THE USE OF MALAYSIAN ENGLISH LEXICAL ITEMS IN THE
WORK OF PREETA SAMARASAN

PREMA A/P JAYA BALAN

FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR

2012
THE USE OF MALAYSIAN ENGLISH LEXICAL ITEMS IN THE WORK OF PREETA SAMARASAN

PREMA A/P JAYA BALAN

DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULLFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR

2012
UNIVERSITI MALAYA
ORIGINAL LITERARY WORK DECLARATION

Name of Candidate: Prema a/p Jaya Balan (I.C/Passport No: 810610-10-5382)

Registration/Matric No: TGB070028

Name of Degree: Master of English as a Second Language

The Use of Malaysian English Lexical Items in the Work of Preeta Samarasan

Field of Study: Varieties of English

I do solemnly and sincerely declare that:
(1) I am the sole author/writer of this Work;
(2) This Work is original;
(3) Any use of any work in which copyright exists was done by way of fair dealing and for permitted purposes and any excerpt or extract from, or reference to or reproduction of any copyright work has been disclosed expressly and sufficiently and the title of the Work and its authorship have been acknowledged in this Work;
(4) I do not have any actual knowledge nor do I ought reasonably to know that the making of this work constitutes an infringement of any copyright work;
(5) I hereby assign all and every rights in the copyright to this Work to the University of Malaya (“UM”), who henceforth shall be owner of the copyright in this Work and that any reproduction or use in any form or by any means whatsoever is prohibited without the written consent of UM having been first had and obtained;
(6) I am fully aware that if in the course of making this Work I have infringed any copyright whether intentionally or otherwise, I may be subject to legal action or any other action as may be determined by UM.

Candidate’s Signature Date: 07 June 2012

Subscribed and solemnly declared before,

Witness’s Signature Date: 07 June 2012
Name: Madam Kan Ngat Har
Designation: Supervisor
This research is a study on how Malaysian English is used in creative writing by a Malaysian writer. It studies the novel ‘Evening is a whole day’ by Preeta Samarasan. Focusing on the extraction and categorisation of Malaysian English lexical items and semantic terms used by a Malaysian writer, this research sets out to study the extent to which the writer uses lexical items and semantic terms from the non-native variety in her prose writing.

Language purists have often accused non-native varieties as being the result of a failure of approximation. The deviations in these varieties are seen in a negative light and therefore the non-native varieties are considered inferior to Standard British English. If that is the case, the question arises as to why writers who are educated speakers of the language choose to use the local variety in their works.

Analysis of data using Baskaran’s (2005) categorisation shows that the writer uses non-native lexical items in her writing. She also uses non-native semantic transfers based on the framework from Menon (2003). These findings show that although there are equivalents in the English language, the writer consciously chooses to use local words in her writing.

This is clearly seen in the dialogues. The writer seems to have done this to depict the actual linguistic scenario in the country as the story studied here has a Malaysian setting.

Thus, the study shows that there is a need for the use of Malaysian English in creative writing when the situation requires its usage. The use of local lexis items and semantic terms in the creative writing which gives our home grown variety of English a distinct and unique flavor should make it more acceptable and recognised as a legitimate sibling of Standard British English and not as an enigma to be hidden in the closet. It shows that the Malaysian variety is known around the globe as a branch in the Varieties of English tree.
ABSTRAK

Penyelidikan ini mengkaji bagaimana pertuturan Bahasa Inggeris di Malaysia diadaptasi dalam hasil penulisan seorang penulis dari Malaysia. Kajian dibuat atas novel bertajuk ‘Evening is the whole day’ yang ditulis oleh Preeta Samarasan.

Fokus kajian ini adalah dalam aspek leksikal dan semantik yang digunakan oleh seorang penulis Malaysia. Ia menunjukkan setakat mana kedua dua aspek ini diadaptasi oleh Preeta Samarasan dalam prosa penulisannya.


Kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa wujud situasi dimana cara pertuturan Bahasa Inggeris di Malaysia harus digunakan apabila scenario dalam cerita memerlukannya untuk lebih memberi erti kepada jalan cerita. Hasilnya memaparkan bahawa ‘Malaysian English’ adalah variasi yang dikenali di medan antarabangsa.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take this golden opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude and utmost appreciation to Ms Kan Ngat Har, my dissertation supervisor who provided me with precious advice, sound guidance and for providing me with relevant details which has been the main reason in my success in completing this dissertation. My gratitude is further extended to my beloved mother and sister, Mrs. Alamealu Veerappan and Ms Niranjini Jayabalan who have been very supportive and encouraging throughout my MESL programme especially during the duration of my dissertation journey.

I would also like to convey my heartfelt appreciation to two very special people. Firstly, my husband, Mr Gunaseelan Kannan who has been my pillar of strength, voice of support and a helping hand that lifted me up throughout the testing periods of this journey. He helped me handle many obstacles and challenges that I met throughout the course of completing my dissertation. Secondly, a dear friend close to my heart, Mr Kaliswaran Palanisamy who came through as a helping aid in the completion of my dissertation.

Special thanks to my dear course-mate and friend, Ms Melyza Pakianatham for her words of support, advices as well as for spending hours with me in getting materials for our dissertation. I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to my beloved cousin Zeeneshri Ramadass (chechi) who was a voice of support and helped me tremendously during the final stages of my work.

Above all, I thank the Almighty for gracing me with strength, patience, perseverance and endurance in completing my dissertation. Last but not least, I would like to dedicate my dissertation in loving memory of my son Ganesh Gunaseelan who may have been with me for a short period of time but has left a lasting memory in my heart. He was a god-given child who has returned back to him.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract iii
Abstrak iv
Acknowledgements v
Table of Contents vi

Chapter One:
1.0 Introduction 1
1.1 Background of the Study 1
1.2 Statement of the Problem 3
1.3 Research Objectives 4
1.4 Research Questions 5
1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study 5
1.6 Significance of the Study 5
1.7 Summary 7

Chapter Two:
2.0 Literature Review 8
2.1 Introduction 8
2.2 Varieties of English 9
2.3 The Nativisation of English 10
   2.3.1 Nativisation of Forms 11
   2.3.2 Nativisation of Context 13
2.3.3 Nativisation of Literary Devices 14
2.3.4 Nativisation of Thematic Concerns 15
2.4 New Englishes: Approximation or Acculturisation 16
2.5 New Literatures in English 21
2.6 Use of Language in New Literatures in English 25
2.7 Malaysian English 27
2.8 Criteria for the Description of Malaysian English 33
   2.8.1 Studies on Description of Malaysian English 34
   2.8.2 Studies on Lexical Variations 34
2.9 Summary 39

Chapter Three:
3.0 Research Design and Methodology 40
3.1 Introduction 40
3.2 Data Collection 40
   3.2.1 Source of Data 40
   3.2.2 Data Collection Procedure 41
3.3 Analytical Framework 42
3.4 Local Language Referents 43
   3.4.1 Institutionalized Concepts 44
   3.4.2 Emotional and Cultural Loading 45
   3.4.3 Semantic Restriction 45
   3.4.4 Cultural/Culinary Terms 46
   3.4.5 Hyponymous Collocation 47
   3.4.6 Campus/Student Coinages 47
3.5 Semantic Transfer from Mother Tongue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subsection</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.5.1 Semantic Under-differentiation</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.2 Word Omission</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.3 Loan Translation</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.6 Summary

Chapter Four:

4.0 Data Analysis

4.1 Introduction

4.2 Local Language Referents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subsubsection</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.2.1 Institutionalized Concepts</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.2 Emotional and Cultural Loading</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.3 Semantic Restrictions</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.4 Cultural and Culinary Terms</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.5 Hyponymous Collocation</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2.6 Campus/Student Coinages</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.3 Semantic Transfer from Mother Tongue

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subsubsection</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.3.1 Semantic Under-differentiation</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.2 Word Omission</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.3 Loan Translation</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4 Conclusion of Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subsubsection</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.4.1 Local Language Referents</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.2 Semantic Transfer from Mother Tongue</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.5 Conclusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subsection</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Five:

5.0 Conclusion 85

5.1 Introduction 85

5.2 Summary of Findings 86

5.2.1 RQ1 86

5.2.2 RQ2 87

5.2.3 RQ3 88

5.3 Conclusion 89

Bibliography
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1: Deviation Chart 19

Figure 2.2: The Malaysian English Continuum 32

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: 4.4.1 Local Language Referents 80

Table 2: 4.4.2 Semantic Transfer from Mother Tongue 82