

**CHOICE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE VARIETIES IN SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES:
A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN SELANGOR, MALAYSIA**

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Abstract

The social networking sites are widely used among the users all over the world. University students use these sites for various purposes, such as for entertainment, communication, and discussions using their own mother tongues and English language. The purpose of this study is to investigate the use of English language varieties in the social networking sites (SNS) among the students of a university in Selangor. A survey was conducted to figure out the choice of English language varieties used by these students. The results of the study showed that majority of the students agreed that they mostly used the Standard English in their social networking sites to convey messages and express their thoughts and opinions. Their choice of English language variety to be used is heavily influenced by the formality of a situation as well as their social role when they are interacting with other people. Therefore, this study has shown that the different English language varieties play their own roles in certain situations in the social networking sites.

KEYWORDS: English language varieties, social networking sites, Standard English, Malaysian English, social factors, millennials, university students

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

With the state of being globally accepted and internationally recognized, English language can be found through a lot of varieties, which is known as World Englishes. According to Holmes (2008), the term is used to refer to the range of different varieties of English with distinctive linguistic features, which have developed in many multilingual countries such as Malaysia, Singapore, Hong Kong, India and many other African countries. Also, the expansion of technology has widened the communication, specifically in a multilingual context.

As a multicultural country, Malaysia has various languages used in daily lives such as Malay language, English language, Chinese, Tamil, as well as languages for different ethnicities. Malay language is the national language in Malaysia and it is the national symbol for unity in Malaysia (Ying, Heng, & Abdullah, 2015). Meanwhile, English language is the second language, hence English language in Malaysia is learned in the ESL context. Being the second language, English language is widely used by Malaysian, as it is considered as the economic language which would help Malaysian to grow economically (Ying et al., 2015). According to Thirusanku & Yunus (2014), "...the English language has been viewed as an asset to achieve development and to acquire knowledge" (p. 255). Therefore, English language in Malaysia is considered as very important alongside the Malay language. The importance of English language in Malaysian society grows from time to time.

Not only the English language is used in daily lives, the English language is also used in the social networking sites in Malaysia, especially for entertainment and communication purposes. The users, especially the youth, spend a lot of time on the social networking sites, up to the point that the use of Standard English becomes almost unrecognizable (Thurairaj et al., 2015). For Malaysians, they regularly use and switch between Standard and Malaysian English in the social networking sites, and this could be the reason why Thurairaj et al., (2015) mentioned that the Standard English slowly becomes stultified.

1.2 Problem Statement

The use of social networking sites (SNS) nowadays is increasing, especially among the younger generations. They have actively participated and fully utilizing as it becomes a platform for the millennial to express their feelings and thoughts on various topics or issues. Though they have the tendency to use their mother tongue to write or post status on social networking sites, English language can hardly be diminished, especially in the growth of technology. Anyway, English language is the global accepted language in various countries and it has revolved alongside with the existence of social networking sites (Kachhia & Kachhia, 2014). Its accessibility and flexibility of language usage has definitely effect the language choice, whether the users are prone to use Standard English or in this context, Malaysian English when communicating. This study therefore aimed to identify the social factors contributing the language choice among the university students in Malaysia.

1.2 Purpose of Study

The main purpose of this study is to investigate the use of English language varieties in the social networking sites (SNS) among the students of a university in Selangor, either Standard or Malaysian English. In addition, this study also seeks for explanation or social factors as to why a variety is selected instead of the other in certain circumstances. Among the social factors included in the study are the addressee, the domains, the purpose of communication, subject or topics, social distance, social role and formality.

1.3 Research Questions

This study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the university students' choice of English language varieties (Standard English or Malaysian English) in the social networking sites?
2. What are the social factors that largely influence the use of Standard English or Malaysian English varieties in social networking sites among the university students?

1.4 Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

1. To investigate the university students' choice of English language varieties (Standard English or Malaysian English) in the social networking sites.
2. To discover the social factors that largely influence the use of Standard English or Malaysian English varieties in Social Networking Sites among the university students.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, the researchers looked into research, which are significant to this field of study. With the purpose to identify the social factors that would influence the choice of variety among university students, it is necessary to determine the development of English language and the language used in the social networking sites (SNS), specifically in Malaysia.

2.1 Development of Standard English

The use of Standard English is generally written and spoken with the establishment of certain degree of regularization or codification (Holmes, 2008). Initially, Standard English have naturally emerged in the fifteenth century and it was considered prestigious back then because it was the variety used the English Court and the important merchants of London. It was used for H functions with a diversity of L varieties and more people from other provinces learnt the language. Besides, the rapid development of the Standard English was due to the functions in the context of administration and government.

It is regarded as the Standard English when it is clearly understood by the native speakers, which also the educated English-speaking people (Ahmad Mahir, Jarjis & Kibtiyah, 2007). The grammar and linguistic rules of the language has been printed or documented which mark its usage in the educational field and also for formal functions. In addition, the words included in the dictionary are known as part of standard variety and reaffirmed the pronunciation and spelling. According to Holmes (2008), it is definitely not always an easy or straightforward process because the decision on selecting the forms in the Standard English should be represented alternative ways of the plural

words, thus, it is crucial to consult the best writers of that time from the upper class for judgments on the usage.

In this 21st century, with the globalization and Internet, English language is rather a convenient variety for communication and it has been used tremendously. According to Focho (2011), though it does not hold the greatest number of first language speakers in the world, English language is acknowledged as native language (ENL), second language (ESL), foreign language (EFL) or lingua franca (ELF). In other words, English language has no official role in a country, but it is crucial for the advancement and growth of the nation especially in major developing fields, specifically in Malaysia (Faisal, 2004).

2.2 English Language in Malaysia

The influence of English language in this country has its own history and it started as early as nineteenth century during the conquest of the British Empire. The use of the language gradually expanded when the British overruled the local and administrative affairs of the Malay State (Hanapiah, 2004). As a matter of fact, English language was incorporated in the local education system and reference materials were also imported from United Kingdom. Those who reached a certain level of education or graduated from the English medium schools were highly recognized and offered to work with the government. In 1957, after the independence, Malay language was affirmed as the national language but English language has remained to be one of the official languages, especially related to the roles of mass media (Hanapiah, 2004).

English in Malaysia is gaining more cognition and has reached almost every house whether in the urban or rural areas. As stated by Foo & Richards (2004), “English is here to stay for a long time until another language takes over as lingua franca of the world”. Therefore, despite that Mandarin and Tamil are the highly spoken languages among the ethnics, Malaysia was ranked with the highest level of English proficiency in the Asian region (Thirusanku & Yunus, 2014) which has proven that the language is a medium of communication within the various cultural group. In other words, English language is growing and yet referred as primary second language and most of the people in Malaysia use either Standard English or a uniquely Malaysian colloquial form which identified as Malaysian English, especially for casual occasions.

Malaysian English (ME) is one of the varieties of English language that have been developed with the influence of local languages. It displayed the local aspirations and identities of a wide range of communities, which is reflected in the use of different pronunciation, vocabulary, grammatical and pragmatic features. As cited by Low (2011), Malaysian English is a manner of conveying English language in another language and it is usually a direct or literal translation from these languages such as Malay and Chinese language. The Malaysians speakers are likely to incorporate ethnic final tag such as *lah*, *loh* and *meh*. According to Holmes (2008), these distractive stress pattern, an end-tag and many other words from local languages are woven casually, specifically in the Malaysian English conversations. Although the basic features of the Standard English are recognized in their conversation, the language has been modified to suit the local settings and level of proficiency among the Malaysians (Low, 2011). The speakers have minimal interest to converse with correct language rules because their purpose of speaking is solely to transmit information, therefore, the Malaysian English is displayed as an attempt to simplify the non-native variety, as well as to localize the acculturated language. In fact, with the new means of global communication, the

Internet has greatly impact the language use and speakers tend to utilize it to express their thoughts, specifically on Social Networking Sites (SNS).

2.3 Social Networking Sites and Language Choice

Individuals are always associated with a form of social structure and it is essential to be related to each other as it provides the sense of belongings. With the development of technology, Internet has created boundless global connection and the platforms for communication is certainly expanding and everyone is able to interact, regardless the demographic and time constraints. According to Abhyankar (2011), 'social network' is an online community which people around the world can develop network with different organizations or individuals for a specific purpose. In the early years of its establishment, social network focused on bringing people together and encouraged the users to share personal information and thoughts via personal webpages. However, in the late 1990s, many sites have been developed with more advanced features for the users to find and manage friends with similar interests. It began to flourish the users with the emergence of Friendster, Myspace and Facebook that have become famous among people of all age group with varieties educational, cultural, professional, social and linguistic background. Today, it is estimated that there are over 200 social networking sites due to its availability, accessibility and flexibility of language used. Although English language is the medium of communication on social networking sites, the language featured is quite distinct from the Standard English, depending on the utility (Kachhia & Kachhia, 2014).

Based on an analysis, cited from Kachhia & Kachhia (2014), the language used on social networking sites can be classified based on the following categories: 1) Shortenings, contractions and G-dippings 2) Acronyms and initialisms 3) Letters/numbers homophones 4) Misspellings and typos 5) Non-conventional spellings 6) Accent stylization. These language features somehow have changed or modified the users' manner of communicating with one another. For example, there are certain words in English language which are used on social networking sites following the style of users' accents. The Americanized words such as 'gonna' and 'wanna' have become famous among the American users. In the Malaysian context, the English language on social networking sites are highly influenced by the younger generations, so it is inevitable that the Standard English language would also be localized for informal use especially among the students in schools, at colleges and universities.

The language choice is likely affected by the characteristics of the language user themselves – user factors and the features of the situation in which the language used – situational factors (Low, 2011). The user factors relate to the characteristics of the language users which include aspects such as one's age, gender, race, profession, class, level of education, nation, region of origin ethnicity, personality and ability. While situational factors focus on the situation because language is prone to be used differently when the users are in different location or using different medium. Also, the topic and purpose of communication could contribute to the users' language choice.

Comprehensively, the language choice, whether to use Standard English or Malaysian English on the social networking sites are intimately dependent on various of social factors, which could reasonably be investigated. With the consideration of past research on the development of English language, this study aims to investigate the social factors, which contribute to the language choice, specifically among Malaysian university students.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Approach and Design

This study has employed a quantitative approach in collecting and analyzing the data by conducting a survey in order to achieve the purpose of this study which are (1) to investigate the Malaysian university students' choice of English language varieties (Standard English or Malaysian English) in Social Networking Sites and (2) to discover the social factors that largely influence the use of Standard English and Malaysian English varieties in Social Networking Sites among the Malaysian university students.

3.2 Research Settings

This survey was distributed online to ensure maximal variation of sampling. By using online survey, the researches were not just able to save time, but also able to reach the participants from further away. Hence, the results will have higher rate of validity because of the variation of the participants.

3.3 Participants

The participants were selected based on purposive sampling whom the criteria of the participants were according to the researchers needs based on the field of study. There were 46 participants involved in this study, which were students of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Shah Alam.

3.4 Instrument

The instrument that was used in this study was a survey adapted from Xuan (2011) entitled 'Survey of Different English Varieties'. Validity test was conducted for the survey before distributing to the participants. The survey helps the researches to determine students' choice of English varieties and the social factors that affected the use of particular English varieties in Social Networking Sites (SNS) of Malaysian university students specifically. The survey consists of 4 sections consists of i) background information and demographic profile of the participants, ii) the general choice of English language varieties in Social Networking Sites, iii) the choice of English language varieties in Social Networking Sites based on social factors, and iv) the social factors of using Standard and Malaysian English in Social Networking Sites.

4.0 RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSIS

4.1 Research Objective 1: Malaysian University Students' Choice of English Language Varieties in Social Networking Sites

The findings below present the Malaysian university students' general choice of English language varieties used in their social networking sites (SNS). There will be two sections in this research objectives; 1) general choice of English language variety in social networking sites and 2) choice of English language variety based on social factors (addressee, domain, subject, and purpose of communication).

4.1.1 General choice of English language variety in social networking sites

Table 1 below presents the general choice of English language variety used to post status in the social networking sites. The results are as per below:

Table 1: General choice of English language variety used to post status in SNS

English Variety	Frequency	Percent (%)
Standard English	25	54.3
Malaysian English	5	10.9
Both	16	34.8
Total	46	100.0

Based on Table 1 above, it shows that Standard English has the highest percentage, which is 54.3% ($f = 25$). Meanwhile, Malaysian English variety has the lowest percentage which is 10.9% ($f = 5$). 34.8% (16) respondents agreed that they used both Standard and Malaysian English when posting status in the social networking sites. Therefore, it is concluded that when it comes to posting status in the social networking sites, the most used variety is the Standard English variety.

4.1.2 Choice of English language variety based on social factors of addressee

In the Table 2 below, it displays the results for the choice of English language variety used in the social networking sites based on the social factor of addressee.

Table 2: Choice of English language variety based on social factor of addressee

English Variety	Parents (%)	Siblings (%)	Friends (%)	Teachers/ Lecturers (%)	Employers (%)	Employees (%)	Public (%)
Standard English	21.7	17.4	21.7	69.6	37.0	23.9	47.8
Malaysian English	39.1	32.6	23.9	6.5	0.00	4.3	13.0
Both	39.1	50.0	54.3	23.9	28.3	23.9	39.1
Not applicable	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	34.8	45.7	0.00
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	97.8	100.0

Based on Table 2 above, the respondents needed to choose the English language varieties used to interact with addressees in the social networking sites. For the addressee of parents, it could be seen that Malaysian English variety and both categories share the same percentage, which is 39.1%. This shows that most respondents would not use only Standard English when interacting with their parents in SNS. In the addressee of siblings, the highest percentage is 50% which refers to the use of both varieties (Standard and Malaysian English). This result is the same with the addressee of friends, where the result shows that the use of both varieties has the highest percentage (54.3%).

Meanwhile, in the addressee of teachers or lecturers, the highest percentage of English variety choice is Standard English, in which the percentage is 69.6%. This is the same with the addressee of employers, where 37.0% of respondents stated that they use Standard English to interact with their employers online. In terms of the addressee employees, 45.7% of respondents chose 'Not applicable' as their answer. Finally, in the category of the addressee public, the highest percentage is 47.8% which represents the Standard English variety. Therefore, most respondents use Standard English when they interact with the public in the social networking sites.

4.1.3 Choice of English language variety based on social factor of domains

Table 3 represents the results for the choice of English language variety based on the social factor of domains in the social networking sites. The result of this category is as per below:

Table 3: Choice of English language variety based on social factor of domains in SNS

English Variety	Family (%)	Friendship (%)	Religion (%)	Education (%)	Employment (%)
Standard English	19.6	19.6	45.7	67.4	65.2
Malaysian English	28.3	28.3	17.4	8.7	8.7
Both	52.2	52.2	37.0	23.9	26.1
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

There are five different categories in the social factor of domains which are family, friendship, religion, education and employment. For the family and friendship categories, the highest percentage for both is 52.2%, which coincidentally refers to the use of both Standard and Malaysian English varieties. Meanwhile, for the categories of religion and education, the highest percentage goes to the Standard English, with 45.7% and 67.4% respectively. The same goes to the category of employment, the highest percentage is 65.3%, which also represents the use of Standard English. Therefore, in the social factor of domains, only two domains show the use of both Standard and Malaysian English (family and friendship) while three other domains (religion, education and employment) show the use of Standard English only in the social networking sites.

4.1.4 Choice of English language variety based on social factor of subject (topic) in social networking sites

Table 4 below portrays the results for the choice of English language variety based on the social factor of subject (topic of discourse) in the social networking sites. The result of this category is as per below:

Table 4: Choice of English language variety based on social factor of subject (topic) in SNS

English Variety	People & Relationships (%)	Work & Money (%)	Leisure & Activities (%)	Appearances (%)	Issues (%)
Standard English	43.5	47.8	26.1	32.6	58.7
Malaysian English	15.2	13.0	21.7	17.4	4.3
Both	41.3	32.6	50.0	50.0	37.0
Total	100.0	93.5	97.8	100.0	100.0

From Table 4 above, there are five topics of discourse included in the social factor of subjects. The five topics are people and relationships, work and money, leisure activities, appearances and issues. The Standard English has the highest percentage for the topics of people and relationships, work and money and issues with the percentages of 43.5%, 47.8% and 58.7% respectively. On the other hand, only two topics display both Standard and Malaysian English with the highest percentage, which are leisure activities and appearances (both percentages are 50%). Hence, in the social factor of subjects, most respondents agreed they used Standard English only in three topics in the social

networking sites (people and relationship, work and money, and issues) while for two other topics (leisure activities and appearances) the respondents use both Standard English and Malaysian English.

4.1.5 Choice of English language variety based on social factor of purpose of communication in social networking sites

Table 5 below shows the results for the choice of English language variety based on the social factor of purpose of communication in the social networking sites. The results for this category are as per below:

Table 5: Choice of English language variety based on social factor of purpose of communication in SNS

English Variety	To persuade	To inform	To entertain	To express feelings	To compare	To debate	To convince
Standard English	43.5	50.0	21.7	26.1	39.1	65.2	52.2
Malaysian English	19.6	13.0	26.1	23.9	13.0	8.7	15.2
Both	37.0	37.0	50.0	47.8	45.7	23.9	28.3
Total	100.0	100.0	97.8	97.8	97.8	97.8	95.7

According to the Table 5 above, there are seven purposes of communication included in this social factor. The purposes included are; to persuade, to inform, to entertain, to express feelings, to compare, to debate and to convince. There are four purposes of communication in which the Standard English has the highest percentage. Those purposes are to persuade (43.5%), to inform (50.0%), to debate (65.2%) and to convince (52.2%). In contrast, the purposes of to entertain, to express feelings and to compare show that both Standard English and Malaysian English have the highest percentage, with the percentages of 50.0%, 47.8% and 45.7% respectively. Thus, for the social factor of communication purpose, most respondents stated they used only Standard English in the social networking sites (to persuade, to inform, to debate and to convince) while for the purposes of to entertain, to express feelings and to compare, most respondents agreed they used both Standard and Malaysian English.

4.2 Social Factors that Largely Influence the Use of English Language Varieties in Social Networking Sites among the Malaysian University Students.

Table 6 below presents the results for the social factors that largely influence the use of English language varieties in the social networking sites. In this section, there are six social factors included which are the factors of topic, social distance, status, social role, formality and function or goals of interaction. The results for this category are as per below:

Table 6: Social factors that influence the use of English language varieties in SNS

Social Factors	Mean	SD
Topic	6.91	1.71
Social distance (how well do you know a person)	7.26	2.06
Status (Is the person you talk with has high status or low status)	7.17	2.40
Social role (Eg: Teacher-pupil, Doctor-patient, etc.)	7.89	1.74
Formality (Formal or informal situation)	8.24	1.79
Function or goals of interaction (What is the language being used for? To ask for help? To clarify? To comfort?)	7.63	1.92

Based on the Table 6 above, the highest mean score is the social factor 'formality' ($M = 8.24$, $SD = 1.79$). This is followed by the social factor of 'social role', with the mean score of 7.89 ($SD = 1.74$). In contrast, the lowest mean score is the social factor 'topic', with a mean score of 6.91 ($SD = 1.71$) and this is followed by the social factor 'status' ($M = 7.17$, $SD = 2.40$). The average mean score falls between 7.26 and 7.63 ($SD = 2.06$ and 1.92 respectively) for the social factors of 'social distance' and 'function or goals of interaction'. To conclude, the formality factor (formal or informal situation) is the social factor that largely influence the respondents whether to use Standard or Malaysian English variety in the social networking sites.

5.0 DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

This chapter focuses on the discussion and conclusion for the study of English language variance in social networking sites among university students. Specifically, the study looked at the choice of English language varieties based on two (2) dimensions: Standard English and Malaysian English. It focused on the students' general choice of English language variety and social factors that largely influence the use of English language varieties in social networking sites among the university students. The study will answer all designated research questions.

5.1 Standard English Implies Sophistication

Standard English is the most common preference for the Malaysian university students in Social Networking Sites. The Standard English linguistically tend to be more sophisticated and sounded write grammatically has the connotation of being smart and assertive. As Social Networking Sites involves larger audience, students wanted to appear intelligent and to be taken seriously, hence the preference use of Standard English in Social Networking Sites. While it is common to use Standard English when discussing and debating, it gives a hint to other people of the tone talking about serious matter or issues.

5.2 Malaysian English Implies Intimacy

Malaysian English on the other hand relates to feelings and affection. The result shows a parallel finding by Noriah et. al (2006) revealed that Malaysian people prefer to use Malaysian English compared to Standard English for informal conversation. It is most commonly used with siblings and parents, which show intimacy. It also used to talk about people and relationship and it brings the people closer by using Malaysian English to avoid the formality of language. It makes way for leisure conversation and doesn't require the students to be heard. Gill (2007) mentioned that

Malaysian English is not only fairly understood by Malaysian but also shows the identity and culture of Malaysian people.

5.3 Formality and Social Role Highly Influence Choice of English Language Variety

There are various social factors contributed to the use of English language varieties in the social networking sites among the Malaysian university students. Based on the result presented in the previous chapter, these students had agreed that 'formality' is the highest social factors that influence their choice of English language varieties, followed by 'social role'. They were concerned of the situation whether it is a formal or an informal communication and also their role when communicating. These findings are related to the research by Low (2011), which stated that language is to be used differently when the speakers are in different location. The students are more focused on the situational factors related to the setting, instead of the user factors. Also, English language varieties in the social networking sites would differ, depending on the utility (Kachhia & Kachhia, 2014). For instance, Standard English is likely to be localized for informal use and the language features somehow be modified, subject to the manner of communicating. It had verified that though the development of technology has created boundless connection with others, they would still ensure the language used in social networking sites suits the situation and social role, regardless the topic discussed in the social networking sites.

In conclusion, this study has highlighted the difference of Standard English and Malaysian English in terms of their usage. While Standard English may serve its purpose to discuss formal or serious issues, Malaysian English has also its functions on maintaining the relationship while being used in daily lives. The study has also brought upon the idea that both languages have served their purpose right and ones have no right to say that one preference is better than the other.

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