ATTITUDES TOWARDS ACCENTED SPEECH AMONG RADIO DEEJAYS IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the attitudes of a group of college students towards different English accents. The first objective was to study the attitudes of college students towards different accents of English on the radio. The second objective was to determine the respondents' perceptions towards their own pronunciation. The third objective was to ascertain why certain accents are preferred over others. Questionnaires were used to elicit information from the students and obtain their responses to three samples of English accents. The samples, derived from deejays from three different radio stations provided naturally spontaneous speech. The findings revealed that the accent that was the most preferred was also the most difficult to understand. The respondents exhibited varying attitudes towards the accents used by the three deejays and it was also found that the respondents were generally happy with their respective accents.

Keywords: attitude, perception, accent, deejays.

INTRODUCTION

Accent relates to pronunciation, and should be distinguished from a dialect, which not only encompasses pronunciation, but also the choice of words and grammar used (Trudgill,1999). Given the historical and geographical spread of English, English is currently spoken in a variety of accents. However, not all these accents are 'accorded' the same status. For example, research has shown that spoken English linked with an ethnic minority is more negatively perceived, especially with regards to status (Giles, Williams, Mackie & Roselli, 1995). For example, in New Zealand, speakers classified as Maori based on their accent have been categorized as less intelligent, less self-confident and lazier; thereby demoting them to a lower social class (Bayard, Holmes and Murachver, 2001). As expected, standard forms of English such as Received Pronunciation (RP) also tend to be rated more positively (Garret, Williams & Evans, 2005). However, recent research has suggested that there is a shift away from viewing Received Pronunciation (RP) positively (Bayard and Green, 2001). In other words, different accents have their own respective identities within various communities and countries.

Background of Study

The immense curiosity in accents can be credited to the movement and assimilation of many different types of ethnic groups. The association between accents and attitudes has boosted concern within the academic community due to the significant impact of decision-making processes in employment sector as well as in relationships. The studies that have been carried out focusing on features affected by variations in accents such as social status, employability, comprehension and the analysis of accents and their corresponding attitudinal responses have gained importance in current times. Researches and studies on English accents center mainly on the common attitudes towards English accents in one country such as Malaysia (Crismore, Ngeow & Soo, 2003). Complementary studies demonstrate how attitudes towards accents are very similar across continents such as Asia, Europe and the like (Bayard & Green, 2002).

Statement of Problem

This research is a preliminary study to gain an insight into perceptions towards various accents and the traits associated with different accents of English. Although, there has been abundant

research on accents; most of the research consists of attitudinal and affective response towards different varieties of English accents. This research will examine the perception of a group towards Malaysian English, a non-native variety of English used primarily by Malaysians. In relation to the Malaysian variety of English, this research attempts to analyze the respondents' attitudes to different local accents and their preference for different pronunciation models as English evolves into the lingua franca of the world and the emergence of non-native varieties of English.

Significance of Study

The findings from this study will fill the research gap about attitudes towards local accents among youths. The findings will also provide insights into accents which Malaysians identify with: whether local-accented English or a native sounding variety. Knowledge of the attitudes towards the different English accents also has pedagogical implications in relation to classroom models of pronunciation. Further, the management of radio stations' can have a better understanding of the impact of deejays' accents on their listeners. In addition, the fact that students are the main target audience of a majority of English radio stations in Malaysia makes this study all the more relevant to the management of radio stations. It can help them in the selection of radio deejays. Radio deejays are also able to evaluate the attitudes and perceptions linked to their accents and decide on appropriate measures to take such as altering their accent to appeal to the masses.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Variety of Accents

Accents have been examined by scholars for various reasons. One issue that has emerged from their studies is that while achieving a native accent seems to be the goal of English- learning for most students, they have difficulties in actually identifying the accent they have voiced as their ideal accent (Scales, Wennerstrom, Richard and Wu, 2006). Scales et al (2006) derived this based on a study where the students were asked to identify the country of origin of the speakers after they voted an American native accent as their ideal. Most of the students were unable to identify what constituted a native accent although this was their preferred accent. There have also been suggestions in other studies that many English language learners prefer to speak like a native English-speaker (Chiba, Matsuura & Yamamoto, 1995). An assumption that the students have toward native speakers is that they would not make mistakes when speaking if they favored a native accent and that their speech would be impeccable. However, as Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991, p.158) point out, "a native-like accent is impossible unless first exposure is quite early, probably around the age of six". Besides, for learners of English as a second language, features of pronunciation from their mother tongue can be discerned in their use of English. For example, in her discussion, Zuraida (2000) found that Malay vowels influenced the way the respondents pronounced English vowels. Thus, it is most likely that language learners will struggle to achieve their accent goal if they start learning English later in life and will continually feel frustrated at never obtaining a native accent.

Perception towards Accents

Ladegaard (1998) conducted an extensive study about the effects of stereotyping people into various social groups based solely on the speech. The implication of the study is that speech samples can evoke latent, stereotyped reactions, regardless of whether one is able to consciously assign the stored information to a particular reference group. Therefore, there are instances when the perception towards someone is unconsciously evoked through speech. Scales et al. (2006) finds the accent that is easily intelligible is also the preferred accent. Their study revolved around the accent perceptions of 37 English language learners and 10 American undergraduate students. The respondents not only provided their background information, they were also individually interviewed on their perceptions on different accents, such as American accent. The respondents indicated that it is acceptable to have a non-native accent, as long as the listener is able to easily understand the speech with ease and the flow of the speech is smooth and fluent. Similarly, Rajadurai (2007) also made similar remarks in her paper by rebuking some of the common myths about non-native speech being less intelligible than native speech, which implies that native speakers are not necessarily better understood than their non-native counterparts. In relation to this, Munro and

Derwing (1995) concluded that a strong foreign accent does not always reduce the comprehensibility or intelligibility of a speech, thereby noting that a non-native accent might not necessarily be inferior to a native one. In their study, a sentence verification task was used to determine the effect of a foreign accent on sentence processing time.

The one aspect that is prevalent in Scales et al (2006) is the fact that there is an almost perfect correlation between an ideal accent and one which is easiest to comprehend. The authors concluded this based on the results of their study whereby most of the respondents preferred the speech rate of the American speaker which was the slowest at 147 words per minute compared to the Mexican's speech rate which was the fastest at 180 words per minute. The study also raises the possibility of a relationship between the rate of speech and the accent preference. The slower the speech, the easier it is to understand and thus, it is preferred over its counterparts. Brown, Strong and Rencher (1975) have observed that the tone of voice is also a major factor of listeners' reactions based on speech. Bayard and Green (2002) also concur with recent research showing that phonological accents have a significant impact in addition to the effects of intonation.

There is importance placed on having a highly perceived accent because having such an accent might increase studies and employment prospects. One such example cited by Scales et al (2006) is where a student who is interviewed complains how he faced limitations with a non-native accent, as he had to pass a test of spoken English before assuming a teaching assistantship. This implies that one must speak English with a native accent to maximize the potential of opportunities available. Another reason why such importance is placed on having a highly perceived accent has its roots in the teaching of English. Students who are learning English, especially those who are learning it as a second language tend to have more respect for a teacher who can speak like a native. Scales et al (2006) states that a positive correlation was found between being nice to listen to, being educated and being a good English Second Language teacher. Thus, it can be inferred that having a positively regarded accent would be instrumental in a career relating to the teaching of English.

Preference for Native Models

Although there are studies which show Received Pronunciation (RP) model as the preferred accent, there are others which expound the General American (GA). These models differ based on numerous factors including the geographical location as well as the extent of exposure to the media (Scales et al, 2006; Bayard and Green, 2002). Many learners of the language, in particular second-language learners strive to shed the stereotypes linked to their accents by attempting to adopt a native-like accent so as to be better understood as well as to be highly regarded. One model, which is highly regarded is the Received Pronunciation or RP model that is the choice of many users of the English language and carries with it a hallmark of unrivalled prestige in most parts of the world, even with the booming of American culture in worldwide media. This phenomenon was observed in Ladegaard (1998) in his study of Danish students. He found that RP is the preferred accent and, although there are many different inner-circle models, Ladegaard (1998, p. 265) finds that the "Received Pronunciation appears to be the unsurpassed prestige variety" among Danish students.

On the other hand, Bayard and Green (2002) discovered that students from Europe, Southeast Asia, the United States and Australasia prefer General American (GA). They attribute it to the constant presence and exposure to American media on a daily basis. Bayard and Green (2002), collected samples of accents from around the world in one of the most diverse language attitude studies conducted in recent times with samples from at least 15 countries. Their investigations, based on four dimensions of status, power, solitary and competence concluded that attitudes towards different accents vary in different cultures and communities. However, while native-like accents are revered, the opposite seems to hold true for one's own non-native accent of English. Dalton-Puffer et al (1997) found that students display negative attitudes towards their own accent as they hold higher regard for native accents which they have had contact with.

Attitudes towards Particular Accents

In relation to attitudes, there are several traits linked to certain accents as a first impression. Interestingly, both positive and negative attitudes can co-exist for the exact same accent. Social

identity can be defined as belonging to a special group (Bresnahan et al, 2002), and there is a theory related to it which extols that those within the group are regarded favorably whereas those outside are regarded negatively. For example, in a study by Scales et al (2006), the British speaker was stereotyped as most educated by some students whilst a portion of the students did not like the British speaker, stating, "She sounded like a school teacher". To further clarify as to why there is such a huge interest in accents within the English language academia, one only has to look at Scales et al. (2006) to discover that stereotypes are attached to each and every accent. British-accented English is indexed as projecting a speaker as a highly educated individual while Asian-accented English is deemed to be difficult to comprehend. Although, it must be noted that speaking with a certain accent does not indicate one's intelligence. Similarly, Dalton-Puffer et al (1997) also found that there exists several accent stereotypes, for instance with Received Pronunciation being described as making the speaker sound educated, polite and organized. Hiraga (2005), in his study of British people's attitudes towards different English accents, found that while there seems to be a concerted effort towards avoiding the usage of the General American (GA) accent among the British, the respondents still rated the General American (GA) accent higher than several British regional varieties in traits like 'pleasantness' and 'prestige'. In this study, British attitudes towards six different types of

English were examined and the implications of this were that the British's aversion to GA was slightly complex, with the influence of a cross-national tripartite hierarchy of accent prestige, which can be divided into 'standard', 'rural' and 'urban'.

Attitudes towards Malaysian English pronunciation

The use of English in Malaysia can be perceived on a continuum with three distinct sub- varieties, the acrolect, the mesolect and the basilect (*The Encyclopedia of Malaysia*, 1998). The acrolect form can be regarded as the standard form used. The mesolect is the colloquial form used in informal situations whereas the basilect is the most simplified version of Malaysian English (Baskaran, 1994). Similar to other varieties of English, the accent of Malaysian English tends to be less socially and geographically marked (Trudgill, 1999). According to a study by Crismore et al (2003), there are two general trends among Malaysians with regards to attitudes towards accents. The first of which is the importance of gaining understanding from an international community of foreign partners and the need for a positive outlook from foreigners when they interact. The second trend is that Malaysians are rather critical when it comes to the use of Standard English language inpublic mediums of communications. Crismore et al (2003) derived these conclusions by conducting a study amongst public and private sector workers by using a Likert-scale questionnaire highlighting selected language issues including attitudes about Standard English and public models of language used. The general preference and attitude towards accents in Malaysia is the high regard held for standard or native-like English. This is similar to other studies such as Scales et al (2006) whereby the respondents identified an American accent as their favored accent due to their perception that it is well-regarded and would lead to brighter educational and employment prospects. There is a consciousness among Malaysians that Standard English is a useful tool in facilitating international communication especially within the corporate and business sectors (Crismore et al., 2003). However, it is also interesting to note that English tinged with a Malaysian accent is not seen in a negative light. The respondents do not regard speakers of English with a Malaysian accent as uneducated or a class below them. Moreover, many of them believe that it would not be difficult for foreigners to comprehend this variety of English. A majority of the respondents are of the opinion that Malaysian English is quite intelligible even though it is quite distinct in certain aspects of lexicon, pronunciation and grammar (Crismore et al., 2003). A percentage of the respondents in a study by Crismore et al (2003) were of the opinion that using English with a Malaysian accent does not mean that the user is an uneducated individual. Furthermore, the same study found that a Malaysian accent commands respect. Similar findings were reported by Tan (2005) where her respondents, who comprised Malaysian teenagers, preferred a Malaysian English accent compared to a British or American accent, although a majority of them felt that British English is more prestigious. However, this differs slightly as to whether the accent is utilized within the Malaysian community or with external parties, so it would be expected that people from the same community would be more

receptive and responsive towards an accent that is familiar. Thus, the attitude towards native-like accents in Malaysia varies and depends on a multitude of complex factors.

However, whilst it is acceptable and looked upon favorably at times, English spoken with a marked ethnic accent is regarded to have limits when it comes to public media. Mass media mediums such as television and radio are expected to utilize native standardized English as their mode of communication. For example, Pillai and Fauziah (2006) found that whilst locally marked accents were used in dramatizing advertisements, the main voice-over, which carried the key message and brand name, was always expressed in a less marked accent. The term 'standardized' can be defined by Widdowson (1997) as a variety of English that is 'socially sanctioned'. He notes that this variety is essentially a written one mainly for meeting business needs and other instructional usages. The mass media yields a considerable influence over the younger generation and seen as a factor in encouraging proper standardized English (Crismore et al., 2003), which is probably why letters written to the local newspapers to complain about the usage of non-standard English.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was developed on the basis of a study done by Soo in 1990 which was conducted among 83 teachers and 251 students in Malaysia by using 8 statements aimed at eliciting information about attitudes towards English, marked by a 5- point agree-disagree scale. For this particular study, the respondents had to complete a 3- part questionnaire and a separate section providing personal information about them. Part one of the questionnaire consists of ten personality characteristics, which the respondents had to use to rate each speaker on a 6-point scale. The purpose of this section of the questionnaire was to examine how the respondents rated each speaker based on several qualities such as *friendliness, attractiveness* and other similar personality characteristics. The scores give an indication as to the perceptions of the respondents towards the different accents of the speakers. The second part of the questionnaire comprised four statements about the fluency of the speakers and the ease of comprehension, to which the respondents had selected from a scale of agreement (*strongly disagree, disagree, agree or strongly agree*). It also allowed the respondents to state any additional comments or impressions they had about the speaker. This section was designed to obtain a better understanding of each respondent's thoughts perceptions on the speakers' speech. The final part of the questionnaire had 8 statements about attitudes in general where the respondents had to select from a 4-point scale of agreement. This section also contained open and close-ended questions, with the aim of acquiring more information about the respondents' opinions on accents in general as well as to allow them to express their thoughts about the speaker with fewer restrictions.

Selection of Radio Stations and Radio Deejays

Radio stations were used because the speech samples selected were a source of naturally occurring spontaneous speech. The samples were also not attempted by other speakers and are unique to each speaker. The samples were also easy to record, but, as "real" data, may not be clearly audible because of recording quality. There were a total of 10 English radio stations in Malaysia as of January 2007 (www.wikipedia.org). This includes radio stations, which play a mix of English and other languages. Excerpts from three radio stations: *Hitz.fm, Lite.fm* and *Mix.fm* were chosen, as these were the only three stations that use solely English. In addition, the task was simplified by the fact there was a specific target group, namely college students. Therefore, the choice of radio stations was made with this particular group in mind. This does not necessarily include all the stations often listened by college students. Rather, it would be of interest to note their response to several different types of stations, which cater to other markets.

Hitz.fm has been in operation for almost 10 years (www.hitz.fm) and plays a mixture of the latest hits in the music arena and popular songs, which have hit the airwaves overseas. It is also one of the first to have expanded to the use of the Internet to broadcast its shows via a new phenomenon called 'pod casting'. *Mix.fm* plays a mix of current as well as older songs from eras bygone. On the other hand, *Lite.fm* plays relaxing soothing tunes, which are a mix of old, and current favorites. It is interesting to observe how they would react towards the accents portrayed on these two radio

stations rather than utilizing two others, which would be similar in kind to *Hitz.fm* because the deejays from these stations are speaking with a different target listener base in mind. They would articulate their speech in a different manner compared to the ones on *Hitz.fm.* One deejay was selected from each station, based on the criteria of each deejay's accent being distinguishable from the other. For *Hitz.fm*, the researcher has chosen Adam Carruthers, who goes by the moniker of Adam C, a deejay of Malaysian-British parentage who hosts the 'Hitz Party' on weeknights. The choice of this deejay was motivated by the assumption that he only joined them. The deejay's voice is not as easily recognizable as other well-established *Hitz.fm* stalwarts such as Rudy. Instant voice recognition would give way to biases and pre-conceived notions, which should be minimized.

From *Mix.fm*, Richard Ng who does the lunch shows with another deejay named Shazmin was selected. However, his voice is clearly the dominant one in the recording excerpt taken with minimal contribution from his partner. Richard is of Malaysian-Chinese descent. Priscilla Patrick from *Lite.fm* was chosen. Although initially there was an argument for a single gender cast of deejays, the researcher felt that having a female deejay adds variety to the study. Priscilla is of Indian ethnicity and does the weekend slots. Similar to Richard, she would not probably be as easily recognizable to our target group as *Lite.fm* is associated with older listeners. The radio deejays were chosen to represent a diverse range of accents projected by a myriad group of Malaysians easily distinguishable from one another. The researcher has refrained from selecting popular deejays amongst college students to minimize any prejudice or favoritism, which may arise during the course of the survey. The deejays were chosen because the recordings were easily obtainable and were spontaneous.

Respondents

The data was collected in a number of sittings throughout the month of February via questionnaires handed out to college students. There were a total of 50 respondents comprising of 24 male students and 26 female students with an age range of 18 to 38 years old, all of who are currently pursuing tertiary education at a local private institution. The average age of the respondents was 22 years old. Fifty was an ideal number as it is large enough to give an approximate indication. All of the students are from the same institution as it is timesaving for the researcher to conduct the process, as all of the respondents would have to listen to a recording while answering the questionnaire at the same time.

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Procedure

A recording, comprising mainly of the deejays' voice, of approximately 3-4 minutes with gaps of 8 seconds between each deejay was played and paused at intervals between deejays to provide time for

the respondents to answer the questions. The respondents listened to the recordings together in groups of 10 to 20. The respondents heard three deejays altogether and had to complete 3 separate sections excluding a personal information section. The questionnaires were collected at the end of each session and compiled accordingly.

Data Analysis

The scores of each deejay on ten different characteristics were averaged out to obtain a general number. The characteristics had two extremes with the scores ranging from 1 to 6, 1 being most unfavorable and 6 being most favorable. For example, a score of 1 would be uninteresting whereas a score of 6 would be highly interesting. The mean scores of the respondents towards certain statements made with regards to each individual deejay as well as general statements about accents were obtained. These scores range from 1 to 4, with 1 signifying a strong disagreement and 4 indicating that the respondent strongly agrees with the statements. For example, for the first statement, "*The speaker is a native speaker*", a score of 2 would indicate that the respondent disagrees with the statement. Total percentages for agreement (*strongly agree and agree*) and disagreement (*strongly disagree and disagree*) were obtained to provide a general picture of the respondents' opinion. The qualitative data addressing specific issues regarding their impressions of the deejays were then examined. The questions posed to the respondents were both of an open and close- ended nature. Particular attention was paid to the open-ended questions, which provide the reasoning underlying the attitude towards each deejay's accent. Data analysis was condensed into simple tables and charts for ease of comparison and the quantitative data reported was analyzed together with the qualitative data gathered from the questions posed at the end of each questionnaire. Additional information provided by each respondent was also used to substantiate the existing data to assist the researcher with regards to the attitudes of college students towards the accents of radio deejays in Malaysia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 50 respondents answered the questionnaire, which comprised 3 sections. The respondents comprised 24 males and 26 females with ages ranging from 18 to 38 years old. This is consistent with the goal of obtaining a target group of college students. The respondents consisted of 39 full-time undergraduate students, 3 part-time postgraduate students and 4 full-time post-graduate students at a private college. The remaining two did not indicate their current status or level of study. The majority of the respondents were Malaysians while two of them were from Libya and China, which were subsequently removed from the data because they did not meet the criteria of being Malaysians for the purpose of this study. Respectively, the Malaysian respondents comprised of Malays, Indians and Chinese.

Characteristics Associated with Accents

This section reports on the impressions of the respondents towards the recordings of radio programs. The focus of the survey is attitudes towards accents, where a six-point Likert scale measuring 11 bipolar adjectives used to describe personality characteristics is constructed. The selected adjectives were meant to demonstrate stereotypical personality characteristics and their opposite counterparts.

The scores ranged from 1 to 6 with, for example, 1 being uninteresting and 6 being highly interesting. As the scores increased from 1 to 6, the perception of each deejay moves from uninteresting to highly interesting. The scores presented consist of the average scores obtained by each deejay on the 11 personality characteristics as well as the standard deviations. Table 1 presents the results of the impressions of the 3 deejays that were recorded. The average scores were calculated by tabulating the scores of each deejay for each individual characteristic and dividing it by the number of respondents who responded. The standard deviation of the scores obtained did not deviate very much for each corresponding mean. The larger the score, the further it deviates from the mean, which indicates more extreme figures on either end of the rating scale.

Table 1. Respondents' Ratings of Deejays

Characteristics	Measures	DJ 1	DJ 2	DJ 3
Interesting	**Mean**	4.6	5.0	2.9
	Standard Deviation	1.2	1.1	1.5
Educated	**Mean**	4.4	4.6	3.6
	Standard Deviation	1.0	1.0	1.2
Friendly	**Mean**	4.8	4.7	3.4
	Standard Deviation	1.1	1.1	1.3
Confident	**Mean**	4.8	5.0	3.7
	Standard Deviation	1.2	1.0	1.3
Hardworking	**Mean**	4.4	4.7	3.5
	Standard Deviation	1.1	1.1	1.1
Sincere	**Mean**	4.6	4.8	3.9
	Standard Deviation	1.0	1.0	1.0
Humorous	**Mean**	4.8	4.8	3.5
	Standard Deviation	1.1	0.9	1.1
Intelligent	**Mean**	4.6	4.6	3.8
	Standard Deviation	1.0	0.9	1.0
Fluent	**Mean**	4.7	4.9	3.8
	Standard Deviation	1.0	0.9	1.1
Pleasant	**Mean**	4.6	4.7	3.7
	Standard Deviation	1.0	1.1	1.0
Attractive	**Mean**	4.7	4.8	3.5
	Standard Deviation	1.2	1.0	1.2

The mean scores of each personality question are crucial for answering our first research question, which is what the attitudes of students towards the different Malaysian English accents heard on the radio. The means can be interpreted to be the average rating for each characteristic for each speaker, with a higher rating indicating a strong rating for that particular characteristic.

Preferred Accents

To obtain responses about their preferred accents, respondents were asked to choose one of four options: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree and Strongly Agree, with each of them given a score of 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively for four statements. Following Crismore et al (2003), the total percentages for *strongly disagree* and *disagree* on one hand and *strongly agree* and *agree* on the other were tabulated for each deejay. There is a strong level of agreement among the respondents that DJ 1 is the easiest to understand with 93.75% of them agreeing. In addition, 83.33% of the respondents also agree that DJ 1 speaks the most fluently. This suggests that the deejay that speaks fluently is also the easiest to understand. There was no consensus as to which deejay was a native speaker with most of the respondents in disagreement that DJ 1(72.92%), DJ 2(60.42%) and DJ 3(75.00%) were native speakers. A large percentage (93.75%) of the respondents agreed that DJ 1 is the easiest to understand whereas 56.25% of the respondents disagreed that DJ 2 is easy to understand. A total of 72.92% of the respondents also agreed that DJ 2 spoke too fast. This suggests that the deejay that speaks too fast is the most difficult to understand. The results correspond with the results of the close and open-ended questions at

the end of the questionnaire as well as the additional comments/impressions section in the second part of the questionnaire. Summaries of the results are tabulated in Tables 2 and 3. The total of the responses do not match up to 50 as some of the respondents left their answer spaces blank.

When queried about which speaker they liked best, the 59.57% of the respondents cited DJ2 (see Table 2). When asked if they would like to sound like their preferred speaker, 78.57% of them were adamant that they would not like to sound like the speaker (see Table 2). This suggests perhaps that although they like the way the speaker speaks, they are comfortable with their own accent. This ties in with the results shown in Table 4.8 where 74.47% of them stated that they would not change their accent, and are contented with it. This affirms the previous findings in the earlier section that the respondents are happy with their current accents. The minority, which wanted to change their accent, named several accents they would like to change theirs to, with American and British accents being popular choices. The speaker selected as least likable was DJ3, with a 71.43% of students stating among others, that the speaker was boring, lazy and not friendly. There was one respondent in particular, which reasoned that the speaker sounded 'too Malaysian' which raises the issue of whether local accents turn listeners off. However, most of them were on similar ground by saying that the speaker's speech was boring.

When questioned about which DJ was easiest to understand, the respondents were unanimous in their selection of DJ1 with 79.17% choosing the speaker based on the fluency of speech and the clear pronunciation of words (see Table 2 & 3). There were numerous answers citing 'slow' as a reason for their ease of comprehension. This suggests that the faster the rate of speech, the easier it is to understand the speech, as found in previous studies. There was one interesting answer to note as one respondent of Malay ethnicity cited DJ3 as the preferred choice because the speaker sounded 'very Malay'. This suggests racial bias towards the speaker, which the respondent can relate to, based on ethnicity. The speaker that was found most difficult to understand was DJ2 (80.43%) with the majority of respondents saying that the speaker spoke too fast (see Table 2 & 3). This result is in tandem with the results in Table 2, as the rate of speech seems to be tied to the comprehension ability. Although this affirms the previous statement, it contradicts with findings in other studies such as Scales (2006), which conclude that the speaker that is easiest to understand is also the best liked. However, in this case, the one that is best liked is also the most difficult to understand. Perhaps, this is due to the fact that the respondents liked the speaker based on the overall 'feel-good vibe' of the speech rather than the content or speed of speech.

Table 2. Summary of Responses to Close-Ended Questions

	DJ 1		DJ 2		DJ 3	
Most preferred	18	*38.30%*	28	*59.57%*	1	*21.30%*
Least preferred	6	*12.24%*	8	*16.33%*	35	*71.43%*
Easiest to understand	38	*79.17%*	3	*6.25%*	7	*14.58%*
Most difficult to understand	5	*10.87%*	37	*80.43%*	4	*8.70%*
	Yes		**No**		**Maybe**	
Would you like to sound like preferred deejay?	9	*21.43%*	33	*78.57%*	0	*0.00%*
Would you want to change your accent?	10	*21.59%*	35	*74.47%*	2	*3.94%*

Table 3. Reasons for Responses

Most preferred	DJ2	Attractive, happy, cheerful, exuberant, humorous, confident, native
Least preferred	DJ3	Boring, lazy, unfriendly, too Malaysian
Easiest to understand	DJ1	Fluent, slow, clear pronunciation, correct pace, very Malay
Most difficult to understand	DJ2	Fast, thick accent, no enunciation, slurring and swallowing of words

It can be seen from Table 1 that DJ 1 was rated the easiest to understand (79.17%) and DJ 3 was rated the least preferred (71.43%). As mentioned earlier, the most preferred deejay that is DJ 2 (59.57%) is also the most difficult to understand (80.43%). This implies that the level of intelligibility is not a prevalent factor in determining perception towards accents. If the deejays were to be ranked in order of preference, it would be DJ 2, DJ 1 and DJ 3 with DJ 2 being the most preferred (Table 3). The second speaker was also the one best liked by the respondents and highly rated on numerous personality characteristics. This suggests that a number of the respondents might have been swayed by the fact that they thought DJ2 was a native English speaker (Table 3). In summary, DJ 2 is the most preferred deejay but also the most difficult to understand. DJ 2 was rated highly on most of the personality traits in comparison with the other two

CONCLUSION

This study has set out to answer the research questions posted in the initial chapter and to shed light on understanding of attitudes towards accents. In conclusion, college students in Malaysia have a preference for certain deejays over others based on their speech and accents. However, the DJ that was the hardest to understand was ironically the one they liked best. This contradicts some of the previous studies done. It is important to note that the one that the speaker that was easiest to understand was also the one which the respondents thought had a slow speech rate and vice-versa, the one with a faster rate of speech was the most difficult to understand

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