

Tracing the Indian Influences on Lexical Borrowing in Malaysian Standard English

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ABSTRACT

Culture is embedded in and reflected by language. Malaysian Standard English encompasses a vast number of indigenised words borrowed from Malay, Chinese, and Indian cultures (Baskaran, 2005). Malaysian Indians, the third-largest ethnic group in Malaysian society, have played a significant role in shaping Malaysian Standard English (MSE) through lexical borrowing from their rich and diverse cultural heritage. This study investigates the influence of Malaysian Indian culture on lexical borrowing in MSE. A survey adapted from Tan (2009a, 2009b) comprising both qualitative and quantitative questions was administered to 60 Malaysian Indian students at one of the public universities in Malaysia. It gathers 134 MSE words borrowed from Indian culture and examines the motivations for borrowing Malaysian Standard English words from Indian culture. The borrowed words are categorised under different cultural items like festivals, martial arts and acrobatics dances, medicine, food, social and recreational activities, religion, and clothing and apparel. The need to emphasise one's Indian ethnic background emerged as the key motivation behind the adoption of the words in MSE. Also, the least significant motivation is the need to fill the lexical gap, which is different from many previous studies. By collecting those borrowed words and their underpinning motivations, this study offers valuable insights into the obvious relationship between language and culture, shedding light on how Malaysian Standard English reflects the influence of Malaysia's Indian community. It also provides opportunities for people to acquire familiarity with Indian culture and promote smooth cross-cultural communication among Malaysian Indian ethnicity and other ethnic groups in Malaysia.

Keywords: culture; language; Indian culture; lexical borrowing; Malaysian Standard English (MSE)

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INTRODUCTION

The world we live in is constantly evolving, influencing the language we use. As a lingua franca, the English language has travelled and adapted in many parts of the world. This has resulted in the development of many English varieties across the globe, two of the major ones being American and British English (Han, 2019). The variation of Standard English (SE) has become an intriguing topic among researchers, as has Malaysian Standard English (MSE). The diversity of Malaysia is reflected not only in its ethnicities but also in cultures and languages (Lisa, 2021). Malaysian society is a multi-ethnic society comprising Malay, Chinese, Indian ethnicities, and so on. Each ethnic group has its own cultural and linguistic background. As a result, cross-cultural communication becomes crucial for Malaysians to build a harmonious community. Besides the Malay language, Malaysian Standard English (MSE) is also, a significant language used as a lingua franca to suit the needs for cross-cultural communication. This is a language that is different from Standard English with its localised features (Tay et al., 2016), such as the features of Malay, Chinese, and Indian cultural phenomena observed in many linguistic elements of MSE. MSE lexis is one of the essential linguistic elements that is different from Standard English and the words borrowed from the cultures of the three major ethnicities are commonly found in MSE. Two significant studies conducted by Tan (2009a, 2009b) have revealed that lexical borrowing in MSE is deeply influenced by Malay and Chinese culture. However, there is limited research on the effects of Indian culture on lexical borrowing in MSE (Lisa, 2021). Lisa (2021) further pointed out that the lower population (6.4%) of the Indian ethnic group compared to the Malay and Chinese demographics may limit linguistic and cultural studies. However, Indians are the third largest ethnic group in Malaysia after the Malays and Bumiputeras (67.4%) and the Chinese (24.6%) (Ibrahim et al., 2018). To fill this research gap, this study investigates the effects of Indian culture on lexical borrowing in MSE.

LITERATURE REVIEW

CULTURE AND LANGUAGE

Sitti Rabiah (2012) mentioned that “Language is a system of symbols used by humans to communicate or express ideas and thoughts to others” (p. 10). Languages are tools used for communication. Humans use languages to think and talk, serving communicative purposes. According to Lebron (2013), culture is “a set of values and beliefs, or a cluster of learned behaviours that we share with others in a particular society, giving us a sense of belongingness and identity” (p. 126). Overall, culture consists of our values, beliefs, or learned behaviours. Language serves as a vehicle for cultures and people can infer the cultures, values, and even the religious beliefs to which others adhere by the use of language (Ninsiana, 2018). In one study, Ninsiana (2018) examined the relationship between language and culture through library research. She explored two kinds of relationships; one is a subordinate relation; the other is a coordinate relation. The former refers to a one-way relationship (e.g. cultural dynamics affect the dynamics of language), while the latter refers to the reciprocal relationship (Ninsiana, 2018). Current research examines the subordinate relation between culture and language, focusing on the effects of culture on language.

LEXICAL BORROWING

Thirusanku and Yunus (2013b) defined lexical borrowing as “the influence on the linguistic patterns of a native language from another language with which it is in contact” (p. 186). Normally, researchers focus on the borrowed words and motivations for borrowing while studying lexical borrowing in a particular society. For example, Gratreh (2022) studied lexical borrowing in Persian society. They collected many borrowed words from 600 minutes of spoken Persian corpus of Al-Zahra University and analysed two motivations (“filling communication gaps in recipient language” and “social, cultural, political and scientific credibility of donor language”) for this kind of lexical borrowing. Another significant study conducted by De La Rosa Yacomelo et al. (2023) examined lexical borrowing from Spanish into Wayuunaiki by the method of documentary source analysis and interview, which collected 536 borrowed words and analysed the potential motivations. It displayed the Spanish cultural implications on lexical borrowing in the Wayuunaiki language in various domains, like basic actions and technology, food and drink, social and political relations, and so on. The research results also illustrated that the motivations behind such lexical borrowing are the lexical gap and the intense contact (De La Rosa Yacomelo et al., 2023). These two studies gathered many borrowed words to help future researchers investigate the lexical borrowing phenomenon in Persian and Wayuu communities. Furthermore, the motivations identified in the research could have invaluable insights for future researchers to study lexical borrowing in other societies. However, these two studies used qualitative methods to analyse the motivations, which ignored the perceptions of the public. In the current research, the researchers also focus on those two aspects (borrowed words and motivations for lexical borrowing) to investigate the Indian cultural influences on lexical borrowing in Malaysian Standard English.

LEXICAL BORROWING IN MALAYSIAN SOCIETY

Regarding lexical borrowing in Malaysian society, researchers have studied it in various aspects including linguistic, educational, literary, media, and dietary fields.

To begin with the linguistic field, Rahim (2014) summarized many MSE-borrowed words from Malay, Chinese, and Indian cultures and discussed the reasons for lexical borrowing, including lexical gaps, the familiarity of form, and cultural connotation. This study only focused on the linguistic aspect of lexical borrowing in Malaysian society, revealing that English is constantly developing in the Malaysian context. The study can be considered a foundation for studying lexical borrowing in Malaysia across various aspects, such as education, media, literature, and more.

Regarding the educational field, Thirusanku and Yunnus (2013a, 2013b, 2015) explored lexical borrowing in the ESL classroom setting, lexical borrowing by teachers, and students’ preferences regarding lexical borrowing or mixing, respectively. All of the three research indicate strong educational and linguistic implications. The research results revealed that lexical borrowing by teachers can attract students’ interest in the learning process. Also, their studies demonstrated the English language is always in contact with other languages, forming new ideas while maintaining cultural identities. These studies concluded that MSE is a distinct variety with deviations at the lexical level.

Lexical borrowing in the Malaysian media field is a popular topic for researchers, and they studied lexical borrowing in different forms of media like films and newspapers. Nor et al. (2015) researched the lexical features of Malaysian English by analysing Malaysian films. Lisa (2021) analysed lexical borrowing in the written and spoken form of Malaysian Standard

English by studying the newspaper corpus and interviews. Kunalan et al. (2021) investigated lexical borrowing from online editorials of mainstream English newspapers by analysing large quantities of real and electronically stored speech. This research demonstrated that the Malaysian English lexical items used in media carry particular features different from Standard English with localised features. However, researchers have distinct attitudes towards lexical borrowing in different forms of Malaysian media. Nor et al. (2015) praised the functions of Malaysian films in studying the lexical features of MSE, while newspapers might not be the suitable tools to serve this research purpose because the researchers recommended eliminating lexical borrowing in the newspapers to maintain the formality of English language (Kunalan et al., 2021).

Zhang (2016) and Rita (2017) studied lexical borrowing in Malaysian literature, specifically short stories. Both of the two studies helped people to understand the uniqueness of Malaysia in terms of cultural identity. Also, they highlighted the importance of MSE language to reflect this cultural identity by lexical borrowing.

The dietary field is another intriguing aspect for researchers to study lexical borrowing in the Malaysian context. Hua et al. (2021) researched the English translation of Chinese food on the street in Penang. Those English translations are the MSE words borrowed from Chinese food culture. They classified those translations into three types, and the research findings indicated the strong Chinese influences on lexical borrowing in MSE.

Overall, previous researchers have studied lexical borrowing in the Malaysian context in different fields like linguistics, education, literature, media, and food. A common conclusion drawn by most of these researchers is that MSE is a distinct variety with Malaysian features. Most of the studies collected various MSE words borrowed from Malay, Chinese and Indian cultures, and analysed the motivations for borrowing MSE words from local cultures. However, these studies just briefly examined lexical borrowing in Malaysian society without a comprehensive and systematic investigation of lexical borrowing from each ethnicity. Nonetheless, Tan (2009a, 2009b) studied lexical borrowing from Malay and Chinese culture into MSE comprehensively and systematically.

BORROWING MSE WORDS FROM MALAY AND CHINESE CULTURE

Tan (2009a, 2009b) published two research articles about the Malay and Chinese influences on lexical borrowing, respectively. She collected 264 Malay-borrowed words and 85 Chinese-borrowed words under different cultural items such as “festival” (“ang pow” from Chinese influence), “martial arts and acrobatics dances” (“tai chi” from Chinese influence), “medicine” (“lingzhi” from Chinese influence), “food” (“roti” from Malay influence), “social and recreational activities” (“silat” from Malay influence), “religion” (“halal” from Malay influence), “clothing and apparel” (“baju kedah” from Malay influence) and so on. Each word contains strong Malay or Chinese cultural implications, reflecting the diverse lexical use of multicultural society.

MOTIVATIONS FOR BORROWING MSE WORDS FROM MALAY AND CHINESE CULTURE

Tan (2009a, 2009b) also studied the motivations for borrowing MSE words from Malay and Chinese culture. She summarised five motivations in total:

1. The need to fill lexical gaps.
2. The need to distinguish among referents that are not differentiated in English.
3. The need to convey Malay or Chinese slang that is difficult to replicate the meaning in English.
4. The need to emphasise one’s Malay or Chinese ethnic background.
5. The need to emphasise one’s religious background.

For Chinese cultural influences, she did not examine the final motivation for the need to emphasize one's religious background given that a large number of Malaysian Chinese do not commit to any particular religion.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Baskaran (2005) identified two categories of lexical features of Malaysian English under the Semantic Approach. The first is the Local Language Referents, and the second one is the Standard English Lexicalisation. The former refers to the phenomenon that MSE language assimilates with local lexical items mainly used in the Malay language, Chinese dialects, and Indian languages. The latter describes how the phenomenon that lexemes are used in a way that reflects the characteristics of Malaysian English. Each category consists of subcategories: Institutionalised Concepts, Emotional and Cultural Loading, Semantic Restriction, Cultural/culinary Terms, Hyponymous Collocations and Campus/Student Coinages for Local Language Referents, and Polysemic Variation, Semantic Restriction, Informalisation, Formalisation, Directional Reversal and College Colloquialism for Standard English Lexicalisation; of which within these two categories represent the types of features in Malaysian English.

The theoretical framework for this research is derived from Local Language Referents of Semantic Approach by Baskaran (2005) specifically focusing on two relevant subcategories: Institutionalised Concepts and Cultural Loading.

Institutionalised Concepts: This subcategory encompasses locally borrowed terms that lack direct equivalents in Standard English but are firmly established within the Malaysian linguistic context. These terms become institutionally embedded, making direct translation unsuitable for conveying their intended meanings. For instance, the term “Bumiputera” translates word-for-word as ‘son of the soil’, but within the Malaysian context, it refers to Malays and other indigenous Southeast Asian people. The direct English translation falls short of capturing the term’s significance within the local context. Similar examples include “gotong-royong” and “rukun-tetangga.”

Cultural Loading: As Malaysian English incorporates the local lexicon, it often involves cultural loading, enriching the language with cultural nuances. Cultural loading refers to the incorporation of terms related to cultural norms, practices, or traditions. These terms cannot be adequately translated into English without losing their cultural essence. Examples include “kampung” (village), “dusun” (orchard), “bomoh” (medicine-man), and “penghulu” (village’s chief). “Kampung”, for instance, holds a distinct Malaysian connotation referring to wooden houses on stilts, unlike the English notion of a village with country-style cottages. The term carries personal and cultural significance for Malaysians, especially during festive seasons when returning to one’s hometown is often expressed as “going back to my kampung” instead of simply “village”.

Based on Tan (2009a, 2009b), there are five motivations of Malay and Chinese influences on lexical borrowing in MSE listed earlier. The third motivation (The need to convey Malay or Chinese slang that is difficult to replicate the meaning in English) is related to Institutionalised Concepts and all of them are related to Cultural Loading. This study uses the Local Language Referents (Baskaran, 2005) to demonstrate the cultural influences on lexical borrowing in the Malaysian context and this study also used his theory to examine the data while exploring the Indian implications of the borrowed words collected to further understand the localised and cultural features of the MSE words. In the previous studies, Tan (2009a, 2009b) studied the Malay and Chinese influences on lexical borrowing in MSE systematically, but she did not do any research about the Indian influence on lexical borrowing in MSE. The research objectives of this research are:

RO1: To identify the MSE words borrowed from Indian culture.

RO2: To examine the motivations for borrowing MSE words from Indian culture.

METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

The design of this research is survey-based with both qualitative and quantitative approaches. For the qualitative approach, respondents were asked to provide MSE words borrowed from any Indian languages (Tamil, Hindi, Sanskrit, Bengali, and so on) popularly shared by the Malaysian Indian community because as Linguistic Relativity states, languages put across and convey distinct cultural significances and meanings (Sapir, 1921; Whorf, 1956). Based on this theory, this study measured Indian languages to represent the effects of Indian culture. This design collected the lexical data directly from the participants (Rahman, 2016) so that it saves time compared to the corpus-based approach. For quantitative design, participants should complete multiple-choice questions to select the primary motivations for borrowing the MSE words from Indian culture. The quantitative design has a high representativeness of the entire population (Queirós et al., 2017). The respondents represent what Malaysian Indian people think about the motivations of this kind of lexical borrowing.

The research aim is to investigate the effects of Indian cultures on lexical borrowing in MSE. The qualitative data would contribute to exploring the Indian cultural implications, addressing the research aim directly. Furthermore, the quantitative data would contribute to the analyse of the motivations for this lexical borrowing. So, the quantitative data was collected to explain the research results qualitatively. This type of mixed-method design is called explanatory sequential design (Creswell & Clark, 2017). Both qualitative data and quantitative data were integrated to provide a comprehensive analysis of Indian influences on lexical borrowing in MSE.

PARTICIPANTS

There were 60 Malaysian Indian respondents from a public university in Malaysia collected in this study. Hair (2007) and Rahi (2018, 2019) stated that the number of respondents in a survey should be 5 times to 10 times greater than the number of items studied in the research. There are 7 cultural items in total so 60 respondents are sufficient sample size ($N = 35-70$) for the current study. The respondents were students at that university studying various courses like linguistics, humanities, history, and so on. They were of mixed gender, between the age of 19-24, in their first to fourth year. Researchers selected university students as the respondents because they may fill in more valuable borrowed words in the current era due to their younger age.

Purposive and snowball samplings were used to gather 60 respondents at this public university. For purposive sampling, participants are chosen to suit the needs of the research (Etikan et al., 2016). To recruit respondents from the university, the researchers had one inclusive criterion and one exclusive criterion. The inclusive criterion was Malaysian Indian students at this university, while the exclusive criterion was the ones who belong to the Mamak community because some of those people are slowly but surely assimilated into the Malay cultural milieu (Chuah et al., 2011).

For snowball sampling, researchers usually recruit a small number of initial contacts, who fit the research criteria and are invited to become participants within the research. The agreeable participants are then asked to recommend other contacts who fit the research criteria and who may potentially also be willing participants and continue to recommend

other potential participants, and so on (Parker et al., 2020). In this research, the researchers asked the respondents recruited (initial contacts or agreeable contacts) to share the survey with more Malaysian Indian students at this university. This sampling method can improve the efficiency of the research because respondents could help the researchers collect the potential respondents to finish the research work earlier.

The study strategically combined purposeful and snowball sampling, rather than relying solely on snowball sampling, to avoid having a highly homogeneous sample (particularly in the perceptions of lexical borrowing) and prevent skewed results because of the potential biases introduced by overreliance on the snowball sampling method.

INSTRUMENT

A survey adapted from studies by Tan (2009a, 2009b) on Malay and Chinese influences on lexical borrowing in MSE was used to collect data. It comprises both qualitative and quantitative questions.

Seven cultural items (festivals, martial arts and acrobatics dances, social and recreational activities, food, clothing and apparel, medicine, and religion) were listed and respondents were asked to select at least four cultural items to answer. For each item they chose, they needed to answer two questions.

Question One requested the respondents to write an MSE word borrowed from Indian culture in the specific cultural item category. The researchers provided an example word for each cultural item category to guide the students.

Based on their response to Question One, Question Two asked the respondents to select one motivation for borrowing the words they filled in from Indian culture. Five motivation options provided were listed, as follows:

- (1) To fill lexical gaps
- (2) To distinguish among referents that are not differentiated in English.
- (3) To convey Indian slang that is difficult to replicate the meaning in English.
- (4) To emphasise one's Indian ethnic background.
- (5) To emphasise one's religious background.

The survey was created on Google Form and distributed online.

DATA COLLECTION

To collect the data, the researchers contacted the Indian Culture Society at this university via email and shared the link to the Google Form with the president of the organisation. Then, the president shared the link to the WhatsApp group of this organisation to ask the members to answer the survey. This process happened at the beginning of the data collection, and it lasted for 2 weeks. However, there were not too many respondents who contributed to the research, so the researchers started to share the survey link with Indian students at this university in person while hanging around the university. To save time, the researchers just sent the survey link to their WhatsApp and asked them to fill in when they were free. Before leaving, the researchers explained the purpose of this research and how to answer the survey to promote the quality of the data and avoid irrelevant responses. By doing so, the researchers collected 60 participants within 5 days. The researchers ensured ethical considerations by orally informing respondents that their answers were confidential and would only be used for research purposes. The participants were aware of the purpose of the research, their participation was voluntary, and they had the right to refuse to answer the questionnaire without any repercussions. They could only get the survey link after they consented to participate.

DATA ANALYSIS

After collecting 60 Malaysian Indian respondents, the data was analysed using the descriptive statistics method. Descriptive statistics “summarises data in an organised manner by describing the relationship between variables in a sample or population” (Kaur et al., 2018, p. 60). Frequency is one of the most widely applied quantitative methods to examine the linguistic features of language use among a specific cohort (Gries & Ellis, 2015). The researchers used the frequency method to analyse the frequency of the words filled in by the respondents and the motivations they selected. Inductive and deductive approaches were also used in the process of data analysis.

The inductive approach is conducted without existing references, and researchers make hypotheses or theories by exploring and observing the facts (Streefkerk, 2023). In this research, this approach was used to analyse lexical data. There were limited references about the Indian cultural implications of the collected words, so the researchers explored themselves to handle this issue.

The deductive approach is conducted based on specific references or theories, and the research results are used to test the references or the theories (Streefkerk, 2023). The analysis of the motivations in current research used deductive analysis. The researchers used the studies by Tan (2009a, 2009b) about the motivations for borrowing MSE words from Malay and Chinese cultures to analyse the features of the same phenomenon in the Indian context.

For lexical data, the researchers contacted a Tamil language expert at this university to verify whether the words collected were MSE words borrowed from Indian culture and excluded some invalid data. This Tamil language expert has taught the Tamil language for 16 years whose bachelor's programme is Tamil Language and Linguistics. After verifying the data, the researchers presented the words under each item in one table. The table also displays the frequency of each word filled in by the 60 respondents, and the researchers analysed the Indian cultural implications of the three most common words filled in by the respondents by consulting that Tamil language expert.

For motivations, the researchers similarly presented the number of respondents who selected the motivations for each cultural item in a table and analysed the frequency of the data. The researchers then compared the research results with previous studies about lexical borrowing in Malaysian society to identify the uniqueness and the commonness of the Indian cultural influences on lexical borrowing in MSE.

RESULTS

ANSWER TO RO1: THE MSE WORDS BORROWED FROM INDIAN CULTURE

Table 1

MSE words borrowed from Indian culture

| Cultural Items | MSE Words Borrowed from Indian Culture (n=134) |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Religion (49 respondents) (n=30) | Nirvana (n=5) Dharma (n=4) Malayalee (n=3) Brahmin (n=2) Hindu (n=2) Karma (n=2) Mantra (n=2) |

| | |
|---|---|
| | <p>Moksha (n=2) Thiyanam (n=2) Vedas (n=2) Amma (n=1) Ashram (n=1) Bhagavadgita (n=1) Brahmanism (n=1) Dewa (n=1) Dewan/Thevan (n=1) Idukaddu (n=1) Indira sakti (n=1) Matham (n=1) Mocham (n=1) Oil pulling (n=1) Om (n=1) Purnama (n=1) Puteri (n=1) Raja (n=1) Samsara (n=1) Sanathana (n=1) Sindhi (n=1) Vibuthi (n=1) Vainavam (n=1)</p> |
| Food (60 respondents) (n=21) | <p>Tosai (n=23) Vadai (n=11) Chapati (n=7) Idli (n=7) Murukku (n=5) Curry (n=4) Idayappam (n=3) Karipap (n=2) Pooiri (n=2) Puthu (n=2) Achar (n=1) Appam (n=1) Biryani (n=1) Kheer (n=1) Laddu (n=1) Masala (n=1) Rasamalai (n=1) Paal appam (n=1) Pani puri (n=1) Payasam (n=1) Sambar (n=1)</p> |
| Medicine (55 respondents) (n=21) | <p>Ayurvedic (n=25) Mooligai (n=13) Marunthu (n=9) Murungai (n=3) Kasayam (n=2) Kashayam (n=2) Ashvagandha (n=1) Brahmi (n=1) Ginger (n=1) Homeopathy (n=1) Karrupu velli (n=1) Kasturi (n=1) Manjal (n=1) Omum water (n=1) Sanjiivi (n=1) Sidha vaithiyam (n=1) Sitha rathai (n=1) Tippili (n=1) Tulsi (n=1) Vendhayam (n=1) Veppilai (n=1)</p> |
| Social and Recreational Activities (54 respondents) | Bharathanatyam (n=8) |

| | |
|---|--|
| (n=20) | Jallikattu (n=7) Cricket (n=4) Uriyadi (n=4) Yoga (n=2) Paramapattam (n=2) Adimurayy (n=1) Atya-patya (n=1) Bambaram (n=1) Chess (n=1) Dandiya (n=1) Kancha (n=1) Kolam (n=1) Koothu/Therukoothu (n=1) Pallanguli (n=1) Pooja (n=1) Sathurangam (n=1) Thiruvilat (n=1) Valukku maram (n=1) Wrestling (n=1) |
| Festival (59 respondents) (n=15) | Thaipusam (n=23) Pongal (n=19) Deepavali (n=9) Navarathri (n=3) Muruku (n=2) Avatar (n=1) Deepam (n=1) Holi (n=1) Juggernaut (n=1) Kadavul (n=1) Karthigai (n=1) Onam (n=1) Ugadhi (n=1) Vaisakhi (n=1) Vilakku (n=1) |
| Martial Arts and Acrobatics Dances (59 respondents) (n=14) | Kabaddi (n=15) Silambam (n=10) Kalari (n=7) Gatka (n=3) Kathakali (n=3) Varma Kalai (n=2) Adimurai (n=1) Gymkhana (n=1) Kolaatham (n=1) Kushti (n=1) Kuttu (n=1) Odissi (n=1) Vaal sandai (n=1) Varisai (n=1) |
| Clothing and Apparel (58 respondents) (n=13) | Veshti/Vetti (n=15) Saree (n=11) Jippa (n=9) Lehenga (n=8) Dhoti (n=7) Thavani (n=7) Punjabi (n=6) Kurta (n=4) Kurti (n=2) Bindi (n=1) Pattu pavadai (n=1) Salwar kameez (n=1) Sherwani (n=1) |

*n=frequency

Table 1 presents all the borrowed words collected from the respondents under the seven cultural items. There are 134 words collected in total.

According to Table 1, “food” is the most popular item shared by the respondents, which was chosen by all of them (60 respondents). The second popular items are “festival” and “martial arts and acrobatics dances”. Both of them were selected by 59 respondents. In addition, the third most common item selected by the respondents is “clothing and apparel”, and 58 respondents chose this item to answer. The rest of the 3 items are “medicine”, “social and recreational activities”, and “religion”, which had 55, 54, and 49 respondents, respectively.

The item “religion” has the most collected words (30 words) with the most frequent word “Nirvana” (5 times).

There are 21 words collected for the item of “food”, and the most common word for this item is “Tosai” filled in 23 times.

The item “medicine” has the second greatest number of words collected (21 words) same as the item “food”. “Ayurvedic” is the most common word for this item filled in by 25 respondents.

“Social and recreational activities” has 20 collected words with two popular words. One is “Bharathanatyam” (8 times), the other is “Jallikattu” (7 times).

Regarding the item of “festival”, there are 15 words collected. Also, the respondents filled in 3 common responses (Thaipusam, Pongal, and Deepavali) which were filled in 23, 19, and 9 times, respectively.

“Kabaddi” and “Silambam” are the most frequent words filled in by the respondents for the item “martial arts and acrobatics dances” which has 14 collected words. The former was filled in 15 times by the respondents, and the latter was filled in 10 times.

Lastly, there are only 14 collected MSE words borrowed from Indian clothing and apparel which has the least number of words among other items. “Veshti/Vetti” is the most common word with 15 respondents.

Overall, the most popular item for respondents is food and the item with the greatest number of words is religion. The most common words collected from the respondents are “Ayurvedic”, “Thaipusam”, and “Tosai”. The words collected imply strong Indian cultural elements within MSE.

ANSWER TO RO2: MOTIVATIONS OF BORROWING MSE WORDS FROM INDIAN CULTURE

Table 2

Motivations for Borrowing MSE Words from Indian Culture

| Motivations | Cultural items | | | | | | | Total |
|-------------------------------|----------------|------|----------|---------|----------|--------|----------|-------|
| | Food | Arts | Festival | Apparel | Medicine | Social | Religion | |
| Ethnic background | 26 | 32 | 14 | 33 | 13 | 19 | 8 | 145 |
| Convey Indian slang | 16 | 13 | 19 | 10 | 17 | 10 | 11 | 96 |
| Distinguish English referents | 9 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 14 | 12 | 8 | 65 |
| Religious background | 4 | 2 | 15 | 3 | 9 | 7 | 21 | 61 |
| Fill lexical gap | 5 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 2 | 6 | 1 | 27 |
| Total | 60 | 59 | 59 | 58 | 55 | 54 | 49 | 394 |

Table 2 illustrates the number of respondents who selected the motivations of borrowing MSE words from Indian culture for each item they chose to answer. The motivation options were selected 394 times in total. In this table, “Ethnic background” refers to “to emphasise one’s Indian ethnic background”, “Convey Indian slang” refers to “to convey Indian slang

that is difficult to replicate the meaning in English”, “Distinguish English referents” refers to “to distinguish among referents that are not differentiated in English”, “Religious background” refers to “to emphasise one’s religious background”, “Fill lexical gap” refers to “to fill the lexical gap”, “Arts” refers to “Martial arts and acrobatics dances”, “Apparel” refers to “clothing and apparel”, and “Social” refers to “social and recreational activities”.

“To emphasise one’s Indian ethnic background” is the most popular motivation shared by the respondents who were selected 145 times. The top 2 popular items are “martial arts and acrobatics dances” (32 times) and “clothing and apparel” (33 times). And the least common item is “religion” (8 times).

The second popular motivation is “To convey Indian slang that is difficult to replicate the meaning in English” which was selected 96 times. Under this item, “Festival” (19 times) is the most popular item, whereas the least items are “social and recreational activities” and “clothing and apparel” (10 times).

“To distinguish among referents that are not differentiated in English” was selected 65 times, ranking as the third common motivation among the five. The most common item is “medicine” (14 times) and the least common items are “festival” and “clothing and apparel” which were selected 7 times.

“To emphasise one’s religious background” was selected 61 times and it was the fourth most popular motivation. Undoubtedly, the most common item is “religion” (21 times). The least common item is “Martial arts and acrobatics dances” (twice).

Lastly, “to fill the lexical gap” was only selected 27 times, which is the least common motivation among the five. The most popular cultural item for this motivation is “social and recreational activities” selected 6 times. “Religion” is the least popular item for this motivation, which was only selected once.

Overall, the 5 motivations are chosen 394 times in total. The most frequent motivation is “to emphasise one’s ethnic background”, which has been chosen 145 times. The least common motivation is “to fill the lexical gap”, which has only been chosen 27 times. Besides the least frequent motivation, others are all chosen more than 50 times.

DISCUSSION

The findings of current research have demonstrated that Indian culture has significant effects on lexical borrowing in MSE and there are distinct kinds of MSE words borrowed from Malaysian Indian culture collected to reflect the potential motivations. Those results align with Baskaran’s (2005) Local Language Referents, especially for the Institutional Concepts and Cultural Loading.

There are 134 borrowed MSE words collected and each of them indicates the strong Indian cultural implications. Taking the three most popular words filled in by the respondents as examples, they are “Ayurvedic”, “Thaipusam”, and “Tosai”.

The word “Ayurvedic” was filled in by the greatest number of respondents (25 respondents). It is an ancient system of medicine that originated in India over 5,000 years ago. The word “Ayurveda” is derived from Sanskrit, where “Ayur” means life and “Veda” means knowledge or science. Therefore, Ayurveda can be translated as the “science of life” or the “knowledge of a long life”. Based on the etymology of this word, Ayurvedic principles are integrated into daily life, and many Indians consider it a way of living that promotes harmony with nature and oneself. “Ayurvedic” is not only a kind of medicine but also a spirit shared by the Malaysian Indian community to promote a healthy lifestyle.

Both “Thaipusam” and “Tosai” are the second most popular words filled in by the respondents (23 respondents). “Thaipusam” is a Hindu festival celebrated primarily in India,

which honours the Hindu deity, Lord Murugan. The festival is observed on the full moon day in the Tamil month of Thai, which usually falls in January or February. The word “Thaipusam” is derived from the Tamil words “Thai” (the Tamil month) and “Pusam” (a star). It is believed that Lord Murugan was born on this day under the star Pusam. During Thaipusam, devotees undertake various forms of penance and prayers to show their devotion to Lord Murugan. This festival is a vibrant display of faith, devotion, and cultural heritage. As a Tamil traditional festival, “Thaipusam” has already become the MSE word shared by the Malaysian Indian community.

The word “Tosai” is borrowed from the Tamil language with South Indian origin. In Indian culture, “Tosai” (also known as “Dosa”) is a popular and traditional South Indian dish made from fermented rice and lentil batter. It even plays a role in various festivals and celebrations. The dish has also gained popularity worldwide due to its delicious taste and versatility in terms of fillings and accompaniments. As a delicious food derived from India, “Tosai” has been regarded as an MSE word shared with the Malaysian Indian community.

Another impressive finding from the current research was about the item “religion”. It was filled in by the least number of respondents (49 respondents), but the researchers collected the most number of words (30 words) from this item, implying that religion is a sensitive and complex issue so that respondents need to select the words appropriately to avoid being rude or offensive, and each of them has their preference to choose the words, leading to different words collected.

In the current study, the researchers investigated some similar and different findings about motivations for borrowing MSE words from Indian culture compared to the previous studies about lexical borrowing in Malaysian society.

The most common motivation chosen by respondents is “to emphasise one’s ethnic background,” which was chosen 145 times. This finding aligns with some previous studies to some extent. Zhang (2016) posited that one of the functions of lexical borrowing is to form a connection between the locals and their hometowns. Therefore, this kind of lexical borrowing connects Malaysian Indian ethnic groups with their Indian ancestors, reflecting their Indian ethnic background.

Furthermore, Zenner et al. (2019) uncovered the relationship between lexical borrowing and social identity. The authors argued that speakers often select loanwords over native equivalents to express social identity and affiliation, reflecting language regard and societal attitudes. Regarding lexical borrowing in Malaysian Indian society, Indian people from Malaysia try to use the terms borrowed from their unique cultures to express their Indian identity and ethnic background, which gives them a sense of belonging to Malaysian Indian communities.

Added to this, Hua et al. (2021) concluded that Malaysian Chinese people maintain their own culture by adapting to the multicultural environment and showing a positive attitude toward other ethnic groups. Similarly, Malaysian Indians adapt to the multicultural norms in Malaysian society and use understandable ways to convey their cultural events by lexical borrowing to communicate with other ethnic groups smoothly. The borrowed words from Indian culture display an intense sense of Indian uniqueness. According to the data collected, this motivation is popular among almost all the items. The 3 most popular items are “martial arts and acrobatics dances”, “food”, and “clothing and apparel”. For example, most of the respondents filled in the words “Kabaddi” for martial arts and acrobatics dances, “Tosai” for food, and “Veshti/Vetti” for clothing and apparel with this motivation. Tan (2009b) pointed out this motivation influences borrowing MSE words from Chinese traditional martial arts and clothing, which somewhat aligns with the results of current research. The reason they chose this motivation for those items could be they are commonly used by Indian people to highlight their ethnic identity and adapt to the multicultural society gradually.

However, Tan (2009a, 2009b) did not suppose that this motivation should be the most important one. In the studies by Tan (2009a, 2009b), she summarised that the vast majority of Malay or Chinese features in MSE are motivated by the need to fill the lexical gap. Besides Tan (2009a, 2009b), many of the previous research highlighted the importance of this motivation (De La Rosa Yacomelo et al., 2023; Ghatreh et al., 2022; Lisa, 2021; Rahim, 2014; Rita, 2017; Thirusanku & Yunus, 2013a; Thirusanku & Yunus, 2013b; Zhang, 2016). De La Rosa Yacomelo et al. (2023) argued that the overall tendency is for Spanish loanwords to fill in terminological gaps, and Ghatreh et al. (2022) also supported that “filling communication gaps in recipient language” is one of the most important motivations for Persian speakers to use loanwords in their speech. Overall, this motivation should be significant in different communities globally.

However, Table 2 shows that “to fill the lexical gap” is the least significant motivation in the current research which was only chosen 27 times. The potential reason should be the total population of the Indian ethnic group. Lisa (2021) summarised that the population of the Indian ethnic group only accounts for 6.4% among other ethnic groups so Indian culture could have less effect on MSE than Malay and Chinese culture, and fewer Indian items could be borrowed by MSE words to fill the lexical gap. Based on the findings, “to fill the lexical gap” was commonly chosen by 3 items (food, social and recreational activities, and clothing and apparel), which aligns with Tan (2009a) for Malay influence on lexical borrowing in MSE. The probable reason should be those items are exposed by Indian people in their daily life and the words are unique things in Indian culture so that the emergence of those things with Indian cultural elements in Malaysia filled the lexical gap of MSE.

As discussed earlier, Institutional Concepts refer to words that do not have direct equivalent meanings in MSE but are firmly established within the Malaysian linguistic context, while Cultural loading refers to the incorporation of terms related to cultural norms, practices, or traditions. People cannot infer the Malaysian context of the words by just translating them into English, so the MSE words reflect the ethnic or cultural background of Malaysian society. The results of the current research have already proved that the Indian ethnic background of the Malaysian Indian people highly motivated them to borrow MSE words from their Indian cultures. Overall, the results of current research demonstrate the credibility of Local Language Referents of the Semantic Approach by Baskaran (2005), especially for Institutional Concepts and Cultural Loading. By examining the lexical data and motivations, the researchers had a better understanding of lexical borrowing and gained new knowledge about Indian culture.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study has revealed that Indian culture has significant influences on lexical borrowing in MSE. The researchers used both qualitative and quantitative questions in a survey, collected 134 MSE words borrowed from Indian culture, and examined the motivations behind this lexical borrowing from 60 Malaysian Indian students at a public university in Malaysia. According to the results of current research, there is something different from previous studies about lexical borrowing in Malaysian society, implying the unique sociolinguistic landscape within Malaysian Indian society. Furthermore, this study demonstrates the credibility of the Local Language Referents of Semantic Approach by Baskaran (2005), providing a comprehensive understanding of lexical borrowing. The current study advocates Malaysian Indian people to adapt more traditional Indian cultures into Malaysian society to generate more borrowed MSE words and advocates other ethnic

groups to respect Indian ethnic group, contributing to promoting smooth cross-cultural communication among Malaysian Indian ethnic groups and other ethnic groups.

Although this research provides a comprehensive overview of how Indian culture affects lexical borrowing in MSE, it still has potential biases, and here are some suggestions to be considered for future research on related topics.

Firstly, the sample size should be enlarged. 60 Malaysian Indian students at a public university just represent the opinions of some of the Malaysian Indian people and more respondents may lead to different findings in the study. Future researchers could collect data from more suitable respondents to collect more comprehensive data.

There are only 7 items studied in the research and there should be more items related to culture being studied. Researchers should study more valuable items to provide more thorough findings of the research.

Future research should also focus on more fields of linguistics. In this study, the researchers only studied one aspect of linguistics, which is lexis, because it is the most sensitive linguistic level compared to others (Vilus et al., 2023). However, there are still many linguistic aspects that can be influenced by Malaysian Indian culture, such as phonology, syntax, and pragmatics. Although it might have difficulties in terms of the methodology, the research gap still needs to be filled.

Also, future researchers could explore more contemporary motivations, like education, media, literature, and so on, for lexical borrowing in Malaysian Indian communities. The five motivations studied in the current research are traditional because they are adapted from what Tan studied in 2009, which is far from the current age. Current research is just a foundation of Indian influences on lexical borrowing in MSE with an equal role to Tan's two studies about Malay and Chinese influences. So, many related studies could be conducted based on the three studies to contribute to colorful Malaysian society.

Last but not least, there are other ethnicities besides Malay, Chinese, and Indian, such as Orang Asli, Bumiputera, Bajau, Mamak community, and so on. There are also limited studies conducted for these ethnicities specifically so that future researchers could focus on lexical borrowing in those communities to fill the research gaps and provide a thorough perspective on lexical borrowing in Malaysian society.

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APPENDIX

SURVEY

Dear Participants,

I am Zhang Zhiming from the School of Languages, Literacies, and Translation, Universiti Sains Malaysia. I am conducting a research project about tracing Indian influences on lexical borrowing in Malaysian Standard English and my research objectives are to collect the Malaysian Standard English lexical items borrowed from Indian culture and to examine the motivations of such lexical borrowing.

I would like to express my gratitude for your time in assisting me with this questionnaire. It should take you approximately 3 minutes to complete.

The questionnaire contains only **two sections**. Kindly **respond to both sections**. The first section requires you to provide some demographic information about yourself. The second section presents various items such as food, religion, festivals, and more. Please **choose at least four items** and provide a **Malaysian English word** borrowed from **the Indian languages (Tamil, Hindi, and so on)** for each item you choose. Lastly, select or fill in the **primary motivation** behind this borrowing.

Please note:

This questionnaire is intended for **Malaysian Indians only**.

Section 1 Demographic Information

Provide the demographic information of yourself

1. Which school are you from?
2.
 - A. School of Languages, Literacies and Translation
 - B. School of Humanities
 - C. School of Social Science
 - D. School of Educational Studies
 - E. Others
3. Year of study
4.
 - A. Year 1
 - B. Year 2
 - C. Year 3
 - D. Year 4 and above

Section 2 Malaysian Standard English Lexis Borrowed from Indian Culture and the Effects of Indian culture on lexical borrowing of Malaysian Standard English Lexis

For the 7 items (Festival, Martial Arts, Social Activities, Food, Clothing, Medicine, Religion) presented below, please select at least 4 and provide one word from Malaysian Standard English that you believe has been borrowed from Indian languages (Tamil, Hindi and so on) for each item. Additionally, select or fill in the best primary motivations for borrowing the words you filled in from Indian culture.

1. Festival:

Please fill in a Malaysian Standard English word borrowed from Indian languages (Tamil, Hindi, and so on) about the Indian festivals
e.g. Deepavali

When Malaysian Standard English borrows the word you filled in from Indian festivals, what do you believe is the primary motivation behind this borrowing? Please select the most applicable option.

- A. To fill lexical gaps
- B. To distinguish among referents that are not differentiated in English
- C. To convey Indian slang that is difficult to replicate the meaning in English
- D. To emphasise one's Indian ethnic background
- E. To emphasise one's religious background
- F.

2. Martial arts and acrobatics dances:

Please fill in a Malaysian Standard English word borrowed from Indian languages (Tamil, Hindi, and so on) about the Indian martial arts and acrobatics dances
e.g. silambam

When Malaysian Standard English borrows the word you filled in from Indian martial arts and acrobatics dances, what do you believe is the primary motivation behind this borrowing? Please select the most applicable option.

- A. To fill lexical gaps
- B. To distinguish among referents that are not differentiated in English
- C. To convey Indian slang that is difficult to replicate the meaning in English
- D. To emphasise one's Indian ethnic background
- E. To emphasise one's religious background

3. Medicine:

Please fill in a Malaysian Standard English word borrowed from Indian languages (Tamil, Hindi, and so on) about the Indian medicine
e.g. mooligai

When Malaysian Standard English borrows the word you filled in from Indian medicine, what do you believe is the primary motivation behind this borrowing? Please select the most applicable option.

- A. To fill lexical gaps
- B. To distinguish among referents that are not differentiated in English
- C. To convey Indian slang that is difficult to replicate the meaning in English
- D. To emphasise one's Indian ethnic background
- E. To emphasise one's religious background

4. Food:

Please fill in a Malaysian Standard English word borrowed from Indian languages (Tamil, Hindi, and so on) about the Indian food

e.g. karipap

When Malaysian Standard English borrows the word you filled in from Indian food, what do you believe is the primary motivation behind this borrowing? Please select the most applicable option.

- A. To fill lexical gaps
- B. To distinguish among referents that are not differentiated in English
- C. To convey Indian slang that is difficult to replicate the meaning in English
- D. To emphasise one's Indian ethnic background
- E. To emphasise one's religious background

5. Social and recreational activities:

Please fill in a Malaysian Standard English word borrowed from Indian languages (Tamil, Hindi, and so on) about Indian social and recreational activities
e.g. kabaddi

When Malaysian Standard English borrows the word you filled in from Indian social and recreational activities, what do you believe is the primary motivation behind this borrowing? Please select the most applicable option.

- A. To fill lexical gaps
- B. To distinguish among referents that are not differentiated in English
- C. To convey Indian slang that is difficult to replicate the meaning in English
- D. To emphasise one's Indian ethnic background
- E. To emphasise one's religious background

6. Religion:

Please fill in a Malaysian Standard English word borrowed from Indian languages (Tamil, Hindi, and so on) about the Indian religion
e.g. nirvana

When Malaysian Standard English borrows the word you filled in from Indian religion, what do you believe is the primary motivation behind this borrowing? Please select the most applicable option.

- A. To fill lexical gaps
- B. To distinguish among referents that are not differentiated in English
- C. To convey Indian slang that is difficult to replicate the meaning in English
- D. To emphasise one's Indian ethnic background
- E. To emphasise one's religious background

7. Clothing and apparel:

Please fill in a Malaysian Standard English word borrowed from Indian languages (Tamil, Hindi, and so on) about Indian clothing and apparel
e.g. saree

When Malaysian Standard English borrows the word you filled in from Indian clothing and apparel, what do you believe is the primary motivation behind this borrowing? Please select the most applicable option.

- A. To fill lexical gaps
- B. To distinguish among referents that are not differentiated in English
- C. To convey Indian slang that is difficult to replicate the meaning in English
- D. To emphasise one's Indian ethnic background
- E. To emphasise one's religious background

Thank you for your participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Zhang Zhiming

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