

CHAPTER 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.0 Introduction

This study found that there is substantial use of non-English language lexical items in the New Straits Times. This reflects the lexical variation in Malaysian English. The pedagogical implications of this variation give rise to the question of whether these lexical items should be incorporated into the ESL classrooms in Malaysia.

5.1 General Observations

- a) All Malaysians, regardless of ethnic origins, understand and use these lexical items. Since the New Straits Times has a vast readership, these items are for all to understand. For example, words like *Encik* and *dadah* are used and understood by everybody and not just the Malays.
- b) It is found that Bahasa Malaysia has a major influence in the lexical variation, which occurs in the new Straits Times.
- c) Nativized lexical items are used when reporting local news.
- d) The use of nativized lexical items does not affect intelligibility for Malaysians.

5.12 The Malaysian Reality

In Malaysia, Bahasa Malaysia is the main medium of instruction in schools. The number of parents who had an English medium education and used English at home has diminished. The English spoken by the Malay medium educated Malaysians is for creating situations as close to everyday communication as possible, such as conveying messages, making and receiving calls, job interviews, giving instructions and selling products. It is on the threshold between EFL and ESL (Platt 1980). Pritchard and Chamberlain (1974: 48) when discussing ESL and EFL in the region, state that, "it is not over-contentious to state as a self evident fact the two approaches to English will be very different, and it is just as obvious, given the National Language policy, that the latter situation of EFL is the one most likely to concern most teachers of English in Malaysia."

The other option open is the approach of teaching "communicative competence", i.e. creating situations that come close to real life situations and where communication exchange takes place as closely resembling 'real life' communication as is possible in an artificial setting. Malaysia, particularly urban Malaysia is still full of possible situations where English is used in everyday communication, e.g. with friends, in the commercial sector, with tourists and in the media.

Many applied linguists have been rather hazy about how to teach communicative competence at the school level and beyond generalizations have not been able to offer a proposal. The Curriculum Development Center of the Malaysian Ministry of Education has provided courses at school level with a definite 'communicative'

slant. Textbooks for these courses have been structured accordingly and the writers made a good attempt to provide suitable material in line with the overall syllabus design.

The textbooks provide teachers with a framework Language structures, tasks and exercises are geared to the particular setting. The settings are local and the participants are local people of a variety of ages and ethnic backgrounds. Their communication needs are real and the situations for communication which are created are credible. On occasion, communication with outsiders, e.g. people from other Asian countries, and friends and tourists from England, Australia and America are also included.

One drawback that Platt (1980) finds with this approach is the lack of actual opportunity the students have to transfer the newly acquired classroom material to real life situations outside the classroom.

The opponents of the communication approach say that there is no chance for communication in English outside the classroom and that now an entirely different approach to teaching English is needed in Malaysia. As Asmah Haji Omar (1978: 14) puts it:

...we do not focus our attention on communicative competence in English. This particular competence is needed in the national language. Day to day interactions between Malaysians of various ethnic groups is and will be conducted in the national language in Malaysia. Teaching the students how to express themselves in English in the buying of stamps or in getting a taxi to the railway station will be a futile exercise, because they surely find it easier to do such things in Bahasa Malaysi and be better understood by their respondents.

This statement was made in support of the reading comprehension approach to teaching English in Malaysia with particular reference to English for Special Purposes Project which was then being developed by the University of Malaya.

In Malaysia today, Bahasa Malaysia is the language of education, commerce and government. It is the National Language. However, English remains as the second most important language in Malaysia. It is firmly established at all levels of the Malaysian education system because of our colonial past and also because of post-colonial government policies.

This role has been enhanced in recent years with the decision taken in recent years by the cabinet to allow English to be used as a medium of instruction in fields such as engineering, medicine and other technical subjects in institutions of higher learning. This decision was taken to enable students to keep abreast of rapidly developing technologies in the above fields and to help Malaysia become a center of academic excellence. Recently, English has been introduced as the medium of instruction for teaching Science and Mathematics at both the primary and secondary levels.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications

In Malaysia, the importance of English is always emphasized but poor command of the language still persists. With this scenario in mind, is it right to use these lexical items in the ESL classroom in Malaysia? By using these lexical items are we not compromising international intelligibility? As far as teaching English as an

international language is concerned, the decisive difference in outlook is the recognition that in the great non-Native Speaking populations, English will be taught by non-native speakers of the language, to non-native learners of the language, in order to communicate mainly with non-native speakers. Smith (1985) says:

It is the widespread use of English which makes it an international language. This does not mean, however, that soon everyone everywhere will be speaking English, wearing jeans and dancing to a disco beat. The spread of English is not a homogenizing factor which causes cultural differences to disappear, but the use of English offers a medium to express and explain these differences. There is no desire among members of the world community when using English to become more like native speakers in their life style. Native speakers must realize that there are many valid varieties of English and that non-native speakers need not sound and act like the Americans, the British or any other groups of native speakers in order to be effective English users. English is being used as an international language in diplomacy, international trade and tourism. Native speakers need as much help as non-native when using English to interact internationally. There is no room for linguistic chauvinism.

Smith (1985)

In terms of approach and methodology, it is not so much that teaching English as an international language has introduced major changes. It is rather that the gradual sophistication in learning and teaching English has now added a new element: awareness of the fact that most ESL/EFL today relate to non-native speaking populations requiring English for their internal purposes, or for dealing with other non-native speaking populations, without the presence or intervention of native speakers (Stevens 1987)

The process of gradual sophistication has brought ESL a long way in barely forty years. Today the trend in teaching and learning English is the recognition of the subtle differentiations of the learners, their purposes and their speech communities.

Strevens (1987) notes that over the years, there has been an extension to the range of "resource countries" providing the intellectual and material bases of ESL/EFL and supplying teachers for work in non native speaking countries. Strevens (1987) adds that originally, Britain and the United States were the obvious and sole resource countries. Now increasingly, Canada, Australia and New Zealand contribute in the same way. India has supplied teachers of English to China; Belgian teachers teach English in Morocco, while in the Arabian Gulf States, a great many teachers of English are from Pakistan (Strevens 1987).

During British rule, the English language in Malaysia could be considered exonormative, i.e. its official norm for English was that of British English with a pronunciation used by educated speakers of English in South-eastern England, a pronunciation sometimes referred to as R.P. (Received Pronunciation). Apart from the fact that this British standard is itself changing (Platt, 1980), the question of whether it is still the norm for Malaysian English arises. It is true that when discussing new varieties, Standard British but that is merely to give a background against which to sketch emerging varieties. There is no doubt that the situation is changing and the exonormative norm for English is gradually being replaced by a local one (Platt, 1980)

This does not mean that teaching programmes should abandon standards. It is the integrative part of any language teaching programme that it has a goal in the form of a language norm. Platt (1980) suggests that language teachers "should abandon a slavish adherence to ex glossic standards and to investigate as a possible official norm the speech and writing of educated speakers of Malaysian English.

Sociolinguists are aware that no matter how hard the English language teachers and curriculum planners may strive, it is the people who will decide in the end how they wish to speak (Platt, 1980).

5.2.1 Teachers and Teaching Materials

In the Malaysian ESL classroom, the teacher is himself unable to produce anything other than Standard Malaysian English. This is because he has himself learnt English as a Second Language within the Malaysian context. There are lexical and grammatical discrepancies between Standard Malaysian English and Standard British English which are obvious if one listens to the BBC Overseas Service. Educational policy makers are faced with a choice: should the target language be an external model, such as Standard British English, or should it be the educated, formal range of Malaysian English? These decisions, which rest with politicians, will finally affect the work of the syllabus makers, the textbook writers, the teachers and the learners.

Textbooks and materials used in the Malaysian ESL classroom are usually produced by local writers who are commissioned by the Ministry of Education. These books and materials use lexical items which reflect the Malaysian way of life. The following examples, from the Malaysian Primary School textbook, 'English Year Five', published by Mahir Publications Sdn. Bhd. K.L 1999, illustrate this.

Examples:

- Nasvid competitions are usually held on this day. (p 21)
- The Sports Day of Sekolah Kebangsaan Seri Pandan is soon. (p 31)
- To play congkak one needs a congkak board and counters. (p 29)

5.3 Recommendations

This is not an exhaustive study. The data was collected at random from the National pages of the New Straits Times. The views and conclusions discussed are general and a more detailed study would be required to give a better insight into lexicosemantic variation in Malaysian English. Some recommendations based on this dissertation are given to extend the scope of research. These are as follows:

- Research could focus on the causes of using certain lexical items.
- A methodology could be drawn up specifically on how to incorporate nativized lexical items in ESL textbooks and teaching materials in the Malaysian ESL classroom.