
RESEARCH

THE ROLES AND STATUS OF ENGLISH IN PRESENT-DAY VIETNAM: A SOCIO-CULTURAL ANALYSIS

Hoang Van Van*

*VNU University of Languages and International Studies,
Pham Van Dong, Cau Giay, Hanoi, Vietnam*

Received 6 October 2019

Revised 14 February 2020; Accepted 16 February 2020

Abstract: Starting from a collection of dialects in the southern counties in England, the English language has moved far beyond its nation and has now consolidated its power as the most widely used *lingua franca* in the world for business, science, communication and technology, and for many other purposes (Cheshire, 1996; Crystal, 1997, 2012; Halliday, 2017). In Vietnam, since *Đổi mới* (Renovation) which was initiated by the Vietnam Communist Party in 1986, English has become the most important foreign language being taught and used nation-wide, second only to Vietnamese – the national language. Why has English gained such a predominant status in the Vietnamese linguistic space? What are the roles and status of English in present-day Vietnam? Does the expansion of English pose any threat to Vietnamese? To what extent does the expansion of English challenge other foreign languages being taught and learned in Vietnam? Will English become a second official language in Vietnam? The answers to these questions constitute the focus of analysis in this paper and will be addressed throughout.

Keywords: English, role, status, national language, second language, foreign language

1. Introduction

In Vietnam, Vietnamese is both the national and official language. All other languages (indigenous as well as non-indigenous) that are taught and learned in the Vietnamese educational system are referred to as non-national languages (for indigenous minority languages) and foreign languages (for non-indigenous languages) (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MoET], 2018a). Among the foreign languages being taught in

Vietnam, English plays a dominant role, and thus has acquired the most prominent status. Although the English language is not spoken much by the general Vietnamese public, it is considerably visible in the linguistic space of Vietnam and prevalent in education and even some aspects of popular culture: there are English versions of Vietnamese newspapers, documents, television programmes and radio broadcasts. As such, it is safe to say that the English language is ubiquitous in Vietnam, attesting to its significance in the country. English proficiency is perceived to be an indispensable tool in helping individuals and

* Tel.: 84-946296999

Email: vanhvv@vnu.edu.vn; vanhvv.sdh@gmail.com

the country as a whole gain competitiveness in today's globalized world. With so much attention concentrated on English, it is not surprising to see that English language teaching (ELT) is a key agenda in Vietnam's education policy (see Thủ tướng Chính phủ [The Prime Minister], 2008, 2017; see also Do, 2007; Hoang 2010b; 2015, 2016b).

The aim of this paper is to analyze the roles and status of English in present-day Vietnam. The analysis is informed mainly by scholarly works on foreign language education as well as foreign language policy and enactment documents at Vietnamese governmental and ministerial levels. The paper falls into five parts. Following Part one which presents the rationale for the paper, Part two provides a brief overview of the growth and expansion of English in the world, offering some explanations why English has acquired the status of both an international and global language today. Based on this broader socio-cultural context of world Englishes, Part three looks in some depth at the roles and status of English in Vietnam and discusses some of the potential threats it may pose to Vietnamese and other foreign languages being taught and learned in Vietnam. Part four is concerned with the prospect of English. Finally, Part five summarizes what has been presented, provides some conclusions, and makes suggestion for planning a balanced language policy in Vietnam.

2. English in the world: A brief overview

2.1. The growth and expansion of English

Since the second half of the 20th century, the world has been witnessing an exploding change in the role and status of some of the major world languages. One such change includes the expansion away from local, to national, and then to international domains of English and the threat it may pose to national and other little languages. The hysterical and uncontrollable expansion of English to almost every corner of the world, the measures

nations-states have taken to fight this global language through their efforts to repel or slow down its ubiquitous invasion, and the constant determination of nations-states to preserve their identity through language, all these have been taking place in a drastic way, making the study of the nature and language-planning capabilities of countries in the world a fast-growing and attractive field to researchers.

Only four centuries ago, the English language as we know now was a collection of dialects, little known beyond the southern counties within the shore of a small island, and spoken mainly by monolinguals there (Halliday, 2017; see also Broughton et al., 1978; Cheshire, 1996). And yet this then local language, and then national language has grown to the status of being the most important international and global language, including such typologically distinct varieties of pidgins, creoles, 'new' English and a range of differing standard and non-standard varieties that are spoken on a regular basis in more than 75 countries and territories around the world and are being learned and used in more than 100 other countries and territories (Cheshire, 1996; Ling & Brown, 2005; Crystal, 2012). According to sociolinguists (Broughton et al., 1998; Cheshire, 1996; Honna, 2006), over three centuries ago when the British began their expeditions to colonize Asia, the number of people speaking English as the first language or mother tongue was just a few million. But now the number of people speaking this language in the world takes up an overwhelming proportion, second only to those who speak Chinese. According to Crystal's (2012) estimation, about 400 million people use English as an official language (mother tongue/first language) in the 'Inner Circle' (Kachru, 1985) countries and territories; from 300 million to 500 million people use English as a co-official language (second language) in the 'Outer Circle' countries and territories; and from 500 million to a billion people learn or speak some English as a foreign language in the 'Expanding Circle'

countries and territories. Taken together, the number of people speaking English as a first, a second, and a foreign language in the world today is no less than 2 billion, accounting for nearly 1/4 of the world population.

Recent UN statistics have shown that about 85% of international organizations use English as an official language (cf. Johnson, 2009), far more than those that use four other major international languages combined: Russian, Chinese, French and German. Currently the United Nations has more than 50 agencies, dozens of programmes, hundreds of specialized agencies, regional committees, functional committees, and standing committees that use English as the official language. English has a formal role or a working role in the minutes of summit meetings and international conferences. The European Union (EU), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and many others, all use English as the official language. English is also the sole official language of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), the only working language of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) and World Economic Forum (WEF). Even the Association of South-east Asian Nations (ASEAN) – an over 50-year-old association whose ten members encompass 10,000 dialects in its territory – adopts only one official and working language – English. English is so widely recognized and used that when an organization has many countries involved and it needs to select some common languages (*lingua francas*) to work, English is often the number one choice. In conferences that include limited members from the superpowers, the value of English is also more widely recognized than that of other world major languages: although the proceedings of those conferences might initially not be written in English, when the results of the conferences or the resolutions passed by the attending officials are needed

to be announced to a wider audience, those documents are often published in English. Statistics have shown that only in the Asia-Pacific alone, about 90% of the proceedings of international organizations have been written in English. Those scientists who want to promote wider publicity of their research findings must also use English as a means of promotion (cf. Crystal, 2012).

English is used by international sports associations as the official language: any major sporting events from regional to international levels use English as the official language. In addition, other international organizations such as the Society of Architects and its conferences, religious conferences, etc., all use English as a means of communicating and promoting their ideas or thoughts. Even in Europe where it is often expected that languages other than English would be more widely used, English is still the most favoured, widely used and learned. According to recent statistics, the number of organizations in Europe that use English as the official language is twice the number of organizations that use French, and thrice the number of organizations that use German (cf. Eurydice, 2002, 2005, 2017). When language pairs in a European Community do not have bilingual translators, people often have to choose an intermediate language, which is always English. For example, when a Finnish person communicates with a Greek, the Finnish speaks Finnish, the first translator translates it into English and the second translator translates it from English to Greek. An obvious example of this is that as far back as the 1940s, when Japan and Germany were negotiating their alliance against the U.S. and Britain, the foreign ministers of those two Axis powers had to find a common language for their talks and decided, ironically, on the language of their adversaries: English (for more detail, see Cheshire, 1996; Kachru et al. eds., 2006; Crystal, 1997, 2012). And as Michael Skapinker of the *Financial Times*, cited in Johnson (2009: 133), has aptly put

it, “It is not just that Microsoft, Google and Vodafone conduct their business in English; it is the language in which Chinese speak to Brazilians and Germans to Indonesians”. The influence of English in Europe is so strong that many non-English medium universities in the world, for want of attracting foreign students, have to use English instead of their respective national/official language as the medium of instruction.¹ English makes its presence and is naturally welcomed in counterbalancing superpowers of the United States: Russia and China. According to Crystal (1997, 2012), in Russia, a superpower which is said to be rather conservative in receiving the English language, the number of English learners as a foreign language in this country reached 15 to 20 million (accounting for about 10 to 12% of the population); and according to Honna (2006), there are about 300 million English learners every year in China (accounting for about 20% of the population).

In media, in order to inform the world of what is going on domestically, many countries of the Outer and Expanding Circles have multi-lingual TV channels, in which the amount of time devoted to the programmes broadcast in English accounts for a considerable proportion. In particular, countries such as Russia, South Korea, and Japan devote a separate TV channel for broadcasting their programmes in English: the Russian RT, the Japanese NHK, the South Korean Arirang, etc. In addition, most fashion TV channels, including French Fashion, children’s channels, and sports channels in the world are broadcast in English.

From what has been discussed, it can be safe to affirm without hesitation that English

has really become a world language in both “international” and “global” senses (Halliday, 2017, p.103). English is used not only in monolingual environments (the environment in which it is the first language or the mother tongue), in bilingual environments (the environments in which it is the co-official language), but also in the environments in which it is a foreign language. English is used not only to communicate within English-speaking countries but also to be used as a means of communication in international and multinational events; it is the most widely used and the most popular language in books and newspapers, at airports, in international transactions, in international associations, in science, technology, medicine, sports, pop music, and in advertisements (for more details, see Crystal, 1997, 2012; Phillipson, 1997; May, 2001, p.199). English is the language whose expansion is so vigorous and whose power is so strong that the Danish sociolinguist Robert Phillipson (1997) has to coin the term “linguistic imperialism”, and the Nigerian linguist Ayo Bamgbose (2006) has to coin the term “hegemony” and the metaphorical expression “recurring decimal” to refer to its unstoppable expanding power over the world linguistic space.

2.2. Why has English become the world’s most important global language?

In a chapter entitled “The Golden Gates of English in the Golden Context” published in RELC Anthology Series 41 *Language in the Global Context: Implications for the Language Classroom*, the sociolinguist Sarwar (2000, p.32) suggests three features that stand out as key elements in the age of globalization in our modern world: the universality of pop music, the expansion and availability of information technology even in remotest places in the world, and the use of English as an international language for educational and communication purposes. Over half a century ago since English became the most widely used and learned language in the world, many

¹ This situation can also be found in Vietnam. To attract Vietnamese students, international joint education programmes between Vietnamese universities and foreign counterparts in non-English speaking countries often have to use English instead of their respective mother tongue as the medium of instruction.

sociolinguists have been interested in studying this special socio-cultural phenomenon. They have raised a number of questions, the most common one of which is: “What linguistic, historical, or cultural factors make English an indomitable force in the development history of the world’s languages?” Different scholars offer different explanations, but three are notable. The first explanation accounting for the unstoppable expansion of English is that it has linguistic features which are easy to learn (Crystal, 1997, 2012; Sarwar, 2001; Johnson, 2009). Proponents of this view argue that morphologically, English has almost no categories of gender and case; neither has it many suffixes or endings attached to the word stems like Russian and some other European languages. Learners of English, therefore, do not have to remember the detailed differences between the categories of masculine, feminine and neutral; neither do they have to remember the suffixes expressing the meanings of case such as nominative, possessive, objective, dative, instrumental, etc. This linguistic approach to the expansion of English sounds interesting but not quite convincing. The reason is that, if one looks back at the history and development of some of the major world languages in Europe, one might see that Latin was once an important *lingua franca* spoken and studied in many countries in this continent despite its morphological and grammatical complexities such as the suffixes or the inflectional endings of words, and the differences in gender, number and case of nouns, etc. French before the 1960s was a *lingua franca* in the French colonial states and territories despite the fact that French is not a morphologically simple language. Russian is perhaps a more morphologically complex language with regard to the categories of gender, number, and case of the noun; tense, aspect, and voice of the verb with inflectional items which seem very difficult to remember, but in the second half of the 20th century it was the language widely used and taught in countries of the former socialist eastern European bloc, including Vietnam, China

and North Korea in Asia. From the above evidence, it can be asserted that the linguistic features that are supposed to be easy to learn cannot be a convincing argument to explain for the expansion of a language beyond its national territory; neither can it be convincing evidence to explain why a language has become an international and global one. In other words, a language becomes a global one not because its intrinsic structural features are simple and easy to learn; and, in contrast, complex morphological and structural features of a language cannot prevent it from acquiring a global status (for more details on this point, see Crystal, 1997, 2012; Hoang, 2010a).

The second explanation has to do with governmental and institutional support. People who favour this argument claim that the reason why the expansion of English far surpasses other major world languages such as Spanish, Chinese, French, Russian, and Japanese is that it has always received strong and intentional support from the British and American governments and their propaganda agencies. According to King (2006), over four centuries ago (on December 31, 1600) Queen Elizabeth II granted a royal charter to a group of merchants for the purpose of exploitation of trade with East and South-east Asia and India. This charter and the merchants were major facilitators of the English language, marking its expansion to the world. And then came the assignment of the tasks of spreading the language to tertiary educational institutions such as the department of linguistics in London with the writing of grammar books, textbooks, dictionaries, and the establishment of linguistic and cultural agencies abroad such as the British Council. Taking Japanese as counter-evidence in support of their view, scholars who argue for this position claim that the Japanese, who despite the earlier predominance in technology and world trade, took no steps towards internationalizing their language (Halliday, 2017, p.39). This explanation sounds interesting, too, but, like the first one, not so convincing. The Russian

(formally the Soviet Union) government has established Pushkin Institutes in a number of countries in the world; the Chinese government has set up over a hundred Confucian Institutes in countries all over the world; and the government of Germany has also established over a hundred Goethe Institutes in different countries around the globe. They have done a lot of corpus planning to promote the teaching and learning of their languages and spread their cultural values beyond their countries of origin by donating the target countries with teaching and learning facilities such as textbooks, grammar books, dictionaries, computers, etc. They have dispatched their native teachers to those target countries to help teach their languages. They even have offered a donation of “a year-abroad programme” to those local teachers teaching their languages so that they could improve their foreign language knowledge and skills by having direct exposure to the languages in the countries where they are spoken. The countries that teach those languages may have benefited considerably from these donation activities, but it is doubtful if the donors’ languages can become globalized like the English language.

Contrary to the first two arguments, the third explanation argues that the reason why English has become a global language is due to nothing but the military and economic power of first the British colonialists, and then the US imperialists (Crystal, 1997, p.7; 2012; Johnson, 2009). This argument sounds more convincing as it has been substantiated in world history. If one attempts to take a close look at the growth and decline of some world major languages, one can see that Greek was once the *lingua franca* in the Middle East, but the fact that it became the *lingua franca* in the region was certainly not due to the wisdom of the great scholars of ancient Greece such as Socrates, Plato, Xenophon, or Aristotle, but due much to the military power of the swords and spears of the Greek army under Alexander the Great. Latin was once used as the

Esperanto throughout most Western Europe, but its prevalence and spread were due mainly to the power of the Legions under the ancient Roman Empire. Arabic was once widespread in the Middle East and North Africa, but the spread of this language was certainly not due to the moral quality or prestige of the Arabs, neither was it due to the linguistic features of the language. Rather it was the power of the Moroccan armies backing the spread of Islam in the regions in the 18th century that made Arabic the *lingua franca* of the region. The presence of Spanish, Portuguese, and French in Latin America, Africa and the Far East was not due to any other reason than the military power of these countries as the then superpowers in the Renaissance. And the reason why Russian could make its presence and was expanded throughout the former eastern European bloc and other socialist countries from the 1960s to the 1980s is no exception: it is due to the military power of the former Soviet Union as one of the two world superpowers in the second half of the 20th century.

A country with military power can impose its language on the dependent country(ies), but to expand and maintain the existence of that language in the dependent country(ies), the country having military power must have economic power (Crystal, 1997, 2012; see also Laurdes et al., 2006). English seems to be supported by both military and economic power to make it the most important global language in the world today. The history of invasion and colonization of the British imperialists has shown that from the pre-modern period, especially from the beginning of the 19th century, Britain was already a world leading state of commerce and industry: it had powerful teams of warships to conquer and colonize other nations; and it developed a strong enough economy and a modern enough science to dominate those colonized nations. Britain was not so populous in 1700, only about 5 million people; it gradually increased to about 10 million in 1800, but none of the

countries in the world could match with its economic growth. Further, most inventions in the Industrial Revolution period came from England. In 1800, the growth rate in the textile and mining industries in England was so fast that the country was often referred to as “the workshop of the world” – a metaphor indicating the dynamism and rapid economic growth of the British imperialists at that time.

Following the virtually unmatched economic growth of Britain was the extremely rapid and effective economic formation and growth of the American imperialists. At the end of the 19th century, the population of the United States was about 100 million, bigger than any other Western European nations; and due to its favourable geopolitical conditions, the United States has become the world’s fastest growing and most powerful economy in the world. Along with military expansion and fast economic growth, from the middle of the 16th century to the end of the 19th century, Britain “exported” its most precious God-sent gift – the English language – to almost every corner of the world, and subsequently it became such a widely used language that many Britons arrogantly claimed that “the sun never sets on the British Empire”. From the end of the 19th century to the present, the military and economic powers of the British imperialists, reinforced by the military and economic power of the American imperialists – the present-day world’s strongest superpower – have firmly established the position of English as the most important global language, ensuring the unilateral prevalence and development of this tongue throughout the planet (for more detail, see Crystal, 1997, 2012; Honna, 2006; Phillipson, 1997; Johnson, 2009; Hoang, 2010a).

3. The roles and status of English in Vietnam

It is not easy to point to a specific date when English came to Vietnam. But what is certain is that English made its first presence in Vietnam as a minor foreign language from the French domination time (from 1859-1954). Since 1954, English in Vietnam has

had a chequered history (Hoang, 2010b; see also Do, 2007). Unlike Singapore and many other countries which used to be Great Britain’s colonies, Vietnam was a colony of France. The French language was thus the main foreign language taught in Vietnam besides the national language – Vietnamese. During the period of 1954-1975, Vietnam was divided into two parts – the North and the South, each part was allied with world super powers of different political ideologies: the North was allied with the former Soviet Union and China, and the South, with the USA. Foreign language education policy, thus, followed different patterns. The North promoted the learning of Russian and Chinese and the South emphasized the study of English and French as the main foreign languages and the required subjects to be taught in secondary and post-secondary education (cf. Do, 2007; Hoang, 2010b). From 1975 to 1986, Russian dominated the foreign language scene in Vietnam; other foreign languages such as Chinese, French, and especially English were relegated to an inferior status. Since 1986 – the time when Vietnam initiated an overall economic reform commonly known as *Đổi mới* (Renovation), opening the door of Vietnam to the world, English has become the first and dominant foreign language taught and learned in the education system (from lower secondary level to tertiary level) and is used to serve a number of functional purposes in the country. A brief analysis of the roles and status of English in some key sectors in Vietnam will be provided below.

It should be noted that in the framework of the Vietnamese Constitution 2013, there is no status other than a foreign language given to English. But based on the official documents such as the Vietnamese Government’s decisions and decrees on education, the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training (MoET)’s circulars, directives and national curricula, and on what is going on in actual practice, it can be affirmed that among the seven foreign languages (English, Russian, Chinese,

French, Japanese, German, and Korean) that are recognized as a subject being taught in the Vietnamese general school education system, English is given a special status, second only to Vietnamese – the national language – in terms of time allocation, and the knowledge and skills required. Along with the spread of English across many parts of the world, the spread of English across many sectors in the Vietnamese society is obvious and seems natural. The first sector that English takes up a dominant status over other foreign languages is the national formal education system: from general schools to colleges.

3.1. English in the general school

English has always been given a privileged place in the general school education curriculum in Vietnam. This can be seen in the ever increasing amount of time allocated to the subject over different periods of time from the early 1980s to the present. From 1982 to 2002, English was introduced nationally as a compulsory subject at upper secondary level (from grade 10-12), 3 periods per week, making up the total of about 300 periods, and an optional subject at lower secondary level depending on the school's availability of resources (Viện Khoa học Giáo dục Việt Nam [Vietnam Institute for Educational Sciences], 1989; Hoang, 2010b). In 1986, Vietnam launched its overall economic reform known as *Đổi mới* (Renovation), opening the door of Vietnam to the whole world. And then eight years later, in 1994 the US lifted its trade embargo against Vietnam. These two important events paved the way for and accelerated the boom of English in Vietnam, making it the most needed language to be taught and learnt in the country. To implement the Vietnamese Government Directive N^o 14/2001 CT-TTg on the Renovation of the Vietnamese General Education Curriculum (Thủ tướng Chính phủ [The Prime Minister, 2001]), the Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training organized the design of curricula for all school subjects including the *General School Education*

English Curriculum (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MoET], 2006). According to this Curriculum, English was taught nationally as a compulsory subject for seven years from lower secondary school through to upper secondary school (from Grade 6 to Grade 12) with the total number of 700 periods (400 periods more than it was allocated in the period of 1982-2002).

To further promote the study of English and to better the quality of English language teaching and learning in Vietnam to meet the demand of the increasing trend of globalization and international interdependency of the global village, on September 30th 2008, the Vietnamese Prime Minister issued Decision N^o 1400/QĐ-TTg on approving the national foreign languages project entitled “*Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System for the Period 2008-2020*” (hereafter shortened to ‘Decision 1400’) and the National Foreign Languages Project (shortened as Project 2020 or NFL). And in 2017, recognizing that a number of problems might hinder the achievement of Project 2020’s goal, the Vietnamese Government had it reviewed and adapted to be more suitable for the period of 2017-2025. The result was that the new extended Project 2020 came into being issued in the Prime Minister’s Decision 2080/QĐ-TTg entitled “*Decision on the Approval, Adjustment and Supplementation of the Project ‘Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System for the Period of 2017- 2025’*” (hereafter shortened to ‘Decision 2080’) (Thủ tướng Chính phủ [The Prime Minister], 2017). According to the Prime Minister’s Decisions 1400 and 2080, and MoET’s *General School Education English Curriculum* (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MoET], 2018b), English is a compulsory subject taught nationally for ten years (from Grade 3 through to Grade 12), 4 periods per week at the primary level, 3 periods per week at the lower secondary level, and 3 periods at the upper secondary level, making up the total number of 1155 periods (455 periods more

than it was allocated in the 2006 *General School Education English Curriculum*). What should be noted here is that in the new curriculum, the amount of time allocated to English accounts for over 10 per cent of the total amount of time designed for all general school education subjects in Vietnam (see Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MoET], 2018a, 2018b). Further, English is recognized as one of the three major subjects whose status, in terms of time allocation, ranks third: only after Vietnamese and mathematics. It is one of the three compulsory examinations (mathematics, Vietnamese, and English) an upper secondary student has to take to be awarded an upper secondary school certificate. The need to learn English of Vietnamese children is so strong that alongside the compulsory ten-year *General School English Curriculum*, on December 26, 2018 MoET issued the two-year optional curriculum entitled *General School Education Introductory English Curriculum for Grade 1 and Grade 2*, with 2 periods per week, 70 periods per year (see Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MoET], 2018c). And to meet the young Vietnamese parents' needs, English is being introduced into a number of kindergartens in big cities, towns and affluent areas for children aged from 3 to 5 (see Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MoET], forthcoming).

The dominant roles and special status of English in the Vietnamese general school education can be seen in the fact that of the seven foreign languages that are currently recognized to be taught and learned in Vietnamese general schools (English, Chinese, Russian, French, German, Japanese, and Korean), the number of students learning English as Foreign Language 1 (compulsory subject) always accounts for over 98% (Hoang, 2010a, 2010b). English is so important in Vietnam that some attempts have been made to roll out a bilingual education policy in some sectors of the Vietnamese educational system. The concept of bilingualism has a long association with the indigenous ethnic minority groups learning Vietnamese as the

“common language” (ngôn ngữ phổ thông), and bilingual education for these groups has undergone its course of trials and hopes reflecting the political realities of Vietnam. To the Vietnamese ethnic majority, which comprises about 86% of the total population, bilingual education is a remote notion. It is only due to the expansion of English in recent years that the notion of bilingual education in the sense of “content and language integrated learning” (CLIL) or “English medium instruction” (EMI) has gained some currency. For a number of people, bilingual education is seen as a useful tool for improving English skills, and for developing a workforce that combines specialized knowledge with English language skills, while still preserving the special status of Vietnamese as the national language. Across Vietnam, particularly in big cities and towns such as Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Hai Phong, Da Nang, Can Tho, some schools begin to use the co-media of instruction in which English is used to teach math and science subjects, and Vietnamese is used to teach the remaining ones. Catalytic factors, such as Vietnam's firm belief in its “open-door” policy, membership of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), World Trade Organization (WTO), Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership – CPTPP or TPP11, and other world organizations have played a key role in promoting this mode of bilingual education. Further, against the background of the international and global status of English springs the need of many parents, particularly those living in big cities and towns that it would be better if their children were educated in a bilingual (English and Vietnamese) environment. Their need is supported by the Vietnamese Prime Minister's Decision 2080 (Thủ tướng Chính phủ [the Prime Minister], 2017) which explicitly states:

Gradually deploying the teaching of content language integrated teaching (CLIT) mode in some subjects such as mathematics, science and other content

subjects in foreign languages.¹

3.2. English in the university

There are two main categories of English language teaching in tertiary education in Vietnam. The first category consists of those universities and colleges where English is taught as a discipline or major (see Hoang, 2008; 2010a). These include departments or faculties of English language in comprehensive universities, English departments in colleges and universities of foreign languages, and teachers' training colleges or universities. The programmes of these institutions last for four years, and they are required to provide students with advanced level training in English: Level 5 as defined in MoET's *Six-level Foreign Language Competency Framework for Vietnam* (equivalent to CEFR Level C1) (see Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MoET], 2014). The second category consists of those universities and colleges where English is taught as a subject or non-major. In this category, English is a compulsory subject taught from undergraduate through to doctoral level. It is treated on par with academic courses in the sense that in the degree structure equal weightage is given to English as it is to the academic courses. The amount of time allocated to English language teaching may vary from university to university, but the general pattern is: at undergraduate level, English is taught for 14/120 credit hours (equivalent to 630 learning periods); at graduate (master) level, English is taught for 7/50 credit hours (equivalent to 315 learning periods); and at doctoral level, English is taught for 4 credit hours (equivalent to 180 learning periods)². The main objective of

teaching English at tertiary level is to provide students with communicative competence in English and to use it as a means to science and technology; and the requirements for English at each level are: on finishing an undergraduate or a master programme, students must obtain Level 3 as defined in MoET's *Six-level Foreign Language Competency for Vietnam* (equivalent to CEFR Level B1) (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MoET], 2014), and on finishing doctoral level, students must obtain Level 4 (equivalent to CEFR Level B2). Although more exact up-to-date estimate is impossible to come by at the moment of writing this paper, of all the foreign languages taught in Vietnamese colleges and universities, the number of students learning English at undergraduate and graduate (master and doctoral) levels always takes up between 94% and 96% (cf. Hoang, 2010a).

In an open world, there are a lot of academic exchanges and transfers across borders which require an open educational system. In the higher education sector, the process of integration and internationalization takes on various forms. At the state level, the Vietnamese Government has been carrying out a number of national projects (such as MoET's Project 911 and the Vietnamese Communist Party (VCP)'s Project 165 to send young scientists and young leaders to study in countries which have more advanced higher educational and management systems. In addition, MoET has granted overseas tertiary institutions permits to establish their campuses in Vietnam; has allowed Vietnamese tertiary institutions to cooperate with their foreign partners to train human resources which are needed by the country's labour market; and has facilitated Vietnamese tertiary institutions to attract more and more overseas students to come and study in Vietnam. Many Vietnamese universities have actively responded to the globalization process. They have modified their curricula to meet international standards.

¹ This passage appears in the Vietnamese original as follows:

Từng bước triển khai dạy tích hợp ngoại ngữ trong một số môn học khác (như toán và các môn khoa học, môn chuyên ngành) bằng ngoại ngữ.

² The data was taken from VNU Hanoi's current tertiary curricula. The amount of time allocated

to English as a subject may vary from one tertiary institution to another.

They have adapted their courses to create credit equivalence so that those courses could be transferred to those existing in the curricula of other tertiary institutions in the world. They have carried out joint education and joint research programmes, and faculty and student exchange programmes. They have been actively involved in sandwich programmes with tertiary institutions in various countries in the world. Several prestigious Vietnamese universities have used English as a medium of instruction for some of their key courses. All the aforementioned activities cannot be carried out successfully without the help of English, reassuring thus its special roles and status at the Vietnamese tertiary education level (for detail, see Hoang, 2013).

To further promote the use of English in the tertiary education sector, since the beginning of the 21st century, a number of national programmes to train young advanced scientists have been carried out such as the Advanced Programme by MoET (from 2008 to 2015), the Strategic Programme (or the International Standard Programme ISP) by VNU, Hanoi (Vietnam National University, Hanoi) from 2008 to 2020, and other high quality programmes by several other prestigious universities in Vietnam. How successful these tertiary English-medium programmes is still under-researched, but what is certain is that those programmes have really encouraged the teaching and learning of academic courses in English, preparing students for their participation in professional, commercial, industrial, and academic sectors.

3.3. English outside the formal education system

Moving outside the formal education system, the special status of English can be seen in the fact that proficiency in English is a necessary qualification in the government services: a candidate with little or no knowledge of English is not eligible to apply for a job in any of these institutions. In certain ministries, proficiency in English is made a

must qualification. In some economic sectors, hotels, business firms, and business groups will only employ executives who are able to speak English with fluency. Needless to say, airlines companies, public and private, do not only need English-speaking pilots but also English-speaking flying attendants and receptionists. Apart from those, English has become a criterion for promotion and personal advancement, and a gate keeper for many job seekers whose actual workplaces, ironically, do not need to use English.

Academia in Vietnam has not been spared the spread of the English language monopoly. To reach a larger audience, Vietnamese academics are constantly required to publish their research papers in English. To be promoted to the title of a professor or an associate professor, a candidate is required, among other qualifications, to have a high level of competence in English. Article 2, Chapter 1 in the Vietnamese Prime Minister's Decision No. 37/2018/QĐ-TTg (hereafter shortened to Decision 37) entitled "*Decision on Promulgating Regulations on Standards and Procedures for Considering and Recognizing Standards and Appointing Professors and Associate Professors; Procedures for Cancellation of Recognition and Dismissal of the Titles of Professorship and Associate Professorship*" stipulates that besides other requirements for a candidate to be eligible to the title of professor or associate professor, the ability to use a foreign language proficiently at Level 4 as defined in MoET's *Six-level Foreign Language Competency Framework for Vietnam* (equivalent to CEFR Level B2) is a must. What should be noted here is that among the foreign languages recognized in the Prime Minister's Decision 37, the ability to use English is specially emphasized: those candidates registering to present their research overview or to be tested in English language competence will not have to take a test in another foreign language, whereas those candidates registering to present their research overview or to be tested

in a foreign language other than English will have to take an English test which requires them to demonstrate “the ability to understand others and to make themselves understood by others in normal conversations in English” (Thủ tướng Chính phủ [The Prime Minister], 2018). The important role and special status of English can also be seen in the number of applicants registering to present research overviews in English compared to other foreign languages. According to the Vietnamese State Council for Professorship, over the past three years, the number of professor and associate professor applicants registering to present their research overviews in English in 28 disciplinary and interdisciplinary councils always far surpassed the number of candidates registering to present their research overviews in other foreign languages: 60 per cent in English compared to 20 per cent in French, 10 per cent in Russian, 5 per cent in German, and 5 per cent in other foreign languages (personal communication with Prof. Dr.Sc. Tran Van Nhung, former General Secretary of the Vietnamese State Council for Professorship at 8.45 am, December 4, 2017).

3.4. *English in the non-formal education sector*

Like many other countries in the world, the need to learn English of Vietnamese people is so strong that it is not just taught and learned in the formal or public education sector (the formal education system) but also in the non-formal or private education sector. Vietnam is now witnessing the presence of hundreds of English language schools, large and small, having origins from English-speaking countries such as the British Council, Language Links, Apollo, EQuest, Oxford Language UK Vietnam, Hanoi International School, Cambridge International Examinations, TOEFL and TOEIC, to name but a few (for more detail, see ESL/Base). These private institutions offer English courses and testing services at different levels of proficiency; they provide

a wide range of up-to-date English textbooks and teaching materials written by both native and non-native speakers of English, meeting a wide range of specific needs of the learners, and enriching the English language teaching landscape in Vietnam.

Today many Vietnamese corporate advertisements focus not on promoting the quality of a product, but on communicating an attitude, experience, or lifestyle that is attractive to their target audience. Many Vietnamese advertising companies capitalize on lingual imagery, using Vietnamese to communicate intra-nationally and English to communicate globally. Giant in technology, industry, commerce Vingroup, giant in telecommunications Viettel, leading enterprise in finance, land, and commerce FLC Group, and leading Garment Joint Stock Company Garco 10 are notable examples here.

In summary, it can be said that English has made its presence in many domains of activity in Vietnam. It is taught and learned in education, and it is used in communication, science, technology, trade, tourism, industry, and advertising. The presence of English in these domains contributes to strengthening its uncompetable position as compared to other foreign languages recognized in Vietnam.

4. **English in relation to Vietnamese and other foreign languages**

It is obvious that there is currently no language in the world that has the spreading power like English. The spreading power of English over many parts of the world not only affects the status of the local or indigenous languages but also the status of other foreign languages being taught, learned and used. Like many other countries that are subsumed under the Outer-Circle in Kachru (1985)'s model, the expansion of English in Vietnam may be said to be beneficial on the one hand and detrimental on the other. The beneficial aspect of English can be seen in its function and role as a *lingua franca* for Vietnam to communicate with people

around the world. The detrimental effects, in contrast, can be seen in what is referred to as “social stratification, exclusion, and problems associated with education and literacy, status of languages other than English, and language rights” (Bamgbose, 2006, p.650). However, as the prominent American sociolinguist Fishman (1999, p.37) has aptly put it, “spreading languages often come to be hated because they can disadvantage many as they provide advantages for some”. The expansion of English to many domains of activity in Vietnam sooner or later will stir up the following questions: (1) “Can the expansion of English pose any threats to Vietnamese?”, and (2) “To what extent does the expansion of English challenge the status of other foreign languages being taught in Vietnam?” These questions will be addressed in the sections that follow.

4.1. Can the expansion of English pose any threats to Vietnamese?

When asked the first question, the answer by many people in present-day Vietnam has, of course, to be in the affirmative “No”, given the fact that the language planning with respect to Vietnamese has been deliberate and explicit: Vietnamese is codified in the 2013 Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam as “ngôn ngữ quốc gia” (the national language) (Quốc hội nước Cộng hoà Xã hội Chủ nghĩa Việt Nam [the National Assembly], 2013). This official and irreplaceable status of Vietnamese is reconfirmed in the Vietnamese 2019 Education Law which states: “Tiếng Việt là ngôn ngữ chính thức dùng trong cơ sở giáo dục” (Vietnamese is the official language used in educational institutions) (Quốc hội nước Cộng hoà Xã hội Chủ nghĩa Việt Nam [the National Assembly], 2019). Further, in the mind of many Vietnamese people, Vietnamese is the language of tradition, the symbol, the soul, and the essence of the Vietnamese nation; it is a means of national cohesion, a badge of national identity, the medium of literary and other forms of cultural

life in Vietnam for thousands of years while English in the current framework of the Vietnamese constitution has no official status; and although claimed by many to be important and beneficial, English only has a functional role: being used as a means for international communication, helping Vietnamese people communicate with the world, modernize their country, and integrate into the world in the context of globalization (cf. May, 2001). The status of Vietnamese as the national language in the current context is, therefore, not at issue.

A closer look at the current state of the art, however, will reveal that although the challenge of English to the Vietnamese language is not so much visible, with the drastic expansion of English to so many spheres of activities in Vietnam, the answer to the question “Can the expansion of English pose any threats to Vietnamese?” may be “Yes”. It has been observed in recent years that apart from the activities that require the use of English, one can see increasingly more and more young Vietnamese people have been using English to communicate with each other in daily life either directly (face-to-face) or indirectly (via the Internet and other social media), and that in their interaction they have often used Vietnamese mixed with English, a phenomenon commonly referred to by sociolinguists (such as Wardhaugh, 1990; Tay, 1996; and Holmes, 2008) as “code-mixing” or “code switching”. It has also been observed that over the past few years the Vietnamese Government and MoET have issued a number of policies to give priority to and to encourage the teaching, learning, and using of English throughout Vietnam such as giving permits to establish bilingual schools (using both Vietnamese and English as the media of instruction), international schools (using English as the main medium of instruction), providing fund for intensive English programmes at both general school and tertiary levels, for developing syllabuses and teaching

materials for children to learn English at early age (from the first grade, even from the kindergarten); encouraging higher education institutions to use English as a medium of instruction through programmes such as MoET's Advanced Programmes and VNU, Hanoi's Strategic Programme. The increasing use of English among the young people, and the Government's policies to prioritize and promote the teaching, learning and using of English can improve the quality of teaching and learning English and enrich the Vietnamese language; but they can raise a feeling of fear that the purity of the Vietnamese language will be eroded and the language will gradually be lost. These realities, if considered seriously, can be a factor that constitutes the challenge of English to the status of Vietnamese.

Thoughtful sociolinguists such as Fishman (1991, 2001) and Rappa and Wee (2006) warn that policies and ways to encourage the use of an external language (the English language

in this case) without appropriate control will diminish the use and may even exterminate an indigenous language. Rappa and Wee (2006), adapting Fishman (1991), whose study was based on North American context where several languages of the American Indian had been lost as a result of the expansion of English, provide a scale of eight stages to illustrate how in a given North American society, an indigenous language, while widely used in highly prestigious domains, can, over time, become restricted to 'mere' community and family-based interactions. They warn that as younger generations of speakers lose touch with the language so that most speakers tend to come from the older generations, there is, in the final stage, a very real possibility that indigenous language may be completely displaced, and correlating with this decline in the fortunes of the indigenous language is the rise of its potential replacement, the external language (English in this case). For reference purposes, these stages are reproduced as follows:

- Stage 1: use of the indigenous language in prestige domains (higher level educational, occupational, governmental, media-related functions)
- Stage 2: use of the indigenous language in less prestigious domains (lower level educational, occupational, governmental, media-related functions)
- Stage 3: use of the indigenous language in the work sphere, mainly for informal interaction
- Stage 4: use of the indigenous language as medium of instruction in education
- Stage 5: informal use of the indigenous language in the home, school, and community
- Stage 6: intergenerational family transmission of the indigenous language
- Stage 7: indigenous language still spoken, but most speakers are beyond child-bearing age
- Stage 8: remaining speakers of the indigenous language are old and dying out

(Rappa & Wee, 2006, p.131)

Although it may no longer be the days when English was intended to take its presence as a dominant language for granted in such a country of independence and sovereignty as Vietnam and it may be a bit too early to talk about the replacement of Vietnamese by English in Vietnam, what foreign language policies have been issued, and how English has been taught, learned, and used in Vietnam in combination with what sociolinguists have warned us from the results of their studies

concerning the cause to the decline or death of an indigenous language by an external language deserve serious consideration, and can be a useful reference for Vietnamese language policy makers.

4.2. To what extent does the expansion of English challenge the status of other foreign languages?

In policy, MoET's (2018) *General School Education Curriculum* (Bộ Giáo dục và Đào

ạo [MoET], 2018a) only mentions generally the terms “ngoại ngữ” (foreign language), “ngoại ngữ 1” (foreign language 1) which is a compulsory subject, and “ngoại ngữ 2” (foreign language 2) which is an optional subject. It, however, does not state explicitly how many foreign languages are taught in Vietnamese schools. Neither does it state explicitly what is/are foreign language(s) 1 and what is/are foreign language(s) 2. In practice, however, most of the Government’s work has been focusing on preparing curriculum and textbooks for the teaching and learning of English as foreign language 1. Other foreign languages such as Chinese, Russian, Japanese, Korean, German, and French, by implication and if taught, are foreign languages 2 (an optional subject). Similarly, at tertiary level, the Government’s Decision 2080 does not state explicitly what foreign language(s) should be taught, but what is actually happening at this level of education is that the number of undergraduates and graduates, including doctoral students enrolling for English always takes up a predominant percentage: around 94-96%. It is clear that in a multi-foreign language environment, when one foreign language prevails, the others will inevitably be relegated to an inferior position, and thus will have to suffer (cf. Herriman and Burnaby, 1996). The sufferance of other foreign languages from the dominant position of English in Vietnam can be seen in at least two respects. First, due to the dominance of English, the number of learners studying other foreign languages in the Vietnamese formal educational system (from primary to tertiary level) has declined sharply, presently accounting for very modest proportion: 2-3% in general school education and 4-6% in tertiary education. Second, the decline in status of other foreign languages may cause psychological problems to their users (those who are teaching, learning and working with those foreign languages). Many of these users express concern that with the rise of English to the monopoly position, the other

foreign languages will disappear some day in the Vietnamese foreign language landscape (cf. Hoàng Thị Yến, 2014). Some people may want French, Russian, Chinese, Japanese and other languages to remain in competition with English because they see this competition as a corollary of the struggle for a more satisfactory balance among the foreign languages being taught and learned in Vietnam. They are sensitive to the need Vietnam has of these foreign languages for an open and multi-lingual world. The dominance of English in the foreign language landscape in Vietnam is regrettable, but in the present state of affairs it seems that no one could do anything except exercising the “letting do” or “laissez-faire” policy.

4.3. *The future of English in Vietnam*

It [the English language] is everywhere. 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, about a third of the world’s population are in some sense exposed to it and by 2050, it is predicted, half the world will be more or less proficient in it. It is the language of globalization—of international business, politics and diplomacy. It is the language of computers and the Internet. You’ll see it on posters in Cote d’Ivoire, you’ll hear it in pop songs in Tokyo, you’ll read it in official documents in Phnom Penh. Deutsche Welle broadcasts in it. Bjork, an Icelander, sings in it. French business schools teach in it. It is the medium of expression in cabinet meetings in Bolivia. Truly, the tongue spoken back in the 1300s only by the ‘low people’ of England, as Robert of Gloucester put it at the time, has come a long way. It is now the global language. “A World Empire by Other Means: The Triumph of English,”

(*The Economist*, cited in Johnson, 2009, p.131)

The above quote is intended to arrive at two things. First, the status of English as a highly valued international and global language in the world and as the most important foreign language in present-day Vietnam is indisputable. Second, it suggests that it might be inappropriate to raise a question about the future of a world language such as English when it is in the frenzy boom. However, based on what has happened to the growth and decline of several world *lingua francas* and to some of the foreign languages taught and learned in the history of foreign language teaching in Vietnam, some thoughtful and far-seeing persons, sooner or later, might come up with a question, “How long can English exist and prevail in the world and in Vietnam?” Futurology is always a risky business; predicting the future of a world *lingua franca* and, likewise, a dominant foreign language being taught and used in a country is not an exception. But if we agree that all things have a beginning, a development, and an end, the life span of the English language as a thing probably follows the same route. The history of world languages has seen the beginning, the expansion or the spread, and the decline of several *lingua francas* such as Latin and Greek. Similarly, the history of foreign language teaching in Vietnam has witnessed the prevalence of the Chinese script used as the official written language in Court of the Vietnamese feudal dynasties and its decline during the French colonization period (from 1959 to 1954). The history of foreign language teaching in Vietnam has also experienced the decline in status of the French language in North Vietnam in the period of 1954-1975, leaving the thrown for the Russian and Chinese languages in the North and the American English language in the South. In 1975 when the Americans lost the war and were forced to withdraw from Vietnam, the English language lost its status, giving dominance to the Russian language throughout the reunified Vietnam. And since the collapse of socialist regime in the Soviet Union in 1991, the Russian language began to decline, ceding its almost

monopoly position to the English language until today (more detail on these points, see Do, 2007; Hoang, 2010b, 2011, 2016a). Based on these facts, it can be predicted that English may also decline and lose its status in the world as well as in Vietnam, but the question “When will the English language decline as its predecessor *lingua francas*?” has probably no definitive answer. However, judging the way the English language has expanded its presence by leaps and bounds in the world during the past few centuries and in Vietnam during the past 30 years or so, and given the current socio-cultural context in the world and in Vietnam in which English is operating, there can be no doubt whatsoever that its future is practically guaranteed for the foreseeable future and probably even beyond. In other words, no matter how the world may be changed, and, similarly, no matter how Vietnam may be changed, the status of English as an international and global language in the world and as a dominant foreign language in Vietnam will not be challenged at least in this 21st century (cf. Laurdes et al., 2006). Different from the past centuries when the expansion of English was backed up by military and economic power, English is now spontaneously evolving towards the status of the most important world language in both international and global senses. It is naturally received and welcomed in Vietnam as the language of modernity and globalization. In the current context, English is no longer the property of the British, nor is it the property of those countries in the Inner Circle; it “has already grown to be independent of any form of social control” (Crystal, 1997, p.139). Its expansion and impact on the political, economic and social life of the modern world is so strong that “Many people would like to resist the dominance of English. The strategic response would seem to be: do away with English. Don’t teach it, or do anything to perpetuate its standing in the community. But most serious thinkers believe that that won’t now work: English is too deeply entrenched, and if people are deprived of the chance of learning it they are the ones who

suffer. That was not the case 50 years ago (over 60 years ago I would add to it) from now; but for the moment that is how it is. It seems that if you want to resist the exploitative power of English, then you have to use English to do it” (Halliday, 2017, p.102).

4.4. Will English become a second language in Vietnam?

English is the most widely taught, learned and used in Vietnam, serving different purposes in education, science and technology, commerce, diplomacy, tourism, and culture exchanges. “English is reaching heights never before attained by any language, and it is leaving other tongues behind in the dust” (Johnson, 2009, p.143). Wherein, an important question arises here that needs to be addressed, “Can English become a second language in the Vietnam?” It should be noted that although there exist two terms “foreign language” and “second language”, the distinction between them is not always clear-cut. In fact, a number of features which are found in the category of “foreign language” can also be found in the category of “second language” and vice versa. But generally we must recognize that foreign language learning is different from second language learning. In foreign language learning the target language is rarely heard and used outside the classroom. In second language learning, in contrast, the learner is surrounded by a community that uses the language for its daily purposes. In foreign language learning, the class is limited to what the teacher can give or arrange for students to receive; whereas in second language learning, the class contribution can be immediately supplemented at the will of the students who do the shopping, talk to their fellow students on a bus or on the way to school, watch the target language TV channels, or read the target language newspapers or magazines (printed or electronic), and so on. Considered from this point of view, English is and will not be a second language in Vietnam for the following reasons:

First, unlike countries which used to be Britain’s colonies, English has no population base in Vietnam.

Secondly, English is not the language of official institutions: the law courts, the National Assembly, and the Government (from central to local) do not use it.

Thirdly, English it is not the language of the Vietnamese media: with some very small exception, Vietnamese newspapers, radios and television broadcasts are all in Vietnamese.

Fourthly, English is not the language of education in the sense that it is not used as a medium of instruction; it is only a subject taught in schools and universities.

Fifthly, although English is a criterion for some people to get a job or to be promoted in Government services and public institutions, the extent to which those people use English in their workplaces is very limited.

Sixthly, despite the fact that a sizeable percentage of Vietnamese people (school children, university students, scientists, and business people) are learning English, English-using population is very limited.

And perhaps finally, English is not the language used in the home, and unlike Vietnamese English does not play an essential role in the Vietnamese national or social life.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we have made an attempt to examine the roles and status of English in present-day Vietnam. We have set the scene for our study by providing an overview of the beginning, the development (expansion), and the domination of the English language in the world linguistic space. From this broader context, we have examined in some detail the roles and status of English in a number of spheres in the Vietnamese society. It is evident from our examination that English is enjoying a special status in the Vietnamese linguistic space. The importance of English is seen at both state and individual levels.

At the state level, English is recognized by the Vietnamese Government as an essential means of communication to help Vietnam move forwards, a valuable resource for the implementation of national modernization programmes, and an important platform for international competition. At the individual level, English proficiency is seen by many Vietnamese people as a key to opening up a range of opportunities. Our discussion has shown that English language education takes place both formally and informally: it takes place inside, outside and beyond the Vietnamese formal education system. Inside the formal education system, English is available at all levels (from the primary to the doctoral level): it is an optional school subject from Grade 1 to Grade 2, and a compulsory school subject (foreign language 1) from Grade 3 through to Grade 12; it is a requirement for students to get high school certificates, a pre-requisite for entry into several tertiary institutions, a required subject for undergraduates, graduates, and doctoral students to be conferred respective diplomas. Outside the formal education system, English courses of all levels are offered in various private language centers. And beyond the formal education system, English plays a number of important roles: it is a gate-keeper for many job seekers, a criterion for promotion, and a must for a scholar or an academic to be conferred the title of professorship or associate professorship. There is no doubt that Vietnam has adopted English as its primary linguistic resource to complement Vietnamese. We have also attempted an answer to several critical issues such as whether the status of the Vietnamese language – our mother tongue – is challenged, to what extent other foreign languages are affected as the result of the expansion of English, and whether English will become a second language in Vietnam. It is evident from my discussion that although English is a foreign language number 1

in Vietnam, it cannot pose any significant threats to the status of Vietnamese: in the present context, the place of Vietnamese as the sole national language seems to remain unchallenged. Some people would like English to become a second official language besides Vietnamese, but, as we have argued above and elsewhere (see Hoang, 2011, 2016), no matter how important English is in the Vietnamese linguistic space, it will not be a second language in the proper sense of the term. We have also tried to show that when a language gains or is given a predominant status, the other(s) are seen to have lost status and thus have to suffer. The Vietnamese foreign language context is an obvious example: the English language has the largest number of learners, making it a foreign language of monopoly. In the years to come, English will continue to enjoy a special status and play more roles: it will continue to be the most needed and the most widely taught and learned foreign language in Vietnam; and along with its expansion it will continue to more or less challenge the status of Vietnamese and diminish the status of other foreign languages being taught in the Vietnamese education. These are the realities in the Vietnamese linguistic space that should be taken into consideration if we really want to formulate a balanced language policy for the sustainable development of Vietnam at present and in the future.

References

Vietnamese

- Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MoET] (2014). *Khung năng lực ngoại ngữ 6 bậc dùng cho Việt Nam* (Six-level Foreign Language Proficiency Framework for Vietnam). (Ban hành kèm theo Thông tư số 01/2014/TT-BGDĐT ngày 24 tháng 01 năm 2014 của Bộ trưởng Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo).
- Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MoET] (2018a). *Chương trình giáo dục phổ thông: Chương trình tổng thể* (General School Education Curriculum). (Ban hành kèm theo Thông tư số 32/2018/TT-BGDĐT ngày 26 tháng 12 năm 2018 của Bộ trưởng Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo).

- Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MoET] (2018b). *Chương trình giáo dục phổ thông môn tiếng Anh* (General School Education English Curriculum). (Ban hành kèm theo Thông tư số 32/2018/TT-BGDĐT ngày 26 tháng 12 năm 2018 của Bộ trưởng Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo).
- Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MoET] (2018c). *Chương trình giáo dục phổ thông làm quen tiếng Anh lớp 1 và lớp 2* (General School Education Introductory English Curriculum for Grade 1 and Grade 2). (Ban hành kèm theo Thông tư số 32/2018/TT-BGDĐT ngày 26 tháng 12 năm 2018 của Bộ trưởng Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo).
- Bộ Giáo dục và Đào tạo [MoET] (forthcoming). *Chương trình cho trẻ mẫu giáo làm quen với tiếng Anh* (Introductory English Curriculum for Kindergartens).
- Hoàng Thị Yên (2014). Chính sách giáo dục ngoại ngữ của Hàn Quốc (Foreign Language Policy in South Korea). Tạp chí *Viện Nghiên cứu Đông Bắc Á – Viện Hàn lâm Khoa học Xã hội Việt Nam* (Journal of North-east Asian Studies – Academy of Social Sciences), 5, 22-32.
- Hoàng Văn Vân (2008). Dạy ngoại ngữ không chuyên ở các trường đại học Việt Nam: Dạy ngoại ngữ đại cương, dạy ngoại ngữ chuyên ngành hay kết hợp cả hai? (Teaching Foreign Languages as a Subject at Tertiary Education in Vietnam: Which Register should We Teach: General, Academic or a Combination of the Two?). Tạp chí *Khoa học, ĐHQGHN (VNU Journal of Science)*, 23(2S) (Phụ chương: Những vấn đề dạy-học tiếng Anh chuyên ngành), 181-190.
- Hoàng Văn Vân (2010a). *Dạy tiếng Anh không chuyên ở các trường đại học Việt Nam: những vấn đề lý luận và thực tiễn* (Teaching English as a Subject in Vietnamese Universities: Theoretical and Practical Issues). Hà Nội: Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội.
- Hoàng Văn Vân (2011). Vị thế của tiếng Anh trên thế giới và ở Việt Nam (The Status of English in the World and in Vietnam). Tạp chí *Ngôn ngữ (Journal of Language)*, 1 (260), 10-18.
- Hoàng Văn Vân (2016a). Vị thế của tiếng Anh trong thời kì hội nhập và một số hàm ý cho việc hoạch định chính sách ngoại ngữ ở Việt Nam (The Status of English in the Context of Integration and Some Implications for Language Policy Planning in Vietnam). Tạp chí *Khoa học Ngoại ngữ (Journal of Foreign Languages Science)*, 46, 12-27.
- Quốc hội nước Cộng hòa Xã hội Chủ nghĩa Việt Nam [The National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam] (2013). *Hiến pháp nước Cộng hòa Xã hội Chủ nghĩa Việt Nam* [The Constitution of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam]. (Ban hành ngày 28 tháng 11 năm 2013).
- Quốc hội nước Cộng hòa Xã hội Chủ nghĩa Việt Nam [The National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam] (2019). *Luật giáo dục* (Education Law). Luật số 43/2019/QH14. (Ban hành ngày 14 tháng 6 năm 2019).
- Thủ tướng Chính phủ [The Prime Minister] (2001). *Chỉ thị về việc đổi mới chương trình giáo dục phổ thông thực hiện Nghị quyết số 40/2000/QH10 của Quốc hội* (Directive on the Renovation of the General School Education Curriculum to Implement Resolution No. 40/2000/QH10 of the National Assembly). Số 14/2001 CT-TTg ngày 11 tháng 6 năm 2001.
- Thủ tướng Chính phủ [The Prime Minister] (2008). *Quyết định về việc phê duyệt Đề án Dạy và học ngoại ngữ trong hệ thống giáo dục quốc dân giai đoạn 2008-2020* (Decision on the Approval of the Project “Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System for the Period 2008-2020”). (Ban hành kèm theo Quyết định số 1400/QĐ-TTg ngày 30 tháng 9 năm 2008 của Thủ tướng Chính phủ).
- Thủ tướng Chính phủ [The Prime Minister] (2017). *Quyết định phê duyệt, điều chỉnh, bổ sung Đề án dạy và học ngoại ngữ trong hệ thống giáo dục quốc dân giai đoạn 2017 – 2025* (Decision on the Approval, Adjustment and Supplementation of the Project “Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages in the National Education System for the Period of 2017 – 2025”). (Ban hành kèm theo Quyết định số 2080/QĐ-TTg ngày 22 tháng 12 năm 2017 của Thủ tướng Chính phủ).
- Thủ tướng Chính phủ [The Prime Minister] (2018). *Quyết định ban hành quy định tiêu chuẩn, thủ tục xét công nhận tiêu chuẩn và bổ nhiệm chức danh giáo sư, phó giáo sư; thủ tục hủy bỏ công nhận chức danh và miễn nhiệm chức danh giáo sư, phó giáo sư* (Decision on Promulgating Regulations on Standards and Procedures for Considering and Recognizing Standards and Appointing Professors and Associate Professors; Procedures for Cancellation of Recognition and Dismissal of the Titles of Professorship and Associate Professorship). (Ban hành kèm theo Quyết định số 37/QĐ-TTg ngày 31 tháng 8 năm 2018 của Thủ tướng Chính phủ).
- Viện Khoa học Giáo dục Việt Nam [Vietnam National Institute for Educational Sciences] (1989). *Chương trình môn tiếng Anh: Trường phổ thông Việt Nam* (English Curriculum for Vietnamese Upper Secondary Schools). Hà Nội: Nhà xuất bản Giáo dục.

English

- Bamgbose, A. (2006). A Recurring Decimal: English in Language Policy and Planning. (In) *The Handbook of World Englishes*, pp. 645-660. Kachru, B. B., Y. Kachru & C. L. Nelson (Eds.). Singapore: Blackwell.
- Broughton, et al. (1978). *Teaching English as a Foreign Language*. London, Henley and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Cheshire, J. (1996). Introduction: Sociolinguistics and English around the World. (In) *English around*

- the World: Sociolinguistic Perspectives*, pp. 1-12. Cheshire, J. (Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, D. (1997). *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Crystal, D. (2012). *English as a Global Language*. Second Edition (Canto classics). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Do, H.T. (2007). The Role of English in Vietnam's Foreign Policy: A Brief History. Retrieved 18 Apr. 2019 from <https://www.worldwide.rs/en/role-english-vietnams-foreign-language-policy-brief-history/>
- ESL/Base. *English Language Schools in Vietnam*. Retrieved on March 24, 2019 from <https://www.eslbase.com/schools/vietnam>
- Fishman, J.A. (1991). *Reversing Language Shift: Theoretical and Empirical Foundations of Assistance to Threatened Languages*. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (2017). Written Language, Standard Language, Global Language. (In) *Halliday in the 21st Century*, pp. 87-103. Webster, J. (Ed.). Great Britain: Bloomsbury.
- Herriman, M., & Burnaby, B. (1996). Introduction. (In) *Language Policies in English-dominant Countries*. Clevedon, Philadelphia, Adelaide: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Hoang, V.V. (2010b). The Current Situation and Issues of the Teaching of English in Vietnam. (In) *Ritsumeikan Studies in Language and Culture*, 22(1), 7-18.
- Hoang, V.V. (2013). The Role of English in the Internationalization of Higher Education in Vietnam. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, 29 (1), 72-80.
- Hoang, V.V. (2015). The Development of the Ten-year English Textbook Series for Vietnamese Schools under the National Foreign Languages Project 2020: A Cross-cultural Collaborative Experience. Paper Addressed at the Plenary Session of the *International TESOL Symposium: English Language Innovation, Implementation, and Sustainability*, Held in Danang, Vietnam on 28-29 July, 2015. Reprinted in *VNU Journal of Science – Foreign Studies*, 31(3), 1-17.
- Hoang, V.V. (2016b). Renovation in Curriculum Design and Textbook Development: An Effective Solution to Improving the Quality of English Education in Vietnamese Schools in the Context of Integration and Globalization. *VNU Journal of Sciences – Education Research*, 32(4), 9-20.
- Holmes, J. (2008). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Third Edition. Malaysia: Pearson Education Ltd.
- Honna, N. (2006). East Asian Englishes. (In) *The Handbook of World Englishes*, pp. 114-129. Kachru, B. B., Y. Kachru & C. L. Nelson (Eds.). Singapore: Blackwell.
- Johnson, A. (2009). The Rise of English: The Language of Globalization in China and the European Union. *Macalester International*, 22, 131-168.
- Kachru, B. B. (1985). Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the outer circle. (In) *English in the World: Teaching and Learning the Language and Literatures*, pp. 11-30. Quirk, R. & Widdowson, H. G. (Eds.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press and the British Council.
- Kachru, B. (1992). World Englishes: Approaches, Issues and Resources. *Language Teaching*, 25, 1-14. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Kachru, B.B. et al (Eds.) (2006). *The Handbook of Englishes*. Singapore: Blackwell Publishing.
- King, R.D. (2006). The Beginnings. (In) *The Handbook of World Englishes*, pp. 19-29. Kachru, B. B., Y. Kachru & C. L. Nelson (Eds.). Singapore: Blackwell.
- Laurdes, M. Bautista, S., & Gonzalez, A.B. (2006). Southeast Asian Englishes. (In) *The Handbook of World Englishes*, pp. 130-144. Kachru, B. B., Y. Kachru & C. L. Nelson (Eds.). Singapore: Blackwell.
- May, S. (2001). *Language and Minority Rights: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and the Politics of Language*. London: Longman.
- Phillipson, R. (1997). *Linguistic Imperialism*. Fourth impression. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rappa, A. L., & Wee, L. (2006). *Language Policy and Modernity in Southeast Asia: Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand*. Singapore: Springer.
- Sarwar, Z. (2000). The Golden Gates of English in the Golden Context. (In) Ho. W. K & C. Ward (Eds.). *Language in the Global Context. Implications for the Language Classroom* (RELC Anthology Series 44, pp. 32-56). Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.
- Tay, M.W.J. (1996). Southeast Asia and Hong Kong. (In) *English Around the World: Sociolinguistic Perspectives*, pp. 319-332. Cheshire, J. (Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wardhaugh, R. (1990). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell.

VAI TRÒ VÀ VỊ THẾ CỦA TIẾNG ANH Ở VIỆT NAM NGÀY NAY: PHÂN TÍCH TỪ BÌNH DIỆN VĂN HOÁ - XÃ HỘI

Hoàng Văn Vân

Trung tâm Nghiên cứu giáo dục ngoại ngữ, ngôn ngữ và quốc tế học,

Trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ, ĐHQGHN,

Phạm Văn Đồng, Cầu Giấy, Hà Nội, Việt Nam

Tóm tắt: Khởi đầu từ một tập hợp các phương ngữ nhỏ ở các quận phía nam nước Anh, tiếng Anh đã vượt xa ra khỏi phạm vi quốc gia và hiện tại đã củng cố sức mạnh của nó như là ngôn ngữ được sử dụng rộng rãi nhất trên thế giới để phục vụ cho kinh doanh, khoa học, truyền thông và công nghệ, và nhiều mục đích khác (Cheshire, 1996; Crystal, 1997, 2012; Halliday, 2017). Ở Việt Nam, kể từ *Đổi mới* được Đảng Cộng sản Việt Nam khởi xướng vào năm 1986, tiếng Anh đã trở thành ngoại ngữ quan trọng nhất được dạy và sử dụng trên phạm vi toàn quốc, chỉ đứng sau tiếng Việt – ngôn ngữ quốc gia. Tại sao tiếng Anh lại có được vị thế thống trị như vậy trong không gian ngôn ngữ ở Việt Nam? Vai trò và vị thế của tiếng Anh ở Việt Nam hiện tại là gì? Sự bành trướng của tiếng Anh có gây ra mối đe dọa nào cho tiếng Việt không? Sự bành trướng của tiếng Anh thách thức các ngoại ngữ khác được dạy và học ở Việt Nam đến mức độ nào? Tiếng Anh sẽ trở thành ngôn ngữ chính thức thứ hai Việt Nam hay không? Đó là những vấn đề trọng tâm được lần lượt phân tích và giải quyết trong bài viết này.

Từ khóa: tiếng Anh, vai trò, vị thế, ngôn ngữ quốc gia, ngôn ngữ thứ hai, ngoại ngữ