

# Lexical Features of Malaysian English in Continuous Essay Writing Among Secondary School Students

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**Abstract**— Malaysian English is a variety used in Malaysia among the locals. Although it varies from Standard English, it is fully established and intelligible for use to a certain extent. The Lexical Features of Malaysian English depicts the essence and flavors of the locals in terms of the culinary, customs and traditions of the locals. Thus, this paper intends to highlight the concept of Lexical Features of Malaysian English based on Semantic Approach and Morphemic approach in Continuous Essay Writing. This study aims to analyze essay scripts from 30 Intermediate secondary four school students and interview three English language school teachers. In line to that, this study adapts Exploratory Sequential Method which will comprise both Qualitative and Quantitative data. The findings of this study are expected to show the common lexical features of Malaysian English used in Continuous Essay Writing and the factors affecting the usage of lexical features of Malaysian English in formal educational writing.

**Keywords**— Lexical Features, Malaysian English, Continuous Essay Writing, Semantic, Morphemic.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The English language is an established language in Malaysia in terms of Malaysian's culture and norms therefore it is considered as the second most essential language among Malaysians. Venugopal [1] has stated that the learning of English in Malaysia took place vastly during the colonial times in which it aims ultimately for the advancement of education and mobility of socio-economy. Accordingly, the English language is positioned as the second language in association with the Malaysia's education system and policy [2]. From here, there is an emergence of a new variety of English through localization process by native language, which is known as nativisation and in the Malaysian context this variety is referred to as the Malaysian English variety. Malaysian English varies from Standard English this is because Standard English is a pedagogical and basic model which acts as a reference model before other varieties of English exist. It is a variety that is mainly used for communications or publications in a formal and official setting yet, Malaysian English is also considered as the essence of the locals in which it has its

uniqueness and features that it is widely used in speaking and writing. Malaysians are more comfortable using the Malaysian English variety most of the time [3]. According to him, the culinary terms such as Durian, Nasi Lemak, Char Kueh Teow, or Thosai have no equivalents in Standard English and the learners tend to use those terms in writing as to how it is. Although, Malaysian English is notably present in written works among the locals regardless of all age groups and classes perhaps, the localized features of Malaysian English are in use as the marker of Malaysian's identity.

## II. CONCEPT OF MALAYSIAN ENGLISH

English can be used in the emergence of new contexts therefore; it is classified as an evolutionary language. The unique identity of the language leads to the evolution of other varieties in English. As such, the Malaysian English variety was also formed [4]. Similarly, in a recent publication, Hashim [5] has stated that historical, linguistic, cultural and political aspects have shaped the Malaysian English variety and eventually influenced the development of the language in Malaysia. Although language or a variety is unique in its' way, there are influences from several external factors, and it is inevitable. However, Malaysian English variety has been established significantly, and the divergence present should be embraced wholeheartedly compared to Standard English. As Talif and Hie [6] mentioned, they have distinguished that the third type of Malaysian English is the colloquial type. In another study by McArthur [7], the Malaysian English expression was formed as a variety of English from the colloquialism derived from English-medium schools. In this sense, colloquialism means the standard variety that has been adapted and adopted according to the usage of Malaysian's convenience, whereas it incorporates and infuses the characteristics and traits of local languages that are instilled in us in the English variety.

Apart from that, Hashim and Tan [8] agree that the Malaysian English variety has affected political, historical and cultural values besides influencing other dialects and languages. Malaysian English works on a broader range of conversationalists comprising Malays, Chinese and Indians. Similarly, Mohd Nor et al. [9] stated that the multi ethnicities in Malaysia are the sole

reason for producing the unique characteristics in the Malaysian English variety. They further added that Malaysian English variety had been derived from numerous linguistic and non-linguistic factors such as traditions, culinary terms, cultures and norms, accent, dialects and influence of mother tongue. Consequently, the influence from these dominants forms the language's role as an intercultural communication tool that enables intra-national and international communication. As such, the reflection of dominants in Malaysian English is vital to enable the variety to stand out on its own and has the integration of its origin [10].

Although, the English brought in Malaysian English, the heterogeneous local people have filtered it. The essential features of syntax, lexis and phonology vary from Standard English. The characteristics of Malaysian English differs from the variety of English used by British speakers. The lexis in Malaysian English is a nativized variety to a certain extent [3]. Nativized in this context means the variety of language has been adapted according to our native languages such as Malay, Chinese or Tamil based convenience in using the language.

### **III. LEXICAL FEATURES OF MALAYSIAN ENGLISH**

The lexical features found in Malaysian English can be measured through specific approaches, namely, the Semantic Approach and Morphemic Approach, which is more reliable for analysing writing skills [3], [11]. These approaches underlined by Baskaran are beneficial for this study in which it acts as a guideline for this research to address the research objectives of this study which is to identify the usage of Lexical Features of Malaysian English in writing. Furthermore, the researcher intends to analyse based on the Semantic and Morphemic approaches. This is because the English language is very interesting. In contrast, a phrase can be conveyed in different meanings like the intended meaning, contextual meaning and the meaning based on the receiver's perspectives. Therefore, the lexis from Malaysian English also holds various meanings in most cases, and the actual meaning might differ from the intended meaning. In accordance with that, the Semantic Approach highlights the underlying meaning of lexis or words to showcase the diversity in Malaysian English. On the other hand, the Morphemic approach can also identify the meanings of words that might differ in different situations based on the Malaysian context. For example, the lexeme 'cut' means to slice something into two, but in the Malaysian context, it can mean to take over a line 'He cut the line.' or to be leading in scores or marks like 'Cindy cut Alex in Maths text paper.' Besides a personal interest in Malaysian English, the researcher

intends to highlight the features of lexis found in Malaysian English that could be very interesting.

### **IV. SEMANTIC APPROACH**

According to Baskaran [3], there are two categories of lexical features of Malaysian English. The first one is the Local Language Referents, and the second one is the Standard English Lexicalization. There are subcategories within these two categories that represent the types of features in Malaysian English. These categorizations are very favourable for this study to analyse data found in the writing scripts from learners.

#### **A. Local Language Referents**

The Local Language Referents or the use of local lexicon in Malaysian English happens when the English language assimilates with local lexical items mainly used in the national language, Malay Language [3]. The usage of local lexicons is derived from the dominant local languages Malay, Chinese and Tamil. These local terms used in Malaysian English do not have any equivalents in Standard English, thus, these words are considered institutionalized. The characteristics of local terms can be derived into the following six subcategories such as Institutionalized concepts, Emotional and cultural loading, Semantic restriction, Cultural/culinary terms, and Hyponymous collocations.

**Institutionalized Concepts** - The local borrowed terms that have been used in Malaysian English have no equivalent in standard English variety. Therefore, the local varieties seem to be institutionalized based on the local context. Eventually, the English equivalent does not carry the same meaning. For instance, the local term Bumiputera if translated word-by-word in English is 'son of the soil' (bumi : earth , putera : son) yet, in local context the term bumiputera refers to a Malaysian term to describe the Malay race and other indigenous people of Southeast Asia, and used particularly in Malaysia. Hence, the English term does not produce the intended meaning based on the Malaysian English lexis. Apparently, it is not possible to apply the direct English translation equivalent because the meaning will not be applicable to the local context. Other similar examples are, gotong-royong and rukun-tetangga.

**Emotional and Cultural Loading** - As Malaysia is country rich in cultural norms, there are plenty of borrowing involving cultural and emotional loadings. Hence, those terms cannot be translated into English because it will lose the cultural aspects and the local terms have infused the language with local characteristics. Some examples of words are kampung (village), dusun (orchard), bomoh (medicine-man) and penghulu (village's chief). In the Malaysian context

“kampung” refers to a village with wooden house settings with stilts (raised around the ground). However, in the English language, the nature of the village replicates a setting with country-style cottages, but in the context it is not the same. Malaysian often correlate the lexis kampung to a rural or suburban trait for example, kampung boy, and they have a personal connection to kampung, especially when Malaysian go back to their hometowns during festive seasons, thus they often address it like ‘I am going back to my kampung’ instead of village.

**Semantic Restriction** – Some words can be translated into English but restricted to a specific field. For instance, the term dadah (drugs) in local terms is used for the illegal drugs smuggled through underground network such as Marijuana, Heroin and Cocaine. However, in English, drugs could also mean the general medicine consumed when someone is unwell. Also, in English, a drug-store is equivalent to a pharmacy in Malaysia. Using drug-store in Malaysia will have a negative connotation. There are other examples of lexemes restricted to only certain cultures like haj specifically meant for Muslims, mecca and pilgrimage, silat refers to Malay’s self-defense art and padi often referred to as paddy, means the rice grown in the fields or uncooked grains.

**Cultural/culinary Terms** - In Malaysia, there are various domestic culinary terms as it has versatile referents based on each race’s native origin and its characteristics. One example of such lexemes is durian derived from the Malay word duri (thorns). Durian is actually a local thorny fruit with white or yellow fleshy pulp inside. Likewise, the term satay means pieces of marinated meats barbecued over charcoals fire, angpow in Chinese is a small red envelope filled with money used to be given as a gift during Chinese New Year. Another example of word used in Malaysian English is sambal, in Malay it refers to a red spice gravy made of chili paste that is used mainly to cook dishes such as chicken sambal and fish sambal.

**Hyponymous Collocations** - The occurrence of local words collated to an English term known as hyponymous collocations. Hyponymous refers to the terms in which the local words are the subordinate referents, whereas English is the superordinate term. For example, the word bersanding ceremony. Bersanding is wedding and acts as the subordinate referent while the term ceremony acts as a superordinate term. Other examples include batik cloth, Syariah court and meranti wood.

**Campus/Student Coinages** - These terms are local referents used by students in educational settings such as school, colleges and universities due to the strong influence of the native language or could be possibly derived from their mother tongue. Words such as, leceh means troublesome, inconvenient lazy or reluctant, teruk meaning serious or in bad shape and doongu means silly, dumb or foolish. In these examples, the words leceh and teruk are the origin of Malay word. In certain circumstances those words are picked up with its meaning and being applied to the English variety context. These coinages are found to be used in informal conversations among the students. Students find it fun, cool and trendy while using these terms. They personally prefer to speak in such local referents terms while incorporating them in English or sometimes they do use together with other languages such as Tamil or Chinese rather than speaking in the standard variety of English.

### ***B. Standard English Lexicalization***

According to Baskaran [3], the Standard English Lexicalization category or English lexemes with local usage mainly consists of lexemes used in a manner in which it helps to reflect the characteristics of Malaysian English. To put it in layman’s terms, a certain word has a certain meaning in the standard English, but if a Malaysian utters the word, the meaning changes, oftentimes unexpectedly possessing a different, non-related meaning altogether. As an example, according to Lim [12], she has stated in her article that Malaysians use the word ‘sound’ to mean ‘scolding’ or ‘telling off’. More often than not, the Malay word ‘kena’ precedes it: Today I kena sound from my teacher. This particular term may have derived from the English phrase often used in the United Kingdom ‘get an earful’. There are also six subcategories in Standard English Lexicalisation such as Polysemic variation, Semantic restriction, Informalisation, Formalisation, Directional Reversal and College colloquialism.

**Polysemic Variation** - This subcategory depicts the extended semantic meanings of certain standard English lexemes. For example, the lexeme ‘cut’ literally means slicing however, in Malaysian English context this word is used to convey several meanings such as overtake as in for running vehicle, beat in terms of beating an opponent by marks or points and reduce for an amount of salary as in ‘I’ll cut your salary if you come late again!’. The common occurrence of semantic extension in Malaysian English shows that the lexemes are being applied to reduce the learning load in which people can use a single word to convey different meanings.

Semantic Restriction - Certain lexemes in English have often been used for a particular referent only. For instance, lexemes such as windy, hearty, and cooling can be used to refer to referents related to food or drinks. There is food that can make people feel bloated, gaseous, or discomfort. These types of food are described as windy food. Besides, hearty food considered to be food such as spicy and oily making one feel burning after consumption. Food such as fruits, vegetables, cucumbers, or yogurt can make one's body cold. Another example of a word that locals often use is 'one-kind', which means weird or peculiar in terms of Malaysian context. One example is 'She is one kind of girl'. Most of the time, these terms can bring out the nativized version of Malaysian English.

Informalization - Informalization is a type that is commonly used among locals, whereas it will replace the standard English words that typically results in colloquialism. These words can be found at an informal speech level and it is not surprising to be encountered in headlines over local dailies, which is a formal written product. It is often incorporated within standard English. One such example is, the lexeme 'kids' used to address children like 'Eight kids were burnt to death'. Likewise, another example is the lexeme 'hubby', which is used to refer to the husband. These terms can be widely spotted in writing scripts of students, especially when they write a descriptive essay. This is because in descriptive essay, most students will write stories or their personal experiences thus, they will include many dialogues in their writing hence they tend to use these informalization terms to make it sound more realistic and livelier.

Formalization - Despite, Informalisation seems to be commonly present, the locals also tend to formalise certain lexemes instead of the basic or occasional words usually being used among the language users. The locals at times tend to use formal words in an informal context like the word witness instead of see, scrutinize for examine and residence for house. Even though, it is not wrong to use those formalisations yet, students may tend to pick up these terms and make a condition overly formal whereas it is not necessary in most cases. This shows one of lexical features that is being adapted by the students.

Directional Reversal - Most of the time local language users use words (verb) in a reverse direction. This usually occurs in converse pairs such as go/come, bring/send, fetch/take and borrow/lend. For instance, the words lend and borrow are often being confused over one for another. This often happens due to the influence of their mother tongue or first language. In the Malay

language, the lexemes borrow and lend are categorised under one concept, which is pinjam. Sentences like, 'Saya meminjam buku itu', meaning 'I lent or borrowed the book to someone'. However, in Malay the meaning of borrow and lend differs in terms of the suffix -kan. Hence, the lexis borrow and lend are often being confused which resulting in some examples like, 'She borrowed me her camera'(lend) or 'He likes to lend my books' (borrow).

## **V. MORPHEMIC APPROACH**

### ***A. Morphological Processes in Word Formation***

Studies have shown that the Morphemic Approach is omnipresent in Malaysian English, be it in spoken or in written. The morphological approach also can be looked at in terms of the morphological process or word-formation processes. This statement is supported by Subrayan [13] in her study that words can be combined and formed by several morphological processes. The word formation process refers to the ways new words are derived based on the incorporation of the English word and a word from other languages. There are also certain types of word formation which enable the coining of new words. Likewise in another publication, Murray [14] has stated that there are two basic ways to allow the occurrence of new words. Borrowing words from another language, and another way is when words are produced according to the element of language that exists in English. However, in order to explain further the types of morphological processes that are relevant to this study, researchers have looked into Mesthrie [15] on coinages, Anthonysamy [16] on acronyms and Baskaran [11] where he has described in detail on few types of morphological processes in word-formation that involves Malaysian English such as, Compounding, affixation, pluralisation, past-tense inflection, gerund information, and conversion.

Coinages - One of the examples of such an approach is coinage, which is the invention of a new word or phrase. Mesthrie [15] states that coinage happens when an individual or a group of individuals find that a specific concept is absent in a language or when the existing vocabulary does not provide enough details to justify the meaning. Zimmer [17] provides some examples on the beforementioned, "cincai", which means to casually do things as one pleases. However, the usage of this word has no relation to literal facets, as it is used as an adjective to describe something in bad condition, or poorly done.

Acronyms - Another such approach is the acronym. An acronym is defined as a word or name formed as an abbreviation from the initial components in a phrase or

a word, usually consisting of individual letters or in some cases, syllables according to Anthonysamy [16], Besides, acronyms can be pronounced as a sequence of letters, as in the case of TNB (Tenaga Nasional Berhad), or pronounced as words, such as MAS (Malaysia Airlines) [16].

**Compounding** - Based on Baskaran [11], Compounding occurs when two different and independent words combine, forming a new word with different meanings such as girlfriend (girl + friend). In this context, the word girl is to describe the gender of a person and preferably used for young age or teenagers. The word friend is considered as a companion regardless of any gender. In this context, combining both words girl and friend, girlfriend means a female partner in terms of a relationship. Nevertheless, this occurrence can be associated with the Malaysian English context in which an English word and local word may be fused to form a new word. For example, the word police pondok is a derivation from the local language Malay which is actually “pondok polis”. However, in this context, both varieties produce a similar meaning to refer to the police’s hub. Another example is satay house and the word satay refers to a local Malaysian skewer food, while the word house is an English word that refers to a building or habitat for human beings. In this case, both words fuse together to form a new compound word that is familiar to Malaysians.

**Affixation** - Affixation is a process when a free morpheme which is a word that can stand on its own and has a meaning like talk, house, girl and university, combines with a bound morpheme where as a morpheme or part of a word that cannot stand on its own and has no meaning such as, -ing, -ly, -ship, anti-, pre- and un- [11]. Some examples of words formed in such an affixation process in English are speaking (speak + ing), friendly (friend + ly), sportsmanship (sports + ship) and, anti-corruption (anti + corruption). However, in the Malaysian English context affixation, occurs with the combination of bound morphemes in English and words from other local languages. Most of the affixation occurs with Malay words. For example, words such as anti-dadah and datuk-ship.

**Pluralization** - Pluralisation is a process in which a word is given an attribute, usually by adding a suffix -s, -en or -es. The form of a word is changed to show that it is more than one. For example, child – children, pen – pens, and tomato – tomatoes. Nevertheless, in Malaysian English, the process of pluralisation is added in the local words such as bomohs, penghulus, or pengarahs [11].

**Past-tense Inflection** - Past-tense inflection is to show an occasion that has been done earlier. Usually, verbs will be added with inflection -ed at the end of the root word [11]. For instance, kick – kicked, walk – walked and talk – talked. However, in some cases in English, there are other forms to show the pluralisation like goose – geese, tooth – teeth, and run – ran. On the other hand, Malaysian English usually encounters the inflection -ed. At times, learners tend to use the local word and add the inflection -ed at the end of the word to show that it is past tense. One of the examples is jagaed. In this context, the word jaga is a Malay word that means to take care of and it is inflect with -ed to form a meaning in past tense.

**Gerund Information** - According to Baskaran [11], Gerund Information or gerunding is similar to the past-tense inflection concept. However, in this case, students add the inflection -ing at the end of a root word. Besides that, a gerund word occurs when a verb is inflected with -ing and forms a noun, like the word swim is a verb being inflected with -ing and forms a noun swimming. Thus, in Malaysian English gerundalising occurs as in jagaing, angkating and kaypoing.

**Conversion** - Furthermore, Baskaran [11] further added that conversion has a similar concept with gerund but not on the whole. Conversion happens when one grammatical form changes to a word of another grammatical form without affecting the spelling or pronunciation. For example, the word email ‘I received an email from my school.’ (Noun) and ‘I will email the letter today.’ (Verb). Nonetheless, in the Malaysian English context, there are examples like makan, ulu and kacang. The word makan is a Malay word which means eat, yet it goes through the conversion process whereas, the word makan can be used as a noun. Although originally, makan in Malay forms a verb, it can also be used in sense of a noun word after conversion. For instance, ‘Lets’ go for makan tonight.’ (Noun).

## **VI. METHOD**

The approach to be used in the Mixed method is the Exploratory Sequential method, whereas the Qualitative method will be carried out first, followed by the Quantitative method. A group of Intermediate secondary four students will be involved in this study, and the written essay scripts of the students will be analyzed to identify the presence of Lexical Features of Malaysian English in their writing. The outcome of the analysis is expected to reveal the common Lexical Features of Malaysian English used in Continuous Essay Writing. Three English language teachers will also be involved to take part in Interview sessions. The criterion of students is secondary four students this is to avoid interruption on teaching and learning activity of secondary three and

secondary five school students as they will be sitting for their public examinations at the end of the term. The researcher tends to choose the intermediate proficiency level of students to obtain the average performing students to represent the whole level of secondary four students in that particular school. The teachers that will be selected are required to have a minimum of five years of teaching experience in English subject.

## **VII. INSTRUMENT**

The researcher has identified three instruments that are expected to be helpful for this purpose of study, which are Document Analysis -Checklist, Questionnaire, and Interview Questions. The Document Analysis – Checklist is designed by the researcher to distinguish the categorization and sub-varieties of Lexical features of Malaysian English according to the Semantic and Morphemic Approach. Accordingly, the essay scripts will be analyzed and features will be marked on the Checklist. This is to answer RQ 1 “What are the common lexical features of Malaysian English used in continuous essay writing among secondary school students?”. The second instrument is a Questionnaire designed for the students to answer RQ 2 “What are the factors affecting the usage of Lexical Features of Malaysian English in Continuous Essay Writing among Secondary school students?”. The researcher designed the questionnaire by referring to several published pieces that have underlined the reasons why students are using Malaysian English in writing. Several constructs have been identified based on the research papers. The items in the Questionnaire will be classified based on the categorization and varieties of Malaysian English, such as:

- 1) Cultural Loading [18], [19],
- 2) Institutionalised concepts [3], [18],
- 3) Influence of mother tongue or other languages [18].

The questionnaire has been designed on 5 points Likert-type scale ranging from “strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree”. There are a total of 15 items in the Questionnaire which the researcher designed according to the identified constructs.

The third instrument is Interview Questions for the teachers to share their views and opinions. Interview Questions were designed for the English language teachers in order to answer RQ 3 “How do the factors affect the usage of Lexical Features of Malaysian English in Continuous Essay Writing among Secondary school students?”. The questions will also probe the teachers’ perception of the usage of Malaysian English in continuous writing.

## **VIII. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE**

The data collection will be carried out through the three instruments mentioned above which are Document Analysis-Checklist, Questionnaire, and Interview Questions.

### **A. Phase ONE**

In this phase, the researcher will first collect the English essay scripts of the participants (students) from the year-end assessment of the school. The essay scripts will be selected based on the common topic that the students choose to write. The data will be obtained from the essay scripts through the document analysis process to mark the lexical features of Malaysian English on the Checklist designed by the researcher.

### **B. Phase TWO**

The Questionnaires will be distributed to a group of 30 to 50 participants (students) each. The researcher will give a brief explanation and definitions of the terms found in the Questionnaire such as Mother tongue, Malaysian English, Local terms, Local flavours and Cultural Loading. The students are required to answer all the sections on their own. The data will be collected through the answers from Questionnaire. The data will be analysed by using the SPSS software through descriptive analysis by measuring the Central Tendency Value. The results of Mode and Median scores are expected to show the middle distribution value.

### **C. Phase THREE**

In this Phase the respondents that will be involved are three English Language teachers. The interview sessions will be recorded via a voice recorder with their permission. Researcher intends to conduct the interview individually based on a one-to-one basis. The data will be recorded and transcribed later for analysis and reference. Researcher will take down some important points in written form for reference. Based on the contents, views and points from the interview session, the discussion will be driven towards the misconceptions or confusions students encounter in their writing. The data will be analyzed through content and thematic analysis. Based on the Thematic Approach, several themes will be generated from the Interview Questions, and the data will be coded according to the themes and descriptions.

## **IX. EXPECTED FINDINGS**

### **A. Document Analysis-Checklist**

This phase is expected to reveal the presence of Lexical Features used in writing among secondary four students. Also, highlighting the commonly used lexical features of Malaysian English in their writing. This will show the

presence of Malaysian English especially in terms of the lexical features.

### **B. Questionnaire**

The data obtained from the questionnaire is classified under ordinal data thus, the results of mode, and median score are expected to show the middle distribution value on each item based on the identified constructs in this study. The mode will show the most common value used by the participants. Meanwhile, the median will show the middle distribution for each item showing the effects of the factors on the student in using Malaysian English in writing.

### **C. Interview Questions**

Content analysis from the Interview is expected to show significant reasoning in favour of how do the factors affecting the usage of Lexical Features of Malaysian English in continuous essay writing among secondary four students. The misconceptions or confusion encountered by the students in writing will also be identified and analysed from the Interview sessions with the respondents.

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