1 How English Came to Asia

In this chapter, I shall first look at how English came to the two major population centres of Asia, India and China, and show how the development of English in these two countries differed and why. I shall then look at how English spread through Southeast Asia and explain how it was that, in 2009, the Charter of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – the ten countries comprising, in alphabetical order Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam – officially made English the sole working language of the group, thereby choosing an 'outside' language to be the sole working language of it. I shall argue that one reason why it was possible for ASEAN to adopt English was because it was actually felt to be, in some sense, a language of the group and not necessarily external to it.

The British presence in India has been divided into three phases (Gilmour 2018: 3). The first, from around the beginning of the seventeenth century, consisted of scattered settlements dealing with trade. The second phase, which lasted from the 1740s to the 1850s, was characterised by conflict – the Seven Years' War took place between 1756 to 1763 – and expansion, and was the period when the East India Company became the major power in India. The third and final phase ended with the independence of India in 1947 (and the establishment of Pakistan) and Britain's subsequent withdrawal.

The impetus for the first phase came when, towards the end of her reign in the early years of the seventeenth century, Queen Elizabeth I gave a trading monopoly to a group of British traders who formed the East India Company (EIC). The EIC first started trading at settlements (known as factories) in Calcutta, Bombay and later Madras (Gilmour 2018). It is important to note that the British were just one of several European nations trading in India. For example, the French had a settlement at Pondicherry, a settlement which remained under French control until as late as 1954.

The presence of the EIC did not mean that many British people went to India during the first phase. In 1700, there were only some 100 British people in Bombay. The period of conflict during the second phase when the EIC was fighting local wars against 'Indian princes and French colonists' (Gilmour

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2018: 16) saw an increased British presence in India, but this was primarily comprised of soldiers; by 1790 there were 18,000 British soldiers stationed in India.

Missionaries, who normally followed hard on the heels of traders and which was the case in China as shall be related, were banned from India until 1813, as the EIC felt they would cause 'trouble with their zeal and their enthusiasm for conversion' (Gilmour 2018: 17). In 1813, however, the British House of Commons passed a motion to promote 'useful knowledge and religious and moral improvement' among the 'native inhabitants of India' (Kachru 1983: 20). By 1850, the numbers of British people in India who were unconnected to the military and the EIC had risen to 10,000. This may seem a lot, but, compared to the population of India, represented a tiny blot. As Gilmour notes, 'So sparsely were they spread that many Indians seldom saw an Englishman unless they happened to live in a city or near a barracks' (Gilmour 2018: 20). It is worth remembering that, at this time, India included Burma – now independent Myanmar. A frontier officer stationed in Burma reported that there were only two people with whom he could speak English, an Indian doctor and his Burmese clerk. Many of the civil servants who worked for the British government in the Burmese part of India were from India itself and this is reflected in the Burmese word for chair, *kalahtain*, which literally means 'foreigner sit'. The term foreigner, or *kalah*, originally referred to Indian civil servants, as these were people who sat on chairs.

As indicated, the British House of Commons and Government had started to take more notice of India by the early 1800s. In 1833, the charter of the EIC was renewed but altered its position significantly from being primarily concerned with trade to becoming administratively responsible for the governing of India on behalf of Britain (Graddol 2010). The Education Act of India redirected funds that the EIC had been required to spend on education from supporting Hindu and Muslim education and the promotion of local literature to supporting Western education and the teaching of English. The Education Act was a key stage in the adoption of English as an official language of India, as it became the language of administration and the law courts.

The division between the 'Anglicists' – those who argued for the teaching of English and a Western education – and the 'Orientalists' – those who favoured the teaching of local languages, philosophies and literatures – remains to this day. An early promoter of the Anglicist position was the British politician Thomas Babington Macaulay. It is worth quoting at some length from his 1835 *Minute on Indian Education*:

> To sum up what I have said, I think it is clear that we are not fettered by the Act of Parliament of 1813; that we are not fettered by any pledge expressed or implied; that we are free to employ our funds as we choose; that we ought to employ them in teaching

what is best worth knowing; that English is better worth knowing than Sanskrit or Arabic; that the natives are desirous to be taught English, and are not desirous to be taught Sanskrit or Arabic; that neither as the languages of law, nor as the languages of religion, have the Sanskrit and Arabic any peculiar claim to our engagement; that it is possible to make natives of this country thoroughly good English scholars, and that to this end our efforts ought to be directed . . . Whoever knows [English] has ready access to all the vast intellectual wealth, which all the wisest nations of the earth have created and hoarded in the course of ninety generations. It may be safely said, that the literature now extant in that language is of far greater value than all the literature which three hundred years ago was extant in all the languages of the world together. The question now before us is simply whether, when it is in our power to teach this language, we shall teach languages, by which, by universal confession, there are not books on any subject which deserve to be compared to our own; whether, when we can teach European science, we shall teach systems which, by universal confession, whenever they differ from those of Europe, differ for the worse; and whether, when we can patronise sound Philosophy and true History, we shall countenance, at the public expense, medical doctrines, which would disgrace an English farrier, – Astronomy, which would move laughter in girls at an English boarding school, – History, abounding with kings thirty feet high, and reigns thirty thousand years long, – and Geography, made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter . . . In one point I fully agree with the gentlemen to whose general views I am opposed. I feel with them, that it is impossible for us, with our limited means, to attempt to educate the body of the people. We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. To that class we may leave it to refine the vernacular dialects of the country, to enrich those dialects with terms of science borrowed from the Western nomenclature, and to render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population. (Sharp 1920: 57 ff.)

In short, Macaulay proposed the teaching of English and a Western education to a select elite group of Indians, who would then govern the country on behalf of Great Britain. And this is more or less what happened. The importance of English in administering the country was recognised in independent India's 1950 constitution which made English an associate official language. The constitution also put a time limit of fifteen years on this use of English, however. It had been a fervent wish of Ghandi and many others of the independence movement, including Nehru, India's first Prime Minister, that English would eventually be removed from India and that Hindi – or rather Hindustani (contemporary Hindi is formed from a number of Hindustani vernaculars spoken across north India) (Graddol 2010: 52) – would become the national language. But this was viewed with great concern by speakers of Indian languages other than Hindi who campaigned fervently for the retention of English (Kirkpatrick 2016). For example, students at Bangalore University adopted the slogan of 'Kill kill Hindi. Kiss kiss English' (Nault 2012: 80). In response to these widespread protests, the 1967 Official Languages Act

allowed English to continue to be used 'for the purposes of the Union, business in parliament and centre regional communications involving a non-Hindi speaking region' (Nault 2012: 80).

The current so-called three-language formula, a formula which has seen several iterations over the years, calls for Hindi-speaking children to also learn English and one other Indian language, and for non-Hindi speaking children to learn their first language, Hindi and English. In fact, most Hindi speakers learn only English as well as Hindi, and most non-Hindi speakers prefer to learn English ahead of Hindi. But, as Mohanty points out, English has become 'the most common second language in all the states' (2019: 333).

Thus, while English had only been taught to an elite during colonial times, local demand for English has burgeoned for many reasons, including its perceived necessity for obtaining decent employment. Arguments about which language should be used as a medium of instruction (MoI) in schools mirror the arguments presented by the Orientalists and Anglicists. And, as noted previously, the Anglicists have the upper hand. The national knowledge curriculum (NKC) in 2009 recommended the teaching of English from the first year of primary school in order to 'democratise English among the masses' (Mohanty 2019: 333) and only 30 out of more than 617 universities or institutions of higher, technical or postgraduate-level education provide instruction in or allow students to use a language other than English (Mohanty 2019: 334). This is despite serious concerns that most students' currently low level of English proficiency means that they are unequipped to benefit from an English-medium education (Graddol 2010).

An example of its democratisation, has been the adoption of English by the Dalit (or so-called untouchable class), which sees English as a tool for uniting the class and presenting a united front, 'a parallel perhaps with the role that English played for those who originally fought for India's independence' (Graddol 2010: 65).

Yet, despite this move to democratise access to English across India, the divide between those who have access to English and those who do not is probably increasing because the private schools which offer EMI are affordable only by the relatively wealthy. Access to English can magnify the gap between the rich and the poor (Graddol 2010: 25). As will be shown, this is not restricted to India alone.

I conclude this section of the chapter by quoting from Graddol's Afterword in his book *English Next: India*.

> Throughout India, there is an extraordinary belief, amongst almost all castes and classes, in both rural and urban areas, in the transformative power of English. English is seen not just as a useful skill, but as a symbol of a better life, a pathway out of poverty and oppression … How can the benefits of English be enjoyed without damaging the potential that India's multilingualism brings, as a source of unique identity in

a globalised world, of cultural richness, and an important future economic resource? (Graddol 2010: 124)

There is no doubt that English is in India and of India. It is impossible, however, to accurately say how many people in India speak English. The figure suggested by Bolton and Bacon-Shone quoted in the Introduction was 260 million, but other estimates range from 55 million to 350 million (Graddol 2010). It is indeed possible that China, despite having no colonial institutional legacy of English, has more speakers of English than India (Bolton & Bacon-Shone's [2020] figure for English speakers in China is 276 million). It is China to which I now turn.

English in China

As Bolton (2003) notes, the first recorded contact between the British and the Chinese took place sometime in the first half of the seventeenth century and was described by an English trader of the time in a book entitled *The Travels of Peter Mundy*. After this early contact, a Chinese pidgin English developed as Western traders and Chinese compradors or middlemen conducted business. After the Opium Wars of the nineteenth century, trade increased, conducted around Canton and the other treaty ports and so, therefore, did the use of this pidgin English.

The arrival of English in China is also closely linked to developments affecting the Chinese language and changes in attitudes towards it which took place during the twentieth century. A number of scholars were critical of the classical form of the Chinese language, arguing that its complexity made it difficult for ordinary people to become literate. Indeed, it has been estimated that only 5 per cent of the population were literate at the beginning of the twentieth century (Woodside & Elman 1994).

The early years of the twentieth century and then the coming to power in 1949 of the Chinese Communist Party saw a number of changes to the language. First, the classical *wenyan* style was discarded in favour of the colloquial *baihua*, thereby making the language far more accessible. This was followed by a number of major language reforms including the simplification of certain characters (Taiwan and Hong Kong still retain the traditional characters) and the introduction of a romanisation system, *pinyin*, designed to be used in primary schools to help Chinese children learn to read Chinese. These reforms have proved overwhelmingly successful with some 80 per cent of the population now literate.

The understanding that language reform was necessary was linked to developments in Japan. At the turn of the century, Japan was seen by China as a modern and powerful nation. China had been defeated in the first Sino–

Japanese war of 1894–5. One reason given for Japan's comparative modernity and power was believed to be Japan's introduction of syllabaries, *katakana* and *hiragana*, to complement the Chinese characters in use in Japanese writing (Li & Lee 2004). Hence the Chinese move to the simplification of their own writing system.

China's earlier painful defeat in the Opium Wars of the 1860s underlined to them how technologically weak China was (Hsu 1976). As well as the need to reform Chinese itself, reformers realised that English was also important as it was seen as the language of technology and scientific knowledge. Thus, the 1860s saw the establishment of the government-sponsored *Tongwen Guan* (School of Combined Learning), where English and other subjects considered useful for modernisation were taught. Missionaries also established schools and universities and English became seen as a passport for lucrative employment (Feng & Adamson 2019). This led to English (or the West) being seen as providing access to practical knowledge while Chinese provided access to Chinese cultural roots or essence, as summarised in the slogan, *zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong* (learning from China for the essence, learning from the West for practical knowledge). This was commonly shortened to the '*ti-yong*' debate and still underpins the learning of English and Chinese in China today, as illustrated in Table 1.1.

Schools and universities which taught English were established towards the end of the nineteenth century, primarily by missionaries, often with the support of forward-looking Chinese reformers (Hu & Adamson 2012). Adamson (2002, 2004) has described the more recent history of English education in China. Table 1.1 shows key dates in the twentieth century of the history of English in China.

It should be noted that, with the setting up of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, Russian, the language of the PRC's major ally, became the first foreign language taught. But with the collapse of the Sino–Soviet alliance in the mid-1950s, English resumed the place of the first foreign language taught, until

Table 1.1 *English in China*

1911–23	Intellectual revolution; English for ideas/philosophy
1923–49	English for diplomacy and interaction
1949–60	English for science and technology
1961–6	First renaissance – English for modernisation and international understanding
1966–76	Cultural Revolution; English speakers are suspect
1976–82	Slow recovery; English for modernisation
1982–present	English highly desirable and strongly promoted in school curricula (Adamson 2002: 232).

the time of the Cultural Revolution when English was regarded as the language of the enemy, the language of the 'running dogs of imperialism', in the colourful PRC terminology of the time. This message did not get through to most Chinese however. I was a student in China in the mid-1970s, and was constantly approached by Chinese students asking whether we could speak together in English so that they could practice theirs. These requests became so frequent that they became an irritation, and I developed a strategy of apologising and saying that I was Albanian – Albania at that time was one of China's few 'foreign friends' – and that I did not speak English well.

Demand for English intensified with the re-ascendancy of Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s and the subsequent opening up of China.[1] In 2001, the Ministry of Education promulgated the New English Curriculum Standards document which stipulated that English should be introduced in all primary schools from grade 3. In the same year, the government also announced that between 5–10 per cent of all undergraduate programmes should be taught through the medium of English. This caused controversy as it seemed to run counter to the Language Law, which stated that *Putonghua*[2] should be the primary teaching medium. The arguments about which medium of instruction should be used echoed some of the arguments between the Orientalists and the Anglicists. Possibly in response to the criticism that English was being given too much importance, the Chinese recently released plans to reduce the weighting given to English in the college entrance exams, the *gaokao*, and increase the weighting given for Maths and Chinese. These three 'core' subjects are currently given the same weighting. Some provinces have acted on this (Feng & Adamson 2019).

In fact, however, the demand for English appears to be growing. English is often introduced earlier than primary 3 and given more class hours than suggested in the curriculum guidelines. There has been an exponential increase in the number of Chinese learning English, from kindergarten through university to language institutes where adults go to improve their English. As Feng and Adamson note, 'In major cities such as Shanghai, parents use every means to get their children into schools with reputable English programmes. Furthermore, they seek extra curricula classes and activities at whatever cost to improve their children's English' (2019: 53). But, as noted in the case of India, access to English magnifies the gap between the rich and the poor. Access to English is very limited in underdeveloped rural areas of China, for example.

[1] Actually, this was Deng's third ascendancy after two previous political 'deaths' through purges. He once quipped to US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, 'You know, I am the only man who was twice resurrected' (Packer 2019: 182).

[2] Literally 'common speech' and the term given to the national language, based on dialects of Mandarin. It is also referred to as Modern Standard Chinese.

Wen (2012) has estimated that in 2008 there were some 165 million school and university students learning English in China and one can confidently predict that there are significantly more than this today. For example, following the demand that universities provide 5–10 per cent of their courses in English, an increasing number of universities are offering English-medium courses (Kirkpatrick 2014). So, the numbers of Chinese learning English will grow. As Hu and Adamson note, 'the survival and expansion of English in the school curriculum mirrors the process of China's modernization and globalization – from a closed to an ever-widening door of international collaboration and from periods of political revolutionary action to intense economic modernization' (2012: 15).

There is, however, a difference between the number of Chinese learning English and the number of Chinese using it in their daily lives. In a summary of a study entitled the *Survey of the Language Situation Across China*, Wei and Su (2015), considered the reported use of English in seven major Chinese cities: Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Guangzhou, Chongqing, Dalian and Shenzhen. Wei and Su asked a number of questions, two of which were:

> What were the averages of the nation and the selected cities with regards to the use of English, English reading proficiency and spoken proficiency?
>
> Was there a statistically significant difference between the national average and the city average in each of the three areas addressed in the first question? (2015: 178 ff.)

Some interesting findings to the research questions were as follows:

With regard to the use of English, on a scale between 1 (seldom), 2 (sometimes) and 3 (often) the national average was 1.265. Tianjin had the highest average at 1.874 and Chongqing the lowest at 1.355.

With regard to reading proficiency, on a scale between 1 (able to recognise a few words), 2 (able to understand simple sentences) and 3 (able to understand simple reading passages), the national average was 1.9821. Again, Tianjin had the highest average at 3.063 and Chongqing the lowest at 1.082 (lower than the national average).

With regard to spoken proficiency, on a scale between 1 (able to utter a few words), 2 (able to say some greetings) and 3 (able to conduct daily conversations), the national average was 1.9263, with Tianjin again the highest at 2.547 and Chongqing the lowest at 1.956.

The results suggest that, while English is being learned by millions of Chinese, it is not yet being used by quite so many. But, as Wei and Su (2015: 184) themselves note, 'Future research needs to collect more comprehensive data so as to achieve a better understanding of how Chinese people use English in their daily lives.' In just such research, Bolton and Botha (2015) investigated the use of English at Sun Yatsen University (SYSU) in Guangzhou. The authors found, in general, only postgraduate students studying business and medicine

needed English in class. They also discovered that only 37 per cent of students reported using English for social purposes, usually for online socialising, and then only reported the use of single words. Despite this relatively low use of English, the authors noted that the students viewed English as important in terms of 'internationalism' and that they saw English as being the language of virtual mobility beyond 'the great firewall of China' (2015: 207). *Putonghua*, the national language, was seen as the core language of education while regional dialects were seen as 'increasingly irrelevant as the heritage languages of parents and grandparents' (2015: 207). In line with the call made by Wei and Su, Bolton and Botha conclude with a call for 'more empirical field-based research on the current impact of English', and 'a more detailed, finer-grained body of sociolinguistic research in this area' (2015: 208).

Demand for English in China is also seen in the number of private English-language schools being bought by Chinese interests and the establishment of campuses of famous English private schools and universities within China itself. A recent edition of *The Times* newspaper reported there are now some thirty-six branches of English private schools in China (*The Times*, Wednesday, 10 July 2019). At the same time, more than 100,000 Chinese are studying at universities in Britain. There is also some evidence that a Chinese variety of English (CE) is developing (Xu 2010; Xu, He & Deterding 2017); the linguistic and sociocultural features of CE will be discussed later in the book.

The Countries of Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

Only Thailand of the ten countries of ASEAN has never been a colony and in that sense it is unique among the countries of ASEAN. English was introduced to Thailand by the then king, King Mongkut (aka Rama IV, r 1851–68), as it was seen as a passport to modernisation. Part of the story, where an English governess was installed in the palace to act as an English teacher, has been dramatised (and romanticised) in the novel by Margaret Landon, *Anna and the King of Siam* which later became the foundation for the musical, *The King and I*. The Education Act of 1892 made English an elective subject in secondary school. By the 1920s it had become a compulsory subject in secondary school (Draper 2019). English became popular during the course of the Vietnam War, after which, however, the policy was to emphasise 'Thainess'. While continuing to promote the Thai language and Thainess, the 1999 Education Act made English the principal foreign language. As the then-President of the Privy Council, General Prem Tinsulanonda, stated in 2006, 'The country is Thai and the language is Thai' (Draper 2019: 239). Yet, English is needed, not least because it is the sole working language of ASEAN.

Of the other nine countries of ASEAN, Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam formed French Indo–China, Indonesia was colonised by the Dutch, while Brunei, Malaysia, Myanmar and Singapore were British colonies and the Philippines a colony of the United States.

Despite being colonised by the British, the history and status of English in the four nations colonised by Britain are remarkably different. Myanmar, which was annexed by the British in 1886, gained independence in 1948. Before independence, English was the language of government and administration. After independence, however, Burmese became the main language and the medium of education in schools, but with English being the main foreign language. In 1962, however, U Ne Win seized power in a military coup and the army continued to exercise power for the next fifty years. During this fifty years of dictatorial and army rule (1962–2015), the country was virtually closed and English was not systematically taught in schools. The Burmese government has only recently started to promote the use of English once more, making it a subject from primary 1, a medium of instruction for maths and science subjects in upper secondary, and the medium of instruction in higher education. However, the lack of English over so many years has meant that its use as a medium of instruction is meeting severe problems, as Drinan's (2013) report on the use of English as a medium of instruction in upper secondary shows:

> Using English as a Medium of Instruction (MoI): this is fundamentally not working for teaching Maths and Science as few teachers can use English, let alone, teach another subject in English. Students are not learning or understanding important concepts in Maths and Science. They merely remember the technical terms in English for the tests. Most teachers use a mix of Myanmar (for explanation) and English (for technical terms). (2013, cited in Kirkpatrick 2015)

In the context of university teaching, 'English textbooks are usually read aloud in English and then explained in Burmese' (McCormick 2019: 249). Yet despite these low levels of proficiency in English, the colonial experience means that English remains a language of influence and prestige. As an example, Burmese passports, while using Burmese script on the cover, use English inside, including even for the person's name (McCormick 2019).

In contrast to Myanmar, where levels of English are low, in Singapore English is the dominant language. Singapore was one of the three settlements, along with Penang and Malacca, known as the Straits Settlements, established by the British in 1824. English was always taught during the colonial period and after independence in 1965, the country's first Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew, made English one of the four official languages (Malay, Chinese and Tamil are the others, with Malay also being the national language). In effect, however, English is the de facto national language. It is

the medium of instruction in schools and is the lingua franca for Singaporeans. The national bilingual policy aims to see Singaporeans learn their respective mother tongues and English. In a policy that recalls the historical *ti-yong* debate in China previously mentioned, the mother tongue is supposed to give citizens access to their cultural roots, while English provides access to technology and participation in globalisation. There are two comments to make about the current bilingual policy. The first is that the government rules that a person's mother tongue is determined by their ethnicity. Thus, the mother tongue of all ethnic Singaporean Chinese, is Mandarin, no matter whether this was indeed the language spoken by their mother, which may well have been another Chinese dialect such as Cantonese or Hokien. Similarly, Tamil is the mother tongue of Singaporean Indians, and this is the language they will learn at school, even though they may be speakers of another Indian language such as Hindi. For Malays, the situation is a little easier as most ethnic Malays will have Malay as a mother tongue.

The second point to make about the bilingual policy is that it has resulted in English becoming the first home language of the majority of children. A report in the *Straits Times* newspaper of 10 March 2016 (Lee 2016) noted that 36.9 per cent of children aged five and older now use English most often at home. This compares with the 34.9 per cent who reported they used Mandarin most often at home. This contrasts with the 2011 figures which showed that Mandarin was the most common language used at home by children aged five and above (35.6 per cent), compared with 32.3 per cent for English. What this suggests is that English is not only playing the role of the international language but also becoming the '*ti*' language, the language of the home and of Singaporean identity. One reason why the Singapore government is so keen to ensure the people speak 'good English' as opposed to 'Singlish', the local colloquial variety of Singaporean English (as evidenced in countless recent campaigns), is that they recognise that the local variety of English is taking on the role the government had assigned to the mother tongues. The same Government Survey also reported a decline in the use of Chinese dialects and Malay, but the use of Tamil (albeit at a mere 3.3 per cent of the population) had remained stable.

English is now the lingua franca of Singapore. It is clearly both in and of Singapore. As Jain and Wee argue:

> Given the demand for the English-educated in the workforce and the role of the language globally, the shift to English can safely be expected to escalate across the population. However, there is no sign that Singlish is decreasing in popularity. On the contrary, a nascent but burgeoning local film industry and other cultural activities provide domestic and international markets for cultural products where the use of Singlish and other local languages such as the various Chinese dialects are considered

valuable markers of cultural authenticity The government therefore has to come to terms with the fact that Singlish is in all likelihood here to stay. (Jain & Wee 2019: 283)

Brunei and Malaysia were also British colonies, and in both Malay was the language spoken by the majority of the population. As noted, the Malay cities of Penang and Malacca were part of the Straits Settlements and Malaysia became independent in 1957. Brunei became a British protectorate in 1888, and achieved independence in 1984. In both places, the debate was (and is) over the respective roles English and Malay should play. In Brunei, the proposal was to adopt Malay as the sole medium of instruction (Malay was made the national language in 1959 and in the same year a report proposed Malay as the sole medium of instruction [Jones 2000]), but for a number of reasons – including a diplomatic row between Brunei and Malaysia – this policy was never implemented. Brunei did implement a bilingual policy, the '*dwibahasa* policy' (Jones 2000). Initially, this policy saw Malay used as the medium of instruction (MoI) for all subjects for the first three years of primary school, with English talking over from primary 4 as the MoI for maths, science, geography, history and technical subjects. Malay remained the MoI for Malay literature, Islamic knowledge, civics, arts handicrafts and physical education. However, and in stark contrast to Malaysia as will be explained, the policy has been changed to a new education system (SPN-21) so that English is now used as the medium instruction for maths, science, social studies, ICT, music, drama and English itself in primary school, with Malay only being used for Malay, Islamic religious knowledge, Malay Islamic monarchy and physical education (Haji-Othman, McLellan & Jones 2019). This means there is more English than under the *dwibahasa* system. But it should be noted that Malay is used as the medium of instruction at religious schools, attendance at which is compulsory for all Bruneian Muslim students. Classes are held in the afternoon and students between the ages of seven and fourteen must attend (Haji-Othman et al. 2019).

The history of English in Malaya/sia is complex (Kirkpatrick 2010b). During the colonial period, as in India discussed previously, English was taught, but only for the elite. The British did not want the majority to learn English as this quote from Maxwell, the Chief Secretary of the Federated Malay States between 1920 and 1926, makes clear

The aim of the government is not to turn out a few well-educated youths, nor yet numbers of less well-educated boys; rather it is to improve the bulk of the people and to make the son of the fisherman or peasant a more intelligent fisherman or peasant than his father had been, and a man whose education will enable him to understand how his own lot in life fits in with the scheme of life around him. (Maxwell 1983: 408)

As Malaya was rich in rubber and mineral resources, the British needed to import labour, and they imported Tamils from India to work on the rubber plantations and Chinese to work in the tin mines. This, of course, added to the

linguistic diversity of the colony, and vernacular schools were established which taught in Tamil and Chinese. The history of Malaysian language policy has been about how to balance these languages with English and Malay in order to keep their respective users happy.

As we have seen, Brunei has moved to make English the MoI for maths and science from primary 1. Malaysia did the opposite. In 2002, it introduced English as the MoI for maths and science from primary 1, but, after experimenting with this for seven years, decided to revert back to Malay as the MoI for these subjects (Gill 2012). The reasons given for this reversal of policy included the fact that children from lower socio-economic areas were failing in maths along with a shortage of maths teachers able to teach the subject in English (Gill 2012). And in 2016, in recognition of declining proficiency in English, the government introduced a Dual Language programme, to be piloted in 300 schools. This gives the schools the choice of which medium to use – English or Malay – for the teaching of maths and science (Gill & Shaari 2019). As these schools need to meet criteria including having teachers who can teach in Malay and English and parental support for the scheme, people have argued that this will further increase the divide between the urban 'haves' and the rural 'have-nots', an argument that can be heard in each of the countries under discussion here. Language policy in Malaysia has been characterised by 'flip-flopping' between whether to promote Malay or English as the medium of instruction. According to Gill and Shaari, 'Presently, in 2016, Malaysia is pretty much in the same position it was a decade ago – standards of English are increasingly declining with terrible impact on the students and youth and their employability opportunities and also a decline in the human capital essential for industrialisation and technological development' (Gill and Shaari 2019: 268). While the history of English in these post-colonial countries is varied, the heritage of English in Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore has led to the development of respective varieties of English, Brunei, Malaysian and Singaporean and these will be discussed later in the book. Here it is enough simply to state that the presence of these varieties is now accepted and that there are grammars and so forth of these varieties of English. The same can also be said of the Philippines, to which I now turn. This too was a colony of an English-speaking empire, although in the case of the Philippines, it was of the American empire. The Treaty of Paris of 1898 ceded the Philippines to America from Spain after the American defeat of the Spanish in the Spanish–American war. The Philippines remained a colony of the United States until independence in 1946.

The decision to adopt English as the medium of instruction in schools was made in 1901 – and here we see significant differences from Brunei and Malaysia. Although all are multilingual societies, both Malaysia and Brunei had a language, namely Malay, that was spoken by the majority of the

population and which could easily be identified as the national language. The Philippines, on the other hand, has more than 170 languages, none of which were spoken widely enough to be considered an obvious choice for the national language. In 1941, Tagalog, the language of the capital, Manila, was made the national language, but this was unpopular, as Tagalog is spoken only by some 5 million people living in and around Manila. To deflect this criticism, in the early 1970s, the National Language Institute was given the task of creating a national language (Gonzalez 1996a). The result was Pilipino, rechristened Filipino in 1987.[3] It is an artificial construct, based heavily on Tagalog, with features from certain other Filipino languages added. Nevertheless, the majority of Filipinos today now accept Filipino as their national language (Tupas 2007).

The advent of a national language led to a bilingual education policy (BEP) for the Philippines which, with some changes, remained in place from 1974 until 2011. Filipino was used for the teaching of all subjects with the exception of maths, science and English itself, for which English was used as the MoI. The BEP drew many critics over many years who argued for the use of more local languages in education. To cut a long and complex story short, the Philippines government eventually legislated in 2009 for a multilingual education policy and the adoption of mother tongue–based multilingual education (MTBMLE). This policy currently allows for nineteen languages to act as the MoI for the first three years of primary school. While those who supported MTBMLE feel that this is not enough, wanting MTBMLE to encompass more languages and to last throughout primary school, MTMBLE represents a significant departure from the bilingual education policy. The Philippines is the only nation of those being reviewed here that has systematically adopted a policy of MTBMLE. The other nations basically run bilingual policies with the respective national language and English being the primary languages of education (Kirkpatrick & Liddicoat 2017, 2019). Yet, there remains a strong pro-English lobby who want to reinstate English as the primary medium of instruction, not least because the Philippines derives so much wealth from its role in the business processing outsourcing (BPO) sector, which includes call centres, and for which a population with high levels of proficiency in English are essential (Young & Igcalinos 2019: 180). The long use of English in the school system has led to the development of a local variety of English, Filipino English, and this will be discussed later.

Indonesia was also a colony, but of the Dutch. Indonesia is one of the most multilingual and culturally diverse nations on earth with more than 700 languages and 400 ethnic groups (Ethnologue 2019). After independence from the

[3] This switch from Pilipino to Filipino was to make the name of the national language sound less like Tagalog as Tagalog has no [f] sound.

Dutch in 1945, Indonesia chose a form of Malay, to be called Bahasa Indonesia, as the national language. Although the language was spoken as a first language only by about 3 per cent of the population at the time of its choice, its development as the national language has been remarkably successful (Montolalu & Suryadinata 2007) and it is now the MoI in all schools and at all levels of education. Indonesia is the only nation of those reviewed here that does not make English a compulsory subject at primary schools. Nevertheless, English is far and away the first foreign language taught: it is compulsory in secondary schools and at universities.

In a marked contrast to the other countries under discussion here, English was first introduced into Indonesian education at the university level. In 1949, an English language programme was set up at the *Universitas Nasional Jakarta* (Kohler 2019). It was nearly twenty years later, in 1967, that English was introduced into secondary schools and not until 1990 was it introduced into primary schools. In 2015, the government announced that English would become a required medium of instruction at all universities, beginning with state universities. It is not yet clear to what extent this policy has been implemented (Kohler 2019: 292).

Despite being taught for some forty years in secondary schools, the teaching and learning of English has not been successful. A recent study which used the TOEIC test to measure the proficiency levels of Indonesian senior high school students showed that more than 55 per cent tested as novices, 37 per cent tested as elementary, and only 5 per cent tested as having even intermediate proficiency in English (Hamied 2011). Dardjowidjojo (2000) offers a number of reasons for this – many of which can be heard across the other countries of Asia – such as a lack of suitably proficient and trained teachers, a lack of appropriate and relevant materials, and demotivated students, especially in rural areas (Kirkpatrick 2012). 'Yet parental and community demand for English are likely to continue and exert pressure for English to remain at least in its current form, if not with an increased presence in future in all levels of education' (Kohler 2019: 294).

The demand for English in Indonesia can also be seen in perhaps unexpected contexts. For example, some of the boarding schools attached to mosques, the *pesantren*, have introduced courses in English for Islamic purposes (Fahrudin 2013). A study of attitudes towards English among staff and students across a selection of universities in the city of Yogyakarta which included Muslim, Christian and secular institutions, found that Muslim participants felt that English could have a positive effect on religious identity. Sample quotes were 'English helps the development of my religion', 'English can deliver information about my religion', 'It is also necessary for us to master English for proselytising' (Dewi 2012: 22; Kirkpatrick 2015: 8). Even then, in a country with no institutional history of English, English can be seen as of Indonesia as well as in it. I return to a discussion of the role English is playing in religion in Chapter 8.

Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam all inherited French as their colonial language and each country also saw Russian as a major language of education as each fell under the influence of the then Soviet Union. Despite this history, all three countries today have chosen to make English the first foreign language to be studied in schools. That English is the sole official language of ASEAN and as all three countries are ASEAN member states is just one reason why English has been promoted. Its importance for use in ASEAN settings should not be underestimated. As a Cambodian Minister reported:

> We need to know English so that we can defend our interests. You know, ASEAN is not a kissy-kissy brotherhood. The countries are fiercely competitive, and a strong knowledge of English will help us protect our interests . . . You know when we use English we don't think about the United States or England. We only think about the need to communicate. (Clayton 2006: 230–3)

English has thus displaced French as the first foreign language in Cambodia and in 2014, government policy decreed that it should be taught from the fourth grade of primary school. However, this has met with problems as many teachers have low or even no English skills. So, while English may officially be on the curriculum, it is not actually taught in most primary schools, and as Kosonen 2019 argues, 'Given the available human and other resources for education in Cambodia, the hurried attempts to promote English language teaching seem to reflect the perhaps over-ambitious goals of political leaders' (2019: 223). But, as Kosonen (2019) goes on to say, given English's role as the sole working language of ASEAN, its importance for Cambodia is likely to increase.

The same can be said for both Laos and Vietnam. In Vietnam, after the end of the Vietnam war and the unification of the nation in 1975, a surge of nationalism led to the policy 'of burning and binning English and French textbooks and other related materials in an effort to get rid of colonialist and imperialist legacies in the early 1980s' (Nguyen & Nguyen 2019: 188). Then, after several years of relative isolation, a unified Vietnam opened up to the world in 1986 under the *Doi Moi* policy. As happened when China opened up, this led to a surge in demand for English, as vividly captured by Ho and Wong:

> When Vietnam embarked on economic reforms in 1986 . . . it prompted a nationwide rush to learn English . . . English classes were crammed with not just students but also professionals such as doctors and engineers as well as retired government officials, senior police, army officers and diplomats. (cited in Ho & Wong 2004: 1)

English thus became reincarnated from being the language of the enemy to the language of 'amity, hope and aspiration for the majority of the Vietnamese people' (Nguyen & Nguyen 2019: 189).

English is now the most taught and learned foreign language in the school curriculum with some 90 per cent of students choosing to take it (Baker, Poly & Giacchino-baker 2003). It is increasingly used as a medium of instruction in private schools and in certain subjects at state universities. The Vietnamese government is currently implementing Project 2020 – recently extended by five years to 2025 in recognition of the hugely ambitious nature of the project – whereby Vietnamese university graduates will be proficient in a foreign language, specifically English.

Laos gained independence from France in 1948 but only became truly independent with the French defeat by the Vietnamese at Dien Bien Phu in 1954 (Keyes 2003). As with the other countries I have described, English is the first foreign language taught in schools, introduced from Primary 3, although the scarcity of materials and suitably qualified teachers means that the level of English is low. English is the 'mandatory first foreign language' at lower secondary level, while French is the 'optional second foreign language' (Meyers 2019: 211).

Conclusion

This brief summary of the development of English in the countries under review shows similarities and differences between them. The similarities are that English is the first foreign language taught in each country. In Singapore, it is the medium of instruction; in some other countries, it is used as a medium of instruction for certain subjects, typically maths and science. Common to all is also an apparently widening gap between those who have proficiency in English and those who do not. This divide is often seen between the rich and the poor and the urban and the rural. As Graddol remarked in the context of India, 'We are fast moving into a world in which not to have English is to be marginalised and excluded' (2010: 10).

The differences include the levels of English that are spoken. In those countries which were colonies of English-speaking empires and which Kachru (1983) has classified as 'outer circle' countries in which new varieties of English have developed and provided their own linguistic norms, English has gained an institutional role and has been learned and taught for many decades. Brunei, India, Malaysia, the Philippines and Singapore are examples. These countries have developed their own varieties of English and I shall discuss these further later in the book. Myanmar provides an exception to this rule, so there the levels of English are relatively low. In those countries that were not colonised by English-speaking empires and where English has traditionally been learned as a foreign language in schools and which Kachru (1983) classified as 'expanding circle' countries, English plays less of an institutional role. Even in these countries, however, the uses and roles of

English are increasing to the extent that English is the first foreign language learned. And, as noted, there may now be more speakers and users of English in China, an 'expanding circle' country, than in India, an 'outer circle' country. Indonesia, Laos, Thailand and Vietnam are all seeing an uptake in the learning and teaching of English and the educated elite in these countries now all speak high levels of English and an increasing number of people now have access to English of some sort and level within the school systems. Even in those countries with no English colonial past, English is being adapted for the purposes of its new speakers, as the example of English for Islamic purposes in Indonesia demonstrates. A further motivation for the learning of English in ASEAN is that English is the sole working language of ASEAN and attendance and participation at ASEAN meetings and so forth requires a facility in English. This means that, in addition to the development of regional varieties of English, English is also being increasingly used as a lingua franca by speakers from these countries and beyond. As I shall illustrate in the following chapters, English is both being adapted by its new speakers for their own purposes so that it reflects their cultural needs and, at the same time, being used as a lingua franca, as a common medium of communication, between the peoples of Asia. Chapter 2 provides an overview to the Asian Corpus of English (ACE), a corpus of the use of English as a lingua franca by Asian multilinguals.