

REFLECTIONS ON THE LANGUAGE ISSUES IN MACAU:
POLICIES, REALITIES AND PROSPECTS

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PRELUDE

Perhaps I could be allowed a moment of luxury by recalling a linguistic anecdote and a fairy-tale:

On 15th October, 1987, a little poem of the Cultural Institute of Macau appeared in a leading English newspaper, The Hong Kong Standard. Here is the poem in English:

*Macao is a work of culture,
The hands of two peoples have raised it,
Stone by stone.*

*Writers, researchers, poets,
Have built a Memory for it;
They have given it a Soul;
Page by page.*

*The book is exciting;
The book continues.*

*In books Macao lives on,
To publish is to give more Soul
To the future,
Page by page!*

This well-conceived poem, intended to promote publications on Macau, is imbued with cultural implications and an earnest desire to preserve and enrich Macau's cultural heritage. It must have touched the heart of many a conscientious scholar, for it was echoed immediately, with a Chinese rendition:

澳門是一文化巨著！
砌磚添瓦、修橋鋪路，
中葡人民齊來建築；
作家給它描述，詩人賦它靈魂，
一章接着一章，
一部接着一部，
馬交在書中屹立如故！

(譯自 1987 年 10 月 15 日香港英文虎報)

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Then, again almost immediately, by luck or by coincidence, this Chinese version of the poem was turned into Portuguese:

*Macau é um trabalho da cultura,
As mãos de dois povos ergueram-na,
Pedra a pedra,
Escritores, investigadores, poetas,
Construíram-lhe uma Memória.
Deram-lhe um Espírito,
Página a página.*

*O livro é fascinante;
O livro perdura.
Nos livros, Macau vive.
Publicar é dar uma alma maior ao futuro,
Página a página!*

(Revista ADMINISTRAÇÃO, Número 16, 1992)

Genuinely fascinated with this linguistic 'somersaulting', I traced this precious poem to its source -- Instituto Cultural de Macau. I was virtually thrown into ecstasy over the discovery that the original poem was written in Portuguese, juxtaposed with a Chinese rendering:

Macau é uma obra da cultura.	澳門是一部傑作，
As mãos de dois povos a ergueram.	作家、詩人、學者
Pedra a pedra.	兩國人民譜寫。
Escritores, investigadores, poetas,	妙筆生花，
construíram-lhe a Memória.	澳門因之生輝，
Deram-lhe a Alma. Página a página.	青史長留。
O livro é emocionante. O livro	書，良師益友，
continua. Nos livros, Macau perdura.	書，智慧結晶。
Publicar é dar mais alma ao futuro.	
Página a página.	

(Catalogue of publications, Instituto Cultural de Macau, 1991)

It is not the concern of this paper to compare the novelties of the different versions of the same poem in three formidable languages, or to comment on the verities and subtleties of translation, though this 'communicative detour' does provide a refreshing vivid example and stirring sociolinguistic evidence for researchers, linguists and translators. My chief concern, however, is the 'linguistic detour', because it has been, and perhaps will continue to be, a contributing factor to the Macau legend. And no matter how illogic it may seem, it has been performing miracles for fortunate Macau belongers.

Now, let's have the fairy-tale.

Once upon a time, a dinosaur and a mermaid met in the South China Sea. Strangely enough, instead of the grand Nine-Dragon Peninsula and the majestic Fragrance Island, they headed for a tiny, unimpressive peninsula -- the A-Ma, Goddess of seafarers, with a pair of humble Lilliputian islands. And interestingly enough, they reached a 'gentlemen's agreement', although they spoke different tongues totally incomprehensible to each other. And how they get across each other's message has remained a mystery, but this did not prevent them from honouring their word. For generations and generations, the two coexisted peacefully, amicably and acquiescently, thus becoming the envy of envying neighbours.

The moral of this fable: there has always been a fairy-tale element, however sophistic, in the language issues of Macau. And it is this fairy-tale element, without which Macau would cease to be Macau, that has been working wonders and will, hopefully, continue to work wonders. Here we may also quote Fodor's keen observations: 'A Portuguese-administered enclave of six square miles in modern China must be a classic geo-political anachronism. How and why has it survived into its fifth century?' (Eugene Fodor, 1988).

SHAPING A LANGUAGE POLICY

Needless to say, a sound realistic language policy should be based on the principle of meeting the linguistic needs arising from, and relating to, social, economic and political dynamics. But do we have a language policy? It is difficult to reply with a straight 'no' or 'yes'. Indeed, few people had bothered themselves about the language problems in Macau until Macau entered the transitional period signaled by the initialing of the Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration, in March 1987. For centuries, a laissez-faire economy has hatched a pluralistic, fragmented educational setup. However, the political change-over, the historic transition and concern for the future and destiny of Macau, have alerted educators, community leaders, administrators, as well as the pragmatic business world, to the impending linguistic needs. And, of course, they also see the urgent need for a language policy that is founded on reliable research findings and which will not only help to ensure the smooth change-over, stability and prosperity of Macau, but also help to boost Macau's international status through cooperation and globalization in the Pearl River Delta region, Asia, the EEC and other English-speaking and Latin-speaking countries. Never before has there been so much research going on into language issues in Macau. Thanks to these worth-while efforts, various ideas have been suggested and 'blueprints' offered by people who address themselves to this issue from various angles. Here, again, the fairy-tale element, the fable, comes in. For example, there has been the fabled talk about translating all Portuguese laws into Chinese before 1999, about bilingual Portuguese-Chinese legislation, about reviving Macau as a training centre for sinologists, etc., all being well-intentioned. Voices are growing louder, as the year 1999 is drawing nearer, for raising the official status of Chinese and for increasing the use of the Chinese language in administration, jurisdiction and legislature, and for promoting the learning and teaching of Putonghua. Also gathering momentum is the call for training bilingual human

resources or a multilingual élite to help maintain and expand international links, preserve Macau's special characteristics and prepare Macau for future challenges on the international arena.

In all these endeavours for change and progress, we can identify some motivating forces:

1. In a report on his sociological investigation of Macau, Professor Boaventura Santos, Centre Director of Social and Economic Studies of the University of Coimbra, claimed that the economic boom, industrial diversification and prosperity of Macau in the past decade had nurtured 'a small middle class that simply did not exist before' (Santos B: *Justiça e Comunidade em Macau -- Administração e Estruturas Comunitárias perante os Problemas Sociais*, 1991). Then it follows that they are the driving dynamism coming from within the local communities. Moreover, a university education, received either locally or in China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, Portugal and other foreign countries, given them the insight and awareness of what is best for Macau. And as most of them have a working-class or grassroot background, which gives them an edge in dealing with local problems, they will take their opportunities to work for the future of Macau. Definitely, they will be the first batch of local talents to be absorbed into the 'localization scheme' and be groomed as the future leaders of the Special Administrative Region of Macau (SARM).
2. Well-educated, liberal-minded professionals, administrators and officials from Portugal have a crucial role to play in shaping language policies. As they have nothing to do with the old scores of colonialism, they are not biased or burdened by historical and colonial stigmas, and therefore can see the problems in their true perspective. Inspired with liberal, democratic ideals, some genuinely wish to give Macau people a fair deal by actually doing something, though they feel somewhat frustrated with the official inertia and inability to get important tasks accomplished quickly. All this is obvious from the views they have expressed in their research papers and at seminars. On the other hand, however, in their capacity as government officials, they have to conform and perform the official duties assigned to them. Understandably, constrained by their official positions, they cannot afford to be too critical of the existing government policies. But nonetheless, they are the propelling force for reform and progress within the administration; they are the last dynasty fighters waiting for the sun to rise again tomorrow and looking forward to the new era with more positive goals.
3. China's open policy, relaxed political climate and growing democracy in recent years have brought an increasing number of intellectuals into Macau. Many of these immigrants from mainland China have made their way into various government departments, academic institutions and professional bodies as advisers, researchers, linguists, translators, writers, teachers, etc. Actually, they are the working bees. They not only have very rich experience in politics but also possess the expertise in education, social sciences, humanities and other fields. Besides, having lived through the vicissitude of life, they are in a better position to make objective comparisons and they have come to like this tiny cosmopolitan port-city. Rather than a den of sinners and gamblers, they see the brighter, more positive side of Macau: a land of freedom,

tolerance, opportunities and hope; a friendly multinational, cross-cultural community that welcomes whoever is ready to do good for Macau. And this welcome and this hope have rekindled their old dreams and ambitions to achieve something in life. And here, in this 'fairy-land', they will, among other things, help to prepare Macau for her role as the future SARM of China.

4. Also attracted to this 'wonderland' are some scholars from Hong Kong, Singapore, etc., and expatriate academics from Canada, UK, USA and other western countries. They have brought with them the latest know-how and development in their field of study, as well as their culture and philosophy. Though they may stay in Macau only temporarily, the continuous flow of expatriate professionals into Macau is vital for boosting Macau's global outlook and international exchanges. Moreover, as native-speakers of English and other languages, they have a unique role to perform in improving second/foreign language teaching and learning, thus making linguistic and communicative contributions and helping enhance Macau's image in the world.

A clear message that has emerged is that the language policy, the linguistic 'blueprint' should converge on the guidelines laid down in the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law:

...The Special Administrative Region Macau Shall formulate its own policies towards education, science and technology, such as the medium of instruction in schools (including Portuguese)...

(Article 7, Annex I to The Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration 1987)

.. In addition to the Chinese language, the Portuguese language can also be used in executive, legislative and judicial organs of the Special Administrative Region Macau. Portuguese is also an official language.

(Lei Básica da Região Administrativa Especial de Macau da República Popular da China, 1991)

And the recently formulated 'Sistema Educativo de Macau' has this to say:

...Nas diferentes modalidades de educação e ensino, so podem ser utilizados, como línguas veiculares, o português, o chinês e, em casos justificados, o inglês...

(Sistema Educativo de Macau, Capítulo II, Artigo 4. LEI No. 11/91/M de 29 de Agosto)

However, when we look at the linguistic realities of Macau, we find that even these guiding principles lend themselves to different interpretations. At best they provide a sort of

spiritual support in times of confusion and uncertainty; and at worst, they are completely ignored.

RUBBING SHOULDERS IN MACAU: LANGUAGE REALITIES

With this little warning and preparation, we now come on the language scene of Macau to have a better grasp of our language realities and dilemmas. The story of a trilingual 'detour' narrated at the beginning of this paper has already cast some light on the problem.

The Government, determined to make the best of the remaining years of the Portuguese administration, has been going all out to promote the teaching of Portuguese. In his elucidating paper entitled 'The Education in Macau in the Period of Transition: Situation & Perspectives', Dr. Alexandre Rosa cited two major channels for the diffusion of the Portuguese language by the Education Department. One is the provision of Portuguese courses in night schools designed for adults or youths who have passed the normal school age; the other is offering Portuguese language course to school children in private Chinese-medium schools (Rosa A: *A Educação em Macau no Período em Transição: Situação e Perspectivas*, 1989). This and other research papers also give many facts and figures, all pointing to the increasing numbers of Portuguese classes and of Portuguese learners. But how can we just bend on sowing without considering what we are going to reap? It is a well-known fact and quite exhausted topic that the overwhelming majority of Macau people are Chinese speaking Chinese and the overwhelming majority of Macau children study in private Chinese-medium schools, with Chinese and English as compulsory subjects. To them, Portuguese is a more difficult, more unfamiliar foreign language than English. School children spend 5 class hours every week trying to learn a language that they will never be able to use, even at the expense of Chinese and English, because they mix up the languages ('subtractive bilingualism', Luk B, 1979), rather than reinforce them ('additive bilingualism' *ibid*), thus resulting in poor standards in all three languages. Furthermore, without a good grounding in their first language or any language at all their cognitive development and personality growth will be affected.

A study conducted by Prof. Paulo Ferreira on 'The Necessity to Teach and Learn Portuguese in Private Chinese-Medium Schools' has revealed the poor motivation and complete lack of interest in learning Portuguese in private schools. Out of the 71 respondents aged between 10 and 18, only 6% said that they studied Portuguese because they liked it. To the question 'When do you speak Portuguese?', 94% answered that they spoke Portuguese only in Portuguese classes. When asked how useful Portuguese would be to their future, 39.3% replied, 'to find a job', while 31.1% thought 'it is useless'. And when asked which foreign language they thought was the most important, 90% of the children investigated said it was English, whereas only 5% of them mentioned Portuguese (Ferreira P: *Da Necessidade do Ensino-Aprendizagem do Português nos Colégios Particulares Chineses*, 1992).

After a little soul-searching, we may come to terms with the linguistic reality characteristic of Macau. An official language is not necessarily a popular language and there is no need to popularize it. We don't really need a large bilingual population (Portuguese-Chinese)

anyway. And it is wishful thinking to 'train' Macau people into bilingual speakers in a few years' time. Rather than attempting something impossible, and wasting resources, why don't we concentrate on planning and offering high-quality Portuguese language programmes tailored for the kind of experts and linguists that we do need while we still have the time and resources to do so? 'A bird in hand is worth many in the bush' is exactly the case with us. Perhaps the PEP (Programa de Estudos em Portugal), a localization programme, is more successful and effective than the 'Difusão da Língua Portuguesa', because it aims at qualified candidates with clear, well-defined objectives and goals (Andrade A: Programa de Estudos em Portugal, um Projecto de Localização, 1992).

Of course, we can learn a lot from our neighbours, Hong Kong (Neves M S & Rosário R D: A Política Linguística em Hong em Hong Kong, 1990), or Singapore (Rocha R: A Localização em Singapore, 1992). However, as we have our own problems, we must have our own model designed to meet our own needs. We need high-calibre bilingual administrators and legal experts; we need competent translators and interpreters. In short, we need a multilingual elite! They should be selected from highly-motivated university graduates, administrators and professionals. Then we can concentrate our available resources on training them. The well-modulated, tailor-made language courses are meant for them. Then, after a couple of years of intensive language training, send them to the best academic and research institutions in Portugal or other advanced countries for further professional training and language 'immersion' for another couple of years. And then we may rest assured that '...the continuity of the Portuguese presence in the Orient will be guaranteed ...' (Correia S A & Costa P H, 1990).

Everybody knows that our official languages are Portuguese and Chinese. But how many Chinese communicate with Portuguese people in Portuguese? And how many Portuguese communicate with Chinese people in Chinese, officially? Like it or not, here in Macau, English enjoys a subtly interesting and important status, though it is neither a native language, nor an official language, nor even a second language. To most learners it is a foreign language. Owing to the lack of government encouragement and the absence of financial and administrative backing, the teaching and learning of English is dominated by the 'market force', or has survived and thrived on its own intrinsic and extrinsic values. As there is neither organization, nor overall planning all the way down to approaches and methodology, syllabus design, materials construction, evaluation, etc., in the English language learning and teaching process, it is up to individual schools, teachers and learners to do whatever they can, to make the best of whatever resources that they have access to, and to resort to whatever means that help them to improve the teaching and learning of English.

However, hopes are beckoning from the Chinese language teaching scene. Perhaps the Portuguese Administration's 'non-involvement' policy towards the education of Macau in past centuries had this advantage: Macau teachers, parents and students have always paid great attention to the learning and teaching of Chinese language and literature. Recently, a Chinese proficiency test administered by Shi Zhong Mou, Chinese Language Research Director, University of Hong Kong, has showed that Macau students, though dwarfed by

their counterparts in mainland China and Taiwan, performed better than their Hong Kong counterparts (People's Daily, Overseas Edition, 19 January, 1993).

In Pui Ching Middle School, Macau, there has been a project -- the Chinese Pilot Scheme for systematic, integrated teaching and learning of Chinese language and literature, starting from Middle 1 (Form 1) to Middle 6 (Form 6). Vigorously supported by the school authorities, subject teachers of the Chinese panel have been working in close cooperation to find a model for effective co-ordinated language teaching and learning. General goals and specific objectives are set for various areas at each level. Divided into three major stages, the scheme consists of eight component series: texts, language items, literature, writing activities, reading activities, language habits, language skills, and extra-curriculum activities (J B Deng, 1992).

The significance of this scheme is that it will not only set a precedent for conscientious and systematic teaching and learning of Chinese, but also become a source of inspiration and valuable reference for the teaching and learning of other languages. And there is another far-reaching implication: with a healthy grounding in their mother-tongue, a high standard of literary and communicative competence in their first language, the students may also stand a good chance of achieving high competence in their second or foreign language, and of leading a more fulfilling life.

In the macroclimate of Macau and Hong Kong being returned to China, Putonghua is becoming a favourite subject of study, and even the language of instruction in some schools. Pragmatic shopkeepers already find themselves doing more business if they speak Putonghua; factory owners and traders find that the ability to speak Putonghua helps them in negotiating business in other provinces of China; and some even find themselves picking up Mandarin through 'bargaining' with customers and tourists from both sides of the Taiwan Strait. It is not difficult for the people of Macau to acquire a communicative skill of Putonghua when the real need arises. I am optimistic that Macau people will learn Putonghua quickly and easily in a total or semi-immersion environment, just like what is happening in Zhuhai and Shenzhen, where we see large, growing Mandarin-speaking communities in a basically Cantonese-speaking province.

And these are the linguistic realities of Macau. We have, indeed, an extremely intricate multilingual setup: we have Portuguese because it has been the language of the Administration for over four centuries and will continue to help maintain and enhance our ties with Portugal, the European Community and other Latin-speaking countries; we have English because it is vital to our unique international status and will play an even more important role in carrying on and boosting our links with the English-speaking world (see Appendix); and, of course, we have Chinese, both Cantonese and Mandarin, for being what we are and for being an SAR, a member of the 'Mega-Economic Triangle' of the Pearl River Delta (W C Leong, 1992). and of the People's Republic of China, with Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Guangzhou as our brothers and sisters.

PROSPECTS: ENVISAGING BEYOND 1999

Counting down the remaining years of the 20th century, we see exciting prospects already appearing on the horizon. Again, I would allow myself a moment of luxury by speculating, with a fairy-tale element, about what is going to happen linguistically in our SARM beyond 1999.

Our administrators, 'high-fliers', government officials of the future SARM will generally speak Mandarin (Putonghua) in the office and at public functions. They will read Chinese and English books, newspapers and magazines.

Top executives, managers and tycoons of the 21st century will speak Mandarin with their Chinese counterparts, negotiate in English with their overseas partners, chair board meetings in Chinese or English, make speeches and present papers in English at international conferences, read English and Chinese newspapers and periodicals. They may speak English or Chinese at their clubs and Cantonese or Mandarin or other dialects when relaxing at home.

Other professionals and 'high-brows' will speak either English or Mandarin at work, make presentations in English or Mandarin at seminars, and have a little chat with colleagues and friends in any of their first languages.

School children, future citizens of the SARM, will use English in their English classes, Chinese (most probably Mandarin) in all the other classes, and Cantonese on the playground or at home.

Shopkeepers and hawkers, our linguistic 'wizards', will speak whatever language that their customers speak -- smithereens of Cantonese, Mandarin, Japanese, English, Portuguese, etc., as long as they get the deal done quickly and profitably.

Hundreds of thousands of passengers and tourists, without whom there would be no Macau, will continue to stream in and out of Macau round the clock everyday. The majority of them will still be Hong Kong Chinese on their way to the casinos, speaking Cantonese. Missionaries and journeyman, Jesuit priests and Catholic sisters, Buddhist priests, international businessmen, Australian jockeys, British engineers, Swiss chefs, French showgirls, hostesses and domestic helpers from Southeast Asia, scholars and academics from all parts of the world, etc., will continue to speak a multitude of languages, with English as the 'inter-medium', lingua franca or international auxiliary, though some of them will learn to speak Chinese if they stay here long enough.

And, at last! Inside the 'ivory tower', somewhat obscured but nevertheless playing a most profound cultural, political and historic role are a team of dedicated bilingual or multilingual researchers, legal experts, historians, writers, translators, etc., who will probably speak the best Portuguese, the best English, the best Chinese, the best everything! And these are the very people that will help to preserve our fabulous cultural heritage, the centuries-old legacy of East-West cultural interflows, for our posterity. And these are the

very people that will help to make Macau live on and on, with all her unique, legendary features!

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