A Comparison of Strategies used by Malaysian Speakers in speaking English

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Abstract
Speaking English is a common phenomenon in the Malaysian linguistic landscape but due to the various levels of oral proficiencies (see Asmah Haji Omar, 1992, 1993; Baskaran, 1987; Pillai, 2006) that exist in the society, Malaysian speakers revert to a number of strategies in their desire to use English in oral interactions. This study uses secondary and primary data of spoken English used by local Malaysians in oral communication. Data is recorded and transcribed using the normal Roman alphabets with minor details like laughter, pauses and repetitions being indicated within the utterances. Translations are provided where code switching is involved and bold fonts are used to show the occurrence. A framework which focuses on language use and communication strategies is applied by looking at the contents of the utterances. Analysis of data suggests that ethnic Malaysian speakers rely on specific strategies in speaking English. This research may have focused on a small group of Malaysian speakers but the significance of this study reveals that cultural influence and possibly upbringing has an impact on how speakers use English in Malaysia. In that regard, the findings of this study may serve as a good lead to the introduction of appropriate teaching and learning materials for adult learners of a language.

Introduction:
Communication is a vital aspect of life in multilingual societies thus, it is beneficial to have one common language that can facilitate the multilingual speakers’ interactions. Despite their lack of fluency in whatever language, speakers will find the innovation to devise their own strategies for conveying meanings. In the context of communication, knowing how to convey one’s meaning with precision and clarity and yet not offending the other party is of utmost importance. Nevertheless, such a skill has to be learnt and honed, much like other artistic skills of dancing, singing, acting, drawing and composing all of which require practice. It is undeniable that in communication, the one who has the language competence stands to have the winning edge as he/she can rely on his/her ability to use the various words of that language with grammatical accuracy to convey his/her intentions and meaning. However, being linguistically competent does not amount to being communicatively competent. One needs to be immersed in a particular community for a period of time before one is able to acquire all the appropriate social interactive skills which are pertinent to a particular society. Such competence includes having the knowledge of knowing what to say, how to say, whom to say it to, in what context and when to say it. Calling it communicative competence, Hymes (1964) and various others (Bell, 1983; Romaine, 1994, 2000; Hoff, 2005) say that such skills are necessary not just for second language learners learning a specific language but also native speaking adults and children. In a multilingual society, it could be a challenging task as one is constantly barraged with the cultural nuances and innuendos of speech eccentricities of the different ethnic groups one meets. If Malaysia is such a diverse society with such a multilingual component of population, there ought to be some distinctiveness in the way they speak English.
Aim:
This study illustrates the case of Malaysian speakers. The participants include adults who are professionals, semi-professionals, artistes, students and also children. It is not the intention of this paper to substantiate the findings with demographic statistics although data was drawn from various contexts of oral interactions. It is hoped that the findings can shed light on the reality of the linguistic landscape in Malaysia where English is used as a common language to convey their communicative needs and functions. The main findings of this study illustrate the various strategies used by Malaysians when using English as a language of communication but some aspects of the findings imply that one’s utterances is also the result of the mental processes and psychological effects of one’s cultural background, professional training, language proficiency as well as habitual practice.

Methodology:
Data was extracted from the observations of the three dominant groups: Malay, Chinese and Indians. Direct participant observation was employed to collect data. Data were categorized as primary and secondary. Primary data were sourced from unpremeditated utterances of participants who were interacting among themselves in specific settings like home, and public grounds like shops, playgrounds and restaurants. In this setting, data were manually recorded and it was mentioned to the participants that a research was being conducted in the use of English. Spontaneous data were also sourced from open meetings, workshops, and public talks. These were also manually recorded but the identities of these participants were not disclosed. Secondary data were sourced from recorded interviews of students’ assignments and consent was acquired. Another set of secondary data were extracted from television and radio talk shows. As far as possible, the amount of data collected from each ethnic group was matched in terms of the categories of adults and children, professionals and non-professionals and students. Data was then transcribed, categorized and analysed. Using a sociolinguistic framework which focuses on how multilinguals speak in specific settings, the researcher then uses the ethnolinguistic approach to identify the factors affecting their spoken English.

Language mixing in multilingual societies:
As the world gets smaller and technology becomes more advanced, people around the world also need to update themselves with current happenings. One way of familiarizing themselves with current happenings is to learn to read, write or speak in some of the common languages of the world, one being English. It has also become inevitable for speakers around the world to absorb some impacts of the phenomenon of globalization and that is the ability to use several languages (Hoffman, 1999) simultaneously. Multilingualism is a phenomenon which occurs as a result of various ethnic communities coming together and as Holmes (2001:12) says, “the relationship between linguistic choices and the social contexts in which they are made is sometimes easiest to see when different languages are involved”. A multilingual has more cultural exposure and this inevitably affects his/her utterances. In addition, with more than one language in his/her linguistic repertoire, a multilingual also has the option to mix languages within his/her utterances and such a practice has been noted as a normal communicative option (Tarone, 1983; Bialystok, 1984; Romaine, 2000).
In their discussion of the bilingual speaker, Weinrich (1953) and Haugen (1953) mention that a bilingual speaker should be the combination of two monolinguals, meaning that he/she should have equal competence in the two languages he/she speaks. Nonetheless, it has become increasingly difficult to categorise bilinguals this way. Some linguists have extended the term, bilingual to encompass multilinguals (Bell, 1983; Romaine, 2000) while others say that although multilinguals live on the basis of having several languages in their linguistic repertoire, one usually serves as their dominant language. It has been said that dominant language will be the one multilingual speakers have most competence in and used most in specific situations. It was added that multilinguals use the various languages, including varieties of these in their linguistic bank to perform pertinent functions with different participants in different situations and contexts. Holme’s study of Singaporeans demonstrates that ‘people may select a particular variety or code because it makes it easier to discuss particular topics’ (Holmes, 2001:25). Thus, it is deduced that a multilingual, as in the case of a bilingual, may be able to speak a variety of languages but he/she need not possess equal competence in all these languages. Like all speakers, multilinguals are not spared from those momentary linguistic gaps caused by memory loss or a linguistic handicap such as not having the appropriate word, vocabulary item or expression. During such instances, multilingual speakers resort to several strategies to fulfill their communicative needs and one of these is to mix languages. Kramsch (1998) calls this language crossing while many labels it as code switching. David (1996, 2000), in looking at language shift of Sindhi families suggests that language mixing can be distinguished but Bell (1983), Romaine (1994, 2000), Kramsch (1998) and Holmes (2001) treats code switching synonymously with language mixing or language crossing. Likewise, the Wikipedia also refers mixing of languages as code switching. Asmah Haji Omar (1992) and Zaidan Ali Jaseem (1997) look upon it in a similar way, referring to code as ‘language’ hence code switching is language switching. In the context of this study language mixing is thus referred to as code switching.

Instances of code switching in the local context have been studied widely, the latest of which was reported in “Code Switching in Malaysia” (David et. al., 2009). While code switching can be viewed from various perspectives, functions of code switching have been investigated quite widely (David, 1996; Kow, 2000; Kuang 1999, 2002; Morais 1995; Manjit Kaur, 1998; Lau, 2008). Kow (2002), for instance, developed ten (10) functions of local instances of code switching whereas Kuang and Ng (2008) who looked at the prevalence of code switching in written articles in Malay magazines found that English terminology, words, phrases and expressions inserted within Malay texts were due to various reasons including habit. Giles’ Accommodation Theory and Speaker Styles propose that speakers code switch for various purposes. More about the functions of code switching will be discussed later on in this paper.

**Malaysia:**
Comprising Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah and Sarawak, Malaysia is not as vast as China in size nor as diverse as India in languages but it houses a population of 27 billion people who are of diverse ethnic backgrounds. Besides the small minority of indigenous people (1%) dwelling in the Borneo states of Sabah and Sarawak, Malaysia is composed of three main ethnicities: Malays (64%), Chinese (26%), Indians (8%) with unlisted others (1%) says the Wikipedia (2010) and this encompass immigrants of Indonesian, Myanmar, Filipino, Vietnamese, mainland Chinese, Bangladeshi, Arab and other descent.
When people talk about Malaysia as a country that is made up of three diverse ethnic groups, they are indirectly referring to peninsular Malaysia, which is the setting of this paper. The linguistic diversity of Malaysia is contributed by the multiethnic communities it houses while the daily interactions among these groups help to develop it into a unique society. In addition to that, the linguistic diversity of Malaysia is also due to its education system (Asmah Haji Omar, 1992). Although Malaysian children are free to enroll in national schools which use Malay as the medium of instruction, parents can also opt to send their children to vernacular schools which use their respective vernacular language (Mandarin or Tamil) as a medium of instruction. However, by the time a child enters secondary school, at the age of thirteen, he/she must enroll into a national school which uses Malay as a medium of instruction with one or two subjects being taught in English. Alternatively, international schools or private schools which use English or Mandarin as mediums of instruction may be resorted to. Entry into such schools are accompanied by stipulated conditions. All vernacular schools teach Malay and English as subjects in addition to their vernacular language. At the time of this paper, both Mathematics and Science are being taught through English in all schools. In the near future, teaching hours of English will also be increased (The Star 22 March 2010) as a move towards improving English proficiency. From the description of the country’s education landscapes, it can be said that the education system enables Malaysian children to acquire language skills relatively young.

English is deemed an important language despite not having an official status (Asmah Haji Omar, 1992) and more so now because of its international attractiveness and universal flexibility. Despite the fact that English is taught from primary schools, it has been found that many Malaysians are not proficient in the language. Many reasons have been cited and this can be traced to individual writing blogs (see blogs of Malaysian writers like nianamah accessed in 2009). Of the many Malaysians who may be described as comparatively fluent and proficient in English, the majority falls into the category of older Malaysian speakers who were the products of the colonial days and its education system. Some younger Malaysians who may be fluent and proficient were those who had been immersed in the language from young, others had received education overseas while a smaller group is the result of using the language at home. Most Malaysian professionals are expected to know and be able to speak English as many graduates also receive language training to develop their proficiency. On the other hand, the majority of Malaysian speakers who are less fluent and proficient tend to be those from the lower socio-economic group (see Jawakhir, 2003) as well as those isolated by geography, with many being the outcomes of the Malaysian education system in 1976 when Malay became the medium of instruction at all levels of schools and tertiary institutions. Others could be influenced by their negative attitude towards using or learning the language. Presently, English is seen as an important stepping stone to success and opportunities, in other words, it is a prestigious language.

**Malaysian English**

Malaysian English has been a subject of much discussion both by locals (Baskaran, 1987; Asmah Haji Omar, 1992, 1993; Gaudart, 1997; Kuang, 1999; Kow, 2000; Thilagavathi, 2002; Pillai 2006) and foreign writers (Platt, Weber and Ho, 1984; Preshou, 2001; David and McClellan, 2008; Hayton, 2007). Discussions range from looking at it as a unique variety of English to how ‘unEnglish’ it sounds when interpreted by foreign ears.
Baskaran (1987) claims that Malaysian English is a variety in itself when compared to standard English because it contains various lexicon peculiar only to his country. Likewise, Pillai (2006) do not disclaim that Malaysian speakers have a range of spoken English ranging from the acrolectal, mesolectal to the basilectal. She also stresses that most Malaysians speak the mesolectal kind although a good speaker may also have a range of registers to fit into the community. Hafriza (2003) mentions that Malaysians are most prone to code switch between Malay and English. As a colloquial form, Malaysians English is also of various strands with each strand carrying a different accent and pronunciation. This is probably due to the ethnic background of Malaysian speakers whose phonology varies and Pillai (2006) highlighted that for instance the /θ/ may be pronounced as /t/. It appears that the respective ethnic groups possess their individual characteristics and these have an impact on their spoken discourse, particularly, utterances made in English.

Hayton (2007) mentions that the different ethnic communities and their different languages have influenced the way Malaysian English is spoken. Malaysian English not only contains lexicons of other languages, it also involves the use of local tags or particles like ‘lah’ and ‘ah’ which are inserted at the end of utterances (tags may also be found within utterances), followed by inverted question forms, the use of peculiar vocabulary to substitute the same concept, omission of certain grammatical components as well as its unique pronunciations, depending on who the speakers are.

**Cultural characteristics of Malaysians:**

The Malay society is a collective community due to their common religious belief in Islam which also serves as the beacon of guidance for appropriate norms of behaviour, moderateness in lifestyles and gentleness in speech. One of the most outstanding characteristics of the Malay culture is their pride in being ‘bersopan santun’ i.e. being well mannered as a result of good upbringing. Asmah Haji Omar (1992), Jamaliah Mohd. Ali (1995), Asmah Abdullah and Pedersen (2003) have mentioned how this is an important manifestation of Malay culture which is perceived through behavior, attire, and speech. In that respect, speech is often never confrontational or direct and meanings need to be inferred so as to ‘save the face of the other’. One strategy was the ‘beating around the bush’ concept introduced by Asmah Haji Omar (1992, 1993). She says that Malays tend to talk about other things instead of what they have in mind and they also prefer to use imageries or symbols to represent what they want to say, thus being indirect. David and Kuang (1999), David, Kuang and Zuraidah (2002), Thilagavathi (2002), David and Kuang (2005) and Kuang and Jawakhir (2010) have conducted various studies of local speakers and their findings indicate that Malay speakers are generally more polite and indirect in their ways.

Besides being direct (see David and Kuang, 1999, 2005), the Chinese are also few of words (see Wong, Kuang and David 2010) and Asrul (2003) has attributed this quality to their nature of work which concerns business and trade. In saying that, Asrul also ties it to their attitude of being efficient in their movements, hence linguistically, it is not surprising if they are direct and to the point when they speak. Unlike the Malays, Chinese do not subscribe to ‘beating round the bush’ or using imageries in their verbal communications although in some instances, it could
have been resorted to avoid conflicts. Most Malaysian Chinese may also be Chinese educated, a result of their ancestors ideology with Mandarin being used widely as a lingua franca today.

Malaysian Indians are the minorities of this country but they also form the backbone of professionals in this country because many Indians are eminent doctors, lawyers and accountants. Malaysian Indians and their communication styles depend on their education and profession David and Kuang (2005). It was found that the higher they are on the socio-economic ladder, the more outspoken the professionals are.

**Communicative Strategies:**
People talk about communication strategies as the cobweb of repertoire that shields a person from ‘falling’ when faced with communicative difficulties or linguistic gaps caused by memory loss, poor language proficiency, inadequate vocabulary or poor expressive skills. Numerous terms such as techniques, ways, means and patterns have been used to refer to the concept. Nonetheless, not all agree that these terms define ‘strategies’ well. The dictionary defines a strategy as a plan that is deliberately devised so as to accomplish communication success (Collins English Dictionary, 2006) in order that a message is successfully and effectively conveyed. L2 (second language) learners have been shown to rely on various communicative strategies when interacting with others through the target language. It appears that when one is faced with a linguistic gap for various reasons, a speaker needs to fall on a mode to help him/her to fulfill his/her communicative needs.

Cohen (1998) defines communication strategies as the conscious processes adapted by learners so as to enhance their learning or using of the target language. She further stresses that such strategies could be accomplished through the storage, retention, recall, and application of information about the language. Foreign language speakers, in particular, appear to improvise on their linguistics deficiencies in order to get their message across when they experience a moment of linguistic impediment. Cohen terms this improvisation as communicative strategy. For the purpose of this paper, the term communication strategies is defined as those conscious attempts employed by speakers to express their meanings and these strategies may be observable.

When second language learners apply strategies they are termed as learner strategies (see Selinker, 1972; Tarone, 1983; Faesch and Kasper, 1983). Tarone (1983) sees learner strategies as attempts to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language. Tarone (ibid.) includes the following strategies for consideration: paraphrase (approximation, word coinage, circumlocution), borrowing (literal translation, language switch, appeal for assistance, mime) and avoidance (topic avoidance, message abandonment). Johnstone (1987), however, terms this as achievement strategies since speakers are using all their resources as a means of conveying their meanings, irrespective of whether the utterances are grammatical or socially acceptable. Among the strategies identified are:

- Code switching and gesticulations
- Direct translation and foreignising
- Word coinage
- Simplification
- Generalization
• Paraphrase
• Repeats and approximation
• Establish foreign identity
• Appeal for repair and confirmation

a. Code Switching:
Language or code switching was one of the many strategies identified by Bialystok (1983) in her discussion of communication strategies employed by non-native speakers (NNS), besides foreignising native language and transliteration. Likewise, both Faerch and Kasper (1983) also consider code switching as a strategy used by second language speakers. They comment that when such a strategy is applied, it often denotes that the speakers are experiencing a linguistic deficiency in the target language and this has been reiterated by Hoffman (1991).

From the psychological perspective, Howard Giles (1984) suggests that speakers in a multilingual society tend to switch from one language to another in their desire to perform specific functions such as to relate solidarity, to show distance or to project power. Citing this as a mechanism used by the speakers to disclose their identity, Giles also mentions that there are reasons behind this language switch. Terming the phenomenon as code switching, Giles proposes that a switch may occur due to the speaker’s lack of proficiency in a particular language. He further cites cases where there may be attempts to camouflage this lack of proficiency and in such an instance, the speaker may resort to converting elements of one language into elements of another language such as borrowing a lexical item from another language and inserting this within the conversation that is conducted in another language, but often, this comes with some amusing results because it is often an incorrect application. Occasionally, speakers may just retain their respective languages and still carry on a conversation. Reitze Jonkman calls this non-convergent discourse. Examples may be seen in bilingual families where the mother and father use different languages with the child and yet both know the two languages.

Without doubt, it can be recognized that the speech of a speaker is often the result of his mood, which in turn is the result of his behavior that is in turn influenced by his mental state of mind. Our mental state of mind affects the kind of speech we utter. Likewise, our cultural upbringing also affects our speech in ways even we are unaware of because it has been so ingrained in our lives. Ultimately, when we are in certain situations, our feelings thus affect what we say. Such an influence may be carried over when we are also bound by our cultural values.

b. Direct translation:
Direct translation is a teaching and learning method of second language learners where learners attempt to use the target language by making literal translations of their native language. Invariably, this can lead to a syntax of utterance or sentence which become ill-formed. Some direct translations serve the speakers’ needs very well even though they sound ungrammatical and some appear funny because of the inappropriate vocabulary used. In the confines of this study, the term direct translation is used in reference to the communicative strategy employed by Malaysian speakers to speak in English such that the utterance is English but the structure of the utterance is in their native language like Malay, Chinese or Tamil. In other words, a direct translation has occurred, for example, ‘Bungkusan ini telah sampai dalam keadaan baik.’ is
translated as ‘This parcel has arrived in condition good.’ (Malay translation) or ‘**Lai, mommy, ni lai kan cher CD sien!**’ is translated as ‘Come, mommy, you come see this CD first!’ (Chinese translation).

c. Simplification

In looking at this strategy, simplification is to do with making an utterance simple in structure so that it is easier to be articulated for the benefit of the hearer. Simplification can be in the form of omitting function words, missing grammatical words or even an error in grammar like wrong pronouns, tenses and others.

**Analysis of data:**

Analysis of data is displayed in three stages with each stage focusing on one ethnic group’s utterances which are discussed in terms of the various strategies identified. These are discussed as distinctive differences. The constraint of this paper does not permit the entire collection of data to be displayed here so only the salient features of spoken English will be discussed.

**I: The distinctiveness of Malaysian Malays utterances**

Comparison shows that Malay speakers speak Malay predominantly but they have a tendency to code switch when speaking either by using single English words or phrases or entire English clauses. Hafriza Burhanudeen (2003) also finds that Malay speakers like to code switch between Malay and English. It is unclear whether professionals code switch less. Nevertheless, it would seem that code switching is prevalent in the utterances recorded in this study. It appears that the phenomenon was almost like a norm and it occurred at different interceptions in their interactions.

a. **Code switching at the word level**

This occurs when speakers insert single English words in their utterances when the matrix language of the conversation is Malay. While the director general of *Dewan Pustaka* and *Bahasa* (2007) deems this phenomenon of mixing language as ‘rojak’ language or ‘bahasa rojak’, a negative outlook of Malay, it appears that few speakers of Malay could adhere rigidly to using Malay only as in itself, Malay has also acquired much of its vocabulary from other languages mainly from English. In that regard, it is possible that some of the English words were used by the Malay speakers because they were a novelty as in ‘terror’, ‘glamor’ both of which are words derived from English. In other instances, using English may be due to the fact that some English words can be easily inserted into Malay syntax because those words ending with an /i/ sound can be easily synchronized with Malay syntax when inserted within a Malay utterance. In this aspect, it is likely that the Malay speakers appear to be operating on the level of what Romaine (2000) claims as code switching ‘occurring at a point where the juxtaposition of elements from two languages do not violate the syntactic rule of either language’ (Romaine, 2000:58) as all bilinguals inevitably, code switch because they have the option to express in another language. Table 1 helps to illustrate the argument and the word switch is highlighted in bold.
Table 1: Word level

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>...you see, orang liar ni... (you see, these liars...)</td>
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</table>
| 2 | Tapi sometimes, kau boleh differentiate, kalau strategi-strategi itu orang suka  
(Nevertheless, sometimes, you have the ability to identify whether or not certain strategies are liked by the audience.) |
| 3 | Hello, ini rumah Mister Param kah?  
(Hello, is this Mr Param’s house?) |
| 4 | ....that’s why I kata... ...(that is why I often say...)  
| 5 | ...bapa kerja, mama chatting...(...)father working, mother chatting ...) |

In utterance (1), the speaker was speaking in English but as he was trying to describe the sequence of the process of detecting liars, he inevitably used the Malay term, ‘orang’, inserting it unconsciously as he was trying to revert to using Malay. However, in this case, the effort was unsuccessful as he had forgotten the Malay equivalent ‘pembohong’ which, in this context, was ‘orang pembohong’. In addition, it would have been redundant to say it that way as in the Malay syntax, ‘orang pembohong’ is grammatically wrong. Hence, as the speaker had overstepped the linguistic boundary, his best choice was to supply an English word, ‘liar’ which then serves as an adjective in the context of this utterance. This strategy helped him to maintain the meaning of his utterance. Further, a switch had occurred here possibly due to the fact that he was speaking in English first, hence he had difficulty in tracing the Malay word for ‘liar’ and ultimately, he had to revert to an English word which was then completed by the Malay preposition, ‘ni’.

In utterance (2), the conversation was in Malay but when the speaker continued, he switched to English. In the context of this utterance, ‘sometimes’ was inserted after the Malay transition, ‘tapi’ followed by the English word, ‘differentiate’ after ‘kau boleh’ within the same utterance. This probably occurred because of linguistic economy as ‘sometimes’ is three syllables as compared to the Malay equivalent, ‘kadang-kadang’ which is of four syllables. In addition, it is highly possible that the speaker did not have the Malay substitute for ‘differentiate’ while talking about the topic thus, the word had to be inserted so as to sustain the conversation.

In utterance (3), the speaker used the English term, ‘Hello’ to initiate a conversation. This is because as a Malay speaker, he was expected to demonstrate respect and be polite as most Malay interactions begin with a religious opening of ‘asalam mualaikum’. In this context, the speaker resorted to being formal by addressing the addressee who was of another ethnic background in the English greeting of ‘Hello’ before continuing in Malay. It can thus be deduced that the greeting was influenced by his ethnic background but when he continued with ‘Mister Param’ the speaker was appearing to be politically correct as ‘Mister Param’ was also an Indian man. The use of English allows the speaker to show his respect for the addressee.

In utterance (4), the conversation appeared to begin in English and a Malay word, ‘kata’ was then inserted after the pronoun, ‘I’. This is quite a common characteristic of modern Malays who prefer to use ‘I’ for ‘aku’ or ‘saya’ which may have been induced by the person’s need to remain less personal as ‘I’ is not only shorter but also neutral, bearing no cultural implications. It is also possible that the speaker may have been a habitual user of the pronoun ‘I’ due to his profession and practice as the speaker was also an executive in an organization. Perhaps, by doing so, the speaker was able to distance himself from the female speaker who was also Malay in ethnicity.
In utterance (5), the speaker used the word ‘chatting’ after ‘mama’ which appears to be a case of inevitability in this age of cyber technology. The term, ‘chatting’ is commonly used by many whilst, it is also the easiest way to express the activity when one goes online. Attempting to say the Malay substitute ‘bersembang’ is not only a mouthful as it contains three syllables but also less precise in meaning. Moreover, the word ‘chatting’ paired better with ‘mama’ both being of two syllables.

b. Code switching at the phrase level

Studies have shown that foreign phrases occur within an utterance of a matrix language because of the need to recall a certain concept which is inexplicable in the matrix language. Sometimes, it is also because of the need to quote. The phenomenon is seen in the following examples.

Table 2: Phrase/expression level

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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Hi, how are you, how was your day, susah kah hari ini? (was today very challenging?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Machici, tolonglah, somebody, pleeease.... (Come and help me Macici....somebody, please come and help me.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>...dia punya kes pun ada, very caring, very caring type ...(we also have cases like his where they are very caring)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>....so, itu lah antara setting dishonesty..... (so, as you can see now, these are some of the settings of dishonesty)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Macam in your case, mungkin dia terkeluar dengan lelaki untuk makan....... (Say for instance, like your case, you may have gone out with another man for lunch.)</td>
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In utterance (1), the matrix language was in English and the speaker inserted a Malay phrase within her utterance. Her initial utterances are basically formulaic expressions which may have been voiced to indicate her politeness to a male counterpart in a social setting. When she recovers her stance as an individual who wanted to know more about her addressee, the speaker resorted to her native language, ‘susah kah hari ni?’ The code switching instance shown here depicts an instance of revealing a relaxed and real identity.

In utterance (2), the female speaker was in a home setting but she was a Datin. As she begged her female listener, her business competitor, to help her out in Malay and it was not entertained, the speaker appealed in English for two possible reasons. One was that she was of a higher class and she spoke English hence using English distanced herself from her ethnic background and so enabled her to maintain her dignity. Further, English was clearer, in this context. Even though it was a formulaic expression which all of us have been exposed to from watching American movies, the expression was easier to articulate in moments of panic.

In utterance (3) it seems that the male speaker had inserted the English phrases of ‘very caring, very caring type’ for the purpose of making an emphasis. It is hypothesized that the speaker had to code switch at the phrase level because it was difficult for him to express this quality of a good husband in Malay, because the Malay equivalent of ‘penyayang’ was not a precise one. Further, the syntax of ‘sangat penyayang’ (very caring) or ‘jenis sangat penyayang’ (very caring type) within the same utterance would not have been able to function grammatically because of the different ‘switching sites’ (Romaine 2000:58).

In utterance (4), the speaker used an English conjunction ‘so’ to make a point which shows consequence and the male speaker then used a Malay construction of ‘itu lah antara..’ which is then followed by the inverted phrase of ‘setting dishonesty’ (instead of dishonest setting). This shows that the professional Malay speaker was more well versed in English. However, as he
became enmeshed in a Malay utterance, it appears that the English phrase he applied also had to adhere to the syntax of the matrix language of Malay, thus it became an inverted form – *setting dishonesty*. In this context, the speaker also committed a faux pas in grammar.

In utterance (5), ‘in your case’ was inserted into the Malay utterance after, ‘macam’ and this is probably due to the male speaker’s mental process which was consciously trying to use Malay but unconsciously reverting to English because of habit. It is very possible that his job entails using more English and as a result, this had influenced his mental processes even in his attempt to describe something to his Malay female colleagues.

### c. Code switching at the sentence/clause level

When a speaker has finished an utterance in one language, he may use another language to resume the conversation by alternating it with a sentence of another language.

**Table 3: Sentence/clause level**

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<td><strong>1</strong></td>
<td><em>Nanti</em> lunch time, I call you. (I will call you lunch time.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **2** | *Memang banyak orang kata,* ‘Money is not everything,’ *tapi, duit boleh membantu kita...*  
(It is true, like what most people would say, Money is not everything but money can help us to …) |
| **3** | *Dia cakap,* you don’t have to worry, my husband is in front of me….  
(When I asked for her husband, she said, you don’t have to worry about me cheating, he is right here with me.) |
| **4** | *Tapi tak, tak ada apa-apa…everything is fine. (But… its alright, everything seems fine.)* |
| **5** | *Bila beri nasihat, jangan macam normal ya,* then they all will accept *lah!*  
(When giving advice, don’t dish it out like you normally do, ok, then people are more likely to accept what you say.) |

In utterance (1), the speaker was not only using a formulaic sentence which is rather common in the Malaysian context, but also displaying a typical habit of office workers. The interpretation of this utterance is that the speaker was speaking to a girl friend who may not be a serious one for the speaker since a serious relationship (among Malays) would have been expressed in more somber nuances like in Malay, for instance, as the speaker would not want their relationship to be too obvious among listeners, being their culture to not display affection openly. In the context of this utterance, the conversation seems to ‘run’ in English, and it is deduced that the speakers used English to distance himself as it is a foreign language to both of them.

In utterance (2), the speaker was talking about money which commenced in Malay but after the opening, the speaker inserted an entire English clause or sentence. This is subsequently followed by a Malay clause. From this utterance, it seems clear that the speaker was merely making a point with the clause, ‘money is not everything’ which is a common statement, hence, it was applied as a strategy to show emphasis about the importance of money. An utterance like this allows the listeners to be aware of his professional background which also illustrates the credibility of the speaker. The utterance then proceeded in Malay.

In utterance (3), the speaker was inserting an entire clause in English ‘you don’t have to worry…’ as a result of making a quotation, that is repeating something said by someone else. As the quotation was said in English, the speaker had no choice but to adhere to the original language of the earlier speaker. From this example, it can be deduced that code switching of clauses tends to be for the purpose of illustrating a quotation articulated by a previous speaker.
In utterance (4), it is possible that the speaker used the English expression, ‘everything is fine’ out of a desire to illustrate a mental desire that is to show his strong emotion. Despite the Malay utterance that began with ‘tapi…’ (but) followed by ‘tak ada apa-apa..’ (nothing) the speaker’s English sentence of ‘everything is fine’ did not seem to fit into the context. It appears that the speaker had code switched when experiencing an internal turmoil to protect himself by words. Perhaps, this is the speaker’s way of being indirect, that is to want to say that something is not right and yet, unable to say so directly. Such an occurrence can be attributed to his ethnic upbringing and cultural value. Ultimately, the speaker used ‘everything is fine’ in a rather pretentious way. Similar to the previous analysis, it appears that Malay speakers may resort to English as a strategy to distance themselves from their cultural identity.

In utterance (5), the speaker also inserted an English clause immediately after the Malay utterance, ‘bila beri nasihat, jangan macam normal ya?’ which was on a topic about ‘giving advice’. It is deduced that the speaker had reverted to English because he did not want to appear direct and foreboding in extending the advice to his listener. Therefore, by reverting to English, ‘then they all will accept lah’ suggests that the speaker was trying to neutralize the situation should the listener feel offended. Expanding it just a little bit more in English enabled him to be impersonal and indirect, thus saving him the hassle of being misinterpreted and being perceived as impolite. In the same way, it appears that English functions as a neutral language in this context.

d. **Indirectness**

It also appears that Malay speakers not only code switch frequently but also avoid confrontations, taking the necessary moves to refrain from hurting or offending their listeners by their comments. The examples below illustrate directives which were veiled in English.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Code switching to induce Indirectness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Men tak suka banyak cakap, so you talk less…. (Most men don’t like their women to talk too much so if you want to remain as his girlfriend or wife, you talk less.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Itu saja yang abang nampak, I’m sorry. (That was all that I was able to see as a judge. I am really sorry I have no better comments for you.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Every department mesti ambil bahagian. (All departments must take part).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Dia punya activity, you must know in detail! (Everything concerning his activities, you should know in detail!)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Oh, you never tell me..patut you bagi tau awal-awal…. (..you should have informed me earlier.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Some students play politic..sebab they don’t understand. (..because they don’t understand.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>...tapi, in future awak perlu ada lain-lain tempo….. (Perhaps, in the near future, you might want to implement various tempos into your act.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tengok Tun Mahathir, he is the best Prime minister in the world, tengok cara dia pakai bahasa Melayu…. (Just look at Tun Mahathir, he is the best Prime Minister in the world, as far as I can see, look at the way he uses Malay…..)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Patut lah, I see see, the programme no more already! (No wonder, I kept looking out for it and then suddenly realized that the programme has ceased.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Utterance (1) shows the speaker ‘advising’ the listeners who were women, not to talk too much. To subdue any hostility arising from the women folks, the speaker veiled his advice in English words. Again, English was used as a neutral language to avoid misunderstandings.
Utterance (2) shows the speaker concluding his negative comments. He then proceeded to making an apology in English, ‘I am sorry’ which was seen as a strategy to appear professional and yet impersonal and distanced so that he would not offend the listening party.

Utterance (4) was a directive which was given a preamble in Malay to deflect any ill feelings first and this was then followed by the directive given in English. It is hypothesized that the Malay speaker was being indirect and less confrontational.

Utterance (5) depicts something of a blame which was vocalized in English. This was seen as a strategy to express her hurts and when she recovered, she realised it could be offensive. Thus, the speaker attempted to retrieve her stand by using Malay to gain her grounds back. She then used a Malay utterance of, ‘patut you bagi tau awal-awal..’ as a way to water down any further displeasure. The code switching instances was for the purpose of displaying her great displeasure and also to show that she nevertheless relented because they share common cultural values.

Similar attempts to show some kind of authority also persevered through code switching between Malay and English in the subsequent utterances of (6), (7), (8) and (9) which was meant to communicate to the respective listeners some negative comments.

e. Grammatical disfluencies

There were also some instances where Malay speakers spoke in English with entirety. However, many of these appeared to carry some ungrammatical forms which could have been due to the transfer of their native language or L1. The following samples illustrate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 5: Deviant English Structures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Not only that, she also look young.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Why they are fighting?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 What is meaning ISI?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Malaysian government has done a lot for the economy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 When business no good, we can find other ways to find income.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Why hospital don’t want to employ more doctors? Because…. there are not enough doctors in this country.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Why you put the u there if you are not a neighbour?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 We do that for a long time already…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 I hope you will open your ears and participate in this seminar.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 I think Prof. Maya also say the same thing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Sometimes you cannot make head or tail also…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Er…master student, that is not big matter…but PhD student is big matter</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The above samples are utterances spoken by professionals, and non-professionals including students. Although these utterances are entirely in English, it is obvious that they contain some grammatical disfluencies, or deviant grammar/structures.

Utterance (1) = subject-verb agreement consistency
Utterance (2) = Inverted question form
Utterance (3), (4), (5) (6) = Omission of ‘the’ article
Utterance (7) = Omission of the verb ‘did’
Utterance (8) = Substituting ‘do for ‘have been doing’ (Continuous tense)
Utterance (9) = Direct translation of ‘listen’ to Malay ‘open your ears’
Utterance (10) = Substituting ‘say’ for ‘said’ (past tense form)
Utterance (11) = Direct translation of Malay ‘head’ or ‘tail’ for make sense at all
Utterance (12) = Direct translation of Malay ‘big matter’

II. Distinctiveness of the Malaysian Chinese Speakers
Of the utterances collected of Malaysian Chinese speakers, it appears that most of their utterances were spoken entirely in English. Close observation of the data indicates that these have structures which are mostly Chinese hence, are deviant in syntax and grammar when assessed through standard English. These could be further categorized.

a. Direct translations – with one and also
It is unclear why Chinese speakers have a tendency to literally or directly translate their thoughts into English as this seem to contain word for word translation. Tarone (1983) and others like Bialystok (1983) had seen this employed by various groups of second language learners who use it as a strategy to learn a target language. From the context of data drawn, it would seem that the Chinese speakers rarely code mix but they often rely on direct translation processes where word for word is literal. Even in the midst of the direct translations, there are peculiarities which are discussed below.

Table 6: The use of ‘one’ and also’

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I always do like that one…(I usually do it that way.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Just now, ah. I use the machine already but still cannot one…why ah? (Earlier, I attempted to use the machine but it was still not working. Can you tell me why?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ya lo, they always like that one… (You are right, they are often like that.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mom, mom, see ah, I like this cannot fall down one.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>If book lost, I also got write. (If the book is lost, I would write it down.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>I think they also don’t know. (I think they too may not know.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Last time I also have no problem one… (I never used to have this kind of problem before.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Say people got trouble, yourself also got trouble! (It is not only me who is in trouble, you too are also in trouble!)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From data shown in table 6, it appears as if the Chinese speakers spoke in English with entirety but close observations indicate that these utterances do not conform to standard English grammar. It also seems that the Chinese speakers have managed to convert their (Chinese) thoughts into English words through some mental processes. Eventually, the influence of their Chinese thoughts are manifested through some common terms like ‘one’ and ‘also’. While ‘one’ represents Chinese ‘terk’ which often displays possession, there is no equivalent word in English and it was thus substituted with ‘one’ while ‘also’ represents ‘yueh’ which means ‘in addition’ in Chinese and this was conveniently substituted with ‘also’.

In utterance (1), the literal conversion is seen in the use of ‘always’ and ‘one’. It appears that the Chinese speakers use extreme words like ‘always’ and never’ to substitute the Chinese words of ‘yu’ and ‘mei-yu’ which could be equated with ‘have’ and ‘have not’ in some contexts.
In utterance (2), the literal translation is seen in the beginning where ‘just now’, ‘already’ and ‘one’ were articulated to represent the Chinese equivalents of ‘kang chai’, ‘yee ching’ and ‘terk’ respectively.

In utterance (3), the use of ‘always’ and ‘one’ prevails.

In utterance (4), literal translation occurs when the speaker begins by saying ‘I like this’ an inverted English syntax of ‘when I am like this’ and saying ‘cannot fall down one’ instead of ‘I won’t fall!’ In addition, Chinese speakers also prefer to use ‘got’ instead of ‘have’ to imply commitment.

In utterance (5), the speaker omits the use of article ‘the’ and the verb to be ‘is’ in saying, ‘If book lost’ indicating that these are aspects of grammar which are absent in Chinese syntax. Again, the use of ‘also’ was applied to mean ‘yueh yu’ in Chinese to show a continuation of process.

In utterance (6), the word, ‘also’ is again used to mean in addition like ‘too’.

In utterance (7), ‘also’ was used to show a process indicating previous times which connects to present time.

In utterance (8), literal translation is seen in the beginning, ‘say people got trouble…’ followed by the word ‘got’ and ‘also’.

All these utterances are clearly unacceptable by standard grammar and incomprehensible by other speakers of English but among Malaysians, they make sense because of their mutual understanding.

b. Omitting relevant aspects of grammar

Like most second language speakers of English, when impeded by a lack of vocabulary, speakers can resort to various communicative strategies to deliver or convey their message. Likewise, the Chinese speakers of this study revealed this phenomenon when they omitted some relevant aspects of grammar because such aspects of grammar do not exist in their own language. In certain cases, the speakers tend to make generalizations, assuming that all English verbs can be emphasized in the same way. These are illustrated below.

Table 7: Omission of relevant grammatical aspects

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>How long you been a mother? (How long have you been a mother?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Ya long time haven’t seen him. (Yeah, I haven’t seen him for a long time already.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Heh, mom, let us make a bet, who cry most, who wins. (Heh mom, let us make a bet, whoever cries most wins.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Ladies and gentlemen, I want to say I very appreciate your support… (Ladies and gentlemen, I just want to say I really appreciate your support.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Utterance (1) indicates that the speaker had omitted the auxiliary verb, ‘have’ which is a natural tendency because the Chinese language does not carry forms of tenses and in particular, the
perfect tense is one of the hardest to be acquired by Chinese learners, so in this case, it was not surprising that the child had omitted it.

Utterance (2) omits the subject ‘I’ and in addition, the syntax of the utterance is also inverted with the time ‘long time’ being in the initial position of the utterance instead of at the end of the utterance. In addition, the speaker had also overlooked the use of the adverb ‘already’ to signify the length of time. Again, this is a norm in Chinese speech because the Chinese language does not have these features of indicating time.

Utterance (3) shows that the child speaker’s utterance is marred by the subject-verb disagreement with ‘cry’ being stated as a plural verb instead of ‘cries’. In addition, ‘who’ was substituted for ‘whoever’ since the Chinese language does not have the subtle differences.

Utterance (4) indicates that the female speaker assumes that the verb ‘appreciate’ can be emphasised by the adverb ‘very’ like other adjectives such as ‘happy-very happy’ or ‘angry – very angry’.

It can thus be seen that the linguistic competence and communicative competence of the speakers involved were of issue here.

c. The use of common tags
Among the common nuances of Chinese speakers seen in speech, the most common ones identified from this study indicate that they are more inclined towards using local tags within their utterances. These tags encompass ‘lah’, ‘ah’, ‘ma’, ‘orh’, and ‘meh’ and are generally used within or at the end of an utterance to show emphasis.

Table 8: Using local tags

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>How long <em>ah</em>, the activation? Three more days <em>ah</em>? How can? (How long is the activation process?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>I told your daughter already <em>ma</em>… (I have informed your daughter already.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Or maybe you see the pink book… I also write down in Chinese <em>orh</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>So now you cannot do anything <em>lah</em>…okay, okay… (Are you saying there is nothing you can do now?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>See how <em>lah</em>, if rain don’t go, if no rain, go. (We will play by ear, if it doesn’t rain, we shall go and if it rains we won’t go.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Today recess <em>hoh</em>, a girl <em>lah</em>, my class monitor, she gave me a ring, not a real one…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Kuang (2002) has suggested that the use of local tags have a number of inferred implications. This is because speakers of multilingual Malaysia have acquired some strategies for making an emphasis in a more economical way without having to resort to using many words. Although, it has not been documented, it is a fact that the succinctness of the Chinese language can be seen in how words are used. For instance, ‘San Chit Ching’ and ‘Chen-Yee’ are ways of saying something economically. In that sense, it could be said that being economic with words is inherent in the Chinese. In that regard, it is not surprising that Chinese speakers tend to resort to reduction of words by using local tags to make a point.
In utterance (1), ‘ah’ is an economical way of asking a question with concern and this concern was manifested in the third question, ‘How can?’

In utterance (2), the speaker uses ‘ma’ to convey her meaning but it is clear that this was hinging on annoyance which could be interpreted as ‘don’t you believe me?’

In utterance (3), the speaker uses ‘orh’ to imply innocence or ignorance.

In utterance (4), the speaker uses ‘lah’ to display her disgust.

In utterance (5), the speaker uses ‘lah’ to indicate a laissez faire attitude because the speaker was non-committal.

In utterance (6), the speaker uses ‘hoh’ because as a child, he was excited and thus need to show this through ‘hoh’ which was used to suggest, ‘believe me’ while ‘lah’ was used to emphasise the gender of the person he was referring to.

**d. Grammatical Disfluencies:**
It is not unusual for Malaysian speakers to speak ungrammatical English which is often spoken for communicative purposes rather than to display grammatical correctness. It appears that the Chinese speakers also commit such ‘errors’ when they spoke in English. However, these are comprehensible to Malaysian listeners because of the ‘immersion’ they experience as a result of living together for so many decades but not to foreigners. Missing aspects of standard English grammar is in brackets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 9: Examples of utterances containing deviant grammar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 5 | I have a member from (THE) language faculty who agrees with me….

On the surface, it also seems as if the Chinese speakers are more proficient with English since most of these utterances are articulated in ‘so called’ English. However, close analysis of these utterances show that the syntax of the utterances is not cohesive hence ungrammatical meaning is quite clear. The five utterances shown above can be analysed. In utterance (1), the child speaker had omitted the verb, ‘have’ which has been explained earlier because Chinese syntax does not possess the perfect tense.

In utterance (2), the professional person had inadvertently used ‘am’ with ‘I’ due to generalization – ‘I goes with am’.

In utterance (3), the speaker is not used to using the preposition followed by the progressive form.
In utterance (4), the student used ‘want’ which has been translated from Chinese ‘yau’ and sociolinguistically speaking the form suggest aggressiveness and this can affect the listener’s response.

In utterance (5), the speaker omitted the use of ‘the’ article, a phenomenon quite common in Chinese speakers because the language does not use articles per se.

**III. Distinctiveness of Malaysian Indian Speakers**

As this community forms the minority of the Malaysian population, it also seems as though data focussing on the use of English would also be scarce. The scarcity is reflected in the data. For a start, it is fair to say that of the three main ethnic groups, the Indians form the majority of the professional group. The community stands at the top on the list of professionals. A majority of Indians are lawyers, medical doctors, surgeons, and economists and they are also exceptionally good with language. In that respect, it would not be surprising to note that this would also be reflected in their spoken data.

**a. Well formed utterances due to education and professional background**

The utterances provided in table 10 illustrate samples of utterances extracted from professionals who were teachers, academicians, lawyers and business men. There was no complaint in these utterances as they were not just standard but also grammatical.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 10: Well formed utterances</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 What I can’t understand is that how did this happen when it is supposed to be a departmental affair?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 As supervisors, we do need to be more compassionate...students too have their personal lives to see to…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 You know, Puan Raihana, we are the examiners here, so please listen to us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 I think what the candidate was trying to say...is that...he has the method...the data...the instrument to ……</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 This is only the beginning of the iceberg... you have not seen what I am like at home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 KLCC was just so crowded and the people there...gosh…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Is it any wonder then that my husband, the Mr Know It All would call the girls down, have an argument and when the girls answered him back, rudely....the hand would go up and WHACK!...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**b. Colloquial English**

On the other hand, some speakers of English also had the tendency to speak like the rest of the community of Malaysians, and so, they reverted to colloquial English which contained certain nuances.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 11: Colloquial English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 I just want to tell your all that the expo is held at Jalan Conlay....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Why your all don’t want to participate in the walkaton?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 I just received an intercity fax and I just want to share it with your all…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Again, what I’m trying to say to say to your all is that…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 What man...take also cannot ah?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 You took it what just now……</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the samples seen in Table 11, it appears that the younger professionals and students like to use ‘your all’ which is meant to be ‘you all as indicated in utterances (1), (2), (3) and (4).
The other common characteristic is the use of ‘what’ as an emphasis as depicted in utterances (5) and (6) respectively.

c. Grammatical Disfluencies
Besides the well articulated grammatical forms of English, some students, professional people and non-professionals also speak in less grammatical forms as the examples below show. Necessary grammar components are shown in brackets (…) but (X) indicates that the word is not necessary.

Table 12: Ungrammatical spoken English

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I very hope I can come to UM…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>When we (ARE) using the (X) Malay, (IT IS A) bit different…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>I got come (CAME) but you (WERE) not there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>They (CIRCLED) round (AND) round and try (TRIED) to hit the car window….</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The examples also indicate that these utterances were spoken in English, a good sign that the Indian speakers do not resort to code switching too frequently. Nevertheless, the utterances may also show some aspects of poor grammar.

Utterance (1) suggests that the speaker also assumed that some verbs and adjectives of English collocate with the adverb ‘very’ which most speakers in Malaysia would use to suggest ‘to a large degree or extent’. However, the speaker’s minimal exposure to the language provides evidence to show that most speakers make generalizations, assuming that ‘hope’ can collocate with ‘very’.

Utterance (2) shows that the speaker makes an attempt to speak in English which has been marred by an omission in the verb to be ‘are’ and subject usage as in ‘it is’ followed by the inability to use article ‘a’.

Utterance (3) suggests that the speaker is also using ‘got’ to imply ‘have’ but her utterance also indicates a weak grasp of tenses and also the common weakness of omitting verbs to be like ‘were’.

Utterance (4) shows a nurse who also spoke without an emphasis for tenses, probably a common characteristic of Malaysian speakers who aim for linguistic economy. In addition, the utterance also suggests that the speaker has an inclination to avoid proper phrases hence, instead of saying ‘they circled around’ or they went round and round’, she verbalized it as merely ‘round round’ and in that event also could not emphasise the past tense form of try.

d. The use of tags
The Indian speakers also used some local tags but it appears that the functions of these tags are slightly different.

Table 13: The use of tags

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Ah Ma (Mother), when lah can go?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Eh, flip lah the ball, to that side! That side!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Why people ask you run, run, you never run? Run lah faster faster….

Got ma, that day, they got come…they got tell you…maybe you never hear.

There were fewer utterances containing tags than those identified in Chinese speakers. In comparison, this phenomenon of using tags is probably a common feature of Malaysian speakers. However, while Chinese speakers were more inclined towards a variety of tags, Indian speakers tend to use ‘lah’ more prevalently. This is shown in the above utterances (1), (2), (3) and (4).

Utterance (1) suggests that ‘lah’ was used in between to show annoyance and insistence of the child who wants to go while the mother is still engrossed in another activity.

Utterances (2) and (3) suggest that ‘lah’ was used to show emphasis of the act of ‘flip’ and ‘run’.

Utterance (4) suggests that ‘ma’ was probably influenced by Chinese speakers and it was used to show defensiveness. Notice too that the ungrammatical form also contained some common features of the Chinese speakers and this was manifested in the use of ‘ma’, ‘got’, and never’ whose meanings of use have been explained above.

**Conclusion**

This study is not new as previous studies of Malaysian English have been conducted. While most talk about the common features of Malaysian English including its pronunciation, grammar forms, code switching instances and how one ethnic group’s accent differs from another ethnic group, authentic data illustrating the ethnic groups’ diversity and their distinctiveness is far in between.

This study is not comprehensive and it does not claim to be indepth but it provides authentic data collected of various categories of people ranging from academicians, professionals, blue collar workers, housewives, students to children and their spontaneous utterances. The findings are also not vastly different from previous studies conducted but they do highlight the basic distinctive features of the three main ethnic groups of Malaysia when they speak English. From the analysis, it can be concluded that Malay speakers use various communicative strategies to convey their meanings but the most common of these is the strategy of code switching. It can also be concluded that Chinese speakers tend to articulate entirely in English and they seem to be using a certain mental process where they translate their thoughts into English words rather smoothly. Besides using the direct translation strategy, they were also seen to be the most frequent users of the various tags available in the Malaysian context. Of the three main ethnic groups, the Indian speakers were found to be comparatively more fluent as their utterances were relatively well formed. From this study, it could be concluded that some of the distinctive features shown could be due to the influence of their professional background while some did not truly reflect their educational background. It is possible that cultural values are of immense significance depending on contexts, hence one probably speaks to ‘fit into the crowds’ as Giles Accommodation Theory shows while others were due to poor proficiency. Incidentally, the use of tags is a common phenomenon while ungrammatical speech cannot be avoided.

In a nutshell, it can be said that spoken Malaysian English is a non-standard variety even in the Malaysian context as different ethnic speakers speak it differently. In addition, this diversity made it difficult for foreigners to understand the spoken English articulated in this country as
they would first have to understand the cultural backgrounds of these ethnic speakers. Clearly a difficult process but nonetheless, it is this uniqueness that made Malaysia truly Asia (Michelle Yeoh).

References:


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