

CHAPTER 16

REGISTER MIXING

In the present study, 'Register Mixing' is a feature of Malaysian English which involves elements of a feature of Singapore English which Crewe (1977) termed 'Formality Mixing'. He described this as a tendency to mix the levels of formal and informal speech through the choice of words considered inappropriate in Standard British English. This means that formal lexis may be used for informal utterances and informal lexis may be used for formal utterances. Examples of these are given by Crewe as follows with the native equivalents given in brackets:

- a. Could you please **furnish** me **with** your phone number so that I can ring you up at home? (give)
- b. My youngest son is **undergoing** national service at the moment. (doing)
- c. We regret very much that your **mum** has passed away. (mother)
- d. The embassy will be inviting you and your **missus** to attend the opening of the art exhibition. (wife)

Another linguist, Baskaran(1989), also observed that Malaysian speakers, like their Singaporean counterparts have a tendency to mix registers namely use formal words in informal contexts and informal words in formal contexts. Examples given by Baskaran of informal words used in formal contexts are: 'hubby' for 'husband' (used in newspaper headlines), 'follow' for 'accompany' and 'stay' for 'have accommodation'.

16.1 Examples of Register Mixing

Examples of formal words used in informal contexts are 'residence' for 'house', 'attached to' for 'working in' and 'witness' for 'see an accident'. The

words and expressions found in the present study could be added to this list.

16.1.1 by the way

In a Business news article, the following comment was observed:

By the way, this will be the last Phileo-edge briefing for the year.'

The expression 'by the way' is a colloquial expression from the native viewpoint. In native usage it is limited only to spoken English in informal situations. By using it in a Business news article, the writer has actually used informal register in a formal context. A native speaker would have used more formal lexis such as 'incidentally' or even 'This is to inform all readers that...'

Hence this usage could be regarded as an example of Register Mixing.

16.1.2 goes to show that

The following expression was recorded from a Business news article:

'**It goes to show that** if they already have a property, they are less inclined to invest.'

As in the case of 'by the way', in native usage this expression is used only in spoken discourse in informal situations. As the Business news article is a formal piece of writing, this usage can be considered non-native and categorized as an example of Register Mixing.

16.1.3 heard from

The following comment was read in a Business news article:

'Asked about reports that part of the deal will be negotiated, Khalid said, "We never **heard from** IBRA officials on that.'

In native usage 'heard from' is usually used in an informal way. For example, to 'hear from someone' or 'to hear something from someone' is an informal way of saying to receive a letter or a telephone call from somebody as in the following

sentence taken from written discourse: 'I look forward to hearing from you' or 'I haven't heard anything from her for months.' Hence it is usually used in informal written discourse such as letters or diary entries.

However, in the above context it is used in formal written discourse, namely in a Business news article in a newspaper. Here its usage is an example of Register Mixing.

16.1.4 looked at

The word 'look' has been used in more than one non-native sense in the data, as shown in the following examples seen in formal writing:

'Other value drivers must also be **looked at**.'(considered)

'Asmah's(1984) study on advertisements **looked at** the use of rhetorical techniques in the Malay advertisement.'(explored)

The usage of 'looked at' appears informal in the above contexts, and the words in brackets are the more formal equivalents which a native speaker would have probably used instead. Hence 'looked at' here can be considered to be an example of Register Mixing.

16.1.5 say

In native usage 'say' is an informal way of expressing 'for example' as in the sentence: '**Say** you lose your job; what would you do then?'

In the data, this usage appears in formal written discourse, namely in a Masters thesis:

'A naturalistic observation would need as its database the lesson with its participants in real time rather than **say** an experimental class set up to try out a particular teaching technique.'

As this is an informal expression used in formal discourse, it has been

categorized as Register Mixing.

16.1.6 letter telling us

ME speakers, especially those of Indian origin, have a tendency to use the informal word 'telling' instead of more formal function words such as 'informing', 'conveying', 'expressing', 'reminding' or 'notifying'. In the following sentence seen in student's entry in her Interactive Journal, the student uses 'telling' in a non-native way, where a native speaker would have used 'informing':

'Letter **telling** us to register ourselves in UM on 3rd of June has arrived.'

The writer, who is of Indian origin, has clearly used an informal word to express a more formal function.

16.1.7 what more is

The following sentence was taken from the dissertation of a Masters student:

'**What more is** the audience will surely be convinced because the journalists have shown to have done some investigation before they started writing because of the numerous references found throughout the series.'

This long sentence actually follows an earlier section stating a reason why a certain series of articles involving investigative reporting, has been well-written. A more formal native equivalent would be 'Furthermore' rather than 'what more is.' Here there appears to be a mixing of register, as the expression 'what more is' may be accepted in an informal conversation but not in academic writing. The more formal word 'furthermore' is the correct register for the above usage.

16.1.8 woeful

The word 'woeful' is an old-fashioned and often humorous word which is only used in literary writing. However, during a radio interview, a Malaysian environmentalist used this word in the following way:

'I'm a user of the public transport system and I know how **woeful** it is but it still can be used.'

The writer seems to have used literary register in a more mundane, albeit formal context. A native speaker may have used a less literary word such as 'deplorable' rather than 'woeful' in the above context.

16.2 Features of Register Mixing

Most of the examples of Register Mixing in the present study involve the use of informal English for formal contexts. There are certain verbs which are often used in informal native conversation. These same verbs are used by Malaysians in formal writing thus rendering them non-native in usage. An example of this is 'looked at' which was seen in a Masters thesis, and 'say' and 'heard from' which were seen in Business news articles in the newspapers.

In addition to individual lexical items, there are also expressions which are used only in informal contexts, but which have been used non-natively, namely in formal contexts. Examples of these are shown below:

Non-native:: 'by the way'

Native:: Readers are informed

Context of Use: 'By the way,, this will be the last Phileo-edge briefing for the year.'(in a Business news article)

Non-native:: 'what more is'

Native:: In addition

Context of use: 'What more is the audience will surely be convinced.'(Toastmasters' meeting)

Non-native:: `goes to show that'

Native: indicates that

Context of use: It goes to show that if they already have a property, they are less likely to invest.' (in a Business news article)

Non-native:: heard from

Native:: notified by

Context of use:: `Asked about reports that part of the deal will be negotiated, Khalid said, "We never heard from IBRA officials on that." (in a Business news article)

Non-native:: looked at

Native: explored

Context of Use: `Asmah's study on advertisements looked at the use of rhetorical techniques in the Malay advertisement.' (in a Masters dissertation)

Non-native: say

Native: for instance

Context of use: `A naturalistic observation would need as its database the lesson with its participants in real time rather than say an experimental class set up to try out a particular teaching technique.'

Non-native: telling

Native: informing

Context of Use: `Letter telling us to register ourselves in UM on 3rd of June has just arrived.'

Besides the non-native mix-up of formal and informal registers, there is also an example of Register Mixing which involves the non-native mix-up of another register namely old-fashioned or archaic/modern register.

This is shown in the use of the word `woeful' by a Malaysian environmentalist on a radio interview: `I'm a user of the public transport system and I know how woeful it is but it still can be used.'

16.3 Summary of Register Mixing

Most of the examples of Register Mixing in the present study involve the use of informal English for formal contexts. There are certain verbs which are often used in informal native conversation. These same verbs are used by Malaysians in formal writing thus rendering them non-native in usage. An example of this is `looked at' which was seen in a Masters thesis, and `say'

and 'heard from' which were seen in Business news articles in the newspapers.

In addition to individual lexical items, there are also expressions which are used only in informal contexts, but which have been used non-natively, namely in formal contexts. Examples of these are 'what more is', 'by the way' and 'goes to show that'.

There are also examples of Register Mixing which involve the use of other factors such as literary/non-literary, old-fashioned or archaic/modern. An example of a word used by a Malaysian which may be considered old-fashioned by a native speaker is 'woeful'.

One can conclude that Register Mixing is not a common feature of ME due to the presence of only eight examples in a corpus of 779 words and expressions.