

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The purpose of this section is to provide a background for analysis of the features of linguistic creativity in Maniam's works by outlining related linguistic research in the area of NNELs. Some reference will also be made to general research in the field of World Englishes.

2.1 *Author-Specific or Literary Research*

It should be noted at the outset that to date most specific research into Maniam's works has been carried out by literary critics who tend to focus on literary themes rather than on linguistic innovations. Furthermore, most of this research focuses on *The Return*. However, such research is interesting per se, and it does provide insight into the roles and function of English in Malaya/Malaysia as a background for interpreting ethnolectal and sociolectal creativity. For example Brewster, in a review of *The Return*¹ comments on the power of English in pre-independence Malaya: socially and professionally, English *enables*, and therefore the use of standard English or acrolectal Malaysian English is guarded jealously and restricted to 'white' colonials and those few Malaysians of high social standing within the community. English education is the key to social and professional development and, for many individuals, provides the opportunity to escape from a mundane lifestyle and/or a squalid environment. An article by Yong and Wong² is perhaps the only incidence of research specific to Maniam which is primarily concerned with *linguistic* innovations (again, this deals with *The Return*). They discuss the development of Malaysian writing in English in general before making specific reference to Maniam's novel, providing examples of grammatical or

structural simplification. They do not, however, discuss lexical or discorsal innovations. With reference to the language of *The Return*, they conclude that:

Malaysian English features as an aspect of style and as a socio-linguistic indicator for the cultural communities of the novel – in particular of the Kedah Tamil community.³

Like most literary critics, Yong and Wong are also concerned with language as a theme in Maniam's works, and show in this article how Ravi's alienation is caused by English education, which severs him from his Tamil roots.

2.2 *Linguistic Research into Post-Colonial Literature*

2.2.1 *Major Concerns*

The major concern of applied linguists conducting research into post-colonial literature is the extent to which 'some writers use nativized English and to what extent it may be used while still writing a literary work which may be considered part of the wider world of English Literature'⁴. Researchers discuss the underlying motives for linguistic creativity in NNELs, concluding that structural, lexical, and stylistic innovations are used firstly to authenticate creative writing by establishing the appropriate cultural context, and secondly to enhance characterization of individuals who would *not* normally use English for communication in their daily lives. Linguists examine the ways in which bilingual writers face the challenge of portraying ethnicity without jeopardizing comprehension for the reader.

A good starting point for discussion of linguistic research into NNELs is Kachru's article *The Bilingual's Creativity and Contact Literatures*⁵, which provides a general overview of the bilingual writer's need to adapt standard English to portray a different culture, and outlines the type of innovative linguistic features found in NNELs. In addition, he poses the question of the reader's comprehension of NNELs and indicates the problem of using monolingual norms to judge multilingual creativity, an issue also raised by other researchers. According to Kachru, the bilingual writer can choose to make a text more or less culture-specific due to an extended range of codes or language varieties in his or her verbal repertoire:

... (a) text may have both a surface and an underlying identity with the native varieties of English; it may show only partial identity with the native norms; or it may entail a culture-specific (e.g. African, Asian) identity both at the surface and at the underlying levels and share nothing with the native variety.⁶

He states that the bilingual uses 'creative *instinct* and formal *judgement*'⁷ to make a text culture-specific. In this article, Kachru discusses the features of linguistic creativity or nativization under three headings, namely *nativization of context*, *nativization of cohesion and cohesiveness*, and *nativization of rhetorical strategies*. He views nativization of context as a strategy which allows the bilingual writer to *extend* the cultural context of English by using cultural and historical presuppositions which are different to those conventionally associated with English literature. To illustrate this, he quotes a section from Raja Rao's *Kanthapura*, which is dense with references to Hindu deities and mythology⁸. The reader outside the speech fellowship in question must make a cultural shift in order to understand these references. There is

no doubt that Maniam uses this strategy, either consciously or unconsciously, throughout his works (see Chapter 5 for examples of Malaysian/Hindu imagery and references). Nativization of cohesion and cohesiveness involves grammatical and lexical innovations (i.e. structural and syntactic simplification, and lexical shift, hybridization and loan translations). Maniam uses all these devices frequently to enhance the ethnicity and social standing of his characters (see Chapters 3, 4 and 5). The nativization of rhetorical strategies, e.g. the transfer of discourse patterns such as imagery, proverbs and idioms, and culturally-dependent speech styles from another code in the bilingual writer's verbal repertoire into English, as discussed by Kachru is also evident throughout Maniam's works (see Chapter 5).

Kachru's observation that the language of NNELs may vary greatly or not at all from that of Inner Circle English literatures is shared by other researchers. There is a general consensus that the extent of linguistic creativity in NNELs varies not only between writers but also between different works by the same writer. According to Lowenberg, in 'a case study of how ethnic identities are treated in the English literature of Malaysia'⁹:

the manner in which ethnicity is foregrounded varies along a continuum of nativization, from Standard English with selected lexical borrowings, to highly colloquial, almost code-mixed varieties of English¹⁰.

He uses two of Maniam's works, *The Return* and *Ratnamuni*, to illustrate this continuum: the former is narrated in Standard English with occasional lexical borrowings, the latter entirely in the basilectal English of an uneducated, first-generation immigrant to Malaysia. It should be

noted, however, that Maniam makes his narrator speak a less basilectal language once the scene has been set. The fact that Maniam has produced two works, which stand at each end of this continuum of nativization, reflects Kachru's observation that the bilingual writer is able to select speech styles as appropriate from an extended verbal repertoire. Platt and Weber, in a discussion of English Literature in Singapore and Malaysia¹¹, comment on Page's observation on the bilingual writer's application of the 'contrast of languages or dialects' available to him, stating that:

Some Singaporean and Malaysian writers have been able to use this 'contrast of languages or dialects' to good effect ... Some writers have no doubt been fully conscious of writing in a local idiom and especially of writing dialogue to reflect local varieties of English. Others may give no *linguistic* clue at all to the fact that it is Singaporean or Malaysian writing, although the topics, the viewpoints and the characters may, of course, be unmistakably of the region. Other writers, again, may give occasional linguistic clues to their background.¹²

They conclude that 'most Singaporean and Malaysian writers in English have attempted to make their characters speak a "standard" English'¹³, a viewpoint which is shared by Yeo and Lowry Weir in their respective discussions of how the bilingual writer can best render in English the speech of characters who would not normally use English in their daily lives. According to Yeo, the writer has two choices:

The first is to have them speak grammatically in English, because in fact they would be speaking grammatically in their own languages, and to indicate their ethnic origins by pronunciation, tone, articulation and other phonetic means unique to the linguistic group ... The second is to represent characters as speaking a 'broken' English, one in which the words are English but the syntax is not.¹⁴

The former strategy would seem to be preferred by writer and audience (or reader) alike as the language flows better and comprehensibility is not compromised. Lowry Weir uses the Indian English novels of Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, and Raja Rao to illustrate this problem, stating that:

All three authors considered here are quite capable of writing and speaking standard English, but this is not true of their fictional creations.¹⁵

She shows how all three authors have a tendency to make their characters speak grammatically in English, choosing instead to enhance their ethnicity by means of lexical and stylistic innovations, including direct lexical transfer of Indian words (translated or otherwise), translation of native idioms into English, and the use of nativized speech patterns such as reduplication. The following example is taken from the speech of Nagaraj's wife in the opening paragraph of *The World of Nagaraj*¹⁶ by R. K. Narayan. The slightly unusual lexicon and style of speech give the language an Indian feel:

He (Nagaraj) could not stay in bed after the hall clock struck six, but his wife, who got up first, would say 'Where is the hurry? Why don't you sleep till seven as others do? None of them to be seen so early except your good self ...' and, rising, hurry off to the back yard to start her day with a cold bath and *the washing of clothes*. (Emphasis is mine: 'where' rather than 'what' and 'the washing of clothes' rather than 'laundry'). (p1)

The speech of the protagonist, Nagaraj, an educated book-keeper, is grammatically correct but rich with lexical borrowings. This can be seen in his conversation with the *sanyasi*¹⁷:

The *sanyasi* looked down at his chest and said, 'These days people have a craving for fancy clothes ... Do you see anyone who is not dressed like a clown in all this crowd?'

‘All kinds of flowery patterns and colours! Sometimes I feel those men wear women’s saris instead of *dhonis*¹⁸. You can’t find a white *dhoni* anywhere ...’ echoed Nagaraj ...

‘I thought it would give me greater peace of mind at home if I wore a *sanyasi*’s dress in the *puja*¹⁹ room, at least ...’ (Emphasis is mine.) (p11)

She also discusses how renowned Trinidad novelist V. S. Naipaul portrays the speech of his Indian characters in English: standard English is used to convey the speech of educated speakers who speak Hindi; English dialect is conveyed as spoken; but modified syntax with grammatical simplification are used to convey West Indian dialect. The speech of Maniam’s characters appears to adhere to this pattern, e.g. in *The Return* standard English is used for educated Tamil characters such as Murugesu, Ravi’s Tamil teacher, the basilectal English dialect of the schoolboys is conveyed as such, and the *syntax* is modified in the dialogue of the uneducated Tamil workers. In addition, Lowry Weir finds that a character’s ethnicity can also be foregrounded by contrasting speech with that of the narrator. This is certainly true of Maniam’s two novels, in which the narrator has been educated in English, and in *The Third Child*, where standard English narration contrasts sharply with dialogue. Finally Lowry Weir suggests that through analysis of fictional characters’ comments about a language, one can make inferences on the status and functions of that language within a particular society. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 provide examples in which Maniam’s characters make comments on the role of English in Malaya/Malaysia.

2.2.2 Lexical and Stylistic Variations

A significant part of linguistic research into NNELs is concerned with how lexical creativity can be used to foreground ethnicity. The work of Lowenberg, Pandharipande and Sridhar will be discussed in this area. According to Lowenberg, 'the most obvious way in which ethnic identity is marked in Malaysian English literature is by means of direct lexical borrowing from the other languages used by each ethnic group'. He points out that this technique is often used in the portrayal of religious ceremonies, providing the following example from *The Return*:

Periathai opened one of the two tin trunks she had brought from India. Handling every object gently, she took out a statue of *Nataraja*, the cosmic dancer, ringed by a circle of flame, a copper tray, a hand-woven silver-and-gold sari, bangles and a *thali*. These were laid out, Nataraja raised in the centre, on an earthen dais in the wall niche ...

In addition, he states that Malaysian writers may use religious references 'to reaffirm their ethnic identities in a Malaysian society that is increasingly becoming dominated by the Malay language and culture'. He quotes from Malaysian author Shirley Lim who discusses:

... an emerging group of Malaysian writers who, in the process of nationalism, find themselves doubly dispossessed. For, initially dispossessed by their use of the English language from their native cultures, these writers in English, after the introduction of Bahasa (Malay) as the national language, now find themselves dispossessed a second time in a country in which both their native and adopted cultures have only a minority status.

One way out of this painful position of non-belonging is to avoid the whole issue of national identity which, after all, is the ideology of

exclusion, and to seek instead their racial or subjective identities through the resources of religion.²⁰

Whether Maniam shares this motivation is unclear, however there is an abundance of lexical borrowings for religious descriptions in his works. Lowenberg also discusses loan translations including that of local imagery, metaphors and similes 'which may seem hackneyed and pedantic to non-Malaysians ... (but are) culturally appropriate in Malaysia ...'.²¹

In *Defining Politeness in Indian English*²², Rajeshwari Pandharipande deals exclusively with lexical borrowings and loan translations for address and reference terms, taking data for analysis from the novels of Anita Desai, Ruth P. Jhabwala, R. K. Narayan, Kamala Markandaya and Raja Rao. Pandharipande states that the presence of lexical borrowings and loan translations not only mark a code as nativized, e.g. Indian English (IE), but also indicate a different underlying culture and context for interpretation. Furthermore, the use of lexical borrowings and loan translations for terms of address or kinship point to overall conventions of appropriateness which differ from those of their Western counterparts. Regarding IE, Pandharipande states that:

the choice of the terms from Indian languages points out that the utterance conforms to the Indian (and not English) conventions of appropriateness ... Use of an English term will not render the utterance impolite per se, rather the utterance will fail to refer/conform to the Indian conventions of appropriateness ... The use of the term 'sister' would not express the pattern of behaviour of a sister in the Indian context since it is conditioned by the non-Indian (English) conventions of appropriateness.²³

As terms of address or kinship for the Malaysian characters in Maniam's works appear almost exclusively in their original language, e.g. Tamil or Malay (see examples in Chapter 3), it would appear that the author's motivation is indeed appropriateness.

Asmah too, discussing the Malay community, emphasizes the importance of adhering to the correct sociolinguistic and cultural rules in language usage, stating that:

If a speaker, native or otherwise, makes a mistake in the use of certain affixes, his listeners may think that all he needs is practice in the use of those grammatical items. *However, if he chooses the wrong pronoun or the wrong honorific, he will be labelled as coarse, rude, not well-bred, etc* (emphasis is mine).²⁴

Therefore, as it is *vital* to use the appropriate term of address or honorific, this type of lexical borrowing not only foregrounds ethnicity but also renders the exact and appropriate meaning, which cannot be provided by an English translation.

In the area of loan translations, Pandharipande warns that not all English collocations should be defined as standard English as they may consist of loan translations from another language. Pandharipande gives the example 'Old Granny'²⁵ meaning 'matchmaker' in IE - the words are English but the meaning is not. Maniam too, uses loan translations to ensure appropriacy and enhance ethnicity, an example being 'Big Mother' an honorific for 'grandmother' in *The Return*.

Sridhar too, looks at 'some linguistic and literary processes employed to extend the potential of the English language to express alien

meanings'²⁶, adding that most non-native writers, despite the ability to express themselves best in English, do consciously or otherwise nativize the language in the areas of vocabulary, collocation, idioms, syntax and rhetorical patterning. Sridhar, however, appears to find the strategy of lexical borrowing a little controversial, advocating the use of contextualization through embedding. She states that Mulk Raj Anand's prose style 'remains self-consciously experimental'²⁷ in that the meaning of lexical borrowings is not always transparent. Similarly, Platt and Weber focus on the need for clarity of meaning in NNELs:

(When considering prose) the writer has greater opportunities for incorporating locally coloured speech but he must, of course, be careful to keep his dialogues comprehensible, especially if he aims for an international readership.²⁸

In Maniam's works, the meaning of lexical borrowings is often given as a footnote. However, Maniam also uses embedding and in most cases the native term can be clearly understood from the context. Discussion of the *effectiveness* of linguistic creativity in Maniam's works will be reserved for Chapter 6, after data analysis has been performed. Regarding loan translations, Sridhar considers them suitable for expressing underlying thought patterns of a particular culture, stating that:

Successful loan translations may be said to have the property of transparency, despite their being literal translations of words and collocations from a foreign language.²⁹

In the words of Nigerian poet and dramatist, John Pepper Clark, the bilingual author may find the following:

... a thought you have has been very well expressed already in your mother tongue; you like that manner of expression so much you want to transplant it into English.³⁰

Maniam tends to use direct translations of proverbs and idioms in his works to portray the value system of the Tamil community (see Chapter 5).

2.2.3 *Grammatical Variations*

As there is a general consensus among critics that bilingual writers prefer to acculturate a text by means of lexical and stylistic innovations rather than by grammatical simplification, there is significantly less detailed research in this area. Although Platt and Weber, Lowenberg, Lowry Weir and Sridhar do provide some examples of grammatical simplification in NNELs in their research discussed above, perhaps the most detailed grammatical analysis of contemporary Malaysian short stories, including K. S. Maniam's *Haunting the Tiger*, is given by Sercombe³¹. The grammatical innovations revealed by Sercombe's analysis fit into the patterns of colloquial Malaysian English described by Wong³², who discusses in detail the simplification features of standard formal native-speaker English, stating that:

... many Malaysians feel that this informal and colloquial variety of English belongs entirely to them ... (and they have felt freer) to adjust the language to their own needs and requirements³³.

A simplified form of standard formal English meets their needs in most situations, and 'the ultimate test of acceptability is whether communication has taken place'³⁴. Wong outlines the five main

processes of simplification, all of which are interrelated, i.e. *overgeneralization, omission, reduction, substitution and restructuring*. All of these features, particularly reduction of the tense system and omission, are evident in the dialogue of Maniam's characters, to a greater extent among uneducated and/or rural communities, and will be discussed in Chapter 4.

2.3 *Implications for an International Readership*

To conclude this review, it is important to consider the researcher's stance regarding intelligibility of NNEL's. As outlined above, certain applied linguists such as Platt and Weber and Sridhar appear to emphasize the need to make concessions for the reader, e.g. embedding of lexical borrowings, glossaries, etc, if a work is to appeal to an international audience. Other researchers feel that at least part of the responsibility of interpretation lies with the reader. Nelson, for example, states that:

(Most often) the author works enough clues into the text to lead the reader to interpretation, if not complete comprehension. Thus the new-English author provokes readers to awareness of a larger world.³⁵

The reader should expect to work at interpretation of a piece of creative writing, regardless of its code and by reading NNEL's, 'monolingual readers can become aware of an untapped language facility ... (and) expand their awareness and appreciation of other *varieties* of English ...'³⁶. With this in mind, a detailed analysis of the features of ethnolectal and sociolectal creativity in Maniam's works will be carried out, and the effectiveness of this creativity will be assessed thereafter.

NOTES

- ¹ *Linguistic Boundaries*, K. S. Maniam's 'The Return', Anne Brewster, in *The Return*, Skoob Pacifica edition, 1996.
- ² *The Case of English in Malaysian Fiction: a Look at K. S. Maniam's 'The Return'*, Irene F. H. Wong and Margaret Yong, in *Southeast Asian Review of English*, 6/7, June-December 1988.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ *English Literature in Singapore and Malaysia*, in *English in Singapore and Malaysia – Status, Features and Functions*, John T. Platt and Heidi Weber, 1980, Kuala Lumpur, Oxford University Press.
- ⁵ *The Alchemy of English, The spread, functions and models of non-native Englishes*, Braj B. Kachru, Pergammon Press, 1986.
- ⁶ Ibid.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ Ibid. Ch. 10, p165.
- ⁹ *The Marking of Ethnicity in Malaysian English Literature: Nativization and its Functions*, Peter H. Lowenberg in *World Englishes*, Vol. 2/3, 1992.
- ¹⁰ Ibid.
- ¹¹ See note 1 above.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ *Singapore English on Stage*, Robert Yeo, National Institute of Education, Singapore.
- ¹⁵ *Style Range in New English Literatures*, Ann Lowry Weir, in *The Other Tongue, English Across Cultures*, London University of Illinois Press, 1982.
- ¹⁶ *The World of Nagaraj*, K. S. Narayan, Heinemann, London, 1990.
- ¹⁷ Holy man, dedicated to life of wandering mendicant. Source ibid.
- ¹⁸ Loincloth. Source ibid.
- ¹⁹ Rights performed in Hindu worship. Source ibid.
- ²⁰ See note 6.
- ²¹ Ibid.
- ²² *World Englishes*, Vol. 11, 2/3, 1992.
- ²³ Ibid.
- ²⁴ *Indirectness as a Rule of Speaking among the Malays*, Asmah Haji Omar, in *Rules of Speaking*, Pelanduk Publications, Kuala Lumpur, 1995.
- ²⁵ Source as note 18.
- ²⁶ *Non-native English Literatures: Context and Relevance*, S. N. Sridhar, in *The Other Tongue, English Across Cultures*, Pergamon Press, 1983.
- ²⁷ Ibid.
- ²⁸ Source as note 4.
- ²⁹ Source as note 22.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ *Some Pertinent Features of the New Literatures in English in Southeast Asia*, Peter G. Sercombe, University Brunei Darussalam.

³²*Simplification Features in the Structure of Colloquial Malaysian English*, Irene F. H. Wong, in *Varieties of English in Southeast Asia*, Singapore, SEAMEO Regional Language Centre, 1983.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵*Bilingual Writing for the Monolingual Reader: Blowing up the Canon*, Cecil L. Nelson, in *World Englishes*, Vol.11, No. 2/3, 1992

³⁶ Ibid.