

**SABAH MALAY DIALECT: PHONOLOGICAL  
DIFFERENTIATION IN SOCIAL CONTEXT**

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## ABSTRACT

Sabah Malay Dialect (SMD) or ‘the speech of Sabah’ is used widely as a lingua franca in interaction between different ethnic groups, and within single groups in Sabah. The broad sociolinguistic setting of the people of Sabah has influenced the formation of SMD. This is enhanced by migrations from Indonesia, the Philippines and other states in Malaysia. Consequently, the vast socio-cultural and socio-economic settings have resulted in language variations in SMD. SMD displays distinctiveness especially in its phonology compared to Standard Malay and other dialects. SMD is indeed a dialect in its own right as shown by this study.

Adopting the methodology of Urban Dialectology, this study explores the phonological characteristics of SMD as a dialect of Malay by observing its phonological differentiations, which arise from usage in social contexts. In doing so, this study determines the social functions of the linguistic variables as spoken by the various ethnic groups of Sabah.

Samples were taken from the city of Kota Kinabalu, Sabah involving 120 informants between the ages of 15 to 64 from various socio-cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Nine linguistic phonological variables were determined in the study: (a), (↔), (e), (o), (h), (k), (r), (tΣ) and (?). Social variations in this study take into account gender, age, ethnic membership and social stratification. Formality of speech is measured from the most formal to the least formal by integrating four stylistic contexts originally introduced in a study by Labov (1966). These variations are Word-List Style (WLS), Reading-Passage Style (RPS), Formal Style (FS) and Casual Style (CS).

This study has identified the phoneme inventory of SMD and the complimentary distribution of the phonological differentiation. It has also identified the distinctive phonological features of SMD, which include a significant realisations of /a/ as [α], /r/ as trill [r], and /k/ as [k] in word-final position, /↔/ as [a], /e/ as [i], /o/ as [u], /tΣ/ as [s] in word-initial and word-medial positions; an extensive insertion of glottal in final open syllables; and an exhaustive deletion of /h/ in most word positions.

This study has also found that there is a significant correlation between phonological, social, and stylistic variations. This is evident as the younger age groups use more of the standard variants, while the older age groups use more of the non-standard variants. The higher the social class, as compared to the lower the social class, the more the standard variants are preferred. The ethnic groups of Bugis (BGS) and other bumiputera (BMP) use more of the standard variants as compared to other ethnic groups. Females are found to be using more of the standard variants than males. The more formal the stylistic context, the more the standard variants are used, and vice-versa. This correlation has become the markers of social differences in the SMD speech community. From this study it is found SMD is indeed a Malay dialect specifically spoken in Sabah.

## ABSTRAK

*Dialek Melayu Sabah (DMS) atau Cakap Sabah merupakan lingua franca antara berbagai-bagai kumpulan etnik dan dalam satu-satu kumpulan etnik yang dituturkan secara meluas di Sabah. Latar belakang sosio-linguistik yang luas terdiri daripada etnik peribumi dan pendatang telah mempengaruhi pembentukan DMS. Seterusnya, latar belakang sosio-budaya dan sosio-ekonomi yang pelbagai juga telah mempengaruhi kepelbagaian bahasa dalam DMS. Dialek ini memperlihatkan perbezaan yang ketara khususnya daripada aspek fonologi berbanding dengan dialek Melayu Standard dan dialek-dialek Melayu lain. Kajian ini mendapati bahawa DMS merupakan dialek tersendiri.*

*Berdasarkan kaedah Dialektologi Bandar, maka kajian ini telah mengenal pasti struktur fonologi DMS sebagai dialek Melayu melalui kelainan linguistik yang dipengaruhi oleh konteks sosial. Kajian ini turut menentukan fungsi variabel fonologi dalam kepelbagaian komuniti penutur di Sabah.*

*Bersumberkan 120 orang responden di sekitar bandaraya Kota Kinabalu yang terdiri daripada pelbagai latar belakang sosio-budaya dan sosio-ekonomi yang berusia dalam lingkungan 15 dan 64 tahun, kajian ini mengenal pasti sembilan variabel fonologi linguistik, iaitu (a), (↔), (e), (o), (h), (k), (r), (tΣ) dan (?). Kepelbagaian sosial mengambil kira pelbagai faktor seperti jantina, umur, keanggotaan etnik dan strata sosial masyarakat. Data kajian dikumpul dan diteliti mengikut peringkat formal dan tidak formal seperti yang diperkenalkan dalam kajian Labov (1966). Variabel gaya pertuturan yang dimaksudkan ialah Gaya Daftar Kata (GDK), Gaya Membaca Petikan (GMP), Gaya Perbualan Rasmi (GPR) dan Gaya Perbualan Bersahaja (GPB).*

*Kajian ini telah mengenalpasti inventori fonem bagi DMS dan seterusnya agihan komplementari bagi kelainan fonologi SMD. Kajian ini juga telah mengenaipasti ciri-ciri kelainan fonologi dalam SMD yang terdiri daripada fonem /a/ direalisasi sebagai [ɑ], /r/ direalisasi sebagai bunyi getaran [r], dan /k/ direalisasi sebagai [k], di semua posisi akhir kata, /↔/ direalisasi sebagai [a], /e/ direalisasi sebagai [i], /o/ direalisasi sebagai [u], /tΣ/ direalisasi sebagai [s], di semua posisi awal dan tengah kata; penyisipan glotal di akhir kata yang berakhir dengan vokal; dan pengguguran fonem /h/ di semua posisi kata.*

*Kajian ini mendapati wujud perkaitan yang signifikan antara kelainan fonologi, faktor sosial dan gaya pertuturan. Buktinya, golongan muda menggunakan lebih banyak varian standard berbanding golongan tua yang lebih banyak menggunakan varian yang tidak standard. Kajian turut mendapati bahawa semakin tinggi strata sosial masyarakat, semakin tinggi mereka menggunakan varian standard. Kajian turut mendapati etnik Bugis (BGS) dan kumpulan bumiputera lain (BMP) menggunakan lebih banyak varian standard berbanding kumpulan etnik yang lain. Golongan wanita didapati menggunakan lebih banyak varian standard berbanding lelaki. Selain itu, semakin formal konteks stilistik antara penutur, penggunaan varian standard lebih diutamakan dan sebaliknya. Perkaitan inilah yang menjadi penanda sosial bagi komuniti penutur DMS. Dari kajian ini jelas bahawa DMS adalah salah satu dialek bahasa Melayu yang khusus digunakan di Sabah.*

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## LIST OF SYMBOLS

/ /	Phonemic Representation
/a/	Phoneme /a/
[ ]	Phonetic Representation
[a]	Allophone [a]
( )	Linguistic Variable Representation
(a)	Variable (a)
(a) <sup>-1</sup>	First Variant of Linguistic Variable (a)
V	Vowel
C	Consonant
>	changed to/replaced by
:	cognate with
[↔]	Open-Mid Central Unrounded Vowel (IPA)/ Lax-Mid Central Unrounded Vowel (NA)
[α]	Open Front Unrounded Vowel (IPA)/ Low Back Unrounded Vowel (NA)
[i]	Close Front Unrounded Vowel (IPA)/ High Front Unrounded Vowel (NA)
[ɛ]	Close-Mid Front Unrounded Vowel (IPA)/ Tense- Mid Front Unrounded Vowel (NA)
[o]	Close-Mid Back Rounded Vowel (IPA)/ Tense-Mid Back Rounded Vowel (NA)
[ʊ]	Close Back Rounded Vowel (IPA)/ High Back Rounded Vowel (NA)
[r]	Voiced Alveolar Trill (IPA)/ Voiced Alveolar Retroflex (NA)
[λ]	Voiced Alveolar Lateral Approximant
[s]	Voiceless Alveolar Fricative
[ʃ]	Voiceless Palatal Fricative (IPA)/ Voiceless Alveo-Palatal Affricate (NA)
[k]	Voiceless Velar Plosive(IPA)/ Voiceless Velar Stop (NA)
[h]	Voiceless Glottal Fricative
[ʔ]	Voiceless Glottal Plosive (IPA)/ Voiceless Glottal Stop (NA)
[O]	Deletion /Dropping of Consonant/Vowel, or No Insertion of Consonant/Vowel
[◻]	open-mid back rounded vowel lax-mid back rounded vowel
[◻_]	open-mid back unrounded vowel lax-mid back unrounded vowel

## LIST OF ABBREVIATION

SMD	Sabah Malay Dialect
STM	Standard Malay
M/T	Mother tongue
ENG	English language
O/LG	Other language
MLY	Malay
KZD	Kadazandusun
BJU	Bajau
BGS	Bugis
BMP	Other Bumiputera
CHN	Chinese
ONB	Other Non-Bumiputera
UMC	Upper Middle Class
MMC	Middle Middle Class
LMC	Lower Middle Class
UWC	Upper Working Class
MWC	Middle Working Class
LWC	and Lower Working Class
WLS	Word-list style
RPS	Reading Passage Styled
FS	Formal style
CS	Casual Style
IPA	International Phonetic Alphabet
NA	North American Phonetic Symbols