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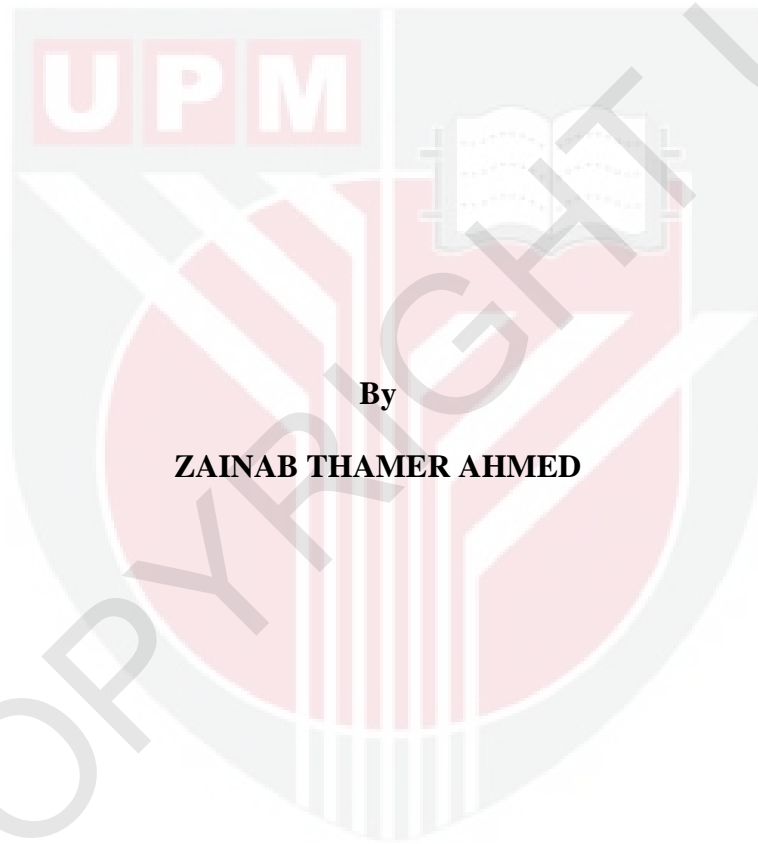
ATTITUDES OF MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TOWARDS ACCENTED ENGLISH

ZAINAB THAMER AHMED

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By

ZAINAB THAMER AHMED

Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

ATTITUDES OF MALAYSIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TOWARDS ACCENTED ENGLISH

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ZAINAB THAMER AHMED

August 2016

Chairman : **Associate Professor Ain Nadzimah Abdullah, PhD**
Faculty : **Modern Languages and Communication**

In the field of sociolinguistics, the exploration of second language learners' attitudes
towards language and language varieties seems to be very significant. Language
attitude studies have generally indicated that second language learners preferred
either American or British accents in their daily interaction. In the Malaysian
context, there is a lack of information regarding the university students' attitudes
towards accented English and it is still unclear which variety of English the L2
learners tend to use as a model for their learning. This study investigated the
attitudes of Malaysian university students towards six native and non-native varieties
of accented English, including American, Australian, British, Chinese, Indian and
Malay. Besides, the present study aimed at exploring whether respondents' social
factors exert any influence on their attitudes towards native and non-native varieties
of accented English in terms of gender, ethnicity, ethnic identity, regional
provenance, self-perceived proficiency in English, and identification of different
accents.

Based on a Multistage sampling procedure, a total of 1465 undergraduate local
students in two Malaysian public universities were selected as respondents of the
study. The respondents mostly belonged to three main ethnic groups, namely the
Malays, Chinese, and Indians all comprising the Malaysian society. The present
study also employed three cross validated research instruments, namely, a survey
questionnaire, the verbal-guise technique, and focused group interviews in order to
measure direct and indirect attitudes. These instruments have been previously
employed in the related studies in fields of social psychology, folk linguistics, and
sociolinguists in order to measure attitudes. Social Identity Theory (SIT) and
Similarity Attraction Theory (SIT) were utilized to guide this study.

The results of quantitative analysis showed that, in general, respondents preferred
native varieties of accented English more than those of non-native based on status

and solidarity dimensions. In addition, differences in the Malaysian respondents' regional provenance, gender, levels of self-perceived proficiency in English, levels of accent identifications, and levels of ethnic identity all had significant effects on the learners' attitudes towards accented English. However, the ethnicity of the respondents was not found to be a significant factor in determining their attitudes towards accented English. The results of qualitative analysis indicated that respondents also preferred native varieties of accented English than those of non-native. On the other hand, when it came to teaching English at the university level, informants favored a combination of both native and non-native speakers of English to teach them, because each group of lecturers has its own capabilities and advantages. Additionally, non-native English lecturers should be given chances to train overseas to enhance their own English proficiency level and that only experienced native lecturers should be employed to teach English in Malaysian universities.

The findings of this study have implications in relation to the choice of a pronunciation model in English language teaching (ELT) context. Additionally, applied linguists, policy makers, sociolinguists, and educators will also benefit from the results of the study as they have always been concerned about the language learners' attitudes toward language and accent variation in order to fully address their needs and goals.

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

SIKAP MAHASISWA UNIVERSITI DI MALAYSIA TERHADAP BAHASA INGGERIS BERAKSEN

Oleh

ZAINAB THAMER AHMED

Ogos 2016

Pengerusi : **Profesor Madya Ain Nadzimah Abdullah, PhD**
Fakulti : **Bahasa Moden dan Komunikasi**

Dalam bidang sosiolinguistik, eksplorasi mengenai sikap pelajar yang mempelajari bahasa kedua terhadap bahasa dan variasi bahasa merupakan sesuatu yang amat signifikan. Kajian mengenai sikap terhadap bahasa secara umumnya menunjukkan bahawa pelajar bahasa kedua menggemari sama ada aksen Amerika atau aksen British dalam interaksi harian mereka. Dalam konteks Malaysia, terdapat kekurangan maklumat mengenai sikap mahasiswa terhadap aksen bahasa Inggeris dan masih tidak jelas variasi bahasa Inggeris manakah pelajar bahasa kedua (L2) berkecenderungan untuk menggunakannya sebagai model bagi pembelajaran mereka. Oleh sebab itu, kajian ini menyelidiki sikap mahasiswa di Malaysia terhadap enam variasi natif dan bukan natif aksen bahasa Inggeris, termasuk Amerika, Australia, British, Cina, India dan Melayu. Di samping itu, kajian ini bertujuan untuk meninjau sama ada faktor sosial informan mempunyai sebarang pengaruh ke atas sikap mereka terhadap variasi natif dan bukan natif aksen bahasa Inggeris dari segi gender, etnik, identiti etnik, provenans regional, kemahiran tanggapan diri dalam bahasa Inggeris, dan identifikasi aksen yang berbeza.

Berdasarkan prosedur persampelan Berbilang Tahap, sebanyak 1456 mahasiswa prasiswazah tempatan di dua universiti awam Malaysia telah dipilih sebagai informan dalam kajian ini. Kebanyakan informan tersebut terdiri daripada tiga kumpulan etnik terbesar, iaitu, Melayu, Cina dan India yang merangkumi masyarakat Malaysia. Kajian ini juga menggunakan tiga instrumen penyelidikan sah silang, iaitu soal selidik tinjauan, teknik samaran verbal, dan temu bual kumpulan berfokus bagi mengukur sikap implisit dan eksplisit. Instrumen tersebut dalam kajian terdahulu telah digunakan dalam kajian yang berkaitan, seperti psikologi sosial, linguistik folk ,dan sosiolinguistik bagi mengukur sikap. Teori identity sosial (SIT) dan persamaan teori daya (SAT) terikan yang digunakan sebagai hala tuju dalam pembelajaran semasa.

Dapatan analisis kuantitatif menunjukkan bahawa, secara amnya, informan lebih menggemari variasi natif aksen bahasa Inggeris daripada bukan natif berdasarkan status dan dimensi solidariti. Tambahan lagi, perbezaan provenans regional, tahap identifikasi aksen, gender, tahap kemahiran tanggapan diri dalam bahasa Inggeris dan tahap identiti etnik informan , semuanya mempunyai kesan yang signifikan terhadap sikap pelajar ke atas aksen bahasa Inggeris. Walau bagaimanapun, faktor etnisiti informan didapati bukan merupakan faktor yang signifikan dalam menentukan sikap mereka terhadap aksen bahasa Inggeris. Dapatan analisis kualitatif juga memperlihatkan bahawa informan juga menggemari variasi natif aksen bahasa Inggeris berbanding dengan variasi bukan natif. Meskipun demikian, dari segi pengajaran Bahasa Inggersi pada peringkat universiti, informan memilih kombinasi kedua-dua penutur natif dan bukan natif bahasa Inggeris untuk mengajar mereka, disebabkan setiap kumpulan pensyarah mempunyai kebolehan dan kelebihan mereka sendiri. Di samping itu, pensyarah bukan natif juga harus diberikan peluang untuk dilatih di luar negara bagi meningkatkan tahap penguasaan bahasa Inggeris mereka dan hanya pensyarah natif berpengalaman yang harus mengajar Bahasa Inggersi di universiti di Malaysia.

Dapatan kajian ini mempunyai implikasi dari segi pemilihan model sebutan dalam konteks Pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris (ELT). Tambahan lagi, linguis terapan, penggubal polisi, sosiolinguis, dan pendidik juga akan mendapat faedah dari dapatan kajian ini kerana mereka sentiasa mengambil perhatian mengenai sikap pelajar terhadap bahasa dan variasi aksen bagi mencapai sepenuhnya keperluan dan matlamat mereka.

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My deepest appreciation and respect to my supervisory committee members: To Dr. Sabariah Md Rashid, who will always be remembered for her consistently helping and compassionately encouraging writing of the text. Thank you for your compassionate assistance and encouragement.

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I owe much gratitude to all the speakers who allowed me to record their voices and all the instructors and students who helped me and took part in my study. Last but not least, I would like to thank all my family members, friends, lecturers, and classmates for their help and support.

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 25 August 2016 to conduct the final examination of Zainab Thamer Ahmed on her thesis entitled "Attitudes of Malaysian University Students Towards Accented English" 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 Doctor of Philosophy.

Members of the Thesis Examination Committee were as follows:

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Date: 28 September 2016

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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Date:

Declaration by graduate student

I hereby confirm that:
- this thesis is my original work;
- quotations, illustrations and citations have been duly referenced;
- this thesis has not been submitted previously or concurrently for any other degree at any other institutions;
- intellectual property from the thesis and copyright of thesis are fully-owned by Universiti Putra Malaysia, as according to the Universiti Putra Malaysia (Research) Rules 2012;
- written permission must be obtained from supervisor and the office of Deputy Vice- Chancellor (Research and Innovation) before thesis is published (in the form of written, printed or in electronic form) including books, journals, modules, proceedings, popular writings, seminar papers, manuscripts, posters, reports, lecture notes, learning modules or any other materials as stated in the Universiti Putra Malaysia (Research) Rules 2012;
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Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name and Matric No.: Zainab Thamer Ahmed, GS31627

Declaration by Members of Supervisory Committee

This is to confirm that:
- the research conducted and the writing of this thesis was under our supervision;
- supervision responsibilities as stated in the Universiti Putra Malaysia (Graduate Studies) Rules 2003 (Revision 2012-2013) were adhered to.

Signature: Name of Chairman of Supervisory Committee:	Associate Professor Dr. Ain Nadzimah Abdullah

Signature: Name of Member of Supervisory Committee:	Associate Professor Dr. Jusang Bin Bolong

Signature: Name of Member of Supervisory Committee:	Associate Professor Dr. Sabariah Md Rashid

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SAT: Similarity Attraction Theory, which suggests that people will be attracted for existential and social comparison reasons to others, whom they perceive to be similar to their own self (Byrne, 1971).

SIT: Tajfel and Turner's (1979, 1986) Social Identity Theory, which postulates that individuals will exhibit a preference for the variety of language or accent that is associated with their most salient in-group.

MEIM: Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measures, a global scale for measuring ethnic identity. The MEIM was first proposed by Phinney (1992).

PCA: Principal Component Analysis as a statistical method was used to highlight the two dimensions of speakers' evaluations.

ANOVA: Analysis of Variance

MANOVA: Multivariate Analysis of Variance

ESL: English as a Second Language

RP: Received Pronunciation

MGT: Matched Guise Technique

VGT: Verbal Guise Technique

US: The United States

UK: The United Kingdom

IAT: Implicit Association Test

AAVE: African American Vernacular English

MWUSE: Mid-West US English

ELT: English Language Teaching

GSE: Glasgow Standard English

GV: Glasgow Vernacular English

SUSE: Southern US English

JE: Japanese English

AE: American English

SA:	Standard American
BrE:	Standard British English Accent
EFL:	English as a Foreign Language
IELTS:	International English Language Testing System
SPSS:	Statistical Package Social Science
AuE:	Australian English

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   English in Malaysia and the Three Circles of World English

Kachru's model of world Englishes is one of the most significant and influential to account for the spread of the English language worldwide. He divided World Englishes into three circles; namely, the Inner, the Outer, and the Expanding Circle (See Figure1.1). The Three Circles model was first published in a book chapter that came out of a conference held to mark the Fiftieth anniversary of the British Council in 1985 (Kachru, 1985). The model represents the various types of spread, patterns of acquisition, and the functional domains in which English is used globally today (Bolton, 2009).

The 'Expanding Circle'

China
South Korea
Japan

The 'Outer Circle'

Malaysia
Singapore
India

The 'Inner Circle'

New Zealand
Canada
Australia
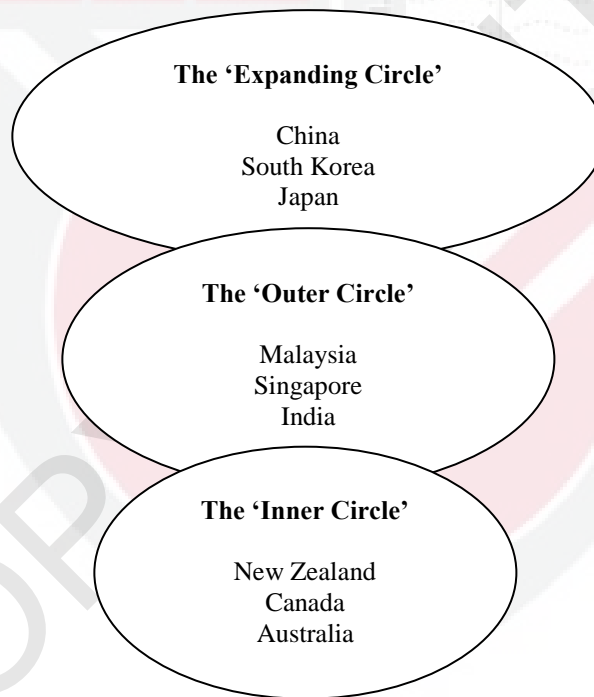
Figure 1.1: Kachru's three-circle model of World Englishes (Kachru, 1996, p.2).

The Inner Circle refers to countries where English is spoken as a first language, such as the UK, the USA, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada. The Outer Circle represents the postcolonial Anglophonic countries where English is spoken as a second language (ESL), such as Malaysia, Singapore, India, and Nigeria (Bolton, 2009; Canagarajah, 1999; Davies et al., 2003). In spite of the geographical distances, the Outer Circle communities share many characteristics. Typically, English is one of the many languages spoken in their multilingual societies, but is recognized as an official, co-official, legal, or language of education. English is used in non-English cultural contexts at the functional level, and is also utilized in a variety of areas, both

as a nationwide and an international language, as well as the language of literary creativity and expression (Bolton, 2009; Canagarajah, 1999; Davies et al., 2003). In other words, English has an expanded functional range in a diversity of administrative, literary, educational, and social domains. Additionally, it has acquired an increasing interest in terms of users at different levels of society. Consequently, there seems to be important dissimilarity within such institutionalized varieties (Kachru, 1985; 2005).

The Expanding Circle includes those areas where English is an international language and traditionally operates as a foreign language (EFL) (Bolton, 2009). Examples of countries that belong to the Expanding Circle are China, Saudi Arabia, Greece, South Korea, Japan, Iraq, Iran, Indonesia, and Taiwan.

The English language varieties spoken in the Inner Circle is referred to as 'norm providing', that is, it has a role of 'norm developing'. In the Expanding Circle, it is referred to as 'norm dependent' (Jenkins, 2009, p.18). The EFL varieties in this model are regarded as 'performance' varieties without any official status and hence rely on the standards set by native speakers in the Inner Circle as the ESL varieties of English became institutionalized and developed as their own standards (Jenkins, 2009).

Based on Kachru's model, English in Malaysia is classified within the Outer Circle and used as a second language. English in Malaysia also functions as a global language while Bahasa Malaysia is used as the official language to express the national identity and foster unity among the country's diverse races.

The Three Circle model has been extremely influential and contributed deeply to our understanding of the sociolinguistic realities of the English varieties, and has been used as the theoretical framework in many related studies (Chiba, Matsuura & Yamamoto, 1995; Sasayama, 2013; Yoshikawa, 2005).

However, over the past few years, many World Englishes scholars have identified some limitations to its general outline, despite the current influences. The following are limitations that have been raised about the model (Jenkins, 2009, p.20):

- The model is based on geography and history rather than on the way speakers currently identify with and use English. Yet, some English users in the Outer Circle speak it as their first language (occasionally as their only language). Meanwhile, an increasing number of speakers in the Expanding Circle use English for a very wide range of purposes, including during social contacts with native speakers and even more frequently with non-native speakers from both their own and different L1s, both in their home country and abroad. As Mesthrie points out, "[t]he German graduate students I taught in the cold Bavarian winter of 2005 seemed to be thoroughly at home in English (2008, p.32, emphasis added). Recently, it was observed that in Expanding Circle Asian countries such as China, educational and academic domains are using English (Jenkins, 2009, p.20).

- There is often a grey area between the Inner and Outer circles: in some Outer Circle countries, many people have learnt English as a first language, and may have spoken it at home rather than using it purely for official purposes such as in education, law, and government (Jenkins, 2009, p.20).

- There is also an increasingly grey area between the Outer and Expanding Circles. Approximately twenty countries are in transition from EFL to English as a Second Language (ESL) status, including Argentina, Belgium, Costa Rica, Denmark, Sudan, Switzerland (see Graddol,1997, p.11 for others) (Jenkins, 2009, p.20).

- Many World English speakers grow up bilingual or multilingual, using different languages to fulfill different functions in their daily lives. This makes it difficult to describe any language in their repertoire as L1, L2, L3 and so on (Jenkins, 2009, p.20).

- There is a difficulty in using the model to define speakers in terms of their proficiency in English. A native speaker may have limited vocabulary and low grammatical competence while the reverse may be true of a non-native speaker. The fact that English is somebody's second or third language does not itself imply that their competence is less than that of a native speaker (Jenkins, 2009, p.20).

- The model implies that the situation is uniform for all countries within a particular Circle whereas this is not so. Even within the Inner Circle, countries differ in the diversity with which language is used (there is far more diversity in the USA than in the UK). In the Outer Circle, countries differ in a number of aspects such as whether English is spoken mainly by the elite, as in India, or is more widespread, as in Singapore; or whether it is spoken by a single L1 groups leading to several varieties of English as in India. Following from this, it is argued that the model conceals more than it reveals and runs the risk of being interpreted as a license to dispense with analytical rigor (Jenkins, 2009, p.20).

- The term 'Inner Circle' implies that speakers from the ENL countries are central to the effort, when, the truth is their worldwide influence is in fact in decline. Note though, that Kachru did not intend the term 'Inner' to be taken to imply any sense of superiority (Jenkins, 2009, p.20).

Therefore, to deal with precise definitions, the terms native/non-native and inner/outer/expanding circles are used thoroughly in this study to describe the varieties of English speech recorded for evaluation (McKenzie, 2010). Kachru categorized the definitions of the Inner, Outer and Expanding Circles (e.g., 1985, 1992). However, this study follows Richards et al.'s (1992, p.241) notion that a native speaker of a particular language is "an individual who acquired the language in question in early childhood". On the other hand, Singh et al. (1995) defined non-native speaker as "an individual who learns the language after early childhood as a second or foreign language" (p.286). According to McKenzie (2010), the reader should bear in mind that the use of such a system of categorization has its own limitations in the milieu of current studies.

1.1.1   The Different Varieties of English in Malaysia

In Malaysia, English is typically learnt either as a first, second or as another language within a local context. Furthermore, different varieties of English accents are heard because Malaysia is a multilingual and a multi-ethnic country. Similarly, it has been reported that English in Malaysia is spoken with a multitude of accents, characterizing different ethnic and socio-economic groups, education level, language and geographical backgrounds (e.g. East and West Malaysia)" (Pillai, 2008, p.42). Verbal variety of Malaysian English was classified into three different varieties comprising Acrolect, Mesolect, and Basilect (Baskaran, 1987). For instance, a university lecturer may utilize the Acrolect variety (the standard variety) when delivering a speech or a lecture, the Mesolect variety (the non-standard variety) may be utilized when communicating to friends in an informal situations, and the Basilect variety (broken Malaysian English) when bargaining about the price at a night market or when talking to tourists (Baskaran, 1994). Accordingly, it seems that Malaysian people may speak several varieties of Malaysian English depending on different situations.

This would lead us to the question which pronunciation model should be utilized in learning and teaching English in this country. The British pronunciation tends to be adopted in the classrooms and there is even a realization that the acrolectal variety of Malaysian English is comparable to RP (Received Pronunciation) (Pillai, 2008, p.42). However, it has been argued that textbook models of pronunciation for instance RP are seen as an "artificial reference points" for individuals who have been utilizing English as a second language (Pillai, Don & Knowles, 2012, p.1).

It has long been accepted that Standard English is spoken in a variety of accents (Trudgill, 1999). Many researchers believe that in the context of global English, there is no established standard for spoken English (Pillai, Don & Knowles, 2012). With respect to this, it has been argued that dependence on such models would lead to a skewed view about pronunciation which consequently fails to address the communicative needs of learners (Levis, 2005). One of the assumptions about the teaching of English is that learners should adopt a type of language used by native speakers. Since English is largely used as a global language, it is realized that through English, speakers tend to indicate their nationality, and other aspects of their identity.

Recent tendency in teaching and learning pronunciation has led to the exposure to different English accents and more concentration on intelligibility rather than imitating native models (Deterding, 2005; Jenkins, 2000; Kirkpatrick, 2007). On the other hand, in Malaysia, the trend seems to be the opposite, with the emphasis being more on British instead of an endonormative model (or local variety of English) (Pillai, 2011). The choice of a particular accent as a model is a demanding task in Malaysia as many varieties of English accents are present. This study seeks to investigate Malaysian university students' attitudes towards accented English since the choice of their English learning and teaching models largely depends on the students' choice.

1.2   Statement of the Problem

In Malaysian universities, Malay, Chinese, and Indian lecturers speak English in a variety of accents. Additionally, students also come into contact with lecturers from foreign countries who speak English with their own accents. As a result, students have to contend with both local and foreign accents of English being spoken in the classroom, giving rise to possible difficulties in understanding their lessons. White and Li (1991) said that "listeners who have difficulty in understanding a speaker are likely to experience negative affect" (p.111).

Many language attitude studies investigating native and non-native listeners' attitudes toward standard and non-standard accents in relation to status and solidarity traits have generally indicated that the informants evaluated standard accents more positively than non-standard accents based on status or competence trait. Nevertheless, the informants evaluated the non-standard accents more positively than standard accents based on solidarity trait. Nevertheless, research has also indicated that in many countries such as South Korea, Japan, and Austria, university students or English language learners show inclination towards American and British accents. They tend to perceive both accents positively by adopting either one of them as a model of their English pronunciation (Chiba, Matsuura, & Yamamto, 1995; Kim, 2007; Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck, & Smit, 1997; Sasayama, 2013). However, in some countries particularly in Malaysia, it is still unclear which accent is more preferable or ideal for learners of English.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, to date, despite the substantial and growing literature on the attitudes of native and non-native respondents towards accented English, almost no research-based study has ever been conducted in the Malaysian context to present detailed information about a sample in relation to background or social variables. These findings were based on an extensive Internet search through databases such as Google Scholar, Taylor and Francis, SCOPUS, ERIC, and ProQuest. In each context, it is deemed necessary to investigate background or social variables since it can provide a sociolinguistic framework, especially for the complicated language context in Malaysia.

As a result, there is a need to conduct a large-scale study to investigate the different attitudes towards English among Malaysian university students. Such a study will allow researchers to determine to what extent and in what ways background or social variables such as regional provenance (urban vs. rural), ethnicity, ethnic identity, gender, competence in English, and previous exposure to English may explain the differences in attitudes towards accented English. There is also a need to employ both direct and indirect methods of language attitude measurements because if researchers depend on one single method, it will produce skewed results and bring about misleading conclusions (McKenzie, 2010).

Another feasible reason to conduct such a study in the Malaysian context is that the success of any language policy is reliant on how well it conforms to the attitudes of those people influenced by the policy, as well as to its success in persuading those who hold negative attitudes (Lewis, 1981; McKenzie, 2010). Consequently, an investigation of the Malaysian students' attitudes towards varieties of accented

English is significant to the implementation of an English language policy in Malaysian universities and schools.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to investigate the Malaysian university students' attitudes towards six speakers who speak with native and non-native varieties of English accents which are American, Australian, British, Chinese, Indian, and Malay. The present study also explores the social factors that are deemed to be important in determining the respondents' attitudes towards varieties of accented English.

1.4 Research Questions

The present study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are Malaysian university students' attitudes towards native accented English (American, Australian, and British) and Malaysian accented English (Chinese, Malay, and Indian)?
2. How Malaysian students' perceive speakers of native accented English and Malaysian accented English?
3. To what extent are Malaysian students' background variables of gender, ethnicity, regional provenance (urban vs. rural), self-perceived proficiency in English, and identification of different accents important in determining their attitudes towards native and Malaysian accented English?
4. What is the relationship between Malaysian students' levels of ethnic identity and their attitudes towards Malaysian accented English?
5. Do Malaysian students' levels of ethnic identity related to their attitudes towards native accented English?

1.5 Language Attitudes

Studies on language attitudes can be classified under 8 different labels, according to their focus (Baker, 1992, p. 29):

1. Attitudes to language lessons
2. Attitudes to language variation, dialect, and speech style.
3. Attitudes of parents to language lessons
4. Attitudes to specific minority language
5. Attitudes to learning a new language
6. Attitudes to language preference
7. Attitudes to language groups, communities and minorities
8. Attitudes to the uses of a specific language

The current study attempts to measure Malaysian L2 university students' attitudes towards native and non-native English accents. Towards achieving this aim, among the above-mentioned classifications, the second and the seventh language attitudes are the focus of this research. However, this study could also provide broader

implications for language policy and pedagogy, especially in the case of the fifth and eighth attitudes, namely towards learning a new language and to the uses of a specific language, e.g., English.

1.6 Significance of the Study

Even though most of the language attitudes studies were carried out in the social and psychological field of language, there is still the question of how people evaluate language and language varieties in sociolinguistics. It was proposed that early language attitudes studies assisted tremendously in the establishment of sociolinguistics as a separate field of study in the 1960s (Joseph, 2004). Genuinely, attitudes towards language varieties would underpin all the methods of socio-linguistic and social psychological phenomena (Garrett et al., 2003). It is widely realized that the study of language attitudes is a key dimension in the construction of sociolinguistic theory (Garrett et al., 1999).

Above all, the study of language attitudes is vital in explaining sociolinguistic phenomena since regardless of the complication of the connection and the impact of the social context (McKenzie, 2008a, 2010); attitudes are deemed to be a significant factor in determining behaviour (See section 2.1.2). It is believed that language attitudes could to large extent influence language behaviour in many ways. Language attitudes contribute to sound changes and help to determine teachers' perceptions of students' abilities, reflect intergroup communication, and define speech communities (Carranza, 1982).

Having an impact on behaviour, language attitudes studies could provide a foundation for the explanation of essential issues in sociolinguistics, such as linguistic change and variation (Labov, 1984). This is the situation where the nature of language attitudes studies is longitudinal using similar research methodology and sample as the original study, which would allow for any attitude change (McKenzie, 2010). Garrett et al. (2003) contended that attitudes towards languages and language varieties are expected to strengthen many short term and long term behavioural results deemed to have significant impact in sociolinguistics. To illustrate, attitudes to language varieties may possibly influence the extent to which particular groups, for instance speakers of minority languages or regional dialects, take part in higher education or affect their opportunity to get a job.

It has been argued that language attitudes can determine the degree to which a language or a dialect spreads or dies (McKenzie, 2010). To demonstrate, when individuals hold positive attitudes towards varieties of English as an internationally spoken language, they regard it as one of the main factors in determining its worldwide spread. In fact, in such case of language spread, it is believed that it can be measured by the extent of the employment of the language and the examination of the attitudes of people towards such employment (Fishman & Rubal-Lopez, 1992).

Even if most of the language attitude studies have concentrated on native speaker perceptions of language and language varieties, there is a need to investigate the perception of non-native speakers from the sociolinguistic perspectives. Primarily, research which examines the attitudes of second language learners towards language

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acquisition may provide contributions to sociolinguistic theory since it raises language learners' consciousness to transact with their own feelings, prejudices, expectations, and stereotypes (Friedrich, 2000; McKenzie, 2008a). As a result, it has been suggested that sociolinguistic studies on second language learners should examine what these learners know about the target language and its varieties as well as how this knowledge is classified in the brain of the learner and employed to reflect group priorities and preferences (McKenzie, 2010).

It is worthy to investigate language learners' attitudes towards varieties of English speech. Therefore, it has been contended that policy makers and educators should be aware of such language attitudes of their students in order to fully address their needs and transact with the diverse feelings that English, as an international language, provokes (Friedrich, 2000). In addition, the choice of a model for teaching and learning English is affected by the students' attitudes towards the language and it is deemed necessary to find out what variety of English foreign and second language learners seek as an ideal language (Starks & Paltridge, 1996).

Indeed, there is a need for language attitude research, which includes non-native speakers as respondents; to split the sample on the basis of variables such as age and gender, to provide a hint for attitude change among various sections of the language learning population. To sum up, from all the above mentioned reasons we can understand that non-native and native speakers' judgment or evaluation of specific language and accent has long been a traditional concern to applied linguists and sociolinguists. Towards this aim, the present study provides useful implications for applied linguists, sociolinguists, policy makers, and educators.

1.7   Limitations of the Study

In any human endeavor, there are limitations. Likewise, the present study was limited to Malaysian undergraduate students from only two Malaysian public universities, namely, Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). The students' ages ranged between 18 to 25 years. Another limitation of this study was the students (N=24) who participated in the focus group discussions were only final year students who were enrolled at Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication and Faculty of Educational Studies (UPM). Regarding the choice of English accents, this study included only one representative speech sample from each variety of English speech.

1.8   Definition of Terms

This chapter concludes with the definition of terms salient to the present study. They are as follows:

Accent: Accent is a certain form of language spoken by a subgroup of speakers of that language which is defined by phonological features (Holmes, 1992). It is also defined as "a loose bundles of prosodic and segmental features distributed over geographic and/or social space" (Lippi-Green, 1997, p.42).

Attitude: Attitude can be defined as "a summary evaluation of an object or thought" (Bohner & Wanke, 2002, p.5). Attitude is a hypothetical construct; it is not directly noticeable but can be inferred from noticeable answers (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

Status and solidarity dimensions: Status refers to the level of prestige given to the speaker (White, 2013). While solidarity refers to the level to which speakers are evaluated to be socially attractive (*ibid*).

Ethnic Identity: It can be defined as the self-identifying characteristics based on membership in a specific cultural or ethnic group which assists people understand themselves better (Kenny & Briner, 2010).

Ethnicity: From social anthropology point of view, ethnicity refers to self-perception in which ethnical groups and individuals belong to.

Self-perceived proficiency in English: It can be defined as "a reflection of the learner's perception towards his/her proficiency in the target language" (Dewaele, 2005, p.124; McKenzie, 2010, p.103).

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LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

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