

Trends in Malaysian English Lexicon: A Corpus-Driven Analysis of *Mamak Murder Mystery* by Marc de Faoite

Azar Firdaus Yusof¹

¹Centre for Languages, Han Chiang University College of Communication, Malaysia

Corresponding author: azar@hcu.edu.my

Abstract

Malaysian English (MalE), a recognised variety within the World Englishes paradigm, is shaped by sustained contact among Malay, Tamil, Chinese, and English. While existing scholarship has documented MalE lexical borrowing across spoken and written domains, less attention has been paid to how such lexical features are naturalised within short fiction and how they function indexically to construct local social meaning. Addressing this gap, this study examines MalE lexical trends in *Mamak Murder Mystery*, a short story from the *KL Noir: Red* anthology. Using AntConc (Version 4.3.1) the analysis identifies culturally loaded lexical items and examines how their unmarked, un glossed use signals shared cultural knowledge and linguistic legitimacy. Drawing on Thirusanku and Melor's (2014) framework, the findings demonstrate that MalE lexical items in short fiction function not merely as local colour but as indexical resources that encode social relations, identity, and belonging. The study argues that short stories operate as compressed sociolinguistic spaces where MalE is intensified and normalised, contributing to ongoing debates on enregisterment, legitimacy, and localisation in World Englishes.

Article Info

Received: 31 January 2026

Revised: 23 February 2026

Accepted: 01 February 2026

Available online: 01 March 2026

Keywords

Malaysian English

Lexical Naturalisation

Short Fiction

Corpus Linguistics

World Englishes

Malaysian Literature

1. Introduction

The global spread of English has resulted in the emergence of diverse localised varieties shaped by historical, cultural, and sociolinguistic forces. Within this landscape, Malaysian English (MalE) has developed as a distinct variety characterised by sustained contact among English, Malay, Tamil, Chinese, and other local languages. Rather than representing deviation from a metropolitan norm, MalE reflects the linguistic realities of a multilingual society and occupies a legitimate position within Kachru's (1985) Outer Circle.

Although MalE has been widely studied in relation to phonology, syntax, and pragmatic norms (Baskaran, 2005; Platt et al., 1984), its lexical dimensions – particularly in literary texts – remain comparatively underexplored. Existing studies on lexical borrowing in MalE often focus on spoken interaction or larger textual forms such as novels (Pillai, 2018; Thirusanku & Melor, 2014), leaving short fiction relatively neglected.

Short stories, however, present a unique analytical opportunity. Due to their brevity, they often condense sociolinguistic meaning, requiring lexical choices to perform significant identity and contextual work within limited textual space. This study argues that Malaysian short fiction functions as a sociolinguistic micro-site in which MalE lexical features are intensified, naturalised, and rendered unmarked.

Focusing on Marc de Faoite's *Mamak Murder Mystery*, this paper examines how MalE lexical items are deployed without glossing or typographical marking, signalling assumed shared knowledge between author and reader. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What types of MalE lexical items occur in *Mamak Murder Mystery*?
2. How are these items distributed and contextualised within the narrative?
3. What sociolinguistic meanings are indexed through their unmarked use in short fiction?

By addressing these questions, the study contributes to ongoing discussions on lexical naturalisation, enregisterment, and the legitimacy of local Englishes in literary discourse.

2. Literature Review

2.1 MalE as a Glocalised Variety

MalE has been consistently recognised as a nativised variety shaped by Malaysia's multilingual ecology (Baskaran, 2005; Schneider, 2007). As a glocalised form of English, it enables speakers and writers to engage in global communication while retaining local sociocultural meanings. The legitimacy of MalE lies not in its conformity to exonormative standards but in its functional adequacy and cultural embeddedness. As a postcolonial variety, it serves as a compelling case study for understanding how language evolves within a multicultural framework. It represents a dynamic linguistic ecosystem that has been shaped over time by historical, cultural, and social forces, positioning it as an integral part of Malaysia's linguistic identity. Its development is deeply intertwined with the nation's colonial history, during which English was introduced and subsequently localised to suit the communicative needs of Malaysia's multilingual population. In this context, MalE exemplifies the concept of glocalisation because it reflects "the blending of the global and the local in various cultural, economic, and social contexts" (Hao et al., 2016; Mommaas, 2016; Robertson, 1996, 2001, as cited in Muhammad Yaqoub et al., 2023). In Bullard's (2025) view, the spread of global culture does not erase local identities; instead, local practices and perspectives actively shape what globalisation looks like in different contexts. In relation to MalE, its evolution through contact with Malay, Chinese, Tamil, and other indigenous languages, resulting in its glocalised form allows one to assert a distinctly Malaysian identity while engaging in global discourse, bridging international intelligibility with local relevance. Consequently, MalE contributes meaningfully to the broader landscape of World Englishes as proposed by Kachru (1985), demonstrating how global languages are continuously reshaped by local contexts.

2.2 Lexical Borrowing and Naturalisation in MalE

Lexical borrowing is widely recognised as a defining feature of Malaysian English (MalE), particularly in domains where English lacks culturally specific equivalents (Hajar, 2014; Tan, 2009). Borrowed items, commonly drawn from Malay, Tamil, and Chinese, frequently undergo structural adaptation such as pluralisation and compounding, signalling their integration into English grammatical systems and their functional stability within MalE (Dawson & Phelan, 2016).

Empirical studies have documented how these borrowings contribute to the expression of Malaysia's multilingual and multicultural identity. Pillai (2018), for example, demonstrates that lexical items of non-English origin occur across both spoken and written MalE, functioning as naturalised resources rather than marked instances of code-switching. Similarly, Hajar (2014) observes that lexical borrowing in Standard MalE extends beyond Malay to include Tamil and Chinese influences, as reflected in commonly used terms such as *thosai*, *kway teow*, and *ang pow*. Zaaamah et al. (2015) further note that localised expressions such as *kampung*, *gotong-royong*, and *pasar malam* fill lexical gaps where

English equivalents are culturally insufficient, reinforcing the role of borrowing as a meaning-making strategy rather than a lexical deficit.

More recently, scholarship has begun to emphasise the naturalisation of borrowed lexemes, whereby such items are no longer marked as foreign but are treated as part of a shared linguistic repertoire (Zenner et al., 2019). These borrowings carry sociocultural and ideological meanings, functioning as markers of identity, familiarity, and belonging. However, much of this work has focused on spoken interaction or educational settings, offering limited insight into how lexical naturalisation operates within literary discourse. While Thirusanku and Melor (2014) highlight the incorporation of culturally and religiously salient terms such as *halal*, *haram*, and *shariah* in MalE, the ways in which such items are deployed unmarked and unglossed in short fiction remain underexplored. This gap underscores the need to examine literary texts as sites where lexical borrowing is not merely present, but fully naturalised and presupposed as shared cultural knowledge.

2.3 Literature as a Site of Sociolinguistic Meaning

The intersection between language and literature has long been recognised as a productive site for examining linguistic variation in multilingual societies (Schneider, 2007; Pillai, 2018; Pillai et al., 2016). In the Malaysian context, literature offers a valuable lens through which the features of MalE can be observed, as literary texts often reflect everyday linguistic practices while simultaneously shaping cultural meaning. Among literary forms, short stories are particularly well-suited to sociolinguistic analysis due to their brevity, thematic focus, and reliance on condensed linguistic choices to establish setting, characterisation, and social relations.

Despite this potential, scholarly attention to the use of MalE in Malaysian short fiction remains limited. Existing studies have tended to focus on broader literary forms or general sociolinguistic patterns (Pillai, 2018; Pillai et al., 2016), with fewer analyses examining how lexical and stylistic features of MalE are embedded within the narrative strategies and dialogue of short stories. This gap is notable given that short fiction often foregrounds linguistic authenticity through unmarked lexical choices that index local identity and cultural belonging.

Literature functions not only as a repository of linguistic variation but also as a site where linguistic norms are produced and circulated. As Bamgbose (1998) argues, literary texts play a crucial role in preserving linguistic diversity in multilingual societies, capturing features that may otherwise remain undocumented in everyday interaction. More recent scholarship confirms that regional literature actively contributes to lexical innovation and the ongoing development of localised English varieties (Semiyeva, 2025). In this sense, literary texts do not merely reflect language use but participate in the sociolinguistic processes through which linguistic forms gain legitimacy and social meaning.

Within Malaysian literary studies, novels have received comparatively greater attention as vehicles for exploring the linguistic richness of MalE. While Azirah (2014) highlights the increasing presence of localised code-mixing and lexical borrowing in Malaysian short fiction, detailed analyses of how MalE operates at the level of lexical choice, dialogue, and narrative construction in individual short stories remain scarce. Addressing this gap, the present study examines *Mamak Murder Mystery* as a case study of how MalE is integrated into short fiction. By analysing lexical patterns in the text, this study demonstrates how short stories function as sociolinguistic micro-sites in which MalE is naturalised, indexical meanings are negotiated, and the variety itself is enregistered as a legitimate literary medium within Malaysia's multicultural landscape.

3. Methodology

3.1 Data

The dataset consists of *Mamak Murder Mystery*, a noir short story by Marc de Faoite, published in the anthology *KL Noir: Red* (2013), edited by Amir Muhammad. This text was selected for its rich representation of MalE and its ability to capture sociocultural nuances in a literary context. The text was digitised and prepared as a plain-text file to ensure compatibility with corpus analysis software.

3.2 Analytical Framework

A corpus-assisted qualitative approach was employed. AntConc (Version 4.3.1) was used to generate frequency lists, concordance lines, and collocation patterns. Identified lexical items were categorised using Thirusanku and Melor’s (2014) classification of MalE lexical features.

The analysis prioritised not only frequency but also contextual deployment, with particular attention to how MalE lexical items were integrated into the narrative and the observed absence of glossing or typographical marking.

Table 1. Thirusanku and Melor’s (2014) Classification of MalE Lexical Items

Classification of MalE Lexical Items	Conversion Pluralisation Polysemic variation Connotative borrowings Suffixation Lexical items functioning as a metaphor Apostrophe showing possession Compounding Cultural loading Institutional concepts Culinary loading Lexical shift Transfer Hybrids of non-English origin used in formal and informal situations Prefixation
---	--

3.3 Data Analysis Process

The analysis was conducted through a series of systematic steps, as depicted in Figure 1.

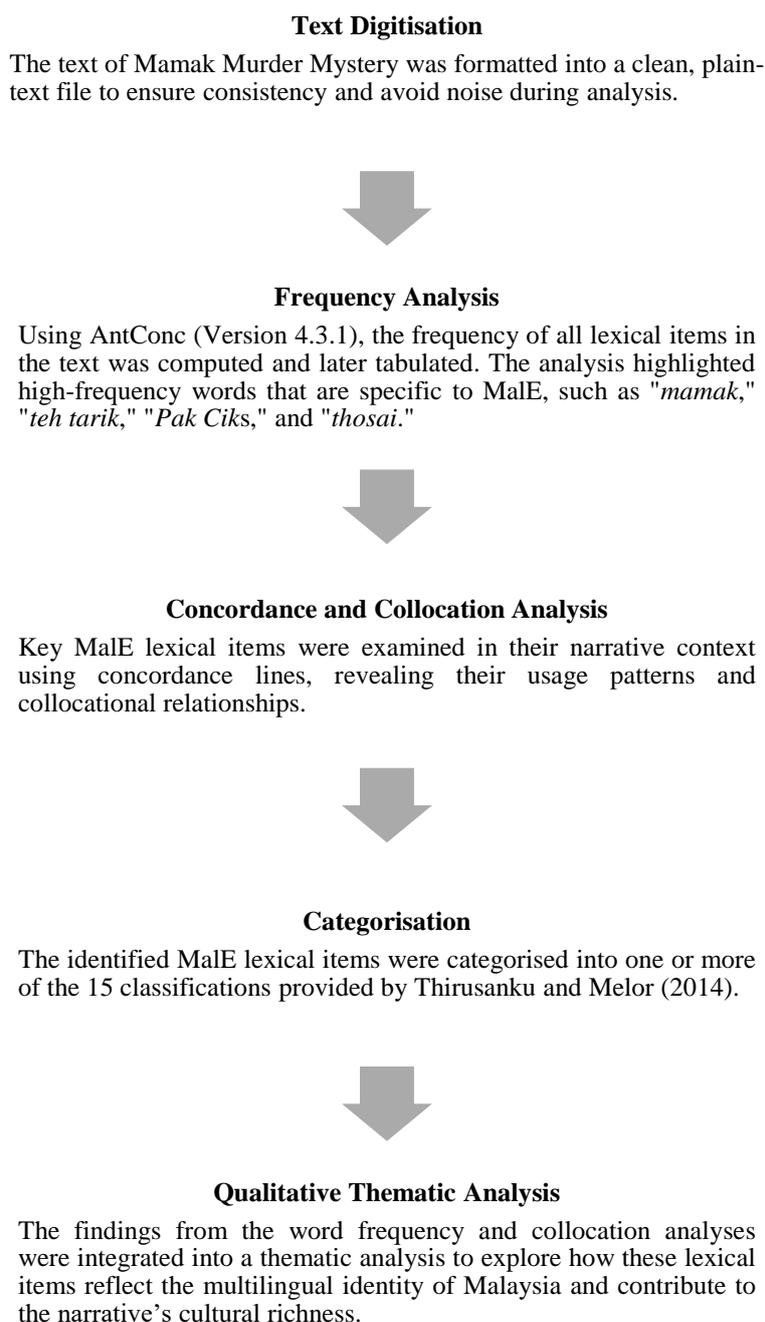


Figure 1. Steps in Analysing Trends in Male Lexicon in de Faoite's Mamak Murder Mystery

3.4 Tools and Resources

AntConc (Version 4.3.1) was the primary tool used for quantitative analysis, facilitating frequency counts, concordance generation, and collocation analysis. Supplementary resources, such as dictionaries and linguistic studies (e.g., Baskaran, 2005; Pillai, 2018), were consulted to validate the interpretations of the lexical items.

3.5 Rationale for Methodology

The combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches allows for a robust and nuanced exploration of MalE lexical trends. Word frequency analysis ensures an objective identification of key lexical items; whilst thematic analysis provides deeper insights into their sociocultural and narrative functions. This methodology is particularly suited for examining MalE in literary texts, where language serves both as a means of communication and a cultural marker.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Distribution of MalE Lexical Items in de Faoite’s Mamak Murder Mystery

The corpus reveals a concentration of culturally loaded lexical items, particularly in food-related, kinship, and address terms. Many of these items occur without typographical marking or explanation, suggesting assumed reader familiarity.

As shown in Table 2, “Tee Vee” registers the highest frequency (20.83%), illustrating the influence of English loanwords in MalE. This is followed by “*thosai*” and “uncle,” each with a frequency of 12.50%. While “*thosai*” reflects the cultural significance of Indian cuisine on Malaysia, “Uncle/uncle” illustrates the local practice of addressing elders with informal familial terms, underscoring intergenerational respect.

“*teh tarik*” and “ringgit,” both occurring at 6.25%, signal the significance of local gastronomic scene and national currency. A cluster of items, such as “*Pak Ciks*,” “sarongs,” “*tudungs*,” “*Indon*,” “*Ey*,” “*macha*,” “*mamak*,” “*Aiyo*,” and “*Appa*,” each appears at 2.08%, collectively representing a wide range of sociocultural and linguistic references drawn from Malay, Tamil, and informal MalE usage.

Additionally, Malay expressions like “*dua*” and “*B’rapa*” reveal everyday conversational codes, while religiously nuanced terms such as “*haram*” add to the cultural depth of the text. Other distinctive entries, for instance, “*thosai* batter,” “*roti canai*,” and “*Indon* maids,” further reflect Malaysia’s pluralistic and multilingual social fabric.

Table 2. Distribution of MalE lexical items in de Faoite’s Mamak Murder Mystery

No	Word/Phrase	Orthographic Variation	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
1	Tee Vee	-	10	20.83
2	<i>thosai</i>	-	6	12.50
3	uncle	Uncle; uncle	6	12.50
4	<i>teh tarik</i>	<i>Teh tarik; teh tarik</i>	3	6.25
5	ringgit	-	3	6.25
6	<i>Pak Ciks</i>	-	1	2.08
7	sarongs	-	1	2.08
8	<i>tudungs</i>	-	1	2.08
9	<i>Indon</i>	-	1	2.08
10	<i>Ey</i>	-	1	2.08
11	<i>macha</i>	-	1	2.08
12	<i>mamak</i>	-	1	2.08
13	<i>Aiyo</i>	-	1	2.08
14	<i>haram</i>	-	1	2.08
15	<i>Appa</i>	-	1	2.08
16	<i>dua</i>	-	1	2.08
17	<i>B’rapa</i>	-	1	2.08
18	<i>Tiga</i>	-	1	2.08
19	Aunties	-	1	2.08
20	old <i>Pak Ciks</i>	-	1	2.08

21	checked sarongs	-	1	2.08
22	Indon maids	-	1	2.08
23	thosai batter	-	1	2.08
24	Paper thosai	-	1	2.08
25	roti canai	-	1	2.08

4.2 Concordance and Collocation Analysis of Male Lexical Items in de Faoite’s Mamak Murder Mystery

The Keyword in Context (KWIC) analysis in AntConc provides a precise examination of how specific lexical items are employed within their immediate textual environments. By generating concordance lines, the KWIC function enables a comprehensive observation of word usage patterns, offering insights into contextual meanings and term frequency. As shown in de Faoite’s Mamak Murder Mystery, this method works especially well for finding recurring culturally important words, phrases, and themes.

Figure 1 shows that the concordance lines for the word “Tee Vee” show consistent links to leisure activities, especially when it comes to watching TV at mamak stalls and socialising. Common words and phrases that go with “Tee Vee” include “mamak,” “children,” and “football match.” These words and phrases show how important “Tee Vee” is as a cultural sign of communal entertainment and everyday life in Malaysia.

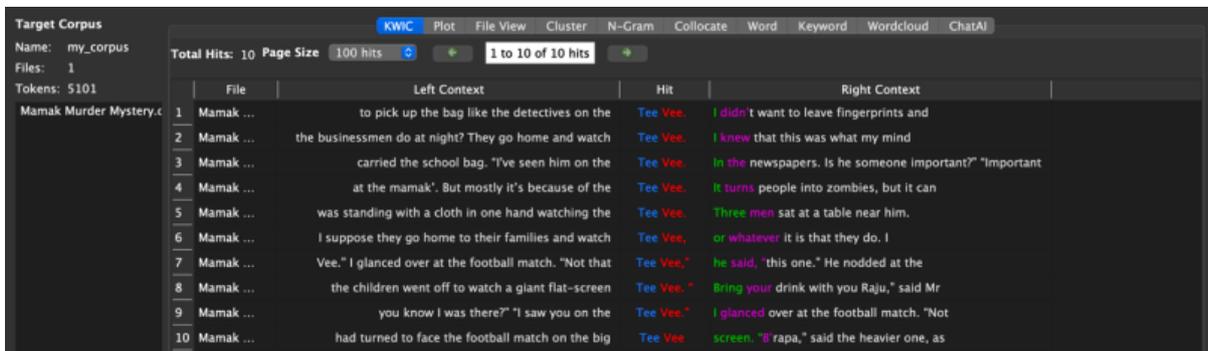


Figure 1. Concordance of “Tee Vee” and Its Social Associations

Figure 2 shows the term “thosai” and its frequent association with culinary practices and sociocultural contexts. Words and phrases like “Paper thosai,” “batter,” and “condensed milk” stress how it is made and the different ways it can be made, while phrases like “Mum says you make the best thosai ...” highlight its presence in familial interactions. These patterns indicate the significance of “thosai” in Malaysian culture. It is both a staple food and a symbol of shared identity in both communal and domestic settings.

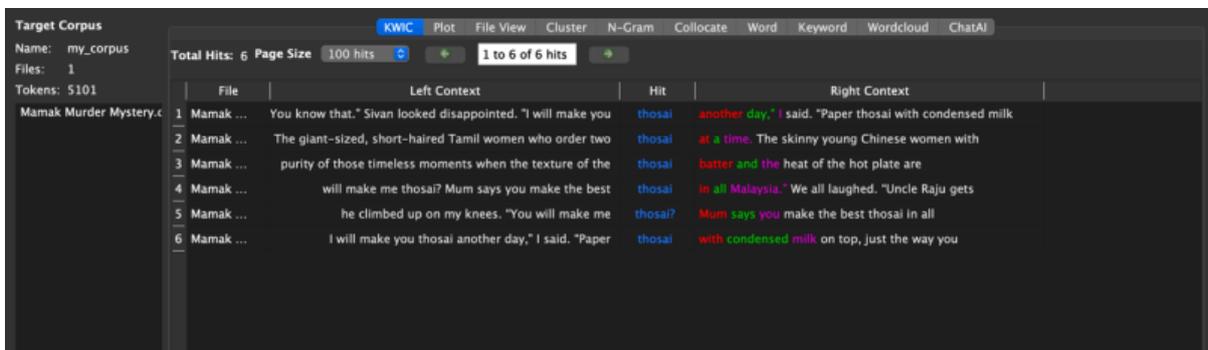


Figure 2. Concordance of “thosai” and Its Social Associations

Figure 3 shows the term “uncle,” which appears six times in the corpus, occurring in both capitalised (“Uncle”) and lowercase (“uncle”) forms, highlighting its cultural significance in MalE as a term of respect and familiarity for older men. Concordance lines show its association with familial and communal relationships, as seen in sentences like “Raju is here.” and “To feel like you belong.” These instances reflect its dual role in denoting kinship and social inclusivity, capturing the nuanced interpersonal dynamics central to the narrative.

File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
Mamak Murder Mystery.c	1 Mamak ... make the best thosai in all Malaysia." We all laughed.	Uncle	Raju gets a break from cooking today," said Mr
Mamak Murder Mystery.c	2 Mamak ... i, playing with her plaited hair. "Sivan!" she shouted. "Come.	Uncle	Raju is here." "How many times I tell you
Mamak Murder Mystery.c	3 Mamak ... is uncle doing in our house? Why you are here	uncle?"	asked Priya with wide eyes and a cheeky smile.
Mamak Murder Mystery.c	4 Mamak ... was just starting to release its sweet perfume. "What is	uncle	doing in our house? Why you are here uncle?"
Mamak Murder Mystery.c	5 Mamak ... Sivan's big brown eyes appeared just above the tabletop.	Uncle	Raju, he said, as he climbed up on my
Mamak Murder Mystery.c	6 Mamak ... his kitchen. To be part of that. To be an	Uncle	Raju. To feel like you belong. The wild anger

Figure 3. Concordance of “uncle” and Its Social Associations

Figure 4 shows the term “*teh tarik*,” which appears three times in the corpus, occurring in both capitalised (“*Teh tarik*”) and lowercase (“*teh tarik*”) forms and consistently associated with cultural and social contexts. Collocations such as “... after the mosque.” and “... back and forth from glass to glass.” highlight its significance as a symbol of communal gatherings and its traditional preparation methods. These instances illustrate how “*teh tarik*” embodies Malaysian cultural identity, blending ritualistic elements with everyday life.

File	Left Context	Hit	Right Context
Mamak Murder Mystery.c	1 Mamak ... The old Pak Ciks in checked sarongs who stop for	teh tarik	after the mosque. The young chubby Chinese men
Mamak Murder Mystery.c	2 Mamak ... as chopping open young coconuts, while Ramgopal poured	teh tarik	back and forth from glass to glass. It
Mamak Murder Mystery.c	3 Mamak ... my eyes and tried to think of nothing. "Ey macha.	Teh tarik	dua!" I opened my eyes. Two Malay men

Figure 4. Concordance of “*teh tarik*” and Its Social Associations

Figure 5 shows the term “ringgit,” which appears three times in the corpus, highlighting its role as Malaysia’s national currency in transactional and descriptive contexts. Collocations such as “... bundles of money.” and “... notes with a dismissive grunt.” reflect its association with financial exchanges and socioeconomic dynamics. These references ground the narrative in local realism, emphasising the practical and symbolic significance of “ringgit” in Malaysian daily life.

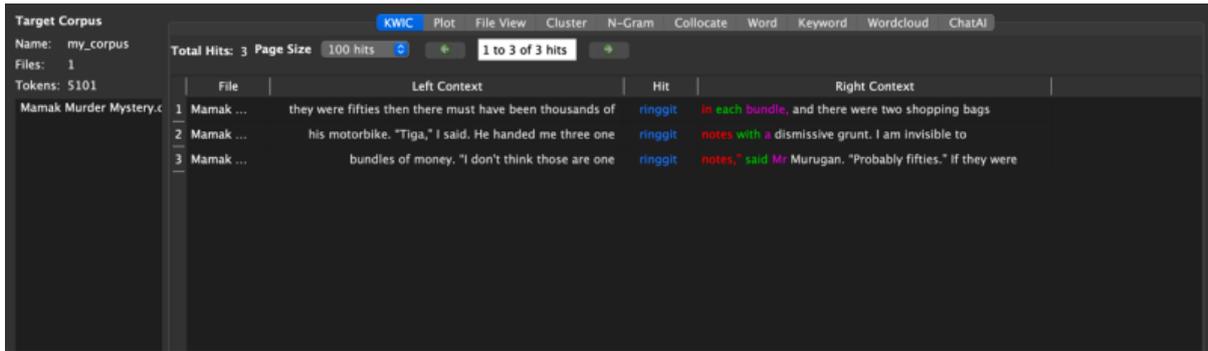


Figure 5. Concordance of “ringgit” and Its Social Associations

Figure 6 shows the term “*Pak Ciks*,” which appears once, highlighting its role as a cultural marker in Malaysian society. Collocations such as “... in checked sarongs ...” and “... stop for *teh tarik*...” emphasise the traditional attire and communal practices associated with elder men. These references anchor the narrative in local realism, illustrating how “*Pak Ciks*” represent generational continuity and the enduring significance of social rituals in Malaysian daily life.

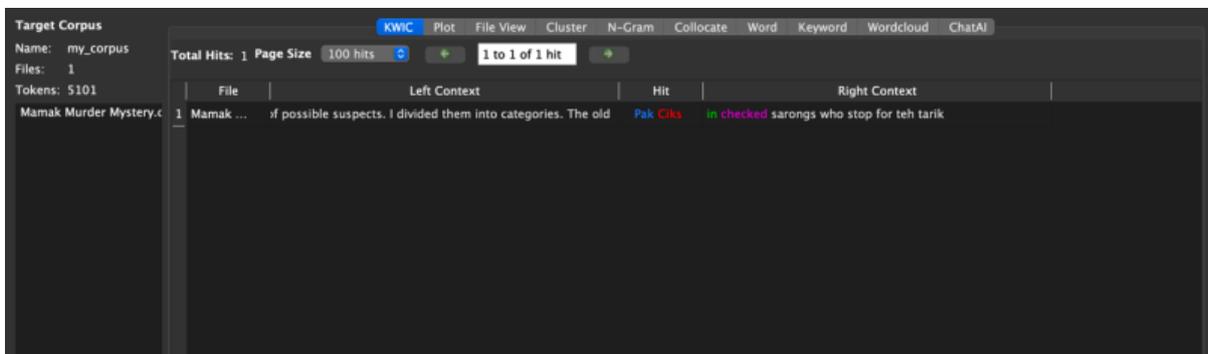


Figure 6. Concordance of “*Pak Ciks*” and Its Social Associations

Figure 7 shows the term “sarongs,” which appears in the phrase “*Pak Ciks* in checked sarongs who stop for *teh tarik* after the mosque.” This highlights its significance as a cultural and visual symbol of traditional attire in Malaysian society. The adjective “checked” evokes a specific pattern associated with local identity and generational heritage. Furthermore, the collocation with “*teh tarik* after the mosque” situates the reference within a socio-religious context, emphasising communal practices and the blending of spirituality with everyday life.

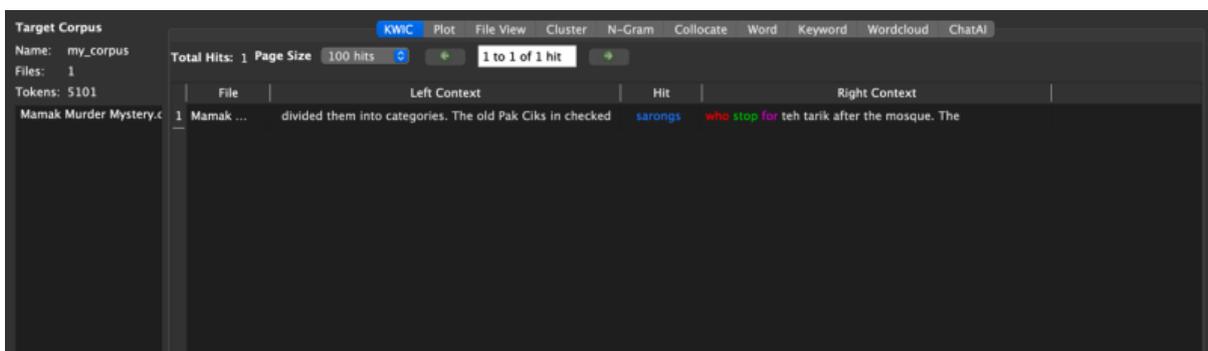


Figure 7. Concordance of “sarongs” and Its Social Associations

Figure 8 shows the term “*tudungs*,” which appears in the sentence “The Muslim women in their *tudungs* who don’t dare meet my eye either.” This positions “*tudungs*” as a cultural marker of religious identity, referring to the modest attire worn by Muslim women in Malaysia. The plural form

conveys a collective image, while its proximity to “... don’t dare meet my eye ...” suggests social distance or restraint shaped by religious or cultural norms. The collocation with “Muslim women” reinforces the *tudung*’s role as a visible signifier of faith and gendered behaviour, highlighting how attire intersects with themes of identity, modesty, and social interaction.

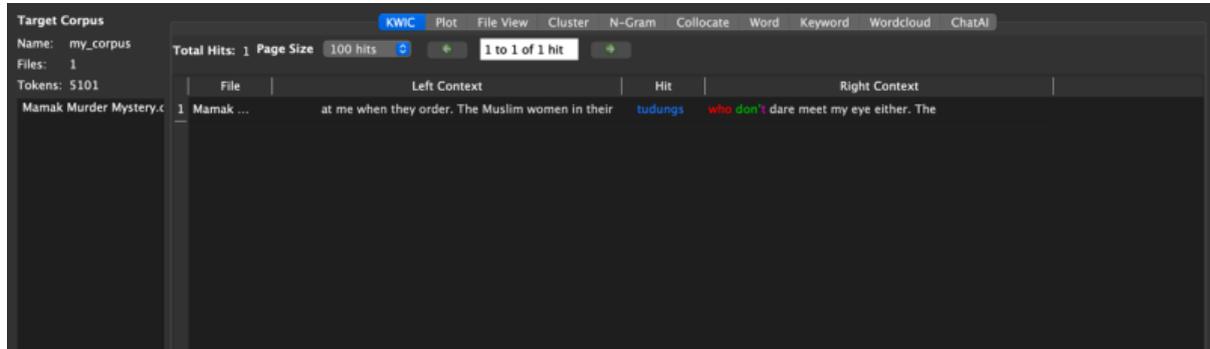


Figure 8. Concordance of “*tudungs*” and Its Social Associations

Figure 9 shows the term “*Indon*,” which appears in the phrase “The *Indon* maids feeding small children, as their noisy parents ignore ...”. The term is a colloquial and often derogatory shorthand for Indonesian, reflecting socio-economic hierarchies and underlying prejudice. Its use alongside “maids” reinforces a stereotypical portrayal of migrant domestic workers, often women in subordinate caregiving roles. The collocation with “... feeding small children ...” situates these individuals within a domestic yet marginalised space, drawing attention to the invisibility of their labour. This portrayal reflects broader societal attitudes towards migrant workers in Malaysia and subtly critiques class and ethnic divides through everyday observation.

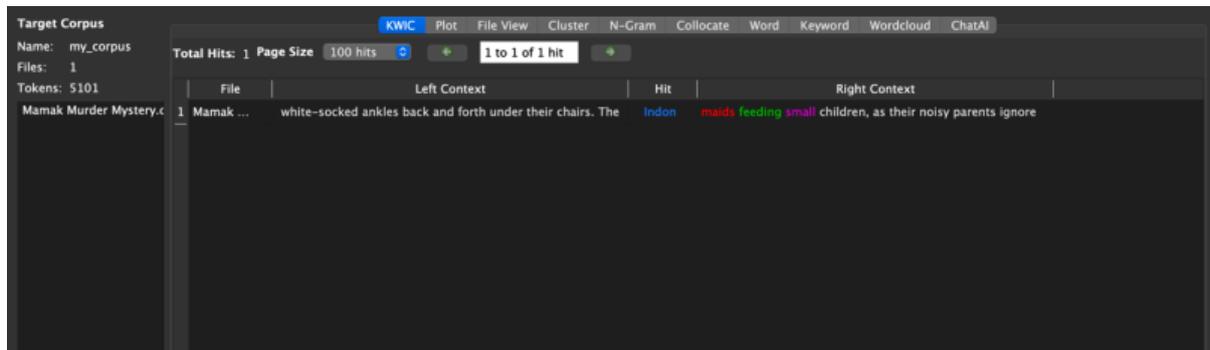


Figure 9. Concordance of “*Indon*” and Its Social Associations

Figure 10 shows the term “*Ey*,” which appears in the sentence “*Ey macha. Teh tarik dua!*” and functions as a colloquial interjection used to attract attention. Common in MalE and Tamil influenced speech, “*Ey*” conveys casual familiarity and immediacy, often heard in informal settings such as eateries. Its pairing with “*macha*,” a Tamil slang term meaning “brother” or “mate,” and the ordering of “*Teh tarik dua*” (two pulled teas), situates the phrase within a local, multicultural context. Together, they evoke the vibrant everyday exchanges typical of *mamak* stalls, highlighting themes of camaraderie, linguistic hybridity and Malaysian urban life.

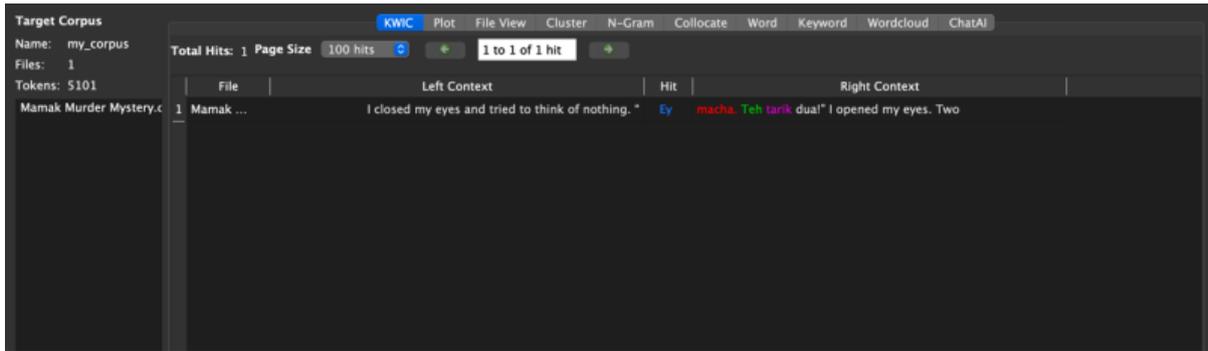


Figure 10. Concordance of “Ey” and Its Social Associations

Figure 11 highlights the term “*macha*” in the sentence “*Ey macha. Teh tarik dua!*” This reinforces a tone of informal camaraderie and shared cultural background. Although previously identified as a casual address among peers, here it underscores social closeness and peer bonding in everyday Malaysian interactions. Its use within a relaxed setting such as a *mamak* stall situates the speaker within a youth-oriented, multilingual environment, reflecting how language signals group identity and belonging in Malaysian urban culture.

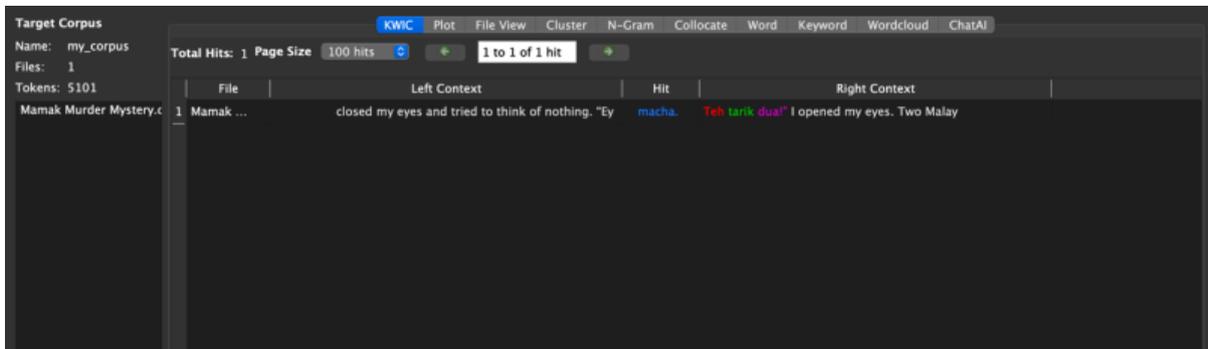


Figure 11. Concordance of “*macha*” and Its Social Associations

Figure 12 shows the word “*mamak*” in the phrase “... man with the mustache at the *mamak* ...” which functions as a noun referring to a type of informal eatery in Malaysia, typically run by Indian Muslim proprietors. Its use here not only identifies a physical location but also indexes a social space that is widely recognised in Malaysian urban life. The reference contributes to characterisation and cultural specificity, situating the narrative within a familiar local context. The definite article “the” suggests shared cultural knowledge, where “the *mamak*” is assumed to be understood by the audience without further explanation.

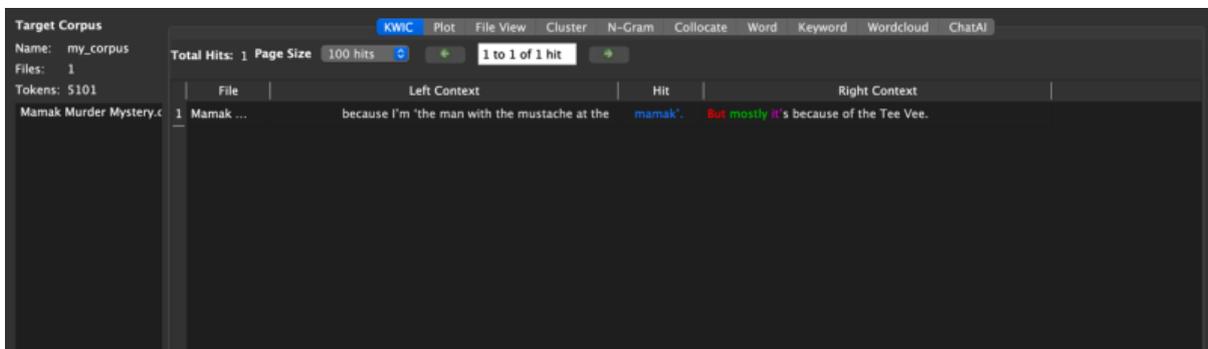


Figure 12. Concordance of “*mamak*” and Its Social Associations

Figure 13 displays the occurrence of the interjection “*Aiyo*,” used by the character Santosh in the sentence: ““*Aiyo*,” said Santosh. “How can I remember that? ...” A loaned exclamation from South Indian languages, “*Aiyo*” expresses frustration or disbelief, and its usage here highlights the emotional immediacy and cultural flavour embedded in MalE. The term’s casual integration in dialogue underscores the influence of Tamil and other South Asian languages, reflecting Malaysia’s ethnolinguistic diversity and the localised expression of sentiment within a multilingual society.

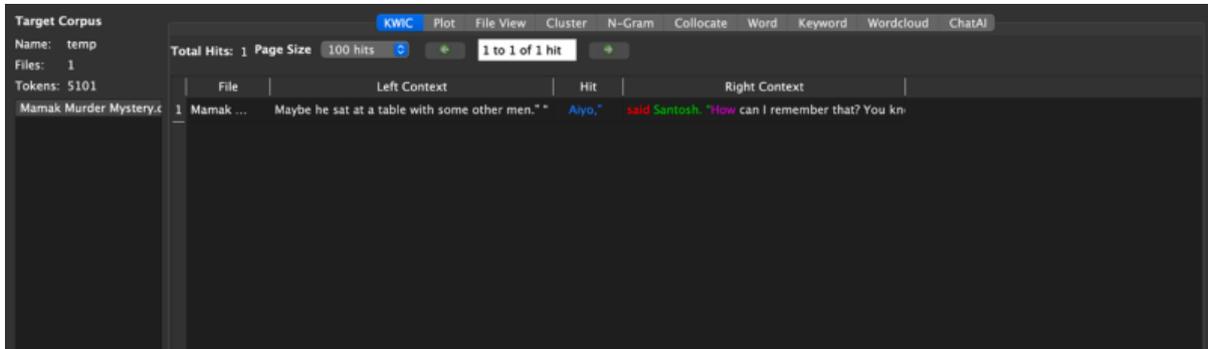


Figure 13. Concordance of “*Aiyo*” and Its Social Associations

Figure 14 illustrates the term “*haram*,” used in the phrase “... Chinese meat is *haram* for you fellows ...,” an Arabic borrowing meaning ‘forbidden’ under Islamic dietary law. Here, it appears in a teasing, informal exchange, reflecting both cultural awareness and everyday multilingualism in MalE. The use of *haram* in casual speech illustrates how religious vocabulary is seamlessly integrated into colloquial contexts, signalling social familiarity while also pointing to broader themes of cultural diversity and linguistic blending.

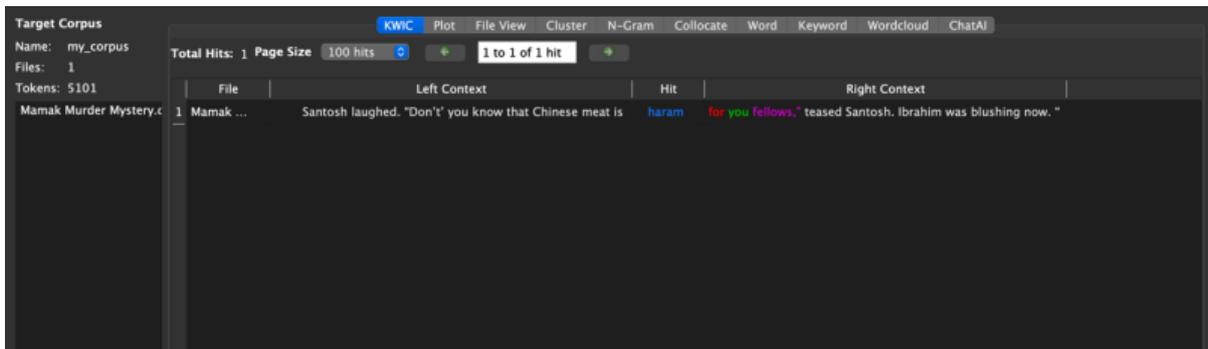


Figure 14. Concordance of “*haram*” and Its Social Associations

Figure 15 shows the term “*Appa*,” which occurs once in the corpus and means ‘father.’ Its use here as a form of address reflects a close familial relationship and signals the character’s ethnic and linguistic heritage. Although not of English origin, “*Appa*” is naturally embedded within the discourse, demonstrating how kinship terms from local languages are commonly incorporated into MalE. This example illustrates the effortless integration of vernacular vocabulary into everyday conversation, reinforcing cultural specificity while contributing to the multilingual character typical of MalE.

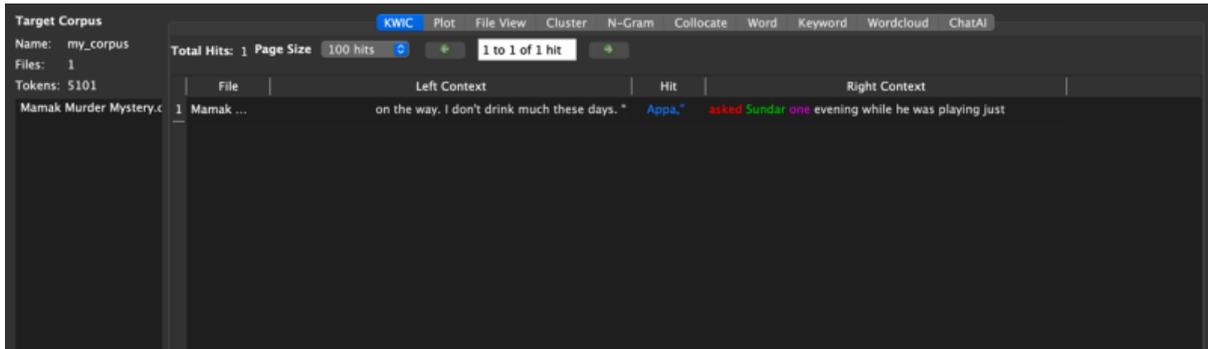


Figure 15. Concordance of “Appa” and Its Social Associations

Figure 16 shows the Malay numeral “dua,” meaning ‘two,’ used in the utterance “Ey macha. Teh tarik dua!” This example reflects both intersentential insertion, through the use of a complete Malay clause within an English narrative context, and lexical integration, where “dua” replaces the English equivalent without disrupting fluency. The presence of “macha,” a Tamil term of address, alongside Malay and English elements, highlights the multilingual and multicultural fabric of MaE. Such code-mixing is typical in informal spoken exchanges, where local terms are naturally embedded into everyday speech, reflecting both linguistic hybridity and social cohesion.

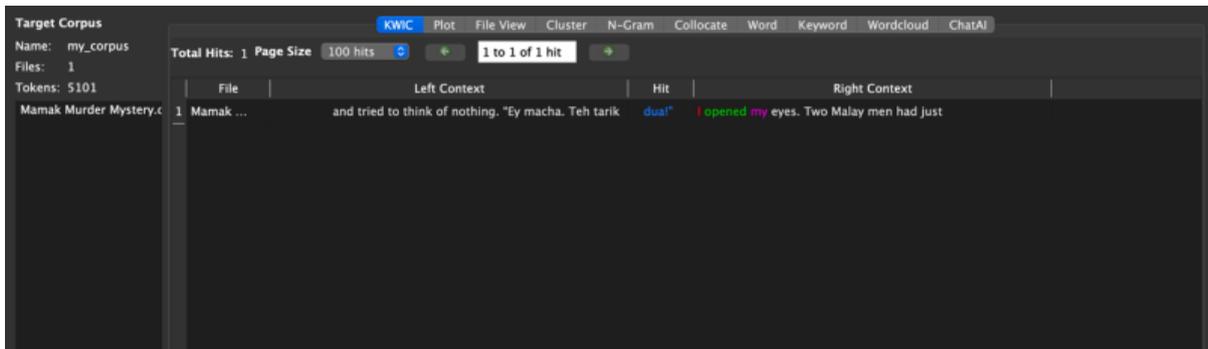


Figure 16. Concordance of “dua” and Its Social Associations

Figure 17 shows the item “B’rapa,” a localised variant of the Malay word *berapa* (meaning ‘how much’), which appears in the context of casual speech within the narrative. Its spelling reflects phonetic rendering and colloquial contraction, reinforcing the oral quality and authenticity of local dialogue. Although only occurring once, its presence exemplifies how MaE integrates Malay lexemes to reflect everyday multilingual interactions in MaE. The use of such forms contributes to the informal, localised tone of the text, while also functioning as a marker of socio-cultural familiarity.

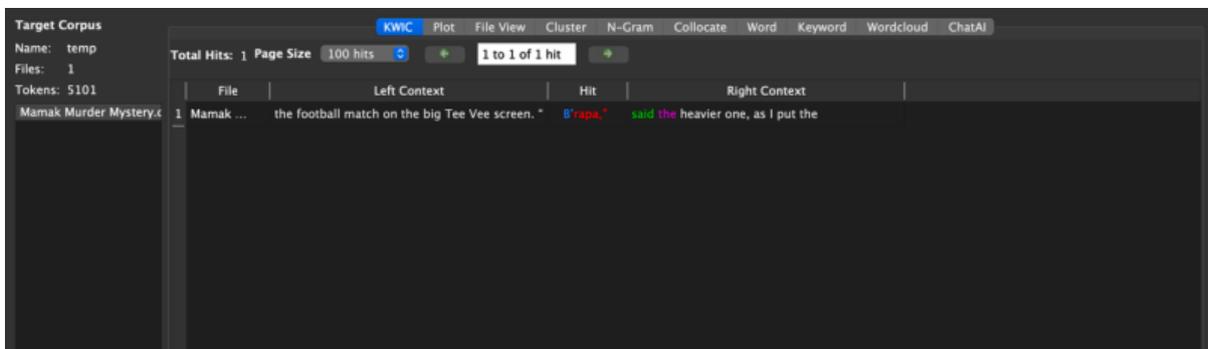


Figure 17. Concordance of “B’rapa” and Its Social Associations

Figure 18 shows the word “*tiga*,” which means ‘three’ in Malay, used in a simple monetary exchange. Similar to the earlier use of “*dua*” in Figure 16, this example illustrates the seamless integration of Malay numerals into English speech in informal Malaysian contexts. Rather than code-switching for emphasis, the speaker uses the Malay term as the default, reflecting how such borrowings are unmarked and culturally embedded. It underscores the fluid, multilingual nature of Male, where Malay vocabulary is naturally woven into everyday English discourse, especially in practical, localised situations.

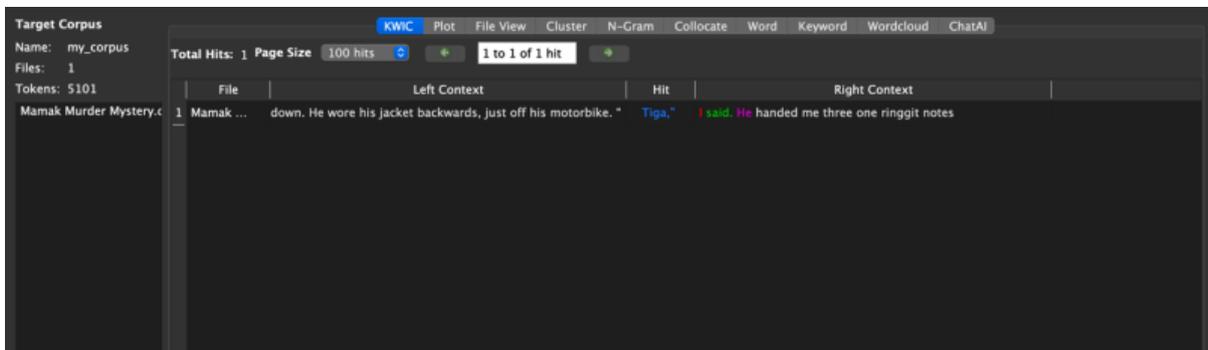


Figure 18. Concordance of “*Tiga*” and Its Social Associations

Figure 19 shows the term “Aunties,” which is used to describe a group of older Chinese women, dressed in “flowery polyester blouses.” In Male, auntie or aunty is a familiar, localised term used not only for actual relatives but also for older women in general, often as a sign of casual respect or endearment. Its usage here reflects both a cultural and linguistic norm, indexing age, ethnicity, and social roles within the Malaysian context. Like “*dua*” and “*tiga*,” this lexical choice is unmarked and naturalised, further illustrating how Male blends English with culturally specific meanings and local reference points, contributing to its distinctive identity.

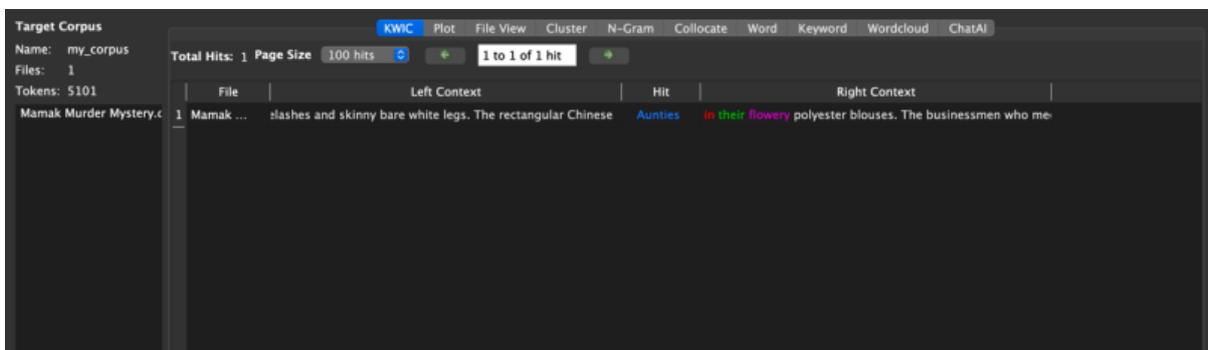


Figure 19. Concordance of “Aunties” and Its Social Associations

Figure 20 shows the expression “old *Pak Ciks*,” which in this context reflects the cultural blending and sociolinguistic texture of Male. The term *Pak Cik*, a Malay honorific meaning ‘uncle’ or referring to an older man, is combined with the English adjective “old,” forming a hybrid phrase. This demonstrates a common linguistic feature in Male: the integration of Malay kinship terms into English sentences. Here, “old *Pak Ciks* in checked sarongs” evokes a vivid local image that is both culturally specific and familiar to Malaysian readers. The use of this phrase without italics or glossing further implies that such borrowings are unmarked and widely understood, showcasing the seamless code-mixing characteristic of informal, localised Malaysian narratives.

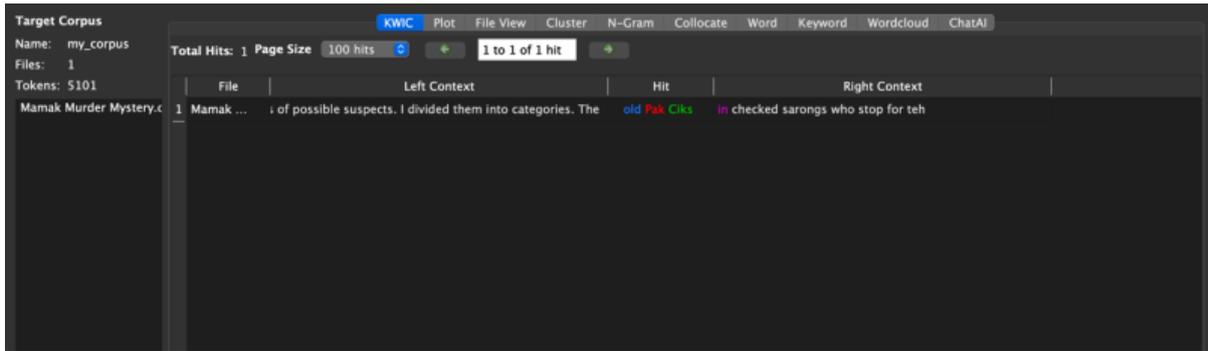


Figure 20. Concordance of “old *Pak Ciks*” and Its Social Associations

Figure 21 shows the phrase “checked sarongs,” which conjures a vivid visual of traditional male attire, specifically associated with older Malay men, or *Pak Ciks*, within a communal and religious context. The checked pattern, common in local sarongs, reflects a humble and rural aesthetic and signals cultural identity. By pairing it with the action “... stop for *teh tarik* after the mosque.” The narrative situates these men within a distinctly Malaysian Muslim routine, subtly reinforcing religious and ethnic associations. While the term “sarongs” may appear in English when referring to a long piece of cloth worn around the waist (Sarong, n.d.), its use here is deeply rooted in local culture. This instance of lexical borrowing is naturalised within MalE, showing how clothing, language and everyday practices are woven into culturally grounded storytelling.

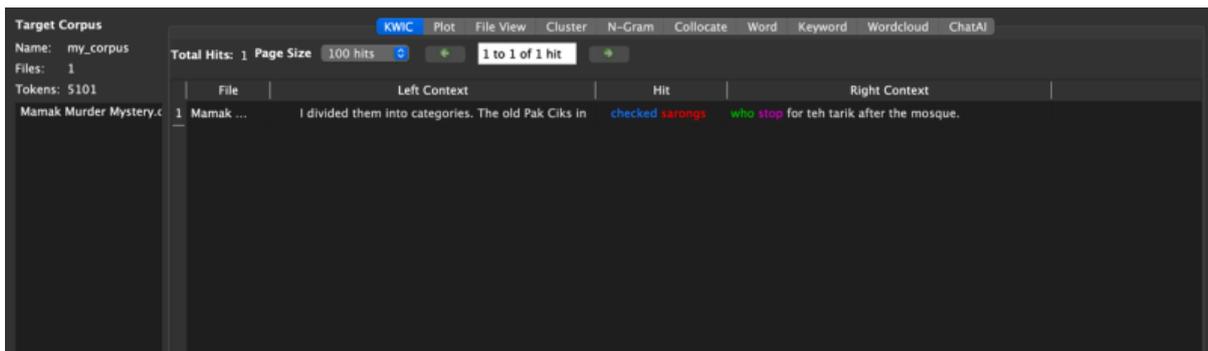


Figure 21. Concordance of “checked sarongs” and Its Social Associations

Figure 22 shows the phrase “*Indon* maids,” which in this extract is a colloquial and often controversial term used in Malaysia to refer to Indonesian domestic workers. While commonly heard in informal local discourse, “*Indon*” is considered pejorative or disrespectful by many Indonesians and has been criticised in both academic and diplomatic contexts. Its presence in the text underscores socio-economic hierarchies and attitudes within Malaysian society, particularly regarding migrant labour. The depiction of these maids “feeding small children” highlights their caregiving role, but also reflects how they are often invisibilised or reduced to functional roles. This instance, therefore, illustrates both linguistic localism and the embedded social commentary in MalE usage.

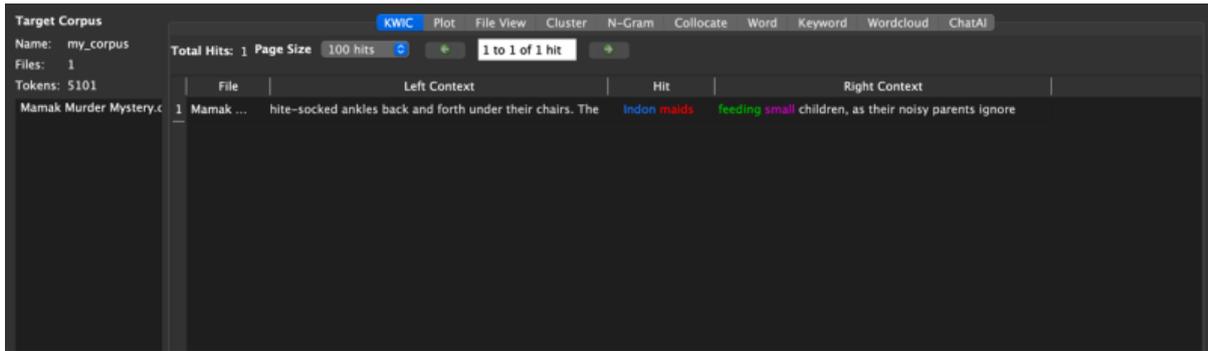


Figure 22. Concordance of “*Indon maids*” and Its Social Associations

Figure 23 illustrates the phrase “*thosai batter*,” reflecting the linguistic blending characteristic of MaE, where local culinary terms are seamlessly integrated into English syntax. “*Thosai*,” a localised spelling of the South Indian dish more widely known as “*dosa*,” is commonly used in Malaysia and Singapore, signifying both cultural familiarity and regional pronunciation. Paired with the standard English word “*batter*,” the phrase denotes the mixture used to make this fermented crepe, indicating everyday culinary knowledge shared among local readers. Its casual inclusion in the narrative suggests a normalised presence of Tamil-origin vocabulary in MaE, without the need for glossing or translation. This instance not only showcases lexical borrowing, but also reflects the way English in Malaysia accommodates and legitimises local cultural references, particularly in food-related contexts.

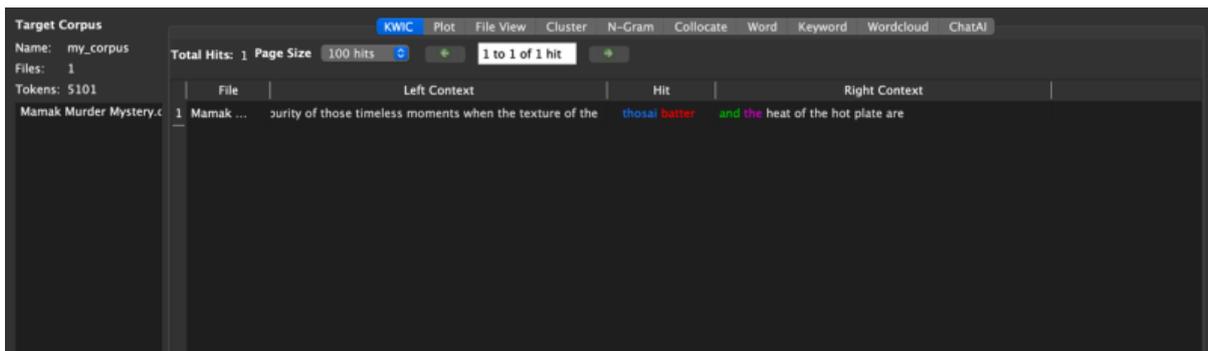


Figure 23. Concordance of “*thosai batter*” and Its Social Associations

Figure 24 highlights “*paper thosai*,” reflecting a similar pattern of local culinary embedding, as seen earlier with “*thosai batter*.” As a specific variation of *thosai*, its inclusion without explanation assumes shared cultural familiarity. This reinforces how Tamil-origin food terms are seamlessly integrated into MaE, highlighting linguistic localism through normalised references to everyday cuisine.

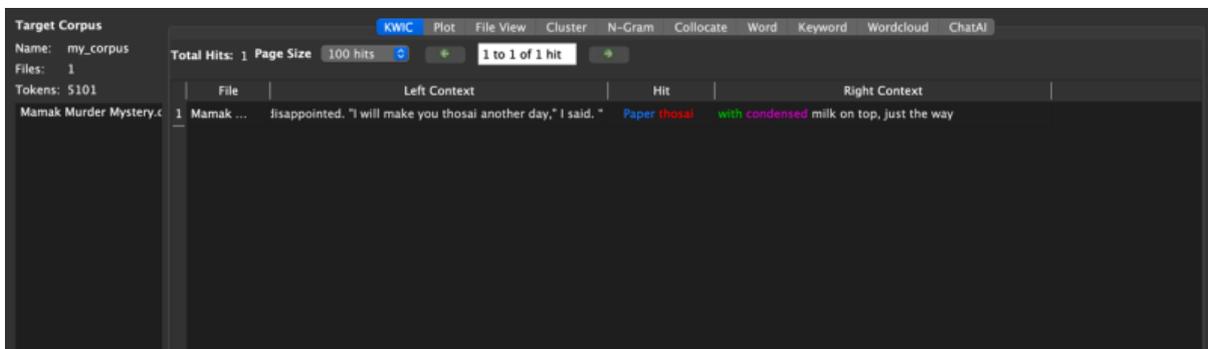


Figure 24. Concordance of “*paper thosai*” and Its Social Associations

Figure 25 shows the term “*roti canai*,” which appears in a matter-of-fact manner, continuing the trend seen with “*thosai* batter” and “paper *thosai*.” A staple of Malaysian cuisine, its unglossed presence further reflects the linguistic localisation of food-related terms in MalE. The verb “flipping” paired with it also conveys cultural specificity, anchoring the scene in a familiar mamak setting recognisable to local readers.

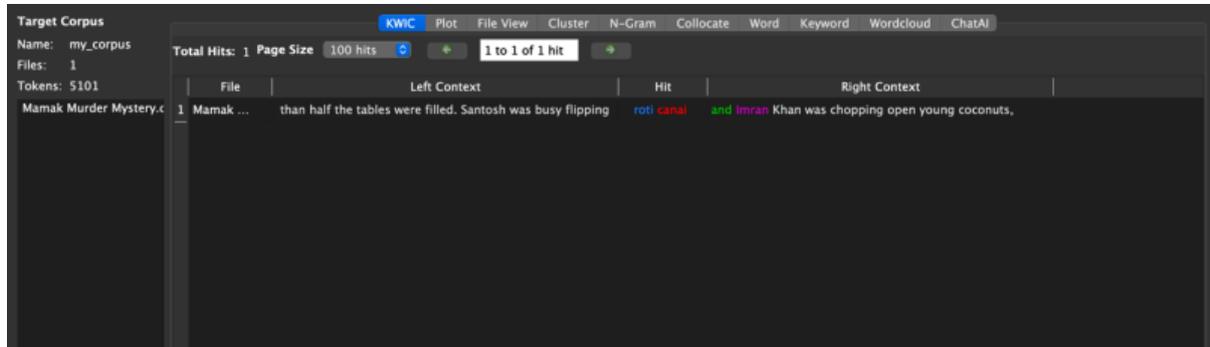


Figure 25. Concordance of “*roti canai*” and Its Social Associations

4.3 Framework-Based Analysis of MalE Vocabulary in de Faoite’s Mamak Murder Mystery

Throughout the following section, the analysis of MalE lexical features in the dataset is guided by Thirusanku and Melor’s (2014) classification of MalE lexical items (see Table 1). The findings demonstrate that the text incorporates features such as cultural loading, connotative borrowings, compounding, culinary loading, and pluralisation. These elements, mainly drawn from Malay and Tamil, play a crucial role in enriching the narrative while reflecting Malaysia’s multilingual and multicultural context. Rather than repeating earlier observations, this section frames the examples within a broader theoretical perspective, underscoring how they function as markers of local identity and social reality.

Cultural Loading

Drawing from Table 3, these culturally loaded lexical items, drawn predominantly from Malay and Tamil, reflect culturally specific references that are readily understood within the Malaysian context. Situated within Thirusanku and Melor’s (2014) framework, their recurrence in the text reinforces the culturally embedded nature of MalE lexis.

Table 3. The Use of Cultural Loading in de Faoite’s Mamak Murder Mystery

Category of Lexical Item	Item	Page
Cultural loading	<i>Pak Ciks</i>	61
	<i>sarongs</i>	61
	<i>tudungs</i>	61
	<i>Indon</i>	61
	<i>Ey</i>	62
	<i>macha</i>	62
	<i>ringgit</i>	63, 72
	<i>mamak</i>	63
	<i>Aiya</i>	66
	<i>haram</i>	66
	<i>Appa</i>	78

Connotative Borrowings

As shown in Table 4, many of the lexical items classified as connotative borrowings. These items carry associative meanings that extend beyond their literal definitions, conveying nuances of social roles, kinship, and local familiarity. Within Thirusanku and Melor's (2014) framework, their use in the text illustrates how MalE lexis draws on culturally resonant terms to express identity, intimacy, and community values.

Table 4. The Use of Connotative Borrowings in de Faoite's Mamak Murder Mystery

Category of Lexical Item	Item	Orthographic Variation	Page
Connotative borrowings	<i>Pak Ciks</i>	-	61
	<i>tudungs</i>	-	61
	<i>thosai</i>	-	61, 62, 69, 70
	Aunties	-	61
	Tee Vee	-	62, 63, 64, 70, 72, 74
	<i>macha</i>	-	62
	<i>dua</i>	-	62
	<i>B'rapa</i>	-	63
	<i>Tiga</i>	-	63
	uncle	Uncle; uncle	69, 70, 76
	<i>Appa</i>	-	78

Compounding

As shown in Table 5, many of the lexical items are classified as compound forms. These expressions combine English and locally meaningful terms, producing compounds that are contextually rich and culturally embedded. According to Dawson and Phelan (2016), the concept of compounded terms refers to "a process that creates new words not through the use of affixes but by combining two or more independent words" (p. 166). Within Thirusanku and Melor's (2014) framework, their presence in the text reflects how MalE incorporates everyday local references into English syntax, signalling cultural familiarity while maintaining intelligibility.

Table 5. The Use of Compounding in de Faoite's Mamak Murder Mystery

Category of Lexical Item	Item	Page
Compounding	Old <i>Pak Ciks</i>	61
	checked sarongs	61
	<i>Indon</i> maids	61
	<i>thosai</i> batter	62
	Paper <i>thosai</i>	70

Culinary Loading

As indicated in Table 6, several lexical items fall under the category of culinary loading. Terms such as "teh tarik," "thosai," and "roti canai" reflect Malaysia's rich gastronomic heritage. These items serve not only as cultural signifiers but also evoke sensory and communal experiences tied to Malaysian food culture. Within Thirusanku and Melor's (2014) framework, their inclusion in the text exemplifies how MalE draws on gastronomic vocabulary to anchor the narrative in a distinctively local setting while maintaining authenticity and relatability.

Table 6. The use of culinary loading in de Faoite’s Mamak Murder Mystery

Category of Lexical Item	Item	Orthographic Variation	Page
Culinary loading	<i>teh tarik</i>	<i>Teh tarik; teh tarik</i>	61, 62, 71
	<i>thosai</i>	-	61, 62, 69, 70
	<i>roti canai</i>	-	71

Pluralisation

As shown in Table 7, the study also identifies the use of pluralisation in terms like “*Pak Ciks*” and “*tudungs*,” where the suffix “-s” is added to non-English words to denote plurality. This adaptation not only aligns with English grammar rules but also retains the local essence of the borrowed terms. Such linguistic practices illustrate how ME blends structural elements of English with the lexicon of local languages to create a unique and meaningful discourse.

Table 7. The use of pluralisation in de Faoite’s Mamak Murder Mystery

Category of Lexical Item	Item	Page
Pluralisation	<i>Pak Ciks</i>	61
	<i>sarongs</i>	61
	<i>tudungs</i>	61

4.4 Linguistic Implications of MalE Lexical trends

A key finding is the systematic absence of glossing or italics. Unlike earlier postcolonial writing that foregrounds linguistic difference, Mamak Murder Mystery treats MalE lexemes as unremarkable. This unmarked usage signals lexical naturalisation and positions MalE as a default communicative resource rather than a stylistic deviation.

Lexical items function indexically to encode social relations. Kinship terms such as “uncle,” “Aunties,” and “*Appa*” signal age, respect, and familiarity, while culinary terms anchor interactions within recognisable Malaysian social spaces. Terms like “*Indon*” additionally index socio-economic hierarchies and ideological attitudes, illustrating how MalE lexis can carry evaluative and political meanings.

Due to its brevity, the short story intensifies sociolinguistic signalling. Each lexical choice performs substantial cultural work, compressing social meaning into minimal textual space. This supports the argument that short fiction constitutes a distinct site for examining linguistic enregisterment.

5. Conclusions

This study demonstrates that lexical features of Malaysian English (MalE) in de Faoite’s Mamak Murder Mystery function as naturalised, indexical resources rather than as decorative markers of local colour. Through their unmarked and un glossed use, these lexical items presuppose a shared linguistic repertoire between writer and reader, reinforcing the legitimacy of MalE within literary discourse. By conceptualising short fiction as a sociolinguistic micro-site, this study extends existing research on MalE lexical borrowing and naturalisation, and contributes to broader discussions on enregisterment and the development of World Englishes. It shows that short stories, despite their brevity, play a significant role in documenting and circulating localised linguistic norms.

The findings also point to several avenues for future research. One promising direction is the examination of MalE lexical trends across a larger corpus of contemporary Malaysian literature, including novels, short stories, and poetry, to identify recurring patterns and emergent innovations. Expanding the dataset would allow for a more comprehensive understanding of how MalE operates as

a resource for cultural expression across literary genres. In addition, future studies could explore the use of MalE in digital communication and media, such as social networking platforms and online storytelling, where lexical borrowing and code-mixing continue to evolve in response to new communicative environments.

Further interdisciplinary research may also investigate the sociolinguistic implications of MalE in educational contexts and identity formation, particularly among younger Malaysians. Comparative analyses between MalE and other regional varieties of English would shed light on how processes of borrowing, naturalisation, and hybridisation are shaped by distinct sociocultural dynamics. Finally, examining how MalE lexical items are received and interpreted by non-Malaysian audiences could provide valuable insights into the global circulation of localised Englishes and contribute to a more nuanced understanding of World Englishes in literary contexts. Together, these directions underscore the richness and adaptability of MalE as a dynamic and integral component of Malaysia's linguistic landscape.

6. Acknowledgements

This research was undertaken independently. I acknowledge the dedication and perseverance required throughout the process, and I am grateful for the opportunity to engage in this scholarly work.

7. References

- Azirah Hashim. (2007). The Use of Malaysian English in Creative Writing. *Asian Englishes*, 10(2), 30-44. doi: 10.1080/13488678.2007.10801211
- Baskaran, L. (2005). *A Malaysian English primer: Aspects of Malaysian English features*. University of Malaya Press.
- Bamgbose, A. (1998). Torn between the norms: Innovations in World Englishes. *World Englishes*, 17(1), 1-14.
- Bullard, E. (2025). Glocalization. EBSCO Research Starters. <https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/business-and-management/glocalization>
- Dawson, H. C. & Phelan, M. (2016). *Language Files (12th ed.)*. The Ohio State University Press.
- Dessi, U., & Sedda, F. (2020). Glocalization and everyday life. *Glocalism: Journal of Culture, Politics and Innovation*, (3). doi: 10.12893/gjcp.2020.3.14
- Hajar Abdul Rahim. (2014). Malaysian English Lexis: Postcolonial and Beyond. In Hajar Abdul Rahim & Shakila Abdul Manan (Eds), *English in Malaysia: Postcolonial and Beyond* (p. 35-53). Peter Lang. doi: 10.3726/978-3-0351-0696-1
- Kachru, B. B. (1985). Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the Outer Circle. *English in the World* (pp. 11-30). Cambridge University Press.
- Muhammad Yaqoub, Gao, Z., Ye, X., Al-Kassimi, K., Chen, Z., & Wang, H. (2023). Three decades of glocalization research: A bibliometric analysis. *Cogent Social Sciences*, 9(2), 1–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2023.2245239>
- Pillai, S., Menon, P. S., & Vengadasamy, R. (2016). The marginalisation of Malaysian texts in the English language curriculum and its impact on social cohesion in Malaysian classrooms. *Kajian Malaysia*, 34(2), 25-58. <http://dx.doi.org/10.21315/km2016.34.2.2>
- Pillai, S. (2018). Code-switching and lexical borrowing in Malaysian English. *English Today*, 34(1), 45-52.
- Platt, J., Weber, H., & Ho, M. (1984). *The New Englishes*. Routledge.
- Schneider E. W. (2007). *Postcolonial English: Varieties around the world*. Cambridge University Press.

- Tan, S. I. (2009). Lexical Borrowing in Malaysian English: Influences of Malay. *Journal in English Lexicology*, 3, 11-62. doi: 10.4000/lexis.629
- Thirusanku, T., & Melor, M. (2014). Lexical borrowing in Malaysian English: A sociolinguistic perspective. *World Englishes*, 33(2), 112-118.
- Zaamah Mohd Nor, Norazrin Zamri & Su'ad Awab (2015). Lexical Features of Malaysian English in a Local English-Language Movie, Ah Lok Café. *Procedia – Social and behavioral Sciences*, 208, 282-299. doi: 10.1016/j.sbspro.2015.11.204
- Zenner, E., Rosseel, L. & Calude, A. S. (2019). The social meaning potential of loanwords: Empirical explorations of lexical borrowing as expression of (social) identity. *AMPERSAND – An International Journal of General and Applied Linguistics*, 6, 1-4. doi: 10.1016/j.amper.2019.100055