

Imperial Language Policy in the Nineteenth Century.

A Study on the Spread of English under Early British Rule in Ceylon and the Protected Malay States

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RESÜMEE

Heute ist Englisch, basierend auf der Anzahl der Sprecher und vor allem aufgrund seiner Verbreitung in allen modernen Medien, als Weltsprache anerkannt und als globales Kommunikationsmittel aus unserem Alltag nicht mehr wegzudenken. Die Untersuchung konzentriert sich auf die Anfänge des Englischen als imperiale Sprache und analysiert am Beispiel von Süd- und Südostasien seine Verbreitung im 19. Jahrhundert. Dabei zeigt sich, dass mit Bildungspolitik in den Kolonien immer auch der Versuch verbunden war, sprachpolitische Entwicklungen und damit einhergehende Aufstiegschancen der Kolonisierten zu steuern. Da sie jedoch nur ein Element in einem komplexen und keinesfalls immer kohärenten Gefüge von imperialer Politik in London, Entscheidungen „on the spot“ und „local agency“ war, konnte sie nur bedingt Wirkung zeigen. Dennoch lässt sich in den Quellen zur Bildungs- und Sprachpolitik besonders gut nachlesen, welche Rolle einerseits die Zivilisierungsmission und andererseits eher wirtschaftlich orientierte Herangehensweisen im politischen Denken und im kolonialen Handeln spielten.

On December 20th 2001 the headline of *The Economist* read ‘The triumph of English. A world empire by other means.’¹ The recognition of English as a world language is unchallenged today as some 380 million people speak it as their first language and perhaps two-thirds as many again as their second. A billion are learning it and it is without a

1 The triumph of English. A world empire by other means, in: *The Economist*, December 20, 2001, Print Edition Christmas Special.

doubt the most important language in international business, politics and diplomacy as well as the language of the world wide web.² Many reasons have been cited for the triumph of English which although today seen as a natural outcome of a long process, could not have been foreseen two hundred years ago. Concerning the question why English became a global language, usually two major factors are mentioned, the spread of the British Empire especially during the 19th century and the rise of the new American world power in the 20th century.³

This article will focus on the British Empire and more specifically on imperial language policy. The question will be raised whether the British language policy as it was implemented in the school system in the colonies can be seen as part of the explanation given above or whether it stands in contrast to the development of English as a global language. In the later case other factors which can but do not have to be part of an active imperial language policy such as the status of English, the labour market in the colonies, local demand for English schooling, or the work of other than state agents such as missionaries would have to be studied when the spread of English in the British Empire is discussed. The article will also try to analyse the motives of policy makers and have a closer look at the discourse and the implementation process to establish the link but also the discrepancy between the two. One of the fundamental justifications for using and diffusing the language of the colonizers was the concept of the “civilizing mission”. The idea that language could play an important role in civilizing the colonized peoples was in no way limited to the British. The French are well known for the relation they saw between the two. Jeffra Flaitz for example writes about France:

In its own heyday, namely in the 16th-19th centuries, the French language was touted and consciously promoted as a vehicle of French culture and ideology. France was, it is well known, a powerful and advanced nation at the time. The French language, moreover, was said to have a ‘mission civilisatrice’. In a word, the association between French language and ideology was not only recognized, but openly accepted, justified, and exploited.⁴

The British took longer to include language as a central theme into their discourse on how to treat the native peoples of their colonies. Although we find statements in favour of anglicisation from the late 16th century onwards they are rather sparse⁵ and it is only in the beginning of the 19th century that language becomes a serious subject for policy makers in the colonial context. A closer look at the sources will nevertheless tell us, that honourable intentions considering the “improvement” of the natives were only one side

2 Ibid., 1-2.

3 D. Chrystal, *English as a Global Language*, Cambridge 1997, 8.

4 J. Flaitz, *The Ideology of English. French Perceptions of English as a World Language*, Berlin / New York / Amsterdam 1988, 2.

5 For example Samuel Daniel, *Musophilis*, dated 1599, “And who in time knows whither we may vent, The treasure of our tongue, to what strange shores, This gain of our best glory shall be sent, To enrich unknowing nations without stores?, Which worlds in the yet unformed Occident, May come refined with the accents that are ours”, quoted from Chrystal, *English*, 65. All original sources are quoted unchanged with relation to spelling and grammar.

of the coin and probably presented only a minor motivation in the process of spreading English around the world. More practically orientated approaches – such as the need to develop a cheap labour force for the British administration and British enterprises in the respective colony – very often figured more prominently on the imperial agenda.

We are presented with a very different picture again when studying the motives of the local population and their demand for English language schooling. Although the motives of the colonizers were reflected and sometimes adopted by certain native elites, other reasons for the appropriation of the imperial language can be found in the sources. English soon became a vehicle to social status, a successful career, political participation and at an early stage in Ceylon and at the end of the 19th Century in the Federated Malay States a precondition for integration into the colonial society.⁶

Two case studies, Ceylon which had become a crown colony in 1802 and the Protected Malay States, later Federated Malay States⁷ which came under the influence of British rule during the last third of the 19th century, will be focussed on to provide some clues. They are not, of course, representative of the British Empire as a whole but linking them to developments in India where many currents originated, will help to put them into a wider context. Comparisons between the colonies will allow for an analysis of parallels and differences as well as influences between the different areas of the British Empire. They will also sharpen our eyes for the role of specific circumstances each locality presented.

The statements of two British civil servants responsible for questions of language policy, one in Ceylon and one in the Protected Malay States give us a first idea of language policy in the British Empire and the different direction it could take. In a letter to the American Mission in Ceylon dated 14 December 1829, Wiliam Colebrook, head of the Commission of Eastern Inquiry, wrote:

*And we have not failed to notice with satisfaction the importance you very justly attach to the cultivation of the English language as the medium for the acquirement of the most useful knowledge by the natives.*⁸

Frank A. Swettenham, in contrast, who had served in the Protected Malay States for several decades, stated in a talk delivered at the Royal Colonial Institute in London in 1896:

I do not think we should aim at giving Malays the sort of higher education that is offered by the Government of India to its native subjects, but I would prefer to see the establishment of classes where useful trades would be taught. It is unfortunate that, when an Eastern has been taught to read and write English very indifferently, he seems to think that from that moment the government is responsible for his future employment, and

6 For a more detailed discussion on the chances and limits of integration see also: A. Steinbach, *Herrschaftssprache als Ressource imperialer Integration*, München 2009.

7 Federation took place in 1896.

8 Colonial Office Records 416/6, National Archives of the United Kingdom (Public Record Office).

*in consequence the market for this kind of labour is overstocked, while many honourable and profitable trades find difficulty in obtaining workmen, because of the prejudice against anything like manual labour.*⁹

These two statements could, of course, be described as personal opinions of two individuals but the wider context in which they were made shows that they are probably rather representative of their time. William Colebrook's suggestions were discussed widely and controversially but the head of the Colonial Office, Viscount Goderich, approved of them and especially mentioned the introduction of English when designing a programme of improvement for the natives of Ceylon which was soon implemented.¹⁰ Frank Swettenham, on the other hand, only expressed a widespread attitude of British civil servants in Malaya and other colonies of the Empire in the late 19th century. Looking at the Indian experience with anglicization and the local response to it many of them gave up the idea that English and the spread of western ideas via the language would lead to a loyal and prosperous colony.¹¹ As in Ceylon the most widely accepted policy was implemented. State schools in Malaya were in most cases vernacular ones. These two fundamentally different points of view shall now be looked into in more detail providing a rough outline of the development of colonial language policy in the 19th century.

During the first three decades of British rule in Ceylon there was nothing like a coherent language policy. Policies and politics in general depended strongly on the particular governor in power who was responsible for the direction the British administration took. For two of them, Governor Sir Frederick North, the first governor of Ceylon, who arrived in 1799, and the third Governor, Sir Robert Brownrigg, education became a veritable passion. Both of them favoured the idea of offering English schooling alongside vernacular education. Their motivation was twofold. North's letters tell us that on the one hand the spread of the Christian faith and the consequent 'contentment, tranquillity and morality' amongst the natives were at the root of his interest in educational matters and the spread of English. On the other hand, Governor North did not forget to mention that lower levels of the British administration could be cheaply filled with English educated natives, providing an argument that would be used in favour of English schooling throughout the period of colonialism in British South and South-East Asia.¹² Sir Robert Brownrigg's arguments were similar to those of North. He also specifically mentioned the role of

9 F. A. Swettenham, *British Rule in Malaya*, Talk at the Royal Colonial Institute, 31 March 1896, in: *Honourable Intentions. Talks on the British Empire in South-East Asia delivered at the Royal Colonial Institute 1874–1928*, ed. P. H. Kratoska, Singapore 1983, 186.

10 Goderich to Governor Horton, London 4 May 1832 und London, 14 September 1832, both in *Colonial Office Records 55/74*, National Archives of the United Kingdom (Public Record Office).

11 Many more examples could be cited. H. B. Collinge, *Inspector of Schools in the State of Perak* e.g. used even more drastic words. He said: "It is the mere smattering of English and English ideas that is harmful, and which in India causes the country to swarm with half-starved, discontented men, who consider manual labour beneath them, because they know a little English." Quoted from A. Pennycook, *The Cultural Politics of English as an International Language*. London / New York 1994, 87.

12 K. H. M. Sumathipala, *History of Education in Ceylon 1796–1965*, in: *The Ceylon Historical Journal* 13 (1968), 2; H. A. Passé, *The English Language in Ceylon*, in: *University of Ceylon Review* 1 (1943) 2, 53.

English schooling in making the Ceylonese loyal subjects and to tie them closer to the British government.¹³

North's and Brownrigg's commitment to education can be seen as part of the broader movement of the Evangelical Revival whose most prominent representative in the colonial context of the time was Charles Grant. His *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, Particularly with Respect to Morals* included chapters on English and its potential as a key which would open to the natives of India a world of new ideas.¹⁴ It is remarkable that in Ceylon state money went into education in general and English education in particular long before the renewed Charter of the East India Company included sums to be spent on education in 1813 and even longer before the mother country, England, for the first time decided to put together a budget for education in 1833.¹⁵

A period of neglect followed after Governor Brownrigg had left the island. Thus was the situation when in 1829 the Commission of Eastern Inquiry arrived, sent out by the British Parliament, to investigate the affairs of the colony.¹⁶ Although the original motives for the appointment of the commission were of economic character, more culturally orientated matters were included into the questionnaires that Colebrooke and his colleagues sent around the island to gather the information needed for their reports. Concerning questions of religion and education mainly the church and the missionaries were consulted but some government officials including the occasional Ceylonese employee were interviewed as well. The answering letters present us with very diverse opinions and practices. We find that the American mission was far more open to English education than its British counterparts, we also find that the means for education were lacking in all corners of the island and that more commitment of the state in these matters was asked for, a claim that doesn't seem to have changed over the centuries.¹⁷

William Colebrooke's work and his final report on the administration of Ceylon clearly showed his preference for English. The reasons he gave were, on the one hand, the old

13 R. T. Ruberu, *Education in Colonial Ceylon. Being a Research Study on the History of Education in Ceylon for the Period 1796 to 1834*, Kandy 1962, 117 and 135-135.

14 Ch. Grant, *Observations on the State of Society among the Asiatic Subjects of Great Britain, Particularly with Respect to Morals* dated 1792, in: *The Great Indian Education Debate. Documents Relating to the Orientalist-Anglicist Controversy, 1781-1843*, ed. M. Moir/L. Zastoupil, Richmond 1999, 84-85.

15 For India see: 'East India Company Charter Act of 1813, Section 43'; in Moir/Zastoupil 1999, 90-91. For England see: G. Niedhardt, *Geschichte Englands im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, München 1996, 54.

16 G. C. Mendis, vol. 1 of *The Colebrook-Cameron Papers: Documents on British Colonial Policy in Ceylon 1796-1833*, Oxford 1956, xiii.

17 The letters of the Commission and the answering letters are collected in: Colonial Office Records 416/6, National Archives of the United Kingdom (Public Record Office). In a publication of the American mission, which was sent together with the report, their aspiration concerning the establishment of an English college was laid out. Right at the beginning of it one of the principal objects of the college education was outlined: 'A leading object will be to give native youths of good promise a thorough knowledge of the English language. The great reason for this is that it will open to them the treasures of European science and literature, and bring fully before the mind the evidences of Christianity. A knowledge of the English language, especially for those designed for native Preachers, is in this point of view, important almost beyond belief. Their minds cannot be so thoroughly enlightened by any other means.'

arguments concerning the need for an English-speaking labour force which could replace higher paid British civil servants and thereby save the colonial government money and, on the other hand, the also often used concept of a broader programme of improvement by ways of anglicisation.¹⁸ Referring especially to the principles and the work of the American mission, Colebrooke recommended, even before his colleagues in India had settled this question in the Orientalist-Anglicist debate,¹⁹ that English should be the medium of instruction and that English should become the sole language of the government, the administration and of all courts of justice in the island.²⁰ Almost all of the suggestions of the Colebrooke-Cameron commission concerning the education system were put into practice. Until 1841, forty government schools were established 34 of which were English schools. In the same year, 2062 students were taught; 254 of them were girls.²¹ A catalogue of rules which implemented Colebrooke's proposals to develop an island-wide system of English government schools was published in 1837 by the newly founded school commission.²²

Although these steps were taken without hesitation the intensive discussion of Colebrooke's reports in letters to the Colonial Office and in the local Press suggests that neither the British minority nor the Ceylonese elite who made actively use of this new forum and participated in the discourse completely agreed on the measures taken. It is interesting to see that not so much the teaching of English in itself was debated but it was felt that this could be the first step to a new structure of society – much wished for by some and dared by others. The newly acquired qualification of natives together with the opening of the Civil Service seemed to be the crucial point. One of the first representatives of the British Government to oppose the steps suggested by Colebrooke was Governor Barnes. He did not see the need for a system of English medium education and was even more decidedly against the opening up of the Civil Service. The arguments he presented stood in direct contrast to those the Colebrooke-Cameron Commission used in its reports. Barnes wrote shortly before he left his job and the island of Ceylon:

Whatever Utopian ideas theorists may cherish of universal fraternity without regard to colour, religion or civilization, or whatever notions Levellers may wish to see adopted, I am decidedly of opinion that this people cannot nor ought to have under existing circumstances any greater share in the Government than they have at present. I am not of those personas who think that black and white people can ever be amalgamated in the

18 Report of Lieutenant-Colonel Colebrooke Upon the Administration of the Government of Ceylon, quoted from Mendis, Colebrooke-Cameron Papers, 70-72; Commissioners of Inquiry to the American Mission in Jaffna, Colombo 14 December 1829, Colonial Office Records 416/6, National Archives of the United Kingdom (Public Record Office).

19 Moir and Zastoupil, Indian Education Debate.

20 Mendis, Colebrooke-Cameron Papers, 70-75.

21 Ceylon Blue Book, 1841, quoted from Sumathipala, History of Education, 12.

22 Prospectus of General Rules and Suggestions intended to promote uniformity of system in the management of the Government Schools in the Island of Ceylon, Colonial Office Records 54/156, National Archives of the United Kingdom (Public Record Office).

*situations of society so as to do away with those distinctions which at present exist all over the world.*²³

And he continued his critique of the Colebrooke's and Cameron's suggestions:

*I should be glad to know where you would propose to draw the line; admitted to one situation they would have an equal claim to another, so that unless you contemplate the supercession of all European authorities, not excepting the Governor, I do not see where you could stop. My opinion is that the line is now well defined, that the natives are perfectly content, and that it ought not to be invaded.*²⁴

A very different point of view was taken by some of the readers of the Colombo Journal, a newspaper which although published by the British Government of Ceylon included in its publications a high number of letters to the editor which present us with a very diverse set of opinions and reactions to the Colebrooke-Cameron reports. Although the letter writers use pseudonyms it is from the contents and from the style of writing possible to say that many British citizens of Ceylon some representatives from the group of the Burgher minority as well as some Singhalese and Tamils participated in the debate. A letter signed "A Native" which was possibly but not necessarily written by one, stated many of the arguments against positions such as the one of Governor Barnes. To strengthen his idea of a diffusion of knowledge and civilization through the opening up of chances in ways of careers and integration he quoted from Thomas Munro, Governor of Madras who had published the famous 'Minute on the Employment of natives in the Public Service' dated from 1824. "A Native" wrote:

*What is in every country the great stimulus to the pursuit of knowledge, but the prospect of fame, or wealth, or power; or what is even the use of great attainments, if they are not to be devoted to their noblest purposes, the service of the community, by employing those who possess them, according to their respective qualifications, in the various duties of the public administration of the country.*²⁵

More practically oriented was a second paragraph of his letter. He adopted some of the ideas former British Governors had already used in their argumentation in favour of the integration of natives into the Civil Service:

I say, it will be advantageous to government, because, the native, from the simplicity of his living will be satisfied with a salary adequate to his expenditure and, it would besides supersede the necessity of interpreters. I say it will be beneficial to the governed, because, when the natives find, that a door has been opened for promotion, they will not be de-

23 Quoted from Mendis, Colebrooke-Cameron Papers, xlix.

24 Ibid.

25 The text is quoted from Munro without further information on the sources. "A Native", letter to the editor, Colombo Journal February 29, 1832, Colonial Office Records 59/1, Archives of the United Kingdom (Public Record Office).

*ficient in zeal to pursue the road to useful knowledge [...] and the bond of attachment towards the Government will be strengthened.*²⁶

Apart from these statements which tried to paint the picture of a new society in Ceylon some of the letters were also very concrete in what kind of support they asked from the government to follow Colebrookes recommendations. Several letters arrived which were of a Kandyan providence. The Singhalese writers were thankful for the chance to make their needs known to a wider public and among other things presented suggestions for the improvement of the Kandyan Province - the mountainous part of Ceylon which had been the last to come under British influence - by establishing a new government school. One of the letters read:

*Sir, – The Inhabitants of the Kandyan Country and particularly those who have acquired some knowledge of the English language have with great pleasure hailed the liberty which the Government has been pleased to extend towards the inhabitants of this Colony to speak their sentiments through the medium of your Journal and suggest measures for the improvement and prosperity of the Colony [...] No less than 17-years have elapsed since the establishment of the British Government in the Kandyan Provinces but to the great misfortune of the Kandyans, no public institution has been yet established in Kandy by Government [...] Education is justly considered one of the surest means of civilizing the inhabitants of any Country, of improving their morals and enlightening their minds, and until Government shall patronize an Institution for education the children of Kandyans, the amelioration of the People of the upper Country cannot be expected.*²⁷

These kinds of statements were countered by more restrictive letters which can be summarized by one remark made by “No Pedagogue” which was published on May 19, 1832. By arguing that ‘we should be more anxious to teach many than to teach much’²⁸ he put into words a principle which many British Civil Servants would favour in the second half of the 19th Century.

A crucial role in the field of language policy was finally played by the missionaries who not only took part in the discussion but who also prevented the school system from becoming a purely English language institution. The principle of English medium classes was introduced to government schools but it was not possible for the British government to force mission schools to accept it. Since there were at this time no grants-in-aid, meaning that the government did in no way sponsor the missionary schools on a regular basis, they had no influence on the language policy adopted by this fast growing sector of the

26 “A Native”, letter to the editor, Colombo Journal February 29, 1832, Colonial Office Records 59/1, Archives of the United Kingdom (Public Record Office).

27 “W. G.”, letter to the editor, Colombo Journal April 7, 1832, Colonial Office Records 59/1, Archives of the United Kingdom (Public Record Office).

28 „No Pedagogue”, letter to the editor, Colombo Journal May 19, 1832, Colonial Office Records 59/1, Archives of the United Kingdom (Public Record Office).

Ceylonese school system. Altogether there were 325 missionary schools accounted for in 1841 only 21 of which taught in English. Another 15 favoured a bilingual approach.²⁹ The effort to win the missionaries over to English schooling failed and there was a revision of the politics of anglicisation beginning in the late 1830s, with the initiatives of Governor Steward Mackenzie who based his arguments in favour of vernacular education on financial factors as well as on new studies about the importance of schooling in the mother tongue. Nevertheless, the favourable approach towards English during the early British days in Ceylon had irreversible implications on its development. English became the key to social rise and prestige in general and to any kind of white colour job and political participation in particular. In addition to that a large proportion of the Burghers, the descendents of mixed marriages of members of former colonial powers and the native population adopted English as the language of their households so that it became their mother tongue only one or two generations later.³⁰ Altogether it can be said that during the first third of the century in some circles of the colonial government and certainly in Ceylon, English was believed to be capable of improving, assimilating and integrating the native population. English schooling was seen as part of a broader programme of civilization such as Charles Cameron, the second Commissioner of Inquiry for Ceylon, described it:

*The peculiar circumstances of Ceylon, both physical and moral, seem to point it out to the British Government as the fittest spot in our Eastern dominions in which to plant the germ of European civilization whence we not unreasonably hope that it will hereafter spread over the whole of those vast territories.*³¹

The situation in the Malay States presented itself in a very different way. The four states, Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan and Pahang were governed by the concept of indirect rule. A British resident was to advise the Sultan of each of the four states. As part of the agreement with the Malay Sultans the British government had accepted in the Pangkor Agreement of 1874 not to interfere with religious and traditional matters. The language policy was formed according to this concept. Statements of British administrators in the Protected Malay States such as the quotation used at the beginning of this paper show, however, that consideration for and tolerance of the Malay culture were not the main reasons for the reluctance to promote English medium education in the Malay States. The question is: How can we explain this change of mind that led the British government to retreat for the most part from its commitment to the spread of English which was promoted so fervently in other parts of the empire during the beginning of the 19th century?

29 Sumathipala, *History of Education*, 12.

30 M. Roberts/I. Raheem/P. Thomé, *People Inbetween. The Burghers and the Middle Class in the Transformations within Sri Lanka, 1790–1960s*, vol. 1, Ratmalana 1989, 56.

31 Mendis, *The Colebrooke-Cameron Papers*, xxxvi–xxxvii.

Frank Swettenham like many of his colleagues referred to India when he explained why he was against too much English schooling and it is indeed India that more than any other colony and probably more than London itself influenced developments in the imperial language policy of the 19th century. About the importance of India in terms of ideas and currents in general Thomas Metcalf writes:

*The British Raj in India did not of course exist by itself, or solely in its relationship to Great Britain as the metropolitan power. It participated as well in a larger network of relationships that defined the entire British Empire. Ideas and people flowed outward from India above all to East and South Africa and to Southeast Asia.*³²

To get a better picture of the motives that led British officials in the Protected Malay States to promote practically orientated vernacular education instead of English medium education we have to look at the situation in India. Luckily the subject of language policy in India is rather well researched and I can content myself with referring to some of the results of this literature. Lynn Zastoupil remarks that the impression of finality created by Macaulay's famous minute of 1835 in favour of anglicisation has to be questioned. Macaulay, law member of the governor-general's council, had supported the view that 'a single shelf of a good European library was worth the whole native literature of India and Arabia' and that it was the duty of the British to spread the English language in India.³³ A closer look at the policy implemented after 1839 leads Zastoupil to the conclusion that even at the high time of anglicism it was a compromise between English and vernacular education that was actually realised.³⁴ Other authors have collected a large number of statements promoting vernacular education in India from the 1840s showing a situation similar to that in Ceylon.

As mentioned above less than a decade after the Colebrooke-Cameron Commission had finished its work in the island of Ceylon a different set of opinions and ideas with regard to the education system started to prosper in the Crown Colony. Governor Steward Mackenzie wrote to the Colonial Office several times to ask permission from London to invest part of the education budget into the translation of English books into the local languages. A lack of suitable schoolbooks and other publications was the reason for his pleas. In his letters to the minister he referred to a statement of the Wesleyan Methodist Mission in Galle which read:

It has been held by some Gentlemen that the English language should be made the medium of communicating knowledge to the Singhalese and certainly could the Singhalese be taught that language. The whole evil connected with a want of books would be removed, but for very many years yet to come the ignorance of English will be the rule and the knowledge for it the exception, for the means of learning that language are not within

32 T. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj*, Cambridge 1995, 215.

33 T. B. Macaulay, 'Minute recorded in the General Department, dated 2 February 1835', quoted from Moir / Zastoupil, *Indian Education Debate*, 165.

34 Moir / Zastoupil, *Indian Education Debate*, x.

*their reach, and of the few who do learn a little the knowledge acquired is not in general such as to enable them to read English books with pleasure. It cannot be estimated that more than 1500 Singhalese children have the means of obtaining instruction in English, if therefore the blessings of education are to be communicated to the Singhalese, the native languages must be the medium.*³⁵

However, the responses he got were not of the kind to support his initiatives. Lord Russel was loyal to the ideas of anglicisation. He wrote:

*I adhere to the opinion [...] that it would be unnecessary for the Government to direct its attention and to devote the funds available for education to instruction in the native languages – that the preferable plan would be to encourage the acquirement of the English language by conveying instruction in that language, to the scholars both male and female, in all schools conducted by government.*³⁶

Although Mackenzie was not successful in convincing the Colonial Office of his plans, his ideas were taken up again during the 1840s and without actively searching for a consent with the London authorities more and more Singhalese and Tamil medium schools were founded or in case of a missionary schools funded by the British government in Ceylon. The following graph (p. 44) shows the development of the implementation process in Ceylon:

It seems that by the middle of the nineteenth century vernacular education had taken the upper hand in both Ceylon and India. The main reason for this change of mind was of a pragmatic nature. The filtration theory designed by Macaulay was simply not feasible and too expensive. In addition the results of English medium education where it took place were in many cases unsatisfactory. Complex contents of the different subjects were often taught without a good foundation in the foreign tongue, a teaching method that led to confusion and little transfer of knowledge.³⁷ The 1854 Despatch in a number of ways articulated a position on language policy that had already become the standard view in India. A passage of it reads:

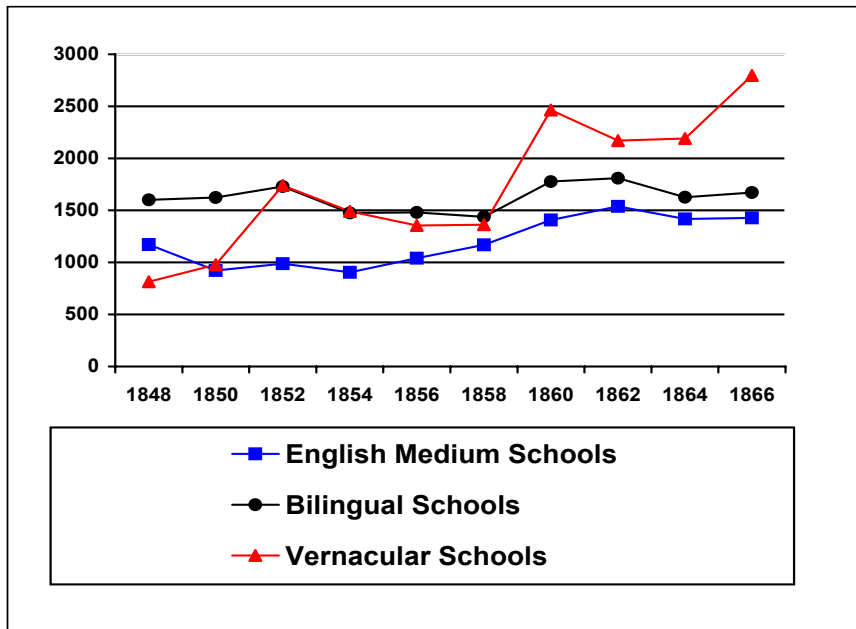
We have always been most sensible of the importance of the use of the languages which alone are understood by the great mass of the population [...] It is indispensable, therefore, that, in any general system of education, the study of them should be assiduously attended to, and any acquaintance with improved European knowledge which is to be communicated to the great mass of the people – whose circumstances prevent them from acquiring a higher order of education, and who cannot be expected to overcome the dif-

35 Report of the Wesleyan Methodist Mission Galle, dated August 5, 1840, in: Governor Mackenzie to the Lord Russel, Galle, August 10, 1840, Colonial Office Records 54/181, National Archives of the United Kingdom (Public Record Office).

36 Lord Russel to Governor Mackenzie, London, December 20, 1840, Colonial Office Records 55/81, National Archives of the United Kingdom (Public Record Office).

37 A. Pennycook, *English and the Discourses of Colonialism*, London/N.Y. 1998, 81–82.

*facilities of a foreign language – can only be conveyed to them through one or other of those vernacular languages.*³⁸



Graph: Number of Pupils according to the Language of Instruction, 1848–1867³⁹

English, of course, did not vanish from the education system on the subcontinent. It remained necessary ‘for those who desired to obtain a liberal education to begin by the mastery of the English language as a key to the literature of Europe.’⁴⁰ In short, it was and in many cases still is the language of higher education in India. A similar compromise was reached by the Morgan Commission in Ceylon in the 1860s. From this time onwards a policy of strengthening the primary school system working in the local languages became officially accepted. English medium schools financed by government were supposed to be the exception rather than the rule. The Commission based its recommendations on the results of questionnaires once again sent around the island but this time addressing a more representative group than at the time of Colebrooke and Cameron. It is also inter-

38 Despatch from the Court of Directors of the East India Company to the Governor General of India in Council, No. 49, dated 19 July 1854, quoted from Pennycook, *Discourses of Colonialism*, 88–89.

39 The numbers of male and female students were added for this graph. Institutions of Higher Education were integrated into the category of English medium schools because their language of instruction was English. The numbers are based on an overview with regard to the development of schools in Ceylon from 1848 to 1867. 25th Report of the Central School Commission for the Instruction of the Population of Ceylon 1867–1868, p. 50, Colonial Office Records 54/442, National Archives of the United Kingdom (Public Record Office).

40 *Ibid.*, 89.

esting to see that the Morgan Commission strongly considered the solutions presented by the British government in India. They especially referred to a statement by the Chief Secretary of Government in India, Arbuthnot, who before acquiring that position had served as Director of Education in Madras. He had remarked:

*That the English Language is confessedly a very difficult one for foreigners, and that it is only after long and laborious practice in speaking, reading and writing it, that any thing like a ready command of it is to be acquired. It is also in every respect most alien, in regard to form and construction, to the languages of India; and, notwithstanding the remarkable facility which the Natives of this country evince in the acquisition of languages, it is well known that comparatively few of the most advanced native scholars acquire that readiness and accuracy in speaking or writing the English language of Europe. It is one thing to acquire such a smattering of English as is very commonly possessed by domestic servants, and many of the subordinates in the public offices in this Presidency. It is another thing to acquire such a command of the language as shall qualify the student to receive with facility and in an intelligent manner, instruction imparted through its medium.*⁴¹

These arguments were without a doubt also known by the British civil servants who worked in the Straits Settlements at the time ruled over by the East India Company. Personal and professional links between the British civil servants in the two colonies were kept tight even once the Straits Settlements became a Crown Colony. And because of the proximity and the administrative links between these areas of the British Empire and the Malay Peninsula as a whole these views spread in the Protected Malay States soon after they had come under British influence.

There is, however, something else that can be felt when reading Swettenham's explanation more carefully. It is not so much a disillusion with reference to the feasibility of anglicisation; it is a certain dismay concerning the outcome of English schooling in India. In the 1860s and 1870s we find more and more statements particularly in India which refer to an 'evil tendency which has shewn itself more especially in the immediate vicinity of the Presidency Towns to substitute a study of the English language in place of the acquisition of general knowledge through the vernacular,'⁴² a tendency that spread because of the need to learn English in order to become clerks, copyists, salesmen or to get any other white colour job. Similar statements concentrate on the responsibility of the government which was no longer capable of providing as many jobs as would have been required to content all English educated applicants. Griffin, the Officiating Secretary to the Government of the Punjab, wrote in this context: There is the danger that such people, 'becoming unfit for their own natural and hereditary professions, remain

41 Report of a Sub-Committee to the Legislative Council Ceylon, Colonial Office Records 54/432, National Archives of the United Kingdom (Public Record Office).

42 A. M. Montreath, Under Secretary to the Government of India, 'Note on the State of Education in India', dated 1862, quoted from Pennycook, *Discourses of Colonialism*, 90.

discontented and disloyal members of the community'⁴³. It was this argument that was echoed by the British civil servants in Malaya and many other colonies.

The result was that a policy of vernacular education gained the upper hand in most parts of the British Empire and certainly in the Protected Malay States. Apart from rare cases of government English medium schools English education was left to the missions. Again the American missions were especially active in this field.⁴⁴ Contacts between the government and the mission were generally friendly as can be seen from the British reports and the memories of American missionaries.⁴⁵ The British were especially impressed with the mission's work in female education, a field which although approached by government schools was more successfully provided for by the missionaries.⁴⁶ The American Methodist Mission went so far as to provide carriages, rickshaws and bullock carts to take girls to school who would otherwise not have been granted permission by their worried parents.⁴⁷ Besides the American Mission there were also British Protestant as well as some French Catholic missionaries who made use of the lack of public English schooling to attract more pupils. They very often opted for a compromise offering most of their schooling in the mother tongue of their pupils but also established English medium schools. Together the missions offered most of the English education in the Protected and later in the Federated Malay States.⁴⁸ They were, however, as a consequence of the agreement mentioned above banished from the rural areas. Their schools were concentrated in the towns where the greatest demand came from the Chinese and the Indian communities.⁴⁹ Apart from the demographical disadvantage of the Malays who mainly lived in the rural parts of the states the strong tradition of Islam in the Malay community resulted even in the towns in a greater reluctance to enter Christian schools.⁵⁰ In view

43 Government of India, vol. 2 of 'Selections from Educational Records of the Government of India, Development of University Education, 1860-1887'; Delhi: National Archives of India, 1963, 202-203, quoted from Pennycook, *Discourses of Colonialism*, 91.

44 J. W. Roxborough, *A Short Introduction to Malaysian Church History*, Kuala Lumpur 1987, 8. Chinese did play a role as the medium of instruction in the beginning of the mission's work but was soon replaced by English. D. F. Cooke, *Some Aspects of the History of the Mission Schools of Malaya (with Special Reference to the Development of the Grants-In-Aid System)* (master's thesis, University of London 1963), 154. Apart from teaching in English the Americans put a great emphasis on teaching the language itself. Oral reports, the performing of simple plays and the telling of short stories to improve oral skills were part of these lessons as well as the study of literature and written assignments. H. H. Peterson, *The Development of English Education in British Malaya* (master's thesis, University of Denver 1942) 112-113.

45 For example Annual Report, Federated Malay States 1901, 20, National Archives of Singapore and Reverend Peach: *Recollections of Malaya*, Royal Commonwealth Society, British Association of Malaya IV/26 1963, 10, Cambridge University Library.

46 Annual Report on Selangor 1900, 57-58, National Archives of Singapore.

47 K. Watson, *The Contribution of Mission Schools to Educational Development in South East Asia*, in: *Education in the Third World*, ed. J. K. P. Watson, Worcester 1982, 79.

48 *Ibid.*, 77-79; Roxborough, *Malaysian Church History*, 8.

49 Statistics for school attendance for the whole of the Federated States were published in the Annual Reports on Education for the Federated Malay States, starting in 1920. Earlier reports also note the difference in attendance, such as the Annual Report on Perak 1901, 36, National Archives of Singapore. Because the greater number of students was of Chinese origin some of the Mission's schools were also called Anglo-Chinese Schools. Cooke, *History of Mission Schools*, 153-154.

50 Watson, *Mission Schools*, 85.

of the spread of English this policy had severe consequences. Except for some Malays of aristocratic descent who received English classes provided for by the British government, the mass of the Malays was left in ignorance of the colonial language and excluded from the advantages related to its acquisition. In the Protected Malay States of the 19th century anglicisation was not wanted by most of the British civil servants and in consequence only supported by the government on a very small scale; where it did take place it often strengthened inequality between the different classes of society as well as between the different ethnicities.

In response to the question asked at the beginning of the article I must start by saying that easy answers cannot be provided because of the lack of a coherent language policy in the 19th century. What we can gather from the case of early British rule in Ceylon and parallel currents and practices in India, however, is the fact that the state's commitment to English was important for the spread of the language in these areas. The potential that British colonial administrators attributed to English as the medium of "improvement" and civilization on the one hand and the way to a cheap local work force for the lower levels of the public and private sector on the other hand, convinced the colonial government to further and promote anglicisation and to invest in it. The irreversibility of this development can be seen in Ceylon where local demand was increased by the experience of social and professional success based on English schooling and remained high once public English medium schools were no longer easily available after a reform in 1869. It is also obvious that English started very early on to conquer the public spaces in Ceylon thereby becoming the one and only common instrument of communication for Singhalese and Tamil elites. The role it played made it extremely difficult to replace after independence, a process which led to harsh controversies and which played a role in the upcoming civil war. In Malaya Malay had always kept certain functions even after having been replaced by English as the language of political affairs and administration in the Federated Malay States after federation. And even though the imposition of Malay as the national language after independence was seriously criticized by the immigrant societies in Malaya and created a lot of tension it was successful in the end.⁵¹

What is interesting though is the fact that although the policy of anglicisation within the state funded school system was much more restrictive in the Protected Malay States the proportion of English speaking inhabitants in this area did not differ enormously from the proportion of English speaking Ceylonese by the time the two colonies became independent.⁵² In this outcome and more generally in the great success of English today as

51 Some compromises were necessary such as the acceptance of English as an equal counterpart to Malay for the first ten years after independence. M. Frey, *Drei Wege zur Unabhängigkeit. Die Dekolonisierung in Indochina, Indonesien und Malaya nach 1945*, Vierteljahreshefte für Zeitgeschichte 50 (2002), 428.

52 In Ceylon about 6 per cent were literate in English at the time of decolonisation. J. E. Jayasuriya, *Education Policies and Progress during British Rule in Ceylon (Sri Lanka) 1796–1948*, Colombo 1971, 541; it is very difficult to find information on the percentage of English speakers in the former Federated Malay States. Figures for the enrolment of children in English schools hint to a similar situation as the one in Ceylon. Loh Fook Seng, *Seeds of Separatism, Educational Policy in Malaya 1874–1940*, Kuala Lumpur 1975, 106–107.

a world language other aspects of British colonialism such as the status of English as the language of the administration, the role it played in the business sector, in institutions of political participation and in the press, local agency and demand for it or finally its prestige in general probably had a bigger share than imperial language policy with regard to the education system ever had.