Aspects of the Verbal System of Malaysian English and Other Englishes

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ABSTRACT

This article reports findings from a comprehensive corpus-based study of several verbal categories in Malaysian English: modals/quasi-modals, progressives and present perfects. Comparisons are drawn with a further five varieties of World English: two Inner Circle and three Outer Circle. For the verbal categories selected there is independent evidence of recent diachronic variation in British English and American English. Apparent time insights into the degrees of advancement of Malaysian English and the Outer Circle Englishes with respect to these changes are derived via comparisons of speech versus writing frequencies, and comparisons with frequencies for the Inner Circle varieties. The findings suggest that Malaysian English is exonormatively oriented toward the current global English superpower, American English, and that there is a continuing reluctance to accept colloquial grammatical features in more formal registers of Malaysian English.

Key words: Malaysian English, modals, quasi-modals, progressives, present perfects

INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the findings of research into three grammatical categories belonging to the tense/aspect/modality system of the verb – modals and quasi-modals, the progressive, and the present perfect – in Malaysian English ('ME') and other Englishes, exploring how patterns of usage are shaped by various sociocultural factors. There is independent evidence that each of the categories examined is undergoing major change in contemporary English, hypothesised in this study to be sensitive to evolutionary status, as described in Schneider's (2003, 2007) Dynamic Model for the postcolonial Englishes. According to Schneider the process of identity reconstruction operating in these Englishes is being guided by a uniform underlying process shaped both by sociocultural factors and the emergence of locally characteristic linguistic patterns. Each English can be located in one of five phases: (1) foundation (transportation); (2) exonormative stabilization; (3) nativization; (4) endonormative stabilisation; and (5) differentiation. American English ('AmE') is the only variety included in the present study to have reached Phase 5 (British English ('BrE') being excluded from consideration since it is not a postcolonial variety), and is recognized as an established reference variety alongside BrE. Singapore English ('SingE') is in Phase 4, following modernization in the immediate post-World war II period, but linguistic diversification of the type found in AmE is not yet in evidence. Philippine English ('PhilE'), ME, and Hong Kong English ('HKE) are all in Phase 3. PhilE is the only Postcolonial English with AmE rather than BrE as its parent variety, is in Phase 3, but some signs of Phase 4 are in evidence (including proposals for the codification and standardisation of language education, and the growth of a Philippine literature written in English). Although HKE is currently in Phase 3, traces of Phase 2 persist (despite the emergence of positive attitudes towards English after the 1997 handover, there has been no significant diminution of the strong tradition of complaint about allegedly falling English standards).

     ME can be traced back to the colony of Penang, established in 1786. As the colony

stabilised, there was an ever-increasing demand for English, particularly from the local elite, which was met by government and missionary schools. With the Constitution of 1957 came a nationalist language policy that saw English disestablished as an official language in favour of Bahasa Malaysia (officially in 1976). More recent efforts to develop Malaysia into a fully developed country in which due recognition is accorded to the important role of English in globalisation and technological advancement have prompted a partial reintroduction of English into schools.

Despite its marginalisation since 1957, ME has undergone steady structural nativization and today is commonly found in interethnic communication. Furthermore, while the official use of English might be circumscribed by government policy, English is today pervasive in the mass media and its currency in informal everyday discourse suggests that it is no longer narrowly the language of the elite. A number of writers (Gill 2002, Rajadurai 2004) have commented on the role served by ME in providing a badge of cultural and linguistic identity for many Malaysians today.

ME is today squarely in Phase 3 ('nativisation') of Schneider's Dynamic Model. One piece of evidence for this claim is the development of a tradition of complaint, as reflected in the criticisms of allegedly declining standards of English that are voiced in English language newspapers (see, e.g., Nair-Venugopal 2000, Gill 2002). There are some indications that Schneider's Phase 4 ('enonormativity') may not be too far away, as reflected for example in the view expressed increasingly that it is time for the codification of ME to be undertaken in earnest (Morais 2000: 104). Nevertheless the linguistic orientation of ME is, according to Schneider's (2007: 152), dominantly exonormative: one of the aims of this study is to determine whether these norms are still conservatively those of BrE, or whether they have moved in the direction of the new global powerhouse, AmE. A second aim is to determine whether the use of ME is, as Schneider also claims, "not yet accepted as adequate in formal contexts" (p.152).

THE VERBAL CATEGORIES

In this section we introduce and exemplify the verbal categories under examination in the study.

MODALS AND QUASI-MODALS

The semantic category of modality embraces various semantic notions, most fundamentally possibility and necessity, that share a concern with qualifying a predication in some way. Modality is expressed primarily in English by the modal auxiliaries (or, more simply, the 'modals'), a closed class of verbs whose inflectional and syntactic properties set them apart not only from 'lexical' verbs (e.g. negation with (contracted) *not*: compare *won't* with *wantn't*), but also from non-modal auxiliaries (e.g. absence of non-tensed forms: compare *(to) can* with *(to) succeed*). Increasingly in Modern English (q.v. Leech et al. 2009: 98-105) the role of expressing modality is being served by 'quasi-modals', periphrastic expressions that are semantically similar to the modals, but formally distinguishable from them in their partial grammaticalisation (as reflected in the existence of colloquial forms featuring incorporation of the infinitival *to* such as *gonna*, *gotta* and *wanna*), and in their idiomaticity (e.g. the typically possessive sense of *have* gives way to one of necessity in the quasi-modal *have to*).

For the purposes of the present study three modals (*must*, *should*, and *will*) and three quasi-modals (*have to*, *want to*, and *be going to*) were selected. *Must* and *should* overlap

semantically with *have to* primarily in the domain of deontic necessity. Note the alternation in (1) between strongly obligational *has to* and *must* expressing a binding bureaucratic rule. Substitution of the less forceful *should* would have the effect of weakening the sense of compulsion. Substitution of *must* or of *have to* for *should* in (2) would have the reverse effect.

(1)   But, yea la, coz being a non-muslim lecturer is very hard, your dress code **has to** be, like, either pantsuite or skirt. But skirt also **must** be office wear style lo, easy. [ICE-MAL S1A-002]

(2)   But Kah Wee is funny. You **should** see he and Avinesh. Two of them like small kids like that. [ICE-MAL S1A-002]

A less common meaning for all three is epistemic necessity, in which they express degrees of speaker confidence in the truth of the proposition. Two examples follow:

(3)   But it **must** be damn painful [ICE-MAL S1A-004]
(4)   There will be air surveillance to monitor the situation. The added security measures **should** reduce the number of tempting targets for the intruders and warn them in no uncertain terms that they will pay a heavy price if they dare come again into our waters. [ICE-MAL W2E-001]

Will, *be going to* and *want to* are all, in contemporary English, dominated by the senses of epistemic prediction and dynamic intention. Approximately two thirds of *will*'s meanings are epistemic, and one third dynamic (Collins 2009:126). In the former sense *will* now competes with the quasi-modal *be going to*, and in the latter with *want to*. Thus in (5) epistemic *will* could be substituted by *are going to*, and in (6) epistemic *'s gonna* by *will*. In (7) dynamic *won't* could be substituted by *don't want to* and in (8) *don't want to* by *won't*.

(5)   It's like they just keep smoking more. It's like "[Walao]", I was like "Gross". I, sometimes wonder lo, like, they really **will** borrow from [Along] ah? [ICE-MAL S1A-002]

(6)   And don't forget if all us [ponteng], she**'s gonna** sit with Sahida. [ICE-MAL S1A-002]

(7)   A: But then how you wash your hair?
       B: You **won't** wash I guess. [ICE-MAL S1A-004]

(8)   No, not bleach. I **don't want to** bleach like someone can la. Like, make it a lighter, so that it can match, [XXX] light brown, right. If I dye too light brown, but cannot [XXX] like this one… [ICE-MAL S1A-004]

THE PROGRESSIVE

The progressive aspect is realized by a form of *be* in conjunction with a present-participle. The progressive aspect characteristically expresses progressive aspectuality, which is associated with such meanings as progressivity, imperfectivity, and dynamicity. A typical progressive situation is one that is presented as progressing through time, with an internal temporal structure. For example in (9) the speaker's choice of the past progressive rather than the simple past *looked* has the effect of metaphorically slowing down the situation, zeroing the reader's attention inside the activity (whereas *her boyfriend looked at us* would present a perfective situation in its 'external' temporal totality).

(9)   Yea yea. "Bye Dhiya". She kissed me four times. You know, can you imagine her boyfriend **was looking** at us and then he just [senyum kambing] to me? [ICE-MAL S1A-017]

A number of specialised uses have come to be associated with the progressive aspect, as listed below:

(i)   The *attitudinal* use, in which the progressive combines with a temporal adjunct such as *always* or *constantly* to suggest an habitual activity of which the speaker disapproves, as in (10):

(10)   A: Did you get any response from the Chinese girl? What's her name?
B: Ong. Noo…
A: But she**'s constantly updating** her status.
B: Everything is in Chinese isn't it? [ICE-MAL S1A-018]

(ii)   The *interpretive* use, which foregrounds an interpretation or explanation, as in (11).

(11)   That's what I**'m saying** interference from first language [ICE-MAL S1A-020]

(iii)   The *politeness* use, which diffidently expresses a present wish or attitude, as in (12).

(12)   Yup. Just **wondering** what's gonna happen after she finish her studies…because I don't think she's gonna stay with her boyfriend though. [ICE-MAL S1A-018]

(iv)   The *futurate* use, in which futurity is typically associated with human agency or intentionality, as in (13):

(13)   So, when **are** you **coming** back? [ICE-MAL S1A-020]

(v)   The *'matter of course'* use, in which the progressive combines with a future-referring modal expression to suggest that the circumstances leading up to an action have been set in train and that it will take place in the not-too-distant future, as in (14).

(14)   You know that Dr Hajar **is gonna be reading** all this right? [ICE-MAL S1A-002]

THE PRESENT PERFECT

The present perfect is realized by a present form of auxiliary *have* in construction with a past participle. It expresses the connection between a past situation and the present moment, commonly analysed in terms of 'current relevance', a concept which encompasses a variety of notions such as recency, iterativity, experientiality, present possibility, and continuance of a state into the present (see McCoard 1978). The opposition between the present perfect and the preterite is a frequently discussed issue. Both forms are capable of describing past situations, yet are divergent with respect to their temporal specification and discourse functions.

The present perfect has three main uses in contemporary English, namely: 'resultative', where the concern is with a situation resulting from earlier activity/situation, as in (15); 'experiential', where a past experience affects a person's current state/status, as in (16); and 'continuative', where an imperfective situation extends up to the time of utterance

(and possibly beyond it), as in (17).

(15)   But it's quite weird. Fashion in Malaysia **has** suddenly **become** 'boom'! [XXX] wearing hijab because of the trend and I don't wanna be a part of that. [ICE-MAL S1A-016]
(16)   **Have** you ever **tried** it? [ICE-MAL S1A-004]
(17)   You know, the casino **has been** there for how many years, you know. [ICE-MAL S1A-003]

DIACHRONIC VARIATION

A number of studies have identified diachronic change in the grammatical categories discussed in Section 2. In their research based on the 'Brown family' of corpora – LOB, Brown, FLOB and Frown – Mair & Leech (2006) and Leech et al. (2009) provide detailed corpus-based evidence of a rise in the frequency of the quasi-modals and a decline in the frequency of the modals in recent British and American writing, a trend that is more pronounced in their spoken than their written data. As Table 1 shows, of the three modals examined in this study it is *must* that has declined most sharply, *will* the mildest and *should* in-between. Of the three quasi-modals it is *want to* that has enjoyed the sharpest increase. *Be going to* has fared quite differently in the two varieties, with only a very small change in BrE but a major increase in AmE. AmE thus leads the way over BrE in the fall of the modals and the rise of the quasi-modals under examination, in all cases bar one (*have to*). In the absence of genuinely parallel corpora of spoken English equivalent to the Brown family of corpora, Leech and his colleagues conducted a further examination using some comparable spoken 'mini-corpora'. What they discovered, that the trends they had found in writing were more pronounced in speech, suggests that colloquialisation (the narrowing of the gap between informal and formal registers) is playing a role in the diachronic developments noted.

TABLE 1. Percentage rises and falls in selected modal expressions in BrE and AmE

	BrE	AmE
must	-29.0%	-3.3%
should	-11.7%	-12.8%
will	-3.9%	-10.3%
have to	+9.1%	+2.8%
want to	+18.6%	+72.4%
be going to	-1.1%	+55.0%

Several writers (Elsness 1994, Smitterberg 2005) have documented the steady rise of the progressive aspect since Late Modern English, while its continuing rise in recent decades has been examined in corpus-based studies. Mair & Hundt (1995), Smith (2002), Mair & Leech (2006), and Leech et al. (2009) all find a substantial increase in the frequency of progressives from the early 1960s to the early 1990s, one slightly more pronounced in BrE than in AmE. Several factors have been advanced as likely contributors to this increase. That one of these is colloquialisation is suggested by the greater popularity of the progressive in speech than in writing. Two further factors are the development of new forms (e.g. combinations of the progressive with modals and the passive voice), and that of new uses (as described above).

According to Elsness (1997) the present perfect has been losing ground to the preterite since Late Modern English, more sharply in AmE than BrE, with a resultant tendency for AmE to prefer the preterite in many contexts where BrE prefers the present perfect. Hundt & Smith (2009) find that the present perfect's loss of territory to the preterite

has continued into the late 20th century. Using data from the Corpus of Historical American English (or 'COHA'), Yao & Collins (2012) confirm that the present perfect has continued to lose ground to the preterite in 20th century AmE. There are several possible explanations for these historical trends. Elsness (1997, 2009) has suggested that one factor may be the formal similarity between the present perfect and the preterite forms in English, by comparison with that in languages such as German and French. Another possible factor is colloquialisation, with a reduction in the formal difference between the preterite and present perfect resulting from such colloquial features as the use of contracted auxiliaries for full forms (e.g. *has > 's*), the use of the same form for the present perfect and the preterite (e.g. *shrink, shrank, shrunk > shrink, shrunk, shrunk*) and the use of regular forms for irregular ones (e.g. *strive, strove, striven > strive, strived, strived*).

While the Malaysian data used in the present study (see next section) is synchronic, some 'apparent time' insights into possible diachronic variation can be gleaned from examination of speech versus writing ratios, and from comparisons with the frequencies and meanings of the modal expressions in the supervarieties.

THE CORPORA

The study is based on data from the Malaysian, British, Singaporean, Philippine, and Hong Kong components of the International Corpus of English ('ICE') collection: ICE-MAL, ICE-GB, ICE-SIN, ICE-PHI, and ICE-HK). Each complete ICE corpus contains approximately one million words of text and conforms to a common design, comprising 500 2,000-word texts sampled in the early 1990s. For the present study we selected texts under the categories S1A ("casual conversation"), W2B ("popular writing"), and W2C and W2E ("press"). ICE-MAL is currently incomplete; we were kindly supplied by Dr Hajar Abdul Rahim with about 36,200 words of spoken data (all representing S1A), and about 122,000 words of written data (including 60,000 words representing W2B, and 62,000 words representing categories W2C and W2E). It should be noted that the sampling for ICE-MAL took place after the year 2000, almost one decade after the sampling for the complete ICE corpora (ICE-GB, ICE-SIN, ICE-PHI and ICE-HK).

In the absence of an ICE-US corpus, whose compilation is yet to be completed, data representing AmE were taken from the (spoken) Santa Barbara Corpus ('SBC'), and categories F ("popular lore") and A ("press reportage") and B ("press editorials") of the Freiburg-Brown Corpus of written American English ('Frown'). Both corpora comprise data from the early 1990s and contain comparable text categories. The following table shows the composition of our data set including the approximate word counts of texts representing each genre:

TABLE 2. Composition of corpora used in the present study

Genre		ICE (complete)		American Corpora	
		Category	No. of words (approx)	Category	No. of words (approx)
Speech dialogues	Private	S1A	180,000	SBC	256,000
Writing	Popular	W2B	80,000	Frown-F	96,000
	Press	W2C, E	60,000	Frown-A, B	142,000

All corpora were part-of-speech tagged by the CLAWS C7 tagset, and queries were performed on the PowerGREP software which allows complex searches using regular expressions.[1] All frequencies presented in tables in the following sections have been normalised to tokens per one million words.

In the present study we distinguish between on the one hand the two corpora representing the Inner Circle ('IC') varieties, BrE and AmE, and on the other hand the four corpora representing the Outer Circle ('OC') varieties – more specifically, Southeast Asian ('SEA') varieties – ME, SingE, PhilE and HKE.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section we present and discuss the results of the study. All frequencies presented represent the number of tokens per million words.

MODALS AND QUASI-MODALS

Table 3 indicates that AmE and ME have a considerably higher frequency of quasi-modal tokens overall (with 4476 and 4547 pmw respectively) than any of the other varieties. This finding, while not unexpected for AmE, is somewhat surprising for ME. What it perhaps suggests is that not only is the linguistic orientation of ME is still strongly exonormative, but that it has shifted towards the global English superpower, AmE. Not only are the average quasi-modal frequencies for AmE and ME very close, but they share a similar affinity for speech (AmE 7626; ME 7843) and dispreference for writing (AmE 1325; ME 1251). In fact in the case of two quasi-modals, *have to* and *want to*, the speech frequencies for ME significantly exceed those for AmE. It seems likely that speakers of ME are influenced by the prominence of AmE in the spoken media (television and movies in particular) that they encounter on a regular basis. Further possible explanations for these results lie in the nature of the ME data: ICE-MAL has a more recent sampling period than the other ICE corpora and the spoken tex*ts available (category S1A) are both limited in number and characterized by a high level of informality* and colloquialism.

As a group the four SEA varieties average a frequency (3713) that is intermediate between the more advanced AmE and the more conservative BrE. The frequencies for SingE and PhilE are close to this average, while that for HKE (2798), which falls below the other two in its evolutionary ranking, is well below it. Not surprisingly HKE, with its historically strong British ties, has a similar frequency to BrE.

TABLE 3. Frequencies of the quasi-modals

		AmE	BrE	SingE	PhilE	HKE	**ME**	SEA
have to	spoken	2201	1508	1809	2236	2011	**3010**	2267
	writing	625	873	1049	771	699	**863**	846
	average	1413	1191	1429	1504	1355	**1937**	1557
want to	spoken	1967	1386	2272	1955	1669	**2679**	2144
	writing	415	196	610	389	485	**355**	460
	average	1191	791	1441	1172	1077	**1517**	1302
be going to	spoken	3458	1940	1440	2307	622	**2154**	1631
	writing	285	78	128	38	110	**33**	78
	average	1872	1009	784	1173	366	**1094**	855
Total	spoken	7626	4834	5521	6498	4302	**7843**	6041
	writing	1325	1147	1788	1200	1294	**1251**	1384
	average	4476	2991	3655	3849	2798	**4547**	3713

Consider next the frequencies for the modals, presented in Table 4. Given that the modals appear to be in decline, AmE – with the smallest total number of modal tokens, 4658 – is the most advanced of the six Englishes. Interestingly the SEA varieties are on average considerably more conservative than BrE (BrE 5146; SEA 5985), a classic case of 'colonial lag'. Of the SEA varieties it is SingE that evidences the greatest degree of conservatism by

far (7096), with ME (5662) intermediate between the two other SEA varieties (PhilE 5503; HKE 5677). Whereas ME is closely aligned with AmE in the case of the quasi-modals, its behaviour in the case of the modals does not differentiate it from PhilE and HKE.

TABLE 4. Frequencies of the modals

		AmE	BrE	SingE	PhilE	HKE	**ME**	SEA
must	spoken	261	510	925	211	299	**276**	428
	writing	637	612	1049	801	599	**932**	845
	average	449	561	987	506	449	**604**	637
should	spoken	671	804	1352	1050	907	**442**	938
	writing	1034	1195	1132	1202	1674	**1399**	1352
	average	853	1000	1242	1126	1291	**921**	1145
will	spoken	3880	3292	5370	4086	3974	**4722**	4538
	writing	2833	3880	4363	3655	3900	**3554**	3868
	average	3357	3586	4867	3871	3937	**4138**	4203
Total	spoken	4812	4606	7647	5347	5180	**5440**	5904
	writing	4504	5686	6544	5658	6173	**5884**	6065
	average	4658	5146	7096	5503	5677	**5662**	5985

The speech versus writing ratios for the quasi-modals presented in Table 5 appear to provide support for Mair & Leech's (2006) and Leech et al.'s (2009) finding, reported above, that the rise of the quasi-modals is more pronounced in speech than writing. In light of the well-known trend for linguistic innovations to spread rapidly in informal spoken genres before becoming established more broadly in the language, the ascendancy of AmE (5.76) and ME (6.27) provides further evidence that they are the most advanced varieties in the rise of the quasi-modals. Just as AmE is well ahead of its Transatlantic supervariety rival, so ME is well ahead of the SEA average. The strong dispreference for quasi-modals in writing displayed by ME suggests the validity of Schneider's (2007, p.152) suggestion reported above that ME has yet to gain acceptance in informal contexts.

TABLE 5. Speech versus writing ratios for the quasi-modals

	AmE	BrE	SingE	PhilE	HKE	**ME**	SEA
have to	3.52	1.73	1.72	2.90	2.87	**3.49**	2.75
want to	4.74	7.09	3.72	5.02	3.44	**7.55**	4.93
be going to	12.13	24.71	11.21	59.92	5.65	**65.27**	35.51
Total	5.76	4.21	3.09	5.42	3.32	**6.27**	4.52

Consider next the speech versus writing ratios for the modals in Table 6. In this case the strength of a variety's endorsement of writing may be interpreted as evidence of conservatism, insofar as older forms tend to linger longer in this more conservative medium than in speech. Perhaps the most striking aspect of the ratios in Table 6 is their overwhelming similarity, all falling between 0.81, the ratio for the most conservative variety, BrE, and 1.17, the ratio for the least conservative variety, SingE). ME, with a ratio of 0.92 is – as in the case of its modal frequencies – neither distinctively more advanced nor conservative than the other varieties.

TABLE 6. Speech versus writing ratios for the modals

	AmE	BrE	SingE	PhilE	HKE	**ME**	SEA
must	0.41	0.83	0.88	0.26	0.50	**0.30**	0.49
should	0.65	0.67	1.19	0.87	0.54	**0.32**	0.73
will	1.37	0.85	1.23	1.12	1.02	**1.33**	1.17
Total	1.07	0.81	1.17	0.95	0.84	**0.92**	0.97

What the ratios for quasi-modals and modals perhaps suggest is that the rise of the quasi-modals is a more dynamic process, one proceeding with strong AmE leadership worldwide

and with strong endorsement from ME in the SEA, than is the decline of the modals, where AmE is not so clearly leading the way.

PROGRESSIVES

According to Collins (2008), AmE is uncharacteristically conservative in the rise of the progressives, with a smaller frequency not only than the Antipodean IC varieties in his study but also the OC varieties (SingE, PhilE, HKE, IndE, KenE). In the case of the OC varieties one factor in these frequency differences may be their greater tolerance than that found in the IC varieties for progressives with stative lexical verbs of the type in (18):

(18)   She**'s having** diabetes ah? [ICE-MAL S1A-002]

The present study – see Table 7 – likewise found AmE to be relatively conservative with a frequency (4992) smaller than that for BrE (5207) and two of the SEA varieties (PhilE 5324, and SingE 5016), with ME only slightly more conservative (4601) and HKE considerably more so (3288). The spoken data generally confirm these overall trends, the only ordering difference being the leapfrogging of SingE by AmE.

TABLE 7. Frequencies of progressives

	AmE	BrE	SingE	PhilE	HKE	**ME**	SEA
Speech	7576	8170	7184	7815	3694	**6986**	6420
							Continued
Continued							
Writing	2408	2244	2848	2832	2882	**2215**	2694
Average	4992	5207	5016	5324	3288	**4601**	4557

Interestingly, when we compare speech versus writing ratios for the progressive – see Table 8 – a pattern emerges that is more similar in many ways to that found with the frequencies and speech/writing ratios for the quasi-modals (with the IC varieties more advanced than the SEA as a group, and ME apparently very advanced).   The endorsement of speech and dispreference for writing reflected in the ME progressive ratio of 3.15, identical to that for AmE, suggests a sensitivity to external colloquially-driven trends (one which, given the results for quasi-modals, might suggest that this is in evidence for colloquially-driven changes more generally).

TABLE 8. Speech versus writing ratios for the progressives

AmE	BrE	SingE	PhilE	HKE	**ME**	SEA
3.15	3.64	2.52	2.76	1.28	**3.15**	2.43

Table 9 summarises the percentages of the special usage types across the six corpora. The percentages for all but ME are derived from Collins (2008). The distribution of the special types in ME is most similar to that in SingE (the variety with which it has the closest areal affinity), the futurate use being strongly dominant and the interpretive use, the only other of any significance. The relatively small percentage of special progressive uses overall in ME (10.6%) ranks it close to HKE, with which it shares a similar evolutionary ranking, and suggests that the development of these uses is playing only a minor role in the progression of the progressive in ME.

TABLE 9. Special uses of progressives

	AmE	BrE	SingE	PhilE	HKE	ME
Futurate	27.1%	53.4%	61.7%	48.6%	50.5%	**72.7%**
Interpretive	53.4%	36.4%	12.1%	28.5%	12.4%	**20.0%**
Matter-of-course	7.6%	5.9%	2.3%	13.2%	24.8%	**3.6%**
Politeness	7.6%	4.2%	2.1%	7.6%	2.9%	**1.8%**
Attitudinal	4.2%	0.0%	0.7%	2.1%	9.5%	**1.8%**
% of all progressives	18.8%	17.9%	20.6%	21.0%	14.2%	**10.6%**

THE PRESENT PERFECT

Table 10 summarises the frequencies of the present perfect in the individual Englishes. Given the evidence presented above that the present perfect is in decline in contemporary English it appears that once again AmE and ME are leading the way, BrE is conservative vis-à-vis AmE, and the ordering within the OC is: ME > SingE > PhilE > HKE. As in the case of the modals, which we have noted to also be in decline, the present perfect evidences strong frequencies in the more conservative medium of writing.

TABLE 10. Frequencies of the present perfect

	AmE	BrE	SingE	PhilE	HKE	ME	SEA
Speech	2541	4141	2438	2558	2550	**1077**	2156
Writing	4090	4695	4565	4908	6179	**3415**	4767
Average	3316	4418	3502	3733	4365	**2246**	3462

Table 11 presents the ratios for the present perfect versus the preterite across the six varieties, revealing an ordering similar to the one identified above. Again AmE and ME are in the lead with identical ratios of 0.10, BrE is conservative in comparison to AmE and within the OC the ordering is: ME > SingE > PhilE > HKE.

TABLE 11. Present perfect vs. preterite ratios across text types

	AmE	BrE	SingE	PhilE	HKE	ME	SEA
Speech	0.06	0.13	0.09	0.08	0.18	**0.04**	0.10
Writing	0.13	0.17	0.15	0.20	0.23	**0.15**	0.18
Average	0.10	0.15	0.12	0.14	0.21	**0.10**	0.14

The speech versus writing ratios in Table 12 provide evidence that, in line with the apparently declining fortunes of the modals, the decline of the present perfect first finds its way into spoken genres and then gradually infiltrates more formal language. In AmE, the combination of a considerably smaller number of present perfects than BrE, with a considerably lower speech versus writing ratio, is compatible with the evidence of a decline that has been in place over an extended period of time. Interestingly the ratios for the OC varieties are lower still than that for AmE. As might have been predicted from its performance with the other categories examined in this study, ME is the most advanced variety in the OC.

TABLE 12. Speech versus writing ratios for the present perfect

AmE	BrE	SingE	PhilE	HKE	ME	SEA
0.62	0.88	0.53	0.52	0.41	**0.32**	0.45

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined developments in a set of grammatical categories of the English verbal system in ME, and in a further set of Englishes, two IC and three OC. For each of the verbal categories, published studies provide ample evidence of diachronic changes in BrE and AmE – a rise in the frequency of the quasi-modals and progressives, and a decline in the modals and present perfects – with AmE the more advanced of the two supervarieties in all of these trends except for the rise of the progressives.

The findings of the study confirm the hypothesis that the linguistic orientation of ME is predominantly exonormative, the results suggesting that the source of its norms is the influential global powerhouse, AmE, rather than ME's postcolonial parent, BrE. In the case of the two colloquially-driven trends, the rise of the quasi-modals and the progressives, the evidence for these claims is the striking similarity between the ME frequencies and speech/writing ratios and those for AmE. A similar finding occurs in the case of the declining present perfect, whose modest frequency and low speech/writing ratio in AmE vis-à-vis BrE is matched by the results for ME vis-à-vis the other OC varieties. The one exception is the modals, in whose decline AmE is more advanced than BrE. Here, for reasons that are not entirely clear, ME retains a conservatively large frequency and a speech/writing ratio that is comparable to that of PhilE and HKE.

A second hypothesis, that ME is yet to gain acceptance in formal contexts, also finds some support in the findings of the study. This support comes in the form of a very strong dispreference in the written texts of ICE-MAL for the two colloquial features, quasi-modals and progressives. For the quasi-modals this dispreference was stronger than that in any other variety, and for the progressive it was equivalent to that in AmE and second only to BrE.

Study of further linguistic variables is needed to ascertain what influence, if any, might have been exerted by the smallness of the Malaysian ICE dataset, by the generic skewing in the available data (all the spoken data is from category SIA, where we would expect the diachronic trends to be most advanced), and by the fact that ICE-MAL has a sampling date that is more recent than that for the other ICE corpora (early 1990s).

ENDNOTE

1. The search routines for the modals and quasi-modals were fairly simple, involving only queries for individual lexical items such as *have to* and *must*. For present perfects and progressives, the search strings we used are similar to those in Hundt & Smith (2009) and Leech et al. (2009). This method allows a number of inserted noun and adverbial phrases so as to incorporate more complex sentence structures.

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