

South-East Asia: Multilingualism for all?

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The ten countries in South-east Asia differ in size, population, history, economics, politics, culture, languages spoken and literacy rate. The linguistic diversity and the complex language situation provide fascinating material for research. Though several of the countries have a bilingual policy (their national language plus either English as a second language or English as a foreign language), in reality, more than two languages are spoken. In Indonesia, for example, with a population of about 210 million people, hundreds of local languages are used in different parts of the country. Even Singapore, the smallest country, is multi-ethnic and multilingual, with four official languages, and several languages used for intra- and inter-ethnic communication.

The speaker will describe the rich multi-linguistic situation in this region, and discuss the dilemma, struggle for (national and personal) identity, language policies and the endangering of many (indigenous) languages in this post-colonial age as English gains importance as a world language in a globalized world.