



ISSN: 1738-1460

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Volume 7, Issue 1

Article 1

### Article Title

Change and Continuity: English Language Teaching in Singapore

### Key Words

English language teaching in Singapore - syllabus structure - change in ELT

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### Abstract:

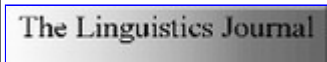
This paper focuses on change and continuity in English Language Teaching (ELT) in Singapore as revealed by a study of the English language syllabuses and their respective textbooks since the time of Singapore's evolvement from a British colony to the modern independent nation it is today. It will also examine how the relevant changes were directly influenced by political, social, and economic concerns of the nation as well as larger developments in language research and language teaching taking place elsewhere.

### Background and Introduction

Change is being experienced in all walks of life, in society, in the sciences and in political, economic and educational practices. Change is a fact of life, it is irresistible and education is an integral part of these broader currents of

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society and change. Change is accelerating and the paradigms that have been used to analyze society are themselves changing. Change in education is nothing new. There have been great pedagogues such as Rousseau, Dewey, and Montessori who invented new systems of education. However, while these changes were relatively few and far in between, change is now on the acceleration and often comes before the dust of the last change has settled down.

Traditionally, education served as the guardian of tradition, responding only to gradual change and the impact of external events. However, by the 1960's, this was no longer true. Cros (1999) observed that in the 1960's and 1970's, change in education began to accelerate but that much of the changes still depended on official injunction. In the 80's, probably due to the worldwide yearning for democracy and the higher value placed on human resources, change began to be seen more positively and was promoted and encouraged either through direct measures or incentives. By the 1990's, innovation was no longer encouraged but became an imperative of professional endeavour. Now people look forward to new ideas- and everyone tries to develop "an innovative spirit". Grassroot initiatives become important and change is now part of the professional repertoire of teachers. The new is seen as a form of creativity and it has become "creative" to break with established paradigms.

As an international and cosmopolitan city, Singapore is not immune to educational changes. Singapore looks for change and wants to change. As a small nation devoid of natural resources and ever hungry for material success, it has always looked ahead to future challenges. It is oriented to the anticipation of impending problems in the future and the changes it instituted, either educational or otherwise, are carefully calculated on pragmatic risk. Like many governments throughout the world, Singapore have been regularly reforming the school system to increase educational standards so as to ensure that more young people can have the appropriate knowledge and skills in the fierce international competition for economic success. In the primary level (ages 6-12) the government tries to ensure as quickly as possible the literacy and numeracy, which provide essential access to the rest of the school curriculum. At the secondary level (ages 13-18), the main focus is to prepare students for the world of work

The focus of this paper is on change in ELT because English is currently, the medium of instruction for all schools in Singapore. It is also the first language for a growing number of school children. Language learning, be it first or second language, is also the basis of thinking and is tied to social and emotional development. Owing to the very important role language plays in the education of an individual, the subject of the language of instruction has been given a prominent place in the school curriculum in Singapore and plays a significant part in the streaming process which takes place in Primary 4 (age 9), primary 6 (aged 12), and secondary 4 (aged 16).

In studying changes and continuity in ELT, the syllabuses and respective textbooks will be examined. Teachers and their respective Ministries of Education normally like to draw up syllabuses because they are logical, organized and can provide a measure of accountability within the school administration. More importantly for the purpose of this paper, the syllabus represents the adherence to some set of sociolinguistic beliefs regarding education. It can be viewed as a political manifesto because it reveals the designer's views on authority and

status. Cooperation with the syllabus and its respective textbooks is encouraged (through grades, encouragement /promotions) while restrictions (through denial of credentials, reduced job opportunities) await those who teach out of synchrony with the syllabus. In the last years, there has been all kinds of English language syllabuses available, e.g. theme-based, communicative, functional, structural, task-based and even hybrid syllabuses.

The first twenty-five years (1959-1984).

In examining how the English language was taught in Singapore, two broad periods can be widely discerned: the first is from 1959 to 1984, while the second is from 1985 to the present. The first period may be further sub-divided into 1) 1959-1970 and 2) 1971 to 1985 for ease of analysis.

1959-1970

The colony of Singapore attained self-governing status from Britain in 1959. Not surprising, the 1960's were years whereby the fledgling nation was more concerned with issues directly related to national survival. This was a period when the government focused not only on the creation of a sustainable industrial economy but also on building values in its people such as loyalty, patriotism, history or tradition. Four official languages were recognized - English, Tamil, Mandarin and Malay in view of its multi-ethnic and multi-cultural population. Correspondingly, there were four language-stream schools.

Understandably then, ELT continued in much the same way that it had operated in the 1950's when it was under British colonial rule. Teaching in the 1950's was influenced by the classical tradition which emphasized the written text, translation from one language to another, a set of approved canonical literary texts of high status, and a procedure which was predominantly instructional. Elsewhere in the English teaching world, the early sixties were the heyday of structural linguistics, which attempted to describe languages more consistently, objectively and scientifically than traditional grammar had done.

Correspondingly, the new primary English syllabus, published in 1958, changed its earlier emphasis on high literary text to one which emphasized the oral text. While not dismissing the continued importance of a high standard in written English, it now highlighted the importance of correct speech. Its stated objectives were to develop pupils' ability to "carry on a simple conversation in grammatical English and understand simple English prose; as well as write simple connected English prose" (Ministry of Education 1958). This was to be acquired by the mastery of the English sound system and the basic patterns of English sentences and phraseology. Oral work was emphasized and the favorite teaching technique was drilling and repetition, especially in areas such as speech training, spelling and dictation. A knowledge of phonetics was also deemed an important tool for "correct speaking." Attention was paid not just to accuracy of writing but also accuracy of speech (cf. Tan 1966).

Reading lessons began with the reading aloud of words and sentences so that the correct intonation and expression could be acquired. Reading meant reading aloud and around the class. Importance was attached to completeness of sentences and accuracy. Textbooks usually contained units which begin with comprehension, followed by vocabulary, grammar or

structure exercises and some advice on composition (cf. Woon 1966).

Grammar was important because it gave a "structure" to the language. The teaching of language was highly structured and repetition and drill practice in the teaching of grammar, syntax, reading and writing were the norms. Grammar was also taught as a subject to be learnt and the teaching of rules were favored (cf. Seet, 1966).

1971-1985

This period saw more attention paid to how English was taught as the 60's and saw a marked increase in enrollment in English-medium schools. It was marked by the introduction of the 1971 and 1981 syllabuses,<sup>1</sup> the establishment of the Advisory Committee on Curriculum Development, and the creation of a centrally coordinated Curriculum Development Institute (CDIS).

It was a period where "bilingualism" meant the learning of English as well as one other official language. However, the 1971 English Language Syllabus was continued and not changed from its structuralist orientation. What was changed was that more effort was put in the refining of structuralist methodology by, for example, finding ways to make drilling and repetition more interesting and varied.

Because language was still believed to be a set of habits, reinforcement exercises continued to be important. It was taught through sentence pattern drill (e.g. substitution tables) and repeated practice. This was also the period when the Ministry of Education began building language laboratories in schools and junior colleges, whereby students would be able to practice the use of the English language. While grammatical structures and repetition had been taught in the 1960's, what was changed was that more care was now taken to teach them in a graded sequence not only at word but also at sentence level. Carefully selected and graded grammatical structures of English were presented in effective meaningful situations. The structures or teaching items were graded by language teaching experts in terms of "What comes before what?" and "What goes with what?"

In the primary schools, a series of flash cards and basal readers were adopted to teach pupils how to read words and sentences. The teaching of phonics was encouraged and pupils taught to read most effectively by learning the sounds that letters make and joining these together to make words.

By the late 1970's, policy makers became convinced that existing textbooks, which had long been published by commercial enterprises, were not written well enough to deal with advancing curriculum reforms in English, Science and Mathematics. It was felt that "textbooks deriving from the open market were not likely to exploit media which were then available - material or sound tape, or video tape, or slides, or film strips, or charts, or transparencies for the overhead projector." (Yeoh 1984: 2). Accordingly, in 1980, the CDIS was established by the government and staffed by hand-picked full-time teachers and educationalists for the main purpose of producing better quality textbooks for the different subjects in both primary and secondary schools. Being a government-funded body, it was deemed capable of exercising more care and thoroughness in the systematic development of textbook

materials of the schools. Unlike commercial publishers, the CDIS subjected their materials to pilot-testing or trials as well as in-service training in the monitoring of the materials in the formative stages of their development.

The first English book produced by CDIS was CUE in 1981. In line with the 1981 syllabus, which continued the structuralist orientation of the 1971 syllabus, it was based on three main tenets:

1. grammatical rules and explanations are necessary (indeed CUE was derived from an error analysis of pupil's written compositions;
2. grammar should be taught in the context of communication, not as passive knowledge;
3. language drills and written practice were important but should not be the only activities.

The next two CDIS English language textbooks were NESPE and PEP in 1984, books which complemented each other in the teaching of English in Primary Schools. Like CUE and its predecessors, NESPE and PEP were basically structural in approach. The teacher continued to be a model of good speech and pupils were required to improve their English through the practice of oral and written exercises.

Where reading was concerned, the "best" method then advocated was to teach it at the word and sentence level before proceeding to brief functional passages such as notices and messages. There continued to be a stress on oral speech. Pupils were to read aloud so that teachers should focus on correcting pronunciation stress and intonation. Word recognition skills, phonics and spelling exercises were also encouraged.

There was no change in the emphasis on oral skills. The units in the course book started off with conversation, which provide pupils with opportunities to make use of English in a variety of situations. Phonics continued to be stressed with a set of books to help teachers in the teaching of phonics in lower primary. Each book contained a number of sounds which were well graded. At the onset, lessons on phonics make pupils realize that many speech sounds were represented by predictable written symbols. There were also audio tapes (every lesson was presented on tape), phonics cards (containing vowels, consonants, blends and digraphs) and phonics slides (for reinforcement and revision of sounds).

Perhaps the most significant change in this period was not so much in the methodology, which remained basically structural, but in the fact that the *NESPE* and *PEP* packages were a strikingly more comprehensive, cohesive and well-coordinated approach comprising a collection of course book, phonics book, practice books and audio visual materials.

The next 25 years - 1985 to present

The year 1985 marks the beginning of the second period of our discussion. Besides the fact that 1985 marks the end of 25 years since the evolution of Singapore from a British colony, that year is also significant because it saw the introduction of REAP (Reading and English Acquisition Programme), the inception of communicative language teaching (CLT) in the

schools, as well as the introduction of process writing in the schools. There was a heightened concern with "democratization" and "student-centeredness", evident in the 1991 and 2001 English language syllabuses. Most important of all, this period also saw the teaching of English as a *first language* in all Singapore schools.<sup>2</sup>

The communicative language teaching movement reached Singapore in the early 1980's. The movement generated a lot of classroom research interest which coincided with and drew its vigour from an upsurge in theories of teaching and learning, which downplayed the role of explicit instruction in general and grammatical explanation in particular, so popular before the 80's.

In Singapore, the communicative language movement influenced the implementation of ACT (Active Communicative Teaching) from the mid-80's in Singapore schools.<sup>3</sup> ACT emphasized both the importance of language acquisition and of immersing the learner in a print-rich and stimulating environment in which the target language was used comprehensively to convey meaning. Teachers trained under ACT were encouraged to use a wide range of communicative teaching strategies to encourage pupil interaction and participation. Lessons tended to take the form of a number of activities and there was only incidental learning of language items. Reading was a starting point for a new experience with extensive reading as an important component. ACT also emphasized the appropriateness of language use and the relevance of task-based activities.

The publication of *CLUE* (Course in Learning and Using English) for secondary schools in 1983 may be said to exemplify the pedagogical mood. As the first locally-produced communicative language textbook, it was distinctive in terms of its communicative features. Each unit was integrated thematically and grammatically. For the first time in Singapore, language was taught as a means of communication in meaningful context and an integrated approach in the teaching of the four skills was stressed. Key words were "authenticity in materials", "fluency" and "context". *CLUE's* "activities" (rather than "exercises") included language games, mind engaging tasks, role-play, retrieving text order, and group work/pair work.

On the other hand, in the primary schools, definitive changes were also taking place. In 1985, REAP was implemented in 30 schools in Singapore, (with more schools joining in the programme subsequently). It was a high profile ministerial supported programme, which drew inspiration from the Big Book and Book Flood Approach which began with Marie Clay in New Zealand.<sup>4</sup> It emphasized the importance of language acquisition as well as the necessity of immersing the learner in a print-rich and stimulating environments in which the target language was used comprehensively to convey meaning. The teaching of reading was integrated with writing, listening and speaking activities. REAP introduced the following features in ELT in the primary school, which were subsequently incorporated in the 1991 and 2001 syllabuses as well as their respective textbooks:

- 1) SBA (Shared Book Approach) introduced beginning readers to an enjoyable experience with books. Teachers used Big Books with enlarged texts and pictures to read aloud to their pupils and

taught them beginning reading skills.

i) LEA (Learning Experience Approach) worked on the principle that all children have experiences which they enjoy sharing and these experiences could be thought about, talked about, written down, read and re-read.

ii) CDS (Class Dictated Story) in which pupils engaged in joint writing with teacher.

### The 1991 syllabus

The 1991 syllabus may be considered highly innovative in relation to its predecessor syllabuses. For one, it was much less prescriptive and structured than the ones before it. Following the lead from the methodological reforms in the mid-80's, it allowed teachers to select from several inventories and lists of language skills, communicative functions, grammar items and task and activities in the various chapters of the syllabus as well as the use of themes/topics to flesh out an integrated lesson sequence. True to the communicative and functional spirit then in vogue, it emphasized fluency rather than accuracy and function rather than form. Language was viewed as a system of meaning making and the importance of purpose, audience, context and culture in the acquisition of learning of language was taken into consideration. It was the first syllabus in Singapore to view teachers as facilitators rather than purely knowledge-givers.

The central innovation here may be said to be that of "integration". This integration was achieved by having sequences of lessons built around themes, which provided varied contexts through which pupils could do meaningful tasks and activities. Teachers would then be preparing integrated sequences of lessons based on particular themes, each lasting on an average two to three weeks. Group work was emphasized and students were encouraged to work together to achieve common goals. More creative types of activities were encouraged and the syllabus encouraged the use of drama, role-play, story telling, poetry, songs and games as a means of inspiring students to express themselves while enabling them to acquire language skills indirectly.

Change was also evident in the teaching of grammar. Prior to the 1991 syllabus, a teacher was seen as the repository of a finite amount of knowledge that must be conveyed to his/her pupils at a time identified by the syllabus. The new syllabus however did away with rigidity and required the teacher only to intervene at appropriate intervals to teach the grammatical knowledge which, in his/her professional opinion, will be of most use to the pupils. The direct teaching of grammar was discouraged, in line with the belief that the pupils' assimilation of language is more effectively conveyed through the context, the teacher being a facilitator of the acquisition of language rather than a repository of knowledge (Nair 1992).

The main textbook for secondary schools, produced by the CDIS, was *New CLUE (1991)*, which like the parent *CLUE (1983)* embodied communicative principles such as the organisation of language teaching materials through the use of themes, the integration of all four skills through the use of tasks and activities; and a thorough exploitation of audio visual materials. .

In primary schools, the sole English language textbook was

*PETS* (Primary English Thematic Series)(1991). Produced by the CDIS, it exemplified the key principles of the communicative language movement. Like *NESPE* and *PEP*, *PETS* continued to offer a multi media package with complementary pupil's worksheets, teacher's handbooks, teacher's resource folios, big books and audio visual materials comprising ETV programmes, audio tapes, compact discs, picture cards and wall charts. What was changed was that unlike *NESPE* and *PEP*, *PETS* had three novel principles:

1. An integrated approach. Here, each thematic unit would include oral interaction, reading comprehension, writing and /or other language skills.
2. Context. Meaningful context was created by organising language materials through themes.
3. Audio-visual aids. Extensively used and a great variety was offered (Chew 1996).

The teaching of reading was carried out through the principles propagated by REAP. Phonics as an aid to reading was discontinued in favour of the whole book approach as exemplified through the work of Frank Smith.<sup>5</sup> Where oral skills were concerned, they were integrated into reading and writing lessons, usually through task-based activities Oral skills were no longer interpreted as phonics or as lessons in the language laboratory. Language laboratories built in the 1970's were now disbanded in the schools in the 1990's. The teaching of listening, long neglected was now encouraged. It had a regular section in *PETS* and audio and visual cassettes were produced for listening activities.

The teaching of writing saw a significant change. Traditionally, writing had been teacher-centered and product focussed. The teacher would introduce a topic, talk about it, perhaps explain how students could write it, ask the class to write and after the pupils had written their compositions, the teacher would then check, mark, and return the piece of work. The 1990's, however, promoted "process writing" by focussing on the interaction between the writer, the reader, the writer's craft and the content of his writing. The "process" of writing now became more important than the "product". It gave the student a real purpose in writing for an audience. The teacher's role was to train students in revision skills so that students could become perceptive editors of their own work and able to assist others in editing theirs (Seow 1995).

#### The 2001 syllabus English Language Syllabus

The current 2001 syllabus did not represent a significant change from the 1991 syllabus. While ostensibly it has changed from a "communicative syllabus" to a "language use" syllabus, this is more superficial than real. For one thing, the 1991 syllabus had also made use of Michael Halliday's functional model as a theoretical platform from which to use and teach English.

Another discernible change was the shift to the right, and away from the more "progressive" educational ideas associated with the mid-80's. This can be attributed to the ministerial concern that Singaporeans should be able to "speak and write and make presentations in internationally acceptable English that is grammatical, fluent and appropriate for the purpose,



audience and context." <sup>6</sup> The concern for discipline and "standards" was now a national concern and this shift can be seen in the reassertion of the need for formal grammar and standard languages. Reflecting this change of mood, the 2001 syllabus puts a clear emphasis not just on fluency but also on accuracy. Aware of the falling standards of grammar and as early as 1955, the MOE had issued a statement that "the question is not whether we should or should not teach grammar, but rather when and how we ought to teach it. Since then, knowledge of grammar is believed to be essential to effective language use and teachers are encouraged to give pupils "the meta-cognitive edge" (Lim 2000:14). Explicit teaching of grammar once again had a place. Most of the primary and secondary textbooks published in 2001, such as "In Step" and "Stepping Out", have reintroduced form and topicality or pedagogical grammar.

However, where grammar methodology was concerned, it was not to be taught through the structural or grammar translation approach as "in the bad old days" but in context -- through text types. In this way, the Ministry hopes to contemplate some sort of middle ground between product and process approach to teaching grammar. To facilitate this, under each "Area of Language Use", the 2001 syllabus printed lists of text types and their relevant grammatical features. A variety of recommended text types, comprising print, visual and electronic media, which provides students with many models of language use, suitable for various purposes, audiences and contexts are listed in the syllabus.

Last but not least, an important change was the argument that teachers in primary and secondary schools should have a choice as to the textbooks that they would like to adopt for their respective schools as was the case in the 60's and 70's. Consequently, CDIS was closed down in December 1996 and the task of producing language textbooks was returned to the commercial publishers, whom they felt were now more ready and equipped to produce high quality textbooks. As the publishers would have to compete for their market share, it was argued that they would be sufficiently motivated to produce the best product possible.

Textbooks for primary schools, produced under the 2001 syllabus by commercial publishers, were also communicatively-oriented with task-like activities based on the promotion of communicative fluency. They were not much different from PETS or New *CLUE* as they emphasized the integration of skills, contextual teaching, and learner's participation such as group work. Cooperation and group work continue to be emphasized. All the language textbooks for primary and secondary schools include tasks and mini-projects, which require students to work together while learning the four language skills. All the primary English textbooks make use of "themes" (e.g. "hobbies", "adventure", "sea creatures") as the framework by which to organize their linguistic content, despite the fact that the syllabus has pointed the movement away from themes to areas of language use as an organizational framework. <sup>7</sup> Much like *PETS*, the themes used often involved the individual (e.g. my hobbies, my friends, my pets, my family); fantasy (e.g. fairy tales, monsters, witches); and general knowledge (e.g. of animals, weather, sports). <sup>8</sup>

What was different was that each of the four textbooks, while incorporating communicative principles had their own particular emphasis, for example, in the Primary 1 textbooks, *Treks* focused on the teaching of phonics and mechanical skills, *Pals*

on vocabulary , *Celebrate* on children's literature and *Instep* on a balance of text-grammar and communicative language activities.

In writing pedagogy, process writing continues to have a place despite the current promotion of "genre writing", which is writing based on a knowledge of text-structure. However, genre writing is not entirely new because a report of how writing was taught in the 1960's by Han (1966:49) reported a then "state-of-the-art technology": that "not only should the audience be decided upon and message or record be selected, but the writer should know why he is writing - to inform, to instruct, to advise, to persuade, to command and so on, and the writing should be produced for some useful end." All these priorities for the teaching of writing in the 1960's have now returned as important principles in the classroom.

### Summary and Conclusion

While innovative changes have been organized under specific periods in this paper, it should be noted that in real life, the "switch" is not instantaneous, as one is likely to assume from the way this paper has been sectionalized, since there is often a merging of the old and new approaches before the latter approach gains ascendancy.

To summarize, our first period, 1959 to 1985, saw a language pedagogy heavily influenced by structuralist ideals. Language was perceived as a collection of well-practiced habits in the oral and written domains. Generally, there was a stress on the explicit teaching of vocabulary, spelling, phonics and grammar. Reading was reading aloud and the teaching of writing was skill-based, with the use of good models as aids. The second period of study from 1985 saw the rise of communicative language methodology and a move towards a thematic and integrated approach. Spelling, word recognition, phonics and grammar was downplayed. In the teaching of reading and writing, there was an emphasis on the "process" rather than the "product". By the turn of the century, however, a functional view of language had emerged and text-types perceived as the best way not just a for lesson planning but also as a strategy for more explicit teaching of writing and grammar. A primary reason for this turn stems from the decline in recent years of CLT. Jennings and Doyle (1996: 169) state that CLT has been a platform of "unprincipled eclecticism, varying from teacher to teacher." CLT had also "incorporated so many approaches that it was difficult to know what it really was." Where the Singapore planners were concerned, CLT also ran the risk of insufficient focus for structural change and accuracy because of its stress on fluency.

The movement from the communicative syllabus in 1991 to a more moderate syllabus incorporating both communicative and structural (grammatical) components in 2001, indicates a realization that communicative methods may not be suitable at all times and in all situations. Similarly, while grammar has been downplayed in communicatively-based textbooks for almost two decades, the political concern over what has been perceived as "declining standards in written English" (and its impact on Singapore's global competitive ratings) has once again led the way in giving the explicit teaching of grammar a place in the 2001 syllabus. One may add here that change is therefore not just constant but also cyclical and often returns full circle. Often, as in language pedagogy, something that is "new" may be something old that has been restored.

While we have surveyed a history of language teaching methods as revealed in the syllabuses and textbooks of Singapore, it should also not be assumed that what is advocated is widely practiced. There is often a gap between the theoretical and the applied (Chew 1996). This is because for Singaporeans, what is really important in schooling is how they fare in the job market. And what is important for the job market is the marks in the examination. It is the examination which determines which programme and school a particular student is eligible for and more importantly, what and how a subject is really taught. Usually, the examination determines how a subject will be taught in class despite what the syllabus may prescribe.<sup>9</sup> Tan's (2001) research found that experienced teachers strongly endorsed learning activities that enhance memorization rather than that of creativity and cooperation, as embodied in the 1991 and 2001 syllabuses. Student-directed small group discussions that empower learners with responsibilities and encourage independent learning rarely take place since teachers prefer recitation and seatwork to sharing time and student-directed small group activities.

In addition, real change may be hindered because sometimes, changes have been too swift, too top-down and too short-lived. As a result, its respective objectives have tended often not to be fully-understood and its intended effects not far-reaching enough (AWARE 2001). The industrialist, Senge (1990:57) wrote that "yesterday's solutions become today's problems." One must also be aware that too much change may lead to a "burn-out" and the possibility that a process that is no longer innovatory can turn into a routine.<sup>10</sup> A change is introduced, it lives and dies. It spreads far and becomes marginalized. It takes hold and disappears. Skepticism creeps in and becomes the order of the day.

ELT has undergone significant changes in each period under study in Singapore's history. It would be fair to say that in Singapore's future history, there will continue to be changes as long as there continues to be social-political initiatives in the republic as well as language teaching methodological developments taking place elsewhere in the world. As history has taught us, any syllabus design if taken to extreme will have its own unique set of strengths and/or weaknesses. In the future, we can expect many more language syllabuses to rise and fall. Whatever position language planners and teachers take, they will need to accept the pedagogical consequences of their action. In the end, the hybrid and/or eclectic syllabus will probably result (e.g. the 2001 syllabus can be said to be a hybrid of the communicative and functional syllabus) not simply because of theoretical considerations but because in the day-to-day world of teaching, this will be the compromise which will satisfy most groups. Teachers in Singapore and elsewhere should be aware of this wider perspective before making their daily informed pedagogical decisions based on the real life needs of their students.

1. Only the 1971 Syllabus will be discussed in detail as the 1981 Syllabus was basically similar to it. See Ministry of Education (1981), *The English Syllabus for the New Education System* (Pr 1-6, Normal Course, Pr 4-8 Extended Course and Pr4-8 English Monolingual Course) Singapore Ministry of Education.

2. The year 1986 saw the first cohort of "O" level candidates take their examination in English only. By 1987 the Primary One

enrollment was only in English schools.

3. ACT was implemented in Primary 4-6 while REAP was implemented in Primary 1 to 3.
4. See for example, Marie Clays influential book. The early detection of reading difficulties, published by Heinemann in 1985.
5. Smith argues that children become readers when they engage in situations where written language is used meaningfully, much in the way they learn spoken language from the association with people around them who use speech in meaningful ways See Smith, Frank (1982) *Understanding Reading*, New York: Holt Reinhardt and Wilson.
- 6) Deputy P.M. B.G. Lee Hsien Loong, in launching the "Good English Movement" in April 2001 argued that it did not make sense to replace mother tongues by a Singapore English Dialect, which is unintelligible to the rest of the world (Project Eyeball, 6 April 2001, P6)
- 7) This was advocated because the Ministry Education thought that although themes can provide the context of language teaching and learning, the selection of skills and grammar based on only the theme leads to an uneven coverage of essential grammar items in the hands of an inexperienced teacher or text book writer.
- 8) In the secondary English language text books, two of the four text books published, are organized by themes while the other two are organized by text types such as "procedure" "Folktale," "letter" etc.
- 9) Interview with 20 primary and secondary school teachers. See The Association of Women for Action and Research (2001)
- 10) The Ministry of Education has in recent years been aware of the "burnout" rate among teachers and have taken steps not just to attract but to retain teachers in the service through financial incentive schemes.

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