

BM-English Bilingualism- Not a Linguistic Conflict

- Rosli Talif & Ain Nadzimah

There is a necessity to be bilingual in both Bahasa Malaysia (BM) and English in Malaysia. This need should not be regarded as a competition where the development of one language could jeopardize the other. Bahasa Malaysia is the national and official language of Malaysia and is regarded as a race-unifying factor while English is stipulated by the national curriculum as the second most important language for the nation. The opportunity to master both BM and English is provided by the government through its education infrastructure.

Bahasa Malaysia has established primacy in Malaysia and its use has successfully been implemented. It is the medium for all levels of official communication and public education. However, with the country's present aspiration of becoming industrially developed and

known worldwide, English is seen as the language that will allow Malaysia to make this quantum leap to international success.

Not realizing the importance of English would be a contradiction to our policy as a nation in a world community because in this era of the global village, the most acceptable other language for Malaysia seems to be English. It opens up the corridor to an important and huge store of knowledge. To be a global player, the government recognizes the importance of English and the role it plays in moulding better students (The New Straits Times, June 29, 1995).

One of the more serious problems facing BM-English bilingualism in Malaysia is the lack of agreement as to its purpose and aims. There is the belief that promoting English

may result in the loss of the Malay identity as stated by Professor Ismail Hussein, "Language is the soul of a race We should master English but let it not master us." (Malaysian Business, October 1-15, 1992). The concern is that Malaysia is officially a BM speaking country, and since all levels of education use BM as a medium of instruction, it is the obligation of the government to preserve the sanctity of BM.

The government's initiative has been misinterpreted and viewpoints on this issue are linked to general political philosophy and ideals of what it means to be a Malaysian. However, the Prime Minister has stated that "we should not become fanatical about it (BM) because that would make it difficult for us to benefit our race in a competitive world. Whether we like it or not, English is an international language" (Malaysian Business, October 1-15, 1992). The nation, therefore, has to take a realistic approach and promote BM-English bilingualism.

It must be noted that while the government is defining

new limits for the use of English, there is no intention to undermine the status and role of BM. English is not to be regarded as a better or more superior language than BM. BM has a role to play and English is the other language for pragmatic reasons.

Learning both BM and English must always be part of a Malaysian education and this should be promoted and encouraged. In today's world, language is an important social phenomenon to stimulate social and economic growth. The learning and use of a language should not be allowed to become a political issue as the opportunity to learn a language should be provided to all.

For as long as there is a need for an international medium of acquiring knowledge and communication, and as English is logically that language, Bahasa Malaysia-English bilingualism in Malaysia should be apparent. Attitudes towards this should be positive. Positive consequences for one language does not imply negative con-

sequences for the other as "no country will downplay or debase its own language" (Asiaweek, June 16, 1995).
Dr. Rosli Talif is an Associate Pro-

fessor and Head of the Department of English Language, Faculty of Modern Language Studies, UPM and Ain Nadzimah is a Lecturer and Coordinator of the English B. A. Program.

Three Situations Where Words Can Hurt.

- Sim Tze Ying (Kolej 5)

Most of us get our messages across through verbal communication. Words without grace are indeed hurting. There are at least three situations where hurting words are being exchanged.

The first situation is during a gossip. For example Jane might say "The convict's daughter who's wearing an overcoat walked hurriedly out of the grocery store." Sharon passed it as, "The convict's daughter walked hurriedly out of the grocery store. She must be up to no good." Finally, Lily concluded it as "Like her father she is a thief. Shoplifting goods out of the grocery store." People would look at the convict's daughter differently, doubt her credibility and outcast her.

The second situation is during a heated argument. Words like "I hate you!" "You are so selfish!" and "You! Good for nothing!" missile around. The recipient would be hurt, angry and disappointed. Hurting words exchanged may cause marriage and friendship to break. Sometimes people are so hurt that they choose to commit suicide. Now who says words do not hurt? It hurts emotionally and physically.

The third situation is during teasing. Calling people names like 'Fat boy', 'Flat nose', 'Nerdy' and 'Shorty' can cause one to feel inferior and stammer when he or she talks. There might be an Einstein among them but instead of encouraging his potential we discourage and condemn him. Some inconsiderate people laugh and scorn at the blind and the lame. Teasing makes the victim feel belittled and unwanted. We categorised them as liabilities instead of assets. Words not only hurt the individual's growth but the country's economy as well. It is important to speak with wisdom. Let our conversation be always full of grace and seasoned with salt. Well-spoken words are like apples of gold in settings of silver. It is your choice to make your speech a blessing or a curse.