

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Introduction**

English language, which begins as a language spoken or owned by the English in England has spread and exported to many countries due to several reasons. Therefore, there are more non-native speakers than native speakers in the world as the result of the globalization. Malaysians are one of the non-native English speakers and Malaysian English (ME) has distinctive linguistics features that are different from the native variety. ME is widely used and understood among Malaysians.

### **1.1 Background of Study**

English language was introduced to the country during the British colonisation period and it gained an important status in the country as time passed. At first, English education was introduced in Malaya where it was mainly for the Caucasians and the children of the upper class. British set up English medium primary and secondary schools to prepare the people for some clerical and administration work for the British government. Course of Studies Regulations 1956, (as cited in Bernadette Foo and Cynthia Richards) stated that English was then made compulsory in all primary and secondary schools.

English was also used in administration, trade and economy, occupation and clerical work, mass media and education. Missionaries made English as the main tool for disseminating Christian religion. Due to the extensive use of English language, the older

generation who went through English education are said to possess good command of English.

According to Bernadette Foo and Cynthia Richards (2004), Malay language eventually became the medium of instruction in schools, with the implementation of the National Education Policy as defined in the Education Act 1961. Though there was phasing out of the English language in education system, English is still recognised as a prestige language that is used in the government, laws, education, media, everyday communication, commercial and business sectors.

The importance of English is still significant as it has long been one of the official languages in the multilingual society of Malaysia which every ethnic group uses their native language to communicate. Yet, English is also widely spoken as a first language especially by those who received English education. Mostly all Malaysians could speak or understand English at various proficiency levels.

According to (Wong, 1983), English Language in Malaysia has gone through language modification process. The English language was modified to suit their social needs and a new variety of English that is known as Malaysian English (ME) then emerged. The English language spoken by Malaysian is said to be influenced by the linguistic features of the local languages in Malaysia due to the various ethnic groups and language backgrounds.

By the term ME, many Malaysians may think that it is bad English or non-standard English. In general, ME can be generalised into two types – Standard ME (SME) and Non-standard ME (NME). ME has undergone the ‘nativisation’ process in which the

sentence structure, vocabulary and intonation were highly influenced by the local languages or dialects and this has made it a distinct variety from Standard British English (SBE) (Baskaran, 1994:32; Prehous, 2001:46). According to Baskaran (1987), ME is divided into three categories, namely acrolect, mesolect and basilect.

The acrolect is the standard Malaysian English (SME) which is internationally intelligible and used in formal context such as newspapers, magazines, and textbooks. The syntax adheres to SBE, whereas coinages and borrowings from local languages are common in accrolectal ME. On the other hand, the mesolect is a dialectal Malaysian English which is also national intelligible and usually used for informal purposes. Mesolectal English can be accepted in the classroom context and also used in informal context. Lastly, Basilect is considered as sub-standard Malaysian English for colloquial use (Baskaran, 1987:53)

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

A great number of research studies have been done on the ME lexis focusing on borrowing from local dialects into the accrolect or Standard English. Romarani (2003), Tota Singh (2003) and Chalaya (2008) have identified the types of lexical borrowing and the use of localised ME lexis in local English newspapers and Govendan (2001) has studied the use of ME in creative writing. These studies examined the categorisation of lexis use and also in which context the particular lexical item appears. However, little attention has been paid to the possible change of Standard English lexemes seeping into Malaysian English usage. These lexemes originating from Standard English seeping

into the Malaysian English accrolectal and mesolectal written discourse usually carry a different meaning and usage in the Malaysian context.

This study attempts to examine how English resembling ME found in blogs were used differently from Standard British English (SBE). Besides, this study will focus on the perceptions of ESL teachers and students towards the variety of samples of English as to whether they are standard or non-standard ME. This may due to the misperception of many Malaysians that ME is non-standard or Broken English. In fact, standard ME is competitive to Standard English in terms of syntax and lexis; and it may be accepted in the formal or classroom context.

### **1.3 Purpose of the Study**

The researcher made an attempt to look at the Malaysian English lexis used in a particular genre, which is web log or blogs. In recent years, blogs or web logs are being used tremendously with various purposes. To some extent, it became a trend for the young generation to blog about themselves or to share their stories, thoughts, daily activities and life experience in blogs. At the same time, they have developed the habit of reading blogs of other bloggers. The blogs they read play an important role in shaping and influencing their thoughts, and may influence they way they use English. This is because the readers may have some favourite bloggers and they would go after things the bloggers do, which may includes replicating the writing style and the way they use language in blog.

Few steps will be taken to achieve the purposes in this study. The first step is to identify the lexis which seems to be different in meaning and usage from standard British

lexicalisation. This will be done with Oxford English Dictionary (OED) by the researcher. The second step is to examine whether the perceptions of teachers and students towards in what ways the meaning of ME lexis of the samples is perceived differently from the Standard English. The third step is to ascertain whether the samples selected from the blogs were SBE or ME is standard or non-standard in terms of usage. The perceptions on the variety of samples will be studied and then relate with the types of context encountered and context of usage to show consistency among them. In other words, the researcher has perceived these samples as ME and this study aims to reconfirm whether the researcher's perception is correct.

This study will concentrate more on standard ME (SME) and non-standard ME (NME), which are the acrolectal and mesolectal variety used in blogs. The acrolectal and mesolectal written discourse is chosen because blog genre can either be formal or informal. Blogs are usually used to express bloggers' thoughts and feelings, and to share things which happened in their daily life. Therefore, young bloggers tend to blog in the informal writing style although they have the competency in the Standard English or accrolectal English.

Based on the above purpose, the objectives of the study are as follow:

- i) to determine the differences in lexicalisation and usage between standard British English and Malaysian English used in the blogs.
- ii) to ascertain the perceptions of the respondents on the samples from blogs as to whether they are Standard British English, Standard Malaysian English and Non-standard Malaysian English.
- iii) to determine the perceptions of respondents as to the formality or informality of usage of lexical items from these varieties of English.

## **1.4 Research Questions**

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

- i) In what ways is Malaysian English found in blogs used compared to Standard British English?
- ii) Which items taken from blogs are perceived as Standard British English, Standard Malaysian English and Non-Standard Malaysian English by the respondents?
- iii) How do teachers and students perceive the formality or informality of usage of lexical items taken from blogs?

## **1.5 Significance of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to identify the usage and meaning of vocabularies originating from Standard English seeping into the acrolect and mesolect of Malaysian English. The lexico-semantic area will be studied, to determine how the lexical features in ME are used differently in ME context or carry a different meaning from SBE.

This study also hopes to identify the perceptions of teachers and students with regards to the samples of lexicalization in terms of the variety they can be categorised into. Besides that, the consistency between the variety of sample ME and the contexts of encountering and usage will be studied. This is to reconfirm the perception of the researcher that the samples selected from blogs were ME. This could also reconfirm the lexico-semantic categorisation by earlier researcher were ME.

## **1.6 Limitations of the Study**

This study focuses on the English resemble ME used in blogs; as in the perceptions of them being standard and non-standard ME but not differentiating them into acrolectal, mesolectal and basilectal English. For the purpose of this study, ten young Malaysian bloggers were selected as the first source of data. Hence, the data obtained from the 10 bloggers is not representative of the language used by other Malaysian bloggers at large. Besides, this study only focuses on the bloggers from Chinese ethnicity aged 18-30, therefore is not representative of bloggers from other ethnic group and other age group.