English in Malaysia
Attitudes towards Malaysian English and Standard English

Engelska i Malaysia
Attityder till malaysisk engelska och standardengelska

Karin Jarmeby Kennerknecht
Abstract

In Malaysia what was at first Standard English has over time changed and a variety called Malaysian English has arisen. This variety of English is full of colloquial expressions and the grammar also differs slightly from that of Standard English. This paper surveys Malaysian speakers’ attitudes towards Malaysian English and Standard English. A questionnaire was used to collect the data. The results show that the informants consider Malaysian English useful for informal and everyday communication whereas Standard English is more useful for international communication as well as more formal purposes. A good command of Standard English is still regarded as important. It became evident that while the informers were aware of Malaysian English and its linguistic characteristics, identifying them in written sentences was not easy. The informants’ attitudes towards Malaysian English and Standard English showed that one variety does not have to exclude the existence of the other.

Keywords: Malaysian English, Standard English, Bahasa Malaysia, attitudes
## Contents

1. Introduction and aims .............................................................................................................. 1

2. Background .............................................................................................................................. 2
   - 2.1 A brief historical background of the English language in Malaysia ......................... 2
   - 2.2 Linguistic features of Malaysian English ...................................................................... 4
   - 2.3 Previous research .......................................................................................................... 8

3. Methods .................................................................................................................................. 11
   - 3.1 Questionnaire ............................................................................................................... 11
   - 3.2 Informants .................................................................................................................... 12
   - 3.3 Ethical considerations .................................................................................................. 12
   - 3.4 Delimitations ............................................................................................................... 13

4. Analysis and results ................................................................................................................. 14
   - 4.1 Demographics and variety spoken the most ................................................................. 14
   - 4.2 Attitudes towards MalE and SE .................................................................................... 16
   - 4.3 Ability to distinguish between SE and MalE ................................................................. 20
   - 4.4 Lah; a uniquely Malaysian word .................................................................................... 21
   - 4.5 Informants’ description of the varieties ........................................................................ 21

5. Conclusion ............................................................................................................................... 22

References .................................................................................................................................. 25

Appendix 1: Questionnaire .......................................................................................................... 27

Appendix 2: Answers to questions 49 and 50 ........................................................................ 31

Appendix 3: Answers to question 47 and 48 .......................................................................... 33

Appendix 4: Answers to questions 51 and 52 ........................................................................ 35
1. Introduction and aims

Malaysia is a diverse country when it comes to its inhabitants. There are Malay-Indians, Malay-Chinese, Malay and many more. In school English is taught as a foreign language and as the country is a former British colony the English language is still a major part of the country’s written and spoken language (Pillai & Ong, 2018: 148). There have been several changes in the country’s language policy and over the years there have also been changes in the educational system in regards of English and how it is used as a medium of learning (Liu & Ricks, 2012: 477).

When studying the languages of Malaysia it is important to remember how diverse in culture it is and also the regional differences. The country consists of two parts divided by the South China Sea. On one side is Peninsular Malaysia and on the other side there is Sabah and Sarawak on the island of Borneo. Malaysian English, as well as the Malaysian language itself, spoken in the different parts of Malaysia differs, and for linguists this is a challenge when it comes to research (Hashim & Tan, 2012: 56).

Most former British colonies such as Malaysia are highly multilingual (Powell, 2002: 262) and in the post-colonial period English has played a significant part in the country’s development. English has been the medium of instruction in schools for long periods of time and also been the chosen language in the business sector (Powell, 2002: 262). A variety of English has emerged, a new English “adapted to function in a local context, via adoption of words to describe local phenomena like fauna and flora and aspects of local culture” (Mesthrie, 2010: 595). What was at first Standard English has over time changed and a variety called Malaysian English has arisen (Baskaran, 2008a: 281). This version of English is full of colloquial expressions and the grammar does not completely follow that of Standard English. According to Omar (2012: 163), the generation that was born during the colonial period speak Standard English, whereas the younger generations lean heavily towards Malaysian English. In the question of Malaysian English and its value there are two sides: one that argues that Malaysian English is a substandard variety of Standard English and another that argues that Malaysian English is the future (Rajadurai, 2004: 54; Baskaran, 2008a: 282).

There are previous studies concerning the attitudes towards Malaysian English and one of the intentions of this present paper is to partly replicate the studies of Crismore, Ngeow and Soo (1996) and Lin, Choo, Kasuma and Ganapathy (2018). Furthermore, the present study
will investigate to what extent the informants are able to identify and distinguish between the linguistic characteristics of Malaysian English and Standard English. The main aim of this paper is to study attitudes towards Malaysian English and Standard English in Malaysia by means of an online questionnaire. Since the survey is fairly small this is best regarded as an exploratory case study whose results cannot be generalised to the entire population.

In this paper the main research question is: What are the attitudes towards Malaysian English and Standard English of the informants in this study?

- What variety of English do the informants perceive themselves to use?
- Are there types of communication where Standard English is regarded as more appropriate, or useful, than Malaysian English and vice versa?
- Are the informants aware of the linguistic features of Malaysian English that set the variety apart from Standard English?
- Are the informants’ attitudes towards Malaysian English similar or dissimilar to those of previous studies?

2. Background

In this section there will first be a brief historical background of the English language in Malaysia (Section 2.1). This is to ensure that the reader will have a context in which to put Malaysian English and how it has evolved from Standard English. Part of the questionnaire used in this study deals with the informants’ ability to discern the differences between Malaysian English and Standard English and Section 2.2 is therefore a survey of Malaysian English which introduces features that are typical of the variety; it also introduces the terminology used for describing these features. Finally, Section 2.3 presents previous research on Malaysian English and attitudes towards it.

2.1 A brief historical background of the English language in Malaysia

When the British arrived in the Malay Peninsula in the early 18th century the natives spoke Bahasa Malaysia (also known as Malay or Bahasa Melayu), a language which is part of the Malayo-Polynesian branch of the Austronesian language family (Thompson, 2017). When the first missionary work began and the British started to colonise the country the English language started to spread across the country (Pillai & Ong, 2018: 147). In 1812 the Penang Free School was founded, the very first school in Malaysia regulated by the British educational system and with English as the medium of instruction (Omar, 2012: 156). In
colonies where trade was the main goal it was important for the colonisers to be able to communicate with the country’s native people (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2012: 2f.). In the case of Malaysia this meant that the British started to spread their own language in order to use it to communicate and do business in. Locals were trained as administrators and schools teaching English to native Malaysians were established (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2012: 2f.). However, these kinds of schools were often located in the bigger cities and most of the students tended to be Chinese and Malay children from well-to-do families (Omar, 2012: 156). During the British rule there was no general policy on education but rather the different ethnic groups were kept separate as schools were established to cater for people of Malay, Chinese and Indian origin separately. The Chinese and Indian families accepted English more readily than the Malay, and sent their children to schools where the language was used as a medium of instruction (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2012: 5). The British encouraged this as it supported their “divide and rule” policy (Grapragasem et al., 2014: 85). The English language was soon associated with elitism and as a language reserved for a minority of the Malaysian population (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2012: 5).

In 1955 Malaysia achieved self-government and two years later, the country became fully independent. After the independence from the British in 1957 both Malay and English were chosen as official languages of the governmental services (Liu & Ricks, 2012: 476). This was in part due to the fact that the ethnic groups of Malaysia did not fully agree on which language to call Malaysia's own (Omar, 2012: 158). The Malay argued for Bahasa Malaysia as the single official language whereas the Chinese and Indian population gave very little support for a monolingual nation (Omar, 2012: 158). The government finally came to an agreement on a bilingual language policy, with Bahasa Malaysia and English given equal status (Omar, 2012: 158). However, it was also agreed that this was not meant as a permanent solution but that it would be reviewed after a period of 10 years (Omar, 2012: 158). In 1971 the nation’s language policy shifted completely and English was removed, which left Bahasa Malaysia as the only official language. Chinese (predominantly Mandarin) and Tamil were used in education alongside Bahasa Malaysia but the official language policy made it very clear that Bahasa Malaysia was to be the dominant language (Liu & Ricks, 2012: 477). Bahasa Malaysia became the dominant language in education, government, and the law courts but when it came to the business sector English remained the dominant language (Gill, 2005: 254).

The English language is so deeply rooted in Malaysia that today bilingualism in English and Bahasa Malaysia is very common, especially in the urban areas (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2012: 7). At present there are a growing number of international schools as well as private colleges
and universities that use English as the medium of instruction in Malaysia (Pillai & Ong, 2018: 148). The government has made it very clear that there are plans to make Malaysia an education hub in South East Asia and politicians want to attract foreign students (Grapragasem, 2014: 91). Influences from other languages are seen more and more as a positive thing and something that can make English an even richer and fuller language (Pillai & Ong, 2018: 153). The current language policy of Malaysia is focused on upholding Bahasa Malaysia as the national language, keeping other languages (such as Tamil and Chinese varieties such as Mandarin) and keeping English as a second language (Hashim & Low, 2012: 173).

Code-switching between English and Bahasa Malaysia is so common today that it seems to be the norm in almost any situation and form of communication (Omar, 2012: 159). The exception to this is highly official ceremonies such as the installation of the King or the Sultan of a state and the opening of Parliament where only Bahasa Malaysia is allowed (Omar, 2012: 159). When it comes to education all of the government run institutions use Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction, apart from the universities where English is also used (Omar, 2012:159). For social interaction a difference can be seen between the rural and urban areas. In the former Bahasa Malaysia is commonly the most widely used language whereas in the latter code-switching between Bahasa Malaysia and English is the norm (Omar, 2012: 160).

2.2 Linguistic features of Malaysian English

Previous research is more or less unanimous in saying that Malaysian English is not simply one variety of Standard English but rather that there are at least three varieties of Malaysian English used simultaneously. Baskaran (2008a: 282) describes them as “official MalE (standard MalE), unofficial MalE (dialectal MalE) and broken MalE (patois MalE).” Thirusanku & Yunus (2012: 8) use the terms *acrolect, mesolect* and *basilect* when they classify the different varieties of Malaysian English. The meaning is the same, where *acrolect* refers to the most standard form, *mesolect* the variety used in informal situations and *basilect* is the most colloquial or rural variety. Malaysian English has developed from Standard English with a mix of native dialects of the Malay, Chinese and Indian people (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2012: 8). Even though some researchers make this division in their studies the majority seem to focus on Malaysian English as such and simply mention that there are sub-varieties that are mainly spoken (Baskaran, 2008a: 280).

Due to the fact that Malaysia used to be a British colony the Standard English spoken in Malaysia is closer to British Standard English than American Standard English or any other variety of English (Pillai & Ong, 2018: 150, Rajadurai, 2004: 54). In this paper the term
Standard English will be used and abbreviated as SE. Malaysian English will be abbreviated MalE.

According to Pillai & Ong (2018: 151) some of the features that are characteristic of MalE are code-switching, code-mixing, lexical shifts, localised cultural expressions and simplification (Pillai & Ong, 2018: 151). Some of these are more evident in spoken MalE, such as code-switching, where a Malaysian can use MalE and then change to SE, all depending on the situation and audience (Brown, 2017: 57). Localised cultural expressions, or local lexicon, are a characteristic of MalE that is apparent in the use of words from Bahasa Malaysia when there is no suitable word in SE. This includes words with a specific cultural and emotional meaning as well as words with a culinary meaning not found in SE (Baskaran, 2008b: 619).

MalE has evolved over the years since the time the country was a British colony, and a strong influence on it has always been Bahasa Malaysia (Baskaran, 2008b: 610). This can be seen for instance in the article ellipsis that occurs in MalE, which can be seen a carryover from Bahasa Malaysia where there is no article system (Baskaran, 2008b: 612). An example of article ellipsis is shown in example (1) (Baskaran, 2008b: 611).

(1) a. Main reason for their performance was that they needed money. (SE: The main reason...) b. He is drug addict (SE: He is a drug addict.)

Another linguistic feature of MalE that may be a carry-over from Bahasa Malaysia is pronoun concord. In MalE there is no number distinction for inanimate nouns (Baskaran, 2008b: 612). This can be seen in example (2) (Baskaran, 2008b: 612).

(2) a. Those books are very informative. It can be obtained at Dillon’s. (SE: Those books are very informative. They can be obtained at Dillon’s.) b. Rahman bought three pens from the shop, but left it on the cash desk. (SE: Rahman bought three pens from the shop, but left them on the cash desk.)

Another characteristic feature of MalE is the treatment of mass nouns as count nouns (Baskaran, 2008b: 613). Words such as staff, lingerie and stationery can be used in sentences like the ones in example (3) (Baskaran, 2008b: 613).

(3) a. How many staffs are on medical leave? b. She bought three lingeries at Mark’s today. c. There are not many stationaries in the room.
These mass nouns are not countable in SE, whereas MalE has added a way to use them as count nouns.

A typical linguistic feature of MalE is the use of local lexicon, and according to Baskaran (cited in Hashim & Low, 2012: 67) it can be categorised into six different lexical groups:

1) Institutional concepts
2) Emotional and cultural loading
3) Semantic restriction
4) Cultural and culinary items
5) Hyponymous collocation
6) Coinage

In the first category, institutional concepts, are words that lack an equivalent in SE such as bumiputera which means ‘sons of the soil’ and is usually used to describe the ethnic group Malay (Baskaran, 2008b: 619). Another important word for the Malaysians is rakyat which means ‘the people’ or ‘common people’. It carries a connotation of a strong national identity and is used in MalE as there is no perfect translation into English (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2012: 9).

In the second category are words with emotional and cultural loading. These are words that carry a deep, emotional association in Bahasa Malaysia and are used in MalE when there are no SE words that work as well for the Malaysian speakers. One such word is kampung which means ‘village’, and usually refers to the village one’s family comes from and conveys a strong feeling of belonging.

The third category, semantic restriction, can be explained with the example of the Malay word kacang which in Collins Dictionary (2013: 763) is translated as ‘nut’ or ‘bean’. If a word is added after kacang, it can take on a different and more specific meaning. This can be seen in combinations such as kacang kuda ‘chickpeas’ or kacang merah ‘red bean’. In MalE, however, the word kacang is used to refer to roasted nuts eaten as snacks (Imm, 2014: 177). The word dadah can be used as another example. Dadah in Bahasa Malaysia means ‘drugs’ or ‘medicine’ in general but in MalE it refers only to drugs used illegally as narcotics (Baskaran, 2008b: 619).

The fourth category refers to cultural and culinary terms. These are words with local culinary and domestic referents specific to Malaysia. The fruit durian (a thorny fruit with a very special smell) is usually mentioned in this category, as is sambal which is a spicy condiment
with chili as main ingredient (Baskaran, 2008b: 620). The Malay word for ‘coffee’ is kopi and more often than not this is used in MalE.

The fifth category, *hyponymous collocation*, refers to local words used as the subordinate referent, when an English word is the superordinate. For example, in the phrase orang asli people the Bahasa Malaysia words orang asli are used together with the English word people. The meaning then becomes ‘native people’, more specifically the indigenous people of Malaysia. Orang means ‘people/person’ and asli means ‘original/natural’ (Collins Easy Learning Dictionary, 2013: 587, 887). The sixth and last category, coinage, refers to what can be called slang. This category changes fast and usually comprises words coined by students on campuses (Baskaran, 2008b: 620).

When it comes to syntactic characteristics, one typical feature of MalE is tagged yes-no interrogatives. A question where yes/no is the answer can be asked with the tag *yes or not* or simply *or not?* (Baskaran, 2008b: 616). These can be used as seen in example (4) (Baskaran, 2008b: 616):

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
(4) & \text{MalE} & \text{SE} \\
\text{a. She can sing or not?} & \text{Can she sing?} \\
\text{b. She can sing, yes or not?} & \text{Can she sing?} \\
\text{c. You are hungry, or not?} & \text{Are you hungry?} \\
\text{d. You are hungry, yes or not?} & \text{Are you hungry?}
\end{array}
\]

This is probably a carry-over from Bahasa Malaysia where such tags are common (Baskaran, 2008b: 616) as seen in example (5):

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
(5) & \text{Bahasa Malaysia} & \text{SE} \\
\text{a. Dia makan atau tidak?} & \text{He eat or not?} \\
\text{b. Dia makan ya ‘tak?} & \text{He ate yes or not?}
\end{array}
\]

Another typical interrogative tag for MalE is the *can or not?* phrase which is commonly used (Baskaran, 2008b: 617). As shown in example (6) it actually has three different functions (Baskaran, 2008b: 617):

\[
\begin{array}{ll}
(6) & \text{a. Seeking permission: I want to come, can or not?} \\
\text{b. Confirming ability: They must come tomorrow, can or not?} \\
\text{c. Assessing volition: You cook this for me, can or not?}
\end{array}
\]

A typical feature of MalE is that wh-questions omit the verbs *is, are, was, do, did, had* and *have* (Pillai & Ong, 2018: 151). This can be heard in sentences such as the ones in example (7) (Pillai & Ong, 2018: 151):
(7) a. When you coming back to visit me? (SE: When are you coming back to visit me?)
   b. Where you went? (SE: Where did you go?)
   c. Why you so sad? (SE: Why are you so sad?)

MalE uses some lexemes, especially verbs, in a reverse direction (Baskaran, 2008b: 622, Hashim & Tan, 2012: 67). This can in part be attributed to the fact that Bahasa Malaysia does not always have the same converse pairs as SE does. In SE there are the pairs go/come, bring/send and borrow/lend for example. In Bahasa Malaysia the last pair only has one lexeme, pinjam, to which suffixes are added to demonstrate the different meaning between borrow and lend (Baskaran, 2008b: 622). This usage of verbs in reverse direction can appear as in example (8) (Baskaran, 2008b: 622):

(8) a. She borrowed me her camera (SE: lent)  
   b. He always likes to lend my books (SE: borrow)  
   c. Can you send me home first? (SE: take)

One word that is often used in spoken MalE is lah, a word that replaces functions normally represented by intonational variation and grammatical structures in SE (Baskaran, 2008b: 618). The word can be used in almost every sentence and carries a different meaning depending on in which situation it is used. For a newcomer in Malaysia it might not be that easy to distinguish the different meanings of the word but as seen in example (9) it can be used as somewhat of a modifier:

(9) a. Person 1: Hey, can you lend me five ringgit?  
   Person 2: Sorry lah, I need money to pay for my lunch.
   b. Person 1: Can you bring coffee?  
   Person 2: Can lah!

In example (9a), Person 2 uses lah to emphasise the fact that he is truly sorry that he cannot lend person 1 any money. In example (9b), lah is used to affirm that it is no problem at all to bring coffee.

All of these features, and several left unmentioned in this paper, make up the variety of English known as Malaysian English. In the following section, Section 2.3, previous research on certain aspects of MalE will be presented.

2.3 Previous research

Since the 1990’s there have been two main strands of research into MalE, one focusing on language policy and language planning, and the other on linguistic features and the influence
of other languages on MalE. There have been several studies on MalE and how it differs from SE, most of which have been done fairly recently. According to Hashim & Tan (2012: 66), the first study that took a closer look at the new English in Malaysia was done by R.K. Tongue in 1974. He, as well as other early researchers, deemed MalE to be a substandard version of SE which was used more in informal situations and primarily spoken, not written. Six years after Tongue there was a study by Platt and Weber which was based on a collected corpus of written text, and like Tongue, the authors concluded that MalE was a primarily spoken, informal and localised version of SE (Hashim & Tan, 2012: 66).

Liu and Ricks (2012) did a study that analysed the reasons behind the language policy and planning of Malaysia, as well as Singapore and Thailand. Thirusanku & Yunus (2012) outline the emergence and development of MalE by describing the changes in language policy in Malaysia from the year of independence and onwards to the first decade of the 21st century (2012: 1). Cheng’s study from 2007 is primarily focused on the English language and how it has been a part of shaping the Malaysian population in regards of heritage and identity (Cheng, 2007: 203). The conclusion she arrives at is that the balance between “Bahasa Malaysia as the language of identity and unity, and the English language as the language of globalization and economic viability” (Cheng, 2007: 220) has created a united Malaysian race; Bangsa Malaysia. Bangsa Malaysia is not defined by race or religion but simply a Malaysian united people. According to Cheng, the former colonisers’ language has been a big part in the creation of this unified people (Cheng, 2007: 220).

Lowenberg (1986) investigated the lexical shift that happens when an English word is replaced by a word from a local language (cited in Hashim & Tan, 2012: 66). According to his study such lexical transfer is in fact a reflection of “the socio-cultural context of Malaysia to which English is acculturated” (Hashim & Tan, 2012: 66). Other studies have focused on the linguistic features of MalE, for instance Baskaran’s study of how words from Bahasa Malaysia complement the English vocabulary in MalE (Hashim & Tan, 2012: 66). There has also been research done about how other languages affect MalE, mainly focusing on Chinese languages such as Mandarin. This is understandable as the Malaysian population consists of 23% ethnic Chinese and Mandarin is widely spoken across the country (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018).

Prior empirical research regarding attitudes towards MalE is not plentiful; two studies were found and used as reference material. The two prior studies regarding attitudes toward MalE both made use of a questionnaire and focused on informants from the academic world. Crismore et al. (1996) addressed students as well as lecturers whereas Lin et al. (2018) only
included undergraduate students. The first study included informants from five different universities and received 498 responses where 438 were from students and 60 from lecturers (Crismore et al., 1996: 323). The informants were randomly chosen, and in addition to the questionnaire an in-depth interview with ten students and five lecturers was conducted as a complement (Crismore et al., 1996: 323). The informants in their study pointed very clearly to the usefulness of MalE on informal occasions but they added that the knowledge of SE was and should continue to be prioritised (Crismore et al., 1996: 90). At that time MalE had not reached the same prestige value as SE in Malaysia and a majority of the informants agreed to the statement that MalE was in fact “mistakes made by people who speak poor English” (Crismore et al., 1996: 334). There was still a strong opinion that if a Malaysian wanted to be understood internationally MalE could not be used (Crismore et al., 1996: 325).

We may conclude that although Malaysian speakers of English are comfortable using Malaysian English among themselves and to some extent, with foreigners, they are nevertheless eager to acquire Standard English because they see Malaysian English as ‘mistakes’ that have to be eradicated. (Crismore, 1996: 334)

Crismore et al. conclude their study with the words “the results of this study raised more questions than they answered.” (1996: 334). Some of this was echoed in Lin et al.’s study that came 22 years later.

Lin et al. invited undergraduate students from the Arts and Sciences specifically to an online questionnaire via a Google forms key (Lin et al., 2018: 86). The number of informants who responded was 253 when the survey closed after three weeks. The informants were 19-27 years old, of various ethnicities and all of them speakers of MalE (Lin et al., 2018: 323). The questionnaire consisted of 26 items; three were for demographic data, and measured five constructs (Lin et al., 2018: 85). The results from Lin et al.’s study show that the informants favour MalE in informal settings as a way to show familiarity and solidarity (Lin et al., 2018: 90). However, the same study also shows that for more formal and international purposes SE is still the language of choice (Lin et al., 2018: 90). The majority of the undergraduates are positive toward MalE but perceive it as “substandard and inadequate for formal or more serious purposes” (Lin et al., 2018: 90). According to Pillai and Ong, the view of MalE speakers as lacking proficiency in English has changed and been “replaced with a better understanding of how these users’ cultural heritage and geographical background has enriched the English language and will further expand the repertoire of English language because of the fluid composition of the people in Malaysia today” (Lin et al., 2018: 155). However, Lin et al.’s study from the same year came up with a different result. According to their informants the attitudes have changed but little since 1996 (2018: 90). The informants “appreciate their local-accented English and Malaysian English, and also agree on the
importance and usability of the language” but when it comes to formal and international purposes the informants are in agreement that SE should be used (Lin et al., 2018: 90).

A previous study mentions that there is a growing sense of pride attached to MalE, especially among younger people (Rajadurai, 2007: 54). This is supposed to be due to the fact that one’s identity can be shown in the more localised version of English where accent and words can be added from the speaker’s mother tongue or other spoken languages (Rajadurai, 2007: 54). MalE is seen as a sign of camaraderie and solidarity and the spoken variety of choice (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2012: 7).

3. Methods

In this section the questionnaire design will be described in Section 3.1. Section 3.2 will present the sampling of informants. In Section 3.3 ethical considerations will be discussed. Finally, Section 3.4 presents the delimitations of the study.

3.1 Questionnaire

One important aspect of a questionnaire is what Denscombe (2014: 160) calls response burden. The meaning of that term is the time and effort it takes the informants to complete the questionnaire. The completion rate will increase if the informant’s burden is minimised (Denscombe, 2014:160). Depending on how fast a reader the informant is the survey should ideally take less than 10 minutes to complete. This was assessed through a pilot run of the questionnaire. Most of the questions were Likert scale multiple choice questions, where the informants choose the answer most relevant to them.

Several questions were taken from the study by Crismore et al. (1996). This is to be able to compare the results from their questionnaire with the outcome of the one made for this study. Questions have also been taken from Lin et al. (2018). Again, this is to be able to compare their collected data with those of this study.

The questionnaire’s first five questions were intended to gather demographic data and included gender, age, ethnicity, occupation and residence of the informants (see Appendix 1). To see if the informants were able to discern between MalE and SE linguistic characteristics the questionnaire had 10 questions written in either variety. The informants then had to select which variety they thought it was written in. The informants’ attitudes towards MalE was gathered through questions regarding in which situations they found it useful, and in
which type of communication they found it useful. The same questions were then asked regarding SE, in order to find out the informants’ attitudes toward that variety and to what extent they differed from the ones they held towards MalE. The final two items were open questions where the informants were asked to describe SE and MalE with three words (see Appendix 4).

A Likert scale was chosen to make the collected data easier to compare with previous studies with similar questions (see Crismore et al., 1996 and Lin et al., 2018). A numerical value was given to each option, ranging from 1 – 5 where 1 stands for ‘strongly disagree’ and 5 for ‘strongly agree’. Crismore et al. (1996) used a four point scale whereas Lin et al. (2018) used a five point scale. Both are common options with this kind of questionnaire and method (Rasinger, 2010: 62). The risk of using a neutral option is that the informants can choose neither to disagree nor agree. However, it can also be seen as the informants being disinterested or uninterested in the question. For this study the choice fell on the five point scale as Lin et al.’s (2018) results could more easily be compared with the outcome. In the results section the responses for 4 and 5 will be added under positive results whereas 1 and 2 will be added for the negative results.

3.2 Informants

The Survey & Report online tool supplied by Karlstad University was used to create and distribute the questionnaire. The help of acquaintances in Malaysia was important to spread the questionnaire to as many people as possible. A few acquaintances were given the link to the questionnaire and then asked to spread it. They were also encouraged to tell people to spread the link, creating what is known as ‘snowball sampling’ (Heckathorn & Cameron, 2017: 102). The directives the original informants had were to choose people from different age groups, make sure to include people with different occupations and preferably from different residential areas. The first informant passes the link on to two (or more) people, and they in their turn do the same, thus creating a snowball effect.

3.3 Ethical considerations

When collecting any form of data from informants it is important to keep certain ethical considerations in mind, as research ethics are “a fundamental feature of all good research” (Denscombe, 2014: 275). What this actually means is that good practice is to protect the informants’ interests. Therefore, researchers should make sure to follow the guidelines described by Denscombe (2014: 279):
1) make sure to avoid risking the personal safety of the informants
2) respect the privacy of the informants
3) treat all information as confidential
4) guarantee the anonymity of individuals in any published document (unless the informants give written consent to be identified by name)

All of these objectives are connected and intertwined. The researcher has an obligation to comply with the laws of the land, ensure that participation is voluntary and based on informed consent as well as operate with scientific integrity (Denscombe, 2014: 278).

In this study the information about the research is explained at the beginning of the questionnaire as is the name of the researcher and information on how to get in touch if questions arise (see Appendix 1). The informants are also reassured that participation is voluntary and they are free to withdraw at any time.

3.4 Delimitations

To use a questionnaire always presents a risk as the number of informants can turn out to be very low. As this survey is a small one the outcome cannot be said to apply to the Malaysian population as a whole. There are potential disadvantages with the use of a questionnaire, among them the possibility that the informants might not submit it at all, or submit it incomplete. An online questionnaire also limits the answers in a way a face-to-face interview does not (Denscombe, 2014: 172).

One potential limitation of using the ‘snowball sampling’ method is that the informants might fail to give the information to other informants and there is no snowball. Another limitation is that “neither the selection of the initial subjects nor the selection of the subsequent waves is random, so the result is a convenience sample” (Heckathorn & Cameron, 2017: 102). Heckathorn and Cameron go on to say that such a sample cannot in any way be said to be the basis for the thoughts of the entire population from which the sample came. The original group of informants selected who to invite to answer the questionnaire and this is where the selection bias comes in. They most likely chose people close to them, either family or friends. The next step would be people from work or school if that is applicable. The interest in answering the questionnaire might not be as high in the second wave of informants and this could mean that the snowball sampling loses momentum and the third wave of informants never comes to be.

The informants are allowed to decide whether or not to participate in the survey and this self-selection leads to biased data (Olsen, 2008: 808). This is due to the fact that “the
respondents who choose to participate will not well represent the entire target population” (Olsen, 2008: 808). However, it is almost impossible to avoid self-selection in survey samples as the informants are given the option to participate or not (Olsen, 2008: 808). The bias can be negligible and not affect the outcome to any great extent. The information gathered from this small study is far from enough to be able to draw any significant conclusions in the matter. However, it can be said that the findings are a general pointer as to the attitudes of the population towards MalE and SE.

A limitation that might occur when using a questionnaire is that the questions asked do not generate the answers needed to move the project forward (Rasinger, 2010: 62). This is hopefully avoided through the careful process of creating and assembling the questionnaire and its questions. When analysing the answers, it is also important to remember not to look for “evidence that will confirm an existing prejudice” (Sealey, 2010: 109). The answers given might not be the expected ones.

4. Analysis and results

In this section the results of the questionnaire will be analysed. In Section 4.1 the demographics and most commonly spoken variety will be presented. In Section 4.2 the informants’ attitudes towards SE and MalE will be analysed and in Section 4.3 the informants’ judgments of 10 sentences written in either SE or MalE will be presented. Section 4.4 presents the word lah and how the informants defined it. Finally, the informants’ own descriptions of SE and MalE are presented in Section 4.5.

4.1 Demographics and variety spoken the most

All the informants in this study are of Malay ethnicity which is not representative of the different ethnic groups that live in Malaysia. The Malay (also known as Bumiputera) population is as high as 69.1% but to get a representative group the Chinese and Indian ethnic groups should make up 23% and 6.9% of the informants (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2018).

Lin et al. had 78.3% female informants (2018: 87) whereas Crismore et al. had 61.78% female informants among the students and 55% female informants among the lecturers (1996: 323). In this study 68.1% of the informants were female. When it came to age groups the majority of the informants were 17-35 years old. None was under 16 and only one was older than 55.
### Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (years) of the informants</th>
<th>Number of informants</th>
<th>Percentage of the total number of informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>-16</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17-25</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-45</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46-55</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55+</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The sample of informants turned out to be fairly small and also uniform in terms of residence. 86.3% of the informants lived in a medium sized or big town and only 9% lived in the countryside. Had the outcome in number of informants been larger it might have been possible to see a difference in attitude towards MalE and SE depending on where the informants came from, but as can be seen there were not enough answers to make such a comparison.

### Residence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Residence</th>
<th>Number of informants</th>
<th>Percentage of the total number of informants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Countryside</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small town</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium sized town</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big town</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

36.3% of the informants were students which seems fairly normal as the age group 17-25 was in the majority. 18.2% were teachers and 13.6% gave no occupation at all. The remaining informants had occupations ranging from doctor to PR executive. All of the informants belonged to the ethnic group Malay and therefore their native tongue can be assumed to be Bahasa Malaysia rather than Mandarin or Tamil, the two languages that dominate the ethnic groups Chinese and Indian. When asked if most Malaysians spoke English, without asking what kind of variety, 54.5% agreed that most Malaysians did in fact speak English. Only
13.6% disagreed and the rest remained neutral. When it came to which variety of English they spoke, 40.8% of them stated that they used MalE most of the time. Slightly less, 36.2% used SE most of the time. As seen in Table 1, 50% of the informants answered ‘neutral’ when it came to SE. What this ‘neutral’ signals can be discussed, one guess could be that the informants are showing disinterest in the question as they rarely think about whether or not they are using SE.

Table 1: Spoken variety

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Most Malaysians speak English</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=2)</td>
<td>(n=1)</td>
<td>(n=7)</td>
<td>(n=10)</td>
<td>(n=2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I speak MalE most of the time</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=1)</td>
<td>(n=6)</td>
<td>(n=6)</td>
<td>(n=7)</td>
<td>(n=2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I speak SE most of the time</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=0)</td>
<td>(n=3)</td>
<td>(n=11)</td>
<td>(n=6)</td>
<td>(n=2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neutral, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree
*n=number of informants

### 4.2 Attitudes towards MalE and SE

In Table 2 three questions regarding MalE and the informants’ attitudes towards the variety are listed. Previous studies have mentioned that there is a growing sense of pride among younger people towards MalE (Rajadurai, 2007: 54). This was not shown in this study as only 49.9% of the informants agreed that they felt proud of their MalE, which differed greatly from Lin et al.’s study where 70% of the informants stated that they were proud of their MalE (2018: 88). There were however more informants that chose the neutral option in this study which might have influenced the result. When it came to the question if the informants would like to keep on using MalE less than 50% agreed. This too goes against previous studies where MalE is mentioned as being seen as a sign of camaraderie among the younger people and the spoken variety of choice (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2012: 7). In Lin et al.’s study (2018: 88) nearly 70% agreed to want to keep on using MalE.

Table 2: Attitudes towards MalE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am confident using MalE</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=0)</td>
<td>(n=3)</td>
<td>(n=7)</td>
<td>(n=10)</td>
<td>(n=2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am proud of my MalE</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=0)</td>
<td>(n=4)</td>
<td>(n=7)</td>
<td>(n=8)</td>
<td>(n=3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to keep on using MalE</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=0)</td>
<td>(n=3)</td>
<td>(n=10)</td>
<td>(n=8)</td>
<td>(n=1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neutral, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree
*n= numbers of informants
Neither Crismore et al. (1996) nor Lin et al. (2018) asked about the informants’ attitudes towards SE. In this study the same questions regarding attitudes towards MalE was asked regarding SE. The informants showed similar attitudes towards the two varieties of English but when comparing the answers to the last question a fairly clear difference showed. When asked if they would like to keep on using SE nearly 80% agreed. This shows that SE is regarded as a variety that is important to learn and use. Among this group of informants it can even be said that they see the continuous use of SE as even more important than the usage of MalE. This could be linked to the demographics, several of the informants are students and as such might be planning to study or work outside of Malaysia. This is of course purely speculative but if that is so, they could be looking at SE as the most important variety to keep on using due to the fact that it is the variety they feel would be more useful outside of Malaysia.

### Table 3: Attitudes towards SE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am confident using SE</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=0)</td>
<td>(n=1)</td>
<td>(n=9)</td>
<td>(n=10)</td>
<td>(n=2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am proud of my SE</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>63.6%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=0)</td>
<td>(n=0)</td>
<td>(n=7)</td>
<td>(n=14)</td>
<td>(n=1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like to keep on using SE</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
<td>68.1%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=0)</td>
<td>(n=0)</td>
<td>(n=5)</td>
<td>(n=15)</td>
<td>(n=2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neutral, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree
*n= numbers of informants

In Lin et al.’s study 75.9% of the informants agreed (2018: 89) that it is important for Malaysians to learn native-like English. Crismore et al. had almost the same numbers as 49.77% of the students strongly agreed and 42.37% of the lecturers did the same (1996: 325). The informants in this present study demonstrated similar attitudes, as a total of 90.8% agreed to the importance of learning native-like, or Standard, English. It is apparent that the common view is that SE is important to learn. Part of the reason could be that Malaysians feel that to be understood internationally they have to use another variety than MalE, as shown in the second question in Table 4. 91.1% of the informants agreed that SE is a necessity to be understood internationally. The question yielded almost the same result in Crismore et al.’s study (Crismore et al. 1996: 325).

Crismore et al. (1996: 332) included a question in their study about whether MalE speakers were regarded as sounding uneducated, and ended up with a result of 27.53% of the students agreeing and 25.86% of the lecturers doing the same. This is almost exactly the same results that came out of the present study, 22 years later. 31.8% of the informants agreed, and nearly the same percentage remained neutral (as Crismore et al. did not use the neutral point there
cannot be a comparison of that outcome). This could be seen as an indicator of the prestige value that SE holds in Malaysia and has done since colonial times (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2012: 5). A speaker of SE is regarded as more educated than a MalE speaker simply because of the social status awarded to the variety.

In Crismore et al.’s study (1996: 326) there was a statement regarding the usage of words from Malaysian culture (Malay/Chinese/Indian) in MalE and which said that the use of such words made that variety better. About 73% of the informants disagreed with the statement. The results were radically different in the present study, as only 27.2% disagreed and nearly 41% agreed with the statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4: SE over MalE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>It is important for Malaysians to learn native-like (standard) English.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5% (n=1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>If Malaysians want to be understood internationally we must use SE.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>People think I am less educated if I speak MalE and not SE.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MalE is actually mistakes made by people who speak poor English.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Using words from Malaysian culture (Malay/Chinese/Indian) makes MalE better.</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neutral, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree
* n= numbers of informants

Table 5 shows the results of questions regarding the usefulness of MalE. In Lin et al.’s study (2018: 88) 82.2% of informants agreed that MalE was useful for practical, everyday use. The same study had 73.9% of the informants disagreeing with the claim that MalE is useful for formal occasions (Lin et al., 2018: 88). In this study 36.2% disagreed with the claim that MalE is useful for formal occasions whereas 77.2% found it useful for informal and casual communication. There appeared to be general consensus that MalE is neither appropriate for more formal occasions, nor for international communication. Question 50 (see Appendix 2) reaffirmed this as the informants answered that MalE was the preferred variety for informal conversations, daily and casual interaction, and communication between close friends and family.

Crismore et al.’s survey show that nearly 95% of the students believe that to be understood internationally they have to speak SE (1996: 324). According to Crismore et al. this “may
reflect their lack of exposure to dealing with foreigners" (1996: 324) as the students simply lack experience as to whether or not MalE would work internationally. This assumption could be transferred to the present study as nearly 40% of the informants were students.

Table 5: Usefulness of MalE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MalE is useful for informal, casual communication</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
<td>22.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(n=0)</td>
<td>(n=4)</td>
<td>(n=12)</td>
<td>(n=5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MalE is useful for formal occasions</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
<td>18.2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=2)</td>
<td>(n=6)</td>
<td>(n=10)</td>
<td>(n=4)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(n=0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MalE is useful for international communication, such as business dealings</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=3)</td>
<td>(n=7)</td>
<td>(n=8)</td>
<td>(n=3)</td>
<td>(n=1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neutral, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree
*n= numbers of informants

In Table 6 the same questions as in Table 5 were used but with SE instead of MalE. Neither Lin et al. nor Crismore et al. had these options in their surveys so comparison was not possible. It does show that for formal occasions 90.8% of the informants agreed that SE is useful. The numbers were even higher when it came to the usefulness of SE for international communication where 95.4% agreed. However, 59% agreed that SE is useful for informal and casual communication which shows that the informants regard SE as a variety of English that can be used on every occasion.

Table 6: Usefulness of SE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SE is useful for informal, casual communication</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=0)</td>
<td>(n=2)</td>
<td>(n=7)</td>
<td>(n=10)</td>
<td>(n=3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE is useful for formal occasions</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=0)</td>
<td>(n=0)</td>
<td>(n=2)</td>
<td>(n=10)</td>
<td>(n=10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE is useful for international communication, such as business dealings</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=0)</td>
<td>(n=0)</td>
<td>(n=1)</td>
<td>(n=10)</td>
<td>(n=11)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*1: strongly disagree, 2: disagree, 3: neutral, 4: agree, 5: strongly agree
*n= number of informants

In the questionnaire, question number 49 was an open one where the informants were asked to name situations when SE is preferred over MalE (see Appendix 2). Some of the answers were presentation, formal speech, formal conversations, when dealing with international companies, formal occasions, talking to tourists, exam paper, formal written text or essays or speeches, business and education. Compared to the results seen in Table 6 as well as previous research it is clear that SE is preferred on formal occasions and also for educational purposes such as essays and exams.
4.3 Ability to distinguish between SE and MalE

To discern whether or not the informants were able to distinguish between MalE and SE the questionnaire included ten example sentences written in either variety (Questions 35-44, Appendix 1). The linguistic features of MalE that were presented in Section 2.2 were used as a basis for the questions written in MalE.

The five sentences written in SE were constructed as either declaratives or questions. The first declarative (10a) included the word ‘durian’ which is a fruit typical of Malaysia, but the sentence itself was written in SE. Only eight out of 22 informants answered correctly on this one. The second sentence written in SE was a question (10b) and 18 out of 22 informants identified it correctly as SE.

(10) a. Durian is a very expensive and tasty fruit.  
    b. Are you going to finish that sandwich?  
    c. Do you like to swim in the ocean?  
    d. Alexander took the train to KL every morning.  
    e. She likes coffee a lot, but only drinks one cup in the morning.

A majority of the informants answered correctly on the following three items (10c, d, and e). The one that most identified correctly was (10c), with 19 out of 22 informants identifying the question as written in SE. The informants did not seem to have any great difficulty in distinguishing SE from MalE; the sentence using a Malaysian fruit appeared to be the one sentence that confused them.

The five sentences in MalE were also constructed as either questions or declaratives. The linguistic feature of yes or not interrogative sentences was used in one question (11a) to determine whether or not the informants considered it a MalE feature. Another typical feature of MalE is to place the adverb at the end of a question and this was included in (11b).

(11) a. You are hungry, yes or not?  
    b. They are going where?  
    c. How many staffs are on medical leave?  
    d. Where you went?  
    e. Main reason for their performance was that they needed money.

20 out of 22 informants correctly labelled (11a) as MalE and only one of the informants regarded (11b) as being written in SE whereas the rest identified it as MalE. The sentences written in MalE included one where a mass noun was used as a count noun (11c) and the linguistic feature of omitting verbs such as did in wh-questions was exemplified in a question

---

1 The city of Kuala Lumpur which in Malaysia is more or less consistently abbreviated as KL.
(11d). The final sentence written in MalE was an example of the omission of the article which is a typical linguistic feature of the variety (11e). The one that stood out was (11c) which only two of the informants identified correctly as being written in MalE. Sentence (11d) was clearly identified as MalE with 17 of the informants getting it right. In SE the sentence would have been “Where did you go?” and the linguistic feature of MalE to omit did was apparently easy to spot for the informants. Sentence (11e) was identified correctly as MalE by 12 of the informants and one could speculate as to why the answer was not more conclusive. Perhaps the article ellipsis is not as apparent as a typical MalE feature for the Malaysians themselves.

There were six sentences (10b, 10c, 10d, 11a, 11b and 11d) that were answered correctly by 16-21 of the informants. There were two sentences (10a, 11c) where the vast majority of the informants got the answer wrong, with only two and eight informants respectively giving the correct answer. Overall, it can be said that even though the informants could distinguish between the two varieties the linguistic features of MalE were not always apparent to them.

4.4 Lah; a uniquely Malaysian word

In spoken MalE the word lah is very common, as explained in Section 2.2. Questions 47 and 48 of the questionnaire (see Appendix 3) were about that word. First the informants were asked to explain what lah means, in order to be able to make a comparison with how previous research has explained the word. Several of the informants said that the word meant nothing, and a few added that it meant nothing but was used at the end of sentences. One answer was that lah was meant as an emphasis to what was said. The word is used by almost everyone in daily communication but the informants still had great problems explaining what it meant.

It was mentioned in Section 2.2 that the word lah is used in almost any given situation and this was confirmed by the majority of the informants in question 48. The informants were asked to explain in what situations the word was used and the answers ranged from “mostly every situation” to “to make a sentence sound nicer.” From the answers one can also deduce that for a MalE speaker the word is not easy to explain; although they use it daily the precise meaning of it is elusive. It is used to emphasise other words but also as somewhat of a filler without a precise meaning or purpose.

4.5 Informants’ description of the varieties

The final two questions of the questionnaire simply asked the informants to describe SE and MalE with three words (see Appendix 4). From their answers their attitudes towards the different varieties could be studied and compared.
SE was described with words such as ‘formal’, ‘precise’ and ‘easy’. A small number of the informants used words with slightly more negative connotations, such as ‘complicated’ and ‘exaggerated’. ‘Global’ and ‘worldwide’ were also used, in comparison with MalE being described as ‘local’ and ‘unique’. When asked to describe MalE with three words one of the informants mentioned that it bonds Malaysians. Another one said that it is “a Malaysian identity”. The word ‘easy’ was used by several informants when describing MalE, as was ‘informal’ and ‘local’. In general, one can say that SE is described with words that cement the outcome from the questions regarding the variety’s usefulness and importance. SE is the preferred variety in formal, business and international communication and this is shown when the informants use words such as ‘recognised internationally’ in this question. On the other hand, MalE is the variety used for informal communication, again shown in the questions regarding the usefulness of MalE (Table 5).

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the attitudes towards MalE as well as SE among the Malaysians. The questionnaire did not spread to a very large number of informants; had the snowball sampling been more successful the results would have been more comparable with those of previous studies where the informants were in the hundreds. However, with the results at hand comparisons to two former studies were made and analysed. The informants expressed that SE was the most useful variety of English in formal and international communication. The same result was evident in Crismore et al. (1996) as well as Lin et al. (2018). A sense of pride of MalE was expressed, as well as its usefulness when it comes to informal communication. The attitudes towards the usefulness of MalE were mainly positive when it came to informal and casual communication. For international, business and formal communication the informants showed that they believed SE to be more useful. This was the same result as Crismore et al. (1996) and Lin et al. (2018) gathered in their studies. When asked to describe MalE with three words many of them chose the word ‘easy’ and it was also described as local, friendly and common. SE on the other hand was described as global, formal and a bit complex. This variety was also described as ‘easy’ by several informants which indicates that even though it might more often be used in formal situations it is not thought of as difficult to use.

The original informants seemed to choose people close to them, in age as well as residential area. Also, the informants were all Malay, which meant that the ethnic diversity of Malaysia is
not shown in the group of informants. One can speculate as to how the lack of ethnic diversity in the informants shaped the results. Among the Chinese and Indian communities the deep rooted tradition of sending children to schools where English is the medium of instruction is still very much alive which could have influenced the outcome of the survey.

The informants were fairly equally divided when it came to what variety of English they spoke the most. Many of them remained neutral and it can be speculated that they themselves do not take any notice of which variety they use and when they use it. MalE is seen as a variety spoken with friends and family and in casual conversations with fellow Malaysians. SE is spoken and used in more formal conversations, such as business and academic environments. Most likely the informants code-switch between the varieties without giving it a second thought, as well as using Bahasa Malaysia or whatever language they use as their native language. It is not uncommon for a Malaysian to speak two or three languages more or less fluently and code-switching is the norm rather than the exception.

SE seems to still carry a prestige value. This variety of English is seen as more correct and the one that should be used in more official and formal conversations. If MalE were to become more widely used in for example the academic world a shift might come and MalE could be seen as equal to SE. Judging by the informants’ attitudes towards MalE and SE this will most likely not happen soon.

Part of the aim of this study was to see if Malaysians themselves are aware of the linguistic characteristics of MalE. Through this study it became apparent that even though the informants use both MalE and SE the differences between the varieties were not always easy to detect. In the questionnaire there were ten sentences in either MalE or SE and the informants were asked to identify the variety. The majority of answers were correct but not one of the 10 questions was answered correctly by 100% of the informants. As far as this small study goes, it is apparent that the differences between SE and MalE are not perfectly clear, not even for users of both varieties. The lines are perhaps more blurred than academic research makes them out to be. This does signal that there is room for further linguistic research in the subject.

Little seems to have changed since 1996 when Crismore et al. did their study. MalE is still regarded as a variety useful for less formal and more casual conversations and SE is the variety useful for more formal and businesslike conversations. The informants in this study seem to regard both varieties as useful and are willing to keep using them. Perhaps one variety does not have to exclude the presence of the other, but rather they can exist side by
side for years to come. Further studies could be done regarding the academic world and the usage of MalE, and if it is spreading beyond informal communication. Another area of interest is the younger generation and whether or not they see MalE as a viable option to SE. Out of the 22 informants one mentioned that MalE is part of the Malaysian identity and another one said that it bonds Malaysians. In future research this could be a possible venue, as it would be highly interesting to see if there is in fact a connection between the feeling of being Malaysian and speaking MalE.
References


Appendix 1: Questionnaire

I am interested in finding out more about the use of English in Malaysia, and would be very grateful if you would take some time to fill in the online questionnaire. It will only take 10-20 minutes to complete. The data will be used for my degree project in English at Karlstad University, Sweden. Participation is optional, and you may withdraw from the survey at any time. To my knowledge, there are no risks associated with this study. No unauthorised person will get access to your responses. By participating in the survey, you agree to your anonymous responses being used for research purposes. If you have any questions about this survey, feel free to contact me at jarmeby@gmail.com

Thank you in advance for your participation. Terima kasih all the way from Sweden. /Karin Jarmeby Kennerknecht

1) Age:
   - 16
   - 17-25
   - 26-35
   - 36-45
   - 46-55
   - 55+

2) Gender: Female/Male/other

3) Ethnicity: Malay/Chinese/Indian/Other (comment)

4) Occupation:

5) Residence: Countryside/small town/ medium sized town/ big town

6) Most Malaysians speak English.
   
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree

7) A good command of Standard English is important.
   
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree

8) The English taught in Malaysians schools are:
   
   Standard English or Malaysian English

9) It is important for Malaysians to learn native-like (Standard) English.
   
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree

10) If Malaysians want to be understood internationally we must speak Standard English.

    Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree

11) I am proud of my Malaysian accent.

    Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree

12) I would like to keep my Malaysian accent.
13) I speak Malaysian English most of the time.
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree
14) I am confident using Malaysian English.
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree
15) I am proud of my Malaysian English.
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree
16) I would like to keep on using Malaysian English.
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree
17) Malaysian English is useful for informal, casual communication.
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree
18) Malaysian English is useful for formal occasions.
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree
19) Malaysian English is useful for international communication, such as business dealings.
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree
20) I am proud of my Standard English accent.
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree
21) I would like to keep my Standard English accent.
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree
22) I speak Standard English most of the time.
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree
23) I am confident using Standard English.
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree
24) I am proud of my Standard English.
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree
25) I would like to keep on using Standard English.
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree
26) Standard English is useful for informal, casual communication.
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree
27) Standard English is useful for formal occasions.
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree
28) Standard English is useful for international communication, such as business dealings.
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree
29) People think I am less educated if I speak Malaysian English and not Standard English.
30) Foreigners don’t understand me if I speak Malaysian English to them.
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree

31) Malaysian English is correct.
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree

32) Malaysian English is actually mistakes made by people who speak poor English.
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree

33) Malaysians have to modify the English language to make it suitable for use in Malaysia.
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree

34) Using words from Malaysian culture (Malay/Chinese/Indian/other) makes Malaysian English better.
   Strongly disagree/disagree/neutral/agree/strongly agree

35) What variety is the following sentence written in: Durian is a very expensive and tasty fruit.
   Standard English or Malaysian English.

36) What variety is the following question written in: You are hungry, yes or not?
   Standard English or Malaysian English.

37) What variety is the following question written in: Are you going to finish that sandwich?
   Standard English or Malaysian English.

38) What variety is the following question written in: Do you like to swim in the ocean?
   Standard English or Malaysian English.

39) What variety is the following question written in: They are going where?
   Standard English or Malaysian English.

40) What variety is the following sentence written in: Alexander took the train to KL every morning.
   Standard English or Malaysian English.

41) What variety is the following question written in: How many staffs are on medical leave?
   Standard English or Malaysian English.

42) What variety is the following question written in: Where you went?
   Standard English or Malaysian English.

43) What variety is the following sentence written in: She likes coffee a lot, but only drinks one cup in the morning.
   Standard English or Malaysian English.
44) What variety is the following sentence written in: Main reason for their performance was that they needed money. Standard English or Malaysian English.

45) What does the word ‘kacing’ mean?

46) In what situations is ‘kacing’ used?

47) What does the word ‘lah’ mean?

48) In what situations is ‘lah’ used?

49) In which situations would Standard English be preferable to Malaysian English?

50) In which situations would Malaysian English be preferable to Standard English?

51) Use three words to describe Standard English.

52) Use three words to describe Malaysian English.
Appendix 2: Answers to questions 49 and 50

49. In which situations would Standard English be preferable to Malaysian English?
1. Easy.
2. Presentation.
3. Formal speech.
4. In formal conversation.
5. Standard English be preferable when dealing with international company.
6. Formal events.
7. For formal occasions or to communicate with the tourists.
8. When to talk official or important things/event.
9. When speaking to other races that use Malaysian English.
10. Exam paper.
11. I don’t know.
13. Study.
15. Formal occasions.
17. Business and education.
18. In formal written text or essays or speeches.
19. All situations.
20. Formal occasions.
21. In formal events.
22. In a formal situation.

50. In which situations would Malaysian English be preferable to Standard English?
1. Hard.
2. Talking.
3. During a convo between friends.
4. In informal conversations.
5. Malaysian be preferable when having a casual conversation.
7. For casual occasions, like talking to your friends.
8. When you just want to talk with your friend in casual manner.
9. In formal occasion and interview.
10. Interview session.
11. I don’t know.
12. Informal conversation.
13. Communication.
15. When talking to native speaker.
17. Communication between close family n friends.
18. In daily interaction activities.
19. All situations.
20. Amongst Malaysians.
21. When talking to Malaysian.
22. Informal situations.
Appendix 3: Answers to question 47 and 48

47. What does the word ‘lah’ mean?
1. Yes.
2. Hmm. Not sure.
3. –
5. Lah is a suffix to complement other sentence.
6. –
7. Its hard to explain.
8. More like an accent for Malaysian. Is sam as the use of... ly. Example: casually.
9. Is.
10. No meaning, we used it at the end of the sentence.
11. I don’t know.
12. No specific answer.
13. –
14. Okey.
15. No meaning.
17. Closed up the answer.
18. As a suffixed.
20. To stress on certain things or occasions.
22. It is a Malaysian habit of emphasizing something.

48. In what situations is ‘lah’ used?
1. People agree with something.
2. Most of the time. Ex: lets go- lah, faster- lah
3. Come lah to the No Nut November Celebrations tonight.
4. Nothing, it’s suffix.
5. I need to have lunch lah.
6. –
7. I can’t put it into words, so, sorry.
8. To tell strongly about something.
9. To tell the exact thing.
10. No lah, yes lah, how lah.
11. I don’t know.
12. As an invitation, as if let’s go-lah.
13. –
15. To make a sentence sounds nicer.
16. Mostly at the end of the word.
17. Confirmed on something.
18. To strengthen the word or sentence before it.
19. Don’t know.
20. Varied.
21. Mostly every situation.
22. Ok-lah.
Appendix 4: Answers to questions 51 and 52

51. Describe SE with three words:
   1. Easy
   2. interesting, preferable, helpful
   3. very nice lah
   4. Complicated, exaggerated, intelligence
   5. World class English
   6. –
   7. Global, Formal, Understandable
   8. Precise, easy to understand
   9. A bit complex
   10. Everyone can understand
   11. I miss you
   12. Accurate, global, professional
   13. –
   14. Easy
   15. Easy, formal, original
   16. Recognised internationally
   17. Formal, clever, bombastic
   18. Formal, correct grammar
   19. Easy, useful and good
   20. Standard English is where you follow all the rules and regulations in English
   21. –
   22. Real, formal, worldwide

52. Describe MalE with three words:
   1. Easy
   2. Funny, common, widely used by Malaysians
   3. Very nice lah
   4. Simple, endemic, ghetto
   5. A Malaysian identity
   6. –
   7. Casual, local, easy
   8. Mood maker
   9. Easy to use
10. For daily conversation
11. I know lah
12. Combination cultural local
13. –
14. Easy
15. Easy, understandable, fun
16. Used in informal conversation
17. Easy, simple, friendly
18. Informal bonding Malaysians.
19. Easy, useful, good
20. Broken English, wrong pronunciations, ungrammatic grammar
22. Unique, adaptable, habit