



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS' LINGUISTIC AWARENESS OF MALAYSIAN
ENGLISH AND ITS IMPACT ON INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION***

SHADI KHOJASTEHRAD

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MALAYSIAN ENGLISH AND
ITS IMPACT ON INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION**

By

SHADI KHOJASTEHRAD

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

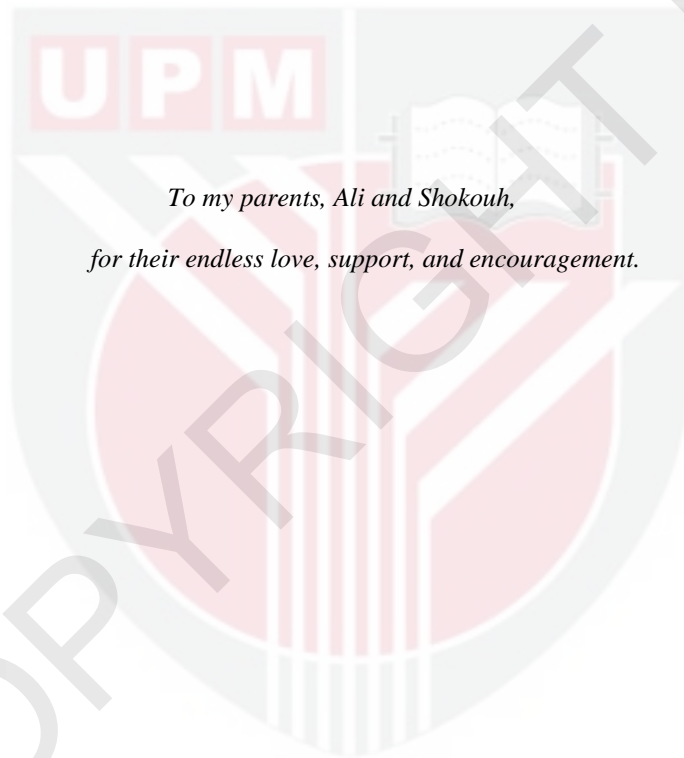
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*To my parents, Ali and Shokouh,
for their endless love, support, and encouragement.*

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of
the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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July 2015

Chair: Assoc. Prof. Shameem Rafik-Galea, PhD

Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication

International mobility has become the hallmark of the 21st century due to globalization. Along with this trend of globalization, a growing number of international students have crossed national boundaries in pursuit of educational experiences in other countries including Malaysia. Malaysia is one of the most attractive destinations for many international students such as Iranians, Arabs, Iraqis, Nigerians and Pakistanis. Many of these students face difficulties in coping with the different socio-cultural and linguistic contexts they are encountering. In particular, their perception of the language used as the main medium of communication in the host country affects the quality of their intercultural communication with the local community. Thus, the sociolinguistic awareness of linguistic diversity can be an important step in modifying discriminatory attitudes affecting intercultural accounts between speakers of different varieties. The present study seeks to investigate how Malaysian English is perceived by international students and the role it plays in their intercultural encounters with the locals. In addition it seeks to explore the impact Malaysian English (ME) has on intercultural communication between locals and international students. The preliminary data was obtained from two focus group discussions, which were then developed into a questionnaire survey that was answered by 372 international students studying at 2 public universities and 1 private university in Malaysia. Other methods of data collection included 19 autobiographies and 3 supplementary focus groups which were used to complement and triangulate the quantitative findings. The findings of the study reveal that the participants in this study have a moderate level of linguistic awareness of Malaysian English and a moderate level of communication effectiveness with Malaysians. The correlational analysis

results demonstrates that there is a significant correlation between linguistic awareness and intercultural communication effectiveness, in which the respondents' fields of study and length of stay in Malaysia were not identified as determining factors in this relationship. Moreover, the attitudinal test findings revealed that the respondents show the most positive attitudes towards Indian Malaysian speakers of English in terms of both English language proficiency and social attractiveness as opposed to Chinese Malaysian speakers of English, who received the most negative attitude for both features. The findings of the focus group discussions and autobiographies show that the respondents have the most difficulty understanding English spoken by Chinese Malaysians while Indian Malaysians are the easiest to understand. Therefore, the findings imply that the intelligibility of a language variety plays a crucial role in developing attitude towards both that particular variety and the speaker of the respective variety. The findings of the study can be used to design English programs with a focus on communication, intelligibility, mutual comprehensibility, and introduction to English language varieties for international students who leave their home countries where English is spoken as the second or foreign language in its own particular form.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah.

**KESEDARAN-PELAJAR ANTARABANGSA MENGENAI
LINGUISTIK BAHASA INGGERIS MALAYSIA DAN KESANNYA KE
ATAS KOMMUNIKASI ANTARA BUDAYA**

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Mobiliti Antarabangsa sudah menjadi satu kebiasaan pada abad ke-21 atas kesan globalisasi. Berikutan trend globalisasi ini, ramai pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa yang sudah melepasi sempadan negara mereka untuk menyambung pengajian dan menambah pengalaman di banyak negara luar termasuklah Malaysia. Malaysia merupakan salah satu negara yang mempunyai destinasi yang paling menarik di kalangan pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa daripada Iran, Arab, Iraq, Nigeria dan Pakistan. Kebanyakan pelajar-pelajar ini menghadapi masalah untuk menghadapi sosio budaya dan konteks linguistik yang berbeza. Oleh sebab itu, persepsi mereka ke atas bahasa yang digunakan sebagai bahasa perantaraan di dalam negara ini memberi kesan kepada kualiti komunikasi antara budaya bersama masyarakat tempatan. Beberapa pengkaji (Godley, Sweetland, Wheeler, Minnici & Carpenter, 2006) telah mencadangkan kesedaran sosiolinguistik di dalam kepelbagaian linguistik merupakan satu langkah yang penting dalam mengubahsuai sikap diskriminasi yang memberi kesan ke atas perbezaan budaya. Kajian terbaharu mengkaji bagaimana Bahasa Inggeris Malaysia difahami oleh pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa dan peranan ia di dalam perbezaan budaya dengan penduduk tempatan. Matlamat yang lain ialah untuk menerokai kesan Bahasa Inggeris Malaysia ke atas perbezaan budaya di kalangan masyarakat tempatan dan pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa. Data awal yang diperolehi daripada dua kumpulan Fokus yang dikembangkan dengan kajian soal selidik yang telah dijawab oleh 372 pelajar-pelajar yang belajar di universiti-universiti kerajaan dan swasta di Malaysia. Selain itu, data diperolehi daripada 19 autobiografi dan 3 kumpulan sokongan untuk menggabungkan data kuantitatif yang diambil untuk mengkaji kesedaran

linguistik pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa mengenai penggunaan Bahasa Inggeris Malaysia dan kesannya ke atas komunikasi antara budaya dengan masyarakat tempatan dengan lebih mendalam. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahawa pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa mempunyai kesedaran yang sederhana dalam komunikasi Bahasa Inggeris Malaysia yang berkesan dengan masyarakat di Malaysia. Hasil analisis korelasi membuktikan bahawa wujud signifikasi di antara kesedaran linguistic dan keberkesanan komunikasi antara budaya, di mana bidang pengajian dan tempoh menetap di Malaysia tidak di ambil kira untuk menentukan faktor- faktor dalam hubungkait ini. Tambahan pula, hasil ujian sikat menunjukkan bahawa responden-responden memberi sikap yang terbaik ke atas orang India di Malaysia yang yang bertutur dalam Bahasa Inggeris dari segi kemahiran bertutur dalam bahasa Inggeris dan juga daya tarikan sosial jika dibandingkan dengan orang Cina di Malaysia yang bertutur dalam Bahasa Inggeris, yang menerima sikap negatif di kalangan masyarakat dalam ciri-ciri tersebut. Penemuan yang diperolehi daripada diskusi berkumpulan dan autobiografi-autobiografi menunjukkan bahawa responden mengalami kesukaran untuk memahami Bahasa Inggeris yang dipertuturkan oleh masyarakat Cina di Malaysia manakala responden paling mudah memahami Bahasa Inggeris yang dipertuturkan oleh masyarakat India di Malaysia. Oleh itu, hasil kajian membuktikan bahawa kefahaman dalam perbezaan bahasa memainkan peranan yang penting untuk membina sikap yang baik ke atas perbezaan bahasa dan penutur bahasa itu sendiri. Maka, hasil kajian ini akan digunakan untuk menjalankan program-program Bahasa Inggeris yang menfokuskan kepada komunikasi, kebijaksanaan, kefahaman dan pengenalan perbezaan Bahasa Inggeris kepada pelajar-pelajar antarabangsa yang meninggalkan negara mereka di mana Bahasa Inggeris digunakan sebagai bahasa asing atau bahasa kedua di negara mereka.

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I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 9 July 2015 to conduct the final examination of Shadi Khojastehrad on her thesis entitled International Students' Linguistic Awareness of Malaysian English and its Impact on Intercultural Communication in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctorate of Philosophy.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT	i
ABSTRAK	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
APPROVAL	vi
DECLARATION	viii
LIST OF TABLES	xv
LIST OF FIGURES	xvii
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS	xviii
 CHAPTER	
1	
INTRODUCTION	
1.1 Overview	1
1.2 Background to the Study	1
1.3 English as a Lingua Franca	2
1.4 Transition to a new country and linguistic Awareness	3
1.5 Problem statement	4
1.6 Purpose of the study	6
1.7 Objectives	7
1.8 Research questions	7
1.9 Study scope and Limitations	7
1.10 Significance of the study	8
1.11 Theoretical perspective	9
1.12 Conceptual framework	11
1.13 Definition of terms	12
1.15 Organization of thesis	14
 2	
LITERATURE REVIEW	
2.1 Overview	15
2.2 World Englishes	15
2.3 Institutionalization of English varieties in ESL context	16
2.4 Language use in the outer and expanding Circle	17
2.5 Status of English	18
2.6 Malaysian English	20
2.6.1 Where is Malaysia	20
2.6.2 Language status in Malaysia	20
2.6.3 Status of English in Malaysia	22
2.6.4 Nativization of English in Malaysia	23
2.6.5 Development of Malaysian English	24

2.6.6	Indigenization of English in Malaysia	25
2.6.7	Malaysian English as a variety	26
2.6.8	Markers of Malaysian English	28
2.6.9	Mesolectal level of Malaysian English	31
2.7	Studies on Malaysian English pronunciation	32
2.8	Accentedness in English	33
2.9	Accent in the context of phonetics	33
2.10	Accent from the sociolinguistic perspective	33
2.11	Accent from the psycholinguistic perspective	34
2.12	Linguistic awareness	34
2.13	Previous studies on the linguistic awareness of English varieties	35
2.14	Previous studies on accent	36
2.15	Language attitude	38
2.16	Language attitude towards English varieties	39
2.17	Previous studies on attitude towards accented Speech	40
2.18	Language attitudes among Malaysians	43
2.19	Intercultural communication	44
2.20	Potential problems in intercultural communication	45
2.20.1	Seeking similarities	45
2.20.2	Diversity of communication purposes	45
2.20.3	Withdrawal	46
2.20.4	Ethnocentrism	46
2.20.5	Stereotyping and Prejudice	47
2.20.6	From Stereotyping to otherization	47
2.21	The role of language in intercultural communication	47
2.22	International students' communication problems	48
2.23	Intercultural Communication Effectiveness	50
2.24	Social communication	50
2.25	Previous studies on intercultural communication Effectiveness	51
2.26	Overview of the adopted theories	51
2.26.1	Schema theory	51
2.26.1.1	How cultural schemas Develop	54
2.26.1.2	Schema-Driven versus Data-Driven functions	54
2.26.1.3	Formation and function	55
2.26.1.4	Extension and change	55
2.26.1.5	Schema theory in cross-cultural in cross-cultural communication	56

2.26.2	Anxiety-Uncertainty Management theory	56
2.26.2.1	Development of Anxiety-Uncertainty Management theory	56
2.26.2.2	Working Assumptions	57
2.26.2.3	Theory construction	58
3	METHODOLOGY	60
3.1	Overview	60
3.2	The aim of study	60
3.3	Research design	60
3.3.1	Research setting	60
3.3.2	The choice of Background variables in the Study	61
3.3.3	Ethical Considerations	61
3.3.4	Population	61
3.3.5	Sampling	62
3.3.6	Sampling procedure	62
3.4	Subjects in the qualitative phase	64
3.5	Subjects in the quantitative phase	66
3.6	Data collection procedure	67
3.6.1	Instrument for qualitative data collection	67
3.6.1.1	Focus group discussions	67
3.6.1.2	Narrative Inquiry	69
3.6.1.3	Autobiography	70
3.6.2	Qualitative method of collecting data	70
3.6.3	Data analysis for the qualitative data	73
3.6.3.1	Recorded transcription and convention	73
3.6.4	Instrumentation for Quantitative data collection	74
3.6.4.1	The selection of speech varieties	75
3.6.4.2	Accent recognition item	77
3.6.4.3	Perceptual and intercultural Communication section	77
3.6.5	Quantitative method of data collecting	78
3.6.6	Data analysis procedure for the qualitative study	79
3.7	Pilot study	79
3.7.1	Background of the subjects	80
3.7.2	Pilot study results	82
3.8	Conclusion	84
4	RESULTS	87
4.1	Overview	87
4.2	Description of participants	87
4.3	Overview of the applied statistical techniques	88

4.4	The verbal Guise test: speakers' evaluation	89
4.4.1	Speaker's English language competence	89
4.4.2	Speaker's social attractiveness	92
4.4.3	Summary	93
4.5	Results of ethnic group identification	96
4.6	Results of focus group discussions	97
4.6.1	Attitude towards respondents' own varieties of English	98
4.6.2	Attitude towards non-native varieties of English	100
4.6.3	Attitude towards Malaysian English	102
4.6.4	Attitude towards ME as spoken by different Ethnic groups	103
4.6.5	Summary	104
4.7	Respondents' linguistic awareness	105
4.8	Findings from focus group discussions	106
4.8.1	English language use in the home county	107
4.8.2	Exposure to English varieties	111
4.8.3	Willingness to adjust	114
4.8.3.1	Adjusting to non-native varieties	117
4.8.3.2	Learning non-native varieties of English	118
4.9	Findings from the autobiographies	118
4.9.1	ME as a wrong variety	119
4.9.2	Decline in English language proficiency	121
4.9.3	Only two standard varieties	125
4.9.4	Summary	125
4.10	Intercultural communication effectiveness	126
4.10.1	ESL vs EFL in terms of intercultural communication	127
4.11	Findings from the autobiographies	130
4.11.1	Uncertainty	131
4.11.1.1	Accent	131
4.11.1.2	Grammar	132
4.11.1.3	Vocabulary	134
4.11.2	Mindfulness	136
4.11.2.1	Looking for similarities	136
4.11.2.2	Stereotyping Malaysian way of Speaking English	136
4.11.2.3	Stereotyping Malaysians' Communication style	138
4.11.2.4	Understanding differences	139
4.11.3	Anxiety	141
4.11.4	Summary	143
4.12	The effect of linguistic awareness on intercultural	143

	Communication effectiveness	
4.13	Findings of focus group discussions	145
4.14	Summary	148
4.15	The effect of field of study and length of stay in the host country	148
	4.15.1 Estimated marginal means	153
4.16	Summary	157
5	CONCLUSION	158
5.1	Overview	158
5.2	Perception of Malaysian English	161
5.3	Social isolation and limited access to English speaking Malaysians	161
5.4	Attitudes towards ME	161
5.5	Intercultural communication effectiveness	162
5.6	Lack of linguistic awareness as a semantic noise	162
5.7	Implication	164
5.8	Limitations and suggestions for future research	165
	REFERENCES	166
	APPENDICES	168
	BIODATA OF STUDENT	255
	LIST OF PUBLICATIONS	256

LIST OF TABLES

Table	page
Table 2.1 Malaysian English Sociolects	28
Table 3.1 Demographics of Respondents in FGD(1), University (A)	64
Table 3.2 Demographics of Respondents in FGD(1), University (B)	64
Table 3.3 Demographics of Respondents in FGD(1), University (C)	64
Table 3.4 Demographics of Respondents in FGD(2), University (A)	65
Table 3.5 Demographics of Respondents in FGD (2), University (B)	65
Table 3.6 Demographics of Respondents in FGD (2), University (C)	65
Table 3.7 Demographics of the Surveyed Participants	66
Table 3.8 Respondents' Home Countries	67
Table 3.9 Statistical Method of Data Analysis	79
Table 3.10 Demographics of the Respondents in Pilot (1)	80
Table 3.11 Demographics of the Respondents in Pilot (2)	81
Table 3.12 Reliability Test Score of Section C (Pilot.1)	82
Table 3.13 Reliability Test Score of Section D (Pilot.1)	82
Table 3.14 Reliability Test Score of Section C & D (Pilot.2)	83
Table 4.1 Definition of Codes for the Adjectives of English Language Competence	89
Table 4.2 Mean Score of Attitude towards Speaker's English Language Competence	90
Table 4.3 Results of Anova for the speaker's English Language Competence	92
Table 4.4 Definition of Codes for the Adjectives of the Social Attractiveness	93
Table 4.5 Mean Score of Attitude towards the Speaker's Social Attractiveness	93
Table 4.6 Results of Anova for the Speaker's Social Attractiveness	95
Table 4.7 Results of Ethnic Group Identification	97
Table 4.8 Level of Linguistic Awareness	105
Table 4.9 Linguistic Awareness among ESL vs EFL group	105
Table 4.10 Results of the t-test for the Linguistic Awareness among ESL vs EFL	106
Table 4.11 Level of ICCE	126
Table 4.12 Level of Anxiety	126
Table 4.13 Level of Uncertainty	127
Table 4.14 Level of Mindlessness	127
Table 4.15 Results of t-test on ICCE among EFL vs ESL group	128
Table 4.16 Results of t-test for the co-concepts of ICCE	128
Table 4.17 Results of Correlation for LA and ICCE	144
Table 4.18 Frequency Results of Moderators	149
Table 4.19 Descriptive Statistics of the Moderating Variables across Samples	150
Table 4.20 Leven's test of Equality	150

Table 4.21 Tests of between Subjects' Effects for FOS & LOS	151
Table 4.22 Tests of between Subjects' Effects for Moderators	152
Table 4.23 Expected Mean Scores for the Moderators	152
Table 4.24 Parameter Estimates of Variables	153
Table 4.25 Grand Mean of ICCE	153
Table 4.26 Effect of FOS on ICCE	154
Table 4.27 Effect of LOS on ICCE	154



LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	page
Figure 1.1 Kachru's Concentric Circles of English	2
Figure 1.2 Theoretical Framework	11
Figure 1.3 Conceptual Framework	12
Figure 3.1 Sampling Procedure	62
Figure 3.2 Research Flow	72
Figure 3.3 Research Procedure	85
Figure 4.1 Respondents' nationalities	87
Figure 4.2. Attitude towards Speaker's English Competence	91
Figure 4.3. Attitudes towards Speaker's Social Attractiveness	94
Figure 4.4 Generated model of Attitude (FGD)	98
Figure 4.5 Generated Model of Linguistic Awareness (FGD)	107
Figure 4.6 Generated Model of ICCE (Autobiography)	119
Figure 4.7 Generated Model of Correlation between LA and ICCE	130
Figure 4.8 Moderator Effect of FOS	146
Figure 4.9 Moderator Effect of LOS	155
Figure 5.1 Transactional Model of Communication	156

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ESL	English as a Second Language
EFL	English as a foreign Language
ICE	Intercultural Communication Effectiveness
LA	Linguistic Awareness
ME	Malaysian English



CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview

This chapter begins with a critical review of the World Englishes model. It continues with a brief description of how unfamiliarity with English varieties leads to confusion and intercultural communication ineffectiveness between international students and the locals of a host country. This is followed by a discussion of the problem statement, objectives, research aims, and the conceptual and theoretical framework. Finally, the significance, limitations and definition of terms are presented and discussed.

1.2 Background of the Study

The linguistic classification of English speakers from outer-circle countries, such as India, Malaysia, and Singapore, is often ambiguous. This is because the Englishes they speak are considered different from inter-languages yet are not considered native varieties (Higgins, 2003).

Based on the well-known model of Worldwide Spread of English proposed by Kachru (1985, 1992) countries can be divided in terms of English language into three concentric models: the inner circle, the outer circle, and the expanding circle (Figure 1) Each circle represents different types of spread, patterns of acquisition and functions of English in a diversity of cultural contexts. The inner circle consists of countries where English is spoken as a native language (ENL) for a substantial (and often monolingual) majority, such as the UK, the USA, Australia and Canada. The English spoken in the inner circle is multifunctional and is used in all domains. It is often endonormative, that is, in terms of appropriateness and correctness, inner circle Englishes provide norms that are propagated through language education and language planning. The outer circle, in contrast, consists of 'post-colonial' countries, such as India, the Philippines, Nigeria, and Malaysia, where English is spoken as a second language (ESL) and is employed for educational and administrative purposes. The varieties of English spoken in the outer circle are often described as 'norm-developing' (Jenkins, 2003: 16) in that they are currently undergoing the development of their own standards. However, 'these Englishes continue to be affected by conflict between linguistic norms and linguistic behaviour, with widespread perceptions among users that Anglo-American norms are somehow superior and that their own variants are therefore deficient' (Bruthiaux, 2003: 160). The expanding circle comprises countries where English is learned as a foreign language (EFL) and is used for international communication, such as in business, diplomacy and tourism. Given the prevalence of English language use throughout the world in the twenty-first century, the expanding circle presumably comprises every nation not included in the inner circle or the outer circle. English tends to be exonormative in the expanding circle, in that educators, policy-makers and speakers themselves have traditionally looked towards inner circle models (mainly from the UK or the US) for linguistic norms (McKenzie, 2006). Thus, according to Kachru's model, English in Iraq, Iran, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, and China, where a big percentage of respondents come from is categorized within the expanding circle. Here, the language does not have the status of an official language, does not function as a lingua franca and is not a relic of colonization. Although English

has a restricted range of functions in these countries, it is taught extensively as a foreign language in the education system, private English schools, and colleges. It is also increasingly employed in international trade, overseas travel and in academic research.

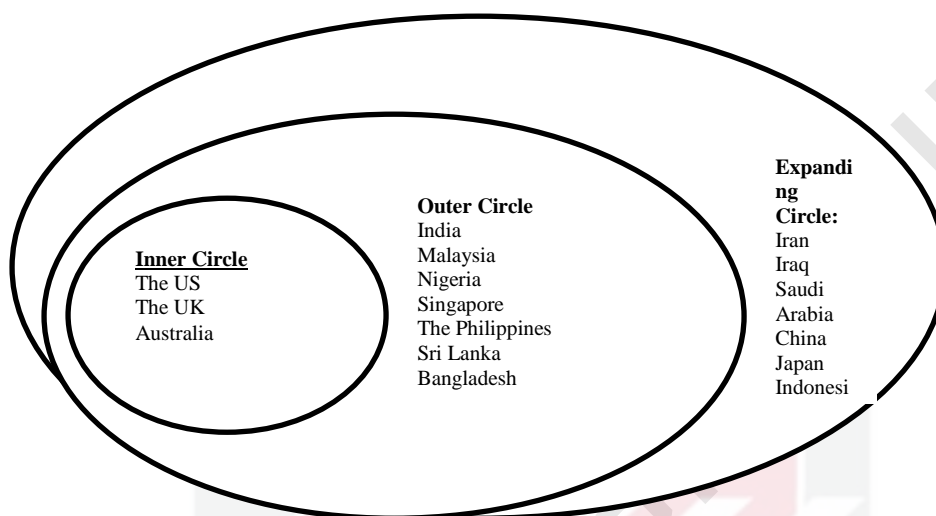


Figure 1.1 Kachru's Concentric Circles of English (adapted from Kachru, 1996: p.2)

1.3 English as a Lingua Franca

It is widely accepted that English is now the primary lingua franca, that is, 'the language used to communicate among speakers of different native languages throughout the world. It is one of the most widely taught, learnt and spoken languages worldwide. Over 300 million people use English as a first language in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the USA and more than 700 million people use it as a second or additional language in countries of Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America, and the island nations of the world (Crystal, 1985a; B. Kachru, 1999). Recent years have observed changes and the rapid emergence of many new Englishes. Efforts are made on various levels to prove that new varieties of English are gaining importance in specific areas.

The varieties of English which are commonly accepted and considered 'legitimate' for educational purposes all over the world are American and British English. The other varieties, i.e., Australian, Canadian and New Zealand English, are still in attempts to achieve legitimacy (Bell and Kuiper, 1999; Collins and Blair, 1989; Turner, 1997; Hundt, 1998). Thus, English comprises many varieties, several of which are internationally recognized (Mehmood, 2013).

The growth of English as a language of international communication has placed it in the unprecedented position of having more non-native than native speakers (Crystal 1997; Graddol 1997) who tend to shape the language to suit their own communicative

needs in diverse multilingual contexts. Corresponding to its use as a contact language in colonial times, EIL is not confined to the educated elite of politicians, businesspersons and academicians, but serves as a means of global interaction between people from all walks of life alongside interactants' own languages and cultures. It is often argued that English for global communication is both a product and a driver of globalization (Graddol, 1997; Crystal, 1997). On the one hand, it serves to unite people having little else in common. On the other, it crosscuts societies, forming numerous internal divisions and social networks based on shared needs, interests, affiliations, or occupational status (Georgieva, 2009).

1.4 Transition to a new country and linguistic awareness

One of the hallmarks of the 21st century is international mobility, which is the outcome of the rapid globalization trend. A growing number of international students are crossing national boundaries to seek educational experiences in other countries. Malaysia has become one of the most attractive destinations for international students over the last few years.

Evidently, for many international students the transition to a new country is associated with facing several language problems. To mitigate such issues, some universities around the world have taken measures to help new students adjust to the new conditions. Different studies have shown that many international students struggle with English language barriers in a host country. For instance as Al-Zubaidi & Rechards(2010) discussed that one of the biggest challenges that Arab postgraduate students face relate to communication barriers, which lead to misunderstanding in terms of both verbal or nonverbal communication.

Due to the significance of sojourners', in particular international students' wellbeing and adjustment difficulties in host countries; this issue has received considerable attention from researchers of various disciplines. For instance, sociolinguistics attempt to explore sojourners' linguistic adjustment, attitudes and language behaviour in host countries.

Linguistic research has shown that intelligibility plays a significant role in listeners' evaluations and attitudes towards speakers with non-standard English accents. Bresnahan et al. (2002) showed that at least in some cases, miscommunication between interlocutors might be attributed to negative attitudes of native speakers rather than non-native speakers' linguistic incompetence. A similar conclusion was reached by Lippi-Green (1994, p. 166), who argued that listeners' goodwill plays a crucial role in communication. In her view, communicative failure can often be attributed to prejudice in listeners who cannot hear what a person has to say, because accent, as a mirror of social identity and a litmus test for exclusion, is more important (Eisenschlas & Tsurutani, 2011:p4). The study of attitudes towards speakers based on their special accent, style, register, and in general, variety, is particularly significant for nations like Malaysia, which are strong migration targets.

However, attitudes might be influenced by cultural differences. When two people communicate, they try to understand each other or to be understood according to their own cultural frames (Barraja-Rohan, 2000). Culture and Language are closely linked

together in a way that one influences another (Kramsch 1998), for instance we can perceive the effects in turn taking, how we express our feeling and meanings, and even in the non-verbal language we use (Barraja-Rohan, 2000).

Culture is dynamic and subject to change. It can be viewed from the wide angle of society or a smaller angle of family and community. Although similarity between cultures facilitates reaching mutual understanding, Scollon and Scollon (2001) point out that the language used to convey messages varies among different individuals and cultures. This is more critical in intercultural communications. However, it should be noted that intercultural communication and cross-cultural communication are not the same as in cross-cultural studies, two cultural groups are compared to identify similarities and differences, whereas in intercultural communication, it is more significant to discover what happens when the two (or more) culturally-different groups approach, interact and communicate (Gudykunst, 2003). In the present research, intercultural communication effectiveness is studied between international students and Malaysians.

1.5 Problem Statement

Today, English is highly influenced by the rapid development of globalisation and its associated processes. According to McKay (2002, p. 12) English is used as an international language for a global purpose, and differs from the local purpose. She points out that English as an international language is used for communication between countries, whereas for local purposes, it is used for communication within multilingual societies. Sharifian (forthcoming) calls this process *glocalisation of English*, as he believes the very global spread of English involves localisation of the language too.

The increasing number of international students studying in Malaysia has given rise to linguistic, cultural, social diversities across the country. Based on Sun Daily newspaper published on 29th January, 2015, "Malaysia is one of the countries with the largest number of international students pursuing higher education there. The increase in the number of international students in Malaysia is verified by the second Education Minister of Malaysia, Datuk Seri Idris Jusoh, who stated that there was an increase of 16.5% of international students registered at public and private universities in Malaysia from 2013 to 2014. They were mostly from Nigeria, Bangladesh, China, Pakistan, Indonesia, Yemen, Sudan, Libya, Kazakhstan and India (<http://www.thesundaily.my/news/1314991>). In addition, the Education Malaysia Global Services (EMGS) presented statistics of new application for student visa of Malaysia was 4,767 on February 2014 (<http://www.thestar.com.my/News/Education/2014/05/11/Record-number-of-foreign-student-applications-in-February/>).

Carroll and Ryan (2005) pointed out that international students bring a diversity of competencies that have been progressively built from childhood, primary, secondary and prior tertiary learning experiences (Talebloo et al. 2013). International postgraduate students in every country encounter various cultural, academic and most often language barriers when they move to a host country. They have to deal with these problems in order to complete their studies. It has also been shown that language use failure can be an outcome of cultural knowledge rather than language knowledge, and non-native

speakers' inappropriate language behaviour takes place unconsciously, resulting in sociopragmatic and intercultural communication failure (Thomas 1983; Xiao and Petraki, 2007).

In a study on international students' problems in host countries, Chen (1990) found that there is a significant correlation between international students' poor command of English and unwillingness to participate in formal and informal activities at the university and communicate with the host nationals.

According to Ward et al. (2001), difficulties in developing effective communication between local and international students might lead to negative outcomes over time, and initial impressions play a significant role in shaping future friendships. Likewise, initial frustration in communication might negatively influence consequent perceptions and attitudes too (Pandian, 2008). Pandian (2008) found that interaction between Middle Eastern and Malaysian students in Malaysia is highly limited at universities despite the international students' willingness to communicate with the locals.

According to Zhai (2004), the three most difficult challenges faced by international students in the US higher education system is adjusting to cultural differences, academic stress, and language problems, and Malakloulunthu & Selan (2011) showed that the most problematic issues faced by the international students in Malaysia are academic adjustments, religion adjustments, personal adjustments, social adjustments, financial adjustments, and finally language adjustments. (Alavi & Mansor, 2011) Likewise, Alavi et al. (2011) identified that one of the most prevalent problems among international students at a public university in Malaysia was the lecturers' English accent, which was strongly Malay accented (Alavi & Mansor, 2011). The communication effectiveness between international students and Malaysians has been also studied from the other aspects and contexts too. In a qualitative research by Rafik-Galea et al. (2014) it was revealed that Malaysian librarians were not fluent enough in English to be communicating with the international students beyond some basic library-related questions. These issues highlight the many challenges international students face when communicating in English in Malaysia.

With the rapid upward trend of globalization, mobility has increased so rapidly that many of us are living, working and studying away from home. However, as Siegler(1985) showed international students who have a background knowledge about the language, and culture of the host nationals shape a conceptual framework which helps them to understand the changes, and adjust to the differences more easily (Siegler, 1985).

In a study carried out by Johnson (2008) international students were able to understand only 20–30% of their lectures during the first year of their study. Similarly, the findings of a study by Brunton et al.(2014) showed consistency with Johnson's (2008) which revealed that international students mainly struggle with language problems and background knowledge about the host country. (Brunton & Jeffrey, 2014)

As an international student in Malaysia, I have experienced the same problem. I could not comprehend the English spoken by Malaysians and I had problems understanding

my Malaysian lecturers. International students participating in the Focus Group Discussion during the first phase of the research mentioned facing similar problems when they were invited to describe their perception of Malaysian English and their communication effectiveness with Malaysians (refer to appendix.16 for the transcripts). Therefore, this problem was considered critical to investigate whether their particular type of perception, extent of linguistic awareness and attitude towards Malaysian English affected their communication effectiveness with Malaysians.

A similar problem was identified by Smith (1997), who found that familiarity with the non-native varieties of English would help international students to develop positive attitude towards both the variety and the host nationals who speak that variety. Likewise, Dalton-Puffer and Kaltenboeck (1997) showed that those international students who spend more time with the native speakers of the target language exhibit more individualized attitudes. Consequently, they evaluate those communities more positively than the students with limited exposure do. Talebloo & Baki (2013) also identified similar problems among the international students at a public university in Malaysia who were struggling to understand local staffs' accented English during the first months of their life in Malaysia. The findings were consistent with what was found by Al-Zubaidi & Cameron Richards (2010) who identified the biggest problems faced by Arab postgraduate students at five Malaysian universities were first, academic difficulties; second, languages difficulties; and third, cultural difficulties. They showed that a significant number of Arab students were concerned about language barriers in Malaysia. Language problems faced by the international students in Malaysia have been also identified in the other countries. Like Lee (1997), Lu (2001) listed the following problems encountered by international students in the host countries: 1) communication/language; 2) social/cultural; 3) psychological/personal; 4) financial; 5) housing; and 6) food and health areas.

Thus, it seems significant to explore international students' perception of Malaysian English as one English variety and the extent to which their linguistic awareness of language varieties influences their intercultural communication with locals. The findings may show the significance of familiarizing English language students with different varieties and how this language is used for communication between people who not only come from native speaker countries but also from communities where English is used as a second, third, or foreign language. This study therefore aims to investigate the extent to which familiarity and linguistic awareness of Malaysian English affects intercultural communication between the international students studying in Malaysia and the locals.

1.6 Purpose

The purpose of this four-phase, sequential mixed methods design is to explore participants' linguistic awareness of Malaysian English and the way it affects how they communicate with locals in Malaysia.

1.7 Objectives

With the general objective of the research stated in section 1.6, this study is proposed to address the following specific objectives:

1. Determine whether international students identify English spoken in Malaysia as a variety of English.
2. Analyze the extent to which international students from different countries can communicate effectively with Malaysians.
3. Explore the extent to which international students' perception of Malaysian English affects intercultural communication with Malaysians.

1.8 Research Questions

In order to achieve the specific study objectives mentioned in section 1.7, the following four research questions were formed to investigate international students' linguistic awareness of Malaysian English (ME) and whether it affects their communication effectiveness with locals.

1. To what extent are international students aware of the Malaysian English (ME) variety?
 - a. What is the international students' attitude towards Malaysian English (ME)?
 - b. How do international students perceive Malaysian English (ME) as a variety?
2. To what extent do international students from different countries communicate effectively with Malaysians?
3. To what extent does international students' linguistic awareness of Malaysian English (ME) affect their intercultural communication effectiveness with Malaysians?
4. To what extent do the field of study and length of stay in Malaysia affect the relationship between linguistic awareness of Malaysian English (ME) and intercultural communication with Malaysians?

1.6 Study Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study is the investigation of international students' linguistic awareness of Malaysian English through studying their perception and attitude towards Malaysian English, and the effect it leaves on their communication effectiveness with Malaysians. The data was collected through verbal guise test, perceptual, and intercultural communication effectiveness (ICCE) questionnaire and the findings were triangulated in the last stage of the research using a qualitative design in the form of focus group discussions and autobiographies.

The present study is not without its limitations, and some shortcomings were encountered in the process of carrying out this study which are discussed below.

As explained in chapter three, the subjects were selected based on purposive sampling from international students at three public and private universities in the state of Selangor in Malaysia. Therefore, they did not represent the whole population of international students throughout different states of Malaysia. The limited accessibility to identify subjects from English speaking countries such as America, England, Canada, Australia and even European countries did not allow the researcher to investigate the inner circle and European countries' attitude towards Malaysian English and compare it with the other outer and expanding circles. Moreover, this study did not take into account the gender and age of the subjects, which might otherwise have yielded interesting findings about attitude towards Malaysian English and intercultural

communication with locals in Malaysia (refer to section 5.3 for a detailed discussion of selection of subjects for the study).

1.10 Significance of the Study

The findings of the present study will focus on international students' linguistic awareness of the variety of English spoken in Malaysia, their attitudes towards ME and how ME affects students' intercultural communication with locals. In other words, the way a language variety is perceived by outsiders (international students in this study) plays a significant role in the language behaviour they reflect in that community. This accordingly influences their interactions, especially in a country that has one of the highest numbers of international students -- mostly from outer or expanding circles. Although the majority of language attitude studies have focussed on native speaker perceptions of languages and language varieties, the perceptions of non-native speakers are also deemed important in sociolinguistics. Statistics of English speakers show that the number of non-native speakers has exceeded the number of native speakers (Clyne & Sharifian, 2008: p28.2). There are approximately 380 million people throughout the world who speak English as a first language, though over a billion people use it as a second or foreign or additional language (Clyne & Sharifian, 2008). Therefore, the probability of communication between non-native groups is higher than with native speakers. As a result, the issue of sociolinguistic behaviour and intercultural communication should receive more attention in multilingual, multi-cultural countries like Malaysia (McKenzie, 2007).

The findings of this study would reveal a deeper need of linking between what should be ideally aimed by the EFL and ESL instructors and achieved by the learners in English classrooms and what is realistically taking place within the context. The findings of the present study will provide insights into the lack of linguistic awareness of English varieties; in particular Malaysian English, among foreign students and how their stereotypical views of English spoken by the different ethnic groups in Malaysian based on their schematic knowledge of native/non-nativeness affect their intercultural communication effectiveness with Malaysians.

The findings also indicate that there is a necessity of planning the English language curriculum at schools or colleges in order to include familiarization activities which will familiarize students with linguistic and cultural diversity in the world. Such activities and exposure to non-native varieties of English will make students more aware of the nonnative varieties of English and will help them to celebrate the diversity and perhaps use English communicatively.

However, non-native speakers of English should be aware that a nonnative accent can be negatively perceived if it impedes the intelligibility of their language to the hearers. Therefore, the findings of this study can be used to design materials to overcome pronunciation inaccuracies in order to prevent negative evaluation of their English language competency among foreigners and those who are not familiar with the different varieties of English spoken.

It is hoped that the findings of this study can help Malaysian ESL teachers and instructors to ensure that Malaysian students are taught to speak English correctly and

to pronounce words more accurately thus improving Malaysian students overall English language competency to sound intelligible to the hearers and not to deviate too much from the standard forms in order to communicate effectively with the members of the other communities.

Finally the findings can be used to guide the planning of special language programs in host countries to familiarize international students with the variety of English spoken there. This would facilitate their adjustment to the new social, academic, linguistic, and cultural environment they have moved to, and improve their intercultural communication with locals.

1.11 Theoretical Perspective

The two disciplines of Linguistics and Communication are linked in the present study for the purpose of the research. The two theories used in the study are integrated into one framework, which is presented in Figure 1.2. This figure shows that international students' perception of Malaysian English will be examined based on the *Schema Theory*, which maintains that schemas are gradually formed from lessons learned from daily events and experiences. When a person encounters a familiar situation again, the previously built cognitive structures are retrieved. Thus, in case of inconformity between what is expected and what is seen, individuals experience confusion, desperation in communication, avoidance and withdrawal until a level of adjustment is established. Schemas also modify and extend to help adapt to the new context. In the particular case of the present work, the context refers to familiarity with the variety of English spoken in Malaysia and modifying the predetermined schema of the norm-bound variety of English commonly defined to be Standard British or American English.

In other words, when people interact with members of the same culture in certain situations or they talk about specific information a number of times, they generate and store schemas in their long-term memory. The more they engage in similar situations or exchange similar information, the more organized, abstract, and compact the schemas become. Cross-cultural adaptation is the transformation of a person's own schemas into those of the host culture and the acquisition of new schemas in the host culture one is residing in. Schema development begins from a cognitive conflict between existing schema and new information (Piaget, 1929). When facing such conflict, individuals need to undergo schema adaptation through assimilation and accommodation to reach a new balance. In addition to these strategies, intercultural interactants also have a third option: withdraw from the situation and abort learning. In other words, instead of changing schemas that have proven inadequate in a new context, they choose to change their situation and environment, such as return to their hometown or move to another area. The analytical view of the present study is based on Schemata, which is the co-concept identified in this theory. The axiom of this broad theory to fit the research purpose is as follows:

Axiom 1: The more often a person repeats a schema-based behaviour in his or her culture, the more likely it is that the (cultural) schema will be stored in the person's memory. "<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Behaviour>

Regarding the independent variable of the research, which is measured based on the Anxiety Uncertainty Management Theory, when individuals from different communities communicate mindlessly, they tend to utilize broad categories and to predict behaviour. In addition, as Mindfulness increases, the categories become more specific and typically more accurate predictors; and when Uncertainty falls between an individual's minimum and maximum acceptable levels, effective communication will take place. The other co-concept of the theory is Anxiety, which is apprehension based on the fear of negative consequences. For effective communication, anxiety should be managed between the minimum and maximum thresholds.

Therefore, the three co-concepts of the Anxiety Uncertainty Management theory identified by the researcher and that address the research aim of the study is: Anxiety, Uncertainty, and Mindfulness. The following axioms of the theory serve as the basis of the research analytical part, as they best fit the research objectives for the intercultural communication effectiveness section.

Axiom 16: An increase in our understanding of similarities and differences between our groups and strangers' groups will produce a decrease in our anxiety and an increase in our ability to accurately predict the others' behavior. *Boundary Conditions:* This axiom holds only when our anxiety and uncertainty are between our minimum and maximum thresholds, or we are not mindful, and only for strangers who strongly identify with their groups (Gudykunst, 2005, p. 299).

Axiom 36: An increase in our knowledge of strangers' languages and/or dialects will produce a decrease in our anxiety and an increase in our ability to predict their behavior accurately.

Axiom 39: An increase in our ability to manage our anxiety about interacting with strangers and an increase in the accuracy of our predictions and explanations regarding their behaviour will produce an increase in the effectiveness of our communication (Gudykunst, 2005, p. 309).

The moderating variables that have been hypothesized by the researcher to be effective in the relationship between the Linguistic Awareness of ME and Intercultural Communication Effectiveness with locals are Length of Stay (LOS) in Malaysia and the participants' Field of Study (FOS). These are explained in detail in section 1.10 in the conceptual research framework.

The link between the two disciplines comes from the point where pre-determined cognition of an English variety by international students leads to predicting and stereotyping speakers of other varieties. Schema-based cognition of language varieties and stereotyping can lead to uncertainty, anxiety, and mindlessness (Refer to section 2.25.2 in chapter 2 for the detailed description of the theories applied in the present study).

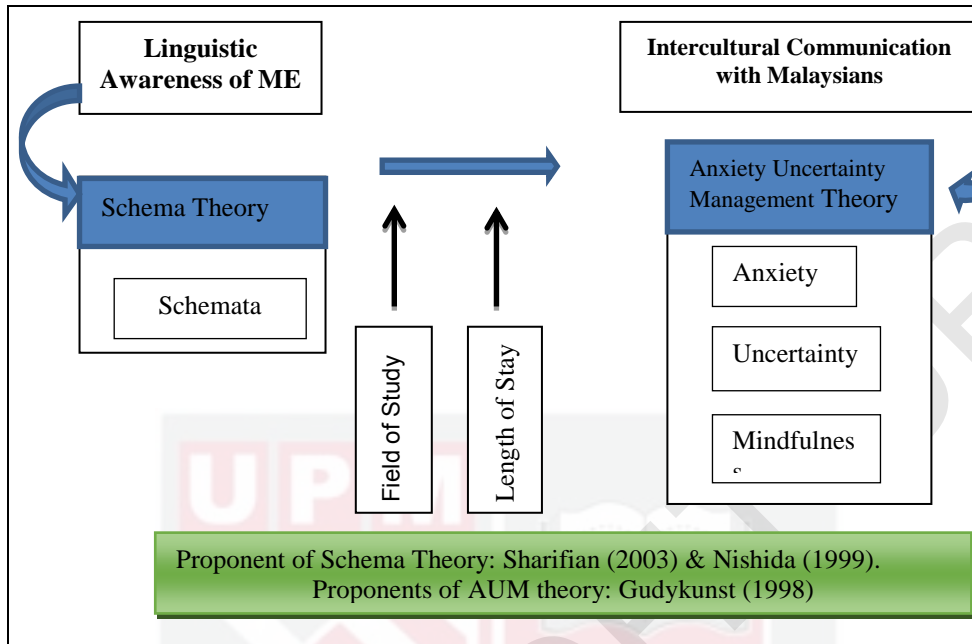


Figure 1.2 Theoretical Framework

1.12 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework demonstrates the relationship between the Independent Variables (IV), Dependent Variables (DV), and Moderating Variables (MV) involved.

In line with the main research focus, which is the effect of international students' linguistic awareness of Malaysian English (ME) on their intercultural communication effectiveness with the locals in Malaysia, the independent variable (IV) of this relation identified by the researcher is linguistic awareness. It is measured by the respondents' perception and attitude towards ME. The dependent variable (DV) was determined as Intercultural Communication with Malaysians. As represented in figure 1.3, the moderating variables under study will be "the length of stay" in Malaysia and the participants' "field of study."

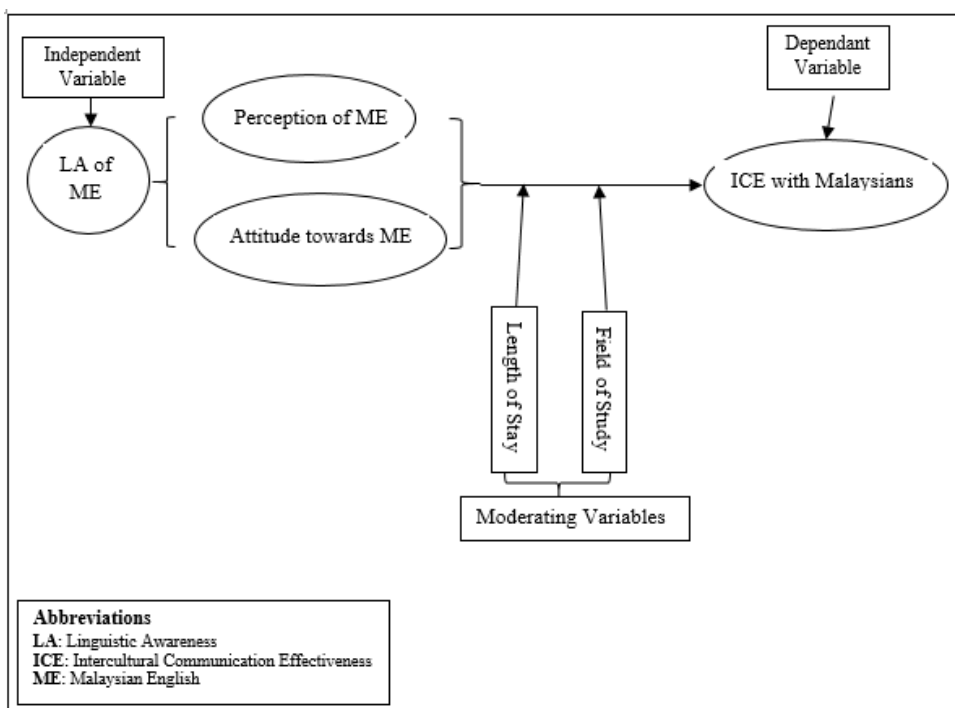


Figure 1.3 Conceptual Framework

1.13 Definitions of Terms

Prior to reviewing the related literature in the next chapter, the key words related to the study are defined both conceptually and operationally.

1.13.1 Intercultural Communication

Some scholars define “intercultural communication” as communication among people from different nationalities (Gudykunst, 2003). Others define it as inter-religious, inter-ethnic and even inter-regional communication (Martin& Nakayama, 2007; Samovar& Porter, 2004). In general, communication can be found highly intercultural when the group identities of the individuals are remarkable in determining the values, language, prejudices, nonverbal behaviours, and relational styles drawn upon by those individuals (Samovar& Porter, 2004). For the present study, intercultural communication refers to the interactions between international students registered at public or private universities in Malaysia with Malaysians ranging from academic to non-academic groups.

1.13.2 Communication Effectiveness

According to Gudykunst(1995) communication is a “process” in which messages are exchanged and through which meaning is created. Meanings cannot be transferred but the message can. Based on this definition of message exchange, communication can be considered effective based on the extent to which the person interprets the meaning of the message attached similar to what the message sender intended (Gudykunst, 1995,

p.15). In the present study, communication between international students and Malaysians is considered effective from the international students' perspective once their mindfulness, anxiety, and uncertainty does not exceed the maximum thresholds.

1.13.3 Anxiety

Anxiety as one of the co-concepts of the Anxiety Uncertainty Management theory refers to the feeling of apprehension when anticipating negative outcomes (Stephan & Stephan, 1985). Anxiety is an affective equivalent regarded as a basic problem, which almost all individuals who enter a new situation or community must face. In the present study, a maximum and minimum threshold are considered for anxiety in order for the communication to be effective. In other words, the researcher considers the international students' level of anxiety acceptable as long as they can understand, predict and explain Malaysians' behaviour correctly and maintain sufficient motivation to keep communicating with them.

1.13.4 Uncertainty

Uncertainty is another co-concept of the Anxiety Uncertainty Management theory (AUM) which refers to a cognitive phenomenon that is best defined as "the inability to predict and explain our own and others' behaviour" (Gudykunst, 1993, p. 39). Based on Turner (1988), in order for individuals to be motivated to interact with strangers, they need to trust others. They need to feel that they are almost reliable and predictable. When we communicate with strangers from other communities, our level of uncertainty increases; however, it should not exceed the maximum threshold that leads to feeling confused and uncertain about an element in communication, which would lead to communication breakdown (Gudykunst, 1985; Gudykunst & Shapiro, 1996; Lee & Boster, 1991). Thus, in the present study, international students' level of uncertainty is acceptable once it falls between the minimum and maximum threshold and they feel moderately uncertain about Malaysian English it should not exceed the maximum threshold to cause them to withdraw communication with Malaysians.

1.13.5 Mindfulness

Mindfulness is the third co-concept of the Anxiety Uncertainty Management theory (AUM). It is considered essential to effective communication and entails being highly aware of one's own behaviour. Mindfulness helps us manage the levels of uncertainty and anxiety at a conscious level. According to Gudykunst (1995), we follow our own hidden rules when we communicate mindlessly. In other words, in communication with strangers, we need to be mindful by paying as much attention to our own scripts of communication as those of the strangers (Yoshitake, 2002). In the present study, international students are considered mindful in English interaction with Malaysians once they do not only seek similarities between what they have acquired, learned, or familiarized in terms of English variety and Malaysian English (ME) and those of the Malaysians, instead they consider the differences and act mindfully.

1.13.6 Linguistic Awareness

Based on the definition given by Lyster (2001), 'Linguistic Awareness represents the awareness of all linguistic levels (phonology, morphology, orthography, syntax, and semantics), like segmentation of sentences to words; words to sound parts (rhyme and onset), syllables to phonemes, identifying morphemes in words; and finally judgment

of grammatical correctness. In the present study, the international students' Linguistic Awareness of Malaysian English represents their familiarity and knowledge about this non-native variety which is evaluated through their perception and attitude towards Malaysian English.

1.13.6.7 Perception

Speech perception is a process through which the sounds of a language are heard, then interpreted and finally understood. Researchers of speech perception seek to understand how human listeners identify speech sounds and use this information to comprehend the spoken language.

In the present study, international students' perception of Malaysian English represents their understanding of this non-native variety in the mesolectal level which will be examined through survey, focus group discussions, and autobiographies.

1.13.6.8 Attitude

According to Bem (1968) attitude is self-description or self-perception. With this view of attitude, individuals recognise their attitudes by observing their own behaviour. For instance, people observe themselves speaking French, and then they assume they must have a favourable attitude toward French. In the present study, international students' attitude towards Malaysian English (ME) will be examined in the mesolectal level (explained in section 2.5.9) spoken by 3 main ethnolects in Malaysia: Malay, Chinese-Malaysian, and Indian-Malaysian through a Verbal Guise Test.

1.14 Organization of Thesis

Subsequent to this introductory chapter that delineates various aspects of the research; Chapter 2 begins with the literature review related to the study. It explores the concept of linguistic awareness of non-native varieties of English, perception and attitude towards these varieties among the members of the other speech communities, and the significance of their specific perception in intercultural communication effectiveness with the locals in the host country. Chapter 3 focuses on the methodological design of the study. The qualitative and quantitative methods utilized by this study are elaborated. Related instrumentation and procedures are also explained. Chapter 4 presents the results of the study. It deals with the quantitative data analysis followed by the qualitative findings. Finally chapter 5 gives a summary of the study with an analysis of the findings. The implications of the findings and possible further research are also discussed.

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