

Trilingualism, National Integration, and Social Coexistence in Postwar Sri Lanka



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Abstract Language has been attributed a causal role with regards to social discord, and language policies that govern media of instruction in schools in multilingual communities such as Sri Lanka have undoubtedly contributed to the disruption and distortion of social relations and structures in otherwise stable ethnically, culturally, and religiously diverse communities. However, abundant historical and contemporary examples suggest that language policy is not usually the sole basis for social disharmony, nor can language policy alone be an adequate response to the need to ameliorate tensions or to repair social fractures following discord or conflict. In Sri Lanka, where postcolonial changes to language policy are commonly argued to be the catalyst for a civil conflict lasting 30 years, hopes are pinned on recent language policy changes which promote language learning to achieve trilingualism (Sinhala, Tamil and English) throughout the country. This chapter considers the potential of the Trilingual Language Policy to achieve political goals of reconciliation and coexistence in the post-war Sri Lankan context given the larger geo-political circumstances, arguing that the promotion of language learning aligns with socio-economic aspirations of Sri Lankans although trilingualism is a necessary yet, in itself, insufficient prerequisite for the achievement of social harmony.

Keywords Trilingual policy · Language in education · Ethnic conflict
National integration · Social co-existence

Trilingualism and Coexistence in Postwar Sri Lanka

Each year, the Faculty of Management Studies and Commerce, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka, where I teach, admits around 1200 students of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds to twelve undergraduate courses. Admission to all courses in universities throughout Sri Lanka generally takes place

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© Springer International Publishing AG, part of Springer Nature 2018
I. Liyanage (ed.), *Multilingual Education Yearbook 2018*, Multilingual Education
Yearbook, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-77655-2_7

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on the basis of one of the following: 40% of available places are filled on the basis of merit, using standardized z scores¹ (instead of raw scores) obtained by students that rank them in the entire national student cohort; 55% of available places in each course of study are allocated to the 25 districts in the country in proportion to the total population; and 5% of available places in each course of study are allocated to 16 districts identified as educationally disadvantaged (University Grants Commission Sri Lanka 2016/17). A typical university classroom will thus conceivably have students not only from almost all districts of the country but also, as ethnolinguistic groups in Sri Lanka tend to cluster together geographically (Peiris and Arasaratnam 2017), a mix of students from Sinhala, Tamil, Muslim (Sri Lankan Moors, Indian Moors, and Malays), and Burgher communities. The mother tongue of Sinhala students is Sinhala, while that of Tamils and Sri Lankan Moors—about 93% of the Muslim population—is Tamil. Indian Moors, the Memon from Sind, the Bohra, and the Khoja from northwestern India, speak the languages of their ancestral homelands, while Malays—about 5% of the Muslim population—speak Bahasa Melayu, the Malay language. The mother tongue of Burghers is generally considered to be English. In such ethnically and linguistically diverse classes, students are expected to inevitably interact and to form relationships regardless of their backgrounds. In practice, however, my observations in classes that I teach indicate that students of the different ethnic groups do not intermingle freely. Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim students regularly sit with members of their respective ethnic groups and communicate freely amongst themselves in their mother tongues, but I rarely see them talking to students from other communities. They show reluctance to participate in pair work with members of one of the other communities, but when I ask them the reason for their reluctance, they reply only with a smile. The groups, especially the Tamil and Muslim students from ethnic enclaves, maintain an isolation and participate in few, if any, social events that involve mixing with students of other backgrounds, be it Sinhala, Tamil, or Muslim.

This, despite all national efforts that have been made through language policies to promote “understanding, diversity, and national integration” (Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission 2011, p. 380), is the observed situation among a group of intelligent, educated, young Sri Lankans. The implementation of the Official Language Policy, which made Sinhala and Tamil the official languages of the country and English the link language, and the Ten Year National Plan for a trilingual Sri Lanka (2012–2021) “to teach Sinhala and Tamil to non-native speakers of the two languages in the country, while promoting the English language to suit different categories of learners” (Prematunge 2011, p. 1), do not seem to have achieved the expected outcomes. Hence, the questions: Why do the Tamil and Muslim students from ethnic enclaves feel excluded, isolated, and insecure amongst others who differ ethnically and linguistically, and/or who come from different

¹Z score calculation is based on (i) Raw marks of students for the given subject for the given year (ii) Mean of the performance of that subject for the given year (iii) Standard deviation of that subject for the given year (University Grants Commission Sri Lanka 2016/17, p. 10). The z score is believed to eliminate any disparity related to the difficulty level of the subjects taken by candidates.

localities? Is it a problem related to language only? Is it language alone that unifies and integrates a nation? This chapter examines this distinct situation by considering the historical background of languages, language policy and language policy for It concludes that language poeducation in multilingual Sri Lanka, the post-war reconciliation efforts, and the challenges faced in the implementation of the recommendations of the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission 2011 (LLRC) . It concludes that language policies, and more specifically language policies for education such as the trilingual language policy, is neither solely responsible for nor capable of ameliorating tensions between groups in multilingual Sri Lanka.

Multilingualism in Pre-European Colonial Sri Lanka

Pre-European colonial Sri Lanka was a cohesive society in which ethnically distinct and linguistically diverse Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim communities lived side by side as people of one nation for more than 2000 years (Arasaratnam 1958; Brown and Ganguly 2003). Language reflected only the culture and history of the speaker and was in no way a marker of an individual's social group nor an obstacle to assimilation (Liyanage and Canagarajah 2014). Attitudes to multilingualism, which was considered an asset and not a source of tension, were positive, and communities maintained cordial relations with one another throughout the pre-colonial and colonial periods by being accommodative, assimilative, and adaptive to any situation (Canagarajah and Liyanage 2012). Unlike modern times, there were neither formal language policies in place nor was there a need for such policies, for all languages were regarded as equal. Language education was not a policy tool but a pragmatic communicative necessity.

In the absence of linguicism, people of diverse cultures and creeds lived peacefully, treated each other with respect, and developed linguistic competence and communicative proficiency in all languages in social, administrative, and educational domains (Liyanage and Canagarajah 2014). Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims co-existed peacefully despite their differences without a link language. According to Liyanage and Canagarajah (2014), historical evidence has shown that Sinhala and Tamil had spread across the country and the people of Sinhala, Tamil, and Muslim communities learnt the language of the other community for pragmatic reasons as well as for aesthetic reasons of appreciation of the classical literature of the two languages. The learning and teaching of languages was conducted in an effective manner with well-established syllabi and competent teachers (Liyanage and Canagarajah 2014), and people who did not know languages other than their own, especially Pali and Sanskrit, were not regarded as learned (Abhayawardhana 1969).

Language and European Colonialism in Sri Lanka

Language Policies of the Portuguese and the Dutch

Sri Lanka experienced successive colonizations during ancient, medieval, and modern periods, but the arrival in 1505 of the first European colonizers, the Portuguese, marked the end of the medieval period and the beginning of modern Sri Lankan multilingualism. The Portuguese held power in the country until 1658, followed by the Dutch (1658–1796), and then the British, from 1796 until independence in 1948 (de Silva Jayasuriya 2001). These imperialists brought significant changes to the socio-economic, political, and cultural practices of the people of the country (Liyanage and Canagarajah 2014). The language of administration during this period was Portuguese, and interpreters were employed to communicate with the locals (Coperehewa 2011). Those who associated closely with the Portuguese, either through marriage or some other means, communicated in Sri Lankan Portuguese Creole, a language that emerged during the period (de Silva Jayasuriya 2001) now spoken by a very small group of Portuguese and Dutch descent in the Eastern and North-Western provinces of Sri Lanka. Attempts of the Dutch to spread their language to the locals during their period of occupation failed, and instead it was used alongside Sinhala, Tamil (Coperehewa 2011; Sannasgala 1976), and Portuguese Creole, which they adopted for use with Creole-speaking wives and servants (de Silva Jayasuriya 2001).

Language Policy of the British

Of the three European colonizers, the British made the greatest impact on the linguistic, educational, and cultural landscape of Sri Lanka (Liyanage and Canagarajah 2014) in view of the fact that they introduced reforms that had far-reaching consequences for the multilingual character of the country. During their period, the status and prominence of Sinhala and Tamil waned as a result of far-reaching consequences of a recommendation of the Colebrook-Cameron Commission (Mendis 1956), appointed by the British government to recommend reforms to the administrative, economic, financial, and judicial systems of the country (Herath 2015). The Commission proposed that English be made the official language of the country and the main language of administration, law, education, and trade (Canagarajah 2005; Herath 2015), thereby diminishing the status of the local languages, which were to be used only at lower levels of administration. This also led to the establishment of three different school systems (Liyanage and Canagarajah 2014; Ruberu 1969; Warnasuriya 1969): English medium-of-instruction (MOI) schools for the children of British expatriates and of local people who served in the British administration; mixed MOI schools (English and Sinhala/Tamil) for the children of lower middle classes (Liyanage and Canagarajah 2014; Perusinghe 1969); and vernacular MOI

schools, schools in which only Sinhala or Tamil language - but not English—were taught, for the children of the majority of the population (Liyanage and Canagarajah 2014). This segregated school system based on the social status of the parents, the different linguistic streams, and a disparity in the quality of education (Liyanage and Canagarajah 2014; Wijetunga 1969) created a distinct class of multilinguals in the country (Liyanage and Canagarajah 2014). This class included some British administrators, who learnt the local languages because a knowledge of Sinhala and Tamil was made mandatory for promotion in the British Civil Service (Mendis 1956). This was enforced, initially in 1852 and thereafter with the introduction of the Civil Service Examination in the 1870s (Warnapala 1974). With the local languages made mandatory for promotion, the Colonial Office facilitated the teaching and learning of Sinhala and Tamil to civil servants, and as a result the local languages regained some prestige.

With the expansion of colonial power in the country and the creation of more jobs for which the only requirement was English language proficiency (Ruberu 1969), the demand for English medium education increased (Liyanage and Canagarajah 2014). However, due to a paucity of local English teachers to cater to the increased demand, the few English MOI schools established were in urban areas, which left rural Sri Lankans with no access to English MOI education essentially monolingual (Liyanage and Canagarajah 2014). According to de Souza (1969), only about 6.6% of the local population spoke English, which was considered the privilege of the few (Herath 2015) and “an important hallmark of elite status” (De Silva 1981, p. 332). The English-educated subsequently enjoyed the privileges of a ruling class occupying all the important positions in the country while the majority of Sinhalese and Tamils, who could not afford an English-medium education, were destined for lives as peasants and working class people (Fernando 1989). The great modern Sri Lankan historian, Mendis (1956), considers the Colebrook-Cameron reforms to be the dividing line between the past and present in modern Sri Lanka.

Post-colonial Sri Lanka: Language Policy

In the period leading to independence and in the decades that followed, language policy was wielded as a political tool in attempts to manage the impacts of colonization and the new ingredient in Sri Lanka’s multilingual mix, English. In the 1930’s, a joint campaign by Sinhalese and Tamil communities for linguistic rights, the Swabasha Movement, demanded replacement of English as the dominant language of government (DeVotta 2005) with vernacular languages (Sinhala and Tamil) so that they would also be able to secure government jobs which were denied them due to their lack of proficiency in the English language. Despite this united approach, in 1956 the Official Language Act No. 33 by the Parliament of Ceylon (The Sinhala Only Act), replaced English, which had retained official status after independence in 1948, with Sinhala as the sole official language of the country

(Canagarajah 2005). The intention was to please the Sinhalese majority who felt British preference for Tamils in appointments to Civil service positions had socially marginalized and economically deprived them and sidelined their religion, Buddhism (DeVotta 2005).

The failure of the Official Language Act to give official recognition to Tamil was not received well by the Tamil community, and non-violent protests were staged outside the parliament and throughout the country (Canagarajah 1995). In consequence, the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act of 1958 was passed, allowing reasonable use of Tamil in administration (Herath 2015), prompting the Tamil community to call off their protests and discontinue their demands for linguistic equality (DeVotta 2005). However, in 1972, the government in power passed a new constitution decreeing Sinhala as the only official language and declaring the Tamil Language (Special Provisions) Act of 1958 as subordinate legislation (DeVotta 2005). In 1978, in an attempt to appease the Tamils, Tamil language rights were incorporated into the constitution and Tamil was made a national language. Thereafter, in the 13th Amendment to the 1978 Constitution, Tamil was uplifted to the status of an official language along with Sinhala, and English was made a link language. This, however, did not have a positive impact on the Tamil community which was by then dissatisfied with the prevailing social, economic, and political paradigm of the country (Herath 2015).

Post-war Reconciliation Efforts

General Reforms in Education

Throughout the post-colonial history of Sri Lanka, extensive reforms have been introduced to the education system of the country. Some of the crucial reforms included the Kannangara Free Education Act of 1945, General Education Reforms of 1997, and the Amity School programme of 2002, supporting national reconciliation among communities and reintroducing English MOI at secondary level (Wijesinha 2012). The Kannangara Free Education Act made education accessible to children from all levels of society—irrespective of social class, economic condition, religion and ethnic origin—and in the mother tongue of the child (Bianco 1999), initially from grade 1–5 to Grade 10 in 1955, to the entire school system in the late 1950s, and by the mid-1960s to universities (Jayasuriya 2014).

The origin of the General Education Reforms of 1997 can be traced back to the youth unrest in the country in the years 1987–89 (Little 2011). It was designed to promote equitable access to basic education (Grades 1–5) and improvements in learning outcomes (Little 2011). The reforms included the development of competence in Sinhala, Tamil, and English mandatory in junior secondary grades and optional in senior secondary grades in 1998. The thinking behind this was that multilingual/trilingual competence would foster national harmony, national

integration, peaceful coexistence, interethnic relations, and respect for one another's culture (National Education Commission 1997, 2014). Even though the foregoing reforms were introduced with the best of intentions, subsequent language policies and language in education policies (Office for National Unity and Reconciliation 2017) and experience show that the desired objectives have not been achieved. The reforms also targeted the responsibility of teacher education and professional development to train pre- and in-service teachers to be empathic and democratic in dealing with children of different ethnicities (Cardozo 2008; Perera 2000). However, the sad reality is that large numbers of teachers, especially from the interior parts of the country, did not receive any training or guidance on the promotion of peace through education (Cardozo 2008).

Why a Tri Lingual Policy?

In 2010, following cessation of armed conflict in Sri Lanka in 2009, the government in power appointed the Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Committee (Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission 2011), a commission of inquiry to investigate the reasons for the failure of the ceasefire agreement of 2002 and to make recommendations to prevent any such failures in the future. Having recognized the vital role that language could play in sustainable development and in fostering harmony and peaceful coexistence amongst the different communities in the country (Fernando 2017), among the recommendations of the LLRC was that Sri Lanka should move towards a Trilingual Language Policy (Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission 2011). These recommendations were based on the concept that learning each other's language, the Tamil language by Sinhala speakers and the Sinhala language by Tamil speakers, would help the different communities in the country to appreciate each other's cultures and to communicate and integrate (Perera 2015). In this policy scenario, it was hoped that English would act as a language common to all communities as well as a life skill for the acquisition of new knowledge to facilitate career enhancement (Amarasinghe 2011). In 2010, according to Sri Lanka's Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration, almost 90 percent of Sinhalese could not communicate in Tamil or effectively communicate in English while 70 percent of the Tamil people could not communicate in Sinhala (Prematunge 2011). Hence, the main goal of introducing the trilingual policy, according to Sunimal Fernando, the advisor to former president His Excellency Mahinda Rajapakse and coordinator of the programme 'English as a life skill' and the initiative for a Trilingual Sri Lanka (Amarasinghe 2011), was to learn to communicate in the language of the other community and to promote mutual appreciation and understanding of the cultures of the Sinhala and Tamil communities. Ironically, the aforementioned Tri Lingual Policy would not have been needed if, in 1956, Sri Lanka had not passed the Sinhala Only Act making Sinhala the only official language of the country, diminishing the status of the Tamil language, and giving prominence to the English language. If Sri Lanka,

instead of putting in place linguistic barriers, had pursued a flexible language policy where the population were given the option to choose the language/s they wished to learn, as was the case before the Free Education Act (Jayasuriya 2014), more people in Sri Lanka today would probably have been either bilingual or multilingual.

The Trilingual Policy in Sri Lanka

The recommendations made in the LLRC report of 2011 with regard to the Trilingual Policy have to a certain degree been implemented by the authorities. The government, for instance, took steps to change school curricula by re-introducing civics/citizenship as a subject, the teaching of second national languages (2NLs) and of the link language English, and reintroducing English as MOI. Questions about the viability and the likelihood of success of such policies and their objectives are prompted in the first instance by earlier attempts to use language in education policies for political ends. The Tri Lingual Policy (Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission 2011) is not the first policy document that has been developed to promote co-existence. The government had implemented earlier language in education policies to achieve social harmony, national integration, and social co-existence in a multilingual setting. For example, the first report of the National Education Commission (NEC) published in 1992 (National Education Commission 1992) aimed to achieve social cohesion, integrity, and unity at national level. Again in 2003, in the Policy Framework on General Education, the same goals were reiterated with further emphasis (National Education Commission 2003). In order to attain the foregoing goals, the teaching of the second national language was originally introduced from Grades 6 to 9 in 1999, was made an additional subject for Grades 10 and 11 from 2001, was introduced in 2003 for Grades 3, 4 and 5, and taught in the oral form for Grades 1 and 2 commencing in 2007 (National Education Commission 2016). Despite these measures, little progress seems to have been achieved due mainly to practical and structural obstacles (National Education Commission 2016).

The latest document developed by NEC, another proposal for a National Policy on General Education in Sri Lanka (National Education Commission 2016), offers several explanations of the unsuccessful implementation of the Trilingual Policy:

- The incompetence of Sinhala and Tamil language teachers. Some of the teachers are not considered proficient to teach their own language, in other words their mother tongue. The root cause of this has been identified as the poor quality of teacher education programs.
- The assignment of the task of teaching to teachers who have very little training. The schools, according to feedback received by NEC, have made makeshift arrangements by assigning the task of teaching the second national language (Sinhala/Tamil) to teachers who have had very short training.

- The pedagogically unsound syllabi, teacher guides, and student text books. There are issues such as mismatches between syllabi, text books, and accompanying teachers' guides, and problems with the sequencing of lessons. It is also reported that teacher's guides are not comprehensive enough for a novice Tamil as a second language or Sinhala as a second language teacher who, due to their inexperience and lack of exposure to the language, might not be able to come up with effective instructional strategies unaided. It is suggested that the best response is to provide them with the frameworks and the instruments.

In addition to these issues, independent research conducted in the western province of the country with regard to issues faced in teaching Tamil as a second language reports that the majority of Sinhalese students (77%) and teachers (60%) do not consider their 2NL, Tamil, as an important subject in the curriculum. Sixty eight percent of students cannot write the Tamil alphabet accurately while 76% of the students do not have the ability to communicate in the Tamil language (Athirathan and Karunanithy 2016). This shows that the Sinhala-speaking majority does not show much interest in learning Tamil, the national language of the minority community, because, on the one hand, there is no political or economic advantage in doing so, and on the other, they view language as the powerful marker of ethnic identity (Canagarajah 2005). Irrespective of their ideologies, Tamil speakers struggle to learn to read, write, and speak Sinhala for survival in Sinhala dominant areas (Davis 2015). The NEC report in conjunction with this additional evidence exposes the failure of attempts to enact the Trilingual Language Policy not only at the levels of classroom delivery and teacher education but also at the broader social level of community engagement with policy objectives. Without a serious attempt on the part of the authorities to deliver the policy instruments of Sinhalese and Tamil students learning the relevant 2NL, the policy objectives of social harmony and reconciliation will not be achieved.

The current government, having acknowledged that “since the conflict ended, there remains a breakdown of trust, intolerance and prejudice between and within communities” (Office for National Unity and Reconciliation 2017, p. 1) has now formulated a National Policy on Reconciliation and Co-Existence (NPRC), yet again reiterating its commitment to promoting national integration and co-existence. The necessity for the formulation of the NPRC, the implementational challenges outlined in the National Education Commission (2016) report, the Trilingual Policy's heavy reliance on language education, and anecdotal evidence such as discussed in the introduction suggest that trilingual competency for coexistence and integration has not been translated into reality. Based on perceptions that conflict can be directly traced to language and language policy through the Sinhala only Act, trilingual policies have in fact achieved little success in the Sri Lankan context twenty years on from the first reforms. Given such circumstances, it could be argued that linguistic policies and societal multilingualism are not the sole cause of, nor the sole solution to, ethnic tensions and social discord as is popularly believed in Sri Lanka.

Ethnic Conflict or Social Cohesion? Policy and Languages in Education in Multilingual Settings

Ever since Sinhala became the sole official language in 1956, the Sinhala and Tamil communities have drifted apart. Although many believe it to be the main cause (Liyanage and Canagarajah 2014), it is simplistic to place the blame solely on the Sinhala Only Act and the negation of language rights of the Tamils for the ethnic conflict that prevailed in Sri Lanka for twenty six long years between 1983 and 2009. Conflict situations can arise for a number of reasons—racial, religious, cultural, ideological, political, economic, or social; it cannot be attributed to just one factor (Kim 2006). In Sri Lanka's case, political and economic circumstances certainly cannot be discounted. The first pre-independence Constitution was framed by our departing colonial masters, who disregarded fundamental factors such as equality and basic human rights; the 1972 Constitution was formulated by a small caucus of the then Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) led coalition; and the 1978 Constitution was formulated by a similarly small caucus of the then United National Party (UNP) led coalition. All three Constitutions lacked widespread public participation in their formulation (Nesiah 2012). Arguably, the exploitation in 1972 and 1978 of social, political, economic, and linguistic phenomena by power hungry politicians who interpreted the situations in their own favour, in tandem with the failure of the post-independent economy to create job opportunities for increasing numbers of qualified youth, also contributed to the ethnic conflict (Herath 2002). As Laitin (2000, p. 98) points out, "conflict over language is not a prescription for violence," but issues related to language along with social, economic, and political grievances can be factors contributing to violence between different ethnic groups.

Sri Lanka's ongoing focus on language policy stems from the disruption of a diverse and accommodative society that began with the arrival of Europeans and that continues today with a geo-political regime dominated by Western economic development agendas, the power of international agencies such as the World Bank, and the hegemony of English. From a languages and languages in education perspective, the imposition of thinking and practices of European modernism on multilingual communities has produced bounded nation states and alien concepts, such as unitary national identities associated with standardized languages and official languages and the governmental machinery to develop education and language policies, that standardize education, mandate media of instruction, and prescribe languages education. Sri Lanka's experience of this disruption and the challenges that ensue in ethnolinguistically settings is hardly unique. Many of Sri Lanka's multilingual neighbours in south and east Asia have similar recent political and economic histories of colonization and independence and are equally ethnolinguistically diverse. Movements of people and introduction of languages, including English, in this region have prompted various language policy regimes, both colonial and post-colonial, in the context of potentially volatile environments. The diverse experiences of these nations lend some weight to the proposition that the factors contributing to the twenty six year Sri Lankan ethnic conflict were much

more complex than widely-held beliefs that post-colonial language policies were the sole or primary cause. Nations such as Malaysia, Singapore, and Pakistan have adopted varying language policy regimes; some aimed at bringing about national integration and social co-existence while others at achieving more instrumental, administrative, and standardization objectives.

In many ways, the policy history of Malaysia, a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-cultural, and multi-lingual country, mirrors that of Sri Lanka. Malaysia, which was a predominantly homogeneous country, was transformed into a heterogeneous country with negative socio-economic effects on the native Malays (Bumiputras) during the British rule (Singh and Mukherjee 1993). Post-independence Malaysia, in an attempt to reaffirm the identity of the native Malays and to promote national integration (Singh and Mukherjee 1993), established Bahasa Malay, the language of the native Malays (53% of the population), as the national and official language. Educational reforms, a common curriculum content across schools and change of the MOI from English to the national and official language (Bahasa Malaya) at all levels with English as an important second language (Gill 2005), were also introduced as a tool to promote “nation building, national identity and unity” (Tollefson & Tsui, 2003, p. viii). Making Bahasa Malay the official and national language parallels the Sinhala Only Act (1956), which gave official status to Sinhala to appease the majority Sinhalese who had been marginalized by the British colonial administration. However, unlike in Malaysia, Sinhala was not made the sole medium of instruction nor was a common curriculum introduced in Sri Lanka. The Tamil speaking student population could follow their studies in their mother tongue and the subsequent passing of the Special Provisions Act (1958) allowed the use of Tamil for administration in Tamil dominated areas of the country. These policies that favoured the Malays were a focus of ethnic tensions between Malays and Chinese (26% of the population) and Indian (7% of the population) (Khader 2012) communities that wanted to retain their language and culture. The policy failed to integrate the nation (Singh and Mukherjee 1993) and disadvantaged the Malays in the rural parts of the country who, as a result of the policy, became monolingual (David and Govindasamy 2007). In 2002, the then government, having realized that the monolingual language policy was a setback for the country in achieving its 2020 Vision, changed the language policy for education policy, decreeing that the teaching of Science and Mathematics at all levels be in English. The thinking behind this was that English would help Malaysians keep abreast of the fast-changing globalized knowledge economy (Gill 2005). This situation too is somewhat similar to that of Sri Lanka, where instruction in the national language made the majority of the people monolingual, and to keep up with globalization, the government had to introduce English medium instructions at secondary (optional) and tertiary levels (compulsory for some degree programmes). Like Sri Lanka, post-colonial Malaysia has experienced ethnic tensions, but, although these flared at times into violence, there has never been open or armed conflict such as experienced in Sri Lanka, and Malaysia is considered a peaceful country (Institute for Economics and Peace 2017).

Pakistan, at the time of independence in 1947, was a nation divided into two physically, culturally, and linguistically. Around 90 percent of East Pakistanis, a little more than fifty percent of Pakistan's population, spoke Bengali while West Pakistanis spoke mainly Urdu, Pashtu, Punjabi, and Sindhi. The approach to post-colonial language policy followed a path similar to both Sri Lanka and Malaysia although the official language was more a lingua franca in a multilingual setting than the mother tongue of an ethnic majority. Not long after independence, the government declared Urdu, the mother tongue of 7.5% of the people but the language that is widely understood in the country, as the only national language and the language of curriculum and instruction in education with English being used for official purposes pending replacement by Urdu (Rahman 2006). The Urdu-only policy impacted negatively on Bengali speakers excluding them from many areas of employment and positions of power creating disunity among the ethnic communities (de Varennes 2015). In contemporary linguistically and ethnically diverse Pakistan, Urdu remains the main official language with English taught alongside Urdu in schools (Agrawal 2015). Pakistan does not have a clearly defined language policy or language in education policy (Mahboob and Jain, 2016), and Durrani et al. (2017, p. 55) suggest that an effective multi-lingual policy could address "social, economic and educational questions linked to language, the needs, and interests of different linguistic groups" and "become a means of fostering social cohesion." Yet, the inter-ethnic conflicts that continue to beset Pakistan cannot be attributed only to language but to a set of circumstances as well—caste, territory, religion (Majeed 2010) which obviously cannot be addressed by language policy alone.

Singapore, a culturally, religiously, and linguistically diverse country with sizeable Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, Taoist, and Hindu communities (Tan and Tan 2014) took a different policy path following independence from the British in 1959. Unlike Sri Lanka, which opted for a single official language with the passing of the Sinhala Only Act, Singapore became a multilingual state by choice, recognizing English, Mandarin Chinese, Malay, and Tamil as official languages. English is used as the language of inter-ethnic communication while the other three official languages are considered mother tongues of the major ethnic groups. Singapore adopts a bilingual language policy for education (Dixon 2005). From the first years of schooling, the medium of instruction is English in all content areas (World Bank 2011), and the official mother tongue is studied as a subject. The government of Singapore is very influential in that, under its strong intervention, the education system strives to promote social-cultural diversity, social cohesion, and harmony through Value and Citizenship education at secondary level (Ministry of Education 2012a; Tan and Tan 2014). Singapore teaches its children, from a very young age, to take pride in their "national identity ... have a sense of belonging to their country ... (and be) committed to nation-building" (Ministry of Education 2012b, p. 5). Singapore remains a peaceful nation (Institute for Economics and Peace 2017) and has so far been successful in fostering national unity while preserving cultural differences in a plural society through its bilingual language policy and Value and Citizenship education (Dixon 2005).

Clearly, post-colonial tensions in ethnolinguistically diverse societies are not distinct to Sri Lanka alone. Despite historical trajectories and language policies similar to Sri Lanka, countries such as Malaysia and Pakistan, in spite of the fact that they have not experienced decades of destructive and open armed conflict, continue to face ethnic tensions that in some instances fragment societal relationships. The approach taken by post colonial Singapore, however, was different. After independence, Singapore adopted a broad suite of policy strategies that included, but did not rely on, a multilingual policy and thus has not faced some of the ethnic issues that have troubled Sri Lanka, Malaysia, and Pakistan. Sri Lanka's introduction of the Tri Lingual Policy, a measure directed at fostering national unity and coexistence (Prematunge 2011), has not achieved the desired unification of the communities (Weerasinghe 2017). The example of Singapore suggests that a more comprehensive strategy than a mere language policy needs to be applied to bring about an effective and sustainable resolution to the post-conflict tensions in the Sri Lankan context.

Besides, while many communities who share language/s co-exist peacefully and productively, there is certainly ample historical evidence that contradicts this optimistic assumption. Sharing a language does not preclude the possibility of conflict between users, for instance, the war between Southern Irish Catholics and Northern Irish Protestants was fought between English-speaking Christians. The Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) uprising in Sri Lanka was a confrontation among speakers of Sinhala. During the ethnic war in Sri Lanka, the Tamil speaking Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) killed more Tamils than the Sinhala-speaking army. The Kashmiri war is fought between sides that speak common languages (Dharmawardana 2011). The long Colombian war was fought between groups that share the same language, and it is the same with the Yemeni war, the Libyan civil war, the South Sudanese civil war, and the Syrian war. These examples further suggest that language differences are rarely the sole causal factor of tensions and conflicts between groups, and by extension that implementation of language policies alone is not necessarily capable of fostering national integration and social coexistence.

Language and Social Cohesion in Current Sri Lanka

The trilingual policy of Sri Lanka has been grounded on the premise that learning the 2NL, the language of the other community, would foster co-existence and national integration within Sri Lanka. Yet, eight years after the war, despite attempts by successive governments to foster peaceful co-existence and national integration through language policies and language policies for education (Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission, 2011; National Education Commission

1992, 1997, 2003, 2014, 2016; Office for National Unity and Reconciliation 2017), students still prefer ethnic segregation, as related in the introduction to this chapter, and do not show any interest in learning the 2NL. The most pragmatic exercise could therefore be to allocate more time for the teaching and learning of English, the third language, which would be mutually intelligible to all ethnic groups while leaving the option of learning the 2NL open for those who wish to do so.

The great majority of the Sri Lankans are already convinced of the benefits of learning English, as the demand for international schools (Balakrishnar and Thanaraj 2015; Wettewa 2016) and bilingual or English MOI (Perera and Canagarajah 2010; Wickramasuriya 2005) attest. English is no doubt the language of “opportunity and empowerment” (Crystal 2012, p. 33). In India, for example, the use of English is reported to be growing and gaining ground not only in South India but also in some other states such as West Bengal. India has adopted a trilingual policy: Hindi, English, and one of the other national languages, but it is different from the Trilingual Policy of Sri Lanka. In India, the flexibility of using any of these languages as a medium of instruction in schools and as a language of administration and record in particular localities is given. This policy has achieved success in that language riots have virtually disappeared (Nesiah 2012). Suggesting that English be given more prominence does not mean that the place given to the vernacular languages should be diminished. The two local languages should of course be allowed to “continue to perform an important set of functions (for instance, expression of local identity)” (Crystal 2012, p. 29).

In addition to language learning, both children and adults should also be educated to strive for a multicultural pluralistic society (pluralism of values, life styles, cultures, relations, and language) and to accept rather than deny diversity, for recognition of differences is what will keep communities together (Beauvais and Jenson 2002). Co-existence and integration are not unidimensional; they are multi-dimensional and interactive and include “belonging, inclusion, participation, recognition, and legitimacy” (Jenson 1998, p. 15), and if one of the dimensions is missing, it can be a threat to co-existence.

In conclusion, policymakers need to admit that the process of reconciliation is complicated and cannot be achieved through a unidimensional policy setting. This is particularly so if that policy is a reinvention of an approach that has been tried and proven unsuccessful, and if the reason for earlier failures, the absence of political will to resource and enact the policy, continues unchanged. Obviously, there are no straightforward answers, but what is vital is the recognition that a fair and amenable language policy in a multilingual nation is a necessary but not of itself sufficient condition for reconciliation and national integration after a period of conflict. If the students in my classes at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura are to live the goals of reconciliation, I believe these recommendations offer some options for consideration.

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