

# ASIAN OR WESTERN REALITIES?

## Collocations in Singaporean-Malaysian English

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### 1 Introduction

As contentious as it may seem, it is often said that there are both ‘Western’ and ‘Asian’ realities and values. If true, such a distinction must come through the use of language (since language is a mirror of reality), of which collocations or multi-word patterning of different single concepts represent one of the most common means of expressing the reality and values inherent in a speech community. In this exploratory study, I hope to examine the notion of lexical and grammatical collocations in Singaporean and Malaysian English (representing the ‘New’ Englishes of ‘Asian’ realities and values) vis-à-vis British, American and Australian Englishes (representing the ‘Old’ Englishes of ‘Western’ realities and values)<sup>1</sup>.

Following the principle of linguistic economy, distinctive collocational patterns are assumed to have come about because they meet the needs of a particular speech community; they express the reality of English use for the speech community concerned. The investigation of such linguistic patterns leads to, among others, a better understanding of the nature of intra-vis-à-vis international communication as well as the fostering of a common world culture that is reflected in a global English dictionary (such as Pearsall 1998).

The central means of establishing and comparing these collocations is to utilize corpus-based methods for the study of current newspaper corpora, which can be said to represent the language of everyday reading, and thus of everyday reality (and values). Two important electronic sources of evidence are therefore used: (1) the English broadsheets and tabloids of Singapore

and Malaysia, and (2) the *Collins-Cobuild Bank of English* which contains (among its vast sources of linguistic evidence) contemporary British, American and Australian newspapers.

## **2 Traditional linguistic motivations for the study of collocations**

From a linguistic perspective, the study of collocations finds its motivation from the fact that there are recurring clusters of words in language. Such clusters of words are variously known as ‘expressions, fixed combinations, formulaic units, larger-than-word units, lexical phrases, lexicalized sentence stems, multi-word lexical units (MLU), multiple-word units, patterned speech, patterns, phrases, prefabricated speech, ready-made utterances, recurrent combinations, stock phrases . . . [and] . . . word-like units’ (Kjellmer 1994: xi).

However, a ‘collocation’, as a recurring cluster of words, is not the same as an ‘idiom’, which is really a fixed expression. Jackson (1988: 96) uses the term ‘collocation’ to refer to the combination of words that have a certain ‘mutual expectancy’, and his definition therefore excludes clichés which are ‘ossified collocations’, as it does of proverbs and idioms which are fixed expressions. There is always some degree of choice, however limited, where collocations are concerned.

Benson et al (1997: ix) further divide collocations into their lexical and grammatical components:

Grammatical collocations consist of a dominant word – noun, adjective/participle, verb – and a preposition or a grammatical construction. Lexical collocations, on the other hand, do not have a dominant word; they have structures such as the following: verb + noun, adjective + noun, noun + verb, noun + noun, adverb + adjective, adverb + verb.

For this study, I use the term ‘collocation’ to refer to the Firthian notion of the habitual co-occurrence of a group of words (Sinclair 1991; Ooi 1998: 76–77); also, following Benson et al, it is useful to distinguish between grammatical and lexical collocations.

In relation to single lexical items, Pawley and Syder (1983) claim that they are much smaller in number than the thousands of ‘morphologically complex lexical items’. Indeed, if Pawley and Syder (1983: 208) are right, ‘collocations . . . form a high proportion of the fluent stretches of speech heard in everyday conversation’. Also, from a learner perspective, Benson *et al.* (1997: ix) are of the opinion that collocations are of immense value to the learner in their quest to achieve a mastery of English. Learners become fluent and accurate in both speech and writing by being able to combine

words into phrases, sentences and texts successfully. This view is consonant with that of Nattinger and DeCarrico (1992) who point to the importance of ‘prefabricated language’ for the learner to master.

### 3 ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Englishes

While lexical and grammatical collocations are fairly well-documented for the native context (e.g. Kjellmer 1994; Benson et al 1997), the identification and documentation of stable collocations specific to ‘nativized’/‘institutionalized’ contexts is a linguistic task in its own right. Kachru (1986), in his seminal work, points to the separate development between ‘Inner Circle’ varieties of English (such as British and American English) and ‘Outer Circle’ varieties of English (such as Singaporean and Malaysian English). An Inner Circle variety of English comes about not only because it is the traditional base of English (as the United Kingdom is) but also when large groups of people from the traditional base migrate to another setting (e.g. Canada, Australia, New Zealand), settle down and interact with the indigenous peoples of the new community. By contrast, an Outer Circle variety has largely come about as a result of colonization, during which the English language first spread through the education system. However, the colonizers did not stay long enough to maintain their linguistic interaction with the indigenous community/communities. Over time, the English language, once ‘transplanted’ into the new context, took root and blossomed into a distinctive shape. To extend beyond this ‘tree’ metaphor, the new English became ‘nativized’ or ‘institutionalized’ through its increasing use in a usually multi-lingual and multi-cultural setting.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, in both Singapore and Malaysia, English is used as an everyday language (in the domains of diplomacy, education, science, technology, government, etc.). Because English is used so extensively in these contexts, it is not surprising to find the emergence of a distinctive way of language patterning. However, it can be claimed that, as a result of language planning policies implemented in the 1980s, the two varieties have begun to diverge: it is a fact that English in Singapore is used in more domains than it is used in Malaysia. English would appear to be the *de facto* national and link language in Singapore, while Malay is both the *de jure* and *de facto* national language in Malaysia. While Malaysia comprises approximately 50% Malays, 30% Chinese and 20% Indians, Singapore consists of 76% Chinese, 15% Malays and 6% Indians.

#### 3.1 Asian vs Western ‘realities’ and ‘values’

Like many people, I do wonder whether “claims about Asianness and the Asian way, and about the contrasts between Asian and other societies, are customarily rhetorical or anecdotal . . . [since] . . . not very much has been

done to try to establish with any modest degree of social-science measurement exactly what the differences may be” (Patten 1998: 164–165). Even Mr Lee Kuan Yew, the former Prime Minister of Singapore and an advocate of ‘Asian values’ (or more correctly, for him, ‘Confucian values’), has recently acknowledged that there is no single value system which encompasses all Asian societies. Instead, for him, common to these Asian values are principles such as kinship and family responsibilities. While such principles among the varied Asian civilizations might still arguably be universal in intent, they have developed differently according to the needs of the society concerned. In Singapore, for instance, the abstract concept of family is translated into a working economic unit, where resources are not only pooled among family members but also enhanced by the Government. An example is the use of the *Medisave* account, which is a component of a working Singaporean’s compulsory pension savings plan. Such an account can be used not only to pay for one’s own medical expenses but also those of one’s siblings, parents and other immediate family members (provided of course there are enough funds in one’s account for such a generous undertaking!). Equally, tax rebates are given to a person whose parents or grandparents live with them. Such concepts, argues Mr Lee, do not seem to find their equivalence in the West, thus confirming his thesis regarding the greater commitment and responsibility towards the family unit. (*The Straits Times*, September 28, 1998)

Much more space can be devoted to the rhetorical and ideological underpinnings of ‘Asian values’, but this study will look more at whether there are Asian ‘realities’ expressed through language. Let us therefore adapt Patten (1998) for a (linguistic) ‘measurement’ to see whether there are distinctive lexical and grammatical collocations specific to a given speech community, thus giving rise to these realities of language use.

#### 4 The data

Why use corpus-based data for the study of collocations? A corpus can extend (or contradict) one’s intuitions or observations about how English is used; moreover, the linguistic claims asserted of a corpus can be verified and checked by others. For instance, while Mel’cuk (1995: 188) asserts that tea without milk cannot be called *black tea* in English (but *black coffee* is of course possible), scores of people in Singapore and Malaysia have been happily doing just that. Indeed, a recently published Oxford dictionary (Pearsall 1998: 183), said to be based primarily on the latest corpus evidence afforded by the British National Corpus (Aston and Burnard 1998), attests to the existence of *black tea*. This term, besides meaning tea without milk, also means ‘tea of the most usual type, that is fully fermented before drying’. Therefore, linguistic statements, about the possible/impossible co-occurrence of two lexical items, can more confidently be made only by recourse to an adequate evidence base.

Table 1 Lexico-statistics for ST94, NST94, NP94 (up to only 10-letter words).

	ST94	NST94	NP94
Bytes	114,342,656	574,479,66	32,685,088
Tokens	18,933,398	85,776,288	5,558,963
Types	137,946	301,133	73,325
Type/token ratio	0.73	0.35	1.32
Standardised t/t ratio	47.15	42.68	47.01
Average word length	4.71	4.61	4.51
Sentences	900,575	3,513,551	338,600
Sentence length	20.97	29.97	
Standardised sentence length	12.47	29.97	11.32
1-letter words	698,337	2,883,140	239,043
2-letter words	3,210,862	17,779,742	934,761
3-letter words	3,634,280	15,946,017	1,125,099
4-letter words	3,040,570	12,850,157	978,924
5-letter words	2,164,706	9,014,098	658,084
6-letter words	1,670,860	7,455,264	489,774
7-letter words	1,587,102	6,561,794	440,628
8-letter words	1,101,535	5,358,401	276,780
9-letter words	847,088	3,648,617	201,175
10-letter words	475,333	2,089,149	110,067

Ideally, a corpus should be maximally representative and includes a judicious sampling of the range of genres, speech and writing styles across the speech community. In the absence of a large corpus suitable for the study of distinctive collocations in Singaporean-Malaysian English, the next best recourse is to use large newspaper corpora. Newspaper corpora can be said to represent the language of everyday reading of a speech community and, *a fortiori*, might be said to indicate the central and typical collocations employed in the linguistic context concerned.

Table 1 shows the 3 datasets used for the Singaporean-Malaysian English (henceforth abbreviated 'SME') component of this study: the 1994 edition of the *Straits Times* (i.e. Singapore's English broadsheet, abbreviated as ST94), the *New Straits Times* (i.e. Malaysia's English broadsheet, abbreviated as NST94) and the *New Paper* (i.e. Singapore's English tabloid, abbreviated as NP94).<sup>3</sup> The reason for choosing 1994 as the year for this study is that these files are the latest that I have been able to obtain from the publishing companies concerned.

As Table 1 shows, the size of Malaysia's broadsheet, NST94, seems inordinately disproportionate to that of Singapore's dailies. This problem has come about as a conversion of the Malaysian text file from its original proprietary format, which gives rise to a large number of formatting codes (see Section 5, Figure 2, for codes such as 'TX', 'LD', 'HL' and 'TZ').

Table 2 Composition of the Bank of English.

<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>Millions of words</i>	<i>Corpus</i>
Indy	19452295	BR Independent broadsheet
Oznews	33378314	Australian newspapers
Brephem	4721964	BR ephemera
Brmags	30137896	BR popular magazines
Brspok	20181050	BR informal transcribed talk
Usephem	1255655	US ephemera
Bbc	18522600	BR BBC World Service radio
Guard	24261095	BR Guardian broadsheet
Newsci	6087440	BR New Scientist magazine
Npr	22259602	US National Public Radio
Brbooks	42127619	BR miscellaneous books
Usbooks	32656385	US miscellaneous books
Usnews	8578632	US newspapers
Econ	12125208	BR Economist financial magazine
Times	20950497	BR Times broadsheet
Today	26606537	BR Today tabloid
Sunnow	5824476	BR Sun newspaper

However, these codes do not cause problems where concordancing and word-search are concerned. While the statistics presented here should be taken with a pinch of salt, they do nevertheless confirm one's expectations that the English broadsheets of Singapore and Malaysia (i.e. *ST94* and *NST94*) are proportionally larger in size and have more complex word tokens and types than tabloids such as *NP94*.

The *Collins-Cobuild Bank of English* (abbreviated as BoE) comprises a number of British, American and Australian newspapers, as shown in Table 2.<sup>4</sup>

## 5 Analyzing the data

The SME dataset was processed using *WordSmith Tools* (Version 2.0), an integrated suite of programs written by Mike Scott for looking at how words behave in texts. In addition to concordancing, *WordSmith* has 'Show Collocate' and 'Collocate Clustering' features for the node concerned, within a span that can be set by the user.

Thus, to take the node-word *curry*, a popular dish in both East and West, Figure 1 shows an edited concordance of 15 lines (due to space constraints) is obtained for *ST94*. A cursory examination of Figure 1 shows (among others) the distinctive collocation *fish head* preceding *curry*. From personal experience, I know that Westerners usually throw out the head of the fish, so it would be bizarre (at least from their point of view) to cook such a

Sunday Mandarin oranges with your **curry** fish head Sumathi Vaidy  
 colour, resembling the colour of **curry** powder, the coffee has  
 insists that he will persist with **curry** fish-head whenever he is  
 He has been selling fish-head **curry** for the past 10 years.  
 famous as chilli crab or fish head **curry**. The competition is  
 is a good contract to the other **curry** or gravy dishes. It  
 foodie who savoured his fish head **curry** said it stands out from  
 of Arts Watch Shakespeare over **curry** puff and coffee Ang E  
 with canned beef and chicken **curry**. Prior to that they  
 thrill to fish eyeballs in assam **curry** will look down their  
 green pepper. Toppings for the **curry** version can include  
 bottle soy sauce, the first to can **curry** chicken, the first to  
 packaging charges include selling **curry** chicken in microwaveable  
 of Asian dishes form fish-head **curry** to tom yam soup. Rose  
 Sprinkle in half the amount of **curry** powder and stir to mix

Figure 1 Edited concordance listing of *curry*, from the ST94 corpus.

as ayam perick Terengganu, rendang, **curry** kepala ikan and ikan  
 on offer for customers. Fish heead **curry** is served in typical  
 second was Chew Kim Lean with her **curry** kapitan ayam. Third  
 (END) ..TX..LD: THE rich aroma of **curry** was thick in the air  
 contributed mainly by sales of **curry** powder. Its projected  
 products which span three lines **curry** and soup powders, items  
 can be seen serving fish head **curry** on banana leaf to  
 and his very own special chicken **curry** and serawa. Classes  
 ginger chicken, lobster meat, **curry** powder fish and  
 Method 1. Marinate spare ribs with **curry** powder, rose wine,  
 rendang tok, fish-head curry, **curry** ikan tongkol, dalca,  
 garlic, dried chillies, turmeric, **curry** leaves and coriander  
 Some varieties, including the **curry** chicken and chocolate  
 94085 ..ED: 2\* ..HL: Fish head **curry** .. HL: .. IN: TZ ..LE  
 of "ang koo", "nasi kunyit" and **curry** chicken. Besides gifts

Figure 2 Edited concordance listing of *curry*, from the NST94 corpus.

curry. But in both Singapore and Malaysia (see Figure 2), this item is considered a delicacy among both the Malays and the Indians. It probably has its origins in a part of South India and taken to both Malaysia and Singapore by immigrants.

Now consider Figure 2, an edited concordance listing of *curry* of (again) 15 lines, taken from NST94.

Comparing both Figures 1 and 2, one sees that this dish is also very popular in Malaysia. There is also an indication that Malay is the dominant substrate language influencing the ME variety. For instance, in the first line of the concordance, *fish head curry* is termed *curry kepala ikan* (Malay *kepala*, 'head'; *ikan*, 'fish'), where there is a tendency not only to place the noun premodifier after its head (as in Malay) but also for code-mixing. This

Table 3 Clustering of some top collocates for *curry X* in the SME dataset.

ST94	Freq.	NST94	Freq.	NP94	Freq.
<i>X powder</i>	<b>15</b>	<i>X powder</i>	<b>69</b>	<i>chicken X</i>	<b>8</b>
<i>chicken X</i>	12	<i>chicken X</i>	59	<i>chicken X</i>	7
<i>fish head</i>	9	<i>fish head</i>	49	<i>fish head</i>	7
<i>fish-head</i>	9	<i>fish-head</i>	39	<i>fish-head</i>	6
<i>X puffs</i>	5	<i>X puffs</i>	23	<i>X puffs</i>	5
<i>fishhead X</i>	5	<i>fishhead X</i>	16	<i>fishhead X</i>	3
<i>green X</i>	5	<i>green X</i>	15	<i>green X</i>	3

observation also finds support in the placing of *kapitan ayam* (roughly ‘Captain’s chicken’) after the node word. In the SE variety, there is less of such a tendency to be influenced by the Malay substrate in terms of code-mixing.

To confirm this manual ‘impressionistic’ ocular scan of the concordances in Figures 1 and 2, one can use the ‘collocate clustering’ feature of *WordSmith* tools to obtain the relevant clustering. Table 3 shows the ranking of a 2-cluster significant collocate for ‘curry’, excluding verbs and proper names with the same form, in the SME dataset.

Consistently, ‘fish head’, ‘fish-head’ or ‘fishhead’ rank among the highest collocates for ‘curry’. There is also some evidence concerning the placement of the noun premodifier after its head, e.g. the term *curry chicken*, instead of the more usual *chicken curry*, occurs more in the *NST* corpus.

In contrast to the SME data, the BoE, under the ‘brmags’ (British Magazine) corpus, has only 1 example which is listed as ‘*Singapore’s fish-head curry mix*’. However, while this particular collocate does not occur together with *curry*, the latter term occurs no fewer than 1007 times in the BoE. Further, using the ‘Collocates’ option available in the BoE, the most frequent collocates before/after the noun are seen to be ‘powder’ (143 instances), ‘chicken’ (72 instances), ‘sauce’ (64 instances), ‘paste’ (63 instances), ‘thai’ (52 instances) and ‘green’ (32 instances).

In concluding this section, we may say that the term *fish head curry* in English reflects the cultural fondness that both Singaporeans and Malaysians have for the dish. However, it is entirely possible that some Western cultures also have this dish which, in any case, does not seem to be expressed in English.

### 5.1 Hard measurable evidence in SME and BoE

Using the methodology outlined in the preceding section, I will illustrate the application of such a method of analysis to 10 lexical items, chosen for their supposedly cultural distinctiveness.

5.1.1 *Filial piety*

The first example is the notion of *filial piety* which does not seem to be very much a coded item in contemporary corpus-based English dictionaries (such as Pearsall 1998, Sinclair 1995). However, having said this, both *filial* and *piety* do get listed individually in these dictionaries. Higgleton and Ooi (1997), which shows how Singaporean-Malaysian English can be incorporated into a standard learner's dictionary without a loss of international intelligibility and standards, is probably one of the very few recent dictionaries that have this term.

*Filial piety* is said to originate from Confucius himself and is probably equivalent to the biblical injunction to 'honour thy father and thy mother'. From the Confucian point of view, honouring one's parents brings with it the attendant duties and responsibilities of taking care of them with reverence. Thus, in the SME data, there are 142, 53 and 36 occurrences of the term in *ST94*, *NST94* and *NP94* respectively. When the BoE is examined, the term is listed 6 times in 'econ', 9 times in 'brbooks', 6 times in 'usbooks', 3 times in 'guard', once in 'indy', 'times', 'npr', 'brmags' and 'oznews' respectively. Considering the size and range available in the Bank of English, the 29 occurrences of *filial piety* do not indicate that it is of major social prominence in today's Western societies. However, on further examination, the collocates of the 147 occurrences of *filial* include (besides *piety*) the following: *duty* (14), *love* (13), *devotion* (9), *loyalty* (9), *obedience* (6), *duties* (4), *generation* (4), *bond* (4), *relationship* (4), *cannibalism* (5), *responsibility* (3) and *affection* (3).<sup>5</sup> If *piety* is taken as the node word, then there are 551 instances, with the following significant collocates: *filial* (29), *religious* (16), *personal* (15), *catholic* (11), *traditional* (11), *profound*, *spiritual* (6) and *Confucian* (5). It would thus appear that, while the term *filial piety* in the BoE does not occur relatively as frequent as it does in the SME data, the notion is found collectively in the collocates just mentioned. Hence, it would be difficult to suggest that *filial piety* is exclusively an Oriental notion.

Notwithstanding this, *filial* does not seem to collocate much with *piety*, as evidenced by the absence of the term *filial piety* in recent Western-based English dictionaries (e.g. Neufeldt 1996, Procter 1995, Pearsall 1998, Robinson 1996, Sinclair 1995). An exception is Costello (1995: 1023), which defines it as the 'dutiful respect or regard for parents, homeland, etc'. More commonly, textual examples of the term nowadays are almost always directly connected with East Asian (Oriental) communities, including the Chinese community in both Singapore and Malaysia.<sup>6</sup>

Let us now turn to the related notion of *filial responsibility*. The term occurs only 3 times in the entire 323 million-word BoE corpus, from which the following statement is obtained: "the idea that the modern American family abandons its old is a myth. . . . Elaine Brody in a major research study reported that the granddaughter's generation has a continuing strong sense of

*filial responsibility*". This statement therefore seems to indicate that the term is not unfamiliar in an Occidental context. From all Oriental perspective, this alternative term *filial responsibility* (in preference to *filial piety*) seems to be catching on in Singapore, because it transcends ethnicity and race, applying not only to Chinese families but also to Malays and Indians who share a similar economic duty. In 1994, *filial responsibility* occurred 24, 0 and 12 times in the *ST*, *NST* and *NP* corpora respectively. While *filial responsibility* does not occur at all in the *NST* corpus, a closer examination of *filial piety* suggests that even Malay writers in Malaysia use the term to describe the need for this value among the Malays, i.e. unlike SE, the term *filial piety* (in contrast to *filial responsibility*) in ME seems to be used irrespective of ethnicity and race.

### 5.1.2 Killer litter

Let us now turn to the term *killer litter*, which in Singapore refers to used things or dangerous objects (including sewing machines) thrown out from a high-rise building, endangering the lives of passers-by below. In Singapore, a person found guilty of throwing such litter can be fined and imprisoned. In 1994, the term occurred 12, 0 and 4 times in the *ST*, *NST* and *NP* corpora respectively. As expected, the term does not occur in the BoE at all. Indeed, the term reflects the concern with this social menace in a high-rise, high-density living society: Singapore comprises only about 500 sq. km. Thus, *killer litter* implies not only that the litter can be killing, but the person who does the act is a killer.

### 5.1.3 Urine detector

Another unusual lexical item is *urine detector*, which occurs 2, 0 and 1 times in *ST94*, *NST94*, and *NP94* respectively. Predictably, the BoE does not have any occurrence of this item. While one might wonder whether this term has anything to do with urinalysis, it actually refers to a sensor inside a lift which, when someone urinates inside it, triggers an alarm and traps the offender in the elevator until the police arrive. Again, one can attribute the prevalence of this item in Singapore to a desire for more effective and technological means for catching social offenders.

### 5.1.4 Corrective Work Order/CWO

In the same vein, the terms *Corrective Work Order* and *CWO* seem to be exclusively SE. For *Corrective Work Order*, the *ST* corpus has 10, the *NST* 1 (but in a report of an event in Singapore), and the *NP* 2 occurrences respectively; its *CWO* variant finds 21, 0 and 2 occurrences respectively. The *CWO* is a term which refers to a court sentence in which offenders who

litter have to clean up litter in public places; repeat offenders wear a bright yellow jacket embossed with the term ‘CWO’. Offenders may also find the media showing their act of compliance with the work order as well in order to shame them. Similar to the term ‘corrective training’ which is used in ‘core’ English for young offenders, the term *corrective work order* is probably coined to reform litterbugs, who of course can include mature members of society. Again, by shaming and getting litterbugs to pick up other people’s litter, the authorities obviously hope that this will be an effective means of reducing the incidence of littering. This term does not occur in the BoE at all; litterbugs in the West are made either to pay a fine or serve a jail sentence, but not sent for ‘corrective training’ of the type described.

### 5.1.5 *Drug vs dadah*

Turning to the notion of substance abuse, there is a preference in both the BoE and SE for such terms as *drug addiction* and *drug addicts*. By contrast, ME has a clear preference for the term *dadah* and its collocates. Table 4 substantiates this claim, and the occurrence of *dadah addict* in the *ST* can be attributed to the syndication of news reports from Malaysia; there a few pages of daily special coverage on Malaysia in the *ST* paper. The figures point to the claim that *dadah* is very much used in ME, the term being a borrowing from Malay.

In ME, *dadah* is preferred to *drugs* because the Malay term refers specifically to narcotic drugs, whereas the English term *drugs* is perceived as ambiguous (since it can also refer to pharmaceutical products or life-saving medicine).

### 5.1.6 *Grassroots leader*

*Grassroots leader* is a term which is said to be exclusive to SE, and it refers to a person who is appointed by the Singapore government to a community,

Table 4 Occurrences of collocates of *dadah* and *drug* in the SME dataset.

<i>Lexical item</i>	ST94	NST94	NP94
<i>Dadah addicts</i>	2	687	0
<i>Drug addicts</i>	197	248	76
<i>Dadah addiction</i>	0	190	0
<i>Drug addiction</i>	67	120	20
<i>Dadah addict</i>	67	120	20
<i>Drug addict</i>	36	57	33
<i>Dadah pushers</i>	0	59	0
<i>Dadah pusher</i>	0	20	0
<i>Dadah abuse</i>	0	289	1

Table 5 Occurrences of *grassroots leader(s)* in the SME dataset.

<i>Lexical item</i>	ST94	NST94	NP94
<i>Grassroots leaders</i>	341	4	22
<i>Grassroots leader</i>	55	1	7

and liaises between the community and the government. While this term does not occur in the BoE, Table 5 indicates that the term does get used in ME, albeit infrequently.

On closer inspection of the use of the term in ME, there are concordance lines like the following:

1. *Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad will attend a meeting with 1500 Barisan Nasional grassroots leaders during his visit here on Monday.*
2. *Samy Vellu, a grassroots leader found himself out in the cold.*

Both Dr Mahathir and Samy Vellu are well-known Malaysian politicians, and so this evidence indicates that the term does sometimes get used in the Malaysian context, contradicting one's prior expectations that this term is an exclusively SE one. Nevertheless, the evidence does show that the term is overwhelmingly used as a collective noun in SE.

#### 5.1.7 *Normal stream*

There are 45, 0 and 33 instances of *normal stream* in the ST94, NST94 and NP94 corpora respectively. There is only one instance in the BoE (in the *Independent* newspaper), its use being the following:

The normal stream of early-morning press conferences attacking the Government has slowed to a trickle.

However, this rare item in the BoE has a different meaning in the Singapore context. It is a part of Singapore's competitive educational 'streaming' process where pupils are selected, on the basis of their school results, to go to the Gifted, Express, Normal or Technical Streams. Thus, a pupil who gets to go to the 'Normal' Stream is actually less than normal and is regarded as being merely average.

#### 5.1.8 *Neighbourhood school*

This term, in core or standard English, should just mean what it denotes, ie. a school in the vicinity without the connotation that it is also average in

substantially. The average **neighbourhood school**, such as they can see." As a **neighbourhood school** with a catchment school, be it an elite or a **neighbourhood school**. So, don't put is nothing to stop any **neighbourhood school** from becoming a to pull up a struggling **neighbourhood school** could be a zero so that instead of a **neighbourhood school's** gain, it could be Primary example of good **neighbourhood school** Forum Type Letter schools. Firstly, a **neighbourhood school** is as good as the On the flip side, a **neighbourhood school** is not bad as what Valley Primary as a good **neighbourhood school**. Last year, the is possibly the only **neighbourhood school** to have tied up Xin is possibly the only **neighbourhood school** to have tied up primary school, a typical **neighbourhood school**, in Yishun. The ago. He had moved to the **neighbourhood school** from Raffles Junior

Figure 3 Edited concordance listing of *neighbourhood school*, from ST94.

child to be educated in his **neighbourhood school** with his peers. He never went back to his **neighbourhood school** or played from their homes than their **neighbourhood school**. The average all their education in a **neighbourhood school** whereas many a language class in their **neighbourhood school** are not required bright boy in the deprived **neighbourhood school** would be severe was odd-girl-out at her **neighbourhood school**, her parents who are able to go to a **neighbourhood school** with many of Nation Conservatism, the **neighbourhood school** and the local

Figure 4 Edited concordance listing of *neighbourhood school*, from the BoE.

standing (as it usually is the case in SE). As the edited concordance listing in Figure 3 shows, there are 30, 0 and 11 instances of *neighbourhood school* in the *ST*, *NST* and *NP* corpora respectively. As expected then, Figure 3 shows that the term is used in contrast with *premier/elite school*. Figure 4 presents an edited concordance listing of *neighbourhood school* in the BoE. More careful investigation yields a longer context for *the bright boy in the deprived neighbourhood school*:

*the bright boy in the deprived neighbourhood school would be severely handicapped, while the dull boy in the privileged middle-class school would profit most.*

Hence, while more such evidence would be useful, this preliminary evidence suggests that *neighbourhood school*, in the BoE, might also have the suggestion of a school which is more than being familiar and near one's residence. If true, such a use would not be dissimilar to its use in Singapore English; overwhelmingly, though, the evidence suggests that the term (in the 'Old' varieties) does not have the association of a school that is average in standing.

## ASIAN OR WESTERN REALITIES?

Robbed of \$700 at kife point a the **void** deck of Block 401 in Bedok was checking her letter box a the **void** deck of a HDB block in Chun Koew, 37, had walked into the **void** deck of the block when he an office assistant, was at the **void** deck of Block 345 in Ang Mo sweepers having to sweep up the **void** deck area near the letter officers have been sent to **void** decks of HDB blocks in seven North-South Highway, carparks in **void** decks and higher rentals for can use parking lots in the **void** decks of seven Housing Board down the block to your car in the **void** deck, get inside, start the went to meet the accused at the **void** deck of her flat. They went Mr Mustapha Hassan, 33. At the **void** deck of Block 433, Wee a-jog and made his way through **void** decks, the market and the four empty mortar shells near the **void** deck. A resident at Block selling fishballs at a fair in the **void** deck of Block 937, Tampines the Bedok Multiservice Centre, a **void** deck day-care centre for the

*Figure 5 Edited concordance listing of void deck, from ST94.*

### 5.1.9 Void deck

There are 192, 0 and 105 instances of this lexical item in the *ST*, *NST* and *NP* corpora respectively. Consider Figure 5, an edited concordance listing of *void deck* from *ST94*. The significant collocation of *void* with *deck* (usually in the singular) is perhaps an exclusively SE use. It refers to the open space on the ground floor of a block of flats and is usually used for communal activities. Unlike SE, the BoE does not have any instance of this term. If one looks at the use of *void* as an adjective, the BoE shows that the term occurs predominantly in the predicative position, except for 2 occurrences of *void spaces*, and an occurrence of *void area* from a US text:

*In California after the earthquake people were trapped for two or three days. There are void areas in the building where people could still be.*

Otherwise, it is unusual (at least from the BoE) to find the adjective *void* in the attributive position in SE, much less as the noun premodifier in a compound noun. Moreover, in land-scarce Singapore nowadays, void decks are being filled with ‘day-care centres’ and rooms for communal activities, thus becoming less ‘void’.

### 5.1.10 Weekend car

The following concordance listing (see Figure 6) is obtained for the two collocates of *weekend car* from the BoE (1 instance from *sunnow*; 2 instances from *today* and 1 instance from *oznews*).

There does not seem to be anything remarkable in the use of, for instance, *weekend car accident*, which is a car accident occurring during the weekend.

hospital after being involved in a **weekend car** accident with a pound; 42 pp. Falles (0481 36902) **weekend car** hire £38. British 23, from Lymm in Cheshire fits in **weekend car** boot sales with was lucky to escape unhurt after a **weekend car** crash in France.

Figure 6 Edited concordance listing of *weekend car*, from the BoE.

With minor bruises. But his 1.6 l white **weekend car** spent the next Sports event. Mr Singh, who owns a **weekend car**, has not yet To work. His Daihatsu Charade is a **weekend car**. Their daughter Traders Association, Mr David Tay. The **weekend car** scheme will end additional registration fee. To use a **weekend car** as a normal car illegally 829 people were caught. \***Weekend car** cheats 172 "Off-peak car scheme" to replace **weekend car** scheme starting YOU have three years to convert your **weekend car** to a normal in the COE preminm by optig for a **weekend car**. This amount of your car. So the longer you own a **weekend car**, the less you tax discount you now enjoy under the **weekend car** scheme 70 per cars now? What happens to my **weekend car**? The Government out the discount on the road tax of my **weekend car**? The Government COE because I wanted to convert my **weekend car** to a normal one the change. How do I convert my **weekend car** to an off-peak.

Figure 7 Edited concordance listing of *weekend car*, from NP94.

*Weekend car* is not treated as a compound noun; instead, the compound noun in this instance would be *car accident*.

However, consider the concordance listing of *weekend car* in Figure 7. Again a Singaporean construct, *weekend car* is a productive compound noun (at least for 1994), referring to a car that can be driven only during off-peak hours, i.e. 7pm to 7am on weekdays and all day on weekends. It is used in contrast to *normal car* (which is yet another distinctive SE collocation which refers to a car that can be put on Singapore's roads at any time). Since the term is a bit of a misnomer (since owners of such cars can drive them on weekdays), it is now officially replaced by *off-peak car*.

## 5.2 Other SE or ME collocations

Owing to the constraints of space, I will just list some other lexical and grammatical collocations (with their gloss) which are not dissimilarly used in both SE and ME. Items acceptable only in informal situations (and definitely not for the classroom) are marked SME: informal:

- 1 *bersanding ceremony* (from Malay + English; 'a Malay wedding ceremony')
- 2 *Chingay parade* (from Chinese + English; 'a Chinese New Year celebration')

- 3 *close proximity* (under Islamic law, ‘a man and a woman who are not married to each other commit the offence of ‘close proximity’ by being alone together’; translation from Malay *khalwat*)
- 4 *paper money* (‘mock money burnt to bring respite to the souls of the dead’)
- 5 *restricted passport* (‘a passport that allows the bearer to travel between Malaysia and Singapore only’)
- 6 *rice bowl* (‘a bowl for serving rice in’; also, ‘one’s livelihood or means of living’)
- 7 *spoilt equipment* (SME: informal, ‘equipment which is out of order’)
- 8 *to be a lamp post* (SME: informal, ‘two’s a company, three’s a crowd’; *to play gooseberry*)
- 9 *to look prosperous* (‘referring euphemistically to a person’s excessive body weight or being plump’)
- 10 *to shake legs* (SME: informal, ‘to be laid-back about things’; antonym to the BoE’s *to shake a leg*, ‘to hurry up’)

## 6 The reality of English use in Singapore and Malaysia

The picture that emerges is that, in the face of THE English language, there are different Englishes which have come about in meeting the linguistic needs of their respective communities. In an increasingly ‘borderless’ and interactive world, there is a need to be cognizant of the existence of these varieties, which should be codified by means of a global English dictionary (such as Pearsall 1998).

Would these varieties reflect a traditional division between ‘Asian’ or ‘Western’ reality or values? At first sight, besides being a provocative and simplistic division, there is no reason to presuppose that values are less than universal in intent. However, Patten (1998: 165), cites a study by David Hitchcock who interviewed about 100 religious and cultural leaders in 1994. Of the intellectuals interviewed, the Asians were more likely “to put stress on order and harmon”, as compared with the Americans who placed “more emphasis on individual and personal freedom.”

This desire for ‘order and harmony’ is certainly found in Singapore through the rise of distinctive collocations in English, the *de facto* official language in the country. *Corrective work order*, *killer litter* and *urine detector* all point to a high-rise, high-density society which is concerned with formalising and articulating, through language, the misdemeanours and punitive measures to restore social order and harmony. Also, the preservation of social order and harmony must mean a preoccupation with ensuring a successful economy. Thus, in order to stay on top of things, Singapore maximizes the use of its human resource (its only one) by means of ‘streaming’ its students. Hence, there is a need for the terms *normal stream* and *neighbourhood school*. And being a small country, Singapore has to maximize its road space, thus the divide into *normal cars* and *off-peak* (or *weekend*) *cars*.

Malaysia, by contrast, has no shortage of land and human resource, and so Malaysian English does not reflect the need to maximize the use of such resources. However, one must not ignore the possibility that the functional load for such Asian social ‘order and harmony’ is instead placed on Malay, the national and official language of the country.

Also, the evidence suggests that there is also no reason yet to suppose that both ME and SE are different types of Englishes<sup>6</sup>. Because of the proximity of the two countries, there still exists the necessary interaction to maintain linguistic cohesion. However, it would not be a surprise to discover that the predominant influence of Malay on Malaysian English and that of Chinese on Singaporean English will have led to less mutually intelligible varieties.

Finally, with the existence of language databases representing different types of English, we can more accurately ascertain the frequency and type of use of a particular linguistic item in different speech communities. The divergence or convergence of use is unlikely to be an ‘all-or-nothing’ situation; rather, one can find different degrees of overlap between varieties of English. For instance, while *red packet* (‘a red envelope containing money given on Chinese ceremonial occasions’) is said to be a typically Singaporean-Malaysian English item, it is also found in Hong Kong English.

## 7 Conclusion

In comparing the language varieties in this paper, I do not wish to suggest that we can extrapolate certain ‘deficiencies’ inherent in a particular culture, since such judgments are not only hard to substantiate but also value-laden and ideological. Neither am I suggesting that all Western and Asian values are encapsulated in only one language (namely English), although I believe it is also true to say that the English language is the most widely regarded global language encompassing the most number of diverse cultures.

What this paper has suggested is that corpus-based methods, as applied to newspaper corpora, are directly relevant to the discovery of the everyday linguistic and also value-laden patterns inherent in a variety of English. The increasing sophistication of computational methods to measure collocational strength, such as those described in Oakes (1998: 162), can lead to the discovery of significant collocates more objectively and accurately. Such methods should be tested not only on native English data but also on nativised ones (such as the respective language databases in this study) in order to provide a comparison and the eventual documentation of these patterns in a globally (inclusive) English dictionary.

## Notes

1 Throughout this paper, ‘Malaysian English’ is abbreviated as ‘ME’, and ‘Singaporean English’ as ‘SE’, and ‘Singaporean-Malaysian English’ as ‘SME’.

- 2 See Crystal (1995: 106–109) and Graddol (1997).
- 3 *ST94* and *NP94* are created by Singapore Press Holdings (S) Pte Ltd; the *NST94* data are created by the New Straits Times Press (M) Pte Ltd. The data was analysed as part of 2 research projects at my university.
- 4 I am grateful to Jeremy Clear for permission to use the data drawn from the BoE corpus created by Cobuild at Birmingham University.
- 5 On closer inspection of the collocates of either *filial* or *piety*, it is interesting to note the most unusual term *filial cannibalism!* All the 5 occurrences of this term come from the *New Scientist* magazine regarding the rare practice by members of the same family which eat the young/unborn members of their own group.
- 6 In an earlier version of this paper, I had erroneously asserted that the term *filial piety* did not occur in the BoE at all. I am grateful to David Minugh for pointing out, firstly, that the phrase does occur in Western newspapers and, secondly, that the BNC Corpus (which people outside Europe do not yet have access to) contains approximately 13 examples. I then checked the BoE again, and corrected this oversight.

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