

Adopt a language policy, Govt told

by
Jessie Yim

TWO prominent educationalists warned yesterday that if the Government does not adopt a language policy, most students will end up handicapped — in English and Chinese.

Dr Wang Gungwu, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hongkong, said the lack of such a policy, which could also cope with changes in society, had caused serious learning problems for most secondary school students here.

Dr Benjamin T'sou, president of the Linguistic Society of Hongkong, said that without effective measures "society could be beset with language fatigue and end up with semi-linguals."

Both were speaking at an international conference on Language Policy and Planning organised by the Linguistic Society of Hongkong.

In attendance were educators, language experts and professionals from many parts of the world.

Dr Wang also criticised the second report of the

Education Commission.

He said it neglected the necessity for secondary schools to prepare students for tertiary education.

Recommendations of the report, he added, would break up the integrity of the whole education system.

Dr Wang said the long-established A-Level examination for Form 7 students was actually derived from a mono-linguistic society — the language adopted obviously was English.

In the past, he said, the system and the examination that went with it operated well.

"But since the early 1970s Hongkong society has become increasingly bilingual, and no less so than in the schools," he said.

Nevertheless, secondary school students have developed against a backdrop of a changing socio-economic society, he said.

"But at this time, the lack of language planning ensured A-level syllabuses...to persist through profound changes.

"The result was to create serious learning problems for the majority of Hongkong's secondary school students," he said.

On the question of the No 2 report of the Education Commission, he said he appreciated a study of language education in the context of a bilingual society.

But then, when the commission dealt with the future of English as the teaching medium in secondary schools, he added, the crucial needs of the majority of the tertiary institutions were not systematically examined.

"The commission continued to treat secondary and tertiary education separately and argued that secondary education was to meet the needs of society in general," he said.

Dr Wang emphasised that it was extremely important that secondary education should prepare students for further education.

He said the commission's recommendations (especially an introduction of an immediate level examination for Form 6 students) would break up the integrity of the whole system.

The objection from the University of Hongkong appears to "have fallen on deaf ears," he added.

The "painful decision" to change the University of Hongkong's degree structure from three to four years was a result of it, he said.

On the future language policy of the University of Hongkong, Dr Wang said the university had planned bridging programmes to prepare its students to meet the language demands for the courses.

The Acting Governor, Sir David Akers-Jones, who also attended the meeting, said the Government will carefully examine the criticisms and consider the suggestions put forward by the two educationalists.