CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN AND
METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This research is an attempt to study Malaysian English lexis as used by creative writers in their works. What distinguishes this study from other studies is that the source of the data is the work of Malaysian writers who have a good background or a good mastery of the English language. These writers consciously manipulate their writings, especially through dialogues, to demonstrate the real linguistic and cultural scenario of the characters and the setting. They employ the English language as a vehicle to transmit the Malaysian cultural heritage, and in the process use Malaysian English especially in dialogues. Therefore, local creative writing would be a good source to examine the use of Malaysian English. The data for this study was collected by analyzing selected works of two Malaysian writers. Examples of Malaysian English lexis were extracted and categorized.

As mentioned in Chapter One, this study concentrates on lexical items which occur in the selected works of Malaysian creative writers in one particular genre, i.e., prose. Although the features of Malaysian English is evident in other areas of language such as phonology and syntax, lexis has been chosen because it is an outstanding feature of Malaysian English. Besides this, non-native lexis is the only area that has been accepted into the English language universally. This is
evident from the lexical items, although few in number, that have made their way into the English language dictionaries. This is however, not the case with non-native phonology and syntax. Although there is an increasing awareness of these areas, they have not been given the acceptance given to lexis.

In categorizing the data, we will be able to find out the type of Malaysian English lexis mostly used and this could give us a hint as to why these Malaysian English lexis are used instead of their Standard British English counterparts.

3.2 Sources of Data

The works chosen for this study were selected from the prose genre. The works that have been selected for this study include a compilation of eight short stories written by Karim Raslan and a short story and a novel written by K.S. Maniam. Below is a discussion of the selected works.

1. The Return

This short novel was written by K.S. Maniam, a well-known Malaysian writer and was published in 1981. The story revolves around an Indian family, which migrated to Malaysia from India. Brewster (1993), points out that, "The drama enacted in the Malaysia before and after Independence, reveals how an immigrant
population comes or does not come to terms with a common nationality.” (in Maniam, 1996:184). In this novel, a lot of Malaysian and Indian elements have been incorporated. This work has incorporated the lexical patterns and sentence structures that are exclusive to the Indians in Malaysia, hence providing the opportunity to analyze such data. There are many Indian lexical items used to either substitute the English language words or as a replacement for the void in the English language for a particular meaning.

2. The Loved Flaw

This is a short story written by K.S. Maniam which won the first prize in the NST - Mcdonald’s Short Story Competition. This story puts forward the battles in the relationship between a man and his sister-in-law. This story highlights how the 17 year old girl gets herself trapped in a sexual tangle with her brother-in-law and how she changes after 10 years. Elements of the Indian culture have been incorporated into the story which will be a good source of data.

3. Heroes and other stories

This compilation of eight short stories was written by Karim Raslan. The short stories have been influenced by Malay culture and language. The stories revolve around middle class Malay families and the conflicts that take place in their families. Thus, this will be a good source of Malaysian English influenced by the Malay language. The eight short stories included in this compilation are:
a. The Beloved  
b. Heroes  
c. A New Year’s Day Lunch in Jalan Kia Peng  
d. The Inheritance  
e. The Mistress  
f. Sara and the Wedding  
g. Go East!  
h. Neighbours  

3.3 Data Analysis

The data for this study consist of lexical items that have been extracted from the selected works of K.S. Maniam and Karim Raslan. In presenting the data, the researcher has not only extracted the particular lexical item but the whole sentence so as to show the context in which the word has been used.

In categorizing the data, the systems used by a few scholars was studied. Tongue (1979), in examining English in Singapore and Malaysia has categorized lexis according to four parts of speech namely nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs. Under each of these categories, he has further divided them into:

1. words used differently or with different but related meaning in the two dialects.
2. words which do not exist in Standard British English (or have quite unrelated meanings).

Baskaran (1985) has divided Malaysian English lexis into two categories:

1. Substrate language referents (use of local lexicon [Malay, Chinese and Indian language words] in Malaysian English) and
2. Standard English Lexicalisation (English lexemes with Malaysian English usage).

Within each of these categories, there are sub categories which she claims "are representative enough although they are not necessarily exhaustive" (1985:85).

Platt & Weber (1980) have attempted to categorise Singaporean English lexis and in the attempt have also come up with two categories somewhat similar to that of Baskaran's. They too, have divided the lexis into two categories but have not divided them into further sub categories. The two categories are:

1. words and expressions from the background language.
2. words and expressions which are used differently in Singapore English from Standard British English.

After looking at the methods of categorization by the three scholars above, the method used by Baskaran (1985) has been adopted. This system of categorization has been adopted for this study because from the researcher's point of view, it is
the most systematic. Besides, it encompasses most of the Malaysian English lexical items. The sub categories under each of the categories cover a vast area of Malaysian English lexis. Although, some overlapping in the sub categories seems evident, this system was selected as it seems the best among those available. Below are the categories and sub categories and an explanation on each of them.

3.3.1 Substrate Language Referents

This phenomenon occurs when local lexemes are absorbed into the English language used in Malaysia, giving it the characteristic of Malaysian English. The local languages referred here are indigenous languages spoken by the locals, namely Malay, Chinese (and its various dialects) and the Indian languages, mainly Tamil. These lexemes are absorbed from the local languages into the English language to ease communication. The difference in culture and the way of life may create a void in the English language when it is needed to express certain feelings or nuances. A word to describe the exact meaning may not exist in the English language, hence the use of a local word. This local word may be from any of the local languages depending on the meaning that needs to be conveyed and also the origin of the speaker. If the meaning that needs to be conveyed is specific to the Malay culture, then there is a greater tendency for a Malay word to be used.
On the other hand, if the meaning is shared by all three cultures, the choice of word depends largely on the indigenous language spoken by the interlocutor.

Besides this, transfer can occur even when there is an existing word in the English language. Richards (1979:14), terms this as “lexical shifts”, “the replacement of a known English word by a word from a local language”. According to Lowernberg (1986:75) “a major acculturative function of such shifts in Malaysia is the establishment of a national identity for all Malaysians through the lexicon of Bahasa Malaysia as the National Language”.

Under the first category, i.e., Substrate Language Referents, Baskaran (1985) has six sub categories:

a. Institutionalised concepts

Some local words used in Malaysian English do not have an equivalent in Standard British English. This particular concept may not exist in the English culture or way of life. According to Baskaran (1985), these concepts are institutionalised in the local context and therefore, even a paraphrase will not express the meaning as effectively or exhaustively. Some examples provided by her are, “bumiputra”, “gotong-royong”, “khalwat” and “rukun-tetangga”. 

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b. Emotional and Cultural Loading

This happens when a local word replaces the existing equivalent in the English language. Richards (1979), terms these replacements as "lexical shifts" where a local word is needed to replace a known English word. There are a number of reasons for this phenomenon. Richards argues that a major acculturative function of such shifts in Malaysia is to create a sense of national identity among Malaysians through the use of Malay lexical items. According to Baskaran (1985:86), "these words are culturally and emotionally loaded and when translated into English, they lose their culture-bound association". She adds that "the local setting and specific sociolinguistic nuances might be dispersed if the English equivalent is used". Some examples of such words given by her are kampung (village), dusun (orchard), bomoh (medicine-man), penghulu (village-chief) and pantang (taboo).

c. Semantic Restriction

According to Baskaran (1985), these are local words with possible translations but used in a semantically restricted field. One good example provided is the word "rice". In English the word "rice" is used to convey the meaning of three different concepts. However, in Bahasa Malaysia, three different words are used. "Padi" is used to refer to the plant and unhusked rice, whereas, "beras" is used for husked but uncooked rice and "nasi" is used for cooked rice. Therefore, when writing or
talking in a local context, many Malaysians would prefer to use the Bahasa Malaysia variant which allows them to be more specific. Some other examples provided by Baskaran are, “dadah” to mean drugs and “toddy” for fermented coconut water.

d. Cultural / Culinary Terms

These words are referents for specific Malaysian cultural elements, cuisine, food, flora and fauna which might be foreign to the English language. Although there is a slow absorption of these words into English, especially for things and food that are known internationally, there are a vast number of words that are still not used in the English language. Some examples of words in this category are, “angpow”, “poppiah” and “pooja”.

e. Hyponymous Collocation

According to Baskaran (1985:87), this is “the presence of local words collocated with the English superordinate term, where the English equivalent is the superordinate and the local word is the subordinate referent”. One of her examples is “batik cloth” where “batik” which is the subordinate comes from the local language whereas the superordinate is the word “cloth” from the English language.
f. Campus/ Student Coinages

According to Baskaran (1985:87), “these are words that have recently come into currency – being transported from Bahasa Malaysia due to the change in medium of instruction in education and the subsequent strong influence of this language”. Therefore, these would be words that are used by school students and university undergraduates. Some examples given by Baskaran are, “lecheh” (troublesome, inconvenient), and “teruk” (serious, in bad shape).

3.3.2 Standard English Lexicalization

Besides borrowing local lexis, Malaysian English also contains a large number of standard English lexis that is used differently from that of standard English. Six sub-categories given by Baskaran (1985) are:

a. Polysemic Variation

According to Baskaran (1985:94), “These are standard English lexemes that have the original English meaning as well as an extended semantic range of meanings not originally found in Standard English”. An example for this category is the word ‘cut’ which is used to refer to its original meaning, i.e., slicing and also to
refer to overtaking. These are words that result from an attempt at simplification where one lexeme is used to refer to many meanings.

b. Semantic Restriction

In this category, Standard English lexemes are used in Malaysian English to refer to specific contexts that are either absent in Standard English or referred to in a different manner in Standard English, for example, “toddy shop” refers to a shop that sells toddy (fermented coconut water).

c. Informalisation

According to Baskaran (1985:89), “Many of the lexemes used by the Malaysian English speaker tend to be informal (colloquial) substitutions of standard English words. For example, use of “hubby” for “husband”.

d. Formalisation

This happens when the Malaysian English speaker uses formal words in an informal context. An example given by Baskaran (1985) is in “letters of a personal nature asking a friend to ‘furnish’ him with the details regarding the Cosmos tour” (p. 90).
e. Directional Reversal

According to Baskaran (1985:90), "there are certain lexemes, verbs mostly, that Malaysian English speakers tend to use in reverse direction". Some examples are, converse pairs like "go/come", "bring/send" and "borrow/lend". This could be because the absence of two separate lexemes for such a meaning in Bahasa Malaysia. For example, in Bahasa Malaysia, the word "pinjam" is used to refer to both the meanings of "lend and "borrow".

f. College Colloquialism

This category refers to informal words used especially among students in colleges and universities. These words are often related to studies and the life of a student. The process dominant here is simplification. Words are simplified to make communication easier. Example: "econs" is used to refer to "economics".