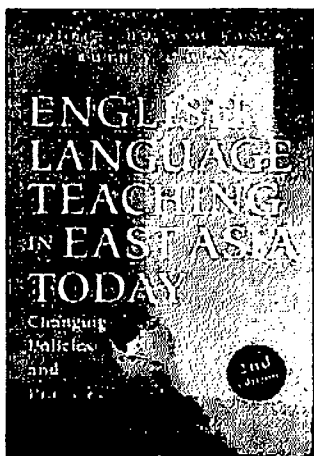
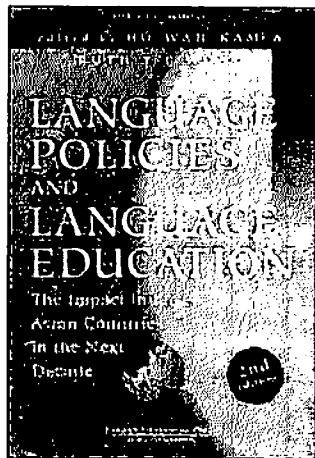


LOOKING INTO ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN EAST ASIA THROUGH TWIN VOLUMES

**LANGUAGE POLICIES and LANGUAGE
EDUCATION**
The Impact in East Asian Countries in the Next
Decade. (2nd ed.).

Edited by
Ho Wah Kam and Ruth Y. L. Wong
Singapore: Eastern Universities Press.
2004, xiv + 384 pp.
ISBN: 9812103376



**ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN EAST
ASIA TODAY**
Changing Policies and Practices. (2nd ed.).

Edited by
Ho Wah Kam and Ruth Y. L. Wong
Singapore: Eastern Universities Press.
2004, xxxvi + 474 pp
ISBN: 9812103368

Reviewed by
Bambang Yudi Cahyono¹

¹ Drs. Bambang Yudi Cahyono, MA. is a lecturer at English Department of the State University of Malang and currently a PhD student at the Department of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics of the University of Melbourne.

INTRODUCTION

During a tea break at the 39th RELC International Seminar, I walked around the book exhibition floors to browse new publications available there. Various books were displayed and many of them were interesting, but I was especially amazed by two eye-catching, orange volumes dealing with a related issue: ELT in East Asia. I decided I couldn't miss these two books and bought them.

The two volumes contain chapters contributed by local authors and edited by Ho Wah Kam and Ruth Wong. In this essay, I will review the content of the chapters, highlighting how these twin books can be useful for the examination of current policies and practices of English language teaching (ELT) in the region. According to the editors, East Asia in this book refers to a region that includes ten countries in Southeast Asia, six countries in Northeast Asia, and Mongolia which is located in East Central Asia.

LANGUAGE POLICIES AND LANGUAGE EDUCATION

The first book, *Language Policies and Language Education*, addresses two sets of activities (i.e., "language policy-making" and "language-in-education planning") in the seventeen countries. The volume offers itself as a means to achieving the following four objectives:

- (1) as an update of much of the information available in printed form on language polices (sic.) and language education in East Asia; (2) as a basis on which to build a better understanding (than is now the case) of the language situation in East Asia; (3) to provide an "insider perspective" of developments, since all the writers are either citizens of the countries they have written on or have lived there for a long time and know the language(s); and (4) to compile an annotated bibliography on the language situation in East Asia, including sources and documents not available in English (Kam and Wong, 2004:viii-ix)

In their introductory chapter, Kam and Wong emphasize that the two sets of activities are related to each other and that they have implications for the demand for education and economic development in each particular country. This chapter also provides the conceptual language situation of the various countries, where English is getting more intensively used as a medium of communication at the international level. It then presents general statistics regarding language of instruction and the status of English as a second or a

foreign language. Finally, some generalizations were drawn to give direction towards future development in terms of language teaching and learning.

In the next 16 chapters, the language and language education policies in the seventeen countries are discussed by the contributors who have been familiar with the language situation in each particular country. These are the countries (the names of which become the titles of these chapters) in the order of presentation in the book: Brunei Darussalam (Kamsiah Abdullah), Cambodia (Nay Chhuon), The People's Republic of China (Lin Li), Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) (Cheng Ngai-Lai), Indonesia (Willy A Renandya), Japan (Nobuyuki Nonna, Hiroko Tina Tajima, and Kunihiko Minamoto), Korea (South and North) (Rosa Jinyoung Shim and Martin Jonghak Baik), Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR) (Sisamone Sithirajvongsa and Edwin Goh), Malaysia (Ruth Y. L. Wong and Joyce E. James), Mongolia (Mira Namsrai and Oyuntsetseg Shagdar), Myanmar (Wong Soon Fen) Philippines (Emma S. Castillo), Singapore (Anne Pakir), Taiwan (Tsao Feng-fu), Thailand (Achara Wongsothorn), and Vietnam (Edwin Goh and Nguyen Bang).

The chapters in this book commonly start with a discussion of the general context of a particular country and its language policy. This is then followed by a discussion of aspects of language education, such as education system, language(s) of instruction, the role of English, and language teachers. The chapter may also address the future trends in language policy and language education of the respective country. For example, Renandya begins his chapter entitled "Indonesia" by elaborating the status of Indonesian or *Bahasa Indonesia* in relation to the vernaculars and foreign languages in this country. Next, Renandya outlines the trend for the future, emphasising the different roles of languages in this country and the importance of a change of language policy at the national level.

In the final section of this first book, Hong and Wang synthesize the discussion of the previous chapters, focussing on the impact of the language policies, both at the macro and micro levels. At the macro level, language policies of each particular country are discussed along with the future directions of the policies in that country. At the micro level, the results of language learning, based on specific measures such as PIRLS (the *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study*) and TOEFL (the *Test of English as a Foreign Language*) are presented and compared across countries in the East Asian region.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN EAST ASIA TODAY

The second book, *English Language Teaching in East Asia Today*, concerns current ELT practices as affected by the language policies in the countries in East Asia. This volume consists of 27 chapters which are preceded by a separate prologue section and concluded by a separate epilogue section. In the prologue section, Ho and Wong describe the aim, scope and concepts related to the theme of the volume.

The first four chapters address general issues of current English language teaching in the region. These chapters include *English language teaching in East Asia today: An overview* (Ho Wah Kam), *English as a language of wider communication in East Asia Today: The issue of mutual intelligibility* (Tony T. N. Hung), *RELC's role in ELT in Southeast Asia (1968 to 2002): Mediating between the centre and the periphery* (Ho Wah Kam), and *ESL/EFL teaching and learning: On-line concordancing and self-correction* (Deng Xudong and Patrick Gallo).

The next 23 chapters discuss English language teaching in the countries of the region in alphabetical order. Two chapters (Chapter 10 and 11) discuss the English language teaching in Indonesia. The other chapters, which deal with other countries, are as follows: *English language teaching in Brunei Darussalam: Continuity and change* (Peter Martin and Kamsiah Abdullah), *English language teaching development in Cambodia: Past, present and future* (Chamnan Pit and Hok Roth), *English language teaching in China: A bridge to the future* (Lixian Jin and Martin Cortazzi), *Extending the reach of middle school EFL teachers in the People's Republic of China* (Lawrence Jun Zhang), *English language teaching in Hong Kong SAR: Tradition, transition, and transformation* (Alice Chow Wai Kwan and Angela Mok-Cheung Hingman), *English education in Japan today: The impact of changing policies* (Nobuyuki Honna and Yuko Takeshita), *Teaching English to Japanese students: The question of vocabulary acquisition* (Taichi Nakamura), *English education in South Korea* (Rosa Jinyoung Shim and Martin Jonghak Baik), *English language teaching in Lao PDR* (Edwin Goh and Thepkaysone Vonechith), *English language teaching in Malaysia today* (Ambigapathy Pandian), *the evaluation of instructional materials in an ESL setting (Malaysia): The application of an empirical method* (Noor Lide Abu Kassim), *English language teaching in Mongolia* (Mira Namsrai), *English language teaching in Myanmar: Current status* (Myo Myint and Poe Poe), *English language*

teaching in the Phillipines today (Emma S Castillo), *English language teaching and the new curriculum in the Philippines: The re-training of English teachers* (Nilda Sunga), *English language teaching in Singapore today* (Cheah Yin Mee), *Developments in the English language syllabuses in Singapore* (Suchen Christine Lim), *Meeting the communicative demands in higher education curricula: An overview of ELT provision in tertiary institutions in Singapore* (Ho Wah Kam), *English language teaching in Taiwan Today* (Chern Chiou-Ian), *English language teaching in Thailand today* (Achara Wongsothorn, Kulaporn Hiranburana and Supanee Chinnawongs), and *English language teaching in Vietnam today: Policy, practice and constraints* (Nguyan Xuan Vang).

The first of the two chapters on ELT in Indonesia is *English language teaching in Indonesia: Changing policies and practical constraints*, written by Christianty Nur. In this chapter Nur describes the languages used at the elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education and highlights problems in the teaching of English. Summing up the results of the literature on English language policies in this country, Nur states that these problems include large class sizes, unsatisfactory qualifications of teachers, inadequate teacher-training facilities, the low salary of teachers, and poor dissemination of the new curriculum. Thus, the problems are concerned with the "impoverished teaching conditions," rather than the "prescribed methods of teaching" (p. 185). In Nur's observation, there has been no indication that English will be adopted as a second language due to the policy of the Indonesian government to use Indonesian language as the language for communication across the country and to preserve Indonesian cultures.

The other chapter is *Engaging EFL students in Indonesia with authentic tasks: Possibilities within limitations*. Here Nur Mukminatien, the author of this chapter, states that Indonesian learners of English lack the opportunities to use English for communicative purposes, especially in writing. To solve this problem, as Mukminatien argues, teachers should provide opportunities for the learners to use English in writing within the current framework of the "Contextual Teaching and Learning" (CTL) approach. Referring to the success in dealing with the problem in her institution, Mukminatien highlights the use of authentic writing tasks as a basis for more complex forms of written communication. The authentic writing tasks refer to any materials which are actually used in real communication and offer a closer personal experience to the learners such as the writing of personal

letters, greeting cards, and postcards. In the concluding paragraph of her chapter, Mukminatien states:

In short, it is possible that, within limitations, EFL teachers can make use of a limited linguistic environment to promote acquisition. Two important aspects of CTL have been fulfilled in this practice: (a) engaging students in *real-life* and *meaningful* tasks, and (b) creating a *learning community* within the school community (cited in Kam and Wong, 2004:193) [sic.]

In the epilogue section of this book, Kam and Wong conclude that “English language teaching (ELT) is flourishing in East Asia” (2004:455). Wong and Ho emphasize that at the regional level, ELT problems have not been fully solved as there are major dilemmas such as, whether traditional methods of teaching should be kept well and alive or should be modernised and whether teachers should be developed in terms of quantity or quality. As Kam and Wong state, this volume is expected to help teachers to be better informed regarding ELT development in each particular country and in a wider perspective so that “there will be a synergistic combination of the *local* and the *global*” (2004:464) [sic.].

FINAL REMARKS

In my opinion, the two books provide access for teachers, researchers, or ELT specialists to examine the development of English language teaching in East Asia. In addition to the extensive examination of the issues, the volumes provide annotated bibliography of the related issues within each particular country. Thus, the volumes could serve to be twin windows for looking into aspects related to language and language teaching policies of the countries in the region, prior to a thorough investigation of these issues in each particular country. With these characteristics in mind, I am sure that these twins will be useful for triggering further development of ELT in the region.