* time to, we all to be *interest* in course. The main things, the song is *fun*, then normally children like the music ... so the *trainer* make *us* like a child, so they *very*, interesting. The *song* is very nice and it's *good* for us and it is fun.

(T 11 1 L 16-20)

In teacher educator reflective interviews during a later part of the study teacher educators described how they moved rapidly into tasks which required teachers to interact with either the teacher educator or most frequently with each other – a productive use of language central to TBLT. When the teacher educators were asked by me if this transitioning after their initial introduction into teacher–teacher interaction was in response to Project frameworks, they all said that it was because the activity based approach worked and teachers responded positively to it. One of the difficulties in teacher education is matching teacher educators’ perceptions of what was successful with the teachers’ perception of what was workable, accepted and useful for plurilingual classrooms. The teacher educators’ rationale was that positive response could be measured through continued attendance, the teachers’ responses to activities, their use of techniques and lastly, teachers’ feedback which was often given informally one to one – the latter is especially difficult to verify. All stated however that the early phase of the course should focus on pair or group interaction; for example ‘You want to get them working right away. They have been working all morning . . . You get them into lively action as soon as you can. They, like the kids, learn by doing’ (TE A Ref Prac 28 02 mins). This was also stated as methodology which teachers applied and saw as effective, namely that transferable tasks or techniques build acceptance of learning.

Task-based language teaching and Malaysian plurilingualism

TBLT has often been described within second language contexts with community support for related real-life links and meaning making. However, many classrooms in rural Malaysia have a complex language ecosystem as they are not in a Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) setting, even if officially described as such (Ambigathy, 2002). Malaysia is a complex range of contexts (see Lee, 2003 and Puah & Ting, 2013) for case studies of this). There are 139 active languages and a dominant four in use, often in one conversation. Across the country, the national language plays an important social acceptance role and in reality a strong classroom interactional role (Musa et al., 2012).

It is useful to consider a term which may apply to Malaysian classrooms’ cultural complexity by drawing on current terminology which is finding acceptance with some Asian contexts (Lin 2013), namely ‘plurilingualism’. Moore and Gajo (2009) describe a plurilingual speaker as a speaker with a repertoire of varied linguistic and cultural resources which meet communication needs or enable interaction with people from other backgrounds and contexts. As defined by the Council of Europe (2012) plurilingual competence refers to the repertoire of resources which individual learners acquire in all the languages they know or have learnt, and which also relate to the cultures associated with those languages.

The plurilingual setting comes into conflict with an English-only approach and this reality impacted on the in-service Project aiming to implement task-based approaches. The use of Bahasa Malaysia or other languages such as Tamil or Chinese in vernacular schools was an issue of considerable debate amongst the national Project

team, many of the teacher educators had experience in second language rather than ‘plurilingual’ settings such as those described by Canagarajah (2006). Some of them saw the frequent use of grammar translation as a method which needed challenging in that the frequent use of the national language took over from task completion in English. Some Project team members, mostly in the more urban areas where there is greater English exposure argued that an immersion approach of English-only would maximize learning, especially as weekly allocation of time for English can be as little as five hours a week. Others in really rural contexts such as within the linguistic complexity of East Malaysia or Tamil speaking plantation areas argued that, ‘The learners do not have the vocab or the outside environment. It is not TESOL task territory here . . . so we have to use local languages to scaffold meaningful tasks for them. No vocab no action’ (TE A. Ref 32).

One of the first C/BT in-house courses had been termed ‘Teaching English Through English’ and after one pilot it was realistically renamed ‘Teaching English Mainly Through English’ (TEMTE). The addition of the qualifier and additional sections on comparative bilingual teaching techniques in the TEMTE course reflected the rural reality where English is in practice a foreign language. The client, namely the Ministry of Education, was a strong advocate for English only in the classroom in an argument which Lin describes from within the Hong Kong setting is ‘the hegemony of linguistic purism and the monolingual principle’ (Lin, 2013, p. 526). It is useful to recall that this Project was at the same time as English for Teaching Maths and Science (ETMS) was being advocated, a move since controversially reversed. The issues of the ETMS Project were described as implementation, suggesting that there were real challenges which could relate to not using scaffolding through the use of the national language or other languages.

On the wider scale, a representative of the Ministry has spoken of a memo which it had sent out at the Minister of Education’s request for only English to be used in schools (Personal communication, May 2005). The Minister of that time was effectively bilingual and had experienced elite bilingual schooling. I encountered many worried teachers after this Ministerial action during 2003 and teachers in 2013 still recalled this edict from the urban centralized structure. The instruction has not been contradicted since being issued. Yet mine and other research points to the use of other than English in English language teaching classrooms. Acceptance of pedagogy which aimed to create greater interaction in classrooms also developed when teacher educators worked with the realities of varied languages and cultural identities (Lee, 2003) at work in the classroom.

When presenting tasks, teacher educators employed varied amounts of the national language. Task-based teaching may benefit by incorporating greater awareness of the positive effects which teachers perceive from an approach which was not English only. Teachers and teacher educators all spoke of the pedagogic benefits of select usage and the social solidarity building that comes from using the language of the community in which one lives. All the teacher educators were working and usually living *in situ* with the teachers’ communities, except for one of the four sites of research. In Site 1 teachers were very responsive to the teacher educator’s use of humour in Bahasa Malaysia. Here the most fluent teacher educator Malay speaker at Site 1 raised the pedagogic issues of the use of Malay both in the actual lesson and in the teacher educator follow-up interview. He consciously uses Malay as do all the

others, albeit to the greatest extent reflecting his observable fluency. A sociolinguistic viewpoint underpins his view which was, 'As I said in the first interview, the use of Malay shows social convergence so that it's we are not the *orang putih* (Europeans) from far away, delivering lectures and moving out' (TE A Ref Prac 17 mins). Teacher educator A who is fluent in Malay also commented that it made more sense to use the vernacular when you could not show a vocabulary item visually or you were talking of abstract qualities. When he espoused the use of Malay the response was positive and audible, especially from early primary teachers. I heard audible sighs and exclamations of delight when observing the interaction.

In another site the teacher educator was working with secondary school teachers, teacher educator B said she had begun her earlier days of Malaysian teacher education by asking teachers for Malay translations so that she would use these for comparative grammar. For her, the main use of Malay was social as with teacher educator D. Teacher educator C would use his beginner's level Malay as occasional input to liven up interaction. This range of reported and observed usage links to the notion that one's greater advocacy of bilingualism or plurilingualism in learning may reflect confidence in using both languages, while at the same time modelling the use of more than English as acceptable pedagogy. Although there was varied usage of Bahasa Malaysia in the early phases for each teacher educator, all the teacher educators' shared a common approach to linking teacher education to the rural classrooms in which tasks are accomplished in a codemeshing situation (Canagarajah, 2006, 2011). Acceptance of greater learner interactivity, more negotiated tasks, pair work and group work was therefore linked to acceptance of classroom and community language complexity.

Implications learnt from teacher education techniques which foster acceptance

Teacher educators gained acceptance by providing transferable tasks and by using some local language according to the teachers' statements. It may benefit all to acknowledge that explanation of abstract terms in the local language may be a better use of time than an insistence on English only, more so when English in rural Malaysia is often closer to English as a foreign language than English as a second language.

I suggest that an orientation time in international teacher education projects is critical with time focused on classroom needs, rather than national syllabuses or urban statements of the ideal. Adapting to the plurilingual nature of learning was seen as important in acceptance of the teacher educators' approaches to sharing techniques. Teacher educators were involved in communication accommodation as they learnt to build social convergence and acceptance. Teacher educators need to approach development education as a learning process in which local knowledge is as valued as any pedagogic expertise. Techniques can then be accepted into the local learning situation. There is also a need to highlight the importance of open-minded listening and observation before transferring techniques and pedagogy.

When building acceptance of some of the features of TBLT one needs to consider the strong influence of the national language or Bahasa Malaysia over the learning of English in classrooms, as well as the complexity of classrooms which are even

more linguistically complex. There is much to be done to move teaching away from rote learning dominated by the nationally prescribed examinations in which discrete point accuracy dominates. This remains a challenge which may be addressed if the National Education Blueprint (2013) is implemented with care. Learning by doing with experiential tasks and acknowledging plurilingualism may be an effective route to greater uptake of innovation as was seen in acceptance of change by teachers in-service experience with the Project described here. There is much to be done to address the pressing needs of English language teaching and learning in Malaysia.

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