Abstract

The great majority of Malaysian Chinese have a Southern Chinese dialect (Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, Hainanese and Hakka) background. The main purpose of this academic exercise is to identify the salient segmental features in the Mandarin spoken by Hokkien (Southern Min) speakers in Malaysia. (E.g., the [f] reading for tongue dental stops.)

The methods adopted in this academic exercise are largely based on studies done on the Mandarin spoken in Singapore by Associate Professor Chen Chung Yu in the late 1970s.

Fieldwork has been carried out in Alor Setar, Kedah, Malaysia. The speech of 28 Malaysian Hokkien informants from four age categories was recorded and analyzed. Analyses have been made in the tone, initial, and final of a syllable. Gradual deviations from the norm of vowel qualities have also been observed. A comparison between the Mandarin spoken in Singapore and the Mandarin spoken in Malaysia is also included.

Some salient segmental features in the speech of 28 Malaysian Hokkien informants includes: The Middle Chinese Ru-sheng or Entering Tone ( 入声) exists partially and sporadically as a short falling pitch; The palatal series were replaced by their dental counterparts; The readings of the retroflexed liquid r involved replacement by full phonemes ( /l/ and /n/) as well as variation within the phoneme ( [j] and [dz]); The velar fricative h [x] when occurring before the vowel u was sometimes read as [f] or [w]; Confusion
between high front vowels [i] and [ü] was also found to be a prominent feature.

Influence of the Hokkien dialect is probably the source of certain salient features of the Mandarin spoken by the Hokkien speakers in Malaysia. However, it must be pointed out that due to the intensive interactions between people from various dialects, reciprocal influences between one another are natural and inevitable. (E.g., the [f] reading for hu- syllables clearly comes from Cantonese.)