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The complicity of medium-of-instruction policies: functions and hidden agendas

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Medium of Instruction Policies: Which Agenda? Whose Agenda?, edited by Tollefson and Tsui, is a collection of 14 essays examining the role of medium-of-instruction policies across a host of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural countries. Under-pinning the collection is the belief that decisions on which language is used as a school or educational system's medium of instruction are more than educational or pedagogical decisions. They are social, political, and economic decisions that reflect social hierarchies, political power, economic opportunities, equality, and language rights, etc., and have profound political and economic consequences. The collection analyses the functions of and the agendas behind medium-of-instruction policies, and particularly the tension between educational agendas and other agendas, across a range of socio-political contexts including English-dominant countries, post-colonial countries, and countries where managing and resolving language conflicts is part and parcel of the political reality.

The collection is divided into three major sections, organized according to the socio-political contexts in which medium-of-instruction policies are formulated and implemented. Part I addresses issues around minority linguistic groups in English-dominant countries, including New Zealand, Wales, and the US. These countries have all had the historical experience of 'having the languages of the indigenous minorities treated as obstacles to civilization and modernization', and of attempting to 'civilize' indigenous people through English-medium schooling (p. 7). The indigenous people in them have been compelled to abandon their native tongues and acquire facility in English, and to assimilate European knowledge, values, and

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world-views. Part II analyses the medium-of-instruction policy issues in several post-colonial states and regions, including Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, India, and sub-Saharan Africa. These countries and regions 'share the common problem of having to deal with a particular colonial legacy: the prestigious colonial language and its function after independence' (p. 9). Part III consists of three chapters that examine 'the conflicts generated by the asymmetrical power relationship between languages, and the ways in which these conflicts were resolved, or are being resolved' (p. 14). The countries discussed in this section include post-apartheid South Africa, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Slovenia.

The collection of essays as a whole demonstrates convincingly that the role of medium-of-instruction policies cannot be adequately understood without an understanding of the socio-historical contexts within which they have evolved. It shows that medium-of-instruction policies are, first, always socially- and historically-situated and, secondly, continually evolving. In addition to the functions of policies and the tension between the different agendas *behind* these policies, the collection opens several other important themes as well as exploring the relation between the choice of medium-of-instruction and political, social, and economic forces, the gap between the rhetoric of medium-of-instruction policies and the reality of their implementation, and the impact of globalization on the development of policies. It significantly adds to our understanding of the centrality and complexity of language policy in socio-political processes. *Medium of Instruction Policies* is a serious, solid, and well-edited book.

In this essay, we will start with identifying the approach the book adopts to examine medium-of-instruction policies. We will then move to unpack and illustrate two important themes of the book: one concerning the functions that medium-of-instruction policies are designed to perform; the other pertaining to the agendas underlying the policies. This will set the stage for a subsequent discussion concerning the limitations of the book and the ways of addressing the limitations. We will argue that the main arguments of the book can be deepened, and made more complex, through attention to the ideologies and discourses that adhere to a particular language adopted as the medium of instruction. We will conclude by drawing implications for research on medium-of-instruction policies.

The approach

This volume is squarely situated in the research tradition of language policy and planning. Unlike most of the empirical studies on medium-of-instruction in the 1970s and 1980s, which focused on the effects of a choice of medium-of-instruction at the micro-level (the classroom and the individual), the essays in this volume examine the nature of medium-of-instruction policies by analysing different macro socio-political events and processes, such as post-colonization, modernization, ethnic conflicts, migration, the re-emergence of national ethnic identities (and languages), and changes in governments, among others. It rests on the assumption that medium-of-instruction policies are not formed in isolation, but emerge in response to a wide range of issues

occasioned by and resulting from these macro socio-political events and processes. These events and processes represent social and political forces that have influenced—if not determined—the formulation and implementation of medium-of-instruction policies. The selection of the authors and chapters for the book, Tollefson and Tsui indicate, has been guided by the belief that 'medium-of-instruction policies must be understood in connection with social, economic, and political forces that shape education generally' (p. viii).

Allied with the focus on macro socio-political issues surrounding medium-of-instruction policies is a *situated perspective*, the 'interpretation of medium-of-instruction polices, and the debates surrounding them, must be situated in their socio-political contexts, which are inseparable from their historical contexts' (p. 3). This situated perspective accounts for the structure adopted in the collection. Each chapter provides a historical review of the development, formulation, and implementation of the medium-of-instruction policies for a particular nation or a group of nations, and attempts to ground the subsequent discussion of recent developments in policies within a particular socio-political context. Such a socio-political analysis, Tollefson and Tsui believe, serves the strategic aim of 'unravel[ing] the complex social and political agendas that underlie decisions on medium-of-instruction policies' (p. viii).

The macro social-political, the situated perspective, and the strategic aim together characterize the approach to examining medium-of-instruction policies adopted in this volume. Overall, this approach is both effective and instrumental in elucidating the functions of policies and agendas as responses to larger socio-political forces and processes. However, there are two inherent limitations. One derives from the macro-level analysis. When macro socio-political events and forces are in focus, the role of individuals and collectivities at the micro-level (school and classroom) tends to be out of focus, if not out of the picture altogether. This, we think, is because the approach of the book is rooted too much in the research tradition of language policy and planning. As Ricento (2000: 208) notes, an important yet largely unanswered question in the area of language policy and planning is 'Why do individuals opt to use [or cease to use] particular languages and varieties for specific functions in different domains, and how do these choices influence—and how are they influenced by—institutional language policy decision-making [local and supranational]?' The second shortcoming centres on the ideological and discursive contexts in which medium-of-instruction policies occur. The collection seems to overlook the ideologies and discourses that are embodied in the particular language adopted as a medium-of-instruction. Our subsequent discussion will further elucidate these points.

The functions of medium-of-instruction policies

The historical reviews of medium-of-instruction policies presented in the chapters show remarkable similarities in the functions of these policies across different countries. Tsui and Tollefson summarize these functions as follows:

> Medium of instruction is the most powerful means of maintaining and revital-
> izing a language and a culture; it is the most important form of intergenera-
> tional transmission … It is also the most direct agent of linguistic genocide …
> Medium-of-instruction policy determines which social and linguistic groups
> have access to political and economic opportunities, and which groups are
> disenfranchised. It is therefore a key means of power (re)distribution and
> social (re)construction, as well as a key arena in which political conflicts among
> countries and ethnolinguistic, social and political groups are realized. (p. 2)

Medium-of-instruction policies are thus characterized primarily as a tool
that serves multiple political, social, and economic purposes.

In former colonial states, medium-of-instruction policies were a vital
instrument for colonial governance, power distribution, and political subju-
gation. The colonial power ensured that the colonial language was adopted
as the medium of instruction by a small number of schools, and thus made
available to an exclusive group of local people. This exclusive group became
the social elite who gained access to power, wealth, and status, as well as part
of the ruling class which acted as auxiliaries to the colonizers and intermedi-
aries between the colonial government and the native people. To a greater
or lesser extent, the colonial government used an indigenous language as an
alternative or transitional medium of instruction to make formal education
more widely available to the public. No matter whether the colonial language
or the indigenous language was used as the medium of instruction, the
purpose remained the same—to subjugate the indigenous people, that is, to
produce consenting subjects through linguistic and cultural assimilation.
The central question was which language should be used as the medium
through which western knowledge, moral values, and world-views would be
imparted to 'native' peoples, with minimal fiscal and political cost. As
compared to these social and political purposes, educational concerns for the
children of indigenous people were secondary in the formulation of policies.

In post-colonial states, medium-of-instruction policies have played a
significant role in nation-building, power redistribution, ethnic manage-
ment, and national economic development. After achieving independence,
there was an urgent need for the selection of a national language that could
contribute to the process of nation-building, in terms of establishing national
identity. In countries like Malaysia and the Philippines, the indigenous
language was instituted as the national and official language as well as the
medium of instruction. The colonial language was relegated in status as a
second language which co-existed with the indigenous language as an official
language and, to a certain extent, a medium of instruction in tertiary or
upper-secondary education (Chapters 7 and 8). As Gill points out in Chap-
ter 7, this can also be viewed as an important move toward altering the priv-
ileged status associated with the colonial language, and therefore reducing
inequality of opportunity among ethnic groups. In other countries the colo-
nial language was retained as both the working language and the medium of
instruction, alongside indigenous languages, with the intention to avoid
potential ethnic conflicts and to foster national economic development.
Thus, in Singapore, English was selected as the working language of the
country and the main medium of instruction, because English was deemed
'politically neutral' for the three main ethnic groups, the Chinese, Malays,

and Indians. The policy of retaining English as the essential medium of instruction, of course, was also justified on the grounds that, as an important medium of international communication and commerce, English served the purpose of the economic and technological development of the country (Chapter 6).

As in Singapore, the decision on language policy in post-colonial Africa was essentially political. As Annamalai observes in Chapter 10, the retention of colonial languages as official languages of government and of instruction were 'the most practically and politically correct choice' from the perspective of the post-colonial governments. The colonial languages were viewed as a 'neutral means of communication for linguistically diverse citizens of the newly independent states' (pp. 201–202). Therefore, instituting the colonial languages as the medium of instruction could avoid ethnic conflicts and wars. The policy, of course, served economic development in the sense that it allowed for further western penetration via investment and markets.

In English-dominant countries, medium-of-instruction policies performed functions similar to those performed in colonial countries. Medium-of-instruction policies were a key vehicle for civilizing and assimilating indigenous peoples. The indigenous languages and cultures were often associated with backwardness and regarded as something that needed to be eliminated in order for countries to be modernized. Language policies for indigenous peoples were from the beginning designed to strip them of their languages and cultures, and to domesticate them as obedient and compliant populations. They were to be civilized and assimilated through the acquisition of another language and culture (Chapters 2–4). According to McCarthy, even when the native language was tolerated and was allowed to be the medium of instruction, it was only used as a useful instrument in the civilizing and assimilating process (Chapter 4). This policy of 'linguistic assimilation', Tsui and Tollefson argue, 'not only deprived the indigenous minorities of the right to speak their mother tongue, but also made it impossible for the indigenous languages to develop into languages that could function in all domains' (p. 3). In this sense, medium-of-instruction policies became a key agent of 'linguistic genocide'. To resist linguistic assimilation, minority-language peoples engaged in direct campaigning around language issues in different domains of life: in government, courts, education, and the media. Medium-of-instruction policy, in this sense, became a powerful means of maintaining and revitalizing a language and a culture. Indigenous languages were a vehicle used by indigenous people to fight for the recognition of their identity, language, and culture (Chapters 2–4).

Medium-of-instruction policies are also an important area for power struggle and a tool for managing and resolving conflicts among ethnic, linguistic, and social groups. This is particularly evident in Webb's account of post-apartheid South Africa (Chapter 11) and Tollefson's account of Slovenia (Chapter 13). Their accounts show how medium-of-instruction policies were the result of political compromise between ethnic and linguistic groups, and how policies could be used to maximize or minimize linguistic and ethnic conflicts. Medium-of-instruction policies, in this sense, are 'a key arena in which political conflicts among countries and ethno-linguistic, social and political groups are realized' (p. 3).

The hidden agendas of medium-of-instruction policies

Another important theme of *Medium of Instruction Policies* concerns the use of various policies in advancing particular social, economic, and political agendas by both the colonial and post-colonial governments. In Chapter 1, Tsui and Tollefson summarize this theme as follows:

> Because medium-of-instruction policy is an integral part of educational policy, debates surrounding it necessarily pertain to educational efficacy. All too often, policy-makers put forward an educational agenda that justifies policy decisions regarding the use and/or prohibition of a particular language or languages. Yet, behind the educational agenda are political, social, and economic agendas that serve to protect the interests of particular social, political, and social groups. (p. 2)

This theme is well epitomized in the case of Hong Kong. In Chapter 5, Tsui questions the mandatory mother-tongue education policy advocated by both the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) government and the out-going colonial government shortly before the change of sovereignty. According to this policy, Chinese should be used as the medium of instruction in a majority of Hong Kong secondary schools. To justify this new policy, both the colonial government and later the Hong Kong SAR government put forward strong educational arguments and related empirical evidence—in terms of students' better cognitive and academic achievements as a result of mother-tongue education. To question whether the change in medium-of-instruction policy was really motivated by an educational agenda, Tsui explores a number of forces that have shaped the formulation and implementation of the new policy since 1998, including school principals, parents, business leaders, and most important, the Hong Kong SAR government. In order to make sense of the change in medium-of-instruction policy, Tsui situates the 'new' policy in the broader social and political context by scrutinizing the colonial history of the medium-of-instruction policy in Hong Kong.

Her analysis shows that educational consultants for the colonial regime had recommended, time and time again, that the mother tongue should be used as the medium of instruction. However, the recommendations were rejected, over and over again, by the colonial government which argued that parental preference and Hong Kong's economic development required continuance of English as the medium of instruction. In other words, the government had stood firm on the position that English was the instructional medium for most schools through upholding the social and economic agendas. The colonial government's position was softened only when there were anti-colonial riots and demonstrations in the 1960s and 1970s. Also, China had begun to play a more prominent role in the international political arena in the 1970s. Finally, there was increasingly a strong awareness of Chinese identity among the people of Hong Kong as well as an increasing demand for the recognition of Chinese as an official language.

In response to these pressures and to ensure political stability, the colonial government altered its position by establishing Chinese as an official language in 1974, and by shifting the responsibility for choice of medium of instruction to the local schools. Only in the 1990s when the handover was

imminent did the colonial government make a recommendation for instituting Chinese as the medium-of-instruction in schools, which appeared to give the educational agenda top priority. However, as pointed out by Tsui, the recommendation was very much a part of the colonial government's plan for a 'noble retreat', in that the 'strategic timing of policy ensured that the challenge of implementing a highly sensitive and emotionally charged policy would be faced by the Hong Kong SAR Government, rather than the colonial government' (p. 108).

In her review of the colonial history of the medium-of-instruction policies in Hong Kong, Tsui concludes that the formulation of the policies is *always* motivated by a political agenda, in addition to the social and economic agendas, and that the political agenda is always placed over and above the educational agenda. As she writes:

> When the educational agenda and the political agenda were in conflict, the former had always been sacrificed. It was only when both agendas converged that educational considerations were attended to. However, this does not suggest that the political agenda was the only force at work. Quite the contrary, it is precisely because there were often other forces at work, notably social and economic forces, that the government was able to put forward different agendas to the public to defend its policy at different times. (p. 108)

This theme is also evident in the Philippines and Sub-Saharan Africa. In the Philippines the bilingual policy instituted English and Filipino as the media of instruction. The decision to exclude languages other than English and Filipino from the schools was made in spite of research evidence showing the advantages gained by children beginning their schooling in languages other than English and Filipino. This was motivated by the aim of developing a nation competent in both English and Filipino, both for economic and national identity purposes (Chapter 8). In Sub-Saharan Africa, according to Alidou (Chapter 10), 'colonial education policy was not aimed at developing an educational system that was culturally and economically responsive to the needs of the African population' (p. 199). Rather, policies were formulated to serve European economic and political interests. After independence, colonial languages continued to be instituted as the medium of instruction, in spite of research findings showing that 'the retention of colonial language policies in education contributes significantly to ineffective communication and lack of student participation in classroom activities' (p. 195).

Such unpacking of the second theme of the book brings to light the tension between different agendas as well as the inevitable triumph of the political, social, or economic agenda over the educational agenda in the development of medium-of-instruction policies. For this reason, Tsui and Tollefson believe that when examining issues concerning medium-of-instruction policies, it is necessary to ask question 'Which agenda? Whose agenda?'

Limitations

On the whole, the volume is very successful in, among other things, elucidating the functions of and the agendas behind medium-of-instruction

policies. Nevertheless, as previously mentioned, there are two limitations. One concerns the notion of medium-of-instruction policies as ideological and discursive constructs. Although the volume focuses mostly on the historical and material (economic, social, and political) contexts upon which medium-of-instruction policies were developed and implemented, it does not attend sufficiently to the ideologies and discourses that are interwoven with the particular languages adopted as the medium of instruction. When Tollefson and Tsui characterize medium-of-instruction policies as 'ideological constructs', they refer to 'the interests of groups that dominate the state policy-making apparatus' and that a policy represents, and 'the unequal relationships of power' that policies produce (p. 284). When they characterize language policies as 'discursive constructs', they emphasize the 'symbolic role' that a particular language can play in shaping and influencing discourses on a range of social issues like opportunity, inequality, and language rights. The ideologies and discourses that determine and shape medium-of-instruction policies appear to be fundamentally extra-linguistic. The language in question is largely taken as if it were nothing but a tool exploited by a government or social group to carry out its own social and political agendas, stripped of the inherent ideologies and discourses associated with the origins of that language. To a certain extent, their treatment of languages, especially the colonial language, mirrors current liberal discourses on the role of English in the world which 'pronounce that it is no longer tied to its insular origins, it is no longer the property of Britain or America, or Canada, or Australia; it is now the property of the world, owned by whoever chooses to speak it, a language for all to use in global communication' (Pennycook 1998: 190–191). The volume, therefore, falls short in its treatment of the complexity of the various ideological and discursive forces involved in the development of medium-of-instruction policies in English-dominant and post-colonial states.

Another shortcoming of the volume derives from the focus on macro-level analysis, in terms of the macro social, economic, and political forces that shape the formulation and implementation of medium-of-instruction policies. This is, of course, justifiable, given that the primary purpose of the volume is to reveal the complex social and political agendas that underlie decisions on medium-of-instruction at the macro-level. However, when the main unit of analysis is exclusively confined to macro-political events and processes, events and processes at the micro-level tend to be obscured or overlooked. Language policy, as McCarty indicates in Chapter 4, can be construed as a socio-political process characterized by 'modes of human interaction, negotiation, and production mediated by relations of power'. 'From this perspective', she continues, 'language policy includes public and official acts and documents, but equally important, it constitutes and is constituted by the practices each of us engages in every day' (p. 72). Schools are important discursive sites in which both official and unofficial language policies are produced and legitimated. 'When we fight in support of a community-based language programme', Pennycook (2001: 215) writes, 'when we allow or disallow the use of one language or another in our classrooms, when we choose which language to use in Congress, conversations, conferences, or curricula, we are making language policy'.

Overall, then, what is missed in the volume is a *micro* perspective—that is, the lived culture and everyday experience of students, teachers, schools, and communities. As a result, the volume as a whole lacks the sense of agency, resistance, and appropriation often present in micro socio-political processes. A fuller and more sophisticated understanding of the role of medium-of-instruction policies in socio-political processes, therefore, needs to take into account the interaction between human agency and the socio-historical contexts in which polices are implemented. A micro-perspective on the development and implementation of medium-of-instruction policies could, we believe, complement the macro-perspective of the book. Since a host of ethnographic studies concerning the implementation of language policies at the school or classroom level have been reported, we will not offer a discussion of the implementation of medium-of-instruction polices from a micro socio-political perspective here. We refer interested readers to the writings of Canagarajah (1993, 1999), Ibrahim (1999), Lin (1999), and McCarty (2002), among others, in which individual agency, not impersonal economic and political forces, is the focus of analysis.

In the next section we will discuss the complicity of functions of and agendas behind medium-of-instruction policies in the light of the ideologies and discourses that are interwoven with the English language. Many scholars, notably Canagarajah (1999), Pennycook (1998), and Phillipson (1992), among others, have argued compellingly that English is not the neutral language of global communication, as popular opinion tends to suggest; instead, it is deeply interwoven with colonial ideologies and discourses. Those colonial discourses which have shaped and perpetuated an East/West dichotomy and the supposed superiority of the West over the other are being constantly reproduced in the contexts of contemporary debates on language policies. Attending to colonial discourses is, thus, essential if we are to fully appreciate the complexity of the ideological and discursive contexts in which current medium-of-instruction policies are formulated, developed, and implemented. We will focus our discussion on the medium-of-instruction policies in British post-colonial states or regions, using the analytic framework developed by Pennycook (1998, 2001) for his analysis of the relationships between language policies and colonial discourses within the former British Empire. The work of Pennycook is relevant here also because his analysis encompasses most of the post-colonial states or regions discussed in Tollefson and Tsui's book, including India, Malaysia, Singapore, and Hong Kong. Our discussion, we hope, will serve to deepen and complicate the main arguments of *Medium of Instruction Policies*.

Medium-of-instruction policies and colonial discourses

According to Pennycook (1998), language policies are constructed between four poles of colonial discourses: *imperial capitalism* (concerning the development of global capitalism and the need to produce workers and consumers to fuel capitalist expansion), *Anglicism* (concerning the need to bring civilization to the world through the medium of English), *local governance* (concerning the social, racial, and economic conditions that dictate

the distinct governance of each colony), and *orientalism* (concerning the need to preserve colonized cultures for the colonial aim). Together, these four discourses have constituted the ideological and discursive contexts in which language policies have been formulated and implemented in colonial states, determining the different functions that policies have been expected to perform. Understanding these functions is crucial for ascertaining the agendas that medium-of-instruction policies serve in post-colonial states in the past and present.

There was a close tie between imperial capitalism and, in British colonies, Anglicism, both of which provided a strong support for instituting English as the medium of instruction. Imperial capitalism provided the economic drive behind colonialism. The promotion of English education in British colonies was a crucial component in the construction of the imperial economic empire, with the populations of various colonial countries as both producers and consumers for the goods of the empire. While imperial capitalism concerned the material aspect of colonialism, Anglicism furnished the ideological or political dimension (Pennycook 1998, 2000). The promotion of English education was essential for the mission of bringing 'civilization' to the colonial states, in the belief that English education opened up 'a new world of literature, reason, history, virtue, and morality' to the indigenous people. The Anglicist ideology, in the words of Pennycook (2000: 53), 'forged an indelible link between a civilizing mission and the promotion of English'.

Both imperial capitalism and Anglicism are alive and well today; they have re-emerged within a new global empire of economics and communication through the global spread of the English language. After independence, most British post-colonial states instituted bilingual or multilingual policies, with the aim of developing their nations' competence in both English and the selected national languages. These countries have also had the basic structures in place for the pervasive use of English—in education and in various arenas of social and political life—as a result of many years of colonialism.

English is no longer the language of colonialism in these countries, but the language of advanced science and technologies and of international communication and markets. Around the globe, there is a massive enterprise of English language teaching. Thus, for many decades, the UK, together with the US, Canada, and Australia, have been carrying on a brisk trade in exporting English teachers to different parts of the world. The British Council has made it plain that English is an economic asset and needs to be fully exploited:

> Of course we do not have the power we once had to impose our will but Britain's influence endures, out of all proportion to her economic and military resources. This is partly because English language is the lingua franca of science, technology, and commerce; and the demand for it is insatiable and we respond either through the education system of 'host' countries or, when the market can stand it, on commercial basis. Our language is our greatest asset, greater than the North Sea oil, and the supply is inexhaustible; furthermore, while we do not have a monopoly, our particular brand remain highly sought after. I am glad to say that those who guide the fortunes of this country share

my conviction in the need to invest in, and exploit to the full, this invisible, God-given asset (British Council Annual Report 1983–1984: 9; cited in Phillipson 1992: 144–145).

The export of the English language to the world is economically motivated.

The spread of the English language has contributed to the creation of a global capitalist empire in which certain parts of the world have become economically dominated by other parts. A new form of imperialism is created where English plays an instrumental role. As Phillipson (1992: 20–21) argues, 'In the current global economy, English is dominant in many domains, which, in turn, creates a huge instrumental demand for English. There has, therefore, already been a penetration of the language into most culture and education systems.' English is instrumental in the creation of a global cultural empire. Alongside the global spread of English language is the spread of scientific, technological, and cultural knowledge from the developed countries to developing countries, which can be viewed as Anglicism in a new guise. The 'new' global economic and political order can be viewed as the motivating force behind the spread of English as an international language.

From this perspective, medium-of-instruction policies in post-colonial nations, through promoting the extensive use of English in education, contribute to the creation and maintenance of a new global economic and political imperialism. There is, therefore, continuity in the functions of medium-of-instruction policies from the colonial and post-colonial eras. This continuity, however, seems to have escaped the attention of the authors of the chapters in this volume in their accounts of the functions of medium-of-instruction policies. This, we think, is due to their overlooking of the continuity and power of the colonial ideologies and discourses that are deeply interwoven with the English language. Thus, the global spread of English, in which medium-of-instruction policies are instrumental, carries serious political and economic consequences. It leads to the creation of a 'linguistic imperialism' which is particularly threatening to other languages and cultures: it is one of many factors contributing to the tragic loss of indigenous languages around the world (Phillipson 1992). It 'privileges certain groups of people [including native speakers and non-native elites who have the opportunity to master it] and may harm others who have less opportunity to learn it' (Warschauer 2000: 516).

However, while imperial capitalism and Anglicism represented the driving forces for the formulation of medium-of-instruction policies supporting English education during the British colonial era, local governance and orientalism provided a justification for policies favouring vernacular education. Education in local languages, rather than in English, was considered as a cost-effective means for social governance—because of the costs and difficulties in finding qualified English teachers and because of the need for producing a vast number of contented and obedient manual labourers (Pennycook 2001). The provision of vernacular education was also tied to the colonialist's intention of using 'oriental' cultures and traditions for colonial governance. As espoused by many colonial administrators with a strong interest in orientalism, vernacular education allowed the preservation of

indigenous cultures and languages which, in turn, promoted loyalty, obedience, and acceptance of colonial rule (Pennycook 1998, 2001). In colonial Hong Kong, the Chinese curriculum centred upon Confucian ethics and traditional morality, which many orientalists believed served to legitimate social hierarchy and thus promoted subservience to authority. Medium-of-instruction policies that promoted vernacular languages as the medium of instruction hence supported effective colonial governance and control. Thus, the provision of mother-tongue education during the colonial period was fundamentally political. English education and vernacular education were two sides of the same coin of colonialism (Pennycook 1998).

These political functions of vernacular or mother-tongue education in colonial times have not received sufficient attention by the authors of the chapters in *Medium of Instruction Policies* as they reviewed colonial medium-of-instruction policies. There is a tendency to attribute the support of mother-tongue education to a concern for the learning and academic achievement of local indigenous students rather than to the political aims of colonialism. However, understanding the political functions of colonial mother-tongue education policies is critical. It allows us to understand better what functions policies are designed to perform—as well as the agendas behind the policies—in the post-colonial era.

Both local governance and orientalist discourses find manifestations in the context of current debates on medium-of-instruction policies. Current mother-tongue education policies in many post-colonial countries are expected to perform political functions which are *not* fundamentally different from those expected in colonial times. In terms of local governance, most post-colonial states have established bilingual or multilingual instructional policies that are supposed to be responsive to their social, racial, and economic conditions, and thus to support their distinct patterns of governance. In Singapore, for instance, the need to avoid ethnic conflicts between the three different ethic groups has led the government to mandate English as the medium of instruction, and at the same time to institute mother-tongue education policies which allow for an equal treatment of the three main indigenous languages, Chinese, Malay, and Tamil. Such policies are believed to perform the function of resolving and eliminating racial conflicts rising from the ethnically and linguistically diverse population (Gopinathan *et al.* 2004). In terms of orientalism, the promotion of mother-tongue education is inextricably tied to the need for the preservation of eastern cultures. The mother-tongue education policy in Singapore, as Pakir indicates in Chapter 6, is believed to be important for the preservation of cultures of the different ethnic groups and to contribute to the development of cultural ties, social cohesiveness, and political stability. In Hong Kong, mother-tongue education is believed to contribute to the inculcation of Chinese values and traditions, which are essentially Confucian. More specifically, as Tsui indicates in Chapter 5, mother-tongue education can 'revive traditional Chinese values' and cultivate 'trust, love, and respect for our family and elders, a belief in order and stability; an emphasis on obligations to the community rather than rights of the individuals' (p. 112). In other words, medium-of-instruction policies that support mother-tongue education are

deeply political; they are closely linked with issues about local governance, political stability, and social control.

This review and analysis shows that no matter whether English or the indigenous language is used as the medium of instruction, medium-of-instruction policies are fundamentally political. Furthermore, there is a significant degree of continuity in the functions of medium-of-instruction policies between the colonial and post-colonial eras. With this insight, we now turn to problematize Tallefson and Tsui's account of the various agendas behind medium-of-instruction policies.

The agendas behind medium-of-instruction policies might not be as they appear to be; they cannot be merely attributed to the interests or intentions of the government or social groups within a particular country. On the surface, medium-of-instruction policies favouring English language adopted by post-colonial states serve the economic agenda of governments. However, the policies, one can argue, go beyond the nation-state to serve the economic and political agendas of the new imperial capitalism associated with the current global economy. At first blush, mother-tongue education policies appear to address educational concern about the learning and cognitive development of local students. However, at a deeper level, instituting mother-tongue education is inextricably tied to the political agenda of a government, either during the colonial or post-colonial era, in terms of ethical or racial management, political stability, and social control. Therefore, many agendas behind medium-of-instruction policies are not only hidden; they are complicit and invisible. As far as medium-of-instruction policies are concerned, the questions 'Who agenda and Which agenda' are complex questions. By and large, the volume falls short of revealing the invisibility and complicity of the hidden agendas of medium-of-instruction policies.

Conclusion

Medium of Instruction Policies is very successful in elucidating the functions and agendas of medium-of-instruction policies in response to various macro socio-political processes and forces. It is also effective in revealing the tensions and conflicts among these agendas, together with their political, economic, and social consequences. Nevertheless, a deeper and more sophisticated analysis of the functions and agendas needs to take into account the ideologies and discourses which are carried by the language selected as the medium of instruction. As far as post-colonial countries are concerned, we need to look beyond the macro social, economic and political processes and try to understand the complex inter-connections between medium-of-instruction policies on the one hand and colonial discourses and ideologies on the other. Researchers and policy-makers need to investigate carefully whose agendas are served by different policies through looking at what the policies promote or deny—not only within the social, political, and economic structures they support but also within the complex ideological and discursive contexts in which they are formulated, developed, and implemented.

Furthermore, a micro socio-political perspective is needed to extend the analysis closer to the realities, in order to understand how medium-of-instruction policies function in everyday face-to-face interaction in classrooms and schools. This micro-level analysis, of course, needs to be integrated with the macro-level investigation of medium-of-instruction policies: the interaction between human agency and the socio-political contexts in which policies are implemented. One key challenge for analysing medium-of-instruction policies is, we believe, to find ways of mapping micro- and macro-realities together in order to understand the complex relationship between broad social, economic and political issues on the one hand and everyday classroom discourses, curriculum, and pedagogy on the other. We hope that more studies will be conducted in this direction.

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