

COMPARISON OF SPEECH RATES BETWEEN MALAY SPEAKERS AND MANDARIN SPEAKERS

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The unique speech rate differences among the different nationalities in Malaysia have yet to be documented. Therefore, this study is to provide preliminary reference data and comparison of the speech rates of Malay and Mandarin speakers in conversational and reading contexts. Speech rate (syllables per minute) was calculated for 24 young adults who were equally distributed among both racial groups. Malay speakers were asked to converse and read in Malay, while Mandarin speakers were asked to converse and read in Malay and Mandarin separately. Malay speakers' rates were then compared to the Mandarin speakers' rate when speaking in Malay and in Mandarin. Conversational speech samples of approximately 300 most perceptually fluent syllables were elicited from each subject using speech sampling. Two oral reading samples in each language were collected from each participant in a quiet setting. Each participant's recording was analysed using WavePad computer programme where pauses longer than 2 seconds (if any) were excluded or edited before the total speaking time was computed. Speech rates were then determined by dividing the total syllable count with the total speaking time in minutes. Results of the analysis identified significantly faster overall speech rate for Malay speakers in both contexts compared to the Mandarin group in Malay and Mandarin. Speech rates between genders revealed no significant difference for both racial groups in each context ($p > 0.05$) except for Mandarin speakers in reading contexts (in both languages). In terms of context, there was no significant difference between speech rates in conversation and reading except for Mandarin speakers when speaking in Mandarin ($p > 0.05$). However, speech rates in reading were faster than in conversation. The rate differences observed between Malay and Mandarin speakers highlight the importance of accurate and useful preliminary reference data of speech rates for clinicians, especially when dealing with individuals who speak languages different from that of the therapist during assessment and management of speech timing disorders.

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