

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The Americanisation of English in Brunei

Salbrina Sharbawi

Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Universiti
Brunei Darussalam

Correspondence

Salbrina Sharbawi, Faculty of Arts and Social
Sciences, Universiti Brunei Darussalam, Jalan
Tungku Link BE1410, Brunei.

Email: salbrina.sharbawi@ubd.edu.bn

Abstract

Previous studies investigating postulations that Brunei English was being shaped by American English did not yield any conclusive findings. In recent years, claims of young English-speaking Bruneians sounding American have become more persistent, thereby precipitating this research. Data was collected from 38 Bruneian Malays who are in their late teens and mid-twenties and over 900 tokens representative of American English features were analysed. Outcomes reveal that Brunei English is indeed diverging from its traditional exonormative norm, British English, and is displaying new and incipient pronunciations that are indicative of on-going sound changes. While Americanisation accounts for some of these changes, it is not the only force at play. The findings of this study provide ample evidence that Brunei English is in active state of dynamic change and is steadily progressing towards the next stage of its evolutionary cycle.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Recent years have witnessed an increase in claims of American English (AmE) influencing the English pronunciation of young Bruneians (Gardiner & Deterding, 2019; Ho 2013; Nur Raihan, 2021). These claims, however, have not been backed by evidence. Most accounts seem to be anecdotal and the first attempt to systematically investigate whether Americanisation was shaping the pronunciation of Brunei English (BrunE) was conducted by Salbrina (2009). The reported instances of rhoticity in the speech of Salbrina's Bruneian subjects, which were peculiarly higher than those of her Singaporean respondents, had initially been thought to be due to influence from AmE. The study, however, yielded unsatisfactory results with only a few reported occurrences of American-like pronunciations in the other investigated tokens. For instance, only one out of the 18 subjects in Salbrina (2009) pronounced *after* and *afternoon* with [æ] and none produced intervocalic taps [ɾ] in *little* and *later*; and only a small number of *hot* and *not* were realised with the open unrounded [ɑ]. Given the lack of substantial evidence, it was, therefore, postulated that BrunE's rhoticity is most likely a consequence of the Bruneians' first language, Brunei Malay, in which postvocalic-r is always articulated (Clynes, 2014).

Over a decade later, assertions of a distinctively Americanised BrunE accent in the speech of young Bruneians have become persistent as evidenced by an increasing number of linguistics students in Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) choosing the topic Americanisation and BrunE for their university academic reports. Included among them was a Japanese exchange student taking a module on world Englishes, who, prior to commencing her study in UBD, had expected her Bruneian friends to sound more 'British-like'. Her speculation, as she explained, had been based on the fact that Brunei was once under British rule and that the Bruneian education system was (and still is) entrenched on the British model.

In another incident, this time involving an accent identification activity in class, a recording of an AmE speaker was wrongly identified by the local students as being Bruneian. When asked to explain, the students responded that their judgement was based on the articulation of the letter <r>, which to them sounded conspicuously Bruneian. An even more interesting incident occurred during an online seminar that was delivered to students from an American university. During the presentation, a recording of a conversation in English between three Bruneian females had been accidentally played, which led the American students to thinking that someone had forgotten to mute their laptop microphone. During the discussion at the end of the seminar, some of the students relayed their astonishment at how American-like the Bruneian females sounded. These incidents are among the motivations for why this present work is carried out. Specifically, it seeks to investigate the veracity of the claims and observations, and to provide systematic evidence, if any, that the sounds of contemporary BrunE have undergone Americanisation.

This study is also undertaken given the historical background of the English language in Brunei. English made its debut in the country by way of the British. The Sultanate of Brunei became a British Protectorate in 1888 (Hussain-miya, 2006), which meant that any matters to do with foreign relations were under the purview of the British Government. Contact with the Americans was minimal with official records stating that a treaty was signed between the two nations in 1850 and that an American consulate was briefly set up in the country from 1865 until 1867 (Office of the Historian, n.d.). Between 1867 and Brunei's independence in 1984, a period spanning over a century, there appears to have been a void in any diplomatic contact between the two countries. The British, on the other hand, played a substantial role in Brunei's development. It witnessed the country's growth from a feudal state to a modern one, beginning with the establishment of a British Residency in 1906 (Hughes-Halley, 1940). The British Resident, acting as a representative of the British Government, was tasked with offering advice to the Sultan on matters pertaining to governance. It is no surprise, therefore, that the education system of Brunei bears some of the trademarks of the British system. For example, the national examinations taken by Bruneian students¹ are developed by a British examinations board. This, coupled with Brunei's early-day status as a British Protectorate and its close association with Great Britain, makes it reasonable to postulate that the brand of English that is used and traditionally promoted in the country is the British variety. Evidence of this can be seen in the English words that have crept into the Brunei Malay lexicon such as *bunit*, which is derived from British English (BrE) *bonnet*, *kabat* from *cupboard*, and *matuka* from *motorcar*. Logically, we would also expect the English of the Bruneians, notably their pronunciation, to be based on BrE, and that appeared to be the case following the findings of Mossop (1996, p. 207), who had noted that the number of differences between the Brunei English accent and R.P. decreases drastically with the advancement along the basilectal and acrolectal continuum. So, it is clear that over three decades ago, the English pronunciation of the Bruneians, notably the acrolectal or educated variety, displayed features associated with BrE. If it is true that the English spoken by present-day Bruneians is Americanised, that is a clear indication that a shift has taken place in terms of pronunciation. And if that is the case, then it is an interesting development for two reasons: one, it implies that AmE is now the model variety in this once British-protected state; and two, BrunE is developing on a path that is unlike its sister variety, Singapore English (SgE). As shall be discussed later, a study investigating the effect of Americanisation on SgE (Tan, 2016) has found that there is minimal influence of AmE on the phonology of SgE.

Whilst frequent references will be made to the linguistic features of BrE and AmE, it is acknowledged that the terminologies British English and American English have been subject to contentious debate as they are both ambiguous and extremely problematic on geographic, linguistic and political grounds (Murphy, 2016, p. 4). Indeed, there are substantial variations within each variety. In this paper, the use of the two terms is retained to refer to the major varieties

that have frequently been used as the yard-stick for English teaching and learning, that is, Received Pronunciation for BrE, and General AmE for AmE.

2 | ENGLISH IN BRUNEI

Research on the English language in Brunei only started to feature regularly in the academia in the 1990s, and this was following a large-scale project funded by UBD titled Verbal communication in Brunei Darussalam: A sociolinguistic profile (Yunos, 2007). One of the project's momentous outcomes was an edited book by Martin et al. (1996) which featured 19 papers discussing the languages spoken in the country. Divided into three sections, the second part was focused on describing the role and features of English of the Bruneians. Back then, English in the country was ranked second after Brunei Malay in the category of important languages; regarded as a second language by the Bruneians; and was predicted to unlikely ever attain a first language status (Ozóg, 1996). It was also only used for communication among the educated population and with non-Malay-speaking foreigners (Martin & Poedjosoedarmo, 1996). Due to their shared history of having once been under British rule, Mossop (1996) pointed out several phonetic similarities between the Bruneian variety of English and those of neighbouring SgE and Malaysian English (MalE). Among the features he had identified was the tendency of the Bruneians to pronounce diphthongs as monophthongs, and to simplify consonant clusters through the process of reduction.

Since then, there have been ample research on BrunE and some notable publications include a monograph that offers a thorough linguistic coverage of the English in Brunei by Deterding and Salbrina (2013); a collection of chapters edited by Haji-Othman et al. (2016), which served as an update of and a continuation to Martin et al. (1996); and a special journal issue on BrunE (McLellan & Chin, 2016a), which also included a research bibliography of works that deal wholly and partly with English in Brunei (McLellan & Chin, 2016b, p. 612). Many of the linguistic features reported in the 2016 publications were extensions of those reported in Deterding and Salbrina (2013). For instance, Nur Raihan and Deterding's (2016) article on pronunciation concurred many of the earlier findings including the rhotic nature of BrunE; the common tendency of Bruneian speakers to realise the dental fricatives as plosives; and the widespread occurrence of spelling pronunciation such that *salmon* is articulated as ['sælmən].

On the phonetic features, rhoticity garnered much interest because, in this respect, BrunE was displaying a characteristic unlike its neighbouring postcolonial varieties. SgE and MalE are acknowledged to be non-rhotic (Baskaran, 2005; Deterding, 2007; Pillai, 2015) and recent reports of rhoticity in SgE appears to be confined only to the educated and elite speakers (Tan, 2012, 2016). In Brunei, however, rhoticity is a widespread occurrence, having no regard for educational background or status, and this is considered an anomaly among post-British colonial varieties. It appears to be a growing trend (Nur Raihan & Deterding, 2016, p. 521) with younger speakers displaying more r-coloured tokens than older ones (Nur Raihan, 2016). An explanation has been offered in terms of a possible influence from AmE but as reported earlier, investigations involving other features normally associated with AmE (Salbrina, 2009; Salbrina & Deterding, 2010) proved to be inconclusive. A more plausible reason for why BrunE is rhotic may have to do with Brunei Malay as instances of /r/ word-finally are always pronounced in this Malay dialect (Clynes, 2014).

As outlined in the previous section, accounts of Bruneians sounding American-like have become more common in recent years, and these have galvanised a flurry of undergraduate academic exercises investigating the phenomenon of Americanisation in BrunE. Studies which looked at lexical choices, such as Nur Raihan (2021), show that there is certainly a preference for AmE (for example, *candy* for *sweets*, and *truck* for *lorry*) but this shift in lexical preference is not exclusively Bruneian. As attested by Gonçalves et al. (2018, p. 10), the drift towards American vocabulary is unmistakable and is a global phenomenon linked to the rise of American economic and political power following the Second World War. The consequent spread of American popular culture that have been felt in almost all Asian societies (Bolton et al., 2020, p. 10) have also contributed to the predominance of American vocabulary in the Englishes spoken around the world.

Similar to the findings of Salbrina (2009) and Salbrina and Deterding (2010), the undergraduate investigations have not been definitive in ascertaining AmE's influence on the pronunciation of BrunE. While there appears to be some instances of AmE features (for example, [æ] in *chance*), these are few and far between. Tan (2016) also arrived at the same conclusion in her examination of SgE. Comparing the speech of two groups of differently aged Singaporeans, Tan (2016, p. 132) found that while the younger speakers exhibited significantly more American features than the older ones, the overall results indicate that the Americanisation process is not a uniform one. Out of the four AmE features she investigated (that is, rhoticity, taps, and the [æ] and [eɪ] vowels in *dance* and *tomato* respectively), only postvocalic-r was prominently showcased and even so, it was the younger and ethnically Chinese speakers who displayed a higher incidence of this feature in their speech. Tan (2016, p. 134) concluded her study by stating that while AmE is not a major influence in the nativisation and change processes of SgE, the Asian variety is detaching itself from its British history through the adoption of new norms and linguistic features that are in line with the force of globalisation. As aforementioned, BrunE has been documented to share many of the features of SgE. If, however, the observations are confirmed that the sounds of BrunE are now undergoing a change due to Americanisation, it would then suggest that this English variety is evolving into a variety that is distinct from the regional Asian varieties. To confirm or refute these claims, it was decided to investigate the speech of the generation that has been widely associated with high English usage (Salbrina & Zayani, 2021; Salbrina, 2021; Zayani & Salbrina, submitted), that is, the Bruneians aged in their late teens to their mid-20s. This would make the current findings comparable to the studies conducted previously as they were also collected from Bruneians of the same age range.

3 | METHODOLOGY

Data for this research was obtained from 38 BrunE speakers. The subjects were requested to perform two speaking tasks. These two tasks (spoken activities) were specifically designed to elicit features that are distinctive of AmE and they involved reading out loud a set of 13 sentences with two distractors (see Appendix) followed by a naming activity involving six images. The subjects were recorded using a Zoom H4n handy portable recorder with two built-in microphones. The audio recordings were then extracted to a laptop and the analysis was done auditorily with visual acoustic support utilising Praat (Boersma & Weenink, 2021). The analysis entailed identifying the tokens as having either BrE or AmE phonetic realisations. The whole process was carried out by one rater and in order to ensure test validity, the identification assessment was repeated after one week. The test of intra-rater reliability returned a coefficient of 0.71 indicating a relatively stable rating. During the analysis, however, it was discovered that some of the tokens, notably those intended to elicit American [æ] and [ɑ], could not be neatly classified into either of the two pre-set groups. Consequently, a third category was added labelled Other and a descriptive note was made of the sounds that had been produced.

The pronunciation features investigated in this study are as shown in Table 1. The number of tokens per subject was 25, making it 950 tokens investigated altogether. Features that have been widely documented to be characteristic of AmE were selected by referring to various external sources, notably those which have compared BrE against AmE (Kretzschmar, 2010; Modiano, 1996; Wells, 2008). A miscellaneous category comprising three words with no predictable pattern but with clearly distinct pronunciations in the two varieties is also included to further appraise the extent of the Americanising effect, if any, on BrunE.

3.1 | Subjects

Table 2 presents the background information of the 38 Bruneian Malays (labelled S1–S38) who took part in the investigation. The ages of the respondents ranged from 17 to 24 ($M = 20.26$ years, $SD = 1.69$) with the females outnumbering the males (26 or 68.4% versus 12 or 31.6%). Most indicate that their first language is Malay (31 or 81.6%) while seven

TABLE 1 Pronunciation target words from speaking task

American [ɜ]	American [eɪ]	Tapping
<i>hurry</i>	<i>tomato</i>	<i>tomato</i>
<i>courage</i>	<i>vase</i>	<i>vitamin</i>
		<i>city</i>
American [ɑ]	American [aɪ]	Miscellaneous
<i>doctor</i>	<i>privacy</i>	<i>herb</i>
<i>shop</i>	<i>anti</i>	<i>schedule</i>
<i>lot</i>	<i>advertisement</i>	<i>clerk</i>
	<i>vitamins</i>	
American [u]	American [æ]	Rhoticity
<i>news</i>	<i>banana</i>	<i>herb</i>
<i>tuna</i>	<i>castle</i>	<i>more</i>
	<i>asked</i>	
	<i>dancer</i>	

(18.4%) claimed to speak English as a first language. For those whose mother tongue is Malay, the most commonly quoted age at which they had first picked up English is three. The respondents were also asked to state the language or languages they most prefer to use in their day-to-day activities. Unsurprisingly, the responses are similar to the pattern observed in Salbrina (2021) with the dual use of Malay and English coming in first (23 or 60.5%) and English second (11 or 28.9%). Malay was chosen by only four (10.5%) subjects.

The informants were also asked to rate their English-speaking ability on the following scale: one – understand but cannot speak; two – understand and can speak with great difficulty; three – understand and can speak but with some difficulty; four – understand and speak comfortably, with little difficulty; and five – understand and speak fluently like a native speaker. The most popular response is four with five coming in second ($M = 4.11$, $SD = 0.73$). Only one claimed to speak English with great difficulty (S5). From the self-reported assessment, the Bruneians are noted for their English-leaning tendencies, and a majority of them profess to speaking English with good proficiency. A majority of the respondents in this study are UBD undergraduates (30 or 78.9%) while the remaining are students at other local institutes of higher education (7 or 18.4%). One subject (S2) has just begun her university study in England at the time of the recording but prior to this, the subject had spent her entire education years in Brunei. None of the informants have lived in, or even travelled to America, which means that any instances of Americanisation in the speech of the Bruneians are unlikely to be due to direct exposure to AmE.

4 | FINDINGS

The overall findings on pronunciation are presented in Table 3. Cases of erroneous identifications or non-production of the target words, such as in the case of one subject (S29) who called out *pot* instead of *vase*, were excluded from the final tally. In the discussion of the vowels, where necessary, Wells’s (1982) standard lexical sets will be used, particularly in describing the pronunciations of the Bruneians.

A quick run through the figures in Table 3 indicates that the general pronunciation patterns of the Bruneians seem to skew on the American side, most evidently for the vowels in *hurry* (38 or 100%) and *courage* (29 or 81.6%), as well as those of *tomato* (35 or 92.1%) and *vase* (30 or 81.1%). Other clear cases of change in progress towards more use of the perceived American pronunciation can be seen in *schedule* (37 or 97.4%) and *clerk* (38 or 100%). While most of

TABLE 2 Demographic information of respondents

Items	Number (and percentage)	Mean	Mode	Standard Deviation
Gender (N = 38)				
Male	12 (31.6%)			
Female	26 (68.4%)			
Age	-	20.26	20	1.69
First language				
Malay	31 (81.6%)			
English	7 (18.4%)			
Preferred language for daily use				
Malay	4 (10.5%)			
English	11 (28.9%)			
Both equally	23 (60.5%)			
Age first learnt English	-	4.10	3	1.47
English ability		4.11	4	0.73
1	0			
2	1 (2.6%)			
3	5 (13.2%)			
4	21 (55.3%)			
5	11 (28.9%)			

courage had American-like realisations, six tokens (15.8%) were recorded to have an [ɔ]-like quality for the first vowel. This could be manifestations of spelling pronunciation that has been reported to frequently occur in the English of the Bruneians (Deterding & Nur Raihan, 2016; Nur Raihan, 2015; Nur Raihan & Deterding, 2016). The pervasiveness of pronouncing words based on orthography has been explained by Nur Raihan (2015, p. 37) as a transfer effect from Malay as it is a language whose words are typically pronounced as they are spelt. Spelling-based pronunciation could also possibly account for the results obtained for *clerk* because in Malay the letter <e> is realised with an [e ~ ə]-like quality (Clynes & Deterding, 2011). Interestingly, it has been noted that spelling pronunciations are typical of AmE, which, according to Cummings (1988, p. 23), stems from the national predisposition among Americans to follow the written word more than the spoken. Spelling pronunciation is also noted to be crucial in the process of language change (Hock & Joseph, 2009) and was one of the main mechanisms responsible for the levelling of the different English dialects during the periods of Middle and Early Modern English (Cummings, 1988). In the case of *herb*, however, the conservative h-less pronunciation has been maintained in AmE while in Britain, the initial /h/ began to be pronounced from the 19th century onwards (Barber, 1993). With 90% of Americans favouring [ɜ:b] over [hɜ:b] (Wells, 2008), an h-less *herb* appears to be one of the defining features of AmE. Thus, a preponderance of [ɜ:b] in an emerging English variety could serve as an indicator of substantial AmE influence over the phonological system of the concerned variety. The Bruneian data, however, reveal that only five (13.2%) tokens were produced without the initial /h/. That most of *herb* were pronounced with the initial /h/ and with r-colouring (32 or 84.2%) suggest that what have been observed here are likely to be instances of spelling pronunciation.

Although the spelling effect may explain the Bruneians pronunciations of *herb*, it does not, however, satisfactorily account for why the vowels in words such as *privacy* and *advertisement* were mostly realised as [aɪ] or those in *tomato* and *vase* as the American equivalent. Had the Bruneians been guided by a word's spelling for how it is to be pronounced, then it would have been expected for them to realise the first vowel in *privacy* as [ɪ] or [i], and the

TABLE 3 Results of the investigation on American pronunciation features (number and percentage)

Variable and token	British-like realisations	American-like realisations	Other
American [ɜ] (N = 76)	3 (3.9%)	67 (88.2%)	6 (7.9%)
<i>hurry</i>	0	38 (100%)	0
<i>courage</i>	3 (7.9%)	29 (81.6%)	6 (15.8%)
American [eɪ] (N = 75)	9 (12.0%)	65 (86.7%)	1 (1.4%)
<i>tomato</i>	3 (7.9)	35 (92.1)	0
<i>vase</i>	6 (16.2%)	30 (81.1%)	1 (2.7%)
American [u] (N = 76)	28 (36.8%)	48 (63.2%)	0
<i>tuna</i>	1 (2.6%)	37 (97.4%)	0
<i>news</i>	26 (68.4%)	12 (31.6%)	0
American [aɪ] (N = 152)	49 (32.2%)	103 (67.8%)	0
<i>privacy</i>	1 (2.6%)	37 (97.4%)	0
<i>anti</i>	22 (57.9%)	16 (42.1%)	0
<i>advertisement</i>	18 (47.4%)	20 (52.6%)	0
<i>vitamins</i>	8 (21.1%)	30 (78.9%)	0
American [æ] (N = 151)	8 (6.2%)	57 (44.2%)	86 (66.7%)
<i>banana</i>	0	16 (42.1%)	22 (57.9%)
<i>castle</i>	2 (5.4%)	21 (56.8%)	14 (37.8%)
<i>asked</i>	4 (10.5%)	6 (15.8%)	28 (73.7%)
<i>dancer</i>	2 (5.3%)	14 (36.8%)	22 (57.9%)
American [ɑ] (N = 113)	23 (15.4%)	26 (17.4%)	64 (56.6%)
<i>doctor</i>	8 (21.6%)	11 (29.7%)	18 (48.6%)
<i>shop</i>	11 (28.9%)	0	27 (71.1%)
<i>lot</i>	4 (10.5%)	15 (39.5%)	19 (50.0%)
Tapping (N = 114)	48 (42.1%)	66 (57.9%)	0
<i>tomato</i>	18 (47.4%)	20 (52.6%)	0
<i>vitamin</i>	8 (21.1%)	30 (78.9%)	0
<i>city</i>	22 (57.9%)	16 (42.1%)	0
Rhoticity (N = 76)	8 (10.5%)	68 (89.5%)	0
<i>herb</i>	6 (15.8%)	32 (84.2%)	0
<i>more</i>	2 (5.3%)	36 (94.7%)	0
Miscellaneous			
<i>herb</i> (N = 38)	33 (86.8%)	5 (13.2%)	0
<i>schedule</i> (N = 38)	1 (2.6%)	37 (97.4%)	0
<i>clerk</i> (N = 38)	0	38 (100%)	0

second vowel in *tomato* along the qualities of [a ~ ʌ]. Thus, another process must also be at play here and it is plausible that these are genuine evidence of AmE influencing the English pronunciation of the Bruneians. It needs to be mentioned, however, that in the case of *tomato* and *vase*, there is also the possibility that the respondents only ostensibly sounded American-like and that the concerned vowels were actually monophthongal rather than diphthongal

TABLE 4 A breakdown of the Other findings for BATH (number and percentage)

Token (N = 86)	[ɐ]	[ɛ]
<i>bangna</i> (N = 22)	20 (90.9%)	2 (9.1%)
<i>asked</i> (N = 14)	2 (14.3%)	12 (85.7%)
<i>castle</i> (N = 28)	15 (53.6%)	13 (46.4%)
<i>dancer</i> (N = 22)	6 (27.3%)	16 (72.7%)
Total	43 (50%)	43 (50%)

given the widespread tendency of Bruneians to localise diphthongs through monophthongisation (Salbrina, 2010, Deterding & Salbrina, 2013).

Investigations into the pronunciations of BrE [ju:] and AmE [u] in the words *news* and *tuna* yielded mixed results. *Tuna* was mostly [tunə], that is, the American pronunciation. *News*, on the other hand, saw an unbalanced split between [nuz] and [njuz] with more favouring the British-like pronunciation. One explanation that could be offered for these varied observations is the interplay between interference from Malay phonology and the process of Americanisation. The word *tuna* is also *tuna* in Malay. However, the Brunei Malay pronunciation is without any aspiration of the /t/ (initial plosives are unaspirated in all varieties of the Malay language, see Clynes & Deterding, 2011) and without the yod, which explains the prevalence of the initial [tu] in *tuna* in the present data. Transfer from Malay and the on-going process of Americanisation could have led to the stabilisation of this American-like pronunciation. It is posited that *news* is still in the process of transition, and that it is also subject to Americanisation but at a much slower rate. A reason for why this is so is because there is no Malay transfer effect to support the process of change. As a matter of fact, words with initial [nj] sound are common in Brunei Malay while those that begin with [nu] are rare. The Brunei Malay dictionary (*Kamus Bahasa Melayu Brunei* 2007) confirms this by only providing two entries for words beginning with <nu>. Thus, in terms of markedness (De Lacy, 2006), [njuz] is less marked and is more natural to articulate than [nuz] for the Bruneians, which therefore explains why there are more instances of the former than the latter.

Comparing the current findings to those of Salbrina (2009), the effect of Americanisation on modern-day BrunE is indisputable. Over a decade ago, only a handful of AmE features were reported in the speech of the Bruneians with zero instances of intervocalic tapping. In this present data, however, the subjects not only showed evidence of realising medial /t/ as the voiced alveolar tap [ɾ], but were also producing this common AmE feature (Giegerich, 1992; Kretzschmar, 2010; Ladefoged & Johnson, 2011) substantially more than the alveolar plosive.

As mentioned earlier, there were instances in which the sounds produced by the Bruneians could neither be placed in the British- nor American-like categories. These were particularly the case in the BATH and the LOT vowels and the findings for the two variables are discussed below.

4.1 | The BATH vowel

In addition to the taps, another notable departure from Salbrina (2009) can be found in the findings for [æ]. Previously, it was concluded that the BATH vowel was commonly pronounced as [ɑ:] by Bruneian speakers of English, but there now appears to be a substantial shift in favour of [æ]. However, the more common vowel sounds, marked as Other in Table 3, appear to be those which have relative auditory qualities between [ɐ ~ ɛ]. The Other findings are outlined in detail in Table 4.

There does not seem to be a discernible pattern as to the occurrences of [ɐ ~ ɛ] other than that when the Bruneians were initially thought to have a British-like pronunciation, the vowel emerged to having a quality closer to [ɐ], that is, the vowel was more fronted. Those who initially sounded American, on the other hand, were discovered to produce a

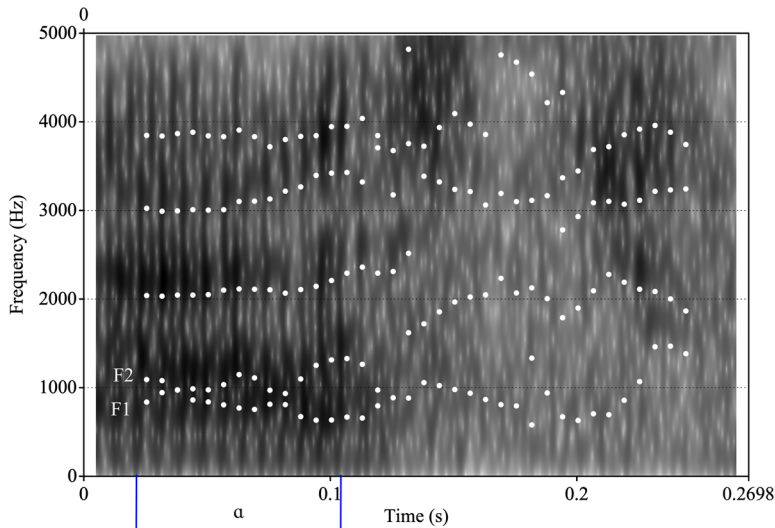


FIGURE 1 The spectrogram of the word *asked* produced with [ɑ:] by S4 [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

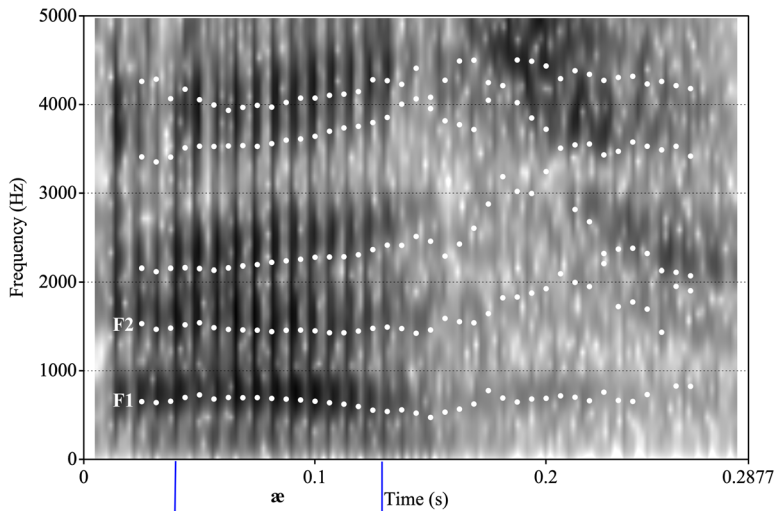


FIGURE 2 The spectrogram of the word *asked* produced with [æ] by S3 [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

vowel more similar to [ɛ]. The differences in the quality of the vowel productions are illustrated in Figures 1–4, which are the spectrograms of *asked* as produced by four Bruneian males, S4, S3, S5 and S30, each of whom were discerned to produce the vowels [ɑ:], [æ], [ɐ], and [ɛ] respectively. Table 5 shows the values of the vowels first (F1) and second formant (F2) frequencies, and it can be seen that there is a degree of agreement in the measurements with the auditory judgments. For instance, the backness of S4’s vowel is confirmed by the distance between its F1 and F2, while S3 and S30’s vowels are noticeably fronted based on their F2. The F2 value of S5’s vowel indicates that it is in a centralised position in comparison to the other three.

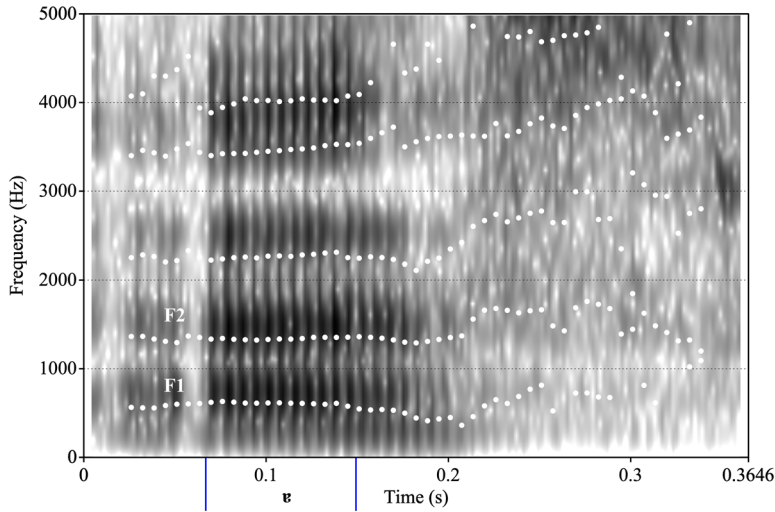


FIGURE 3 The spectrogram of the word *asked* produced with [ɐ] by S5 [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

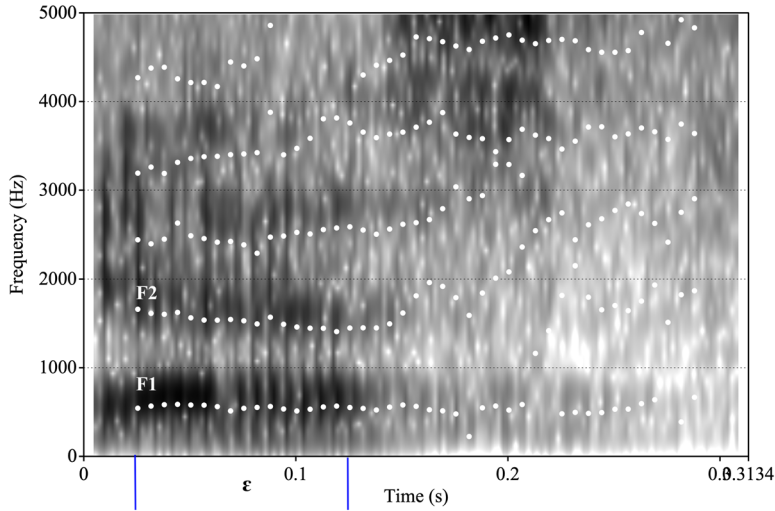


FIGURE 4 The spectrogram of the word *asked* produced with [ɛ] by S30 [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

TABLE 5 The F1 and F2 values of the four realisations of BATH

Subject	Vowel	F1 (Hz)	F2 (Hz)
S4	[a:]	941	1080
S3	[æ]	760	1619
S5	[ɐ]	676	1469
S30	[ɛ]	595	1654

TABLE 6 A breakdown of the Other findings for LOT (number and percentage)

Token (N = 64)	[ɔ]	[ɐ]
<i>dɔctor</i> (N = 18)	4 (22.2%)	14 (77.7%)
<i>ʃɒp</i> (N = 27)	14 (51.9%)	13 (48.1%)
<i>lɒt</i> (N = 19)	6 (31.6%)	13 (68.4%)
Total	24 (37.5%)	40 (62.5%)

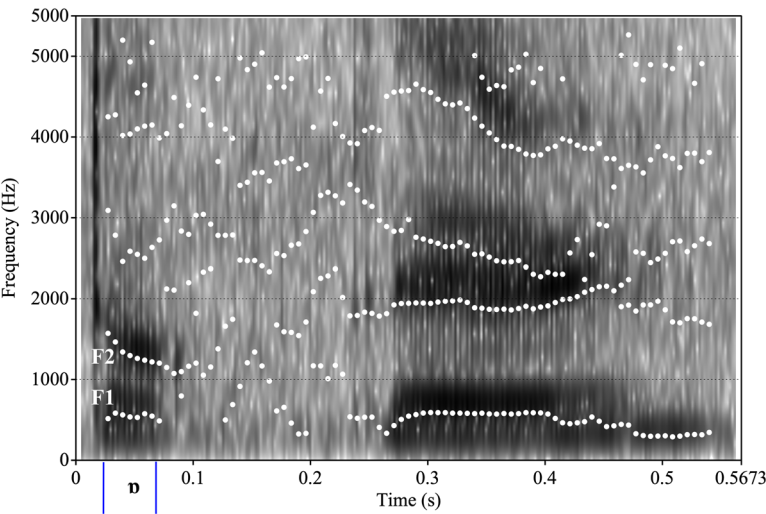


FIGURE 5 The spectrogram of the word *doctor* produced with [ɐ] by S2 [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

4.2 | The LOT vowel

Equally intriguing are the findings obtained for the LOT vowel. This, too, was investigated in Salbrina (2009) who reported only seven instances of the American [ɑ] in her data of 72 tokens. The remaining tokens were produced with a BrE-like vowel quality. In the current data, a shift is again observed in the direction of AmE, although it is not as extraordinary as what we saw earlier with BATH. Most of the Bruneians, however, produced the LOT vowel with a quality that is perceptually judged to be between [ɔ ~ ɐ]. Similar to what was reported in BATH, the Bruneians who were initially thought to sound British or American were in actual fact producing vowels that were, upon closer listening, of different qualities. The vowel of those who were at first deemed to sound British were actually less open, while those judged to sound American-like has a more fronted vowel, much like the centralised [ɐ]. Table 6 presents the results for the two vowels, which shows that the centralised [ɐ] is more common for *doctor* and *lot* while there is an almost equal split between [ɔ] and [ɐ] for *shop*.

To illustrate the differences in the quality of the LOT vowel, the spectrograms of the word *doctor* uttered by four female subjects, S2, S18, S35 and S37, are shown in Figures 5–8 while the vowels formant values are presented in Table 7. Again, the perceptual impressions of frontness and openness of the vowels are confirmed acoustically by the formant measurements.

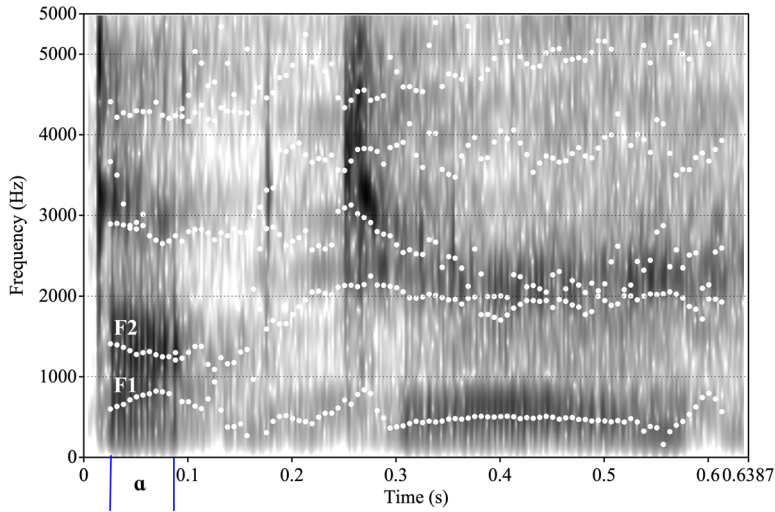


FIGURE 6 The spectrogram of the word *doctor* produced with [a] by S18 [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

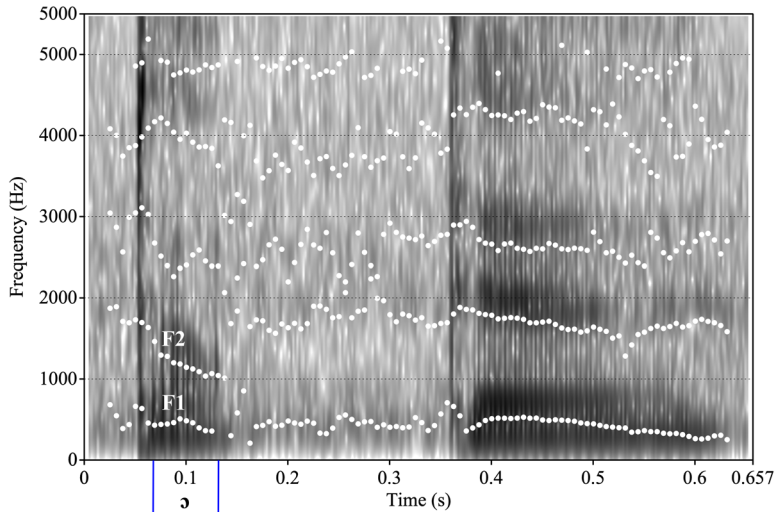


FIGURE 7 The spectrogram of the word *doctor* produced with [ɔ] by S37 [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

TABLE 7 The F1 and F2 values of the four realisations of LOT

Subject	Vowel	F1 (Hz)	F2 (Hz)
S2	[ʊ]	534	1266
S18	[a]	765	1293
S37	[ɔ]	495	1159
S35	[e]	650	1518

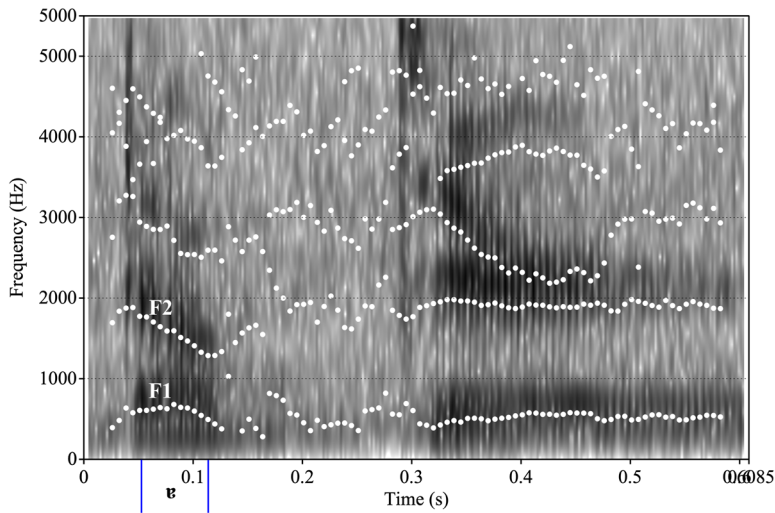


FIGURE 8 The spectrogram of the word *doctor* produced with [ɐ] by S35 [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

TABLE 8 Overall BATH and LOT categorised into British- or American-like vowel qualities (number and percentage)

Token	British-like realisations	American-like realisations
BATH (N = 151)	51 (33.8%)	100 (66.2%)
<i>ban̩a</i>	20 (52.6%)	18 (47.4%)
<i>castle</i>	4 (10.8%)	33 (89.2%)
<i>asked</i>	19 (50.0%)	19 (50.0%)
<i>dancer</i>	8 (33.8%)	30 (78.9%)
LOT (N = 113)	47 (41.6%)	66 (58.4%)
<i>doctor</i>	12 (32.4%)	25 (67.6%)
<i>shop</i>	15 (65.8%)	13 (34.2%)
<i>lot</i>	10 (26.3%)	28 (73.7%)

4.3 | BATH and LOT

The BATH and LOT vowels have produced varied, but nonetheless compelling results. The synchronic variability in the vowel realisations in the two lexical sets are indicative of an active process of change. In both cases, the back vowels undergo fronting and, in some instances, raising as well. As mentioned earlier, the BATH and LOT were previously predominantly realised with the British vowel variants (Salbrina, 2009), but the current data reveal that this is no longer the case. Instead, modern-day young Bruneians appear to produce the vowels similar in quality to those of AmE and Table 8 illustrates this point by conflating the Other vowels into their respective British- or American-like counterparts.

Based on the findings of BATH and LOT, it is hypothesised that the active systematic vowel shift in progress of moving from the British-like vowels towards the American-like variants will eventually see the BrunE vowels for BATH and

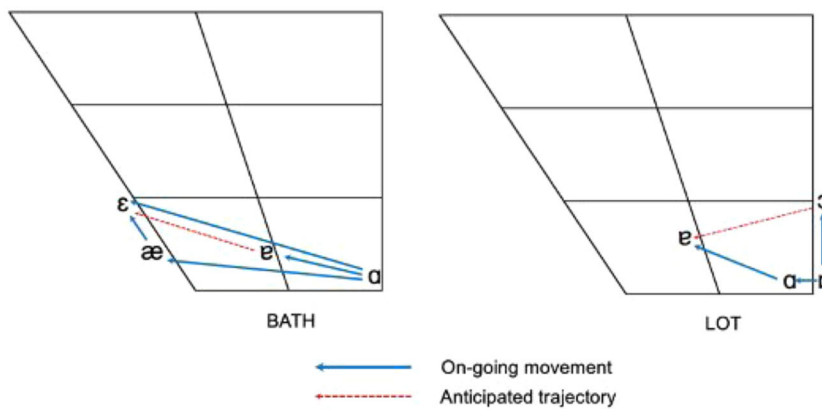


FIGURE 9 Chain shifting of BATH and LOT in BrunE [Colour figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]

LOT be stabilised to /ɛ/ and /ɐ/ respectively, and that these could be among the intrinsic markers of a BrunE accent. The vowel trajectories of BrunE BATH and LOT and their projected targets are illustrated in the following figure (Figure 9).

5 | CONCLUSION

Drawing all the findings together, a picture that emerges is a complex one. It is irrefutable that the English variety in Brunei is undergoing some major sound changes, but to say that they are all attributed to the process of Americanisation would be an oversimplification. The effect of Americanisation is particularly profound in three pronunciation features: in rhoticity, in the realisations of the diphthongs in *tomato* and *vase*, and in the articulation of the first vowel in *hurry* and *courage*. It is also in these three features that there is widespread uniformity. A number of factors have been proposed to explain the uniform idiosyncrasies noted in the pronunciations of the Bruneians. In addition to the influence from AmE, it is also posited that other processes such as spelling pronunciation, transfer effects from Malay, and linguistic markedness are also at play. What this study has shown is that the effect of Americanisation on the English of the Bruneians seems to be enhanced when the concerned element or feature is also present in Malay, as was the case in the yod absence in *tuna* and the articulation of /r/ in postvocalic positions, or if the effect is supported by other change mechanisms, such as pronouncing words as they are spelt, as was the case in *clerk* and *herb*.

In addition to uniformity, the present findings also point to considerable variability in the sounds of BrunE. Variation and variability are expected phenomena in emerging Englishes given that the input is more mixed (Van Rooy, 2010, pp. 16, 7) and drawn from diverse sources. Eventually, however, these variations are expected to converge on stable conventions. Examples of this were seen in the responses for *news*, which were explained as a consequence of linguistic markedness stemming from Malay. However, as AmE is also an influencer in the shaping of BrunE phonological system, opposing forces are in operation resulting in the varied responses for *news*. The variability may persist for a while until one point in time when one effect outweighs the other, which then will result in one form being selected more often than the other, therefore resulting in dialect levelling and uniformity in the sound production.

At the start of this paper, mention was made of a distinctive BrunE accent based on the ability of the Bruneians to recognise an accent as being Bruneianised. Rhoticity has been frequently cited as a salient aspect of this purported accent and the findings here provide further confirmation of this feature's omnipresence in BrunE. This study's findings also point to the emergence of other localised features such as /ɛ/ in BATH and /ɐ/ in LOT, and together with rhoticity, these linguistic features could potentially signal an accent as being inherently Bruneian. The observations and findings made here could be adequately explained by enacting Croft's (2000) innovation and propagation processes of

language change. Contact between Malay, BrE and now, AmE, has resulted in a feature pool of innovations in BrunE, that have diffused with some becoming established while others are still in the process of stabilising.

A major takeaway from this present study is that the speakers of modern-day BrunE are showing signs of dissociation from the traditional exonormative norm, BrE. BrunE now displays phonetic features that closely resemble those of AmE. However, this process of Americanisation appears to only be the starting point of BrunE's linguistic journey away from BrE, and the AmE features are not, in fact, the target as demonstrated by the findings for BATH and LOT. In other words, there is not enough evidence to suggest that the change being observed in the English spoken by contemporary young Bruneians is driven by a tendency towards Americanism. Indeed, more research needs to be conducted in order to verify whether the incipient linguistic variants observed in this study are socially diagnostic of the local Bruneian identity and consequently, prognostic of BrunE's endonormative stability. It would also be worthwhile to expand the scope of study to include Bruneians of non-Malay ethnicity and to compare the eventual findings to those of Singapore, which, having been ahead of BrunE in the developmental cycle of world Englishes, would display advanced features of stabilisation and homogenisation irrespective of ethnic lines. The results of these recommended future research, together with the current findings, would provide a more comprehensive account of BrunE and its variety status within the world Englishes paradigm.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants involved in the study

NOTES

¹ The exams are the General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level and Advanced Level, which students take at the end of their secondary school and pre-university years respectively.

REFERENCES

- Barber, C. (1993). *The English language: A historical introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Baskaran, L. (2005). *A Malaysian English primer: Aspects of Malaysian English features*. Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press.
- Boersma, P., & Weenink, D. (2021). *Praat: doing phonetics by computer* [Computer program]. Version 6.1.39. Retrieved from <http://www.praat.org/>
- Bolton, K., Botha, W., & Kirkpatrick, A. (2020). Asian Englishes today. In K. Bolton, Botha, W., & Kirkpatrick, A. (Eds.), *The Handbook of Asian Englishes* (pp. 1–12). Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Clynes, A. (2014). Brunei Malay: An overview. In P. Sercombe, M. Boutin, & A. Clynes (Eds.), *Advances in research on linguistic and cultural practices in Borneo* (pp. 153–200). Phillips, ME: Borneo Research Council.
- Clynes, A., & Deterding, D. (2011). Standard Malay (Brunei). *Journal of the International Phonetics Association*, 41(2), 259–268.
- Croft, W. (2000). *Explaining language change: An evolutionary approach*. Harlow: Longman / Pearson.
- Cummings, D. W. (1988). *American English spelling: An informal description*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- De Lacy, P. (2006). *Markedness: Reduction and preservation in phonology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Deterding, D. (2007). *Singapore English*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Deterding, D., & Nur Raihan, M. (2016). Spelling pronunciation in English. *ELT Journal*, 71(1), 87–91.
- Deterding, D., & Salbrina, S. (2013). *Brunei English: A new variety in a multilingual society*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Gardiner, I. A., & Deterding, D. (2019). Language selection and assessment in Brunei Darussalam. In F. Fang & H. P. Widodo (Eds.), *Critical perspectives on global Englishes in Asia: Language policy, curriculum, pedagogy and assessment* (pp. 45–63). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- Giegerich, H. (1992). *English Phonology: An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gonçalves, B., Loureiro-Porto, L., Ramasco, J. J., & Sánchez, D. (2018). Mapping the Americanization of English in space and time. *PLoS ONE*, 13(5). <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0197741>
- Haji-Othman, N. O., McLellan, J., & Deterding, D. (Eds.). (2016). *The use and status of language in Brunei Darussalam: A kingdom of unexpected linguistic diversity*. Singapore: Springer.
- Ho, D. G. E. (2013). [Review of the book *Brunei English: A new variety in a multilingual society*, by D. Deterding & S. Sharbawi]. *Southeast Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 13, 40–41.

- Hock, H. H., & Joseph, B. D. (2009). *Language history, language change, and language relationship: An introduction to historical and comparative linguistics* (2nd ed.). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Hughes-Halley, H. R. (1940). A sketch of the history of Brunei. *Journal of the Malayan Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, 18(2), 23–42.
- Hussainmiya, B. A. (2006). *Brunei revival of 1906: A popular history*. Bandar Seri Begawan: Brunei Press.
- Kamus Bahasa Melayu Brunei. (2007). Brunei: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Kretzschmar, W. A. (2010). The development of Standard American English. In A. Kirkpatrick (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of World Englishes* (pp. 96–112). London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203849323>
- Ladefoged, P., & Johnson, K. (2011). *A course in phonetics* (6th ed.). Wadsworth: Cengage Learning.
- Martin, P. W., Ozóg, C., & Poedjosoedarmo, G. (Eds.). (1996). *Language use and language change in Brunei*. Athens: Ohio University Press.
- Martin, P., & Poedjosoedarmo, G. (1996). An overview of the language situation in Brunei. In P. W. Martin, C. Ozóg, & G. Poedjosoedarmo (Eds.), *Language use and language change in Brunei Darussalam* (pp. 1–23). Athens, OH: Ohio University Center.
- McLellan, J., & Chin, G. V. S. (Eds.). (2016a). Special issue: English in Brunei Darussalam. *World Englishes*, 35(4), 489–634.
- McLellan, J., & Chin, G. V. S. (2016b). A research bibliography for English. *World Englishes* 35(4), 612–617.
- Modiano, M. (1996). The Americanization of Euro-English. *World Englishes*, 15(2), 207–215.
- Mossop, J. W. (1996). Some phonological features of Brunei English. In P. W. Martin, C. Ozóg, & G. Poedjosoedarmo (Eds.), *Language use and language change in Brunei Darussalam* (pp. 189–208). Athens, OH: Ohio University Center.
- Murphy, L. M. (2016). British English? American English? Are there such things? *English Today*, 32(2), 4–7.
- Nur Raihan, M. (2015). Spelling pronunciation: A new norm in Brunei English? *South East Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 15(1), 36–42.
- Nur Raihan, M. (2016). The status of Brunei English based on the phonology of local teachers and undergraduates. *South East Asia: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 16(1), 8–15.
- Nur Raihan, M. (2021). The use of American and British lexis in Brunei English. *J-Lalite: Journal of English Studies*, 2(2), 73–85.
- Nur Raihan, M., & Deterding, D. (2016). The pronunciation of Brunei English. *World Englishes*, 35(4), 521–528.
- Office of the Historian. (n.d.). A Guide to the United States History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, by Country, since 1776: Brunei. Retrieved from <https://history.state.gov/countries/brunei>
- Ozóg, C. (1996). The unplanned use of English: The case of Brunei Darussalam. In P. W. Martin, C. Ozóg, & G. Poedjosoedarmo (Eds.), *Language use and language change in Brunei Darussalam* (pp. 156–172). Athens, OH: Ohio University Center.
- Pillai, S. (2015). Rhoticity in Malaysian English: The emergence of a new norm? In U. Gut, R. Fuchs, & E. M. Wunder (Eds.), *Universal or Diverse Paths to English Phonology* (pp. 23–40). Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Salbrina, S. (2009). An acoustic investigation of the segmental features of educated Brunei English speech. (Doctoral dissertation). National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore.
- Salbrina, S. (2021) English use in Brunei: Investigating the Gen Z. *Asian Englishes*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2021.1961376>
- Salbrina, S., & Deterding, D. (2010). Rhoticity in Brunei English. *English World-Wide*, 31(2), 121–137.
- Salbrina, S., & Zayani, Z. A. (2021). Language and the Malay Muslim identity: An insight into Brunei. *Journal of Islamic Governance*. Thought Paper Series No.6. Retrieved from <https://islamicgovernance.org/tp6/>
- Tan, Y. (2012). To r or not to r: social correlates of /r/ in Singapore English. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 2012(218), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl-2012-0057>
- Tan, Y. (2016). The Americanization of the phonology of Asian Englishes: Evidence from Singapore. In G. Leitner, A. Hashim, & H. Wolf (Eds.), *Communicating with Asia: The future of English as a global language* (pp. 120–134). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Van Rooy, B. (2010). Social and linguistic perspectives on variability in World Englishes. *World Englishes*, 29(1), 3–20.
- Wells, J. C. (1982). *Accents of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wells, J. C. (2008). *Longman pronunciation dictionary* (3rd ed.). Harlow: Pearson Education Limited.
- Yunos, R. (2007, April 6). Languages in Brunei. *The daily Brunei resources: Helping to foster a better informed Brunei society*. Retrieved from <http://bruneiresources.blogspot.com/2007/04/languages-in-brunei.html>
- Zayani, Z. A., & Salbrina, S. (submitted). The Bruneian Zoomers: Language use, social interaction and identity.

APPENDIX: SENTENCES

1. He's watching the news so give him some privacy.
2. He is anti-vaccine.
3. Cigarettes are bad for you.
4. The shop sells Italian herbs.
5. The cat is very docile.
6. She ashed for some medicine.
7. Could you hurry up?
8. The clerk says he has a busy schedule today.
9. Can you give more details about him?
10. The adertisement says vitamins are good for us.
11. We took the best route to the city.
12. He has a lot of courage.
13. She wants to be a dancer.