

CHAPTER 3

Lexical Creativity

Having shown in Chapter 2 that lexical innovations form a major part of linguistic research in the area of NNELs, the aim of this section is to show how Maniam uses lexical creativity to foreground the ethnicity of his characters and enhance the cultural setting of his works. This study is primarily concerned with the frequency and type of *lexical borrowings* in Maniam's works, as illustrated in section 3.1 below. As textual analysis has shown that there are few incidences of other types of lexical creativity (i.e. *loan translations*, *extension of semantic range*, and *the formation and use of new hybrids*) in Maniam's works, these features will be discussed briefly in section 3.2.

3.1 *Lexical Borrowings*

The bilingual writer may use lexical borrowings unconsciously and inevitably, i.e. when there is no known English equivalent of a word or phrase. However, as English is being used *outside* a Western context, they may also be part of a conscious strategy to authenticate a particular cultural setting and enhance descriptions. Examples of lexical borrowings in Maniam's works have been grouped into two general areas, namely terms which refer to *items* (3.1.1) and terms which refer to *people* (3.2.2). The first category includes the use of native terms for implements (e.g. for house and garden), items of clothing, religious articles and references, and for food and plant items. The second category includes terms of address or honorifics, which denote nationality or ethnic group, and terms which refer to a job or profession. As lexical borrowings appear to occur in a uniform manner throughout Maniam's works, examples have not been limited to any one piece of writing. It should be noted

that quotations from the texts have not been altered in any way, i.e. unless otherwise stated, italics are the author's. In addition, all definitions are taken from footnotes present in Maniam's works.

3.1.1 *Terms which Refer to Items*

Perhaps the best example in this category is Maniam's seemingly conscious use of the terms *uduku*¹ and *thundu*², found in *Ratnamuni* and *The Cord* respectively. The use of these native terms not only avoids cumbersome, incongruous English translations, but also enhances the ethnic origins of the protagonist Muniandy. Furthermore these terms function as leitmotifs, reappearing constantly throughout the texts in association with Muniandy, portraying his 'Indianness' and emphasizing his adherence to Indian traditions rather than to the lifestyle of modern Malaya/Malaysia. The *uduku* is mentioned in the opening paragraph and again in the first page of *Ratnamuni*, helping to set the scene for the tale of the Indian immigrant Muniandy:

When I was coming here - nothing. Only her - the *uduku*.' (p1)

I press the *uduku* strings, make a little song in the empty boat all night.'
(p1)

In *The Cord*, the *thundu* is first mentioned in the stage directions before the entrance of Muniandy, enhancing his characterization:

He (Muniandy) is dressed in a white shirt and vesti and a *thundu* is thrown over his shoulder. (p31)

Maniam uses this term in several different contexts throughout *The Cord*. Primarily, in its original context, it symbolizes dignity and the traditions of India:

(Muniandy) takes the thundu off his shoulder and wipes his body. He looks at the thundu thoughtfully.)

Muniandy: To me in the Big Country, this piece of cloth carried dignity.

When I went to a wedding it was there over my shoulder. When I went to a funeral, it was there over my shoulder. I never used it to wipe my face or body. (p72)

However, in Malaya, it seems to enhance the alienation and poverty of the Indian immigrant worker, for whom it has become a 'rag':

Muniandy: Here in this country, it has turned into a rag. I use it as a whip, I use it to soak up the sweat on my body. (p72)

The audience sees how the *thundu* has been downgraded in status along with its owner. It is no longer an item of ornamentation associated with dignity, but an item that fulfills a need.

Finally it symbolizes the umbilical cord tying father and son together, as well as man to his homeland and native traditions:

(Ratnam takes the thundu from Muniandy and holds it stretched between his hands.)

Ratnam: When you hold it like this, it feels like the handle of a Yamaha.

Muniandy: ... Many meanings can be given it.

(Takes hold of one end and tugs lightly)

And when I hold it, we're joined together. Its like the umbilical cord linking us. Father and son. Relatives. (p72)

Like Muniandy in *Ratnamuni* and *The Cord*, Periathai, the narrator's grandmother in *The Return*, is a first-generation immigrant from India and provides a link with his ethnic origins. The use of the native terms *thinnai*³ and *kolam*⁴ in association with her enhance the Indianness of both the person and her dwelling:

“It was like treading Indian soil once more,” she commented reflectively, when she sat later on the *thinnai* of her newly-built, first real house. (p3)
The walls, *thinnai*, and even the *kolam*-covered yard appeared insignificant. (p4)

The Return has several instances of lexical borrowings for objects which are not used in the Western world and therefore have no English equivalent, for example the term *parang*⁵. As the narrator is talking about Communist raids at the time of the Emergency, the Malay term adequately evokes the feeling of terror:

I dreamed always of a blood-covered figure suddenly confronting me with a blood-stained *parang*, asking for sanctuary. (p7)

This same lexical borrowing is used in *In A Far Country*, in association with the Malay, Zulkifli, during a tiger hunt. Here the translation provided for the reader is ‘long knife usually used by *Malays*’ (emphasis is mine):

“The gun has to be left behind,” he says. “I’m leaving the *parang* here.

From now on we carry no weapons. They are useless.” (p100)

Another weapon referred to by a native term is the *kris*⁶, also found in *In A Far Country*, this time associated with Zulkifli’s son:

The third wall is an armoury of all kinds of weapons. But the interest comes to rest on the *kris*. Their range and make are so varied, intricate and beautiful that being impaled by any of these would be heroic death. After all the abstract images of death, the handles and curved blades are real and potent. (pp131-132).

The term *changkul* is found in both *The Return* and *In A Far Country* and is translated as ‘Malaysian hoe’ and ‘spade’ respectively:

He (Naina, Ravi's father) ran round to the back of the house where the *changkuls* were kept, and grabbed one. The men forced the changkul out of his hand. (*The Return*, p161).

If you looked at his (referring to Wali Farouk, jungle expedition leader) hands you realised that the callouses there had not been raised by his ventures into the jungle. They had come to be permanent little knots around the edges of his palms perhaps through holding the *changkul* or pick-axe. (*In A Far Country*, p162)

This term is also used in the short story *Mala* (in *Sensuous Horizons*):

The boys spent their afternoons desultorily digging at an unyielding plot of ground. Mala, watching them, noticed how the handles of the *changkul* flew away from them. There was a dull thud as the *changkul* hit the ground. (p222)

Here a translation is *not* provided for the reader. However, the meaning is embedded in the context. Similarly Maniam elaborates on the terms *parang* and *kris* to ensure that they can be clearly perceived as a weapon and knife, even in the absence of translation.

Other examples which fall into this category are the terms *gantang* used for 'measure of rice' in the speech of the Malaysian plantation workers in *Ratnamuni*, *rotan* for 'cane', and *kualis* for 'deep frying pans' in *The Return*. The use of these terms which have no exact Western equivalent serves to authenticate the Malaysian setting:

- Two *gantangs* of rice. Three dollars. Donation for the white doctor *tuan's* going. Eighty-eight dollars left from the hundred. (p22) (In this example Muthiah, plantation supervisor, is giving out wages to the Indian workers.)

We were hauled up; the dog barking beneath the stairs, we were given whacks on our bottoms with a *rotan*. (p75)

The potter, who had cast his vessels in a semi-covered shed behind Periathai's house, arranged his pots, *kualis*, jars, calabashes, in pyramidal fashion, as he had always done ... (p112)

In Maniam's works frequent lexical borrowings for items of clothing enhance the ethnicity of the characters. The term *thundu*, for example (see *Ratnamuni* and *The Cord* above) is also found in *The Return*. It is used in a paragraph where the narrator describes the death of his Indian grandmother, Periathai, a description of a religious ceremony which is particularly dense with lexical borrowings:

Pakiam trailed behind and, obeying Periathai's unspoken commands, pulled out the tin trunk from under the bedstead. She took out the wedding sari, *thundu* – all mildewed - and the thali. Laying them out on a copper tray, she placed it before Nataraja. (p9).

The term *vesti*⁷ is found in both novels. In *The Return* it appears as an everyday item, and in *In A Far Country* it enhances the description of the narrator's Indian father in the first chapter:

My mother, forgetting I was saying prayers, would have come into the room for a towel or a *vesti*. (*The Return*, p18)

He was to be found there (at the smoke-house) at all hours of the day except for the one time he went into town. That happened on pay-day when he wore a white *vesti* and shirt to receive his salary and then go off to buy the month's provisions. (*In A Far Country*, p21).

The term *thavani*, 'half sari worn around the house or on informal occasions'⁸ is found in *The Return*, in association with the narrator's Indian mother. This description appears to be the Indian equivalent to the Western housewife wiping her hands on her apron and is an authentic description:

Though bewildered, she mechanically wiped her hands on her *thavani* border. (p32).

There is also the term *jubbah*, a 'loose long-sleeved shirt', which falls to the knees. This forms part of the Indian wedding attire, which Ravi must iron in his father's laundry in *The Return*. Again, the density of lexical borrowings in the description of ceremonies should be noted:

Bridegrooms wore the thundu across the front, over a silk *jubbah*, as they bent to tie the thali round their bride's neck. The end of the thundu had to be displayed, spreading out stiff and fan-wise. People often made scathing remarks if the thundu didn't "perform". (p109).

The term *sari*, 'long textile worn by Indian women' is regularly used in association with Maniam's female Indian characters. Although this term has now been absorbed into the lexicon of standard English, Maniam appears to consciously use it to indicate ethnicity, as in the following example in which the Indian narrator of *In A Far Country* introduces his wife to the reader, having entered her living-room:

The windows were wide open as if the occupant wanted the room aired and the curtains were made out of old *saris*. I drew them across the windows and recognised that the saris were the ones Vasanthi had brought from her home and must have worn after her puberty rites. There is a photograph of her wearing one of these saris, just after she came out of her menstrual isolation. (p2)

However, the most striking use of this term to foreground Indian ethnicity is in the play, *The Sandpit* and its later adaptation, *The Sandpit: Womensis* (both found in *Sensuous Horizons*). The theme of these plays is the tension between Santha and Sumathi, the two Malaysian-Indian wives of Dass. Santha, the first wife, embodies traditional Indian values, whereas Sumathi, the younger second wife, is more modern. The first play is a monologue related by Santha; in the

second play Sumathi is also given a voice. Throughout the plays Santha refers to herself as 'this woman in the sari' and to Sumathi, in sharp contrast, as 'the woman in the dress'. The opening stage directions of *The Sandpit* describe Santha's attire:

... *The sari that she has on is worn primly and tucked tightly at her waist, its border wide and stiff.* (p153)

The play opens with Santha making a sari border while waiting for Dass to return:

I've always made my own sari border, putting in the silver or gold thread, carefully, patiently. (*Holds up the sari border.*) This one I started a month ago but the work was slow. Only during the last four days has the work gone forward. (*Looks at the sari border.*) Almost a yard finished. (p153)

She then says of Sumathi:

Sumathi didn't even wear a sari when she came, just a dress. (p154).

The sari accompanies Santha throughout the play, a feature of her ethnic origins which symbolizes dignity and morality. Sumathi on the other hand feels imprisoned by her Indian background in modern Malaysia.

The lexical borrowings in the following speech appear deprecatory:

My father too had his chair. Sat on it like a king. Called my mother. She went in obedience, wearing her sari and a pottu on her forehead. The pottu. The kum-kum mark of slavery. She was nothing when she didn't wear the pottu. But when she made that red dot, she could command and she could obey. (p204).

It should be noted that the term 'pottu' is not italicized and translated. However, the meaning of the term is explained in Sumathi's words.

Maniam has a tendency to use lexical borrowings frequently in religious references. These lexical borrowings are to some extent inevitable as the ceremonies or events in questions are alien to Western culture. The

description of Ravi's grandmother in *The Return* has already been given above; the first chapter of both *The Return* and *In A Far Country* have descriptions of the major Hindu festivals, e.g. Deepavali and Thaipusam, which provide a cultural background for the Tamil community portrayed. In the following example, the narrator explains how life is given meaning for the Tamil community in Malaya by adherence to native Indian traditions. For the reader, the use of native terms for the festivals of *Thaipusam* and *Ponggal*, translated as 'Hindu festival of repentance' and 'First day of the first month in the Hindu calendar' respectively, give the novel a strong Indian flavor:

These festivals, together with *Thaipusam* and *Ponggal*, created a special country for us. We were inhabitants of an invisible landscape tenuously brought into prominence by the lights, mango leaves strung out over the doorways, the pilgrimages to Sri Subramanya temple in Sungai Petani on Thaipusam day, the painting of the bull horns the day after Ponggal and the many taboos that covered our daily lives. (*The Return*, p14)

In *In A Far Country* the term *kenduri* for 'feast' is retained in Sivasurian's dialogue. The Malay word is obviously more appropriate for this activity in a *Malay* village:

When the girl returned, there was great rejoicing. Everyone, for miles around, came to the *kenduri* given by the money and provisions given by every quarter. (p111)

The term *puja*, 'special prayer session', occurs repeatedly, both in narration and in dialogue:

When *pujas* were held on Fridays, the women hurried out to the goats with whole bunches of bananas and rice boiled in brown sugar. It therefore came as a surprise to me to see their behaviour change a week or two before Deepavali. (*In A Far Country*, p9)

“I want to do a home-coming puja,” my wife said the other day. (*In A Far Country*, p171)

Sumathi: When Athan married me he told my father ‘I saved your daughter. I saved you from a lot of shame. I don’t want the comedy of a temple wedding. The registration office is enough. Then a puja at the temple ...’. (*The Sandpit:Womensis*, p185).

Sumathi: ... Heard my mother and father whispering that night. You know what they did that week? Conducted a puja. A strange puja. My mother made me wear a sarung up to my chest then took me to the bathroom. (*The Sandpit:Womensis*, p194)

There is also the religious exclamation *Muruga*⁹:

Muniandy: *Muruga*, my fault. *Muruga*, my fault. *Muruga!* *Muruga!* (*Ratnamuni*, p3)

A Western religious exclamation such as ‘God’ from an Indian estate worker in Malaya would be totally incongruous.

This exclamation is also found in *The Third Child*:

Velu felt himself relax ... He thought he could sleep well that night. As his head touched the pillow, he said “Muruga”, invoking with that one word the protection of the Lord of the Universe. (*The Third Child*, pp169-170)

In *Mala*, the description of the Hindu purification ceremony is similar to that described by Sumathi in *The Sandpit:Womensis* (see above example) and contains the same lexical borrowings:

Mala waited in her wet *sarung* watching her mother lay out the feast for the dead ... They (Mala’s family) took turns placing *kumkum* and oil and holy ash on Mala’s hair. (pp227-228)

The wedding ceremony too is dense with lexical borrowings as illustrated by the following example taken from *The Sandpit*:

Athan brought his own people, a bus full of young men, to help with decorating the *panthal*¹⁰ and serving the food after the *thali*¹¹-tying ceremony in the big hall. (p154)

As noted in Chapter 2, the strategy of using lexical borrowings to authenticate descriptions of non-native religious ceremonies is widely used in NNELs in general. A similar description of the Hindu wedding ceremony is found in Marie Gerrina Louis' *The Road to Chandibole*¹²:

Around me the women kept saying what a handsome couple the groom and his *tholan* made. By the way, his *tholan* was Ravi himself. Ravi, who had become our brother when Letchumi stood as Lalitha's *tholi*.

The holy fire or *agni* was between us and the flames seemed to dance around her face.

I forced myself not to return the look for it would have been most improper for a bride to boldly look her husband in the face while on the *manavarai*.

(pp153-154)

In *In A Far Country*, the term *thali* is used to unfavorably contrast Western values with the traditional Indian values forsaken by the narrator:

They say 'What does your wife wear around her neck? Not the thali surely? A string of gold coins! That's what she wears.' (p155)

Finally, in *Ratnamuni* there are the following references to religious markings, which enhance description of Muniandy's Indian wife:

Suddenly this milk-white woman, long blue *pottu*¹³ on her forehead, waking me up to go for people for her father's funeral. (p2)

Always crossing legs on the floor, near the door. Knocking her head on my toes every morning, *thoornooru*¹⁴ on her forehead. (p3)

In *In A Far Country*, the term *pottu* is also used to mark the Indian appearance of Sivasurian:

Outwardly he looked Indian, the blue tattooed *pottu* on his forehead testifying to that, but in everything else he was an enigma. (p78)

Lexical borrowings are extensively used to refer to food and plant items which are either not available or generally unknown to the Western world, e.g. *samsu*, the ‘illegal alcoholic brew’ which Maniam’s Tamil workers drink to drown their sorrows:

Though you smelt *samsu* on his breath even during the mornings, he wielded the brush as a scourging whip. (*The Return*, p68)

Although many of these terms have been absorbed into the lexicon of standard English - like the term ‘sari’ described above - and may no longer be considered lexical borrowings, they nevertheless lend ethnicity to a piece of creative writing. The following example is taken from Maniam’s description of a seafood feast enjoyed by the narrator and his companion during a night out in Penang in *In A Far Country*. It should be noted that although only two Malay words, *sotong* and *siput*, are italicized and translated as ‘squid’ and ‘sea snails’ respectively, the terms which are underlined will be mostly unfamiliar to the Western reader and will be perceived as lexical borrowings which authenticate the setting of the novel in Malaysia:

Food had never looked so inviting, so seductive. *Sotong* strips hung from hooks, gleaming like newly-skinned fruit bats. *Siput* and mussels were heaped into bowls ... In glass cases, streaming from shelves, came golden strands of mee; translucent beehoon and glossy, thick koay teow ... They shuffled, rolled and pinched the mee into the bowls and ladled hot curries over them. Fish balls crowned the spicy mound and onion stalks, sliced, were scattered around them. (pp50-51)

The following description of Indian foods helps to foreground the ethnicity of the Tamil community which is portrayed in *The Return*. Again this descriptive passage occurs in the first chapter, and is associated with the narrator’s Indian grandmother, Periathai. As in the

previous example, terms which are underlined *may* be perceived as lexical borrowings by the unfamiliar Western reader¹⁵:

We (the narrator and his siblings) scrambled for places on the large iron bedstead, beside which were ranged clay and copper vessels holding strange delights ... *vadais*, left over from the day's sales, dhal curry filled with brinjals, potatoes, pumpkin cubes, tomato slices and *avarakai*¹⁶ were served with rice. Those of us who had "behaved" received a teaspoonful of home-brewed ghee to flavor the spread. (p6)

Lexical borrowings for food items occur frequently when Maniam describes Hindu festivities. The following description of Deepavali occurs in the first chapter of *In A Far Country*:

The men returned ... The children ran out to grab from their hands the little bundles of *vadais* and *murukus* that would prevent them from paying too much attention to the killing of the goats. (pp10-11)

The English translations 'Indian doughnuts' and 'Indian spicy tidbits' respectively would be incongruous in this description of a Hindu festivity. In addition, *vadais* are *savoury* doughnuts, unlike their Western counterparts, which are sweet.

In the following example, the lexical borrowings *sireh* and *kerambu*, translated as 'leaf eaten with betel nut shavings' and 'Indian spice' respectively, in association with the 'philosopher-woman' enhance the Malaysianness of this character:

The philosopher would chew her *sireh* and betel nut shavings, spiced with lime and dried *kerambu*. (*In a Far Country*, p15)

Other examples of lexical borrowings for food items are numerous and include *kanji*¹⁷ from *In A Far Country*, and *kaya*¹⁸, *assam*¹⁹ and *kurma*²⁰ from *The Return*.

Finally, the terms *lallang* for ‘Malaysian tall wild grass’, and *angsana* for ‘Malaysian tree with yellow flowers’ are used in both novels. Again the use of these Malaysian terms authenticates the setting:

We took the *lallang*-fringed path between the railway tracks and the main road. (*The Return*, pp152-153)

... I noticed the door to my right slightly open. I wouldn’t have seen it if the sunlight coming through the crack hadn’t struck my face with the warm sting of the *lallang* grass. (*In A Far Country*, p2)

My father hailed a trishaw and the man pedalled us uphill to the school. Under the old, tall *angsana* trees stood the fathers with their sons. (*The Return*, p23)

The *angsana* shamelessly dropped its flowers all over the ground. (*In A Far Country*, p113)

To conclude this section, it should be noted that lexical borrowings can also be used for intangible items or abstract nouns. For example, the feeling evoked by the term *mayam* for illusion in *Ratnamuni* seems to indicate a particular type of illusion experienced by the sector of society under discussion, i.e. first-generation immigrants from India, seeking their fortune in Malaysia:

Now I am learning about *mayam*. (*Ratnamuni*, p11)

When my wife bent over me in the morning I didn’t listen to her words.

The voice charmed a *mayam* over my ears. (*Ratnamuni*, p17)

The English translation ‘illusion’ probably would not convey the same feeling in this context.

3.1.2 *Terms which Refer to People*

One area in which lexical borrowings abound is in terms of address used by Maniam's characters in their speech. Native terms may be used to imply respect (e.g. estate-worker addressing superior during colonial times, or wife addressing husband), to imply cultural or ethnic belonging, or even to imply sarcasm or scorn.

Lexical borrowings used as appropriate for showing respect in the Tamil culture are *ayah*²¹ and *amah*²². In the following example from *The Return*, Ravi is compelled to use these honorifics when addressing Menon and his wife:

Karupi was talking in the other room, my father giving grunted replies.
"I tell you the boy's head is turning ... last week he came running from Ayah's house. He didn't even let the *Amah* count the clothes ..."
Ayah and amah were the honorifics for Menon and his wife. I stiffened again, recalling the humiliation. One day the Amah would respect me!
(p40)

The term *ayah*, together with *tuan*, is also used repeatedly by Muniandy in *Ratnamuni* to address a policeman. Again, it is a more *appropriate* term to address a social superior in colonial Malaya. An English term such as 'Sir' would be incongruous with Muniandy's speech and with the Malayan setting:

It is true, *ayah*, I have to dig and dig before I get the pearl out of the shell.
But now my Ratnam is waiting for where policeman-*tuan* you have put him.
(*Ratnamuni*, p5)

'Respectful' terms of address, however, can also be used to imply sarcasm. In *The Cord*, the community of Tamil estate workers seem to

regard the clerk, Muthiah, with a mixture of admiration and scorn as he has climbed the social ladder to become an administrator through education, hence the edge of sarcasm in the following exchange between Leela and Ratnam:

Leela: The old man tried to educate you. He sent you to Muthiah-ayah ...

Ratnam: Don't mention Muthiah-ayah in front of me. He shouts at me once a month and his voice stays in my ears for the rest of the days! (p29)

Also in *The Cord*, Kali's use of the terms 'maharani' and 'maharaja' to address the downtrodden couple, Ratnam and Leela, has a sarcastic or condescending tone:

Leela: ... And I've to borrow salt ... Kali! Kali!

Kali: Yes, maharani, another little gift? (p34)

Kali (addressing Ratnam): I bowed before the maharani, now I bow before the maharaja. (p34)

Lexical borrowings are widely used to refer to family members. In *The Return*, the Tamil word *mamah* is used for 'father-in-law' but it can also be used to refer to a male cousin or an uncle:

"See what filth she's throwing at us *mamah*," Anjalai wailed. (p72)

In *In a Far Country*, and *The Cord*, *amma* is used for 'mother' in the speech of the plantation workers (in the example from *The Cord*, it may also refer to an older woman's motherlike figure):

"Yes, tell *amma*. Everyone here wants you to feel happy ..." (*In A Far Country*, p14)

Govindan: Amma! Amma! Husband at work? (*The Cord*, p51)

In *In A Far Country*, *thambi* is used for 'brother' (its precise meaning is *younger* brother) in the speech of the Indian Sivasurian. This term in

particular indicates in-groupness as Sivasurian addresses the narrator as a fellow Indian:

“I come from a long way of *thambi*,” he said, “and sometimes I don’t know from where.”

That was the way he spoke and he always called me *thambi*, meaning brother. At that time I took it merely as a polite form of address but since I started looking at the book he left behind for me, I’ve begun to have doubts. (pp78-79)

In *The Sandpit*, Santhi, the ‘traditional’ wife, calls her husband *athan*²³. Here the use of an English translation would be incongruous with the character of Santhi, whose adherence to Indian traditions is a major theme of the play. ‘Makchik’ too is a culturally-loaded term which carries respect when speaking to/of an older Malay lady. It should be noted that such lexical borrowings can be used to indicate ethnic group or nationality:

Athan stopped listening to me. (*The Sandpit*, p154)

Makchik came yesterday. An old woman. Knows *athan* from the time he was born. (*The Sandpit*, p157)

In the following example from *The Return*, one sees the use of the filial honorific, *Naina*. This is an excellent illustration of embedding in that Maniam explains to his reader the precise meaning of the lexical borrowing, and also the appropriateness of the term ‘ayah’ in multi-cultural Malaya:

The victory, my father’s and mine over Ayah, had a strange effect on the people of Bedong and on my family’s fortunes. My father, whom I had now begun to call *Naina* (the filial honorific in Telugu), earned a new reputation in the town. Even the Malays and Chinese nodded to him, softly uttering the word ‘Ayah’, a general form of according respect. (p103)

The term *Periathai* is also used as a symbol of status in both *The Return* and *The Cord*. The term ‘Big Mother’ is obviously a loan translation as in Western culture it does not carry the same connotations of achievement:

My grandmother barely survived the Japanese Occupation, but already she had become *Periathai*, the Big Mother. (*The Return*, p4)

Leela: Stop all this poking-choking! Kali has spoken to Periathai. (*The Cord*, p35)

In addition to the use of native terms of address and honorifics to foreground ethnicity, Maniam’s character Muniandy in *Ratnamuni* uses lexical borrowings to refer directly to race. The following examples not only enhance the Indian ethnolect of Muniandy, but also imply that certain *characteristics* are associated with a particular ethnic group, i.e. in Muniandy’s world, important people are normally ‘white’, Indian estate-workers perceive themselves as socially inferior, and money-lenders are frequently Sikhs:

*Cheenan*²⁴, *Malai*²⁵, white *tuan*, I don’t know, *ayah*. *Kling*²⁶ like me, look for children like gold. (*Ratnamuni*, p2)

I am now paying his (Ratnam’s) debtors. A chain. Bayi, the *Bangali*²⁷ money-lender, Arunasalam, the shop-keeper, Ah Tong, the meat and vegetable man. (p14).

Finally, Maniam’s frequent use of native terms to refer to a job or profession appears to support the researcher’s conclusion that English in NNELs must be adapted to portray a different underlying mentality. Lexical borrowings in this area imply that certain jobs or professions have different characteristics to their Western counterparts, e.g. ‘clerk’

(*kerani*) in colonial Malaya is not just a job but an indication of social status, and ‘village doctor’ (*bomoh*) has different connotations in a Western environment:

Be a gardener, *kerani*, sweeper, scavenger, all money in the end.
(*Ratnamuni*, p2)⁴

His wife calls Ahmad, the *bomoh*. (*Ratnamuni*, p19)

In the following example, the use of the native term ‘*bidan*’ for midwife (understood from context) is appropriate for similar reasons: it implies a home birth, probably in a *kampung* or village rather than in a Western medical setting:

The *bidan*, Makchik, brought me into the world as a human being. (*The Sandpit*, p166)

The profession of *sin-seh*, ‘Chinese folk medical expert, obviously has no exact Western equivalent. It should be noted that the phrase ‘medicine shop’ is a loan translation:

Beside the quack ... stood the agent from the Chinese medicine shop, the *sin-seh*. (*The Return*, pp131-131).

The term *penghulu*, ‘Malay headman of village’, is used in both *In A Far Country* (in a scene occurring in Zulkifli’s *kampung*) and *The Third Child*. The mention of this figure, which has no equivalent title in the Western world, authenticates the cultural setting:

“The *penghulu* hurried towards us.

“‘Send for the police,’ he said. (*In A Far Country*, p128)

Velu thought for a while.

“After these rainy months the *penghulu* of Ayer Hangat is invited to the south of Thailand ... I know the *penghulu* and can ask him to take you both. I’ll do this only for you.” (*The Third Child*, p175)

In *The Third Child*, a native term is also used to compare a character to a religious figure. This term is not translated for the reader. However, the context clarifies the meaning to some extent:

Velu thought all he needed was a holy thread and a *vesti* to make him a *pusari*. Then he would be somebody, be useful to some people. (*The Third Child*, p173)

In *The Return*, the term *jamindar*²⁸ is uttered by Letchumi with sarcasm in order to belittle Govindan:

“O, the great *Jamindar* has come back!” Letchumi, Govindan’s wife said loudly from three houses away. “He thinks he owns everything.” (p71)

The term *dhobi* meaning ‘launderer’ is frequently used in Maniam’s works, generally with a deprecatory edge:

They always made me feel I was a *dhobi*’s son and could never dream of being more. (*The Return*, p101)

3.2 *Loan Translations, New Hybrids, and Extension of Semantic Range*

The most striking example of loan translation in Maniam’s works appears to be motivated by *appropriacy* in the area of terms of address and/or honorifics (this is in line with Pandharipande’s observations – see Chapter 2 above).

Here the English words do not imply admiration in Inner Circle English cultures:

My grandmother barely survived the Japanese Occupation but already she had become Periathai, the Big Mother. Even her grandchildren addressed her by that name. If they didn’t, they were admonished by any Indian within earshot. (*The Return*, p4).

Another example is the term 'coffee shop', which occurs in *The Third Child*. This appears to be a direct translation from the Malay 'kedai kopi', and consists of a shop which serves meals, not just coffee and pastries like its English counterpart:

"You're a serious, thin young man, if you don't mind a coffee shop keeper telling you that. Did you like your food tonight?" (p163)

It should be noted that the *direct* translation of non-native phrases in Maniam's works tends to involve the translation (or *transcreation*) of proverbs, which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Again, there are few examples of new hybrids in Maniam's works. Those examples located all involve lexical transfer for an item which pertains solely to Malaysian culture:

We took the *lallang*-fringed path between the railway tracks and the main road. (*The Return*, p152)

"What fathers and mothers are these? Nothing for their children?" the *vadai*-seller remarked loudly. (*The Return*, p81)

From another stall he had a saucer of ice-*kachang*. This chilled his hot tongue. (*The Dream of Vasantha*, in *Sensuous Horizons*, p201).

There are slightly more occurrences of extension of the semantic range, particularly in basilectal speech:

When I was older, I heard the estate clerk say ... the salary was delayed because the DO had not okayed the pay-out order. (*In A Far Country*, p75)

She admitted, when I talked to her on returning to K.L., that she too wanted to be honourable, a woman as unspotted (i.e. untainted) as my wife. (*The Loved Flaw*, 151).

She didn't see me seeing (i.e. looking at) her ... (*The Loved Flaw*, p144)

“You think you have given two would-be-famous sons. Chasing them everywhere – to wash them, feed them, and sleep them!” (*The Third Child*, 169). (Here the verb ‘to sleep’ is used as a transitive verb.)

To conclude, the above analysis suggests that Maniam uses lexical borrowings in order to enhance the cultural setting of his works and to foreground the ethnicity of his characters. The contribution of this strategy to his works will be considered in Chapter 5. However, it is important to note at this stage that in the area of lexical innovations, Maniam does make some concessions to the unfamiliar reader or audience. According to Kachru ‘(lexical borrowings) are ... normally used when referring to contexts which are typically South Asian. If such references are aimed at an audience outside the region, it is normal to provide glossaries for them’²⁹. In Maniam’s case, the context is Asian (or Malaysian) throughout, and the lexicon is made intelligible to a worldwide audience by means of footnotes and/or embedding.

NOTES

¹ Small drum.

² Woven white cloth, worn over the shirt by Indian men.

³ Raised, cement verandah.

⁴ Intricate designs made by Indian housewives on courtyards.

⁵ Long-bladed knife.

⁶ Malayan traditional knife/blade.

⁷ White cloth worn by Indian men.

⁸ The *thavani*, with the *pavade*, is also worn during formal occasions by young Indian girls, who are not old enough to wear a sari.

⁹ God.

¹⁰ Raised wedding dais, decorated with arches and young coconut leaves.

¹¹ Holy, yellow string tied by the bridegroom around the bride’s neck during the wedding ceremony.

¹² *The Road to Chandibole*, Marie Gerrina Louis, Heinemann Asia, 1994.

¹³ Painted dot on woman’s forehead.

¹⁴ Holy ash.

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- ¹⁵ *Brinjal*, in particular, is an Anglo-Indian word, which may be perceived – by the *unfamiliar* reader – as a lexical borrowing.
- ¹⁶ Trellis-work of Indian legumes.
- ¹⁷ Rice-gruel, p14.
- ¹⁸ Coconut jam, p91.
- ¹⁹ Sour substance used in curries, p130.
- ²⁰ Spicy mutton preparation, p19.
- ²¹ Tamil term of respect.
- ²² Honorific for lady of high social standing.
- ²³ The term Hindu wives use to address their husbands.
- ²⁴ Chinese.
- ²⁵ Malay.
- ²⁶ Pejorative term for Indian.
- ²⁷ Sikh.
- ²⁸ Land-owner, a term of high status and regard.
- ²⁹ *The Alchemy of English, The spread, functions and models of non-native Englishes*, Braj B. Kachru, Oxford: Pergamon Institute of English, 1986.