CHAPTER FOURTEEN

CONCLUSION

14.0 Introduction

This study set out to investigate how the meanings of a select corpus of English womanwords are presented in two English-Malay dictionaries. By the process of componential feature analysis, several interesting aspects of meaning presentation are observed in both dictionaries. The most significant findings of the study are stated below:

(a) Meanings of entry words are basically in the form of equivalents (lexical, literal, semantic and functional). Where such equivalents are not available, meanings are given in the form of phrasal equivalents, descriptive or explanatory equivalents (especially in *KDB*), proverbs and borrowings. English glosses (in *KIMD*) and Malay glosses (in *KDB*) contribute towards clarifying understanding or usage of the equivalents.

(b) The words that represent the concept of "woman" in Malay and English have a varying range of application. There are positively no one-to-one equivalents for most instances.

(c) One English entry with its polysemic and connotational uses is often seen to be represented by various Malay lexical items, each relevant in particular contexts of use.

(d) In the course of translating from English to Malay loss or gain in meaning is observed. Loss of meaning is seen in the restrictions placed on

explicating the range of meaning of the English entry word. A gain in meaning is seen in the detailed sociolingusitic contexts of use given for the Malay equivalents. (This is especially the case in *KIMD*).

(e) Equivalents show different distributions of meaning compared to the entry words.

(f) Lexical gaps exist between the languages. The lexical gaps are mainly derivational or matrix gaps. Lexical gaps are filled either by borrowing from English, or in the case of derivational gaps, by lexical items of Malay.

(g) The Malay equivalent meanings do not reflect the same inequalities and biases that exist in the English entries. The notions of sexism found in the English entries are not transferred to the Malay equivalents thus resulting in attitudinal gaps. At the same time it is clear that the gender differences created by the English language are not created similarly in the Malay language. The negative evaluative loadings for women, for example, in the English suffixes, are not transferred to Malay equivalents.

(h) When the two bilingual dictionaries studied are compared, one clear difference is notable. The *KIMD*, while attempting to present as wide a range of meaning as possible of the English entry words, emphasises to a large extent the range of usages (linguistic as well as sociolinguistic) of the Malay equivalents. The *KDB*, however, restricts its elucidation of meaning to the English entry words. Details about the various sociolinguistic usages of the Malay equivalents are seldom described. *KIMD's* equivalents and

meanings, therefore, reflect the world-view of the Malay usage of the lexical items. The *KDB,* however, limits its meaning presentation by explicating the world-view behind the English lexical entries (although not all senses are dealt with).

14.1 Conclusions

On the basis of the findings above it is possible to formulate the following conclusions:

(a) Over two centuries of English/Malay bilingual lexicography has brought minimal changes to the presentation of meaning in such dictionaries. Equivalents are still the predominant elements of meaning. The weaknesses inherent in such a form such as incomplete transference of meaning (lacking certain component meanings of the entry word), over generalization of entry word meaning (or vice versa), ambiguity and, incongruencies in correspondences (the equivalents can be grammatically or structurally different from the entry words) still persist. Although a string of equivalents can be a convenient resource to a user, their immediate or inappropriate insertability can be a source of frustration and confusion.

(b) One problem associated with bilingual dictionaries is the difficulty of presenting meanings for culture - specific items. The referent in this study is a female human being, a person who is definitely not a culture-specific "item". Nevertheless, problems of meaning transfer still arise. This is not because a woman is an unknown item or object in a particular society, but because of how a particular society views her and how that language

describes or refers to her. The lexical items thus created for her in one society may not be found in another society, resulting in an inability to correspond lexical items and concepts about women in both societies. Therefore in this study, the sexism inherent in some English lexical items could not be transferred to the Malay equivalents completely, probably because of a lack of such items in that society (This does not mean that sexism does not exist in the Malay society, however).

(c) The two dictionaries are basically descriptive in their presentation of meaning. The emphasis is to describe usages of the English entry words. In this, both dictionaries attempt at an objective presentation of meaning. Nevertheless, prescriptivity, or subjectivity is seen in the *KIMD's* presentation of Malay meanings. As language is a social institution, the lexicographers of *KIMD* show this by indicating the attitudes and usages of particular Malay lexical items and expressions as used in Malay culture and society. These discriminations in usage are not indicated by the English entry words.

(d) As a bilingual dictionary involves two languages it is inevitable that there is a bias in the presentation of meaning. *KIMD* is an example of such a dictionary that presents the world-view of its lexicographers and their language, that is Malay. The meanings of English entries are filtered and discussed in greater detail with respect to the Malay culture. The meanings represent more the ideas, concepts and usages in the lexicographers' culture than that of the entry word. This is seen in the extent of description given to the Malay lexical items, and in the illustrative examples.

(e) Gender in English is basically natural but is also structural, whereas that in Malay is lexical. The English entries are words that are gender-specific in themselves. The Malay equivalents have to resort to lexical items like "perempuan" or "wanita" to indicate gender. Many Malay equivalents for the English entries are given as gender neutral terms. Therefore the semantic area occupied by the English entries are not reflected in the Malay equivalents resulting in incongruence. While it is true that dictionaries themselves do not influence sexual attitudes in society, it is their task to reflect them in the information that they provide.

In summary, a quote from Moon (1989:88) seems appropriate:

> "Dictionaries reflect the culture of their time - or perhaps the culture of a slightly earlier time ..... Dictionaries are not without social influence and significance but that influence and significance is limited in its effect. ..... While purporting to be objective to a reasonable extent, dictionaries are covertly subjective..... Dictionaries after all reflect language as well as attitudes, but the attitudes are inherent in the language. There is no obvious way for lexicographers to distance themselves from attitudes which permeate their language and society ....."