

## Indexical properties of syllable-final /l/ in Singapore English

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Speech features play an important role in the active construction of identity and stances, according to their indexed social meanings. This study examined the indexical properties of syllable-final /l/ in Singapore English (SgE). Previous studies found that syllable-final /l/ in SgE tends to be vocalised/dropped. Malays, however, preserve syllable-final /l/s, but they are clear-l, which were posited to be an ethnic marker [1]. This study aimed to ascertain the association of the variants (dark-, clear- and vocalised-l) with the three ethnic groups in Singapore and the social meaning of and attitudes towards them.

A modified matched-guise test was employed. 24 monosyllabic tokens (8 words, 3 alternate tokens each) spoken by a Malay and a Chinese female were used as stimuli. They were modified to differ mainly in their syllable-final /l/. Other segments were ethnically/culturally neutral. Informants indicated how near each pronunciation was to what was expected of the three ethnic groups, evaluated the three variants on a list of traits, and described the community they thought the speaker belonged to.

Findings revealed that tokens with vocalised-l were significantly more likely to be rated as 'Chinese', clear-l as 'Malay' and/or 'Indian', and dark-l as ethnically neutral. Each variant had distinct indexical properties. Clear-l, for instance, was stereotypically affiliated with negative sub-cultures of the Malay community, dark-l was associated with the English dominant, highly educated, middle/upper class, while guises with vocalised-l were regarded to be Chinese dominant. The analysis will also consider informants' characteristics, such as their interactions with other ethnic groups and their ethnic/cultural affiliation, in order to see how social meanings interact with these factors.

[1] Sim, J. H. (2019). "But you don't sound Malay!": Language dominance and variation in the accents of English-Malay bilinguals in Singapore. *English World-Wide*, 40(1), 79–108.