

Semantic Extensions And Loan Shift Extensions In Bahasa Malaysia Resulting From Contact with English

Carmel Heah Lee Hsia
Pusat Bahasa
Universiti Malaya

Introduction

Some scholars have considered it axiomatic that when a foreign cultural item (material or non-material) is borrowed, the designation for it is simultaneously borrowed as well. Thus, Jespersen (1956:28) declares that 'in many ways the study of language brings home to us the fact that when a nation produces something its neighbours think worthy of imitation, they will take over not only the thing but also the name,' and that this is 'a general rule'.

But in its contact with English, Bahasa Malaysia provides evidence that it is not necessarily the case that the transfer of a cultural item should be simultaneous with the transfer of the linguistic form that represents it. The volume of English loanwords borrowed into Bahasa Malaysia has indeed been tremendous. But there is another alternative other than the outright transfer of English morphemes into the language and that is, to adapt the language itself to meet the situation via the process of substitution. This gives rise to two types of indirect borrowing, namely, loan translation and loanshift extension, collectively referred to by Haugen (1972:85) as 'loanshifts'.

Loanshifts

The process which gives rise to loanshifts, namely, substitution, involves the use of Malay words to designate new concepts expressed in English on the basis of models of English items. The term 'shift' has been used to describe the products of this process because these loans appear in the borrowing language only as functional shifts of native morphemes. According to Haugen (1972:85), in loanshifts there is 'morphemic substitution without importation,' that is, the morphemes involved are all native. In the first type of loanshift, namely, loan translations, the native terms appear in a new arrangement, in the second type, loanshift extensions, the meanings of native words have been extended. Both types of change are based on the model of a lexical item in a foreign language.

Loanshift Extensions

In this group of loanshifts, the "shift of context" here refers to a shift in the semantic field of the native morpheme. In Bahasa Malaysia this semantic and often collocational shift is often the result of the application of an existing Malay term to cover the semantic dimension(s) of an English item. The dominant process involved is semantic extension in which the word acquires a new meaning while retaining its original one.

The necessary condition for this kind of borrowing to take place is partial semantic similarity between the Malay term and the English term which functions as its model. For instance, before borrowing, the Malay word *arus* 'current' shared with the English model *current* the designative function of

reference to 'the flow of a stream of water'. After the contact, a shift in the designative function of the Malay word occurred to include a new designative function, that is, reference to 'a movement of electricity'. This extension is illustrated by the appearance of this Malay word in such expressions as *arus elektrik* 'electric current'. Thus the partial semantic similarity between the Malay replica and the English model is the starting point for the extension of meaning, the function of the extension being to bring the designative function of the replica up to a higher degree of congruence with that of the model.

As with loan translations, there is a problem of identification. It is often extremely difficult to decide whether the extension in meaning of a Malay term is due to indigenous shift or due to the influence of an English model. Here it is appropriate to note T.E. Hope's (1960:133) observation that 'a semantic borrowing forestalls or by-passes a change of meaning which could equally well have occurred in the receiving language itself, given the right conditions'.

In Bahasa Malaysia the impetus for the 'indigenous shift' derives largely from its contact with English - from the need to overcome the problem of intertranslatability between the two languages. Though the extensions in meaning which result are not borrowings in the strict sense of the word - as they are not based on identifiable models in English - they are very much a contact phenomenon. In studying the overall impact of one language on another, they need to be considered along with borrowings (both morphemic and semantic).

In studying the process by which words in a language extend their meaning through linguistic pressure from another language in a contact situation, we need, therefore, to make a distinction between

- (a) extensions in meaning due to indigenous shift and which are not directly based on models in the foreign language; and
- (b) extensions in meaning which are based on models in the foreign language

In this article the term *semantic extension* is used to refer to (a) and the term *loanshift extension* (as used by Haugen (1953:402)) is used to refer to (b), the true semantic loans

Types of Semantic Extensions

The following are the ways in which Malay words have become semantically extended as a result of linguistic pressure from English. It may be pointed out that the types of semantic change described below are not mutually exclusive for in some cases more than one may have been at work.

1 *Semantic Extension based on Similar Appearance and/or Function*

This type of semantic extension takes the form of a perceptual similarity established between the appearance and/or function of the innovation with a familiar native item. The following are some examples

- (a) Extension through perception of similarity in appearance and function.
 - kereta* 'carriage' extended to mean *motor-car*.
 - ladang* 'clearing' extended to mean *plantation*
 - kandang* 'a pen, stall for animals' extended to include *dock* 'enclosure in criminal court for prisoner'.

- (b). Extension through perception of similarity in appearance only, without reference to function.

piring 'saucer' (in *piring hitam* 'black saucer') extended to mean *gramophone record*.

kuman 'a very small louse' extended to mean *bacteria*.

kisi 'lattice-work' extended to mean *electrical network*.

- (c) Extension through perception of similarity in function only, without reference to appearance.

perenggan 'fence' extended to mean *paragraph*.

injak 'inturning spikes of a basket-trap which prevent the escape of fish caught', extended to mean *valve*

kilang 'mill' extended to mean *gland*.

2. Semantic Extension through Progression from Concrete to Abstract

The way in which new concepts are interpreted in terms of natural and material phenomena may be seen in the examples of semantic extensions below

cerakin(an) 'traditional Malay medicinal chest with small compartments for storing herbs'. This has been extended to mean *analysis*.

The structure of the concrete referents - 'a chest made up of small compartments' - suggests in a very striking manner what is involved in the process of analysis, that is, as defined in the *Chambers Twentieth-Century Dictionary* (1975:43) 'the separating of a thing into its elements or component parts'

kesan 'footprint of an animal' extended to cover 'the abstract idea of 'impression on the mind'

rangka 'framework of house' extended to mean 'framework', outline of anything (e.g. discussion)

Verbs which denote physical action or activity have also been semantically extended by being used to describe abstract acts. For example:

bangun 'to get up, rise' extended to cover the abstract idea of 'to develop (country, land, etc.)'

hurai 'to untie' extended to cover the abstract sense of 'to clarify'

tapis 'to strain, filter' extended to mean 'to censor'.

hidang 'to serve up food' extended to include 'to present' (radio or television programme).

Adjectives may also be semantically extended by acquiring an abstract meaning in addition to their original concrete meaning. This can be seen in the following examples:

kabur 'dim (of sight)'; indistinct (of distant scene)' has been extended to mean 'ambiguous'

(ber)kemas 'tidy, neat' has been extended to mean 'lucid'

3 Semantic Extension through Syntagmatic Relationship

Semantic extension can also occur through syntagmatic modification of a general Malay word. In this process, a word with a general meaning is used in association with several other words which act as specifiers to indicate more particular senses. Though syntagmatically modified in this manner, the word in question acquires an enlarged semantic boundary. Some unconscious linguistic economy is often achieved as a single word with the appropriate

differentiating elements can suggest a multitude of things.

Some examples of Malay words which have been semantically extended by being used to form various syntagms are given below"

Semantic Extension through Syntagmatic Relationship

Malay Word	Syntagmatic modifying component	Corresponding Term in English
<i>Surat</i> (letter)	<i>kebenaran</i> (permission) <i>kuasa</i> (power) <i>naik kapal</i> (board ship) <i>pekeliling</i> (circulated) <i>sumpah</i> (oath) <i>teguh</i> (prohibition)	warrant letter of administration embarkation slip circular statutory declaration patent
<i>hak</i> (truth)	<i>negara</i> (state) <i>cipta</i> (invent) <i>milik</i> (own)	nationalisation copyright ownership, title
<i>bahan</i> (material)	<i>api</i> (fire) <i>mentah</i> (raw, uncooked)	fuel raw materials
<i>reka</i> (invention)	<i>cipta</i> (creation) <i>benuk</i> (form)	composition (literary) design, graphic art

4 *Semantic Extension through Insufficient Differentiation of English Near-synonyms*

The impact of the English language on Malay vocabulary is so rapid and intense that it is not always possible to think out consistently applicable native equivalents for English lexical items. As a result, any near-synonyms in English automatically become synonymous in Malay and are designated by one and the same Malay lexical item. The result is proliferation of meaning in the Malay word used to cover the different senses of the English near-synonyms. Some examples of the way a single Malay word is utilised to refer to a number of different 'signifieds' or senses in English are:

- penyata* report, statement, return (such as income tax return)
- kelebihan* extra, excess, superfluity, majority
- tipu* deception, fraud, counterfeit, cheating.
- tambah* increase, addition, supplement, extra.
- taraf* level, standard, variance.
- bidang* sphere, field (of knowledge), profession.

In general, the kind of semantic extension which can be observed in the examples given above (which show an intimate fusion of functions within a single lexical item), indicates the cultural impact of a sophisticated and highly differentiated society on a developing society. The flow of information is so intense that language planners do not have the time to search for equivalents for each and every one of the English lexical items in which the information is encoded. The extension of the meaning of particular Malay words so that they cover a wide range of similarly functioning English words is a practical way of overcoming, to some extent, the problem of translatability between

the two languages. Furthermore, this enables the language to resist importing even more English loanwords.

5 *Semantic Extension through Specialization*

Semantic specialization in native Malay words usually occurs when the use of a single Malay word in place of a number of English words is likely to lead to ambiguity. In such instances, a search has to be made for approximate native equivalents (some of them 'naturalised' foreign elements of long standing, notably Arabic and Sanskrit) which are then used consistently in place of the English terms so that they eventually assume a specialized meaning. Many examples of nouns which have become semantically specialized abound in the political and legal vocabulary of modern Malay.

Semantic Specialization in Malay Nouns

English Term	Malay Specialized Substitute
Directive	<i>perintah</i> (ordinary meaning: command, order)
draft (legal documents)	<i>rang</i> (ordinary meaning: draft of letter)
article of Constitution	<i>perkara</i> (ordinary meaning: matter, affair)
clause	<i>fasul</i> (ordinary meaning: reason, cause)
rights (of property)	<i>hak</i> (ordinary meaning: truth)
budget	<i>anggaran</i> (ordinary meaning: calculation)
policy	<i>dasar</i> (ordinary meaning: materials of construction)

Semantic specialization can also occur by assigning specific meanings to native Malay words which overlap in meaning.

Malaysia has been such that Malay synonyms or near-synonyms, where they are found, are made to specialize automatically and the minor semantic distinctions between them brought home to the Malay speaker. For instance, to obtain the Malay equivalents for the Chemistry and Physics terms *absorb* and *adsorb*, two synonymous Malay verbs *serap* and *jerap* were made to specialize, so that the former refers to *absorb* and the latter to *adsorb*. In the same way, the Malay synonyms *tenaga*, *kuasa* and *daya* have been assigned specific meanings in order to give the equivalents of *energy*, *power* and *force* in English scientific terminology.

6 *Generalisation of Meaning*

As pointed out by Lyons (1977:265) generalisation is the converse process to specialization in semantic change. Words which are previously 'area specific', that is, restricted to a particular context acquired a more general meaning and thus new collocations. This type of semantic extension is particularly common among verbs. Many of these extensions involve words traditionally used in a religious context. Some examples are given below:

rujuk used to mean only 'to take back a divorced wife after the first or second *taluk* (pronouncement of divorce)', it is now extended to mean 'to refer (to any matter, issue, person or authority)'.

kaji used to be confined to 'to study the Koran', it is now used in the general sense of 'to study (a subject, problem, matter, etc.)'.

tafsir used to mean only 'to interpret, comment on the Koran'; it is now used generally to mean 'to interpret, explain (a matter, text, etc.)'

Generalization involving words used previously only in a religious context also occurs among adjectives. Some examples are:

wajib 'obligatory (by religion)' which is now used in a general sense.

haram 'unlawful, forbidden by religious law' is now used in the general sense of 'illegal'

Through being semantically extended in the ways described above, Malay words, particularly verbs and adjectives, have also extended their collocational range. For instance, the verb *terbit* 'to rise' was used mainly to collocate with *matahari* 'sun', as in the phrase *matahari terbit di waktu pagi* 'the sun rises in the morning'. In its extended sense of 'to publish',

with books, magazines, newspapers and other kinds of printed materials.

It may be noted here that the semantic extension of Malay words, and the semantic adjustment which this process imposes on the lexico-semantic structure of Malay, is largely induced by contact with the English language. Wherever direct importation is resisted and native substitution by semantic extension takes place, some form of semantic and collocational adjustment is bound to follow. Although this process does not result in the appearance of new morphemes in the language - as is the case with the importation of loanwords - it is still linguistic change which is externally induced. This contrasts with the kind of linguistic change which is internal to the language and which is more gradual and systematic.

Types of Loanshift Extensions

In loanshift extensions the extension in meaning results from attempts to substitute Malay words for English words with which they correspond only in the literal meaning. These are considered as loans as the extension in meaning is based on lexical models in English. In the process these Malay words acquire the secondary meaning (e.g. *plant* 'factory' as opposed to its primary meaning of 'vegetation') or the metaphorical meaning (e.g. *eye* of a needle) of the English word.

The following are examples of Malay nouns which have acquired these additional meanings as a result of being used to translate English words literally

kerusi 'chair' which is literal translation of English *seat* is used in its secondary meaning of 'political constituency'.

sayap 'wing of a bird' used to translate English *wing* in the political sense, as in the phrases 'left wing' and 'right wing'

lorong 'lane' used to translate *track* in the technical sense of 'sound-track' or 'speed-track'

cawangan 'branch of a tree' used to translate English *branch* when used in the sense of 'a part of an organisation'.

As in the case of nouns, Malay verbs which correspond only in literal meaning to English verbs have been used to translate the latter when they are used

in their secondary or metaphorical meanings. As a result these Malay verbs have acquired the secondary or metaphorical meanings of the English verbs as well. Some examples are:

beri 'to give' used to translate English 'to give' when used in such phrases as 'to give an opinion, statement, report, explanation, etc.'

faham 'to understand' used to translate English 'to understand' in its secondary meaning of 'to believe', as in 'I understand that he is a distant relation'

ambil 'to take' used to translate English 'to take' used in such phrases as 'to take a decision, the initiative, an examination, time (e.g. it will take 20 minutes), etc'

Literal translation of English words has not only brought about changes in meaning of Malay words but also changes in parts of speech in Malay. Many nouns in Malay have acquired a new usage as verbs (with the appropriate affixes) through being used to translate English nouns used in their verbal forms. Some examples of Malay nouns which have been verbalised in this manner are given below:

Menyuarakan (*suara* 'voice') to translate 'to voice' in such phrases as 'to voice an opinion'; 'to voice a complaint'.

membintangi (*bintang* 'star') to translate 'to star (in films)'.

mementaskan (*pentas* 'stage, platform') to translate 'to stage' (a play).

A large number of adjectives have also been semantically extended through being used as direct literal translations of English words. Some examples are:

mundur 'backward' has been extended to mean 'lacking in ability' through being used to translate such phrases as 'the backward students' *murid-murid yang mundur*.

berat 'heavy' has been extended to mean 'serious, dull' on the model of the English 'heavy' as applied to books. Thus, *novel yang benar-benar berat* 'a really heavy novel'.

ringan 'light' extended to mean 'easy to read' through being used to translate English *light*. Thus *novel yang relatif ringan* 'a novel that is relatively light'.

kiri 'left' and *kanan* 'right' used to translate English *left* and *right* when used to describe political tendencies and sympathies.

merah 'red' used to translate English 'red' in the sense of 'communist'

As the examples above show, many of the adjectives (as indeed nouns and verbs as well) through being literally translated from English, have come to acquire a figurative sense or a metaphorical meaning on the model of the English items.

Effects of Lexico-Semantic Structure

All the different types of semantic extensions and loanshift extensions

in their secondary or metaphorical meanings. As a result these Malay verbs have acquired the secondary or metaphorical meanings of the English verbs as well. Some examples are:

beri 'to give' used to translate English as 'to give an opinion, statement, report, explanation, etc.'

faham 'to understand' used to translate English 'to understand' in its secondary meaning of 'to believe', as in 'I understand that he is a distant relation'

ambil 'to take' used to translate English 'to take' used in such phrases as 'to take a decision, the initiative, an examination, time (e.g. it will take 20 minutes), etc.'

Literal translation of English words has not only brought about changes in meaning of Malay words but also changes in parts of speech in Malay. Many nouns in Malay have acquired a new usage as verbs (with the appropriate affixes) through being used to translate English nouns used in their verbal forms. Some examples of Malay nouns which have been verbalised in this manner are given below

Menyuarakan (*suara* 'voice') to translate 'to voice' in such phrases as 'to voice an opinion'; 'to voice a complaint'

membintangi (*bintang* 'star') to translate 'to star (in films)'

mementaskan (*pentas* 'stage, platform') to translate 'to stage' (a play)

A large number of adjectives have also been semantically extended through being used as direct literal translations of English words. Some examples are:

mundur 'backward' has been extended to mean 'lacking in ability' through being used to translate such phrases as 'the backward students' *murid-murid yang mundur*.

berat 'heavy' has been extended to mean 'serious, dull' on the model of the English 'heavy' as applied to books. Thus *novel yang benar-benar berat* 'a really heavy novel'.

ringan 'light' extended to mean 'easy to read' through being used to translate English *light*. Thus *novel yang relatif ringan* 'a novel that is relatively light'

kiri 'left' and *kanan* 'right' used to translate English *left* and *right* when used to describe political tendencies and sympathies.

merah 'red' used to translate English 'red' in the sense of 'communist'

As the examples above show, many of the adjectives (as indeed nouns and verbs as well) through being literally translated from English, have come to acquire a figurative sense or a metaphorical meaning on the model of the English items.

Effects of Lexico-Semantic Structure

All the different types of semantic extensions and loanshift extensions

discussed lead ultimately to polysemy in Malay words. For in almost all the cases, the Malay word retains its original meaning(s) in addition to the new

The ways in which polysemy has come about in Bahasa Malaysia under the influence of English may be summarized in three general categories. They are:

1. *By shifts in application*

This would include most of the ways we have described by which words are semantically extended. Thus *luas* 'wide' is applied to *pengalaman* 'experience' to give *pengalaman luas* 'wide experience'. It used to have only a spatial

2. *By the figurative use of a word*

Thus, *gelap* 'dark' is used metaphorically to mean 'illegal', as in *pasar gelap* 'black market'.

3. *By a word being used in a number of specialized senses*

Semantic specialization is a frequent cause of restriction of meaning by reducing the range of a word as a whole (e.g. *deer* in English once meant 'beast'). But it can often give rise to polysemy as well when the same word is given a number of specialized senses only one of which will be applicable in a given sphere. For instance, through English influence, *kertas* 'paper' can refer not only to the material in general, but to a variety of other things: legal or official documents (e.g. *kertas putih* 'white paper'), a set of examination questions (e.g. *Kertas Bahasa Inggeris* 'The English Language Paper'), a communication read or sent to a learned society (e.g. *Kertas kerja* — 'working paper').

Admittedly, it is sometimes difficult to say which one of the above has been at work in giving rise to polysemy. In particular, (1) and (2) are difficult to separate and, in fact, often occur together. Polysemy has often been denounced as a defect of language and as a major obstacle to communication and clear thinking. Ullmann (1977:167) quoted Aristotle who was highly critical of polysemy: 'Words of ambiguous meaning', he claimed, 'are chiefly useful to enable the sophist to mislead his hearers'.

But Ullmann himself and other linguists too think otherwise. 'Far from being a defect of language', Ullmann (1977:168) points out, 'polysemy is an essential condition of its efficiency. If it were not possible to attach several senses to one word, this would mean a crushing burden on our memory: we would have to possess separate terms for every conceivable subject we might wish to talk about'. He stresses, 'Polysemy is an invaluable factor of economy and flexibility in language'.

In assessing English motivated polysemy in Bahasa Malaysia, one would agree with Ullmann that the polysemy has not had a detrimental effect on the language. Semantic extension is indeed an economical method of

encoding the innumerable concepts that have been introduced into Bahasa Malaysia via the English language. The alternatives would be to create new words altogether or import the English words which denote the concepts; these would increase the number of new morphemes in the language which have to be learned by the Malay speaker. In fact, it would not be inaccurate to say that semantic extension, and the polysemy it gives rise to, can often make the concept expressed in the new meaning more accessible to the native speaker. This is because the innovation is designated by being identified with a previously known referent having more or less the same appearance and/or function. For instance, the semantic extension of *tali air* which originally meant only a 'runnel' or 'irrigation canal', gives the speaker an idea of the function and appearance of the innovation.

Though a large number of Malay words have acquired additional senses as a result of the contact with English, this has not led to the ambiguity and confusion that has often been claimed. The *context* in almost all cases makes it clear which of the senses of the polysemic word is to apply in a given situation. For instance, *tanur* has both the meaning of 'oven' and 'kiln' - the latter meaning, a semantic extension to match the technical term 'kiln' in English. However, the contexts in which the two senses are used - one domestic, the other technical - are so different that there is little likelihood of their being confused in actual usage. Furthermore, in its borrowed meaning, the extended word tends to collocate with certain words only and this reduces further the possibility of ambiguity and confusion. For example, the verb *edar* (originally, 'to revolve') in its new sense of 'to circulate' borrowed from English, collocates with newspapers, magazines, pamphlets, and other types of printed material only.

Ullmann (1959: 167) has pointed out that 'Modern languages carry a much heavier semantic load than ancient ones'

numbers of words which have an ordinary meaning and also a scientific or technical meaning, for example, *energy*, *force*, etc.

Thus it is an inevitable result of the modernization of the Malay language that polysemy should increase as the language attempts to carry this greater semantic load demanded of it by its modernization.

Conclusion

Finally, we may note further that the expansion of the semantic boundary of the words that have been examined has a sociological dimension as well. This is because the process is related to the various social, economic, legal and political changes that have taken place and continue to take place in Malay society. Hence, the semantically extended terms suggest a correlation between linguistic change and socio-economic political change. As new ideas, institutions and techniques become implanted in the traditional conceptual system of the Malays, familiar words with referents which bear (or suggest) some semantic similarity with the new phenomena are made to expand their role. Semantic extensions such as *ladang* 'plantation', *harga* 'quotation', *lembaga* 'commission', *anggaran* 'budget', *pindaan* 'amendment', *tanggung* 'liability' are clearly associated with specific institutional practices in the fields of

business, government and legal procedure in Western societies. The introduction of these institutions and procedures (implying ideas and concepts as well) into Malay society have made it necessary to widen the range of meaning of words which traditionally were associated with sense(s) which were clearly circumscribed by the condition and state of evolution of the society. In this process of semantic adjustment, English has played a major role both by providing the impetus for indigenous shift and, also, by serving as a model for extension in meaning.

Notes

The examples of semantic extensions and semantic loan extensions quoted are taken from Heah, C.L.H (1981), *The Influence of English on the Lexical Expansion of Bahasa Malaysia* Unpublished Ph.D Thesis University of Edinburgh

References

- Chamber Twentieth-Century Dictionary (1975). Edinburgh. W & R Chamber Ltd.
- Heah, C L.H (1981). *The Influence of English on the Lexical Expansion of Bahasa Malaysia*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. University of Edinburgh.
- Haugen, E. (1953). *The Norwegian Language in America*, (2 volumes). Philadelphia. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Haugen, E. (1972). 'The Analysis of Linguistic Borrowing', In *The Ecology of Language* (collected and introduced by A.S. Dil), Stanford: Stanford University Press, pp. 78-109.
- Hope, T.E. (1960). 'The Analysis of Semantic Borrowing', In *Essays Presented to C.M Girdlestone*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne, pp. 125-141
- Jespersen, O (1956) *Growth and Structure of the English Language*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell
- Lyons, J (1977). *Semantics*. Vol 1 Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ullmann, S. (1959). *The Principles of Semantics* Oxford Oxford University Press.
- Ullmann, S. (1977). *Semantics. An Introduction to the Science of Meaning*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.