INTRODUCTION

Making one of the earliest theoretical expositions of the role of communication in national development, Deutsch (1953, 1966) suggests that language and literacy are important elements in social communication and mobilization, which are in turn basic measures of national development. He persuasively shows that communication is essential to the formation of a people, a community and a nationality, and that the degree of linguistic assimilation is indicative of communicative ability, which determines the level of national assimilation or differentiation.

From Deutsch's conceptualization, it becomes clear that, in multilingual societies, both language planning and communication planning are essential to national development and the two are closely and inescapably related.

A review of current literature however reveals that there has been little systematic analysis treating language as a variable in communication planning. One possible explanation is that language as the built-in “medium” in all verbal communications -- interpersonal or through mass media -- is often taken for granted. Most discussions on communication planning therefore tend to “by-pass” the language issue, and the communication planners and researchers are typically concerned only with the problems of training, budgeting, production, development of infrastructure, etc. Yet for those with practical experience in a multilingual society, the language issue is in fact omnipresent at almost every stage of communication planning. And in many cases, the language factor simply cannot be “taken for granted”. Judging from the fact that linguistic diversity and language group identity are elements closely associated with nation-building and national development in multilingual states, as we shall see in the later discussion, it is suggested that language should be treated as an important variable in communication planning in multilingual states and that communication planning scholars should look into the problem carefully and systematically.

LANGUAGE DIVERSITY AND NATION-BUILDING

For most developing countries in Asia and Africa, the task of nation-building is constantly confronted with the problems of multiethnicity and language diversity. The presence of competing ethnic/language groups in these new states generally means that...
the establishment of a new nationhood requires the cultivation of a new national identity. The emerging national identity can be achieved either through an expansion and elevation of an indigenous ethnic identity imposing upon other “less” indigenous and usually minority ethnic groups, or through the development of a new supraethnic identity treating various ethnic groups as of equal standing. In either case, it is expected that the emergence of a new national identity in the new states is not likely to be natural or spontaneous. Some planning efforts from the part of the ruling elite are consequently required. Both communication planning and language planning can and should play important roles here. While the significant role played by communication in development has been extensively explored (Lerner, 1958; Pye, 1963; Schramm, 1964; Lerner and Schramm, 1967; and Frey, 1973) and thus is better known to communication scholars, the position of the language variable in the communicative system in relation to nation-building deserves further discussion.

According to Deutsch (1966), linguistic and cultural assimilation in multiethnic states is a slow process that may involve decades and generations. As a contrast, growth in economy, technology, and societal structure such as transportation and marketing systems can be very rapid. Deutsch sees a great danger in this differential growth pattern in national development. In his own words,

Much of this economic or technological development may force people into new and inescapable contacts with each other as workers, customers, and neighbors -- contacts far narrower, perhaps, than the range of human relations that can be communicated within one culture; but contrasts far wider than the relations which can be communicated in the absence of a common culture to outsiders. Linguistically and culturally, then, members of each group are outsiders for the other. Yet technological and economic processes are forcing them together, into acute recognition of their differences and their common, mutual experience of strangeness, and more conspicuous differentiation and conflicts may result. (1966: 125-126)

Apparently, Deutsch is pessimistic that mere contacts at the societal level without meaningful social communication may lead to tension and conflict. By implication, however, careful communication planning taking into consideration the language situation of the society should be able to help in reducing tension and conflict and in improving communicative integration and social cohesiveness.

Kelman (1971) analyzes the problem from a socio-psychological point of view. He points out that sentimental attachments with respective ethnic/language groups in a multilingual society pose a potential barrier to participation in the national system and to the development of a national identity. He is less pessimistic than Deutsch in believing that so long as the existing socio-political structure is efficient enough to help the individual in achieving his own ends or the ends of his ethnic community, the resultant instrumental attachments may eventually lead to sentimental attachments to the new state and then to the emergence of a new national identity. In such case, we have a type of nation-building “in which the primary push is from state to nation” (Kelman, 1971: 27).

Accordingly, in such new states, Kelman argues, language policies ought to be based entirely on functional considerations: