CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS

4.0   INTRODUCTION

As stated in Chapter 3, the identified ME utterances are the data of this study. It is crucial to note that these items are not chosen at random, but through meticulous review of the transcribed dialogues in which the main criterion for selection is the items' ME characteristic features. Frequency of utterances is not the key factor of selection. Thus the information on frequency count for items given in the analysis and restated in the summarizing tables (pages 113 - 115) serves only to provide a general statistical picture of the whole data. It is not to suggest the items' differences in the degree of significance. These items are presented and described in this chapter under two main categories of lexical and syntactic features. Comparison with the usage of SBE is made where necessary. Each utterance referred is presented with a bracket containing the initials S for Scene and L for Line. Thus (S1, L1) indicates that the utterance occurs in Scene 1, and Line 1 in the transcription of the movie (Appendix 3).

The analysis of the identified lexical features is presented in section 4.1. In sub-sections of 4.1.1, 4.1.2, and 4.1.3, each feature is described semantically and/or pragmatically (to a certain extent, where discourse is concerned) in relation to the SBE usage, based on the categorization of ME lexical features as gathered in the literature. For the purpose of distinguishing the localization of some items as compared to their usage (or absence of usage) in SBE, corpus evidences are retrieved from Collin's Concordance Sampler. Reference to the *Encarta World Dictionary* is also made for this purpose.

In addition, besides taking into account the semantic and pragmatic senses of the lexical items, another way of describing them is by analyzing the types of word formation involved. There are various processes of word formation in the English morphology, but for the purpose of this study, the description is to be focused on the word formation processes involved in some of the ME features found in data. This is described in section 4.1.4. Exclamations, another feature of ME, are discussed in 4.1.5.

Section 4.2 presents the analysis of the syntactic features of the data, each of which is described under sub-sections based on the items' syntactical characteristics. In order to distinguish the features of ME syntax, again, the structural analysis cannot stand alone without a certain level of association with the SBE usage in terms of meaning that is described within the discussion.

4.1   LEXICAL FEATURES

The analysis of ME lexical features identified in the data is done based on the categorizations and characteristics established in previous works as reviewed in Chapter 2. The description of each item under its respective category serves to confirm its status as a lexical feature of ME, and thus contributes to the reliability of the data as a source for understanding the nature of ME.

4.1.1 Local Language Referents (Use of Local Lexicon in ME Speech)

These are local terms that have been assimilated into the spoken (as well as written) English in the country. As stated by Baskaran (2005:37), "with almost two decades of ESL status in the country, the lexicon of ME has a profusion of local terms with characteristics that warrant their presence in the system". In this case, English translational equivalents could hardly suffice and this applies to terms like *kampung*, *balik kampung*, *gotong royong*, and *pasar malam*. She adds that "although on the whole there is sameness of reference (in this case 'hometown/village', 'going back to hometown', 'cleaning up', and 'night market' respectively), the degree and nature of the sameness of meaning (between the local lexeme and its English equivalent) is variable – thus the need to maintain the local term". In the following discussion, some examples of such items gathered from the data are described under two categories based on Baskaran's (2005) characteristics.

4.1.1.1 Cultural/Culinary terms

These, as defined by Baskaran (2005:41), are "native (local) culinary and domestic referents specifically akin to a characteristic of local origin and ecology". The words *ta pao* (S4:L10) meaning 'take-away', *ong* (S4:L1 and S6:L20) meaning 'good luck', *char kway teow* (S4:L1 and S4:L4), and *teh tarik tongkat ali* (S6:L26, S11:L1, S11:L2, S13:L1, and S27:L1) can be categorized as cultural/culinary terms based on their cultural-bound effects and association with local delicacies.

4.1.1.2 Emotional/Cultural loading

Referring to some prominent local characters, *Datukship* (S9:L13 and S9:L18), and *Tauke* (S3: L10, S4:L3, and S4:L4) could hardly be translatable into English due to their culture-bound association. Hence they can be labeled as emotional/cultural loading. *Kao tim* (S5:L4, S10:L11, and S17:L18) which in Hokkien means 'to get something done or settled' can also be included in the same category as it is indeed Malaysianized (understood by Malaysians of various races, yet such referents with identical meaning are not present in SBE).

Interestingly, *kiasu* (S15, L38) is also used in the data. This word is a borrowing from Hokkien 'kia' (afraid) and 'su' (to lose), compounded as 'kiasu'. According to Ooi (2001: 177), "*kiasu* is used nowadays in increasing frequency to characterize the negative Singaporean trait of being overly competitive or being afraid of losing out". As a result of its growing popularity, the derivational kiasu + ism = *kiasuism* is also being used. McDonalds, as stated by Ooi (2001), had even once come out with *Kiasu Burger* in Singapore. Although the use of *kiasu* is more widespread in Singapore, the fact that the item is labeled as SME lexical item in Ooi's concentric circles suggests that it is shared with ME speakers as well. This is understandable as this item originates from Hokkien, one of the salient dialects amongst the Chinese community in both Malaysia and Singapore.

Another way of describing ME features, as established earlier, is by considering their level of formality that can be related to the different categorizations of the lectal continuum. The main characteristic of ME lexis that can be considered as an Acrolect (standard ME), following Pillai and Fauziah Kamaruddin's sub-division (Table 3: page 32), is the fact that they are localized lexical items accepted in both formal and informal use. Another characteristic that marks the vocabulary as Official ME lexis based on Baskaran's subdivision (Table 2: page 31) is the fact that the words are not substitutable in an international context, giving them a more localized context. The fact that *Datukship, char kuay teow* and *teh tarik tongkat ali* are proper nouns that are specific and hardly translatable allows them to be used by speakers of ME of any sub-varieties in both formal and informal contexts. In the movie, the items are used both by Ah Lok as well as Dr Singh (the former a prominently basilectal/mesolectal speaker, and the latter acrolectal, based on education background and evidences in other aspects portrayed in the movie). Considering these, the items can therefore be categorized as Acrolect (Standard ME)/ Official ME. On the other hand, *tapao*, *kao tim*,and *ong* can be considered as Mesolect (Colloquial)/ Unofficial ME as they are localized lexical items (Hokkien origin) not commonly used in more formal context. Similarly, *kiasu* that is placed in Group E in Ooi's (2001) concentric circles, is described as being used commonly in informal contexts, thus can be considered as a mesolectal feature.

4.1.2 Standard English Lexicalization (English Lexemes with Local Usage)

These are originally English words that somehow carry a different meaning (as compared to the meaning in SBE) when used by ME speakers. These are words that can be described under certain characteristics, as illustrated in the following sections.

4.1.2.1 Polysemic Variation

Polysemic variation, according to Baskaran (2005), includes standard English lexemes that have the original meaning as well as an extended semantic range of meanings not originally in standard English. One such example is the verb 'cut', which, besides carrying the original meaning of 'slicing', also carries the meanings of 'overtake' and 'reduce' in ME. Another instance gathered in the data is the word 'uncle'. Ai Ling refers to Michael Soo as 'uncle' (S9:L9 and S9:L10). The aunty/uncle reference towards an elderly of no blood-relationship or older person of long-standing acquaintance is used commonly by young Malaysians as a term of respect. This means it does not necessarily refer to their parents' siblings as in the SBE usage, thus indicates a semantic extension of this particular item in ME.

4.1.2.2 Informalization

As stated by Baskaran (2005:46), "many of the lexemes used by the ME speaker tend to be informal (colloquial) substitutions of standard English words and it is common to find a profusion of lexemes indicating a more informal style and register in ME". Words like 'kids' (for children) or 'hubby' (for husband), 'fellow' (for person), 'partner' (for spouse), 'sleep' (for 'go to bed'), 'follow' (for 'accompany'), and 'spend' (for 'giving someone a treat for something') are some examples that can be put in this category. Some words in the data that can be categorized as Informalization are discussed next.

(a) *Spend*

(S14, L7) Louis: *Aiyah* that one no problem. I **spend** you this time.
Next time Ah Lok Café you **spend** me lor..ok?

In this example, the word 'spend' is used to mean "give someone a treat for something" or code-switched later by Louis as *belanja* in "next time I *belanja* you". 'Spend' as used here functions as a transitive verb that takes the objects 'you' and 'me'. This kind of structure is not common in SBE. With reference to Encarta World English Dictionary (UK Edition) shown in Figure 4, although 'spend' is described as a verb that carries the meaning of "paying out money in exchange for goods or services", there are four other meanings of the transitive verb, none of which takes 'you' or 'me' as the object as used in ME. This is further exemplified in the extract of Collin's Cobuild Concordance in Figure 5, where none of the 15 instances of 'spend' takes 'me' or 'you' as the objects.

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spend [spend]
verb (*3rd person present singular* spends, *present participle* spending, *past and past participle* spent
[spent])

Definition:

1. *transitive and intransitive verb* **pay money:** to pay out money in exchange for goods or services

2. *transitive verb* **devote time or effort:** to devote time, energy, or thought to something
  • *spent a lot of time thinking about it*

3. *transitive verb* **pass time:** to pass a particular amount of time in a particular place or way
  • *spend a week in Hawaii*

4. *transitive verb* **use something up:** to deplete something totally

5. *transitive verb* **sacrifice something:** to sacrifice something, especially for a cause
  • *spent her life working for reform*

**Figure 4: Definition of 'spend' by Encarta® World English Dictionary[UK Edition]
(2009) Retrieved from: http://uk.encarta.msn.com/dictionary_/blur.html**

1	that Tom agreed, I'd decided to **spend** a discreet figure on this objective
2	have as part of their training to **spend** a considerable period in the country
3	after this week, you can always **spend** a few days with us at Girvan." I
4	coming. Therefore, you'll have to **spend** a holiday with his sister, whom you
5	of the anti-ugly school to **spend** a lifetime and a fortune distributing
6	They can't save any of it up and **spend** a little more in the following year
7	background will be unfamiliar I must **spend** a little time in giving a very short
8	should do for the young. I want to **spend** a little time in seeking some answer
9	nine and a half." "They seem to **spend** a lot of time making passionate love
10	keen to start should be forced to **spend** a whole year on such unhelpful matt
11	discovered that the Eskimo does not **spend** all his time in utilitarian pursuits
12	long enough for Miss Cheesecake to **spend** all the money which by rights should
13	re Education Committee proposes to **spend** 16,499,935, an estimate which repres
14	officers would, for a change, **spend** an evening in the village at the house
15	up a desperate resistance he should **spend** an hour reading the Nigerian Consti

Figure 5: Edited concordance listing for 'spend' (from Collin's Cobuild database)

(b) *Blur*

Another word in the data that can be put in the same category is 'blur'. According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2005), 'blur' is defined as 'smear', 'dimness', or 'confused effect'. Some examples of usage to carry these meanings are shown in the Collin's Concordance extract in Figure 6.

1	as we razzle our life away [p] The rest is a **blur**. [p] [h] SUNDAY [/h] MAN,
2	lights Mastino caught a glimpse of the white **blur** of the driver's face looking
3	the door opened the vision vanished into a **blur** of grey like smoke. Even
4	with polished clarity - never a slur or a **blur** of imprecision - the prosaic
5	language so quickly [p] [h] Schools must not **blur** culture boundary, says
6	At this point F1 aficionados will begin to **blur** the air with stories of how
7	on a stretcher. Winter maintained the yellow **blur** by booking Coleman for a
8	were men. No effort had been made to **blur** the gender divide here.
9	in love. The first few days in hospital were a **blur** of visitors, and general joy.
10	Unfortunately, too many of the songs **blur** into a ska mish-mash, but

Figure 6: Edited concordance listing for 'blur' (from Collin's Cobuild database)

As shown in the above extract, 'blur' is used as an abstract noun (Extracts no.1, 2 and 7), i.e. a state of dimness; a collective noun (Extracts 3, 4 and 9) to determine a particular state of dimness; and a verb (Extracts no. 5, 8 and 10) i.e. the act of smearing or dimming something. Using the word as an adjective to label a person as in "You are blur" is not common in SBE but evident in the data as follows:

(S4, L5 and L6)   Wife: *Aiyoh*, why you always like that one. You got all your orders
mixed up again…so **blur**.
Hawker: Not **blur** la…err what they say ah..meticulous ah?

Interestingly, the hawker, in self-defense, says that instead of being 'blur', he is actually meticulous or being very particular about details. Thus, unlike its meaning in SBE, 'blur' as used in the data acts as an adjective to describe someone's state of carelessness or inefficiency, thus carries a negative connotation.

In addition, as described by Su'ad & Hajar (2008), 'blur' could also be seen as carrying "cultural identity and cultural connotation". Words occur in lexical or syntactic combinations. English words or phrases in ME 'co-habits' with their neighbors to form interesting and indigenized connotation. As part of speech, 'blur' is categorized as a verb or a noun. In ME, it has taken a new life as an adjective. There is even an entry in the Encarta World English Dictionary [UK Edition] for the new identity of 'blur', thus acknowledging ME usage, as shown in Figure 7.

noun (*plural* **blurs**)

Definition:

1. fuzzy or unclear image: something that cannot be seen clearly, e.g. because it moves too quickly or because it is not distinctly remembered

2. smear or smeared area: a mark on something that makes it unclear, or an area of something that is unclear

transitive and intransitive verb (*past and past participle* blurred, *present participle* blurring, *3rd person present singular* blurs)

Definition:

1. make or become vague: to become less clear or distinct, or make something such as an idea less clear or distinct
  * *blurred the line between right and wrong*

2. make or become fuzzy: to become fuzzy or unclear, or make something fuzzy or unclear

adjective

Definition:

Malaysia **confused:** confused or uncertain about something (*informal*)
  * *I am very blur about linguistics.*

[Mid-16th century. Probably variant of blear]

  * **blurred·ness** *noun*
  * **blur·ri·ly** *adverb*
  * **blur·ri·ness** *noun*
  * **blur·ry** *adjective*

Figure 7: Definition of 'blur' by Encarta® World English Dictionary [World English Edition] (2009) Retrieved from: http://uk.encarta.msn.com/dictionary_/blur.html

It is interesting to note that even speakers who are proficient in standard English in

Malaysia would be able to decipher this new meaning of *blur*, so widely acceptable

the cultural connotation this word has taken.

(c) *Follow*

(S12, L1)   Louis: Hello..I have this friend wanna spy your café building ah..I tell you what ..I pick up a new car…you **follow** me, then we can talk some more…

(S25, L5) Ah Lok: Yeah because I'm a good singer. I'm a good singer and then I also can dance. You know, nowadays ah all these people, they like to learn singing you know. Then you **follow** me lah…you **follow** me…you teach the auntie..actually talk about this place ah I feel so sad lah..I feel the sad song coming….(singing)

'Follow', as used in the data (S12, L1) carries the meaning of "accompanying" someone, physically, to go somewhere. In the next instance (S25, L5), "follow me" suggests the directive "repeat after me". In contrast, as evident in Figure 8, none of the instances from the extracts of Collin's Cobuild Concordancer shows the same structure of 'follow' + 'me' as the object. Instead, 'follow' functions as a transitive verb that takes the objects 'signs' , 'their conscience', 'the instructions', 'procedures', 'Afrikaans', 'the continental pattern' and 'the balanced diet' in Extracts 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 9, and 10 respectively. In these cases, 'follow' could generally mean "acting the same or as directed/shown by something or in accordance to something". As for Extract 5, 'follow' is used as an intransitive word meaning 'to refer', whilst for Extract 6 'to take place'.

```
1  magnificent beech avenue to the car-park and **follow** signs to [f] St Ninian's Cave [f] [p] [f]
2       about this." They must," I said. They must **follow** their conscience," said the Cardinal.
3    courgette, etc., over two rows. In late autumn **follow** with two double rows of
4   programme it into your mind. Your mind will **follow** the instructions you give it as long as
5             there is no easy blueprint for others to **follow**. `While the head is important, the idea
6    step for us." A stock market flotation could **follow** in three or four years' time.  [p] The
7   buy the freehold directly. We do not have to **follow** procedures set out in the Leasehold and
8          [p] Is Argentinian-Spanish destined to **follow** Afrikaans as the newest great language
9        to be cajoled into early booking but will **follow** the continental pattern of deciding at
10  banning certain foods, fitness walkers should **follow** the balanced Diet Pyramid.
```

Figure 8:Edited concordance listing for 'follow'(from Collin's Cobuild database)

As shown in Figure 9, *Encarta World English Dictionary* (2009) lists 19 definitions of 'follow', 18 of which are closely associated with the usage in the corpus extracts. Interestingly, though, definition no. 19 has acknowledged the Malaysian way of using 'follow' to mean "to accompany" somebody. As the word 'blur', this seemingly shows that 'follow' as used by Malaysians has been so popularly used that it has become a recognized variety of ME.

follow [fóllō]

verb (*3rd person present singular* <u>follows</u>, *present participle* <u>following</u>, *past and past participle* <u>followed</u>)

Definition:

1. *transitive and intransitive verb* **come after somebody or something:** to come after somebody or something in position, time, or sequence: *the main course followed by dessert*

2. *transitive verb* **add to something already done:** to add to something already done by doing something else, usually a related thing: *She'll follow her lecture with a demonstration.*

3. *transitive and intransitive verb* **go after somebody or something:** to take the same route behind another person, e.g. by walking down the street or driving along the same road, deliberately or by chance: *followed them home*

4. *transitive verb* **keep somebody under surveillance:** to have somebody's movements under constant surveillance: *ordering the suspect to be followed*

5. *transitive verb* **watch somebody or something closely:** to watch, observe, or pay close attention to somebody or something: *eyes seemed to follow me around the room*

6. *transitive verb* **go along route:** to go along something such as a road or path: *following the path*

7. *transitive verb* **take same direction as something:** to take the same course or go in the same direction as something else: *The road follows the river along the valley.*

8. *transitive verb* **go as directed by something:** to go in the direction indicated by something such as a signpost: *Follow that sign ahead.*

9. *transitive verb* **obey something:** to act in accordance with something, especially with instructions or directions given by somebody else: *only if you follow my instructions*

10. *transitive verb* **develop in accordance with something:** to be or develop in accordance with something, usually something already known about or established: *following the same pattern of behaviour*

11. *transitive and intransitive verb* **do same as somebody or something:** to imitate or do the same as somebody or something: *She followed her father into medicine.*

12. *transitive and intransitive verb* **understand something:** to understand something such as an explanation or narrative: *can't follow her explanation*

13. *transitive verb* **engage in activity:** to engage in or practise something such as a career, occupation, or lifestyle: *decided to follow a career in law.*

14. *transitive verb* **keep abreast of something:** to keep informed about or up to date with the progress of something: *Are you following the television series about twins?*

15. *transitive verb* **be about something:** to be about somebody or something, especially to describe or depict what happens to somebody or something over a period of time: *The story follows a typical American family.*

16. *intransitive verb* **result from something:** to happen after and as a result of something else: *Issue too many instructions and confusion invariably follows.*

17. *transitive and intransitive verb* **be logical result:** to be a logical consequence of something: *follows from their loss of sponsorship*

18. *transitive verb* **read words or music:** to read the words or music of something while listening to it

19. *transitive verb* ***Malaysia* accompany somebody:** to go with somebody: *Can I follow you to the market?*

Figure 9: Definition of 'follow' by Encarta® World English Dictionary [World English Edition] (2009). Retrieved from:
<u>http://uk.encarta.msn.com/dictionary_/follow.html</u>

(d) *Fellow*

(S27, L6) Louisa: What you mean never mind? This **fellow** ah..crooked **fellow** you know. He's trying to cheat you off your inheritance ah..

'Fellow', according to *Encarta World English Dictionary* (2009), means a member of a learned or scientific society as in *Fellow of the Royal College of Surgeons.* In addition, Wikipedia Dictionary (2009) states that 'fellow' in the broadest sense is "someone who is an equal or a comrade; it is also used to describe a man, particularly by those in the upper social classes, and is mostly used in an academic context. A fellow is often part of an elite group of learned people who work together as peers in the pursuit of knowledge or practice". However, as used in ME, this term refers to any person in general. According to Baskaran (2005:46), 'fellow' is generally used in ME to mean a person (both male and female). Thus, in contrast to a member of respected, learned society, this person could be just anybody in the society, ranging from a 'nice fellow' to a 'bad fellow'. In the data, it is used to address a person who is 'crooked' and a 'cheater', thus giving a negative connotation to the positive meaning as originally applied in SBE.

4.1.3 Particles

Particles in Singapore English (applicable in ME as well) have been extensively examined in previous works, some of which include studies by Richards & Tay (1977), Kwan-Terry (1978), Bell & Ser (1983), Loke & Low (1988), Platt & Ho (1989), Gupta (1992), Wong (1994), and Low & Brown (2005). These studies have

looked at the syntactical positions of the particles (e.g. whether after a noun or a verb) that could account for their existence and their pragmatic or discourse functions. In recognition of the significant discourse functions they serve, they have been referred to as *discourse particles* or *pragmatic particles* by Platt & Ho (1989) and Gupta (1992). Pragmatic particles, according to Gupta (1992), are a small set of words, mostly loans from Southern varieties of Chinese, which are used to indicate the attitude of speakers to what they are saying. In particular, they contradict what an interlocutor has said, make an assertion, or add a sense of tentativeness. They are often utterance final. The most common are 'ah' (tentative), 'lah' (assertive) and 'what' (contradictory). 'Lah', as stated by Gupta (1992), is the most stereotypical feature of the English of Singapore and Malaysia. Baskaran (2005) refers to 'one', 'what' and 'lah' as *grammatical particles* as they are characteristically Malaysian and stand for a range of functions. The ME particles that are commonly evident in the data include 'ah', 'lah/la', 'one', 'what', 'mah', 'meh', 'hor', and 'lor', all of which are described in the following sections.

4.1.3.1 *Ah*

'Ah' is the most frequently used particle throughout the movie with a total of 221 utterances. It carries either pragmatic or syntactic role. The pragmatic versus syntactic role of particles may be similar to the emotive and non-emotive sentence-final particles in Mandarin described by Kwan-Terry (1978) in Low & Deterding (2003): "emotive particles serve to express the attitude of the speaker and thus play a pragmatic role, while non-emotive particles serve purely syntactic roles such as to

indicate the end of a clause". The following discussion of the syntactic and pragmatic functions of 'ah' is made based on this recognition of emotive-non emotive roles as well as the author's own understanding and judgment of the contexts involved.

(a) **The syntactic functions of 'ah'**

The particle 'ah' can carry a syntactical role, that is equivalent to a tag or a hedge ('isn't it', 'is it', 'you know'). According to Baskaran (2005), in basilectal ME, there is an enclitic 'ah?' with falling intonation, at sentence-final position. For example:

> Was Patrick late? (SBE)
>
> Patrick was late or not? (Mesolectal ME)
>
> Patrick (was) late, <u>ah</u>? (Basilectal ME)

Enclitic 'ah' is commonly used as a substitute for interrogative tags in the basilectal ME. For this function, the particle is placed at the sentence final position to replace the equivalents of *isn't it*, *is it*, or other tags, followed usually with a question mark. Some are exemplified in the data (equivalent SBE structures are suggested in brackets):

> (S5, L17) Ai Swee: Movie <u>ah</u>? No need to eat can meh?
>
> (Going for a movie, aren't we? Is it okay if we don't eat?)

> (S6, L6) Dr Singh: You think this is what? Clinic <u>ah</u>?
>
> (What do you think is this? A clinic, is it?)

(S9, L4) Ah Lok: Through appointment, <u>ah</u>?

(Through appointment, is it?)

(S9, L33) Ah Lok: Eh you don't take me seriously one <u>ah</u>?

(You don't take me seriously, do you?)

(S10, L9)   Mother: Lu *siaw*, <u>ah</u>?

(You're crazy, aren't you?)

(S11, L11) Datuk: Not a bad idea, <u>ah</u>?

(Not a bad idea, is it?)

(S15, L6) Hawker: Hey, you from Penang <u>ah</u>?

(Hey, you're from Penang, aren't you?)

(S15, L11)Michael Soo: This insurance covers cosmetics <u>ah</u>?

(This insurance covers cosmetics, doesn't it?)

With a total of 26 utterances, this particular function of 'ah' in substituting the interrogative tags is a prominent feature in the data. Based on Baskaran's (2005) description and due to the fact that it is mostly uttered by Ah Lok, Ai Swee and Louis, 'ah' carrying this function can be thus labeled as a basilectal variety of ME.

'Ah' can also be used like an audible comma to function as a pause. With 23 lines of instances found in the data (some of which are listed below), it can be said that 'ah' is most commonly used to mark a mere pause (an audible comma) in the natural conversation, without necessarily carrying any pragmatic value:

(S3, L11) Ah Lok: You know <u>ah</u> my daughter <u>ah</u> very good manager. Because of
her <u>ah</u>..this place became very prosperous...I tell you she's got
the brain of her mother.

(S5, L13) Ai Swee: One of the directors in the audition <u>ah</u>, they want me to speak
proper England.

(S5, L39) Ah Lok: Salesmen…sometimes they we wake up <u>ah</u> don't know got
sun, or got no sun…

(S6, L17) Ah Lok: I want you to meet my friend, Mr Louis Wong. He's the only
contractor I know <u>ah</u>..can pick up his watch, look at his face
and comb his hair.

(S6, L23) Ah Lok: So now I tell you…even though he got no education <u>ah</u> but he
worked his way up. When I hold the microphone..you see <u>ah</u>
they say I sound like Elvis Presley..

(S7, L3)   Simon: Boss said <u>ah</u> everybody must take part one

(S9, L2) Ah Lok: I thought <u>ah</u>.. you only got boutique <u>ah</u> in London, Paris,
Mailan. Anyway <u>ah</u> I want you to meet my daughter, Ah Swee
<u>ah</u>..80% beautiful like the mother. 20% multiply by 45 times 10
<u>ah</u> charming like the father.

(S9, L6) Ah Lok: She <u>ah</u> is a expire…perspire to be an actress

(S9, L14)Ah Swee: Pa, why that Su <u>ah</u> so like that one..

(S9, L20)Ah Lok: I think you must ask Michael <u>ah</u>..to recommendation to you
<u>ah</u>..what actually you like lah.

(S9, L24)Ah Lok: I think <u>ah</u> he got slightly ear problem <u>ah</u>..

(b) **The Pragmatic functions of 'ah'**

Besides having syntactic functions as described above, 'ah' can also carry pragmatic

functions, as evident in the data.

i. Keeping two interlocutors in contact

'Ah', as stated by Low & Brown (2005), is widely used in ME to keep two or

more speakers in contact, indicating that more is to follow in the conversation:

(S1, L16): *Louisa keeping in contact with Ah Seng on the phone*.

Louisa : Hello Ah Seng <u>ah.</u>.ok you talk first you talk first. What? Where can?
Eh, how can Manchester <u>ah</u>..give Chelsea two goals. You crazy or
what. Eh, half a goal <u>ah</u> also matters la I tell you..haiya like that <u>ah</u>..

(S14, L6): *Ah Lok enjoying the spa treatment with best friend, Louis*.

Ah Lok: Enjoy.. you see <u>ah</u>…you see the pillow also my saliva all come
out..Louis <u>ah</u>..I really enjoy enjoy enjoy..

(S15, L35): *Ah Lok excitedly recounts his experience to his friends*.

Ah Lok: I tell you, I tell you, I tell you all <u>ah</u>.. I just took datuk <u>ah</u> for a very
exotic herbal plate. After taking it <u>ah</u>..he says he feels like a bull like
that you know. I think he wants to go home and experiment <u>ah</u>..

(S16, L6): *Ai Swee sharing sisterly secrets with Ai Ling about her relationship with Vincent.*

Ai Swee: That's the problem, I think. You know <u>ah</u>…Vincent is not rich

(S21:L1): *Louis giving a warning to his debtor.*

Louis: Oi you better give me back my money <u>ah</u>..and I tell you afterwards I pull your legs <u>ah</u>..tomorrow I give you until12 o clock afternoon <u>ah</u>..you remember <u>ah</u>.. hayya…borrow money so clever, pay back also don't know..

(S23:L3): *Ah Lok consoling his sick and saddened daughter following his decision to sell the café to pay for her treatment.*

Ah Lok: Haiya this place is only brick, wood and cement. What's most important <u>ah</u>…is that you must get well you know after the operation. Then after that <u>ah</u> we can build another café what..

In the above instances, the particle 'ah' is used to indicate that more is to follow in the conversation, thus keeping the two or more interlocutors in contact; either by being actively involved in the conversation or being an attentive listener.

ii. Consolation

Another function of 'ah', uttered in a falling soft tone, is to convey consolation, indicating that it is 'okay' to do something, or not to worry about things:

(S3, L14)

Ah Lok (to Mr Lee): Come la, I *belanja* you don't worry <u>ah</u>..so <u>ah</u>, make sure you come back.

(S4, L3)

Hawker's wife (to a customer): Tauke coming coming…wait <u>ah,</u> your turn next, your turn next.

(S9, L29)

Ah Lok (to daughter Ai Ling): Anyway…anything you want <u>ah</u>..your papa always do for you…

iii. Persuasion

'Ah' is also used when the speaker is trying to persuade his respondent into doing something or when he is expecting a positive response towards his request:

(S9, L38): *Ah Lok bargaining/negotiating on the part of his daughter in buying Michael Soo's designer shoes.*

Ah Lok: Eh Michael, I pay installment la**.** 1 month 100 dollars..if I got more I give you two or three..if I short that time <u>ah</u>..you promise me <u>ah</u>, you don't <u>ah</u> my daughter walk walk half way you repossess the shoe <u>ah</u>..

(S13, L20): *Ah Lok warmly welcoming the car sales manager to his café.*

Ah Lok: (Introducing himself) Tan Ah Lok, owner of Ah Lok Café: Everything Also Got. You come by <u>ah.</u>

(S13, L26): *Louis asking for a favor from Ah Lok not to reveal his unruly acts.*

Louis: I also forget la. I think I got about 12 you know..only 5 got road tax. Don't tell anybody <u>ah.</u>

(S15:L10): *Lucy trying to persuade Michael Soo into buying her insurance policy.*

Lucy: Come, come sit with me. Calm down, calm down. Think positive, think positive…You know <u>ah</u> Michael..I think you should get some extra health insurance.

(S17, L10): *Hawker persuasively requesting Ah Lok for a treat of a bottle of champagne.*

Hawker: Woah, I'm so happy I wanna celebrate with you all la..(bringing a bottle of champagne). You don't charge me for this <u>ah</u>…

(S19, L10): *Ah Lok desperately expecting a positive news from Louis about his café's potential buyer.*

Ah Lok (to Louis): I really need the money for something really important. Call me <u>ah</u>..you sure <u>ah.</u>.

iv. Indicating annoyance

The following instances gathered from the data demonstrate the hawker's spontaneous reaction, being irritated by Michael Soo's request for a discount on a plate of *char kuay teow*.

(S15, L6)

Hawker: Hey you from Penang <u>ah</u>?..and your mother <u>ah</u> go to hair salon <u>ah</u>…bring own shampoo <u>ah</u>, some more wanna ask to give cheaper..

(S15, L8)

 Hawker: I have to pluck the *taugeh* one by one for you <u>ah</u>..some more wanna ask for discount <u>ah</u>? You're lucky I'm not charging you by the hour.

v. Indicating sadness, an attempt to hold back the tears

There are a few instances where 'ah' appears as an important element in speech for the speaker who is emotionally saddened. In an attempt to avoid from bursting into tears, 'ah' acts as a pause, allowing the speaker to 'keep the strength' to proceed with what he wishes to say. This is evident in Ah Lok's dialogues after discovering his daughter's ailment:

(S18, L4)

Ah Lok: Doctor say <u>ah</u> my daughter Ling Ling, the heart got problem you know,
and only the surgery will help to stop, solve this problem <u>ah</u>..doctor also
say don't worry he say don't worry the insurance will pay for the
operation because very expensive that's why I think think think
<u>ah</u>...insurance only insurance I got is only for my car.

(S20, L3)

Ah Lok: Fa Chai, you don't have to give up all your money you know. It has been
your dream to go to England to play football, and everyone here has
contributed towards making that dream come true..I..Tan Ah Lok,
together with my late wife <u>ah</u>..if she was alive <u>ah</u>..in order <u>ah</u>..to help Ai
Ling <u>ah</u>,to pay for the operation <u>ah</u>..I have decided to sell Ah Lok
Café…And I like to thanks my brother..Louis Wong..brother come here,
Louis Wong here help me find a buyer in such a short time. Without him
<u>ah</u>..I couldn't be able to do <u>ah</u>..what I just said I wanted to do..you don't
have to, Fa Chai.

(S21, L5)

Ah Lok: You know <u>ah</u> these two girls of mine <u>ah</u> both of you <u>ah</u>, two of you are very
precious to me you know…and you <u>ah</u>..even though your sister <u>ah</u> she's
beautiful like your mother…but you <u>ah</u>…you are special because you got
the heart and the brains of your mother. That's why it's very important
<u>ah</u>..it's very important that, that you have to be with me you know, very
important.

(S21, L7)

Ah Lok: Ha, you don't start <u>ah</u>..I get emotion that time <u>ah</u>..I get emotion that time
<u>ah</u>..I very hard to stop one..I tell you…now I feel like sad song coming
already..

To conclude, the particle 'ah' is used in the data in order to carry both syntactic as well as various pragmatic functions. In carrying out its various functions and meanings, it is vital to acknowledge the paralinguistic factors surrounding the particle such as stress and intonation patterns. As illustrated, 'ah' is uttered in a falling soft tone when used to convey consolation and in a rising tone when used to indicate annoyance. It is also found that 'ah' is widely used by only a few characters, especially Ah Lok. Others include his daughter Ai Swee, Louis and the hawkers. Taking into account the characters' educational and social background as presented in Appendix 2, it can be implied that 'ah' is a feature of basilectal or colloquial ME that is not used commonly by speakers at the acrolectal level, or in a more formal context.

4.1.3.2 *Lah/la*

This is another common particle used in ME and has received a lot of attention from linguists. Tay (in Crewe 1977:155) describes it as a code-mark: to mark that the speech act is one involving dimensions of informality, familiarity, solidarity and rapport between participants. Later works, in addition, recognize other multiple pragmatic functions of 'lah'.

Platt & Ho (1989) confirm the different pragmatic functions of particles: to indicate obviousness, disapproval or intimacy and to highlight a particular lexical item. Instances of 'lah' carrying various pragmatic functions gathered from the data are as follows.

a. To point out the obvious

(S11, L7) Dr. Singh: Vitara is a car <u>lah.</u>.

b. To show/express disagreement/ disapproval/contradiction

(S13, L14) Ah Lok: No, not car <u>la</u>, Honda Cup.

(S15, L13) Michael Soo: No <u>lah</u>, if it's well done you cannot tell one.

(S15, L18) Lucy: No <u>lah,</u> 2000 ringgit can *kao tim* already.

(S15, L12) Lucy: No <u>lah</u>, you such a joker <u>la</u> you..

(S13, L15) Louis: You talk nonsense <u>la</u> you..

c. To persuade

(S13, L28) Louis: Oh that way at the back...that one I like..come <u>lah</u>

(S15, L5)   Michael Soo: Since everything and my own water, cheaper <u>lah</u>?

(S13, L24) Louis: Aiyah one more limosine <u>la</u>. I have many also..

(S13, L27) Louis: Eh, you go and see some more cars <u>lah</u>..

d. To express annoyance

(S5, L28)   Hawker's wife: Aiyah, then next time don't say <u>la</u>

e. To suggest/ approve

(S15, L34) Datuk: You see him another day <u>lah</u>.

 (S16, L5) Ai Swee: You and Michael make a good pair <u>lah</u> because he's rich.

It is important to note that the intonation patterns surrounding 'lah' are also vital in conveying the different communicative intents. Interestingly, its use as gathered from the data, is not as widespread as 'ah'. This is not to say that 'lah' is not commonly used in ME as a whole because it could be used more widely by speakers of acrolectal level as well. Low and Deterding (2003) for example, have gathered the data from some formal conversations/interviews between trainees and an expatriate British university lecturer and have collected instances of 'lah' used by both parties.

4.1.3.3 *One*

The use of 'one' in ME is not always to indicate the numerical one (1) as it is used in SBE. It is also used as an intensifier that may be related or translated from the use of 'punya' in the colloquial Malay as in "dia mesti datang punya" (he must be coming *one*). Here the particle 'one' is used as a tool to place an emphasis on something, an intensifier. This feature is particularly common in the basilectal and mesolectal varieties of ME taken from the data and could be described into two categories:

a. **'one' as a restrictive relative pronoun** (i.e. 'one' is used instead of 'who', 'which' or 'that' as used in the SBE construction of relative clauses):

(S15, L16) Lucy: Oh, they say ah, she's the second wife of a rich Tan Sri, from the film industry <u>one</u>.
(Oh, they say she's the second wife of a rich Tan Sri, **who** is from the film industry)

(S16, L8)Ai Swee: You can copy from professional like me, very easy <u>one</u>.

(You can copy from a professional like me, **which** is a very

easy thing to do)

b. **'one' as a marker for definitive** (i.e. the speaker is very definite or sure about

something):

(S13, L22) Louis: One day also you'll be datuk <u>one </u>you see la..

(One day you will surely be a datuk, I can assure you that..)

(S15, L13) Michael Soo: If it's well done you cannot tell <u>one</u>

(It it's well done, you definitely cannot tell the difference)

(S19, L9) Louis: Don't worry la tomorrow we can talk..can discuss <u>one</u>.

(Don't worry, we can certainly talk about it tomorrow)

(S16, L8) Ai Swee: This sort of thing cannot learn in school <u>one</u>.

(You surely cannot learn this sort of thing in school)

(S19, L11) Louis: Sure call you <u>one</u>.

(I will definitely give you a call)

4.1.3.4 *What*

Like the other particles discussed, 'what' too has certain pragmatic functions. The two

main functions gathered from the data are:

a. To seek for an approval/agreement.

'What' used for this function has a falling tone, marking the speaker's expectation for a positive response towards his/her statement:

(S1, L8)   Jucy   : Eh, use my phone la

               Louisa: Never mind same <u>what</u>, this one ah latest model.

                   [It doesn't matter, they're just the same after all, (don't you think?)]

(S21, L3) Ai Ling: If it wasn't because of my stupid heart, papa will be able to keep this café.

            Ah Lok: *Aiyah*, this place is only brick, wood and cement. What's most important ah, is that you must get well you know after the operation. Then after that ah we can build another café <u>what</u>..

                   [We surely can build another café, (don't you think?)]

b. To express contradiction: disbelief, disagreement, annoyance

Unlike the first function, 'what' used for this function is uttered in an interrogative tone (usually followed by a question mark), stressing the speaker's disagreement, contradiction or annoyance towards another speaker:

(S1, L16) Louisa: Eh how can Manchester ah..give Chelsea two goals?

               You crazy or <u>what</u>?

               [Are you crazy (or something)?]

(S24, L4) Vincent : Why don't you just use the calculator instead?

            Ai Swee: You think I'm stupid or <u>what</u>?

                (You think I'm that stupid?)

(S26, L19) Dr Singh: He's going to make money from this scheme..

                Louis   : I make money so what? I'm just a contractor <u>what</u>..

                    (I'm just a contractor, you know that)

4.1.3.5 *Hor*

This particle, as stated by Low & Adam (2005), is used to elicit some form of agreement from the interlocutor. There are five instances of 'hor' gathered in the data. This particle is said on a rising tone, as in:

(S6, L25) Louis: Wah…your name very special one ah, Soosay Samilah Esquire. Wah..you also partner with the.. what..Esquire chicken what..the place still ah, very good one <u>hor</u>..

(S9, L21) Ah Swee: I love shoes. That day I went to Petaling Street <u>hor</u>..then..

(S15, L29) Lucy: But one can never be too sure of what will happen <u>hor</u>..

(S16, L1) Ai Ling: Jie Jie, I think Vincent has a heart for you, <u>hor</u>..

(S16, L17) Ai Ling: I study so many subjects in school <u>hor</u>, but they also never teach me how to find..

4.1.3.6 *Lor*

According to Low & Adam (2005), this particle is usually spoken with a high tone, and it is used to express resignation about someone else's action or belief. There are three instances of 'lor' found in the data:

(S1, L16)   Louisa: Hello Ah Seng ah..ok you talk first you talk first. What? Where can? Eh, how can Manchester ah..give Chelsea two goals..you crazy or what. Eh, half a goal ah also matters la I tell you..aiyah like that ah.. like that ah..like that I'll take Chelsea <u>lor.</u>

(S10, L11) Hawker's wife: Why my numbers all never strike, or else *kao tim* <u>lor.</u>.

 (S14, L7) Louis: Next time Ah Lok Café you spend me, <u>lor</u>?

4.1.3.7 *Mah/Ma*

Most researchers agree that 'ma' (usually uttered on a mid level tone) is a borrowing from Chinese although they disagree as to exactly which dialect it came from. Wong (1994) links it to Chinese, while Smith (1985) relates it to Hokkien. This particle is used for two reasons:

   a.   to justify one's belief or assertion
   b.   to state the obvious

There are 9 instances of 'mah/ma' gathered from the data, each carrying certain functions, such as:

(S3, L2)   Ai Ling: This one no need battery, <u>ma</u>. (To state the obvious)

(S6, L37) Ah Lok: Your work all done already, <u>mah</u>. (To state the obvious)

(S8, L5 - L7)   Father: What you doing here?

Ah Chai: Ma asking <u>mah</u>. (To state the obvious)

Father: You should be out there practising <u>mah</u>..(Assertion)

(S10, L10) Father: You know la this thing means a lot to him <u>mah</u>..(Assertion)

(S10, L19) Ah Lok: Of course your rental still the same <u>mah</u>..

(To state the obvious)

(S14, L1) Louis: Only men can be hard <u>mah</u>..

(To justify one's belief or assertion)

(S26, L4, L5) Ah Lok: You mean tear down everything ah?

Louis   : Of course <u>mah</u>..(Assertion).You want the money fast <u>mah</u>

for the operation, and my company is willing to pay you

upfront first you know. (To state the obvious)

4.1.3.8 *Meh*

Wong (1994) suggests that the use of 'meh' is restricted to ethnically Chinese speakers. It is an optional suffix usually used to donate a question mark to, for example, 'yes', as in "yeah, meh?" commonly used amongst those of Chinese descent. It is usually pronounced with a high level tone with two functions: a) to express surprise and/or b) to express indignation. Three examples taken from the data are:

(S5, L17) Ai Swee: Movie ah? No need to eat can <u>meh</u>?

(Going for a movie? Is it possible/Will you mind if we don't

eat?)

(S16, L4) Ah Lok: My car insurance can pay <u>meh</u> for this operation?

(Can my insurance pay for this operation?)

(S27, L8)   Louis: Can forget, <u>meh</u>?

(Can it be forgotten?)

4.1.4   Word Formation Processes in Malaysian English

As mentioned in this chapter's introduction, ME lexical features can also be morphologically described based on the types of word formation involved. A few lexical items in the data are interestingly produced through certain types of word formation, presented in the following sections.

4.1.4.1 Affixation

This is a process that involves the combination of an affix (either a prefix or a suffix) with another word (either a noun or an adjective) to form a new word that may result in a change in the word class. For example, 'care' (noun/verb) + 'less' (suffix) = 'careless' (adjective). An example taken from the data, ***datukship*** (S9:L13 and S9:L18), which is also categorized as a local language referent in 4.1.1, marks an interestingly productive process of suffixation in ME:

Noun 'datuk' + Suffix 'ship'= *datukship*, as in *lordship*.

Other ME examples of affixation (prefixation) as cited by Baskaran (2005) are *ulufied* and *anti-dadah.*

4.1.4.2 Compounding

Compounding is the process of taking two or more existing words and combining them to form a new lexical item that could carry a totally different meaning from the original words. Some compounded items are spelt as one word as in 'homework', hyphenated as in 'son-in-law' or two words as in 'couch potato'. In ME, there are instances where two English words are combined to produce an item that is not commonly used in SBE, as exemplified below based on the data:

(a) *Handphone*

    (S4, L7 – L9) Wife: ….eh, *lou gong* ah, lend me your *handphone*.

                Hawker: Eh, what for?

                    Wife: I want to do some purchase la..lend me your *handphone* la..

'Hand' (noun) is compounded with 'phone' (noun/verb) to produce 'handphone' (noun). Its British equivalent is 'mobile phone' and American 'cell phone'. A search through Collin's Cobuild Concordancer for 'handphone' with the sub-corpora of British/American books, ephemera, radio, newspapers, magazines, and British transcribed speech results in '0' entry. This shows that it is not a feature of SBE. As stated earlier in Chapter 2, 'handphone' might have been regarded 'colloquial' but recently perceived as an acrolectal ME, if not standard ME, due to its wider acceptance of use in the country, both in formal and informal contexts. It is now even listed by the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* (2005). Interestingly, it is also recognized by Encarta World English Dictionary (Figure 10). This fact suggests that

'handphone' belongs 'exclusively' to ME, not only because of its widespread use in the country, but also due to its appearance in the afore mentioned dictionaries, thus cementing its place as a variety of English.
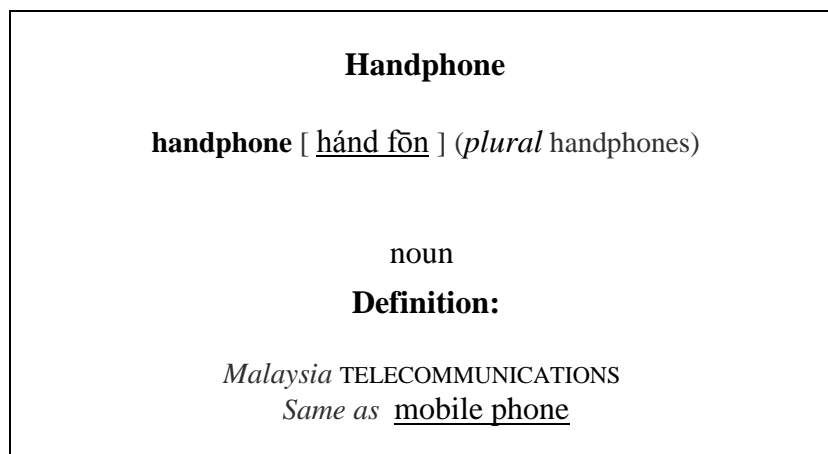
<div style="border:1px solid black; text-align:center">

Handphone

handphone [<u>hánd fōn</u>] (*plural* handphones)

noun
Definition:

Malaysia TELECOMMUNICATIONS
Same as <u>mobile phone</u>

</div>

Figure 10: Definition of 'handphone' by Encarta® World English Dictionary (2009) Retrieved from: http://uk.encarta.msn.com/dictionary_/follow.html

(b) *Because why*

(S1, L1) Louisa: Sorry I'm late, *because why*..I went to do my hair.

"Because" is a connector on its own, while "why" can either be an adverb or conjunction, depending on its usage. Thus the compounded 'because why' can function as a connector/conjunction. A speaker of SBE uses only 'because' or 'the reason why' or 'you know why' in the same context. Thus 'because why' is indeed a Malaysian fusion of the two expressions that could be a translation of an informal Malay usage of *sebab kenapa*. Asmah in Morais (1997) has offered an interesting and plausible explanation for the use of 'because why': the Malay equivalent is *sebab*

mengapa. In Malay, *sebab* can also mean 'reason'. Therefore *sebab mengapa* may be translated into English as 'the reason why'. So in using 'because why' in the example above, the speaker displays considerable linguistic inventiveness. Morphologically, the production of this term can thus be described as a result of a process of word formation, i.e. compounding.

(c) *Last time*

The words 'last' (adjective) and 'time' (noun) are compounded to form 'last time' in ME that functions independently as an adverbial of time referring to the past. The SBE equivalent would be 'in the past' or 'previously'. The use of 'last time', in this sense, is not so much a lack of precision but rather a Malaysian or Malay way of thinking conveyed by the Malay word for 'past' (*dahulu*, *dulu*, or *dulu-dulu*). To illustrate, in the example taken from the data: (S13, L12) Ah Lok: "*Last time* I got Honda you know", the SBE equivalent would be "I used to own (or I previously owned) a Honda you know". On the other hand, though may be used in SBE, 'last time' is not to carry the same meaning as used in ME as it does not stand as an independent compounded lexical item. In other words, it does not function individually as an adverbial phrase of time in SBE. Thus, we may come across an SBE speaker uttering "The last time I saw her was yesterday" or "That was the last time I saw her", in which the word 'last' is usually preceded by the definite article (determiner) 'the' and functions as an adjective to describe the noun 'time', a different structure compared to ME.

4.1.4.3 Reduplication

Reduplication is a word formation process whereby words (or parts of words) are repeated, often with slight variations, in order to add some extra meaning to the basic words. Quirk et al (1985:1579-80) note four main uses of reduplication in SBE:

a. to imitate sounds, e.g. tick tock of a clock

b. to suggest alternating movements, e.g. ping pong

c. to disparage by suggesting instability, nonsense, insincerity, vacillation, e.g. higgledy-piggledy, hocus-pocus, wishy-washy, goody-goody, dilly-dally

d. to intensify, e.g. tip-top

Relatively, the reduplication in L1, particularly the Malay language, is indeed a productive process. As stated by Heah (1989:326), reduplication in Malay morphology is used to express four main functions:

a. Indefinite plurality (with variety applied) – this is its common semantic function, e.g. *kuih muih* 'all kinds of cakes'.

b. Intensify, e.g. *jauh jauh* 'far far away'

c. Repetition, frequency, and continuity in action, e.g. *melompat lompat* 'to keep on leaping', and

d. Resemblance to object denoted by the rootword, e.g. *layang* 'fly' *layang-layang* 'kite'.

In comparison with Malay, reduplication in SBE is not a very productive process. Most such expressions seem like fossilized phrases - it is difficult to think of examples produced along similar lines to those items quoted above. We cannot, for

example, say "baddy-baddy" or "bittom-bottom", on analogy with "goody-goody" and "tip-top".

Due to the productive process of reduplication in L1, ME produces a lot of expressions that do not have the equivalence in English under the same word formation. For example in the ME utterance "Don't eat *sweet sweet* things", the reduplication 'sweet sweet' comes from the Malay reduplication *manis-manis* as in *Jangan makan benda manis-manis*, intensifying the sweetness of the food. There are five instances of reduplication found in the data that carry the functions of reduplication in the Malay language (as directly translated in brackets):

(S9, L25) Ai Swee: I look nice *leg leg* all (Indefinite plurality: "Aku nampak cantik dengan *kaki kaki* sekali")

(S9, L29) Ai Swee: I want this one (shoe). .got *shiny shiny* ..
          (Intensify: "Aku mahu kasut yang ini, ada *kilat kilat*..")

(S9, L37)   Ah Lok: *Walk walk* half way..
          (Repetition, continuity in action: "*Jalan-jalan* separuh jalan..")

(S5, L15) Ai Swee: Smile *big big*..(Intensify: "Senyum *lebar-lebar*")

(S24, L2)   Ah Lok: Oh you mean the high rise (building), *high high* one like that..
          (Intensify: "Oh maksud kamu bangunan *tinggi-tinggi* macam tu..")

4.1.4.4 Repetition

Repetition is slightly different from reduplication in that it is basically done as a sign of urging for a continuity of action, not producing a new morpheme with added meaning as in reduplication. To illustrate, 'sweet' is reduplicated to form *sweet sweet* which is an ME lexical item on its own, as compared to *come down, come down* that is simply repeated to urge for continuity of that particular action of coming down. There are nine examples of repetition in the data, as follows:

(S1, L12)   Louisa: *You go in first* la, *you go in first* la..

(S1, L16)   Louisa: *You talk first, you talk first*

(S8, L3)   Ah Chai's mother: *Quick quick*, go help your father..

(S4, L3)   Hawker's wife: Taukeh *coming coming*

(S25, L1)   Ah Lok: *Come down, come down* first..

(S17, L11)   Ah Lok: Just *open, open*. Just don't let Ai Ling know enough already lah.

(S17, L9)   Ah Lok: Why you people *shoo shoo* him away ah?

(S26, L9)   Louis: *forget it, forget it*..don't waste my time.

(S26, L10)   Ah Lok: Please la, please…*I sign, I sign*

If verbs are repeated three times, the meaning to indicate continuity or progressiveness of the action in that particular situation is further intensified:

(S1, L15)   Jucy: *Sure, sure, sure*.. (assuring)

(S14, L6)   Ah Lok: I *enjoy, enjoy, enjoy* ..(the feeling of enjoying intensified)

(S18, L4)   Ah Lok: That's why I *think think think* ah.. (continuity)

(S24, L4)   Ai Swee: I *press, press, press* (the calculator).. (continuity)

(S25, L3)   Ah Lok: *do, do, do* .. (continuously thinking of what to do in response
                 to the question posed)

(S26, L16)   Lucy: *look, look, look* (urging someone to do something)

4.1.4.5   Conversion: Verbalization of Noun

In the morphology of English, when a lexical item converts its word class to another, the process is commonly called "conversion". According to Quirk, Randolph and Greenbaum (1987: 441), "conversion is the derivational process whereby an item changes its word-class without the addition of an affix". In addition, Bauer (1983: 226) states that "conversion is a totally free process and any lexeme can undergo conversion into any of the open form classes as the need arises". This means that any word form can be shifted to any word class, especially to open classes—nouns, verbs, etc.—and that there are no morphological restrictions. This can be exemplified in the noun 'sign', converted into the verb 'to sign', changed by derivation (suffixation) into the noun 'signal' and converted into a new verb, 'to signal'. In this case there is no blocking because these words have slight semantic differences (Bauer, 1983: 226-227).

Bauer (1983) suggests that the status of conversion is a bit unclear, stating that "it must be undoubtedly placed within the phenomena of word-formation; nevertheless, there are some doubts about whether it must be considered a branch of derivation or a separate process by itself (with the same status as derivation or compounding)". It is understandable then that the terminology used for this process has not been completely established yet. The most usual terms are 'conversion', because a word is *converted* (shifted) to a different part of speech; and 'zero-derivation', because the process is like *deriving* (transferring) a word into another morphological category with a zero-affix creating a semantic dependence of one word upon another (Quirk, 1997: 1558). This would imply that this affix exists - because it is grammatically meaningful -although it cannot be seen. Other less frequently used terms are 'functional shift', 'functional change' or 'zero-marked derivative' (Cannon, 1985: 412), denominations that express by themselves the way the process is considered to happen.

Another related term that is used when a noun is converted into a verb is "verbalization of nouns". According to Bhat (1994) nouns may be used in the categorial conditions of verbs (i) by themselves, (ii) by adding an auxiliary as a tense-carrier and a relation-indicator or (iii) by adding verbalizing affixes or by making other types of changes in them. Languages may use one or more of these devices, and may attach different degrees of importance to them. All the three devices involve characteristics of decategorization (as nouns) as well as those of recategorization (as verbs). This results in the process of Verbalization.

The process of verbalization of nouns can be seen in the following examples, in which the nouns are changed into verbs with the structure of 'to-infinitive' + 'noun' and 'modal' +'noun'.

(S9, L20) Ah Lok: …I think you must ask Michael Soo ah, ***to recommendation*** to you ah, what actually you like..

(S6, L38) Ah Lok: …Want any song, I ***can song*** for you.

(S20, L3) Ah Lok: …And I'd like ***to thanks*** my brother, Louis Wong.

The infinitive 'to' and modal verb 'can' are placed before the nouns and used as verbs in the sentences. This is a rare structure that cannot be found in SBE. According to Aitchison (1989: 161), "the aim of conversion varies with the user: adults convey it to use fewer words, whereas children perform it in order to be understood, although they frequently produce ungrammatical utterances. Anyway, it always helps to make communication easier". As shown in the data, "to recommendation", "can song" and "to thanks", may be labeled as ungrammatical as such structure is not used in SBE, but they are most probably used with a purpose. Uttered by the main character, Ah Lok who evidently displays basilectal features in most of his speech throughout the movie, such structure is most probably used for humorous purposes, making the listener laugh at how ridiculous or distorted it sounds (the genre of the movie is a comedy). It could also act as an indication of two extremes: lack of proficiency causing gross error at one extreme and the unlimited creativity of an ME speaker in 'playing' around with the language, at another.

4.1.5 Exclamations

Being a spontaneous part of conversation, it is understandable that ME contains some unique exclamations. Many exclamations used in ME are borrowed from the local languages. Examples found in the data are:

4.1.5.1 *Aiyah*

According to Tsen (2004) 'aiyah' which originates from Mandarin 哎呀 *āiyā* is an exclamation used at the beginning of a sentence to express consternation, despair, dismay, exasperation, etc. The SBE equivalent could be "come on", "oh no!" or "oh dear!" used in expressing surprise, disagreement, or annoyance. Examples gathered from the data are as follows.

(S3, L13) Ah Lok: *Aiyah* Ling Ling ah, that's what we call PR, PR!

(S13, L24) Louis: *Aiyah* one more limosine la..I have many also..

(S14, L7)   Louis: *Aiyah*, that one no problem. I spend you this time.

(S16, L4) Ai Swee: *Aiyah*, he like that one ah..

(S24, L8) Ai Swee: We're all so sad. *Aiyah* talk nanti lah..

4.1.5.2 *Aiyoh*

As stated by Tsen (2004), this exclamation is also derived from Mandarin 哎哟 $\bar{a}iy\bar{o}$, used to express concern, consternation, dismay, frustration, surprise, etc.

(S1, L2) Jucy: *Aiyoh,* what you want? (annoyance)

(S4, L5) Hawker's Wife: *Aiyoh*, why you always like that one..
(regret/disagreement)

(S13, L4) Ah Lok: *Aiyoh*, this car ah, 500 000 ah? (surprise)

4.1.5.2 *Wah*

This exclamation is originated from Malay, expressing admiration, or astonishment.

(S4, L1)Hawker's Wife: *Wah*, this is the 8th plate of kuay teow with 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8 cockerels in it! And today is the 18th. *Wah*, damn "ong" eh!

(S5, L5) Vincent: *Wah*, not bad ah for a small girl!

(S6, L8) Ah Lok : *Wah*, good entrance ah..

(S6, L25)Louis   : *Wah*…your name very special one ah, Soosay Samilah Esquire. *Wah*..you also partner with the.. what..Esquire chicken what…the place still ah, good one hor..

(S9, L35) Ah Lok: *Wah*..3000 ringgit ah?

4.1.6   Summary of Findings on ME lexical features

As gathered and analyzed in the previous sections, it is evident that ME lexical items do carry certain features that distinguish them from the standard variety. The differences can be seen not only in terms of meaning but also in terms of the word formation involved. Some cultural or culinary items are uniquely Malaysian as they are hardly translatable into SBE, thus can be regarded as acrolectal or Official ME. On the other hand, some items which are originally English words are used to carry different meaning in ME ('polysemic variation' and 'informalization') due to profusion of lexemes indicating a more informal style and register in ME, thus resulting in the semantic extension of these items as compared to their original meaning in SBE. These items can be placed along the basilectal-mesolectal continuum as they are not commonly used in a formal context and not used to carry the same meaning as they are in SBE. Besides, certain particles and exclamatory markers are also unique of ME as they are produced as a result of the influence of substrate languages, carrying pragmatic as well as grammatical functions. These items are indeed localized as they are not present in SBE and can be regarded as basilectal as they are mostly used by prominently basilectal speakers in the data. On the whole, the fact that each lexical item making up the data of this study can be linguistically and systematically described under certain categories has contributed to the uniqueness of ME as a variety of English in expansion, as well as having a variety within itself.

4.2   SYNTACTIC FEATURES

Besides the various features of lexical items, ME can also be described based on its syntactical characteristics. The sentence construction of ME at the level of clause or phrase may be different compared to SBE in terms of structural arrangements and features. This could be due to the influence from the main substrate languages of Malay, Chinese and Tamil. Some structural differences of ME in comparison with SBE that are most prominently used in the data are examined under the following sub-topics.

4.2.1 Noun Phrase Structure- Pronoun Ellipsis

As mentioned earlier in Chapter 2, one of the characteristics of ME established in previous studies is the omission of subject. Leong, in Low & Deterding (2003), has used Firbas framework in his study of subject omission in Singapore Colloquial English. Different shades of theme are recognized by Firbas (1992: 80-81), each labeled as TP (theme-proper), MT (middle-theme) and DT (diatheme). These reflect a gradual rise in CD, that is, TP carries the lowest degree of CD within theme, and DT, the highest (Firbas, 1992:81). The concepts of TP, MT and DT are summarized in Table 6 and exemplified in (1):

(1) "That boy over there hates MR Tan's module. Although it isn't difficult, he simply refuses to learn".

In this utterance, the causal elements are labeled as follows:

That boy over there   hates Mr Tan's module.

(MT)   (Non-theme)

Although	*it*	*isn't difficult,*	*he*	*simply refuses to learn*
(non-theme)	(DT)	(Non-theme)	(TP)	(Non-theme)

Theme	Description
TP	A theme which repeats information from the thematic portion of an earlier clause
MT	A theme which carries information recoverable from the situational context or that which is known to both the speaker and hearer. MT does not carry any contextual information.
DT	A theme which repeats information from the non-thematic portion of an earlier clause.

Table 6: Description of TP, MT, and DT

As described by Leong (2003), the non-thematic portion in (1), comprising rheme and transition, is left unanalyzed as it is irrelevant to the present discussion. Assuming no previous co-text, *that boy over there* is MT as the referent is physically present in the situational context. The second theme, *it*, is DT since it refers to Mr Tan's module, which is in the non-thematic portion of the previous clause. The last theme, *he*, is TP as it repeats previously known thematic information (*that boy over there*)

The description of subject omission gathered in the data is to be done based on the framework above. In the following description, omitted subjects are represented by the symbol Ø. Elements functioning as theme are boxed, and TPs that carry repeated information from an unexpressed co-text are marked in italics.

(i) (S9, L36) Ai Swee: Papa, I really like Ø. You see, so nice. I'll take another one for you.

Omitted subject Ø = it = the blue shoes. The omitted *it* is labeled DT as it is

retrievable from the non-thematic portion of an earlier clause "I want blue shoes, can

ah?" (S9, L27)

(ii) (S9, L42) Ai Swee: So can Ø wear Ø now?

MT   DT

Omitted subject Ø, *I* is labeled MT as it is recoverable from the situational context;

the sentence is thus understood by speaker and listener involved even without the

pronoun I (Ai Swee does not need to emphasize that it is *me* who is going to wear the

shoes as it is obvious in that situation). Also, again, the omitted subject Ø *it* is labeled

DT as it is retrievable from the non-thematic portion of an earlier clause "I want blue

shoes, can ah?"

(iii) (S6, L38)

   Ah Lok: When you come to Ah Lok Café, Ø want any song, I can song for you.

   (Ø = You. The subject 'you' is omitted here as the information carried by the

      subject is co-textually present in an earlier clause "When you come to Ah Lok

      Café")

(iv) (S17, L4-L5)

   DJ: Give it up for Ah Lok Café's very own sexy miss china town, *Miss Ai Swee*.

91

Ai Swee: Ø want to say thank you to everybody for helping make this place, this

place very nice to stay in.

(Ø = I. The subject 'I' is omitted as its function as a pronoun for "Miss Ai Swee"

is retrievable from the earlier clause)

4.2.2 Clause Structure – Interrogative clause variation

The characteristic feature in ME interrogative clauses that is not the same as those in SBE lies in word order. According to Baskaran (2005:141), "where in British English there is subject-operator inversion for all operators (whether non-auxiliary, auxiliary or modal), in all direct interrogatives, in ME such inversion occurs only for the non-auxiliary *be* in WH interrogatives, both direct and indirect".

4.2.2.1 Wh-Element in ME-Sentence Final Position

This structure is influenced by the same interrogative structure in Malay. It can be seen that as in Malay where the wh-element can occur in sentence-final position, in ME too, the wh-element can occur in sentence –final position (with or without an adverbial or noun). For example:

(S5, L13) Ai Swee: Waiting for me for what?
(What are you waiting for me for?)

(S6, L6)   Dr. Singh: You think this is what? Clinic, ah?

(What do you think this is? A clinic?)

(S9, L32) Ah Lok: You give me 3000 for what?

(What did you give me 3000 for?)

In the ME utterances above, unlike the SBE equivalent shown in brackets, the wh-word is placed in the sentence-final position instead. This could be influenced by the word order in Malay wh-interrogatives in which "apa kamu nak makan?" (What do you want to eat?) could also be restructured in a casual speech as "kamu nak makan apa?", directly translated as "You want to eat what?" This feature, as described by Baskaran (2005), is colloquially mesolectal, but interestingly, as shown in the example, it is also used by a prominent acrolectal speaker, Dr Singh. A speaker of ME, therefore, should not be labeled as exclusively acrolectal, mesolectal or basilectal as he or she is usually able and willing to 'code-switch' along the continuum based on the people in contact and the formality of the context involved in the conversation.

4.2.2.2   ME Interrogative Tag Varieties

According to Baskaran (2005), in the Yes – No interrogatives, the same word order of S V as in ME wh- interrogatives prevails, whilst an appended tag (e.g. *or not* or *yes or not*) is used, in lieu of the subject-operator to mark it as Yes- No Interrogative. Ample examples of interrogatives with this structure are taken from the data:

(a) *or not*

(S9, L13) Datin Laila: New York got *or not?*

　　　　　　　　　　(Do you have/ Have you got it in New York?)

(S8, L4)   Ah Chai: Pa, you need any help *or not?*

　　　　　　　　　　(Pa, do you need any help?)

(S7, L1)   Simon: So you're going to karaoke tonight *or not?*

　　　　　　　　　　(So, aren't you going to the karaoke tonight?)

(S14, L5)   Louis: Eh, Ah Lok, you like this *or not?*

　　　　　　　　　　(Eh, Ah Lok, do you like this?)

(S16, L6)   Ai Swee: Does it suit me *or not?*

　　　　　　　　　　(Does it suit me?)

(S19, L4)   Ah Lok: Your buyer still interested *or not?*

　　　　　　　　　　(Is your buyer still interested?)

(S19, L7)   Louis: You want to keep it for your daughters, remember *or not?*

　　　　　　　　　　(You want to keep it for your daughters, don't you remember?)

(S26, L20) Ah Lok: I need the money for my daughter's operation, you all know *or not*?

　　　　　　　　　　(I need the money for my daughter's operation, don't you all know that?)

Note that the standard form equivalent each takes the operator 'do' or a *be* verb as the

subject in the construction of the question. Thus 'or not' placed in the sentence final

position allows the omission of *do, does, is*, and *are* in most cases, except for in "Does it suit me or not?" in which both operator 'do' and 'or not' are used in the questions, giving more emphasis on the speaker's expected answer from the respondent.

(b) *is it*

This tag is commonly used in the ME interrogatives, regardless of the singularity/plurality of the subject in question and the positive/negative status of the statements in question, all of which are important elements in the structure of question tags in SBE. Thus, in "Michael, you got ear problem, is it?"(S9, L24), the tag 'is it' is used instead of 'haven't you' that is used in SBE, given the same statement. Another example is shown in the conversation between Ah Lok and Datin Laila, as follows:

(S15, L35-36)

Ah Lok: I tell you, I tell you, I tell you ah.. I just took Datuk ah for a very exotic herbal plate. After taking it ah..he says he feels like a bull (making bull sound) like that you know. I think he wants to go home and experiment ah..

Datin: *Is it*? Well, you know..they don't call me Laila for nothing..(laugh)

In this example, in the Datin's attempt to seek confirmation on Ah Lok's statement about Datuk's intention to go home and experiment the effect of the herbal plate, the ME version 'is it?' is substitutable with 'Does he?' in SBE. In contrast, in the ME version, the pronoun 'he' referring to the person in question is generalized as 'it' and the auxiliary verb 'does' to mark the singular object is generalized as 'is'. This use of

'is it' tag over the boundary of the complex rules of SBE interrogative tags indicates another ME simplification of the rule of syntax. It is evident therefore that in ME, unlike in SBE interrogative tags, polarity differences between declarative and tag are insignificant to meaning.

4.2.3 Copula Ellipsis

Low & Brown (2005) state that the verb 'be' has four main functions in the standard form of English:

a. as an auxiliary verb in progressive constructions, e.g. I <u>am</u> singing

b. as an auxiliary verb in passive constructions, e.g. I <u>am </u>wounded

c. as a copula verb, linking a subject with a complement, e.g. She <u>is</u> Joanne. We <u>are</u> tall. That <u>is</u> what you would expect.

d. Before prepositional phrases, e.g. The exam <u>is</u> at 9 a.m. (It is a moot point whether at 9 a.m. should be considered an adverbial or a complement here)

In comparison, as stated by Platt (1980:174), the verb *to be* is not always used in ME before adjectives, predicate nominals, in adverbial constructions referring to location, and in auxiliary constructions such as *he is working.* In addition, Baskaran (2005:159-160) states that basilectal ME has a tendency to ellipt the copula in both declaratives as well as interrogatives. This tendency for copula ellipsis, she adds, is an obvious influence from the substrate languages, particularly Malay. Malay for one has no verb *be* other than *ada* to show *there is* (presence of something), as in:

Ada dua ekor kucing di dalam peti itu.

There are two tails (classifier) cats inside box that.

There are two cats in that box.

But in sentences like 'she is a tourist' or 'she is crying', the verb *be* is not overtly manifested in Malay. Hence we get:

She is a tourist.

Dia seorang (classifier) *pelancong*

She is crying.

Dia sedang menangis.

As stated by Alsagoff (2001), Platt and Weber (1980) attribute this non-realization or variant realization to the influence of substractal languages. They illustrate that a comparison with Malay, Chinese and even Tamil yields a similar pattern. Being another substrate language, Tamil, too, is an influence in the absence of the copula in ME. According to Baskaran (2005:160), "the verb *be* is not overtly manifested in Tamil", exemplified as follows:

Avel	*en*	*thangai*
She	my	sister

Avar	oru	a;ciriya:r
He	one (a)	teacher

Due to the influence of the substract languages, the absence of copula 'be' in interrogatives as well as statements/declarations is thus a common feature in the

basilectal variety of ME. Examples taken from the data are as follows (the omitted be-verbs are shown in brackets).

(a) **Interrogatives**

    (S13, L13)   Louis: (Are) you joking or what?

    (S24, L2)   Ai Swee: Why (are) you hiding there?

    (S4, L5)   Hawker's Wife: Why (are) you always like that?

    (S8, L5)   Hawker: What (are) you doing here?

(b) **Statements/ Declarations**

    (S3, L11)   Ah Lok: My daughter ah (is) very good manager.

    (S4, L3)   Hawker's wife: Wait ah, your turn (is) next.

    (S13, L13)   Louis: You (are) crazy.

    (S14, L2)   Massage Girl: You (are) so handsome one.

    (S14, L6)   Ai Swee: But I (am) scared.

    (S15, L12)   Lucy:You (are) such a joker.

    (S17, L5)   Ai Swee: My papa (is) very nice.

    (S24, L2)   Ai Swee: You know, papa (is) so sad..Ai Ling (is) in the hospital
                       now.

    (S26, L25)   Ah Lok: If you don't mind Vincent, I (am) confused lah..

4.2.4 Absence of Operator 'do'

As the copula 'be', the operator 'do' which appears in SBE interrogatives, too, tends to be omitted in the colloquial ME. Examples taken from the data are:

(S1, L9)   Jucy: Who (do) you wanna call some more?

(S4, L6)   Hawker: Not blur lah..What (do) they say ah..meticulous ah?

(S5, L15)   Ai Swee: What (do) you want now? My eyes or my smile?

(S5, L39)   Ah Lok: Why (did) you take your beautiful look and throw it on a youth
              like that…

(S9, L23) Ai Swee: What (does) he mean? I don't understand..

(S11, L14)   Datuk: Why (did) the typewriter stop ah?

(S16, L6) Ai Swee: So what (do) you think of this colour?

(S17, L9) Ah Lok: Why (did) you people shoo shoo him away ah?

Again, the influence from the substract languages plays a role for the absence of the operator 'do' in the ME interrogatives listed above. "What you want now?", for example, is directly translatable as "Apa kamu nak sekarang?" in Malay in which there is no inversion for the operator 'do' or its Malay equivalent 'perbuatan'. So it is not a necessity to say "Apa (perbuatan) kamu nak sekarang? in the Malay version as compared to "What do you want now?" in which 'do' acts as an auxiliary verb in the interrogative structure of SBE.

4.2.5 Sentence Construction due to Localization of Items

As gathered in the data, there are instances of sentence structure that is unique of colloquial ME, resulting from localization of items involving direct translation of L1 and/or the process of simplification in syntax.

4.2.5.1 Direct Sentence Translation from Malay to English

There are instances in ME, especially at the basilectal level, where the structure of sentence produced deviates significantly from the standard version due to direct word by word translation from L1. In the following examples, the meaning of each utterance as directly translated from Malay is presented in italics whilst the SBE version is in brackets:

(S5, L33) Ai Swee: Like that how can? (*macam itu mana boleh?*)
(It is not possible if that is the way)

.

(S1, L16)   Louisa: Where can? (*mana boleh?*)
(How is that possible?/ Impossible!)
…You crazy or what? (*gila ke apa*?)
(Are you crazy?/Are you out of your mind?)

(S5, L40) Ai Swee: Papa, not so loud, shy lah people. (..*malu lah orang*)
(Papa, not so loud, he might be embarrassed/ you may embarrass him)

(S14, L3)   Louis: Anything also can (*apa-apa pun boleh*)
(Anything will do/ Anything is possible)

(S15, L30) Datin: Where got fun like that? (*Mana ada seronok macam itu?*)

(That is not fun at all)

4.2.5.2 ME Sentence Construction due to Localization of Phrases

Besides L1 direct translation involving whole sentence as above, nativization of items could also be at the level of phrase. There are certain phrases in the data that are used differently in ME compared to SBE, thus requires a re-structuralization if we were to give the SBE equivalents to the contexts. This is illustrated as follows:

(a) *can or not*

In "A little bit softer *can or not*?" *(*S14, L1) uttered by Louis, in comparison with the standard equivalent "Can you do it a little bit softer?"*,* the ME version undergoes a restructuring where the modal verb 'can' is moved from the front position of the question and placed at the sentence final position instead together with the 'or not' tag. The use of *can or not* could be a direct translation of Malay "boleh ke tak?" which is casually used in asking for a favour or permission.

(b) *No need*

(S1, L11)   Jucy: Broke, *no need* to call la..

(S3, L2) Ai Ling: This one *no need* battery ma..

'No need' is used in the examples to mean "there is no need/necessity". The speakers of SBE would say "I suppose not" or "I guess not" or "that is not necessary" instead. Syntactically, it could be described as a result of a simplification process or omission, another common feature of ME. In this case, "there is no need for that" that could have been used in SBE is reduced to "no need". This feature of ME could also be described as a direct translation of the Malay "tak usah" or "tak payah" that is commonly used in casual communication.

4.2.5.3 ME Sentence Construction due to Localization of Words

Apart from the phrases described, ME also possesses some items at word level that do not only carry different meaning but also require syntactical re-structuralization in their SBE equivalents. Examples taken from the data include the following:

(a) *Can*

'Can' is used generally to mean "boleh" in its Malay equivalent, attributing to the famous Malaysian tag: "Malaysia Boleh". The way 'can' is used in ME is over the boundary of the standard usage. In ME, 'can' could be used as a single word to answer questions like "Can you sing?" or "You pay first can, ah?" with simply "can" to mean "sure, why not", or "cannot" to mean "that is not possible". This involves

simplification of the structure of syntax. Examples taken from the data are as follows (the equivalent standard usage is presented in brackets):

(S3, L7)   Mr Lee: I'm running short of cash. Can I pay you by credit card?
                Ai Ling: No, cannot.
                Mr Lee: But..but I thought the front say *can*..
                    [But I thought the front (i.e. the notice at the counter) says
                     it is possible]

(S6, L23)   Ah Lok: …house also *can* build, road also *can* build.
                    (He can build houses as well as roads)

(S27, L8, L9)   Louisa: *Can* forget, meh?
                    (Can it be forgotten?)
                Ah Lok: *Can* forget.
                    (Sure it can be forgotten)

(S14, L1)   Louis: Wah, a little bit softer *can* or not?
                    (Can't you do it a bit more gently?)

(S14, L3)   Louis:…No problem, anything also *can*.
                    (…No problem, anything will do)

(b) ***Cannot***

A total opposite of 'can', this is another example of a direct translation of the Malay "tak boleh" that, unlike the SBE usage, is generally used in a variety of contexts. The SBE equivalent of 'not possible', 'not able', 'not willing', 'won't', 'not', etc. are simply generalized as 'cannot' by ME speakers. For instance:

(S3, L5 & L6)   Mr Lee: I'm running short of cash. Can I pay you by credit card?
                   Ai Ling: No, *cannot*.
                            (No, I'm afraid you can't/ that is not possible)

(S16, L10) Ai Swee: Ok lesson number 1, you must have long hair, *cannot* short hair..
                    (..You must have long hair, <u>not </u>short hair)

(S24, L6) Ai Swee: He won't to talk to you one, he got no mood to talk now, sure
                   cannot one..sure *cannot* one.
                   (I'm very sure he <u>won't </u>talk to you now/ I'm afraid it's <u>not </u><u>possible</u> for him to talk to you now/ I'm afraid he's <u>not willing</u> to talk to you now)

Interestingly, 'can' and 'cannot' as described above both represent simplification or re-structuralization of syntax as compared to the standard forms that are presented in brackets. Nonetheless, the use of the terms is extended semantically as they are widely applied in various situations.

(c) *Also*

Another example of English lexis that is used differently compared to SBE is 'also'. Again, L1 influence is a crucial factor for the localization of the term. Used commonly to replace its Malay equivalent 'juga' (formal) and 'pun' (less formal), 'also' is used casually in ME as in the examples taken from the data:

(S6, L23)   Ah Lok: One day also they never built Rome..house *also* can build,
                   road *also* can build.
                    (Rome was not built in one day. (This guy, Louis) can build
                    houses as well as roads)

(S11, L4)   Ah Lok: If we don't eat *also* we become endangered species..
                    (Even we would become endangered species if we don't eat
                    them)

(S13, L22)   Louis: Everyone *also* call me datuk here. One day *also* you'll be
                    datuk..
                    (Everyone calls me 'datuk' here. One day, you'll be a 'datuk'
                    too)

(S13, L12)   Ah Lok: Last time I got Honda you know. Here I put 10 dolars, I go
                    Penang I come back never finish *also*..
                    (I went to Penang with only 10 dollar fuel and yet when I
                    came back, there was still some fuel left)

(S13, L24)   Louis: I have many *also*..
                    (I have a lot of that too)

(S14, L6)   Ah Lok: You see the pillow *also* my saliva all come out
                    (You see the pillow, my saliva all came out)

(S16, L7)   Ai Ling: I study so many subjects in school hor but they *also* never
                  teach me how..
                  (I study so many subjects in school but they have never taught
                  me how..)

(S19, L1)   Louis: Borrow money so clever, pay back *also* don't know..
                  (You know how to borrow money but don't know how to pay
                  back)

(S23, L11)   Ai Swee: OK that one *also* can
                  (OK, that one will do)

(d) ***Got***

Another ME item that appears as a single word yet involving re-structuralization of syntax in its SBE equivalent is the word 'got'. This involves the substitution of *There + be* or *have* with the existential/locative *got*. This is another ME simplication of syntax in which 'got' is used to replace the structure of there + *be*. Influenced by the equivalence of 'there + be' or 'have' that simply means *ada* (existing) in Malay, it is therefore replaced by the existential/locative 'got' as evident in the data:

(S5, L39) Ah Lok: Salesmen…sometimes they we wake up ah don't know *got* sun, or
                  got no sun…
     (Salesmen..sometimes when they wake up, it is not certain whether or not <u>there
      is/there will be</u> sun..)

106

(S9, L2)Ah Lok: I thought ah, you only got boutique ah in London, Paris, Milan. Here

also *got* ah? (<u>Do you have/ Have you got</u> a boutique here too?)

(S9, L13) Datin Laila: New York *got* or not?

(<u>Do you have/Have you got</u> a boutique in New York as well?)

(S13, L4) Ah Lok: ..if I take loan, 50 years one *got* ah?

(<u>Is there/ Do they have </u>a loan scheme for 50 years?)

Uttered mostly by the prominently basilectal speaker Ah Lok, besides the replacement

of there + be /have with the existential 'got', 'or not' and the enclitic 'ah' are used as

well in the examples above as the interrogative tag. These examples, therefore, clearly

represent the basiletal level of ME as there is a major reconstruction of syntax needed

to produce the SBE version.

(e) *Already*

According to Low & Brown (2005), in SBE, the perfective aspect (I have done

something, something has happened) is used in certain circumstances:

a. To show that an action is recently completed, e.g. *At last! I've finished!*

b. To show often this completed action has some connection with or has some

impact on the present time. For instance, *I've broken my leg* is equivalent to

saying *my leg is broken now*.

c. To give news, e.g. *There has been an explosion at Edinburgh Castle.*

d. To describe past events that happened in a period of time extending up to the

present, e.g. "*You've only ever called me darling once.*"

e. To say that something has happened several times in a period of time extending

   up to the present, e.g. *I've written six letters since lunch time.*

As described above, the perfective aspect takes the form have/has + past participle in the standard form. The use of 'already' in ME, however, could take different forms. Bao (1995) distinguishes three uses of 'already' in Singapore English that apply in ME as well:

a. Completive: *Already* is used to show the completion of an action at or before the time of utterance. Thus *I ate the cake already* means *I've finished eating the cake*.

b. Perfective: *Already* may function to show the sequence of two events, e.g. *Drink already ah, cannot sleep*, meaning "If I have drunk(coffee) then I cannot sleep"

c. Inchoactive: *Already* is used to signal the onset of an action, often translatable as 'has started to', e.g. *My baby speak already*: *My baby has started to speak*

The perfective aspect in ME is commonly expressed by using the adverb 'already' rather than the SBE form for perfective (has/have + participle). As evident in the data, there are some examples that can be described based on the above three uses of perfective aspect in ME:

In the two following examples, the completion of another action at or before the time of utterance is shown; hence the use of 'already' can be labeled as 'completive':

 (S9, L29) Ah Lok: This side I use *already*.. (Completive)

[I have (already) used this side before]

(S9, L41) Ah Lok: ..settled with him *already*..(Completive)

[I have settled with him (already) before]

In the examples below, 'already' is used as a perfective, showing a subsequent event happening due to something else prior to it:

(S11, L4) Ah Lok: You eat *already* ah, you go back home, you feel.. (Perfective)

[Once you (have eaten) it, you will feel …)

(S24, L2) Ai Swee: Why you hiding there? See, I count wrong *already*..(Perfective)

[See, I (have counted) wrongly because you caught me by

surprise by hiding there]

As for the next example, the inchoactive aspect of ME perfective is evident as 'already' is used to signal the onset of an action, translatable as 'has started to':

(S21, L7) Ah Lok: Now I feel like sad song coming *already* (Inchoactive)

[Now I feel like the sad song (has started to play) in the air]

4.2.6 Summary of findings on ME syntax

From the above analysis of ME syntactical features, it is gathered that the process of simplification is one of the most common characteristics of this variety, and this is mainly

109

due to L1 influence. It is found that the ellipsis of pronouns and copulas are prominently evident in the dialogues of certain characters especially Ai Swee, Ah Lok, the hawkers and the contractor Louis. Such features are not spoken by characters like the lawyer, Soosay, Dr. Singh, DJ Tony, Michael Soo, and Vincent. Based on the background of the characters, generally it can be implied that the former group, the less educated ones, tend to speak more of the basilectal variety of ME and sometimes switch to mesolectal. To illustrate, in the utterance "you're coming, *ah*?" and "you're coming, *is it*?", whilst the tag 'ah' is considered as basilectal and 'is it' as mesolectal, both structures are loosely used by the characters. Besides the process of simplification as evident in the ellipsis of grammatical items, ME sentence construction could also be dissimilar with SBE due to the influence of L1 and this can be seen at the level of sentence, phrase and word. Words like 'can', 'cannot', 'got', 'also' and 'already' and phrases like 'or not', 'can or not' and 'no need' are indeed unique of ME as the structure involved deviates significantly from that of the SBE equivalent. The fact that some major re-structuralization is needed in 'translating' the contexts involved into the SBE version proves that these are features of colloquial ME that can be put within the lines of basilectal to mesolectal continuum. Moreover, they are mostly used by basilectal and mesolectal speakers (Ah Lok, Louis and Ai Swee), as prominently identified throughout the movie.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

5.0 INTRODUCTION