CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the problem

English has the status of a second language in Malaysia and it has been receiving due recognition from various domains and sectors. The government continuously emphasizes the importance of English and the need to learn this language. As a result, English has become a vital language used in speech and in writing locally in many aspects of Malaysian every day life. Many locals use English widely in their everyday conversation especially in the urban areas. Its extensive use is also seen in the business sector especially in the private companies and in the common interaction domains, such as, shopping centres. English has also become a household language whereby in many families, English is the communicative medium among members. Besides these, English is also used in radio and television broadcasting. The radio network has various English stations like Radio 4, Time Highway Radio, Mixed FM, Hitz FM, Light and Easy, just to name a few. There are also locally produced television programmes in English such as Global, Business Trends, World News, Money Matters, City Of the Rich, Pedoman and Hey Good Cooking.
As a result of the use of English as a second language (L2) in various domains over a long period of time, this language has acquired great depth and has become deeply rooted in this country. It is natural for languages to adapt to the users of the country in which they are used and English is not an exception. It has developed its own varieties and these varieties are referred to as New Englishes. As English has been used among the locals from the colonial era until today without much effort at standardization, a considerable amount of transfer from the local languages has occurred. Thus, English in Malaysia has gone through a process of nativization resulting in a distinctive variety called Malaysian English. It should be acknowledged that within this new variety itself, several sub-varieties have sprung similar to that of L1 varieties. Platt & Weber (1980:23) have analysed Malaysian English as a continuum ranging from acrolect to basilect, with various intermediate mesolectal levels. There is an educated variety, or the acrolect, which is almost similar to an L1 variety with a slight influence from the local languages especially in the area of phonology and lexis. On the other hand, there is also a lower variety or basilect, which is usually but not always used by uneducated speakers. Between these two categories falls the mesolect. The vast difference between the acrolect and basilect results in various levels of mesolectal speech. The emergence of sub-varieties within Malaysian English makes the situation similar to that in England where the Queen’s English thrives well along
with the Cockney dialect and various accents such as upper class accent and the working class accent.

Malaysian English is the result of various processes like simplification, acculturation and generalization by locals, thereby making it exclusively Malaysian. Though, in the design of the syllabus for English Language in schools, the use of Standard English is emphasized, the speakers have acculturised the language to suit their needs when communicating. Most Malaysians are comfortable using this variety although there may be some who try very hard to imitate the L1 varieties and frown upon this unique L2 variety. Many regard it as a deviation from the parent language, or a result of deficient approximation of a second language resulting in “fossilization” (Selinker 1972). On the other hand, there are also scholars who refute this notion. Sridhar (1983:52-53) defends it by saying that it is the process of “adapting an alien code to the socio-cultural context of use”.

This study is an attempt to examine the use of Malaysian English lexis in creative writing by Malaysian writers. Thus far, many studies have been done not only on Malaysian English in speech and in writing but also on attitudes towards Malaysian English. However, creative writing in English by Malaysian writers is fairly a new area of study and the writings are somewhat fewer in number
compared to other non-native English-speaking nations like India and those in Africa. Today, in Malaysia, many new literary works have emerged that receive international recognition. These include poems, short stories, novels and plays. One factor in common about all these literary works, which makes them distinctive, is the richness of the language used giving it the added exclusive, Malaysian flavour. As far as the researcher is aware, no studies or research has focused on this area. Platt and Weber (1980) have attempted to study English literature in Singapore and Malaysia. However, most of the examples used to illustrate their points and arguments are taken from the work of Singaporean writers. Perhaps, this was because at that time Malaysian writings were still small in number and thus the Singaporean work stood out. Besides, perhaps, it was alright then to study Singaporean and Malaysian English together. However, now, it would not be appropriate, as the linguistic scenery in both the countries have gone through various changes along with the differences in language planning. Thus, this study will look at the use of Malaysian English lexis by selected local writers of prose with an attempt to categorise them, bearing in mind that the selected works are still a part of English literature catering for an international audience.
1.2 Significance of the Study

The English language used in Malaysia is believed to contain features of the indigenous languages used by the speakers. These features are the result of transfer from the local languages. This process of transfer, whether in the form of lexis or grammatical simplification has been termed as "interference" or even deficient approximation of a second language. This is evident in the conclusion by Trudgill & Hannah (1982:100) that:

these varieties of English differ, often considerably, from the English of native speakers elsewhere in the world, mainly as a result of interference from local languages.

Many studies carried out in this field have emphasized the informal aspect of Malaysian English, especially in speech. Thus, the results of these studies would be significantly different from those that are carried out on written Malaysian English. It would be short sighted to regard Malaysian English as wrong or inferior compared to the native varieties only because it is different. In addition, it will be inappropriate to conclude that the differences are merely a result of fossilization. Other reasons for the differences should also be looked into so that we will not be blinded by the opinions of purists who regard all non-native varieties of English as inferior to the native varieties. Thus, this study attempts to look at spoken and written English depicted in a particular genre, i.e. prose in creative writing.
English in a non-native situation does not and need not have similar functions as in a native environment. In Malaysia, English has a functional motivation to adapt itself to a new situation. The language has been slowly equipped with adaptations that allow it to meet the needs of the users as opposed to the native variety since there are certain culture-bound needs which cannot be met by an L1 variety of English. These adaptations and distinct features will allow the new variety of English to function effectively in a non-native speech community. Kachru (1983) terms this process as "acculturation" of English.

The differences in the case of Malaysian English compared to the native variety can be in the form of lexical items, grammar, culture bound slang, phrases and idioms, pronunciation and intonation. In Malaysian English, there are words and expressions which may not have an equivalent in English language, or perhaps the equivalent might not carry the exact weight culturally. Thus, they would not convey the emotional expressions of the speaker when literally translated. There is a need for new expressions to fill this emptiness in English. It is inappropriate to regard this acculturation process as an error. Rather, it should be seen as a result of linguistic creativity. It is believed that this study will enable us to look at the adaptations and distinct features found in Malaysian English in the area of lexis.
When studying a new variety of English, we should not merely emphasize the differences and term them the result of second language acquisition but study the need of the users as to why such a difference is needed. This does not mean, however, that standard L1 variety should be totally discarded. Standard L1 varieties will always have a special place with Malaysians. However, it should also be ensured that Malaysian English receives due recognition and is not frowned upon. This is because it is a variety by itself and a legitimate variety too because it performs various sociolinguistic functions and eases communication which is the main reason for the existence of a language. Besides, this study will also reveal to us the type of lexis used by Malaysian writers in creative writing. We will also be able to see to some extent the meaning of these words in Malaysian English and Standard British English and the reason for these writers who have an almost perfect grasp of the English language to use these words. This study is different from other studies done on Malaysian English in that the subjects are not school or college students or the public whose mastery of the language may not be considered good enough, hence the results may be considered merely “interference” or “fossilization”. In this study, the data is based on literary work by writers who have an in-depth knowledge of the language and have consciously used Malaysian English words to portray the linguistic scenario of the country.
Kachru (1986) has accused Prator (1968) of committing seven sins in his attitude towards non-native varieties of English evident in Prator’s article “The British Heresy in TESL” (in Fishman et.al 1968:459-476). Among the seven sins, Kachru contributes at least four to be the result of a lack of understanding of the non-native varieties of English. The four sins are “the sin of not recognizing the non-native varieties of English as culture-bound codes of communication”, “the sin of ignoring the systemicness of the non-native varieties of English”, “the sin of ignoring linguistic interference and language dynamics” and “the sin of overlooking the ‘cline of Englishness’ in language intelligibility” (1986:5-6).

Kachru seems to appeal especially to native speakers to “understand the functions of these varieties of English in the perspective of their uses and users” (1986:14). It is hoped that this study will be able to contribute to this by creating a better understanding of Malaysian English. It is an attempt to examine and categorise one of the areas of Malaysian English, i.e., lexis. This interest in the area of lexis arose from the fact that it is a very outstanding feature of Malaysian English. Besides, lexical items from other L1 varieties like cookies for biscuits and gas for petrol in American English have been accepted as part of the English language and therefore why not Malaysian English lexis? It is also interesting to note that some Malaysian English lexical items have found their place in the English
dictionary. This study will provide us the opportunity to look at some of the other lexical items that have not made their way to the English dictionaries.

Malaysian English contains lexical items that are not used in Standard British English (SBrE) or those that are used differently from SBrE. This phenomenon is not new nor is it surprising as it is also evident in other L1 and L2 varieties of English language such as American English, Australian English and Indian English. This study concentrates on lexical items used in the selected works of two Malaysian writers in the genre of prose. These lexical items are words or expressions that are not found in the English dictionary and if they are, they do not convey the same meanings. In the attempt of categorising the data, the method used by Baskaran (1985) has been adopted.

Baskaran (1985) in her study on Malaysian English, has attempted to present some of the main linguistic features of Malaysian English such as phonological variation, syntactic variation and lexical variation. In her discussion on lexical variation, she has mentioned two categories i.e. Substrate Language Referents and Standard English Lexicalisation. Within each of these categories she has also included sub-categories which she claims are “representative enough” (1985:85).
This study will look at how the data from Malaysian creative writing fit into the categories mentioned. Although there are many genres such as prose, poetry and play in creative writing, this study has limited its data to prose. Two writers have been chosen and some of their works have been selected as the source of data. A discussion on the selected works will be included in Chapter Three.

1.3 Aims of the Study

The aim of the study is to examine the lexical items from a selection of literary work written by Malaysian writers:

The specific questions this research intends to address are:

1. What are the Substrate Language Referents that can be found in the selected works of writers Karim Raslan and K.S. Maniam?

2. What are the Standard English lexemes that can be found in the selected works of Karim Raslan and K.S. Maniam?

3. In which of these two categories is the concentration of lexis items?

Before we study the use of Malaysian English, we need to look at how English was first introduced to Malaysia and the developments that took place before and after British colonization.
1.4 The Development of English in Malaysia

1.4.1 The Development of English in Colonial Malaysia

English has a long history in Malaysia and this began with the British colonization. As is the case now, in the 19th century, the largest ethnic group in Malaya was the Malays. Thus, the language used among them was the Malay language. Soon after, the British began to exert a bigger influence in Malaya by establishing commercial centers in Penang (1796), Singapore (1819) and Malacca (1824). The British colonies of Penang and Singapore were established by Sir Francis Light and Sir Stamford Raffles respectively. "It was in Penang, Singapore and Malacca that English was most important and consequently where its acquisition was felt to be an advantage" (Platt, 1980:386). Later, the influence of the British extended to the Federated Malay States, i.e., Perak, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan and Pahang, followed by the Unfederated States, where the importance of English gradually increased.

In the 19th century, there was a big influx of immigration by the Chinese and Indians to Malaya resulting in a multiethnic society. The Chinese mainly worked in the tin mines whereas the Indians worked in the rubber estates and coffee plantations. As the people from the three ethnic communities lived separately, they only needed to use their own ethnic language for intra-ethnic communication.
However, when it came to inter-ethnic communication, informal Malay was the lingua franca. Lowernberg (1989:73) illustrates this point further:

The predominant languages spoken by this diverse population included Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, Hakka and Hainanese as the Primary Chinese languages: Tamil as the most widely used South Asian language, in addition to Malayalam, Telugu and Punjabi; and Malay as both the primary language of the ethnic Malays and the most widely used lingua franca for inter-ethnic communication (Lowernberg 1989:73).

Besides using their own language within their own communities, they needed a speech variety that was intelligible to the other sub groups of their own ethnic community for ease of communication. “Among the Chinese it was (and is) a typically dominant “dialect”: in Penang, it is a variety of Hokkien. While in Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh, it is Cantonese”. (Platt 1980: 387). As for inter ethnic communication, a pidginised Malay or bazaar Malay was used.

For the function of administration, the colonials needed to communicate with the locals. There was a need for a common language, as it would allow the colonials to have more power over the natives. Lowernberg (1989:73) points out:

As their colonial interests expanded, the British began to need cadre of English educated non-Europeans to function as an infrastructure of officials, business agents, and clerks.
Thus, there was a need for English education for the locals and this resulted in the establishment of the Penang Free School in 1816. Consequently, several other free and mission schools were established for students who wanted the English medium education. However, these schools were only attended by children from educated families especially among the Indians and Chinese. Among the Malays, only the sons of royalty and aristocrats managed to receive education from these "prestigious schools". According to Lowernberg (1989), "English became the dominant language of power among the non-Europeans involved in the administration of colonial Malaya. Its use increased at all levels of government including revenue collection, supervision of mining and the legal system" (p.73). This was when English began to gain a foothold in Malaya. Many jobs in the sectors mentioned above became available to the non-Europeans. Besides, they were also given the opportunity to further their education in British universities. All these resulted in English becoming a tool for self advancement. With English, they could secure a good job and involve in transactions with the British. The locals especially the rich Chinese and Indians were motivated to acquire the language so as to achieve a higher standard of living.

1.4.2 English in Post colonial Malaysia.

With the achievement of independence, Malaysia established the Malay language as the national language and thus, Malay became a compulsory subject in all
schools. The rationale for this was "to unify the cultural and national aspirations of Malaya" (Le Page 1962: 132). Nonetheless, the importance of English was not denied either. English too, was to have an official status until 1967 (Lowernberg 1989:74). As a result of these policy decisions, the functions of English decreased in Malaysia. In many domains, Malay began to take the place of English except in the legal, commerce and scientific domains. Even with this rapidly decreasing importance of English, it became the first language of some locals, as Platt (1980:390) points out, "English covered a continuum from first language through second language to a foreign language".

Besides this, the enrollment from all ethnic groups in government assisted secondary schools who chose English as the medium of instruction increased from 61.0% in 1956 to 84.4% in 1964 (Platt and Weber 1980:34).

It is clear that although English was used in fewer domains, its importance was still recognized by many. According to Lowernberg (1989), this was due to the following factors:

1. Among the languages present, it was the only language in post-World War II Malaya that had suitable registers for the various language domains of a modern nation.

2. The only non-Europeans who had the training and experience to administer the new nation in Malaya were English educated.
3. There was a linguistic drift toward English which paved the way towards higher education and economic advancement through scholarships to universities and training institutes in the British Commonwealth and in the United States. Besides, it also proved to be the stepping stone for the best government and private sector jobs.

Thus, for the locals, English began to be a status symbol and a tool for advancement. With this, English began to spread in Malaysia. According to Asmah (1965:196-197), English was made "the most indispensable requirement in the achievement of social and economic status". She also adds that "its pressure and importance are still felt even at the present moment when all efforts are being reinforced towards the establishment of Malay as the National language". Although this was way back in 1965, not much has changed today. English still plays a vital role in this country even though Malay or Bahasa Malaysia is the national language.