

## Like That *Lah*: Malaysian Undergraduates' Attitudes Towards Localised English

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### ABSTRACT

Native-like English use is often considered the standard to be achieved, in contrast to non-native English use. Nonetheless, localised English varieties abound in many societies and the growth or decline of any language variety commonly depends on how it is perceived; for instance, as a mere tool for functionality or as a prized cultural badge, and only its users can offer us insights into this. The thrust of the present study falls in line with the concept of language vitality, which is basically concerned with the sustainability of non-global languages. This paper first explores the subject of localisation and English varieties, and then examines the attitudes of Malaysian undergraduates towards their English pronunciation and accent, as well as their perceptions of Malaysian English. A 26-item questionnaire created by the researchers was utilised to collect data. It was also tested for reliability, with returned values indicating good internal consistency for all constructs, making the instrument a reliable option for use in future studies. A total of 253 undergraduates from a public university responded to the questionnaire and results revealed that overall, the participants valued their local-accented English and the functionality of Malaysian English, but regarded this form of the language as substandard. They also considered it important for Malaysians to achieve native-like English use, particularly for the attainment of better educational and economic prospects. These findings provide direction for educational policy-planning as well as English language teaching, and are of relevance to research on English varieties, including the preservation of linguistic heritage.

**Keywords:** English varieties; Malaysian English; local-accented English; language attitudes; language vitality

### INTRODUCTION

The expansion of the English language and the development of its varieties is a result of British colonisation and globalisation which started in the 18th century (Baugh & Cable,

2012). Fast forward, English is currently a global language with approximately two billion speakers, and many distinct varieties influenced by the specific communities that have adapted it over many years. English is today recognised in many countries as a second language (L2) (e.g. Malaysia, Philippines, Pakistan) and foreign language (FL) (e.g. China, Iran, Brazil). However, there are also countries that, having recognised the essentiality of English for socioeconomic development and global standing, have taken measures to transform it into their official language (e.g. Singapore, Nigeria, India).

In general, the worldwide English-speaking community is divided into three groups: 1) those whose mother tongue is English, 2) those who use English as a second language, and 3) those who use it as a foreign language (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2012). While this three-tiered distinction is useful in certain contexts, it does have its shortcomings, primarily in that it neglects the dimension of local English varieties. The spread of English through various means has in fact resulted in many Englishes coloured by multicultural identities and these varieties have been termed differently by sociolinguists over the years. For instance, ‘nonnative varieties’, ‘new Englishes’, ‘Third World Englishes’ and ‘Localized Forms of English’ (Thirusanku & Yunus, *ibid.*).

Despite a plethora of studies on English varieties, there is a surprising paucity with regards to research on perceptions of Malaysian English, although fundamentally the growth or decline of a language, be it a standard form or a colloquial variety, normally depends on how it is perceived. In short, the survival of a language is, to a certain degree, reliant on society’s acceptance of it. This is in line with Crismore, Ngeow and Soo (1996, p. 319) position:

“Language attitudes form the basis for the acceptance and growth of language varieties within a society. In situations in which the standard norm of a language and its non-native variety are used almost in tandem with one another, the users of these languages can provide insights into language trends. Perceptions and attitudes are indicators of the growth or decline of a variety of English.”

So, is Malaysian English a source of national pride, an honoured cultural badge? Or is it a mere tool for functionality, useful only for casual communication? Do Malaysians themselves find it appropriate for formal situations? Scholarly output to these questions is unfortunately few and far between, especially with regards to the perceptions of Malaysian undergraduates, despite the fact that this cohort is not only sizeable but has experienced substantial exposure to and usage of Malaysian English. Furthermore, Standard English is also part of their linguistic repertoire as tertiary students, thus allowing them to discern better the role and standing of Malaysian English against a wider backdrop.

This study aims to examine the attitudes of Malaysian undergraduates towards their local-accented English and Malaysian English. It also hopes to determine the extent to which Malaysian undergraduates consider Malaysian English useful, Malaysian English as a form of Standard English, and the importance of Standard English. It is both reasonable and interesting to discover not only the undergraduates’ general and specific perceptions of Malaysian English, but also the more minute details of how they perceive their own local-accented English. For the present study, local-accented English refers to English spoken with a Malaysian accent as opposed to, for instance, a British or American accent. Meanwhile, Malaysian English (or Manglish) refers to a form of English influenced by the local languages and dialects used in Malaysia. For example, Malay, Tamil, Mandarin, Hokkien, and Cantonese.

The present study is guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What are the attitudes of Malaysian undergraduates towards:
  - a) their local-accented English?
  - b) Malaysian English?
- 2) To what extent do Malaysian undergraduates consider:
  - a) Malaysian English useful?
  - b) Malaysian English as Standard English?
  - c) Standard English important?

The targeted cohort is, after all, a generation that will determine the maintenance of the nation's linguistic heritage. This cohort's input is valuable not only because they are in a position to provide us with such information, but also because it affords us an idea of what the future holds for our own unique form of localised English. This in turn provides direction for ongoing educational policy-planning and English language teaching, as well as future research concerning English varieties and the preservation of linguistic heritage.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### ENGLISH VARIETIES

The spread of English as a global language is the result of many factors including historical tradition, political purposes, commercial, cultural and technological advantages, the advent of popular cultures across low-cost free media, and the growth of middle class societies (Crystal, 2003; Moody, 2012).

While Standard Englishes arise and thrive, there are possibilities of the birth of new standards from the well-known English varieties in Australia, Europe and even South Asia (Mesthrie, 2006). The number of native speakers in the Inner Circle countries is surpassed by the population of non-native speakers of English in the Outer Circle countries, and far outnumbered by users of English as a foreign language in the Expanding Circle countries (Hu, 2012).

Nations that are ex-British colonies often demonstrate tendencies to diverge, and do not typically adhere to the rules of Standard British English. This means that the citizens learn a new dialect of English, much like how people learn English as a foreign language (Groves, 2013). Thus the effect of the British Empire on the development of the English language in other countries is rather limited, as L2 speakers tend to speak in their varieties instead of adhering to Standard English. It is also worthy of note that the regular varieties of English in a particular society often exhibit a level of homogeneity that makes them mutually intelligible (Hu, 2012).

Of late, Asian English language varieties such as Chinglish (Chinese English), Singlish (Singaporean English) and Manglish (Malaysian English) are progressively making their mark, demonstrating not only the ever-evolving nature of the English language, but also its continuing global importance as a lingua franca. Nair-Venugopal (2000) also noted that the globalisation of English does not appear to obviate the processes of localisation or nativisation. Rather, it enhances these processes as it is the community that ultimately determines what is locally appropriate, valuable and relevant.

Malaysia and Singapore are two Asian countries that form the Outer Circle where English is used as a second and first language, with important intranational use (Norizam, 2014). In the case of Malaysia, English made its way through colonisation and commerce, and was later adopted into formal education. Through the processes of nativisation or assimilation with the local languages, English was gradually adapted to suit its new cultures. The localisation of English has led to changes in linguistic structures and use, such as the

elimination of lexical items that are commonly found in Standard English. Such processes usually result in the emergence of unique English varieties that symbolise the cultures they represent, and in the creation of national identities (Norizam, *ibid.*).

### MALAYSIAN ENGLISH

The British occupation of Malaya has led to the development of Standard Malaysian English (SME), an institutionalised acrolect used in many formal settings. Interactions between distinct Malaysian ethnicities and sociocultures, meanwhile, have resulted in the birth and growth of Malaysian English (popularly known as Manglish), a basilect considered to be a variety of SME.

Manglish is far departed from Standard English but is related to the original form of English, making it a ‘daughter-lect’ (Groves, 2013). It is not a single dialect, but a cline between very standardised English and a form of English much closer to the local languages and dialects used in Malaysia, including Bahasa Melayu (Malay Language), Tamil, Mandarin, and the Chinese dialects Hokkien and Cantonese (Crystal, 2003). Manglish is often compared – and confused – with Singlish (Singapore English) due to the almost similar sociocultural demographics of their speakers.

A study of 31 weblogs highlights that the lexical items in Manglish are mainly influenced by Malay dialects as well as other languages, while the lexical items in Singlish are mainly adapted from Chinese dialects (Norizam, 2014; Zhia, 2015). However, both varieties share similarities in terms of acronyms, nouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs and tag questions, among others (Norizam, 2014). A further example of the variance between Manglish and Singlish may also be observed in the use of particles. For instance, in Singlish, the particle *ya* is quite commonly used by younger female Singaporeans in giving advice. This is, however, uncommon in Manglish.

Manglish is fundamentally Malaysia’s dominant brand of localised English, and is the most common spoken variety among Malaysians in less formal to informal situations. The speakers see the language as short, simple, easy and effective in getting their messages across, with influences of local flavours that also project their identities (Zhia, 2015). Due to the impact of popular culture from American English, Manglish has further evolved to also include some specific modes of expressions and slangs, especially among youths (Pillai, 2014).

Zee Avi, a New York-based Malaysian singer, sees Manglish as an authentic representation of how the people of her generation speak (Moody, 2012). However, the factors that influence Manglish usage vary, and these include level of education and social settings (Groves, 2013).

The acrolect speakers switch to the mesolect form when they converse with their friends in informal settings, to indicate familiarity and solidarity. It is prominently used in intragroups communication and different groups normally have specific ways of communicating with each other. Nair-Venugopal (2000) observes the case of two lawyers using the Manglish mesolect in their interactions with one another, indicating that it is used even among professionals for the purpose of asserting identity, familiarity and solidarity with one another. Some of the characteristics of the speeches are the:

- 1) use of particles for emphasis and effect (e.g. *Can lah! No problem one.*)
- 2) omission of auxiliary verbs (e.g. *My case going to be adjourned.*)
- 3) use of tag questions (e.g. *You wanted to go shopping, nak pergi tak?*)
- 4) practice of code-switching (e.g. *Then real susah.*)

The basilect, patois or bazaar Manglish, is sometimes referred to as broken English that is of low variety and colloquial (Lim, 2014). It generally deviates from SME and contains many newly invented vocabularies (Norizam, 2014).

It is at the basilect level that the influence of local varieties such as Malay, Tamil and Chinese is most prominent, in the use of particles such as *what*, *meh*, *one*, *ar* and *lah* (Lim, 2014). Crystal (2003) projects the use of Manglish to be a mixture of all three sociolects, particularly with the steady growth of the middle income and working classes. Today, the differences between the three levels have become progressively less distinct, a situation that is likely to continue as the lower strata of society rise in economy and power.

#### LANGUAGE VITALITY: ATTITUDES TOWARDS MALAYSIAN ENGLISH

Although there is a scarcity with regards to research on local and foreign perceptions of Malaysian English, discussions abound especially in media forums as to its role and standing in society. According to Abdul Razak (2015) and Zhia (2015), the usage of Manglish is long-debated in terms of whether it actually makes a cool phenomenon or butchers the purity of the English language. While many do regard it as a low variety colloquial that should not be encouraged, many also embrace it as a unique Malaysian culture that should be celebrated.

Zhia (*ibid.*) posits that Malaysian English is a cool phenomenon among Malaysians because it is a statement of their cultural identity, an element which is both interesting and attractive to foreigners. Many Manglish speakers are able to switch from the colloquial variety to SME when necessary. The issue with Manglish lies when the speakers possess inadequate SME proficiency. This causes difficulties in distinguishing between the correct forms of English and its varieties. Therefore, they naturally end up using incorrect English in formal settings. Language educators are naturally worried that Manglish will harm English language development. In fact, students themselves also disapprove of the use of non-SME in educational settings, although they accept its usage in their daily lives (Abdul Razak, 2015).

Opinions vary as to whether Malaysian English should be seen as a badge of national pride or just a tool for functionality, or even as an accepted form in formal settings. After all, it is already present in academic settings and according to Nair-Venugopal (2013), it would not be surprising for Manglish to continue making inroads into the academic world. Likewise, Zhia (2015) highlights that there are concerns that Manglish has penetrated our academic institutions and it may therefore be necessary to determine the extent to which it is acceptable in such settings.

Previously, the tendency in English language learning was primarily to achieve native-like competency. While this remains predominantly true, the rise of English varieties complements the multilingual model and has, to a certain degree, eroded the emphasis on multilinguals having to sound like native speakers – “Instead, the multilingual can be allowed to sound just that: a multilingual.” (Kirkpatrick, 2009, p. 14). In a similar vein, Zhia (2015) observes that while users appreciate the importance of SME, they do not feel the need to assimilate accent and grammatical forms in their speeches.

Kirkpatrick (2009) further asserts that the focus of education should be on the local languages and for students to learn literacy in their mother tongue and national language to inculcate a sense of identity and a strong foundation in these languages, which will likely facilitate the later learning of the English language.

Fundamentally, although opinions vary, it is evident that the progress of a language cannot be halted as individuals will naturally gravitate towards what they are most comfortable with. Essentially, languages abound in various communities and the development as well as survival of any language, standard or variety, largely depends on the level of acceptance that society accords it.

This is in tandem with the concept of language vitality, which is basically concerned with the attitudes of a community towards a local language. Language vitality is demonstrated by the extent that the language is accepted and used for communication and expression in various contexts. More succinctly, according to How et al. (2015, p. 121), it is “defined as the degree to which a language will live and survive”.

According to Aziz (2014, p. 21), the framing of language vitality over the years can be described as “sociological and socio-psychological in nature”; the former being more focused on typology of language endangerment and revitalisation whereas the latter covers a wider range of objective and subjective elements. Aziz notes that the type of approach taken depends on a study’s needs and focus.

He also posits that language use or choice is a significant entity in the study of language vitality because it leads to language shift and maintenance. Assessing language use (including perceptions and attitudes) is therefore crucial to monitor and estimate the survivability of non-global languages set against the backdrop of internationalised, hegemonic languages.

According to SIL International (2017), a research-intensive organisation focusing on ethnolinguistics and sustainable language development, assessing language vitality is pertinent to determine the likelihood that a language will continue to be used into the foreseeable future.

The earliest construct proposed for the study of language vitality is Joshua Fishman’s (1991) Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS). Lewis and Simons (2009) observe that the construct is the best known and most cited, but is more focused on disruption rather than maintenance. It also centres on the key role of intergenerational transmission (parents passing on a language to their children). Apart from that, GIDS also takes into account societal and institutional factors that impact parental decisions regarding language behaviour and transmission.

The present study falls in line with the concept of language vitality, in that it is concerned with the attitudes of a particular segment of society towards a localised language – Manglish; the researchers believe that the growth or decline of this language variety is, at least to some extent, reliant on the level of acceptance accorded to it. It is to be noted that this study does not focus on intergenerational transmission. Instead, the focus is on first-hand perceptions garnered from a specific generation already substantially exposed to Manglish usage.

## METHOD

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND INSTRUMENT

The present study implemented the survey approach, and reports results using a descriptive design based on quantitative and qualitative data. As the essence of the study is to capture language attitudes, a largely latent yet measurable dimension, the researchers opted to design and utilise a comprehensive questionnaire comprising closed-ended (five-point Likert scale) and open-ended items. According to Nelson (2008), in her work on survey research methods, such perception measures in a survey instrument enable researchers to investigate both quantitative and qualitative empirical premises.

However, the subjective nature of perception presents a problem, which is reliability. The researchers therefore sought to remedy this problem by conducting multiple reliability analyses. The questionnaire consists of 26 items (three for demographic data) measuring five constructs, as reflected in the five research questions presented earlier. Reliability analyses

were conducted using the SAS 9.4 software platform to measure the internal consistency of each construct as well as the internal consistency of the instrument as a whole.

### SAMPLING AND PARTICIPANTS

The study was conducted in Universiti Sains Malaysia and purposive procedures were adhered to taking into account the researchers' knowledge of the population of interest as well as the nature of the study's aims. Specifically, Malaysian undergraduates, from the Arts and the Sciences, were invited to participate in the study and their access to the online questionnaire was via a Google Forms key. The portal remained accessible for three weeks. A total of 253 undergraduates of various ethnicities, between the ages of 19 to 27, completed the questionnaire. All of the participants indicated that they speak English with a non-native, Malaysian accent and that they are users of Malaysian English (Manglish).

## FINDINGS

### RELIABILITY

This section reports the reliability of the questionnaire's five constructs as well as the reliability of the questionnaire as a whole. As shown in Table 1, constructs 1, 3 and 4 obtained  $\alpha = .88$ ,  $\alpha = .74$  and  $\alpha = .87$  respectively, denoting good reliability. Construct 2 obtained  $\alpha = .96$  which denotes excellent reliability, while the fifth construct obtained  $\alpha = .65$  which denotes acceptable reliability. The reliability of the questionnaire as a whole is good, with  $\alpha = .83$ . Interpretation of the obtained values is based on the commonly accepted rule of thumb for interpreting Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ ) readings (George & Mallery, 2003).

TABLE 1. Results of Reliability Analyses

Construct	Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha$ )	Level of internal consistency (Reliability)
Attitudes towards local-accented English	.88	Good
Attitudes towards Malaysian English	.96	Excellent
Usefulness of Malaysian English	.74	Good
Standard of Malaysian English	.87	Good
Importance of Standard English	.65	Acceptable
Overall	.83	Good

### DEMOGRAPHICS

This section provides some background about the respondents of this study in terms of demographic data, specifically their age, gender and race. As shown in Table 2, the respondents were between the ages of 19 to 27 years old, indicating that they were made up of first-, second-, third- and final year undergraduates. The largest cohort, at approximately 93% ( $n = 235$ ), comprised those between 20-23 years old.

TABLE 2. Respondents' Age Range

Age (years)	Number of Respondents ( $n$ )	Percentage (%)
19	5	2
20	46	18.2
21	81	32
22	73	28.9
23	35	13.8
24	10	4
25	1	0.4

26	1	0.4
27	1	0.4
	<b>253</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3 shows classifications according to gender and race. With regards to the former, most of the respondents were females ( $n = 198$ ), constituting more than 78% of the total sample population while only 21.7% were males, a fair representation of the current male-female ratio in most Malaysian public universities. As for race, as illustrated in the lower half of the table, the majority of the respondents were Malays, constituting 56.5% ( $n = 143$ ) of the sample population whereas only 4.3% were of East Malaysian ethnicity. The second largest group was Chinese respondents at 28.5%, followed by Indian respondents at 10.7%. Again, this is a fair representation of the ethnicity ratio in most Malaysian public universities. The following sections detail the core findings of this study, presented in accordance with the research questions (and the corresponding five constructs of the questionnaire).

TABLE 3. Respondents' Gender and Race

Category	Group	Number of respondents (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	55	21.7
	Female	198	78.3
		<b>253</b>	<b>100</b>
Race	Malay	143	56.5
	Chinese	72	28.5
	Indian	27	10.7
	East Malaysian ethnicity	11	4.3
		<b>253</b>	<b>100</b>

### ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS

Table 4 shows the respondents' attitudes towards local-accented English. More than 76% affirmed ('Agree' and 'Strongly Agree') that they spoke Malaysian English most of the time, whereas 5.1% disagreed and 2.4% strongly disagreed with the statement. The rest remained neutral. With regards to the second item, approximately 72% affirmed that they were confident in their English pronunciation while 7.1% disagreed with the statement and 2.4% strongly disagreed. As for items 3 and 4, more than 70% of the respondents affirmed that they were happy with and proud of their Malaysian accent; for each item, approximately 10% indicated otherwise ('Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree'). Almost 65% of the respondents indicated in the positive in terms of keeping their Malaysian accent, in contrast to almost 15% who indicated otherwise. About one fifth of the respondents remained neutral.

TABLE 4. Responses to Construct 1: Attitudes Towards Local-Accented English

Item	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)
1. I speak Malaysian English most of the time.	2.4	5.1	16.2	38.3	37.9
2. I am confident in my English pronunciation.	2.4	7.1	18.2	55.3	17
3. I am happy with my Malaysian accent.	1.2	9.1	19	35.2	35.6
4. I am proud of my Malaysian accent.	2	7.9	19	28.1	43.1
5. I would like to keep my Malaysian accent.	3.2	11.5	20.9	24.9	39.5

\* 1: Strongly Disagree; 2: Disagree; 3: Neutral; 4: Agree; 5: Strongly Agree

The students' attitudes towards Malaysian English are showcased through their responses to the second construct (Table 5). A significant proportion of students perceived this language in a positive light especially in relation to being proud of it (42.3%). A majority of them (41.5%) were also confident using Malaysian English and expressed their intention to



continue doing so in the long run (40.3%). Only an insignificant proportion thought otherwise. Students strongly agreed (39.5%) and agreed (32.8%) that they were happy with their Manglish while 17% remained neutral.

TABLE 5. Responses to Construct 2: Attitudes Towards Malaysian English

Item	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)
1. I am confident using Malaysian English.	0.8	7.9	14.6	35.2	41.5
2. I am happy with my Malaysian English.	2.4	8.3	17	32.8	39.5
3. I am proud of my Malaysian English.	2.4	10.3	17.4	27.7	42.3
4. I would like to keep using Malaysian English.	2.8	12.6	16.6	27.7	40.3

\* 1: Strongly Disagree; 2: Disagree; 3: Neutral; 4: Agree; 5: Strongly Agree

Mixed responses were garnered for the third construct (Table 6) in relation to the usefulness of Malaysian English. 45.8% of the students strongly agreed and 36.4% agreed that Malaysian English is useful for practical, everyday use. A majority of the students (86.1%) communicated that the language is useful for personal communication as well. However, only 13.4% strongly agreed with regards to using Malaysian English for casual cross-cultural communication. A bigger number (49%) agreed on this item but a representation of 17.4% were in disagreement. Interestingly, with respect to Malaysian English being useful for formal occasions, a large proportion disagreed (37.5%) and strongly disagreed (36.4%).

TABLE 6. Responses to Construct 3: Usefulness of Malaysian English

Item	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)
1. Malaysian English is useful for practical, everyday use.	1.6	3.6	12.6	36.4	45.8
2. Malaysian English is useful for personal communication.	1.6	2.8	9.5	39.1	47
3. Malaysian English is useful for casual cross-cultural communication.	3.6	17.4	16.6	49	13.4
4. Malaysian English is useful for formal occasions.	36.4	37.5	16.6	7.1	2.4
5. Malaysian English is useful for official purposes.	50.6	26.9	14.6	6.3	1.6
6. Malaysian English is useful for higher education.	38.7	32.4	18.2	9.1	1.6
7. Malaysian English is useful for international business dealings.	54.2	28.1	11.5	4.7	1.6

\* 1: Strongly Disagree; 2: Disagree; 3: Neutral; 4: Agree; 5: Strongly Agree

The standard of Malaysian English is reflected in Table 7 (fourth construct). A large proportion of the students strongly disagreed (51.8%) and disagreed (21.3%) that Malaysian English can be construed as a form of proper, standard English. However, 9.5% showed a positive response towards this item. For the next item, 31.6% conveyed their neutrality with respect to the language being correct, while 54.2% conveyed their disagreement. The last item of this construct showcased 49% strongly disagreeing with the notion of the language being accurate and on the same magnitude, 18.6% disagreed.

TABLE 7. Responses to Construct 4: Standard of Malaysian English

Item	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)
1. Malaysian English is proper, standard English.	51.8	21.3	17.4	7.1	2.4
2. Malaysian English is correct.	27.3	26.9	31.6	13.4	0.8
3. Malaysian English is accurate.	49	18.6	25.3	6.3	0.8

\* 1: Strongly Disagree; 2: Disagree; 3: Neutral; 4: Agree; 5: Strongly Agree

Table 8 highlights the importance of Malaysian English through the fifth and final construct. Most students (65.2%) affirmed the importance of using standard English in casual situations. A greater proportion (88.5%) acknowledged the importance of using standard English in formal situations. A substantial number of students (75.9%) affirmed that Malaysians should achieve native-like English use for the following reasons primarily: educational prospects (96%), economic prospects (77.9%), improvement of social standing (62.1%), and political prospects (38.7%). The following are several other more diverse responses to the final item of the open-ended section: “To prevent miscommunication to variety of different English speakers of different accents and dialects”; “For international communication”; “To get a better job”; “Improve the English standard at international level”; “Cultural”; “Make international friends”; “For us to get career overseas”; “Malaysian English only good for here”; “To achieve more in life”; “International interaction”; “More better experience outside Malaysia”; “For all purposes”; “Malaysian English not recognized other places”.

TABLE 8. Responses to Construct 5: Importance of Malaysian English

Item	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)
1. It is important for Malaysians to use standard English in casual situations.	2.4	10.3	22.1	58.9	6.3
2. It is important for Malaysians to use standard English in formal situations.	0.8	4.3	6.3	32.4	56.1
3. On the whole, it is important for Malaysians to achieve native-like (proper, standard) English use.	0.8	4.7	18.6	23.7	52.2
4. It is important to achieve this for the following reason(s) (you may select more than one): See FIGURE 1 below					

\* 1: Strongly Disagree; 2: Disagree; 3: Neutral; 4: Agree; 5: Strongly Agree

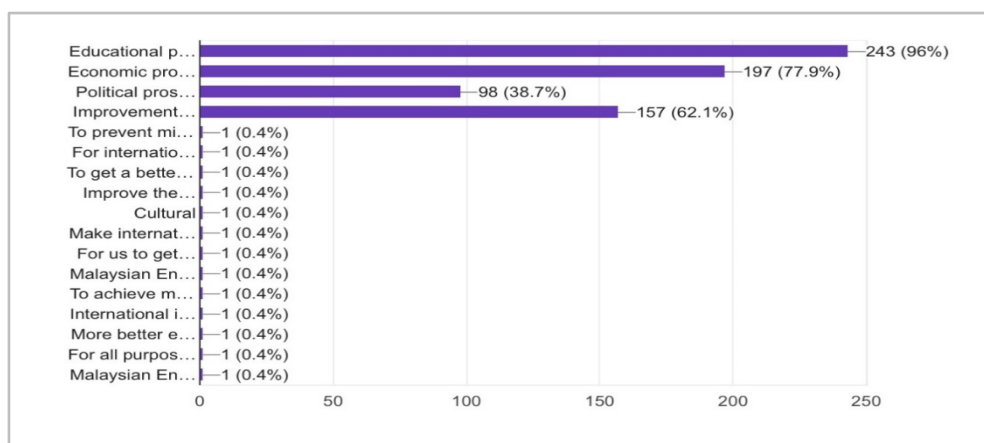


FIGURE 1. Responses to Final Item in Construct 5

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study investigated the attitudes of Malaysian undergraduates towards their local-accented English and Malaysian English. It further explored if Malaysian undergraduates consider Malaysian English to be useful, important and conforming to SME. The findings have brought to light a number of issues and concerns surrounding the perceptions and attitudes towards localised English, as well as the usefulness, standard and importance of Malaysian English.

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that students do have positive attitudes towards their local-accented English and towards Malaysian English per se, especially in terms of its usefulness and importance to a certain extent. The findings of this study have underlined the extant vitality of Malaysian English, with students affirming their pride and use of the language.

Undoubtedly, it is evident that the notion of language vitality reigns supreme in the case of Manglish as it is clearly accorded acceptance and even importance among the various races, which concurs with other studies (How et al., 2015; Aziz, 2014; Stapa & Shaari, 2013). It is also noteworthy that the findings of this study corroborate with those of Zhia's (2015) study in relation to speakers ignoring the necessity to conform to the accent and grammatical aspects of SME despite possessing knowledge and awareness of its importance. In this paradigm, the basilect is used positively, which concurs with Norizam (2014) but contradicts Lim's (2014) findings that Manglish is viewed negatively. It is undeniable, however, that Manglish does deviate from SME and contains many newly-invented vocabularies, as aptly pointed out by Norizam (2014).

In tandem with this, the students' responses do reveal that they acknowledge the reality of Malaysian English falling short in comparison to SME especially in terms of it being suitable for use in formal occasions, official purposes, higher education, and international business dealings. On this premise too, the majority of the students highlighted the inferior status of Malaysian English as they perceived it as improper English, incorrect and inaccurate.

The present study has demonstrated that although students are positive towards their local-accented English and affirm the use of Malaysian English, a substantial number of them also perceive it as substandard and inadequate for formal or more serious purposes. In other words, one can safely say that Malaysian English is only vital – for now at least – within the spectrum of casual use. This is an interesting reflection of Crismore, Ngeow and Soo's (1996) suggestion that the perceptions of and attitudes towards a language can greatly influence its survivability.

Acrolect speakers often switch to the mesolect form when they converse with their friends in informal settings, to indicate familiarity and solidarity. It is prominently used in intragroups communication and different groups normally have specific ways of communicating with each other. Similarly, the students had also reflected on the importance of using SME in casual and formal situations while trying to achieve native-like English use. The importance of achieving native-like status was viewed in tandem with prospects relating to education, the economy, and the improvement of social standing.

The participants of this study reiterated the point where acrolect speakers switch to the mesolect form when they converse with their friends in informal settings (to indicate familiarity and solidarity). This aspect is deemed vital, as Manglish is prominently used in intragroups communication. The findings imply that Manglish can be clustered as a favoured language which exists quite prominently in the Malaysian community and allows various races to utilise the same language within the same communication setting.

In essence, it appears that students appreciate their local-accented English and Malaysian English, and also agree on the importance and usability of the language. However, this is only limited to casual situations. For formal and international purposes, they are still of the opinion that proper, standard English should be employed.

On the whole, this study has produced encouraging findings with regards to the relevance of Malaysian English in terms of its vitality, which also translates to its survivability in the long run. It is acknowledged, however, that the study would have benefited from a larger sample and as such, the researchers do recommend that future studies involve more respondents from different institutions of higher learning in Malaysia. It is also

suggested that future studies take on a more qualitative approach to gather more in-depth data, and also consider looking into the vitality and preservation of other English varieties within the region and across the globe to facilitate cross-cultural comparisons.

This study and its findings are of significance as they provide direction for educational policy-planning and specifically, English language teaching. In order to ensure the continuing vitality of Malaysian English as well as the effective learning of SME, it is pertinent for us to strike a balance so that the best of both worlds can be enjoyed. Effective interventions should be consistently employed to help our students improve their English proficiency and where possible, cultural clarifications should be adhered to so that students are mindful that they can resort to Malaysian English when there is a need to apply code-switching to achieve more effective communication.

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