

Current Trends in Pronoun Usage Among Malay Speakers

by

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This paper is an attempt to describe the current trends in pronoun usage among Malays across three sociolinguistic variables: gender, age and formality. Data was generated by questionnaires, taped conversations and random observations of specific groups of people. These were carried out in the environment of the IIUM campus and its immediate locality. The results showed that educated or urbanized women, rarely, if ever, use Malay pronouns to friends and colleagues. The preferred address terms are those of English first and second personal pronouns. This research also showed that men differed in their use of pronouns from women, and even ignored attempts of women who do use Malay pronouns by not reciprocating with the same Malay address terms. This suggests a male-dominant distribution of the use of the specific pronouns. Another observation is that the younger groups of Malay speakers not only use more types of pronouns, but they also appear to set new trends of address terms.

Introduction

In the classic study of Brown and Gilman on the use of pronouns in Europe, users of the language showed extreme disparity in the use of non-reciprocal pronouns in the early part of the twentieth century. Those in power were addressed as “vous” by subordinates who, in response, were addressed as “tu.” The former pronoun was also widely used to address elders and older people to show not only respect, but also politeness. However, Brown and Gilman also noted that the term “tu” was preferred by both “groups” when addressing each other within their circle. Thus, it would seem that the phenomenon of differing pronoun usage is determined by social factors, which may not be within the bounds of the society players to bring about change.

The current trend in pronoun usage in Malaysia, which has been en vogue for the last forty years, at least in the urban areas or within educated society, which is the main

subject of this paper, is that women use English pronouns while men use Malay pronouns in Malay sentences, regardless of the language use at point of communication, be it Malay or English. It is also observed that men use Malay pronouns only when speaking with other men, which immediately points to solidarity, as proposed by Brown and Gilman, in their study. Preliminary observations of the exclusive distribution of the pronouns among the Malays, however, indicate them to be more gender markers. But if women are seen as subordinate to men, then this would be so in addition to the pronouns being solidarity markers.

This paper will examine if, and how, solidarity is actually influencing the use of Malay and English pronouns, that is, how far gender influences the choice of pronouns among all speakers. A discourse analysis will also be carried out to identify the factors and/or environments that might dictate or determine the distribution of pronouns, both Malay and English, found in the conversations of the selected group of speakers, especially women, since the trend show that they do not have access to the full range of Malay pronouns in the everyday communication.

English and the Vernacular

The dichotomy between the colonialist language, English, and the vernacular, is well-known throughout the world, especially in the British colony. Since the paper is looking at current trends in pronoun usage among Malay speakers, a brief history of English in Malaysia would serve as a useful background which may shed some light in the discussion later on in the paper. Colonisation of Malaysia, then Malaya, by the British started over a hundred years ago, an event which is well-documented in the annals of history of the region. English, thus, became the language of commerce and government, and soon the

lingua franca of the region. Those speaking the language were educated and held good positions with the British-oriented government offices. Administrative employment (white-collar), as opposed to farm work, was perceived to be prestigious. As such, English became a coveted language with the Malay language, and all other vernaculars, taking a back seat as fluency in the language would almost guarantee a government position. Eventually, as English became widely spoken in the country, code-switching emerged as a noticeable, if not distinct, variety among the Malays.

Rubin (1968, in Wardhaugh 1992) reported that in Paraguay, for instance, the major population speaks the native language, Guarani; however, Spanish being the official and prestigious language is spoken mainly by women of the upper class society. In many places in Southeast Asia, such as Singapore and the Philippines, one is ensured a swift and polite service, if English is spoken in a commercial environment.

Women and Language

Various research on women and language pretty much present the fact that women and men have communicative styles which are different from each other's due to some sort of sociocultural expectations about their abilities and interactional patterns (Tannen 1993). Differences in speech styles and motivations can be attributed to language socialisation between men and women (Bernstein 1972; Maltz & Borker 1982; Tannen 1990; Sheldon 1993; Coates 1994) whereby speakers talk and socialize within their own same sex peer groups (Maltz and Borker 1982; Tannen 1993). Being insecure, women sought ways to express themselves in ways that reflect a higher social standing (Lakoff 1975; Labov 1970; Trudgill 1980). One of the ways they do this is by hypercorrecting aspects of language, as detailed by Labov's in his classic New York study on women in

the various social classes. In addition, it was found that women tend to speak the standard form of the language which they perceived as more prestigious than the non-standard, since it is the variety spoken by members of the upper class (Fischer, 1958; Labov, 1966; Shuy, Wolfram, and Riley 1967).

Studies that show that women are politer than men are based on findings that show women using less slang and abusive words (Smith-Hefner, 1988; Kramer, 1973). Smith-Hefner (1988) in a study of Javanese also found that while women are polite because of their secondary status, men do so to express their superiority and authority. While it is acceptable for men to be assertive and forceful (Miller et al., 1986), women are often perceived negatively when they try to do the same thing (Tannen, 1990). Differences in language use are reflections of sociocultural expectations about men's and women's abilities and interactional patterns (Tannen, 1993), and the study of language and gender is part of the more general study of relations between language and social meaning (Ochs, 1992). Therefore, it is clear that gendered behavior is shaped and constrained by the situation and the context including those pertaining to language.

Distribution of Pronouns in Malay

The following pronoun distribution of the Malay language is taken from *Nahu Melayu Mutakhir* (Complete Malay Grammar) by Prof. Dr. Asmah Hj. Omar (1986). Consistent to the topic of this paper, which focuses on the first and second person pronouns, only the first and second person pronouns are listed.

Table 1. Distribution of First and Second Person Pronouns of Malay

	First	Second
Formal	saya (I)	anda (you)
		kamu (you)
		awak (you)
		saudara (you—referring to a male)
		saudari (you—referring to a female)
Informal	aku (I)	kau/engkau (you)
	kita (we— Sing.or Plural)	awak (you)

The list above shows the types of pronouns found in Malay, be it written or spoken, formal or non-formal. With the exceptions of *saudara* and *saudari*, which are extremely formal pronouns, gender is not indicated nor reflected in any of the other pronouns. There are also dialectal forms of pronouns not listed above, and they vary tremendously according to regions. These pronouns are not accounted for in this study as it only looks at the spoken Malay in the urban areas in the vicinity of Kuala Lumpur. Since this paper focuses on informal pronouns, below is the preliminary distribution of informal pronouns we observed in spoken Malay, with gender taken into consideration:

Table 2. Distribution of Informal First and Second Pronouns of Malay

First		Second	
Male	Female	Male	Female
aku	--	kau	--
		awak	awak

The pronoun *kita* (we) from Table 1 is not included in Table 2, as it is a form that can be either singular or plural, in addition to the fact that we did not observe this to occur in our speech observations. Its singular form is used by women in certain dialects and children.

In general, *aku* (I) and *kau* (you) are also observed not to occur in conversations between unfamiliar people. Hamilton (1992) in his compilation of Malay words for tourists advises first-time learners of Malay to avoid as far as possible the second person pronoun *kau* either by omitting it entirely or by substituting it with the name, or terms related to the rank, employment, or relationship with the hearer.

Methodology

Data was gathered via three ways. The first is by direct observations of Malay speakers in the environment of a university in Kuala Lumpur, which as mentioned earlier, would ensure a “dialect-free” speech that would cause fewer variations in pronoun usage other than those used in the urban speech. The second is by taping recorded natural speech of twenty Malaysian students ranging in age from twenty-one to thirty-nine. All of them had lived, worked or done at least two years of college in Kuala Lumpur or one of the major cities. This is significant as it not only shows that they are educated but also exposed to urban life where either English is spoken widely. The recorded speech was analysed for frequency and environment of pronoun occurrences. Two sets of data were collected. The first set consisted of recordings of natural conversation of six groups of people: 2 mixed, 2 women-only, and 2 men-only. For the mixed groups, the first ranged in age from early twenties to mid thirties, while the second was older with age ranging from late twenties to late thirties and had working experience. For the women-only groups, the first ranged in age from early twenties to early thirties and the second from late twenties to early thirties. For the men-only groups, the subjects range from mid twenties to early thirties. Only one

tape of the men-only groups was transcribable. This recording included data of an unplanned interruption by a woman, which provided further natural data for the research. The second set of data, Part Two, is on the perceived use of pronouns among Malay speakers. A questionnaire was distributed via e-mail to Malaysian students who were asked to complete the task of filling in the blanks of a dialogue with first and second person pronouns that were deleted earlier. Email was chosen because it reaches more people faster. It also gave the students time to reflect on the actual usage of pronouns in society as they perceive it. The subjects in the first part of the study were also invited to participate in the questionnaire. The purpose of the quiz was to see if there was a consensus on the use of English and Malay pronouns among educated Malay. Interviews with a few of the subjects followed the quiz to compare the subjects' answers to the results obtained in Part One to that of Part Two, because what the subjects themselves do may not be what they perceive the society to be or what they think it should be.

Results

a. Direct Observations

In the Malay society, the use of pronouns *aku* (I) and *kau* (kau) when addressing unfamiliar people is considered impolite. This was also observed when addressing someone older or superiors (for e.g., student addressing teacher). Men, as shown earlier in the pronoun distribution chart (Table 2) have free access to both Malay first and second person pronouns; however, we observe that these pronouns, *aku* and *kau*, do not occur freely. They were used only when speaking to other men of about the same age or

younger, or to those of the same economic rank. With older or higher ranked men, the formal pronouns are opted.

With the women, the distribution of pronouns in natural conversation (Malay, English, or code-switching) is shown in Table 3, in comparison to the pronouns found in the conversations of the male speakers.

Table 3. Distribution of Pronouns in Informal Malay

Male		Female	
First	Second	First	Second
aku	kau	I	you

The distribution of pronouns is rather startling. While the men have free access to the Malay pronouns, the women do not. In fact, the English equivalents, “I” and “you” are found consistently all throughout the observed and recorded conversations. The context of the occurrences of “I” in the speech of Malay women is similar to the occurrence of *aku* in the informal speech of Malay men—only with familiar people or those perceived to be on the same economic rank. “I” and “aku” in women’s and men’s speech, respectively, were not found in conversations with:

1. strangers or unfamiliar people,
2. older or respected people,
3. people of higher ranking such as employers.

With younger addressees such as children, “aku” is occasionally used by both men and women, which could be a show of authority or to emphasize a point. Otherwise, kinship terms such as that signify the relationship, such as “Uncle,” are found to be used. English pronouns are never used with children or by children. Children also do not address their elders with the second person pronoun, “kau,” nor do they use the first person pronoun,

“aku” to address themselves. With family, relatives, and close family elders, kinship terms are often used. With other people, the title of the addressee must be added to the kinship term or name such as *Pakcik* (uncle), *Makcik* (aunt), *Abang* (big brother), or *Kakak* (big sister) before the name to indicate respect of rank. Because of the importance of showing respect to people of higher rank in the Malay society and the sense of social hierarchy involved in the use of personal pronouns, Malays usually prefer to use their first name or kinship terms when addressing themselves (Oey and Hamilton, 1990).

Adolescents are often heard using “aku/kau” with each other regardless of gender. However, this is done only with close friends of about the same age. When they finish high school, women will stop using Malay pronouns. Some may continue to use Malay pronouns but within a small circle of friends. Eventually, their circle of *aku-kau* friends become smaller, causing them to succumb to the use of English pronouns as they go into the workforce, where English tends to be the dominant language (actually depending on where one works).

b. Recorded Conversations

The recorded conversations among the selected speakers show the use of both Malay and English, either separately on occasions, or in a code-switched manner. The pronoun usage was noted regardless of the language used, and presented below according to the language where they occurred in and the type of group the conversation took place.

Use of Pronouns in Malay sentences

Mixed-interaction

Data collected from the two mixed groups are shown below. Names of female subjects are capitalized here, and throughout the paper; while *F* and *M* refer to *Female* and *Male*, respectively.

Table 4. Occurrences of Pronouns in Mixed Groups

		Age	Pronoun Type			
			Aku	Kau	I	You
1F	NORA	34	0	0	91	11
2F	AIDA	23	0	0	11	8
3F	KAT	29	0	0	3	3
4M	Nizam	22	0	0	1	4
5M	Jasmin	22	0	0	0	0
6M	Kam	26	0	0	5	6
7F	YAZA	29	0	0	2	2
8F	ZAINI	29	0	0	2	4
9F	NORA	36	0	0	10	15
10M	Din	39	5	1	9	1
11M	Mazlan	37	6	3	25	2
12M	Saiful	33	4	3	15	4
	Total: Men		15	7	55 (31.6%)	16 (27.1%)
	Women		0	0	119 (68.4%)	43 (72.9%)

Note: Only pronouns (Malay and English) in MALAY SENTENCES were counted.

In the mixed-group conversations, we found very few occurrences of Malay pronouns, even among the men. This is contrary to the general observation stated earlier that Malay men use Malay pronouns. In fact, with the first group (1-6), Malay pronouns were not found at all. Because the general observation is that the men would use Malay pronouns only with other men, the transcriptions were further analysed, and the results show that the men did not speak or refer to each other throughout the conversation. It was observed that remarks were made without reference to anyone in particular. Secondly, 5M spoke only English, and therefore no pronouns were counted since this

section only looked at Malay sentences. However, the fact that the data shows no evidence of 5M not using Malay pronouns, or Malay for that matter throughout the two-hour conversation, does not mean that he does not use Malay or Malay pronouns at all.

The second group, 7 to 12, shows the occurrences of twenty-two Malay pronouns, all by the men, while none occurred in the speech of the women. Transcripts show that the men in the second mixed group (10M,11M,12M) spoke to each other and also to the women. However, all twenty-two of the Malay pronouns are found only when the men referred to each other, which supports the general observation of Malay-pronoun usage among men only. When speaking with the women, the men used only English pronouns. This suggests that English pronouns are associated with women, as evident in Table 3. The data also shows fifty-five instances of “I” and sixteen instances of “you” in the men’s speech. In fact, Table 4 shows more instances of English pronouns than Malay by the men. The women did not use Malay pronouns at all throughout the conversation. Their use of English pronouns more than doubles that of the men’s. The overall findings of these two groups support the pronoun distribution in Table 3, with one addition: men also use English pronouns in their Malay sentences, but only when the addressee is a woman. This indicates an important finding which is that English pronouns are not used exclusively by the women.

Overall, the data of the two groups show that English pronouns are much more preferred than Malay pronouns by both men and women. What is not indicated in the total data is the frequency of instances of English pronouns in the men’s speech when they were speaking to each other as opposed to when speaking to the women. This is because it is difficult to determine who was being addressed to by individual speakers, compared to

when Malay pronouns were used. The transcription clearly shows that the use of Malay pronouns, “aku/kau”, is by a male speaker to a male addressee. In addition, the transcription shows that whenever a male speaker uses the Malay first person pronoun, “aku,” the immediate turn-taking will go to another male. Thus, where there are occurrences of Malay pronouns by a male speaker, they appear to signal the immediate turn for another male speaker. Below is an excerpt of a dialogue that shows the consistent transition of pronoun use of speakers from the second group in Table 4. The capitalized names refer to female speakers and all the pronouns used, Malay and English, are highlighted.

- (1) NORA: Tapi nak dapat tujuh puluh ribu tu kena pinjam dululah I rasa you got to borrow somewhere masa nak masuk tu.
“but to get the seventy thousand dollars..must borrow first I think you have to borrow somewhere...at the time of entry..”
- (2) Din : masa I, I jual kereta I.
“during my time, I sold my car.”
- (3) Mazlan: Yes. I ni nak bawak masuk tak tau lagi.
“Yes. I don’t know how I will bring it in.”
- (4) NORA: macam mana?
“so, how?”
- (5) Mazlan: Lepas tu dari JB, baru dapat keluar dalam e-mail, komplek pasal apa JB murah.
“After that from JB, just out in e-mail, someone complained about JB being cheap.”
- (6) ZAINI: pulak??
“What??”
- (7) Mazlan: hah, tu sekarang dia nak standardized semua sekali.
“hah, so now they want to standardize everything.”
- (8) NORA: How is standardized? What is standardized?
- (9) Mazlan: dah standardize dah. Tapi..
“it’s already standardized. But..”
- (10) YAZA: You’ve got to follow the book.
- (11) Mazlan: Ah, baru je.
“Ah, but only recently.”
- (12) Din: Tak ah. They just refer, to query...
“No. They just refer, to query...”

- (13) Mazlan: Bila kena marah, bila orang marah, dia query lah because ada orang kat JB dia murah.
 “When they get complaints, when people get angry, they query because there are people in JB who got it really cheap.”
- (14) Din: Eeh, murah betul, Lepas tu?
 “Ee, that is cheap, and then?”
- (15) Mazlan: Tapi **I** still, **I** want to send to JB. Kan? Boleh, boleh, ambik dok, beritau **I** just, kalau apa, tak kisah lah.
 “But I still, I want to send to JB. Right? Can, can, take, just tell me, if anything, I don’t mind.”
- (16) *Din: Tak dak problem lah. **Aku** dah bagi tau dah adik ipar **aku**.
 “No problem. I have informed my brother-in-law already.”
- (17) Mazlan: Adik ipar **kau** kat mana?
 “Where is your brother-in-law?”

Note that the pronouns used for the most part of this conversation were English and when Din initiated the use of Malay pronouns in (16), Mazlan spoke next, reflecting a shared knowledge among the speakers, males and females, that he was being referred to and that it was his turn to speak. This is further marked by his use of Malay pronoun *kau* in response to Din’s *aku*. The use of pronoun *aku* immediately signals that speech is occurring between two men. A total of six instances of pronoun switching from English to Malay in the men’s speech were counted in the mixed-group data. In Din’s first turn in the earlier part of the above dialogue, he used English pronouns and this was reciprocated by Mazlan indicating that the use of pronouns among Malay men is determined by the speaker. However, when English pronouns were used, the next turn can be either be taken by a male or female, as seen above where (1), a female, is followed by (2), a male, who in turn is followed by (3), a male.

Women-Only Group

As mentioned earlier, data was collected from two groups of female speakers. In the table below, the women in the first group (1-3) were roommates and attending college.

One of them (2F), in her late twenties and the oldest in the group, was an English teacher in Malaysia; and at the time of the collection of data, she was doing her graduate studies. The other two were transfer students from the same college in Kuala Lumpur and had known each other for two years. The women in the second group (4-6) were all in their late twenties and had working experience. One is the spouse of one of the male participants and another is the teacher from the first group. Individual data for both groups can be seen below:

Table 5. Pronouns Occurrences Among Female Speakers of Malay

	Pronoun Type			
	aku	kau	I	you
1F	20	1	2	1
2F	51	15	18	17
3F	10	0	4	3
4F	0	0	46	37
5F	0	0	38	33
6F	8	2	23	17
TOTAL	89	17	131	108

As in the mixed groups, the transcriptions show that almost two-thirds of these two conversations were carried out in English. Among the first women-only group (1-3), women did use the Malay pronouns, “aku/kau” in their conversation. The table also shows that subjects 1-3 preferred using Malay pronouns to English pronouns. MUNAH (2F), for instance, had fifty-one counts of “aku.” This almost triples her use of English pronouns, at fifteen. In fact, she used more Malay pronouns compared to the other two women. One reason for this as shown in the transcription is that she dominated the conversation, being the oldest (“big sister”) in the group. However, she also used English

pronouns consistently and the transcription actually shows her using English seventy-five per cent of the time instead of Malay in her conversation. LAILI (3F) used a dialectal form of the first person pronoun, *saya*, (see (11) in the excerpt below) which is typical of dialects in northern Malaysia. LAILI informed me later, in an interview, that she used English pronouns only when speaking English. The above results, however, show this to be untrue. MUNAH's use of Malay pronouns with her roommates as seen in the narration below and throughout the taping is consistent. In my interview with her later, she told me that the only time she would be using English pronouns is when she is speaking in English. However, the data in Table 5 negates this assertion. The excerpt below shows the evidence of the use of English and Malay pronouns in the speech of the three women:

- (1) MUNAH: eee...tensionlah. I mean, all those, all those administration work. **I** memang tak suka, tak larat selalu.
“eee...tension. I mean, all those, all those administration work. I really don't like, can't stand it always.”
- (2) LAILI: Tu nak ngajar ape, I mean..
“Then what to teach, I mean..”
- (3) MUNAH: **You** memanglah, **aku** rasa, **you** akan, kalau **you** jadi counselor, **you** boleh masuk sekolah tapi **you** tak ngajar.
“You really, I feel, you will, if you become a counselor, you can enter school but you won't be teaching.”
- (4) NA: La..boring nya.
“La...that's boring.”
- (5) MUNAH: **You** akan counsel budak je...
“You will counsel kids only..”
- (6) NA: Counsel? Oh my God...
- (7) MUNAH: Macam kat sekolah **I**, kat sekolah **I** ada sorang cikgu, kerja dia counseling aja. Yang, yang ganti bila **I** keluar dulu.
“Like at my school, at my school there's one teacher, her work is just counseling. The one, the one who replaced me when I left.”
- (8) LAILI: Maknanya kerja eh?
“That means work right?”
- (9) NA: Loan.
- (10) MUNAH: Loan? Ah...**you** boleh kerja dengan mana-mana company.
“Loan? Ah..you can work with any company.”
- (11) LAILI: Tulah, **saya** rasa, dok kerja dengan factory.

- (12) MUNAH: “Yes, I feel, (I) work with factories.”
Macam, macam Mat lah, macam dia sama aje macam **kau** punya line.
“Like...like..Mat...like he is in your line.”
- (13) LAILI: Ah, lebih kuranglah, kalau tak **saya** ambik Masters jadi lecturer je lah.
“Ah, about the same, if not I do Masters to be a lecturer.”
- (14) MUNAH: Eh..lecturer mesti ada PhD sekarang.
“Lecturers must have PhD nowadays.”
- (15) LAILI: Oh, PhD pulak? Ah..**I** tak nak ambik PhD.
“Oh, PhD? Ah..I don’t want to do PhD.”

Clearly in the above excerpt, MUNAH does use English pronouns in her Malay (lines 1 and 7) and this occurred consistently throughout the transcription. LAILI used “saya” (lines 11 and 13) but her use of “I” in line (15) is contrary to her statement that she only used English pronouns in English sentences.

MUNAH’s (2F) persistent use of Malay pronouns provides for an interesting case study. Some of her interactions with a few male friends were also observed. With close male friends, she has addressed them on several occasions using Malay pronouns, but there were no instance of any of the men reciprocating. Instead, English pronouns are used in response. Below is an excerpt of a dialogue between MUNAH and a male addressee that illustrate this point in the non-reciprocal use of Malay pronouns between male and female speakers:

- (1) MUNAH (F): Mohar..**kau** nak tak buku ini, kalau tak **aku** buang je.
“Mohar...do you want this book. if not I will just throw it away.”
- (2) Mat (M): Entahlah, **I** tak nak kot. Cuba tanya Lan dia nak tak?
“Don’t know, I don’t think so. Try asking Lan if he wanted it?”
- (3) MUNAH (F): Lan? Lan..**you** nak tak buku ni? **I** nak bagi kat Mohar dia tak nak.
“Lan? Lan...you want this book? I wanted to give to Mohar but he didn’t want it.”

The transcription shows that when speaking to Mat, who is a male, MUNAH used Malay pronouns, and speaking to Lan, another male, she uses English pronouns. Two reasons can be put forth for this discrepancy. The first is that Mat is a few years younger than MUNAH and not married, while Lan is older and married. Thus, there is a rank difference and MUNAH recognized and acknowledged this in her use of English pronouns with Lan. The second reason is that Mat's non-reciprocating response may be perceived by MUNAH as a rejection of her desire to being treated as a member of the *aku* community. This causes MUNAH to revert back to English pronouns when addressing another male addressee.

In the second group of women (3F, 4F, 5F), NORA and FARAH did not use Malay pronouns at all while MUNAH did so for a total of eight *aku* and two *kau*. Like the men, NORA and FARAH did not reciprocate MUNAH's use of Malay pronouns to them; instead, they used only English pronouns. This could well be the reason for MUNAH's limited use of Malay pronouns with this group as compared to the first group of women, who clearly responded with Malay pronouns. The aggregated score of pronoun use by the women shows that English pronouns are much more preferred than Malay pronouns in Malay sentences. Even though Malay pronouns are used, the preference for English pronouns is clear.

All-Men Group

Table 6 below shows the total data of the men's choice of pronouns. The count was aggregated as the men showed consistency in using the same forms of pronouns to each other, even during the unscheduled interruption by a woman.

Table 6. Use of Pronouns Among Male Speakers of Malay

	Pronoun Type			
	kau	aku	I	you
Men Only	57	35	2	1
With woman present	0	0	12	8
TOTAL	57	35	14	9

Here, the transcription shows that Malay, as well as Malay pronouns, was the preferred medium of conversation indicating that men among themselves prefer to speak in Malay. Data show fifty-seven occurrences of “aku” and thirty-five occurrences of “kau,” and only two instances of “I” and one “you” in the men’s speech. This is contrary to the results obtained in the mixed group in Table 4 in which the men used more English pronouns than Malay. However, during the interruption and present of a woman, the men switched to English pronouns while maintaining their speech in Malay. The table shows a jump in the men’s use of English pronouns from three to twenty at this time. Malay pronouns were never used throughout this interruption, which took about five minutes. The woman used English pronouns all the time, but this is not counted and shown in the data in Table 8.

The men’s change in pronoun usage from Malay to English supports the earlier assumption that the use of English pronouns is associated with women. Obviously, the men’s choice of pronouns is not only dependent on the sex of the addressee, but also on the presence of others, particularly women. This could also explain why some men were reluctant to use Malay pronouns in the mixed group (Table 4), while others easily switched their pronoun usage depending on who their addressee was regardless of who was present.

Below are two excerpts of a dialogue taken from this group: one with only the men present and the other with the woman present. Notice that between the two men, only Malay pronouns were used and this changed radically with the presence of the woman. The use of the dialectal *hang* (I) is because the males were from the North of Malaysia.

- (1) Mat: **Hang** kalau sampai sana pun, gi Santa Barbara naik flight jugak?
 “When you arrive there, even to Santa Barbara take a flight?”
- (2) Hafiz: mmm, tau maybe **aku** lepak kat LAX LA dulu kot...
 "mmm, who knows maybe I will hang out at LAX LA first..."
- (3) Mat: Kenapa **hang** suka panggil LAX
 “Why do you like calling it LAX?”
- (4) Hafiz: LAX tu airport. LA yang lain.
 « LAX is the airport. LA is different.”
- (5) Mat: LAX kan orang panggil?
 “People don’t call it LAX?”
- (6) Hafiz: LAX, LAX untuk airport. Untuk LA orang panggil yang lain, **aku**
 beli baju kat sini habis, murah-murah.
 "LAX, LAX for airport. For LA people call it something else, I
 bought a lot of clothes here, very cheap.”
- (7) Mat: daripada nak tunggu **hang** pi, kat mana? Pi LA, entah bila..
 “Better than waiting for you to go, where? Go to LA, don’t know
 when..”
- (8) Hafiz: Alah suka duduk dalam bilik je, lepas tu duk dalam bilik je. Reject
 shop. Target shop, K-mart, Lucky, JCPenney.
 “Just like to sit around in the room, and then just sit in the room.
 Reject shop. Target shop, K-mart, Lucky, JCPenney.”
- (9) Mat: Duit **hang** habis dah?
 "Your money is finished?"
- (10) Hafiz: Duit **aku**?? Duit **aku** okaylah. Sebab cukup..
 “My money?? My money is okay. Because it is enough...”

Evidently, there are no English pronouns in the speech of both men in the above transcription. Compare this conversation to the one below where the woman interrupts them and stayed for a few minutes.

- (1) FARAH (F): Apa nak cakap ah tadi?
 “What was (I) going to say just now?”

- (2) Mat (M): ah, yang tadi yang dengar bunyi kawan **you** yang datang dari Malaysia.
 “ah just now (I) heard like it is about your friend coming from Malaysia.”
- (3) FARAH (F): Hah, takde, sebab Nora datang, so **I** takut nanti Kak Rubi kata ‘ajak Nora tak ajak dia kan’ so **I** kata takde. Nora tu nak datang makan kat sini. Lagipun sorang je. Biasa je. Tu **I** kata... nak kemana kita Lan?
 “Hah, no, because Nora came, so I was afraid that Kak Rubi will say that ‘Nora is invited, she is not, right?’ so I said no, Nora, she didn’t come to eat here. Anyway, she came alone. That’s normal. Then I... where are we going today Lan?”
- (4) Mat (M): Kemana lagi?
 “Where to now?”
- (5) Hafiz (M): Pegi...kot. **I** dah call USAir. **I** dah book tiket untuk **you**.
 “Probably going. I’ve already called USAir. I booked a ticket for you.”
- (6) FARAH (F): Iya?? **You** belanja? Alright. **I** nak pegi, Lan tak pegi pun tak apa.
 “Is it? You pay? Alright. I want to go even if Lan doesn’t want to.”
- (7) Lan (M): Okay, **you** bayar.
 “Okay, you pay.”

In the above discourse when FARAH came in and used only English pronouns in her speech, the men responded to her with English pronouns, even though they were using Malay pronouns prior to her appearance. This suggests again that men tend to use English pronouns in the presence of women, and that they have the use of both Malay and English pronouns, that is they are able to switch from one set to the other, depending on the circumstances. Women, on the other hand, do have the use of both Malay and English pronouns but in very limited circumstances, that is they use Malay pronouns only in the company of females who are familiar. For example, MUNAH in the earlier data (Table 5) used both Malay and English pronouns, but her use of Malay pronouns was limited to her roommates only.

Part 2: Perceptions of the Use of Pronouns of Malay Men and Women

Based on the findings of the observations as well as the recorded conversations, the dialogue is divided into three parts: the first part shows two men meeting in the city during lunch hour. While they are talking, two women, one an old friend of both the men approach them. This forms the second part. Greetings and introductions are exchanged and the conversation continues with the four of them. In the middle of this conversation, one of the men made a reference to the other man and the exchange resulted in each having a turn at addressing the other. Two sentences later, the women left the men. The third part shows the dialogue continuing with the women. All first and second person pronouns were deleted and in their places, blanks are provided for participants to fill in. Thus, the subjects will be using their intuitive judgments to decide on the “correct” pronouns used by the characters in the dialogue. The subjects are expected to find the characters in the dialogue college-educated and held good jobs, based on the information provided in the dialogue itself. The dialogue being colloquial, interspersed with light code-switching, would have caused the subjects to sense the informal atmosphere and opt for informal pronouns, which is the major objective of the task. The language portrayed in the dialogue is typical of that found in Kuala Lumpur. As none commented on the language or the informality of the quiz, we assume the subjects found the conversation as nothing out of the ordinary.

Results

The results of the intuitive judgments of the three situations are shown in the table below:

Table 7. Perceived Used of Pronouns in Malay Discourse

	Men-only	Men with women		Women-only
		Men/Men	Men/Women	
Men	Malay	Malay	English	English
Women	Malay	Malay	English	English

The table clearly shows that both Malay men and women have the same perceptions of the proper use of pronouns among men and women. In short, the results show that both men and women agreed to the following pronoun distribution in spoken Malay:

1. men use Malay pronouns when speaking with other men,
2. women use English pronouns,
3. men use English pronouns with women.

However, the results of actual speech in Part One shows the following:

1. men use Malay pronouns when speaking with other men
2. women use English and in some instance Malay pronouns,
3. men use English pronouns with women and each other in *the* presence of women.

These results show that what is perceived is not what actually happens. The data in Part One do not match the results of data in Part Two except for the “agreement” that English pronouns are woman-related and Malay pronouns are man-related. The matching perceptions of pronoun use among Malays indicate a common shared knowledge on the use of pronouns in the Malay society. It also shows the subjects’ awareness of the social effects of the pronoun use.

A few of the participants were interviewed following this questionnaire and asked to explain their choices on the distribution of pronouns. Two subjects, a male and a female, suggested that men used Malay pronouns when speaking with other men but when

speaking to women, they must use English pronouns. Both could not recall any instances when they themselves would cross over and use Malay pronouns when speaking to a woman and vice versa. Another participant was surprised with the consistency of women using only English pronouns and men using Malay, but concluded, in retroflection, that it was normal.

Using English pronouns in Malay sentences is not generally considered a positive group identity in Malaysia especially in recent times where the people are called upon to use and be proud of the national language instead of continuing to uphold the colonial language. This is why some groups maintain their own languages, dialects and styles, while others lose them and assimilate towards the speech patterns of a more powerful group. Whether or not they succeeded is open to interpretation based on context and societal values. Assimilation is also a strategy used by women who are more aware that they do not have equal status with men and are less prepared to accept this state (Coates, 1986). The generally accepted pronoun norms in the Malay society put women in a bind: using English pronouns is sneered at because of its non-Malay identity, and using Malay pronouns is frowned upon as impolite and unladylike.

Discussion

From the results, several factors can be deduced about men, women, and the use of pronouns in the educated Malay community and in the urban areas of Malaysia. First, on the subject of men and pronouns, men have the use of both Malay and English pronouns. The distribution of these pronouns based on the above data are:

1. Malay pronouns are used when men are speaking among themselves,
2. In the presence of women, men may or may not use Malay pronouns when referring to each other,
3. When addressing women, men use English pronouns only.

Malay women also have the use of both English and Malay pronouns with the latter being very limited in distribution. Malay pronouns are used by women where the relationship between the speakers indicate solidarity or intimacy, although this might not always be a case for the use of Malay pronouns, as shown in the study. Outside of this solidarity circle, the use of Malay pronouns by the women is not well accepted by others, men or women. The men's reluctance in using Malay pronouns with women who use them suggests that Malay men are not comfortable or feel that they are close enough with the addressee to allow an exchange that contains Malay pronouns. Women who do not reciprocate other women's use of Malay pronouns are also indirectly discouraging them from forms which they too think are inappropriate for women. Lakoff (1990) points out that there are "subtle agents of gender exclusion in which both sexes participated" and this seems to be one instance of gender exclusion as it clearly shows the participation of both genders. Both men and women "participate" to reinforce the use of Malay pronouns as the male register.

When Malay pronouns are used by and to women, as explained earlier, it is considered rude. The use of Malay pronouns may indicate solidarity; however, issues of politeness and solidarity are not always easy to separate. Are the men simply being polite when using English pronouns with women or are they maintaining the exclusivity of the use of Malay pronouns? Do the women who do not use Malay pronouns see them as rude

address forms for women or are they upholding these forms as men's talk? What is obvious is men see Malay pronouns as the appropriate forms in the context of an all-male speech situation. The consistency of Malay pronouns used by men and English pronouns used by women show that Malay pronouns are associated with men and English pronouns are associated with women. The men are able to switch between Malay and English pronouns, depending on the addressee, whereas the women cannot. In light of this, we are inclined to conclude that men switch between Malay and English pronouns, whereas women borrow English pronouns because the Malay equivalents are not available to them. "Borrowing" is a familiar term in historical linguistics and it refers to the temporary or permanent use of a linguistic feature from one language in the performance of another (Corder, 1980). The men's pattern of usage, going back and forth from English to Malay depending on context and interlocutors present shows the characteristics of code-switching. Gal's (1988) definition of code-switching is appropriate for this context when she said that "code-switching is a conversational strategy used to establish, cross or destroy group boundaries; to create, evoke or change interpersonal relations with their rights and obligations." The differences in pronoun usage seem to suggest an established boundary between the men and the women, and this boundary can be crossed by men but not by women.

The general avoidance of addressing an addressee with the second person pronoun *kau* due to impoliteness could be an evidence of the unavailability of pronouns to the women. Women tend to shun or told to shun impolite forms of language (Lakoff 1973, Holmes 1995) and choose instead politer forms that eventually become known as women's language (Lakoff 1973). Since the use of *aku* and *kau* are impolite for women,

they have nothing to address themselves or their addressees with. The alternative of using kinship terms, as discussed briefly earlier, with people who are not related would be out of the question. The only alternatives then are the English pronouns because the use of English itself is prevalent in society.

Although Malay pronouns seem to be gender markers for men, we must consider other reasons why women are using English pronouns. The first is the prestige enjoyed by the English language especially during the colonial times; this could have played a role in influencing Malay women into using English. Their knowledge of English may not be good enough for them to use the language widely; but the constant use of English pronouns in Malay utterances might have caused them into perceiving that they sounded “English”. This caused the English pronouns to take roots Malay women discourse in place of the Malay pronouns which might or might not have been there in the first place.

Non-reciprocal use of language is not a new phenomena. The non-reciprocal pronouns of European languages, for example, was first used based on ranks and status but is now no longer so. Today, they indicate solidarity in which some forms of pronouns will not be used to address people other than those within a given group (Brown and Gilman 1960). Other groups may have autonomous use of the same pronouns but not when addressing a person from another group, even one who uses the same pronoun due to lack of familiarity. This semantic change from status to solidarity of European non-reciprocal pronouns is similar to the change in function of English pronouns in spoken Malay. First, English pronouns was prestige-influenced, followed by solidarity among educated women in urban areas and later caught on by women of the middle and classes.

The use of *aku/kau* in situations may also signify authority. Women express authority mainly to their own children and in this context *aku/kau* are often used. When a woman addresses an adult, man or woman, with *aku/kau*, she might be interpreted as expressing undue authority, which is considered rude, as women do not generally use Malay pronouns as shown in the study. In formal authoritative positions such as in a business, formal pronouns are used. However, the semantics of Malay pronouns change when men use Malay pronouns, no negative connotations, authoritarian, or animosity is associated with their use of Malay pronouns. Consider the language situation in Java: it was reported by Smith-Hefner (1988) that when a woman uses polite forms of speech she is being a woman but when a man uses polite forms he is exhibiting power and authority. This is because politeness has a role in Javanese society and this role is a function of men. Perhaps Spender (1980) was right when he suggested that even if women were to speak exactly like men, they would still be evaluated as less successful because it is not the language that determines the evaluation, but the sex of the speaker.

The Malay women in this study are powerless in the issue of exercising their rights to the use of Malay pronouns. When they use Malay pronouns, they are said to be impolite, but when men use them, it is the “natural” thing to do. Thus, it would seem that assertive speech is a domain of power denied to women, but clearly available to men, and this was also proposed by Lakoff much earlier (1975); the powerlessness of women cause a loss of opportunity for women to be as forceful and direct as the men. Using Malay pronouns has become a taboo for the female members in many Malay families and this, perhaps, is one reason for the informal development of a separate sex pronoun system (Trudgill 1975, Wardhaugh 1992).

In previous studies, it has been shown that women are usually the ones who initiate changes (Labov 1970, Trudgill 1975, Shuy, Wolfram and Riley 1967, Gal 1978). In the Malay society studied in this paper, it seems that it is also the women who initiate the change of using Malay pronouns instead of English pronouns. The men, at least in this study, never once initiated the use of Malay pronouns with the women. However, in the future, society's tolerance for the alien English pronouns may decrease and new forms of pronouns may emerge or be created to allow for a set of pronouns that can be used freely by both sexes. If so, perhaps when more men, and women, accept the use of *aku/kau* by women, the Malay society will have one set of pronouns for all.

Conclusion

Lakoff (1990) once pointed out that the study of communicative difficulties between the sexes is never ending because the more we study gendered speech, the more differences, as well as reasons for them, arise. In this paper, we found that Malay pronouns are now marked for gender. Men have a monopoly on the use of Malay pronouns and observe the "proper" use of pronouns when speaking to women. Because women have no Malay first and second pronouns available to them since they have become part of the male register, they have borrowed and implemented the use of English pronouns, and this use is recognized by both sexes. Nevertheless, the language is changing, as all languages are, with the awareness of the members' need to do away with foreign pronouns when and if equivalent ones are available. However, the awareness must come from both genders with the men breaking up their monopoly to allow women to use Malay pronouns as well as addressing and responding to them with these pronouns.

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