

Sociophonetic variation, identity production and perception in ethnic Chinese Indonesian girls.

Keywords: identity, ethnicity, sociophonetics, variation

Abstract:

The current paper focuses on sociophonetic variation within groups of ethnic Chinese girls across two school settings in Pontianak, West Kalimantan, Indonesia. The paper presents an auditory and acoustic analysis of Chinese girls' production of /r/ as the trill [r] or the flap [ɾ] in Indonesian speech. Additionally, I explore the perception of variation in the production of /r/ in relation to social and ethnic identities. Previous sociophonetic studies have demonstrated the relationship between phonetic variation and social factors such as socioeconomic status (Hay & Maclagan, 2010; Ying-Ying Tan, 2012), region (Docherty & Foulkes, 1999), age (Hay, Warren, & Drager, 2006) and ethnicity (Mendoza-Denton, 2008). Studies of perception have further shown that listeners attribute particular social characteristics to a speaker's use of socially salient phonetic variation (Drager, 2015; Strand, 1999). There is a wealth of studies analysing the role of sociophonetic variation in identity construction and identity perception (e.g. Drager, 2015; Hay & Maclagan, 2010; Mendoza-Denton, 2008; Ying-Ying Tan, 2012). However, there have been no studies assessing the relationship between sociophonetic variation and the ethnic identity of the Chinese minority in Indonesia. Indonesia plays host to a large number of different ethnic groups, amongst them, the ethnic Chinese are considered the most politically and socially controversial (Handoko, 2009; Purdey, 2006). The current study examines data drawn from recordings of everyday interactions between 24 ethnic Chinese female college students and kindergarten teachers aged 18-26 as well as two sets of semi-structured interviews conducted with each of the participants of the study. The methodology incorporated an experimental model which required participants to make judgements on others' ethnic identity based on visual and auditory stimuli. The results of the study demonstrated that the production of /r/ as [r] or [ɾ] are socially salient variables that are linked to two opposing ethnic identities: *pribumi* 'native' Indonesian identity and Chinese Indonesian identity. Participants of the study drew on variation in the production of /r/ to negotiate their own ethnic identity and classify the ethnic identity of others.

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