Profiles of Malaysian Malay Standard Accent and Identity Values

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the profiles of the standard accent of Malay language in Malaysia. The discussions are linked with the issues of identity and integration values. For this purpose, five phonological variables which had been identified as relevant in these regards were chosen and analysed, namely, the final syllable open-ended vowel (a) such as in *saya* 'I', the final syllable close-ended vowel (i) such as in *bilik* 'room' and (u) such as in *duduk* 'sit', the initial (r) such as in *rumah* 'home', and the post-vocalic (r) such as in *pasar* 'market'. The pronunciation of these variables by the informants in four formal speech styles, which had been specially designed, was recorded. A total of 125 informants from four cities were involved in this study. The profile of accent was examined from five social variables. These include the informants' socio-economic status, gender, age, geographical location and native or non-native speaker factor. The study reveals that the notion of the national standard accent of Malaysian Malay - at some point - has been demonstrated by the informants and this is applicable through all the five social variables, within two patterns of phonological variables. Firstly, the phonological variables of (i), (u), and $(r)_1$ were used prominently as standard accent, and secondly, (a) and $(r)_2$ were used alternately between the standard and non-standard accents. The findings illustrate the existence and the growth of national identity and integration values, where the informants were able to accommodate their accent to the standard variation in the formal context of the study. In this sense, they are also inclined to identify themselves more with the national identity as compared to the local identity.

INTRODUCTION

The language spoken by someone and his/her identity as a speaker of a language is inseparable. According to Crystal (2003), "language is seen as the primary outward sign of a group's identity" (p. 34), and language signals who we are and where we belong to, in terms of age, sex, social status, personality, intelligence, social group, geographical, nationality, contextual background, etc. For Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (in Tabouret-Keller, 1997), language acts are perceived as acts of identity. Furthermore, according to Tabouret-Keller (1997), features of the language are the link which binds individual and social identities simultaneously. The features imply the whole range of language use, from phonetic to lexical units, syntactic structures, and even in personal names. This notion implies that the relationship between language and identity is often very strong even though with a single phonemic feature; for instance, we can include and exclude someone to or from any social group (Tabouret-Keller, 1997).

Hence, from the linguistic point of view, there is a social meaning for phonological aspects, especially in relation to integration and identity of a language community (cf. Honey, 1997). Montgomery (1995, p. 64) asserts that variations in pronunciation can become powerful indicators of regional identity and affiliation. Meanwhile, differences in the patterns of variation caused by geographical or spatial isolation are regularly transformed into powerful mechanisms for asserting and recognizing social differences (Spolsky, 1998). Furthermore, in the case of English for example, post-vocalic (r), such as in *car* and *fourth* is capable of implying social significance. In this context, there are two variants of (r) - pronounced or silent. In Scotland, Ireland, Boston, New York, and eastern USA, pronounced (r) is a standard prestige accent and implies the integration and identity of English speakers of those regions (Holmes, 2001). Besides that, there are also accent[2] differences between British, USA, and Australian English. The different accents show the identity and simultaneously imply the national integration of the respective nations. In line with that, Coupland and Bishop (2007) found that British's accent-types associated with 'standard' speech are strongly favoured in the prestige and attractiveness dimensions.

In a broader sense, language is apparently an effective instrument as a symbol of national identity and integration within a multi-racial nation and between separated geographical locations of a country. Crystal (2003, p. 34) asserts that "the most widely encountered symbol of emerging nationhood is language". In the context of Malaysia as a multi-racial country[3], the Malay language (bahasa Melayu), which is the national and official language of the country, plays the above-mentioned role. Meanwhile, in the dimension of regional differences, Malay language acts as an integrating device between the people of the Malay Peninsula with Sabah and Sarawak states in Borneo[4]. The Malay language was implemented as the national and official language of

Malaysia on September 1st, 1967 for the Malay Peninsula, 1973 for Sabah, and 1985 for Sarawak state (Salleh, 1993). Prior to that, English was the national and official language of the nation. However, in the implementation, neither pronunciation nor phonological matters was taken into consideration.

For Malaysia, pronunciation, specifically accent, can also be a symbol for national identity and integration[5]. This is due to the fact that the Malay language is not just spoken in Malaysia, but also in Indonesia (known as Bahasa Indonesia), Brunei, Singapore, and southern Thailand, but with different accents. The accents of the Malaysian Malay language among speakers who are separated by different regions and comprised multi-lingual and multi-dialectal society background could change if they take into account the issues of integration and national identity when conversing in a formal situation. In sociolinguistics, this phenomenon is termed as 'speech accommodation,' that is, using the same pronunciation as a way of showing identicalness (Holmes, 2001; Downes, 1998; Giles, 1984). For instance, based on our current observation, and when interviewed by the national electronic media, the Federal Ministers as well as singers from Sabah and Sarawak in Borneo were found to be trying to accommodate their Malay language accent to the standard Malay Peninsula language, which has the national features. In addition, Aman and Mustaffa (2009) found that a majority of informants (male, higher SES, younger age group) in

Kuching, Sarawak, are accommodative to the national standard accent when they interact in a formal context. These are early signs of their awareness towards the national identity.

This article is an attempt to seek answers concerning the profile of the national Malaysian Malay accents and its inter-relation with identity values. In more specific, the first aim was to obtain a usage level of the standard accent for five phonological variables in accordance to the five non-linguistic variables, namely, socio-economic status (SES), gender, age, native/non-native, and regional. Simultaneously from such figures, a discussion was carried out to see their links with identity values of the respective non-linguistic variables. A general comment on the national identity was also made.

Malaysian Malay National Accent

The standard Malay accent as a Malaysian national language in this article is the accent that is normally spoken in the formal official government broadcasting agency - Radio Television Malaysia (RTM) national news programme, governmental official meetings, as well as in national schools and higher learning institutions. According to Omar (1992), the standard Malay language is based on the Johor-Riau dialect [which covers the southern of Malay Peninsula areas like Johor, Singapore, Riau islands (in Indonesia), Melaka, Selangor, and up to Ipoh in Perak with minimum phonological differences] which had emerged incidental in nature and "become the model of correct

and prestigious usage without so much as a discussion or asking for a consensus from speakers" (p. 206). She also asserts that the southern style of pronunciation has become the norm for RTM even at the branch stations in northern states, Sabah and Sarawak and has a variety of uses in schools and in official functions.

In the case of Malaysian Malay language, the phonological variables which play a significant role in the issue of identity and potent as an integration function among their multilingual society are: open-ended (a), such as in *saya* 'I', close-ended (i), such as in *bilik* 'room', close-ended (u), such as in *duduk* 'sit', initial (r) such as in *rasa* 'feel', and post-vocalic (r) such as in *lebar* 'wide' (cf Aman, 1995; Omar, 1985). In a formal context, these variables are pronounced as the standard national accent, such as [sayə], [bile/], [dudo/], [rasə], and [lebar] respectively. The pronunciation reflects the Malaysian identity, which differs from the speakers of the Malay language of other countries, such as Indonesia or Brunei. Thus, the standard pronunciation of Malaysian Malay could be a manifestation of the national identity of its people. Nevertheless, there are also variations in pronunciation of those phonological variables in the daily use of the language, depending on the geographical location, local dialect (cf. Omar 1977), and race. So, there is [saya], [bilik], [duduk], [Fasa], and [leba], [lebaw] or [leb].

In the specific case of post-vocalic (r), it is worth providing a further explanation. Although in general, the national standard accent is based on Johor-Riau Malay dialect, as stated by Omar (1992), according to Onn (1980, p. 16) in Johor Malay local dialect, post-vocalic (r) is regularly omitted or realized as a non-trilled [ř], but in this article, we believe that based on a period of time and the impact of numerous factors such as modern education, Kuala Lumpur as a new political and administrative centralisation, and media (cf. Omar, 2004), there would be an accommodation in pronunciation among the speakers. This view is concord with Omar (1992, p. 219) who stated that "a standard language usually has as its basis a regional dialect, but in its evolution it tends to show developments which diverge from the base dialect from which it grows" and this is happening to the standard Malay, where it is now lacking in many of the features of Johor-Riau dialect (Omar 2004, p. 121)[6]. In the specific case of post-vocalic (r), Omar (1985, p. 139) stated

TABLE 1
Standard and Non-Standard Accents of Malaysian Malay

Phonological Variables	Standard Accents	E.g. Non-Standard Accents
(a) open-ended: *saya* 'I'	/ə/ – [sayə]	/a/, / / - [saya], [say]
(i) close-ended: *bilik* 'room'	/e/ – [bile/]	/i/ - [bilik]
(u) close-ended: *duduk* 'sit'	/o/ – [dudo/]	/u/ - [duduk]
(r)$_1$ initial: *rumah* 'home'	/r/ – [rumah]	/Φ/ - [Φumah]
(r)$_2$ rhotic: *pasar* 'market'	/r/ – [pasar]	/ø/, / / - [pasa]; [pas]

that there were tendencies for the final (r) to be pronounced as a fricative velar among RTM newscasters. In other words, post-vocalic (r) is increasing to be pronounced [r] slightly. Based on that argument, therefore in this article, our stand is to categorise the [r] as the standard variation (see also Table 1).

The Malay Accent Research

This study is on the accent of Malaysian Malay. The framework used is a combination of the sub-discipline of sociolinguistics and phonology, or so-called socio-phonology. This socio-phonological study is considered relevant because it is more practical (Milroy, 1987a) and is able to show a considerable rate of linguistic differences (Omar, 1985; Holmes, 2001). In fact, language accommodation takes place more often in phonology (Omar, 2004, p. 134). Since the study was also to examine the issue of integration and identity, it would investigate the link between linguistic (phonological), style of speech, and social variables as well. It focused on the questions of 'convergent' and 'divergent' in pronunciation. This study is based on the sociological urban sociolinguistics approach which was pioneered by Labov in New York City (Labov, 1972), and later by Trudgill in Norwich (Trudgill, 1974) and Milroy in Belfast (Milroy, 1987b). Details of the research design are as follows.

Phonological Variables

Based on the previous literature on this matter (cf Aman, 1995; Omar, 1985),

there are five (5) phonological variables which have been identified as suitable and appropriate to be analyzed and tested. These include the final syllable open-ended vowel (a) such as in *saya* 'I', the final syllable close-ended vowel (i) such as ini *bilik* 'room' and the close-ended vowel (u) such as in *duduk* 'sit', the initial consonant (r) or $(r)_1$ such as in *rumah* 'home', and (r) in the final position word (rhotic) or $(r)_2$ such as in *pasar* 'market'. Following Omar (1985), of the five phonological variables, two are the most significant in relation to the accent and identity concerns, namely, (a) and $(r)_2$. There is a variance in terms of pronunciation. In the context of this study, accent for the five phonological variables is categorized into two variations – the national/ standard accent (S) and the local or non-standard accent (NS). These five phonological variables were used to test on the informants' pronunciation through four (4) speech styles (see below).

Speech Styles

This study was conducted in a formal context of situation. Being formal, it means recordings were carried out in a situation where the researchers and informants were total strangers. In order to elicit the usage of the five phonological variables, four different styles of formal speech were designed, namely, reading Word List Style (WLS), reading Passage Style (PS), Conversation Style (CS), and Story-Telling Style (STS). These four speech styles differ in their degree of formality (cf. Trudgill, 1974), with WLS being the most formal and

STS the least formal (most casual). WLS and PS involved the reading of a text, and were also considered as 'text style' whereas CS and STS were considered as 'non-text style'. WLS requires the informants to read a list of words prepared by the researchers. CS involves an interview between the informants and the researchers. Among the questions revolved were about themselves, the weather, and views on their hometown. Meanwhile, STS involves the informants to relate events about their past, be it pleasant or bad, or their plans for a better city given the chance to be a mayor, with minimum interruption from the researcher. Labov and Waletzky (1997) named this type of language style as Personal Experience Narrative (PEN). Both CS and STS are still considered as formal styles because the recordings were carried out in a situation where the researchers and informants were total strangers (see Appendix).

The occurrences of the phonological variables for WLS and PS were predetermined, but not for CS and STS as they were subjected to their emergence in the informants' utterances. In WLS, variables (a), (i), (u), $(r)_1$, and $(r)_2$ occurred 8 times respectively for every informant. For PS, (a) variable occurred 19 times, (i) 5 times, (u) 10 times, $(r)_1$ 9 times, and $(r)_2$ 5 times.

Social Variables

The social or non-linguistic variables taken into consideration in this study are gender, age, socio-economic status (SES), native or non-native speaker (so-called 'nativization'), and regional differences factor (so-called 'regionalization') of the informants. These social variables are the specific identity concerned in this study. Age was further categorized into adolescent (15-25 years old), early adulthood (26-40 years old), adult (41-55 years old), and elderly (56 years old and above) (Wikipedia.org). SES was determined by a combination of the level of education, income, and the type of job indices of informants (cf. Trudgill, 1974). Native informant refers to Malay speakers, while the non-native refers to the non-Malay speakers (mainly of Chinese and Indian origins). Regional differences refer to the two regions that form Malaysia, which are the Malay Peninsula and Sabah and Sarawak states in Borneo Island.

Site of the Study

In order to meet the objectives of the study, four main cities were targeted. These were Melaka (the capital state of Melaka), Kota Bharu (the capital state of Kelantan), Kuching (the capital state of Sarawak), and Kota Kinabalu (the capital state of Sabah). Melaka and Kota Bharu were chosen to represent the Malay Peninsula, while Kuching and Kota Kinabalu represented Borneo for the regional differences variable. Melaka was also chosen to represent a majority area of the non-native speakers of Malay, while Kota Bharu was chosen to represent the minority one. Meanwhile, Kota Bharu, Kuching, and Kota Kinabalu coincided with the native speaker variable factor. One of the apparent local features of pronunciation for the native speakers in

Kota Bharu is open-ended (a) is pronounced [ ], meanwhile, speakers in Kuching and Kota Kinabalu pronounce it as [a] (Omar, 1985).

In this study, the choice for city dwellers was based on the fact that they have undergone socio-cultural and linguistic changes earlier related to development. In addition, city dwellers in this country have increased to 65 percent. This figure is based on the statistics from the Ministry of Rural and Territorial Development, which stated that rural dwellers formed only 35 percent of the population in 2005 (*Mingguan Malaysia,* 25 March 2007). Thus, focusing on the city dwellers was deemed to be appropriate for this study in order to reveal and discuss the national accent of this particular dynamic group of people. With the diversity in the features and the consideration taken up, it was hoped that the profile of the standard accent could be obtained.

Informants

The data for this national accent study were elicited by the actual use of language among informants, using the different speech style frameworks as mentioned earlier. The language data were gathered from complex features of informants. In other words, the informants selected must be of various socio-economic backgrounds, from both genders, from young to old age (15 – 56+ years old) and from two geographical regions of Malaysia (Malay Peninsula and Sabah & Sarawak in Borneo). Besides that, the native or non-native speaker factor was

also taken into consideration in this study.

A total of 125 informants from the four cities who matched the criteria stated above were interviewed. Sixty percent or 75 of the informants were males and 40 percent (50 informants) were females. The distribution according to age group showed that four age groups were present in the study. Ten percent (13 informants) belonged to the adolescent group (15-25 years old), 35 percent (44 informants) were in their early adulthood (26-40 years old), 42 percent (52 informants) belonged to the adult group (41-55 years old) and 13 percent (16 informants) were those of the elderly group (56 years old and above). From the regional dimension, 60 percent (75 informants) were from the Malay Peninsula and 40 percent (50 informants) were from the Sabah-Sarawak states of Borneo. Seventy-five informants or 60 percent were represented by the native speakers and 50 informants or 40 percent were represented by the non-native speakers. From the scores of the three SES items, the informants were grouped into four categories, namely, middle-lower group (MLG), upper-lower group (ULG), lower-middle group (LMG), and middle-middle group (MMG). In other words, the lowest SES group obtained in the study was MLG, whereas the highest group was MMG. The distribution according to the SES group was fairly reasonable with MLG at 17 percent, ULG 37 percent, and both LMG and MMG with 23 percent, respectively. Information on the informants is shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2
Demographic Characteristics of the Informants

Non-linguistic Variables	n	%
Gender		
Male	75	60
Female	50	40
SES Group		
MLG - (Middle Lower Group)	21	17
ULW - (Upper Lower Group)	46	37
LMG - (Lower Middle Group)	29	23
MMG - (Middle Middle Group)	29	23
Age Group		
1 - (15-25 years old)	13	10
2 - (26-40 years old)	44	35
3 - (41-55 years old)	52	42
4 - (56 + years old)	16	13
Native		
N - Native informant	75	60
NN - Non-native	50	40
Region		
MP - Malay Peninsula	75	60
SS - Sabah and Sarawak state in Borneo	50	40
N	125	100

RESEARCH PROCEDURES

This study involved direct audio recordings of the informants' speeches in the four styles, which had specially been designed. The recordings and the fieldwork were carried out by the researchers themselves. The recordings were then listened to with the assistance of two linguistics post-graduate students who had been trained to identify and capture the pronunciation variations of the five (5) phonological variables to note the frequency of their occurrences, and also to record them. The listeners only needed to identify all the phonemes, i.e. whether they were pronounced as the standard or the non-standard variant. The raw data gathered were then analyzed using a coding form, which had specifically been designed for the purpose of this analysis. The frequency of accent occurrence (standard accent or the non-standard accent) in the four styles was also converted into percentages. A mean of percentage value for every non-linguistic variable and their sub-segment was also calculated. Personal details and SES of the informants were transferred to a coding form. The informants were categorized into groups based on the SES scores, age group, and gender.

The occurrences of the phonological variables for CS and STS were not fixed but subjected to their emergence in the informants' utterances. For STS, the researcher prompted the informants to speak by asking them relevant questions about themselves and their opinions about the

city. For STS, the researchers motivated the informants to tell a story about their past experiences; pleasant or bad (Labov, 1972), with minimum interruption from the researcher.

The number and the criteria of the informants stated earlier on were reasonable and reliable because based on the research methodology carried out, 125 informants in this study uttered the phonological variable (a) 7227 times, (i) 3025 times, (u) 3547 times, $(r)_1$ 2478 times, and $(r)_2$ 2246 times (refer to Table 3). Besides that, those phonological variables were uttered in the four ranges of speech styles, as mentioned above. The complexity of the informant's criteria, the high occurrences of phonological variables within the four speech styles designed are believed to be adequate factors to depict the reality of the accent used and its relationship with identity and integration values.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Profiles of Malaysian Malay National Accent and Identity Values

From the formal context of this study, in overall, it was deduced that the notion of the national standard accent of Malaysian Malay, at some point, had been demonstrated, of which a majority of the informants were found to use more of the standard accent as compared to the non-standard accent for the sum of five phonological variables. The mean score for the five phonological variables shows that the standard accent used is 71.4 points; while the non-standard used is only 28.6 points (see Table 3). The findings also implied that the majority of the informants had automatically adjusted their pronunciation into the national standard accent whenever speaking in this formal context of interview.

Nevertheless, in the profiles (Table 3), three out of the five phonological variables

TABLE 3
Profiles of Malaysian Malay Language Accents According to Five Phonological Variables

| ACCENTS | Stat. | PHONOLOGICAL VARIABLES | | | | | |
		Open-ended (a)	Close-ended (i)	Close-ended (u)	Initial $(r)_1$	Final $(r)_2$	Mean
Standard	f	[↔] 3568	[e] 2729	[o] 3204	[r] 2168	[r] 918	12587
(S)	%	49	90	90	87	41	71.4
Non-Standard	f	[a] 3659	[i] 296	[u] 343	[Φ] 310	[O] 1328	5936
(NS)	%	51	10	10	13	59	28.6
TOTAL	f	7227	3025	3547	2478	2246	

were found to be used more saliently as the standard accent. They are (i), (u), and $(r)_1$. The standard accent for (i) is [e], (u) is [o], and $(r)_1$ is [r]. The analysis from each of the phonological variables showed that (i), (u), and $(r)_1$ were used profoundly as the standard accent with the score of between 87-90 percent. Specifically, variables (i) and (u) were used as much as 90 percent as the standard accent, meanwhile $(r)_1$ was used 87 percent as the standard form. These profiles are also true for all the socio-economic status (SES) groups, both gender, all four age groups, native or non-native speakers, and informant from both regions (refer to Tables 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 and the discussion given below). These illustrate that the informants have fewer problems in using the three variables as a standard accent. Apparently, the norm in the pronunciation of these phonological variables is still the main reason for this profile of accent.

Meanwhile, it is also noticeable that there is an exceptional case in the profile of two other variables, namely, (a) and $(r)_2$. In this regard, variables (a) and $(r)_2$ were found to be used oscillatory as the standard and non-standard forms. However, the difference in the percentage between the standard and non-standard variant is minimal. For (a), 49 percent is used as standard (pronounced as [↔]) and 51 percent as non-standard. As for $(r)_2$, 41 percent is standard or [r] and 59 percent is non-standard. This profile is applicable for upper lower group (ULG) and middle middle-group (MMG) speakers (refer Table 4), for both gender (refer Table 5), and younger age groups (refer Table 6).

The oscillation in the pronunciation of the variable (a) could probably be linked to the factor of 'confusion' among the informants towards the notion of 'codified' pronunciation of Malay, which was imposed by the government through the Ministry of Education in 1987 until 2004 (Aman, 2006; *Mingguan Malaysia,* 2000, and see end note 8), and the accent that has been used in the news programme of the most popular private television channel – TV3. Under the new 'artificial codified' pronunciation system, it was proposed that open-ended (a) must be pronounced in accordance to the spelling or [a]. Nevertheless, pronouncing of [a] in open-ended (a) has deviated from the normal current standard practice of the Malay language in Malaysia.

With regards to $(r)_2$, this finding suggests that the 'usual' pronunciation is still the key factor in the choice of accent among speakers. The finding also shows that in certain social and linguistic variables, a number of informants (59%) have difficulty in pronouncing their final (post vocalic) (r) to [r], even in a formal context. This situation is related to the norm that most speakers of the Malay language silent the (r) in this position (cf. Omar 1985). Nonetheless, 41 percent of the informants were surprisingly able to accommodate and change their pronunciation for this specific phoneme. This also implies an interesting development of pronunciation among Malaysian Malay speakers.

Despite that, in overall, it can be concluded that the usage of the standard accent is reasonably high. It is worth emphasizing that the tendency and awareness on the national accent is applicable to socio-economic status, gender, age, native or non-native speaker, and regional variables. A detailed discussion of the profiles and their link with identity matter is given as follows.

Accent and Socio-Economic Status

In general, it can be said that socio-economic status (SES) is not the main cause factor for the accent choice in this study. It was apparent that all the four groups of informant used the five phonological variables more regularly in the standard form than the non-standard form. In other words, there is no SES group that is distinctive from each other. In addition, the different scores between the standard and the non-standard variations for all SES are profoundly clear, having the lowest score as 27.6 point (63.8 – 36.2, ref. Table 4) for MLG. The figures also show that the higher the SES of the informant, a more standard accent is used. The mean score for the standard accent of the middle-lower group (MLG) is 63.8 point, upper-lower group (ULG) is 69.2 point, and lower-middle group (LMG) is 75.2 point. For the middle-middle group (MMG), the mean is 72.2 point, which is less than LMG score but it is still more than the two lower groups. However, the two middle group informants (LMG and MMG) were noticeably more aware of the standard accent because they used it more profoundly as compared to the lower economic group. In this case, the middle groups used the standard accent more than 72 point, while the lower groups used between 63-69 points. Nevertheless, in detail, the difference between the highest score for the lower group (69.2) with the lowest score of middle group (72.2) is only 3 percent. This difference is too small to show the level of awareness among the SES group (ref. Table 4).

TABLE 4
Socio-Economic Status and National Accent

SOC. VARIABLES		PHONOLOGICAL VARIABLES										
		(a)		(i)		(u)		$(r)_1$		$(r)_2$		Mean
(SES)	Accents	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
MMG	S	762	44	553	69	762	90	548	90	368	68	72.2
	NS	982	56	245	31	87	10	59	10	176	32	27.8
LMG	S	1046	61	846	92	747	92	522	90	205	41	75.2
	NS	679	39	78	8	68	8	58	10	292	59	24.8
ULG	S	1476	55	921	93	1207	93	726	83	178	22	69.2
	NS	1191	45	66	7	94	7	146	17	624	78	30.8
MLG	S	303	27	383	83	488	84	365	86	148	39	63.8
	NS	802	73	78	17	94	16	58	14	236	61	36.2

The analysis from every phonological variable also shows that all four socio-economic groups apparently use the standard form more frequently as compared to the non-standard form for the variables (i), (u), and $(r)_1$. As for (a) and $(r)_2$, there were tendencies for the higher social groups to use the standard accent, whereby 61 percent of the LMG used the standard form [ə] for (a), and 68 percent of the MMG used the standard form [r] for $(r)_2$. These findings denote that for the Malaysian Malay accent (language), SES variable is not a good social 'marker' in terms of language variation. In other words, the status of the speakers could not be identified through their accent. Speakers of this language, irrelevant of their SES background, tend to and are able to accommodate to standard accent in the formal context of this study. This situation can be linked to the fact that the Malaysian society is not formed by strict social segregation. This modern nation is just 50 years of age[7].

Gender and Accent

A second profile, which was identified from this study, is that there is a similarity in the pattern of accent for both genders whereby they use the standard accent more prominently as compared to the non-standard accent. The mean score of the standard accent for both genders is 73.8 point (refer to Table 5). These findings indicate that both genders have a tendency to shift to the national standard accent in the formal context of speech. In other words, choosing the standard accent is not fully influenced by gender variable.

However, the analysis of every single phonological variable again showed that both genders used (i), (u), and $(r)_1$ consistently higher in the standard accent. They were used more than 87 percent. Meanwhile, female and male informants merely pronounced the variable (a) alternately in its standard and non-standard accents, with male's usage slightly more in its standard variant as compared to the

TABLE 5
Gender and National Accent

SOC. VARIABLE			PHONOLOGICAL VARIABLES					
	Accents	Stat.	(a)	(i)	(u)	$(r)_1$	$(r)_2$	Mean
Male	Standard	F	2146	1736	1908	1264	550	
		%	54	91	91	87	46	73.8
	Non-Standard	f	1811	182	188	196	653	
		%	46	9	9	13	54	26.2
Female	Standard	f	1468	1002	1281	983	366	
		%	49	92	92	90	46	73.8
	Non-Standard	f	1496	91	109	105	435	
		%	51	8	8	10	54	26.2

females. The score is 54 percent and 49 percent, respectively. As for (r)$_2$, it is again pronounced more in its non-standard variant as compared to the standard variant by both genders, with 46 percent each and a difference of only 8 percent. The similarity in the pattern of accent by both genders is likely due to the fact that intrinsically, Malay is a non-gendered language and gender has never been a social issue in this society.

Age Variable

There is no clear distinctive pattern of accent usage according to age factor. All four age groups of informant used the standard accent more apparently than the non-standard. The mean score for the standard accent was between 64.4 and 73 points. Only the informants from the elderly group (56 years old and above) used the standard accent with less than 70 point, i.e., 64.4 point. Meanwhile, the other three groups used the standard accent more than 70 point (see Table 6).

This finding illustrates that younger generation informants (adolescent, early adulthood and adulthood) were more aware and sensitive towards the notion of the national standard accent whenever they used the language in a formal context. Education may be a good factor that has influenced the younger group to shift to the standard form. This finding is in line with the literature that "as people get older their speech becomes gradually more standard, and then later it becomes less standard and is once again characterised by vernacular forms" (Holmes, 2001, p. 169). The higher usage of the standard accent among younger informants tends to imply that the future of the national standard accent of Malaysian Malay language notion is good and compelling.

A further analysis for each phonological variable also repeated the same scenario as the two previous social variables, where (i), (u), and (r)$_1$ were apparently used as the standard accent by all the age groups.

TABLE 6
Age and National Accent

SOC.	PHONOLOGICAL VARIABLE										
VAR.	Accents	(a)		(i)		(u)		(r)$_1$		(r)$_2$		Mean
(AGE)		f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	
56 + yrs	S	371	37	322	89	433	87	244	78	95	31	64.4
(Elderly)	NS	630	63	39	11	66	13	70	22	211	69	35.6
41-55 yrs	S	1940	60	1052	93	1450	94	866	83	338	35	73
(Adult)	NS	1271	40	79	7	86	6	175	17	616	65	27
26-40 yrs	S	928	39	849	88	1044	86	831	94	418	54	72.2
(Early Adult)	NS	1447	61	118	12	166	14	49	6	352	46	27.8
15-25 yrs	S	260	46	222	88	277	92	227	97	65	31	70.8
(Adolescent)	NS	307	54	30	12	25	8	8	3	146	69	29.2

Meanwhile, the variables (a) and $(r)_2$ were used alternately in their standard and non-standard variants by all the age groups. However, what is interesting is the profile of the adult group (41-55 years old), which shows their consistency in using more standard accent for four phonological variables, except for $(r)_2$. This is associated with the stability of the language attitude among the adult informants as compared to the younger ones. In this sense, younger informants could be influenced or confused by the notion of the 'new codified pronunciation' of Malay in schools that was introduced and implemented by the Ministry of Education in the mid-1980s[8].

Accent and 'Nativization'

'Nativization' refers to the category of speakers, whether they are native or non-native speakers of the language. In this study, it was found that this nativization factor did not influence the usage of standard accent in the formal context of language use. The pattern of accent usage for both

categories is merely the same. Both native [Malays in Kota Bharu, Kuching (Sarawak), and Kota Kinabalu (Sabah)] and non-native [non-Malays (Chinese) in Kota Bharu and Melaka city] groups used the standard variant more prominently than the non-standard. In more specific, the mean score for the native speakers is 71.4 point and non-native speakers is 70.4 point (see Table 7).

The detailed analysis showed that both the native and non-native informants tend to consistently use the standard variant than the non-standard for (i), (u), and $(r)_1$ variables. Nevertheless, both categories of informants were found to be using (a) and $(r)_2$ in a contrastive manner. Seventy-one percent of the native speakers pronounced the (a) variable more as [a] (non-standard accent) and $(r)_2$ as standard accent (60 percent). In contrast, 72 percent of the non-native speakers consistently pronounced the standard variant (a) as [ə] and 84 percent of them used the non-standard variant for $(r)_2$.

These interesting findings demonstrated that the native speakers are facing a dilemma

TABLE 7
Nativization and National Accent

SOCIAL VARIABLES	Accents	Stat.	PHONOLOGICAL VARIABLES					
			(a)	(i)	(u)	$(r)_1$	$(r)_2$	Mean
Native (Kota Bharu, Kuching, K. Kinabalu)	S	f	1084	1312	1707	1426	758	
		%	29	85	86	97	60	71.4
	NS	f	2700	225	286	39	510	
		%	71	15	14	3	40	28.6
Non-Native (Kota Bharu, Melaka)	S	f	2484	1417	1497	742	160	
		%	72	95	96	73	16	70.4
	NS	f	959	71	57	271	818	
		%	28	5	4	27	84	29.6

in the case of the accent for (a). This is most probably due to the local accent influence, especially for the informants in Kuching and Kota Kinabalu. In Kuching (Sarawak) and Kota Kinabalu (Sabah) regions, (a) in this position is pronounced as [a]. Simultaneously, they were found to be able to realize the standard accent [r] for rhotic (r) or (r)$_2$ more often than the non-standard. Meanwhile, the non-native speakers found it slightly difficult to realize (r)$_2$ as a standard variant, but they were able to pronounce [ə] as a standard variant for (a).

'Regionalization' Variable

Regionalization refers to the geographical location between the Malay Peninsula and Sabah and Sarawak in Borneo. Both regions are separated by the South China Sea. In this sense, it was found that there is no apparent different pattern of accent for both the regions. The informants from the two regions (Malay Peninsula and Sabah-Sarawak in Borneo) chose to use the standard variant more often

than the non-standard variant, with the mean score of 72.6 point and 68.4 point, respectively (see Table 8). The relatively high scores for the standard variant usage by the informants from Kuching (Sarawak) and Kota Kinabalu (Sabah) implied their willingness to integrate and accommodate for national identity reasons. In other words, in the formal context of interaction, regionalization factor is irrelevant in the case of accent choice.

The detailed analysis of each phonological variable shows the same trend with the previous social variables findings, whereby (i), (u), and (r)$_1$ were used more apparently as the standard accent by the majority of informants from these two regions. However, in the case of the (a) variable, the Malay Peninsula informants were found to have used the standard variant or schwa more (68 percent) as compared to their compatriots in Kuching and Kota Kinabalu. As for the informant from Kuching and Kota Kinabalu, (a) was pronounced more as the non-standard or

TABLE 8
Regionalization and National Accent

SOC. VAR.	PHONOLOGICAL VARIABLES							
REGIONAL	Accents	Stat.	(a)	(i)	(u)	(r)$_1$	(r)$_2$	Mean
Malay Peninsula	S	f	3203	1872	2116	1222	343	
(MP)		%	68	95	95	81	24	72.6
	NS	f	1474	94	103	281	1058	
		%	32	5	5	19	76	27.4
Sabah-Sarawak	S	f	365	857	1088	946	575	
(S-S)		%	14	81	82	97	68	68.4
	NS	f	2185	202	240	29	270	
		%	86	19	18	3	32	31.6

local accent of [a], with 86 percent. For the Malay Peninsula informants, this could be linked to the prevalent pronunciation for the variable (a) as schwa, meanwhile for those from Kuching and Kota Kinabalu, this could be linked to the local accent influence, where (a) is pronounced [a].

For $(r)_2$, the standard variation is used more by the informants from Kota Kinabalu (Sabah) and Kuching (Sarawak). The score is 68 percent. On the contrary, the informants from Malay Peninsula used it far lesser, i.e., 24 percent only. This shows that the Malay Peninsula informants still silent the phoneme compared to the informants from Sabah and Sarawak who have the tendency to pronounce the phoneme. This can also be linked to the prevalent pronunciation factor for the Malay Peninsula speakers, while for Kuching and Kota Kinabalu speakers, they have the tendency to adjust the pronunciation even though in their normal usage, $(r)_2$ is pronounced as [Φ] among Kuching speakers (Omar, 1985).

Speech Style Factor

Speech style refers to two main different types of interaction during the interview, i.e. with text material (so called 'text' style) and without text (so called 'non-text' style). It is believed that the type of speech style used influence the way we use the language. Text could make informants more careful in their speech because it involves reading (cf. Trudgill, 1974).

From the study, although the standard accent is generally realized more in the text style compared to in the non-text style, the pattern of usage does not differ much. This finding implies that the tendency to use the standard accent among the informants is not influenced much by the different speech style factor. It is proven that in the text style, the standard accent was used as much as 72.2 point, while in the non-text style, the standard accent used was 65.6 point, with the difference of only 7 points (see Table 9). These findings are also supported by three phonological variables, namely (i), (u), and $(r)_1$, which are frequently used as the

TABLE 9
Texts and Non-Text Speech Style Factor

SPEECH STYLES	Accents	Stat.	(a)	(i)	(u)	$(r)_1$	$(r)_2$	Mean
			PHONOLOGICAL VARIABLES					
Texts (WLS & PS)	S	f	1482	1458	1973	1943	784	
		%	44	90	88	91	48	72.2
	NS	f	1923	164	277	182	843	
		%	56	10	12	9	52	27.8
Non-Text (CS & STS)	S	f	2086	1003	1269	238	134	
		%	55	92	95	64	22	65.6
	NS	f	1725	90	66	135	485	
		%	45	8	5	36	78	34.4

standard accent both in the text or non-text styles of speech.

Nevertheless, in further detail, once again, (a) and $(r)_2$ were used less in their standard variant. In the text style, the scores are 44 percent and 48 percent, whereas in the non-text style the scores are 55 percent and 22 percent, respectively. Considering text style, which is a more formal and careful style, the decrease in the standard variant (44 percent) and the increase in the non-standard (55 percent) for (a) were unexpected. This inversion could be related to the effect of the codified phonetic pronunciation notion of Malay in overall, or prevalence in pronouncing (a) as [a] among Sarawakian and Sabahan. With regards to

a 'new codified' pronunciation notion, most informants might be confused because they thought they were expected to pronounce (a) as [a] in the text style interaction. Conversely during the non-text interaction, which is more casual and where they were expected to use the non-standard variant, they pronounced (a) more as the standard variant (55 percent).

As for $(r)_2$, the decrease of the standard variant compared to the non-standard is related to the prevalence among the Malay speakers to silent this final consonant. Interestingly for this phonological variable, it was found that the different speech styles do influence the rate of accent type. As expected, the percentage for the standard

TABLE 10
Profiles and Level of Malaysian Malay Standard Accent (SA) According to Five Social and One Linguistic Variable Tested with Six Phonological Variables

SOCIAL VARIABLE	CATEGORY	Mean for SA	LEVEL
	Middle-Lower Group (MLG)	63.8	Satisfactory
SES	Upper-Lower Group (ULG)	69.2	Satisfactory
	Lower-Middle Group (LMG)	75.2	Very good
	Middle-Middle Group (MMG)	72.2	Very good
Gender	Male	73.8	Very good
	Female	73.8	Very good
	Adolescent	70.8	Very good
Age	Early adult	72.2	Very good
	Adult	73	Very good
	Elderly	64.4	Satisfactory
'Nativization'	Native speaker	71.4	Very good
	Non-native speaker	70.4	Very good
Regionalization	Malay Peninsula	72.6	Very good
	Sabah & Sarawak	68.4	Satisfactory
LINGUISTIC VAR.			
Speech style	Text	72.2	Very good
	Non-text	65.6	Satisfactory

accent is higher in the text style (48 percent), but in the non-text style it is only 22 percent. Nonetheless, this sole situation is not be the overall picture of this accent study profile.

CONCLUSION

As a conclusion, it is appropriate to provide Table 10 that illustrates the profiles and level of the standard accent used by six social variables, namely, SES, gender, age, native and non-native group of speaker, as well as regionalization and speech style. The percentage figures are taken from respective previous tables. The formula for rating the level was made by putting the score of 50 point as the threshold value. At this point of score until 59, the status is considered as an even between the standard and the non-standard accents. Hence, it is rated as an 'alternate'. However, if the mean score is between 60-69 points, it is rated as 'satisfactory', 70-79 point as 'very good' and 80 point and more is rated as 'excellent'.

Table 10 shows the profiles and status of the national standard accent of the Malaysian Malay language. From the figures, it can be concluded that the standard accent of the Malaysian Malay has been utilised by a majority of the informants. It is proven that 10 out of 14 social variable categories use the standard variant at a 'very good' level and four others at a 'satisfactory' level. In addition, pertaining to linguistic variable (speech style), the standard accent is used at a 'very good' level for the text style and a 'satisfactory' in the non-text style. No category uses the standard accent at an 'alternate' level. As for the SES

variable, the lowest category of informants – MLG were also able to utilise the standard accent at a 'satisfactory' level. In terms of gender, even though the literature has stated that females tend to change their language towards the standard variety, this study has found that both genders make use of the standard accent at a 'very good' level. The findings also show that younger speakers tend to use more of the standard accent as compared to the 'elderly' group. This is a proof that younger speakers are more open towards changes in their language use. For the 'nativization' factor, it was interestingly found that both native and non-native speakers of Malay language were able to utilise the standard accent at a 'very good' level. In terms of regionalization factor, even though Sabah and Sarawak are geographically separated by the sea from the main part of the country (Malay Peninsula), they still get to use the standard accent at a 'good' level.

Both the profiles and status also denote that the standard accent choice does not impinge directly with any social variables (SES, gender, age, nativization, and regionalization) and linguistic variable (speech style). Instead, it suggests that the formal context of interaction is the main reason why the informants accommodate their accent to the standard form.

Based on the profiles and also the apparent use of the national standard accent in the formal context such as in this study, together with the overall and detailed findings according to socio-economic status, gender, age, native and non-native factor,

and regional variables, it can be concluded that in reality there exist the values of the national identity and integration. In other words, the informants aree willing to be identified with the national identity as compared to the local identity. Thus, these findings are in line with Giles's accommodation theory (cited in Tabouret-Keller, 1997, p. 322), where the "basic postulate of the theory is that people are motivated to adjust their speech style, or accommodate, as means of expressing values, attitudes and intentions towards others."

In a broader sense, these findings suggest that Malay as the national language of Malaysia, specifically in terms of its accents, and in the context of 53 years of independence, is at least able to be an 'identifier' value of identity and integration of Malaysians who differ in socio-economic, nativization, region, gender, and age status (even though it is not a 'marker' yet). In a nutshell, it is a priceless tool which has served its role in the nation's identity and integration.

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END NOTES

[2]Accent is a variety of speech differing phonetically from other varieties and normally restricted to differences mostly in phonology (Matthews, 1997).

[3]Malaysia is a plural society with 26.7 million citizens. Malays as the Bumiputra form 55% of her population, other Bumiputras of Sabah and Sarawak (Kadazan, Murut, Iban, Melanau, etc.) 11.9%, followed by Chinese (24.3%), Indians (7.4%), and others (1.3%) (Population by sex, ethnic group and age, Malaysia, 2010). www.epu.gov.my/html/themes/epu/images/common/pdf/eco_stat/pdf/ (retrieved on 21 January 2011).

[4]Malaysia consists of two regions – Malay Peninsula and Sabah and Sarawak states in Borneo.

[5]Besides, there are other factors such as the posting of government staff and students between the two regions, the role of electronic media, especially national television and radio stations, and the role played by the administrative and modern-cultural centre based in Kuala Lumpur.

[6]Original text: "*Inilah yang berlaku, misalnya, pada bahasa Melayu standard yang tidak lagi menunjukkan begitu banyak ciri-ciri dialek Johor-Riau*" (Omar, 2004, p. 121).

[7]Malaysia was ultimately free from colonialisation in 1957 after respectively being colonialised since 1511 by Portuguese, Dutch, British, Japanese, and British. It lasted for about 500 years.

[8]What was proposed in the new 'codified pronunciation' of Malay system is to pronounce the word in accordance with the spelling or pronounce it phonetically. In the notion, (a) was the phoneme that created the major problem for the language user and according to Omar (1992: 212), it "generates facetious ways of pronouncing words". The policy was not successful because it was not the usual pronunciation of the society. By contrast, Malay language in Malaysia is not a phonetic language. The policy was retrenched after several years of implementation (see *Mingguan Malaysia* 2000).

APPENDIX

THE QUESTIONS

(Based on speech styles)

Early Interaction

(*as guidance only*)

1. Perkenalkan diri dan bertanya khabar.
(*Introduce yourself*)

2. Tanya sama ada informan memang berasal/tinggal dari bandar itu.
(*Ask the informant whether she/he is a local dweller*)

3. Tanya namanya.
(*Ask his/her name*)

4. Nyatakan hasrat anda untuk menemu bual dan memintanya masa 15 minit.
(*State your intention and ask permission to spend 15 minutes for that purpose.*)

5. Nyatakan perbualan itu dirakam – hanya tujuan akademik. Dapatan dirujuk secara kumulatif; tiada rujukan secara individu dibuat.
(*Ask permission to record the interview and state that it is only for academic purposes.*)

Reading Word List

I	II	III
bapa	saya	tukar
ikan	hati	susu
lontar	rambutan	resam
jalan	baju	kesal
mata	tiada	buluh
wajar	kebun	jahit
suka	kuala	buku
milik	belukar	rasa
rumah	bilik	cinta
tujuh	rapi	seluar
fikir	kasut	zaman
cantik	teman	lain
bentuk	ambil	kelapa
siar	pasar	kasar
masuk	mengikut	panggil
ruang	reka	pujuk
janji	makan	rombak

Reading Passage

Rumah perlu dirancang untuk kehidupan selesa. Sebuah rumah harus merupakan unit tersendiri yang dirancang, direka bentuk dan dihias bagi memenuhi cita rasa pemiliknya.

Hari ini, kita tidak mempunyai masalah untuk menghias rumah kerana kita boleh mengambil majalah hiasan atau menonton rancangan televisyen sebagai panduan. Bagaimanapun, program hiasan dalaman di media kebanyakannya hanya tertumpu pada ruang tertentu. Malah, kos dan harga perabot serta barang perhiasan tidak pernah disiar. Apa yang dapat dilihat ialah pereka bentuk dalaman memilih idea dan cadangan mengikut trend dan gaya terkini. Biasanya, didorong untuk mempromosi barang penaja program berkenaan.*

Untuk merancang kediaman selesa dan harmoni, kita tidak wajar mengikut trend reka bentuk semata-mata, tanpa berfikir dulu keperluan dan kehendak kita. Kediaman selesa dan harmoni adalah berasaskan kualiti hidup sempurna. Keseronokan penghuninya akan bermula dari pintu masuk lagi. Rumah yang selesa membawa keseronokan untuk penghuninya balik ke rumah, melontar keluar segala tekanan dan kebimbangan, dan menjadikan diri dilindungi di ruang persendirian.

(From *Berita Minggu* newspaper 1 April 2007)

Interview guiding questions

1. Apa nama sekolah tuan/puan/encik/saudara?
(Which school did you go to?)

2. Tingkatan/darjah tertinggi sekolah.
(*Your highest level/class in the school*)

3. Tahun berapa tamat sekolah.
(*Year of graduating from school*)

4. Ada kelulusan IPT? Di mana, tahap diploma atau ijazah?
(*What is your highest level of education- where and what level?*)

5. Ada menyambung pelajaran lagi?
(*Did you further your studies?*)

6. Boleh beritahu umur (belasan tahun/20-an/30-an/40-an/50-an).
(*Could you tell your age group?*)

7. Boleh beritahu pekerjaan tuan/puan/sdr (atau pekerjaan ibu/bapanya).
(*What do you do / what does your father / mother do?*)

8. Boleh terangkan sedikit bagaimana kerja tuan/puan itu.
(*Could you tell more about your job?*)

9. Bagaimana pendapatan sebulan, adakah memadai?
(*Is your income sufficient?*)

10. Bagaimana keadaan cuaca di bandar itu kebelakangan ini?
(*How's the weather in the city lately?)*

11. Apa istimewa atau menariknya bandar itu?
(*What's so special about the city?)*

12. Pernah tinggal di Semenanjung (bagi responden di Kuching dan Kota Kinabalu), di mana, berapa lama, mengapa.
(*Have you ever been to Malay Peninsula?*) (Question for informant in Kuching and Kota Kinabalu only).

Story Telling

1. Selama ini, apakah peristiwa/pengalaman yang tidak dapat saudara lupakan atau lucu? Mohon ceritakan.
(*Could you relate an experience or incident that you cannot forget? Please tell me the story*)

Atau / or

2. Kalau tuan/puan diberi kesempatan/kuasa mentadbir bandar ini, ceritakan apa yang akan tuan/puan lakukan untuk bandar itu.
(*If you were the mayor of this city, tell me what would you do for this city?*)