

# English Lexical Items in Spoken Malay

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## Introduction

Jangan kacau aku. Aku tengah tak ada mood sekarang.

*Don't bother me. I'm in no "mood" now.\**

Aku suka stail dia bercakap.

*I like the "style" he talks.\**

The above utterances are often heard in Malay conversations. It can be heard on the streets or during conversations in the office, between teenagers and among adults. The practice of inserting an English word in a Malay conversation is common and not confined to bilinguals only.

There has been a number of works on the influence of English on the Malay language. Carmel Heah in her book noted that the observations can be divided into two: first observations prior to 1957. These are observations by writers of dictionaries and grammar of Malay. One of the examples given by Heah is the publication of the Malay-English Dictionary in 1901 by R.J. Wilkinson. The second is observations after 1957. According to Heah, these observations are mainly related to terminological development of Bahasa Melayu. All of these works gathered their data from written text; Heah too gathered her materials from newspapers, popular magazines, dictionaries, etc. At present not many works are available on the usage of English lexicals in spoken Malay. This paper will highlight the English lexical items which are frequently used in spoken Malay.

## Borrowing

In discussing the usage of English lexical items in spoken Malay, it is necessary to determine whether this phenomenon is

code-mixing or borrowing. Kachru (1978:108) defines code-mixing as:

transferring linguistic units from one code to another. Such a transfer (mixing) results in developing a new restricted or not so restricted code of linguistic interaction.

He further states that code-mixing may be considered as borrowing if, "the term is used in an extended sense and not in its restricted sense". Based on the phrase, "used in an extended sense", it would seem to me that the English words used in spoken Malay, which is the focus of this paper, can be classified as borrowing. Definition of borrowing given by Gumperz (1982:66) also seems to support my contention. He says borrowing is:

the introduction of single words or short, frozen, idiomatic phrases from one variety into the other. The items in question are incorporated into the grammatical system of the borrowing language. They are treated as part of its lexicon, take on its morphological characteristics and enter into its syntactic structures.

More succinctly, Kamwangamala (1989:331) defines borrowing as the integration of the borrowed item into the system of the borrowing language. According to this definition, the phenomenon described in this paper is definitely borrowing.

## **Subjects and Methodology**

The subjects of this study are a group of 2nd year B.Ed. TESL students consisting of 4 males and 13 females. All of them are in their early twenties. They have been together for three years, including one year doing their matriculation studies. They are all competent bilinguals and would often code-switch or code-mix during conversation among themselves. However, there are also instances where they would converse entirely in Malay and insert English words sporadically in the conversation. Usually,

these can be heard in conversation along the corridors, in the cafe or in the class. I gathered the data for this research by listening in on their conversations and recording in notebooks the Malay sentences they used that had English words inserted into them. At times, I would also be involved in these conversations to purposely encourage usage of such words. Sometimes I would seek clarification from the speakers on certain words whose usage was unclear to me. This went on for two semesters. At the end of the second semester, I had gathered about 20 pages of sentences. These were analysed and 38 English words frequently used were extracted from the data.

**Table 1**  
**Original Words Collected from the Data**

1. best	14. last-last	26. gang
2. real	15. condemn	27. loaded
3. jogging	16. frust	28. season
4. hot	17. round	29. smart
5. mood	18. round-round	30. style
6. act	19. glamour	31. terror
7. action	20. blow	32. cancel
8. tackle	21. relax	33. boss
9. tension	22. relax-relax	34. sound
10. sure	23. challenge	35. brother
11. join	24. balance	36. member
12. free	25. respect	37. over
13. last		

The second part of the research is to confirm with the subjects the usage of these words. I drew up a questionnaire giving them the list of the words that I had compiled. They had to indicate whether they had used those words, and if so, to supply a sentence for each word and indicate the context. (See Appendix A)

After looking at the questionnaires returned by the students and from earlier observations, a pattern was showing that the words were used differently in Malay conversation. To confirm this, I looked up the meaning of these words in two dictionaries (i.e., *The Collins Cobuild Essential English Dictionary* and *The American Heritage Dictionary*). The rationale for choosing these two dictionaries was to note down the meanings of the words, including the various accepted meanings by native speakers of English in both the U.K. and the U.S. These meanings I shall refer to as standard usage.

## Results

Based on the sentences supplied by the students, the original 37 words were trimmed down to 34 words. The words deleted were “brother”, “member” and “over”. These words were deleted because they did not get a 100 percent recognition rate from the subjects.

At this stage there are two sets of meaning: (1) meanings based on the sentences supplied by the subjects, and (2) meanings found in the dictionaries. When the two sets of meanings are analyzed, the lexical items can be grouped into three different categories, namely:

1) *meaning change:*

the items in this category are used to connote an entirely different meaning than in standard usage

2) *meaning change in some situations:*

the items here are used to connote more than one meaning, one meaning different than standard usage