

Title: Contact Expressions in Contemporary Malaysian English

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Date: 25 NOV 2011

DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-971X.2011.01729.x

Journal: World Englishes

Volume: 30, Issue 4,

Pages: 551–568

ISSN: 0883-2919

ABSTRACT: Language contact touches on theoretical, descriptive and applied linguistics. Typically research into lexical contact outcomes tended to be accumulative, collecting contact effects, whether old or recent, on the assumption that they are all relevant today. Their currency or demise or, in the case of recent formations, their increasing currency and spread are under-researched. Such themes are crucial in multilingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious contexts such as Malaysia in South-East Asia where loan expressions can signal a developing over-arching ‘Malaysian English-ness’ or the existence of ethnic lines of division. This paper investigates the contact of English with other languages in Malaysia and raises three questions. Given the large number of loan words in English and in Malaysian English, the first question is to what extent loans from Malay, Chinese and Indian languages are ‘known’ and to what extent knowledge stratifies in terms of ethnicity, religion, etc. Findings might signal a trend towards an overarching, pan-ethnic general Malaysian English (MalE). Particularly interesting are expressions from Arabic that occur in a growing number and raise questions of inter-religious comprehension. The second question derives from a tentative classification of selected words into those that go back to the contact with European languages from the 15th century up to independence and those that have come into MalE since. The first category is considered ‘old’, the second ‘recent’. New words may signal a development towards endo-normativity. A third question that we hoped to find evidence for is whether age is a factor that interacts with findings to the other two questions. Though limited in scope, this study has wider applications to English, socio- and educational linguistics.

URL : <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-971X.2011.01729.x/full>