

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

#### a) The Status of the English Language

The English Language occupies a unique position among languages because it is not just the native language of communities in Britain, the United States, Australia, Canada and New Zealand but it also plays a major role in global affairs, being used, to some extent in almost every country in the world. The number of people for whom English is the mother tongue (L1) is widely agreed to be about 375 million and it is used as a second language by around 375 million speakers in the world (Crystal, 1997). This figure is derived from the population and school statistics of countries such as the United States, Canada, Britain, Australia and New Zealand (Crystal, 1997). Until recently, the comparable number of non-native speakers of English has been estimated at 700 to 750 million (Strevens, 1987). This figure has been reached by reference to factors such as the readership of English Language newspapers in countries where English is not a mother tongue (Strevens, 1987). Crystal (1997) has called for a broader view of those who should be counted as "English-users" to include all who use it, even on a limited scale. His estimate is between one billion and two billion users of the English language.

Today, the term 'English' is generally applied to many forms of the language, which are different from each other: American English, British English, Indian English, West African English etc. This trend referring to different forms and varieties is to accept differentiation within English and even to use a new

plural, 'Englishes' as in the title of the journal "World Englishes", co edited by Braj B. Kachru of Illinois University at Urbana and Larry E. Smith of the East-West Center, Hawaii. (Strevens, 1987).

### **1.1 The Spread of the English Language**

English, compared to other languages like Chinese, Greek and Sanskrit is a relatively young language. How then has it come to occupy this unique position?

Strevens (1987) is of the opinion that the global spread of the English language began between 1600 and 1750 when Britain began to set up colonial settlements overseas. As these settlements stabilized and prospered, large numbers of people, being non-native speakers of English had to learn to use the language in order to survive or to find employment with the governing class.

Around 1900, the next stage in the creation of what is today's global English began. This phase occurred in the colonies of the British Empire in Africa, South-East Asia, the Pacific and the Caribbean. During this phase, schools were built and education began to be offered to the indigenous people. This education was provided in English. Thus, from about 1900 onwards, millions of additional speakers of English were created, users who used English as a second language, in countries where it had a special position in education, law, the media and commerce.

## 1.2 Nativization of English

The term nativization refers to the divergence of a language from a parent source (Kachru, 1981). It has been variously described as “acculturation” (Stanislaw, 1982) or “indegenization” (Richards, 1979). In the context of English, this term refers to the changes which English had undergone as a result of its contact with various languages in diverse cultural and geographical settings in the “outer circle of English” which includes South Asia, South East Asia, West Africa, Malaysia etc. (Kachru, 1985). The process of nativization at various linguistic levels is responsible for the “deviations” in the new varieties of English in these countries.

### 1.2.1 The Existence of Varieties of English

English has undergone changes as a result of its contact with diverse languages in countries such as India, Nigeria, China, Kenya and other countries in Asia. These changes are described as adjustments, borrowings and transfer.

These “new varieties of English” reflect the national identities of the speakers who use these varieties. This is evidenced from a remark once made by the Ambassador of Singapore to the United Nations:

*When one is abroad, in a bus or train or airplane, and when one overhears someone speaking, one can immediately say this is someone from Malaysia or Singapore. And I should hope that when I'm speaking abroad my countrymen will have no problem recognizing that I'm a Singaporean.*

*(R.K. Tongue 1974)*

Quirk (1972: 19) refers to these new varieties as “national variants”. He goes on to explain that although within each of these national variants there is considerable variation in speech according to education, region and social standing, each has a “national standard” which represents educated speech as against uneducated speech and cuts across regional varieties. These national standards are distinct from what he calls “Standard English”, which is supranational, in the sense that it embraces what is common to all the national standards (1972: 17).

In countries like India, Singapore and Malaysia where there is a sufficiently large and stable community that uses English, there is a localized form of English (LFE), which is identifiable and definable through its distinctive features of grammar, lexis, pronunciation, discourse and style. The existence of labels like “Singapore English”, “Malaysian English”, “Indian English”, etc. is evidence that localized forms have emerged and are in use in that community.

The great majority of the world’s English users, being non-native users speak and write varieties different in detail from the native speaker varieties.. Many native speakers, perhaps the majority, even among teachers of English, overtly or unconsciously despise these varieties (Strevens 1987). These native speaker attitudes are perceived by the non-native speakers as being arrogant, imperialist and insulting towards them. Thus, speaking from his own experience, Kachru (1982) says, “...to have one’s English labeled *Indian* was an ego-cracking linguistic insult.”

A similar conflict of attitudes occurs whenever a native speaker criticizes or rejects varieties of English. Strevens (1987), believes that the basic reason for these native



speaker attitudes is ignorance and a total lack of awareness of the existence of flourishing, effective, functional and sometimes elegant and literary non-native varieties of English. Most native speakers including teachers of ESL/EFL, have not experienced non-native speaker varieties of English in the circumstances of their origins, e.g. in India, Singapore, West Africa etc., or even read much about them. Consequently, they wrongly equate variations from native speaker norms with classroom errors and mistakes or regard non-native speaker varieties as some kind of interlanguage on the path to native speaker English (Strevens 1987).

The history and experience of the United States and Britain have been significantly different with regard to the emergence of non-native varieties. As Britain's large number of colonies approached political independence so there emerged the same kind of pride in their own identity reflected in their language. Strevens (1987) says that already in 1960, some British teachers of EFL in Africa were beginning to believe that it was no longer appropriate to expect Ghanaian and Nigerian schoolchildren to speak English like Englishmen and women.

### **1.2.2 Recognition of Nativized English Varieties**

Although the new varieties of English had already appeared on the linguistic scene for some time, it was only recently that the reality of their existence began to be recognized. It is not that linguist and language teachers were not aware of their existence. They were but their attitude towards it varied from one of disregard, suspicion, anxiety and even hostility. Some even called attention to it only to condemn it.

At the TESOL convention in 1995, Kachru presented his paper “Models of English for the Third World: White Man’s Burden or Language Pragmatics”. In his paper, Kachru demonstrated how Indian English had already established itself because of its widespread use and multi-faceted functions in Indian society as a new variety of English. The empirical evidence Kachru used had been data he had collected and published for his doctoral thesis at the University of Edinburgh in 1962. His paper touched on the Indianness, intelligibility, phonological, grammatical and lexical features as well as the functions and uses of Indian English.

The other well-known and documented varieties, which Stevans (1987: 133) mentions are Fijian English, West African English, Filipino English, Jamaican or West Indian English, Singapore and Malaysian English.

Stevens (1987: 119) comments that most English Language teachers are now aware of the new varieties of the language and their relevance with regard to language teaching. Because of the advances made in sociolinguistic research, which has now become accessible to practicing language classroom teachers, there is a keener realization that English is not a single, homogenous language. Teachers wishing to extend their familiarity with English by understanding better its diversity and range and function of the varieties of English do not need to be persuaded that varieties exist.

### 1.3 English in Malaysia

Fishman (1978: 6) states of new nations that:

*... in the absence of a common nationwide, ethnic and cultural identity (new nations) proceed to plan and create such an identity through national symbols that can lead to common mobilization above, beyond and at the expense of pre-existing ethnic-cultural particularities. It is at this point that a national language is invoked... as a unifying symbol.*

Therefore even before achieving complete independence, the Alliance government had started moving towards the establishment of Malay as the national language.

However,

*... the immediate operational needs of the country may well necessitate the short term recognition of another or of multiple languages... Thus, some nations have hit upon the expediency of recognizing several local languages as permissible for early education (i.e. grade one to six), whereas the preferred national language is retained for intermediate education and a non-indigenous language of international significance is retained (at least temporarily) for government activity and higher education*

*(Fishman 1978:7)*

Thus we can see that what Fishman states has generally been true in Malaysia as the government has retained the policy of allowing primary education in Mandarin or Tamil, with Bahasa Malaysia as a second language.

With the present policy of implementing Bahasa Malaysia as the national language there has been a change in the relative statuses of Bahasa Malaysia and English. Whereas English was a prerequisite for higher status occupations and higher incomes at one time, its position has now been relegated to one of a second language. Bahasa

Malaysia has now become the language that has more functional value for most of the population as it has become the language of government and education and the language needed for social and financial advancement.

We shall now attempt to look at the changes in the functions and status of English, in relation to Bahasa Malaysia, in the following domains: Family, Friendship, Transactions, Employment, Education, Media and Government.

### **1.3.1 The Family Domain**

The use of English in the family domain has normally been the 'norm' for urban elites of various ethnic backgrounds. English was not used in this domain among the rural communities of Malays, Chinese or Indians. However, in the urban centers of Penang, Kuala Lumpur, Malacca and Johore Baru, there were and still are, families in which English is used among siblings and English-medium educated parents. This may be explained by the fact that Kuala Lumpur was the center of British administration, whilst Penang and Malacca were Straits Settlements with a history of direct colonial rule and Johore Baru because of its close geographical contact with Singapore.

Platt (1980: 137) also found that among ethnic Indian Malaysians of the same age group with an English-medium education, a high use of English was claimed with siblings, and even with parents whereas among Malays, there was a considerable difference according to the educational and socio-economic background of the speakers and their parents.

According to Platt (1980: 141), there is a shift in this pattern with greater use of Malay in the family domain among the English-medium educated Malays because of the greater use of Malay in the Employment Domain. Among other ethnic groups, two trends have been observed:

- a.) A move towards greater use of the native languages – the Chinese dialects or the Indian language.
- b.) A move towards greater use of Bahasa Malaysia.

The first trend operates in families with an English-medium education where younger members of the family are now being educated in Bahasa Malaysia but where some of the older members of the family have an inadequate command of it. These older members of the family are usually able to communicate in Bazaar Malay in the Transactions and Employment domains but feel uncomfortable discussing more personal and 'elevated' topics in Bazaar Malay and thus resort to their 'native' speech variety when discussing such topics.

The second trend occurs in families where younger members of the family are educated through the medium of Malay but where older members of the family are also competent in Malay. In such situations, conversations between siblings and sometimes even with parents are in Malay.

### **1.3.2 The Friendship Domain**

English has been widely used in the Friendship Domain among the English-medium educated especially, among speakers of different ethnic backgrounds. However, in an

investigation by Platt, (1980: 157), it was found that there has been a movement from English to Bahasa Malaysia in this domain. In the 1975 interview with university students, 55% of those with English medium education and 26% of those with Chinese medium primary education, claimed to use Bahasa Malaysia in this domain; especially with Bahasa Malaysia educated Malay students.

### **1.3.3 The Transactions Domain**

In this domain, Bahasa Malaysia or its Pidginized form, Bazaar Malay has always been important as an inter-ethnic means of communication, (Platt, 1980: 158) except in the more fashionable shops where English was available as an alternative. Among Indians, transactions would be carried out in their own speech variety whereas amongst the Chinese there is usually a 'dominant' dialect such as Cantonese in Kuala Lumpur and Hokkien in Penang, which would be used when communicating with those of a different dialect background from their own.

Currently the use of English in this domain is diminishing except in situations where there is a need to communicate with tourist or expatriates working in Malaysia. (Platt, 1980: 158)

### **1.3.4 The Employment Domain**

Although English is used only in a small proportion in this domain, it is of great importance because it is the medium for higher status positions in government and much of the private sector. English is "the most indispensable requirement in the achievement of social and economic status." (Asmah Hj Omar, 1975: 22)

Advertisements for situations vacant in the English Language press normally stipulate that a reasonable command of English is a pre-requisite for employment (Platt, 1980: 159). Thus we can see that English is in second position to Bahasa Malaysia in frequency of being specified for job vacancies.

### **1.3.5 The Education Domain**

In 1960, the Rahman Talib Education Committee Report recommended parallel Malay and English medium schools and also stressed the need for the University of Malaya to become bilingual. The report also suggested setting a target date for a pass in Malay to be compulsory for the Malayan Secondary School Entrance Examination and for entry to teacher training courses (Platt, 1980: 161).

In 1970, the Ministry of Education announced that the first year level at English medium primary schools would change to Malay medium in 1971 and a gradual conversion to Bahasa Malaysia would be completed throughout the primary and secondary levels of education in 1982 (Wong, 1981: 129).

In 2002, the Ministry of Education announced that Mathematics and Science would be taught in English in all primary and secondary schools in the country from 2003 beginning with primary one and secondary one. The Ministry of Education hopes that this move will help to arrest the declining standard of English in the country.

The use of Bahasa Malaysia has increased within universities. Not only are students required to attend courses, and pass tests in Bahasa Malaysia, it is also used in lectures and tutorials, and examination questions are answered in Bahasa Malaysia.

In 1970, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, the first Malay medium institution of higher learning was opened.

Thus, the use of English as a medium of instruction in education has completely been replaced by Bahasa Malaysia. However, it remains as a compulsory second language within the school system, and it still retains some importance in tertiary education.

### **1.3.6 The Media Domain**

Four main English daily newspapers are published in Peninsular Malaysia. The New Straits Times, The Star and, The Sun are morning papers whilst one, The Malay Mail, is an afternoon paper.

Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) is the responsibility of the Malaysian Ministry of Information. There are four main radio networks: Radio One, the national network, where Bahasa Malaysia is used and three other networks provide music and news broadcasts in English, Chinese and Tamil.

There are two RTM TV channels: TV 1 concentrates on programmes in Bahasa Malaysia while TV 2 shows programmes in English, Chinese and Indian languages. Advertisements are in Bahasa Malaysia on TV 1 and in Bahasa Malaysia, English, Chinese and Tamil on TV 2.

Private TV stations TV3 and NTV 7 broadcast a mixture of programmes in Bahasa Malaysia, English, Chinese and the Indian languages. Mega TV shows programmes mainly in English whilst Astro shows programmes in Bahasa Malaysia, English, Chinese and Indian languages.



### **1.3.7 The Domain of Government**

This is a domain in which there has been a virtually complete changeover from English to Bahasa Malaysia. Clause 2 of the National Language Act, 1967 states that 'the National Language shall be used for official purposes' and this is reiterated in the revision (Act 32 of 1971). Bahasa Malaysia has thus become the language of all government correspondence and instrumentation and it is used in all official written matters like forms, notices and road signs.

### **1.3.8 The Domain of Law**

The Malaysian legal system is a heritage of the British system and English was the official language of the courts, although interpreters were used when necessary.

Clause 8 of the National Language Act of 1967 states that: 'All proceedings (other than the giving of evidence by a witness) in the Federal Court, the High Court or any subsidiary court shall be in the national language or in the English language or partly in the national language and partly in the English language.'

Clause 8 of Act 32 of 1971 does not change this but the use of Bahasa Malaysia in courts has increased and is increasing.

## **1.4 Statement of the Problem**

English is recognized by the government as a second language and there is emphasis to learn the language among Malaysians. There are English dailies and there are English radio stations like Radio 4 and Time Highway. There are also local English programmes on TV like 'Global', 'Money Matters', etc. in addition to foreign

programmes in English. English is spoken in almost every aspect of life especially in the urban areas. English is also widely used by private companies for management.

Slowly the emergence of localized features can be seen. Lowenberg (1986: 81) reports that since English was used outside the classroom context by the locals during the colonial era, considerable transfer occurred from the colloquial varieties of the indigenous languages resulting in a highly nativized, colloquial subvariety of English. This colloquial subvariety of English continued to be used in adulthood as an inter-ethnic code of solidarity and informality. By the end of the colonial era, a distinctive non-native variety called Malayan English (later Malaysian English) evolved, with a style range including a formal, educated sub-variety used as a medium of instruction in schools and a highly colloquial sub-variety, used in less formal domains. The educated sub-variety is not totally different from British English but one can observe Malaysianised features of phonology, syntax and lexical items. The heterogeneous local population has filtered the English language brought into the country by the British and made it recognizably Malaysian. Each of these linguistic levels has had influence from the local languages as well as modification by way of various communication strategies like generalization, simplification and omission that have now fossilized, (Baskaran, 1987: 47).

It is quite common to find lexicalization such as the following in the Malaysian print media:

a.) ...at a charity fair held at St. Nicholas home in Jalan Bagan Jermal yesterday.

(NST p. 6, 19 August 2001)

b.) Police arrested 41 dadah addicts... (NST p.3, 20 August 2001).

Though 'standard' international English is emphasized in policy making, the cultural and ethnic background of its users has given way to the sociolinguistic development of Malaysian English.

#### 1.4.1 Significance of the Study

In Malaysian English there are systematic patterns in the usage of Malaysian lexical items, which are different from the standard British forms.

*All languages change, they change in respect of their elements.*

*The changes are regular, not random, the manner of change will be powerfully influenced by languages learned earlier*

*R.K. Tongue 1979: 16*

In Malaysia the influence of Malay, Chinese and Tamil are all evident in the variety of English used. Lexical items convey emotional and cultural meaning and the choice of words used depends on the 'communicative needs' of users. Some of the words used in Malaysian English go through a semantic shift to fulfill certain speech acts like thanking, in the Malaysian way.

Malaysians go to great lengths to refrain from offending their guests, friends and neighbors in their daily interactions. They tend to be indirect when asking for favors or giving messages. This is why they select lexical items or idioms, which are culture based as translation would not convey the exact expression of the speaker .(Lowenberg, 1986: 71)

There is a need to look at these 'deviations' and their functions in a sociolinguistic context. 'Adapting an alien code to the sociocultural context of use' (Sridhar 1985), a process which Kachru (1981) terms the 'acculturation' of English (cited in

Lowenberg 1986: 72) by which English is equipped to function effectively in non-western, multilingual speech communities like Malaysia, is the normal course of communication or use of English in its true sense.

Many research papers have been written on contrastive analysis and error analysis with Malaysian students (Lee, 1986; Nair, 1990). These are thorough studies, which contribute towards the learning and teaching of English as a second language in Malaysia. Second Language Acquisition research in Malaysia should take into consideration usage of lexical items in its creative linguistic manner, which reflects the students' cultural and emotional expressions. They cannot always be generalized as errors. One would have to see how the context of culture is manifested in linguistic forms, in new style ranges and in the assumptions one makes about the speech acts in which the second language is used (Kachru, 1981: 25-26).

In advocating this view, it does not mean that Standard English is discarded. While the standard form is taught, the usage of English in the Malaysian context has to be acknowledged because of its sociolinguistic functions. English can be used as a vehicle for the transmission of culture in the multiethnic society of Malaysia.

### **1.5 Aim of the Study**

The aim of this study is to examine lexical and semantic variation in an English Language newspaper – The New Straits Times (see chapter 3). The examination of lexical items is carried out primarily to:

- a.) Examine the type of lexico-semantic variation in the English language used in the New Straits Times.
- b.) Exemplify such variation
- c.) Identify the possible causes of the variation
- d.) Highlight some implications

It is important for such variation to be studied and documented to provide knowledge of the existence of lexical variation in Malaysian English. This would contribute towards a greater understanding of Malaysian English.

#### **1.6 Limitations of the Study**

This is not an exhaustive study. It is limited to categorizing and exemplifying lexical and semantic variation in the data collected from the New Straits Times. This study does not touch on variation in the aspects of grammar and syntax.