Accommodation in Formal and Informal Brunei English

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Abstract

This paper investigates accommodation in formal and informal Brunei English. Data was collected from sixteen female and sixteen male undergraduates at Universiti Brunei Darussalam using a map task (Faahirah, 2016) and an interview with a non-rhotic expatriate professor. It was found that the female speakers accommodate more towards the speech of their interlocutor than the male speakers in the formal conversation, though it is hard to separate the effects of formality from accommodation.

Introduction

Brunei Malay is the most widely spoken language in Brunei and it is the first language (L1) of most Bruneians with English as their second language (L2). Brunei Malay is strongly rhotic (Clynes, 2014; Deterding & Ishamina, 2016), and this may influence the pronunciation of English by Bruneians. Another influence on rhoticity is from American English through media such as movies and music.

Previous studies showed that the English of about 50% of Bruneian undergraduates were rhotic (Salbrina, 2010; Deterding & Salbrina, 2010, 2013; Nur Raihan, 2016). However, a recent study shows that rhoticity is now even more common among current undergraduates (Nur Raihan, 2017). Rhoticity may be an emerging feature in Brunei English as the local variety establishes its own styles of pronunciation (Deterding, 2015).

The use of plosives for the TH sounds has also been reported in previous studies of phonological features in Brunei English (Mossop, 1996; Deterding & Salbrina, 2013). [t] and [d] often occur at the start of words such as *think* and *there* partly due to the absence of /θ, ð/ in Malay (Clynes, 2001; Clynes & Deterding, 2011).

Although rhoticity and use of [t] and [d] for the TH sounds are two widely-reported features of Brunei English, many speakers have variable realization of these features, depending on context. This paper investigates the extent to which Bruneians change their pronunciation when talking with friends and when being interviewed by an expatriate professor. It will initially consider rhoticity and the TH sounds, but will then discuss accommodation for a few other features of pronunciation.

Phonetic Accommodation

In phonetic accommodation, speakers change the way they talk according to their interlocutors' speech. Giles, Coupland and Coupland (1991) discuss two accommodation strategies in conversation: positive accommodation (convergence) and negative accommodation (divergence). Convergence is a strategy whereby speakers change their speech to become more similar to each other, while divergence refers to speakers moving away from their interlocutor's speech style.

Giles, Coupland and Coupland (1991) suggest the usual motivation for convergence is the speakers' need to gain social approval, and Jenkins (2000) adds that one motivation for accommodation is to increase intelligibility between speakers. Meanwhile, the motivation for divergence is to maintain individual social identity and sometimes to emphasize power. Jenkins (2000) says that many individuals do not want to lose their L1 identity when they speak their

L2 English and this means preserving some features of their L1 accent. For example, a speaker may retain /r/ in non-prevocalic environments even when their interlocutor is non-rhotic. Indeed, some speakers may exaggerate some features of their pronunciation in order to emphasize their individuality.

The current study discusses the possibility of accommodation in the two phonological features mentioned above, rhoticity and TH, as well as some other apparent instances of accommodation, both positive and negative.

Phonological features in Brunei English

The phonological features of Brunei English have been studied widely in recent years. Here, rhoticity and the TH sounds will be described.

Rhoticity

A rhotic accent involves occurrence of /r/ in words wherever 'r' occurs in the spelling. This includes at the end of a word or before a consonant, for example in *far* and *hard* respectively. In contrast, in a non-rhotic variety, /r/ only occurs before a vowel in words such as *read* and *hurry*. Non-rhoticity is the prestige norm in England and Wales while a rhotic accent is the norm in most of the United States (Wells, 1982). We should note that, even in non-rhotic accents, /r/ may occur at the end of a word if the next word begins with a vowel, such as the phrase *far away*. This is called 'linking r' (Roach, 2009, p. 115). Here, an accent is described as rhotic or non-rhotic, while tokens are described as having R-colouring or no R-colouring.

Rhoticity was not mentioned by Mossop (1996), possibly because it was not prominent in Brunei English then. However more recent studies (Salbrina, 2010; Deterding & Salbrina, 2010, 2013, Nur Raihan, 2016) show that rhoticity in English is now common among young Bruneians, and Nur Raihan (2017) shows that it has increased substantially over the past nine years. There are four possible influences that may have resulted in increased rhoticity: American English through film and music media; Brunei Malay as L1; Philippine English through teachers in schools and domestic helpers; and spelling pronunciation.

Brunei English may still in be in the third phase, also called 'nativization', of Schneider's Dynamic Model (2007). This suggests that it is in the process of developing its own independent status. However, it may be moving towards the fourth phase, labeled 'endonormative stabilization', as many phonological characteristics are becoming well established (Deterding, 2015). The increasing occurrence of rhoticity may be part of this process of endonormative stabilization, though the fact that American English and Philippine English might be influencing Brunei English suggests that it is still subject to external influences, so perhaps it is still in the third phase.

Initial voiceless TH

Traditionally, voiceless and voiced TH, the sounds at the start of *thin* and *this* respectively, are pronounced as [θ] and [ð] by most people in the UK, USA and Australia (Wells, 1982). However, some speakers in Ireland and New York use [t] and [d] (Wells, 1982) and many speakers in London use [f] and [v] (Wells, 1982).

In new varieties of Englishes, voiceless TH is often pronounced as [t] in Singapore (Deterding, 2007) and Malaysia (Baskaran, 2004). One influence is because of borrowed words into Malay from English such as *terapi* ('therapy') and *teater* ('theatre') (Deterding & Salbrina, 2013) in which the voiceless TH in English is pronounced as [t] in Malay, so it is hardly surprising if the same words are pronounced with [t] in Brunei English.

Data

Sixteen female speakers and sixteen male speakers were recorded for the current study. All were ethnically Brunei Malay. They were aged between 18 and 25 years and all were full time undergraduates at UBD. They are referred to as M1 to M16 for the male speakers and F1 to F16 for the female speakers. 30 speakers gave Brunei Malay as their first language (L1) and English as their second language (L2). One male speaker gave Kedayan as his L1 and one gave English.

The study involves two kinds of recordings. The formal data consists of a five-minute interview with an expatriate professor from Britain who has a non-rhotic accent. The interview was conducted in a quiet office in UBD. The other involves an informal conversation of each speaker talking to their friend. These two recordings are used to provide a comparison between formal and informal speech and also to see if the speakers accommodate towards the pronunciation of their interlocutor.

In the formal data, the interviewer started with the question 'What did you do in your last vacation?' and then progressed to other topics such as hobbies and plans for the future. While some participants spoke easily and fluently, others seemed more reticent, so there may be substantial contrasts with the informal data.

The informal data consists of eight female-female recordings and eight male-male recordings. They are referred to as MG1 to MG8 for the male group and FG1 to FG8 for the female group. The informal recordings lasted between three to five minutes. The speakers were seated opposite each other and each had a map. The maps use a similar design as those in Slovak (2007) but the landmarks are changed to make them more suitable in the local context (Faahirah, 2016). The speakers were not allowed to see each other's map. As shown in Figure 1, each speaker has a different map. One speaker, the Leader, has a route while the other speaker, the Follower, does not. The Leader describes the route to the Follower.
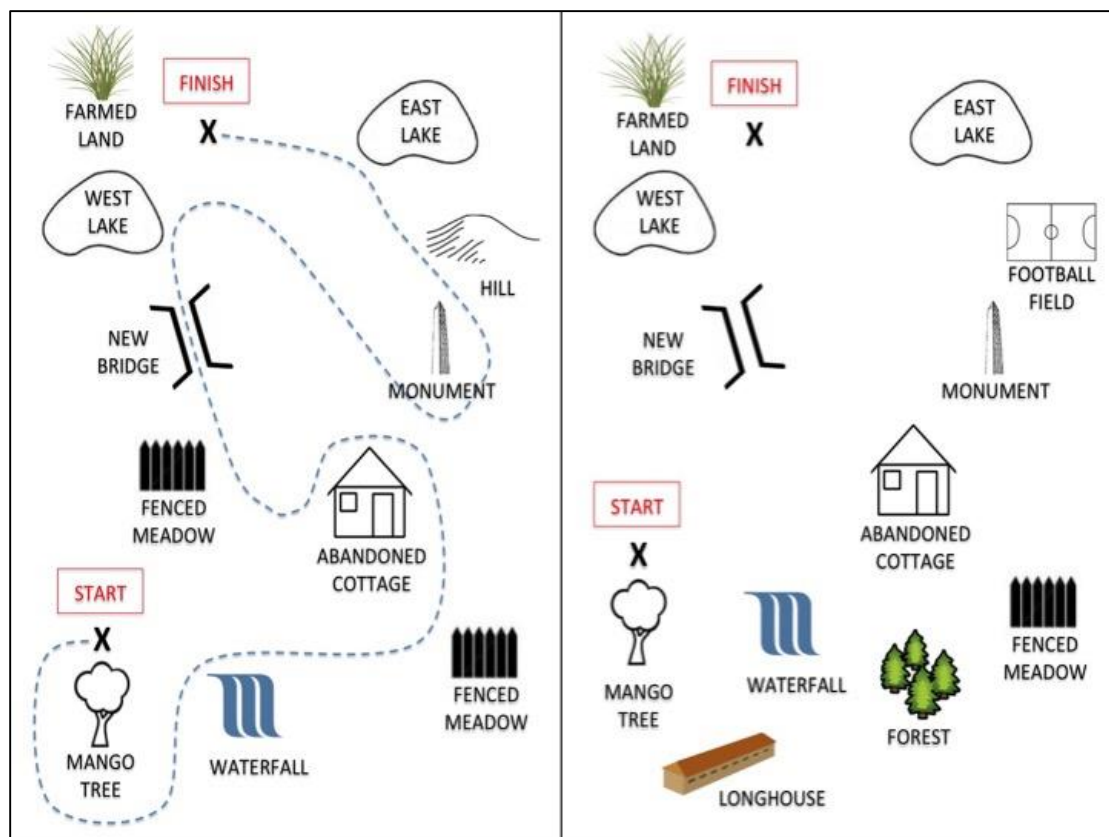

Figure 1. English map for Leader and Follower (Faahirah, 2016)

Methodology

Five tokens of potential R-colouring and initial voiceless TH were investigated for each speaker in the formal and informal data. The tokens selected for R-colouring consist of the first five tokens of potential [r] in the coda of a stressed syllable in a content word. For TH, any word containing voiceless TH was selected. In some cases, fewer than five tokens were found, especially for voiceless TH. In these cases, all the potential tokens were analysed.

The researcher listened to all the tokens and perceptually judged the presence of R-colouring and the realization of voiceless TH. A second researcher also listened to all the selected tokens and provided an independent perceptual judgement. In cases of disagreement, both researchers listened to the tokens again to see if they could agree. In cases of continued disagreement, the analysis was based on the auditory judgments of the researcher (as she is a native speaker of Brunei English).

For the incidence of R-colouring, there was 85% agreement in the formal data and 82% agreement in the informal data on the incidence of R-colouring between the two raters. For TH sounds, there was 77% agreement in the formal and 89% agreement in the informal data.

Results

Table 1 shows the incidence of R-colouring in the formal and informal data. It suggests that the female speakers are significantly more rhotic in the informal than formal conversation (χ^2=6.63, df=1, p=0.01) while the male speakers are a little more rhotic in the formal than the informal conversation, though the latter shift falls just short of significance (χ^2=3.63, df=1, p=0.06). Given that the interviewer in the interviews in the formal recording has a non-rhotic accent, it is surprising that the male speakers are more rhotic in the formal context. It seems that they are diverging from the pronunciation of the interviewer, using negative accommodation possibly to emphasize the independent nature of their own speech.

	Female		Male	
	[r]	no [r]	[r]	no [r]
Formal	66 (82.5%)	14 (17.5%)	70 (88.6%)	9 (11.4%)
Informal	68 (95.8%)	3 (4.2%)	57 (77%)	17 (23%)

Table 1 Occurrence of R-colouring in formal and informal conversations

Table 2 shows the pronunciation of voiceless TH in formal and informal data. It suggests that both the female and male speakers use [t] more in the formal than the informal context. This is surprising, as one would expect [θ] to occur more often in the formal context, as it represents the standard pronunciation. Though both shifts are small and not significant (χ^2=0.13, df=1, p=0.72) for female speakers and (χ^2=3.25, df=1, p=0.07) for male speakers. the fact that [θ] is not more common in formal contexts is surprising. Perhaps [t] for voiceless TH is becoming the standard in Brunei English. However, notice that the shift in the use of [t] is greater for the male speakers than the female speakers. This confirms that male speakers may have a greater tendency for negative accommodation, to move away from the pronunciation of the interviewer (who always uses [θ] for voiceless TH). In a later section of this paper, I will consider an example in which a male speaker seems to move from using [θ] to [t] during the interview.

	Female		Male	
	[θ]	[t]	[θ]	[t]
Formal	25(48%)	27 (52%)	27 (47.4%)	30 (52.6%)
Informal	8 (53.3%)	7 (46.7%)	16 (69.6%)	7 (30.4%)

Table 2 Pronunciation of voiceless TH in formal and informal conversations

Attempts were made to identify instances of accommodation. For example, if a speaker had more R-colouring when talking with their friend than during the interview and if their friend also had a rhotic accent, this was counted as an instance of positive accommodation. In contrast, if a speaker had fewer tokens of R-colouring in the informal data despite the rhoticity of their friend, this was counted as negative accommodation.

| | [r] | | TH | |
	+	−	+	−
Female	3	0	0	1
Male	1	1	4	2
Total	4 (80%)	1 (20%)	4 (42.9%)	3 (57.1%)

Table 3. Total number of positive and negative accommodation for rhoticity and TH

For rhoticity, three female speakers (F7, F9 and F11) show evidence of positive accommodation. F7 has fewer (2 out of 5) R-colouring tokens with the British speaker and has more (4 out of 5) R-colouring tokens with her interlocutor (who has 2 out of 2). Similarly, F9 and F11 have fewer (3 out of 5) R-colouring tokens with the British speaker and have all (5 out of 5) R-colouring tokens with their interlocutors, both of whom also have R-colouring in all their tokens (4 out of 4). The instance of positive accommodation for rhoticity for the male data is when M5 has no R-colouring in all five tokens with the British speaker and has R-colouring in all five tokens with his rhotic Bruneian interlocutor.

In contrast, M10 shows negative accommodation for rhoticity, as he has more (3 out of 5) R-colouring tokens in the formal conversation but he has fewer (one out of five) R-colouring tokens when talking to his rhotic Bruneian friend (who has 5 out of 5).

For TH, there are four speakers (M9, M10, M13 and M14) who show evidence of positive accommodation. M9 has [θ] (4 out of 4) with the British speaker and (2 out of 3) with his friend (2 out of 3). M10 has [θ] (3 out of 3) with the British speaker and (2 out of 3) with his friend (2 out of 3). M13 has [t] with the British speaker (4 out of 4) and has an instance of [θ] with his friend who has more [θ] (5 out of 5). M14 has [θ] (1 out of 2) with British speaker and more with his friend (5 out of 5). His friend has an instance of [θ]. However, it is hard to interpret the data from M13 and M14. Although they both show positive accommodation with their friends by using [θ] in the informal data, at the same time we could say they exhibit negative accommodation by using [t] with the British speaker.

One female speaker (F3) shows clear evidence of negative accommodation. She has more [t] (3 out of 3) with the British speaker and has [θ] (1 out of 1) with her interlocutor who uses [t] (2 out of 2) so in this case her speech is dissimilar to her interlocutor in both contexts. One male speaker (M7) also shows negative accommodation. He has more [t] (5 out of 5) with the British speaker and one [θ] (1 out of 1) with his interlocutor who always uses [t] (2 out of 2). M8 has more [θ] (3 out of 3) with the British speaker and has [t] (2 out of 2) with his friend who has [θ] (1 out of 1). Again, this is hard to evaluate, as M7 could be regarded as positive accommodation in the formal data or negative accommodation in the informal data or else it might just be seen as a style shift because of changes in formality.

Examples of Positive Accommodation

Here, I will show some instances of positive accommodation. In example (1), F9 hears no [r] in *work* spoken by the interviewer and she may imitate this pronunciation feature.

(1)   F9-Int:137
    Int: would you like to do some lab **work** [ˈwɜːk] maybe forensic **work** [ˈwɜːk] or maybe erm medical testing that sort of thing
    F9:   yeah i'd like to do medical testing (.) kind of **work** [ˈwɜːk] but (.) i think i'm going to spend more time in the laboratory (.) doing experiments and all yeah

In contrast, in the informal conversation, F9 shifts towards the rhotic speech of F10, particularly for the word *Farmed* as sh1own in (2), in which both speakers have R-colouring.

(2)   FG5:176
    F9:   okay (.) just go straight to the left? and then: (.) you'll see a **Farmed** [ˈfɑːrm] Land (.)
    F10:   okay straight:? to the left? i'm walking down the little? (.) and then okay (.) erm (.) **Farmed** [ˈfɑːrm] Land okay right?

Another example of positive accommodation is by F2 in (3) for the formal context and (4) for the informal context. In (3), she uses an aspirated /t/ in *city*, and her interlocutor would similarly use an aspirated /t/ in this word, but in (4) she uses the flapped /t/ in *Waterfall*, just like F1. So we can say that in this instance she is copying the pronunciation of her friend.

(3)   F2-Int:18
    Int: okay so did you really like it in lo- in (.) leeds
    F2:   erm: yeah it's very different from london but (.) leeds is (.) erm (.) in my opinion a bigger **city** [ˈsɪtʰi] than (.) the (.) <tsk> (.) towns around it

(4)   FG1:7
    F1:   er (1) turn (.) left? (1) and then you go straight? (.) and then after that you turn right? (2) and along the way? can you see the **Waterfall**? [ˈwɔṭərfɔl]
    F2:   the **Waterfall** [ˈwɔṭərfɔl] is just straight from where i am? (.) but yes i can see the **Waterfall** [ˈwɔṭərfɔl]?

Examples of Negative Accommodation

In contrast, speakers sometimes exhibit negative accommodation, perhaps to emphasize their own style of speech. In fact, we sometimes have evidence that speakers clearly move away from the speech of the Interviewer. In (5), M1 uses the standard pronunciation for initial voiceless TH in the *theme*. However, when his interlocutor repeats the word also using [θ], M1 then shifts from the standard pronunciation and instead uses [t] at the start of the word, apparently emphasizing that his speech is distinct from that of the Interviewer.

(5)   M1-Int:139
    Int: and and johor is that also good for shopping or did you just visit people
    M1:   in johor i (.) it's not mostly shopping though (.) i went to: **theme** [ˈθiːm] parks (.) yeah
    Int: right what are the **theme** [ˈθiːm] parks in johor
    M1:   the (.) erm: (.) the water **theme** [tiːm] parks

Another similar example of negative accommodation is by M2 in (6). He starts off using British pronunciation of *France* with the vowel [ɑː], but then, after the interviewer pronounces

the word in the same way using the vowel [ɑː], M2 adopts a more American pronunciation of the word with [æ] instead of [ɑː], apparently emphasizing his difference from the Interviewer.

(6)   M2-Int:202
         Int: okay (.) if you could travel anywhere in the world (.) where would you like
                 to go to
         M2:   anywhere in the world? it would (.) probably be: <tsk> (1) @ it's erm: (.)
                 it's probably gonna be either: (.) england or **france** (ˈfrɑːns)
         Int: right (.) you (.) you haven't been to **france** (ˈfrɑːns) before
         M2:   i've actually been to **france** (fræns) (.) yeah

Conclusion

While it is often difficult to identify accommodation clearly, as shifts in pronunciation may reflect the formality of the context or else accommodation towards one's interlocutor, it seems that the female speakers tend to show positive accommodation while some male speakers appear to exhibit negative accommodation, perhaps to emphasize their identity. Further research needs to be done in terms of accommodation to see if this pattern of negative accommodation by male speakers is evident in a wider range of data.

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