Abstract

This study attempts to investigate phonological features of the Mandarin spoken by Malaysians from a Cantonese background. This fieldwork survey was carried out in Malaysia, mainly in Kuala Lumpur and nearby areas such as Cheras, Kajang and Semenyih. The pronunciation of 42 informants from Cantonese background had been recorded. They were categorized into 6 age groups. However, in this study age difference does not seem to have affected performance. Comparison has also been made between Malaysia Mandarin and Singapore Mandarin as well.

The study consists of three main sections: (i) tone, (ii) initial, (iii) final.

The salient features of the speech of 42 Malaysian (Cantonese) informants are summarized as follows:

The appearance of a short falling pitch for characters with an Entering Tone in Middle Chinese was high, 42%. Neutral tone in kinship terms reference and noun suffix-ţ was hardly found.

Correct pronunciation for retroflexive sibilants was low, 27.9%. The reading of the retroflexed liquid ɭ was much complicated. It involved variations both between full phonemes (/ɭ/~ɭ/, and occasionally /n/) and within phonemes ([ɭ~dz~j]). The replacement of the palatal series by their dental counterparts was the most significant feature in the informants’ speech, 55.2%. Initial ʐ [ȵ] showed the greatest tendency to be replaced.
The lateral ɬ and nasal ʰ occasionally replaced each other in the environment of a nasal ending in the syllable. The velar fricative ʰ [x] when occurring before the vowel ʊ, which is functioned as the main vowel rather than a medial was occasionally pronounced as [f] or [w]. The glide [j] and [w] were often missing when ɭ and ʊ occurred at syllable initial position.

Confusion between ʊ and ɭ was obvious, replacement of ʊ by ɭ was more frequent than the other way round. Confusion between -n and -ng ending has also been observed. Vowel qualities in certain finals have also been described.